

# **Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities**

## **Postcolonial Approaches**

**Edited by Elizabeth DeLoughrey,  
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# Introduction

## A Postcolonial Environmental Humanities

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The cover of our collection features two photographs by the Cuban artists Atelier Morales (Teresa Ayuso and Juan Luis Morales), prints from their series *Patrimonio a la Deriva*, *Los Ingenios*, or *Adrift* *Patrimony: Sugar Refineries*. The left-side image, entitled “Vereda” (2004), captures the ruins of the Cuban sugar plantation system, representing a verdant tropical landscape dominated by coconut palms, and visually overwhelming the small, almost toy-like, colorful steam train in the lower left corner. The Spanish word *vereda* translates as path; in establishing the first railway system of the Spanish empire, Cuba certainly was “pathbreaking” in terms of colonial modernity, monoculture, and enslaved African labor. Yet with the collapse of the Cuban sugar trade at the turn of the twenty-first century, Atelier Morales sought to document the ruins of the industry in a series of powerful images in homage to French-born Cuban lithographer Eduardo LaPlante, whose nineteenth-century representations of rural Caribbean life signify as the artists’ lost “patrimony.”<sup>1</sup> While the photograph initially may elicit a kind of tropical nostalgia—a melancholic view of an agricultural industry in ruins, an oxidizing locomotive overtaken by the fecund powers of nature—a closer examination of “nature” in the photograph reveals an always and already social landscape. This is in keeping with work in postcolonial studies which foregrounds how the history of colonialism necessitates the imbrication of humans in nature. In this case the coconut palm, that icon of ahistorical tropical islands, is better recognized as a nineteenth-century import to the Caribbean from the Pacific, a new crop replacing that infamous fifteenth-century import from across the Atlantic, the sugar cane. Moreover, the photograph has captured the specter of what resembles a cell phone tower in the alignment of the palms, anticipating an industry of new transnational pathways and networks. *Vereda* is our “pathway” into the photograph and its layers of human and nonhuman history, leading from the lower left of the image into the center of the old railway and plantation system. This suggests a new direction for tropical aesthetics that builds upon and complicates historical images of colonial landscapes and anticipates new futures. A pathway, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, can also be understood as a sequence of events, a course of a life, a line of thought, an argument and, we would argue, a *narrative*. This evocation of narrative is vital to engaging the history of ecological

imperialism and its representational aesthetics, which inform global ecologies and the environmental humanities.

*Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches* is a volume committed to extending critical conversations about nature, globalization, and culture in the context of twenty-first century environmental debates and their historical antecedents. The essays collected here are all informed by what is increasingly called the “environmental humanities,” and focus in particular on how the history of globalization and imperialism is integral to understanding contemporary environmental issues. In the last decade, the field of postcolonial ecocriticism has offered important new perspectives on how environmental change is entwined with the narratives, histories, and material practices of colonialism and globalization. Postcolonial approaches emphasize how experiences of environmental violence, rupture, and displacement are central ecological challenges across the Global South, while at the same time identifying possibilities for imaginative recuperation that are compatible with anticolonial politics.<sup>2</sup> The aim of this collection is to build on this groundbreaking work by making a case for the foundational importance of postcolonial methods to the environmental humanities—a relatively new but rapidly expanding interdisciplinary field that seeks to bring together cultural, historical, social, and scientific dimensions of ecological thought.

Our volume focuses in particular on two themes that have major bearings on the development of the environmental humanities. First, the role that narrative, visual, and aesthetic forms play in drawing attention to and shaping our ideas about catastrophic and long-term environmental challenges such as climate change, militarism, resource extraction, the pollution and management of the global commons, petrocapiatalism, and the commodification and capitalization of nature. Second, we explore how an interdisciplinary and comparative field like postcolonial studies can contribute to the scope and methodologies of the environmental humanities, especially in conjunction with the foundational work already established in areas such as political ecology and environmental justice.<sup>3</sup> As humanities scholars, we understand the formation of the environmental humanities to be a necessary challenge to the limitations of our own disciplinary departmentalization, and an invitation to bring the humanities into a conversation with the political, social, and environmental sciences. We support David Nye et al.’s claim that “scholars working in the environmental humanities are posing fundamentally different questions, questions of value and meaning informed by nuanced historical understanding of the cultures that frame environmental problems” (2013, 28). While we make no claim that this will result in a simple synthesis (or even “consilience,” in E. O. Wilson’s terms) of these different areas of inquiry, our aim is to foreground how interdisciplinary discussions of narrative, visual, and creative works from different regions can advance understanding of the specificity of ecological concerns as well as anticipatory visions for the future.

In an era of tremendous risk and uncertainty that seems to be increasingly managed by a “global ecocracy” (Sachs 1999, 67), we cannot afford to rely on the knowledge of one discipline or method alone. As anthropologist Arturo Escobar declared nearly two decades ago, “we need new narratives of life and culture” (1996, 65). These narratives, he suggests, are likely “hybrid,” and “arise from the mediations that local cultures are able to effect on the discourses and practices of nature, capital, and modernity” (65). They are also clearly inspired by and reflected in literary and artistic works, which makes their analysis essential for understanding the social, cultural, and political experiences of global ecological change in specific locations and across different timeframes. We see the collection as helping to situate the—as yet rather nebulous—concept of the environmental humanities with a firm grounding in the significance of the ongoing histories of imperialism for environmental research. The conviction shared by our contributors is that a postcolonial dialogue is indispensable for establishing an effective base for the environmental humanities in the twenty-first century, and that this field has much to offer in elucidating critical issues surrounding the narration and visualization of alternative ecological futures.

In recent decades, literary scholars have expanded the geographical and historical contours of ecocriticism by exploring how writers from postcolonial, settler colonial, and decolonizing regions have imagined and inscribed the environment, providing vital perspectives on how ecological transformation is entangled with colonial expansion, capitalist industry, and globalization. In so doing, the field of postcolonial ecocriticism has always understood itself to be “interdisciplinary, transnational, and comparative” (Cilano and DeLoughrey 2007, 80), and has long engaged with the complexities of interdisciplinary dialogue as well as problematizing facile claims to the global. In using the term “global ecologies” for our title, we are cognizant of the debates in the fields of postcolonial studies, development studies, and political ecology that have critiqued “globalizing impulses” in which methods of thought are exported to postcolonial regions, and where the global and local are reduced to “simple synecdoche,” so instead we advocate for a method in which “each interrupts and distorts the other” (O’Brien 2001, 143). This is in keeping with a powerful discourse in globalization and development studies that has been critical of a “neoliberal environmentalism reasserting cultural difference in the terms of making the world environmentally secure for unrestrained capitalist accumulation” (Di Chiro 2003, 206). This has implications for both the circulation of material and cultural capital, and is a key disciplinary critique about the accumulation of transnational difference as cultural value. Thus a postcolonial approach to the environmental humanities is self-reflexive in its engagement with histories and knowledges of ecological difference, particularly at an institutional level, where universities are implicated.<sup>4</sup>

In this collection's framing of global ecologies, we seek to avoid the "over-worlding" of postcolonial texts and contexts whereby social and ecological desires are projected onto the indigenous and/or Global South. We critique othering practices that outsource the labor of knowledge systems to an "eco-Indian," fabricate idyllic "primitive" harmonies with nature, and project the desire for mass resistance onto the Global South. We seek to avoid facile binaries that locate "green orientalism" (Lohmann 1993) in the past (a primitivism projected onto the Global South and the indigenous subject) as well as the reification of a place all too easily depicted "as a locus of anti-imperialist resistance" and critique (Huggan 2004, 704). While we engage a comparative global scope, we do so dialectically and with attention to the complexity, contradictions, and complicities of the figure of the Global South. This is why attention to narrative is so central to our project. The turn to critically situated aesthetics, narratives, and visual forms is crucial to localizing and theorizing historical texts and contexts, and helps to disrupt and situate a universalizing impulse. It is also why we are keen to establish points of dialogue with the everyday narratives of environmental negotiation and exploitation analyzed in certain strands of anthropological research, which likewise pay close attention to the contradictory interface of global and local concerns in specific communities and locations. In an epoch increasingly described as the "Anthropocene," in which a planetary humanity is rendered as a geological agent, it is all the more critical to examine the ways in which narratives situate and embed cultural and ontological experiences of ecology.

Examining how narrative, stylistic, and visual forms anticipate their circulation, and in fact may disrupt, parody, and complicate their global consumption (Huggan 2001; Mukherjee 2010, 9), can be instructive, suggesting an "aesthetics committed to politics" (Cilano and DeLoughrey 2007, 84). Postcolonial approaches to environmental texts have elucidated how writers and artists complicate canonical and colonial legacies as well as develop new forms and media. A growing body of postcolonial scholarship has examined and identified narrative tropes like the pastoral, counterpastoral, New World baroque, forest fictions, progressive realism, mimesis, counter landscaping, petrofiction, and prelapsarian visual aesthetics.<sup>5</sup> For example, Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011a) turns to politically engaged nonfiction, "transnational meldings" (36), the "environmental picaresque" (45), and the strategic adoption of the "rhetoric of environmental justice" (37) by the dispossessed. We believe that focusing on how to narrate both ecological crisis and utopian visions is vital to the environmental humanities,<sup>6</sup> and we support Nixon's observation that, "in a world permeated by insidious, yet unseen and imperceptible violence, imaginative writing can help make the unapparent appear" (15).

Nonfiction writing often shares this imaginative vision and, whether through journalism, *testimonio*, or even scholarly work, can also

elucidate what a homogenizing globalization seeks to render invisible, raising pressing questions about ethics and accountability. Nonfiction narrative forms may adopt the pastoral, as Ken Saro-Wiwa does in *Genocide in Nigeria* (1992), to strategically draw out an indigenous fall from nature created by oil companies in the Niger Delta, or to help render visible an “aesthetics of rupture and connection” (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 28) described by Édouard Glissant (1989) as characteristic of post-plantation narratives of the Caribbean. Due to the ways in which the histories of colonialism have displaced and alienated people from the land, the imaginative and material act of ecological recuperation is often deeply fraught. Consequently, far from any idealized notions of harmony and balance, postcolonial environmental representations often engage with the legacies of violent material, environmental, and cultural transformation. In an effort to recuperate histories that colonial narratives sought to suppress, they might take on the authoritative voices of historians or, as we see in recent novels by Helon Habila (2011) and Indra Sinha (2007), the adaptation of an “official” journalistic voice (and its parody).<sup>7</sup> We see such generic negotiations as offering incisive critiques of how mainstream environmental narratives are framed, drawing attention to the power relations and structural inequalities they all too frequently occlude, and contributing to the creation of alternative modes of articulation and analysis in line with the tradition of postcolonial thought and writing. As Edward Said famously remarked, “because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, the land is recoverable at first only through the imagination” (1993, 77), an observation that retains relevance as communities continue to assert ecological sovereignty in the context of changing national and global power structures. Language and narrative, including the narrative work of the visual, are integral to conceptualizing both the legacies of rupture and the possibilities of imaginative recuperation and transformation.<sup>8</sup>

A postcolonial environmental humanities advocates for the power of the imagination as expressed collectively across the full range of cultural practices. It draws comparatively on cultural resources to delineate a more equitable and ecologically restorative vision of the world. To that end, *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities* is divided into five thematic sections that address multiscale topics ranging from soil and plants to the planetary climate: (1) The Politics of Earth: Forests, Gardens, Plantations; (2) Disaster, Vulnerability, and Resilience; (3) Political Ecologies and Environmental Justice; (4) Mapping World Ecologies; and (5) Terraforming, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene. Together, these sections provide culturally and historically differentiated perspectives on environmental concerns across a wide variety of geographical locations—including Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Australasia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe, and North America—and approach ecology and globalization in ways that are centrally responsive to the specific

experiences of colonialism, militarism, and/or capitalist resource extraction in these regions. Our contributions also engage with a wide range of disciplines and academic, activist, and theoretical interests that demonstrate the relevance of postcolonial and humanities-based approaches to the environment for broader audiences. Rather than being prescriptive, the essays in this volume suggest methods and ways of thinking to address large-scale challenges such as climate change and disaster vulnerability that resist the tendency toward a universalizing globalism. Moving between systemic analyses and specificities, the dialogue established throughout this collection provides comparative grounding for thinking through the conflicting scales that a global approach to the environment must address—from plants to planetarity, and commodity frontiers to the capitalist world-system. This multiscale format allows us to bring into view the contested forms of power and agency that have led to the planet's entry into a geological epoch called by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer (2000) the Anthropocene, while paying close attention to the narratives and lived realities of ecological violence, crisis, and transformation that are intimately tied to imperialist practices.

Our volume is a collective and transnational endeavor, emerging from a series of workshops, panels, and conferences hosted by the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität and the Deutsches Museum), the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), and by the University of California, Los Angeles. We organized these events because although we feel that the resurgence of environmental concern in the humanities has produced many inspiring exchanges between disciplines and methodologies, there is still an uncritical tendency toward “superpower parochialism” (Nixon 2011a, 34) in the framing of environmental concerns that often reflects the perceptions and preoccupations of the privileged and the Global North. As DeLoughrey and Handley have argued, “the discourse of nature is a universalizing one,” and this means that scholarship “is particularly vulnerable to naturalizing dominant forms of environmental discourse, particularly those that do not fundamentally engage with questions of difference, power, and privilege” (2011, 14). There is certainly a need to address modes of universalism in light of how the global nature of environmental crises requires collective response, but it is also crucial that we consider the positionality of such claims carefully given the radically different concepts of ecology that are being employed across academic disciplines (hence the plural “ecologies” in our title). This is producing debates about political agency and responsibility in the Anthropocene, and raises the concern that certain environmental philosophies are being privileged over others in ways that reinforce the long-standing marginalization of dispossessed voices.<sup>9</sup>

The essays in this collection illustrate that such differences in environmental conception can be productively understood by approaching

ecological research in conjunction with histories of empire and globalization. Now, more than ever, postcolonial approaches to the environmental humanities help complicate and clarify the historical power relations that underpin global ecologies. Conservative dismissals of the relevance of postcolonial approaches in the humanities are better understood as anxious responses to the field's ongoing work in disrupting Eurocentric norms and American exceptionalism in and outside the academy. Such dismissals often involve mischaracterizations of postcolonialism as a temporal marker or as an uncritical celebration of anti-colonial narratives, rather than a critical method that supports the ongoing task of decolonization on a global scale. As Robert JC Young points out, postcolonialism cannot be limited to a field, theory, or time period because its goals have always been broadly defined, including efforts to reconfigure the dominant knowledge formations of the Global North and its ethical norms; to destabilize hierarchical power structures; and to reposition knowledge from below, interrogating "the interrelated histories of violence, domination, inequality and injustice" (2012, 20). The relevance of these historical experiences is not diminishing in the twenty-first century but rather is becoming reconfigured and, in some cases, amplified as environmental conflicts deepen. Our definition of postcolonialism is therefore necessarily broad, and essays from this collection expand beyond the British/Anglophone model to considerations of colonial and ecological regimes in Russia, new extractivism in Latin America, and the material and discursive fallout of nuclear militarism in the US and the Pacific Islands. Like Rob Nixon and many others, we affirm the vitality of postcolonial methods in "an era of rampant neoliberalism and empire" (2011a, 36). The following sections of this introduction elaborate on these claims by addressing the environmental humanities as a developing field and its relevance for the ongoing legacies of empire.

## DEFINING THE ENVIRONMENTAL (AND ECOLOGICAL) HUMANITIES

The environmental humanities is a new field that has—so far—only been loosely defined.<sup>10</sup> While the term privileges the conceptual rubric of the humanities, its disciplinary engagements necessarily extend to the arts as well as the social and environmental sciences. There has been a remarkable production in this emergent field over the last few years, including newly minted undergraduate and graduate programs, conferences, and a number of book series and open-access journals. This reflects the substantial expansion of environmental humanities research, which for many years was conducted within specific departments, and which has now been drawn into environmental studies programs and research centers that call for sustained and innovative *multidisciplinary* research.<sup>11</sup> Two of the main challenges as we see them now involve (1) establishing a clear definition of what environmental humanities



research entails and how it can respond effectively to global ecological challenges; and (2) devising appropriately *interdisciplinary* methodologies that not only bring different disciplines into transformative dialogue but also constitute new forms of environmental knowledge that can be communicated across the arts and sciences and to public audiences.

We see a postcolonial environmental humanities as what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has described as “a Humanities to come” (2004, 526). By this phrase, Spivak means a critical pedagogy that seeks an “uncoercive arrangement of desires” between self and other including, we would add, nonhuman others (526). This ethical claim she defines as less of a sense of being “responsible *for*” than being “responsible *to*” (537; original emphasis), a calling for engagement to “learn from below” (548) even as we recognize our own limitations in doing so. To learn from below “the dominant must first redefine herself,” and this gesture requires that geography—the Global North and Global South—“stop being read in evolutionary terms as a teleological narrative of pre-modern to modern” (Didur and Heffernan 2003, 10). By understanding global development as complex and uneven rather than subject to outmoded narratives of “progress,” we can ensure a foundation for the environmental humanities that is consonant with the alter-globalization perspectives that are allied with environmental justice movements and which foreground questions of ethics and responsibility (see also Taylor 1995; Escobar 1995).

While the term “environmental humanities” (also known as “ecological humanities”) is relatively new, research in this area has well-established genealogies in disciplines such as anthropology, geography, literature, history, philosophy, and science and technology studies, all of which have contributed to the shaping of the discourses of ecofeminism, political ecology, indigenous studies, and environmental justice in the last few decades. Some of the most significant work in bringing these perspectives together has come from Australia, where environmental humanities research has drawn attention to postcolonial issues even if empire has not always been prominent in how the field has been conceived elsewhere. In issuing an invitation for researchers to join their “ecological humanities” initiative in 2004, Deborah Bird Rose and Libby Robin outlined a vision of the field that is not only rooted in a combination of social and environmental justice perspectives but is also alert to the histories of colonial settlement and displacement, foregrounding the “ethical imperative” for “settler society scholars [...] to be responsive to indigenous people’s knowledges and aspirations for justice” (2004, para. 1).<sup>12</sup> This statement retains foundational importance for the environmental humanities at large, not just in settler societies (including the US) but more broadly in accounting for the global histories of dominance, displacement, and marginalization that have accompanied imperial practices over time, along with the integration of much of the world into the system of capitalist globalization. It also holds resonance for unsettling instrumentalist approaches to

environmental knowledge that tend to underplay the moral and ethical dimensions of environmental crisis rather than thinking critically about how these are essential for envisioning sustainable and equitable ecological relations on a global basis.<sup>13</sup>

Like Rose and Robin, the editors of the inaugural issue of the journal *Environmental Humanities* (including Rose) drew upon Val Plumwood's concept of "ecohumanities perspectives" as articulated in her 2002 book, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*, in identifying the contours of the field.<sup>14</sup> This is a text worth examining in terms of its commitment to ethics, an often unstated but constitutive element of both postcolonial and environmental scholarship that is foregrounded, as we have seen, in Spivak's sense of a "Humanities to come." Plumwood has argued that "two historic tasks [...] arise from the rationalist hyper-separation of human identity from nature: they can be summed up as the tasks of (re) situating humans in ecological terms and non-humans in ethical terms" (8). She reminds us that these fields of knowledge are gendered, stating: "One of the problems in standard ways of thinking about the crisis is precisely this rationalist divorce between male-coded rational prudence and female-coded ethics, as if they were separate and non-interacting spheres" (9). This is perhaps no more obvious than in the disciplinary formulations around climate change, in which one sees the reentrenchment of "hard" and "soft" sciences where positivist formulations of knowledge, privileged by the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), contribute to a discourse of masculinized technocracy managing a chaotic, ever-changing feminized earth.<sup>15</sup> This we suggest is a cautionary tale that should be a focus of environmental humanities critique in an era in which university funding shifts to the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) models of knowledge and labor production, and increasingly eschews the invaluable contributions of the humanities and social sciences. As we seek to build a critical body of work around the postcolonial environmental humanities, we must be attentive to the ways in which the field itself may reiterate the gendered, racial, and class privileges that have constituted the history of the "hard" sciences as well as environmental movements in the Global North.

Drawing from the methods of postcolonial and feminist scholarship, environmental humanities researchers treat knowledge as always culturally situated. Moreover, as Rose and Robin argue, a truly "ecological" humanities needs to be relational and interconnected, deconstructing hierarchies between the arts and the sciences and encouraging modes of thinking that move across cultural as well as human and nonhuman boundaries. This is consonant with how we would define the environmental humanities as a field whose core role is to offer a culturally differentiated, historically nuanced understanding of human-environmental relations, and which is self-reflexive about the limitations of any single methodological approach or philosophical standpoint. Our work here foregrounds the complex histories of empire while recognizing that current forms of globalization cannot be

reduced to a simple extension of earlier practices of imperialism. A postcolonial approach to the environmental humanities therefore means relating cultural and historical analyses to cross-disciplinary ecological concerns in ways that emphasize tensions between different forms of knowledge, and that focus attention on how power relations affect environmental decision making and practices at multiple scales, from the domestic to the global.

The contributors to this volume also call attention to the necessity of expanding the geographical, political, and historical contours of the environmental humanities in relation to what could be called "critical ecologies" for the twenty-first century.<sup>16</sup> While the environmental humanities invokes an interdisciplinary field, critical ecologies suggests a method of reading that derives from engagements with subaltern studies, critical race, gender and sexuality studies, and an ongoing scrutiny of empire including its historical and contemporary genres and forms. It is a critical reading practice aimed at recognizing and "reducing domination" (Biro 2011, 3), and is connected to bioregionalism, ecofeminism, social ecology, and environmental justice (6). As a radical critique, it requires that we "rethink some of our fundamental socio-political institutions," most especially capitalism (6). Building on the foundational work of Marx and the Frankfurt school, critical ecologies is concerned with questions of domination, alienation, ethics, and aesthetics. Not surprisingly, political theorist Robyn Eckersley pinpoints Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980)—a text that historicized how the rise of Enlightenment science feminized and therefore sought to dominate nature—as a foundational work for critical ecologies and the environmental humanities. Importantly, Merchant's work elucidated how our *narratives* of nature matter; how attitudes, policy, and actions necessarily shift when, for instance, a culture determines that the earth is no longer a figure of alterity like the planetary maternal but rather a virgin, waiting for the 'penetration' of empire, capital, and globalization (Merchant 1980, 2). This point remains of fundamental importance as cross-disciplinary work takes up the challenge of theorizing the human and experiences of embodiment in the Anthropocene.

## THE ANTHROPOCENE: LOCATING THE HUMAN IN ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES

In the introduction to the inaugural issue of the journal *Environmental Humanities*, the editors wrote that:

the need for a more *integrated and conceptually sensitive* approach to environmental issues is being increasingly recognised across the humanities and the social and environmental sciences. The development of the environmental humanities might therefore be understood as a response to this need; an effort to enrich environmental research

with a more extensive conceptual vocabulary, whilst at the same time vitalising the humanities by rethinking the ontological exceptionality of the human.

(Rose et al. 2012, 2)

Certainly the *humanities* and social sciences have been charged with anthropocentrism; recent work in animal studies, posthumanism, multispecies ethnographies, and new materialism have done much to correct that history.<sup>17</sup> Yet a postcolonial environmental humanities would foreground how a deep understanding of historical and contemporary power relations is essential for effectively “rethinking the ontological exceptionality of the human.” The history of European empire constructed a gendered and racial hierarchy of embodied and disembodied subjects along the lines of nature/culture that relegated women, the indigenous, non-Europeans, and the poor to an objectified figure of nature as much as the white propertied heterosexual male was tied to rationality, subjectivity, and culture.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, postcolonial approaches position the nature/human binary as political, and do not necessarily see the dismantling of this divide as the foremost intellectual priority due to the already historical imbrication of the human with nonhuman nature and place.<sup>19</sup> In other words, many cultures do not have a separate notion (or even term for) “the environment” (Strathern 1980), and their ethical and philosophical codes are not simply assimilable to the binaries of western knowledge configurations. Our collection is committed to accounting for the more-than-human and multispecies world, while at the same time identifying the hierarchical processes that led certain humans to be reduced to “nature” (or other species) and examining the significance of this for present-day experiences of environmental racism. We therefore raise questions as to the relevance of the shift to the “posthuman” by subjects that are not seen to be determined by race, gender, sexuality, and empire. Humanism, as Neil Badminton has argued elsewhere, “cannot escape its ‘post’” (2004, 9), and there is a colonial legacy of figuring a racialized and embodied subaltern whose constructed relationship to nature and the non-human animal have ongoing social and political effects. Consequently, a postcolonial approach to the environmental humanities involves analyzing how empire has constructed the human and how this affects the multiplicity of subjects in humanities research.

The point raised by Rose et al. about the larger question of the “ontological exceptionality of the human” brings us to recent conversations about the Anthropocene and environmental humanities research. Dipesh Chakrabarty has recently turned his attention away from “provincializing” the universalist assumptions of Enlightenment thought in order to explore how the science of climate change, and an identification of the agency of the human species in bringing about a new geological epoch, “challenges not only the ideas about the human that usually sustain the discipline of history but also the analytic strategies that postcolonial and postimperial

historians have deployed in the last two decades in response to the post-war scenario of decolonization and globalization" (2009, 198). For Chakrabarty, the attention to relations of power and exploitation raised by postcolonial scholars remains indispensable for assessing issues of environmental justice at a time when the widespread but unevenly distributed effects of anthropogenic climate change are becoming perilously manifest. However, the challenge he sets out involves approaching this by thinking across three disjunctive concepts of the human that operate in relation to life in the Anthropocene: the human as universal, rights-bearing subject (as positioned in much liberal humanist thought); the human as endowed with "anthropological difference;" and the human as a geological force, which has wreaked environmental havoc due to fossil fuel dependence and, unlike the first two conceptions, is not ontological (Chakrabarty 2012, 1–2, 13). As some of the contributions to this volume make clear, it is no doubt essential that environmental humanities research engages the new historical and ontological questions raised by climate change, and evaluates the practical and philosophical implications of thinking politically beyond intrahuman concerns. At the same time, this volume emphasizes the need for such critique to be equally attentive to intrahuman power relations and different cultural understandings of history and the environment. We believe such understandings are imperative for assessing the pervasive effects of historical exploitation and inequality on present-day environmental issues, and for producing a nuanced and emancipatory foundation for approaching global ecologies—one that avowedly addresses the complex ethical and ontological terrain on which environmental governance is based.

Understanding climate change as a geological shift created by humans leads to new conceptions of history, deep time, and of the notion of humanity, which in turn raise important questions in considering different *scales* of ontology. The planetary scale invoked by Chakrabarty is quite different from an ontological relationship to place in a context in which colonial powers render the landscape into resources to be owned, cultivated, or simply extracted. As evidenced in this volume, a central aim of a globally responsive environmental humanities is to examine the specificities of these different scales of ontology, with attention to the imperialist assumptions and practices that underpin such things as the extraction of botanical specimens in the colonies, settler appropriation of indigenous grasslands for livestock and agricultural purposes, and the importation of agricultural crops and indentured and slave labor into a worldwide network of plantations. The varying scales of ontology and ecologies involved in each of these historically specific examples require rigorous attention to the economic, material, linguistic, and epistemological assumptions that inform a sense of belonging.

While the scope of this volume is large, we make no claim that what we call postcolonial approaches to the environmental humanities—or what Donna Haraway calls "naturecultures" (2006)—need be fully commensurable. Following postcolonial methodologies that emphasize difference, alterity, and

the multiplicity of narrative constructions, the perspectives in this collection offer diverse and culturally responsive modes of theorizing place, resilience, vulnerability, environmental transformation, reclamation, disaster, and violence. This concentration on the historical and cultural specificities that constitute different forms of environmental knowledge is central to the volume's contribution to the field, along with its focus on how differential power relations condition both the conceptual understandings and material transformations of global ecologies.

## NARRATIVE AND THE LIMITS TO VISION

While this volume seeks to open up an interdisciplinary conversation about issues from neoliberalism and militarism to food, land, and water sovereignty, one of our shared concerns is how narrative practices have differently inflected the representation of nonhuman nature and environmental justice, and how attention to narrative and aesthetic form is fundamental to understanding environmental crisis. This is why the humanities are integral to our environmental futures. We are invested in how we tell stories about ecology that contribute to what Vandana Shiva (2005) calls "earth democracy," which is not necessarily derived from moments of crisis but rather from the everyday. Refuting institutional structures that segregate humanities-based research from empirical and scientific concerns, our collection emphasizes the profound ways in which understandings of the environment are embedded in language, narrative, history, and the cultural imagination, and how some of the most creative and urgent perspectives on ecological change are generated through postcolonial contexts and critique. "To reconfigure the environmental humanities," argues Rob Nixon, "involves acknowledging, among other things, how writer-activists in the Southern Hemisphere are giving imaginative definition to catastrophes [...] rendering [them] tangible by humanizing drawn-out calamities inaccessible to the immediate senses" (2011b).<sup>20</sup>

Literary scholars working in the environmental humanities such as Ursula Heise and Allison Carruth have emphasized the importance of narrative, suggesting that it is vital to imagining and articulating our future. There is a struggle, they contend, "against the concepts and stories that have enabled environmental degradation in the past and against impartial (and imperfect) ideas about nature in environmentalist thought and writing itself" (2010, 3). They ask the following "crucial question" for the field as a whole:

which concepts and narratives from the environmentalist inventory will move environmentally oriented thought into the future, and which ones shackle environmentalism to outdated templates? (3)

Their question arises from the US debate created by Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus about whether apocalyptic renderings of climate change

contribute to “feelings of helplessness” rather than incite North Americans toward political action (2004, 30). Yet apocalypse, as some of our contributors argue, is a particularly Judeo-Christian narrative tied to the Cold War, and can become a useful and familiar rhetoric to inspire political action in that particular context.<sup>21</sup> Other “outdated templates” for environmental storytelling would include the narrative that ecologies are constituted by natural harmony and balance rather than chaos and rupture, as historian Donald Worster (1989) and biologist Daniel Botkin (1990) have shown. Yet the pastoral and harmony of nature narratives, while themselves fictions (historically and scientifically speaking), can be effective mobilizers, raising the possibility of using rhetorical fictions that reflect accepted cultural idioms, but may not be in step with the latest scientific norms. As such, the attention to narrative in the environmental humanities might be concerned not only with the “truths” of scientific ecology but also with the strategic use of *fiction* as a mobilizing idiom.

The linguist George Lakoff has lamented that when it comes to environmental narratives, we are afflicted with “hypocognition,” which is to say a “lack of ideas we need” (2010, 77). Importantly he points out that the concept, inherited from the Enlightenment, that reason is “unemotional, logical, abstract, [and] universal” has been proven false by cognitive and brain science. Instead, “real reason” is “mostly unconscious (98%); requires emotion;” and is situationally variable (73). Thus narrative and rhetoric, if they are to make any impact, need to “make sense in terms of their systems of frames” (73). This does not mean that we are limited by pre-existing cultural frames, rather it brings up the imperative to invent them in order to create new circuits of thought. Lakoff uses the example of Michael Pollan’s invention of the terms of “oil-based” versus “sun-based” food systems to call attention to the politics of consumption evident in a system of petroleum-based transportation, fertilizers, and pesticides (77) that destabilize the agricultural sovereignty of small farmers and developing nations, and contribute excessively to global carbon emissions. Literary figures, scholars, journalists, and activists all contribute to the making of new terms, narratives, and therefore new frameworks of thinking and affect; notable recent examples include Crutzen and Stoermer’s “Anthropocene” (2000), Martínez-Alier’s “environmentalism of the poor” (2002), and Nixon’s “slow violence” (2011).

While narrative has the capacity to expand our understandings, postcolonial approaches, building on feminism and deconstruction, have also emphasized its necessary limits and disjunctures. The radical critique of positivism emerging from the humanities and social sciences foregrounds a resistance, via Foucault and others, to a will to knowledge, questioning the production of epistemology itself. Accordingly, our collection builds upon the work of Plumwood and other postcolonial and feminist perspectives in recognizing the limitations of any claims to the global. As Plumwood explains, “our capacity to gain insight from understanding our social context, to learn

from self-critical perspectives on the past and to allow for our *own limitations of vision*, is still one of our best hopes for creative change and survival" (2002, 10; emphasis added). Acknowledging this both critically and in the stories we choose to focus on is crucial for identifying how histories of imperialism have shaped ways of seeing "the environment," and point to alternative modes of understanding that resist what Haraway calls the masculine "god-trick," or claiming "to see everything from nowhere" (1989, 581). Just as the field of postcolonial studies argued for the *provincializing* of Enlightenment epistemologies, a move against universalism in the service of empire, postcolonial approaches to the environmental humanities are equally concerned with the gendered tension between a claim to the global and its necessary parochialization. To be self-critical is to be self-reflexive, suggesting the need for humility in recognizing our limitations of vision. This applies across disciplinary boundaries as well as local, national, and international institutions. An environmental humanities that is grounded in postcolonial methodologies might elucidate gaps between ecological knowledge systems and managerial practices—which, at their worst, can have disastrous consequences—and help critique and reframe the questions asked by environmental researchers in light of historical insights, cultural differences, and unjust power relations.

## DECOLONIZING ECOLOGY

Our collection title evokes and builds on Wolfgang Sachs's groundbreaking 1993 volume *Global Ecology: A New Arena of Political Conflict*, particularly its articulation of geopolitical concerns. We see Sachs's collection, which was published in the wake of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, as a forerunner to our own in that it emphasizes how ahistorical attention to the environment on a local or global scale fails to capture the complex social relations that have shaped and defined what we mean by ecology. Moreover, its concern with development foregrounds a topic that is all the more prescient in an era of geopolitical tension—and colonial critique from nations like India—over the relationship between development and future carbon emissions. Our collection, coming just over twenty years after Sachs's, seeks to anchor an awareness of how the science of ecology needs to be situated in history, particularly the history of imperialism; in narrative practices, especially those that defamiliarize the environment; and in the recognition that it is a contested field of enquiry, even as it is used as a resource for environmental activists.

The concept of ecology is barely one hundred years old, and has been mobilized in multiple ways over time to serve the shifting needs of colonial authority. Furthermore, as scholars such as Peder Anker (2001) note, "[t]he formative period of ecological reasoning coincides with the last years



of the British Empire" (1), and the modern science of ecology was seen by imperial agencies as one of the "urgently needed tools for understanding human relations to nature and society in order to set administrative economic policies for landscapes, population settlement and social control" (2). As DeLoughrey argues (2013), ecology as an academic field was institutionalized through radiation research that arose from US nuclear testing in the Pacific Islands, connecting its formation directly to militarism and empire.<sup>22</sup> Our pluralization of Sachs's title seeks not only to "provincialize" ecology but also to highlight how it has been mobilized to serve the needs of different political constituencies, and to engage the work of "critical ecologies" set in motion by key contributions to imperial environmental history, development studies, critical geography, and political ecology.<sup>23</sup>

Sachs's collection also provides a provocative example for postcolonial and environmental humanities research due to its emphasis on confronting technocratic, "solution"-driven approaches to environmental problems that refuse to acknowledge the richness of local ecological knowledge and adaptation strategies, along with historical and cultural specificities or the systemic need to confront unequal distributions of wealth. Such managerial strategies tend to be discussed in relatively "closed" spaces, as disaster studies specialists Adolfo Mascarenhas and Ben Wisner point out, "reserved for bureaucrats, elected officials and experts," and are "often where 'acceptable risk' is determined—without consultation with those affected" (2012, 56). The need to counter such techniques is familiar to much postdevelopment and feminist thinking, and is evident in the frustration of impoverished communities in the Global South and in the North who bear the brunt of deleterious environmental change.

This uneven relationship to institutions of power presents an important challenge to environmental humanities research that seeks to support politically progressive decision-making, while deconstructing and resisting the undemocratic and frequently exploitative ecological management regimes dictated by institutions based in the Global North (from Washington, DC to the World Economic Forum at Davos). These regimes are weighted heavily toward neoliberal doctrine, and are often adopted in the Global South by corrupt political actors and networks of complicit elites. It is clearly a significant step to move from interdisciplinary reconfiguration (i.e. constructing an inclusive vision of the environmental humanities) to asserting its relevance to the many real-world practices it addresses. Yet this remains an important challenge if we are to respond meaningfully to the "mission statement" set down by another newly established online journal in the field, *Green Humanities*, to develop a collaborative research base that has "the overarching goal of coaxing our global society toward a more sustainable future" (2013). Such "coaxing" surely involves constructing a strong ethical as well as environmental response to the tendency identified by Sachs over a decade ago in *Planet Dialectics* (1999) for the post-war era of development to be replaced by a globalizing neoliberalism characterized by increasing

“instability,” “failure,” ecological exhaustion, and security “risks” (20–22). At the same time, it may necessitate new methodologies and approaches for humanities researchers, not only to what we study and how we study it, but also to who we speak to and ask to listen. This means thinking carefully about creating or even *conjuring* new audiences, as well as redefining intellectual and institutional parameters that allow us to engage more directly with political, scientific, and economic discourse—something we hope our collection contributes toward.

## GLOBAL ECOLOGIES AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES: POSTCOLONIAL APPROACHES

Together, the volume’s essays negotiate what we see as a productive tension between provincializing environmental research and addressing large-scale concerns such as the struggle for the global commons and shared access to resources such as soil, water, air, and the ocean. As befits a collection oriented toward the global and the postcolonial, the work represented here grapples with terms and concepts that have caused contestation across various fields: epistemologies of climate change; the Anthropocene; worlding and world ecology; globalization and globality; the planetary and planetarity. These essays draw from environmental justice and the “environmentalisms of the poor” as well as the fields of geography and political ecology, which we would like to see increasingly integrated into environmental humanities conversations. Such perspectives are crucial to helping us think through the spatial as well as temporal interrelations between capitalism, colonialism, and climate change, and uneven development on a variety of interlocking scales. They also support us in emphasizing the urgency of understanding disaster, vulnerability, and resilience in relation to differential forms of agency (human and nonhuman). The rising tide of environmental catastrophes—both slow and abrupt—is increasingly attuning global attention to issues of environmental relocation and resistance even as the historical and economic roots of these crises often remain obscured. The organization of our collection aims to help develop and even transform environmental perceptions in this light by focusing on creative and narrative works that negotiate the tensions between diasporic affiliation, forced migration, habitation conflicts, and cultural conceptions of place-attachment, which are essential to any meaningful understanding of global ecologies.

The first section examines the historical and imperial politics of forests, gardens, plantations, and “urban jungles.” Entitled “The Politics of Earth: Forests, Gardens, Plantations,” the contributions in this section draw attention to how postcolonial readings of particular environments can unsettle colonial and nationalist framings of ecology. They also explore the tensions and overlaps between imaginative texts and state, industrial, and scientific discourses. The essays establish a comparative dialogue between different

forms of cultivation, contamination, and "ruination," to borrow a Jamaican term, which have significant implications for understanding the historical contours of global ecologies in the present. These include issues of interdependence and North/South relations; internal colonialism and the discourse of "nativism" in national cultures and horticultures; the relationship between environmental pollution and poverty; and the memorialization of plantation histories and destructive environmental practices.

David Arnold's "Narrativizing Nature: India, Empire, and Environment" opens our collection by using two contrasting narratives to provide a post-colonial reading of Indian environmental history. The first is that presented in the Bengali novel *Aranyak* (1939), which depicts how a city-bred outsider becomes absorbed into the world of the Indian forest, revelling in its rich vegetation while painfully aware of its impending destruction and the poverty of its human inhabitants. For Arnold, *Aranyak* shows the difficulty of trying to "provincialize Europe" in the narrativization of nature. The second set of sources consists of environmental health narratives about Calcutta. These inscribe nature within the modern city and its urban "jungle," while ascribing many urban environmental problems, including pollution, to the poor. The chapter demonstrates that these texts invoke discursive continuities between city and countryside and between colonial and postcolonial readings of "nature."

Jill Didur's "'The Perverse Little People of the Hills': Unearthing Ecology and Transculturation in Reginald Farrer's Alpine Plant Hunting" is also concerned with colonial era ideas about the environment and nature that circulated in the first half of the twentieth century. This essay, however, turns our attention to colonial accounts of travel and botanical exploration in South and Central Asia, and examines how colonial figures wrestled with challenges to their taken-for-granted ideas about self and other, prompted by their travels in unfamiliar landscapes in the colonial peripheries, and horticultural experiments with exotic plants in the gardens of the imperial center. Didur argues that Farrer's views on how to establish a rock garden that would best support the ecological needs of the exotic plants he collected during his travels in Asia involved a complicated renegotiation of colonial ways of seeing foreign people, cultures, and landscapes within the imperial center. With attention to discussions of ecology and transculturation in Farrer's narratives of plant collecting and rock and alpine gardening, Didur traces a practice of accommodating for difference (rather than taming the influence of the foreign) that could serve as a model for structuring countercolonial global ecologies in the present.

Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert's "Bagasse: Caribbean Art and the Debris of the Sugar Plantation" explores the relationship between colonial cultivation, ruination, and representation in the region. The essay examines projects by Caribbean artists Atelier Morales (Cuba), Hervé Beuze (Martinique), Charles Campbell (Jamaica), and María Magdalena Campos-Pons (Cuba), reflecting on the history of sugar production through its human and environmental costs. Her analysis of these works (many of which incorporate *bagasse*, the

debris left after cane is crushed, as artistic material) explores the rich expressive possibilities open to twenty-first-century environmental artists. These “ephemeral installations”—bagasse rots, reeks, decays—metaphorically illustrate how nations and peoples have been marked by the crushing and discarding of waste. By addressing the history of sugar production through bagasse, contemporary artists have entered into a complex dialogue with the specificities of past representations of sugar production and its exploitation of workers and the land, and provide a means of theorizing regional history through recourse to earth, plants, and plantations.

The section ends with Susan K. Martin’s essay, “Writing a Native Garden? Environmental Language and Post-*Mabo* Literature in Australia,” which augments the section’s focus on the politics of the earth, turning in this case to native plant use and the idea of the Australian garden in writing of the 1990s following the *Mabo* and *Wik* decision on indigenous land rights. The term “native garden” in Australia refers not to gardens grown by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people, although it may include these, but to the variety of gardens using plants indigenous to the Australian landmass. Native gardens in Australia, Martin points out, have complicated origins in discrete environmental, horticultural, and nationalist movements, with sometimes incongruent values. Because the *Mabo* decision used the history of Murray Islanders’ gardening and cultivation in establishing indigenous land rights it potentially shifted the place of gardening and cultivation in the national consciousness. With this in mind, Martin examines how Murray Bail’s novel *Eucalyptus* (1998) and the writing of Alexis Wright help us think through the idea of the garden, the “native” garden, and the circulation of the terms “indigenous” and “native” in Australian culture and horticulture, along with the possibility of reconciling understandings of space in modern Australia. One could say that of all the tropes of ecological study, place is perhaps the most profound in terms of history, knowledge, ontology, and experience. Our opening section foregrounds the complex ways in which attention to the “politics of earth” is constitutive of the environmental humanities.

Our second section, “Disaster, Vulnerability, and Resilience,” engages what a postcolonial and humanities-based approach might bring to the study of disasters and of resilience in different cultural contexts, and establishes a cross-disciplinary dialogue across the humanities and social sciences. It questions how ecological vulnerability is produced in relation to specific experiences of colonialism and militarism, and examines the implications of this for how concepts of disaster risk reduction and resilience are constructed and acted upon. Rather than dismissing the sociological and scientific bases for these theories, the essays in this section discuss how they might be recalibrated in relation to postcolonial readings that draw on the rich resources of testimonials, and political, ethnographic, and fictional narratives, which combine different epistemologies and forms of witness to histories of disaster and militarism.

Anthony Carrigan's "Towards a Postcolonial Disaster Studies" makes a case for a sustained critical exchange between two interdisciplinary fields that have significant bearings on the development of the environmental humanities: postcolonial studies and disaster studies. It does this first by exploring points of overlap and disjuncture between disaster studies and postcolonial studies, connecting these to the volume's core concern with how global environmental problems are mediated creatively in different cultural locations. It then turns to the work of Barbadian poet and historian, Kamau Brathwaite, as a means of demonstrating how a postcolonial and humanities-based approach can help reframe the question of "what is a disaster" in ways that are historically sensitive and culturally nuanced. This involves addressing how postcolonial perspectives might challenge, reject, or reconfigure key disaster studies concepts such as resilience, risk, adaption, and vulnerability, while at the same time asking how disaster studies insights can help frame and inform interpretations of postcolonial disasters.

Barbara Rose Johnston's "Nuclear Disaster: The Marshall Islands Experience and Lessons for a Post-Fukushima World" examines the US history of nuclear weapons testing in the Marshall Islands (RMI), which raised both the region's and the planet's atmospheric radioactivity to critical levels, and contemporary struggles by people in the RMI and their allies to ameliorate the nation's environmental health. US military testing in the Marshall Islands involved ecological baseline studies, biological effects of radiation, the nature and behavior of radioactive fallout in the atmosphere, marine, and terrestrial environment, and the bioaccumulation of radioisotopes in the environment, food chain, and human body. A wide array of degenerative health effects resulted, including cancers and reproductive abnormalities. Using a "critical global ecologies" approach, Johnston demonstrates that the Marshallese experience with nuclear disaster and their continuing efforts to restore human and environmental health offer important lessons in this post-Fukushima world.

These questions about disaster mitigation and response are a shared concern in the third contribution to this section. Focusing on indigenous considerations of climate change and disaster, Ilan Kelman, JC Gaillard, Jessica Mercer, James Lewis, and Anthony Carrigan's co-authored essay "Island Vulnerability and Resilience: Combining Knowledges for Disaster Risk Reduction, Including Climate Change Adaptation" reminds us that no single knowledge form can be a panacea for addressing climate change and other disaster risk reduction (DRR) or long-term environmental concerns. However, indigenous knowledge in all its varied and diverse forms has the potential for contributing far more than is usually permitted in mainstream scientific literature. The authors explore the relationship between indigenous knowledge and DRR based on literature covering small island communities, where questions of vulnerability and resilience are frequently magnified. They also identify points where the primarily development-oriented, fieldwork-based examples on which the chapter is based might intersect

with environmental humanities research, particularly in terms of how cultural and political insights can enhance DRR strategies. The chapter engages with one of the dominant philosophical and narrative forms with respect to global ecologies—scientific rationalism—and highlights points of departure for an increasingly holistic approach to disaster research.

In the third section, “Political Ecologies and Environmental Justice,” we bring environmental humanities perspectives to bear on two areas of vital importance for conceiving new ecologies in the twenty-first century. The essays are sensitive to the tendency to romanticize oppressed communities in resisting environmental violence and extractive industries (a point that echoes Kelman et al.’s conclusions about community heterogeneity in the previous section), while emphasizing how narrative forms of literature and film intersect with regionally specific resilience and environmental justice debates. The contributors explore how a postcolonial environmental humanities speaks to political ecology’s concern with questions of scale (temporal and geographic), and build a dialogue about what the “environmentalism of the poor” means in the different contexts of Africa, India, and Latin America. They also bring to the fore the challenges of claiming sustainability in relation to shifting political regimes, culturally localized forms of activism, and indigenous negotiations of capitalist modernity, neoliberalism, and state violence.

In “The Edgework of the Clerk: Resilience in Arundhati Roy’s *Walking with the Comrades*,” Susie O’Brien reads Roy’s work as a site of critical engagement with the concept of resilience and considers the different ways this term circulates in a variety of contemporary discourses concerned with the environment. Describing the capacity to survive through turbulence, resilience has come to play a central organizing role in environmental management, and, increasingly, in discourses of development that emphasize the interdependence of culture, environment, and capitalism. Roy’s recent nonfiction challenges this conception of resilience, highlighting the deployment by mining companies of the rhetoric of sustainability and creativity to provide cover for their role in environmental despoliation and the displacement of tribal peoples. Focusing on her 2011 collection, *Walking with the Comrades*, which has been widely criticized for what some see as its negativity and militancy (in contrast to Roy’s 1997 Booker-Prize winning novel, *The God of Small Things*), O’Brien argues that Roy’s political nonfiction reworks the concept of resilience to emphasize postcolonial environmental justice, and the vital role of the critical imagination in that ongoing project.

This focus on the aesthetics of activism is continued in “Filming the Emergence of Popular Environmentalism in Latin America: Postcolonialism and Buen Vivir,” where Jorge Marccone moves the conversation beyond literature by focusing on a number of Latin American documentaries, released within the last decade, that represent recent popular environmental struggles. In contrast to the mainstream media, these documentaries focus on popular movements reacting to environmental changes brought by extractivist

policies. Far from being mere cases of local resistance against transnational capitalism, the films reveal to different degrees the influence of a transnational and interethnic environmental movement, while at the same time functioning in counterpoint to one of the most influential popular environmental movements of the last fifteen years in Latin America: *Buen Vivir*. The essay examines *Buen Vivir* as a possible interlocutor for postcolonialism, which has introduced indigenous political ontologies at the national level. The essay concludes by offering a few suggestions regarding the potential conflicts between popular environmentalism and the current pursuit in the "First World" of the institutionalization of the environmental humanities.

In the final essay of this section, "Witnessing the Nature of Violence: Resource Extraction and Political Ecologies in the Contemporary African Novel," Byron Caminero-Santangelo addresses how two contemporary African novels provide important material for getting beyond stereotypes of violence in African culture and society that circulate in popular media. Challenging what James Ferguson calls "Africa Talk," Caminero-Santangelo reads Somalian author Nuruddin Farah's *Crossbones* (2011) and Nigerian author Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010) as undermining narratives of conflict and anarchy on the continent with attention to practices of witnessing, theories of political ecology, and multiscale narrative approaches to representing (neo)colonial history. In addressing the results of internationally financed resource extraction, his reading of both novels suggests that postcolonial histories of ecological degeneration and discursive transformation stymie precise causal analysis, dislocate oppositional identities, and complicate clear solutions.

In the fourth section, "Mapping World Ecologies," our contributors move between regional and global scales as they engage different perspectives on the historical constitution of "world ecology" and its diverse narrative and scalar claims. The essays here look at how "globatarian" approaches to ecological management facilitated a shift from interstate affiliations to neoliberal globalization; at how the capitalist world-system can be considered in terms of world-ecology; and at the generic and tropological shifts these historical processes have occasioned across a variety of narrative forms. One thread that connects with the first section of essays involves considering how particular capitalist and colonial industries imprint themselves on the way people understand, relate, and narrate experiences of environmental exploitation in postcolonial locations. The essays demonstrate the implications of systemic analysis in relation to conceptualizing alternative ecological as well as economic futures, emphasizing the importance of this approach for the environmental humanities.

Cheryl Lousley's chapter discusses how the 1983–87 World Commission on Environment and Development, which made sustainable development a global policy framework, imagined and constructed a world community through its report, *Our Common Future*, and through the public hearings it held in eleven cities on five continents. Building on early postcolonial

critiques of the unequal power relations and illusory universalism of the sustainable development paradigm, the chapter examines how the world-making project of the Brundtland Commission involved an array of disjunct and heterogeneous narratives. The commission constructed its world vision by way of an aspirational narrative of global futurity, concretized in *Our Common Future* through the vernacular voices of quoted public hearing participants. However, Lousley shows how the report's aspiring sense of commonality is undercut by the public hearing transcripts, which reveal different conceptions of an imagined common world. A postcolonial narrative analysis, Lousley argues, shows how worlds, like nations, remain always in the process of being made; hence, they might be made and narrated differently.

Michael Niblett's "Oil on Sugar: Commodity Frontiers and Peripheral Aesthetics" also draws on a comparative world-ecological framework to consider issues of monocultural production, arguing in this case that literary forms are the abstract of specific socio-ecological relationships. In particular, the essay analyzes the ways in which the political ecologies of sugar and oil have impacted upon fiction from the economic peripheries of the world-system. The chapter examines the distinctive literary idioms and forms generated by this history, paying particular attention to the irrealist aesthetics through which the lived experience of the ecological dynamics common to both oil and sugar frontiers (most notably a pattern of boom-and-bust) finds expression. Exploring the ways in which petroleum and sucrose can seep into the texture of everyday life, patterning behaviors and habitus, Niblett suggests that exposing and critiquing this process of naturalization is one task that scholarship in the environmental humanities might take up. The study of literature has a key role to play here insofar as literary works provide access to affective modes corresponding to socio-ecological formations and to the transformations in human and extra-human natures through which they develop.

The final essay of this section, Sharae Deckard's "Ghost Mountains and Stone Maidens: Ecological Imperialism, Compound Catastrophe, and the Post-Soviet Ecogothic," brings Russia into the ambit of global environmental humanities, developing a theory of the ecogothic to illuminate how contemporary post-Soviet literary aesthetics register the *longue durée* of compound environmental catastrophe. The chapter examines how Olga Slavnikova's novel *2017* (2006) portrays supernatural apparitions in figuring the slow violence of Soviet-era nuclear irradiation and chemical pollution in the Urals, intimating the region's prehistory of resource colonization and industrialization during tsarist empire, and prognosticating future crises. Deckard argues that the post-Soviet uncanny of the novel crystallizes a post-catastrophic structure of feeling expressed in ecogothic motifs of nature's revenge, fears of toxification, and a sense of repetitive temporality. Nevertheless, the novel's "green spectres," Deckard shows, resist the logic of phantom objectivity which has characterized the history of ecological



imperialism and resource extraction in the Urals by gesturing to an alternative ecological consciousness.

The final section, "Terraforming, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene," approaches global ecologies by exploring some of the characteristic practices and effects associated with environmental transformation in the Anthropocene. This section addresses both the deliberate terraforming of the earth by nuclear superpowers, and the consequences of humans acting as a geological force. Drawing attention to issues of ethics, politics, indigenous knowledge, and creative adaptation, the section is guided by the characteristic postcolonial commitment to increasing local autonomy while also considering obligations to planetary concerns beyond the human. The essays consider how long histories of colonial oppression, including nuclear militarism, indigenous dispossession, and slavery, heighten ecological vulnerabilities in the Anthropocene. They also examine how particular narrative forms and aesthetics highlight the potential for collaborative affiliations that resist the exploitative operations of biocapital, and the ongoing territorialization of land and sea. Addressing these new shapes of empire is one of the most important tasks of the environmental humanities in the twenty-first century.

Joseph Masco's "Terraforming Planet Earth" examines the ways in which US militarism has reconfigured the earth, bringing attention to forms of nuclear empire that are often overlooked in postcolonial (and American) studies. Engaging the US nuclear program as an instrument of ecological change, the essay examines how the global biosphere has been remade as a post-nuclear formation since 1945 and considers the implications of nuclear geoengineering for a contemporary anthropology of nature. The paper takes up the valences of the term "fallout," suggesting that it is a form of history made visible by negative outcomes. It also examines the legacies of environmental toxins, particularly those created by the nuclear age, turning to address the US Project Plowshare of the 1960–70s, a program intended to use nuclear explosives for construction purposes. Masco acknowledges that nuclear tests are not alone in changing the biosphere, yet the cumulative scale and scope of the effects of industry in the twentieth century reflects an important legacy of geoengineering in the Anthropocene.

George B. Handley's essay, "Climate Change, Cosmology, and Poetry: The Case of Derek Walcott's *Omeros*," places Walcott's work within the context of contemporary debates about the ethical and theological implications of climate change. While critical ecologies has remained by and large a secular field of scholarship, Handley turns to the ways in which poetry and its claims on the reader's faith may be relevant to the environmental humanities. The chapter seeks to help us understand the common genealogy of colonialism and the crisis of climate change, and to identify how Walcott's poetry reads the physical world against the grain of instrumental value and portrays it as a site of perpetual flux due to death, change, emergence, and creation. In light of recent calls by ecotheologians for new cosmologies that will assist us in seeing our place and our ethics in the world

in new ways, Handley's interdisciplinary reading suggests poetry as one site of such reenvisioning.

In "Ordinary Futures: Interspecies Worldings in the Anthropocene," Elizabeth DeLoughrey shifts from land-based concerns to trace out the ocean's potential for a dynamic rendering of queer kinship with nonhuman others. The chapter turns to Maori author Keri Hulme's collection, *Stonefish* (2004), which inscribes the ways in which rising sea levels generate adaptive mutations in plants, mushrooms, and even humans. Hulme poses a fluid waterworld of queer kinship, an ontology of what Jane Bennett calls "vibrant matter," inscribing an intimate relationship to the seascape of Aotearoa New Zealand. Through experiments in form, the collection renders the sea, climate change, mutation, and the submarine as profoundly ordinary rather than apocalyptic. The emergence of what Hulme calls an "unseen neural network" inscribes new morphologies for an increasingly maritime world, posing an ontological and genealogical challenge to the state's territorialism of the foreshore and seabed, and deconstructing the human/nature divide found in much discourse of the Anthropocene. Posing an alternative to the discourse of apocalypse generated by anthropogenic climate change, DeLoughrey shows how Hulme positions nonhuman others as ordinary and integral to challenging the neoliberal territorialism of the settler state.

Taken as a whole, this volume asserts that a critical study of narrative—and a critical demand that the concept of ecology engage the vectors of social history—is essential to determining how we interpret and mitigate environmental crisis. Thus the work of *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities* is to foreground how narrative and representational forms encode particular epistemologies and assumptions. As the authors of *The Emergence of the Environmental Humanities* suggest, this knowledge of human behavior, expression, and aesthetics is vital to shaping and developing the knowledge produced by the environmental sciences (Nye et al. 2013). Our collection, which examines narratives from documentary film, journalism, and the visual arts to history, poetry, and fantastic fiction, argues that these conversations are integral to the interdisciplinary groundwork of the environmental humanities, a field that has the radical potential to change our ecological futures.

## NOTES

1. This is explored in detail by Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert in this volume.
2. This is a point argued in DeLoughrey and Handley's (2011) introduction to *Postcolonial Ecologies* through the work of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said. See also Huggan (2004), Nixon (2005; 2011a), Vital and Erney (2006–2007), Cilano and DeLoughrey (2007), Huggan and Tiffin (2007; 2010), Wright (2010), Roos and Hunt (2010), Carrigan (2011b), and Deckard (2012). While these works sought to bring the two fields in dialogue, other authors have turned to literature with a more regional approach. See DeLoughrey, Gosson, and

- Handley (2005) and Paravisini-Gebert (2005, 2008, 2009) on the Caribbean; O'Brien (2001), Mukherjee (2010), and Didur (2011a: 2011b; 2013) on South Asia; Vital (2008) and Caminero-Santangelo and Myers (2011) on Anglophone Africa; Crane (2012) and Mason et al. (2013) on settler colonies (particularly Australia, Canada, and South Africa).
3. There is tremendous work being done in North American literary scholarship on environmental justice—see for instance Adamson et al. (2002) and Stein (2004). For an introduction to relevant current issues in political ecology, see Peet et al. (2011), and Johnston (2011).
  4. This extends right up to the level of global governance, including what Giovanna Di Chiro calls “Worldwatchers” (2003, 205). These include transnational institutions—from the World Bank and NAFTA to the UN and the WTO—whose approach to “saving nature” involves “whitewash[ing] the differential social and environmental impacts of globalization,” and enjoining all global citizens to “put our differences aside” and “stop creating havoc, such as overbreeding, or slashing and burning the rainforests,” which disrupts their vision for sustained economic growth coupled with neoliberal environmental management (205).
  5. See Casid (2005); Casteel (2007); DeLoughrey and Handley (2011).
  6. We share the sentiment of Huggan and Tiffin (2010) who write that “in reaching out across languages and cultures, postcolonial ecocriticism is paradoxically driven—as is this book—by the impossibility of its own utopian ambitions: to make exploitation and discrimination of all kinds, both human and nonhuman, visible in the world; and, in so doing, to help make them obsolete” (16).
  7. See, for example, Nixon (2009), Mukherjee (2011), and Carrigan (2012) for examinations of Sinha’s formal and narrative strategies, and Caminero-Santangelo (this volume) on Habila.
  8. See Huggan and Tiffin (2007, 10); Carrigan (2011b, 24–30); DeLoughrey and Handley (2011, 5–7); Didur (2011a, 44–48).
  9. See, for example, Dawson (2011), Baucom (2013), and Moore (2014), with the latter offering a sharp indictment while introducing the “Capitalocene” as a materialist alternative.
  10. Important sources where the term environmental humanities is being debated and defined include the special issue of the *Australian Humanities Review* (2004), the Australian journal *Environmental Humanities*, the US-based journal *Resilience*, the report by Nye et al. (2013), and the Australian Environmental Humanities Hub (<http://www.aehhub.org>).
  11. This has been boosted by collaborative and regional organizations such as the Nordic Network for Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies (NIES), the European Environmental Humanities Alliance (<http://europeanenvironmental-humanities.org/>), Environmental Humanities Now (<http://environmentalhumanitiesnow.org/>), and the Environmental Humanities Transatlantic Research Network (<http://environmental-humanities-network.org/>).
  12. For another precursor of this article, also written from an Australian perspective, see Eckersley (1998). See also Griffiths and Robin’s (1997) edited collection on settler societies and environmental history.
  13. There is a need for researchers across *all* disciplines to explore the points of tension and disjunction between different cultural understandings of the environment, and to highlight the extent to which these respond to and are conditioned by current and historical power relations. Another key consideration for environmental

humanities research centers on how the global drive for sustainability, with its founding emphasis on “intergenerational equity” (as inscribed from the Brundtland Report onward), only makes sense if this includes a parallel commitment to intrahuman *equitability* across cultures and classes and across the human–nonhuman divide (see also Carrigan 2011b, 6–8).

14. Questions of ethics have long been examined in the field of history, particularly with the journal *Environmental Ethics* (founded in 1979), but outside of postcolonial studies have been less visible in literary ecocriticism.
15. See also Hulme and Mahony (2010); Yusoff and Gabrys (2011); and Kelman et al. in this volume.
16. This term was suggested by Barbara Rose Johnston at the 2013 Global Ecology: Nature/Narrative/Neoliberalism conference at UCLA.
17. While the essays in this volume do not deal substantively with animal studies, we see this as an important growth area for a postcolonial environmental humanities that helps to figure global environmental justice issues through multispecies frameworks. See, for example, Tiffin (2001), Armstrong (2002), Ahuja (2009), Huggan and Tiffin (2010), Miller (2012), and DeLoughrey, this volume.
18. See Stepan (1982), Arnold (1996), and Moore et al. (2003).
19. See Guha (1989, 2000a, 2000b), Guha and Martínez-Alier (1997), Huggan (2004), Huggan and Tiffin (2010), Mukherjee (2010), DeLoughrey and Handley (2011), and Nixon (2011a).
20. On the need to address the different representations and temporalities of rapid onset disasters alongside long-term calamities, see Carrigan (2011a; 2011b, ch. 6; 2014; and this volume).
21. See also Skrimshire (2010).
22. On ecology and nuclearism see Masco (2012); on Pacific Island nuclearization see Johnston (2007) and Johnston and Barker (2008).
23. On European imperial environmental history see Gerbi (1985), Grove (1995), Arnold (1996), Drayton (2000), Anker (2001), and Crosby (2003; 2004).

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