

Call for Chapters

“Environmental and Cultural Destruction at Imperial Margins”

Type: Edited Volume

Subject Fields: Study of Empires, Environmental Humanities, Borderlands, Frontiers & Contact Zones, History, Political Sciences, Anthropology, Postcolonial Studies, Memory Studies, Linguistics, Religious Studies, Literary, Film, and Art Studies, Human Geography, Animal Studies

This call invites submissions for contributions to an edited volume with the working title “Environmental and Cultural Destruction at Imperial Margins.” The volume was initiated following the second annual conference of the Graduate School “Empires” (University of Freiburg), held in late 2023 in Freiburg, Germany (<https://www.grk2571.uni-freiburg.de/veranstaltungen/konferenzen/jahrestagung-2023/jahrestagung-2022>).

This volume delves into the intersection of three vibrant research fields: environmental humanities, the study of cultures in human societies, and the study of the relational spaces of borderlands, frontiers, and contact zones in (post)imperial contexts. It seeks to offer fresh perspectives on the origins and mechanisms of practices of destruction that have unfolded in the cultural and environmental margins within (post)imperial or inter-imperial spaces. The volume’s primary focus lies on different transformative processes, which can be characterized as destructive, affecting in an interrelated manner both the environmental and cultural ‘other’ within imperial spaces. We aim to understand the dynamics of othering and marginalization of environments and cultures as interconnected yet distinct phenomena and intend to investigate how imperial logics have been causing entanglements of environmental and cultural destruction.

Building on the concept of the “environmental imaginary” (Davis and Burke 2011), we propose to examine the intertwining, competing, and conflicting environmental and cultural imaginaries

clashing in imperial borderlands and frontiers. Against the background of (post)imperial hierarchies, this clash and the subsequent imposition of environmental imaginaries reverberates through time, leaving scars from military force, administrative rule, and the colonization of land and mind. The notion of “civilizing projects”, involving a “civilizing” centre claiming superiority and seeking to elevate the civilizational level of so-called peripheral peoples (Harrell 1995), is one that we invite you to extend to the non-human world. Our volume draws connections to insights from James C. Scott concerning state projects that aim to render marginally perceived terrains “legible”, subjecting societies and their environments to state visions of scientific designs that delegitimized and eradicated pre-existing ways of organizing societies and environments, and ultimately had destructive effects on both (Scott 1998).

We aim to describe, analyse, and distinguish between various forms of borderlands and frontiers. Destructive processes within imperial margins are not solely the outcome of state rule; they can also arise from imperial neglect, the establishment of capitalist commodity frontiers (Beckert et al. 2021), or emerge from local non-state actors operating within or against imperial hierarchies. Such relational spaces of liminality have often been described as “contact zones”, denoting “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt 1991, 34), “middle ground” (White 1991), “zomia” (Scott 2009) or “terra nullius”. Concepts such as these can assist us to better understand these relational spaces within (inter/post)imperial contexts, help us reflect upon how these entangled nature-human landscapes were imagined, conceptualized, and gazed upon, and explore the transformations they underwent.

Another aim of this volume is to critically engage with the term ‘destruction’ itself through the lens of contrasting environmental and cultural imaginaries. We seek to explore the dialectical relationship between destruction and construction. ‘Destruction’, a performative description of negative judgmental nature, is a term that is situational and entangled with the researcher’s own positionality, while ‘construction’, conversely, implies a positive development. In this volume, we intend to disrupt the simple destruction-construction dichotomy and engage in their causal and temporal interconnectedness that defies easy definition. While both environmental and cultural destruction can result from the efforts of creation and conservation, destruction can impose and/or create new multi-species assemblies, cultural realities, and historical narratives that can result in resistance, adaptation, re-imagination, or regeneration.

We welcome contributions from a wide array of disciplines, encompassing, but not limited to, environmental humanities, history, anthropology, memory studies, linguistics, religious studies, literary and film studies, post/de-colonial studies, feminist studies, animal studies as well as

social and political sciences. We embrace interdisciplinary perspectives and encourage innovative approaches that bridge these disciplines.

We particularly encourage submissions focusing on the exploration of environmental and cultural destruction in the context of the following geographical regions: **Africa**, the **Americas** (both South and North), the **Middle East**, and the **Arctic**.

Please submit a draft of approximately **ten pages**, accompanied by an **abstract** of no more than 300 words, and a brief biographical note by **15 April 2024** to the following email address: conference@grk2571.uni-freiburg.de

We plan to publish the edited volume with De Gruyter as an open-access publication in collaboration with some conference participants who cover various geographical regions (Central Asia, Australasian Sea, Habsburg Galicia, India, and Indonesia).

In case of acceptance, we expect **full paper drafts** by **30 June 2024** which we would like to discuss in a collaborative **writing workshop** in July. We intend to submit **final chapters** to peer review in **late October 2024**.

The volume will be edited by Verena Zabel and Ricardo Rudas Meo, both PhD candidates at the Graduate School “Empires” at the University of Freiburg. For more details about the editors, please visit: <https://www.grk2571.uni-freiburg.de/#personen>

For further information or questions, please contact the editorial team at: conference@grk2571.uni-freiburg.de

References

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