

Call for Papers Environmental Change and Migration in Historical Perspective

Rachel
Carson
Center

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Location: Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, Munich

Conveners: Uwe Lübken (RCC) & Franz Mauelshagen (KWI)

When the government of the Maldives held a Cabinet meeting 20 feet under water in October 2009, it not only protested against the lack of decisive action against climate change; the publicity stunt also called attention to what is arguably one of the most serious problems triggered by global warming and the consequent rise of sea-levels, i.e. the environmentally forced migration of more and more people out of hazardous areas. Mohammed Nasheed, President of the Maldives, warned that his entire nation may have to find a new home if the oceans rise as predicted by the UN.

In Western countries, “climate migration” is often framed as a security issue, yet the notion that millions of “eco-refugees” will be fleeing the Global South for the (literally) safer shores of the developed countries probably tells us more about Western climatic paranoia than about the real problems involved. As recent literature on the topic has clearly shown, the issue is much more complicated than that. Migration can be both a short-term and a long-term strategy to cope with environmental change. The distance covered by migrants can span thousands of miles, but it might also be just a few hundred feet to relatives on high and dry land. Also, migration might not be available at all as a coping strategy if victims of environmental change lack the resources necessary to leave. Furthermore, people might be forced to leave a hazardous area, or they might migrate more or less voluntarily. The evacuation of a certain region can be administered by the state in one case and can be spontaneous and unplanned in another. Finally, as far as causation is concerned, “environmental migration” is, of course, entangled into a web of many other factors (economic, political, ethnic, etc.).

While a lot has been written in the last two decades about theoretical problems and terminological questions of environmentally induced migration, and while the amount of empirical studies on contemporary problems is slowly but steadily growing, we still know very little about the historical dimension of this relationship. Thus, CLIMATES OF MIGRATION, a joint project by the Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Essen, and the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society at LMU Munich, invites proposals for a multi-disciplinary conference on the historical intersections between environmental change and migration from all parts of the world.

We seek proposals on a range of interconnected historical topics, including, but not limited to:

- migration as a result of the constant degradation of the environment (droughts, erosion, etc.)
- migration as a result of different kinds of extreme natural events in the past (storms, floods, earthquakes, and others)
- population changes over time in distinct hazardous locations such as floodplains, coastal zones, etc.
- histories of vulnerability and resilience; what exactly is the relationship between the hazardscape and the landscape, or, put differently, why did people move into a dangerous area in the first place?
- historical examples of relocation, resettlement, zoning, and city planning issues with impacts on the population as a result of environmental change
- historical discourses on environmentally induced migration such as colonial debates about climate as an incentive for or an obstacle to migration
- islands, especially small and low-lying ones, as particularly vulnerable (or particularly resilient) places
- the relevance of local, regional, and transnational networks for “environmental migrants”

Please send a proposal of no more than 500 words and a brief CV to Angelika Möller (angelika.moeller@carsoncenter.lmu.de).

The deadline for submission of proposals is March 10, 2011. Participants will be notified as soon as possible.

The conference will be held in English and will focus on the discussion of pre-circulated papers of about 5,000 to 7,000 words (due by July 15, 2011). The RCC will cover participants' travel and accommodation costs.

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact us:

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