**“**‘Every Kitchen an Empire Kitchen’:

Tea and the Politics of the Imperial Consumerism in 1930s Britain and India”

**Erika Rappaport**

**Associate Professor of History**

**University of California, Santa Barbara**

This talk examines women’s role in the buying and selling of imperial tastes in Britain and its Empire in the 1930s. British tea planters responded to the collapse in global markets in the early 1930s by entering into output restriction schemes, by seeking tariff protection, and by creating new markets at home and in the empire. The later strategy refashioned consumers as imperial activists and created a new kind of female imperial saleswoman. The talk focuses in particular on The Drink Empire Tea Campaign, which tea planters launched in 1931 to exhort distributors and consumers to buy and drink only tea grown and manufactured in the British Empire (that is India, Ceylon and British Africa), as opposed to East Asia or the Dutch East Indies. The campaign hired pro-empire female activists and the leaders of conservative women’s associations to transform both the grocer’s shop and the kitchen into political and commercial spaces dedicated to the cause of imperial unity. However, in Britain and in India left-leaning working-class consumers, Indian nationalists, including Gandhi himself, and multi-national corporations rejected this drive to cultivate imperial consumerism. Imperial consumerism was thus a contested idea that became a source of great tension between planters and political activists, retailers and consumers at home and in the Empire.