

Call for Papers



Decolonisation and the Promises of Development, ca. 1950-1980

In recent years, scholarship on decolonisation and development has placed strong emphasis on continuities with the colonial past, often to explain the shortcomings and contradictions of postcolonial development projects. While this has yielded crucial insights into the endurance of imperial structures, it has also muted the sense of anticipation and possibility that accompanied the formal end of empire.

This workshop seeks to recapture that moment of promise, exploring the tensions between the limits and possibilities of development during decolonisation. We invite historically grounded contributions that examine decolonisation and development as intertwined processes, rather than separate or sequential ones. Development was not only a policy domain or a colonial legacy, but also a vital arena in which postcolonial futures were imagined, contested, and enacted. Just as some actors embraced development as a tool of liberation and worldmaking, others challenged, subverted, or rejected it altogether, envisioning alternative paths beyond the developmentalist paradigm.

We invite contributions that examine development not merely as a legacy of empire or an instrument of control, but as a site of contestation and imagination—a field in which postcolonial actors debated their ideas for the future. What does it mean to see *decolonisation as development*—and development as a key arena in which decolonisation itself was defined, debated, and enacted? Submissions that examine development teaching institutions, training programmes, and sites of knowledge production are especially encouraged, as they offer insight into how expertise and education shaped postcolonial developmental thought.

Potential Topics*

- **Pluralities of Development** – socialist, non-aligned, indigenous, and South–South approaches to development.
- **Development as Worldmaking** – planning, anticipation, and alternative global orders in the postcolonial moment.
- **Institutions of Development Education** – universities, training centres, and expert networks as laboratories of postcolonial development knowledge.
- **State-Building and Sovereignty** – development as a practice of governance and legitimacy in newly independent states.

- **Transnational Solidarities** – exchanges and collaborations within the Third World and beyond.
- **Development and its Discontents** – contemporary critiques, rejections, and failures of development projects.
- **Affective and Intellectual Histories** – recovering optimism, anticipation, and forward-looking imaginaries of decolonisation.

* Please note that submissions must explicitly deal with both development and decolonisation, in line with the workshop theme.

Format

The workshop will consist of five to six individual sessions of 1h to 1.5h maximum, depending on the number of participants. Each session will be dedicated to one person's contribution only. The sessions will be opened by a short discussion of one of the three invited senior scholars. Afterwards, all participants will discuss the contribution amongst themselves, with the author only listening and taking notes. The final part of every session will give authors the opportunity to respond to the preceding discussion or ask questions. The workshop will be closed to outside audiences. The idea is to workshop advanced work with a view to collectively publish our findings as a special issue. Prospective participants are thus requested to submit unpublished work (papers already in a review process are not allowed). Participants are expected to set enough time aside to read thoroughly other participants' work.

We invite interested candidates to send us an abstract of their proposed contribution (max. 300 words), along with a three-four sentence bio to nicolas.hafner@graduateinstitute.ch by Sunday, 18 January 2026. Submissions that do not fulfil all the requirements set out above will not be considered. Please start the file name with your last name first (e.g. Lastname_Firstname) and use "Abstract for Decolonisation and the Promises of Development" as the email subject.

Reimbursement of travel and accommodation expenses related to the workshop will be considered for participants who may need it. Please state in your email whether you will need funding and for what (accommodation and/or travel).