# [Global Histories]

## A student journal

**Where is the 'Human' in Contemporary Environmental Migration History? Readings on the Backdrop of the Ethiopian Famine Crisis of the 1970s and 1980s**

Author: Adrian Franco

# Review Article: Where is the 'Human' in Contemporary Environmental Migration History? Readings on the Backdrop of the Ethiopian Famine Crisis of the 1970s and 1980s

**"Sand Waves and Human Tides: Exploring Environmental Myths on Desertification and Climate-Induced Migration." by Giovanni Bettini and Elina Andersson, Journal of Environment & Development 23, no. 1, 2014: 160-185, DOI: 10.1177/1070496513.519896**

**Disentangling Migration and Climate Change. Methodologies, Political Discourses and Human Rights. Edited by Thomas Faist and Jeanette Schade (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), ISBN: 978-94-007-6207-7**

**Organizational Perspectives on Environmental Migration. Edited by Kerstin Rosenow-Williams and François Gemenne (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), ISBN: 978-1-138-93966-0**

**"Gardens of Eden or Hearts of Darkness? The Genealogy of Discourses on Environmental Insecurity and Climate Wars in Africa." by Harry Verhoeven, Geopolitics 19, no. 4, 2014: 784-808, DOI: 10.2080/14650045.896794**

**ADRIAN FRANCO**

*Adrian Franco holds a MA degree in Contemporary History and Art History at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich. Currently, he is alumnus of the interdisciplinary Master Certificate Program at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society at the University of Munich. His research interests encompass the entanglements of human rights history, humanitarianism and environmental history, as well as Brazilian history in a global context.*

The recent humanitarian refugee crisis in Syria and the forced migration of people has caused much debate regarding the causes of such migration. The most common arguments say it is caused by political turmoil, economic inequalities, international neglect or autocratic rule. This paper will investigate another explanation that is often overlooked: that people ultimately flee their homelands because of environmental degradation and violent conflicts arising from ever more scarce and contested resources. Furthermore, it will ask how historians can weigh

genuine environmental causes with other events?[1] This paper will give a review of recent literature which considers ways of embedding environmental migration debates into history. Its critical stance investigates how these approaches may gain salience once they embark on a reflection about the past of human rights and humanitarianism. The claim is that the later open perspectives on issues of environmental migration can provide a balanced and even challenging view on what social scientists and international policy makers privilege as a rationalized human security issue. Reflecting on the genealogies and on multiple perspectives of each historical event can make evident the many ambiguous realities of migrants and persons engaged in assisting refugees that can otherwise be overlooked.

This paper will strongly agree with the argument presented by political scientist Harry Verhoeven in a seminal article in *Geopolitics* in 2014, in which he challenged scholars in environmental migration "to historicise and to politicise the prevailing dystopian discourse about climate-induced insecurity".[2] Verhoeven's sharp critique of the heavy mortgage of colonial and post-colonial thinking about human life amidst hostile environments on the African continent helps to problematize the historical grounds in political and advocacy analysis. In turn, historical case studies may help to diversify the narratives which are employed in environmental migration debates, and to give names as well as social and regional contexts to individuals involved in migration movements. The ultimate goal is to inform policy makers and the public to question the dominant trope of climate catastrophe as a single brutal and ambiguous threat to global society.[3]

*Troubling with agency in environmental migration studies: a new research agenda*

Historical narratives can substantially and empirically contribute to debates on environmental migration that have only recently demonstrated a zeal for more interdisciplinary research and dialogue. In recent publications, scholars who problematize the very terms and conclusions derived from contemporary human security policies have widely acknowledged in recent publications the importance of having a closer look at the historical records of international organizations and NGOs in migration history. It is on these grounds that global security issues have been discussed among politicians and experts, and where decisions have been

---

[1] For more information on behalf of environmental migration policies and current research programs in that field: Environmental Migration Portal. "Environmental Migration Portal." Accessed July 11, 2016. https://environmentalmigration.iom.int. Regarding the Syrian war, the issue was aroused by Peter H. Gleick, "Water, Drought, Climate Change, and Conflict in Syria," *Weather, Climate, and Society* 6, no. 3 (2014): 331-340.

[2] Harry Verhoeven, "Gardens of Eden or Hearts of Darkness? The Genealogy of Discourses on Environmental Insecurity and Climate Wars in Africa," *Geopolitics* 19, no. 4 (2014): 787.

[3] See: Felicitas Hillmann and Marie Pahl and Birte Rafflenbeul and Harald Sterly, eds., *Environmental change, adaptation and migration: bringing in the region (*Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

made to take action. Furthermore, critical voices of human security policies have made efforts to bring the migrant back into the story. This article argues that it is precisely in this area that the best opportunities for future collaborations between historians and other scholars interested in migration studies lie.

Sociologist Kerstin Rosenow-Williams' and political scientist François Gemenne, in their promising edited volume *Organizational Perspectives on Environmental Migration* (2016), bring together insights of legal, political, and scientific policy makers as well as the views of humanitarian advocacy networks.[4] As several articles in the volume show, international institutions, such as UNHCR, UNDP or IPCC, have profoundly shaped the discourses and politics of environmental migration under the rubrics of global risk management and continue to do so.[5]

Although with a different emphasis, sociologist Thomas Faist and philosopher Jeanette Schade have presented a similar argument. Both editors of *Disentangling Migration and Climate Change. Methodologies, Political Discourses and Human Rights* (2013) underline the need to reflect on migrational practices as individual coping strategies. Following Faist and Schade along their line of thinking, it is the migrant who decides to move in order to adapt to looming disadvantages and hardships:

> As to agents, it is necessary to go beyond the notion of vulnerability because it often hides the very active role human beings play in interacting with their 'environment'. Agency needs to be brought in, which means recognizing that migration is most often a proactive and not simply a reactive choice. In a nutshell, we thus move from considering vulnerabilities to include capabilities. Seen in this way, migration in the frame of climate change is a case of spatial and social mobility, a strategy of persons and groups to deal with a grossly unequal distribution of life chances across the world.[6]

Such approaches to international organizations and individual migration strategies often run contrary to neo-malthusian views, in which mismatches of populations and dysfunctional regional ecologies must almost necessarily force people

---

[4] Kerstin Rosenow-Williams, "Introduction," in *Organizational Perspectives on Environmental Migration,* ed. by Kerstin Rosenow-Williams and François Gemenne (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 1-7.

[5] See Lars Thomann, "Environmental Migration: a concept between complexes and complexities," 21-37; Julia Blocher," Climate change and environmental related migration in the European Union policy," 38-56; Sinja Hantscher, "The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' discourse on environmentally displaced persons," 93-107; and Sarah Nash, "Towards an 'Environmental migration management discourse'", in *Organizational Perspectives on Environmental Migration, ed.* Rosenow-Williams and Gemenne, 198-215.

[6] Thomas Faist and Jeanette Schade, "Introduction", in *Disentangling Migration and Climate Change. Methodologies, Political Discourses and Human Rights,* ed. Thomas Faist and Jeanette Schade (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 4-5.

to leave. The latter, in turn, are said create large turmoil and to threaten established social, economic and political systems. This has resulted in neo-malthusian alarmist claims that the destabilization of regional climates caused by human action must be contained by the means of global as well as national preventionist policies: "According to this view land loss due to sea level rise, desertification and landslides, or water stress and storm surges lead to the deprivation of crucial livelihood assets and ecosystem services, and thus forces people to leave. This may happen suddenly due to hazard events or gradually due to slow onset changes."[7]

What follows then, according to Faist and Schade, is a general heuristic difficulty to intertwine climate change and environmental migration without discussing individual or group migrational agency. Both authors also point to the uncertain causes and consequences of climate change, and the trouble in prefiguring the role of political conflicts and economic inequalities that precede human migrational movements.[8] In other words, the various contributions in Faist's and Schade's edited volume focus on sociological and political approaches to livelihood strategies. What needs to be accounted for, as the volume advocates, are the capabilities of individuals and groups to cope with situations of distress. Thus, claims for human rights in the wake of migration represent one strategy of transforming the challenges of environmental catastrophes into reasonable demands on the side of the individual.

This affects Sara Nash's remarkable and highly self-critical argument in *Organizational Perspectives on Environmental Migration*. Nash investigates whether recent shifts in migration management studies towards individual adaptation strategies will foster a rather neo-liberal and market-oriented logic: heralding the individual responsibilities of people who decide to migrate, while diminishing the involvement of global economic injustice and power relations, which raises doubts about the effects of agency embedded in capitalist biases.[9]

Environmental scholars Giovanni Bettini and Elina Andersson add to Faist and Schade's approach in a contribution to the *Journal of Environment & Development* (2014). Starting from the perspective of the migrant in his or her local setting, they clarify that scrutiny is not about disqualifying the realities of environmental hazards as such. A thorough analysis of regional ecologies threatened by situations of environmental distress can shape notions of climate change induced migration relationships on different spatial levels and through various time frames. Moreover, as Bettini and Andersson have demonstrated, a historical comparison between understandings of climate change and other environmental related issues can reveal the profound scientific uncertainties regarding the causes and effects of

---

[7] Ibid., 7.
[8] Ibid., 9-17.
[9] See Sara Nash, ""Towards an 'Environmental migration management discourse'", 198-215.

climate change, and unmask the various stages of political discourse considering the rhetoric of climate catastrophe and failed human management efforts.[10]

### *Dismantling the history of 'doom & dust' in the 'Horn of Africa' region*

This section will elaborate further on the argument for historicizing environmental migration discourses and practices while reflecting on matters of agency and advocacy. Of particular interest in the following historical case study is how Verhoeven deems the well-publicized Ethiopian famine of 1983-85, as well as the peculiar ethnic and Cold War upheavals in the geopolitical region ascribed to the so called 'Horn of Africa', to play crucial roles in the contemporary history of policy dilemmas. Verhoeven's salient point about the colonial legacies regarding environmental disasters in East Africa is very convincing. He argues that notions of food shortages and drought caused by overpopulation and agricultural failure influence which direction most of the environmental risk analysis of Ethiopia and its regional neighbors takes.[11] However, in addition to critical stands on environmental phenomena, it is equally important to emphasize the advantages of incorporating human rights and humanitarian approaches here, one aspect that Verhoeven's historical argument does not account for.

By the time of the Ethiopian famine crisis of the 1980s, and this is the quintessential merit of the historical argument as it is claimed by Verhoeven, the 1970s had already witnessed considerable attention from political and economic scientists and policy-makers regarding food. This global attention was triggered by the need to understand why the issue of national and international food security had worsened the conditions of people suffering from malnutrition and hunger in some African countries, which were ultimately said to be doomed to scarcity or be at least fragile in attaining self-sufficiency.[12]

This and other research into food policies of the 1960s and 1970s help to bring to light the difficulty of defining the problem: food had become increasingly addressed in the framework of global risk and international security management, terms that were closely linked to perceptions of broad scale climate change. Scientific and political struggles with desertification processes constituted a much debated key phenomenon regarding the severity of droughts in the so called 'Sahel' region, extending well into the 'Horn of Africa' (i.e. Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya).[13] As Verhoeven explains, the problem of establishing a causal rela-

---

[10] Giovanni Bettini and Elina Andersson, "Sand Waves and Human Tides: Exploring Environmental Myths on Desertification and Climate-Induced Migration," *Journal of Environment & Development* 23, no. 1 (2014): 169-173.

[11] Verhoeven, "Gardens of Eden or Hearts of Darkness," 796-798.

[12] ibid. 796-798.

[13] Jennifer Clapp, *Hunger in the Balance. The New Politics of International Food Aid (*New York: Cornell University Press, 2012); Christian Gerlach, "Die Welternährungskrise 1972-1975," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 31*, 2005: 546-585; Margaret R. Biswas and Asit K.

tionship between drought and harsh arid environments on the African continent as a security issue derives from colonial and post-colonial environmental determinisms. Among these, 'African flora and fauna' had been described paradoxically as either incompatible with human settlement or abundant in economic opportunities to be seized. In both cases, Verhoeven can give good reasons that the neo-malthusian outcome was a deeply troubling assumption that environmental determinisms help to create the dead ends of inescapable resource conflicts, and the failure of African people to exercise not only the sufficient production of food but also its equal distribution.[14]

In turn, Verhoeven makes explicit that discourses about environmental determinisms surfaced again when the infamous Ethiopian famine of the 1980s unfolded, and the Ethiopian Socialist *DERG* military regime sought to justify forced and large-scale resettlement programs of ethnic peasantry groups inhabiting the Northern provinces of Wollo and Tigray, populations that were heavily affected by starvation. Applying large scale resettlement schemes against the moral backdrop of resolving poor human living conditions in hostile environments, became the moral stance of Ethiopian officials in order to prevent the repetition of the tragic and deadly outcomes of the 1973-1975 famine. In this period, food scarcity had led to the downfall of emperor Haile Selassie and his outspoken, ingenuous and ultimately mistaken attitude toward crisis management. Despite this historical antecedent, allegations soon gained international credibility that *DERG* militaries had deliberately abused foreign international emergency aid and political support in the resettlement program in order to combat Northern separatist rebel organizations, by removing the entire local population of Wollo and Tigray accused of being aligned with the rebels.[15]

### The Ethiopian Famine of 1983-1985 from a transnational humanitarian and human rights perspective

In principal, Verhoeven makes a strong claim to have a close look at the historical 'long tails' of power relationships that have shaped a causal nexus between drought, famine and ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia. However, a careful understanding of trans- and international food aid policies during the 1983-1985 famine should be more boldly present beside a historical analysis of how governments responded to allegations of atrocity concerning the Ethiopian resettlement program amidst outright civil war.

---

Biswas, eds., *Desertification: Associated Case Studies prepared for the United Nations Conference on Desertification* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980); Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues, *The encroaching desert: the consequences of human failure* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

[14] Verhoeven, "Gardens of Eden or Hearts of Darkness," 787-788.

[15] Ibid., 794-798. See also, Alex De Waal, *Evil Days. 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991)

One suggestion for further research would be to merge the histories of migration management in Ethiopia with the trans- and international efforts of humanitarian organizations to rescue as many lives as possible.[16] Moreover, it is evident that conducting historical research on how humanitarian and human rights organizations have come to debate and engage with environmental migration, already lies at the heart of what is being discussed among social scientists. While acknowledging the growing threat of climate change to livelihoods, humanitarian organizations tend to see economic, political and societal conflicts or inequalities as the crucial triggers of migration. Thus, scrutinizing how human rights and humanitarian organizations took over the voice of migrants in order to change the Ethiopian resettlement program, opens a vast field of questions on how networks of transnational advocacy and power relations were conceived of in the 1980s. Migration is mostly accredited by humanitarian organizations with positive coping capacities on the side of the migrant, who should be supported via short-term protection and long-term development projects.[17] In the wake of famines, such a standpoint easily runs into issues of environmental management intertwined with development policies, leaving researchers to question how migrants can be helped on their way through the deserts, and how sustainable agricultural programs can be applied and fostered.

An investigation of German based documents related to the Protestant *Berliner Missionswerk* (BMW), which at the time had maintained a strong partnership with the *Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (EECMY), provides a historical case for such an expansion of narrative besides the ongoing focus on economic and political security approaches to the Ethiopian famines. When the revolutionary Amharic *DERG* regime decided to suppress religious institutions and to carry out brutal and bloody socialist collectivization[18] reforms against peasants and rival ethnic groups, BMW and EECMY staff politicized their missionary work in the name of human rights, and strongly opposed international emergency aid for the Ethiopian government and its forced resettlement program of people directly affected by the famine.[19] Ultimately the result of this transnational engagement facilitated a failed terror attack carried out by Ethiopian military and designed

---

[16] Tanja R. Müller, " 'The Ethiopian famine' revisited. Band Aid and the antipolitics of celebrity humanitarian action," *Disasters* 37, 2014: 61-79; Peter Gill, *Famine and Foreigners. Ethiopia Since Live Aid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Florian Hannig, "Mitleid mit Biafranern in Westdeutschland. Eine Historisierung von Empathie," *WerkstattGeschichte* 68, 2014: 65-78.

[17] Kerstin Rosenow-Williams, "Environmental Migration and the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement", in *Organizational Perspectives on Environmental Migration,* ed. Kerstin Rosenow-Williams and François Gemenne (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 126-144.

[18] Collectivization reforms in Ethiopia commenced with the DERG regime and resembled the great Sowjet collectivization reforms of the 1920s and 1930s, under which former peasant agriculture was transformed into large scale mechanized and state run cooperatives.

[19] Berliner Missionwerk, "Ethiopia. Revolution and Nation. Human Rights and Refugee Relief," *Horn of Africa 5*, no. 2, 1982: 41-47. Berliner Missionswerk, ed., *Hunger und Elend durch Vernichtung der Dörfer im Oromoland* (Berlin: Berliner Missionswerk, 1987).

to kill one of the BMW staff members responsible for Ethiopia in Berlin on 22 March 1982. In 1979 one of the charismatic leaders of EECMY, general secretary Gudina Tumsa (1929-1979), had been kidnapped and killed by Ethiopian government forces.[20]

After the EECMY was pressured to bring its transnational relationships with other churches to an end, the BMW cooperated in clandestine relief work to care for thousands of refugees in the Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti borderlands to Ethiopia.[21] This engagement in refugee assistance extended to Ethiopian asylum seekers living in Berlin. Many of those refugees in Germany at the time belonged to the Oromo people and had been persecuted in an arbitrary manner by the mainly Amharic Ethiopian military for insurrection against the state. Simultaneously, the BMW led several endeavors to impede aid and assistance efforts from the Federal Republic of Germany and from Church development programs, such as *Brot für die Welt*, from reaching Ethiopian state officials.[22] The transnational history of the BMW and the EECMY can be placed in both German and Ethiopian contemporary history of migration in the wake of famine and civil war. The case even established close links to ecumenical networks on a global level with the *International Lutheran Council* and the *World Council of Churches*. Concerning the relationships between the BMW and other Protestant churches in the former GDR that were worried about religious freedom and human rights in African countries such as South Africa, the Ethiopian famine helped to foster dialogues that surmounted Cold War thinking. Churches in the GDR were equally alerted about what happened to the EECMY in Ethiopia, for the German Democratic Republic had become deeply and covertly engaged in the contested climate of Cold War geopolitics at the 'Horn of Africa'.[23]

The history of BMW in the face of the Ethiopian famine points to the argument that humanitarian organizations were able to debate the ambiguities of aid and assistance in times of war and political unrest, without being inclined to recur on

---

[20] Gunnar Hasselblatt, *Naechstes Jahr im Oromoland. Von der eklatanten Verletzung der Menschenrechte durch den abessinisch-amharischen Rassismus in Athiopien. Ein Bericht* (Stuttgart: Radius, 1982).

[21] Documents are archived by the Berlin *Evangelisches Landesarchiv* (ELAB): Berliner Missionwerk, "BMW: report on visit to Somalia. - D.A. Wilson Feb. 11Th 1980 - March 1st 1980," File BMW 1/9765.

[22] Berliner Missionswerk, "Letter: Hollm to Linnenbrink, 29th March 1983," File BMW 1/9766. Berliner Missionwerk, "Letter: Kruse to Binder, Bevollmachtiger des Rates der EKD am Sitz der Bundesregierung, 29th June 1982," File ELAB 36/3166.

[23] Berliner Missionswerk, "Letter: Envangelisches Konsistorium Berlin-Brandenburg to Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR, 12th Jan. 1981," microfiche EZA/101/1528. Berliner Missionswerk, "Letter: Hasselblatt and Gruhn to LWB, 08th Oct. 1982," Digitalisat Gossner_G 1_0741. See also Patrice G. Poutros, "Asylum in Postwar Germany: Refugee Admission Policies and Their Practical Implementation in the Federal Republic and the GDR Between The Late 1940s and the Mid-1970s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 1, 2014, 115-133; Hanns Lessing and Tilman Dedering and Juergen Kampmann and Dirkie Smit, eds., *Contested Relations. Protestantism between Southern Africa and Germany from the 1930s to the Apartheid Era* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2015).

any form of environmental determinism, which Verhoeven has convincingly portrayed to be influential in human security debates. In a similar manner, the French organization *Médecins sans Frontière* had to leave Ethiopia in 1985 for their critical stand on the issue of forced resettlement.[24]

Of course, such modes of denunciation evoked other dilemmas. How could suffering people in Ethiopia and its neighbor states be aided without causing undesirable political side effects? Moreover, the goal for advocacy in the name of human rights and Christian solidarity often brought the BMW close to being questioned by other organizations and the EECMY to being questioned on the legality of speaking out for others who had to remain silent or engage in disguise. In this context it is not surprising to see that none of the published material issued by the BMW during the famine crisis included critical remarks articulated by ecumenical partners or by refugees on behalf of the BMW's human rights campaign. If Ethiopian people appear, their statements served as testimonies denouncing the cruel regime of the DERG and its Amharic elite against other ethnic and religious groups.[25]

The historical case of BMW advocacy shows that one cannot underestimate the importance of contemporary human rights discourses in humanitarian engagement with the Ethiopian famine. However, rights-based moral politics were also in the scope of authoritarian regimes, such as the DERG itself, which emphasised the fact that the social rights of its citizens to be free from hunger and poverty had to be valued above civil and political rights when planning forced resettlements on the countryside.[26] Hence, the humanitarian and human rights engagement by the BMW reveals how ambiguous the struggles about the causes of migration in the context of political, ethnic, religious and environmental calamities could be as the tragic famine of 1983-1985 unfolded. That being said, a historical perspective on how famine relief was debated among humanitarian organizations and in dialogue with other Ethiopian or foreign state authorities, not to mention international arenas and scientific or expert communities, offers a bridge for discussing the interplay of different agents and advocacy networks.

*Merging the histories of human rights, humanitarianism and environmental migration*

The above mentioned approaches to environmental migration, as they appear mainly articulated by social scientists, need to reflect on the rising issues of hu-

---

[24] Eleanor Davey, "Famine, Aid, and Ideology. The Political Activism of Medecins sans Frontieres in the 1980s," *French Historical Studies* 34, 2011: 529-558.

[25] Gunnar Hasselblatt, *Schreie im Oromoland* (Stuttgart: Radius, 1980).

[26] Roland Burke, "Some Rights are more equal than Others. The Third World and the Transformation of Economic and Social Rights," *Humanity,* 2012: 427-446; Ian Brownlie, *The Human Right to Food* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 1987).

man rights history and the growing political involvement of humanitarianism in the 1970s and 1980s.[27] Only then does the astonishing trans- and international attention to what happened in Ethiopia in times of famine crisis gain a balanced account, in which the historical uniqueness of environmental determinisms applied to drought, famine and politics of securitization can be thoroughly deliberated against the backdrop of migrants and their humanitarian advocates. Most importantly of all, it becomes evident that behind refugee numbers there are always people and individual destinies to be lamented and dealt with by state and non-state institutions.[28] The histories of contemporary humanitarianism and human rights discourses regarding the Ethiopian famine can offer an entry point to issues of advocacy and agency on different transnational, global and local levels regarding the subject of environmental migration. This approach would thereby embrace different groups from migrants to concerned citizens mostly in Europe and in the US, who gave credit to humanitarian interventions in Ethiopia.

This does not delegitimize the current trend in securitizing environmental migration on the questionable basis of historical determinisms and the limits of individual coping strategies, but only highlights the historical ambiguities of humanitarian appeal inside liberal policies: where Syrians suffer from hunger blockades, immediate alleviation and possible long-term remedies are deeply embroiled in controversies about decision making and power.[29] Still, those appeals cannot be refused without unforeseeable losses and unbearable calamities once humanitarian aid seems morally affordable and materially possible.

Ultimately, it seems clear that climate change discourse is very much attached to concepts of environmental migration that take human agency essentially as a hubris. A careful historical analysis of the now much cited catastrophes that occurred prior to contemporary human security policies in the wake of climate change debates, such as the Ethiopian famine crisis during the 1970 and 1980s, can help to bring the 'human' figure back in. This should not be for the purpose of blurring the deep ambiguities of humanitarian discourses once again, but in order to think through the critical histories of human rights and humanitarian aid from a global perspective, with a look at how different groups have accredited incidents of environmental distress with the power to substantially destabilize societies and affect migration.[30] Or at least, how it came about that climate scientists and politi-

---

[27] Jan Eckel, *Die Ambivalenz des Guten. Menschenrechte in der Internationalen Politik seit den 1940er Jahren* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia. Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2010).

[28] Jenny Edkins, *Whose Hunger? Concepts of Famine, Practices of Aid* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

[29] Andrea Böhm, "Hunger als Waffe," last modified January 8, 2016, http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2016-01/syrien-hunger-lebensmittelpreise-abgrenzung-madaja-zabadani-notstand. David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night. Humanitarianism in Crisis* (New York: Simon&Schuster, 2002).

[30] This includes non-Western charity and emergency aid policies. See: Rajeswary Ampalavanar Brown and Justin Pierce, *Charities in the non-western world. The development and regula-*

cians may engage with migration in terms of environmental phenomena and why other narratives became relatively marginalized. At the heart of such a research agenda lies the migrant who has been conceived of, at least until now, in terms of passive victimhood. To problematize this troubling absence of voice and the different political and humanitarian efforts towards advocacy, or even towards silencing, marginalization and abuse, can be one essential contribution of historical research to current debates on environmental migration.

---

*tion of indigenous and Islamic charities* (London: Routledge, 2013).