**Commodities and Global History in the Modern Era**

MA in Global History

**Course Description:** What role did weapons, oil, medicines, and tobacco play in shaping the post-WW2 global order? And what can material objects reveal about historical transformations? This course explores how the history of the Cold War and its aftermath can be told through the goods that were traded at the time. Through commodities, it explores the changing legal regimes, competing development models, and shifting transnational alliances that characterized the global history of the Cold War.

Participants will furthermore reflect upon the people involved in the production and trade of these items--their biographies and everyday lives. Throughout, we will interrogate how the relationship between human and non-human actors can be theorized and employed as a tool for historical research. Moreover, we will examine how such exchanges live on in the technologies and ideas that circulate today. While drawing on the lecturers’ expertise in the field of Eastern Europe and the socialist world, this course incorporates contributions addressing other geographical and disciplinary areas.

**Teaching Methods:** The course will be in English. Lecturers will guide discussions to which students are expected to contribute. Students will be assigned weekly readings, and are expected to prepare three questions based upon the texts for collective discussion each week. Additionally, each student will briefly introduce one text to the class once in the semester.

On a date of their choosing (the first by the end of week seven, the second by the end of week fourteen), students will submit two short reflection papers (of around 500 words each). In addition, students will complete a term paper addressing a debate, approach or perspective on the history of commodities (of around 10 pages—5,000 words). A first draft of an abstract and a bibliography should be sent to the lecturers by April 30. Topics for the term paper can be discussed with the lecturers throughout the semester and the last class in semester will be reserved for a public discussion of paper topics. Final papers are due by July 15.

All reading assignments will be available on the Moodle platform.

Attendance in this course is obligatory and students can miss no more than two classes in the semester. Late submissions of written coursework will be penalized with a half-grade reduction per day overdue.

**Grading:** The course grade will be based on: class participation (20%), weekly assignments and reflection papers (30%), and the final essay (50%).

**Structure of Course:**

Part I: Concepts

**March 1: What is a Commodity? What is Globalization?**

Osterhammel, Jürgen & Petersson, Niels. *Globalization: A Short History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009. Pp. 1-13

Skotnicki, Tad (2007). Commodities, Commodity Fetishism, and Commodification. In George Ritzer (ed.). *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. Malden, MA, pp. 607–612.

Beckert, Sven. *Empire of Cotton: A Global History.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015, pp. ix-xxii

Optional Reading:

Angelika Epple, “Globalisierung/en,” Version: 1.0, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 11.6.2012, URL: <http://docupedia.de/zg/Globalisierung>

**March 8: The Politics of Material Objects**

Langdon Winner, “Do Artifacts Have Politics?” in *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. pp. 19-39

**March 15: Commodity Chains**

Topik, Steven; Marichal, Carlos and Zephyr L Frank, (eds.), *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500-2000* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006. Pp. 1-24

Komlosy, Andrea, and Goran Musić. *Global Commodity Chains and Labor Relations*. Brill, 2021. (chapter 2, pp. 29-55)

**March 22: Commodity Frontiers**

**Guest Lecture: David Mayer**

Optional Reading:

Beckert, Sven, Ulbe Bosma, Mindi Schneider, and Eric Vanhaute. “Commodity Frontiers and the Transformation of the Global Countryside: A Research Agenda.” *Journal of Global History* No. 16, no. 3 (2021): 435–50. doi:10.1017/S1740022820000455.

Moore, Jason W. (2000). *Sugar and the Expansion of the Early Modern World-Economy. Commodity Frontiers, Ecological Transformation, and Industrialization*. Review (Fernand Braudel Center) 23/3 (2000), 409–433.

Part II: Spaces, Spheres, Connections

**March 29: Capitalism, Socialism, and Globalization**

Trecker, Max."2. The “Grapes of Cooperation”? Bulgarian and East German Plans to Build a Syrian Cement Industry from Scratch". *Between East and South: Spaces of Interaction in the Globalizing Economy of the Cold War,* edited by Anna Calori, Anne-Kristin Hartmetz, Bence Kocsev, James Mark and Jan Zofka, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019, pp. 33-58. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110646030-002>

Neuburger, Mary C. *Balkan Smoke. Tobacco and the making of modern Bulgaria,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013, pp. 199-229

**April 20 (NOTE THAT THIS IS A THURSDAY!): The Urban Landscapes of Knowledge in the Cold War USSR**

**Guest Lecture: Alexey Golubev**

The lecture will be held from 13:00 until 14:30 in the IOG Seminar Room

Optional Reading:

Golubev, Alexey: *The Things of Life. Materiality in Late Soviet Russia*. Ithaca: Cornell, 2020. Chapter Four, pp. 90-112

**April 26: Decolonization, Cold War Trade and Commodities**

Christopher R. W. Dietrich, *Oil Revolution: Anticolonial Elites, Sovereign Rights, and the Economic Culture of Decolonization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 158-190

James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Steffi Marung (eds.). *Alternative Globalisations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020 (chapter 7, pp. 166-186)

**First draft of abstract and bibliography due April 30!**

Part III: Commodities in Focus

**May 3: Oil**

David S. Painter. "Oil and Natural Resources" in *Cambridge History of the Cold War, Vol. I* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 486-507

Ljubica Spaskovska. “’Crude’ Alliance – Economic Decolonisation and Oil

Power in the Non-Aligned World,” *Contemporary European History* (2021), 30, 528–543

**May 10: Medicines**

Vargha D (2021). Technical assistance and socialist international health: Hungary, the WHO and the Korean War. *History and Technology*, 36(3-4), 400-417

Richardson-Little, Ned. “Transnational Drug Trafficking and the German Embrace of International Narcotics Law from the Kaiserreich to the Nazis,” in: Dietmar Müller and Katja Naumann (Hg.) *Transregional Connections in the History of East Central Europe*. De Gruyter, 2021, pp. 135-159

**May 17: Weapons**

Johnston, Rosamund. “Globalization from Below,” draft text for *The Routledge Handbook of 1989 and the Great Transformation*.

Geyer, Michael. “Arms Exports: The Normality of a Scandalous Subject—A Comment” in German Yearbook of Contemporary History, Vol. 6 (2022), pp. 241-258

**May 31st: Agricultural Goods**

Beckert, Sven. *Empire of Cotton: A Global History.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015. Chapter 5, pp. 98-136.

Lowenhaupt Tsing, Anna. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*: *On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 2015. pp. 61-73

Part IV: Actors

**June 7: Enterprises**

Required Reading:

Valentina Fava; Between Business Interests and Ideological Marketing: The USSR and the Cold War in Fiat Corporate Strategy, 1957–1972. Journal of Cold War Studies 2019; 20 (4): 26–64. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_a_00822>

Dejung, Christoph. *Commodity Trading, Globalization and the Colonial World. Spinning the Web of the Global Market.* New York 2018: Routledge, pp. 288-316

Optional Reading:

Doleshal, Zachary Austin. *In the Kingdom of Shoes: Baťa, Zlín, Globalization, 1894-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021). Pp. 109-132

**June 14: Workers**

**Guest Lecture: Goran Music**

Required Reading:

Komlosy, Andrea, and Goran Musić. *Global Commodity Chains and Labor Relations*. Brill, 2021. (chapter 10 by Goran Music, pp. 251-273)

Optional Reading:

Lowenhaupt Tsing, Anna. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*: *On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 2015. Pp. 73-83

**June 21: Consumers**

Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger (eds), *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2012. Pp. 169-196

Banet-Weiser, Sarah and Mukherjee, Roopali. "Introduction: Commodity Activism in Neoliberal Times". *Commodity Activism: Cultural Resistance in Neoliberal Times*, edited by Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser, New York, USA: New York University Press, 2012, pp. 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814763018.003.0005>

**June 28: Paper Topics**