

Monday, 17.07.2023; 4:15 - 6:00 pm CEST

Anna Guiteras Mombiola, Complutense University of Madrid, Spain

The many faces of indigenous labour in Bolivian Amazonia, 1840s-1940s

Abstract:

Bolivian Amazonia joined the international economy from the mid- nineteenth century onwards, a process that demanded increasing numbers of workers, mainly from indigenous populations. This labour force was often recruited freely and voluntarily, but in many other cases it was not. Labour recruitment took the form of free labour, debt peonage and forced labour, among other intermediate forms, where different degrees of arbitrariness and violence were possible, often constituting a kind of "slavery". Despite the "beneficial" intentions of Bolivian legislation, it did not take long to accommodate the interests of the region's economic agents. We will discuss how the erratic application of labour contracting legislation and the persistence of practices of domination of Creole society rapidly generated a confluence of public and private interests that allowed the abuse and exploitation of the different ethnic groups. Such access to the indigenous peoples invoked work as the only way of inducing them into national social and commercial life, leading to labour practices which, despite their mutations, survived well into the twentieth century.

Bio:

Anna Guiteras Mombiola is currently a lecturer at Complutense University of Madrid (Spain). She holds a PhD in history from the University of Barcelona (Spain), and has been a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Cologne (Germany) and a postdoctoral researcher at Pompeu Fabra University (Spain). She also benefited from a postdoctoral scholarship from the Gerda Henkel Foundation. Her research focuses on the colonization of Bolivian Amazonia, the changes that occurred in indigenous societies perceived as 'civilized' due to their incorporation into the new liberal order, and the educational projects designed to promote the addition of certain ethnic groups to national society. She is a member of the Science Panel for the Amazon. She has published two monographs, *De los llanos de Mojos a las cachuelas del Beni, 1842-1938* (2012) and *Warisata en la selva* (2020), as well as articles in specialized journals and chapters in edited volumes.