

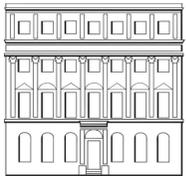
Registration

Please note that all lectures will take place online via Zoom.

For information on how to register for the individual lectures, please visit our website (<https://www.ghil.ac.uk/events/lectures>).

Contact Us

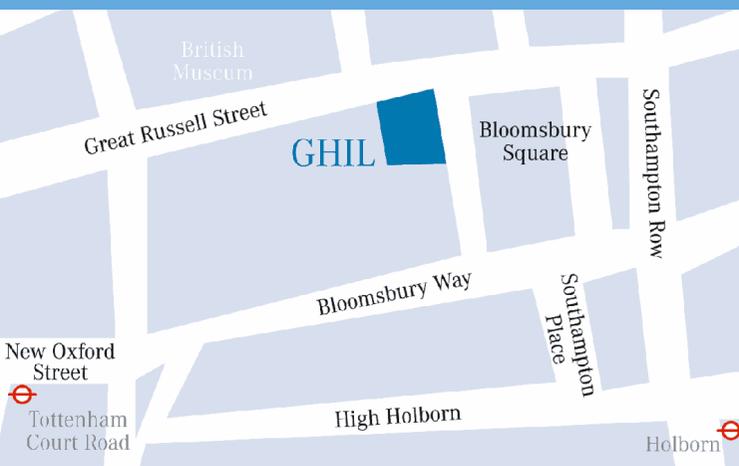
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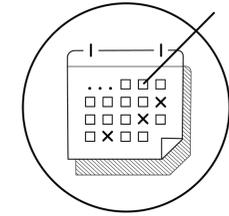
‘Historians and the Challenge of Right-Wing Populism’

Right-wing populist movements around the world make avid use of often simplistic or reductive interpretations of the past to garner support and promote their vision of the future.

On television, in newspapers, on websites and social media, the research of professional historians is selectively appropriated, openly challenged, or dismissed entirely as propaganda put forward by an elitist establishment.

This lecture series brings together researchers working on topics subject to such reinterpretation who face criticism and at times abuse from right-wing populists. Speakers will reflect on their efforts to prepare and reform their academic disciplines in order to mitigate or pre-empt appropriations of the past by right-wing populists. They will also consider how to approach contested episodes from the past in university classroom teaching, and how scholars can set the historical record straight by making research-based knowledge of the past accessible and understandable to wider audiences.

German Historical Institute London



Summer Lecture Series 2021



‘Confronting Histories of Violence and Populism: What can be learnt from “the Germans”? What have “the Germans” yet to learn?’

4 May, 6:00 p.m. (Zoom)

Corinne Fowler, Susan Neiman, Michael Rothberg, and Mark Terkessidis, Chair: Samira Ahmed

For many countries, the ‘German model’ of coming to terms with the past has long been considered exemplary with regard to the Holocaust. Many saw that Vergangenheitsbewältigung could serve as a model for other difficult histories. Yet in the recent years, this model’s character has come under scrutiny, with the debate around the Humboldt Forum showing that Germany has widely ignored other dark chapters, such as its colonial past. Furthermore, it raised the question of how to place different histories of violence into relation with one another and whether, as Michael Rothberg puts it, memories of atrocity must stand in a hierarchy.

The rise of populism in Germany has led to a resurgence of narratives that were supposed to have been laid to rest, and which seek to avoid difficult chapters entirely and focus on other, more ‘glorious’ moments of the past instead.

So, where does this leave us? Can German efforts to atone for Nazi atrocities still serve as a model for how other countries might come to terms with their own legacies? To what extent is the old model of ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’ still relevant in a post-migrant Germany? What other histories need to be written? How can we steer away from competitive models of history writing? And what tools do we have to answer populist or even extremist criticism of contemporary means of dealing with the past?

This round table brings together four leading experts from Germany, the US, and the UK to discuss these pressing questions of our time.

Professor Corinne Fowler directs a public history project called Colonial Countryside: National Trust Houses Reinterpreted. Corinne co-edited the National Trust report on its properties’ connections to colonialism and historic slavery. She is author of Green Unpleasant Land: Creative Responses to Rural Britain’s Colonial Countryside (Peepal Tree Press: 2020).

Susan Neiman is the Director of the Einstein Forum. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, Neiman studied philosophy at Harvard and the Freie Universität Berlin, and was Professor of Philosophy at Yale and Tel Aviv University. She is the author of Slow Fire: Jewish Notes from Berlin, The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant, Evil in Modern Thought, Fremde sehen anders, Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-up Idealists, Why Grow Up?, Widerstand der Vernunft. Ein Manifest in postfaktischen Zeiten and Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil. She is the mother of three grown children and lives in Berlin, Germany.

Michael Rothberg is the 1939 Society Samuel Goetz Chair in Holocaust Studies and Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Los Angeles. His latest book is The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators (2019), published by Stanford University Press in their ‘Cultural Memory in the Present’ series. Previous books include Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization (2009), Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation (2000), and, co-edited with Neil Levi, The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings (2003). With Yasemin Yildiz, he is currently completing Inheritance Trouble: Migrant Archives of Holocaust Remembrance for Fordham University Press.



Mark Terkessidis is a freelance writer and works on the topics of (popular) culture, migration, racism and social change. He studied Psychology in Cologne and earned his doctorate in Education in Mainz. He was editor of the magazine 'Spex' and presenter for WDR 'Funkhaus Europa'. His book publications include Interkultur (2010), Kollaboration (2015, by edition Suhrkamp), Nach der Flucht. New Proposals for the Immigration Society (2017, Reclam) and Wessen Erinnerung zählt. Koloniale Vergangenheit und Rassismus heute (2019, Hoffmann & Campe).

Award winning journalist and broadcaster Samira Ahmed presents Front Row on Radio 4, Newswatch on BBC1 and the Intelligence Squared podcast How I Found My Voice. She won the British Broadcasting Press Guild Audio Presenter of the Year award in 2020. Samira's acclaimed BBC4 series Art of Persia was the first major documentary series to be filmed in Iran for 40 years. Samira won the Stonewall Broadcast of the Year award while a presenter at Channel 4 News. She has been a BBC News Correspondent, a reporter on Newsnight, a news anchor for World Service TV and Deutsche Welle TV.

In cooperation with the Goethe-Institut London.



‘Medievalism, Extremism, and “White History”’

25 May, 5:30 p.m. (Zoom)

Amy S. Kaufman

The attack on the US Capitol in January 2021 showed right-wing extremists sporting a chaotic and cross-temporal panoply of symbols : from Spartan helmets and Confederate flags to Templar patches, Norse runes, an Indigenous headdress, and video game logos. This talk will explain how extremists weave symbols from particular historical moments, and from renditions of those moments in popular culture, into an alternate historical narrative that can most accurately be called ‘White History’ — a mythical understanding of the past that elevates whiteness, colonialism, and masculinity. Moreover, this talk will explore the way mainstream cultural forces such as textbooks, media, and political speech reinforce these narratives even though they contradict real, recorded history.

Amy S. Kaufman is a medievalist working as a full-time writer and speaker on Medieval Literature, Popular Culture, and the relevance of the Middle Ages to contemporary politics. Most recently she co-authored the book The Devil's Historians: How Modern Extremists Abuse the Medieval Past (2020).

‘Writing a History of Right-Wing Terrorism in Post-WWII Germany: Chances, Challenges, and the Need for New Narratives’

15 June, 5:30 p.m. (Zoom)

Barbara Manthe

Although right-wing terrorism has been a highly relevant issue to German society in recent years, there is still surprisingly little knowledge about its history. This observation applies not only to the general public and the media, but also to historians, who have only recently begun to fill this gap. This lecture examines interpretations of right-wing terrorism in Germany after the Second World War. How do they relate to the master narratives of the Federal Republic and how are they entangled with interpretations of National Socialism? What current challenges do historians face in seeking new narratives of right-wing terrorism, and to what extent are these narratives contested by existing legends and speculations?

Barbara Manthe is a Research Fellow at the University of Bielefeld and an expert on the history of radical right-wing terrorism and violence in the Federal Republic of Germany since 1945.



'The Past in the Present: Historical Pedagogy of Hindu Nationalism in India'

29 June, 5:30 p.m. (Zoom)

Tanika Sarkar

This lecture discusses the historical pedagogy of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ('National Volunteer Organisation'), which is the ideological inspiration behind India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP has been continuously in power for the last seven years. Together, the two movements are interrelated parts of an intricate organizational apparatus which has innumerable affiliates all over the country. A particular version of Indian history has long been a core part of their propaganda machinery, and their vast range of formal and informal educational institutions propagate identical historical lessons. After a brief overview of the cardinal tenets of this history, this talk focuses on the methods of dissemination which have captured the popular discourse to a large extent and have predisposed significant sections of the electorate towards the BJP.

The conclusion will highlight how and why this version of history has proved so successful in dislodging far more credible and compelling alternatives.

Tanika Sarkar is Emeritus Professor of History at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her work investigates questions of religion, gender, and politics in both colonial and post-colonial South Asia, with a particular focus on women and the role of the Hindu Right. Her most recent book is Hindu Nationalism in India (2021).

