

Kirchhof, Astrid Mignon; McConville, Chris (Hrsg.): *Transcontinental and Transnational Links in Social Movements and Environmental Policies in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2015. ISBN: 1467-8497 (ISSN).

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Environmental history is a broad denomination that embraces the study of the changing relations between people and places over time. An environmental historian might consider the material world and changes in biological and physical environments as well as their impact on human societies. Alternatively, one might undertake a cultural or intellectual approach, studying the representations of nature and how these have changed over time. Or, the historian could examine law and state policy in relation to the natural world. One might even tackle all three in a single study.<sup>1</sup> Yet, as the editors of this volume argue, „For a sub-discipline that takes as its subject the natural world [...] environmental history has remained stubbornly wedded to the nation-state“ (p. 331). They challenge their colleagues to think beyond the concerns of the local to consider the transnational and transcontinental dimensions of environmental history.

To advance this transnational and transcontinental agenda, editors Astrid Mignon Kirchhof and Chris McConville showcase the interwoven histories of Western environmentalism, unravelling some of the global networks of people and ideas that have shaped scientific, political, and lay understandings of environmental issues throughout the twentieth century. Tracing these connections across Western Europe, the United States, and Australia demands careful collaboration and synthesis, which a contributors' workshop at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society has clearly facilitated to produce this fine volume.

The guiding theme of the volume is a focus on the question of how ideas developed in one context were translated and received in another. Here, „context“ might be disciplinary as well as physical in terms of the transla-

tion of ideas from the environmental sciences into political structures. Sabine Sauter, for example, studies the export of scientific ideas about soil erosion from the US Dust Bowl to the Mallee of Australia, and their subsequent influence on leading figures in the post-war conservation movement. Chris McConville, meanwhile, explores the „limited acceptance of transnational expertise“ (p. 381) in his study of the Australian environment movement from the 1960s through the 1980s, which he attributes to anti-urbanism and a growing awareness of Australia's pre-colonial Aboriginal history.

In addition to the study of the contexts of idea creation and reception, the essays examine the processes of transnational translation. As contributor Christopher Rootes observes, „Ideas travel. But they do not always travel in straight lines“ (p. 414). The mediation of knowledge transfer and its impact on the reception of these ideas is the work of a cast of mediators – „activists, politicians, experts, social organisations, and the media“ (p. 333). Emma Shortis shows how French explorer Jacques Cousteau „harnessed his celebrity, personal charisma and media skills for a global campaign to marshal public opinion against Antarctic opinion“ (p. 335). Even within a global movement, the different focus of disparate groups could limit the effective translation of ideas, as Kirchhof examines in her study of the international peace and nuclear disarmament movement in the 1980s. She argues that women of the peace movement, such as Petra Kelly and Helen Caldicott, found a „common language“ drawn from ecofeminism and difference theory, which helped them to foster transnational connections.

Whether Greenpeace, Earth First!, or Friends of the Earth (just some of the groups studied in this collection), international organizations offer fertile ground for the study of transnational exchanges of ideas. In spite of their global organizational structures and affiliations, however, the contributors reveal the ongoing significance of local traditions of protest and environmental concerns, and

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<sup>1</sup> John R. McNeill, Observations on the nature and culture of environmental history, in: *History and Theory* 42 (2003), pp. 5–43.

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their implications for the work of these organizations. Frank Zelko explores the challenges of establishing a West German branch of the Umweltmulti Greenpeace, where it clashed with a local „environmentalist culture that was deeply committed to democracy, egalitarianism, and consensus-based decision-making“ (p. 398). As Rootes shows, the German form of Friends of the Earth also retained a local character, in contrast to its counterparts in Australia and the United Kingdom.

Although the volume concentrates mostly on the transnational environmentalism of the Cold War era, a highlight of the volume is Wöbse's exploration of the scientific internationalism of the national park movement in the early twentieth century. Her study of Swiss naturalist Paul Sarasin, who utilized evidence of the plight of Australian Aboriginal peoples to argue for the protection of all indigenous peoples „as an integral part of wild nature“ (p. 339), reveals the common language of Aboriginal primitivism at work. Providing an environmental history perspective on Sarasin's work complements the emerging literature on his contributions to nature protection and Aboriginal land rights, and demonstrates the usefulness of drawing such insights together with the history of science and historical studies of settler colonialism.

Together, the articles in this volume convey the challenges of transnational environmental movements, such that their work must transcend national boundaries while reflecting and speaking to local concerns and traditions. Combining the material, cultural, and political approaches of environmental history has enabled the contributors to study both the translation and mediation of environmental ideas in new and important ways. In addition to advancing the study of environmental history on transnational and transcontinental scales, this collection also brings together different national approaches to the field of environmental history itself. Reading German, Australian, and North American scholarship in conversation brings to light refreshing and enlightening insights into the diverse perspectives that informed the environmental politics of the past and their legacy in the twenty-first century.

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