

## Fighting Drink, Drugs, and Venereal Diseases

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### *Global Anti-Vice Activism, c. 1870-1940*

**Date:** April 1-4, 2012

**Venue:** Monte Verità (<http://www.csf.ethz.ch/>)

#### *Summary*

From mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, a growing number of non-governmental organizations, intellectuals and policy-makers became concerned with 'vices' that appeared to pose a vital threat to national populations and even humanity at large, namely alcoholism, drug trade/abuse and prostitution. A basic question is, why did the fight against them mobilize people around the globe? Promoters of Eugenics and 'social hygiene' – intellectual and political currents that attracted influential supporter in all parts of the world, especially between the 1890s and the 1940s – understood intoxicants and sexually transmitted diseases as 'racial poisons' (Mariana Valverde), against which society had to be defended. Projects of social reform and national 'regeneration' in metropolitan, colonial, and post-colonial countries thus involved measures to fight, control and contain those poisons. The time period which is the focus of the conference was marked by a large increase in voluntary organizations, which were often well connected beyond national boundaries. Social and political movements such as socialism, feminism, and anti-colonial nationalism became also in many different ways engaged in debating and solving issues of 'vice.'

The conference thus explores, firstly, how 'vices' became reframed in the context of international bio-political discourses. Apparently, scientific, medical, and biological concepts became increasingly important over against moral and religious arguments against illicit behavior and consumption. Secondly, it seeks to understand why intoxicating substances and venereal diseases became addressed as global issues. The trade in intoxicants (such as the export of gin to West Africa) as well as the traffic in women, or the mobility of sex workers were not confined to any national or imperial boundaries, but constantly threatened and transcended them. Finally, the conference addresses the question of regulation. Anti-vice activism was crucial in setting the agenda for both governmental interference and international regulation. The conference will not only invite research on organizations and initiatives which campaigned against vices – on the organizational repertoires they relied on, the languages they used, the contacts they established, the people they were able to mobilize – but also papers analyzing the interaction of state, non-state, and supra-state actors in the making of regulatory regimes. It explicitly invites contributions that focus on extra-European developments. Participants would be encouraged to analyze the establishment and mechanisms of trans-local connections from the perspective of Asian, African, and Latin-American case studies in order to explore the tension between internationalism and imperialism as forces of globalization.

## *Key Topics and State of the Art*

*Civil Society, Globalization and Transnational Movements:* The forces, mechanics, and actors of globalization have received a lot of scholarly attention in recent years. Social and political scientists have analyzed the new global order that emerged after the end of the cold war, while historians have traced the long-term roots of the increasingly dense interaction and interdependency, as well as peoples' consciousness of the wider world. Approaches such as the new imperial history and recent currents of global and world history have shown how imperial rule has changed the political, social and economic institutions as well as the cultural practices of both colonial and European countries, while international historians have looked at the relations between Western countries and the formation of the modern state system. They have thus explored processes of the making of the modern world as well as the framework for thought and action across political and cultural boundaries that this world provided. Special attention has been thereby paid to a particular type of actor, which figures also prominently in the post-cold war globalization literature: non-governmental, non-profit – in other words: civil society – organizations dedicated to the improvement of human life and society. Being often considered a crucial force for democratization, active citizenship, as well as economic and social development within a national frame and beyond, scholars based in the United States such as Akira Iriye, John Boli and George M. Thomas, or in German-speaking academia Madeleine Herren have analyzed the contribution of international organizations and civil society networks to the building of a global community. Since a first wave of internationalism can be dated back to the decades around 1900, the emergence of a border-crossing, or even global civic activism was also related in many ways – that scholars have just started to explore – to the power relations of colonialism, sometimes supporting, sometimes undermining them. This is true for both, direct entanglements with Empire, as Fischer-Tiné's study on the Salvation Army in India and Britain has shown, as well as for what has been called the USA's informal Empire, as Ian Tyrrell's scholarship on the American-based World Women's Christian Temperance Union (especially his monograph *Women's World, Women's Empire*) has demonstrated on the example of its 'white women's burden' attitude towards the non-Western world. In similar ways, historians of gender and sexuality have pointed at the ambivalences and contradictions which apparently shaped many currents of Western women's rights activism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Recent historical research has also pointed at the role of some transnational movements – as for example the Esperanto movement – in the formation of world culture and global identities. Less attention has been paid, however, to the transnational moral reform, or, anti-vice or movements, a lacuna which this conference aims to fill.

*Anti-Vice Activism:* With the increased interest in civil society, Jürgen Habermas' account of a liberal public sphere, characterized by freedom of opinion, speech and assembly and the enlightenment ideal of a 'public use of reason' has inspired historians to look at the formation of public spheres (bourgeois as well as plebeian and women's ones) also from a comparative and non-European perspective. Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, associational and print culture entered the repertoire of the urban middle classes in colonial as well as newly formed Eastern European national elites and Latin American Republicans. Although political debate and opinion-formation certainly remain crucial features of the history of civil society, the bettering of the manners, morals and habits of one's countrymen and increasingly of human beings in general were certainly as important a field of public discourse and campaigns. Moral reform, the living up to protestant ideals of a rational conduct of one's life, stood at the beginning of many efforts to social 'uplift' in late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the context of the evangelical revival and mission movement in the English-speaking world. Towards the end of

the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, anti-vice activism, i.e. the fight against sexual and political 'licentiousness', against the loosing of self-control by intoxication and the destruction of private and public order connected to it, became not only extended, but also reframed and redefined. As the example of anti-alcohol campaigns (currently researched by a SNF-funded group of doctoral students under direction of Harald Fischer-Tiné, supplemented by Jana Tschurenév's post-doctoral study) shows, the fight against liquor was no longer dominated by a Christian agenda of rescuing fallen sinners, but taken over also by scientists, medical experts, and secular reformers, who saw addiction as a disease (as Harry Levine and Mariana Valverde have pointed out), which threatened individual and public health, and, thereby, crucially affected the strength of the nation and even humanity at large.

*Bio-politics:* In the wake of the writings of Michel Foucault on the history of the human sciences, scholars from different disciplines became interested in the impact that the new knowledge of humans as evolved, living, biological beings – the knowledge associated with the name of Darwin – had on other academic fields as well as on social and political debates among a wider public. The popularization of the biological knowledge of the human went hand in hand with ideas to apply this knowledge and use it for the 'bettering' of the nation or the 'race'. The latter concept also gained currency towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in connection with challenges to colonial rule, re-enforced imperial hierarchies and competition between colonial empires. Eugenic societies for the 'perfection' of human life through gaining control of the hereditary process were formed and Eugenicist ideas discussed widely around the globe. Nancy Stepan, in her influential study on the *Hour of Eugenics* in Latin America has argued that we can now identify different regional variants of that global current. Against this background, liquor, opium, and sexually transmitted diseases became understood as 'racial dangers' – they were assumed to affect the germ cells and thus cause a constant 'degeneration' of the hereditary substance of a population. Thus, the consumption of intoxicants (which was supposed to lead to unwanted sexual behaviors) had to be restricted, the spread of 'venereal diseases' contained by the regulation of prostitution and its mobility.

Quite a number of innovative studies, many of them products of the last two decades, offer insights in the regulation of particular intoxicating substances, or prostitution, in specific national or colonial contexts, which is an excellent starting point for searching for global connections and making informed comparisons. The case of 'white slavery' – a fin de siècle cultural paranoia, producing improbable alliances between feminists, missionaries, social conservatives, and many others – might stand as an excellent example for this. Local campaigns have been well researched for Buenos Aires (Donna Guy), several cities in the USA (Brian Donovan), as well colonial port cities of India (Harald Fischer-Tiné). Such anti-vice campaigns are a topic which allows bringing together extra-European and colonial history with a more Western-focused international history, as well as new research in post-Ottoman and Eastern Europe; to practice an empirically grounded global history, while at the same time a better knowledge of the wider discursive framework, the global ideological environment of campaigns to 'defend society' sheds new light on locally-specific developments.

## MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

The *main objectives* of the conference are, in short:

- to enable a better understanding of transnational movements around 1900 and their relevance for globalization processes;
- to look at the emergence of a global civil society from a new perspective, particularly focusing at civil society in the non-western world, and civil society's entanglement with Empire;
- to analyze the complex web of interaction between state and non-state actors, between national or imperial citizens, and people without citizen rights, between states, civil society and international institutions such as the League of Nations;
- to understand the making of modern drug policies, international conventions on drug trade and human trafficking, which can offer important insights on the workings and failures of such policies today;
- to explore the diversity of movements to reform human life, as well as to identify common frameworks and universal tendencies.

The conference aims stimulate dialogue between innovative and growing research fields, such as the social and cultural history of intoxicants, political science studies on drug policies, studies in sexuality and its regulation, a history of knowledge that explores the linkages between science, medicine, and social and political thought, and research in transnational NGO's as major actors in the making of a 'global community'. Together, these will enable a new understanding of the emergence of national and international regulation of flows of 'dangerous' substances, diseases, and people, as a crucial part of the history of global governance.

We chose the Monte Verità as the conference venue because it's history as a site for experiments with vegetarianism, abstinence from drinking, and in general with new lifestyles is closely linked to the life *Lebensreform* movements of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The program will thus not only include visiting the museum of the site, but also an invited evening lecture by Helmut Zander, (HU Berlin) on The Monte Verità and Life Reform Movements.

## PRELIMINARY STRUCTURE OF THE CONFERENCE AND EXPECTED RESULTS

The conference includes (a) keynotes and evening lectures which will provide the common framework; (b) research paper presentations in panel sessions; (c) comments to papers, which will help structuring the discussion in the panels and give feedback to the presenters; (d) a round-table session in the end, to summarize results from the panel sessions and discuss the outcome of the conference in general.

The panels are structured thematically and intend to include different regional/local/trans-local case studies. We decided upon the following preliminary structure:

1. *Global Civil Society: Organizations, Campaigns, Networks* (I) focuses on local actors engaging in anti-vice activism, in various political contexts, such as of nation-building, imperial 'civilizing missions' and gender politics. It follows a comparative approach.
2. *Global Civil Society: Organizations, Campaigns, Networks* (II) particularly analyses patterns and media of interaction in the light of an emerging internationalism. One of the sessions will look at the global connections established by anti-alcohol campaigners

- and temperance societies.
3. *Changing Knowledge Frameworks: Medicine, Social Sciences, and Bio-Politics* sheds light on the scientific background of global anti-vice activism, including research on medical and psychological explanations of the effects of intoxicants, 'race science' and eugenics.
  4. *The Making of Regulations (I)* explores the interaction of civil society campaigners with national and imperial governments, as well as international institutions and looks at the laws and policies emerging from this interaction. The first part of the panel looks at 'white slavery', prostitution, and debates on 'venereal diseases'.
  5. *The Making of Regulations (II)* looks at emerging alcohol and drug policies.
  6. *Trajectories and Legacies (I)*: While panels 1-5 take a historical or history of science approach to 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century anti-vice activism, panel 6 looks at 'social diseases' emerging since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as AIDS, as well as at recent popular scientific approaches to intoxicants, such as the definition of addiction as a brain disease.
  7. *Trajectories and Legacies (II)* explores long-term changes in societal approaches to drugs, prostitution, or sexually transmitted diseases, including explanatory frameworks from the field of political science.

We intend to publish selected contributions in an edited volume on anti-vice activism. We hope that the conference will enable a new understanding of the emergence of national and international regulation as part of the history of global governance, and thereby shed light on issues of public debate and policy-making until today: how far should society, should the state intervene with individual behaviors for the sake of public health? Why to prevent the consumption of drugs? Why some substances are considered more dangerous than others? Which measures of regulation to take? How to deal with problems, such as drug trade human trafficking that transcend national borders?

#### CONTACT

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