



Call for Papers

## *Silent Springs* Global Histories of Pesticides and Our Toxic Worlds

Conference to Mark the Anniversary of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*

16–19 October 2022  
Akademie Schloss Tutzing, Germany

Conveners: Marin Coudreau, Christof Mauch, and Céline Pessis  
with  
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How many “silent springs” have there been since Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* in 1962? Chemists have invented more and more formulas, generations of pesticides have compounded into the earth’s lands and waters, and their use has grown exponentially. Synthetic molecules have continued to accumulate in the fabric of life—from soils and earthworms to the bodies of farmers and consumers—to the point that researchers now consider pesticides potential “agents of global change” in a similar way that CO<sub>2</sub> is an agent of global warming. The environmental and health catastrophe associated with the chemical intensification of agriculture has steadily increased since Carson’s best-selling book was published, as toxicants have followed the trajectories of international trade and power asymmetries. Sixty years after the publication of *Silent Spring*, this conference will explore its resonance and impact, both acute and muted, but will also address issues that the book overlooked. In the context of agro-industrial infrastructure, it aims to follow the molecular level up to the trophic chains. This conference intends to pay attention to intertwined processes at different scales, from the transformation of regional economies to the proliferation of pests or invasive species.

*Silent Spring* has often been considered the starting point of the environmental movement in the US and beyond. But has Rachel Carson’s classic really changed the world we live in? It has long been argued that the book’s western worldview obscured environmental justice issues in the Global South. How has the debate about chemical poisons unfolded internationally since the 1960s? Critics such as French psychiatrist and political philosopher Franz Fanon, American eco-anarchist Murray Bookchin, Soviet physicist and dissident Andrei Sakharov, and Indian environmental activist Vandana Shiva are only a few examples that suggest a multiplicity of registers of indignation, narratives, and revolts confronting the social and environmental damages of pesticides.

How can scholars in environmental history and the environmental humanities tell the stories of post-Carson forms of “toxic colonialism” as they happened both in the Global South and behind the Iron Curtain? How have new generations of pesticides and new actors in the global trade and governance of toxicants, such as China, contributed novel challenges and solutions to human health and the environment? What role have agrochemical companies played in the dilution of



regulations? What mechanisms in the production of knowledge have helped to spread doubt about the long-term impacts of their products on human bodies and the global web of life? To what extent has this renewed geographical, social, gender, racial, and generational asymmetries in the “contamination of the Earth”?

The conference will address some of the above queries and explore issues arising from the following larger, and overlapping, thematic fields:

- Industries, sciences, and “chemical wars”
- Markets and the global circulation of pesticides
- Ecologies and toxic colonialism
- Toxic bodies and the health of the planet
- Contestations, mobilizations, and alternatives

We welcome proposals with a historical approach but also from diverse disciplines such as environmental studies, anthropology, political science, and others. Collaborative projects and proposals with alternative writing formats are also welcome. Please send a proposal of no more than 500 words and a one-page CV to: [conferences@carsoncenter.lmu.de](mailto:conferences@carsoncenter.lmu.de).

The deadline for submissions is 15 May 2022. Participants will be notified of acceptance as soon as possible.

The conference is a joint initiative of Le RUCHE (Réseau Universitaire de Chercheurs en Histoire Environnementale) and the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society at LMU Munich. Held in English and French, it will focus on the discussion of pre-circulated papers of 6,000 to 8,000 words, including footnotes (due by 15 September 2022), and the discussion will be in both languages. The RCC and Le RUCHE will cover travel and accommodation costs.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact the conveners:  
[celine.pessis@neuf.fr](mailto:celine.pessis@neuf.fr), [mauch@lmu.de](mailto:mauch@lmu.de), [marincoudreau@gmail.com](mailto:marincoudreau@gmail.com).