

Editorial

Humanistic Environmental Studies and Global Indigeneities

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The Environmental Humanities constitute an emerging transdisciplinary enterprise that is becoming a key part of the liberal arts and an indispensable component of the twenty-first-century university. Bringing together scholars from a number of environmentally related fields in the humanities and allied social sciences—including Ecocriticism (Literature and Environment studies), Environmental History, Environmental Philosophy, Environmental Anthropology, and Human Geography—the Environmental Humanities has, in the past decade, become a substantial collaborative scholarly endeavor. Journals including *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* (est. 2014) and *Environmental Humanities* (est. 2012), as well as book series such as Routledge Environmental Humanities, are providing an increasing number of venues for scholars in the humanities and related social sciences to introduce new approaches for grappling with the world’s environmental challenges. For their part, initiatives such as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-funded Humanities for the Environment (<http://hfe-observatories.org>), which includes the African Observatory, Asia-Pacific Observatory, Australian Observatory, North American Observatory, and European Observatory; in addition to institutes and projects, such as Environmental Humanities at Princeton, Environmental Humanities Project at Stanford, Environmental Humanities at UCLA, Australian Environmental Humanities Hub, Environmental Humanities Laboratory (KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden), Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society (Munich), Transatlantic Environmental Research Network in Environmental Humanities, and the African Network of Environmental Humanities—not to mention the Harvard Global Institute Environmental Humanities Initiatives—are providing a growing number of opportunities for scholars in a variety of humanistic and related social science disciplines to embark on collaborative environment-related research and teaching.¹ Indeed, the institutional and scholarly umbrella of environmental humanities has provided specialists in a variety of humanistic and related social science fields with a forum to join forces on shared environmental concerns, as well as to work together with engineers and scientists, politicians and business leaders, within and outside the academy.

Understandings of the Environmental Humanities generally are quite broad and the field’s aims ambitious. In “Developing the Environmental Humanities: A Swiss Perspective,” Philippe Forêt et al. declare the environmental humanities to be “a metadiscipline that brings into conversation several subfields . . . [and] seeks to offer new and more synthetic insights into cultural, historical and ethical dimensions of our most intractable environmental problems” ([2], p. 67).² In addition, Forêt et al. note that the Environmental Humanities work to “recast established environmental problems as cultural issues and so provide fresh ideas to environmental research” ([4], p. 68). Similarly,

¹ For more on the African Network of Environmental Humanities see Agbonifo [1].

² See also Mathae and Birzer [3], Sörlin [4]. Each of the above initiatives has a comprehensive website outlining objectives and programming.

in “Four Problems, Four Directions for Environmental Humanities,” Astrida Neimanis et al. define the Environmental Humanities as “a term for a range of multifaceted scholarly approaches that understand environmental challenges as inextricable from social, cultural, and human factors” ([5], p. 70). They argue that, “More than information exchange, the environmental humanities should be utilized as a transdisciplinary meeting ground and a laboratory for culturing new approaches, methods, theories and desires in relation to significant environmental matters” ([5], p. 86).³ Furthermore, Neimanis and her colleagues emphasize that the environmental humanities respond to what Gisli Pálsson et al. refer to as “the need to re-frame global environmental change issues fundamentally as social and human challenges, rather than just environmental issues” ([7], p. 5).

Seeking to understand how different communities within and across national borders have grappled with ecological challenges, the Environmental Humanities, or more accurately humanistic environmental studies, works to promote the cultural transformations necessary both for reducing ecological devastation and for preparing for an increasingly uncertain and potentially traumatic future.⁴ Lawrence Buell’s comments on the importance of humanistic work to ameliorating environmental destruction also apply to adjusting to an age of biodiversity loss and climate chaos: “For technological breakthroughs, legislative reforms, and paper covenants about environmental welfare to take effect, or even to be generated in the first place, requires a climate of transformed environmental values, perception, and will. To that end the power of story, image, and artistic performance and the resources of aesthetics, ethics, and cultural theory are crucial” ([8] p. vi). Ideally, humanistic environmental studies not only draws on the expertise of individual humanists, social scientists, and others engaged in interdisciplinary work across world areas but also brings together scholars from across the humanities, social sciences, and related fields—from Anthropology, Architecture, Art History, Economics, Ethics, History, History of Science/Medicine, Literature, Philosophy, Psychology, Religion, Sociology, Urban Planning, and adjacent fields. Fundamental as well is collaboration with scholars in the Digital Humanities, Public Humanities, and especially Medical Humanities, given the devastating effects of environmental destruction on human health.⁵

Humanistic environmental studies focuses largely on cultural products—including everything from architecture, literature and nonfiction writing, drama, music, the visual arts, film, and other media to the discourses of activism, politics, history, medicine, and religion. This attention to cultural products stems largely from their power to change radically environmental consciousness, for better or for worse, and to mobilize or silence communities. Cultural products often allow societies to envision alternative scenarios and to think imaginatively about implementing changes that enable adaptation, increased resilience, lessen fear, modulate risk, and make the competition for resources more manageable, or at least less catastrophic. In so doing, cultural products give particular insight into how societies, communities, and individuals understand environments and engage with environmental challenges. They expose how people dominate, damage, and destroy their environments and reveal how they grapple with an uncertain and potentially traumatic future. By engaging rigorously with a wide range of cultural products, humanistic environmental studies, in the words of Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan, has the “radical potential to change our ecological futures” ([9], p. 25).⁶

³ Neimanis et al. give examples of successful models, including the collaborative project and collection of work *Thinking with Water* [6].

⁴ Although the term “environmental humanities” is gaining increasing traction and generally refers to research and teaching in both the humanities and the humanistic social sciences, the term itself does not appropriately recognize the importance of humanistic social science endeavors. As such, it can be somewhat off-putting to social scientists and other scholars both within and outside the humanities. Similarly, I modify “environmental studies” with “humanistic,” since the term “environmental studies” generally does not include humanistic research and teaching.

⁵ The terms “digital humanities,” “public humanities,” and “medical humanities” can be as misleading as the term “environmental humanities,” given the important place of humanistic social science research in these endeavors.

⁶ DeLoughrey et al.’s [9] volume focuses on postcolonial approaches to the environmental humanities, with particular emphasis on narrative practices.

This Special Issue of *Humanities* stands at the crossroads of humanistic environmental studies and Indigenous Studies, a similarly interdisciplinary and collaborative field that is rapidly growing both nationally and internationally and is paying increasing attention to global indigenities.⁷ Current estimates of the global Indigenous population vary from between 250 and 600 million individuals belonging to somewhere between 4000 and 5000 “Indigenous” groups dispersed worldwide, from the Americas to Africa, Asia, Oceania, and Europe. Most of these communities have their own language(s), belief systems, and relationships to one another, non-Indigenous communities, the state, and the land ([11], p. 135).⁸ Moreover, as Mary Louise Pratt rightly notes, “Indigenous” is almost never the primary identity of “Indigenous” peoples, who instead are first Adivasi, Aymara, Cree, Dayak, Hmong, Kung, Maori, Quiché, or any number of other identities ([14], p. 399). At the same time, the umbrella of indigeneity, although not without serious hazards, draws attention to “inhumane, colonizing, and oppressive treatment that nation states and the international community have perpetrated on indigenous population” [15]. It also enables peoples separated by language, culture, history, and geography to recognize each other and collaborate ([14], p. 399).⁹

In this spirit, global indigeneity brings to light the “interconnectedness of regional, national, and global issues confronting Indigenous communities” [16]. As the Institute for Global Indigeneity at the University at Albany: State University of New York states on its website, “Understanding Indigenous issues in a global context . . . helps to link narratives of Indigenous peoples, extend their agency in contexts that still feature hostility and barriers to opportunity, and ultimately, broaden the conversations about self-determination and sovereignty.” Likewise, as Chris Anderson argues, “global indigeneity is marked as much by the similarity of its resistance to colonialisms as it is by the kinds of elements—relationship to land, spirituality, etc.—that are often thought to bind indigenous peoples together” ([2], p. 304).

Also important in this context is the transnational Indigenous peoples’ organization Advancement of Global Indigeneity (AGI), envisioned as an “international advocate for the advancement of opportunities for Indigenous peoples,” which

intends to build and mobilize a coalition of Indigenous individuals and communities around the world that can act on behalf of and work to strengthen the self-determination capabilities of their respective communities . . . The collective power of Indigenous voices needs to be joined together to impact and promote peaceful coexistence, global understanding, and international policy development. There is an urgency to share our Indigenous voices and perspectives, not only for the future of Indigenous peoples, but also for the future of all the peoples of the earth ([17], p. 509).

This is not to minimize the importance of specificity, of rigorous examination of individual communities. Rather it is to encourage global and interdisciplinary perspectives that build on such examinations.

Doing so is particularly important when examining how human societies have grappled with ecological challenges and crises. Indigenous peoples generally are believed to be more deeply connected with the environment than are other populations and to have suffered more profoundly from exploitation of resources. For instance, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP 2007 [18]), recognizing that respect for Indigenous knowledge, cultures, and traditional practices contributes to “sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment,” declares in Article 29: “Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories

⁷ Charles et al. [10] argue that colonized Indigenous people globally share similar experiences despite differences in histories and contexts.

⁸ See also Anderson ([12], p. 287); de la Cadena and Starn [13].

⁹ See also Anderson [12].

and resources . . . States shall take effective measures to ensure that no storage or disposal of hazardous materials shall take place in the lands or territories of indigenous peoples without their free, prior and informed consent.” Similarly, Article 32 warns, “States shall provide effective mechanisms for just and fair redress for [the development, utilization, or exploitation of mineral, water, or other resources] and appropriate measures shall be taken to mitigate adverse environmental, economic, social, cultural, or spiritual impact” [18].¹⁰ Yet it goes without saying that all too frequently the mechanisms provided and measures taken both nationally and transnationally are not effective and lead to tremendous suffering, both human and nonhuman.¹¹

The eleven articles in this Special Issue—written by innovative thinkers in American Indian Studies, Anthropology, East Asian Studies, Historical Climatology, History, Indigenous Studies, Comparative Literature, Social Ecology, and Social Justice—provide new perspectives on these concerns. Most are firmly grounded in a particular community, or even subset of a community, but they place their analyses in much broader disciplinary and geographic perspective.

Global Indigenities and the Environment opens with two articles that examine the concept of “indigeneity,” addressing the local and global consequences, challenges, and promises of promoting the “Indigenous.” First, Michael Dove, Lauren Baker, Samara Brock, Chris Hebdon, and Francis Ludlow’s “The Double Binds of Indigeneity and Indigenous Resistance” points out that, just as the concept and identity of “indigeneity” has enabled communities to “articulate their cultural distinctiveness and independence, justify claims to land and resources, forge wide-ranging alliances, and achieve a global visibility,” with some peoples even adapting themselves to this concept, so too has “indigeneity” been criticized for its limitations and for “engendering disputes over definitional boundaries, inclusivity and its performance.” The article begins with an explication of indigeneity and the challenges and potentials that it presents, followed by three case studies: how Indigenous movements have led the transformation of Ecuadorian politics, the UN-REDD Programme in Peru and Ecuador (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Food Degradation), and the Pebble Mine prospect in Alaska.

For its part Michael Hathaway’s “China’s Indigenous Peoples? How Global Environmentalism Unintentionally Smuggled the Notion of Indigeneity into China” looks at the long and contentious history between environmental and Indigenous groups and reveals the struggles of global environmental organizations to foster the notion of Indigenous people and rights in a country that officially opposes these concepts. In the 1990s, Beijing declared that, unlike the Americas and Australia, China had no Indigenous peoples, that the country instead was a space of “ethnic minority” groups. In sharp contrast with Taiwan, which has an increasingly powerful aboriginal consciousness, China is one of the few nations officially opposed to the category of “indigeneity.” Moreover, there is little grassroots support; the one group most easily recognizable as Indigenous is the Tibetans, who are either largely unaware of the possibilities of or uninterested in this status; some Tibetan activists have suggested that they are striving for *more* than can be achieved by adopting the mantle of “indigeneity.”

Following Dove et al.’s and Hathaway’s contributions are three articles on the environmental activism of Indigenous peoples. First is Anna J. Willow’s “Indigenous ExtrACTIVISM in Boreal Canada: Colonial Legacies, Contemporary Struggles, and Sovereign Futures.” This study approaches contemporary extractivism—“manifested in massive hydroelectric developments, clearcut logging, mining, and unconventional oil and gas production [that] removes natural resources from their points of origin and dislocates the emplaced benefits they provide”—as an environmentally and socially destructive extension of an enduring colonial societal structure. Willow examines the “extrACTIVIST”

¹⁰ The UNDRIP was the result of decades of collective struggle. As Anderson notes, “in addition to the various forms of resistance against local resource-extraction attempts, cultural domination, and entrenched inequities, Indigenous peoples and their allies also came together more globally in their attempts to raise consciousness of and challenge the massively destructive effects of global colonialism/capitalism” ([12], p. 302).

¹¹ For more on understandings of indigeneity and relationships between indigeneity and environment, see Castellanos’s [19] and Gaard’s [20] works.

resistance to extractivist schemes through four case studies, drawn from across Canada's boreal forest. She argues that because extractivism is colonial in its legacies and causal logic, effective opposition cannot emerge from environmentalism alone but instead arises from movements that pose systemic challenges to conjoined processes of social, economic, and environmental injustice. She reveals extractivism and ACTIVISM to be two complex and non-exclusive sides of an ongoing global debate concerning how resources should be used and who should be empowered to determine their use. Far from demanding the cessation of all extractive operations, the fundamental core of Indigenous extrACTIVISM is the quest for survival through land-based self-determination.

Then, J. T. Way's "The Movement, the Mine and the Lake: New Forms of Maya Activism in Neoliberal Guatemala" explores the social, economic, cultural, and political issues at play in two recent events in the Sololá and Lake Atitlan region of the Guatemalan Mayan highlands (2004–2005): (1) the violent breakup of anti-mine protests; and (2) the multiple reactions to a tropical storm that threatened the lake ecosystems. By mapping events in Sololá against development, agrarian transformation and rural urbanization, Way argues that resilient Maya community structures, although unable to stop the exploitative tide, continued to provide local cohesion and advocacy. The article places these incidents in the larger context of Mayan political activism and concludes with a discussion of the increasing importance of creating and controlling community structures to confront spiraling violence at home.

Charlotte Coté's "'Indigenizing' Food Sovereignty, Revitalizing Indigenous Food Practices and Ecological Knowledges in Canada and the United States" discusses the food sovereignty movement in North America. Initiated in 1996 by La Via Campesina, a transnational association of peasants representing 148 organizations from 69 countries, the food sovereignty movement advocates the right of all peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food and the right to define their own food and agricultural systems; it is grounded in the idea of revitalizing Indigenous food systems and practices through the reaffirmation of spiritual, emotional, and physical relationships to the lands, waters, plants, and all living things that sustain Indigenous communities and cultures. Coté analyzes the concept of food sovereignty to articulate an understanding of its potential for action in revitalizing Indigenous food practices and ecological knowledge, understanding the food sovereignty movement as part of larger efforts to restore profound relationships with [the] environment. The article focuses on the cultural responsibilities and relationships Indigenous peoples have with their environment and the efforts being made by Indigenous communities to recuperate these relationships through the revitalization of Indigenous foods and ecological knowledge systems as communities assert control over their own foods and practices.

Willow's, Way's, and Coté's articles on Indigenous activism are followed by three related studies on changing Indigenous understandings of nature and conservation in the United States, Japan, and the Ecuadorian Amazon. David Tomblin's "The White Mountain Recreational Enterprise: Eco-political Foundations for White Mountain Apache Natural Resource Control, 1945–1960" reveals the White Mountain Apache Tribe (Native American) as engaged in a perennial struggle to control natural resource management within reservation boundaries, explaining how Indigenous peoples are constantly reinventing their relationship with the land, their communities, and outside influences. The White Mountain Apache Tribe developed the White Mountain Recreational Enterprise (WMRE) in 1952, the first comprehensive tribal natural resource management program in the United States; this enterprise has fought numerous legal battles over the tribe's right to manage cultural and natural resources for the benefit of the community rather than outside interests. Tomblin demonstrates how in so doing, the White Mountain Apache Tribe embraced both Euro-American and Apache traditions, resisting certain Euro-American ideals while incorporating others in order to survive. He argues that, far from a simple compromise, this was instead a strategy for maintaining cultural identity.

Similarly, Ann-Elise Lewallen's "Signifying Ainu Space: Reimagining Shiretoko's Landscapes through Indigenous Ecotourism" discusses how the Ainu, formally recognized as Japan's Indigenous peoples in 2008, have since then sought to recuperate land and self-determination by physically

reenacting Ainu traditional knowledge through ecotourism in Hokkaido. The Ainu argue that ecotourism taps into memory held in places (embedded memory), which is hidden under layers of *wajin* (ethnic Japanese) settler history in Hokkaido; they emplace visitors in a vast landscape of human-deity relations. Iwawaki relates Japan's attempts to have Shiretoko (northeast Hokkaido) nominated as UNESCO World Heritage site both to legitimate Japanese claims to Shiretoko and to reinscribe the authority of Japan as the proper steward and rightful owner of this Ainu space; Japan initially applied for Shiretoko's designation as a World Heritage natural site in 2004, but based on the assumption that Ainu no longer resided in the region, the national government failed to include Ainu representatives in its bid. It is in this context that Iwawaki examines how Ainu attempts to assert ancestral claims are stymied by the realities of settler colonialism and the erasure of the Ainu presence from the landscape of Hokkaido and Japan, the Japanese government going so far as to argue that Ainu "indigeneity" as recognized in Japan might or might not correlate with international categories of Indigenous peoples. In contrast, Indigenous ecotourism places Ainu at the center, enabling them to author and control discourse on themselves and the land.

And finally Juliet Erazo's "Saving the Other Amazon: Changing Understandings of Nature and Conservation among Indigenous Leaders in the Ecuadorian Amazon" brings to light the irony of Indigenous leaders increasingly favoring oil development in their own backyards while simultaneously opposing oil development in the downstream Yasuni National Park. Erazo analyzes how the concept of "wilderness" has emerged as a meaningful imaginary for Amazonian Indigenous leaders and youth alike, who increasingly subscribe to Northern environmentalists' romanticization of "the Amazon" as a wild place, distant from the places where they work and live. The article links contemporary events to environmental historian William Cronon's 1990s critique of First-World environmentalism, making clear how many Indigenous inhabitants of the Amazon are changing conceptions of their environments in new, unexpected, and often surprising ways.

This Special Issue wraps up with three articles on creative engagement with the environment. First is Sandie Suchet-Pearson et al.'s "*Morrku mangawu*—Knowledge on the Land: mobilizing Yolnu mathematics from Bawaka, North East Arnhem Land, to reveal the situatedness of all knowledges," which examines a system of mathematics distinct from Western norms. Yolnu mathematics, *morrku mangawu*, refers to the complex matrix of patterns, relationships, shapes, motions, and rhythms of time and space that underpin the ways the Yolnu peoples of North East Arnhem Land in northern Australia nourish and are nourished by the environment. This system of mathematics relies on the connectivity of the human and more-than-human, challenging Western knowledge, including Western ideas of math and environmental management. Suchet Pearson and her collaborators discuss how for the Yolnu community, learning mathematics is a way of learning country—Yolnu mathematics is "living mathematics," underscoring the plurality, the situatedness, the more-than-human diversity.

This study of Indigenous mathematics is followed by two contributions on Indigenous literature, Ivanna Yi's "Cartographies of the Voice: Storying the Land in Native American Oral Traditions and Literature" and John Ryan's "No More Boomerang: Environment and Technology in Contemporary Aboriginal Australian Poetry." Yi analyzes how through their oral traditions and written literatures, Native American storytellers and authors invent new postcolonial cartographies by storying the land, that is to say, by "investing the land with the moral and spiritual perspectives specific to their communities." This article examines how native places are made, named, and reconstructed through storytelling, demonstrating that the land itself becomes a repository of the oral tradition. Spanning the Mayan *Popol Vuh*; Algonkian, Western Apache, Hopi, Iroquois, and Laguna Pueblo stories; and contemporary fiction and poetry of Joy Harjo and Leslie Marmon Silko, Yi reveals the dialogic relationships with the land experienced by Indigenous peoples and their emphasis on maintaining a direct relationship with the land.

For its part, Ryan's "No More Boomerang" spotlights interconnections between the environment and technology in Aboriginal Australian poetry, where the land is a "nexus of ecological, spiritual, material, and more-than-human overlays." Focusing on the writings of three literary-activists—Jack Davis,

Oodgeroo Noonuccal, and Lionel Fogarty—Ryan examines creative engagement with the impacts of late modernist technologies on Aboriginal peoples and the land alike; critiquing invasive technologies that adversely impact both the environment and Indigenous cultures, these writings also invoke Aboriginal technologies that once sustained and in many places continue to support both peoples and the land. To be sure, Fogarty, Noonuccal, and Davis do not reject Western technology, and in fact they acknowledge their indebtedness to Western forms of writing and technology. Indeed, theirs is an invitation to reconsider earlier types of technology, and to imagine new types of technology, that have fewer deleterious consequences for country and culture.

The Indigenous peoples who are the focus of the articles in this Special Issue herald from Alaska and Canada to the Amazon, and from the Americas to Oceania and East Asia. But there is considerable room for growth. In an issue of necessarily limited length, we attempt here to offer some of the most innovative scholarship that is globally indigenous in character if not in combined geographical coverage, with Africa, Europe, and South and Southeast Asia our most visible lacuna. The number and types of challenges addressed in this Special Issue are also inescapably constrained: the scholars whose work is presented here grapple with a broad range of Indigenous struggles from numerous perspectives, but there are many more that deserve our attention and that will need to be the focus of future scholarly endeavors by experts in an even wider variety of fields.

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