



CEDEJ's Tuesday seminar

**World Wounds  
Liver Disease in Egypt and  
the Global Histories of  
Medicine, Capitalism, and  
the Environment**

Jennifer Derr

In the past decade, the Egyptian government organized and executed the world's most successful and wide-ranging treatment program for hepatitis C. This program relieved millions of people of the burden of living with a virus that for much of the twentieth century had infected more Egyptians as a proportion of the population than in any other country in the world. The history of hepatitis C infection in Egypt is intimately connected to that of another disease, bilharzia (schistosomiasis),

the prevalence of which first skyrocketed during the British colonial period. In this talk, Professor Derr explores the entangled histories of bilharzia and hepatitis C in Egypt. Agricultural labor, environmental contact, and political economy – each of these factors played a role in fueling the disease. In the second half of the twentieth century, understandings of illness and the measures used to combat it were shaped by the histories of medicine and health in Egypt as well as the interventions of international organizations and scientists from across the globe. Professor Derr's scholarship interrogates what the history of liver disease in Egypt might teach us about sickness, health, geography in Egypt, and the histories of medicine, capitalism, and the environment on a global scale.

Jennifer L. Derr is an Associate Professor of History at the University of California, Santa Cruz where she also served as the Founding Director of the Center for the Middle East and North Africa (2019-2024). Professor Derr's first book, *The Lived Nile: Environment, Disease, and Material Colonial Economy in Egypt* (Stanford UP, 2019), was the winner of the 2020 Middle East Political Economy Book Prize. Her second manuscript, provisionally entitled "The Organ that Traveled the World: Medicine, Capitalism, and the Environmental Body," traces the production of the liver as a site of knowledge, disease, and treatment in 20th-century Egypt and the significance of this history within that of biomedicine and public health during the second half of the twentieth century. In 2019, Professor Derr was awarded the United

States National Science Foundation's 5-year CAREER grant to support a broad research agenda focused on the "History of Science at the Interface of Biomedical and Environmental Concerns." Most recently, in 2024-2025, Professor Derr was a fellow at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute.

**Date:** On October 14, 2025

**Time:** 2pm (Cairo local time)

**Address:** 23 Gamal Eldin Abou El Mahassen St., Garden City, Cairo