

Call for Papers

Postgraduate Workshop:

“Ecological Othering and Biopolitics in the Environmental Humanities”

10-11 October 2014, Munich, Germany

The development of modern environmental thought and environmental discourses is inextricably intertwined with the historical expansion of colonialism and imperialism. European colonial occupation and settlement of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas depended on the notion that the white European colonizer was ‘naturally’ predestined to rule over occupied, non-white populations and their lands. At the height of British colonialism, misappropriations of Darwin’s “survival of the fittest” provided a convenient theoretical justification for colonial politics and the often brutal dispossession and relocation of Native populations. Furthermore, colonial discourse cemented inferior subject positions for racial others as “closer to nature”, as critics have shown by analyzing the binary opposition between “primitive savage” and “noble savage” (Moore, Pandian, and Kosek 13). The ideological foundation of such “ecological othering” in many cases persists into the post-colonial (and neo-colonial) contexts of the present. Assumptions about the particular ‘closeness’ and ‘traditional’ – often implying non-modern – relationship to nature of indigenous people in the Amazon rainforest, for example, remain. Similar prejudices are attached to Native American populations throughout the American continent in general. Such stereotyping, on the one hand, extols the idea of an “ecological Indian” (Krech). Appropriated by Native populations, on the other hand, it can also have an empowering potential because it provides the “means [...] to articulate an alternative response to the pervasive Western, techno-industrial attitudes” (Schweninger 16, Krech).

In regard to the US, Sarah Jaquette Ray has shown in her recently published book *The Ecological Other* (2013) that white supremacist convictions still pervade American culture and in particular modern environmentalism. In her analysis, Ray reveals how environmental discourse constructs and enforces social hierarchies “along lines of ‘purity and pollution’” in that it establishes a differentiation between “natural and unnatural bodies, and between bodies that are ‘good’ for nature and those that are not” (2). In this context Foucault’s concept of biopower proves to be helpful to further investigate the regulatory mechanisms of “ecological othering” and to analyse how the framing of environmental problems often reflects exclusionary tendencies.

Taking Ray's concept of the "ecological other" as a starting point for discussion, this workshop wants to explore how environmental discourse draws on the notion of "good bodies" and "bad bodies" and how the "healthy body" comes to play an important role for nation-building and population control (biopolitics). Furthermore, analyzing how this particular rhetoric has turned environmentalism into a white middle class movement, the workshop also discusses the role of environmental justice in opening the discourse and including a multitude of environmentalisms.

We invite contributions from postgraduate scholars in the environmental humanities that engage with a variety of concepts and theories related to this vast research area, which can include but are not limited to:

- biopolitics (Foucault, Agamben), necropolitics (Mbembe)
- purity and immunity versus contamination and contagion
- illness, disability, deviance
- normativity and othering
- environmental justice and environmental health (e.g. toxic contamination, workplace safety, risks)
- theories of materiality and the corporeal (e.g. Latour, Alaimo)

Interested young scholars can either participate with a poster, an excerpt/chapter of their dissertation/MA thesis or by suggesting a relevant secondary text for discussion. Workshop space is limited to a maximum of 15 participants. The workshop language is English.

If you are interested in participating, please send an email until **July 20th, 2014** to **docforum.elc@gmail.com**, including a short biographical note, your current project topic and state in which form you'd like to contribute.

Workshop Format and Program

The workshop is organised by the postgraduate forum "Environment, Literature, Culture" which aims at bringing together young researchers from the EASLCE membership countries to share and discuss their research with other young scholars in the environmental humanities.

The workshop will open with a keynote with Dr. Clare Barker on Friday afternoon, which will serve as an introduction to the workshop's topic. Following the discussion, there will be a reception with snacks and drinks during which participants will receive the

opportunity to get peer-feedback on their dissertation (or a chapter of it) or current research project during a poster session.

On Saturday, we will have time to discuss a total of 6 texts in two text sessions. The texts for discussion will be made available to and should be read by all participants in advance. Those who suggested a text will be asked to briefly introduce it in a short input presentation before the discussion. Please bear in mind that we do not want to discuss thesis projects in their early stages during this text session (if you want to present your whole project, please apply for the poster session). Chapters or excerpts of your thesis are, however, as welcome as are theoretical secondary texts that you find challenging or useful with respect to the workshop's topic.

We try to keep costs for all participants as low as possible, and we hope to be able to contribute towards your travel expenses; this applies in particular for participants without university or third-party funding.

Organizers:

Antonia Mehnert, Rachel Carson Center, LMU München

Hanna Straß, LMU München, EASLCE webinar coordinator

References:

Krech, Shepard. *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*. London: Norton, 2000. Print.

Moore, Donald S., Anand Pandian, and Jake Kosek. "Introduction. The Cultural Politics of Race and Nature: Terrains of Power and Practice." *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference*. Ed. Donald S. Moore, Jake Kosek, and Anand Pandian. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. 1–70. Print.

Ray, Sarah J. *The Ecological Other: Environmental Exclusion in American Culture*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2013.

Schweninger, Lee. *Listening to the Land: Native American Literary Responses to the Landscape*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008. Print.