

The Nature State Workshop

Rachel
Carson
Center

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Sponsors: Rachel Carson Center, Parco Nazionale del Gran Paradiso and Comune di Valsavarenche

Conveners: Wilko Graf von Hardenberg, Claudia Leal, Matthew Kelly, and Emily Wakild



Wilko Graf von Hardenberg, Matthew Kelly, and Claudia Leal. Emily Wakild could not attend the workshop in person because she was caring for her newborn baby.

Participants

Claudia Leal, Universidad de los Andes, Bogota, Colombia

Emily Wakild, Boise State University, USA (via Skype)

Emmanuel Kreike, Princeton University, USA

Ian Tyrrell, University of New South Wales, Australia

Matt Kelly, University of South Hampton, United Kingdom

Michael Hathaway, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada

Shiho Satsuka, University of Toronto, Canada

Siddhartha Krishnan, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, Bengaluru, India

Stefan Dorondel, Francisc I. Rainer Institute of Anthropology, Bucharest, Romania

Veronica Mitroi, Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées, Paris, France

Wilko Graf von Hardenberg, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA

In this workshop, historians, anthropologists, sociologists and geographers of nine different nationalities and working in North and Latin America, Europe, Australia and India—and six of whom are RCC Alumni—discussed nature conservation across the world in the twentieth century. The focus was on the concept of the nature state, a set of institutions and regulations for nature management—such as national parks, hunting laws, and measures for agricultural promotion—that have developed within the broader modern state. Besides addressing the specificities of each paper, the discussions centered on how the type of state or regime (colonial vs. national, authoritarian vs. democratic), the kind of environments (forests, grasslands, wetlands, tropical or temperate), and the early development of certain institutions (such as forest or game reserves) contributed to forging different *regional genealogies* of the nature state. Colonialism, grasslands, and game reserves, for instance, are fundamental to understanding the trajectory of the nature state in many parts of Africa, but are not very relevant in Latin America. Participants also identified *global turning points* in the development of nature states. The end of the age of liberalism with the Great Depression led to a strengthening of the role of the state that contributed to the growth of the nature state: in the 1930s, for instance, national parks were created for the first time in Latin America and Japan, and were seriously discussed, also for the first time, in the United Kingdom. The second turning point came in the 1970s with the environmentalism becoming truly global.

While the papers dwell with a wide variety of topics, their contributions can be centered around three core issues, as follows.

The emergence of the nature state in colonial and national settings

Tyrrell, Kreike, Wakild, and Leal dealt with the emergence of the nature state as part of colonialism and nation building spanning almost the entire century. Together they show that there is no linear and progressive development of the nature state, and that neither colonialism nor nation building can be signaled out as intrinsically fostering nature conservation institutions. Rather, the particularities of colonial relations, the way in which states are organized and make decisions, and the nature of the landscapes themselves need to be carefully explored to follow the ambivalent development of nature states and establish typologies.

In “The export of the national park idea in an age of empire: The Philippines, 1898-1940”, **TYRRELL** first explains how the US attempted, in the context of inter-imperial rivalries and cooperation, to develop the Philippines around forestry to make the colony pay for itself. It then goes to show how, in the 1930s, a *nationalist* project for national parks emerged, which started by attempting to follow the US model but was soon shaped by both local subjects’ ways of

managing the environment and a cultural politics of elite nationalism that relied on Filipino mythology. The shift from a colonial utilitarian conservation model of the nature state to a national conservation one based on an autonomous version of parks in the first decades of the twentieth century contrasts with the colonial policy in Namibia at the time. Here, as **KREIKE** argues in “Negotiating the Nature State Beyond the Parks,” the South African government *began* by creating Etosha National Park in 1916, but did not do much else initially in part out of concern of generating social unrest in a conflictive area. Only in the 1950s, as it planned to effectively annex Namibia, did the nature state unfold by moving beyond national parks and, among other policies, controlling livestock movement. Various state agencies intervened—sometimes cooperating and sometimes clashing—in the implementation of diverse conservation measures.



Ian Tyrrell



Emmanuel Kreike

Wakild and Leal move the discussion to Latin America, where by the beginning of the twentieth century independent nation states had been forming for many decades. The Southern Cone pioneered the development of nature conservation in Latin America and in “Parsing Protection in Patagonia: Science and Scenic Conservation on a South American State Frontier, 1903–1936,” **WAKILD** explores how the natural sciences contributed to the appropriation of the Patagonian frontier and the emergence of the nature state—through forestry and the creation of national parks—in Chile and Argentina. She contrasts how the grassy plains and forested mountains generated different kinds of expertise and policies. Scientists emerge in this story as embodiments of the nature state with independent views and agendas from the larger state in which they often operated. The development of the nature state in most countries in Latin America came later, in the 1960s and 1970s, as **LEAL** explains in “Behind Paradise: Building Parks in Colombia, 1960s–1970s.” In her piece, instead of exploring the role of science, she examines how regimes, both democratic and authoritarian, that gave much decision power to the presidency were fundamental

for the development of national parks. Like Kreike, Leal delves into the struggles among different state institutions, thereby analyzing the relations of antagonism and collaboration between the nature state and the broader state of which it is a part. She also moves from the national to the local level to compose a comprehensive picture of the vagrancies of building the nature state.



Claudia Leal

For and against cultural landscapes

Krishnan, Kelly, Satsuka, and Hathaway show how the nature state has not only been built around the separation between nature and culture, but also around its integration. In particular, they focus on the policies of the British nature state regarding certain iconic cultural landscapes both at home and in India, and also examine the relation of the Chinese and Japanese states with forested landscapes in the peripheries of their national territories. In “India, as Terra Paradoxa: (1900–1950)”, **KRISHNAN** recounts an unusual story of British settler colonialism transforming a grassland lawn-like environment into a forest in Madras. In so doing, he moves away from the common idea that these colonizers created British-looking landscapes everywhere, as well as from the strong emphasis on forests on Indian environmental studies. The British read a cultural landscape maintained by the Toda people as natural and transformed it through plantations into what they considered a productive one; yet, for the Toda, the menacing tigers that came to inhabit the new landscape denoted its untamed character. By moving forward in time and to the British Isles, **KELLY**, in “The Conservation Turn: British Politics in the 1970s,” shows how nature conservation becomes an unlikely bedfellow with notions of cultural heritage, in a critique of modern agriculture as environmentally destructive. British national parks, created as World War II ended, aimed at conserving agricultural landscapes without anticipating the radical changes that the modernization of agriculture would soon bring about. A few decades later, biodiversity became the argument for protecting the landscape from agriculture and empowering the nature state in the process.



Siddhartha Krishnan



Matt Kelly

HATHAWAY moved the discussion to East Asia with his paper “Discovering China’s Tropical Rainforests: Shifting Approaches to People and Nature in the late Twentieth Century,” in which he shows that conservation *through* agriculture reveals a way of conceiving nature in a broad manner. With the strong participation of global conservation forces embodied in the World Wildlife Fund, agroforestry is initially the preferred mechanism for nature protection in Yunan province. However, the tide turns and swidden agriculture then becomes valued as the best way of maintaining a healthy environment. Looking at Japanese natural parks, **SATSUKA** similarly explores how nature conservation relied on avoiding conceiving nature and culture as separate realms. In “Separation or Harmony? Satoyama Conservation Movements in and beyond National Parks in Late Twentieth-Century Japan,” she contributes to the exploration of the translation of the national park idea into different cultural traditions and epistemologies. She explains how protecting a cultural landscape became conceived as a way of maintaining both traditional values and conserving biodiversity.



Michael Hathaway



Shiho Satsuka

Regime changes and citizenship

Dorondel, Mitroi, and Hardenberg explore how in the transition from authoritarian to democratic

regimes conservation policies altered the relation between states and their constituencies. In “Fishermen Into Poachers: Nature, State and Fishing Practices in the Danube Delta” **DORONDEL** and **MITROI** explain how in the transition from socialism to postsocialism in Romania fisheries ceased to be conceived as a productive resource and rather were signaled as natural resource protected under a biosphere reserve. Both regimes aimed at controlling access to fish and attacked traditional fishing practices that came to be defined as poaching. In socialism poaching largely meant “stealing” part of the catch from state-owned fishing boats, while later it came to mean “destroying” the environment. **HARDENBERG** stays in Europe but moves west to Italy and from wetlands to mountains. In “Another Way to Preserve: Hunting Bans, Pastoral Economy, Nature Conservation and the Brown Bear in Italy, 1930–1960” he shows how the transition from fascism to democracy led to a change in the implementation of hunting regulations from the national to regional level. Biosecurity, the protection of the population against the threats posed by a dangerous animal, led damage compensation to take precedence over the effective protection of a severely endangered bear colony.



Veronica Mitroi



Stefan Dorondel



Wilko Graf von Hardenberg

This workshop aimed at taking the state seriously in the studies of the history of nature conservation in the twentieth century, and having a truly global and international perspective decentered from the US experience. Building on recent anthropological literature on state ethnographies, papers deal with the nature state in very tangible manners. The state ceases then to be an all-encompassing abstraction to be often represented by specific state officials with specific responsibilities, ideologies, and actions, or by regulations emanating from particular decision-making processes in certain institutions and with concrete effects. Such treatment of the state also means dealing with the state in various scales and, very importantly, reconstructing its global connections.

Revised versions of the papers discussed in this workshop will be submitted next year for a special supplement of the British journal *Past & Present*. Participants will also contribute to the Arcadia project of the RCC's Nature & Society Portal.

Claudia Leal