

[Ecotones 4 Kolkata, Partitions and Borders](#)

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Type:

Conference

Date:

March 15, 2018

Location:

India

Subject Fields:

Colonial and Post-Colonial History / Studies, Environmental History / Studies, Ethnic History / Studies, Asian History / Studies, Latin American and Caribbean History / Studies

Ecotones 4 - Partitions and Borders

Venues: Jadavpur University and West Bengal State University

Dates: 12-15 December, 2018

Language: English

Deadline to send a proposal: March 15, 2018

Notification of acceptance: April 15, 2018

An 'ecotone' is a transitional area between two or more distinct ecological communities, for instance the zone between field and forest, mountain and ocean, or between sea and land. The two ecosystems may be separated by a sharp boundary line or may merge gradually. An 'ecotone' may also indicate a place where two communities meet, at times creolizing or germinating into a new community.

After the first three conferences held in Montpellier, Poitiers and Reunion island, 'Ecotones 4' will focus on one area that has served as an ecotone for centuries. This is the area of Bengal in East India, an ecotone area between Europe, the Indian subcontinent and the Far East. With its unique position, the region has been criss-crossed for centuries, by travellers, traders, colonists, refugees, pirates and missionaries of diverse racial, religious, linguistic, regional and national affiliations from all over the globe.

In this conference we will explore how a region functions through history as a transitional space between two ecologies. Do these ecotone spaces echo the distinct notes of its two borders, or do these spaces create a unique melody of their own and constitute a third space? How do these ecotone spaces reflect the dynamic flow of people into and out of its precincts? Do they have essential attributes that impact the people who call the ecotone their home? The studies on the culture and the geography of these areas will also enquire into the vulnerability of the ecosystems and of the populations in these areas, the former experiencing a persistent burden from the latter who source their livelihoods from their habitat, while the latter have to bear the brunt of myriad forms of assault.

During its centuries-old history, the region of Bengal has been a space that, like the people who inhabit it, came to be dynamic in nature. This has been a space that has, through history, granted refuge to many — a history that was made possible because of its unique geographical terrain, making it, paradoxically, both easy to access and difficult to monitor. This aspect has been accentuated by the political position of this ecotone area, situated between two nations, and on the Bay that opens into South-east Asia.

Bengal is a transitional zone where the urban and urbane space of North India dissolve into the marshy, rural world of the Gangetic delta; it is a transcultural zone where the racial and cultural 'purity' of Brahminical and Mughal India gave way to a syncretic mixture of languages, cultures and ethnicities; it is a transcolonial zone where French, British and other European interests intersected and creolized. This plurality can be seen reflected in the cultural and religious practices, in popular and classical art cultures, in public institutions and architecture, as well as in the folklores and customs of the place.

In order to explore the ecotonal nature of the territory from an interdisciplinary perspective, the conference will identify geographical areas, environmental concerns, historical periods and cultural fields which have been ecotone areas of conflict, confluence and transition.

The proposed areas of interest of this conference will be around the following issues:

1. Migration into and out of the ecotone area,
2. Socio-cultural and economic aspects of such im/migrations,
3. Trans-regional ties as a consequence of these im/migrations,
4. Fluidity and porosity of borders,
5. Heterogeneity and confluence of identities
6. political definition and redefinition of borders and identities
7. changes in the geographical map of the region and its impact upon the nature of the ecotone
8. natural calamities and forced migrations

The conference will work at three distinct levels:

- a) academic — with scholarly papers that analyse the historical, political, socio-cultural and anthropological aspects of the area;
- b) cultural — through story-telling via folklore, textile cultures, songs and *pats* (pictures);
- c) performative / auto-ethnographic — first-person accounts of people who have either arrived or transited through the area driven by a diversity of reasons ranging from those of livelihood, to that of natural and man-made calamities.

We trust the strong regional focus will give a specificity to the conference, which may then be useful in comprehending the patterns of human behaviour and history to arrive at theoretical or thematic

understanding of ecotone areas, in Bengal and elsewhere.

We invite contributors to upload their proposals (a 250-word abstract, title, author's name, a 150-word bio, and contact) to the conference website: [Ecotones 4 Kolkata](#)

Each presentation will be 20 minutes (followed by discussion time). All methodological and theoretical approaches are welcomed. We also invite creative interventions suggesting fresh topics. A selection of papers will be considered for publication at the conclusion of the series of 'Ecotones' events.

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