

Attwood's self-described attention to historical *traces* (the inadvertent record) rather than *sources* (the self-conscious official record) allows us to notice how historical actors *mobilized* ideas about native title and Indigenous sovereignty in a range of different communicative and persuasive speech acts, instead of simply how these ideas were formally defined.

Attwood's nuanced attention to archival detail, and the messiness and happenstance it reveals, makes this less a work of causal explanation, then, and more a revelation of the minutiae of political negotiation that only subsequently stabilize into concepts like native title. In his account, native title was, to British actors, an inconsequential sideshow to their struggles for jurisdiction and economic self-interest, not an end in itself. Nevertheless, historically contingent differences in the instrumentalization of native title in the nineteenth century have become enormously consequential in the present, as the relative strength of Maori claims based on the Treaty of Waitangi demonstrates. The weighty disciplinary issue emerging from the book is thus the tension between juridical history—where precedent narrates a linear development between foundational events and present action in order to justify it—and the “invariably complex, occasionally incoherent, sometimes mundane, frequently base and seldom constant” nature of historical forces documented by historians like Attwood.

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*Environments of Empire: Networks and Agents of Ecological Change*. Edited by Ulrike Kirchberger and Brett M. Bennett. (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2020. 278 pp.)

In 2015, an international cast of historians gathered at the University of Kassel in Germany to discuss nature and empires. This book commemorates that meeting with nine essays selected from among the presentations. The 2020 volume appeared during the COVID-19 pandemic. An accidental relic, it prompts fond memories of leaving home to share breathing space with clever strangers.

The editors of *Environments of Empire* wrestle an ambitious assortment of topics and approaches into a dialog with Alfred Crosby's concept of ecological imperialism. Crosby argued that European empires succeeded in creating neo-Europes at similar latitudes around the globe because of an accompanying portmanteau biota. Weedy plants, fecund animals, and lethal micro-organisms paved the way for human colonization. The essays broaden Crosby's geographic focus and challenge the one-sidedness of European global hegemony, yet they

maintain his central premise: human empires rose and fell in concert and conflict with natural environments. Crosby drew his case studies from Anglophone empires. Two essays in the volume take place in Australia, but the rest expand Crosby's vision to include Cuba, France, Germany, Cameroon, Togo, Syria, Lebanon, the Ottoman empire, the Netherlands, Java, and West Africa.

A shared timeframe unites the geographically diverse essays. The authors describe the intensification of colonization and global exchange that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They deal with empire-building in the era of mass communication and industrialization. Many of the colonizers at this time saw themselves on the cutting edge. They were out to improve the empires that preceded them.

The essays chronicle roles of nature and empires in nation-building, network formation, and animal studies. The first three essays look at failed efforts to pull off grand scientific schemes in imperial settings. Government planners in France, for example, botched an attempt in the 1970s to acclimatize Havana tobacco in France, and their reputations took a tumble when the newspapers scandalized their mistakes. In another essay, German agronomists and biologists sought to improve cotton, rubber, and cocoa production in Cameroon and Togo, only to have their experiments crash when moths, beetles, and fungi proved beyond their control.

The next three essays focus on knowledge networks. The authors read imperial sources against the grain to recover nodes and participants overlooked or erased by European experts seeking status in European museums, gardens, and universities.

The concluding essays feature animals as actors. When dredges destroyed the oyster beds in New South Wales, colonists turned to aquaculture to salvage the resource. Transplant bivalves from New Zealand arrived with a parasite. Each adaptation compounded the first acts of colonial destruction. The final essay in the volume fully embraces animal agency by depicting wild horses as landscapers and colonizers on par with humans.

I remember flying home from conferences wondering if the expenditure of time, money, and jet fuel was worth it. Did we steer a conversation in a new direction or chat one another in circles? I commend the editors and authors of *Environments of Empire* for demonstrating the value and possibilities of those in-person exchanges of yore.

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