

dieser Lesbarkeit sichtbar und vorherrschend. Fehlen die Flagge und mit ihr die nationalen Hoheitszeichen, so bleibt die Mehrdeutigkeit erhalten“ (S. 217).

Ein kleines Manko dieser Arbeit ist die geringe Zahl an Abbildungen, die auch durch die manchmal ein wenig zu lang geratenen Baubeschreibungen nicht kompensiert werden können. Die enthaltenen Abbildungen fallen zudem recht klein aus, Details sind Mangelware und fehlen genau dort, wo von ihnen die Rede ist. Die konkrete Beantwortung der Frage „Kann man national bauen?“ bleibt Elmenhorst schuldig. Die Frage spiegelt aber auch nicht den Kern seiner Untersuchung wider. Vielmehr zeigen die vorgestellten Beispiele aktueller Botschaftsbauten Strategien nationaler Selbstdarstellung durch zeitgenössische Architekten, die ihren Bauten den vom Bauherrn gewünschten Bezugsrahmen verleihen. Doch erst „der Kontext ihrer Benutzung, ihre Funktion als Botschaften kodiert diese Bauten national. Ohne diesen Kontext verlieren sie ihren scheinbar nationalen Charakter“ (S. 219). Sollte also dereinst die Flagge an der britischen Botschaft in Berlin eingeholt werden, so darf spekuliert werden, ob dort demnächst irgendein Unternehmen des Dienstleistungssektors einzieht.

Anmerkung:

- 1 J. Thaurer, Bericht aus Bonn, in: Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin, Nr. 18, 4. Mai 2012, S. 38-42.

Stephen Mosley, *The Environment in World History* (= *Themes in World History Series*), London: Routledge, 2010, 123 S.

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This is a cogently written and succinct introduction to the field and a welcome addition to the growing literature of the impact of modern humans on the environment. The book's contribution to environmental history lies in its ability to condense a sampling of the existing literature into a short volume with 117 pages of text. It excels as a primer for newcomers to the field including interested citizens, college students and faculty committed to adding courses on global environmental history to the curriculum. It contains six chapters with the following titles: Introduction: environment and history, The world hunt, Forests and forestry, Soils and irrigation, Cities and the environment, Conclusion: beyond the limits.

Mosley begins by describing the origins of the field, differentiating it from other more narrowly defined disciplines and providing a concise and informative survey of many "main themes in world-environmental history-deforestation, species loss, soil erosion and pollution of air, land and water- using case studies." (p. 4). Although the order of these themes is not followed precisely in the chapters that follow, the thoroughness with which Mosley addresses each remains one of the volume's more appealing contri-

butions. In addition, Mosley argues, “one of the most challenging things about environmental history is its interdisciplinarity,” (p. 2), noting that it gives historians an opportunity “to rethink systems of periodisation,” (p. 4).

The world hunt describes human exploitation of species during the last 500 years. Although a familiar narrative to environmental historians, its vivid retelling describes an “epic circumpolar quest for fur,” (p. 17), in which one species, the beaver population, fell precipitously from an estimated 50 million in pre-contact North America to about 100,000 in the early twentieth century. As Mosley points out, the modern world “still teems with life,[but] it is much less exotic and diverse,” (p. 13). With the near collapse of “charismatic megafauna,” such as bison and wolves, and an equally charismatic aquatic life with the global slaughter of whales in past centuries, “the world hunt” became emblematic of the ecological transformation of earthly space. Livestock, cattle and sheep primarily, domesticated these traditionally wild eco-niches.

In the next 25 pages, Mosley describes the many economic, cultural, technological and natural forces that triggered the depletion of the world’s forests. Agricultural expansion, urban development, and needs for building materials and fuel became symbolic of a modern world economy. Here Mosley’s carefully constructed narrative crosses national and imperial boundaries. Industrial expansion in England, Germany, Japan and the United States swallowed primal forests. During its incipient years of industrial development beginning in 1810, the USA consumed about two million tons of wood, the equivalent of one

thousand square miles, to produce 49,000 tons of pig iron. This onslaught continued into the last century and by 2005 “some 40 percent of the world’s forests have been lost.” (p. 31).

Importantly, Mosley avoids the trap of retelling a well-worn declensionist narrative of the world’s woodlands. As he points out, about two billion people depend on trees for wood and its fruits and nuts. Despite a near quadrupling of the earth’s population in the last century, regrowth now exceeds cutting, a measure of the success of a worldwide initiative of forest conservation and the establishment of forest reserves and parklands.

In *Soils and irrigation*, chapter 4, Mosley focuses on the worldwide agricultural expansion of settler societies in the fifteenth century and the mechanization of food production in the second half of the twentieth century. Soil composition and erosion serve as global organizing concepts. Mosley defines their centrality best in the following way. “Soils (the pedosphere) are in contact with the gases of the atmosphere, the groundwater of the hydrosphere and the minerals of the lithosphere, linking them together ‘in one body’ and supporting every form of life on earth (the biosphere).” (p. 58).

Centuries of ploughing up the land, repeated cropping, and poor grazing practices by expanding settler societies eroded and exhausted the soil. Plantation agriculture accelerated the depletion of the soil’s nutrients by cultivating the “soft drugs,” sugar, tea, coffee, chocolate and tobacco that quickly became globally traded commodities.

As Mosley points out, however, soil management in the last century meant “the

large scale ‘chemicalisation’ of agriculture, particularly the use of nitrogen-based fertilizers.” (p.74). As many ecologists and soil scientists have suggested, Mosley questions the safety of this short-term solution to the world’s food needs. Like them, he notes that artificial fertilizers disrupt the soil’s microbial activity that supports life in the biosphere. However, renewed appeals for sustainable agricultural land management, less dependent on fossil fuel energy for farming may remain a distant goal. Chapter 5, “Cities and the environment,” examines many of the social and health related consequences of the world’s increasingly urban and industrial growth. Beginning with ancient Rome and bringing urban history up to the present, urban energy flows produced goods initially for local and regional consumption and later for a global marketplace leaving a residual of polluted land, water and air. Despite legislative initiatives to reduce our ecological footprint, Mosley’s narrative suggests that our policies fail to acknowledge the human costs related to urban-industrial development. With China now burning two billion tons of coal annually, a tonnage that will undoubtedly grow as more millions of Chinese move to its 120 million person cities, a “technical fix” to constrain global pollution seems improbable.

In a brief three-page conclusion, Mosley asserts that environmental history teaches us about the relationship between social inequality and ecological degradation. One could also argue that the more compelling message from reading “The Environment in World History” is that for most of human history, we exploited the natural world but left a delicate footprint. The fossil fuel revolution and the four-fold population increase in the last century, however, changed our relationship with the planet and turned us truly into the “rogue species” that J. R. McNeill described in “Something New under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century”. For centuries, the West benefited the most from its exploitive behavior. Now others, including China, India, Brazil with more countries to follow will exhibit a pattern of behavior developed in the West. As with many of the volumes in this series “Themes in World History” edited by Peter N. Stearns, this one will undoubtedly become an important contribution to the field of world environmental history. Brevity and clarity with a broad historical perspective make this book a valuable addition to a relatively new and vibrant field of study.