

reader to rethink his/her methodological toolkit. The larger claims in this slim volume, lucidly articulated and better defended in Guha's previous works, deserve close analysis: in his earlier scholarship, Guha assailed the elitism of modern Indian historiography, perpetuated by the colonial and recently-empowered nationalist schools, for clinging to a conception of politics confined to colonial institutions bequeathed by British imperialism. These parameters, Guha argued, resulted in the popular politics of the Indian people being left out, whose existence in an autonomous domain, separate from indigenous elite politics and the mechanics of colonial governance, demanded scholarly treatment through the creation of an alternative discourse. This new paradigm, deeply indebted to Gramscian insights, enabled him to examine the pillars of popular politics and collective action which structured peasant insurgency in colonial India. By excavating these activities, Guha demonstrated, a focus on either indigenous elites or the colonial state would exclude an expansive theater of activity. The colonial state, Guha indicates, was non-hegemonic in civil society, failing to fully assimilate civil society. He characterises British rule, therefore, as 'dominance without hegemony' as it left a vast public sphere unaltered.

Guha's arguments are vulnerable to criticism on several grounds: the first criticism stems from Guha's depiction of colonisation. He dwells mainly on the first phase of this process (i.e., the act of conquest) and then fast-forwards to a mature, fully-functioning colonial state, skipping the intervening period of gestation. Lauren Benton's *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400-1900* (2002) provides a useful corrective to Guha's uncomplicated account. She points out that the colonial state *per se* did not exist in the first centuries of colonialism and that it neither did, nor had the capacity to, claim a monopoly on legal authority and identity, but rather was fractured and incomplete. The characteristics of the dominance which later occurred and the chronology of its institutionalisation derived from an 'interactive politics and not simply the logical extension of conquest' (258). Rather than move away from state-centred colonial history, it might be argued, scholars would benefit from examining the often-circuitous and much-neglected process of state-formation. Second, Guha's polemical stance toward what he regards as historiographical orthodoxy leads him to portray 'Western' methodology as monolithic and stale. While he favourably alludes to Marc Bloch of the *Annales* and Giambattista Vico in passing, Guha leaves his reader with the impression that world history as practiced in Europe and North America has done little to modify Hegel's early nineteenth-century framework. More disappointing still is Guha's rambling recapitulation of Hegel's theory of 'World History' and conception of colonisation, which deprives the latter's account of its innate subtlety and complexity. His endnotes indicate Guha consulted no commentaries other than those of Jean Hyppolite and Charles Taylor, suggesting that he is unaware of a huge body of scholarship which hardly corroborates his theses.

But Guha's aim in *History at the Limit of World-History* is neither to reconstruct the intellectual milieu out which Hegel's ideas emerged nor to write a history of Indian historiography. He is after bigger game: to identify previously-neglected modes of discourse, especially literary ones, and to employ these sources in order to write a history of India and other the postcolonial states which escapes from the stultifying boundaries of traditional state-centric history.

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Peder Anker, *Imperial Ecology: Environmental Order in the British Empire, 1895-1945*. Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2001. vii + 343 pp. ISBN 0-674-00595-3.

With this book, Peder Anker has made a valuable contribution to the growing corpus of recent scholarship that critically examines the history of science, in this case ecology, and its institutio-

nalisation within the context of late European imperialism. Anker traces the expansion of ecological research in the first half of the twentieth century, showing how through the use of new technologies like the airplane and the 'cannibalization' of reasoning from other disciplines, particularly psychology, leading theorists and practitioners in the field constructed a new ecological order of knowledge that progressively encompassed all of the sciences of nature; from botany to forestry to animal ecology and finally to human ecology. He argues that by the 1930s and 1940s, ecology had emerged as an important tool for the improved management of the material and human resources of the British Empire, helping to both humanise nature and naturalise humanity in a way that elided the thorny political, racial, and social class issues surrounding the practice of imperial trusteeship.

The expansion of ecology, as Anker impressively illustrates, was riddled with personal tensions and ideological conflicts. Although all the ecologists discussed in the book shared a common vision of scientific colonialism and the desire to bring ecological research to the forefront of imperial science, Anker shows that a vigorous philosophical debate erupted between the two major networks of patronage within the British Empire. In the southern part of empire, a small but highly vocal group of ecologists coalesced around the South African statesman and botanist, Jan Christian Smuts, whose influential patronage and philosophical beliefs inspired a whole generation of South Africa-based botanists and ecologists, ranging from Iltyd Buller Pole Evans to John William Bews to John Phillips. In the North, a larger network of British ecologists formed under the leadership of Arthur George Tansley, editor of *The New Phytologist* and Sherardian Professor of Botany at Magdalen College, Oxford, from 1927 to 1937. The members of the 'Oxford School of Imperial Ecology', as Anker terms it, included Thomas Ford Chipp, Charles Elton, Robert Scott Troup, Ray Bourne, Julian Huxley, Alexander Morris Carr-Saunders, and H.G. Wells. At the heart of the debate between these two camps were two radically different approaches to ecology, with the South Africans championing Smut's idealistic philosophy of holism and gradual evolutionism as the basis for their research, while the Oxford group challenged with a more mechanistic management view that Tansley would synthesise into his seminal ecosystem theory. This controversy reached its height in the 1930s after Smuts gave his famous lectures at Oxford calling for a full-scale ecological survey of the African continent in order to investigate the possibilities of a renewed policy of white settlement in the highlands of Central and East Africa. In the end, an African Survey was conducted under the chairmanship of Malcolm Hailey, with E.B. Worthington carrying out the scientific side using a systems approach to coordinate and centralise the various branches of scientific knowledge and render them useful to colonial administrative needs. After the Second World War, Smut's philosophical holism came under increasing attack for being deeply hypocritical and threatening to open society, whereas the Oxfordian systems methodology began to reach a global audience through Huxley's directorship of UNESCO.

Anker's book stands as a carefully documented and highly readable narrative that draws many fascinating connections between the conceptual evolution of ecology and an impressive array of seemingly disconnected intellectual influences, ranging from Freudian psychoanalysis to the anti-modernist literature of Oxford idealists like J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis to the popular science fiction writing of H.G. Wells. Along the way he has also made some critical interjections into the field of environmental history. Anker's emphasis on the importance of North-South relations in the emergence of ecology as an imperial science challenges the contemporary and still largely accepted understanding of the historical role of ecology as a Western and generally benign body of knowledge. Anker insists that the theoretical distinction made by such prominent environmental historians as Donald Worster between a 'bad' managerial and 'good' Arcadian view of nature is historically flawed. As he convincingly demonstrates, leading intellectuals like Julian Huxley and H.G. Wells espoused in their ecological writings both a romantic affection and interest in the preservation of nature from the detrimental affects of human intervention, and a missionary zeal for scientific and state planning and

management of the world's resources for the well-being of humanity. In a similar vein, he shows how South African ecologists like Smuts and John Phillips could employ a deep ecological reasoning to legitimise racist views in favour of a policy of segregation of black and white peoples. There was an ecological division of mankind in which different races possessed different biotic backgrounds and occupied different biotic communities that needed to be conserved and developed gradually along their own lines. Such logic helps explain how it is that Smuts could be both a long-time supporter of the League of Nations and one of the main architects of the U.N.'s declaration on human rights, and at the same time condone state violence and suppression of black people and labour strikes in South Africa. Perhaps the strongest message one is left with after reading this book is that the history of ecology must be viewed anthropocentrically, as a product of human and not environmental agency. The belief that humans are a part of nature and must live in balance with it, rather than over and against it, is a historically and socially contingent belief and not the sacred truth currently in vogue in environmental studies and philosophy.

If there is a flaw in Anker's reading of imperial ecology it is that he tends to reinforce the predominantly held view among historians that science was an effective tool of imperial domination and control, in which a system of global knowledge was increasingly enlarged at the expense of local knowledge and the welfare of local communities. While there is certainly much justification and truth in this perspective, it does not fully capture the complexity of the relationship between science and empire. As the work of Helen Tilley makes clear, there existed a subtext of criticism and dissent among many colonial scientific advisers that at times challenged the very notion of imperial trusteeship and domination. She argues that these advisers, many of them ecologists and bio-scientists working in the field as part of colonial agricultural service, helped to generate alternative visions and models of colonial development that were sensitive to local conditions and knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Although it goes beyond the scope of Anker's study and would require a closer examination of the early postwar period, what is needed is a deeper understanding of how colonial knowledge was produced and institutionalised by examining the process by which the concerns and visions of practitioners operating on the peripheries of empire were filtered back up and had an influence on policy debates in London and Europe, and how in turn, the perspectives of officials and experts at the centre, imbued with a particular reading of history and agendas emanating from wider imperial and international research currents, were circulated outward. What can be said is that Peder Anker's book on imperial ecology is an important step in that direction and should be read by everyone interested in understanding the legacies of empire which continue to shape our contemporary world.

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#### Note

- 1 Helen Tilley, 'African Environments and Environmental Sciences: The African Research Survey, Ecological Paradigms and British Colonial Development, 1920-1940', in William Beinart and Joann McGregor, eds, *Social History and African Environments* (Oxford and Athens, 2003), 109-130.

Peter N. Stearns, *Cultures in Motion: Mapping Key Contacts and Their Imprints in World History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001. vii + 120 pp. ISBN 0-300-08228-2 (cloth); 0-300-08229-0 (pbk.).

In this concisely written and engaging historical atlas, Peter N. Stearns carefully examines fourteen distinct cultural contacts to synthesise global history from the onset of civilisation to the present. These moments of contact, he explains, provide more than 'moments of obvious drama' (2). They also serve as opportunities for analytical comparisons, instances where civilisations respond to new ideas in complex and often contradictory ways. By examining the