

Climate change, empire and the legacies of environmental determinism

This two-day workshop, hosted by the Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect at the LMU Munich, will examine environmentally determinist ideas historically and trace their imperial legacies in the face of today's climate crisis.

We live in a time when concern about human effects on the environment and climate are greater than ever. For much of human history, however, the opposite was true, and environments' and climates' effects on people were often the more pressing concern. Environmental or climatic determinism – the idea that people are shaped physically, culturally and even morally – by their environments has a long and often insidious history.

Determinist thinking had particular utility in the age of European and global empires in the 19th and 20th centuries, taking on new forms amidst attempts to expand and justify imperial dominance. Everything from 'energy' to racial characteristics and from 'civilisational success' to the limits of habitability were seen as environmentally and climatically determined. Today, these ideas are once again being reconfigured in new and troubling ways, such as in the deterministic language sometimes employed around climate and migration, which risks echoing racist, early 20th-century visions of 'nomadic hordes'. With the Anthropocene concept placing human and planetary histories and futures on the same scale, tracing the language of environmental determinism has become an imperative.



Please register by 11 March 2024:

<https://www.globaldisconnect.org/registration/>

Your participation is understood to imply consent to photographic and video recordings for internal purposes, scholarly communication and publicity. Should you have any concerns, please contact Sophie Eisenried at sophie.eisenried@lmu.de.



Käte Hamburger
Research Centre
global dis:connect

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Concept and organisation:
Lachlan Fleetwood

18–19
March
2024

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LMU Munich
Maria-Theresia-Straße 21
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Monday, 18 March 2024

09:15 Registration and coffee

09:45 Opening Remarks

10:00 Environmental determinism and habitability

Alice Wolff (Cornell University), Environmental determinism from the medieval to the modern

Margot Damiens (Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3), To shape or be shaped – environmental determinism in the reflections around the colonization of the High North around 1800

Matthew Bender (The College of New Jersey), Journey to Kilimanjaro: environmental determinism and European colonial notions of ‘habitability’ in East Africa, 1860-1940

Chair: Lachlan Fleetwood (LMU Munich/Global Dis:connect)

11:30 Coffee break

12:00 Environmental determinism and the weather

Emma Wordsworth (University of Cambridge), Causation, climate and culture in British famine relief narratives: India, China, and Asia Minor, 1873-1879

Animesh Chatterjee (Stavanger University), ‘Neck-ties, Punkahs and the Customary Allowance of Wind’: thermal modernity and inequities in weathering colonial Calcutta

Chair: Callie Wilkinson (LMU Munich/Global Dis:connect)
Lunch break

13:00

Environmental determinism and acclimatisation

14:30

Zhengfeng Wang (Leiden University), Food, refrigeration and climate control: environmental governmentality in treaty-port Shanghai, 1900s-1930s

Vanessa Heggie (University of Birmingham), Making Antarctic citizens: acclimatisation vs. adaptation to cold and heat in mid-twentieth century physiology

Chair: Floris Winckel (LMU Munich/Rachel Carson Center)

Coffee break

15:30

Environmental determinism and climate change

16:00

Katja Doose and **Christine Bichsel** (University of Fribourg), Negotiating dryness. Environmental imaginaries of Central Asia’s aridity in the early 20th century

Philippe Forêt (University of Basel/University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland), Climate change and the passive resistance to environmental determinism, 1905-1927

Chair: Judd Kinzley (UW Madison/Global Dis:connect)

18:30 Dinner

Tuesday, 19 March 2024

09:30 Environmental determinism in arid regions

Guillemette Crouzet (European University Institute), Oil futures: the Zagros Mountains, the Baktiari Tribe, and British imperial imaginaries in the early twentieth-century Middle East

Maggie Freeman (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), ‘To Control the Desert Tribes’: policies for environmental and social control in the British mandate’s ‘desert corridor’ (1920-1948)

Matheus Duarte (University of St Andrews), Internal imperialism, desertic determinism: local knowledge, multi-species encounters and epidemiological reasoning in the Brazilian backlands (1899-1965)

Chair: Tom Menger (LMU Munich/Global Dis:connect)

11:00 Coffee break

11:30 Environmental determinism and colonial climates

Sarah Stradling (Freie Universität Berlin), In search of a healthy climate: imagining medical colonisation in German South West Africa

Angelo Matteo Caglioti (Barnard College, Columbia University), Determinism Italian style: positivism, colonial climates and Italian imperialism

Chair: Matthias Leanza (University of Basel/Global Dis:connect)

12:30 Lunch break

14:00 Environmental determinism and the environmental humanities

Matthew Vollgraff (University of Basel), ‘Like an Echo of the Earth’s History’: Josef Strzygowski and the environmental determinism of ‘global’ art history

Dalal Musaed Alsayer (Kuwait University), Everywhere a village: US empire, environmental orientalism and the making of a productive landscape in the Levant, c. 1930-1960

Michael Boyden (Radboud University Nijmegen), Environmental determinism and affirmative biopolitics in John Steinbeck’s Salinas Valley novels

Chair: Sabrina Moura (LMU Munich/Global Dis:connect)

15:30 Close