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Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity

Edited by Tema Milstein and José Castro-Sotomayor

Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity

The *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity* brings the ecological turn to sociocultural understandings of self. The editors introduce a broad, insightful assembly of original theory and research on planetary positionalities in flux in the Anthropocene – or what in this *Handbook* cultural ecologist David Abram presciently renames the Humilocene, a new “epoch of humility.” Forty international authors craft a kaleidoscopic lens, focusing on the following key interdisciplinary inquiries:

Part I illuminates identity as always ecocultural, expanding dominant understandings of who we are and how our ways of identifying engender earthly outcomes.

Part II examines ways ecocultural identities are fostered and how difference and spaces of interaction can be sources of environmental conviviality.

Part III illustrates consequential ways the media sphere informs, challenges, and amplifies particular ecocultural identities.

Part IV delves into the constitutive power of ecocultural identities and illuminates ways ecological forces shape the political sphere.

Part V demonstrates multiple and unspooling ways in which ecocultural identities can evolve and transform to recall ways forward to reciprocal surviving and thriving.

The *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity* provides an essential resource for scholars, teachers, students, protectors, and practitioners interested in ecological and sociocultural regeneration.

Tema Milstein is an associate professor of Environment & Society at the University of New South Wales. Her work tends to ways culture, society, and discourse inform – and are informed by – earthly relations.

José Castro-Sotomayor is an assistant professor at California State University Channel Islands. His work investigates environmental and intercultural dynamics of human and more-than-human communication, agency, and dissent.

“Intricately transdisciplinary and cross-geographical, it is the first volume of its kind to caringly craft a gathering concept, that of ecocultural identities, bringing together the social, political, and ecological dimensions of identity. What results is a treasure of insights on the politics of life, broadly speaking, and a novel toolbox for tackling effectively the damages caused by modern capitalist modes of extraction and the urgent task of Earth’s ontological repair and renewal.”

Arturo Escobar, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

“Too often mislabelled an ‘issue,’ the environment is in fact integral not just to everything we do but to who we are. This link between our identity and our ecology has long been recognised in many societies, but others seem to have forgotten its signal importance. This superb collection shows why all identities are ecocultural ones, and why full recognition of this is essential to all our political futures.”

Noel Castree, University of Manchester

“A smart, provocative, and original collection, the *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity* provides a definitive introduction to the constraints upon, and the contexts, formations, and impacts of, our diverse – but often unexamined – ecological selves.”

Robert Cox, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and three-time national president of the Sierra Club

“The *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity* is an urgent call to the prevailing identity discussion. Amplifying the voiceless could – and should – encompass our environment, and not just the humans in it. If we can’t recognise the value of the ecosystem which makes life possible, there’s slim chance we’ll remember to see the value in each other.”

Ayishat Akanbi, cultural commentator and writer, United Kingdom

“If diversity is a crucial condition for healthy cultural and ecological affairs, it is also so in scholarly matters, and that is what readers will find in this excellent *Handbook* – a variety of ways of keeping our social and ecological worlds mutually articulated, healthily together.”

Donal Carbaugh, University of Massachusetts

“I am in complete solidarity with this book.”

Donna Haraway, University of California, Santa Cruz

“Some of the most transformative scholarship occurs when we don’t simply critique the limits of existing approaches, but courageously throw in front of us new conceptual approaches or orientations, often marked in the first instance by new words. It is in this vein that the *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity* runs, offering up and then beginning to give form, colour, and texture to the term ‘ecocultural identity’ as a way to think beyond a range of dichotomies that have constituted and normalized human exceptionalism and our violent estrangement from the eco-worlds in which we are embedded. In a spirit of humility and generosity, the editors do not try to fix this new term in the net of their own interpretations, but rather create a rich interdisciplinary and global forum where the chapter authors are welcomed to articulate their understandings of what ecocultural identity means, and what this term might do to how we might think and act. Readers too are invited to join the conversation in what promises to be a fertile approach to thinking and acting with appropriate humility in an era that is crying out for humans to come home to themselves as ecocultural beings.”

Danielle Celemajer, University of Sydney

“The chapters in this *Handbook* lay the groundwork for a radical revisioning of human relations with/in the more-than-human world. The *Handbook* provides needed strategies for ecological resilience in the midst of the Anthropocene and for imagining our collective future.”

Danielle Endres, University of Utah

“As we find ourselves faced with the extreme environmental consequences of the Anthropocene, we need guides to help us negotiate appropriate ways of living with and understanding our relationship to the more-than-human world. This *Handbook* offers to the field a significant theoretical contribution, ecocultural identity, providing a practical and necessary guide for comprehending our inseparable place in the ecological web of life.”

Barb Willard, DePaul University



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Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity

*Edited by Tema Milstein and
José Castro-Sotomayor*

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Contributors

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Tema Milstein is an associate professor of Environment & Society at the University of New South Wales. Her work tends to ways culture, society, and discourse inform – and are informed by – earthly relations. She is co-editor of this *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity* and of *Environmental Communication Pedagogy and Practice* (Routledge). Tema is forever grateful for the creaturely forest and water relations of her wild childhood, which essentially informed who she is, and currently grateful for becoming familiar with the deep-rooted relations of her new home country of Australia.

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Ecocultural identity

An introduction

Tema Milstein and José Castro-Sotomayor

We humans are cultural and ecological beings. This doesn't make us unique as a species – myriad other beings, from orcas to elephants, are cultural and ecological, too. Yet, perhaps for an increasing majority of us humans, it seems as if our ecological selves have become steadily less accessible. The lack of earthly self-awareness in an increasingly human-centered world is reflected in the invisibility and deniability we assign to our environmental interlinkages, impacts, and interdependencies. And this lack of wakefulness is reified in the largely unabated extractive and destructive orientation that powerful interests and the majority of governments maintain toward the planet.

The absence of ecological palpability also has been evident in much social activism, which often has emphasized sociocultural identity formations, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, yet largely disregarded interrelated more-than-human dimensions (environmental justice movements being among the clear exceptions). Equally in scholarship, research overwhelmingly has articulated identity as shaping, and being shaped by, human society but rarely as shaping, and being shaped by, the more-than-human world (Dervin & Risager, 2017; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Nakayama & Halualani, 2010). Indeed, identity, representation, difference, contingency, and power can be understood as 'pre-ecological' concepts (Jagtenberg & McKie, 1997, p. 121), notions emerging from societies and scholarships that predominantly have ignored or denigrated extra-human relations, knowledges, and practices.

As important as extant identity scholarship and activism have been to understanding and improving aspects of the human condition, cultural commentators such as Akanbi (2019) have begun to explore how clinging too hard to sociocultural dimensions of one's identity 'can shutdown conversation,' make social movements 'hollow and full of holes,' and block compassion, empathy, understanding, nuance, interconnectedness, and common recognition. This clinging is part of a cultural condition Haraway (1991) pinpoints as a long-defined 'proper state for a Western person' that centers an urge 'to have and hold a core identity as if it were a possession' (p. 135). Such 'ownership of the self' (p. 135), however, conflicts with actual social and ecological interlinkages of selves, which interweave unavoidable, often invisible commonalities and evade hubristic attempts at possession. Indeed, all of us, each and every one, are always participants in crisscrossing sociocultural and ecological webs of life, whether consciously or not. It is the growing majority of humanity's obliviousness – and even active

denial – of our interrelated sociocultural and ecological constitutions and conditions that has us where we are today, in the midst of unfolding anthropogenic biospheric catastrophe. This is the context for the *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity*.

This *Handbook* brings together diverse voices from around the globe to illuminate dynamics and forms of ecocultural identity so we can better understand – and better relate and respond to – the intertwining of disrupted ecosystems and our day-to-day and long-term mutual existences. The chapters within account for a plurality of subjectivities in flux and formation in the Anthropocene (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000), Capitalocene (Moore, 2015), Chthulucene (Haraway, 2016), or what Abram (2020) in this *Handbook* presciently introduces as the Humilocene, a grounded-human epoch steeped in both humiliation and humility. In order to intervene in the ontological, political, and institutional flows that configure this many-named epoch of human-surpassed earthly boundaries (Alexiades, 2018), the *Handbook* authors reinterrogate what it means to be human and reimagine the many ways we identify that are of essence to whether we can think and cultivate our ways into inhabitable futures.

The *Handbook's* assembly of original theory and research provides views into ways sociocultural and ecological identities not only are entwined but also mutually constituted. Our intention is to help foster a radical multi-lensed epistemology focused on ways ecocultural selfhood is being, and could be, understood, felt, performed, and practiced. As such, this *Handbook* has three core transdisciplinary goals: first, to provide a prismatic introduction to the emergent concept and framework of ecocultural identity for researchers, instructors, students, activists, and practitioners; second, to provide a catalytic resource for examining, critiquing, and activating ecocultural identities as they manifest in everyday lives and in structural processes; and, third, as the *Handbook* illuminates the depth, breadth, and common threads of a diverse budding body of knowledge and expertise, this collection aims to ignite increased interest in academic and public realms and to expand dialogues regarding the planetary positionalities at the heart of our most actively destructive and robustly thriving presents and futures.

What is ecocultural identity?

As identity has become an increasingly central concept across the public sphere, scholarship has examined ways ‘the lived experience of identities is always implicated in processes of transformation’ (Elliot, 2020b, p. 12). Narrations and navigations of identity intersect with politics, society, and processes of reinvention, reconstruction, and renewal. Antiessentialist understandings of identity emphasize ways identities never emerge from an already present unchanging core, but rather within contexts and relationalities, making identities ‘continually and differently constituted’ (Escobar, 1999, p. 3) often partly in milieus of power. What largely has been missing across disciplines and in the public domain, however, is a dedication to understanding identity ecologically in tandem with cultural and social modes of consideration. An ecocultural identity framework troubles this tendency to conceive of the environmental as separate from or a subsidiary of the economic, political, historical, and cultural, and instead situates group and individual ecological affiliations and practices as inextricable from – and mutually constituted with – sociocultural dimensions.

As Abram states in this *Handbook*, ‘we don’t have a hoot of a chance of healing our social justice issues until we begin including the more-than-human world within our sense of the socius, or the community’ (Abram with Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020, p. 24) The large-scale erasure of our species’ perception of our nestedness within ecological communities, Abram argues, also renders our human relationships – from the intimate to the international – remarkably brittle. As Earth floods, quakes, and melts, and as extremist rhetoric intoxicates

much of the political arena, an ecocultural perspective on identity offers an expanded, potentially recuperative lens for understanding self, others, and existence as intrinsically relational and broadly ethical.

This *Handbook* introduces a new term: *ecocultural identity*. As such, we want to make clear from the start what this term means and what it does not mean. The notion of ecocultural identity offers an overarching framework for understanding *all* identities. In other words, ecocultural identity is not a normative concept – for instance, chapters in this *Handbook* are not limited to environmentalist identities, which much previous work has focused on (e.g., Chianchi, 2015), nor ecocentric identities (e.g., Clayton & Opotow, 2003; Horton, 2003; Thomashow, 1995), another area of well-developed research. Rather, an ecocultural identity lens serves to widen the scope on *all* identities to understand ways sociocultural dimensions of selfhoods are always inseparable from ecological dimensions.

The ecological turn in this conceptualization of identity hinges upon the assumption that *all* identities have earthly constitutions and forces – whether those identities are destructive or protective, complacent or creative, extractive or restorative. In illuminating ecological dimensions of identity, the importance of culture also cannot be overlooked as identities are always materially and discursively constructed. We are made of, part of, emerging from, and constantly contributing to both ecology and culture – producing, performing, and constantly perceiving and enacting through the both. In these ways, one’s ecocultural identity – whether latent or conscious – is at the heart of the positionalities, subjectivities, and practices that (in)form one’s emotional, embodied, mental, and political sensibilities in and with the all-encompassing world.

The lens of ecocultural identity is boundary-crossing in a number of respects – traversing across different fields of thought as well as surmounting culturally constructed borders separating human, flora, fauna, and environment. As such, the study of ecocultural identity has the potential to illuminate the complex and thickly storied self as vitally entangled within the stories of other species and the Earth itself. Such ecocultural inquiry expands notions of intersectionality to include not only sociocultural categories but also oft overlooked more-than-human groupings, including but certainly not limited to those of mammals, oxygen-carbon dioxide exchangers, land-dwellers, bodies of water, and biomes. This more-than-human intersectionality can lead to acknowledgements of enduring intraspecies, interspecies, and elemental commonalities and to shared questions, concerns, and actions regarding our collective course of living (Nicholas Jacobson, personal communication).

Scholarly explorations of cultural and ecological identification as mutually constituted have been steadily growing (Armstrong, 1995; Carbaugh, 1996; Elliot, 2020a; Gómez-Barris, 2017; Grusin, 2015; Hodden, 2014; Jagtenberg & McKie, 1997; Junka-Aikio & Cortes-Severino, 2017; Mendoza & Kinefuchi, 2016; Milstein, 2012b; Milstein, Thomas, & Hoffmann, 2019; Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010; Weiss & Haber, 1999). These developments of renewed understandings of an extended self, at once indivisibly ecological and cultural, unshackle predominant notions of human subjectivity, senses of selfhood, and worldly experience, and have liberatory potential. As Grusin (2015) states,

To extend our academic and critical concern to include nonhuman animals and the nonhuman environment, which had previously been excluded or ignored from critical or scholarly humanistic concern, should be a politically liberatory project in very much the same way that earlier, similar turns toward a concern of gender, race, ethnicity, or class were politically liberatory for groups of humans.

(p. xix)

In these ways, as part of a new social grammar (Santos, 2011), an ecocultural lens can contribute both to problematizing and redefining conventional concepts of self amidst a crisis of group and individual identity marked not only by a fierce fixity of identity labels but also by a pernicious anthropocentrism that fixes humanity at the center of existence. While inquiries into sociocultural identity can productively focus on linking related oppressions that disparate groups experience in order to build up coalitions that actively change society, a notion of identity that additionally embraces the intrinsic ecology of existence aims at coming to terms, too, with the roles our oppressions and liberations play in our common extinctions or continuances in one form or another. The move to expand views of identification to always include who we are relationally as ecological bodies and environmental forces and reactants is also a move to address dominant feelings of disconnection and polarization that underlie both environmental and sociocultural struggles, and to form new insights that open alternative public spheres and counter patriarchal, imperialist, capitalist, and extractivist systems of modernity that rapidly have (trans)formed our shared milieu (Junka-Aikio & Cortes-Severino, 2017).

Movements, such as Indigenous-led protector uprisings, Extinction Rebellion, and the child-led School Strike for Climate, are examples of ways ecocultural perspectives contribute to fostering and delineating a radical democracy that, in Sandilands words, ‘is an ecological necessity, one which necessarily includes a variety of struggles in transcendence of fundamentally limiting notions of the subject’ (as quoted in Code, 2006, p. 20). An ecocultural identity lens assists us in remembering we are ‘earth citizens,’ which can ‘help us recover our common humanity and help us transcend the deep division of intolerance, hate, and fear that corporate globalization’s ruptures, polarization, and enclosures have created’ (Shiva, 2015, p. 6).

Transdisciplinary and international scope

Today’s problems and opportunities require holistic and kaleidoscopic conversations. As such, the *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity* provides far-reaching original transdisciplinary international research on the role of ecocultural identity in processes of local and global disturbance and renewal. Such scholarly inquiries commonly are dispersed among separate disciplinary subfields or discrete interdisciplinary schools of thought with relatively small numbers of adherents – and tend largely to be limited to culturally Western regions. In an attempt to broaden and interconnect the conversation, the *Handbook’s* authors speak from a wide variety of disciplinary and multi-disciplinary backgrounds, including geography, communication, environmental studies, anthropology, education, planning, agricultural sciences, linguistics, history, sociology, arts, cultural studies, and philosophy. The *Handbook* authors hail from North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Oceania, and employ an interlinking array of methodologies and a diversity of orientations integral to ecocultural work’s vital transdisciplinarity.

The *Handbook’s* resulting collection of original theory and research provides an essential reference on ways individual and collective ecocultural identities endure, emerge, and transform responsively with/in today’s disrupted world. At the scale of identity, the *Handbook* chapters examine the reasons, ramifications, and possible resolutions for anthropogenic environmental problems. Chapter authors develop and apply an ecocultural lens to theory building and case studies to illustrate and nuance sociocultural and ecological tensions within and among a wide range of identities – including but not limited to Indian Hindu river protectors, U.S. Evangelical Christian environmentalists, Ghanaian illegal miners, Swedish pastoral farmers, Thai canal dwellers, and American West ranchers. The research within engages broad spectrums of cultural, spatial, temporal, and environmental contexts – such as polar imaginings, nation-state borderlands, interspecies mobilities, childhood educations, Indigenous-settler intersections,

forestry relations, fossil fuel industry-induced earthquakes, desert waterscapes, and ancient and pre-colonial interspecies and political ecological histories.

Part I of the *Handbook*, ‘Illuminating and problematizing ecocultural identity,’ features chapters that both create and examine generative theory to reveal ways ecocultural identities are produced, felt, negotiated, constrained, and transformed in everyday, historical, and institutional contexts. Part II, ‘Forming and fostering ecocultural identity,’ comprises chapters that examine specific cultivations and forces of identity that further ways of being in the world, and investigate how these intersect with class, race, gender, religion, and the colonial present within historical, political, environmental, spatial, interpersonal, and multispecies contexts. In Part III, ‘Mediating ecocultural identity,’ chapters highlight media and technology contexts and consequences for ecocultural identity and the significance of public sphere representations in reflecting and shaping both ecocultural identifications and relations. Chapters in Part IV, ‘Politicizing ecocultural identity,’ examine the hybridities, inclusions, and exclusions that circulate within and transform identities in praxis and politics, and ascertain barriers and opportunities for more radically inclusive and restorative democratic systems. The fifth and final part, ‘Transforming ecocultural identity,’ features chapters illustrating the interpretive power of an ecocultural approach to demonstrate and inform transformation in ways often overlooked or undermined by exclusively sociocultural or exclusively environmental orientations.

A note on terminology

In creating the *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity*, in our dialogue together as editors and with chapter contributors, we encouraged reflexive engagement with ways the very language we use can function to both constrain and cultivate ecocultural vernaculars and ways of knowing. We also worked collaboratively with chapter authors to have the diverse and evolving original research and theory-building of this *Handbook* be accessible to an equally diverse and evolving readership.

Where possible, unnecessary discipline-specific or field-specific jargon has been avoided and essential terms that may not have the same centrality of meaning across disciplines or in the public sphere have been clearly defined. Further, we challenged all contributors to avoid unreflexive use of common terms such as ‘nature,’ ‘environment,’ and ‘animals’ – terms that in the context of dominant discourses often function to reproduce notions of a separate, homogeneous, and backgrounded ecological other. Instead, we asked contributors to trouble the tendency to frame the ecological or the animal as separate from or subordinate to the human and to attempt to revive the ecocultural power of language to evoke earthly immersion and relation. The *Handbook* also attempts to avoid unreflexively reproducing politically strategic terms that have become central to popular speech, such as ‘climate change’ (introduced by a U.S. Republican think tank to replace the term ‘global warming’ in order to lessen public concern) (see Luntz Research Companies, 2002). Instead, the chapters favor explanatory terms such as climate ‘disruption,’ ‘crisis,’ or ‘emergency’ to indicate human agency and biological urgency.

In understanding ecocultural identity as often shaped by powerful vested economic and political interests, we also tried to remain reflexive about the potentialities and difficulties of directly engaging with and introducing an expanded ecocultural scope in the purviews of long-established, long-anthropocentric academic disciplines most of us *Handbook* contributors were trained in as researchers. The ecocultural lens itself serves to engage a struggle over meaning and can be seen in reflexive symbolic moves and intentions of scholars such as Haraway (2008) in her use of the integrative term ‘naturecultures.’ In this *Handbook*, in part by engaging such ecocultural neologisms and concepts as the more-than-human world (Abram, 1996), humanature (Milstein, 2016; Milstein,

2012a), and humanimal (Mitchell, 2003), we discursively interlace culture and ecology in scholarship as they are in life, turning toward ‘lexical reciprocal intertwining’ (Milstein, 2011, p. 21, note 1) and away from dominant binary constructs that reproduce an anthropocentric status quo.

The iterative process of working with chapter authors from multiple disciplines and practitioner realms, most of whom have never met in person, mirrored challenges of and opportunities for doing recuperative ecocultural work within the public sphere, in daily interactions, and throughout the institutions that structure our worlds. From the original call for papers, to review and selection of chapters, and through several revision stages, as a diverse group of authors we faced a shortage of established common frames for ecocultural inquiry. In conversation, however, we experienced ways expansive and expressive terminologies and frameworks can be engaged, emerge, and multiply to galvanize the ecocultural issues of our times.

In the *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity*, we have strived to create and provide a shared, collaborative, and reflexive platform for introducing, connecting, and expanding conversations about the ecocultural manifestations and reverberations of identities. We worked closely with contributors in expressing a multi-voiced language and transdisciplinary orientation to define and illustrate ecocultural identity as a framework and to apply it as a fruitful lens to a wide variety of today’s overwhelming questions. In honoring the significance of both the ecological and the cultural in the configuration of the self, this *Handbook* expansively reclaims the constitutive and responsive dimensions of identity. Our hope is this expanded ecocultural scope provides a useful lens through which to clarify who we have been until now and who we would like to be tomorrow.

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Part I

Illuminating and problematizing ecocultural identity

Identity is an unavoidable, complex, varied, and contested concept at the center of today's public, political, and academic vernaculars. Individuals and groups experience, enact, and negotiate multiple identities that intersect within contexts to form, at least momentarily, a perceivable and seemingly fixed representation of who or what an individual or group is. Although scholars from multiple disciplines have considered notions of identity through diverse theoretical, methodological, and ontological approaches, predominantly sociocultural categories – imagined as largely devoid of ecological or more-than-human considerations – have shaped identity conceptualizations. Authors in this section put an ecocultural lens on identity to expand the scope and revisit and redefine identity as always already sociocultural and ecological.

The opening chapter of Part I provides a nuanced and embodied more-than-human framework for considering identity as ecocultural from influential cultural ecologist and geophilosopher David Abram. In Chapter 1, 'Interbreathing ecocultural identity in the Humilocene,' Abram centers earthly existence as the focus point for moving through and past interrelated social and environmental problems. In conversation with the *Handbook* editors, he shares insights about acknowledging and embracing identity via the path of remembering humanity's interdependence 'with so many other shapes and styles of sensitivity and sentience' (p. 6). He elaborates on the intimate relations between language and the more-than-human world (his broadly influential term) and how those who write have the obligation to keep human language alive, to transform and create new terms to evoke the world within which we are connected in an interbreathing vital flux of earthly organisms. In this vein, Abram introduces the term *Humilocene* to describe the current 'epoch of humility' as a regenerative, ethical, and empathetic framework within which multiple ecologies of sensory experience interlock to engender ancient and renewed ways of being human – as a species, as animals, as sensory bodies – and to break from the prevalent contemporary narcissistic human posture threatening existence on our planet. As a new concept developed in this chapter, the Humilocene provides fresh ecoculturally inclusive ways to understand contemporary interwoven environmental and cultural crises and to foster relational identifications that stimulate humble and holistic conversations and actions.

Scaling down to everyday ecocultural interactions, Tema Milstein traces the boundaries of normative human-centered identity in Chapter 2, 'Ecocultural identity boundary patrol and

transgression.’ This chapter illuminates the hegemonic character of interpersonal ecocultural interactions, which often function in Western/ized settings to restrict both individuals and societies to ecologically distanced positions and to mask biospheric care, connection, and immersion. Based on extensive ethnographic work, Milstein identifies ways individuals express connection with the more-than-human world, ranging from worms to whales, and ways these expressions are marked as aberrant by others, and constrained with ridicule or labeling. At the same time, she illuminates ways individuals self-patrol, mitigating their own expressions of forms of ecocentric identity via self-labeling, self-censoring, and marking their own boundary-crossings out of the anthropocentric realm. Milstein also identifies rare unmitigated displays of ecocentric identity, in which shared regenerative ways of being are co-constructed, validated, and strengthened. As a practical outcome of this research, she illuminates methods for transforming ecocultural identity in these times – specifically for undisciplining and rewilding our ecocultural selves, and renewing communication in Western/ized settings as a restorative resource.

Chapter 3, ‘Borderland ecocultural identities,’ by Carlos Tarin, Sarah Upton, and Stacey Sowards, presents the U.S.–Mexico border as a site of ecocultural liminality and contestation. The Río Grande, as a living international border, works as a metaphor and material riverway for articulating how identity may unfold across geographies and ways landscapes of the borderlands are an ecotestimonio of resistance, resilience, and diffusion. Inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa’s work, these authors theorize borderland ecocultural identities through what they term *environmental nepantlisma*, an ecocultural identity characterized in part by alluvial diffusions, ‘the physical and metaphorical flows of water and sediment that occur following floods and changing river patterns’ (p. 54). The authors theorize the complexities of identity in border landscapes fraught with numerous conflicting dualistic tensions – in this case, contested dualities including U.S./Mexico, English/Spanish, city/desert, culture/nature, human/more-than-human, straight/queer, and citizen/non-citizen. Whereas these identities’ boundaries are patrolled and policed (both literally and symbolically), the border also provides a unique lens for understanding how (seemingly) oppositional tensions can both conflict and converge in order to (re)create transformative perceptions and praxis. Indeed, this chapter animates environmental nepantlisma as a ‘geography of self’ that simultaneously constrains and enables possible modes of thought and practice, contributing to a broad understanding of ecocultural identity as transitory, in flux, bounded, resistant, and constantly negotiated.

In Chapter 4, ‘Ecocultural identities in intercultural encounters,’ José Castro-Sotomayor recasts the particularities of borderland ecocultural identities in his work with a transboundary Indigenous organization located at the border of Ecuador and Colombia. Castro-Sotomayor engages with dominant notions of culture and their limitations when it comes to illuminating ways human-centeredness, intrinsic to dominant understandings of intercultural relations, tends to undermine, or even completely forget, the ecological dimension of human selves and the environmental conditions in which identities arise. He theorizes ways ecocultural identity exists in dialectical relations between ecological subjectivity and environmental identity, a differentiation that attends to nuances of ways extrahuman actors function as constitutive elements of identity. His study demonstrates how an ecocultural perspective offers different ways to understand intercultural relations and ethnicity, race, and class-based approaches to these relations. In focusing on two kinds of site-specific ecocultural identities, *restorative* and *unwhole-some*, he illustrates ways insider–outsider and respect–disrespect dialectics inherent in these dueling identities inform inter- and intra-ecocultural relations among Indigenous, Mestizo, and Afro populations. Castro-Sotomayor’s chapter illustrates ways that an ecocultural perspective can contribute to efforts to diversify and enhance transdisciplinary fields of inquiry that seek paths away from anthropocentric identity constraints and toward ecologically awakened peace-building processes.

In Chapter 5, ‘Western dominator ecocultural identity and the denial of animal autonomy,’ Laura Bridgeman takes us on a fascinating voyage into the ancient origins of Western mastery identity. Examining a frozen moment in time, she identifies the frieze of the Greek Parthenon as marking a likely starting point of *dominator identity* in the West. Bridgeman connects a close read of these beginnings to contemporary times – and the shifting dynamics of the dominator identity – in part illustrated in recent U.S.-based protest-driven removals of horse-man monuments that represent multiple interlocking oppressions. All the while, Bridgeman centers other animals’ sentience and autonomy, the loss (to most humans) of a universal language in which all animals communicate, and an illumination of the symbolic and material work required to assert and reproduce dominator ecocultural identities. The horse-man (*not* woman) journey serves both as metaphor and lived relationship, actively denying animal sentience and physical autonomy and playing a central role throughout Western civilization. The horse’s body serves as a site both of representation and acting-out of the domination of gendered selves and othered animals according to the chain-of-being hierarchy originating with Plato. In illustrating ways the horse-man relationship has remained core to dominator identity for thousands of years, including during waves of colonization, female disempowerment, and slavery and recent assertions of white racial supremacy, Bridgeman argues for an alternate Western *loving ecocultural identity*, which replaces domination with respectful interspecies relationality.

In the final chapter of this first section, Chapter 6, ‘Critical ecocultural intersectionality,’ Melissa Parks revisits the concept of intersectionality within an ecocultural identity framework. In this theory-building essay, Parks foregrounds anthropocentrism as a deeply rooted and foundational ideology in Western/ized cultures that perpetuates hierarchical human-centered structures and directly intersects with additional nodes of othering and oppression, including race and gender. Parks argues for adding an ecocultural lens to the transdisciplinary framework of critical intersectionality to challenge overlapping forms of both sociocultural and more-than-human othering. In the process, she reviews extant eco-oriented identity theories and their conceptualizations of ecological identity, environmental identity, and green identity, and posits ecocultural identity as an alternative non-normative lens that problematizes conceptions of identity as static and separate from sociocultural power structures. Parks argues an ecocultural approach to identity functions to intersectionally dismantle dualistic and anthropocentric orientations that permeate predominant constructions of identity and interlocking oppressions of both people and planet.

Identity is multidimensional and its mounting complexity signals a world that is becoming increasingly fragmented in terms of senses of self and the well-being of societies and vast and multiple ecologies. In illuminating and problematizing ecocultural identity, this first section of the *Handbook* centers an ecocultural perspective and offers key theoretical constructs of an ecocultural framework and approach. The chapters within seek to understand ways an ecocultural identity lens can help expand understanding of not only who we are and how we transform as individuals or groups, but also how who we are as a species engenders planetary environmental crises or earthly repair and renewal.



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Interbreathing ecocultural identity in the Humilocene

David Abram with Tema Milstein and José Castro-Sotomayor

David Abram is a cultural ecologist and geophilosopher whose work has helped catalyze the emergence of several fields of study, including the burgeoning fields of ecopsychology, eco-phenomenology, and ecolinguistics. He is author of *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (Vintage, 1996) and *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* (Vintage, 2011). The former book is considered a generative work and continues to inform and inspire scholars across disciplines, and the latter is reflected in the film *Becoming Animal* (2018) by Peter Mettler and Emma Davie. Abram also is founder and creative director of the Alliance for Wild Ethics (AWE), a consortium that employs the arts and the natural sciences ‘to ease the spreading devastation of the animate earth through a rapid transformation of society,’ especially ‘through a rejuvenation of oral culture – the culture of face-to-face and *face-to-place* storytelling’ (<http://wildethics.org/the-alliance/>).

Abram’s work explores, first and foremost, the ecology of perception – the manifold ways that sensory experience binds our separate nervous systems into the encompassing ecosystem. This exploration has led him to engage, ever more deeply, the ecological dimensions of language – the manner in which ways of speaking profoundly influence and constrain what we see, and hear, and even taste of the Earth around us. Abram works to alter our directly felt experience of the world by transforming the ways language today is dominantly used. Through the weaving of his own words, his writing brings the world alive in ways that can excite and nourish earthly spiritual and sensual engagements and identifications. For instance, while writing in the mid-1990s, he found himself frustrated by problematic terminology within environmentalist movements that reinforced the dominant Western culturally constructed divide between humankind and what commonly is referred to as ‘nature’ or ‘the environment.’ In response, in 1996, Abram coined the phrase ‘the more-than-human world’ to signify the broad commonwealth of earthly life, a realm that both *contains* humankind and yet also, necessarily, *exceeds* humankind and human culture. The term has been gradually adopted by many other scholars and theorists (you will see ‘more-than-human world’ informing the discussion of ecocultural identity throughout this *Handbook*) and has crossed into the practitioner realm to become a key term within the paradigm-shifting phrasing of activists and the broader ecological movement.

Abram’s work is deeply resonant with the *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity’s* intention of understanding and addressing contemporary ecocultures and ecocultural identities and of

offering alternative ways of thinking and feeling at once ancient and strangely new. As a pivotal contemporary thinker who lectures and teaches around the world both within and outside academia, we asked Abram to join and help frame the ecocultural identity conversation. The following is a transcript of a conversation with the *Handbook's* editors, Tema Milstein and José Castro-Sotomayor, in Abram's home in the southern foothills of the United States Rocky Mountains.

MILSTEIN: Identity is manifesting centrally in society and politics right now, driving activisms and organizing on the ground and informing major regime and policy changes. At the same time, a lot of activisms, politics, and much social science and humanities research around identity continue to focus exclusively on sociocultural aspects. The conversation in this *Handbook*, in part, responds to ways this tendency leaves out the more-than-human world and, in many cases, reproduces and leave unchallenged the dominant Western human/'nature' binary at the heart of today's related ecological and social crises.

ABRAM: Yes indeed. Our identity as animals, for instance, or as citizens of this breathing biosphere, are completely left out of account.

MILSTEIN: And since identity is transdisciplinary and also often non-academic, many people in different contexts around the world are part of this conversation. We felt now is a time to expand the scope of the conversation and ask: What does identity mean when we take into account humans always being ecological and, equally, society and culture always being ecological?

ABRAM: Wonderful. So often our internecine human conflicts – our readiness to take offense at perceived slights in relation to some identity or other – come in the way of and interrupt any felt discovery of our shared dependence upon the Earth, our shared interdependence with other creatures and plants and earthly elements. I often think that we use identity conflicts to hide, or avoid noticing, what's really at stake today – which is our deeper identity as parts of Earth. There's been so much violence toward or between or against particular groups, violations and affronts, marginalizations and erasures that must indeed be recognized, acknowledged, and – to whatever extent possible – accounted for, apologized for, even atoned for. But we do not have time for all of these affronts in their specificity to be recognized clearly before we begin noticing the collective assault – to which most if not all of us contribute – on the biosphere itself, the collective desecration of our larger Body.

A key and obvious problem with putting so much weight on our particular sociocultural identities is that they can inhibit our flexibility and fluidity. Identity gets a lot of people locating themselves within a set of defined boundaries, rather than affirming and recognizing themselves as outrageously fluid composites, composed of so many different voices, all these different trajectories that flow together here to create 'me' at any moment. In our ways of construing what it is to be human, we've been leaving out so much of who we are, forgetting our interdependence with so many other shapes and styles of sensitivity and sentience.

It can be very disturbing to realize that we're not just a part of something so much bigger than ourselves, but we are immersed in it – embedded within a world wherein there are many other beings out and about that are bigger than us, that can eat us, and even beings who are much smaller than us (microbial organisms around and within us) who can, and ultimately *will*, take us down. That is to say, there are innumerable reasons to be frightened of this earthly biosphere or distressed at having to notice our utter embedment within this wild cauldron of life churning with powers that we are in many ways beholden to. And so I reckon that there's a reflexive impulse to hide from our inherence in this cauldron, to find some way to pretend it's not there, to turn away from the teeming multitude of beings

toward others who look just like us – toward others of our own species – and to find other ways to get caught up in the purely human discourse, both by celebrating those folks we identify with and by being affronted and doing battle against other persons and factions that annoy us. It's a way of avoiding having to notice the countless other shapes and styles of life with whom our lives are entangled! It does seem to me that that is what's happening – a reflexive crouch, a way of avoiding what most terrifies us. That's not all that it is, of course, but I think that's part of the dynamic – when something is calling us to actually open our gaze beyond the purely human sphere, it feels disturbingly taboo and terrifying, really, since it's so contrary to the many gestures inculcated by several hundred years of modernity.

MILSTEIN: You and I talked some time ago about 'the Anthropocene' and you had thoughts about the term, as well as concerns. You had started to play around with another conceptual term – in addition to the many others that have been thought up and put into circulation. Can we talk a bit about your term and how it might connect with conversations about ecocultural identity?

ABRAM: Well, listen – I have no quarrel with what the Anthropocene purports to be naming. That is, the simple truth that has been evident to any half-awake human being for several generations: that our species has become a geological force – especially so in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, by virtue of our numbers and our technology – that in recent times we've become an earthly power comparable to the largest geologic forces, like hurricanes, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions. And this *should* be recognized and acknowledged – that most humans, by the way we live, are now massively affecting the life of the biosphere, even the habitability of this planet, not just for centuries but for millennia to come. This should be obvious to all. But my quarrel is with the particular name that's been given to this epoch we've recently entered, to this somewhat new planetary state of affairs.

Allow me to back up a moment. We are a social species, us two-leggeds; so we, in our particular form of sociality, we seem to secrete this thing that we call verbal language, among us. And it's a beautiful thing, language. But those of us who speak, who use words (which is pretty much *all* of us) – and especially those of us who take up the craft of writing – it's our responsibility, it seems to me, to always be tending the language to keep it from desiccating, keeping our language alive and brim full with meaning. Like many poets, when I write an essay or a book, I write with a sense of responsibility to the language itself – with the intention to keep meaning fresh and alive, and to enliven, by whatever increments, the ways we speak in our most ordinary conversations. So, when I first started publishing my own work, I found myself grappling with what Eileen Crist calls the poverty of our nomenclature, the sad lack of rich and nuanced words to speak of what we call 'nature,' or to speak of the relation between nature and culture. Nature is so often thought of as 'the other' of culture, so 'nature' is out there, 'culture' is in here. Culture and civilization are what exist inside the city walls, as it were, and nature is everything that's outside the window, outside the door, outside the city. And so then we have more recent terms like 'the environment.' But the term 'environment' carries so many unfortunate assumptions with it. It flattens all of the outrageous diversity of our world – humpback whales and spiders spinning their webs, and octopi and earthworms and elephants – glomming them all together in this single word, 'the environment,' which tacitly situates humankind at the center of this wild-flowering profusion of shapes and sensibilities. The term 'environment' locates us humans at the center, as the only thing that's not 'environment,' since all these other beings are 'our' environment. They are what surrounds us.

Yearning for some other ways to speak of this, I soon realized that I really wanted some way to speak of nature in a fresh manner, in a way that implies that the world of human culture, with all of its creativity – of language, of art, of technology – is encompassed by and permeated by and hence *a part of* the wider natural world. Human culture is sustained and perfused by this wider world, which nonetheless exceeds us, exceeds our capacity to comprehend it, exceeds even the fluid bounds of our imagination. I was yearning for a way of articulating human culture as a subset within the larger set of earthly nature. But this would need a different phrase, a different way of framing things: we had no word or figure of speech by which to speak of culture as a nested set, wholly embedded within the natural world.

And so I coined a phrase, the *more-than-human world*, to indicate that the human world is a subset within the larger set of the more-than-human world – a world that encompasses, subtends, and even pervades the human world but that also always *exceeds* the human world; it is always *more* than just us and our linguistic creations and our artifacts. So that was a very important term for me – and, over a number of years, I watched as the phrase was taken up by many others within the wider ecological movement, and became part of the lingua franca of the many-faceted movement for ecological sanity. I think that is something we should all be engaged in – finding new terms and new phrases to articulate states of affairs that were previously unnoticed because previously unspoken, like your word ‘ecocultural identity.’

So then, here comes this new phrase floated by some scientists, this new word – the Anthropocene – which has got many people very excited, and seems to have precipitated a kind of sustained academic orgasm among many scholars and theorists, especially in the humanities, largely because it breaks down the facile distinction that seems to exist between culture and nature. The ‘Anthropocene,’ as a term, seems to say that human culture now so thoroughly influences the rest of nature that we must begin to speak of the biosphere as now living within the regime of the anthropos. That is to say, human activities have so thoroughly influenced every facet of the organic, biotic world that that world itself can be characterized as an Anthropocene Earth.

The problem with this is that if we accept this notion of the Anthropocene, then there is nothing that exceeds the anthropos. It’s in direct contrast and contradiction to what for me has been so important – to accept that there are so many facets of the Earth that exceed humankind, that exceed even our reach of our human intellect and imagination. But the Anthropocene suggests that the anthropos – the human – is coextensive with earthly reality itself. There is no *more-than-human* world, for there is nothing that exceeds the anthropos.

The huge problem brought by the discourse of the Anthropocene – that the human is now co-extensive with earthly reality, such that there is no outside, there is nothing that exceeds the anthropos – is that *such discourse forecloses any move toward humility*. It interrupts or really undermines any gesture of humility in the face of a more-than-human Earth. Whereas it does seem to me that our most proper and necessary response for us, today, as humans, is that we slowly drink a tall glass of humility, swallowing it down and allowing it to enter our bloodstream. Recognizing the extremity and the extent of the damage we have wrought and are wreaking upon the rest of this biosphere, it seems to me that we must begin to recognize the beauty, the wonder, the multiplicitous elegance of our world in its outrageous otherness, and step back from having such a huge and immense footprint everywhere we tread.

But of course the very term ‘Anthropocene’ precludes such a turn toward restraint. It rather names ourselves, the anthropos, as those who must now take the reins of this world. It’s up to us to manage the Earth, now, managing it, even engineering it to best suit our

purposes (or perhaps for the benefit of all beings, if we can do so) – we’re the ones who have to steer this boat now. It’s like the old storekeeper’s admonition, ‘You broke it; you own it.’ So we must now consider ourselves the masters and controllers of the biosphere. It seems to me that that is what’s implied – or at least that that’s the implication that most persons will necessarily draw from this name, the Anthropocene.

Indeed, there are already many persons who are taking the phrase in this manner – as an aspirational term, a phrase that celebrates our human ascendance over every part of nature – even if that was not the original intent of those who coined the term. But natural scientists, including Eugene Stoermer and Paul Crutzen (the biologist and atmospheric chemist who coined the term) are not always especially attentive to the poetics of their craft. They are not always attentive to metaphoric resonances; they are not as attentive as others might be to all of the consequences latent in a particular term they might choose. So I think we all of us, as citizens – as scientists and as non-scientists, as poets and as philosophers – have to always be trying to do that work, pondering the epistemological and ethical consequences of the terms that we use and taking care to avoid terminology that’s inherently problematic, or dangerous, or destructive.

Many people have come up with alternative names for the Anthropocene – the Capitalocene, for instance, by those who want to say, ‘Look, it’s not humans per se, it’s just humans beholden to the imperatives of the capitalist economy that have created this mess.’ And many, many other alternatives have been put forward. But our scientist sisters and brothers, our geologists and planetary biologists and Earth system scientists, have been saying, ‘Yeah, yeah, but look, there’s a basic reality that we need to face, which is the centrality of our species in its entirety in this planet-wide transformation that is underway, and that’s why anthropos needs to be emphasized.’ To which I reply: Look, if we want to name our species as central to this new epoch – if it’s really the activity of humankind, as a whole, that is bringing about this new planetary regime – then listen, comrades: Instead of the term ‘anthropos’ and the implicit arrogance of the term ‘Anthropocene,’ why not work with this other ancient word for our species – the ‘human’ – in its rich and earthly etymology. After all, the word ‘human’ is closely cognate with the word ‘humility,’ since both are derived from ‘humus,’ which names the Earth underfoot, the soil.

As soon as we notice the humble, earthly ancestry of the word ‘human’ then another possible name for this new geological epoch immediately suggests itself. If we really wish to underscore the human species as a key – if unwitting – perpetrator of this new and rather calamitous state of affairs, wherein so many other animal and plant species are tumbling into the oblivion of extinction, then why not call this epoch the *Humilocene*. The Humilocene: *the epoch of humility*. That does emphasize our species’ outsize influence right there in the name – Humilocene – yet it also feels awkward and disturbing, at first, for it carries an echo of another word that shares the same origin, which is ‘humiliation.’

Yet these echoes – humble, humility, even humiliation – are a mark of what is right with the term. Shouldn’t humankind, after all, be humiliated by the evidence of what we have wrought? Shouldn’t we be humbled by the slowly dawning recognition of how much loss, how much destruction so many of our species have brought about? It seems to me that Humilocene would be a far more appropriate term than Anthropocene – precisely because it suggests, and even enjoins, a step toward restraint and a new humility for our kind. Perhaps, in oral tradition, this transitional period – the dawn of the Humilocene – may come to be known as ‘The Humbling.’ (It’s a term suggested by my friend, Dougald Hine, one of the founders of the Dark Mountain Project.)

MILSTEIN: This evocative term, the Humilocene, in part brings to mind much of the writing you have done about becoming sensitive and sensible, and the vulnerability and reciprocity inherent in doing so. How do these processes of becoming connect to potential for transforming ecocultural identities in these times?

ABRAM: You are talking about the process of coming to deeply value our sensory experience, according a sort of primary value to the world we experience with our animal senses. Some speak of my philosophical craft as *geophilosophy*. That is to say, trying to work out how do we philosophize, how do we *think*, under the influence of a more-than-human Earth. As a cultural ecologist my particular fascination is with the ecology of sensory experience: the way that the activity of our animal senses – of our eyes, of our ears, and our skin, of our nostrils and our taste buds – the way the activity of our senses binds our separate nervous systems into the enveloping ecosystem. It seems to me that perception, or sensorial experience, functions always like a sort of *glue* binding our individual nervous systems into the enveloping ecosystem.

But I'm also deeply interested in the ecology of language: the manner in which our words, or *what we say*, so profoundly influences *what we see* (or hear or taste) of the Earth around us. I'm convinced there are ways of speaking that actually inhibit or *frustrate* the spontaneous reciprocity between our sensing body and the earthly sensuous. But I'm just as convinced that there exist other ways of speaking that can open and encourage that spontaneous affinity between our animal senses and the animate Earth. So that's the edge where I'm always paying attention. It seems to me that sensory perception, that our senses when left to themselves – unimpeded by technologies that intervene between our senses and the earthly sensuous – our senses instinctively bind themselves into the more-than-human terrain. I mean, after all, our eyes and our ears and our skin have co-evolved with all of these other textures, all of these other colors and shapes and sounds, so that our ears, by their very structure, are tuned to the honking of geese, and the howling of wolves. Our eyes have co-evolved with many other eyes, and are always, in a sense, waiting to be seen by eyes that are not just human.

But we're living at a time when so many technologies are inserting themselves between our bodily senses and the broad body of the Earth around us, short circuiting this instinctive reciprocity, so now we're caught in this kind of reflection with our own signs – this reflective loop between ourselves and the screen that short-circuits that older co-evolved reciprocity with the animate terrain. Today, we're engaged with so many technologies that only reflect us back to ourselves that we've stopped noticing how richly tuned our animal body is for meeting – being met by – the many-voiced Earth.

MILSTEIN: If we re-attune, is that an entry point to more ecocentric ecocultural identities? For me, too, the technological fixation, screen life, two-dimensionality, just as you said, has started to bound who we are more and more thickly.

ABRAM: Agreed. If we are looking to really *transform* our culture, to shape-shift this astonishingly oblivious society that has become so blind and deaf to the presence of other forms of earthly life, I think perhaps the most interesting, as well as subversive and powerful, move we can make is to identify ever more deeply with our own bodily presence, to open a new solidarity with our animal flesh. No, not just solidarity – to actually *identify* with this breathing, pulsing creature that we call our body.

Instead, we so often think of the body as something other than ourselves. The linguistic habits of our Western civilization have taught one to think of oneself as an ineffable essence – a kind of spirit presence that is housed within this animal flesh. We think that our bodies are one thing, and our selves are something else. But to identify with the body itself, to intuit

that this palpable shape – this porous skin, and the blood surging in all these boulevards and byways just beneath that skin, and these nostrils sniffing the air at every moment, and these ears grazing among the sounds of the world – that this *is me*. That this body is the self, the tangible presence of the self. That the spirit is not *housed* in the body but that it has this palpable, thingly aspect. The more I identify with this body, the more I discover my entanglement in a more-than-human world. For the body is our sole access to the other animals. This body is what enables my affinity with all these other bodies – bodies not just of other animals, of coyote, and squirrel, and spider, and raven, but also the physical body of trees, and the plants whom we ingest as food, all these rooted but sensitive beings. I have access to these other bodily presences only by virtue of being a body myself. To identify ever more deeply with my creaturely flesh is a very subversive move indeed, affirming my embedment in a more-than-human community. It is a most powerful way of coming to our senses, beginning to taste the world with one's tongue, to hear and attune to the speech of other beings.

I think it bears saying that an objection to this approach could come from a range of stalwart folks grappling with various forms of disability, persons who find themselves embodied in ways that are incredibly limiting and frustrating, or that deeply impede their way in the world. Sometimes such persons approach me, to say: 'But, Abram, I'm sorry, I am not going to identify with this body. What I am is something so much more creative, and so much more free than the lunky animal of my body.' We can think of the physicist who just left us, Stephen Hawking.

Yet I can't help but suspect that it's just the habits in our language that lead us into that sort of a conundrum. That is, no matter how limited my body is relative to others, it is still my sole access to every facet of the real. Even if I am bound to a wheelchair, I'm still breathing. I'm still tasting. Or, even if I have no taste, my access to the colors and shapes of things. Even if I'm blind and deaf, it's still this body with its limited senses that opens the possibility of reflection and imagination. All my flights of creativity are possible because of this body's intimate exchange with other bodies and beings.

Even a fully able-bodied human is very limited. There are so many things I cannot do. I can't flap my arms and take to the sky. I'm unable to grow apples out of my limbs like that apple tree outside the window. To be a body has always been a source of frustration for the over-civilized, over-educated mind of many modern folk. And hence, within the Western tradition there's long been an aspiration to divest ourselves of the body, to break free of our embodiment. This flight from embodiment – because the body terrifies us; being a body renders us mortal and ensures that we're going to die. It also renders us vulnerable, in every moment, to the gaze of others who might see me as being too fat, or too skinny, too dark-skinned, or not feminine enough, or too pimped. My body is vulnerable to the attack of various pathogens who might take me down, or make me shiver with a bone-wrenching fever. (I've had malaria a couple times.) And so this body is continually associated with being a drag on our spirit, and a block on our aspirations. It holds us to the Earth and makes us succumb to the suck of gravity.

But truly this is a bizarre and blinkered perspective, since, after all, there would be no sense of wonder, no possibility, no aspiration to flight if one wasn't an enfleshed thing that encounters other fleshly beings with wings, swooping and flapping. There would be no possibility for thought, no experience whatsoever, without a sensuous and sensate body to sense things and to reflect on those things.

CASTRO-SOTOMAYOR: When you're talking about the body, I was thinking about what kind of spaces you are picturing that body as immersed in. I'm thinking, for instance, of heavily urban spaces where 'nature' has become not something with which we connect, but instead

only part of the beautification of the city. It's something that's just there or something we don't pay attention to. With your evocative language you bring me out of those really urban spaces and put me in spaces where the possibility to reconnect to the more-than-human world is easier to imagine. But what about those bodies that dwell in heavily urban spaces and who might not have the possibility of developing those connections – spaces where the body's interactions are more limited due to the characteristics of the place?

ABRAM: I'm envisioning the body wherever the body finds itself. Like right here in this room. sometimes, after I give a lecture, people come up and say, 'Yeah, that's cool what you say about nature, but I have no experience of that nature you speak of. 'Cause I live here in the middle of the city, and my apartment is up on the eighteenth floor, and so my whole encounter with nature is with a single plant just outside the front door of my apartment building. I pass this plant on my way into the taxi, or on my way home from work in another high rise building, and so I don't really have any experience of the more-than-human you speak of.'

But that's a mighty weird thing to say. Wherever we are, even in the downtown of some metropolis, we are not just in contact with nature, we're subsumed within nature, and immersed in it all the time! Even in the middle of the city we are breathing, thank goodness – yet there'd be no oxygen for us to inhale if there weren't all these green and rooted folks around the city and poking up through the cracks in the sidewalks, plants who are exhaling this oxygenated air that all us animals need for our metabolism. And after breathing it in, we alchemize that oxygenated air within our organism, transforming it, so that what we animals then breathe out is precisely what all the plants breathe in – since that carbon dioxide-infused air is exactly what the plants need for their photosynthetic metabolism. So by the simple act of breathing, we are exchanging air not just with other animals (and the other human animals who surround us there in the city), but we are all *inter-breathing* with the grasses, and wildflowers and the maple and beech trees growing within and around the city.

Further, even in the downtowns, we remain under the influence of gravity – that is, still susceptible to the intense attraction our bodies have for the body of the Earth, or that the Earth has for our bodies and that holds us to her. Ground and gravity are not human inventions! Indeed gravity is an astonishment: the mutual attraction between my body and the body of the Earth. There are so many ways in which we are in contact with something more than just ourselves, even in the middle of the city. And, of course, there are swallows and other wingeds swooping in and out of the streets between the buildings, and nesting under our windows.

Nonetheless, we've come to think that there's hardly any 'nature' in the city. It's a habit that's now encoded in the ways we speak: nature is always somewhere out there, and culture, and all of this so-called human stuff, is in here. Nature and culture are on different sides of this divide. So I'm carefully trying to undo that, coaxing folks to notice that the city is not just permeated by nature, it is permeated by *wildness*. In fact, any sufficiently dense urban hubbub – like New York City – is deeply wild, and you get various humans sort of embodying wild creatures just as intense and unique in their otherness as bear, or jaguar, or harpy eagle.

A couple decades ago, the Santa Fe Institute was pioneering this notion of 'complexity' and pointing out that even if we know the location of every molecule of air at this moment, we could not possibly predict the arrangement those molecules would take in a moment due to the nonlinear behavior of the air currents, and they would say this is true even of a water drop as it's falling down a window pane when it's raining outside – it's impossible to

predict the precise trajectory that that water drop will take down that flat pane of glass. The scientific community came up with a word for such inherently unpredictable behavior going on all around us, even in the middle of the city, even up on the eighteenth floor of some skyscraper. They would say the air currents in the room are *chaotic*. ‘Chaotic’ was the term they chose to speak of such non-linear behavior. Even the heart pounding in my chest, whose beat seems fairly regular, defies our ability to predict the precise micro moment of the next heartbeat – because it’s always just a bit out of phase with itself, which allows it to respond well to any sudden perturbation, to any surprise or shock. And they called that pattern of the heartbeat, or the falling raindrop, or the air currents, ‘chaotic.’ Which seemed to me a fairly ill-chosen term, because by ‘chaos’ we usually mean ‘no order whatsoever.’ But, of course, the heartbeat is not utterly unruly. The pattern of waves as they crash on a beach, or of air currents in the room, are not without any order whatsoever. So, to call them chaotic seemed very strange to me. I think that the word they were looking for was ‘wild.’ These unpredictable patterns are not entirely out of control, they are just out of *our* control, beyond our ability to fully fathom and predict. They’re *wild*. And that’s true everywhere – within the city as well as out in the woods. Wildness is what we’re made of. The heart beating in my chest is wild, and is much more-than-human in its vitality.

MILSTEIN: These intimate understandings of the wildness of ourselves and others, and this clarity about always, everywhere, being in contact with the more-than-human world, seem to connect with thinking you have done about traditionally oral cultures and the understanding that all things have the power of speech. Could you talk a bit about your interest in orality and how orality might relate to ecocultural identity?

ABRAM: Well, when we speak of traditionally oral cultures we are speaking about cultures that have evolved and flourished, often for many millennia, in the absence of any formal system of writing that is coupled to the spoken language. Without a formal system of writing, verbal language is felt to be something very different from what it becomes for a highly literate culture. Once you write words down, you can begin to think of those words as labels, for instance. If I encounter an oak tree, the encounter sometimes calls the word ‘oak’ out of my mouth. But if I write down the word ‘oak,’ then, if I encounter an actual oak tree, I can now view or at least imagine that visible word alongside that visible tree. Similarly with the word ‘rain.’ Now that visible word represents this other visible, wet thing, the rain itself. Once ‘mountain’ is written down, it becomes a label that represents – or even stands for – that big *thing* over there, that vaguely triangular thing. So, with writing we can begin to think of words as *representing* the world, and we come to think of language, verbal language, as something that stands for, or represents, the real. But for deeply oral cultures, that have not stepped into the regime of writing, verbal language is not really a representation of the world – rather it’s a piece of the world. It’s made of the world. Words, terms, phrases, are things, like stones. A spoken word has a texture and a taste in your mouth and as you roll it over your tongue. And so other beings are affected by the rhythms of our speaking and the music of our discourse.

For traditionally oral cultures, language or verbal language is felt not so much as a way of *representing* the tree or the mountain but rather a way of bridging the distance or the gap between me and that mountain. That is, I use language to connect me to the other beings. There’s a sense of words or phrases as arising in a kind of call and response with a speaking world. For example, it’s not by chance that words in English that we use to describe the movement of a stream flowing between the banks will be words like ‘rush,’ ‘gush,’ ‘wash,’ or ‘splash.’ Because the sound that unites all those words – ‘*sshhhhh*’ – is the sound that the water itself speaks as it moves between the banks. So it’s not that we make up words for

things out of whole cloth, but rather that our spoken language is taught to us by the speech of the things themselves, that human language is informed by the speech of an animate world.

Within traditionally oral cultures, a person often will use the spoken language to call herself into the presence of a mountain, for instance, or to call that mountain into relation with her. A person can sing the sun up out of the ground in the morning, and indeed many traditional Indigenous peoples feel that if there are not at least some of them out there before dawn praying the sun up out of the ground, then in fact the sun may choose not to rise.

Westerners think of prayer as an arcane or highly religious act – the act of speaking to a divine presence outside the world. But, at its source, prayer is simply speaking *to* the world rather than speaking always *about* the world. Speaking *to* the world: speaking to the moon, speaking to the sun, speaking to the wind, and listening for the wind's reply. So to assume (as so many of our Indigenous oral ancestors did) that everything is alive and that everything speaks is hardly a superstitious and irrational assumption. It simply is a very practical way to hold one's senses open to the calls, the cries, the solicitations of the other beings around us and the land itself. It's a powerful and pragmatic way of tuning oneself to the nuances in the land, to what the river itself is asking of me today, or to what is unfurling just now, here, at this bend in the dry riverbed.

What better way to attune my senses to what's happening, right here, then to address the riverbed: 'It's good to see you again this morning!' And so oral cultures spend a lot of time, praising the things around them, aloud, offering praise to the trees, offering praise to the clouds, to the coyote or elk whose tracks you come upon, just as a way of binding your attention into the more-than-human plane of life, the dance of things. And there's this intuition that the other animals *hear* and *feel* and can *register* something of your appreciation, and also the plants – who are not, after all, insentient beings. There's even a sense that the land itself honors and registers and feels our pleasure and our appreciation of it, and so it leans close to us when we are praising it, and takes more care of us.

I think these are just very practical practices. They don't make sense in a literal, literate mindset – but literal truth is itself an artifact of literacy, and hence a very recent way of understanding the world. The sense of the world as a literal set of facts rides on the surface of a much deeper, much older oral animistic sensibility that knows that everything is alive, awake, and aware. Which is simply a way of asserting that we can have a dynamic relation not just with other people, but with every facet of the sensuous terrain. That I can resonate or feel into any and every aspect of the world. That the ground itself feels my steps as I walk upon it. And I don't think we can ever eradicate this old, instinctive sensibility within ourselves. It's just covered over by a little veneer of literate civilization.

Mind you, I don't mean to be dissing literacy or disparaging literature. I am a writer; I love books and I love to read. I'm just aware that literacy brings a kind of hyper-reflective sensibility into existence, a sensibility that is able to detach itself from the sensuous terrain much more easily than any non-literate, oral-cultured person can detach him or herself from land. And so there's a huge responsibility, in this era of ecological breakdown, for those of us who are writers – a responsibility to find ways to open the literate mind back onto the animate Earth, a responsibility to bring the literate intellect back in service to our full-bodied oral affinity with the many-voiced Earth. To bring our human intelligence back into the wider conversation. And I'm excited that some writers are beginning to do this. My friend Richard Powers recently published an astonishing novel in this regard, a book titled *The Overstory*, wherein the primary protagonists are, well... trees.

MILSTEIN: I like the way you talk about this very thin kind of crust of literate civilization, and you're not talking in terms of past and future – it's not this temporal progression from one

to the other. You write about that, as well – the undoing of this teleological fallacy of sociocultural progress, of value-weighted development from one state of being to another.

ABRAM: Right, it's all-present, in a way, like sedimented layers of Earth (and our body also has these sedimented layers within itself), and underneath many of these, there are these deeper strata. I mean, for 98 or 99 percent of our human tenure on this planet, we all lived as hunters and gatherers, as fishers and foragers, in a manifestly animistic context. We lived in small-scale collectives that assumed everything was alive, awake, and aware. And it's just a tiny shred of that time since humans have stepped into the regime of settlement and agriculture, the regime of literacy. It's important to realize that we're all still composed of a deeply oral sensibility – that the languages we speak, almost all of them, arose in a thoroughly animistic context. And, hence, that our languages were not born just of humans speaking to one another, but were born in a kind of call and response with a speaking, many-voiced world.

CASTRO-SOTOMAYOR: How do these ideas connect to notions regarding the place-based constitution of language? In *Spell of the Sensuous* you define place as 'a qualitative matrix, a pulsing and potentized field of experience, able to move us even in its stillness' (Abram, 1996, p. 190). I found this really fascinating. How do you see place and space interrelating in an era that privileges the global over the local or, as you've said, the homogeneous and void space over the qualitative dimensions of place? And how do these relations of place and space influence our identities?

ABRAM: Well, 'space' and 'time' in our Western and Westernized cultures have become conceptual abstractions that have very little to do with our direct corporeal experience of our world. We tend to think of time as strictly linear – as time that progressively moves in a line from a distant past to a very different future. Meanwhile, we think of space as an immense and infinite homogeneous expanse, a void. And we speak of these as if they're two different things. But the idea that one could even imagine a space without time, a space with no time in it whatsoever, is really quite silly. Space needs time in order to spread, in order for any point in that space to reach or make contact with any other point. That is, space needs time in order to *be* space. And to imagine time unfolding without any space in which changes happen is similarly nonsensical. It seems to me that linear time and homogeneous empty space are twin abstractions that function to eclipse the Earth from our awareness. They are a way of hiding ourselves from our actual, bodily inherence in the breathing Earth.

But if we allow our linear notion of time to flow back into homogeneous space, then space itself transforms – each point in space begins to display its own dynamism and pulse, and by virtue of dynamism begins to differentiate itself. As soon as we allow time to blend with space, space transforms into *place*. Place is a dimension filled with specificity and uniqueness, wherein each point in the terrain is richly different from any other point. Why? Because of the way things happen there! Because of the rhythm, the complex dynamism of each place. The rhythm of life here in the upper Rio Grande valley is so different from the rhythm of life in Amazonia. And both are wildly different from the rhythm and pulse of the way things unfold in the Hudson River estuary. Or from the dynamism and syncopation of life in the Pacific Northwest of this continent.

Certainly, the renewal and replenishment of a deep sense of place is a necessary ingredient in finding our way to a livable future. The diverse Indigenous cultures of the Earth all are or were, by and large, place-based cultures – cultures profoundly informed by the unique characteristics of the terrains they inhabit. Even deeply nomadic cultures were still cultures of place, often exquisitely attuned to the broad bioregions within which they circulated,

following the animals and the fruiting times of the local plants. Yet many of us, today, carry a recognition that some of our Indigenous forebears may not have had. For it's clear today that each place, each ecosystem, is dependent for its well-being upon the health and flourishing of every other ecosystem, each place dependent upon the well-being of other, very different places, most of them far away.

Indeed, in our own era, we've become aware that the Earth itself is a place – a vast Place that contains all these smaller places. The Earth is not everything; it's not the universe. It's just our own finite spherical world. Yet, as many Indigenous cultures do, I've begun to think of the Earth as my larger body – of this two-armed and two-legged form as my smaller body, and the Earth as my larger Flesh. It's also your larger Flesh. It's the larger Body of each of us, but it's also the larger Body of the spider, and the larger Body of that aspen tree. We have our individual small bodies, but we all share a common spherical metabolism in which our individual physiologies are completely entwined.

Of course the Earth is an utterly immense relative to our small bodies, and so we never experience all of the Earth at once. I only experience some small corner of it at any time. Whatever place or bioregion where I dwell, or linger, at this moment is the way Earth discloses itself to me. And we may suspect that each place, each ecosystem, is a unique organ within the planetary physiology. The U.S. Southwest desert, here where we are speaking, is one of the organs of this larger body, just as the Amazon basin is clearly a very key organ – the rainforest there often now thought of as the lungs of this larger Body. But *every* place is an organ within the broad spherical metabolism that is our planet.

Now, if the cells in my left kneecap were trying to act the same as the cells in my right lung, my body would break down. I wouldn't last very long. Well, just so, if here in the upper Rio Grande watershed we try to live the same way of life that folks are carrying on in the Hudson River estuary, I would imagine that our larger Body would begin to break down. If folks in the Amazon Basin are trying to live out forms of culture identical to those that pulse along the lower Yangtse River, in China, the larger physiology of the Earth will ultimately collapse, will break down. Each place – each ecosystem or bioregion – calls for, is open to, a range of possible cultures, but whatever culture shapes itself there, it must be appropriate to the mix of plants that live and flourish in the soils of that place, and to the specific animals that pollinate those plants, or graze on them, the particular creatures who dwell within or migrate through that place. And hence those possibilities for human – and more-than-human – culture will be very different from the possibilities afforded by the islands of the United Kingdom, themselves very different from the styles of culture that are possible in the Mediterranean, or that are called for by the ecology of this high desert region where we now sit.

Hence, in the face of the spreading homogenization of culture – a Starbucks on every street corner, with two or three McDonald's on the periphery of every town – it would seem like a great *rediversification* of culture is very important in this time. Letting our communities take their directives – the rhythms and textures – from the needs of the more-than-human community wherever we dwell. Differences among communities, and among cultures, become increasingly important. Now, perhaps for the first time, we can say that in order for our culture to flourish, here in the high desert – in order for our particular spirits of place, the gods and goddesses that we honor, these mountains with their icy snowcaps that we and the other animals all depend on, melting slowly through the spring and summer, replenishing the aquifers and the forests, and these spectacular lightning storms that are intensifying at this time of year – in order for these powers or gods to flourish, we need *your* gods to be flourishing down there in the Amazon, *and they better be different from our gods and goddesses!* Because that ecology there is so richly different from ours here!

That is very different from anything I think the Earth has seen before from us humans – that we start taking pleasure in the *differences* in our cultures, realizing that the beauty of any particular culture depends upon the flourishing of other cultures that are really different, of other belief systems that are really different. And such is possible, perhaps for the first time, because we all share a common awareness of the larger Flesh that they're a part of, of the larger physiology or spherical Body that we're all a part of. And here we call it Terra, while over there you call it Gaia, but we know that these are all different translations of the same big Mystery that no person and no culture can ever experience all at once in its entirety.

MILSTEIN: I'm momentarily going to shift the scope from the global to a more one-on-one interspecies scale of identification. In *Becoming Animal* (2011), you tell a story about being in your kayak in the Salish Sea in the U.S. Pacific Northwest. And you talk about the stellar sea lions, and being drawn to them, and what happens when the sea lions let you know you clearly have come too close, and then, at that same time, that humpback whale comes up right next to your kayak and breaches, multiple times! And you write that the encounter – and other charged interspecies encounters – changed you, that you began to notice the animal dimension in your own speaking. I wonder if you could expand on this in terms of how you view such interspecies moments connecting us to animal dimensions of our identities.

ABRAM: A few things that brings up. One is, speaking very personally, I'm acutely aware that those electric encounters with other shapes of sensitivity and sentience have been formative for me, whenever they have happened, starting when I was quite young. But certain encounters – like when I was cross-country skiing in the northern Rockies and came out of a clutch of trees and unexpectedly found myself face to face with a mother moose, about six feet away from me, and her eyes locked on mine as she pounded the snow with her forelegs. And then I saw one ear of hers swivel backward, and you see a little moose behind her, and it was a mighty dangerous encounter. And I don't know how my body came up with this, but I just took a deep breath and I went, <sing> 'aaaaaaaah' – louder than that though. And, by the time it died out, I noticed the muscles in those forelegs relaxing. So I took another gulp of air and offered another tone <sing deeper> 'aaaaaaaah.' And, by the time that second tone died out, the moose had gone back to nibbling on the willows, completely relaxed.

And I thought, 'Wow! That's really cool!' as I was gliding past. Because I realized then that there's so much information carried in our sounds, for those who have ears to hear. Yet that was just one in a slew of such encounters. That experience of locking eyes with another has happened to me various times. Quite early on, after it had happened maybe the third time with another animal in the backcountry, I began to notice a sensation that always seems the case now: if my eyes lock with another creature, there's a sensation of something passing out of my right eye into its left eye, and out of its right eye and into my left eye. So a kind of circuit is set up, flowing between us both, and then something breaks the trance, or one of us takes a step and it breaks. And I don't know for how long I've been in that trance, only that everything is changed. It's as if another very different nervous system has just, you know, synapsed itself to my nervous system, and something of me has flowed into it, and something of it has flowed into me.

At a certain moment, I began to realize that every such encounter has changed me, profoundly. And I actually can chart my life, and the different moves and changes in my life that I've made, by these encounters with other animals. They're very rare, but there's a sense for me that I'm most *real* and most *really* myself when I fall into relationship with

a radically other form of life, when I feel myself gazing and being gazed at in return from an entirely different set of senses. And it returns me to myself in a new manner. I am speaking very personally here because it feels like my life emerges from such encounters. I feel I am more present at such moments of deep meeting.

So, then I think of Wolfgang Goethe, who says that *every object, rightly contemplated, opens an organ within us for its contemplation*. This beautiful, simple attention that Goethe gave to the act of perception, to sensory experience itself. When I come into the presence of another being, of another nervous system, of another animal, of another life that is just as present – or perhaps far more so – than me in my life, when I come into the presence of another shape of awareness, the moment extends itself, and it's not just <snaps> a split-second encounter, but an open moment. And time seems to dissolve, and there is – I can't help but feel – a new depth within myself constituted by the encounter with the other.

Within the Eastern traditions, and Buddhism in particular, there's a teaching that is usually translated as the codependence of self and other, or the interdependent arising of self and other – that the self emerges only in relation to the other, and that we know ourselves really only as we come into relation with others. How much more deeply and profoundly this is the case when the other we encounter, and make contact with, is of another species! So it seems to me.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the great Vietnamese Zen master, coined a word that is so indispensable for us today: *interbeing*. Our interbeing with one another, our interbeing with a sea lion, our interbeing with a moose, or a coyote, or even a spider that we unexpectedly come upon as she's spinning her web. And if I gradually tune my eyes to the spider as she spirals, setting the silken threads of the web, then this whole other depth of the world opens around me, the world as experienced from this other scale of experience! The interdependent co-arising of self and other – that who I am is, in ever so many ways, a function of the others I'm in relation to, who give me back to myself, transformed and deepened.

So, to Thich Nhat Hanh's word *interbeing* I would want also to add another similar term: *interbreathing*. That, as Thich Nhat Hanh says, we inter-are with one another. But also, in a very palpable, bodily way, we are all of us *interbreathing* with one another – continuously exchanging breath. As we were saying before, what all us animals breathe out is precisely what all the green and growing plants are breathing in, and what these grasses and trees breathe out is what all us animals need for our own metabolism. So what we breathe out, they breathe in; what they breathe out, we breathe in. Talk about reciprocity! It's so exquisitely palpable, and luscious really.

And yet we, in this modern moment, tend to take the air profoundly for granted – as though it were just empty space. And so we don't notice this magic: that the atmosphere of this Earth is an elixir born of the *interbreathing* of our organism with all these other earthly organisms – with the soils, with the oceans, with the fish in those seas. So, in this very visceral, material sense, we are born of one another, materially constituted by our relations with one another. (The term 'interbreathing' is also used by the great contemporary Jewish bodhisattva and activist-sage Rabbi Arthur Waskow.)

MILSTEIN: I'd love to connect this further with your experience with shapeshifting and identity.

You write about this in *Becoming Animal*, and especially you yourself experiencing shifting shape into another being, a raven. I told my sons about that this morning as they were eating their breakfast, and they stopped, their spoons just froze in the air, as I told them the story. This possibility of shifting into a very different being's shape and experiencing an embodied alternate reality speaks to so many of us, yet few believe we really can do such a thing. I don't know if you actually knew you were training to do such a thing.

ABRAM: I didn't. No.

MILSTEIN: I'd love to hear your insights on how *shifting* into a different being, just momentarily, might affect dimensions of ecocultural identity – one's own – and whether you see this aspect of expanding notions of self as central to the Indigenous magicians, or shamans, you've studied with.

ABRAM: Well, I try not to use the word shaman, only because it's become way overused. I'm living in a town where every lamppost seems to think it's a shaman. It's just a term that comes from one part of the world – Siberia. And when we speak of this single thing, 'shamanism,' as though it's the same practice among the Pueblo peoples or with peoples in Amazonia or in Indonesia, we really miss that the shaman, or magician, is someone who is not primarily in service to the human community, but is really in service to the whole more-than-human community, and to the human collective as a part of that wider community. And that community is very different in Indonesia than it is in Siberia, since the creatures in the Indonesian islands are so varied and different from those in the terrain of the reindeer herders in the circumpolar Arctic, and since the animals and the plants there are so different from those here in the upper Rio Grande valley. So the practice of such magic intermediary work is necessarily very, very different because it's informed by the very different shapes of sentience that inhabit and even constitute these different ecologies.

And not just the animals and the plants, but the landforms, the elements, the winds and the waters of each place. The magician or intermediary has an ecocultural identity composed of the place and all the beings that make up that terrain, that ecology. He or she will often, if not always, have certain other animals, and perhaps a few plants as well, who are her particular *familiars*. A close affinity with raven and with coyote, each of whom then provides for her a whole other set of senses. Because by apprenticing myself to raven, which is to say by watching and following these birds as they swoop and dive, learning their antics and where they hang out, and listening in on their conversations with one another, their cantankerous calls and cries, and then their more intimate *<makes soft raven sounds>* as they're speaking with one another, I'm letting their colors, their textures, their ways in the world inform and move into me. Slowly, this other animal, and *its* ways, begins to be felt as a variant of my own experience of the world.

My attention to its ways provides another take on the same world that I experience, but from a very different angle, from a very different perspective, through a very different set of senses. So I gain a kind of stereoscopic experience of the local Earth. Just as I do if I am given to stopping in astonishment and watching spiders as they weave their webs. If I really lend it my attention, watching and learning whatever I can of spider – which also can include reading and studying what's been discovered about the ways of these local spiders by scientists and naturalists, but not only that. If I'm regularly out in the land, encountering other beings or following their tracks in the sandy soil around here, and listening and learning from a few such Others, then I gain not just a stereoscopic, but a trioscopic or quadriscope sense of this place, this realm, this watershed that I inhabit, a richer sense of how this land feels itself from a range of other perspectives.

Then, as well, I might have a particular closeness to a certain plant, perhaps because it's a plant that I ingest regularly and eat of its leaves. For me, it's a plant I don't ingest through my mouth, but through my eyes and my ears and my skin: the Aspen tree. There are some growing around my home, but there are huge aspen groves up the slope of these mountains where I live. And when I am ailing – if I'm physically ill, or if I'm just bummed out, if I'm going through a really difficult patch and melancholy has me in its grip – I know that if I just wander up into these mountains and get myself into the aspen

groves and just sit there among those trees, or walk among them, or lie down and sleep in their midst, their medicine will ease what I'm going through. They are the most medicinal of trees for me, in any season. Whether it's in the summer with their green resplendence, when the aspens are also very talkative – because, as everyone knows, aspens chatter and whisper among themselves. It has to do with their leaves, the stalks or petioles of aspen leaves are flat, yet their flatness is perpendicular to the leaf surface. So, when the slightest breeze comes, it wants to turn the stem this way, but it wants to turn the leaf that way; so the result is that the leaves will all start quaking and quivering. They whisper and chatter. But then, come autumn, those leaves turn a kind of honeyed gold, and it seems the mountains are all cloaked with Jason's golden fleece. But then, once those leaves fall to the ground, the fractal richness of the bare white aspen branches against the blue of the sky, and the trunks and branches, as you know, are a bright white, yet etched with black markings that often look like eyes staring back at you. And, in the winter, as the snow blankets the mountain's ground, the aspen trunks, white etched with black project their long black shadows upon the white snow, creating a dizzying chiaroscuro of black on white on black and white to walk through, or glide through on skis. So in every season, aspen offers up this sense-altering medicine for those of us who are given to its magic, who are aspen-struck. They form a key part of *my* identity here.

But your question, Tema, reached further still, probing into the mystery of shapeshifting. You suggested that few people have access to such experiences. Well, yes, and *deeply* no. With the experience that I described in *Becoming Animal* of actually entering into, and taking flight with, a raven I was at great pains to stick as closely as I could to the sensorial experiences that brought me to that unexpected moment. Because I now know that anytime I gaze at – or anyone gazes at – a bird as it takes flight, if we follow it closely with the focus of our eyes as that winged being swerves, swoops, turns, and glides, then my nervous system is *synapsed* through my eyes to its nervous system. My sentience is in direct contact with *its* sentience. There, already, is a kind of subtle shapeshifting that goes on *all the time* whenever we are really attending, really perceiving the world.

And that's what that whole series of lessons that led up to the experience with the raven taught me – that sensory perception itself is the deepest magic. I mean, here I am sitting, speaking with the two of you, and so you see me here, and I see you over there, yet there is all this space between us. So, how is this happening? Is something of me gliding out through my eyes and making contact with you over there where you sit? Or is something of you actually pouring through this space and sliding in through my eyes over here? Neither of those seem quite right, but obviously something is happening, because I am perceiving you, Tema, and you're perceiving me at the same time. We're both perceiving José. So somewhere between there and here is, and perhaps at *every* point between us, this mingling and interchange that is happening. There is a subtle exchange and mutual informing of one another. That's what perception is.

One of my recent discoveries in this vein comes from having noticed for a long time how much pleasure I and some others receive from the color green. That it's not just a visual pleasure, but when I'm out in the world and I see a green hillside – particularly when the sun just emerges from a bunch of clouds and is spilling its radiance across that hillside – there's this visceral and tactile pleasure that rolls across my skin. The color green feeds me in this way. And when the green is variegated, composed of different mosses, grasses, and leaves or needles, of different hues and colors, as in the American northwest, for instance, the pleasure can be almost orgasmic – always heightened when sunlight hits it for the first time.

At a certain moment I found myself pondering this and then realizing that, well, all of these green beings are engaged in photosynthesis. And yet I grew up being schooled to think that photosynthesis was a set of automatic, almost mechanical happenings within the physiology of a tree or a plant, whereby that plant is transforming sunlight into matter, sugar, oxygen. But, basically, these leaves are eating or drinking the sunlight and morphing it, transforming it, alchemizing it into their flesh. In the way I'd been taught, this all happens automatically, without any sensation accompanying the metamorphosis, which now seems really bizarre to me – the idea that such a thing would not be accompanied by *feeling*, would not be accompanied by some qualities of sensation. What kind of sensation? Well, I don't know, but I would imagine it would be a kind of intense pleasure, a delicious quality of feeling. And of course that those sensations would be heightened whenever sunlight strikes that leaf or that grassy field. And I suddenly realized that, wait a minute! – the pleasure that I feel in the color green, is this not a kind of empathy in the eyes? That is, are my eyes perhaps picking up something of what these beings themselves are sensing and feeling as the sunlight spills across them? So when I look at a forested hillside, I now recognize the sunlight green as a kind of ecstasy rippling across the folded contours of that hillside. Which is just to say that a kind of shapeshifting is happening all the time when we stay close to our senses, and linger with them, and let them saturate our conscious awareness.

As I wrote in *Becoming Animal*, the human body is our very capacity for metamorphosis. The body is a shapeshifting being – it changes shape with every gesture and movement of our limbs, and every facial expression we make. Our body is this exquisitely tuned instrument that can reverberate any and every part of the sensuous terrain, can shape itself to feel into any part of the world. My body is a variant of every other being or body in the landscape. The stones, the rocks, the boulders jutting out from the flanks of this mountain, these cliffs – well, I have my own stony or bony constitution. The streams and waters flowing down from this mountain are echoed deeply in the bloodstream and circulatory system of my organism. But my body also has its leafy aspects – I mean perhaps my hair is kindred to the leaves of these trees. Which is just simply to say that we have within our bodies echoes of every other bodily presence around us, even if they be very distant echoes. And everything, conversely, every part of the landscape, is a distant variant of my own flesh. After all, we are all constituted of the same stuff. And so we have within us this magical capacity to feel into and empathize with pretty much *anything* of the Earth – because we ourselves are, first and foremost, pieces of Earth. And, so, a kind of shapeshifting is just native to the human organism. It's our birthright.

CASTRO-SOTOMAYOR: I was thinking while you were speaking about to what extent being engaged with, or being conscious or awake to, this sensible body helps us question or interrogate those other layers we have imposed upon or between us – ethnicity, race, gender, ability, etc. Recently, for instance, I was walking through a street with these beautiful trees in the median. I was walking through this beautiful median garden, immersing myself and conversing with the trees and the leaves, looking at the colors and the sunbeams, and really enjoying myself. And suddenly, I caught myself thinking, 'I am deep in the ecological dimension, but my body is still like this.' You see, I am bearded, I am darker skinned. So, I am in the ecological dimension but, also, I could be affected by these other dimensions, like gender and ethnicity, or the color of my skin. For some, in comparison to these other cultural categories that identify me, the ecological dimension is unimportant or even irrelevant. In an academic discussion about identities, I witnessed one scholar accusing another of being frivolous, of thinking of 'happiness and the universe' when talking about the ecological dimension of our identities or experiences. The ecological was dismissed as not

meaningful in the charged political context we are living right now. But it is immensely relevant. And I have discovered, personally, that it is a way of moving and understanding that actually opens different ways of interrogating our worlds.

ABRAM: Well, as we've already mentioned, we as humans seem to have lived for 99 percent of our time within this biosphere as hunters and gatherers, in a deeply animistic context. In a context, that is, wherein we assumed that everything is alive, that everything is, in some sense, awake and aware. Inevitably, then, we found ourselves negotiating relationships with every aspect of the sensorial terrain. The beings that we touched – the ground, the textured bark of a tree – were also touching us. That bony, stony boulder we moved our hand over, with its lichen-encrusted fissures, was also feeling my hand and sampling the chemistry of my skin. It seems likely that we felt ourselves in this kind of multi-relational exchange all the time, negotiating relationships with insects, with birds of flight, with animals peering down at us from branches, or looking up at us from clumps of grass, but even with the ground itself – since the ground seemed to feel our weight as we walked upon it. Now, this is not to say that this was easy, or even fun. Any relationship, any intimate relationship, is really hard – and you stumble across really fraught edges and get frustrated with one another. It's mighty difficult, and plenty dangerous, as well, and I think that's also what it is to be in relation – in intimate carnal relation – with the flesh of the wind and the soil and the rain. It's difficult as hell, but it's also deeply nourishing, and it feeds what Mary Oliver calls the soft animal of our body.

And if this was our most basic, longstanding modality of ancestral life, well, consider: Suddenly we're born into a civilization that defines away the life and animate agency of all these other shapes of sentience. 'Yes, sure, those animals are alive, but they're not really sentient, they're certainly not conscious. In fact, they probably don't have feelings at all. If they're plants, rocks – forget it. There's no sensibility whatsoever. The ground? Give me a break. The wind, the rain? Are you mad?' Countless things that, to an animistic sensibility, were felt to be alive, animate, and hence engaged relationally with us whenever we encounter them, are now defined as being inert, inanimate, or basically determinate, mechanical processes that happen automatically. There's no spontaneity, no real creativity outside the human sphere.

Suddenly then, we found ourselves cut off from all of those difficult but nourishing relationships that used to feed us. Nonetheless our nervous system still knows, still craves that rich nourishment – that full round nourishment it once got from its living interchange with hummingbird and mountain and spider, from sunrise and crescent moon and thunder cloud. But now all those presences are just passive stuff. The only place I can turn for relationship is toward another human – because humans are the only things that are truly conscious in the world as we currently construe it. So, I turn toward my sweetheart, my lover, my spouse, *craving* this deep and multiplicitous otherness, and demanding, wanting, desiring something of that from her or from him. Yet another person, shaped so much like ourselves, cannot possibly provide all of that diverse and manifold otherness we once felt in the world. And so, it's like, 'I really love you, darling, but I'm just not feeling *met* by you. It's just not happening!' And I think that this frustration blows apart so many of our relationships, one after another. For this bodily organism is still needing, still craving this multiplicitous otherness!

It's a situation that renders all our human relationships remarkably brittle and breakable. Yeah, 'brittle,' that's the right word. Not just our intimate relationships, but our relationships with persons in our community, and communities themselves become much more harsh, fragmentary, prone to breakage at many different points. Even international relations become far more brittle when they're not nested within a broader matrix of interchange

with the mountains and rivers, with an Earth that we sense is actively supporting us as we walk upon it, within an atmosphere that is *actively* nourishing us as we drink of it. No – we now assume that all of this just happens automatically, and so we don't pay it any mind. We focus all our attention upon our human relationships, which stay profoundly fragile and breakable as a result.

It seems to me that opening up to one's ecocultural identity – waking up as a bodily animal engaged in relationship with so many other beings – eases the fragility and brittleness in all our human relationships. Including, especially, those edges within our internecine human struggles with one another – our ethnic grapplings with one another that we keep firing up and filing the edges of so that we can grate, and cut, and slice into one another. Why are we so ready to take offense, why are we so impatient with one another, so badass *mean* to each other? Because we are all cut off, by the nature-demeaning norms and nature-destructive habits of this commercial civilization, from the wider field of relationships. Yet we're still craving it, still needing participation in that animate world. Because it's our birth-right to be engaged within a much wider and a much wilder range of relationships and reciprocities with other beings, and with the otherness of our world.

Consider a city like Los Angeles, composed of a broad array of ethnic communities – groups of Vietnamese Americans interacting with the Mexican Americans, bumping up against the Jewish Americans and the African American community and the Filipino community. But every now and then – particularly during a prolonged drought, or in a summer that's stiflingly hot – these edges snag on one another and sometimes give rise to violent clashes and flare ups and riots. Because these different communities with their divergent thought-styles and habit really don't have much in common with one another. Except this one thing, this very big thing that they *do* have in common: the actual place where they live. If they could collectively turn away from one another toward the place that enfolds them, if we stop glaring at each other and turn toward the ground underfoot, and inquire of the ground, 'What do you ask of us here? What does this place ask of those of us who live here?' that simple gesture – turning away from our preoccupation with one another toward the needs of the terrain where we all live – would begin to draw the human collective, with all of its differences, into a new alignment with itself.

If, in Israel–Palestine, these two warring, pissed off factions – ancient cousins – were to stop nursing their endless grievances with one another and turn to the land and to the waters, and ask, 'What do *you* need from us? What does this place ask of *any* humans who choose to live here?' – and began listening closely for the reply – that, it seems to me is the *only* solution to that cycle of unending violence. Beginning to give precedence to the needs of the more-than-human terrain over our strictly human concerns. And I do think that it alone can bring a solution. But the proof would and will be in the pudding, and in the eating of the pudding. I think this is the edge where we're at right now as a civilization, as a species, as a planet.

MILSTEIN: This is certainly in line with the aim of this *Handbook*, to expand beyond the destructive fiction of a purely human realm and to reconnect with our always ecological and earthly selves. In addition to inter-group conflict, marginalization, erasure, and violence, there are other dynamics, also fed and kept volatile by the governing structures and corporate institutions of our times, that seem to unremittingly shape and stunt our identities. One that comes to mind is today's hyper-consumerism – the craving of, and over-identification with, stuff.

ABRAM: There are so many who say the problem is that we're too materialistic a culture, and that our problem is our materialism. But I am one of those who would say, 'No, the problem is that we are not materialistic enough.' We don't care about the materials we use, from which

we fashion our chairs and our buildings. We don't identify with our *own* materiality, with our own bodily thickness and density and weight. And so we treat matter as though we were outside it, in a very aloof and detached fashion, and this is one way of understanding the ecological crisis: that it is born from, or generated by, a culture – a human culture – that relates to the world as though it were not part of that world, as though we are spirits that just happened to land here and get stuck in these bodies. And we're kind of pissed at our body for imprisoning us, so we treat our body and the body of the Earth as though it was something for us to instrumentalize, manipulate, engineer, and master and control, rather than how we would engage this world if we really identified with our materiality and realized that we were completely in and of the Earth – pieces of Earth – and, hence, that the Earth is our real Body, our larger Flesh.

MILSTEIN: You point out in *Becoming Animal* that you pay little attention to the social or political in that book because there's a necessary work of recuperation to be accomplished before the social and political spheres can be reconfigured. And I feel like we've been talking about recuperation for most of this conversation. How do you see such a recuperation eventually, maybe directly, leading to things like replenished social and political participation, climate wellbeing solidarity, and environmental and social justice? How do we move from nourishing identities that are recuperative and replenishing to invoking that scale of change?

ABRAM: I just think we don't have a hoot of a chance of healing our social justice issues until we begin including the more-than-human world within our sense of the socius, or the community. I just don't think real community is possible, for instance, anymore without turning toward and realizing that the human community is nested within, or embedded within, a more-than-human community of beings.

And so, feeling the active support of the ground underfoot, and honoring the soil, and – when we're frustrated in another community gathering or town hall meeting – stepping outside to just go and consult one of the old trees and just say, 'Geez, how do I do this?' and listen! And take what comes from the tree and its response, or what it suggests obliquely to my body, the insight it brings me when I just rest in its shade for a minute or three, and then step back into that town hall meeting. I don't think we can do it *alone*, and I think that is the source of a lot of our problems, as well as the source of a lot of the ills that are now befalling the wider ecology. We can't do it alone, and we wreck the world when we try to.

So, I do think bringing place into the equation is utterly key. Bringing the Earth into the political equation is massively important. Earth in its sphericity – what are the consequences of living arrayed around the surface of a sphere? I don't think we've even broached this yet in our international relations. But just as important, and more so, is bringing place into the political equation. *Place and the Politics of Wonder* – that was the name of a book I was intending to write. I proposed that one and *Becoming Animal*, and the publisher just went for *Becoming Animal*.

CASTRO-SOTOMAYOR: Have you developed the idea about the politics of wonder someplace else?

ABRAM: Not at great length, not yet. But some of these things are very obvious and have been spoken of for a very long time. We're now living in these nation-state constructs where, you know, between New Mexico and Arizona, or between New Mexico and Texas, or between New Mexico and Colorado, there are these straight lines that run across the map. Between the United States and Canada, another straight line. And we have to then work out our politics and economics accordingly. But, of course, these straight lines have nothing to do with ecological reality.

As we were saying earlier, the Earth articulates itself in richly different ecosystems, different bioregions. Once we realize that that's the *reality* of what's here and ask: What is

the actual watershed I inhabit? What are the contours of this realm wherein the humans, the other animals, and the trees and herbs are sharing the same water? Once I discern its actual contours, I'll see it's different from the broad Pecos watershed on the other side of the Sangre de Cristo mountains above my home – the water there is different, the minerals in that water are different. What are the forms of culture, of community, and collective solidarity that are called for by *this* ecosystem? And, working closely with others – with brothers and with sisters and with the other animals – to make space to ensure that we can all flourish here, and many of us – the humans, in particular – will have to give up certain things (like golf courses) so that all us beings can flourish together in this land. But it does seem to me that a much more place-based politics is what's called for, one increasingly attuned to the bioregional contours and ecological realities, rather than the artificially drawn straight line and right angle boundaries of the nation-state.

Our species is in a massive, planet-wide crisis from which there's no guarantee that we will survive. What *is* clear, what really aches, is that we're taking down countless other beautiful beings as we tumble. Yet there's this slowly dawning awareness that we inhabit a breathing biosphere – a vast spherical metabolism upon whose flourishing our individual lives all depend. Perhaps this growing recognition of our common flesh can free us – not, hopefully, into some global homogeneity of consciousness, but to accept the invitation of gravity and shrink back down into our particular places, attuning to the uniqueness of the local earth wherever we find ourselves, becoming half-decent citizens of the bioregional commonwealth. Perhaps we can relax into our differences, and the divergent rhythms of our particular places, because we're now awake to the framing-place that holds our individual places within it. As I mentioned earlier, perhaps for the first time it's really possible to understand that the health and integrity of *this* bioregion depends upon the flourishing integrity of every *other* bioregion, and indeed that each ecosystem necessarily calls for its own uniquely wild form of culture. In the long run, let us hope, there'll be a re- diversification of human culture, even in some sense a re-indigenizing of culture, within a sense of our larger identity as Earth. This breathing planet experiencing itself in and through an outrageous multiplicity of divergent cultures, expressing itself through a thousand and one styles and traditions – each place, each creature, each individual (whether fingered or finned or feathered, whether antlered or leafing or covered in lichen) a unique expression of the manifold weirdness of this whirling world.

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Ecocultural identity boundary patrol and transgression

Tema Milstein

After heavy rains in the United States Pacific Northwest, millions of earthworms squeeze up through city sidewalk cracks. It's thought they are taking advantage of the momentarily wet surfaces to move across distances that otherwise are relatively vast or unnavigable (Porter, 2013). As they stretch and flatten their bodies in shiny lines across the concrete, most passersby step on them without notice or care. After one such heavy rain, a student and I contemplated our walks home after class. She brought up the earthworms, saying that, on these rainy days, it took her hours to get home as she would stop to kneel to gently remove worms, one by one, from harm's way. Whenever someone walked by, she added, she pretended she was tying her shoe.

This student, brave and upfront in her sociocultural identities as a firefighter and butch lesbian, confronted and broke occupational, gender, and sexuality norms every day. Nonetheless, during those worm-saving moments, confronting and transgressing anthropocentric norms, including normative notions of earthworms being lowly and unworthy of one's attention or care, felt comparatively insurmountable. She consciously masked her ecocentric identity and her feelings for another species, hiding her actions away every time another human was present. Metzner (1995) names the wider cultural framework for such experiences in psychological terms as dissociative alienation – a feature of Enlightenment-informed cultures for centuries, built into Western/ized political, economic, and educational institutions. It is not that Western people lack earthly care and connection (there are long histories of ecocentric thought and care, paralleling and contrasting the rise of industrialism through contemporary times of late capitalism), but rather that Western/ized cultures themselves (broadly defined) have become overwhelmingly dissociated from their ecological foundations and earthly relations (Milstein et al., 2019). This predominant split of humans from the more-than-human world (Abram, 1996), and associated perceptual ruptures from nonhuman flora, fauna, and ecosystems, centrally impacts ecocultural identities. Indeed, as Metzner (1995) argues, 'for most people in the West, their highest values, their noblest ideals, their image of themselves ... have been deeply associated with a sense of having to overcome and separate from nature' (p. 66). At the same time these anthropocentric imaginings reign, however, Western ecocentric ways of perceiving, behaving, and identifying – ranging from Romanticism of the early 1800s to radical environmentalism born in the 1970s to the contemporary child-led global School Strike for Climate (Laville et al., 2019) – reflect and inform ecocultural counter-discourses and struggles.

This chapter attempts to illustrate and locate the outer boundaries of dominant normative *anthropocentric identity* by attending to interpersonal moments when individuals cross – and/or patrol – this identity’s borders. I specifically examine boundary-crossing instances when individuals express ecocentric, interspecies, and biocentric identities (hereafter collectively referred to as ecocentric identities). For the purposes of this study, I define the counter identity – *ecocentric identity* – broadly and inclusively to refer to a range of earthly non/anti-anthropocentric identification with the more-than-human world. Ecocentric identity herein is akin to Macy’s (2016) *encompassing self*, a positionality that identifies with the wider reaches of life in ways that, importantly, can motivate ‘sustained and resilient action on behalf of life’ (p. 153). In particular, this chapter illuminates the everyday hurdles interactively put in the way of performing and manifesting ecocentric identity in our times.

This chapter is both empirical and heuristic, accessing interpersonal moments in a broad range of contexts to focus on theory building about ecocultural identity much in ways scholars have constructed theory around disciplining related dominant normative identity boundaries, such as those of gender, sexuality, race, and socioeconomic class (Butler, 2006; Luhmann, 1989; Turner & Reynolds, 2010; White, 2008; Woodward, 2004). As such, the chapter takes as a given Foucault’s (1975) notion of disciplinary power, in which – within hegemonic networks of symbolically and materially re/produced societal and institutional pressures and punishments – individuals constrain themselves and others to dominant normative identities, in part via self-regulation and normalization.

This kind of inquiry is not only important but urgent as, in this anthropogenic climate crises era, industrialized humanity is called upon to rapidly expand notions of self beyond limited humancentric spheres and to remember and mindfully reinhabit inextricable ecological roles and their reverberations. In order to aid such vital expansive transformation, ecoculturally focused scholarship must undergird and enhance ongoing examinations of structural conditions (e.g., economic, political, historical, legal) with considerations of ways societies simultaneously self-constitute, reconstitute, and newly constitute at the discursive and interpersonal scales (Milstein, 2012). This chapter aims to aid in this examination, specifically by empirically illustrating ways individuals in everyday interactions normatively set, reinforce, and patrol the boundaries of dominant anthropocentric identity and actively debilitate their own and others’ transgressions into ecocentric realms.

I observe communication in spaces ranging from awe-inspiring (such as where people seek out wild and iconic charismatic megafauna) to mundane (such as one’s own backyard), illustrating instances when individuals express ecocentric identity, interlocutors discipline such expressions, and individuals mitigate their own expressions. I also provide examples of far rarer instances when individuals boldly display ecocentric identities, in the process engage in associated dialogic tensions, and, at times, co-construct essential transformative identity spaces. By examining lived expressions and repressions, this chapter attempts to map contemporary boundaries of dominant Western ecocultural identity, to understand ways these boundaries are normatively patrolled and maintained, and to illuminate moments in which such boundaries are neatly hurdled.

In what follows, I review relevant literature to build an argument about ways normative ecocultural identity and everyday talk inform one another. I then, as a participant observer, interpret ways individuals in a wide range of Western/ized settings reinforce and transgress anthropocentric identity boundaries. I close with a discussion about interpersonal interaction’s hegemonic constraining function, which I argue overwhelmingly serves to restrict individuals and societies to ecologically distanced positions and to mask biospheric connection and earthly immersion during this Anthropocene/Capitolocene (Moore, 2016)/Cthulucene (Haraway,

2016)/Humilocene (Abram with Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020, pp. 5–25) epoch. I posit that current dominant Western communication overwhelmingly functions as a limited and limiting environmental resource, embedded in and disciplined by wider structural contexts in which deep-seated power is invested and in which histories of exploitation and silencing are implicated. At the same time, I argue that, in expressing ecocentric counter-identities, some may be renewing communication as a restorative resource, pushing past fixed borders, cultivating transformative identity spaces, and co-constructing shared regenerative ways of being.

Ecocultural identity and discourse

Identity studies often focus on difference, the construction of difference, and the symbolic and material power embedded and produced in marking and maintaining difference. Plumwood (1997) provides a liberatory framework for understanding parallel traits inherent in constructing inequality via difference, drawing clear correspondences among androcentrism/sexism (with men as standard and women as other), ethnocentrism/racism (with white/colonizer as standard and people of color/colonized as other), and anthropocentrism (with humans as standard and more-than-human world as other). Following Plumwood, this study recognizes the entanglement and codependency of these multiple forms of othering.

Definitions of being human continue to dominantly hinge on anthropocentrism in Western cultures. This defining and distinguishing take place in culturally ingrained identification practices – from religious texts to classroom textbooks. This defining also is structurally codified. For instance, Carr and Milstein (2018) illustrate how environmental law and policy ostensibly put in place to structurally protect endangered species fall far short by reproducing a discourse that obscures humanity's ecological constitution and roles. Instead of effectively protecting species and ecosystems, these legal codes of environmental protection create an 'invisible sphere' around ecological ramifications embedded in systemic human practices, such as housing sprawl, overconsumption, and fossil-fuel dependency, leaving dominant anthropocentric practices of identification largely unchallengeable and unchanged.

Though a number of individual and structural changes are afoot – including a rise in actions hitched to shifting identifications ranging from Blockadia¹ and veganism to novel uses of judicial systems and rewritings of nation-state constitutions to protect climate health and more-than-human rights – the anthropocentric 'dominator identity' that Bridgeman (2020) articulates in Chapter 5 of this *Handbook* continues to reign. As Plumwood (1997) points out, those situated as dominant, or standard, are materially and symbolically privileged and upgraded, and those positioned as other are materially and symbolically marginalized and degraded. At the same time, standard identities also distort and limit possibilities for those in the dominant position (man/colonizer/human) as their virtue is largely defined through adherence to the dominant perspective and positionality. While the biosphere suffers, the constraints of anthropocentrism restrict humanity's transformative potential, even in the face of indisputable need.

Thomas (2015) has shown, for instance, that New Zealanders of European descent (Pakeha) engaging in environmental decision-making must adhere to normative Western instrumentalist, rational, and scientific discourse if they are to be heard. And – when Pakeha do bring in ecocentric views (including those of kinship, guardianship, and spirituality) – they and their messages lose legitimacy in the decision-making context. This constraint on those identified with the standard/dominant culture, however, does not apply, in Thomas's observations, to those identified with the Indigenous othered culture. In contrast, Thomas

observed Maori participants in the same environmental deliberations – who voiced enduring ecocentric cosmologies using their own Indigenous ecocultural framing to express such identifications and relations – were able to effectively introduce non-instrumentalist views into the decision-making process. Thomas's work shows how one's cultural position as standard or other, in context, can remove or grant one's legitimacy and authority to identify and express ecocentric views. Lest it seem that Indigenous communities have free rein in expressing ecocentric identity, extant research also illustrates ways in different contexts Indigenous cultures are undergoing a pronounced and rapid rise in structurally imported anthropocentric identity that actively and overwhelmingly denigrates and displaces long-standing Indigenous mutualist ways of being (see Regassa Debelo et al., 2017, and Alhinai & Milstein, 2019).

Stibbe (2014) argues ecolinguistics and related transdisciplinary ecocultural fields need more comprehensive theory about the discursive formation of identity. This theory-building is especially necessary to understand identity's role in creating, maintaining, and possibly averting anthropogenic ecological crises. I enter this theory-generating task understanding discourse as a reality-producing resource and force that both enables and constrains, and understanding dominant discourses and counter-discourses as central to processes of ecocultural identity formation, struggle, and transformation. Huspek (1993) argues counter-discourses (e.g., ecocentrism, feminism, decolonialism) operate in opposition to, and are creations of, a dominant discourse (e.g., anthropocentrism, sexism, ethnocentrism). In this way, a dominant structure 'produces counterforces against which it asserts its own value through devaluation' (p. 16). Dominant discourses and counter-discourses thus form a dialectical relation of opposition and interdependence as, 'without what it devalues, the dominant structure itself can have no value but must dissolve into nothingness' (ibid). Relatedly, the oppositional, or counter, discourse also depends upon the dominant to give it its foremost purpose. At an individual scale, these rival discourses generate colliding worldviews, or competing ideologies, that vie for one's allegiance. While the dominant discourse-counter-discourse dialectic provides the individual with choice, the choice is a strained one – the selection of a discourse and its respective worldview necessitates rejection of a rival discourse and the decision of whether to represent or compromise one's own values, to oppose or agree with one's more or less powerful interlocutor's discourse, to be heard or not, to be celebrated or retaliated against.

For instance, an individual with a counter or disempowered view (e.g., rivers should have personhood rights) may be interacting with a power wielding other (expressing the dominant view that rivers are resources to serve human needs). In this case, interpersonally, neither counter nor dominant view may be wholly fulfilling choices: a counter-discourse would be devalued and dismissed by the power wielder and adopting the dominant discourse requires the individual with a counter view to discursively defer to the power wielder.

Consequences of these interactions can go beyond mere awkwardness or disagreement. For example, Ryan (2011) interviewed largely activist individuals about the repercussions (beyond social isolation) they experience from expressing counter-discourse-driven identities in environmental and social conflict. Repercussions included social/psychological, economic, professional, legal/political, and physical retaliation. Knowledge and/or experience of such consequences led individuals to self-censor and otherwise avoid expressing their counter-discourse-informed identities. Some, however, adopted strategies to express counter-discourses, such as using preface or buffer statements, or limiting their expressions to when they were within a safe community.

This theoretical framework of dueling ecocultural discourses, or two opposing poles in dialectical tension (see Milstein, 2009; Milstein & Dickinson, 2012), helps further highlight

hurdles that may exist for an individual who identifies counter to the anthropocentric *environmental imaginary*, or the socially accepted and entrenched framework of discourses that govern ecocultural communicative norms (McGregor, 2004; Watts & Peet, 1996). Huspek (1993) argues the pervasiveness of dominant discourse structures, or the hegemony of the dominant ecocultural pole in a dialectic (e.g., anthropocentrism, mastery, human/nature dualism), makes it so even while individuals may possess the awareness to select from the less powerful rival structure dialectical pole (e.g., ecocentrism, reciprocity, mutualism), which is a form of option or choice, they still must select among existing structures if they are to be understood, heard, and legitimated – and so one’s discursive production is a reproduction of existing structures.

In this way, McGregor (2004) investigated ways in which environmentalists’ discourses paradoxically are caught within anthropocentric constraints. He found Australian environmentalists predominantly emphasized dominant instrumentalist anthropocentric discourses – speaking the language of developers and neoliberal government – and largely eschewed politically and socially disempowered ecocentric counterdiscourses that likely fundamentally inspired and informed their own ecocentric identities, such as those focused on ecological morality, spirituality, or emotion. Huspek (1993) points out that one option for dissent is to utilize a dominant discourse and its counterdiscourse simultaneously, disguising one’s meanings ‘beneath the veneer of meanings offered by a rival structure’ (p. 17). In the case of identity, this form of dissent could entail performing identities that disguise resistance yet also carry with them overtures to change.

Revealing the boundary patrol of ecocultural identity

During the past 15 years as a participant observer researcher, I’ve observed others’, and experienced my own, navigations of ecocultural identity in a range of Western/ized settings, including via a long-term ethnographic study on the North American Pacific coast in the world’s highest concentration of whale watching (Cerulli & Milstein, 2019; Milstein, 2008, 2011, 2016; Milstein & Dickinson, 2012; Milstein & Kroløkke, 2012) and in a wide array of sites across the United States, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. Study participants in this chapter often were outspoken people devoted to changing dominant Western ecocultural orientations from anthropocentric to ecocentric, including an array of activists, naturalists, scientists, and students. Whereas I include a wide range of participants – all of whom navigate persistent ecocultural identity tensions – the identity struggles of these outspoken change-agents perhaps most boldly illustrate and challenge the boundaries of anthropocentrism.

A researcher with a field notebook can represent a heightened cultural authority in the form of scientific surveillance and, in some cases, elicit self-consciousness. At times, my presence could have exacerbated identity self-disciplining, especially with participants who regularly compare themselves to science objectivity norms. For instance, a whale watch tour naturalist characterized by other naturalists as unacceptably emotionally expressive on tours (e.g., ‘She can string several ohmygods together in a row when the whales are there’) gave an excited shriek as an orca² surfaced nearby, then turned to me and said: ‘I can’t believe I did my most unprofessional squeal in front of you, a researcher!’ While this may point to a study limitation, this heightened self-consciousness also points to a possible strength. The presence of a perceived authority figure may magnify assumed dominant ecocultural identity constraints and self-reflection. Throughout my analysis, however, to ensure I am accurately observing widespread patterns of ecocultural identity patrolling and disciplining, I limit interpretations to dynamics I observed multiple times across multiple individuals in multiple different settings, often when my presence was unnoticed.

I do this empirical work to make plainly visible the everyday patrolling of ecocultural identity. This patrolling likely will be immediately personally familiar to the reader yet nonetheless remains overwhelmingly invisible, unremarked upon, and unproblematic in academic, interpersonal, or popular conversation. In the analysis that follows, I illustrate ways in which ecocentric expressions that fall outside the boundaries of dominant anthropocentric identity are disciplined by others, in repeating patterns of ridicule and labeling. I then map instances of self-patrolling the boundaries of anthropocentric identity, which I group in reoccurring themes of self-labeling, self-censoring, and marking boundary-crossing. Finally, I illuminate far rarer examples of largely unconstrained expressions of ecocentric identity and interpret ways individuals often dialogically acknowledge anthropocentric identity constraints at the same time they are overcoming hegemonic boundaries and cultivating transformative identity spaces.

Disciplining others

I categorize instances of interlocutors patrolling and disciplining other people's boundary-crossing expressions of ecocentric identity – and guarding, maintaining, and reproducing anthropocentric identity – as falling under forms of either ridicule or labeling. Both forms of other-disciplining functionally serve to silence or dismiss the validity of those expressing ecocentric identity and reinforce anthropocentric identity as the only appropriate way of identifying.

Ridicule

A common mode of ridicule I have observed is teasing, which serves the function of shaming and quieting ecocentric expressions and increasing self-consciousness surrounding ecocentric identity portrayal. For instance, on a sea kayak tour in the Pacific Northwest, a seal mouthing a writhing red creature broke the ocean's surface. I asked the tour guide what was going on. She quickly pulled in her arms – which initially had unselfconsciously shot up in excited response to the seal. She turned to me and said in a controlled tone that what we were seeing was a harbor seal eating an octopus. She had seen this once before while guiding a tour, she said, and had been teased after she had screamed with excitement.

The participants made jokes about it for the rest of the trip. They kept repeating, 'It's an octopus!' That's what I screamed when I realized what he had in his mouth. I was totally filterless. I was so excited.

Whereas constraints often are discussed by scholars of discourse, the tour guide draws attention specifically to the *straining* function of constraint in reproducing dominant identity. The notion of being 'totally filterless' (or without cultural filter) when expressing one's immediate feelings about an interspecies moment maps onto my work with Kroløkke (2012) identifying rapturous moments of rupturing ecocultural constraints. At the same time, participant teasing 'for the rest of the trip' worked doggedly to reinstate prevailing anthropocentric filters of objective dispassionate relating to other species. Here it is interesting to break down etymologically the term 'constrain': While 'strain' means to filter or force to a damaging degree, 'con' has multiple meanings in English use history, including: with, combine, attentively study, learn by heart, steer, and, more recently, disadvantage or deception. We see all these meanings at play in the tour guide being disciplined by others to filter and force away the emotional immediacy of her response, learning to steer her corporeal response to deceptively hide her strong feelings of interspecies connection and excitement.

This imposition of a constraining anthropocentric boundary in response to someone being ecocentrically ‘filterless’ is reminiscent of patrolling and disciplining dynamics in response to the ‘orcagasm,’ a name locals at my long-term study site of orca-focused tourism give to an involuntary, unconscious, ecstatic, and wordless expression people often singularly or collectively utter during close experiences encountering wild orcas (Milstein, 2016; Milstein & Kroløkke, 2012). Similar to the kayak guide’s scream, the orcagasm marks a momentary rupturing of anthropocentric constraints. At the same time, locals use the term ‘orcagasm’ to teasingly comment on tourist behavior, and locals themselves are viewed askance if they engage in orcagasm. Whereas the kayak tour guide may face the additional discursive constraint of being – and needing to perform like – the in-charge authority, which in many cases can serve to strengthen identity boundaries, the hegemonic power of anthropocentric constraints also can be seen in ways tourists rarely privy to the ‘orcagasm’ term still often automatically discipline others’ unselfconscious ecstatic expressions with wild whales. For example, a humpback whale surfaced directly beside a tour boat:

AN ENGLISH PASSENGER: Ooooooooooooooooooh!

HER FRIEND, ALSO ENGLISH: Did I tell you I have a tape recorder on and I’m taping all the sounds you make?

Similarly, two U.S. visitors on shore watch orcas swim by.

VISITOR 1: Oh! Oh!

VISITOR 2: Keep it down. Your pitch. They’ll think you’re their mama and beach themselves.

Teasing, in Western/ized settings, perhaps could be a response to a wide range of aloud expressing of strong positive feelings, but one seldom hears teasing in situations of aloud emotional expressing that involve more anthropocentric experiences, such as firework displays or sport events or captive animal performance (including orcas). In the wider framework of the additional patterns I lay out below, I argue the coercive control imparted through ridicule of ecocentric expressions serves a particular normative function – enforcing strict hegemonic boundaries upon identifications and actions that venture beyond those considered compatible with an anthropocentric ecocultural identity. These examples of ridicule are not stunning examples of coercion or cruelty. Instead, tacit acceptance of, and participation in, ecocentric expression-disciplining ridicule allow dominant anthropocentric identification to persist unchallenged and, in the process, to exert profound control.

Labeling

The patrolling of normative ecocultural identity boundaries and the disciplining of ecocentric expressions that stray beyond such dominant anthropocentrism perhaps are more explicit in the form of overt labeling. Labeling serves as a means of marking someone as aberrant or other. This dynamic can be seen plainly in the conversation of two first-year college students volunteering for Earthwatch in North America:

VOLUNTEER 1: My sister got me a T-shirt that says ‘nature freak.’ She’s not into nature like I am.

At school, kids will talk about the video games they are playing and ask me what I’m doing and I say I went on a great nature walk this weekend. Suddenly you’re singled out.

VOLUNTEER 2: I don't have any friends who are into nature. Like none of my friends from high school are. They always make fun of me. Also you get dismissed when you try to bring something up that's bad or going wrong. People say you're just a nature freak a tree hugger. Or a conservation hippy.

VOLUNTEER 1: You get labeled. But I'm not weird like that. I mean you know what I mean. I don't have dreads. I like soap. At my school there was this one day when everyone gave soap to the hippies. It was funny.

These individuals, in their unambiguous youth, overtly identify the normative force of labeling, describing the boundary patrolling work such labeling does – being 'targeted,' 'singled out,' 'dismissed.' At the same time, Volunteer 1 navigates the hegemonic tensions his peers introduce by disciplining and aligning himself with the normative standard ('everyone') and against those who have been labeled and othered as too 'weird' ('hippies').

Disciplining of expressions of ecocentric identity often takes the form of labeling people who venture beyond the anthropocentric realm as mentally aberrant, with terms such as 'crazy' or 'insane' for those who don't acceptably act within the boundaries. For instance, while living in Seattle, in Washington state, I seasonally picked apples in a local city park with an old orchard and a 'pesticide-free' sign. In the first decade of the 2000s, I never saw other people picking apples and the delicious fruit would fall to the ground and rot. One day as I harvested, a fellow graduate student I knew walked through the park with his baby in a stroller. I waved, but he quickly avoided eye contact. When I said his name, he stopped and said: 'Tema? Oh, I thought, who is that crazy person picking the apples?'³

Labeling behavior that transgresses anthropocentric boundaries goes beyond off-the-cuff (yet problematic⁴) uses of 'crazy' to include labels of more diagnosable forms of mental illness. For instance, in news coverage of an accomplished local land artist in New Mexico, who by hand dug large intricate and beautiful caves that required intimate knowledge of the land and rock, a news anchor described the artist as 'a man obsessed,' a label the news program likely would not adhere to a person dedicated to a corporate office job (CBS News, 2014).

Such ridicule and labeling do not merely symbolically reinforce the anthropocentric status quo. In addition, these forms of disciplining have material and structural force, categorizing those who have legitimacy in informing decision-making and those who do not (see Ryan, 2011, on associated sanctions). A wild wolf advocate described how she was labeled – and her knowledge dismissed – as 'woo woo' by U.S. conservation officials because she discussed the connection she feels with wolves, how the wolves sometimes visit when she is camping in their territory (and even introduce their pups), and how she can see visions of where they currently are and later learns from pawprints or scanner plane GPS coordinates she was right. In trying to explain to officials that a recently government-matched pair of wild-reintroduced wolves will not mate because they were stressed from several relocations, she was discouraged because:

The government officials won't listen to me because it's 'woo woo' – and it's not even 'woo woo;' it's easy to understand this.

According to the Urban Dictionary, 'woo woo' refers to 'unfounded or ludicrous beliefs' or a person 'espousing New Age theories' (Urban Dictionary, n.d.).⁵ As we'll see in the section below on self-disciplining, individuals use 'woo woo' also to patrol and discipline their own expressions of ecocentric identity.

The wolf advocate's contemporary experience of identity disciplining – and lack of legitimate voice in the eyes of policy officials – echoes a less tolerant past. The advocate grew up in Germany, where women in her family told her not to talk in the ways she did about other animals because:

It was dangerous. It was just 20 years after the Nazis and there was still fear about witch hunts.

Her statements bring into view ways in which contemporary disciplining – via ridicule and labeling – serve to monitor identity boundaries reinforced far more conclusively with murder and erasure in recent and not-so-recent history, such as in Nazi Germany and in European and North American witch hunts.⁶ Hegemony is powerful not only because of the disciplining of one's contemporary moment, but also because of corresponding generational and cellular memories of coercive violence that more harshly enforced the same ecological identity norms not so long ago.

Disciplining self

The disciplining of the self is implicated in one's disciplining of others. In disciplining others, one exhibits knowledge of, and adherence to, anthropocentric identity boundaries and, in turn, marks and performs the normative acceptability of those constraints. For instance, a U.S. marine biology student at an academic conference in New Zealand told another attendee:

This is a weird conference. I haven't seen any stats or science at all. I don't know what to make of it. It's like some of the people who attend our other conferences – the dolphin freaks and the turtle freaks and the whale freaks. They just love the dolphins and they want to talk about their feelings. Like they want us to do stuff based on their feelings. But it's not systematic science. It's just feelings. They don't think of them as animals but as like these mystical beings or these things they are connected to in some way.

<The student turns to look at a New Zealand Ministry of Conservation film showcasing marine protected areas. As she looks at video footage of a whale and then a turtle, her demeanor changes and her voice becomes soft.>

Aww, pilot whale. Aww, turtle.

In disciplining others, the marine biology student traces and patrols the boundaries not only of scientific regimes of objectivity but also of anthropocentric identity norms incorporated within such regimes. In her momentarily unselfconscious reactions, however, she exhibits pleasure and, in turn, an unruly emotive connection, temporarily transgressing anthropocentric boundaries. In what follows, I illustrate ways individuals directly patrol and self-discipline themselves in such transgressive moments, typically when they express pleasure with, or care for, the more-than-human world. I organize these acts of self-discipline under three repeating themes: self-labeling, self-censoring, and marking boundary-crossings.

Self-labeling

Whereas individuals use labels to categorise others' ecocentric expressions as aberrant, individuals also use labels to do this work on themselves. Participants often followed or premised

their own ecocentric statements with self-conscious labels, such as I am a/n ‘environmentalist,’ ‘animal lover,’ ‘bird nut,’ ‘weirdo,’ ‘fanatic,’ etc. For example, a professional photographer standing on shore hoping to see wild orcas said:

I am a whale person. I just love them. I’m an animal lover in general, but whales
 <pause> I’m the only one like this in my family. I guess I’m just a weirdo.

A wildlife advocate in the U.S. pointed out a flock of birds floating on the ocean’s surface:

They’re common murre. They use their wings to swim in the water. They’re alcids. They’re related to penguins. I’m a bird nut.

In addition to such labeling of one’s self as aberrant when expressing care for or knowledge of the more-than-human world, individuals often labelled their own pleasurable and profound interspecies experiences – clearly deeply meaningful for them – as out of bounds or abnormal. Here, two examples illustrate this dynamic: the first from a graduate student in the United States studying herbalism and the second from an Alaskan plumber in New Zealand fresh out of the ocean after swimming with wild dolphins on a tour:

GRADUATE STUDENT: This is going to sound a little crazy but after learning more about these plants I feel different when I’m walking outside in the hills. I no longer feel alone. I know this sounds kind of out there but now I feel like I’m with friends.

PLUMBER: You know these oceans are where all life began. The bible thumpers don’t want to hear that but it is. I got such a peaceful feeling like you were home. I know it sounds odd. There was no fear. And the dolphins look and feel like angels. I feel a sense of wellbeing just a peaceful peaceful feeling.

Each individual uses labels (‘a little crazy,’ ‘odd’) to identify their experiences of interspecies or ecological relating as crossing a normative boundary (‘out there’). Illustratively, they also each specifically point to ways their expressions ‘sound’ aberrant to others. This attention to, and assumption about, how one’s expression will be received draws attention to the interactive core of hegemony. In those moments one knows one is crossing an invisible cultural boundary, there also exists a clarity that this crossing is being witnessed, and possibly patrolled, by others who share, and have investment in, the same boundaries.

Some participants used labels to present themselves as still adhering to normative standards while expressing ecocentric views. For example, one U.S. undergraduate student in an environmental studies university course introduced himself to the class as ‘an environmentalist, but I’m not like a Nazi environmentalist,’ as he described bringing a garbage bag to pick up trash on his favorite secret mountain trail where he sometimes sees bear cubs. When asked why he labelled himself this way, he described working as a ‘pusher’ in the U.S. military – ‘pushers’ literally push whatever the armed forces need out of planes; and the student explained that the military considers the tonnage of waste pushers produce to be unproblematically disposable.

I talk this way because I’m constantly surrounded by people driving big rigs burning gas and moving stuff and they don’t think about these things at all. They think I’m strange because I care about the Earth.

Self-labeling, via labeling one's pleasure, connection, or care as aberrant, functions to simultaneously acknowledge normative ecocultural identity boundaries and mark one's crossing of those boundaries, interactively signaling one's knowledge of leaving the bounds of acceptability and one's anticipation of being censured for doing so. In some cases, as with the student above, differentiated self-labeling ('an environmentalist, but I'm not like a Nazi environmentalist') served the function of demonstrating that one knows where the anthropocentric boundaries are located, while at the same time allowing the individual to adhere to a level of ecocentric beliefs and practices that appeared unthreatening to the dominance of anthropocentrism and protecting the individual from being judged too aberrant. In the next section, I look at self-disciplining in the form of quieting oneself.

Self-censoring

Self-censoring is difficult to observe, as generally it occurs internally and in silence. However, some participants brought up, or revealed, this ecocultural identity self-disciplining process. Examples ranged from silencing one's ecocentric orientation in front of others, to denying having expressed ecocentric feelings, to expressing that others do not want or need to hear one's ecocentric understandings, to refusing to talk about profound interspecies experiences. In the process of such acts of self-censorship, anthropocentric identity borders effectively are self-patrolled and remain uncrossed.

In one instance, a U.S. American whale watch tour passenger waited to describe his feelings about orcas until after his friend wandered to another part of the tour boat:

My connection is kind of like spiritual. I know it's weird <rolls eyes>. I didn't want to say it in front of her because she doesn't believe in the spiritual stuff.

Self-censoring at times also took the form of denying something had been expressed. For instance, after orcas passed about three meters away, a U.S. biology research team intern said to no one in particular:

INTERN: I can die peacefully now.

HEAD RESEARCHER: What?

INTERN: Nothing.

In both these examples, individuals reveal profound feelings. And, in both instances, the individuals presume those intimate more-than-human feelings would meet push back or be deemed inappropriate by those around them. In adhering to implicit anthropocentric identity boundaries, each turns to self-silencing.

Self-censoring also came in the form of playing down ecocentric statements one made, even when one clearly was speaking to like-minded people. A U.S. wildlife naturalist who lives on an island undergoing rapid human accretion explained the island had:

No poisonous snakes and not a lot of insects. Sometimes some imported black widows and brown recluses. No large predators except cars.

TEMA: Did you say cars? I have to listen closely to you. You slip in these great things.

NATURALIST: And boats. I say random things.

TEMA: They don't sound random to me.

NATURALIST: I just think not everyone wants or needs to hear all the stuff I say.

In this reflexive explanation, the naturalist dismisses her thoughtful earthly identifications of cars and boats as predators ('I say random things'). At the same time, she illustrates the everyday interactive power of anthropocentrism in noting that her deep and broad ecocentric knowledge and consciousness was not what 'everyone wants or needs' to hear.

Marking boundary-crossings

When individuals did cross anthropocentric identity boundaries in expressing their ecocentric identities, they often discursively marked the instant they found themselves at the crossing. These self-conscious communicative acts often took place in conjunction with expressing especially emotionally revealing responses to encounters with the more-than-human world. The marking of the crossing often functioned to negate some of the meaningfulness of the encounter – a pernicious effect of disciplining. For instance, a wild orca protector, who was part of a non-profit organization that educated the public about whale-safe boating and monitored and reported on dangerous boating behavior, told a volunteer about his first encounters with wild orcas:

PROTECTOR: The first time I cried.

VOLUNTEER: You cried?

PROTECTOR: I got teary eyed. It was from the ferry, so it was fast. The next time, I saw *<identifies specific individual orca>* going around Cattle Pass in July. I was in a kayak. I thought I can't believe this is happening. *<after a pause, the individual appears to become self-conscious and shifts to an exaggerated, slightly louder and self-mocking voice>* Oh my god. This is so beautiful. *<back to regular tone>* She swam right under my kayak. She was looking at me. The day after that we were just blown away. *<shift to exaggerated mocking voice>* That was a religious experience. I had a silent orcagasm *<snickers>*. And I broke down later that night on the beach. I was like oh my god that was beautiful.

Though the protector told this story in part to share with another protector moments that were especially meaningful to him and would be to her, as well – and his words appeared genuine and reflective of his care and ongoing dedication – the shifting tone of his utterance reveals identity tensions as he crosses felt anthropocentric boundaries to express interspecies deep connection.

A U.S. American in her 80s standing on an island shore hoping to see orcas described seeing them at the same place years earlier.

It was a miracle. They came right up to the cliffs. Isn't it silly? We still talk about seeing them that time. *<pause>* It's just a wonderful sight to see. It's just unbelievable how huge they are watching them surface. The excitement is what it is I think. The excitement. To be so happy we still have those creatures around.

Here, the individual rhetorically marks the anthropocentric boundary she crosses ('isn't it silly?') with her continued feelings of nostalgia for that moving interspecies moment. After marking her crossing, however, she appears to feel secure to proceed beyond the boundary. This excerpt illustrates how, in some instances, marking boundary-crossing can serve the function of broadcasting that the individual knows they are crossing a boundary and, in that acknowledgement, can continue to do so relatively unabated. In an everyday interactive way, these examples point to similarity with what Ryan (2011) found in activists who

avoided the repercussions of expressing counter-discourses by using similarly acknowledging preface or buffer statements.

Marking boundary-crossing, however, also can leave boundaries acknowledged yet relatively unchallenged. In another example, on a rainy day inside a whale watch boat, naturalists told passengers stories:

NATURALIST 1: I like to tell people some telepathy stories. I get the feeling the whales know a lot more than we think they know. That there is also some communication they have that we may not comprehend or understand. What I tell you you can take it or leave it.

NATURALIST 2: I think these stories will convince you.

NATURALIST 1: We had this older woman onboard. She was pretty frail and sat on the boat the whole way up to Canada with a blanket on her knees. We were next to J pod who was resting. All of a sudden Granny the whale jumps out of the water about 10 feet high right next to this granny on the boat. Even I just about had a heart attack. It seemed like a kind of granny connection. To help her get the blood flowing again.

NATURALIST 2: One time our boat had a baby crying and a whale stopped and faced the place on the boat where the baby was crying and vocalized above the water like 'it's OK it's OK.' <pause> Alright that's my last woo woo story.

Though the naturalists told me later that they believed in the interspecies connections they described in their stories, and they framed their stories as having the function of convincing listeners, in marking their communication as transgressing anthropocentric boundaries (e.g., 'take it or leave it,' 'woo woo'), boundaries may remain relatively untroubled and the dominant discourse-counter-discourse structure can continue relatively unabated.

In this way, the act of marking boundary-crossing often serves to resituate individuals firmly in the anthropocentric realm just as they seem to be venturing beyond. In what follows, I examine far rarer moments when individuals cross anthropocentric boundaries and, often in unmitigated ways, both express and validate ecocentric identity. I also interpret the dialogic dynamics of doing so, in which – similar to some instances in marking boundaries – individuals first acknowledge normative boundaries in order to navigate and then determinedly break through them.

On the other side: Expressing and validating ecocentric identity

Openings for more boldly transgressing anthropocentric boundaries and cultivating ecocentric identity arose within different contexts, including knowing one was not overheard by others, knowing one was aligned with rising popular sentiment, possessing specialized ecocultural knowledge, sharing company with an ecocentrically identified cohort, and performing – and validating others' – ecocentric identities to cultivate transformative identity spaces.

Privately, in our one-on-one interviews, some study participants in some contexts were more likely to express ecocentric identity. For instance, in an era of popular anti-capture feature and documentary films (e.g., *Free Willy*, *Blackfish*, *The Cove*), displaying empathy for captured or injured wild animals appeared to become more widely culturally acceptable. Pointedly, such private displays of connection often opened doors for individuals to discuss wider distressing ecocultural issues and to signpost aspects of dominant anthropocentric identity as problematic. For instance, one whale watch tourist I interviewed privately talked about crying 'like a baby' when Keiko, the orca who starred in *Free Willy*, died, and then said:

I love the sea and all of the sea creatures. We just need as a society to start paying attention. Like global warming is here. We can see that in Minneapolis. Our summers have totally changed. It's 100 degrees and sweltering there right now. It never used to be that way when I was a kid. And in the winter, we have only a few solid days of good stable snow for my daughter to sled. It used to be all winter we could do that. And the skating ponds it used to be that all the water froze over and you could drive onto the lakes. Now the lakes are too thin. This winter alone we've had at least 10 cars that went through the ice. And yet people are too thick to pay attention to what's going on around them.

In the sweep of speaking, the participant smoothly transitions from empathy for captured animals, to love for the ocean and all its inhabitants, to personal experience of climate disruption, to the necessity of awareness and the constraints of anthropocentrism (here articulated as people being 'too thick to pay attention to what's going on around them'). Similarly, without marking or mitigating her expression of ecocentric identity, in a one-on-one interview, a Colorado wild-life sanctuary volunteer, who worked with injured bears and wolves, connected her profound interspecies experiences – and resultant knowing – to wider anthropogenic destruction and captivity:

When you get to work with them, you see everything that happens in their world. Everything is all of a sudden *true*. You get to see what nature really is. How things work in the world. It's a true healing for humankind because without animals our souls are kind of empty. Without animals without nature without connected relationships I guess without people understanding nature things get destroyed. And it's very sad to see this over something we did. It's very sad to me. The second time I saw an orca was in Marineland and it was the most heart-wrenching disappointment I've ever felt for anything.

In these cases, both individuals identify human anthropocentrism as the cause for injury, disruption, and destruction (e.g., 'Without animals without nature without connected relationships I guess without people understanding nature things get destroyed'). Here, too, the individuals implicitly position the more-than-human world as an agent who needs to be paid attention to, and who evokes healing and ecocentric understandings ('everything is all of a sudden *true*').

In expressing and yearning for widespread ecocentric identity, individuals often engaged in dialogically acknowledging, and negotiating, tensions between ecocentric identity and dominant anthropocentrism. For instance, in a one-on-one interview, a local whale advocate described a powerful interspecies connection as the force that draws tourists to the whale watch industry.

That's what supports the whale business more than anything. This energy is what draws people. This secret field that we all deny but that links us.

In identifying the energetic force of interspecies connection, the advocate at the same time acknowledges imposed anthropocentric limitations – the energetic field of interspecies connection is 'secret' and something 'we all deny.' Yet, even in anthropocentric denial, this field 'links us' and transgresses boundaries.

The dialogic process of navigating tensions between dominant anthropocentric identity and counter ecocentric identity serves to complicate hegemonic dynamics of self-disciplining

described in the previous section. Understood this way, self-labeling paradoxically can serve both as a way to dismiss one's expressions and at the same time to introduce counter-hegemonic beliefs. At times, individuals may work to protect deeply felt ecocentric connection by preemptively labeling themselves (e.g., 'nature freak'), leaving societal anthropocentric boundaries intact while shielding their own ecocentric identities within the dominant structure. In this way, labeling oneself as a 'fanatic' or as 'loony' may function to at once discipline and preemptively claim and protect one's ecocentric identity, creating a somewhat safe space within which such an identity can exist in otherwise hostile anthropocentric territory.

At other times, self-labeling may serve as re-appropriation – in the way claiming the power to label oneself takes dismissive power away from others. Functions of re-appropriation similarly inform wider organized decisions to claim ownership of other derogatory, disciplining labels – for instance, claiming and repurposing labels such as 'queer.' In this way, one U.S. city's beekeeping association recently took on the official self-moniker 'Beeks' (a combination of bees and geeks), beating to the punch disciplining of members' fascination with, and deep ecocentric knowledge of, all things honey bee.⁷

Importantly, such boundary-transgressing labels usually must be self-claimed to be affirming. The force of labels such as 'dorcass' (for people who are 'crazy about the orcas') or 'orcaholic' (used, for example, by a whale researcher who described needing to regularly see wild orcas in order to get his 'orca fix'), for instance, is different depending on who is labeling you – someone else or yourself. In labeling others, aberrant and diagnosable transgressing of anthropocentric bounds is ascribed; in self-labeling, a group or individual engages dialogically with those bounds in order to, at least partially, move through them. The function of preemptively self-labeling, therefore, can vary – from self-disciplining in order to self-preserve within existing boundaries to re-appropriation in order to actively boundary cross.

Two young Earthwatch volunteers – one wearing a green rubber bracelet that said 'Treehugger,' the other a 'Nature Freak' T-shirt – worked through such dialogic tensions:

VOLUNTEER A: I feel connected to the whales.

TEMA TO VOLUNTEER B: Do you feel connected to them?

VOLUNTEER B: No.

VOLUNTEER A: Yes you do!

VOLUNTEER B: OK I do. I've loved them since I was three and I went to Sea World.

VOLUNTEER A: I've loved them since I saw *Free Willy*. The first time I saw it, I watched it six times. I just loved them. I watched it so many times that my parents took the tape away from me.

TEMA: Could you explain if you have the words what you mean by love?

VOLUNTEER A: Without sounding weird?

TEMA: Sounding weird is OK.

VOLUNTEER A: OK well I love them. Like I love my nephew the same way. OK I love my nephew more than them but you love them like they're a person. You kind of get connected to certain whales and you always want to see them. You love them. You just want to chill in their presence.

VOLUNTEER B: After a while it becomes who you are. I wouldn't be the same person without whales.

TEMA: How so?

VOLUNTEER B: Like I like to draw them. And passion.

TEMA: Passion?

VOLUNTEER B: Yeah passion. When I was younger when I had a hard test I'd just think someday I'll get to do what I want to do – be with the whales and study them. They inspire me. They just keep on pushing you.

The individuals navigate the tensions between, on one end, expressing deep feelings of inter-species connection and, at the other, sounding aberrant and denying connection. In self-labeling ('without sounding weird?') they signpost, receive responsive affirmation from their interlocutor (the researcher authority figure in this conversation) and silent affirmation from their peer, and are able to move beyond anthropocentric boundaries, creating an alternative space with each other to discuss love and talk about other animals as beloved agents (e.g., 'They just keep on pushing you').

Even when expressing ecocentrism with others who also identified as ecocentric, individuals often illustrated their knowledge of dominant anthropocentric constraints in, for example, noting they knew there were still others who would view them as aberrant. For instance, a medicinal herbalist teaching a plant-identification class in the U.S. Southwest told her students:

I'm sure my neighbors think I am insane but I love my dandelions. I pick them and do a dance and blow them across my yard helping them spread.

In preemptively marking the boundaries of what is considered sane in an anthropocentric culture, the teacher, steeped in plant knowledge (including the benefits of dandelions for land and body), creates acceptable space within which to show one's orientation differs from the norm. Similarly, in a U.S. landscape design class, a student talked about a 50-year-old sycamore tree in her yard.

I brought several tree doctors out but they all said it's at the end of its life. It's really heartbreaking. I feel like I'm losing a relative practically. Isn't that silly? But it's a trauma. I'm in a grief-stricken mode right now. When they took out the old apple tree in my yard I paced around like I was losing a pet. Like it was being euthanized.

Here, the marking and patrolling of anthropocentric identity boundary-crossing is brief ('Isn't that silly?') – the individual dialogically acknowledges the boundary while at the same time deftly crossing it. These dialogic identity moments, in addition to signposting boundary-crossing, also function as prompts to which others can affirm – and respond with – shared ecocentric identity. In these instances, supportive transformative identity spaces can open up in which ecocentric identity, at least momentarily, can be experienced collectively. For instance, a woman living in the U.S. Southwest, in the middle of a long-term drought, told a friend:

I'm super compulsive about water. I don't waste any. Like I even gather the water the cat didn't drink when I'm changing her water bowl and water the plants with it. I know it's compulsive.

FRIEND: Sounds more like conscious than compulsive.

In this interaction, the individual evokes the anthropocentric boundary-patrolling act of labeling herself as diagnosably aberrant ('I'm super compulsive'), yet the friend responds to

the dialogic prompt with ecocentric reframing and affirmation. In doing so, the friend, in a sense, undisciplines the interactive moment, replacing the negative aberrant frame that functions to reproduce a normative anthropocentric wastefulness standard with a positive ('conscious') frame that acknowledges and validates ecocentric knowledge and care.

Other forms of validating ecocentric identity include individuals encouraging others' expressions of unbridled ecocentric emotion. One island-based naturalist described her interaction with two people on shore who she described as 'middle class America kind of standard retired people on vacation':

One orca came in close and I said now there's Granny⁸ and the lady just started to cry and she totally got it. And her husband was embarrassed and sort of laughing and I just said hey that's what it's all about. Do it you know let yourself go. Because there's a lot of people who think because they're adults they have been taught as you grow up you can't express this emotion. And one thing that I have noticed and I know I've talked to some other people who have sort of experimented is if you stand out on the point and you're quiet other people are quiet too and if I stand out on the point and I start getting idiotic like I do get excited and hooting and hollering and jumping up and down other people will too. So you sort of give them permission to let that inner kid out or the joy out as opposed to all that is supposed to be the way they're supposed to act in life.

The naturalist pinpoints reactions to what is considered unacceptable behavior ('her husband was embarrassed and sort of laughing') and describes normative ecocultural behavior, or 'the way they're supposed to act in life,' as something that is learned ('they have been taught as you grow up you can't express this emotion'), adroitly mapping the boundaries of anthropocentric identity. At the same time, through affirming others' ecocentric expressions ('hey that's what it's all about'), freeing them from constraints ('do it you know let yourself go'), and expressing her own ecocentric identity in loud, emotive, and public ways, she both validates others' expressions and opens up transformative identity spaces ('you sort of give them permission'). In transgressing anthropocentric identity boundaries and cultivating forms of ecocentric identity in themselves and others, individuals displayed a range of boundary-crossing styles that dialogically engaged the borders of normative anthropocentric identity and, at the same time, validated their own and others venturing beyond those boundaries.

Cultivating ecocentric identity: Fearlessly being 'out there'

Paradoxically, in this global moment, knowledge of vast anthropogenic effects vie with largely uncurbed anthropocentric identities. Such tensions fight it out in our interpersonal interactions. In this contradictory moment, ecocentric identities serve to widen the circle of relation and compassion, yet anthropocentric identities assert supremacy and dictate common sense. The dynamics illustrated in this chapter in multiple Western/ized settings allow us to begin to chart normative anthropocentric identity boundaries, to identify the patrolling of others and selves at those boundaries, and to illuminate successful boundary-crossings into ecocentric identity.

Through observing largely invisible and unproblematized everyday behavioral controls on ecocentric expressions, we see how such controls can be implicit or overt and can present themselves externally and internally. The act of othering ecocentric identities through overt gestures of ridiculing or labeling function to categorize and control, corraling boundary-transgressors

back into what is considered acceptable territory within dominant Western/ized ecoculture. By the same token, patrols stemming from within – via self-labeling, self-censoring, and marking boundary-crossings – serve to redraw boundaries around one’s self and even to pathologize ecocentricity. Some, however, disarm the patrol and boldly transgress the boundaries of anthropocentricity.

This study invites an existential question: How can ecocultural transformation happen within such boundedness? The identity negotiations under study are embedded in, uphold, and push up against wider ecocultural structural contexts, such as profit-driven neoliberal economies kept alive at all costs, commodified ways of being, legal systems blind to ecological embeddedness, education systems discounting more-than-human sources of knowledge, and governments enraptured by extractive transnational conglomerate corporations. Vying with enduring and reawakened ecocentric knowledge, too, are cynicism, numbing fear, guilt, and doomism about our species’s biospheric disruption.

Certainly, one resourceful and regenerative role communication can serve is as a discernable map from which one can chart reproductions of anthropocentrism and disciplinings of ecocentrism and understand ways hegemonic ecocultural identity boundaries are patrolled, contested, and – most importantly – effectively transgressed. I close this chapter by discussing the political and practical implications of understanding dominant anthropocentric ecocultural identity as both intensely monitored and under contestation. I then explore possible directions for fostering transformative spaces for Western/ized ecocultural identities to invoke more regenerative and replenishing ways of being and relating.

Political implications

The disciplining of identity is personal and political. Dynamics seen in this study’s interpersonal disciplining also can be observed in politicians’ strategic communication for large-scale structural and economic gain. Instances of labeling and dismissing ecocentric identity as ridiculous, for instance, are used to valorize anthropocentric identity in today’s vitriolic right-wing governmental discourse and, at the same time, to secure political power and corporate gain at vast ecological and cultural expense. In a recent news article about the U.S. Trump administration’s attempts to remove environmental protections from several national monuments, an approving Utah Republican state representative, whose stance was that previous administrations’ protections had unfairly constrained drilling, mining, and grazing in his state, is quoted as saying:

When you turn the management over to the tree-huggers, the bird and bunny lovers and the rock lickers, you turn your heritage over.

(Turkewitz & Friedman, 2018)

Such politically expedient identity disciplining has related intended effects on all levels of structural decision-making and policy.

Even with short-term greed and self-interest as drivers, however, in many cases the more-than-human world is becoming far harder to ignore. For example, the Republican mayor of Miami, Florida, a city experiencing super hurricanes and rising sea levels, recently told journalists, that, despite many of his party colleagues’ wariness of their identities being called into question by being ‘called crazy or liberals’ if they talked about the climate, voters had grown sharply aware of risks they face through their own visceral experiences of climate disruption:

I don't think my statements are going to change the way the administration thinks or the governor thinks, but let me tell you, people are afraid. People are understanding there is a new normal now.

(Burns, 2017)

In charting a political way forward – from massive climate disruption driven by wealth and power in the hands of a few to an equitable and regenerative climate-stable future – Klein (2014), while not using identity terminology directly, argues not only for structural but also cultural shifts:

Fundamentally, the task is to articulate not just an alternative set of policy proposals, but an alternative worldview to rival the one at the heart of the ecological crisis – embedded in interdependence rather than hyperindividualism, reciprocity rather than dominance, and cooperation rather than hierarchy.

(p. 7)

Indeed, as more people directly experience anthropogenic climate disruption and other forms of Earth destruction – and more participate in actively trying to transform both personal and structural practices – active boundary-crossing into ecocentric identity realms may be inevitable. Such a transformation will inform policy and election outcomes. In order to change widespread worldviews, however, one could argue that one must be able to do so in everyday interaction.

Practical implications

The everyday communicative spaces from which my data emerge are not spaces of overt exploitation or resource-extraction where one might expect a strict policing of anthropocentric identity boundaries. Nor are they overtly ecocentric spaces wherein activists or change makers are asserting or performing ecocentric identities for one another or a wider audience. Rather, they range from everyday places (backyards, classrooms, sidewalks) to sought-out places of wild proximity – spaces where one might expect looser constraints. What this study exhibits is the everyday patrolling of anthropocentric identity boundaries tangible in one's heightened anticipation of how others might judge even the most mundane ecocentric expressions, such as stopping to smell flowers, lie down on the grass, or save a worm. With each decision to do or not do such seemingly small more-than-human acts, one crosses an invisible but visceral ecocultural borderline.

As this chapter shows, in a wide range of Western/ized spaces, individuals sense consequences attached to transgressing the boundaries of anthropocentric identity. In presenting this work at a scholarly conference, one audience member spoke of ways this study rang true to his experience of becoming a vegetarian, and the constant disciplining he faced when making, and now living, his ecocentric choice.⁹ In contrast, he remarked, meat-eaters who questioned or ridiculed him, never felt it necessary to question or explain themselves – those who identify with the dominant discourse are not called upon to defend their stance. There are, of course, far fiercer consequences to boundary-crossing into ecocentric identity, including assassination in countries ranging from the Philippines to Brazil. Globally, 2017 saw those patrolling and profiting from the boundaries of anthropocentric identity kill 207 environmental activists (Zachos, 2018).

Less stark disciplining of ecocentric identity happens even in those spaces ostensibly most dedicated to questioning dominant paradigms. For instance, two U.S. graduate students discussed being in their critical methods course the first day of class and being asked to introduce themselves by describing their identities. They were comfortable identifying as feminists – and outlining their racial, gender, sexuality, socio-economic, and able-bodied identities – yet they also wanted to say environmentalists. They stayed silent, however, anticipating they would be ridiculed or labeled by the professor and fellow students.

Another U.S. graduate student described feeling a need to ‘tone down’ her ecocentric identity in her courses and in her everyday life – and a distinct mix of discomfort and excitement when she not only was allowed but encouraged to identify as ecocentric in the boundary-crossing space of an ecoculturally focused class. As she gave herself permission to express her ecocentric identity with others in that space, she also grew dismayed by the abundance of basic ecological information she did not know. Up to that point, she had been focused on keeping herself within anthropocentric boundaries and, as a result, had developed blind spots to her ecological relations. She described being distressed when she became aware that she did not know basic information she cared deeply about, such as the origin source of her drinking water, the type of fossil fuel that powered her electricity, the phase of the moon – information deemed irrelevant within the realm of anthropocentrism.

Undiscipline and rewild ecocultural identity

As we undiscipline the anthropocentric ecocultural self, we have the opportunity to rewild the self. In rewilding, we can embrace identities rooted in interdependency, reciprocity, response-ability, regeneration, and also *regenerosity*, which I define as the circular mutual gifting and nourishing integral to our ecosystems if not our current modes of identification. Ryan (2011) argues for developing research-informed motivational frameworks for ecocentric speaking out and, in the process, overcoming fears related to doing so. In closing, I outline four interrelated moves to support such speaking out and transforming ecocultural identities while acknowledging the daily hegemonic forces that must be persistently traversed and transgressed in order to do so.

Open to vulnerability

I pick up a thin wriggling worm folded onto itself on a hot U.S. Southwest desert campus sidewalk and gently place it on a patch of moist shaded soil. The student I am walking with says in a snide tone: ‘Saving a life, huh?’

The student’s hardened response took me by surprise. As the earthworm found a way back into the safety of the soil, the chastening force of his comment settled onto us and silence ensued. In disciplining ourselves and others to anthropocentric stances, we also effectively close off senses of openness to one another. Macy and Brown (1998) argue for what they term ‘a life-sustaining society,’ contending that, in order for Westerners to reconnect with one another and the more-than-human world, we must recognize and experience the closely related grief we feel for all vulnerable species, peoples, bioregions, and more-than-human processes that industrialization and hyperconsumerism have assailed or destroyed. In interrelating deeply – and providing a space for despair and grieving – we embrace what Macy and Brown identify as our true sacred nature and, therefore, are able to undertake necessary shifts in identification. Doing so opens space not only for ecocentrically expressing but also

for deep listening with the more-than-human world. Alaimo (2009) argues it is in fully being in conversation with our own interrelated ecological vulnerability that a new and necessary environmental ethic can be forged – an ethic steeped in inextricable ecocentric transcorporeality.

Acknowledge many forms of knowledge

Diverse bioregion, plant, and animal knowledges play a part in building a foundation from which to experience and assert ecocentric identity. These knowledges do not have to be attached to advanced academic degrees. Instead, or in addition, they can be grounded in diverse relational knowledges, including traditional ecological knowing (from which we all descend, more or less long ago), spiritual knowing (ranging from individual to organized), and embodied knowing (that worms will die if stepped on, that dandelions are good for the land and body, that apples grow on trees).

While much of the world has left behind mutualist ways of knowing for dualist ways (often under protest and duress), enduring mutualist ways of knowing offer ways forward to inhabitable and reciprocally thriving futures (Alhinai & Milstein, 2020; Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020; Regassa Debelo et al., 2017). Similarly, scientific knowledge can embrace relational knowledges. In my long-term whale tourism study, I often have based my work at the University of Washington's island invertebrate laboratory field school. Hanging in the computer lab has been a quote by Albert Einstein. Established and budding marine scientists can look up from their screens and read the quote while listening to the nearby burbling tanks of star fish and anemones:

The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of true science.

The quote is superimposed upon an artist's rendering of human hands outstretched in the water and covered with sea creatures. On the fingers are barnacles and on the palms are starfish, urchins, moonsnails, clams, and chitons. The poster serves as a reminder that our ethical sensibilities are tied to diverse forms of knowledge, and our diverse knowledges emerge from our interconnections, our ecocultural relations and sensibilities.

Break the bonds

Call foul. Flip the script. *Doggedly refuse to be disciplined.* One whale advocate during an interview, for example, boldly dismissed as a hoax accusations of anthropomorphism, and at the same time drew attention to the identity-boundary disciplining function of such claims:

Of course anthropomorphism exists. Because we are animals. They are animals. We are like each other. I've always thought of the accusation of anthropomorphism like medieval religion. Accusing someone of it is a fundamentalist trick. A hoax that gives us authority over nature. It has some merit but it's overrated.

Sweeping accusations of anthropomorphism, like other forms of anthropocentric boundary patrolling, give the accuser authority over the individual, dismissing their senses of more-than-human emotion, intention, and experience. By calling foul, one refuses to play by the dominant rules, refuses to stick within the bounds. Instead, by flipping the script, one stays

on one's toes and is always ready to consciously take part in the dance – the perpetual renegotiating of hegemonic norms of acceptability – and, in the process, to relocate culture (Milstein & Pulos, 2015).

In Klein's book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* – which is a testament to breaking through boundaries, as well as decidedly ecocentric – she quotes Alexis Bonogofsky, a 33-year-old goat ranger who helped stop oil companies from transporting big rigs through southeastern Montana. Bonogofsky begins with a dialogic acknowledgement ('it sounds ridiculous') of anthropocentric boundaries, then transgresses those boundaries to describe a shared expansive sense of ecocentric identity that will, she asserts, 'save' the place she cares so deeply about:

It sounds ridiculous but there's this one spot where I can sit on the sandstone rock and you know that the mule deer are coming up and migrating through, you just watch these huge herds come through, and you know that they've been doing that for thousands and thousands of years. And you sit there and you feel connected to that. And sometimes it's almost like you can feel the earth breath... That connection to this place and the love that people have for it, that's what Arch Coal doesn't get. They underestimate that. They don't understand it so they disregard it. And that's what in the end will save that place. It's not hatred of the coal companies, or anger, but love will save that place.

(Klein, 2015, pp. 342–343)

Change with others

Transgressing hegemonic boundaries and embracing counter identities is more possible – and often more fun – when one has the opportunity to do so with others. Such systems of support enable individual and collective ecocultural mobility. Anderson (2007) describes these opportunities spatially as 'encounter spaces,' in which restorative ways of living and identifying can be experienced collectively. *Seek, co-create, and enjoy such transformative identity spaces.*

For academics, our classes are ready at hand to serve this transformative encounter function (Milstein et al., 2017). Graduate students, in one instance, discussed a newly shared sense of ecocentric identity that emerged in the process of being on an ecoculturally focused class field study together:

STUDENT 1: Did any of you feel this from our field study – that perhaps self-change was mediated by the people around you being on board?

STUDENT 2: Yes!

STUDENT 3: When we were at the Earthship and there was so little time to take it all in I realized that our communal awe inspired inspecting of the plants and mushrooms and was not only contagious (and exponentially increased the experience) but also allowed me as an individual to take in more information than if I had been there alone because I didn't know the plants and didn't have time to look at each one and most likely would not have spontaneously engaged in interaction with the plants. Most likely because I would have thought it was 'not allowed.' It was a powerful reminder of what being in a community means and also how one's personal potential is exponentially increased when interacting with many like-minded others. I don't find those moments very often. I'd say our field trip left an imprint in my mind, like a new blueprint.

Through being with a group of people who are ‘on board,’ an ecocentric ‘communal awe’ was ‘contagious’ and brought into collective experience. The students connect being in a community of like-minded people with breaking through boundaries one has internalized (‘I would have thought it was “not allowed”’), exponentially increasing one’s ‘personal potential,’ gaining ‘a new blueprint,’ and experiencing ‘self-change.’

Ecocentric individuals, otherwise constantly inundated by anthropocentric disciplining, can be buoyed by interacting with others – or having role models – who boldly transgress hegemonic identity boundaries. A U.S. teacher of telepathic interspecies communication¹⁰ discussed her students’ fears of rejection and the importance of reaching out to find a supportive community:

I still find a lot of my students are reluctant to tell people that that’s what they’re practicing or trying to learn and I just keep encouraging them, Tell them tell them because there are so many people walking around going I have no one I can talk to about this and they’re sitting right with people that I know they can talk to about this. They’re all so afraid of people thinking they’re strange or not normal. It’s sad. It’s sad because this is our birthright to be able to communicate with other species other beings. They all do it and we can do it too. And it’s really nice. I mean I have learned so much. My feelings about the world and the afterlife and everything has changed so much by talking to animals because I’ve seen all these different perspectives on things now and so I feel much more at home in the world and less fearful.

In overcoming fears and changing with others, one engages the support system not only of those who one otherwise would not know might feel and identify similarly but also of an expanded lifescape that provides more forms of knowledge and connections for fortifying ecocentric identity and feeling ‘much more at home in the world and less fearful.’

A U.S. graduate student introduced above as describing her feelings for plants (‘I know this sounds kind of out there’) later sought out a supportive and knowledge-amassing transformative identity space through an independent study on plant–human relations. In her study, she found fertile ground for her ecocentric identity to take root and gain legitimacy. She reflected on this transformation:

Taking the time to learn the names and habits and symbiotic relationships of botany around me has changed this because now when I wander through botanic neighborhoods, I can tell the gentrifying force of Russian olives that took over where yerba mansa used to live. I can feel the give-and-take of rotted piñon stumps and their bright fungi guests and the yarrow emanates a warm healing presence to which I feel like responding Well hello! I know that you would staunch my bleeding if I was wounded and appreciate that kind of character in a plant ally. You’re a very nice friend to have and I value our relationship. I feel that all living things have a telos and a personality or a plantanality and it’s so comforting to take the time to know my neighbors as I’m sure they knew me before I was ever aware of their sparkling presence.

Such spaces – which can be fostered among friends, co-workers, families, strangers – provide momentary flux. These spaces of movement are not permanent, but instead are a break from predominant anthropocentric bounded regimes of experience, providing opportunities to occupy different modes of meaning that can inform different ways of being.

In closing and opening

This chapter illustrates ways subtle and not-so-subtle everyday processes of patrolling and disciplining ecocultural identity are rooted in pervasive dominant discourses. These discourses, too, inform – and are deeply seated in – wider anthropocentric structures of Western/ized societies. By interrogating everyday interaction in a range of settings – from the wild to the routine – I map ways the boundaries of dominant anthropocentric identity are interpersonally and intrapersonally drawn, and ways counter-discourses of ecocentric identity likewise are corralled, constrained, or otherwise silenced. In examining patterns of disciplining others and oneself, ways anthropocentric identity is normatively maintained become visible.

In contexts of wider structural constraints and processes, identity and wider society are constituted in such everyday interactions. Yet, as anthropocentric boundaries are set and reset via interaction and inaction, alternatives inevitably arise. Such boundary-crossing challenges – or refusals to play by anthropocentric rules – castoff dualistic constraints and instead embrace a replenishing mutualism and consubstantiality (Regassa Debelo et al., 2017; Sowards, 2006). Each such act of rewilding identity has the power of immediacy, an embodied ecocentricity potentially felt and performed in ways that have practical and political implications at a time when such earthly relational replenishment is of essence. To that end, this chapter also contributes a metaphorical set of boundary-crossing tools – a mindfulness of words as wire-cutters, of lexicon as ladders – that may be employed to boundary cross in everyday interactions in ways that can have widespread reverberations. The first step is simply an observational awareness of ways everyday communication and self- and other-correction reproduce and rebuild – or, through tentative and bold rewilding, neatly hurdle – those boundaries that keep us anthropocentrically removed from our more-than-human lifescape.

Notes

- 1 Blockadia refers to locals and activists organizing to block the incursions of fossil-fuel extracting, transporting, and combusting corporations. The term was first used by those doing the blocking, then popularized by Naomi Klein (2015), to refer to the transnational informal network of organized resistance arising in localized communities and places. See the interactive *Environmental Justice Atlas* – ‘Blockadia’: <https://ejatlas.org/featured/blockadia>.
- 2 Orcas, or killer whales, are scientifically classified as dolphins. However, I employ the common popular usage of ‘whale’ for orcas to reflect participant discourse.
- 3 A note here on the dynamic nature of ecocultural identity and practices – just a decade later, as I write this chapter, these trees not only are harvested by many but also have been adopted and protected by organized community volunteers who hang signs about their activities, protect the trees, and distribute the apples.
- 4 Such flippant use of derogatory mental illness terms is problematic in the case of ecocentric identity shaming and in the attendant shaming of people living with actual mental illness. Here, again, we see the parallel traits of othering across categories (Plumwood, 1997), as well as parallel disciplining functions.
- 5 While beyond the scope of this chapter, parallels among androcentric, ethnocentric, and anthropocentric disciplining are ever-present and interrelated (Plumwood, 1997) – and such moments often are marked by gendered or racialized terms such as ‘woo woo’ that connote softness, weakness, irrationality. For instance, the ‘woo woo’ dismissal of care based on connection has parallels in gender and sports. Carr (2017), in his work on skateboarding, looks at a patriarchal ‘communicative code’ that for female skaters presents a strong barrier to skating among men, who dominate skateparks. A long-time skater and gender-inclusive skate camp organizer, described how she subverted the male-dominated space through her style of teaching and encouraging the girls in her camp: ‘Like “oh, you got hurt? Take a break. Listen to your body.” And I will say all of those woo-woo things. And all of these guys will hear it and someone will make fun of us for it. But it puts a wedge into the harshness of skate culture’ (p. 29).

- 6 The term ‘witch hunt’ also reflects and informs violent othering entanglements of anthropocentrism and androcentrism, with ‘hunt’ representing the pursuit and killing of othered beings, in this case largely women (those, in North America and Europe, predominantly identified as witches) who had, or were said to have, deep earthly knowledges and relations.
- 7 It’s important to note there are certain kinds of acceptable more-than-human-connection zones within anthropocentric identity. As one colleague pointed out, one can say, ‘I love dogs’ or ‘I love my garden’ without qualifying, or self-disciplining, those statements. It’s in looking at these acceptable zones where one can chart finer lines on the map of identity acceptability. For instance, with dogs and gardens, domestication and mastery principles still reign, leaving anthropocentrism intact even while expressing emotive connection with other species.
- 8 Granny, who died in 2016, was the 100+-year-old matriarch leader of the Southern Resident Killer Whales J pod.
- 9 This is as good a place as any to acknowledge the informal and more formal feedback of colleagues on various iterations of this piece, many of whom also shared reflections from their own experiences and observations that helped further confirm the international prevalence of this patrolling process in Western/ized spaces. Specific thanks to members of the Environment & Society Group Speakeasy at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. In addition, some of the research pulled from in this study took place while serving as a Fulbright senior scholar in New Zealand and while serving as a visiting fellow at the University of Tasmania in Australia – many thanks to both of these organizations for their support.
- 10 Openness to, or disbelief in, interspecies communication is cultural. Interspecies telepathy, for instance, comes up somewhat regularly in my long-term whale tourism case study site. One local whale advocate said he had scientific cynicism about telepathy with whales but had several friends who believed whales are telepathic. When he was working with belugas in Russia, he said the Russian scientists had the head telepath from the Moscow police force serve as a key part of the whale research. ‘The Russians integrate telepathy into their whale research. They don’t just believe in it, they take it as a matter of fact.’ He described the research team – from the highly respected Shirshov Institute of Oceanology – also playing movies for belugas under the water. While he was there, he said, they played *Casper the Friendly Ghost*.

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Borderland ecocultural identities

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The El Paso, Texas–Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua region at the United States–Mexico border is the largest bi-national metropolitan area in the Western hemisphere. Sitting on the banks of the Río Grande (in Mexico, known as Río Bravo del Norte), the border region is a unique bioregional amalgamation of distinct ecocultural forces wherein languages and populations intermingle in complex ways. Residents of this region must frequently straddle two or more distinct languages, nation-states, and cultures in order to make sense of their identities. Moreover, the bustling cityscape of the Paso del Norte region is also located in the heart of the Chihuahuan Desert. The ecocultural significance of a desert landscape and river, combined with a large number of border dwellers, walls, canals, plants, and non-human animals, highlights the centrality of metaphorical and literal boundaries that constrain and enable movements and beings. In this essay, we use Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of the *nepantlera*, first articulated in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), to theorize the complexities of ecocultural identity in a landscape fraught with numerous, conflicting dualistic tensions – U.S./Mexico, English/Spanish, city/desert, culture/nature, human/more-than-human, straight/queer, and citizen/non-citizen. To be certain, the boundaries of these ecocultural identities are patrolled and policed (both literally and symbolically¹), yet the border provides a unique lens for understanding how seemingly oppositional tensions can conflict and converge in order to (re)create a transformational praxis that we argue is uniquely grounded in ecocultural identities produced in bordered contexts.

We take up Anzaldúa’s concept of the *nepantlera* to begin theorizing ecocultural identity in the borderland. According to Anzaldúa (2015), *nepantla* is ‘a psychological liminal space between the way things had been and an unknown future. *Nepantla* is the space in-between, the locus and sign of transition’ (p. 17). *Nepantleras*, then, are figures who live between and across the borders of multiple worlds and work to negotiate meaning in order to provide ‘perspective[s] from the cracks’ (p. 245). Ecocultural identities for border residents, crossers, inhabitants – human and more-than-human – are constituted and complicated by a variety of tensions that must be negotiated. Our analytic goal is thus to articulate environmental *nepantlisma* as a ‘geography of self’ that simultaneously constrains and enables possible modes of thought and practice. As Anzaldúa (2015) argues:

The geography of our identity is vast, has many nations. Where you end and the world begins is not easy to distinguish. Like a river flooding its bank, cutting a new channel that winds in a new direction, we escape our skin, our present identity and forge a new one.

(p. 244)

Anzaldúa's (2000) conceptualization of geography of the self is a way to understand identity through the layering, stacking, and clustering of selves and the communities (human and more-than-human) to which we belong. Geography of the self has traditionally been used to describe oppositional tensions brought forth by the co-existence 'of different cities or countries who stand at the threshold of numerous mundos [worlds]' (Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 255), and we extend this idea to human nature contexts (Milstein, 2011). In doing so, we complicate the culture-nature dualism by articulating how identities are imbricated simultaneously by nature and culture, albeit in ways that are sometimes conflicted and tensional.

In probing the potential of Anzaldúa's concept of the *nepantlera* to make sense of ecocultural identity, we focus primarily on the Río Grande, which stretches from southern Colorado to the Gulf of Mexico. As both a natural and symbolic resource, the Río Grande is an apt metaphor for understanding ecocultural identity within the context of the border. The river is a distinctive regional feature with a large presence that defines both biological livelihood and ecocultural identity along its banks. The Río Grande watershed affects natural vegetation, agriculture, and human and more-than-human migratory patterns. More importantly, however, the river itself is a site of ecocultural contestation whose flows have been constrained to demarcate clear boundaries between the United States and Mexico.

The Río Grande is not only an important marker – it is central to contextualizing and historicizing how ecocultural identity unfolds in the borderland. In focusing on the Río Grande, our argument is that the river highlights the numerous tensions and paradoxes that are central to *nepantlisma*. Our own subject positions and ecocultural identities – as border dwellers, as bilingual, as Latinx, as *mestizx*,² as colonized – color this analysis by connecting our lived experiences with Anzaldúa's oeuvre. Charting ecocultural identity in the borderlands, thus, is an *ecotestimonio* wherein 'geography is the witness, and the voices collected upon its surface are varied' (Driver, 2012, pp. 181–182). This *ecotestimonio* links our material reality and identifications with the politically fraught discourses that enable and constrain life in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands.

We take a cartographic approach that traces the flow of the river from north to south to show how stable meanings and conceptions of ecocultural identity are troubled by a confluence of factors at various stopping points along the river: *alluvial diffusions* and land disputes, border signage as *resistance*, and *resilience* despite militarization. Following a brief explication of Anzaldúa's notion of *nepantlisma*, we focus on configurations of meaning along the Río Grande that highlight the potential of borderland theory for disrupting essentializing notions of identity that have traditionally reinforced the dominant Western nature/culture dualism. Ultimately, we argue that *nepantlisma* is an ecocultural identity characterized in part by *alluvial diffusions*, by which we mean both the physical and metaphorical flows of water and sediment that occur following floods and changing river patterns. We use this term throughout our analysis both literally and metaphorically to denote ways in which *nepantleras* position themselves as resilient and resistant within and against shifting environmental, political, and ecocultural contexts. *Nepantlisma* is also an ecocultural identity marked by *resistance* (as evidenced through border graffiti, for example) and *resilience* in how we respond to forces of border militarization. We unpack these concepts of diffusion, resistance, and resilience in the rest of this chapter after first discussing borderland theory and its connection to ecocultural identity.

Borderland theory and ecocultural identity

Borders are dividing lines, the resulting vague and undetermined spaces that develop around those lines, and the consciousness that emerges in those spaces (Anzaldúa, 1987). Our essay is situated on the Mexico/U.S. border and, while this space contains a militarized ever-building wall of division, the border is much more than a physical barrier. The United States' El Paso, Texas, and Mexico's Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, make up a borderland community, influenced by simultaneous desires for unity and calls for division by forces inside and outside the region. In addition to the spaces created by physical borders, Anzaldúa (1987) explains that borderlands

are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.

(p. 19)

El Paso and Ciudad Juárez are also situated within the psychological and sociocultural borders Anzaldúa describes, as the people who move through this space daily navigate the border, multiple languages and cultures, and dialectical tensions between human and more-than-human worlds (Dickinson, 2014; Holmes, 2016; Milstein, 2009; Milstein & Dickinson, 2012; Milstein et al., 2019). For example, the militarization of the border has created a dialectical tension between human interdependence with the Río Grande and the human desire for dominance and control over the river as a bordering structure, which we go into further below.

People who exist in borderlands find themselves in a state of *nepantla*, a Nahuatl word for 'in-between space' that Anzaldúa (2015) offers for making sense of 'el lugar entre medio' (p. 28) or 'the place in the middle' (Mora, 1993, p. 5). As *nepantleras* move within and across binary categorizations in their lived experiences, they are presented with, and expected to choose from, multiple, competing, and contradictory labels of otherness (Anzaldúa, 2015). Because of the complexity involved in creating a sense of identity while living in an in-between space, *nepantla* identities are stacked and multilayered. Moreover, *nepantla* identities span time and space, and 'geographies of selves made up of diverse, bordering, and overlapping "countries"' (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 69).

As *nepantleras*, we draw from *el cenote*, a Spanish term for sinkhole, which Anzaldúa (2015) suggests forms a well of ancestral knowledge created by the waters of many rivers. As the streams of these rivers flow upward, 'they co-mingle to create meaning, customs, and practices that spread and are "borrowed" from and by other cultures through diffusion' (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 88). For *nepantleras*, then, the construction of culture involves the creation of 'a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and the planet' (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 103). The environments that we interact with and depend on, therefore, become parts of our geographies of selves, as they are woven into our identities (Anzaldúa, 2015). In turn, our identities change as our environments do (Steele, 2008). As Anzaldúa (2015) explains, 'the places where I've lived have had an impact on my psyche, left a mark on every cell in my body' (p. 68). *Nepantlisma* as an ecocultural identity draws from the embodied knowledge of the borderlands – physical, place-based, psychological – engendered by human and more-than-human connections to natural and built environments.

This geography of the self as articulated through *nepantla* is also a political stance. Blackwell (2010) explains this through what she calls 'nepantla strategies,' which are

based on understanding how power operates in extremely restricted spaces and on adapting tactics that move in and between those confinements. To open new possibilities,

nepantla strategies include differential modes of consciousness, hybrid political discourses, and the ability to move and shift between sites of struggle and to traffic meanings and knowledge from one context to another to create new cultural narratives of gender and empowerment.

(p. 15)

To illustrate, Blackwell interviewed members of the community organizing group, Líderes Campesinas, and found these female community leaders engaged in nepantla strategies through the creation of ‘transnational subjectivities,’ which in turn led to new forms of self-empowerment as they worked to address working conditions, pesticide exposure, health, education, and globalized agricultural industries. Their community work also moved within and beyond the workplace and family life, revealing creative resistive movements and an understanding of complex racialized and gendered hegemonies. These women, based in California, illustrate how the border transcends its physical location and inhabits border-scattered people’s identities, minds, actions, and activisms.

Living in the in-between space means existing within multiple, often contradictory, cultures, languages, and worldviews, and, while it is not always comfortable to live in this space of contradictions, it comes with ‘certain joys’ as ‘dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened’ (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 19). Nepantleras taking up this work of developing Mestiza consciousness, therefore, have much to teach us, and we can learn by examining the ecocultural identities and strategies employed by writers, artists, and activists living in border regions (Holmes, 2016). Nepantleras not only develop a tolerance for the ambiguity and contradiction that surrounds them, they are able to creatively turn ambivalence into a transformative state of consciousness, making nepantla a consciousness with resistant and activist potential, such as in the case of the Líderes Campesinas. This means that, while nepantleras still must navigate the dominant Western human/nature dialectical tension that often leads ‘humans to construct nature as *other*’ (Milstein & Dickinson, 2012, p. 512), they possess the potential for a resistant ecocultural identity grounded in environmental nepantlisma. Mora (1993) explains, for example, how the nepantlera comes to understand the desert:

how normal the starkness is when we live in it and know no other landscape... We can learn from the desert, from the butterflies and snakes around us, how vulnerable a creature is in transition. We can offer one another strength and solace, protection from the harsh elements, from the painful cold of sexism, racism, ageism, elitism; faith [and] the space for exploration.

(p. 53)

While Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of nepantla draws heavily on her own co-constructed relationship with the more-than-human world, other scholarly uses of this concept tend not to examine ecocultural identities, but instead center solely on the human or social sphere. By focusing specifically on ecocultural nepantlisma, then, we explore how borders not only have impacted the identities of nepantleras in terms of language and nationality, etc., but how border structures are environmentally disruptive in such a way that human and more-than-human actors have co-constructed identities characterized by alluvial diffusions and strategies of resilience and resistance to these imposed human-made boundaries.

In what follows, we trace the geography of the Río Grande from Colorado to the El Paso, Texas-Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua region to examine the porousness and flexibility of ecocultural identity in the borderlands. Animating the Río Grande as a metaphor for ecocultural

identity highlights the salience of nepantlisma as a way of deconstructing the rigidity of the nature/culture dualism, as well as that of other dualisms. We mark three stopping points along the Río Grande to reflect upon ways ecocultural identity shapes and is shaped by the complex constellation of discourses and ecosystems along the U.S.–Mexico border. These stopping points are defined in the following sections through nepantlera orientations in alluvial diffusion of border crossing, resistance to constraining aspects of the border, and resilience through survival strategies.

Chamizal: The Río Grande as alluvial diffusion

After the U.S.–Mexico war ended in 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo defined the U.S.–Mexico border as the deepest part or natural channel of the Río Grande/Río Bravo. However, through much of the nineteenth century, Rocky Mountain snowmelt caused spring floods that often changed the course of the river for extended periods of time. Two interesting cases in the El Paso, Texas–Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua region illustrate how the river’s deepest waters literally moved people back and forth across the international border. For example, the Chamizal Tract, a 385-acre parcel of land, was originally on the south bank of the Río Grande in Ciudad Juárez (at the time, known as El Paso del Norte, renamed in 1888 in honor of the Mexican president Benito Juárez). Spring floods in 1864 contributed to the moving river boundary, which eventually was ‘relocated’ by the river’s fluctuating flow entirely to the U.S. side of the river (National Park Service, 2018b). Flooding from the river’s changing course affected Córdova Island, another tract of land that was a peninsula on the Mexican side of the river, which eventually was ‘relocated’ to the U.S. side when an artificial river cut was built by the U.S. government even though the land was still owned by Mexico. Córdova Island was a site for immigration and illegal trade in the first half of the twentieth century, causing further disputes between the Mexican and U.S. governments as well as their citizens in the region. These two land tracts were not minor, irrelevant issues; the Chamizal Tract, for example, had 5,600 U.S. citizens by 1960, which increased the importance of addressing the location of the border and ownership of the land (National Park Service, 2018c). The Córdova Island area now is known as the Chamizal National Memorial as established after the Chamizal Convention of 1963, in which the U.S. and Mexican governments finally resolved the century–old dispute about the border’s location. The Chamizal Tract was returned to Mexico, and the 5,600 U.S. residents had to move and many had to find new jobs, schools, churches, and friends, although the U.S. government did provide minimal financial assistance to the displaced.

To prevent further disputes, the river was cemented into place along the heavily populated border area in El Paso–Ciudad Juárez. The cementing also had the effect of disciplining the unruliness of the river itself, and the people living in the region, by limiting movement of humans and non-human animals, the ways in which plants grow, and even how seeds are dispersed. At the same time, the Convention also helped improve diplomatic relations between Mexico and the United States at a particularly crucial time during the Cold War. The Chamizal National Memorial was established on both sides of the border; today, the cemented river and the border freeways on both sides separate the two parks, but both areas commemorate the final resolution of long disputed territory (National Park Service, 2018a).

The ecological and cultural impact of a cemented river, however, preceded by the damming of the river farther north in New Mexico have created long lasting effects on ecocultural identities through the consequences of taming the river. Upstream northwest, New Mexico’s Elephant Butte Dam, completed in 1916, controls the flow of the river to prevent the flooding of years prior and to promote agricultural output through regulation of water resources. The

Río Grande's water volume changes substantially through the seasons when water is released from the dam as needed. Holmes (2016) also notes that 'Irrigation and a shift from ranching to industrial farming is drying up the Río Grande and the Colorado River and threatens acequia water-management systems³ that have long sustained communities in the Southwest' (p. 36). Shifting agricultural practices have changed the river and people's relationship to the river. The presence and absence of water at any given time also changes the ecology of the river, which sometimes is a dry riverbed and at other times a full flowing river with greenery on both banks. The river eventually enters the official designated location of the U.S.–Mexico border and the cemented portion through the cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez. It continues to flow as the physical center of the U.S.–Mexico border for hundreds of miles to the Gulf Coast on the other side of Texas/Mexico.

The controlled stoppage and flow of water manifests in the ecocultural psyche of border dwellers. The ways in which the nineteenth-century spring floods reshaped the river's flow and subsequently the border's location as well as twentieth-century efforts to concretize the river's path are exemplified through the remnants of alluvial diffusion, or the way in which the river's water and sedimentation disperses and recedes over land during and after a flood. The area of the river in New Mexico, just before the river begins to define the U.S.–Mexico border throughout the state of Texas, contains numerous trails for biking, walking, and hiking. At different times of the year, this area is experienced in different ways depending on alluvial diffusions and the amount of water flow. For example, when the river is dry, off-road vehicles, horses, and hikers use the riverbed as a trail. When the river is flowing more heavily, humans play along the banks, while non-human animals such as birds, coyotes, and desert cottontail rabbits, change their migratory patterns because they cannot physically move back and forth due to the river's fullness in the spring and constant alluvial diffusions that change the landscape.

Farther into the cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, the cemented and canaled river is heavily fenced and walled, preventing access and use for both humans and non-human animals. The literal and metaphorical concretized border in this region affects the flow of water, the topography of the land, non-human animal migrations, and the psyche of the people who live there. A nepantla ecocultural identity constantly moves back and forth among worlds, developing strategies that enable the nepantlera to sustain the mental contradictions and competing forces that make survival in the borderland difficult. Mora (1993) writes about how nepantla shapes experiences and perceptions of comfort and identity, which requires what Chela Sandoval (2000) describes as *differential consciousness*, in which one maintains strength, grace, and flexibility to navigate intersectional selves. Sandoval (2000) writes that differential consciousness 'can thus be thought of as a constant reapportionment of space, of boundaries, of horizontal and vertical realignments of oppositional powers' (p. 181). Using differential consciousness within a nepantla identity enables negotiation of ecocultural identities in the borderlands, in which 'taming' of 'unruliness' is ongoing and systemic, as evidenced in the cementing of the river itself.

The history of the U.S.–Mexico border and the Río Grande in the Paso del Norte region illustrates how border dwellers become nepantleras, and thus this history becomes a layer within their geographies of self. The artificial and controlled flow of the river, as well as the border walls constructed by the United States government over many years, shape and define how we literally see both sides of the border. The constraining aspects of and on the river as border in some ways physically prevents full immersion in multiple cultural, linguistic, and ecological identities because those on one side cannot go to the other side easily. With an ecocultural identity-rooted nepantla and differential consciousness, border dwellers sometimes are able to find places of immersion similar to ways humans and non-humans find ways to move

back and forth across the river/border. In essence, these differential consciousness strategies are part of our resistances, as illustrated in the markings along the canals and elsewhere along the Río Grande.

River bank graffiti as resistance

As we discussed in the previous section, a concrete canal now constricts the Río Grande/Río Bravo. In turn, the canalled river creates an environment that simultaneously constructs and rejects the border. While the concretized Río Grande positions people as border subjects, these same people construct the channel as a palimpsest, or a text capable of 'giving testimony to what came before' (Driver, 2012, p. 181). The concrete walls of the canal are covered in graffiti by Mexican artists whose messages have faded with time and been painted over. This artwork offers narratives that challenge stereotypes of Mexico, U.S. foreign policy, Trump, and the border itself.

The Paso del Norte Bridge only allows vehicles to move in one direction, crossing from Ciudad Juárez into El Paso. Pedestrians, however, can cross by foot from El Paso into Juárez and while doing so, can look down through a chain link fence and see the graffiti on the canal. The word 'Vida'⁴ is painted in curly script accompanied by the colorful portrait of a woman with big eyes, brown and green skin, and a white flower in her long, flowing brown hair. 'BERLIN WALL' is painted in capital white letters against a blue background, with the words so large they run from top to bottom on one side of the canal. The famous portrait of Che Guevara, the Argentine Marxist revolutionary figure in the Cuban revolution, has been replicated, this time in hot pink against a black background. Though it is hard to make out the fading cursive writing, covered by newer paintings, a message about Che reads 'se vive la obra y el pensamiento antimperialista'⁵ and while the middle is illegible the message ends with 'revolucionario de los Estados Unidos America.'⁶ The words 'BORDER PATROL ASESINOS'⁷ are written underneath a painting of the infamous yellow border signs in the region with the black silhouette of a family crossing the border (Carcamo, 2017), both faded with time but still visible. A traffic barrier just above the canal features two separate graffiti messages that call attention to the border itself: 'La frontera donde debe vivir'⁸ and 'La frontera mas fabulosa y bella del mundo.'⁹ On a nearby overpass, which while not part of the canal is still in clear view of those crossing the border into Ciudad Juárez, there is a painting of the White House with a large wall painted around it and labeled 'THE WALL.' The words 'Fuck Trump' are written twice, once on either side of this image.

On the walk across the Paso del Norte Bridge from Ciudad Juárez to El Paso, the messages painted on the canal appear to be directly targeted at U.S. Americans broadly and U.S. politicians more specifically. On the side of the canal that faces the U.S. the message 'DE ESTE LADO TAMBIEN HAY SUEÑOS'¹⁰ has been painted in large, black capital letters. On the side facing the people crossing to the U.S. someone has painted 'NO A LA GUERRA! PAZ! PAZ EN IRAK!'¹¹ A nearby message reads 'QUIEN GANARA?'¹² Someone has painted 'WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION' in large black capital letters underneath the message 'TODOS UNIDOS EN CONTRA DE LA GUERRA IMPERIALISTA'¹³ in capital yellow letters. The faded state of these two particular graffiti messages signifies they may be remnants of nepantlera reactions to former U.S. President Bush's invasion of Iraq. A nearby piece of graffiti art lists 'Texas, Nuevo Mexico, Arizona y California,' states all formed on land the U.S. forcefully took from Mexico. While the message is so faded it is hardly visible, one can make out the words 'reclamamos'¹⁴ and 'nuestra sangre.'¹⁵ The words 'FUCK BORDER' are painted on the bottom of the canal, close to the water. Finally, someone has painted a globe next to an image that appears to be Trump, directly above the words 'He is fucking the world.'

As nepantleras, the border leaves its mark on us and we leave our mark on the border. Holmes (2016) explains ‘we can only understand ourselves through a web of relations to other humans and the more-than-human-world, including the natural and built environments through which we move and to which we develop attachments’ (p. 10). Both the river and the canal become another layer in the geography of the self, informing our relations to the border. The cementing of the Río Grande by the U.S. government was an attempt to discipline the unruliness of the water and human actors in the region. In the canal, where the river runs dry as we write, these nepantlera graffiti artists take up where the water left off to transform the built environment of the canal into a site of resistance and inter-relational communication.

The messages described above are painted in strategic public places, meaning they are dependent on the surrounding border context and grant a specific type of public access to those crossing and those policing the border (Holmes, 2016). Steele (2008) explains the border is a site that simultaneously upholds tradition and produces change, as it ‘physically provides a space in which fluidity/fusion/liminality is empowering – even strong enough to speak for the (now) unspoken’ (p. 104). The canal as a palimpsest allows for new stories of the border to be written, which is significant because, as Anzaldúa argues, nepantleras ‘write to record what others erase when they speak’ and ‘to rewrite the stories others have miswritten’ about them (Anzaldúa, 1981, as cited in Steele, 2008, p. 105). For example, Driver (2012) has demonstrated that graffiti, posters and marches make the streets of Ciudad Juárez a palimpsest that serves as an ecotestimonio of femicide, the mass murder of women that has plagued the city since 1993. These texts ensure the stories of these women, and the crimes against them, will be told. We, in turn, argue that, as a palimpsest, the canal functions as an ecotestimonio of resistance to the U.S. and the border itself; the word ‘RESISTE’¹⁶ also appears in capital white letters against a black background in the canal.

People who exist in nepantla are inherently resistant. As Anzaldúa (2015) explains, ‘Nepantleras function disruptively. Like tender green shoots growing out of the cracks, they eventually overturn foundations, making conventional definitions of otherness hard to sustain’ (p. 84). The graffiti on the border canal also exists in a state of fluctuation since the images and messages are painted over, either by local authorities or other graffiti artists. Like the flowing river, these messages lack permanence but function as an assemblage of meaning that actively communicate resistance. Working together, human and more-than-human nepantleras disrupt the built environments meant to control and discipline them. Where in the past the river changed course, refusing to serve as a static border, nepantleras now paint messages of resistance through differential consciousness on its cemented banks in order to change course, albeit in new and different ways.

Militarization of the U.S.–Mexico border

In a third and final stopping point, we consider how militarization and securitization of the U.S.–Mexico border shapes ecocultural identity through the complex colonial history of the Southwest and the legacy of interstate violence that laid the groundwork for contemporary territorial policing. The border, Anzaldúa (1987) notes, ‘*es una herida abierta*’¹⁷ where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds... Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe’ (p. 25, italics in original). The indeterminacy of the border has justified the constant presence of Border Patrol agents (‘hunters in army-green uniforms’ for Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 11) for decades and, consequently, created an ever-expanding policy apparatus that aims to police the border at all times. Yet, these policies continuously tear open the wound of the borderland by creating untold harms for humans and more-than-humans alike. For instance, the amplification of concerns for border securitization following the 2016 election have enabled immigration officers to turn away asylum seekers before reaching the border, detain

thousands in privately owned immigration holding facilities, and forcefully separate mothers from their children while awaiting immigration court appointments.

Militarization of the border has detrimentally affected human border dwellers, and also has created massive environmental harms. Meierotto (2014), tracing the environmental history of the Sonoran desert (which extends across the U.S.–Mexico border in southeastern Arizona), explains, ‘The environmental impacts of these shifting policies include increasing habitat fragmentation, wildlife disruption, damage to fragile habitats and vegetation, erosion, trash deposits, and the development of new roads and trails that alter the overall surface hydrology’ (p. 639). Militarization of the border is nothing new. Thus, understanding ecocultural identity in the borderlands requires starting from a position that inclusively contextualizes the historical legacy of imperialism, colonialism, and environmental degradation created by border militarization over the last several decades.

Recent political developments have reignited securitization discourses that pose significant dangers to ecosystems and populations along the border. On June 16, 2015, Donald Trump announced his candidacy for U.S. president. In his announcement speech, which contained blistering, xenophobic rhetoric critical of U.S. American foreign policy, then-candidate Trump proposed building a wall along the entirety of the U.S.–Mexico border. While Trump’s proposed policy was ostensibly about securing the border to prevent human migration, his speech echoed securitization discourses prevalent in U.S. foreign policy for decades. Chávez (2012) explains, ‘Militarization of the U.S.–Mexico border has not occurred in response to the War on Terror; instead, it has been the U.S. government’s plan at least since the Reagan administration’ (p. 49). Indeed, the American Immigration Council (2017) notes, ‘Since the last major overhaul of the U.S. immigration system in 1986, the federal government has spent an estimated \$263 billion on immigration enforcement’ (p. 1), much of which is spent to fund armed Border Patrol agents stationed directly along the U.S.–Mexico border fence.

In many areas along the border (especially near populated regions), the border is already secured and heavily fortified with concrete barricades, multiple barbed wire fences, cameras, and various technologies like motion sensors and thermal scanners meant to detect and deter human migration. In short, the border is already heavily policed and militarized. Thinking through ecocultural identity in the borderlands necessitates attention to the contemporary political moment given how the anti-environment and anti-immigrant Trump administration, and its insistence on developing a border wall, will further change human and more-than-human migratory patterns, creating unknown numbers of environmental catastrophes, and further politicize the lives and livelihoods of those who straddle ecocultures in the region. These harmful impacts are already occurring and will only be exacerbated in the future.

The contested terrain of the ecocultural borderland is complicated further by recent legal challenges that have attempted to halt construction of the proposed border wall on the grounds that construction would violate federal environmental standards. On February 27, 2018, U.S. District Judge Gonzalo Curiel rejected attempts by the state of California and several environmental advocates to halt planning of the border wall. The judge noted in his decision that ‘The court cannot and does not consider whether underlying decisions to construct the border barrier are politically wise or prudent’ (p. 2). Implicit in his decision is a move to de-politicize the context of the border wall by rendering the environmental concerns politically inert. Despite the massive ecological implications the wall will have on borderland ecosystems, Curiel’s ruling suggests environmental concerns were *not* considered a legitimate basis for halting construction and, by rejecting the plaintiff’s arguments, creates rhetorical distance that squelches the legitimacy of ecological interests (see Carr & Milstein, 2018, for more on the legal system’s ecocultural ‘invisible sphere’).

In mid-September 2018, the Trump administration began construction of the border wall in a narrow stretch of downtown El Paso. The move to begin construction in the area is

not surprising because, as Anzaldúa (1987) reminds us, ‘The only “legitimate” inhabitants [of the borderlands] are those in power’ (p. 25). In this instance, state-sanctioned legitimacy has entrenched the dominant Western nature/culture dualism by upholding the anthropocentric bias that views environmental matters as secondary to security concerns. The natural environment and, by extension, the more-than-human inhabitants, are being disciplined by the dominant political regime that, for decades, has continuously emphasized the need for securitization and militarization of the U.S.–Mexico border.

Ecocultural identity in the borderland must be framed within the context of militarization. Living in El Paso, Texas, the concrete barricades, metal fences, and concrete canals that have ‘secured’ the Río Grande are inescapable features that define border life. Yet, despite the increasing militarization and the racist, xenophobic rhetoric and violent attacks that permeate the contemporary, division-focused political moment, we do not mean to suggest that, as border dwellers, we are merely docile bodies. On the contrary, as nepantleras, our continued existence in the borderland underscores the resilience required to cross boundaries, build bridges, and continue to thrive.

The desert is hostile in more ways than one, but we persist. The militarization of the U.S.–Mexico border has created environmental chaos that likely only will be magnified in the future, but human and more-than-human inhabitants of the border continue to find ways to migrate, to cope, to heal the ruinous psychic and ecological injuries that are the legacy of centuries of colonization and imperialism. Our geographies of self hold these traumas of colonialism, while at the same time carving out spaces for healing, persisting, and resisting. Nepantlisma, then, is resilience. As nepantleras, human and more-than-human border dwellers resiliently endure the extreme militarization of the border by adapting to the ebb and flow of political forces that shape daily life along the Río Grande. After all, as Anzaldúa (1987) reminds, ‘Stubborn, persevering, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that renders us unbreakable, we, the *mestizas* and *mestizos*, will remain’ (p. 86).

Nepantla geographies and ecocultural identities

The border, both physical and metaphorical, constructs geographies of the self for those who live and have lived in the region. As nepantleras our geographies of the self include histories of colonialism, evidenced through efforts to control and discipline bodies and environments through limiting the flow of the Río Grande and militarizing the border. These layers of our lived experiences are stacked along with our potential for resistance and resilience, as the river, human, and non-humans push back against this unnatural boundary and continue to find ways to thrive.

The wall and the border that runs through the El Paso/Ciudad Juárez region, however, do shape ecocultural identities and experiences of the self and the body. These geographies are marked by nepantlisma, the feelings of betweenness. Alluvial diffusions of identities are deposited, sedimentary, layered, stacked, eroded, and disseminated. These alluvial diffusions are the strengths that emerge from nepantleras through seeing in new ways, navigating quotidian complexities, embracing creative approaches, and maintaining a differential consciousness, which enable resistance and resilience. Anzaldúa (1987) explains,

La facultad [mental faculty] is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant ‘sensing,’ a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak... .

(p. 38)

This orientation toward the world – in which one is constantly aware of contextual, cultural, and situational nuances – is part of a differential consciousness. Instances of resistance, such as graffiti and moments of resilience, also suggest an orientation toward social and ecological justice that is a central aspect of the nepantlera’s ecocultural identity.

Finally, the nepantlera’s differential consciousness is also a method of sustaining seemingly competing perspectives and perceptions at the same time. In that sense, nepantlisma blurs dualisms: culture/nature, human/non-human, queer/straight, white/non-white, and so forth. The nepantlera understands the world through diffused identities, strategies of resistance, and tactics of resilience. Complex thinking as such also enables deeper understandings of intersectional identities (or, interconnected and complexifying social categories such as gender, race, and class), which we also hold at the same time, even when they conflict or pull us in different directions. Bridging borders and dualisms expands ecocultural identities by allowing for contradictions, inconsistencies, imperfections, and competing views. Recognizing, accepting, and embracing such ways of thinking encourages resilient and resistant orientations focused on the ecological, the cultural, and the linguistic, which demand the interrogation of unquestioned norms and socioecological structures in our society through nepantla approaches, tactics, and strategies.

Notes

- 1 This policing of identity has resulted in violence along the border, most notably in the mass shooting event at an El Paso Wal-Mart on August 3, 2019. Twenty-two people were killed and 24 others were injured in the attack. In a manifesto explaining the motivation for the attack posted online, the shooter claimed he was defending his country from cultural and ethnic replacement by Hispanic immigrants.
- 2 A term used to describe descendants of Indigenous peoples and Spaniards, or the offspring of both the colonizers and the colonized. Editors’ note: The original Spanish words Latino/Latina and Mestizo/Mestiza are gendered. That is, the words refer to female – mestiza – or male – mestizo. The addition of the ‘x’ at the end (or an @: e.g., mestiz@) degenders pluralized Spanish terms, which by grammar rules are masculinized in the plural.
- 3 Acequias are water-sharing networks that originated with local Indigenous peoples and were extended by Spanish colonists. They are dryland communally-built ditch systems used to move river water or snow runoff, primarily for agricultural purposes. They are prominent throughout the U.S. Southwest region and have significance in local peoples’ shared senses of ecocultural identity and senses of relations-in-place (Milstein et al., 2011). For more on acequias, see Hoffmann’s (2020) chapter in this *Handbook*.
- 4 ‘Life.’ English translations of Spanish words will appear as endnotes to avoid privileging English.
- 5 ‘We are living anti-imperial work and thought.’
- 6 ‘Revolutionary of the United States.’ While the correct spelling in Spanish would be ‘América,’ this reflects spelling in the graffiti. Several of the graffiti messages we analyzed were missing accent marks and in this chapter we have chosen to quote them as they appear on the canal.
- 7 ‘Border Patrol assassins.’
- 8 ‘The border where one should live.’
- 9 ‘The most fabulous and beautiful border in the world.’ The correct spelling in Spanish would be ‘más.’
- 10 ‘On this side there are also dreams.’
- 11 ‘No to war! Peace! Peace in Iraq!’
- 12 ‘Who will win?’
- 13 ‘All united against the imperialist war.’
- 14 ‘We reclaim.’
- 15 ‘Our blood.’
- 16 ‘Resist.’
- 17 ‘Is an open wound.’

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Ecocultural identities in intercultural encounters

José Castro-Sotomayor

The ways identity enters the realm of politics are as multiple as the contexts within which identities emerge. Identity formation is embedded in relations of power and positions of privilege fermented in the breeding ground of history by stories that interweave our social worlds through dialogue, tensions, and misunderstandings (Nakayama & Halualani, 2010). A political perspective on culture, a focus on the constitutive force of communication, and a questioning of privilege in the negotiations of our identities are all significant contributions of critical appraisals on identity formation (Collier, 2014; Collier et al., 2001). Although meaningful, these considerations also reveal a human-centered bias in the definitions of culture, identity, and discourse as they are conceptualized primarily in relation to other humans. As scholars have argued (Carbaugh, 1996; Code, 2006; Mendoza & Kinefuchi, 2016; Milstein, 2012), the human-centeredness intrinsic to scholarly, public, and quotidian focus upon intercultural relations tends to undermine, or maybe completely forget, the ecological dimension of our human selves and the environmental conditions in which identities arise and continue to be (re)produced.

In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate how an ecocultural perspective on identity illuminates different ways to understand intercultural relations and ethnicity, race, and class-based scholarly approaches to these relations. I use my collaborative work with the Gran Familia Awá Binacional (GFAB), a transboundary Indigenous organization working on the border between Ecuador and Colombia, to understand how ecological subjectivities weave their way into the formation of cultural identities and intercultural relations. Subjectivity is ‘a degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity[,] that particular set of traits, beliefs, and allegiances that, in short- or long-term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being’ (Hall, 2004, p. 3). An ecological subjectivity highlights the more-than-human (f)actors and foregrounds the constitutive meaningfulness of Nature¹ in the formation of cultural beings. With this in mind, I focus on two kinds of ecocultural identities that emerge from my interpretation of Awá identity negotiations with communities of Mestizos – those of mixed ethnic and cultural Indigenous and European heritage – and Afros – descendants of African slaves and acts of marronage – bordering Awá territory, Katza su.

In Awapit, Awá’s native language, Katza su is how Awá name their territory and the term means *casa grande*/big house, the ‘physical and symbolic space in which different

beings coexist and share common spaces, sometimes entering into situations of conflict' (CAMAWARI et al., 2012, p. 61). Katza su is the more-than-human (f)actor in the constitution of two forms of Awá, Mestizo, and Afro ecocultural identities. The first is a *restorative ecocultural identity*, which is mutually constituted both by a self who conceives of Nature as the locus of thought and consciousness and recognizes the intrinsic value of Nature, and by a social being whose practices are primarily eco- or bio-centric. In contrast, the second is an *unwholesome ecocultural identity* that undermines or completely disregards Nature as a source of self-awareness and knowledge, and therefore tends to reproduce a social being whose anthropocentrism and practices render Nature as mainly instrumental – that is, as a resource to exploit whose value is conditioned purely upon the projection of human desires and needs.

In the following sections, I present my case methodology and borderland site. I then revisit extant literature to interrogate the emphasis on the cultural dimension in the current scholarship on identity formation, and present my conceptualization of ways ecocultural identity – as a concept and framework resulting from the dialectic relations between ecological subjectivity and environmental identity – informs intercultural relations. In the third section, I present my analysis of the inter- and intra-ecocultural relations among Awá, Mestizo, and Afro populations. I show how the more-than-human actor, Awá's territory Katza su, is a constitutive part of the ecocultural identity formations and negotiations among these ethnic and racial groups, wherein ecological subjectivity becomes more salient and the ecological dimension encompasses the cultural dimension categorized as ethnicity, race, or class. I close this chapter by presenting some ideas on how an ecocultural perspective can contribute to diversifying transdisciplinary fields of intercultural inquiry by embracing extrahuman factors as constitutive of identity. This approach can help illuminate human and more-than-human entanglements that shape and are shaped by the ecocultural identities enacted and implicated in environmental conflicts, and can help inform peace-building processes as interspecies ethical spaces of interaction and ecological awakening.

Methods and site of research

To develop this study, I collaborated with Federación de Centros Awá del Ecuador (FCAE–Ecuadorian Federation of Awá Centers) and Unidad Indígena del Pueblo Awá (UNIPA–Union of Indigenous Awá People) from Colombia, the major organizations forming the Gran Familia Awá Binacional (GFAB).² Previously, between 2010–2011, I collaborated in a project to build an environmental agenda to address issues of biodiversity and sustainable development at the border between Ecuador and Colombia (Lucio & Castro-Sotomayor, 2011). The Agenda aimed at directing attention to the environment as an encounter point to further collaboration amid the reverberations of the 2008 diplomatic impasse between the Ecuadorian and Colombian governments.³ During these binational workshops, I heard for the first time about the GFAB, one of several Indigenous and Afro organizations working at the Ecuador–Colombia border and seeking to form or consolidate their binational organizations.⁴

To develop the research that supports this case study, I reestablished contact with the GFAB. I conducted semi-structured interviews in Spanish with FCAE and UNIPA elite members, which I define as people of influence whose source of authority lies on their political and economic position as well as their cultural or traditional knowledge. This distinction is central insofar as the formation of Awá organizations are separate from their traditional authority (e.g., the elder) (Pineda, 2011). Further, this distinction is often problematic among Awá people because despite the elders' knowledge and use of Awapit – Awá's native language that is perceived by Awá people as a living repository of Awá stories and traditional

ecocultural practices – elders usually do not hold positions of power within the organizational structures because elders lack formal education, most of them do not speak Spanish, and most live deep into the territory, which limits their interactions with non-Awá communities (CAMAWARI et al., 2012). As a ‘site for the production of meaning’ (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 14), interview texts elicit social actors’ ways of language-use in stories, accounts, or explanations that help illustrate their unique experiences, knowledges, and cosmovisions. For the purpose of investigating interculturality and the formation of ecocultural identities, therefore, I decided to interview Awá political leaders (none of whom were considered by Awá communities as elders yet) who were living or working in several places across Awá borderland territories. This geographical movement across ecologies and nations allowed me to encounter Awá leaders’ cultural and organizational voices influenced by distinct environmental circumstances shaping Katza su.

I also move between my interview texts and secondary literature produced by Awá communities, as well as literature produced by NGOs and governments relating and denouncing the dire conditions in which Awá people live. I approach these documents as ‘sites of claims of power, legitimacy, and reality’ (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 232) that contain spatial, temporal, and practical contingencies associated with the texts’ construction, interpretation, and use. When analyzing the data, I considered the methodological uncertainties that emerge from the multiple voices that possibly manifest during the interview and the institutional means and modes through which Awá perspectives have been amplified (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Dunbar et al., 2002; Fontana, 2002). But most importantly, the ecologies influenced the interviews’ inter-ecocultural encounters are fundamental to my interpretation of the texts supporting this study (for details of the methodological implications of these ecological/geographical translations and considerations of interviews as intersubjective ecocultural engagements, see Castro-Sotomayor, 2019). Formations of identity should not be understood only within economic, social, or political systems, but also within ecological systems, which at the borderlands feature meaningful particularities.

Bio- and geo-graphies of poverty and the constitution of ecocultural identities

The borderland site of this case study is essential in understanding the ecocultural relations within. Nation-state borders are sites where ‘territoriality is most explicitly enacted in the contestation, production, and communication of identities’ (Shome, 2003, p. 45); therefore, I approached Awá organizations as sites of contestation, conflicts, and multiple interests, as well as sites of resistance, creativity, and hope (Collier, 2014). These tensions and possibilities of agency are central to the negotiation of Awá ecocultural identities and their relations with Mestizo and Afro communities; in particular, considering the history of Awá people.

The history of Inkal Awá,⁵ gente de la montaña/people of the mountain, is the history of their territory, Katza su. Awá’s narrations register the disappearance, shifts, and reconstitutions of the boundaries of their ancestral territories as manifestations of colonization, displacement, evictions, invasions, recoveries, and legalizations (CAMAWARI, 2002). The power of remembering engenders possibilities of creating an evocative aura that isolates moments from our existence of the present; albeit momentarily, this isolation may enliven emotions of ecologies that instill in us deep and meaningful connections to particular places. Yet environments also are interested spaces and places and a material manifestation of histories of resistance, colonization, and drastic transformations. The ecologies and environments in which Awá interact along with Mestizos and Afro communities are no different. Historically and ecologically situated conditions inform the relationships and discursive positionings of Awá, Mestizo, and Afro populations.

On one hand, Awá and Afrodescendants share a colonial history of oppression that is typical of the colonial formation of the nation-states in Latin America and directly linked to processes of slavery and marronage (Escobar, 2012; Latta & Wittman, 2012a; Micarelli, 2015). Awá's binational condition also is intimately linked to their relations with Afro communities. Between 1920 and 1940,

the growing tensions between Awá and black communities and the difficult living conditions caused by the marginalization of the State [gave rise] to a great migration of Awá families who, crossing the San Juan River (Mayasquer), came to the other side of the river, to the Ecuadorian territory, in search of land and better life options.

(Bisbicus et al., 2010, pp. 22–23)

The current colocation of Awá and Afro populations is one of the results of the national governments' land policies that have placed these communities side by side, often provoking struggles over the same or overlapping territories (Castro-Sotomayor, 2012; SENPLADES & DNP, 2014). Instead of facilitating the resolution of land issues, however, the intervention of the State and the lack of national or local policies to help define the territorial boundaries of minority populations have aggravated territorial struggles and frictions between Awá and Afro communities. While the international border is not the only margin toward which minority populations have been forced to move or relocate – Indigenous and Afro communities in central parts of the country usually live in remote usually rural areas as well as in rundown parts within urban centers, for instance – at national borders the state enacts more voraciously the confinement of these populations as the materialization of national imaginaries requires 'a technology of division' that functions as a device of inclusion/exclusion embedded in power, globalizations, and neocolonial dynamics (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 6).

Similarly, the role of the state was more harmful than beneficial to relationships between Awá and Mestizo communities. Contrary to Awá or Afro communities, Mestizos⁶ came with the law on their side. Via cooperatives, the national government facilitated the allocation of land to Mestizo people for agriculture and rearing cattle, activities up to this day mainly carried out by Mestizo peasants.⁷ This process is perceived and documented by Awá organizations in their reports, communities, and personal accounts as an ongoing systematic dispossession of Awá traditional land that has dismembered their territories. This situation has accelerated a process of acculturation – the 'inappropriate approach to Western culture that terminates the vital elements of [Awá] culture' (FCAE et al., 2016, p. 15) – that has altered Awá's Indigenous traditional ways of survival and resistance drastically, hence aggravating their already marginalized condition (CAMAWARI, 2002; CAMAWARI et al., 2012; FCAE, 2016).

The observed intrusiveness of the government, and the land dispossession that accompanies it, is associated with involuntary processes of acculturation transforming Awá's subjectivity. For instance, some Awá families have sold their land to agricultural cooperatives; landless Awá have become part of salary-based economic relations. Some Awá men have become *cuidadores* (caretakers) of mestizo peasants' farms or workers in Mestizos owned nearby agro-companies. A repercussion of this dynamic is the incorporation of landless Awá into 'peon-patrón/laborer-patron' relationships while Awá women end up working in Mestizos' households as domestic workers (CAMAWARI, 2002, p. 20). As a corollary of increasing dependence on salary-based economic activities, Awá's ecological subjectivity recedes to give way to an economic subject who fuels the treadmill of a capitalist economic system and

positions Awá as cheap labor. Awá conceive this system as invasive and see the ‘penetration of the economic market system’ as bringing more disadvantages than benefits (CAMAWARI, 2002, p. 32).

While race, ethnicity, and class are important cultural categories in Awá’s relationships with Afros and Mestizos, I argue they are not the most salient ones in these interactions in which the ecological dimension of identity acquires relevance and is core to conflicts between non-Indigenous and Awá communities and organizations. To illustrate how the ecological dimension expands understanding of intercultural relations, I situate identification processes within the Awá territoriality as the ecocultural positionings, enactments, and negotiations of these communities occur within the discursive realm configured by the cosmopolitics of sacred, lineage, and land relationships constructed by Awá with and within their *Katza su* (Castro-Sotomayor, 2020). Within Awá territoriality, Awá ascribe an identity to other Awá, as well as to Afros and Mestizos, not only based on their race, ethnicity, or class, but primarily in relation to the nonhuman actor *Katza su*. In what follows, I demonstrate the saliency of the ecological dimension in understanding how Awá cosmovision, or principles of co-existence incorporating ‘secular and spiritual behavior, mythic characters, and historical experience’ (Rappaport, 2005, p. 191), influences enactments of and inculcates Awá, Mestizos, and Afro cultural identities. With this case study, I argue that attending to ecocultural identities that emerge from the dialectical relations between human and more-than-human participants in intercultural encounters contributes to a more comprehensive approach to intra-relations within a group and inter-relations between and among groups.

Ecologically expanding the cultural boundaries of identity

Revisiting notions of identity or constructing a new grammar to engage the politics of identity from an ecological perspective has become unavoidable. As anthropogenic environmental disruption effects are felt around the planet, it is necessary to connect the ecological dimension with conventional ways of approaching identity in the political and cultural realms. An ecological perspective on the politics of identity interrogates cultural discursive formations such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and age, and claims that humans are also material beings *of* Nature (Hodden, 2014). The more-than-human realm exceeds the symbolic boundaries of our human understanding of the wider world and subverts dominant frames of ‘nature’ – which position Nature as a passive object and often disregard the constitutive force of nonhuman actants in the evolution of human and more-than-human history (Carney & Rosomoff, 2009; Duvall, 2014). In what follows, I elaborate an ecocultural perspective on identity and show how the ecocultural lens necessarily widens the scope on identity at a time when this is critically needed.

Defining ecocultural identity

Definitions of a human identity as shaped by relations with the more-than-human world are as diverse as the disciplines that inform them. Consonant with extant scholarship (Carbaugh, 1996; Daryl Slack, 2013; Depoe & Peeples, 2014; Dürbeck et al., 2015; Grusin, 2015; Jansen, 2016; Marafiotte & Plec, 2006; Milstein, 2012), the concept of ecocultural identity embraces notions of agency and voice that do not eradicate human agency but expand notions of agency to include more-than-human (f)actors. On one hand, this challenges the anthropocentric assumptions about what humans understand as ‘cultural’ by looking at humans from the intersection between the symbolic and the biotic. On the other hand, the

notion of ecocultural identity illuminates a corps of politics that engages with diverse and destructive and constructive subjects of Nature who articulate traditional Nature-based livelihoods within global and local discourses, practices, and norms (Agrawal, 2005; Cepek, 2011; Davidov, 2013; Escobar, 2010; Light, 2000; Peterson et al., 2016). Ecocultural identities, thus, emerge within institutional structures – regular formal or informal practices that are ‘socially constructed, historically evolving, and/or interest-based roles of interaction that represent incentives, opportunities, and/or constraints for individual and collective actors’ (Grainger, 2005, pp. 336–337) – that govern the environment by organizing humans and nonhumans and shaping individual and group relationships with/in/as Nature (Milstein, et al., 2017).

The formation of ecocultural identities results from the dialectic relations between ecological subjectivity and environmental identity, that is, between the subjective process of thought and self-consciousness about identity and the particular set of traits, beliefs, and allegiances that constitute, temporally or permanently, consistent personalities and modes of becoming social beings (Hall, 2004). *Ecological subjectivities* elicit Nature as the location of enunciation, a ‘site, a habitat, a medium of ecological interaction and encounter’ (Code, 2006, p. 27), from where the self speaks, feels, knows, learns, and communicates who the self is in relation to humans and more-than-human others. Hence, within/from Nature, ecological subjectivities could be thought and brought into consciousness by embracing lively and intentional elements and processes of wider ecosystems (Hutchins, 2013; Milstein, 2016). The formation of *environmental identities* entails cultural itineraries and ‘temporalities of struggles’ (Collier et al., 2001, p. 223) that overlap, compete, morph, and converge into and arise from Nature, which becomes the political platform for a participatory co-evolution and mutual constitution of ecocultural identities.

An *ecocultural identity* is historical, discursive, material, and temporal and is contingent upon the dialectical process involving the formation of ecological subjectivities and environmental identities. The uniformity and fragmentation of ecocultural identities parallel the contested notions of Nature spread throughout a spectrum of environmental ideologies oscillating from anthropocentric/instrumental to ecocentric/holistic (Corbett, 2006). That is to say, ecocultural identities can be unwholesome or restorative depending on the meaningfulness of the more-than-human realm in the identity formation process as something of utilitarian use or someone with intrinsic value. The material and discursive construction of ecocultural identities – and the positionalities, perceptions, and subjectivities attached to them – inform individuals’ and groups’ emotional, embodied, ethical, and political sensibilities regarding the more-than-human world.

The concept of ecocultural identity directs attention to ways not only human but also more-than-human Nature – e.g., mountains, animals, rivers, forests – constitute and enter the realm of politics of identity. Thus, an expansive ecocultural perspective on identity interrogates the dominant scholarly notion of intercultural relations as mainly human-to-human relations among multiple cultural actors. Similar to other Indigenous cosmovisions, Awá principles of co-existence put in conversation cosmologies and earthly and sacred behaviors with historical experiences, dialogue that solidifies Awá political standpoints and actions. Awá’s processes of ecocultural identity formation illustrate how nonhuman forces influence the discursive positioning of Awá, Mestizos, and Afros in relation to Awá’s territory Katza su and within Awá territoriality. To Awá, territoriality articulates sacred, lineage, and land relationships with the four principles – Katza su/territory, wanmattit puran/unity, tiinta paran/autonomy, and au tunto tuan/culture and identity – that form Awá cosmovision. Indigenous

people's embodied experiences and historical conditions coalesce in the territory where 'regimes of reality, and the practices that bring them about, unlike history or science, do not require proof to affirm their actuality' (De la Cadena, 2015, p. 150). To Awá, *Katza su* is an active participant in the decisions they make regarding well-being and the mandates (policies) to achieve *wat milna* (*vivir bien/good living*). As a political praxis, within Awá territoriality, 'geography becomes verb' (Leff, 2004, p. 125), a discursive gesture that brings about Awá ethics of respect that frames relations with both human and nonhuman communities, hence, influencing the formation of Awá ecocultural identities and their ecocultural relations with Afros and Mestizos (Castro-Sotomayor, 2019).

In the next section, I argue that ecologically expanding notions of the cultural makes it so one always recognizes that identity forms in inextricable dialogue and co-participation with a more-than-human world that is intrinsically agentic and full of diverse voices. Hence, it is vital – theoretically, methodologically, and ethically – that conceptualizations of identity gravitate toward notions of selfhood that interrogate and challenge the human-centeredness of dominant identity formations. Solely focusing on the cultural elements of identity – race, ethnicity, or class – risks obscuring the ecological dimension enveloping and running through intercultural relations. As this case shows, Awá ecocultural identities become salient when *Katza su*, the nonhuman element always present in Awá, Mestizos, and Afros intercultural encounters, becomes the source of meaning-making and the evocative actor in the positioning of and interrelations among these populations.

Ecocultural dialectics within territoriality

Territoriality helps situate how many Indigenous communities (re)produce the symbolic and material conditions that inform their relationships with both human and nonhuman communities. As an analytical concept, territoriality contributes to the understanding of alternative social grammars that interweave 'sociability, private and public spaces, culture, mentalities, and subjectivities' (Santos, 2011, p. 24). Within Awá territoriality, *Katza su* becomes an essential actor that influences the dialectical ecocultural relations among Awá, Mestizos, and Afros. Dialectics facilitate looking at interactions as mutually constituted relations that move in tandem across multiple historical temporalities and locations (Dickinson, 2014; Martin & Nakayama, 2010; Milstein & Dickinson, 2012). Two dialectics emerge within Awá territoriality and inform the ecocultural positionalities among Awá, Mestizos, and Afros. An insider–outsider dialectic stresses non-Awá actors' relations *with* Awá *territory* (*Katza su*); a respect–disrespect dialectic refers to both Awá and non-Awá actors' relations *within* Awá *territoriality*. Both dialectics illustrate ways Awá and non-Awá actors' relations affect the articulation of sacred, lineage, and land relationships with Awá cultural and political principles. I introduce the insider–outsider and respect–disrespect dialectics and show how they work in tandem to construct restorative and unwholesome ecocultural identifications based on the impacts certain practices have on *Katza su* at the individual, community, organizational, and societal levels.

Insider–outsider dialectic

The insider–outsider dialectic undergirds Awá construction of non-Awá ecocultural identities. I refer to the construction of these ecocultural identities as *inter*-ecocultural positionalities. A political ecological context featuring contested territorial boundaries, the extension of the agricultural frontier, and the so-called legal grabbing by transnational enterprises informs the ecological and cultural positions Awá construct in relation to other populations. Within the Awá

insider–outsider dialectic non–Awá are rendered as suspicious. As Filiberto Pascal,⁸ a bilingual Awá school teacher, illustrates, ‘[outsiders] are observing what [Awá] have in the field [territory]. Then, outsiders are very observant and, from the road, they see what they have and what they do not have.’ On the Colombian side, the road connecting the cities of Pasto and Tumaco cuts through Awá territory and places them simultaneously in vulnerable and safe spaces. Safe because living close to the road means less harassment from irregular armed forces – National Liberation Army (ELN), dissidents from Revolutionary Armed Force of Colombia (FARC), paramilitary forces, and drug cartels⁹ – than that suffered by Awá communities living further into Katza su. But, by the same token, proximity to the road renders Awá vulnerable to the observant gaze of outsiders and to an accelerated process of acculturation that has endangered vital elements of Awá culture (FCAE et al., 2016). While this process affects Awá communities differently based on their geographical/national location, acculturation is a central factor in the formation of Awá ecocultural identities and their relationships in the border zone.

Interviews with Awá elite reveal the construction of unwholesome ecocultural identities that Awá ascribe to Mestizos and Afros whose actions disrespect and damage Katza su. Within the insider–outsider identity frame, there are two ways Awá ecoculturally position Mestizos and Afros. The first ecocultural positioning Awá construct is via *homogenization*, that is, Awá equate Afro and Mestizo identities into one unwholesome ecocultural identity on the basis of the pernicious effects both populations have on Awá territory. Katza su, then, becomes an active and sensuous actor in the ecocultural homogenization of Mestizos and Afros as their practices, according to Awá, equally damage their Indigenous territory.

Regarding Awá–Afro ecocultural relations, one of the consequences of this ecocultural homogenization is it erases their shared ethnic and racial struggles and fights against the uses and abuses of their territories by both the Ecuadorian and Colombian states. Although Awá and Afros ‘protect their cultures and their environments’ (CAMAWARI et al., 2012, p. 101), ecocultural homogenization dismisses common conditions of exploitation, oppression, and discrimination perpetuated by the consolidation of Ecuador and Colombia as nation states. Regarding Awá–Mestizos ecocultural relations, homogenization reaffirms Awá perceptions of Mestizo colonos¹⁰ who, according to Awá documents, appropriate Awá lands ‘through different forms of deception and out of interest to intensify the illicit crops’ (CAMAWARI et al., 2012, p. 14). The illegal activities of logging, mining, or planting coca in Awá territory are performed by both Mestizos and Afros, which furthers an ecocultural homogenization that obscures Awá–Afro shared colonial histories and dismisses Awá–Mestizo shared colonized subjectivities, as *mestizaje* is also a product of the violence that shaped and colored Latin America’s history.

Awá construct the second ecocultural positioning via *fetishization*, what Ahmed (2014) describes as ‘the transformation of the wound into an identity’ (p. 32). In terms of identity, the problem with fetishism, she states, is it ‘cuts the wound off from a history of ‘getting hurt’ or injured. It turns the wound into something that simply ‘is’ rather than something that has happened in time and space’ (Ibid. p. 32). Awá construction of Mestizo and Afros into a homogeneous unwholesome ecocultural identity turns the individual bodies of Afros and Mestizos into ahistorical ‘objects of feelings.’ Therefore, in relation to Katza su, Awá ascription of a singular unwholesome ecocultural identity to Afro and Mestizo communities aggravates Awá signification processes of Afro and Mestizo bodies, as they become the fetish, and thus, the main reason for the dire environmental situation Awá experience, instead of the historic social, political, and economic neglect by the state and its incumbent government of border population, whether Indigenous, Mestizo, or Afro.

The insider–outsider dialectic helps illustrate how, through the ascription of an unwholesome ecocultural identity to non-Awá groups, Awá construct their avowed ecocultural identity as restorative. Awá restorative ecocultural identity emerges by contrasting it with that of Mestizo peasants or Afros, or other outsiders, who ‘sicken’ the territory by ‘poisoning’ rivers and ‘intoxicating’ the land, as two representatives of UNIPA, Rider Paí and Eduardo Cantincus, denounced during their interviews. The sickness becomes part of Awá people’s ‘invironment’ – ‘the zone of the body’s perceptual dialogue with nature’ (Bell, 2004, p. 108), as ‘the air [Awá] breathe and the sources of water (rivers) for [their] consumption’ are polluted (CAMAWARI et al., 2012, p. 175). For instance, Eduardo Cantincus, UNIPA Economic and Production Councilor, states,

oil spill is human impact, but that is not our fault, people [Mestizos] arriving from Putumayo[,] they are stealing the oil [from the pipes that cut across our territory], all that, the rains ended, the fish, all that.

In this regard, the fetishized bodies of Afros and Mestizos are equated into one homogeneous unwholesome ecocultural identity that intersects with identities emerging from participation of some Afros and Mestizos in those harmful activities associated with Western (invasive) notions of development, like oil extraction or mining, which have generated contentious debates within Awá organizations:

Now, there is a proposal that we request the mining concession as Awá Federation. I said no. How is that possible? No! I am going to tell the Assembly to say no. I do not agree. Because we are not from the city. Now because it is the Awá Federation now we are going to ask for the mining concession? No! No! Leave [the territory] alone. Our resource is there.
(Olindo Cantincus, former president, FCAE)

Olindo’s statement shows how the enactment of an unwholesome or a restorative ecocultural identity is also based on geographical locations that evince distinct worldviews. The insider–outsider dialectic illuminates geographically oppositional ecocultural identities between Awá and non-Awá societies as Awá’s ascription of an unwholesome ecocultural identity to non-Indigenous inhabitants is directly linked to their location (e.g., ‘we are not from the city’). In Awá interpretations, urban centers are the epitome of unwholesome ecocultural identities, a dichotomy present in the statement of the President of UNIPA, Rider Paí, who also positions Awá territories as distinct from the ‘large cities, which are large extension of lands that are not managed by the Indigenous people and that are fully exploited.’

The distinction of Awá Indigenous territories from urban settlements also entails the construction of a restorative ecocultural identity associated with specific practices that present Awá’s worldview in terms of environmental protectors, ‘leave the territory alone!’ This avowed identity also positions Awá as holders of a different understanding about relations with the land, not only as a resource but also as the symbolic and cultural currency of Awá Indigenous ecocultural identity. For instance, Olindo’s claim, ‘Our resource is there,’ does not correspond to the utilitarian Western notion of material assets; rather, and more importantly, his use of the term ‘resource’ suggests the territory holds within it all Awá need for their physical and cultural survival. As Eduardo strongly states:

The peasants, those who arrived, they no longer respect. As Awá, we preserve the forest, mountain, traditional products, culture. But now people are arriving and that’s

why our culture is ending[.] Before [their arrival to the territory] there was no poison. [Now] because of the coca they brought; then, there has been much effects.

Eduardo's statement affirms the cultural significance of territory in constructing and sustaining differentiated worldviews and practices – 'we preserve the forest, mountain, traditional products, culture.' Further, his assertion exemplifies the fetishization of Mestizo bodies and the activities they perform (e.g., poisoning the territory through coca plantations) as outsiders are the cause of Awá culture 'ending.'

In sum, the insider–outsider dialectic works in the discursive positioning of Awá, Mestizo, and Afro ecocultural identities on the basis of the emotional burden generated by the intrusion of extractive activities performed by external actors whose 'inappropriate production systems' disturb the equilibrium of Katza su (Bisbicús et al., 2010, p. 30). The two identification processes at work, homogenization and fetishization, shape the inter-ecocultural positionalities among Awá, Mestizos, and Afros. In tandem, these identification processes performed by Awá people coalesce Mestizo and Afro historically distinct cultural identities and erase shared colonial histories that could, on one hand, aggravate the ahistoric individualization of the wound and, on the other, enervate possibilities of alliances that could counter common conditions of marginalization among these populations. Coalitions, according to Awá's cosmovision, are a matter of respect, and as Eduardo stated, 'those who arrived,' the outsiders, 'no longer respect.' Respect, thus, is the core of the second dialectic.

Respect–disrespect dialectic

The second dialectic stems from a vital principle in Awá relational ontology: respect. This principle is at the core of Awá territoriality – the exercise of political and cultural control of Katza su – and guides Awá lifeways to the extent that 'the reproduction of Awá life, including the Inkal–Awá, depends on the success of the negotiations among these beings (animals, plants, river, forest) and Awá's respect for the rules that govern the mountain' (CAMAWARI et al., 2012, p. 61).¹¹ Respect is prescriptive as disrespect has life-or-death consequences for the human and more-than-human spiritual and bodily dwellers of the territory. Eduardo warns,

If we do not respect nature, punishment comes, that is, drought; drought comes[.] That's why we cannot play with nature, we cannot play.

The respect–disrespect dialectic highlights ecocultural frictions and modes of resistance embedded in an ecologically and culturally grounded ethics of respect Awá are expected to enact. This dialectic illuminates not only the construction of ecocultural relations between Awá and non-Awá – or the *inter*-ecocultural positioning – but also refers to ways Awá construct ecocultural relations among Awá individuals, families, and organizations – *intra*-ecocultural positioning. Two ecocultural identifications among Awá community members and leaders emerge: the other within and the apologetic, an identity position built out of self-blame.

The first ecocultural identity that emerges within the respect–disrespect identity frame is the *other-within*. This ecocultural other-within results from the involvement of some Awá individuals or families in economic activities that infringe upon Awá cosmovision and possibly jeopardize their territoriality. The dire socio-political and environmental conditions in which Awá communities live and the hardships in finding ways of economic support both

have contributed to the formation of unwholesome ecocultural identities by the participation of some Awá in legal economic activities such as palm oil, cattle rearing, the commercial exploitation of wood, or by becoming part of illegal networks of drug production that operate in Awá territory. These practices are ‘developed especially by Mestizos [but] there are some members of the [Awá] communities that sow within the limits of the different reservations to obtain some money to meet the needs of the families’ (CAMAWARI et al., 2012, p. 87). For instance, extractive practices such as the sowing of coca requires preparing the land by clearing areas and forest cover. The ‘clearing’ needed to advance legal or illegal logging or monocrops goes against Awá traditional knowledge and ecological practices such as of *tumba y pudre* (take down and rot), which Eduardo laments is getting lost as ‘there are brothers who no longer think this way.’

Among Awá, therefore, an ecocultural other-within emerges from both the enactment of economic activities themselves (e.g., mining or illegal cropping) and the related ecological material transformations – such as clearing the forest cover. Awá families’ involvement in extractive and/or destructive economic practices is not merely illegal but also and mainly ecoculturally reproachable within Awá ethics of respect as certain practices are understood as respectful or disrespectful according to the effects on *Katza su*.

In addition, the respect–disrespect dialectic nuanced the possible emphasis or relevance ethnicity could have in Awá intercultural relations. The dialectic shows that the relationships among Awá are intrinsically ecocultural, as harmful environmental economic practices, like mining or clearing the forest, become central to the formations and positioning of some Awá as an ecocultural other-within. These practices directly harm and disrupt the articulations between Awá cosmological and organizational principles that configure their territoriality. In the following account from Olivio Bisbicús, UNIPA’s Territory and Biodiversity Coordinator, the ecocultural other-within emerges:

We as Awá are in the jungle [but] we live like peasants, like white people [who] are not thinking of protecting the territory. [These Awá who think like peasants or white people] think more about let’s say development. [They say] ‘I want a development’ [but this is] an individual project not a collective project.

The Awá other-within is also a detached ecocultural self with a degree of individualism that works against the Awá communitarian self as the other-within favors ‘individual projects, not collective projects’ in direct contradiction to Awá cosmovision, in which, as Filiberto asserts, ‘Awá do not take care of only one person, we work with the community more than anything.’ The community is formed by the extended relations among human and nonhumans, that is why the practices performed by those constructed as ecocultural others-within are extraneous to Awá cosmovision. Furthermore, these inappropriate practices might debilitate Awá political and symbolic control of *Katza su* and erode relationships of trust and eventually weaken Awá organizational structures.

The second ecocultural identity that emerges within the respect–disrespect dialectic – and that is negotiated among Awá communities – is the *apologetic ecocultural identity*. This identity emerges from the environmental and ecological responsibilities that Awá themselves transfer to one another and expect Awá of all generations to fulfil. To violate these expectations risks fragmenting Awá’s indigeneity as it is an unwholesome ecocultural identity built out of self-blame. For instance, José Jairo, FCAE’s Councilor of the Center of Mataje Alto, denounces:

Then even ourselves as Awá are guilty because to us as Awá, we never settle for having one hectare of land but five and up. There are some families that have up to 100 hectares!

Awá symbolic and political control of their territories is tested against an accelerated transformation of Katza su's landscape as communal lands become private property. And the concentration of land within Awá territories is increasing the pressure on Katza su as Awá population grows. Demographic changes have set the stage for internal conflicts among Awá families and, although these conflicts are becoming a matter of ethnic identity,¹² the core motivation for these struggles and frictions among Awá has its roots in the transformation of Awá relationships to land from the commons to individual ownership, and from a sacred place of lineage to a productive space of class.

The apologetic ecocultural identity narrows the scope of comprehending local environmental problems as responsive to structural global issues embedded in extractive practices, land degradation, and climate disruption.

There has been a lot of harmful effects. And also the fault is of ourselves. Mining, river bank mining, [before] everything was all beach sand. Then the humans also changed and also changed the physical appearance [of the territory].

(Florencio Cantincus, FCAE President)

The 'fault' attributed to Awá communities' harmful practices exacerbates the apologetic sentiment informing the constitution of an unwholesome ecocultural identity within Awá communities. At the same time, self-blame dangerously positions Awá as the main responsible agents for the deleterious transformations occurring in their territories. This positionality, hence, may lead to losing sight of the structural factors that Awá organization documents explicitly refer to and critically address.

In addition, an apologetic ecocultural identity risks discrediting traditional Indigenous knowledges. Florencio states:

We used to have a traditional meeting here; traditional festivities where the grandparents will be able to harmonize [the territory]. And that's why we're wrong. We're not well because they [the grandparents] are not harmonizing the territory. Previously all traditional healers harmonized what is produced [in the territory.] [They harmonized] all what is produced and therefore nothing was lacking.

Here, Awá avowed ecocultural identity is constructed from a sense of actively harmonizing their relationships with their territory through the performance of traditional ecocultural practices such as 'festivities.' Harmony and balance with territory are fundamental endeavors in Awá cosmology. The productive power of enacting ecocultural identities comes to the fore in the power attributed to traditional healers, usually elders, to 'harmonize what is produced' and to ensure that 'nothing was lacking' to Awá communities. At the same time, the perceived passivity ascribed to Awá elders – '[the grandparents] are not harmonizing the territory' – suggests a devaluation of the elders' cultural status within the communities. However, this perception may overlook or obscure the structural factors shaping Awá communities' geopolitical location that could explain the impossibility of performing these ecocultural practices. When self-condemnation prevails, a disempowering vision of Awá people, fueled by an apologetic ecocultural identity – 'that's why we are wrong' – is likely to emerge and eventually debilitate Awá cosmovision and territoriality.

The two unwholesome ecocultural identities – other-within and apologetic – emerge from the respect–disrespect dialectic. These ecocultural identities might disempower and erode Awá’s internal political ecocultural bonds because Awá position themselves – individuals or communities – as responsible for the changes happening in the territory due to acquired damaging practices, and incapable of performing the actions needed to address these transformations. However, another reading is also possible.

Purposefully at the margin: A restorative ecocultural identity

Awá identification of unwholesome ecocultural identities among Awá community members demonstrates their profound and meaningful reflexivity regarding Awá ways of living. This critical look at themselves – whether as polluters, miners, illegal crop farmers – and the awareness of a lack of continuity in their traditional practices due to pressuring economic and political circumstances foregrounds possibilities of enacting agency. By looking critically at themselves within larger global dynamics, Awá are able to cultivate a restorative ecocultural identity that emerges from the regenerative practices Awá are implementing and projecting to perform in their territories. In particular, when the ecocultural discursive realm of Awá territoriality is activated, empowerment finds its way.

One example of how Awá’s reflexivity enhances agency is the formation and consolidation of an integral farm, that is, an agroecological center that aims to counter practices and views that stray from traditional Awá ways of being, living, and feeling. The farm is located 30 minutes by car from Predio el Verde, the entrance of El Gran Sábalo Indigenous Reservation of UNIPA (Union of Indigenous Awá People, Colombia). The farm works with the Awá Bilingual Agro-environmental Technical Educational Institution to provide food for inland communities, as well as to be a center for the revitalization of Awá culture. To Eduardo Cantincus,

The integral farm is for the Awá to research with the elders the names of the trees in Awapit, name of the animals, fish, and all medicinal plants. And the names of all the traditional products in Awapit. [The integral farm] is an educational center.

As a traditional food reserve, the farm is an example of a community-based approach to passing on traditional ecological knowledge and revitalize and foster intergenerational dialogue by doing ‘research with the elders.’ The farm also functions as a pragmatic way to address the economic distress of Awá communities. Eduardo continues:

The traditional food reserve farm is planting chiro, pineapple, cane, yucca, all variety of products; also ponds [for fish]. Then we ourselves are going to have [economic] income. So that’s what we’re aiming for.

Awá’s reflexivity and resilience and their agency and alternative positions are a catalyst for the implementation of the integral farm. For instance, after describing the cultural and economic goals of the farm, Eduardo immediately frames this agricultural/educational space as a way of confronting the incursion of alien ideas and practices into Awá ways of life and self-determination:

Here, as the Grand Awá Family, we want to have an integral farm. But I’ve also been saying to the brothers, ‘I do not know what is happening, but other brothers no longer [have the Awá] way of thinking. They are already destroying trees, polluting streams.’ So far it comes. But we are going to have an agroecological center!

The acculturation process is evident here as ‘other brothers no longer [have the Awá] way of thinking.’ The integral farm functions as a confrontation to the incursion of alien ideas and practices into their ways of life and self-determination. Furthermore, Awá’s recognition and self-criticism of the impacts produced by some actions and practices performed by some of their own, ‘destroying trees, polluting streams,’ goes beyond the disempowering apologetic ecocultural position that facilitates the formation of the ecocultural other-within within Awá communities. The assertiveness with which this statement ends – ‘but we are going to have an agroecological center!’ – presents the integral farm as an example of active harmonization and reclaims Awá agency. The integral farm is not ‘outside modernity’ but it is modernity’s exteriority, that is, a state ‘where the difference between “the space of experience” and the “horizon of expectations” becomes apparent’ (Mignolo, 2007, p. 494). As exteriority, Awá’s integral farm affirms the purposeful and intentional determination of Awá to stay at the margins of modernity and its developmental thinking where, in Olivio’s words:

Wealth is all green growth from the bosom of nature, from the bosom of Mother Earth who gives us life. And then, we are still living there [in the territory].

Ecologizing intercultural relations and the politics of identity

Our current disrupted ecological condition demands rethinking ways of examining, challenging, and negotiating identities. Anthropocentrism pervades dominant approaches to intercultural relations, the study of which favors the human and the essentialization of Nature and, therefore, hinders possibilities of interpretation and analyses of relationships that exceed the human realm. An ecocultural perspective entails (a) summoning scholars to enter realms of understanding beyond the human; (b) incites departing from human exceptionalism and embracing emplaced embodied experiences; and (c) attends to a multivocality that is diversified by the voices and agencies of the more-than-human world, which always envelop the cultural interactions that constitute human identity formation and negotiation processes. In closing, I posit three inter-related fields of inquiry in which an ecocultural perspective can illuminate the ecological threads forming the intercultural webs of interactions.

First, an ecocultural perspective expands understandings of intercultural relations by embracing extrahuman (f)actors as constitutive of identity. Within the discursive realm of Awá territoriality, the incorporation of Katza su’s voice and agency in intercultural relations among Awá, Mestizos, and Afros expands by complicating what at first glance appear to be land-based ethnic and class conflicts among these populations. While ethnicity, race, and class intersect in the formation of Awá, Mestizo, and Afro intercultural relations, these cultural constructs are inflected and re-signified via the ecology enveloping and informing them. For instance, the process of homogenization shows how the inclusion of territory as an active and sensuous actor in these populations’ relationships renders secondary the colonial histories shared by Awá, Mestizos, and Afros. Also, the fetishization process elucidates ways in which intercultural relations are ecologized when the effects experienced by cultural groups also are extended to include harms to the more-than-human world. In a multispecies, pluriversal world of ‘different colonial histories entangled with imperial modernity’ (Mignolo, 2007, p. 498), conceiving intersectionality also as an ecological concept becomes imperative (See Parks, 2020, Chapter 6 of this *Handbook*).

Second, an ecocultural framework that simultaneously illuminates how identity emerges from perceptions of and engagements with human and more-than-human realms would be

beneficial to processes and models of environmental conflict management. Identity issues are at the core of environmental conflicts (Peterson et al., 2016), and how ‘nature’ is defined by the diverse organizations and interest groups implicated in these conflicts shapes their intercultural communication and possible collaborations (see Banham, 2020, Chapter 28 of this *Handbook*). Within environmental conflict situations, directly addressing the distinct, and likely conflictive, notions of ‘nature’ – as commodity, feminine, wild, dangerous or welcoming, nurturing, or peaceful – and the ecocultural identities these ideas inform, could be the key factor to hinder or advance destructive or regenerative actions toward not only humans but also to nonhumans. This case study suggests that to create ecocultural spaces of interaction to manage environmental conflicts, researchers and practitioners can critically engage with and delve into the use of Indigenous/non-dominant languages to define and understand what territory, land, ‘nature,’ and self are. Models of public participation to engage environmental conflicts, then, should facilitate the deployment of non-dominant languages, such as the Awá language Awapit, and bring forward non-Western and more encompassing notions of the more-than-human world, like *Katza su*. This praxis may legitimize participation processes and outcomes (e.g., Kauffman & Martin, 2014) as well as strengthen at-the-margin communities’ civic action (Castro-Sotomayor, 2019).

Third, an ecocultural perspective contributes to expand frameworks of intercultural and environmental peacebuilding (Broome & Collier, 2012; Bruch, 2016; Chirindo, 2016). Some scholars have demonstrated that concentrating on the ecological dimension of political practices significantly contributes to reducing conflict and generating peace (Gorsevski, 2012; Sandwith et al., 2001). Yet, while there are exceptions (e.g., Rodríguez et al., 2017) it seems that in peacebuilding frameworks, the ecological and cultural dimensions of identity are generally seen as separate, with the former as a subsidiary of the latter. As this case illustrates, to think ecologically about the possibilities of alliances among antagonist groups requires building coalitions upon a human existence that stretches beyond its cultural self, into the ecology of the subject and toward the environmental dimension of identity. Peacebuilding processes, therefore, would benefit from conceiving political spaces of participation as intercultural spaces in which ecocultural identities are negotiated, environmental ideologies are implicated, and ecological practices are legitimized through communication practices.

The extreme and unescapable ecological conditions that both human and the more-than-human worlds are enduring demand we critically engage with the ecocultural identities implicated in the intercultural encounters that construct our social worlds and impact the ecologies on which we depend. To question our human exceptionalism and self-sufficiency on a planet that largely exceeds our too human concept of the world is not an alternative anymore but an exigency. The voices of the more-than-human are getting louder; if we do not listen, the majority of our identities will stay concealed behind our human-centeredness and constrained to intercultural relations and peacebuilding among humans who seem not to understand our own fragility – this is not enough to embrace the radical changes our species needs to survive.

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These pages are the result of my interactions and relationships with Awá people, their stories and histories, and their resilient force, which have sedimented my commitment to environmental and social justice. Awá also shared with me the gift of humility, for which I will always be thankful.

Notes

- 1 With the capitalization of Nature, I seek to elevate the standing of Nature, or the more-than-human world, in conversations regarding identities and the politics in which they are embedded.
- 2 The other two Awá organizations in Colombia that are part of the GFAB are Main Council Awá of Ricaurte (CAMAWARI) and Association of Indigenous Councils of the Awá People of the Putumayo (ACIPAP).
- 3 On March 1, 2008, the Colombian military attacked a camp of the guerrilla group FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). The *Operación Fénix* occurred 1.8 kilometers (1.1 miles) over the Ecuadorian border, in Sucumbíos Province. The operation killed Raúl Reyes, second-in-command of FARC, as well as 24 individuals present in the encampment at the moment of the attack. Among them were an Ecuadorian citizen and four Mexican research students. This event generated a delicate diplomatic crisis between Venezuela, Ecuador, and Colombia. Now, at the time I write this piece, Colombia-Venezuela relationships have further deteriorated, aggravated by the millions of Venezuelans seeking refuge in Colombia as well as in other countries of the region. The relationships between Ecuador and Colombia, on the other hand, have improved to the point that their governments issued the *Binational Border Integration Plan 2017–2022: Border for Prosperity and Good Living – BBIP (2014)*. This document is the most recent outcome of the binational dialogues and it is the primary document framing binational initiatives.
- 4 Other Indigenous people with binational organizations are Cofán and Éperas (SENPLADES & DNP, 2014). Afro organizations working with a binational perspective are Confederación Comarca Afroecuatoriana del Norte de Esmeraldas (CANE, Ecuador) and Corporación Red de Consejos Comunitarios del Pacífico Sur (RECOMPAS, Colombia).
- 5 Phonetic note: the *Í*/*í* signals a nasal sound in the pronunciation of the vowel.
- 6 Mestizos and mestizaje emphasizes the ‘inherent cultural-racial mixture of Latin America peoples[.] In the 1920s and 1930s mestizaje became a central means of interpreting the national character of the political apparatus of the state. The idea that all Latin Americans shared in Indigenous and European heritage and that Indigenous heritage was central to making the Americas distinct gained increasing commonsense force. In this context, the possibilities of indigeneity as embodyable topoi grew exponentially, helping make a national self that included indigeneity while excluding Indians’ (Olson, 2014, p. 178). The term ‘Indian’ is a racialized, often pejorative label to refer to Indigenous people. Mestizos ruling groups used the term to position these populations as folkloric subjects upon which the nationhood of the new born Latin American countries was built. Ironically, being Indian also refers to disenfranchised Indigenous people alienated from the same nations their romanticized representation helped to create (see Olson, 2014).
- 7 I make this assertion on the basis of my interviews and Awá documents. However, a more up-to-date census should be conducted to support this information.
- 8 In presenting my analysis, I use interviewees’ real names and positions within the organizations as this was the decision participants made when given the option of a pseudonym. Awá criticisms of governmental institutions and reports of human rights violations and impacts on their territory by illegal groups have been publicly stated in Awá organizations’ community-based accounts and diagnoses.
- 9 On November 30, 2016, the Colombian Congress ratified a peace agreement between the Colombian government and Revolutionary Armed Force of Colombia (FARC). Border populations continue suffering the escalation of violence between narcoguerrillas, formed by dissident elements from FARC, and Colombian and Mexican drug cartels. These actors want to fill the vacuum of power created by the dismantling of FARC’s drug network and to gain control of the corridors and plantations installed across the border zone. At the time I write this chapter in 2019, the implementation of the Peace Agreement is facing great obstacles and seems to be failing as FARC announced they will take up arms against the Colombian government once again (<https://www.eltiempo.com/politica/proceso-de-paz/farc-regreso-a-las-armas-reabrio-heridas-del-proceso-de-paz-406704>).

- 10 The equivalent of *colono* is 'settler.' The word '*colono*' literally translates as 'colonist.' In Spanish, the word itself contains the historical roots that inform Awá-Mestizos conflictive relations – colonist/colonialism. In contemporary Latin America, the Mestizo, though of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry, represents the settler – the privileged and embodied manifestation of colonial times.
- 11 According to Bisbicus, Paí, and Paí (2010), to Awá people, '[Rules] are not guidelines written in codes, they are not strict: rules are deduced from the stories told by those who have survived because they suffered in their own flesh. The spiritual ones eat the men, they tear their flesh apart, they look at them, frighten them, make them sick, endorse them; [the spiritual ones] produce fear to those Awá who dared to hunt animals in excess, to step on or to bathe in the holy places or because Awá passed and ignored the known limits' (p. 46).
- 12 Among Awá communities, one of the ways acculturation manifests is via inter-ethnic marriages, which are causing disagreements regarding land rights within Awá's territory. As Eduardo Cantincus disdainfully states: 'Now both peasants and Afros also want to be Indigenous. Paisas want to be Indigenous. [They say], "I also want to be Awá not because of the work but for interest in [getting] land"; or [Paisas] are coupled with an Indigenous woman. Therefore, they want to be Indigenous. But we say, "Here, there is control." So, you are Paisa or you come from Putumayo, you cannot take the position of governor, you cannot have any position because you are not from here. To have a position to govern in our territory you must be an Awá speaker. He must be an Awá speaker, and born here, and also have no crime. That's how it is.' Note: Paisa is someone from the Paisa Region of northwest Colombia, formed by Antioquia, Caldas, Risaralda, and Quindío. For insightful analyses of similar dynamics involving acculturation, interethnic marriage, identity, and land rights in First People Nations of North America, see Lyons (2010), Sturm (2002), and Garroutte (2003).

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Western dominator ecocultural identity and the denial of animal autonomy

Laura Bridgeman

The horses came into view as we came around a bend in the dirt road on Ren Hurst's sanctuary in California, United States. We continued walking, chatting quietly amongst ourselves, not intending to stop unless, as Hurst says, we were invited to do so. As we drew closer, several of the horses turned toward us; two stepped out onto the path, intercepting us: an invitation. Coco Bueno, caramel-color with soft brown eyes, put his head down as I came to stand in front of him. I raised my hand, palm upward, and he took another step toward me: another invitation. I began running my fingernails gently along the side of his neck, then moved down his shoulder and flank. His eyes closed partly as he stood motionless. After a few moments, we humans decided to continue on our way. Coco and another horse chose to join us. Side by side, we walked a path beaten with years of tires and footsteps, yet simultaneously forging a new one on which horses are not led, choosing instead to walk alongside humans of their own volition. Glancing back at our intermingling footprints in the dust, it was clear no metal shoes were hammered into their hooves, nor did they endure metal in their mouths, reins around their necks, or humans upon their backs. They were free to spend their days however they chose. That day, they chose to walk with us for a little while, before wandering off to nibble on clusters of desert sage.

Choice is life. The ability to act upon one's desires – to practice autonomy – is a vital component of the achievement of a satisfactory life. It also is something that Western-acculturated humans overwhelmingly deny other animals¹ through domination, giving rise to what I call the *dominator ecocultural identity*. An expansion of patriarchy – a system of intra-human relations mediated by male domination – the dominator ecocultural identity encompasses contemporary Western cultural perceptions of, and relationships with, animals.² Horses, perhaps the most conspicuously dominated animal in history, act as symbols for Western-acculturated humanity's domination of animals generally, giving rise to one of its most potent and instructive symbols: the horse-man.³ Intrinsic animal autonomy – which does exist and, as I argue in this chapter, was at one time in Western history universally recognized – is denied within contemporary dominator ecocultural identity. This denial is so fundamental to Western identity that it is invisible, masquerading instead as the natural order.

Through an examination of the horse-man's journey, this chapter unearths the ancient roots of animal autonomy denial, explores its manifestations within contemporary ecocultural identity, and illustrates how fostering a loving ecocultural identity that recognizes and respects animal autonomy is one of the keys to dismantling oppressive structures that affect intra-human relations. In rendering visible the fallacy of animal autonomy denial that lies at the core of contemporary Western identity, this chapter aims to provide a roadmap toward overcoming the ancient systems of oppression that continue to define Western societies and lives.

Anatomy of animal autonomy denial

The contemporary Western dominator ecocultural identity refers to a collectivity of identities forged and cultivated within white settler nations that center a Eurocentric hierarchical logic. At the heart of this identity is the denial of animal autonomy, which assumes two forms. The denial of *physical autonomy* is carried out with instruments such as leashes and cages, and animals' positions within houses, laboratories, and farms. The denial of *intrinsic autonomy* is a refusal to accept or acknowledge animals' sentience. My arguments throughout this chapter are grounded within the understanding of animals being sentient, based on the work of a growing number of scientists, including Bekoff (2007), concluding animal sentience does in fact exist. The denial of intrinsic autonomy, therefore, manifests as, but is not limited to, the refusal to acknowledge that animals possess desires and the ability to make choices, or that they experience suffering when they are prevented from acting upon their desires. While the dominator ecocultural identity has ancient roots, the denial of intrinsic autonomy is an exclusive feature of contemporary times and is so widespread it is rendered largely invisible, regarded instead as objective truth. Further, I argue, since intrinsic animal autonomy does exist, contemporary denial of animal autonomy is a fallacy. This is evidenced in part by the alternate or simultaneous acknowledgement and denial of animals' intrinsic autonomy that is a common feature of contemporary perceptions of and relations with animals, as explored in subsequent sections.

The inclination to restrain animals in enclosures – which extends also to members of our own species (for example, prisons, national borders, and the walls of Berlin and the Trump administration⁴) – stems from Western-aculturated people's captivity within the ideological enclosure of the dominator ecocultural identity, the pillars of which were erected thousands of years ago and took various forms, including in husbandry (pastoralism), language, and hierarchy. These three pillars of husbandry, language, and hierarchy, which are subject to examination and critique in this chapter, continue to be among the load-bearing structures of this enclosure, wrapped within a mesh-like boundary that actively prevents human-animal connection unmediated by domination and submission.

The resulting isolation this structure perpetuates onto those it holds within its confines is a major factor keeping intact the oppressive power structures upon which Western and associated societies currently depend. However, as the mesh-like boundary is permeable, individuals of other species are able to slip through, affording glimpses beyond the enclosure's cultural mandates. As I will argue, instances and relationships with individuals of other species where domination is absent can serve as vital inspiration and instruction to ways this solitary confinement of humans and animals may be overcome and oppressive power structures dismantled. The process of illuminating the composition of the contemporary dominator ecocultural identity and its enclosure renders both vulnerable to analysis and potential transformation, which ultimately is the purpose of this chapter.

The Golden Age: A time before domination?

Within Western historical narrative, notions of a Golden Age – an idyllic time of prosperity and happiness during the prehistory of humanity – trace roots to the earliest of Greek writers. Hesiod's version had the trappings of paradise: a time when women and men lived in peace and harmony with one other; where food was abundant and acquired with little effort, and death was 'no more troublesome than sleep' (Barnes, 2006, p. 9). Beyond Hesiod, Hebrews in the Levant likened the Golden Age to the Garden of Eden, as does the book of Genesis (Barnes, 2006). The relationship between humans and animals is said to have been different during this age, with some arguing that killing and eating animals was not necessary (Boddice, 2011). Throughout the centuries, Western artists depicting iconic scenes, such as Orpheus 'singing to the beasts' (Clark, 1977, p. 13) and Noah's ark, show animals and humans living together in harmony, with dreamy human expressions and animals at ease (Clark, 1977).

Though some argue this Golden Age was fictitious (Clark, 1977), there may have existed deeper understandings between humans and other animals due to a universal, or shared, language – something alluded to by Western writers such as the Roman versifier Babrius (Dubois, 1982). Notions of a shared language also have been described in enduring myths of many non-Western and Indigenous cultures. And contemporary Western thinkers, such as Abram (1996), argue language is not a purely mental phenomenon developed and possessed solely by human beings, but the embodied outcome of the perpetual interplay between the body and the wider world. By virtue of existing in the same physical world, experiences can be shared and understood across species – making the existence of a shared language a plausible notion.

Partnership societies

Depictions of the Golden Age appear to illustrate a time when life was not structured according to the tenets of domination and submission. While Hesiod doesn't say where this Golden Age was to have taken place, in *In Search of the Lost Feminine*, Barnes (2006) offers one possible answer: that it refers to the civilization of the Minoans. Said to have lasted from around 2500 BCE to 1500 BCE, the Minoans were concentrated on Crete and the Cycladic islands of the eastern Mediterranean. According to Barnes, this sophisticated, influential culture viewed time as cyclical rather than linear, rendering women as the doorways to human immortality. Women were at the center of social and cultural life, and sexuality, ecstasy, joy, and grace were celebrated. Generally absent from Minoan artwork are depictions of male aggression or violence, the glorification of war, or hierarchy – all of which, as we will see, are heavily featured in works of classical Athens, and continue to define contemporary Western cultural identity. Eisler (1987) argues Minoan society was oriented toward what she calls a *partnership* model: a society in which notions of superiority and inferiority do not dictate social relations amongst genders or other sects of society, and where the absence of hierarchy allows for mutually respectful and caring relations and the conditions for relative peace amongst society members.

While Eisler focuses her analysis on intra-human, and particularly gendered, relations, the ways that human–animal relations were affected by a partnership societal orientation warrants examination. Minoan society appears to have recognized intrinsic animal autonomy and did not emphasize denial of animal physical autonomy. In *The Goddess and the Warrior*, Marinatos (2000) looks at Minoan art featuring scenes of women and animals, finding the latter

‘submissive of their own volition’ (p. 119): ungulates accept women’s caresses, lions sit peacefully at their sides, monkeys proffer flowers to them. Animals are depicted, time and again, as companions rather than inferiors, the sense of understanding and mutual respect seeming to pervade these scenes perhaps facilitated by a shared language. Shows of force are nearly entirely absent, especially from earlier periods of the civilization, before any influence of dominator culture.

A common thread among these authors is that partnership models within prehistoric societies were prevalent not only in Minoan culture but around the world. Without tenets of domination and submission directing intra-human relationships, were these societies inclined to dominate animals for food, pets, protection, entertainment, or other reasons? Contemporary thinking tends to regard animal domination, in the form of husbandry, as inevitable and a signifier of evolved, sophisticated human culture.

While an examination of the world’s cultures is beyond the scope of this study, one digression will be permitted in order to strengthen this analysis beyond interpretation of ancient myths and into contemporary lived realities, the goal being to illustrate that the presence, vulnerability, or susceptibility of animals toward human domination does not necessarily result in their domination. In *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Descola (2013) draws examples from the Amerindians of non-Andean South America who long have hunted animals and practiced plant cultivation, yet never crossed the boundary into dominating animals as livestock – practicing husbandry – despite possessing the skills and conditions necessary to do so. Those acculturated within the dominator ecocultural identity tend to view this trajectory – from hunting animals to husbandry – as inevitable, and are perplexed when any culture refuses to fully engage in animal domination. While this trajectory may have held true within most cultures, if the ancient myths of Western culture’s Golden Age hold any truth, it may be, at one time, that Western human societies practiced neither hunting nor husbandry.

Origins of Western dominator ecocultural identity

If partnership societies, such as the Minoans, at one time did not dominate animals through hunting or husbandry, then the first people to do so would have been responsible for erecting the initial pillar of the dominator ecocultural enclosure through denying physical autonomy to animals. Based on my research, I suggest this may have been accomplished by people known broadly as the Indo-Europeans, also known as Aryans. These nomadic people, who later would be incorporated into Nazi mythology (Eisler, 1995), were the first to instill dominator configurations into ancient European human societies. Beginning in 4300 BCE, they began arriving from Central Asia, practicing war and slavery, and laying waste to many agrarian partnership societies. They came upon horses’ backs, and some credit them with being the first to dominate horses. Regardless, the importance of horses to these people is widely recognized (Eisler, 1987).

The Indo-Europeans were pastoralists: their livelihoods revolved around the domination (husbandry) of animals. Eisler (1995) points out that pastoralism constitutes a form of slavery that demands a deadening of empathetic emotions in humans, using this as an explanation of how domination came to infect intra-human relationships in the form of domination over women and slaves perpetuated largely by men. Indeed, Indo-Europeans were notable in their frequent comparisons of women to horses, slaves, and property (Barnes, 2006). The domination of the animals themselves, however, was a foundational – and, as Eisler suggests, perhaps even the original – factor contributing to the rise of the dominator ecocultural identity.

A major contributing factor to the decline of Minoan influence was the massive volcanic eruption of approximately 1500 BCE that wrought havoc on Minoan cities, paving the way for foreign invasion. Beginning in 1600 BCE, the Indo-Europeans arrived in mainland Greece and coastal areas of the Aegean, forcing partnership societies to begin accommodating dominator values (Barnes, 2006). Due in part to a new focus on the accumulation of wealth through war and conquest, women's position as the gateways to immortality and cyclical life was rejected. Material wealth replaced immortality, and the introduction of marriage became a key method to contain women's sexuality and ensure patriarchal lineage, thus rendering all who were not considered men – women, slaves, and animals – as assets to be controlled in this purveying and passing down of wealth.

The resulting transformation of the relationship between humans and animals is traceable through myths: the women, who were the most commonly depicted humans in Minoan art and were not pictured dominating animals, were gradually replaced by men and women who held animals forcibly (Marinatos, 2000). Though the denial of intrinsic animal autonomy was still far from accomplished, I argue the physical denial of autonomy would be something from which dominated animals have never truly recovered.

Hierarchy and language

By the time of classical Athens (508–322 BCE), the human–animal relationship was increasingly defined in terms of domination and submission. In his examination of depictions of the Golden Age throughout Western history, Clark (1977) notes, 'it was above all through speech that man became separated from the rest of the animal world' (p. 69). This language-driven separation, enabled by the Greek alphabet, formed a critical pillar of the dominator ecocultural enclosure. As Abram (1996) states, it was during Plato's lifetime (428–347 BCE) the alphabet became incorporated into Greek life. Unlike writing systems to that point, which used ideograms that related directly to natural phenomena, the alphabet introduced characters that referred exclusively to human-made sounds and images. The resulting loss of 'worldly, extra-human significance' enabled language 'to be experienced as an exclusively human power' (Abram, 1996, p. 132), allowing for the development of what Abram calls the literate intellect: a new, reflexive sense of self that encouraged abstract thought while de-emphasizing sensory perceptions. Animals, therefore, may not have been able to, or were actively prevented from, understanding the alphabet, perhaps at the same time rendering human participation in the universal language more difficult.

Accompanying this monumental shift in Greek intellect was Plato's creation of the chain-of-being hierarchy, forming the third pillar in the dominator ecocultural enclosure. In *Centaurs and Amazons*, Paige Dubois (1982) writes that, in response to Athens being at risk of collapse due in part to having vastly more slaves than citizens, Plato created his chain-of-being hierarchy – known also as his *Phoenician lie* – which articulated invented hierarchical differences among the inhabitants of Athens. The goal of this chain-of-being was to rationalize and justify social structures such as slavery in order to keep the elite in power. Using slavery as a metaphor for all relationships, this model of domination placed the Greek male citizen at the top of the hierarchy that held women, slaves, barbarians (non-Greeks), and animals on descending orders (it should be noted that, at this time, people were not enslaved based on racism and white supremacy, which is the connotation in places like the United States with a history of antebellum slavery⁵). Citizens' superior position on the hierarchy was justified due to an alleged exclusive possession of *logos*, or reason – perhaps facilitated by the literate intellect Abram identifies. Dubois points

out that logos conferred authority, functioning as the criterion through which social relations of domination and submission were articulated. In logos, then, the denial of intrinsic animal autonomy took further shape, though was still far from completion.

Women and horses submit to husbandry

The domination of women and animals formed a foundational aspect of ancient Athenian society, submitting to men in similar ways: women to husbands in marriage and animals to husbandry. I contend that the conspicuous overlap within the psychological (including linguistic – the ancient Greek word for wife, ‘damar,’ is derived from the root meaning ‘to tame’) and physical containment of women and animals constitutes evidence of intrinsic animal autonomy recognition. Despite Plato’s lie that women and animals lack logos, I argue their intrinsic autonomy was nonetheless recognized in order to most effectively deny their physical autonomy. Examples of this come from the philosopher Xenophon (430–354 BCE), who produced texts that appear to act as instruction manuals for dominating wives and horses – for practicing husbandry – wherein he recommends techniques for getting both accustomed to men’s hands, which alternately mete out affection and discipline in order to compel obedience (Xenophon, 362 BC/2013).

Women and slaves likely rebelled against their systemic demotion and domination within Athenian society; I suggest animals may have, as well. In *The Reign of the Phallus*, Keuls (1985) labels classical Athens as a phallocracy due to its particularly brutal violence and domination against women, who were generally married as young as possible, kept as ignorant as possible, and sequestered indoors for much of their lives. Keuls suggests they were even denied names, given that women’s names were virtually absent from both public records and artistic compositions – one example of this comes from the aforementioned Xenophon, whose tale centers around a 14-year-old bride who is never once named (Xenophon, 362 BC/2013). Further, Keuls points out there is no writing or artifact from the fifth century of Athens that can be attributed to a woman. It seems clear women were prevented from fully practicing their intrinsic and physical autonomy. It is difficult to imagine women did not rebel against these conditions; Barnes suggests the virulent misogyny, plainly obvious on Athenian pottery, sculpture, and written works of the time, became popular topics rendered by artists in response to women’s objections to their domination. Keuls provides examples from pottery such as Heracles killing Amazon women, Poseidon and Hermes on a raping expedition, Zeus killing the goddess Semele, the beating of prostitutes, men molesting and sexually harassing women, and male satyrs raping and molesting women. These kind of works of art were disseminated as a way to ‘contain and corral the female threat to patrilineal descent’ (Barnes, 2006, p. 175).

Given my position that animals are in fact possessive of intrinsic autonomy (Bekoff, 2007), it would follow that they, too, may have rebelled against their domination. If Barnes is correct in asserting Athenian misogyny was developed in response to women’s rebellion against domination, then it would follow that *misotheia* – hatred of animals (Mason, 2017) – would be similarly present within Athenian artifacts. Indeed, this appears to be the case, as there are ‘countless stories of the clubbing, stabbing, and strangling to death’ of animals (Keuls, 1985, p. 34).

The similar techniques used for compelling the obedience of both women and animals, and the subsequent rebellion against this domination as depicted in artworks, suggests that the intrinsic autonomy of animals and women alike were recognized and seen as threatening to the patriarchal order. If animals were understood by ancient Athenians as being

unthinking, unfeeling, and unreasonable, then the need to psychologically break their wills would not be necessary, and animals' rebellion would not be perceived as possible. However, evidence suggests the contrary was both believed and experienced. We now turn to a striking example of what I argue is the containment of women and animal rebellion alike, one that renders the ancient Athenian acknowledgement of intrinsic animal autonomy further visible.

A grand temple of autonomy denial

The Parthenon, located on the Athenian Acropolis, was begun in 447 BCE and completed in 432 BCE. Barnes (2006) argues this structure was designed to show Athenians that 'their strength and power had come from their rule of women' (p. 175). I suggest the Parthenon also enshrines the subordination of horses, who likely represented the relationship between animals and humans generally. The Parthenon frieze – a narrow band of carved marble that ran along the architrave of the structure – depicts 378 men and more than 200 animals, most of whom are horses. The relevance of these horse-men continues to confound experts. It may appear as though the procession is about to ride into war, yet the virtual absence of weapons casts doubt upon this theory. In Greek art generally, myths and allegories are represented while direct historical accounts are avoided, so it is unlikely this procession represents an actual event (Dubois, 1982). If animal rebellion needed to be constrained, and, on a practical level, instructions be transmitted on how horses ought to be dominated, then the significance of the horse-men begins to make sense.

A closer examination of Block XII of the West Frieze (Figure 5.1) may support this contention. This block, situated toward the beginning of the frieze, where horses are being prepared for riding, depicts a horse whose attitude is particularly submissive, with head lowered between forelegs. The horse's mane is unusually long, and there is an apparent lack of genitalia, the latter notable given the artistic convention generally followed throughout the frieze that renders male genitalia visible when the leg furthest from the viewer is held forward and the leg closest to the viewer is held back, which is the position this horse assumes. I therefore contend this horse is female – possibly the only one on the frieze. Three men surround her, one who is making a 'very precise gesture,' suggesting that an 'extremely specific action' is taking place (Neils, 2001, pp. 127–128). It may be tempting to imagine this man held the horse's reins; however, no drill holes, where reins would have been attached, are visible. Some speculate the horse is being rejected from the procession (Neils, 2001); if this is true, I would argue this rejection is gender-based. However, I wish to take a step further in arguing this block is emphasizing the psychological domination of a female horse, with pointing gestures by the men that are intended to engender negative emotions within the horse, in addition to whatever physical abuse she may endure. If this block depicts psychological assaulting of a horse, this constitutes a recognition of intrinsic autonomy of horses as it conflates women with horses and portrays the pure ideals of domination.

The sculptures of the Parthenon are revered for their beauty and craftsmanship, with carefully wrought details giving the frieze striking realism. The purpose of monuments such as the Parthenon was the conveyance of ideas; every inch of the structure in question is drenched in symbolism. Facial expressions, therefore, must be meant to convey something significant. In the men's faces on Block XII of the West frieze, as appears to be the case with many of the men's faces throughout the frieze, we are confronted with mouths turned sternly downward, appearing to wear the very masks of the dominator.



Figure 5.1 Block XII, West Parthenon Frieze.

Source: Acropolis Museum, photo: Socratis Mavrommatis.

Should the men's facial expressions be deemed too subjective for interpretation, when we turn to the horses' faces there is less room for doubt. Recent studies have illustrated that horses' eyes are emotionally expressive (Figure 5.2), noting wrinkling and an angular contour developing in the skin above the inner corner of the eye and a bulging of the eye (Walther et al., 2015) are associated with horses who are stressed, pained, or appear worried (Gleerup et al., 2015). Additionally, Gleerup et al. found that, in pained or stressed horses, nostrils tend to become flared and ears held lowered or asymmetrically. These facial contortions are present on virtually every horse whose face remains intact on the Parthenon frieze (Figure 5.3). Interestingly, some of the horses are depicted with ears pointing forward, suggesting that lowered ears were not simply an artistic convention, lending support for my contention that the Parthenon artists recognized differing emotional states of horses and intentionally depicted the vast majority as being afraid or pained.

The contemporary horse-man

While the horse-man symbol remained largely unchanged from ancient Greece until contemporary times, the relationship – along with Western humanity's perception of and relationships with animals – transformed significantly. How can it be that such poignant expressions of fear and concern be expertly rendered upon the faces of hundreds of horses on the Parthenon, yet scientists today seek to discover, then often express surprise, that horses make facial expressions at all (Radford, 2015)? The severing of empathy first practiced by the Indo-Europeans, the abandonment (or rejection) of the universal language, and animals' demotion within the illusory hierarchy have rendered Western-acculturated people

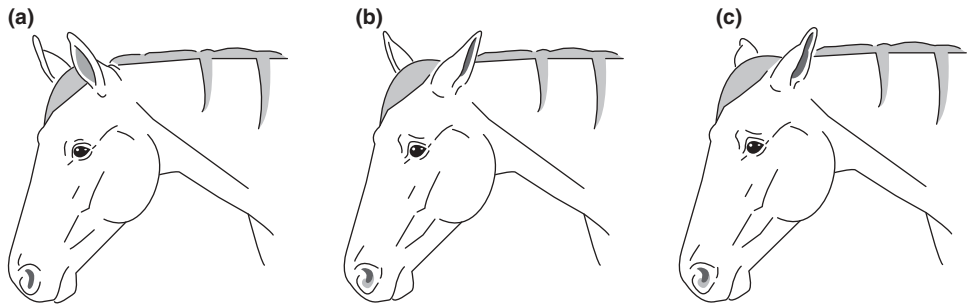


Figure 5.2 (a) Facial expression of a pain free, relaxed and attentive horse (Ill. Andrea Klintbjer). (b) Facial expression of a horse in pain, comprising all features of the pain face including asymmetrical ears (Ill. Andrea Klintbjer). (c) Facial expression of a horse in pain, comprising all features of the pain face including low ears (Ill. Andrea Klintbjer).

Source: 2014 The Authors *Veterinary Anaesthesia and Analgesia* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of Association of Veterinary Anaesthetists and the American College of Veterinary Anesthesia and Analgesia.



Figure 5.3 Block IX, West Parthenon frieze.

Source: Acropolis Museum, photo: Socratis Mavrommatis.

largely incapable of, or unwilling to, discern horse or other animal facial expressions. Yet this process cannot be assumed to be inevitable, nor insurmountable. Plato's original scheme of differentiation continues to play a substantive role in contemporary Western cultures, though modified to include a more entrenched human-nature binary (Descola, 2013) and an emphasis upon racial divisions, resulting in Western societies' organization along the contemporary white-supremacist speciesist patriarchal hierarchy.

The confederacy rode on horseback

Horses bore the dominator ecocultural identity, literally and figuratively, upon their backs throughout the intervening centuries from ancient Athens to the contemporary United States. Their domination was integral to the success of countless bids for conquest, including the genocidal colonization of the New World. Just as Plato's hierarchy was fabricated in order to preserve slavery in ancient Athens, contemporary white-supremacist speciesist patriarchal hierarchy was woven into the fabric of the United States with the same goal of enabling a master/slave dynamic to function as the framework for all social relationships. Among the most literal, and horrific, examples of this dynamic was the enslavement of African Americans. The Confederacy, a proto-state comprised of slave-holding states within the United States, existed between the years 1861 and 1865 and fought to maintain the legal institution of slavery. The Confederacy made ample use of horse-man symbolism, including on the Great Seal of the Confederacy, which features an image of George Washington on horseback.

Although slavery was formally abolished in 1865, the years between 1890 and 1940 saw a resurgence of Confederate monuments erected with the intention, in part, of conveying a message of white superiority imbued with an illusory moral authority (Savage, 1997). Perhaps the most striking example of these monuments is a precise, full-scale replica of the Parthenon, erected in Nashville, TN (Nashville was known also as the 'Athens of the South'), beginning in 1920 and completed in 1931, designed by Confederate veteran William Crawford. In *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, Savage (1997) notes that horse-man statues were the standard for depicting military heroes because it encoded authority in the 'natural dominance of man over animal' (p. 133). Robert E. Lee, a terrorist also known as a commander of the Confederate States Army (Wilson, 2017), came to embody the Confederacy and exemplified Southern manhood; Lee dominated his horse, Traveller, not through infliction of pain or fear, as on the Parthenon, but rather through a moral mastery of an 'inferior animal.'

Lee and Traveller's depicted relationship illustrates the contradictions inherent within contemporary denial of intrinsic animal autonomy. Traveller was said to buck any African American person who attempted to mount him, stemming from Traveller's alleged instinctual understanding of the racist delineations of the hierarchy. However, the ability to discern and act upon any morality – racist or otherwise – necessarily entails possession of it. Despite this narrative, Traveller is prevented from acting upon any of his other so-called instincts, which could be assumed to be fleeing violence such as war. Traveller's intrinsic autonomy is simultaneously recognized (he chooses who rides him) and rejected (since he is naturally inferior, acting solely on instinct) in order to justify and reify Confederates' racist domination, as well as Traveller's physical autonomy denial that prevents him from running far beyond human reach.

Good riddance to the horse-man?

The hierarchical power structures represented and maintained by the horse-man symbol have faced resistance throughout history. Raulff (2017) describes the toppling of horse-man

monuments by Parisian revolutionaries during the French Revolution, including those of Henry IV and the Bourbon Kings. The symbolism of such acts – undertaken with the understanding that ‘a king was only a king when he was on horseback’ (pp. 234–235) – demonstrates the potency of the horse-man symbol and, conversely, the meaning engendered through its physical destruction during struggles against oppressive regimes. Similar challenges are taking place in the contemporary United States. In 2017, after decades of protests aimed at addressing racist domination taking place across the country, local governments removed monuments of Traveller and Lee from the cities of Dallas, Baltimore, and Franklin, which were among 28 cities to remove or relocate other Confederate monuments (Carbone, 2018). Another occurrence that same year further demonstrates an apparent diminishing potency of the horse-man: on September 26, Alabama Republican Senate candidate Roy Moore – who, given his contentious comments about race and sexual orientation and also his alleged molesting of a 14-year-old girl, is the model dominator (*Washington Post*, 2017) – rode to a polling station on horseback on the day of a contentious election in Alabama, where the African American population was mobilizing to support his Democratic opponent Doug Jones. Despite Moore’s summoning of the ancient symbol of authority, Jones, who appeared on his own two feet at the polling station, won the election thanks largely to African American voters (Lowndes, 2017).

Diminishing the power and relevance of the horse-man symbol, in its myriad manifestations, forms a component within the overthrowing and transformation of social structures informed by the dominator ecocultural identity. Regarding the Parisian revolutionaries, Raulff (2017) writes, ‘[w]hoever could lay a hand on the sovereign’s steed could also bring the monarch to the ground’ (p. 235). This legacy of activism continues to thrive.

Toppling the dominator ecocultural enclosure

Movements seeking to address systemic oppressions resulting from the contemporary white-supremacist speciesist patriarchal hierarchy could be strengthened by the understanding that this structure is connected and upheld, in part, by the denial of intrinsic animal autonomy. Merely a modification of the original Phoenecian lie, the contemporary hierarchy is a system of falsehoods, the singular goal being the retention of power structures that protect and uphold the elite. In *Aphro-ism*, authors Ko and Ko (2017) identify the human–animal divide as contributing to the formation of the foundation of white supremacy and racism, with the definition of human as being white and male, and the negative status of “the animal” as the anchor for the divide. As long as animal continues to indicate the ‘opposite status marker to humans’ (p. 47), white supremacy remains intact.

I suggest the way ‘animal’ is conceptualized cements the denial of intrinsic animal autonomy in place and emphasizes a human/animal divide that contributes to the foundation of hierarchy in its entirety, having implications for feminist and anti-speciesism movements, as well. Failure to recognize this foundational aspect of the white-supremacist speciesist patriarchal hierarchy amounts to a tacit acceptance of it in its totality, thereby reinforcing its potency. Unfortunately, this is common; for example, Eisler (1995), who persuasively advocates for ridding domination and submission from gendered relations, takes up the denial of intrinsic animal autonomy as evidence and motivation for doing so, claiming, among other things, that humanity possesses the greatest capacity for conscious choice of all species. Eisler’s employment of the illusion of human exceptionalism serves to entrench the very hierarchy she seeks to dismantle, illustrating the degree to which anthropocentrism within the dominator identity is embedded, rendering it invisible even to many/most of our more respected and insightful critical scholars.

The variety of speciesism utilized by Eisler is becoming increasingly outdated. Through contemporary scientific explorations, Western science, itself a formidable pillar of the dominator ecocultural enclosure through its reflection and assertion of dominator ideology, is shedding light upon the fallacy of intrinsic animal autonomy denial as it is revealing animals as being far more emotional and intelligent than once believed (Bekoff, 2007). However, scientific understandings can only go so far in modifying cultural conceptions, behaviors, and identity.

Language presents another significant barrier that must be overcome should the dominator ecocultural enclosure be toppled. The limited ability of those within the enclosure to understand or communicate with animals powerfully cements the denial of animal autonomy in place. In service of dominator ecocultural values as it is, the English language has profound effects on the perceptions and experiences of its speakers. Milstein (2008) describes ways that English words are frequently insufficient in conveying moments of connection with other species, revealing discursive ‘hurdles’ (p. 188) placed between humans and animals, which render these moments of recognition difficult to understand and thus the animals unknowable. At other times, metaphors serve to interpret animal behavior in ways that reinforce the dominator hierarchy, for example by describing wild animals as performing for human audiences (Milstein, 2016). By rendering visible these cultural barriers to understanding and connection, a path beyond them is illuminated, the first steps of which I explore in the next section.

Beyond husbandry: Fostering a loving ecocultural identity

Should Western societies hope to fully overcome systemic oppressions perpetuated by the white-supremacist speciesist patriarchal hierarchy, a new ecocultural identity should be fostered: one that recognizes and respects the intrinsic and physical autonomy of all animals. This is why I am calling for a *loving ecocultural identity*, an identity that replaces domination with respect and understanding in relations with other animals. This radical shift could help dismantle the dominator ecocultural enclosure and bring more holistic thinking about, and actions against, systemic oppressions into lived experience.

In *All About Love*, hooks (2000) defines love as the participatory action of recognizing, nurturing, and enabling the autonomy of oneself and others. She emphasizes that, despite widespread ignorance and cynicism regarding love, engaging in the practice of living according to a love ethic is ‘as crucial to our survival as a nation as the drive to succeed’ (p. xxviii). hooks’ love ethic involves applying the principles of care, respect, integrity, and a willingness to cooperate and learn to relationships with oneself and other human beings, all of which are then guided by the presupposition that ‘everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well’ (p. 87). In order for this loving ethic to be successfully employed, I argue hooks’s definition of ‘everyone’ must be expanded to include other species.

The first step toward enacting a loving ecocultural identity is to apply the principles of a loving ethic to interactions and relationships with *individuals of other species*. The notion of animals as individuals is deliberately obscured by the dominator ecocultural identity, which refers to them instead in terms of populations, stocks, and resources (Stibbe, 2012). Actively rejecting these abstractions by relating to individuals of other species encountered within daily life – be they dominated animals such as dogs, or wild animals such as pigeons – can be a powerful way to overcome the isolation perpetuated by the dominator ecocultural identity’s enclosure, since animals may pass freely through its permeable mesh when recognized as individuals.

Encounters with individuals of other species that feature a felt connection – known as peak experiences (Frohoff & Oriel, 2017) – are common, and often inspiring or jarring enough to be unforgettable (see Abram with Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020, Chapter 1 of this *Handbook*). What tends to be striking about these experiences is their lack of coercion by humans, with animals approaching or engaging with humans of their own volition. Peak experiences are therefore potentially transformative, helping to cement a loving ecocultural identity into place, as they directly challenge the denial of animal autonomy and create space for applying the principles of a loving ethic. Scientist Barbara Smuts (2001) developed a framework for what she calls meeting animal minds, describing the ‘surprising’ ease with which one can develop relationships – both ephemeral and long-term – with individuals of other species. She notes the importance of one’s outward countenance, body language, and tenor of voice carrying significance as they do within intra-human relationships. She illustrates this with a charming encounter she experienced as she sat in a forest one day: a mouse popped out from the underbrush unexpectedly close to where Smuts sat; Smuts whispered a greeting and gently cocked her head in order to indicate benign intentions. To her surprise, the mouse curled up at her feet, taking a brief nap before going along her/his way.

Smuts also provides an example of a long-term relationship with her dog, Safi, in which the two co-create conventions that allow them to navigate their relationship. Smuts leads the way in treacherous urban environments (with Safi mostly off-leash), and their roles reverse when on camping trips or forest hikes, where Safi assumes the role of trailblazer and protector. Smuts describes their touching daily morning routine at home:

When I wake up in the morning, Safi presses her forehead against mine and holds it there... . When I get out of bed and say, ‘let’s stretch,’ Safi places her front feet close together facing my hands and we synchronize yoga’s ‘downward dog’ position (at which she naturally excels), touching our heads together briefly as we stretch forward. Then we both shift to ‘upward dog,’ and our eyes lock as we lift our heads to face one another. Thus begins our day, synchronous movements expressing our emotional alignment, in the way of wild animals.

(p. 304)

Smuts writes that their mutual understanding of subtle gestures and vocalizations co-creates these shared rituals, which define and strengthen their relationship, one in which each individual supports the autonomy of the other. The apparent care and respect, with commitments toward understanding, cooperation, and ‘a common future in which the circle of shared experience and fellow feeling grows ever larger’ (p. 304), form a striking example of the loving ecocultural identity put into practice.

These sorts of relationships can become increasingly common as the dominator ecocultural identity is confronted. In *Riding on the Power of Others*, Hurst (2015) describes her journey – from working as a horse trainer and trader to viewing the use of horses, and animals generally, as abusive. After coming to these realizations, she allowed the horses in her care to heal ‘mentally, emotionally, and physically from the demands of domestication’ (p. 117). She stopped riding them or adorning their bodies with the accoutrements of domination and began noticing changes in their personalities:

They now found us [human caretakers] interesting, and they began wanting to share space with us in the most awesome and peaceful of ways. Their eyes began changing... .

One by one, the glossy stares disappeared, the veil of old hurts lifted, and I began to meet my own horses... for the very first time.

(pp. 117–118)

Overcoming the denial of animal autonomy with words, thoughts, and actions is a subtle, complex process that, as with intra-human relationships, requires the histories, personalities, and social locations (class, cultural background, and so on) of both human and animal individuals be taken into consideration. Hurst (2015) points out that most domesticated horses are ‘conditioned beyond any hope of being able to confidently express how they really feel’ (p. 147). Employing a loving ecocultural identity will not always be easy or pleasant, but it provides an avenue for dealing with difficulties in constructive ways that allow for the increased understanding and respect of everyone involved. The key understanding is that this is possible: animals do have intrinsic autonomy, and by recognizing and respecting this – by manifesting a loving ecocultural identity rooted in pre-Athenian and contemporary science-informed times – Western-aculturated, as well as many other, people will be better equipped to address the connected oppressions that permeate contemporary societies.

Love and domination cannot coexist

The conflation of love with domination is a predominant feature within human–animal relationships in the West. hooks’ loving ethic requires an end of the ‘obsession’ to dominate. I argue this only can be achieved by engendering a loving ecocultural identity that removes domination from human–animal relations. Hurst (2015) points out that contemporary horse–human relationships, wherein horses often are loved and cherished as companions, involves recreational riding – defined by causing horses pain, since pain infliction (bits, spurs, whips, riding crops) or the threat of pain (yelling, cracking the whip) forms the primary component of compelling a horse’s obedience. Furthermore, in order for a person to enjoy doing so, at least a partial severing of empathy from the horse’s experience is necessary. This practice, initiated by the Indo–European pastoralists centuries ago, has led to the conflation of pleasure with pain, and love with domination, within contemporary interspecies and intra-human relationships, rendering people blind to the suffering they participate in or of which they are the cause.

hooks (2004) identifies one of the most powerful lies of patriarchy and, I argue, of the dominator ecocultural identity: that love and domination can coexist. It is common for contemporary Western-aculturated people to believe they have loving relationships with companion animals, yet by and large these relationships are mediated by the tenets of domination and submission. Animal autonomy, both intrinsic and physical, is denied in varying forms and degrees: self-ascribed ‘animal lovers’ consume factory-farmed individuals; beloved pet birds are kept in cages; dogs are controlled with collars and left in isolation during human working hours.

While there are numerous cultural examples of this conflation of love with domination within contemporary intra-human relationships, the most extreme can be found within BDSM sexual practices (Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, and Sadism and Masochism), where the very accoutrements used to dominate horses (whips, riding crops, bit gags, the act of breaking) enable the acting-out of animal husbandry between humans – acting out, in other words, the very foundation of Western culture: the dominator ecocultural identity. Eisler (1995) notes the equation of sexual freedom and excitement through torture and degradation is a result of the dominator conditioning that remains largely unconscious, yet widespread. The domination of horses, acting again as metaphors for all animals and the tenets of domination and submission that infect contemporary lives, is sexually fetishized, further deadening empathy for

the plight of animals and humans alike. Eisler recognizes male domination as an emotional and sexual dysfunction that is key to upholding the dominator identity; I argue further that recognition of and sensitization toward horse and animal suffering imparted by domination must also be addressed should gendered, racial, and species domination finally be overcome.⁶

Between individuals of other species

A few years ago, as I sat beneath the shade of a sprawling banyan tree, a crow alighted on the grass beside me. The crow made soft, intricate vocalizations while looking at me intently, feathers nearly grazing my knee. I returned whispered greetings, trying to hide my astonishment – playing it cool. A silence befell us as we gazed at the shimmering leaves and the horizon beyond. A scene from a Minoan artifact came to mind: a human and deer stand shoulder to shoulder, looking outward together – whether it was toward a particular object or location, we’ll likely never know. To me, it seems an acknowledgment of a path they would travel together, these two individuals of other species. That day beneath the banyan, the crow slipped through the mesh of the dominator ecocultural enclosure, offering me a precious glimpse of what could be possible should the power structures the horse-man represents be rejected, should the influence of domination be cleansed from relations with others, should a loving ecocultural identity be enacted. It seems as though Western-aculturated people are beginning to grasp these ideas; the dawn of a new Golden Age may be at hand. As this chapter has shown, the path toward this does exist; it is now a matter of choice to begin taking the first steps, alongside other species, footsteps intermingling along the way.

Notes

- 1 The word ‘animal’ has acquired derogatory connotations in contemporary Western culture. I seek to meaningfully reclaim this word by drawing from Lisa Kemmerer’s (2006) concept of ‘anymals’ – a term that can be used by any species to refer to individual(s) of other species – while retaining the conventional spelling.
- 2 This chapter focuses on animals; though beyond the scope of this study, the dominator identity and its tenets also encompass relations with flora and the more-than-human world more generally.
- 3 Though women have also practiced horse domination, historically this has been primarily the arena of men – hence the term horse-man.
- 4 The Trump administration’s wall is meant to enforce the national border between the United States and Mexico, with critics decrying the project as one designed to foment division and exclusion aimed at people from Latin American nations (Díaz-Barriga, 2017) (for more on ecocultural identity in this borderland, see Tarin, Upton & Sowards, 2020, Chapter 3 of this *Handbook*).
- 5 There are numerous writings on this topic, among them Snowden (1983), demonstrating that Africans were not discriminated against because of the color of their skin in ancient times; Roberts (2016), providing a timeline for the development of the race-based slavery system in the U.S.; and Painter (2010), tracing the historical development of the concept of race and whiteness within Western history.
- 6 I am not calling for an end to BDSM practices, but merely a recognition of their origins.

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Critical ecocultural intersectionality

Melissa Michelle Parks

I was born into disposable medical gloves in a sterile room in a city hospital, cleaned of my mother's fluids and wrapped in a pink-striped blanket. I was kept indoors for the first days of my life, breathing air outdoors only when I transitioned to a fossil-fueled automobile to a house with walls and thick insulation protecting me from the outside elements. Like other members of the class *Mammalia*, my cries were quelled with my mother's breast, but I moved quickly to plastic bottles with rubber nipples, then to commercially processed food. I began to crawl on carpet indoors and, later, toddled around on well-manicured lawns. I had designated playtime in a playground sandbox – socially acceptable concrete-bordered access to specially formulated sand purchased from big box hardware stores. Later, I went to school and learned indoors, with 15- or 40-minute regulated, supervised outdoor excursions. I learned about nature – growing pea plants in plastic cups, making solar ovens out of aluminum foil – all while seated in the plastic chairs and sanitized spaces of my indoor, climate-controlled classrooms.

I was born into a United States American family within a dominant anthropocentric society obsessed with separation from nature – from my conception, I was part of a deeply ingrained human/nature divide that I would actively reproduce through my imitation of others. My identities were formed by systemic anthropocentrism as well as experiential influences in, and education about, the 'more-than-human world' (Abram, 1996). Human discourse, dominant anthropocentric ideologies, and environmental and ecological factors all contributed to the formation of my ecocultural identities.¹

In this chapter, I discuss the complex phenomena of ecocultural identities and ecocultural intersectionality. Building on Plumwood's (2002) assertion that anthropocentrism is fundamental to oppression and othering, I argue that ecocultural identity theory can make identity studies more productive in at least three major ways. First, the conceptual framework of ecocultural identity illuminates the inextricable interconnections between human cultural discursive constructions, the damaging consequences of anthropocentrism and its dualistic ideologies, and the ever-present influence of the more-than-human world. Second, ecocultural identity theory provides a transformative framework that disrupts dominant academic views of identity, which are fundamentally reliant on human-centrism (Milstein et al., 2017). Finally, ecocultural identity theory provides a schema for interrogating and rearticulating extant academic theories on eco-oriented identities, illuminating the influence of the more-than-human world on cultural and social identity formation and vice

versa. Ecocultural identity thus can assist with a non-normative, more inclusive, more productive conceptualization of intersectionality – a concept borne from the overlapping realms of law (Crenshaw, 1991) and feminism (Collins, 1998), and a concept that, despite adoption and advancement across numerous disciplines, remains largely anthropocentric.

I begin by exploring extant transdisciplinary eco-oriented identity theories, including those of ecological identity, environmental identity, and green identity, interrogating their similarities, differences, and current impact on scholarship. Next, I describe ecocultural identity theory as a more inclusive, expanded identity framework that, as a non-normative frame, has the capacity to unearth foundational anthropocentric ideologies that result in interrelated forms of marginalization and oppression. I also advocate for the use of ecocultural identity theory as a transformative lens for the critical race theory concept of intersectionality. Introduced by Crenshaw (1991) as a model for understanding the multidimensionality (and thus multiple modes of oppression) of Black women's identities, intersectionality allows that identity is not a single entity or category, but a complex of intersecting and interacting identities that plays vital roles in social empowerment and disadvantage. While intersectionality studies have bloomed and developed over the past two decades, they remain dominated by anthropocentrism, an orientation that drives many forms of oppression and othering. By broadening the framework of intersectionality to one of *ecocultural intersectionality*, an ecocultural lens could unmask and undo the fundamental ideologies of not only anthropocentrism, but also interconnected patriarchy, sexism, heteronormativity, racism, ableism, ageism, and other forms of oppression, colonization, and exploitation. Furthermore, an ecocultural identity frame unearths previously marginalized forms of ecocentric identity.

In the next section, I discuss theories of ecological identity, environmental identity, and green identity, which serve as an entry point into the discussion of the influence of the more-than-human world on identity formation and the performance of environmentalist identities. However, within these theories, there remain unexplored challenges in the negotiation of eco-oriented identities and connotations of environment, nature, and ecology, which can be better addressed through the more inclusive frame of ecocultural theory. Existing eco-oriented identity theories stem from largely non-critical fields, and thus overlook the influence of dominant power-laden ideologies. These eco-identity concepts also overall are lacking in attention to their mediation by and intersections with other forms of identification (and oppression) such as race, gender, and sexuality. Therefore, following a brief review of extant eco-oriented identity theories, I articulate how the concept of ecocultural identity provides a broader, more inclusive framework for intersectionality and other facets of critical studies, and I advocate for the use of ecocultural identity theory as a transformative, transdisciplinary intersectionality frame.

Extant eco-oriented identity theories

I identify myself in accordance with basic sociocultural labels that are also ascribed to me by others. Girl. Woman. White. Middle class. Able-bodied. Student. Teacher. Environmentalist. There exists a gap in literature, however, regarding ways people relate to their surrounding ecosystems, particularly through cultural mediation. This gap in extant scholarly identity theory slowly is being filled by transdisciplinary environmental and ecocultural scholars who seek more encompassing understandings of the self as part of a broad, more-than-human ecosystem. Theories of ecological, environmental, and green identities, as discussed below, provide entry into the complex relationship of human identity and 'the environment,' as well as a foundation for the theoretical extension of ecocultural identity and intersectionality. While productive starting points, these extant theories stem from positivist, social scientific orientations and hinge on static, stable definitions of ecology and environment that connote

separation from humans. This discursive perpetuation of the human/nature divide in scholarship is symptomatic of a dominantly anthropocentric society that focuses on humans as actors and the environment as a background before which action occurs.

Ecological identity

Ecological identity refers to ‘all the different ways people constitute themselves in relationship to the Earth as manifested in personality, values, actions, and sense of self’ (Thomashow, 1995, p. 3). Ecological identity describes how we extend and articulate our sense of self in relation to the more-than-human world. Stemming from environmental psychology, the basis for ecological identity is that ‘a cognitive or intuitive understanding of ecology may significantly reorient personal identity’ (p. 4). Empirical studies by Richard Borden and team demonstrated correlations between strong ecological orientations and characteristics such as cooperativeness and leadership potential, suggesting that a proactive connection to more-than-human elements through ecological experiences are related to particular, positive characteristics in individuals (Thomashow, 1995). Borden’s findings also suggest ecological identity is closely related to the environmental psychology concept of place identity (Thomashow, 1995).

Early place-based identity scholars argued that sense of self is not static, but ‘characterized by growth and change in response to a changing physical and social world’ (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 59). As Proshansky et al. (1983) explain, place identity is a sub-structure self-identity consisting of ‘cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives’ (p. 59). These cognitions include memories, ideas, feelings, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings, and conceptions of behavior and experience related to the physical settings that contribute to our daily realities. Proshansky et al. argue the foundation of these environment-related cognitions is our ‘environmental past,’ our bodily history in relation to environments as places inclusive of all material and spatial relationships. Place-identity is thus fundamental to ecological identity, as our understanding of ourselves and realities are grounded in our environments.

Building on environmental psychology literature on place and identity, Thomashow (1995) pushes for an interpretive perspective of ecological identity, which he argues is rooted in emotion and experientialism. He draws connections between ecological identity and the idealistic concept of bioregionalism – the idea that ecological boundaries should work in tandem with political, cultural, and economic ones. Bioregionalism, in this sense, becomes a ‘powerful and practical approach to ecological identity’ (p. 62). Learning about and intimately knowing the place in which one lives increases ‘circles of identification,’ or the ways we understand ourselves in relation to our ecological situations (p. 23). Ecological identity is more immersive and conscious than place identity on its own, as it requires an experiential and relational understanding of the more-than-human world within place. Closely related to this concept of ecological identity is environmental identity, which examines collective belonging through environmental behaviors.

Environmental identity

According to Clayton (2003), environmental identity is:

one part of the way in which people form their self concept: a sense of connection to some part of the nonhuman environment, based on history, emotional attachment, and/or similarity, that affects the ways in which we perceive and act toward the world; a belief that the environment is important to us and an important part of who we are.

(pp. 45–46)

Clayton notes that environmental identity is similar to collective identities such as nationalist or ethnic identities in providing connection, belonging, and fulfillment. Engagement with the environment and other people committed to protecting the environment fulfills a sense of community. Environmental identity varies in value among individuals, as it is not limited to ‘those who are labeled “environmentalists” by virtue of a political position’; indeed, many who are associated with positions that are considered anti-environmental ‘nevertheless demonstrate, through words or behavior, their love of some aspect of the natural world’ (p. 45). As with ecological identity, environmental identity is a normative, positive viewing of the self in relation to ‘the environment’ and the benefits one may gain from this relationship. Indeed, the frequency of ‘time in nature’ has been moderately positively linked to nature relatedness, place attachment, and increased environmental concern and behaviors (Nisbet et al., 2009, p. 715). According to Hinds and Sparks (2009), the increase and improvement of environmental experiences can result in ‘beneficial psychological rewards’ such as greater psychological well-being and stronger ‘conservation ethics’ (p. 181).

Environmental identity theory emphasizes the importance of the more-than-human world in the formation of human identity; yet, like ecological identity theory, overlooks the fundamental ways dominant anthropocentric ideologies mediate and marginalize different types of human–nature relations. While these theories point to the importance of environmental interaction, their social scientific orientations largely ignore the relation between anthropocentrism and forms of systemic oppression and exploitation. Green identity theory, discussed next, enters the conversation through performative identity, exploring normative performances of environmentalism.

Green identity

Green identity connects material relations to activist lifestyles, as ‘activists’ material relations are themselves performative of distinctive green lifestyles’ (Horton, 2003, p. 2). Although there are various modes of analyzing green identity, DeLaure (2011) focuses on the social and performative dimensions of identity. She explains that, unlike ecological or environmental identities, green identity is ‘not a kind of private alchemy between an individual and nature’ but that it is ‘always already embedded in the social’ (p. 451). She asserts that identity is directly linked to our performances of culturally sanctioned personas, noting:

Framing identity as performance suggests that we become who we are in part through enacting certain roles that already circulate in culture. We present ourselves as a ‘conservationist,’ ‘deep ecologist,’ or ‘concerned citizen’ by drawing upon models we see around us. The actions we take, and people’s reactions to them, constitute performances of identity.

(p. 451)

Our performances of green identity are thus built through socially constructed and normalized ‘green cultural codes’ (Horton, 2003, p. 64). Importantly, our performances are material, through what Whitmarsh and O’Neill (2010) call pro-environmental behaviors, meaning that, if someone identifies as ‘environmental’ or ‘green,’ she likely also will perform pro-environment behaviors, such as recycling and reducing energy consumption. This performance of green identity is largely conscious – chosen as a mode of self-identification – and projected through various modes of communication by environmental activists, to whom environmentalism is a vital, conscious part of self-identification.

Like ecological and environmental identities, however, the study of green identity is normative and largely centered in psychology. It is thus focused on environmentally positive identity, reliant on self-identification, and used as a predictor for behaviors. As with ecological and

environmental identity, little attention in green identity studies is directed toward relations of power such as the association between mainstream environmentalism and dominant ideologies. Relatedly, these three extant identity theories often are unintentionally limited to white middle-class environmentalists, foregoing others and neglecting wider questions of ecological aspects of *all* identities.

Eco-orientated theories and the critical paradigm

Contemporary eco-oriented identity theorists show interest in the influence of the more-than-human world on the construction of human identity. Ecological, environmental, and green identity theories all demonstrate scholarly interest in humanature² and the potential benefits of place-person identification. Their grounding in psychology and sociology makes these theories particularly useful for exploration of identification processes and place-based understandings. However, the psycho-social background of these theories also can be limiting. One issue with the fundamentally positivist orientations of these theories is that the concepts of ecological and environmental identity require static definitions of ecology and environment. These terms can be misinterpreted to mean spaces apart from humans, which an individual must consciously pursue. Further, developing and performing an environmental identity is viewed as normative. As Clayton (2003) writes, environmental identity is similar to national or ethnic identities in that it fosters a sense of belonging, which comes from a conscious immersion and identification of the self into particular circles of belonging. Similarly, green identity is dependent on the performance of eco-oriented values and beliefs via self-identification. I argue, however, that eco-oriented identities are more complex than the previously discussed extant theories would suggest, and that they are neither normative nor altogether conscious choices. The focus of these extant eco-identity theories is narrow, and discussions of how these forms of identity intersect with other forms of identity and overarching power structures are largely absent. The ecocultural identity framework, in contrast, broadens the scope of identity theories by attending to relationships among ecology and culture in non-normative and transdisciplinary ways.

In the next section, I explore the concept of ecocultural identities, focusing on three main arguments. First, I focus on the potential for an ecocultural identity framework to illuminate the always inextricable relations between humans and the more-than-human world. Next, I discuss ways an ecocultural identities lens illuminates and challenges established power structures, including the dominant discursive construct of anthropocentrism. By its very nature, an ecocultural lens for identity challenges the human/nature divide. Finally, I argue that ecocultural identities, unlike ecological, environmental, and green identities, are not a performance-driven choice, as the influence of the more-than-human world is always already influencing our identities and vice versa, affecting humanimals and the Earth in more ways than we can know, and these often invisible influences contribute to identity formation and change.

Ecocultural identities

I conceptualize ecocultural identities with the theories of ecological, environmental, and green identities in mind, but dig deeply into the inherently critical and cultural characteristics of identity formation, using the foundational concept of ecoculture as a guide. The notion of ecoculture discursively recognizes the intertwining, inextricability, and constant co-influence of culture and ecology. As Milstein et al. (2018) write, ‘Our shared ecological relations spring from the co-constructed meanings we harbor about “nature.” These cultural

productions shape views, and propel or stall actions, ranging from the intimately local to the overwhelmingly atmospheric' (p. 1). Ecocultural identities, then, are composed not only of environmental orientation, but also of micro and macro contexts. Similar to other identities, ecocultural identity is thus multi-scalar. Race and sexual orientation, for example, are both deeply individual and personal, yet they also both are implicated in large-scale, dominant systems of meaning. Ecocultural identities operate in similar and interrelated ways.

Like ecological, environmental, and green identities, ecocultural identities are important to the individual as they have the potential to enable greater understanding of the more-than-human world, foster positive place attachment and place identity, and promote ecological care and concern. Similar to socio-psychological perspectives on identity and ecology, ecocultural identities can be performed through normative environmentalist behaviors. However, while ecological, environmental, and green identities assume beneficial ecological behaviors through environmentalist performances, ecocultural identity is non-normative and rather a framework for understanding all identities as ecological and, therefore, is inclusive of myriad ways of ecologically perceiving and acting – from the beneficial to the destructive.

Ecocultural identities are always already present, whether the individual is aware or not. The concept of ecocultural identity challenges normative dualisms of ecology/culture or nature/human, redefining nature as inclusive of humans and human-built environments and vice versa. As more-than-human influence is always present and active in human self-identification, ecocultural identities are undergoing continuous, constant reformulation. Human bodies, like all earthly bodies, are emplaced in, and enmeshed with, surrounding ecosystems; though dominant ideologies perpetuate the dualistic idea that human bodies are separate from the environment, they transcorporeally (Alaimo, 2010) absorb the more-than-human elements that always already surround and permeate them. This constitutes what Bell (2012) refers to as *invironment*, or the 'inner zone' of the ecosystem – the environment within – where the body is in 'perpetual dialogue with the environment' (p. 127). Ecocultural identity theory illuminates the very nature of the human body, demonstrating its permeability and fluidity in relation to its surroundings.

Even as our conscious brains may deny the ongoing communication between the human body and the more-than-human world, our bodies have agency. Ecocultural identities include not only our conscious, cultural, and socially-constructed identity formation, but also the ongoing exchange between our bodies and the rest of the world. That is, the *invironment* functions with the environment to formulate ecocultural identities. Abram (2011), for example, shares an embodied experience with his home as one of phenomenological more-than-human communication – a subconscious component of ecocultural identities brought to light when he becomes suddenly aware of his inherent, ongoing, and sensuous connection to the more-than-human world even in human-built environments. Examining the wooden beams of his house, he writes:

The beams of the house had been quietly conversing with my creaturely body over the course of the year, coaxing my eyes and my wandering fingers in moments of distraction, and I now noticed that I already knew them as individuals – knew them without knowing them, that is, until tonight, when they suddenly broke through the cool callus of my assumptions, forcing me to acknowledge the silent exchange, this language older than words in which my muscled limbs were utterly fluent.

(p. 34)

Abram's exchange with the elements of his house is a revelation that 'nature' is all around, both outside and inside. According to normative ideas in dominant Western culture, wood ceases to be 'nature' once it is cut, treated for pests and mold, lacquered, and made into

a human construction. Yet Abram reminds us that ‘nature’ continues to be present even through human processing – because the humans, the lacquer, and the so-called dead wood are all ‘nature,’ too. ‘Nature,’ then, is not some external realm that can be isolated from the human – rather, we can find it in the very wood, metal, glass, and insulation that humans use so strategically to separate ourselves from the outside – that seemingly external space we dominantly refer to as ‘nature.’

This turn of focus means that ecocultural identities emerge from relations ‘with/in/as nature’ (Milstein et al., 2017) – not only in wild mountainside, a faraway meadow, or time in the woods, but also in day-to-day existence. Thus, ecocultural identity theory has many facets in that it does not focus specifically on the dominant conception of a ‘nature’ as out there separate from humans, but interplays with/in/as the social – the human-centered contexts in which we exist and perform. Like our social and discursive experiences, the more-than-human world also deeply impacts ecocultural identities at every moment.

In addition, unlike ecological, environmental, and green identities, ecocultural identities are not optional. Unlike green identity theory, for example, which recognizes the interrelationship between environmentalist identity and performance, ecocultural identities are not linked to any particular sustainable or unsustainable behaviors. While, certainly, people may choose to perform their ecocultural identities in ‘green’ ways, ecocultural identities are non-normative, always already present, and may be performed in an infinite number of ways, including through behaviors normatively viewed as anti-environmental. The open framework of ecocultural identities leaves room for the impact and shaping of identity by known and unknown elements of the more-than-human. It allows space for subconscious performances, relations, and communication, to which Abram (2011) directs our focus in his discussion of his humanimal senses communicating with his home. Ecocultural identities may be unnoticed, nameless, or perhaps conceived as something else entirely.

Additionally, like environmental identity, ecocultural identities can be accessed for political purposes. As ecocultural identity can be understood as multi-scalar, individual identification merges into larger power structures. Ecocultural identities may revolve around a connection to the more-than-human and indeed, are important for environmental activism. However, ecocultural identities are also implicated in adversity to the more-than-human, and in extractive or exploitive behaviors. The concept of ecocultural identities acknowledges the deeper, socio-culturally constructed foundation of today’s environmental issues. As Lord et al. (2014) argue, for example, cultures are inextricably interwoven with their energy source. As energy is required for cultural practice, dominant energy-based values have become foundational in cultures that depend on extractive dominant energy sources. Thus, through the fossil fuel culture and its inherent extractive ideologies, anthropocentrism directly effects the social construction of self-identification as part of a system that positions humans as separate from, and unaffected by the extractions of, the natural resources upon which they rely.

From a political standpoint, activists with a consciously strong sense of their public’s ecocultural identities would engage not only in current environmental issues, but also the underlying anthropocentric ideologies that contribute to their construction. The ecocultural identity theory framework thus creates space for multi-dimensional interplay and integration between humans and environment, taking into consideration the bases of culture(s) both causing and suffering from environmental degradation.

Because of its ability to illuminate humanature, ecocultural identity theory also attends to ways in which different cultural groups interact with the world and each other. Milstein et al. (2011), for example, illustrate the phenomenon of ecocultural identities with the concept of relations-in-place, which demonstrates the inextricability of cultural groups and their social

relations from their places of dwelling. These ecocultural connections are elucidated through traditions, food cultures, and storytelling behaviors embedded in place, demonstrating identity formation that is deeply connected to the more-than-human world and problematizing individualism, which often is at the base of ideologies that further the human/nature divide. Thus ecocultural theory, through its emphasis on – and even celebration of – cultural characteristics, similarities, and differences, creates space for multiple, dynamic forms of identity, which are always already intermeshed with the more-than-human world.

Despite dominant anthropocentric and dualistic orientations, the very foundation of biological existence is dependent on the more-than-human realm, meaning that our connections with/in/as ‘nature’ are inextricable from our self-identities as socially raced, gendered, classed, etc., beings. This undeniable interweaving makes ecocultural identities contextually salient in the negotiation of self and other. Not only should ecocultural identity theory be incorporated into critical identity studies and existing eco-identity studies, but ecocultural identity theory also should expand the framework of critical intersectionality scholarship.

Ecocultural intersectionality

The dominant human/nature divide is vastly normalized in Western and most industrialized societies. Merchant (2013) argues that such anthropocentric societies have been shaped by a largely Christian religious quest to recreate the safety, purity, and human-centeredness of the proverbial Garden of Eden. Internalized by settler colonialists since the seventeenth century, the Eden story ‘has propelled countless efforts by humans to recover Eden by turning wilderness into a garden, ‘female’ nature into civilized society, and Indigenous folkways into modern culture’ (p. 2). This internalization remains deeply ingrained in dominant Western culture and many colonized cultures, resulting in colonial past and present phenomena of normalized racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, and heteronormativity. As Plumwood (2002) notes, ‘This instrumental model of the human-nature relationship is so deeply entrenched in the Western outlook that even many conservationists work unquestioningly within it’ (p. 147).

Working within this anthropocentric system has long been the norm within Western societies, even for activists seeking change. My birth in a hospital room, my playtime in a bordered sandbox, my toddling around on cleanly cut grass all contribute to and were shaped by inherently anthropocentric viewpoints. Simply by being born into a culture that privileges humans over other species and over balanced ecological relations, I operate within, contribute to, and perpetuate a human-centered system of hierarchical ideologies, power, and oppression, whether I intend to or not. Yet, I also am a humanimal, shaped by, and an interrelated part of, the more-than-human world. In order to better understand these ecocultural identities, however, they must be viewed in relation to my multiple other identities – including my race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, and the many other plural, fluid identities I cannot name – as well as the relations of power in which I am situated. The intersectional plurality, fluidity, and power relations of all identities are vital to identity studies and can be illuminated in critical and environmental studies through the ecologically inclusive framework of ecocultural identity.

As mentioned earlier, originally established as a tenet of the Black feminist movement, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) first explicated the multiple ways in which race and gender interact to influence dimensions of Black women’s experiences. ‘The intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women’s lives,’ Crenshaw states, ‘in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately’ (p. 1244). Collins (1998) adds, ‘rather than examining gender, race, class, and nation as distinctive social

hierarchies, intersectionality examines how they mutually construct one another' (p. 62). Following these beginnings, the concept of intersectionality expanded across disciplines, with applications to sexuality (e.g., Taylor et al., 2010), queer theory (e.g., Muñoz, 1999), age (e.g., Calasanti et al., 2006), ability (e.g., Campbell, 2008), socioeconomic class (e.g., Brah & Phoenix, 2013), etc. Many facets of human identity now are understood to intersect, functioning dynamically and simultaneously. Intersectionality is particularly important in addressing the infinite ways power operates to privilege some groups over others. From the moment we are conceived, we are subject to dominant expectations, with these projected onto us based on race, class, ability, gender, and other sociocultural norms, which build from birth onward and result in constant and infinite power dynamics and identity struggles.

My early moments in a southern California hospital established me, without my choice or knowledge, as a white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, able-bodied girl child. I had no hair, but plenty of labels – the bow someone stuck to my head, the pink blanket, the clothes I was dressed in, the name I was given, the label on my plastic hospital bassinette – broadcasted the fact that I was born with a vagina. The very hospital in the neighborhood I was born indicated my whiteness – my racial privilege provided by historic structures that provided me with an inherent level of power and access based on the color of my skin. Power functions through the ability of culture to fragment our identities, emphasizing the labels that are most salient in a given context. We label and are labelled within a system where the available language to identify is always already constrained; we are usually forced to choose one identity and/or one is ascribed onto us (Collier, 2014). It is no surprise these labels are often the most simplistic and stereotypical (Collins, 1998). Intersectionality responds to the pitfalls of singular descriptors and identities by acknowledging fragmentation and multiple identities and ways aspects of our identities operate simultaneously. Ecocultural identity adds to this by understanding the intersecting web of cultural identities as also always already including, reflecting, and informing ecological identities, whether we are conscious of this or not. Currently, however, ecological aspects and essences of identities remain backgrounded, even in these critical identity frameworks, due to the continued favoring of dominant humancentric perspectives that doggedly endure in applications of important and influential critical theory, including intersectionality.

Despite ongoing innovation in transdisciplinary critical fields, ecocultural facets of identity are rarely – if ever – visited, let alone foregrounded. I argue, however, that an ecocultural lens can expand the framework for intersectionality and enhance intersectionality work in three major ways. First, as a non-normative frame, ecoculture disrupts dominant anthropocentric norms. As anthropocentrism underlies colonial perspectives that are foundational to, and entangled with, racism, sexism, and a number of other oppressive forces (Plumwood, 2002), ecocultural questioning troubles norms of over-simplified, singular, and often oppressive identity categories such as race, gender, and sexual orientation. Intersectional scholarship must move beyond and actively disrupt the anthropocentric ideological forces in which it is currently entangled. Ecocultural intersectionality creates space for the messy, fuzzy, ecological aspects of identities that often are overlooked in favor of socially and discursively constructed, clean, neat, singular identities that hinge, visibly or not, on humancentric perspectives.

A second way the ecocultural lens expands intersectionality is by fostering the embodiment and emplacement of identities, both normative and non-normative. For instance, an ecocultural lens allows me to identify and be identified as a woman as well as a humanimal with embodied responses to the sunshine, to the calls of sandhill cranes, to the scent of manure. It allows me to maintain my ecological, environmental, and green identities, which I perform through anthropocentrically normalized cultural behaviors, and simultaneously respond in reflexive and embodied ways to more-than-human influences. Ecocultural intersectionality

includes contexts of physical place, cultural space, and ecologically embodied experiences as influences of identity, serving as a more inclusive, non-normative form of intersectionality, which recognizes the agency and influence of the more-than-human world, as well as the permeability, and permeating aspects, of the humanimal body.

Third, ecocultural intersectionality acknowledges and sanctions the unknown factors in identity. While identities – like green identity – are often thought of as conscious choices or outward labels, ecocultural intersectionality posits there are layers of identity that remain unnoticed, unfelt, and misunderstood. Rather than relying on overly simplistic cultural categories, ecocultural intersectionality reflects a more holistic reality: thick, messy webs of identity with embodied, more-than-human identity collisions, combinations, and layers rather than tidy intersecting patterns (see Milstein, 2020, Chapter 2 of this *Handbook*). Some strands of identity may be better understood, more highly valued, and more consciously present than others, while other strands contribute to the web of identities in subtler, often subconscious ways. While the anthropocentric frame of intersectionality leads me to interrogate how sociocultural categories such as race and gender, for example, contribute to my identity, ecocultural intersectionality expands my attention to also include non-normative extra-human factors that also contribute to my identity, such as climate, more-than-human encounters, and microbiotic gut health.

In dominant Western society, most of us are born into sterile hospitals, isolated from germs. Toddlers are chastised for touching dirt, and children are taught, through culminating microaggressions, that the more-than-human world is dangerous and unhealthy. These discursive and material microaggressions perpetuate a well-established, deeply ingrained, socially constructed human/nature divide. This divide is foundational to many normative ideologies, dictating a hierarchical organization of relationships and promoting layers of mastery implicated in forms of othering and oppression missed in a purely sociocultural understanding of intersectionality.

While I reflect on my birth in that California hospital, attempting to map out all the ways those early moments outside the womb shaped the multiple, fragmented, and intersecting identities I juggle decades later, I type on a laptop. The screen door forbids mosquitoes but allows in fresh air, as well as sounds of birdsong, bumble bees on the wild mint outside the door, and someone's music from across the way. A car rumbles up the road, creating a cloud of dust that I breathe in along with juniper pollen and the scent of the dog sleeping on the floor next to my chair. Who I am extends well beyond the labels I have carried since birth. Every breath I take makes tiny shifts in who I am; every place I have visited contributes to my identity; every person, dog, and mint blossom I meet – and every exhaust cloud, spray of insect repellent, and wave of laptop computer radiofrequency energy – shapes me in microscopic ways, both conscious and subconscious.

My view of the world and my scholarly perspective is thus created not only through daily discourse, my upbringing, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, class, social status, education, body ability, and my own deeply rooted anthropocentric ideologies and practices, but also through my ecological movement through cities and fields, my performance of green identity, my day-to-day interactions with the materials and environments I breathe, eat, drink, see, touch, smell, hear. My deeply ingrained anthropocentric orientation often prevents my recognition and interrogation of these and many other aspects of my identity; however, my identity is consistently and constantly in flux. The transdisciplinary concept of ecocultural identity sheds light on these inherent issues, and ecocultural intersectionality helps me better understand the intricacies of my own and others' existences in simultaneously inseparable social and more-than-human realms.

While it is useful to interrogate these issues of identity on a personal level, ecocultural identities are also multi-scalar. I advocate for the use of ecocultural intersectionality in academic realms, where it can function productively in multidisciplinary ways to contribute to

further theorization of identity formation and ecological and cultural relations, and promote inclusivity. Most importantly, more focus – and awareness – must be placed on anthropocentrism, as this human-centered way of thinking is fundamental to, and interrelated with, the many forms of oppression and othering under interrogation in critical studies. By ecologically broadening the framework of cultural intersectionality to one of ecocultural intersectionality, the anthropocentric roots of both sociocultural and ecological marginalization and oppression can be revealed and problematized in an array of contexts and amidst a range of scales. As a non-normative critical framework, ecocultural intersectionality provides an ecologically inclusive lens that disrupts systemic, anthropocentric ideologies that underlie the colonial mindset and, at the same time, contributes to better understanding and active dismantling of oppressive ideologies such as racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, and heteronormativity. This expanded form of intersectionality is an integral, critical step toward social and environmental – or ecocultural – justice.

Notes

- 1 I write about ecocultural identities in the plural form, discursively emphasizing identity's multiplicity and fragmentation. Humans do not have one simple ecocultural identity; instead, all identities (including normative categories like race and gender) are ecocultural. Simultaneously, the plural use of ecocultural identities refers to the always already present ecological dimension in every cultural human being.
- 2 The compound term *humanature* is a discursive move to undo the human/nature divide, as it calls attention to the symbolic and material blending of humans and the environments within which they reside and of which they are part (Milstein et al., 2011). Compound terms such as *ecoculture* (Milstein et al., 2011), *naturecultures* (Haraway, 2008), and *humanimal* (Milstein, 2013) 'reflexively engage human and animal, human and nature, ecology and culture, in integral conversation in research as they are in life' (Milstein et al., 2011, p. 488).

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Part II

Forming and fostering ecocultural identity

This second part of the *Handbook* provides exploratory and comparative case studies for examining and understanding ways of cultivating identification in the world. The chapters look at ways ecocultural forces intersect with identity formations such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, and religion within specific political, historical, and environmental contexts. The original research provides insights with implications that radiate beyond the case sites themselves. More broadly, the studies provide theoretical grounding and methodological substantiation for wider reflection on the concerns, struggles, anxieties, hopes, victories, and (un)certainities that configure the intricacies of today's mutually constituted sociocultural and ecological conditions.

Mariko Oyama Thomas, in Chapter 7, 'Intersectional ecocultural identity in family stories,' opens up this part with an intensely personal and evocative essay. She untangles multigenerational raced, gendered, and classed relationships with the more-than-human world, interweaving her recent memories of her father's passing, his stories of life as a mixed-race child in urban Los Angeles, and her own reflective and also fundamentally different raced, gendered, and classed experiences. She offers a reflexive lens, grounded in autoethnography and oral history, to understand how ecocultural identity unfolds and moves through generations, creating related yet different experiences for members in the same family. Thomas interrogates the historical conditions that restricted – or allowed for – her and her father's wanderings of public and wild spaces. She draws attention to environmental justice and unequal access and, at the same time, reveals physical and symbolic boundaries and overcomings that centrally engage identity formative sociocultural and more-than-human relations.

In Chapter 8, 'Interspecies ecocultural identities in human–elephant cohabitation,' Elizabeth Oriël's and Toni Frohoff's study of elephant–human relations demonstrates how landscapes need to be designed for the movement of mobile species. In focusing on mobility, space, and shared terrain, the authors examine interspecies forms of access and exclusion, the fostering of dialogic and monologic ecocultural identities, and a loss of collective mutual interspecies intelligence taking place in elephant–human relations in India, Sri Lanka, and Kenya. Oriël and Frohoff connect histories of colonialism and privatization of land to today's spatial designs that enclose and traumatize wild elephants. They argue instead for understanding landscapes as multispecies spaces and ecosystems that are reliant on diversity of form, function, movement, and interaction. In attending to and reflecting upon historic and contemporary trans-species co-habitation and

conflicts, the authors show how elephant lifeways can inform the extent to which humans' permeable selves come to the fore within *interspecies ecocultural identities*.

Jeffrey Hoffmann in Chapter 9, 'Memory, waterways, and ecocultural identity,' examines urban agricultural identities linked to ancestral water-sharing *acequia* ditch systems of New Mexico in the U.S. Southwest. The author illustrates how oral histories and interview-documented memories of working-class elders of multiple ethnicities identify waves of colonization and contemporary urban development as motivating violence against both humans and the more-than-human world, and impacting high desert dwellers' communal water relations and conceptions of water. Hoffmann interprets an ecocultural tension between 'trust' and 'anxiety' and proposes this dialectic as a framework for understanding destructive effects of forces of suburbanization and gentrification, as well as a logic for how these forces might change to foster identities of trust in future generations. In examining the past, rethinking the present, and imagining possible future identities, Hoffmann posits *ecocultural memory* as the constitutive capacity of human and more-than-human communities to retain, recall, and pass along knowledge of symbiotic social and more-than-human relationships and practices through generations.

The past-present-future flux has different nuances in Chapter 10, "'Progressive ranching" and wrangling the wind as ecocultural identity maintenance in the Anthropocene,' by Casper Bendixsen, Trevor Durbin, and Jakob Hanschu. The authors, all of whom identify as raised in families whose livelihoods directly depended on resource extraction (including ranching, logging, and farming), point out that it is 'no accident that the concept of ecocultural identity is being problematized at a moment when orienting coordinates, ecological and cultural, are becoming dislodged by fundamental planetary disruptions' (p. 165). Indeed, anthropogenic disruption puts humans in a position where creating or maintaining a sense of stability, within which an ecocultural identity and, more fundamentally, life, may persist, becomes central to lifeways again. This chapter looks at one such case, in which a conservative ranching family's focus on in-group, or familial kin, connects to innovative adaptation to farming renewable (wind) energy as a means to monetarily support and maintain that kin, and their ranching way of life, into the foreseeable future. One of this chapter's main contributions to considerations of ecocultural identity, then, is an articulation of ways maintenance of ecocultural identity involves conserving existing arrangements and, at the same time, bringing in new technologies that keep the fundamentals of those existing arrangements intact. In part, this chapter also provides an inside look at a contemporary manifestation of the horse-man dominator identity outlined in the *Handbook's* first part by Bridgeman, as ranchers centralize 'horsemanship' as one among other embodied maintenances of the progressive rancher identity. The authors point out they 'wanted to explore ecocultural identities with which we had significant connections, those dependent on classically anthropocentric relationships with the environment, where non-human life exists for exploitation at worst or as an ethical object of stewardship at best' (p. 166). They argue these particular rural kinds of identities are due additional inquiry as ethical commitments felt by people living and working in these ways may often be misunderstood.

Another such possibly misunderstood rural ecocultural identity is examined in Chapter 11, 'Constructing and challenging ecocultural identity boundaries among sportsmen,' by Jessica Love-Nichols. Love-Nichols examines ways the sportsmen identity of hunters and fishers, a community both politically conservative and committed to environmental conservation, simultaneously challenges and constitutes the sociopolitical environment in which it exists. In particular, the author highlights ways U.S. sportsmen draw on this identity to impede and build coalitions for environmental action. Love-Nichols finds the sportsmen identity draws on linguistic, cultural, and environmental affiliations, specifically a perceived deep connection to the 'outdoors' and a commitment to conservation. As with Bendixen et al., Love-Nichols identifies with

the identity under study and is also critically reflexive about ways in which raced, gendered, and classed orientations often obscure variation in environmental practices and ideologies within politically conservative sectors and impede their potential for environmental protection.

In Chapter 12, ‘The reworking of evangelical Christian ecocultural identity in the Creation Care movement,’ Emma Frances Bloomfield’s examination shows how seemingly untenable identities can be remade within movements. Bloomfield surveys active members of the Evangelical Christian Creation Care movement, which pairs biblical teachings with support for environmental advocacy, to illustrate the movement’s guiding narrative and how members perform Evangelical ecocentric identities. In doing so, the author illuminates how potentially competing and contradictory positionalities – Christianity and environmentalism – are negotiated. While many Evangelical Christians oppose government-implemented environmental protections and may even welcome climate disruption as a sign of the Apocalypse, some are finding ways to balance their religious identities with ecological concerns. Bloomfield exhibits how movement members recast environmentalism as a sacred charge, allowing for the emergence of what she terms a *sacred eco-consciousness* compatible with their Evangelical Christian identity. The ecocentric identity fostered by the movement represents a reconfiguration of the relationship between Christianity and ‘nature,’ producing new points of possibility for widespread environmental advocacy.

Chapter 13 by Charles Carlin, ‘Navigating ecocultural Indigenous identity affinity and appropriation,’ considers questions of appropriation of Indigenous knowledges and practices in what some critics have written off as spiritual tourism by examining the influential relationships Native American mentors have had with non-Indigenous ‘nature’-based ceremony guides. The author focuses on the School of Lost Borders, nestled in between California’s Sierra Nevada and Inyo Mountains, and looks at ways the school fosters an ecocultural identity that emerges from an animate world in which ‘the human psyche and the more-than-human landscape mirror one another.’ Carlin ethnographically examines how the school navigates the complex, never-innocent relationship between the U.S. American wilderness tradition and colonialism. By posing ecocultural affinity and solidarity as ways to connect disparate worlds, Carlin’s study aims to create dialogue. Instead of questions such as whether work like the school’s fasting ceremonies constitute cultural appropriation, the author argues for lines of inquiry regarding the extent to which ecocultural movements can reckon with colonial legacies and establish bonds of solidarity to reimagine humanity’s place in the larger web of life. He posits that a regenerative scholarship can attend to difference, critique appropriation or erasure, and contribute to locating such bonds of solidarity among diverse communities.

In examining several distinct cases of ways identities are formed and fostered, this part of the *Handbook* draws attention to interpersonal, intra- and inter-group, interspecies, and internatural spaces of interaction as powerful sites for understanding and reimagining human ecocultural orientations in the present and future. The chapter authors do not lose sight of the larger sociopolitical, economic, and historical structures that shape and divide different identities and their relations within the more-than-human world. At the same time, they delve into ways regenerative ecological practices can cut differently across class, race, gender, religious affiliation, and generations and possibly contribute to a more encompassing and mobilized panorama of environmental advocacy and action.



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Intersectional ecocultural identity in family stories

Mariko Oyama Thomas

Here is what I remember. I remember perching on a squeaking plastic hospital stool and hearing the mellow rhythmic beep of a mass of IV tubes winding their way into my father's veins, pumping him full of toxic yet necessary chemicals. Cancer is an aggressive animate force that seems to barge its way into most people's life stories in one way or another and, during that unbearably cold and snowy winter, my family was no exception. I can still see the precise tilt of my father's chin when he turned his head gently to me and smiled, the lines in his face curling into comforting patterns of concentric moons. In juxtaposition with the heavily muscled and agile form I had watched cross rivers and summit mountains countless times, the change in his physical state was dramatic. I fixed my gaze on the row of sockets above his bed, recalling a scene from a film¹ we had watched together, where a girl-child wanders around a refugee hospital looking for her father. The frame zooms in on her, passing rows of hospital beds, and she notes in a loud whisper, 'When animals get sick out here, they plug them into the wall.' Somehow, my kin and I were in a time where my beautiful animal father was plugged into an undulating, whirring mess of chords.

Later that morning, bright winter light streamed through the hospital windows and my father and I began to speak rather pragmatically about the potential that he might die from this untimely disease. Since I was six or seven, I had known of his staunch refusal to waste away under fluorescent lights. By age nine, I was almost bored of repeating back to him, 'I know I know, if you ever get too sick, I'm supposed to leave you in the evergreens in the snow with a bottle of good bourbon, *I know*, Dad.' His request was starting to be painfully relevant. On that otherwise ordinary morning of his sickness, I realized I already had a deep-set understanding of how life, death, and place in our more-than-human environments are interrelated topics. I was also beginning to understand that our consistent story-sharing over his life had radically constructed how I perceive both the more-than-human world and the cycles of life.

'Mariko,' he said. His voice was warm and commanding as it had ever been.

I snapped my head up from my reflective stupor and he said, 'Don't worry girl, you'll always be able to find me in the mountains. Remember, evergreens.'

'Bourbon,' I responded.

‘Yes.’ He rolled onto his side to press the nurse call button, and I noticed his long brown finger still moved with an overwhelming grace. He smiled again. ‘But none of that cheap plastic bottle stuff your friends drink.’

Diversifying environmental identity and history

As a half Black and half Japanese man raised in the experiences of poverty and racism that 1950s Los Angeles provided, environmental awareness and enjoyment was not a public priority in my father’s community. Even so, I am positive that engagement with ‘nature’ was desired by many poor minorities. I also am skeptical about whether history books have properly reflected the diverse experiences and ways of connecting with the more-than-human world that different cultural groups and individuals lived.

This chapter uses layers of narrative that offer sentimental and sometimes startling examples as to how environmental orientations are wound into all other forms of cultural identity to create an ecocultural identity. My memories work as a reflexive lens on how environmental identity moves through generations but binds itself to other cultural identities, creating different experiences even for members of the same family. Between my father’s stories and my own, I paint a multi-layered, multi-cultural fresco of how ecocultural identity happens. To do this, I use a hybrid methodology of oral history and performative auto-ethnography to analyze stories and memories from both my father and myself to untangle both of our gendered, raced, classed, and embodied relationships with the more-than-human world. Additionally, I aim to provide an example of how oral histories can work to reveal multiple cultural identities intersectionally (regarding race, gender, class, body, age, and other cultural identities simultaneously, see Crenshaw, 1989) without isolating them from environmental orientations or access to, and embeddedness in, the more-than-human world. With this style of analysis, I demonstrate a webbed, interconnected understanding of ecocultural identity, and show that every identity is, and can be understood as, ecocultural.

Family stories and ecoculture

Stories are our world-making toolkits. We use them to make sense of race and ethnic identity (Joseph & Hunter, 2011) and gender performance (Fivush & Haden, 2003). And we use them for building group or family identity (Mishler, 2006) and making sense of the more-than-human world (Milstein et al., 2018; Haraway, 2003). As Somers (1994) writes, ‘We come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making’ (p. 606). If we understand orientations to the more-than-human world as co-constructed alongside other cultural identities, then social narratives – ranging from broader histories to more personal family stories – can be understood as teaching not only social but also ecological orientations. Families are often the first story-sharing arenas for people, making reflection and analysis of narratives told within families an important site for observing the formation and performance of ecocultural identity.

Analyzing oral histories of people who have lived through eras of overt marginalization and oppression with an ecocultural lens offers detailed accounts of how different generations fostered or strayed from specific relationships with the more-than-human world. Oral histories hold ecocultural political power, as they have the potential to aid in remediating environmental racism and exclusion (Endres, 2011). Oral history and autoethnographic methods combine well, as both are more concerned with how something was experienced than in

empirical truths (Ritchie, 2014; Ellis et al., 2011). Interweaving these methods provides a multifaceted toolkit to unpack the complicated interplay of ecocultural identities absorbed and performed in families.

Intersectionality and the more-than-human world

In order to enter my discussion of my father and my intersectional relationships with the more-than-human world, a review of structural hindrances and identity stereotypes of relationships with the more-than-human world is necessary. Non-urban wilderness spaces, green spaces, and places that are constructed as ‘naturally beautiful’ are often much less accessible to minority groups, with barriers of public zoning and planning (Sze, 2006), hegemonic constructions of who belongs in or deserves green spaces (Byrne, 2012), fear of physical aggression from other humans (Evans, 2002), and lack of leisure time and access to transportation (Tierney et al., 2001). Additionally, narratives about relationships between marginalized groups and the more-than-human world are rare in dominant cultural constructions of environmental discourse, and are often founded on historical tropes built by dominant groups or unceremoniously erased from accounts. For example, cartoonish accounts of United States American Black farmer Washington Carver’s peanut cultivation seem to infiltrate many elementary school classrooms (Finney, 2014), and often serve as a singular trope for Black people in ‘nature’.

Many films also foster the continuous propagation of stereotypes by portraying Indigenous peoples as earthy spirit-guides (Sturgeon, 2009) or providing discordant stereotypes of people of color in wild spaces where they are exoticized as ‘more natural’ beings (Outka, 2008). At the same time, people of color are rarely included in advertisements featuring outdoor recreation or leisure (Martin, 2004). Instead, the savvy outdoorsperson image is generally reserved for white heterosexual men (Evans, 2002; Finney, 2014). This representation is reflected in the real life demographics of United States National Parks visitors, as those who identify as Black make up only 1.2 percent of visitors in continental U.S., while Asians make up 2.6 percent, compared to overall respective national populations of 13.2 percent and 5.3 percent. Meanwhile, white people make up 94.6 percent of park visitors yet are only 62.6 percent of the U.S. population (Flores et al., 2018). Additionally, a study done in California showed that even urban parks tend to have disproportionately higher numbers of white visitors (Byrne, 2012). This creates issues of representation for many minority groups, as it is difficult to picture oneself experiencing outdoor spaces when media and practice can show the opposite.

Gender also persists as a powerful factor in determining access to out-of-doors spaces. Massey’s (2013) work acknowledges the gendered divide between public and private spaces, where women are often relegated to the private or home spheres. Female-bodied children are often raised to be fearful of isolated outside spaces and places. For example, Wesley and Gaarder (2004) found that women who wished to engage in outdoor recreation must often negotiate between perceptions of vulnerability and fear and the reward of being on an outdoors adventure.

Many of these oppressive stereotypes are intersectional, meaning that a person’s multiple cultural identities work in a web of privileges and disadvantages. For example, research has demonstrated how gender and class are factors that co-construct children’s access to free play. Mackett et al. (2004) found that, while many children were allowed outdoors without supervision, girls were more likely to be only allowed outside playtime when other children were present. Additionally, not only gender, but access to financially related artifacts like cars (Hillman et al., 1990) and phones or computers (Louv, 2008), alter ways children come to explore and understand outside spaces. While financial affluence traditionally supports increased access to some outside experiences, upper middle-class neighborhoods often exhibit higher levels of

parental surveillance, rapid disappearance of suburban play spaces (Louv, 2008), and reduced free time due to children's increased pace of life (Pooley et al., 2005). Class and gender simultaneously can serve as passports or impediments to environmental knowledge, depending on the context.

At the same time, minority voices are often excluded from membership, decisions, and meaning-making about public environmental decision-making. This results in a lack of attention paid to how different sociocultural identities can change experiences of more-than-human spaces (Evans, 2002). Lastly, there is a lack of conversation (scholarly or otherwise) about including environmental identity in the meshing of sociocultural identities from which most scholars analyze intersectionality, even though intersectionality is a methodological tool and theory that braids easily with multilayered conceptualizations of ecoculture because, at its root, it acknowledges complexity (McCall, 2005). Additionally, intersectionality works to unpack how layers of sociocultural identities work together (and against one another) to construct experiences of multiple dialectics of oppression and privilege at once, a way of knowing that is necessary for understanding ecocultural identities, as well.

The ubiquitous and effervescent term 'environment' historically has been utilized to demarcate a backdrop for anthropocentric conflicts of humanist cultural identities, and is rarely framed as an active agent in the formation of sociocultural identities. Even extremely generative works on culture and identity neglect to acknowledge the importance of the more-than-human world in identity work (Mendoza & Kinefuchi, 2016), or recognize the privilege of environmental knowledge and access when studying intersections of race, class, gender, and ability (Slack & Whitt, 1992). Orientation and relationship with the more-than-human world should be given special intersectional attention in understanding spectrums of identities. We exist in a time when even some of our most radical moves for social justice and equality fail to include the quickly shifting planet. Framing every identity as inherently ecocultural – and therefore bound in our bodily existences in the more-than-human world – is more crucial now than perhaps it has ever been.

Performing ecoculture

In the remainder of this essay, I analyze my own memories and excerpts of my father's oral history I recorded during the long hours he received chemotherapy treatment. The narratives give evidence of experiences with the more-than-human world that provide insight as to how all identities are inherently ecocultural. Additionally, because I weave my own stories and memories throughout his, I show how dependent ecocultural identities can be on the experiences of older generations. The writing method of performative autoethnography allows for a nuanced interweaving of both the writer and the subject of the writing, illuminating the complex process in which a story is absorbed through the lens of the listener (Madison, 2009, 2012). This performative autoethnography, therefore, aims to portray both my father's and my own experiences of sociocultural environmental relations in a single and multifaceted story. Through warm trails of memories, I highlight my father's embodied experiences of racial heritage and relative poverty – and my gendered though fairly affluent experiences – to bring more scholarly attention to the intersectional intricacies of ecocultural identity and environmental access.

Affluence and girlhood/poverty and boyhood

I can recall so vividly the sensation of sitting on my father's lap in his biology classroom at the high school where he taught. I don't even have to close my eyes to remember the warm familiarity of the incubator filled with pheasant eggs humming, and the moist, verdant scent that

the aquariums filled with piranhas gave off. I can see the plastic baggie of live goldfish we had recently bought to feed the piranhas that day, the ebbs and flows of life being a relatively early lesson in my family. In my palm lay several rocks that I clenched the way some people grasp rosaries, rolling them through my fingers, sliding them along my then un-calloused palms. These stones were insignificant except for the fact that my father had just helped me meticulously label them with location and type in the ungainly scrawl of a child's hand wielding a permanent marker. In traditional fashion I was begging him to tell me stories about being a child, as I was completely entranced at the simple reality that he had ever been my age before. His stories of juvenile adventures offered a universe of delectable mischief, as his childhood stories seemed to be devoid of the adults I was constantly supervised by, and dotted with comedic incidents that took place in abandoned concrete lots and hidden urban riverbanks.

My father, Franke Thomas, was born as the third of seven children to a tall charismatic African American man named Charles Thomas and a tiny Japanese woman named Sachiyeo Oyama on April 23, 1954. His birth certificate was printed with the phrase 'Thomas baby' where most people's names are written, and, in the racial ignorance of the time, the hospital erroneously listed his races as 'Negro' and 'Mongolian.' In 1950, Charles and Sachi started their young family in a predominately Black community in Los Angeles, with Sachi as the solitary Japanese woman for miles around. As a woman who already had been familiar with the geographic displacement of being sent to an internment camp a few years prior, and the emotional displacement of her Japanese family's refusal to accept Charles, she persisted in exercising astounding grace in raising mixed-race children in low-income circumstances. This feat was especially noteworthy in a time when federal miscegenation laws still technically outlawed the creation of her children.

While Charles worked long hours at a medical testing lab – hours that increased out of necessity with every Thomas baby birth – Sachi ran a household with at least two infants at a time clasped to her hips, her long black braid swinging down her back. She sewed clothes for the children from discount bolts of fabric and kept everyone fed on a steady diet of rice, eggs, and soy sauce. She painstakingly created order in a house filled with her children, their neighborhood friends, and a menagerie of rejected animal creatures (including dogs, rabbits, and an especially antagonistic spider monkey named Mitzie who had her own pet cat) that Charles brought home from his work at the laboratory.

Between the lack of money, the frequency of baby arrivals, and the absence of Charles, the Thomas children (and especially the Thomas boys) were left with unparalleled amounts of unsupervised time, a phenomenon common for their social class at that time in history particularly. As the story goes, absence of pocket money and seemingly endless hours to fill (after chores, of course) made exploring pockets in their city a daily ritual. There were stories about stealing five-gallon ice-cream tubs from the ice-cream truck, then eating every last bite to hide the evidence, henceforth causing me to postulate my own lactose intolerance as a product of intergenerational karmic backlash. Or tender moments when the crew of children was so rowdy that Sachi made them sit in a dark room around a single candle until the energy level in the house had returned to a manageable level. Many of these stories were deeply seated in his knowledge and wonderment of the urban environment where he lived, and some I had never heard before emerged in my oral history work with my father. For example, in one recording session he told me:

There was an open field and we used to just walk out and we would go in the arroyo. There was water there, so we'd just go out there and fish for bullhead catfish, collect snakes, we let them go, and guppies in these gallon pickle jars and I'd keep them all lined up in my bedroom. When we moved, there was a little more outdoors, and we'd walk. We walked everywhere those days. We would walk to Brookside park and there was an arroyo there

too. The water was overflow of Pasadena coming from the San Gabriel mountains. So we'd just go out and spend all day there, we'd explore, and then I was interested in pigeons at the time so I'd crawl up under the bridge and catch some. A lot of boys in the inner city kept pigeons.

Stories like this illuminate ecocultural identity subtly. In one small utterance, my father told me something about a historical era, gender, class, and his awareness of the more-than-human world. For example, the Pasadena of his memories is filled with exciting green spaces hidden in-between the busy highways and street-corners. Bridges held the ecological intrigue of pigeons in their crevices, and he and his friends specialized in finding water sources, knowing that where water existed other animals did, too.

This short excerpt also says something about class and gender. It is unclear from this tale whether catching pigeons was a prized activity for girls, as well, but from other stories, I know my eldest auntie was home more often helping cook and change diapers. My father was often free to roam the neighborhood with other boys as long as he was home for dinner, and the chances of his parents knowing what he was up to were slim due to the lack of technology in the era and the multiple more pressing activities his parents were already dealing with. As a male child, he was afforded privileges connected to assumptions of physical ability, independence, and safety, with fewer responsibilities of childcare toward his youngest siblings. Additionally, the 1950s era was one that unquestionably accepted the sentiments of 'boys-will-be-boys,' making mischief, wandering, and physical play more possible and certainly more socially acceptable. Still, while his gender afforded him relative independence, his race (unmentioned in this story but ever-present) curtailed the areas where he and his other racially ambiguous brothers could wander with the other boys from their neighborhood.

What a beautiful crew they must have been, the Thomas boys with their silky black Japanese hair or fluffy curls depending on the child, their Mexican and African American friends strutting beside them, all of them simply looking for ways to pass hot summer days. But then again, how dangerous those miniature excursions could have been during times of errant racism, where larger systems of oppression worked to form certain arroyos and streets where they were safe to be themselves, and some where they were aggressively unwelcome.

In my own childhood, I found romance in the images his stories painted of pickle jars full of tiny gulping guppies and cooing pigeons in handmade wire huts. Through these tales, I absorbed Los Angeles as a magical city where bright lights and burrito stands were layered on snakes and be-furred red bottlebrush trees. All of these scenes were swathed in history, nostalgia, and plant-life's insistence on existing in the center of concrete chaos. Because of this, I was gifted with a taken-for-granted perspective that cities were bursting full of characters from the more-than-human world. However, my own urban experiences were remarkably different than his seemingly endless tales of wandering the cracked sidewalks in freedom.

My father encouraged my exploration of the middle-class suburban spaces where we lived, and never hesitated to help me raise tadpoles he drove me to the creek to collect. He and my mother began camping when I was an infant, and I was carted on many hikes peeking out of a giant backpack. He also supported my insurmountable cravings to fill my pockets with rocks everywhere we went (often to the point where I had to clench my pants in balled fists so they wouldn't slip to my ankles from the weight), and he helped me build houses for fairies and butterflies in the field at the end of the cul-de sac. Despite this privileged and supported access to more-than-human nature, a combination of my gendered identity, our middle-class suburban lifestyle, and an era rife with over-publicized kidnappings of girl-children, constructed my access to the more-than-human world divergently from his experience.

My social position as a young female made me appear vulnerable both in his eyes and in U.S. American society's construction of abduction in the early 1990s, meaning that playtime without adults present was virtually unheard of. It was a point of pride for my father that he had the leisure time to escort me on most outdoor adventures, and that he knew the girls I played with and constantly terrified the boys I wanted to play with. Aiding this surveillance was our family's privileged income level, allowing my fair-skinned blue-eyed mother to work part-time when I was small, staying home with my younger brother and me most afternoons. Not only was her supervision constantly available, but several other stay-at-home mothers constantly peeped out their windows with lurid plaid print curtains, ready to bark at us little girls the minute we laid our grubby hands on a fence with an instinct toward hopping it, or lifted a dirt clod to join the boys' muddy nameless game. Those women, all meaning so well, all working from an interconnected child-rearing mentality found in some lucky suburbs, effectively and unknowingly began to curtail their daughters' instincts toward the edge of the park and the tops of gnarled oak trees, as well as their physical faith in their own little bodies and the safety of the out-of-doors world.

Race, space, and ambiguity

Unlike me, my father did not camp as a young child. As he or any of his siblings would tell you, people of color did not camp in those days, especially if they were below the poverty line and from an urban area. However, he was fortunate that in middle school he joined a backpacking club that soon turned into a non-profit called Outward Bound Adventures² (OBA) that spanned generations and still exists in Los Angeles presently. The non-profit spent its minimal budget on orchestrating trips to bring inner-city young people of color into the mountains, a progressive goal for the time. It took exactly one hike up to the twisted lodge-pole pines and cool dry winds of the high Sierras for my father's soul to relocate to the mountains. I can remember him speaking so emotively about the dusty trails and trickling glacial streams that the Sierras took on a mythical aura. Long before I set foot at Trout Creek where he preferred to basecamp,³ I would whisper the word *Si-err-as* to myself, touching my tongue on each syllable and conjuring up the scent of ponderosa sap and dusty puff of hiking boots on the earth created by his tales.

Unlike many children read as White, I was lucky to be raised highly conscious of race and its relation to space. With my mother's fair skin yet my father's darker coloring, I possessed a certain phenotypic ambiguity that made people consistently ask where I had my tans done but people rarely guessed my racial background or punished me for it. While I moved fairly smoothly through all environments, my father was often stopped at airports. I spent years loitering beside him as he was pulled aside at yet another TSA point, his bags disemboweled with confusion as they pulled out rocks, bones, and plant seeds from wherever we had just visited. It seemed beyond many people that this brown-skinned body could ever actually be a biology teacher, or possess truly innocent intentions for carrying vials of sand and leaf samples.

I was confused by the waves of stereotypes I heard as I grew older, ignorant slurs about Black people not liking to camp, or ski, or swim – my first entry to the woods was through my multiracial family and the members of OBA, the tall Black boy kings and Mexican girl queens of backpacking. My whole life, the people who were best at camping and hiking generally had been those who identified as people of color, and this kind of exposure started me out in a small rip in the fabric of outdoor racial stereotypes. It was enough to have been raised with this counter-narrative for me to see its grand potential.

I can remember asking my auntie about the ecocultural identities they were raised with, and her saying, 'They [their community] didn't know what to do with us, we weren't really Black, we weren't really Japanese, and, to make matters worse, we all liked to hike.' I do not

think my father and his siblings ever had ambiguity work as an advantage like I did, as being mixed-race became interesting and popular to parts of dominant culture during my younger lifetime and not his. In the sociopolitical era of his youth, he was a mixed-race man who did not fit in binary delineations of people of color and whiteness, or urban and non-urban, and who also held a non-dualistic worldview of humankind and nature. His amorphous ambiguity and blending of several cultural identities allowed me to comprehend the world in spectrums as opposed to binaries at a young and impressionable age.

In many ways, more-than-human spaces not only allowed a space away from the chaos of racial stereotypes and poverty, but also a doctrine of spirituality. Backpacking trips in the Sierras offered him a space of belongingness, a place to challenge the dominant norms that controlled the poverty, judgment, and more oppressive forms of religion he experienced in his youth. In another segment of his oral history he said:

I can remember hearing one of my [backpacking] leaders saying that this was his church, this is where he prays, this is where he comes to rest in solitude, and I factored that into my thinking. At that time, we were raised to think we were separate, particularly for people of color in the '50s, it wasn't a thing to do. You didn't have families going on vacation, going out climbing, going to Yosemite where you could get into nature and find out things.

I consider how dramatic it must have been for him to realize he could attend to his soul in the mountains, and how powerful it must have felt to be in a space where his sociocultural identities took on new meaning. More than any other aspect, my youthful and ignorant prejudice against religion made it hard to accept as an important part of ecoculture. Later in life, when my father remarked that the wild was his place of worship, I better understood that his form of religion worked from a place of love for all things on this planet, something many religions preach, though in different terms. Religion or spirituality can be another point of accessing ecocultural awareness and identity, and many of us find our spirituality in learning about the natural cycles of life and death, belongingness on this Earth, and the responsibilities that living beings have toward one another.

During his last years on his planet, my father learned to work with the different stages of his health and its multiple intersections with his other sociocultural identities to find how he could interact with outdoor spaces. What was once a muscular and sure-footed body had to find different ways of moving through the more-than-human world, adding hiking poles and a slower cadence to his walk. This weight of being chronically ill added another intersectional layer to his ecocultural identity. By the time he had been sick for a year, the thick calluses and lines of dirt from constant outdoor exposure had melted away from his palms. Chemotherapy made him exhausted, and he caught chills easily, meaning his time outside became limited in the winter and his previous freedoms of roaming became short walks with special attention paid to insulated clothing and the clock, an all powerful dictator of his medication schedule. Even the germs and bacteria, which he once had ignored by kissing children, wrapping near-strangers' blistered trail feet, and picking up ill or wounded animals, became a threat to his newly delicate immune system, making the world of tiny microbes he had once interacted with in peace a perilous universe of possible infections. Additionally, his skin turned to a paler shade than I had ever seen it, shifting his perceivable racial identity. Perhaps even his sociocultural identity of growing up poor with few doctors contributed to how long his cancer remained unchecked, as he would often wait for his body to heal itself as opposed to visiting hospitals.

Throughout my life, my father's stories made me envious and I fantasized about roaming streets, parks, and mountainsides alone, unconstrained by the vulnerabilities of my female body or the

surveillance of his protective eye. Just as my father's brown skin solicited stereotyping in the mountains or certain parts of the city, my female form seems to invite in a different kind of stereotyping and control, whether in forests or cities. Not only did my gender seem to curtail my freedom in moving through more-than-human spaces, my relative affluence did, too. Though higher social class can allow children more access to summer camps, national park vacations, and leisure time, my experience made it a barrier between my body and unsupervised more-than-human exploration. In an effort to rise above the rampant racism and lack of access to activities that cost money in his own childhood, my father and mother insisted I play sports, take music lessons, and maintain adequate grades, resulting in the incredible advantage of music literacy and college preparation but few of the open hours for whimsical observation of and engagement with the outdoors.

However, despite my inability to make verbatim facsimiles of his wandering, I at least knew there was unadulterated value in finding wonder in ditches and overgrown building lots. Hierarchical separation between human and more-than-human, city and wilderness space, or different races was fuzzy in my upbringing, and, though I had not realized it at the time, I was raised with the privilege of considering the more-than-human environment as something that did not actually belong in any way only to heterosexual white men. I was brought up in a world of stories and experiences that indelibly built the base for my ecocultural identity and allowed the space to find links between my life and my father's, his ecocultural identity and my own.

Not too long after I began writing this, my father passed through the veil and toward what I can only imagine was the forest wonderland of his imagination. My mother, brothers, and I were fortunate enough to bring him back to the farm where he and my mother lived in the midst of the most dramatic blizzard that U.S. northwest valley had experienced in years. The storm blanketed us in heaps of soft white snow and kept us from coming or going, as if the whole world had decided we were supposed to remain still. When his last breath whistled through his teeth, Motown hits were blasting from the corner of the bedroom; I think it was The Temptations but it may have been Smoky Robinson. I had asked him a few days earlier if I really did need to lean him up against a tree in the snow and he had laughed and told me not to worry about it because it was extremely illegal. Still, he could see the evergreens through the window. After he passed, we bathed him in river water and anointed him with sage. We slid hawk feathers into all his pockets and dabbed whiskey on his lips. We, the mixed-culture family, had no rituals handed down to us so we invented our own out of what he loved about living in this environment and the array of ecocultural identities he embodied here on Earth.

After the stories

I understand my own ecocultural identity is inevitably connected to my father's and that his narratives worked to influence and build my ecocultural orientations. In acknowledging my own emotional proximity to these stories, I find intergenerational storytelling is crucial for the formation and critical understanding of ecocultural identity. I also acknowledge how the range of identities we each experience within our lives always will work to create different experiences for us than our previous familial generations. My father and I had different oppressions and privileges, but they make the most sense when analyzed simultaneously. While his stories are important for remembering minority resistance to stereotypes about outdoorspeople, mine are relevant in showing how ecoculture moves between generations. I am uncompromisingly and outwardly mixed-race, but have also been afforded the privileges of being read as White my whole life. Despite this, when one is also handed stories of slavery, racism, and internment camps, or of having your aunts and uncles be the first Black folk their community had ever seen going to National Forests, it is impossible to relinquish embodiment of minority heritage

stories. Few people would ever be able to see from the surface how my embodied existence is a legacy of historical resistance and a diverse ecocultural identity, or think to question my presence on hiking trails or ski resorts or riverbanks. However, my multi-faceted ecocultural body is a holding vessel for these stories and those histories.

When I consider my father's stories and perspectives, it becomes clear how fiercely interwoven relationships with the more-than-human world are in every area of social and cultural identity and also astounding that we humans ever perceived our raveled, luminous, dynamic, and permeable identities as something isolated from the more-than-human world or vice versa. No matter how distant some of us might feel from the more-than-human world, or how little our families' stories outwardly reflect ecocentric orientations, we are all here living, breathing, and performing identity today because somewhere down the line in our ancestry someone was innately ecocentric. A grandmother or grandfather of ours had intimate understanding of their own place in an ecosystem, whether that was where to seek shelter, a relationship with one grain versus another, what animals were kept close, or how to navigate through places and spaces. As much as humans tend to pose 'the environment' as a storied site for our history, we are also a storied site for the more-than-human world. We can see this in our personal and cultural affinities toward deserts, oceans, cities, or mountains, fears of certain environments, eating habits, and our choices or realities of living in certain areas.

A family story that is not ecocultural is an impossibility. Everything to do with us, our histories, and our bodies, has to happen somewhere (see Casey, 1993) and every 'somewhere,' even city sidewalks and high-rise buildings, is part of and in intimate relationships with the more-than-human world. The cultural identities of our predecessors controlled the norms of our genders and ethnicities and where we chose or were forced to dwell. Stories helped us build practices and taught us how to understand our placement in society and on the Earth. Practices of our older generations in turn become preserved in stories about them, and family stories provide a space for the creation, remembrance, and development of ecocultural identities.

My father's tales are ones I wear proudly in my bones, in my gait up a mountainside and in my ability to pick through discount clothing, in the tilt of my eyes and the olive of my skin. Our stories combined are what make me encourage children to take their shoes off in the dirt, and also to convince little girls to try and climb old oaks faster than their brothers. Those narratives whisper in my ears when I start to curse the concrete of the cities, and provoke me into noticing the spray of green persisting through a crack in the sidewalk or the cicadas singing loudly in the middle of a suburb, because, if he could find magic in Los Angeles, I can certainly at least try to notice it in the small town in northern New Mexico where I now live. Those stories about moments of victory he had, opportunities lining up perfectly to get him out of the projects and into the woods, make me tear up when I see people of color at campsites, or running forestry divisions, or teaching at outdoor schools, all of whom I live in a privileged enough time to encounter. He is gone now, but I task myself with being the keeper and the guardian of his stories here, and with honoring his ecocultural identity and all it has taught me.

Notes

- 1 *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012) is an independent film that tells the story of a little girl, her father, and the flooding of a remote delta community in the U.S. deep South.
- 2 Outward Bound Adventures is a Pasadena-based outdoors nonprofit that began in 1960, focused on getting urban low-income kids of color into the mountains. It's not to be confused with Outward Bound, an international outdoor recreation company.
- 3 Basecamp is generally a set-up camp area where backpackers might go to acclimate before they summit or continue hiking a mountain.

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Interspecies ecocultural identities in human–elephant cohabitation

Elizabeth Oriel and Toni Frohoff

One could map the diversity of human–elephant relationships on the landscape and, correspondingly, map the continuum of these interspecies dynamics on both human and elephant psyches. The mind or psyche is an ecological system, as landscapes are (Guattari, 2005), and these systems reflect and mirror one another. Accordingly, landscape designs correspond to and reflect subjective positions and perceptions. Across Asia and Africa, human/elephant conflict occurs within a complex nexus of ecological, subjective, and social relations that inform and emerge from one another. This chapter explores this nexus, with an interspecies attention to the interplay of landscape, land-based practices, and ecocultural identities for both humans and elephants in India, Sri Lanka, and Kenya. Highly disrupted and fragmented landscapes, altered by human activity, become especially challenging systems for human and elephant coexistence. Historically, human and elephant lifeways and cultures formed interweaving and often mirroring patterns of *mobility* and *shared permeable spaces*. Working with extant literature, we explore how these patterns reflect pluralistic or dialogic relations and hegemonic or monologic influences.

Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) argues the world and existence are dialogic, with different, contesting perspectives coexisting, though this reality can be overlain with monologue that subsumes difference into one voice, one perspective. Across elephant ranges, traditional dialogic patterns have been losing out to a complex mix of modernist anthropocentric land designs, often precipitated by colonial rule. These influences are monologic, fitting diverse worlds into one, neither supporting difference nor the multiplicities of ecosystems. We argue that historic trans-species negotiations and relations generate and are generated by selves that are hybrid forms, acknowledging interdependencies and mingling amid shared more-than-exclusive spaces, mirrored in permeable concepts of self.

Movement and permeability are general features of living systems; these patterns have operated on a landscape scale and, we argue, within identities across human–elephant relations. In traditional systems across many regions of Asia and Africa, elephants and humans have co-constructed mirrored patterns that entail similarities across the species boundary and allow each to coexist. Research in India, Sri Lanka, and Kenya on land use arrangements and cultivation practices reveals that when humans and elephants possess *mobilities in their food acquisition processes* (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018) such as pastoralism and shifting agriculture, and patterns of *shared access*

to permeable spaces such as post-harvest vegetation for elephants (Benadusi, 2015; Fernando et al., 2005; Münster, 2016), these practices foster potential for shared landscapes and mutual coexistence. In pre-colonial times, in parts of savannah and forest elephants' ranges, it was not unusual for humans and elephants to successfully navigate even somewhat tight spaces, maintaining abilities to grow and acquire food, tend to livestock herds (for humans), and browse and graze (for elephants). These patterns involve practices, skills, sensitivities, information flows, and tolerance for others' needs, including some crop loss. The adaptations to the Other correspond to permeable selves (and fields), and the mutual resource partitioning corresponds to the ontological paradigm of interspecies mutualism, in which, as Descola and Pálsson (1996) describe, humans are enmeshed in interdependent and reciprocal relations with natural systems. These also are mutualisms in the biological sense, when two species' activities create benefit for the other. These traditional patterns may inform future design of land use arrangements, and we argue, correspond to alternate ecocultural identities in which self contains the other.

Ecocultural identities reflect various forms of dialogue (dialogic to monologic), and correspondences among self with world, with landscapes, spatial designs, hard and soft boundaries. A modernist approach to landscapes and identity categorizes and commodifies spaces and individuals, Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith (1991) argue, and isolates and categorizes land parcels, viewing each in terms of function and not in terms of relationality. This modernist influence denies the role of other animals, plants, landforms, and water as agents and mutual participants in generating landscapes and identities. When ecocultural identities are in dialogue with other beings and landscape – thus, forming less boundaryed and more connected identities through lines of communication – identity holds self and other simultaneously. Accordingly, mobilities and permeable spaces are two features of dialogic external and internal landscapes.

Landscapes designed as exclusive spaces to serve one purpose, altered through deforestation, monocultures of cash crops, and large scale hard boundaries (boundaries that are fixed and cannot be crossed), devolve dialogue into monologue, inserting a modernist and hegemonic voice as predominant on the organization of landscape. A corresponding neoliberal monetization of selves and landscapes, with transnational market-based economies as the centerpiece, displaces other social and subjective values. Diversity of social and subjective experience, and multispecies voices and listeners in a landscape, generate resilience at the same time that monologic places become fragile to climate crises and other disruptions (Shiva, 1993; Altieri et al., 2015).

Extinction is more than the loss of physical bodies. Extinction of culture stemming from loss of ancient knowledge of social and ecological relationships is equally important to extinction of pheno- and genotype. Culture has been defined and documented across multiple animal species, including cetaceans, nonhuman primates, and elephants, as 'information or behavior – shared by a population or subpopulation – which is acquired from conspecifics through some form of social learning' (Rendell et al., 2004, p. 431). Whereas Rendell et al. highlight intra-species culture, we view culture in this chapter as interspecies, examining relationality and learning within a multispecies and ecological context. The agencies of many beings and the landscape itself play a role in cultural transmission and identity formation. We specifically look at ways elephant culture is intertwined with plants, humans, seasons, water, and topography.

This chapter finds a common territory among human and elephant lifeways in relation to how landscapes and identities correspond. In this way, we map ecocultural identities across the species boundary, as both dialogic and monologic modes of organization shape relations between individuals and world. We synthesize extant literature findings from India, Sri Lanka, and Kenya with our own recent fieldwork (2018) in Asia, exposing human–elephant–terrain patterns within the three countries, though similar patterns occur in other regions and nation states across elephant ranges. First, we summarize the localized tensions among humans and

elephants; then we trace economic and political forces that exert monologic control over landscapes, contributing to interspecies conflicts. In conclusion, we examine the centrality of mobility and responses to loss of access, looking at permeability and exclusions, and focusing on ways movement and spatial design correspond to both dialogic and monologic ecocultural identities for humans and elephants.

From cohabitation to conflict

In this section, we trace the changes that intensification of landscapes, density of human population, and the modernist ontology of separation (human/nature, body/mind, self/other) have wrought, severely straining cohabitation among humans and elephants. Conflicts among humans and elephants increase across their range each decade and threaten elephants' continued existence across their habitats. Since 1980, human population size has almost doubled in India and tripled in Kenya, which are two significant elephant range countries. Of course, human population growth that is disproportionate to other species is a symptom of imperialist practices, as Vandana Shiva (2005) argues in *Earth Democracy*.

As geographies of human–wildlife interaction change, so can the potential for conflict (Margulies & Karanth, 2018). In Africa, poaching is the primary threat, though conflict over terrain (grazing areas and crops) also threatens both forest and savannah elephants. For Asian elephants, the clashes with humans over terrain and crops pose the primary threat, though poaching and electrocution from power lines cause many deaths. In India, roughly 400 humans and 100 elephants die each year due to human/elephant conflict (Barua et al., 2013). In this chapter, we focus on conflict over terrain more than poaching, though, to some degree, poaching violence is motivated by human and elephant changing relations to landscape and landscape design.

The roots of human/elephant conflict generally can be traced to colonial rule and attendant land use changes with corresponding impacts on subjectivities. Factors that foster conflict include: increasing human population, expanding agriculture, logging, and other human activities; loss of traditional modes of agriculture and community cohesion; invasive plants that displace native plants and are not palatable to elephants; breakdown of social and cultural development for young elephant bulls as older bulls die from human attacks and poaching (Jadhav & Barua, 2012); translocation of elephants in which humans capture and transport them to foreign terrain to ease conflict over crops; and elephants' desire for certain crops like banana, mangoes, sugar cane, and rice or paddy (Sukumar, 2011). Elephant deaths occur often from direct human attacks with poison, guns, or explosives, yet indirect anthropogenic effects also cause elephant deaths, such as starvation and collisions with trains.

Many human deaths in Sri Lanka occur due to human ignorance about how to behave around elephants. In one village in southern Sri Lanka, a tusker who routinely begs for food on the side of a road has allegedly killed three humans who approached him too closely. These examples of human insensitivity to elephant culture resulting in violent ends occur worldwide, spurred on by anthropocentric constructs of other animals as entertainment (Milstein, 2016). Learning respectful interactive behaviors with other species is paramount to coexistence.

The prevalence of elephant/human conflict in Asia and regions within Africa points to human-oriented landscapes not prioritized around the logics of multispecies coexistence. Elephants are subject to management plans dictating that elephants remain within protected areas that do not contain adequate carrying capacity to maintain a thriving population, often having too little vegetative and water resources and mineral deposits. In Asia, interspecies conflicts often arise when elephants leave the reserves (which may involve breaking through fencing or simply traversing a boundary) and enter agricultural fields, damaging crops, and at times other property;

though currently escalating, this type of conflict in agricultural fields has taken place for centuries, though it became markedly intensified by colonial rule and land use arrangements such as plantation agriculture (Sukumar, 2011). In pre-colonial times, elephants in parts of Asia were captured and used in war and as forced laborers, though contemporary conflicts over terrain and resources essentially began with European rule (Sukumar, 2011). Colonial rule precipitated a system change from cultivation that regenerated soils with diverse inter-cropping shifting fields and growing periods tied to seasons and climatic change to plantation methods of continuous stationary monocropping. Across elephant range countries, the former ancient regenerative and sustainable modes of agriculture continue to diminish in favor of industrialized and intensive cultivation, driving species loss such that extinction becomes the norm (Fernando et al., 2006). In regions where traditional subsistence cultivation continues, expansion of crops into elephants' historic routes and increasing settlements also disrupt the balance.

The socio-ecological disruptions to landscapes and identities where conflicts occur are tragically evidenced in both humans and elephants, and can be viewed as a multispecies environmental justice issue. Subsistence farmers can lose a substantial proportion of crops in one incursion from an elephant. In my fieldwork (Oriel), I spoke to farmers who report that, on a seasonal basis, they struggle with elephants in their fields daily. Farmers and other humans living near elephants not only are at higher risk from the physical threat of elephants but also suffer from psychiatric and social pathologies, such as psychosis, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder – mental health dimensions of these human/elephant conflicts (Jadhav & Barua, 2012). Farmers in many parts of Asia and Africa suffer the familiar globalized marginalization caused by politicians setting crop prices, while distributors and agrochemical companies eat into farmer profits. Government officials who determine land designs, those who benefit from elephant ecotourism, and the globalized commercial agricultural corporations who plant irrigated crops hold no fiscal or perceptual responsibility. Some farmers, outraged and protesting the incursions by elephants and larger structural politico-economic issues that keep their profits low, are forced to adapt, yet their plight is mirrored in elephants' loss of access to habitat, an example of how environmental justice transgresses species boundaries.

As ecology and culture for humans and elephants have become fragmented, so has the psychology and physiology of impacted individuals within and across species. Human-inflicted deaths and habitat loss affect elephant physiology, resulting in elevated stress hormone levels (Gobush et al., 2008) and behavior over generations manifesting as psychobiological trauma in elephants (Bradshaw et al., 2005). This traumatization from fragmented habitat and, in particular, disintegrated family and social groups, is related to a dramatic rise in elephant hyperaggression within and across animal species (Bradshaw et al., 2005). Hyperaggression accounts for 90 percent of male elephant deaths in one African park. Traumatized elephants sometimes direct excessive aggression toward humans. Concurrently, human aggression and retaliation becomes more of a threat to elephants, and the multi-dimensional circle of violence and blaming is self-perpetuating. Meanwhile, dialogic interspecies ecocultural identities may flourish with policies that empower all of the affected parties mutually in ways that also enrich the surrounding ecologies that sustain them. In highly developed landscapes, where multispecies actors vie for nutrition, ecocultural patterns of movement and boundary features must be both qualitatively and quantitatively measured and assessed. Policies that support coexistence need to reflect the qualitative – or the qualities of livelihoods and identities that aren't represented in numbers.

Interspecies ecocultural identities can foster either cohabitation or extinction, and past human–elephant relations point to practices and identities rooted in cohabitation. Traditional farming practices and elephants foraging patterns exhibit a spatio-temporal choreography of shared space and resource partitioning that allows for avoidance; these practices lend benefit to

both humans and elephants, as well as other species. Human pastoralists and subsistence farmers' practices benefit elephants in their own food acquisition by sustaining grassland areas and shifting cropping areas, leaving fields fallow that elephants access after harvest (Kamau & Slyuter 2018; Fernando et al., 2005, 2006). A temporal mobility also operates as growing seasons take place during rainy months when vegetation is prevalent for elephants, while their access to fields secures food for drier times.

Elephants design landscapes around their needs for food, water, and minerals from deposits, and their alterations benefit many other species when their density is not too great. For example, in the savannahs of Amboseli in Kenya, elephant browsing and grazing create greater plant diversity, decrease woodland and dense shade, and indirectly shape the wildlife community (Western, 1989). Elephants play a similar role in forests, creating gaps where sunlight breaks through the forest canopy, allowing for varied ground vegetation that benefits gorillas, duikers, bush pigs, forest hogs, and buffalo. Elephants dig wells in dry river beds for water, which then provide for both humans and other species in the area (Haynes, 2012; Ramey et al., 2013). Elephant trails and pathways through thorny and dense vegetation are used by many – another example of their engineering work benefiting others. These reciprocal practices are apparent on the subjective realm. Human–elephant choreography of mutual benefit builds identities as circles of continuity and relationality, even kinship, with hybridity as a defining feature.

These traditional patterns occurring among elephants and humans – as well as other species – are just one example of multispecies collaboration as shared resource practices accruing mutual benefit. For instance, accounts of dolphin–human fishing cooperatives have been described from the age of Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23–79) to recent times and are practiced on several continents (Frohoff & Oriel, 2015). The dolphins are typically the initiators of these relationships wherein participating members of both species benefit by mutual herding and catching fish near the shore. In many of these regions, families or individuals regularly work exclusively with one or several particular individual dolphins. These collaborative relationships sometimes extend to the progeny of both dolphins and humans over generations, resulting in multispecies ecocultural evolution. Because they are shared spaces of highly differential habitat utilized by marine and terrestrial animals, coastal areas offer one of the most permeable boundaries, allowing for multidirectional mobility for multiple species. Mutual resource partitioning is based in identities structured around mutual needs and interests, and ecologically oriented negotiation.

'Conflict' as an outcome of monologic identities

Human-dominated landscapes, in which human needs subsume all other life forms, are an example of monologic spaces that frame human–wildlife relations. Landscapes are spaces of multiplicities of human and more-than human actors, and monologic influences devolve the complexities that foster resilience. The Global North controls a monologic narrative about progress that exploits and devalues the Global South through remotely controlled power and sovereign debts, feeding the North's empire-conditioned standard of living (Hickel, 2017). This dynamic casts an enormous influence on human/elephant conflict that warrants further discussion elsewhere. Imperialism and remote hegemonies that drive disproportionate human population numbers exert human-centric monologues in diverse dynamics globally, while reverberations of colonial times – introduction of plantation agriculture in monocultures to countries across Asia and Africa, exporting goods abroad with profits often ending up in foreign investors' pockets – insert hidden monologues of power and privilege. This continues into the current neocolonial era, as corporate entities export cash crops, marginalizing subsistence farmers and elephant access to traditional use areas. Elephants are restricted to protected

areas and humans are denied historical access to these same lands for grazing, growing crops, and acquiring forest products. Currently, neoliberal policies that de-regulate, privatize, and marketize dictate relationships and alter landscapes to separate humans and elephants into exclusive zones, further decreasing historical access and extending the reach of market-based logics. This triangle of expanding neoliberal agriculture and logging, enclosed protected forest areas, and increasing human-dominated landscapes leave local people and wildlife such as elephants marginalized in terms of space and control over their lives (Münster & Münster, 2012).

As plantation agriculture instrumentalizes plants, farmers, and other species, the monocultures and monopolies of agribusiness also instrumentalize science and knowledge-production to foster productive capabilities, discarding system health and diversity. The current ecological crisis is essentially an ontological crisis, calling for humans to unveil and reflect on the premises of anthropocentric logics and explore other logics based in diversity, difference, and wellbeing as standards. Certainly, conservation biology supports biodiversity as a basic premise, yet Western science is still hampered by the delusion of objectivity, the internal logic of separation that divides human lives from other animal lives, the removal of values and ethics from scientific enquiry, and the reduction of emotional, cultural, and moral lives of non-humans. This is reflected in management plans based in market variables that often fail to consider essential elements of other animals' lives. It is also reflected in the frame 'human/elephant conflict' which obscures the historical and cultural roots of the conflict, suggesting that humans' and elephants' lives and interests are mutually incompatible.

Conflict resolution often revolves around shared goals and shared realities. Human and elephant relations to terrain as a place of survival, identity, and historical continuity are mutual across the species divide. The unit of survival is the organism *and* their environment, anthropologist Gregory Bateson contends, re-drawing the lines Darwin drew solely around the organism (Harries-Jones, 2016), thus tying an organism's source and identity to terrain and a diverse web of relations. Centralized control of landscapes becomes a form of control over subjectivities. Political geographers argue the modern state system organizes and operates through territoriality, and boundaries and borders are central to this pursuit. Geographer Robert Sack (1986) contends that 'territoriality is the primary spatial form power takes' (p. 26); more-than-human geography includes other species in this lens of territorial control. Transformations of separated and highly intensive agricultural and forestry lands along with hard-bounded national parks are central to these pursuits of territory control in Asia and Africa and correspond to monologic ecocultural identities. The multiple human actors involved in the conflicts, both those immersed and those distant, enact colonial and neocolonial logics and storylines. The current moment calls for new interspecies imaginations to be brought into dialogic, diverse, and equitable modes of relating and self-organizing based on models of historic cohabitation patterns.

Dialogic ecocultural identities

Dialogism can be understood as an ecological communicative framework in many respects, and is based in the essential reality that diverse voices and interests from members of various cohabitating species coexist. Self is not an isolated unit but is composed of other, Bakhtin (1981) asserts, ranging from ecological relationships between plants and fungi to humans and bacteria. Selves and world are both multiplicities of difference; existence emerges in the relationship among differences (Holquist, 2003). Identities, like dialogues, can be dialogic, in which each different perspective coexists with others – and subjectivity comes about through responsibility to the Other (Levinas, 1981). Identities, conversely, can be monologic, in which certain ideologies or authorities subsume others' interests, thus making no room for difference.

The dialogic merging of self and other is apparent in stories within certain Asian religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism. The hybridity of human–elephant relations, evident in the Hindu god Ganesh, who is both human and elephant, and the Buddha, whose mother conceived him when an elephant entered her womb, provide spaces to explore Bakhtin’s dialogue, an entry into respect of difference and more-than-human relations. Themes of hybridities come to the fore in Piers Locke’s (2013) innovative scholarship; his new transdisciplinary field of ethnoelephantology troubles dualities to explore human–elephant relations among the entangled social, historical, and ecological domains.

Dialogic ecocultural identities are permeable interspecies spaces of self and landscapes, processing the world through movement, mobility, and relation to terrain. Landscapes also are voiced agents in the dialogue. The triad of human–elephant–terrain is in dialogue, co-generating ethical approaches to one another by navigating avoidance, knowledge of life histories, acute listening.

From an interview in Sri Lanka, an elephant researcher recounted that a Veddic (an Indigenous group) man in Sri Lanka can feel elephant movements through vibrations in his arms (personal communication, 2018). In another anecdote, a farmer said he plays the radio when he leaves home to scare elephants away, though they can tell the difference between real human voices and radio voices (personal communication, 2018). Human–elephant negotiations over space require knowledge of the other as visceral experience, a holding of the other inside oneself. These negotiations are dialogic, attending to diverse voices, though they’re drowned out as elephant terrain is reduced, and farmers resort to firecrackers and explosives to scare elephants away.

How do diminishing patterns of shared access and mobility correspond to ecocultural identity? This *Handbook* understands identity as ‘materially and discursively constructed’ (Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020, p. xix). Human–elephant modes of acquiring food, movements, shared spaces are both embodied, material practices and modes of communication with the terrain and other beings. Discourse in the social sciences and humanities is understood as inclusive of both language and practice. Elephants do possess meaning-imbued language, uttering sounds that function like words (Kenneally, 2008), yet anthropocentric orientations to communication erase the myriad forms of language and ways beings communicate with one another (Plec, 2013; Abram, 1996).

The intertwined identities and psychological connections between elephants and humans manifest positively or negatively in a vast range of behaviors and result from individual elephant life histories involving intense and/or frequent human contact (Plotnik & de Waal, 2014). Elephants can discern between people by identifying them by voice, smell, and physical appearance and can distinguish human vocal cues that signal age, sex, and ethnic identity (McComb et al., 2014). This sensitivity and sophisticated perception animate the potential for cohabitation through knowledge of the other and also allows for conflict avoidance.

Dialogic relations across human and elephants emerge as diverse interests held together through collective benefit (system health). An example of human–elephant relationality to shared terrain occurs among the Nayaka people in India’s Nilgiris Hills. Anthropologists Naveh and Bird-David (2014) write the Nayaka speak of ‘the walking of this place’ (p. 30), which reflects the cosmoecological ethos within place. Grasses speak in subtle ways of weather changes; elephants can hear far away storms approaching with their sensitivity to low-frequency sound below the normal limit of human range, called infrasound; humans are attuned to elephant movements and adjust their behaviors. The divergent modes of living find a cohesion through attentiveness to place that co-constructs permeable selves. Alaimo’s (2010) work highlights the vulnerabilities of permeable spaces, both inside and out, that shape the transcorporeal nature of bodies, fluid boundaries that run counter to the modernist exercise of

controlled, ordered, human-oriented environments. Human population size and capitalist approaches to food production crowd out ethical relations within overly dense human spaces that have become divorced from that which sustains them. Loss of and/or remembering this ‘walking of the place’ invokes anger, trauma, resistance, as evidenced by both elephant and human aggressions, and identities informed by injustice and loss of ethical relations to place.

Rather than promote particular policies or practices, we argue for the application of processes that mirror ecological systems and traditional interspecies practices of cohabitation to inform contemporary land use arrangements and land-based practices, and ultimately a new ecopolitics that subsumes human politics within ecology. Permeable internal and external spaces and capacity for movement are both integral to dialogic ecocultural identities that foster coexistence. Modernist approaches to complex ecological issues can produce binary options, often organized around utility, in which human and elephant worlds are divided and colliding. Yet new imaginations into the two seemingly incommensurable goals of economic development and multispecies coexistence take on new possibilities when market-based priorities are not the centerpiece but humans and the more-than-human world are conceived and produced in ecological terms.

Mobilities and responses to loss

For anthropologist Tim Ingold (2017), movement is the essential feature of life, ‘movement – along the ground, in walking, in the air, in respiration – is not what a body does but what it is’ (p. 38). The presence or absence of capacity for movement, in both terrain and subjective spaces, is an essential aspect of ecocultural identity. Life moves along lines, not inside enclosures. Conflicts amongst humans and elephants increase with a lack of mobility for both species. An ontology of movement suggests system-oriented epistemologies that move with the studied (as researcher Maan Barua (2014a) follows free-ranging elephants), unearthing dynamisms and flux. Mobility patterns call for land use policies of larger protected areas with shared spaces in buffer zones (Fernando et al., 2005), ecologically oriented agriculture that doesn’t encroach on elephant terrain, and spaces that foster access and physical mobility as a form of social life, such as wildlife corridors and underpasses beneath roads and train tracks.

Movement is central to elephants’ lifeways: most migrate along generationally maintained routes, though distance depends on terrain and conditions. Elephants also are enormously mobile and mobilized within the globalized world. As an iconic species, religious symbol, captive entertainer, commodity within ivory markets, and migrants losing habitat, they traverse the world in transnational networks. They do so both physically and conceptually, including in artworks, campaigns, logos (Barua, 2014b; Whatmore & Thorne, 2000), and in chapters such as this one, illuminating the dynamics of spaces humans create for elephants and ways that elephants respond.

This globalized de-territorialized mobility is juxtaposed with an accompanying physical loss of mobility across terrain in much of elephants’ range. Plantation agriculture is erasing tropical forests and ecosystems (Lewis et al., 2015). Monologic agricultural expansion poses the greatest threat to biodiversity across African forest and savannah elephants’ and Asian elephants’ ranges. And now related consequences of climate disruption, such as wildfires, tree disease, and decimation by insects, also are ravaging forests worldwide. African forest elephants declined by 62 percent from 2002–2011, in part due to losing 30 percent of their geographic range (Maisels et al., 2013), which aids poachers as elephants lose abilities to hide. Asian elephants’ favored habitat, seasonally dry forests, are one of the most threatened forest types in India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal due to agricultural expansion by both corporate and local actors (Fernando & Leimgruber, 2011). In Sumatra, elephants have lost 69 percent of their forest habitat from 1986–2001, largely from deforestation for palm oil plantations, and elephant populations have decreased by 84 percent in

the Sumatran province considered the stronghold for conservation (Gopala et al., 2011). In other elephant range countries, forests continue to be drastically felled, affecting numerous species and curtailing safe passage across terrain.

Motion is central to mammalian lifeways and ecocultural identities. Protected areas and reserves, though crucial to protecting biodiversity and forest cover, also are problematic when their size is small and when they're not connected to other reserves, especially for migrating species such as elephants. Kamau and Sluyter (2018) describe a loss of mobilities among elephants and humans in Kenya, as precolonial patterns devolve within restricted, enclosed spaces and related conflict increases. The authors trouble the neocolonial conservation strategies promoted in Kenya by such notables as Richard Leakey, advancing the Yellowstone Model for conservation, which excludes humans from enclosed, electrically-fenced wildlife spaces (Kamau & Sluyter, 2018). This model, now in use worldwide, creates bounded parks, often barring Indigenous people from areas of historical access and use. Using oral histories and archival material, Kamau and Sluyter (2018) reveal a pre-colonial Tsavo, Kenya, as an:

assemblage of interactions based on fluidity and permanent mobility that had positive effects on humans, elephants, and the general ecology. In pre-colonial Tsavo, there was mutual cohabitation of several modes of production (hunters and gatherers, pastoralists, and agriculturalists), and cultural perspectives that supported the coexistence of humans and elephants in the same landscape.

(p. 524)

When mobility accompanies access to terrain and resources across the species divide, identities match this fluidity with a transcorporeal responsiveness, a form of bodily situated dialogue that facilitates shared spaces.

Not only do African elephants travel vast distances, having home ranges of 15 km to 11,000 km, but also parts of their bodies are consistently in motion.

In the wild, elephants are rarely still; some segment of their bodies, whether legs, ears, eyes, trunk or tail, is in motion. Despite their great size, elephants are vigorous animals, perpetually active in mind and body. Apart from the two to three hours of a 24-hour day when wild elephants may stand or lie down to sleep, they are searching over vast areas for food, water, companions and mates, or they are actively engaged in preparing a food item for ingestion, interacting with a conspecific or another species, or occupied in some frivolity.

(Poole & Granli, 2008, p. 2)

With motion being a central feature of wellbeing, play as a form of motion is essential to thriving – its absence is an indicator of diminished welfare for individuals and societies.

The psyche and ecocultural identity of elephants is intrinsically intertwined with their highly complex mobilities and social dynamics that are informed in relation to, and knowledge of, their terrain. Social lives of elephants are dynamic and straddle a paradox and complexity of social fluidity and flux combined with durable familial and extra-familial close and lasting friendships, perhaps comparable only to chimpanzees and humans in complexity (Poole & Moss, 2008). For African and Asian elephants, the family unit is the most stable structure, usually made up of one or more females and their offspring. In African elephants, matriarchs have a clear dominant role; while in some Asian elephants, the social structure is less understood and may be less hierarchical (de Silva et al., 2017). The social structure of elephant societies is enmeshed with local ecological features, such as vegetative productivity and predator presence,

and informs their ecocultural identity as the social informs the subjective. Females typically stay with their natal herds throughout their life. While maturing males leave the group, they stay in intermittent contact with their maternal relatives throughout their lifetimes (Lee et al., 2011). Though families are closely bonded units, individuals are in constant movement during the day, separating and coming back together, and are part of a larger social dynamic called fission-fusion, a semi-fluid pattern of social composition and group size shared only by a few cooperatively hunting carnivores such as hyenas, lions, some cetacean species, a few nonhuman primates, and humans (ibid.).

For African elephants, the matriarch, usually the oldest and largest, is the repository of complex and ancestral social and ecological knowledge. She reduces conflict, reinforces social ties, and holds extensive knowledge of social dynamics and locations of plant and water resources. Leadership is afforded due to successful problem-solving abilities and social permissiveness (Lee & Moss, 2012). In a study on personality traits and leaderships among African matriarchs, Lee and Moss (2012) describe 'openness' as the defining feature, drawing from Costa and MacCrae's (1992) human personality models involving influence, knowledge, and perceptual abilities. Researchers did not often witness assertiveness and dominance by matriarchs or others, as the respect given to the matriarch subsumes these traits. Lee and Moss (2012) describe elephant matriarchal leadership as a negotiation among individual interests, which is reminiscent of dialogism, a coexisting of distinct points of view. Personality and leadership styles reflect ecocultural identities and determine survival, both individually and of the group or family unit. Openness, which in the personality models is also called 'absorption,' is a receptive quality that facilitates ecocultural dialogic relations and coexisting with diverse perspectives and forms.

In contrast, restricted movement within fragmented habitats leads to elephants not only eating and damaging crops but damaging homes and cars, and even injuring or killing humans. Human explanations of these acts vary based on one's life history, culture, and identity. Naveh and Bird-David's (2014) research in the Nilgiri hills of southern India finds that Nayaka people responded to a group of elephants eating their crops and destroying their home by drawing on their knowledge of living with elephants and a quality shared by humans and elephants of *budi*, which means 'an ability to interact wisely' (p. 29). The Nayaka explained that the elephants who did the damage had *budi*, yet they had been traumatized when people threw firecrackers at them on the same night, while the human offenders had no *budi*, no ability to cooperate with elephants. They could explain the elephants' anger within their dialogic paradigm that extends sociality, culture, and wisdom to the more-than-human world. Ursula Münster's (2016) work in south India provides another human explanation for elephants trampling property from residents of a high-conflict zone in Wayanad – elephants have lost fear of humans. In contrast to the dialogic mode among the Nayaka, some in Wayanad call for a return to hunting and capture to resolve the conflict. Shrinking human and elephant terrain tend to elicit violent solutions.

Subsistence farmers and elephants losing access to historical terrain are examples of expulsions that sociologist Saskia Sassen (2014) speaks of in her analysis of global processes. Expulsions erase one from the system, with no hope of re-joining. Capitalism since the 1980s has been driven by extractive, predatory speculation that takes no interest in marginalized people (or non-human animals), playing out in mining and forestry. Extraction and expulsions increase, becoming more visible. The shift into larger monocultures is one piece of this global trend. Expulsion is operant for elephants with fragmented habitats, small reserves, and wildlife corridors that often are illegally encroached.

Not only are landscapes fragmenting, but so, too, is collective knowledge as a guide to living with others. These sites of conflict also are sites of injustice, where elephants and subsistence farmers lose out to development, globalized agri-business, and deteriorated ecosystems. In

some elephant range nations, elephants were instrumental in building infrastructure, such as reservoirs, irrigation systems, and logging that supports agriculture. Perhaps elephants pass along inter-generational memories of their forced participation in these projects and view agriculture as a shared resource. Land use arrangements, with their historical and cultural influences and residues can be perceived as fixed and impossible to shift; yet conservation action plans should address these foundational arrangements so that mobility and access can be integral to future designs.

From shared and permeable spaces to expulsions

Intimately related to how movement informs and is informed by ecocultural identities are human and elephant relations to space and spatial designs. Relations to self and to others dictate orientations to space; space is not objective and neutral but is impregnated with mind, memory, experience, and subjectivity (Bateson, 2000). Selves and the interiors of homes and buildings are deeply entwined, as Bachelard (1958) argues, and this is true also for land and landscapes. The enclosures in sixteenth-century England denied previously held rights to common lands and brought about massive privatization, ending ancient systems of shared arable farming in open fields. Landscapes went from places of access, commonly managed spaces where one gained livelihood, to separate bounded spaces of exclusion.

Stengers (2015) calls attention to the loss of collective intelligence brought by the enclosures in Europe, a loss that capitalism, in its zombie all-consuming style, imposes by disentangling relations between humans and other species. We posit it is not only landscapes that are shifting, but also collective intelligence about landscapes that are being lost. This plays out in elephant ranges as traditional patterns become mechanized, as economic structures and corruption maintain poor compensation for crops, and as plantation models of agriculture tie farmers, as dependents, to corporate powers. Exclusion from collective and public space contributes to modernist ecocultural modes in which individuals are divorced from other humans, other species, and systems as a whole, promoting monologic ecocultural identities.

Landscapes are multispecies spaces and ecosystems rely on the diversity of form, function, movement, and interaction. Protected areas, the spaces for diverse more-than-human life forms, have been the cornerstone of conservation management around the world since the 1970s. Although they have protected many species now extinct due to human impact outside their bounds, protected areas overall have failed in conserving targeted species as a whole. They are a modernist construct that, to be successful, must accompany a multitude of other landscape, social, cultural, economic, and political factors. Elephants leave protected area boundaries and, in Sri Lanka, for instance, 70 percent live outside protected areas.

Landscapes need to be designed not just for human movement but also for the movement of elephants and other mobile species. With 10–20 elephants dying in India a year in train collisions, transport networks need to be elevated with safe passage for elephants and others through underpasses. One promising human/elephant conflict mitigation technique in Sri Lanka is electric fences around crop areas, which are small-scale hard boundaries that do not restrict broader elephant movements (Fernando, 2015). Fencing human cropped areas is more tenable than fencing elephants.

Exclusive reserves that separate humans and elephants are not designed for the wellbeing of either species (Jadhav & Barua, 2012). In Sri Lanka, Fernando et al. (2005) argue that traditional chena cultivation fields that provide common use areas for humans and elephants along with protected areas should form contiguous landscapes. The diversity of subsistence plants within intercropped fields mirrors and informs dialogic ecocultural identity as diverse

compositions of different roles, needs, and interests. Vandana Shiva (1993) connects monocultures to subjectivities and mental monologues. In contrast, hybridities and multiplicities thrive in diverse forms in shared internal–external spaces.

Another spatial and subjective confinement humans enact for elephants are methods of capture. Enclosures where captured elephants are held are one feature of human control, and these small spaces are connected to global networks in which elephants are typically dominated – either as performers, iconic captives under the auspices of conservation, or confined objects of worship. The practice of treating elephants as property for entertainment for the paying has become an aspect of their commodification, often by corporate zoos and circus entities. Interspecies ecocultural identities change as humans remove elephants from their ancestral habitats to confine them – fragmenting elephant societies, culture, and psychology, and restricting the most essential aspects of their agency relative to their culture and relationship to place. Across Asia, in heavily populated areas, elephant livelihoods in protected areas and corridors exist on a continuum of enclosed spaces of human control, exerting human-centered monologues that remove autonomy, dignity, and alter their 6 million-year-old evolution.

Toward inclusive policies

Responding to the world as opposed to reacting is dependent on agency, which is a diminishing feature of marginalized subsistence farmer and elephant lives. Intertwined human and elephant ecocultural identities, co-created over centuries, contend with contraction and loss of community structure, perhaps making the Nakaya's 'budi' (or ability to interact wisely) more difficult to perceive in others. Elephant leadership, listening, mobilities, and access to shared and permeable spaces are aspects of elephant lifeways and ecocultural identities informing human–elephant cohabitations. These patterns mimic natural systems and processes of movement, flow, permeability, and mutualisms. Re-aligning human practices with these processes elicits greater resilience and coexistence.

Ultimately, elephant lifeways and ecocultural identities can guide negotiations across species and aid in building a natural-systems based diplomacy that may work to transform the arts of negotiation from the human-centered realm of power and control to one built on cooperative practices within a multispecies body politic. Trans-species dialogic communities rely on a mix of humans and elephants having voice and agency within a bottom-up, highly localized nexus of relations combined with a globalized narrative that supports multispecies landscapes. Monologue is an outside voice, an abstracted idea. When dialogue maintains the field, and when identities are fluid enough to answer in the process, multispecies communities are spaces of contestation, collaboration, and ethical attunement to the 'walking of the place.'

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Memory, waterways, and ecocultural identity

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In the high desert riparian Middle Río Grande Valley¹ of the United State Southwest, Nuevo Mexicano² ecocultural identity is rooted in ancient, collaborative, and trust-based relationships with water and the human and more-than-human life water nurtures. Fundamental to Nuevo Mexicano ecocultural identity is the acequia system, a centuries-old, miles-long network of gravity fed irrigation ditches that have allowed for relatively stable and sustainable agriculture in a high desert river valley that, prior to damming, flooded regularly. Acequias are the result of ancient Indigenous Pueblo Indian³ knowledge and North African knowledge carried to the area by Spanish colonizers beginning in the early sixteenth century. Centuries after Spanish colonization, Anglo and other European colonizers imposed forced cultural assimilation and industrialized (sub)urban development that violently disrupted Indigenous ecoculture. In New Mexico, the site of the present study, this included the disruption of many acequias and the entire lifecycle of the riparian forest ecosystem known locally as the bosque. Yet, the Río Grande and surviving acequias remain powerful more-than-human actors that draw life into their flows. And acequias' maintenance and care and the connections of all life in the Valley, human and more-than-human, are essential to Nuevo Mexicano ecocultural identity.

In this study, I look at traditional ecocultural relationships based in shared acequia waterways and the disruption of these waterways in the form of (sub)urban development and forces of gentrification. I argue the relationship between multiple ecocultural identities in present-day Western colonial contexts is constructed upon an underlying dialectic between trust and anxiety. The trust-anxiety dialectic pervades human and more-than-relationships, illuminates contradictions in regimes of power and control regarding human relationships with water, and helps explain how elders from multiple ethnic groups make sense of both enduring and changing ecocultural identity in younger generations. More generally this study demonstrates that symbiotic human and more-than-human relationships with water are possible at local scales as alternatives to environmental disruption and degradation. Supporting symbiotic local ecocultural relationships, or what Milstein, Anguiano, Sandoval, Chen, and Dickinson (2011) call "relations-in-place," is ever more important in the present global ecological crisis. Moreover, this study shows ways that ecocultural anxieties related to race and class inequalities, human disconnection from more-than-human life, and instrumentalist urban development practices are obstacles to communities' abilities to realize symbiotic

relationships with water at larger geographic scales. Working through these anxieties and relationships of trust in ways that undo inequalities is fundamental to restoring more reciprocal relationships with water locally and beyond the local scale.

Disruption and resilience in the South Valley, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Perhaps nowhere along the Río Grande is the trust–anxiety dialectic more apparent than the South Valley network of neighborhoods in the city of Albuquerque, New Mexico. While acequias still flow in the northern part of the state, the South Valley is one of the last vestiges of traditional acequias in the urban landscape of Albuquerque. People who live in the South Valley, particularly those who have lived there for many generations, tell rich and vibrant stories of past and present mutual living with more-than-human life – with acequias often at the center of these stories. Yet, news media and many people who live in other parts of the city narrowly represent the South Valley as a neighborhood full of drugs and crime. In part because of these contradictions, this neighborhood is a powerful context for examining the trust–anxiety dialectic in ecocultural identity.

This study examines archived U.S. Southwest oral histories, and contemporary interviews and field notes from my own study of traditional farming in a contemporary South Valley Farming Cooperative⁴ (SVFC) (Hoffmann, 2018). The oral histories, known as the South Valley Oral History Project (SVOH) were collected in 1995–1996 by the New Mexico Endowment for the Humanities (NMEH) in order to document the perspectives of community elders of multiple ethnicities⁵ about South Valley neighborhood change and community needs. Many of these oral history participants commented then on ways South Valley neighborhoods and residents were changing in terms of community closeness and relationships to water and the more-than-human world.

The 1990s were significant ecoculturally because they marked the first decade during which much of the planet began to collectively focus on sustainability (e.g., the Brundtland Commission in 1987 and the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit of 1992). In addition, in the 1990s, the ecological degradation and ecocultural inequalities, contradictions, and anxieties of suburban development grew too visible to ignore, sparking widespread activist and scholarly critique. The interviews and fieldnotes I collected in 2014 and 2017 at SVFC enrich and complicate the 1995–1996 oral history participants' stories by highlighting a movement of revitalization of acequia-based cooperative farming that oral history participants hoped for in the 1990s. At a global scale, during my research and at the present moment, the destructive effects of global climate disruption have become more widespread than ever, and extreme water scarcity in arid and semi-arid climates has necessitated immediate and collective shifts toward radically more sustainable relationships with water. Restorative human ecocultural identities based in shared waterways offer a glimmer of hope for alternatives to socially and ecologically destructive forms of control. Finally, the ecocultural anxieties that emerge from the present study point to larger historical inequalities and spatio-cultural patterns in urban development that must be addressed, changed, or disrupted to release the flow of more symbiotic relationships with water at larger geographic scales.

The chapter is organized as follows: First, I describe the context of the acequia system, the life and ecoculture it supports, and specific forms of disruption of these waterways. I explore and theorize how large-scale water diversion is not simply a common part of suburban development, but part of a larger history of racist and classist gentrification projects, and disruption of Indigenous relationships with waterways. Next, I demonstrate ways participants' core senses

of ecocultural identity emerge from storytelling and memory. Participants illuminate several forms of past and present disruption of ecocultural identities in the form of disconnection with more-than-human life, traditional relationships with food, and the water cycle. However, many participants' stories also clarify how collective ecocultural practices (like acequia maintenance) strengthen the resilience of traditional ecocultural identities, despite disruptive forces. Finally, I conclude that racist and classist patterns of gentrification projects that disrupt waterways – and ecocultural identities tied to them – exacerbate the social problems ('disorder,' public safety, quality of life) they claim to ameliorate, and exponentially worsen the ecological crises of climate disruption and water pollution. An historically, ecoculturally, and critically informed approach to city planning and neighborhood safety, therefore, fundamentally is necessary for restoration.

Ecocultural contexts: Acequia culture, disruptive ecocultural forces, and ecocultural memory

Acequias comprise relationships based on trust, community collaboration, and nurturing more-than-human and human others (Rivera, 1998). These waterways were and still are the lifeblood of community connection and Indigenous, Mestizo, and many other immigrant and diverse ecocultural identities for many in the South Valley and other parts of New Mexico. In recent history, the flow of acequias, both materially and symbolically, has been disrupted through water diversion for housing and business development, and more generally by the forces of suburbanization and gentrification. Suburbanization contributes to increased greenhouse gas emission and global climate disruption, and suburbanization and industrial development are responsible for spatially exacerbating social, economic, and ecological inequalities along lines of class and race (Brisman, 2004).

Despite these destructive ecocultural forces, acequias and their source, the Río Grande, persist and, during the past two decades, have experienced and influenced an increase of community engagement, revitalization of traditional farming, sustainability education, and ecological restoration projects (Hoffmann, 2018). I argue that the Río Grande and acequias themselves are powerful more-than-human actors that draw many forms of life and meaning into and around their flows. The ancient and perpetual practice of acequias' maintenance and care, as well as the bountiful life they support throughout the riparian valley, are primary sources of Nuevo Mexicano ecocultural identity (Arellano, 2014; Fernald et al., 2007; Fernald et al., 2012; Rivera, 1998). At the heart of Nuevo Mexicano ecocultural identity is a long, complex, and sometimes contradictory set of relationships with place, as well as communication practices that make such relationships meaningful.

Milstein et al. (2011) center culture in understanding senses of place, and they identify a culturally specific sense of 'relations-in-place.' The lens of relations-in-place highlights the embeddedness of social relations in place, as well as the relationality of the more-than-human world and its agency in the construction of human notions of place. These authors studied Nuevo Mexicano people's deep connection to land, which includes how they see connection with each other – a connection made possible by the land through food systems and the life-giving power of acequias. While part of a sense of relations-in-place for Nuevo Mexicano people is a feeling of loss as forces of White/Anglo colonization and modernization disrupted and destroyed many acequias, memory and multiple generations of connection to land are an irreplaceable strength and remain integral to local senses of sustainability.

In addition to showing the strength of place-based communities to survive, Milstein et al. (2011) also demonstrate contradictions in stories of how people relate to acequias. Considering playing near acequias to be dangerous, some parents tell ecocultural stories that are

meant to scare children away from the water's edge. Dickinson (2014) complicates the ecocultural notion of 'closeness' to 'nature' through what she calls the 'get close–stay away' dialectic. In this dialectic, adults encourage children to physically 'get close' (touch a plant's leaves, step off of a hiking trail to explore on their own). However, when adults deem too much risk is involved (swimming in rivers or, in the case of Milstein et al. (2011), acequias), they revert to fear of, and control and mastery over, more-than-human life. In the present study, this dialectic occurs when elders compare their memories of being close to more-than-human life with how they see children interacting presently.

In summary, much of Nuevo Mexicano ecocultural identity comes from complex human and more-than-human relations that compose and are supported by communal waterways, acequias. People draw a sense of ecocultural identity partly from their relational work with one another in the maintenance of acequias and from their farming practices that surround acequias, and the acequias provide the source and context of life and symbiotic relations. During the last century, most acequias have been disrupted or destroyed by water diversion practices for capitalist driven development, suburbanization, and gentrification. Within these two contexts, one of thriving human and more-than-human life fed by communal waterways and another of violent restructuring of land and water and the disruption of Indigenous and other place-based ecocultural identities, South Valley community elders construct oral histories of both trust and anxiety.

Contextualizing the mid-1990s in the South Valley

The South Valley neighborhood in Albuquerque, the largest city in the state, is a border between more rural New Mexico and the urban sprawl of the city, between a historically Spanish colonized, present-day Anglo-colonized place and the *Isleta Pueblo*.⁶ Through sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spanish land grants still honored today, many Nuevo Mexicanos who are descendants of Spanish colonial families and Indigenous peoples have lived and farmed in the South Valley area for 14 generations. In addition, in the South Valley, third generation White families might live next to Mexican immigrants who arrived years, months, or weeks earlier. While the South Valley is historically working class, parts of the Valley have been gentrified. Today, there are people in million-dollar homes less than a mile away from people living below the U.S. poverty line.

The South Valley, however, does not fit the mythic 'melting pot' metaphor of U.S. cities (Nagel, 2009; Ruddick, 1996). The melting pot myth is a problematic conception of settler colonialism; its imagined utopia is exclusive and requires the erasure of specific histories of difference, particularly in places like the South Valley (Smith, 2010). In New Mexico, more specifically, is the myth of 'tricultural harmony:' a utopic vision of New Mexico in which Indigenous, Spanish, and Anglo peoples celebrate a 'common' heritage and all benefit equally from the abundance created by such harmony. Arellano (2014), a Nuevo Mexicano Mestizo scholar, argues this myth can be perpetuated by newcomers, such as people who rent or purchase land in the South Valley for its beauty and history but ignore traditional farming and life (and ecological responsibilities to protect water) that surround acequias. The tricultural myth often takes on a form of ecocultural identity in which White settlers express desire to experience and even write themselves into the romanticized history of ancient connection to land and water. Yet, the public picture painted of the South Valley in the 1990s looked drastically different from such an imagined utopia.

In the following section, I explore 1990s media reports that overrepresent crime, drugs, and violence in the South Valley neighborhood. Through extant research, I also demonstrate how negative media representations and asymmetrical policing of neighborhoods of color

contribute to an increased fear of crime. Fear of crime exacerbates destructive suburbanization and gentrification patterns that scholars have shown time and time again to increase social and economic disparities between working-class communities of color and more affluent, whiter communities. Finally, and most importantly for the present study, I use extant research to argue that the criminalization of communities of color makes it more difficult for such communities to maintain ecocultural identity-based practices, such as collective maintenance and care for acequias and the traditional farming made possible by these communal waterways.

Fear of crime, suburbanization, and the disruption of waterways

Crowder and Roybal (1995) wrote in the *Albuquerque Journal* daily newspaper, concerning drug-related gang-violence in Albuquerque,

Gangs. They're a problem statewide, and growing. Bernalillo County⁷ alone has at least 9,000 members. And they are becoming more deadly, turning our streets into drug markets and killing fields.

(p. A1)

This article, among a surplus of similar news stories from this era, represents three neighborhoods of color in Albuquerque, including the South Valley, as 'war zones.'⁸ Yet, in each of these neighborhoods and wider Albuquerque, rates of both violent crime and murder decreased almost every year from 1980 to 2015 (Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2019). Despite some differences in reported violent crime, people's fear of becoming victims is generally not based on any real likelihood of being victimized, but rather on the social construction of fear of crime, often through media (e.g., Gerbner's (1998) 'mean world syndrome').

Aggressive policing tactics like 'stop and frisk' and policing 'disorder'⁹ (Wilson & Kelling, 1982) result in police targeting low-income neighborhoods and people of color upward of three times as much as wealthier neighborhoods and White people, while courts convict people of color more than twice as much as White people for the same crimes (Fagan & Davies, 2000; Greene, 1999; Harcourt & Ludwig, 2006; Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004; Xu et al., 2005).

In addition, news media overrepresent arrests of people of color and underrepresent arrests of White people (Callanan, 2012; Lyon, 2008; Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2005). The present study does not primarily focus on policing or crime, but this context is fundamental to understanding what it feels like to live in the South Valley – in all 30 oral history interviews, participants point to news media's overrepresentation of crime and underrepresentation of positive community stories about the South Valley as the primary reason people who live in other parts of Albuquerque misunderstand, fear, or avoid the South Valley.

Brisman (2004) compellingly links disproportionate arrests and convictions of low-income people of color, systematic obstacles to avoiding recidivism, and fear of crime to ecological degradation, water, soil, and air pollution. Pulling inordinate numbers of young men of color out of communities like the South Valley makes it difficult for employers to retain staff, and also immediately interrupts intergenerational teaching about ecocultural relationships. When forced to relocate, the promise of an increased tax base and wealthier clientele often leads businesses to suburban developments. White and middle-to-upper class flight to suburbs draws the tax base out of neighborhoods of color; schools and community programs lose funding, which contributes to larger barriers to collective organizing and community-directed action (Low, 2001; Simon, 2007; Skogan, 1986). Moreover, fear of crime is a symptom of much

older forces of division and segregation, and this fear disrupts the trust and collaboration that acequias encourage. The disruption of acequia-based ecocultural identity happens partly when communities have to spend too much of their time, resources, and energy on dealing with social issues. Under surveillance, and social and economic pressure, passing along ancestral knowledge of place, water sharing, and farming takes a lower priority (Brisman, 2004).

South Valley community members have long struggled to resist larger developmental forces such as the city of Albuquerque annexing and re-zoning agricultural land for industrial or suburban development. Such development includes redirecting rain and floodwater to sewer systems and disrupting aquifer recharge through the aggregate evaporative effects of suburban concrete, including, in Albuquerque, the concrete lining of once soil-bottomed arroyos (mountain-to-valley storm water channels) (Bhaduri et al., 2000; Mitsch & Gosselink, 2000; Poiani & Bedford, 1995). Over the past century, due to several dams built for flood control, large scale irrigation, and urban/suburban development, the flow of the Río Grande has been reduced to 1/6 of its pre-Anglo colonization size. This has deeply disrupted the Bosque ecosystem, endangering several species, including the silvery minnow, and a keystone riparian species – cottonwood trees (Río Grande Bosque, 2018).

Furthermore, suburban ecoculture, even in the desert, often is based in lawn culture that encourages overuse of water and pollution of groundwater with inorganic fertilizers. Suburban ecoculture is not only harmful to human and more-than-human life in the suburbs (Robbins, 2012), but also affects soil composition and water throughout the watershed of a given suburb (Kaufman, 2000; Law et al., 2004). Ecocultural identities that belong with the flow of water, alongside the seasons' cycles of planting, nurturing, harvesting, and returning to the soil, stress and erode when cut off from waterways.

Within this context, the oral history participants remember in order to voice their own histories and representations of life in the Valley. These memories connect participants to dwelling in the South Valley and show how the place itself, composed of diverse more-than-human relationships, is imbricated with their own identities. Ecocultural memory is crucial to restoration in a time when ecologies of human domination and disruption have become the new normal – a normal that, if not curtailed and transformed, implies the eventual complete erasure of fragile ecosystems, such as the Bosque, as well as the acequia-based ecocultural identities that manage the sustainable extension of the river integral to the riparian ecosystem.

From socioecological to ecocultural memory

At the heart of my study is the power of ecocultural memory to guide and shape the future of ecoculture. Scholars have shown that social memory is an interactive and constitutive process laden with political tensions between whose stories become 'official' histories and, in contrast, the myriad stories that emerge from specific memories of place-based life (Halbwachs & Coser, 1992; Olick & Robbins, 1998). People use memory not only to understand the past and present but also to envision the future (Zerubavel, 1996). Moreover, one person's memory not only is their own but rather an emergent amalgam of relationalities between historical selves and others (Kyprianidou, 2011).

Scholarship often takes a binary approach in terms of 'social' and 'ecological' memories. Ecological memory is defined as the capacity of ecosystems to retain knowledge of past experiences like droughts, floods, fires, and, in terms of human ecology and ecocultural identity, various forms of agriculture, development, (de)growth, migration, pollution, and/or restoration. Scholarship often only attributes the capacity for human ecological memory to people working 'directly' with ecosystems (Barthel et al., 2010). Although I do not question the

importance of memory in human communities who work directly with ecosystems (my study explores such a community), to argue that ecological memory is only present or relevant in such communities reconstructs a binary between humans and ecology in diverse contexts.

In response, I suggest an ecocultural lens for understanding memory. Ecocultural memory, I argue, is the iterative, interactive, and constitutive capacity of human and more-than-human communities to retain, recall, and pass along knowledge of human and more-than-human relationships and practices through generations. Human practices in relationship to more-than-human life, including water, soil, air, weather, seasons, climate, cycles of life, and material and energetic flows, leave complex and lasting marks upon ecologies. But so, too, do ecologies shape human communities. Chawla (1994) shows that memory in relation to place is the early foundation for what this *Handbook* introduces as ecocultural identity, and this memory which begins in childhood is reconstructed iteratively throughout life:

In childhood, the universe is active. In early childhood, every part of the world appears alive, purposeful, willed. Clouds and rivers make their way as deliberately as dogs and people. Trees feel winter cold. A stone trips an intruder. The moon and stars commune. Young children may know fear, but they avoid meaninglessness and chaos by creating intentional worlds.

(p. 145)

Ecocultural memory refers to all forms of more-than-human relationality, and memory accounts can speak to symbiotic or parasitic relations, and can be based in both trust and anxiety (Chawla, 1994).

Oral memory and ethnographic interviews: Participants and method

The 1995–1996 SVOH oral histories were conducted by NMEH as part of a research effort to better understand inter-ethnic relations and community member perceptions of neighborhood change over their lifetimes.¹⁰ Oral history participants' ethnicities include Pueblo Indian, White/Anglo, self-identified Hispanic, Mestizo, Genízaro, and Chicano. Participants all originally are from low socio-economic status families, and their stories reflect upon how the meaningfulness of being working class has changed over time. In my analysis, I also draw on fieldnotes and interviews I collected during eight months of ethnographic fieldwork in 2014 and six months in 2017 with a network of traditional, organic farmers working with cooperative economic models (see Hoffmann, 2018). As the researcher, I am a fifth generation U.S. American, descended from Polish immigrants and part of a family that has been working class since immigrating to the U.S.¹¹ In my interpretation of Indigenous peoples' and people of color's memories, I do my best to remain as respectful as possible. In terms of the subject matter of the present study, I have spent a significant part of the past five years working with acequia-based communities and volunteer-farming with traditional acequia-based methods. I recognize that the invitation to farm with Indigenous people on Indigenous land is not given lightly, and that my presence as a White person carries the historical contradictions of racialized violence. I see the present study as an opportunity to explore these contradictions in terms of ecocultural identity, and I hope this study may offer insights into restorative ways of collectively relating to water and place.

In the following section, I analyze moments in which participants activate ecocultural memories in order to make sense of the present and future of the South Valley. To show

how ecocultural identity emerges from memory, I use Chawla's (1994) grounded ecofeminist and phenomenological concepts concerning human identification with nature.¹² Chawla (1994) argues for an understanding of sense-of-self in place as 'identification through language... through empathy... and through models of care.' Specifically, in terms of language, Chawla points to identification of embedded self-in-place through metaphors and descriptions of 'feeling,' both phenomenological and affective, over dominant metaphors of mechanization and instrumentalization. Chawla describes 'empathy' as moments of remembering when 'boundaries between the self and another thing dissolve in an intense act of perception' (p. 189).

Finally, Chawla highlights the 'models of care' that adults teach children, or material examples of caring for other living beings, places, or ecological processes. In this study, I highlight participants' memories that locate why or how they learned to care for or relate to more-than-human others, including water. Such learning also can include the 'imagined' origin of specific kinds of care, in which indigeneity may at times be referenced. Yet, White participants often present memories that fragment, subsume, or erase past violence against Indigenous people in favor of the myth of tricultural harmony. Finally, emerging from the study's data, I propose, develop, and interpret the ecocultural dialectical tension between 'trust' and 'anxiety' as a framework for understanding the destructive ecocultural effects of forces of suburbanization and gentrification, but also as a logic for how these forces might change.

In line with the analytical framework built from Chawla's (1994) work, emerging from participants' memory accounts, I found the present case study's ecocultural identities to be based in more-than-human connection to acequias, childhood experiences with more-than-human others, and a sense of loss when acknowledging generational changes in ecocultural identity. As the following analysis shows, participants' memories both reify and complicate the myth of tricultural harmony by showing specific relationships of care for more-than-human and human others that fortify community trust across ethnic lines. Yet, while most acknowledge human violence wrought upon more-than-human others and forces (such as water), many of these same accounts fail to acknowledge Spanish and Anglo violence against Indigenous peoples as part of the ecocultural past of New Mexico.

As participants struggle to imagine a restorative ecocultural identity for future people in the South Valley and beyond, they reveal various forms of anxiety that undergird neighborhood change and the history of the U.S. Southwest. At times, these anxieties take the form of negative representations or perceptions of the South Valley, usually in ways news media or people from other parts of the city speak about or represent the Valley. At other times, anxieties take on the form of a general worry about South Valley youth in the 1990s. Specifically, participants describe a sense of loss regarding how South Valley youth relate to more-than-human life and shared water systems. Furthermore, some participants point to urban development practices as the source of problems with ecocultural relationships with water, producing anxiety about the survival of the ecosystem and its related more-than-human ecocultural identity.

In the following section, using the framework from Chawla's (1994) work, I interpret participants' memories and discourse. For South Valley residents, the communicative practice of ecocultural memory is not only a voyage down streams of the past; remembering also is a practice of sensemaking about anthropogenic endangerment of waterways and the life they compose and support. Moreover, elders' ecocultural memories are a launching point for envisioning a restorative orientation to identity in aqueous relations of the future. However, most participants' ability to envision a restorative sense-of-self and sense of relations-in-place in this context is significantly complicated by 'anxieties' from experiencing and/or imagining destructive human action, as well as the complexities of working through (or against) human difference within the context of a history of violent colonization.

Remembering ecocultural childhood, speaking to present day disconnection

If you want to understand the culture and history of people in this place you must begin with water. Everything we do, everything we know is based in water. Water is our primary way of relating to one another both culturally and legally. It is also how we relate to land and other kinds of life... through farming and caring for animals.

(Leonardo, SVFC)

Prior to various waves of modern development, the communities of the present-day South Valley neighborhood, now connected via large avenues, were connected via acequias, or the large shared systems of dug-out ditches coming off the Río Grande that irrigated communities' fields in order to maintain subsistence agriculture. While many of these acequias still exist and feed water to many forms of life in the valley, they have been deeply disrupted by present-day infrastructure.

As both a necessity to survival and a source of community connection and joy, these waterways formed a fundamental part of ecocultural identity in the South Valley. One resident, María, in her late 60s, a self-identified Hispanic mother of two adult sons, talked about her childhood connection to acequias, and how, in her perception, younger generations are losing this connection:

Nobody swims in the ditches anymore... I learned how to swim in the ditch.... We used to go to the Río Grande too. You know, the kids nowadays they see a snake and you know. To get to my cousin's house we used to have to run through the ditch, you used to have to go through the ditch and you'd see a snake and you would just jump over it you know. And nowadays the kids are all 'Aaaghh'.... We used to even go swimming with snakes. The kids are not as connected to nature like a lot of things you know. They tell you not to go to the ditches, you know, don't do this and don't do that. But it's weird because... that was our entertainment... kids today just don't want to get dirty.

(María, SVOH)

María remembers a sense of relations-in-place (Milstein et al., 2011) focused around the acequias that also meant coexisting with more-than-human animals who are now avoided or even killed on sight as regular practice. María locally illustrates a contemporary phenomenon – Dickinson's (2014) 'get close–stay away' dialectic – in which children used to be encouraged to physically 'get close' to more-than-human nature: 'we used to have to run through the ditch... this was our entertainment.' However, when in the presence or potential presence of 'too much' danger or risk (i.e., swimming in the acequias and encountering a snake), adults taught children to 'stay away' based on fear. While María's generation sees a loss of closeness to more-than-human life in the younger generation, she provides a memory of coexistence and mutuality with more-than-human others ('We used to even go swimming with the snakes') in the vital waterways that provide everyone with life.

Lupe, a grandmother whose parents grew up in Mexico but came to New Mexico before she was born, talked about another kind of more-than-human closeness of community that she embodied as a child and young adult, but that has faded with time:

We were poor but we didn't know it. We were all happy kids as far as I can remember. We took care of each other... everybody had a hand in raising the neighborhood children... I don't remember ever going hungry.... We raised corn, carrots, cucumbers, chickens. We had a lot of happy times.... But now I see that it has changed a lot but then Albuquerque has changed. There's a lot of growth, a lot of new people have come in. And I think part of the problem now is that we don't know each other as well as we did then... there's not that closeness, I don't think, that there was before.

(Lupe, SVOH)

Here, Lupe's memory shows the embodiment of closeness as a form of place-making; having a 'closeness' across families was crucial for everyone's quality of life, especially in the context of what official income scales would call 'poverty.' This closeness is highlighted in shared agricultural practice via acequias and the harvest: 'I don't remember ever going hungry.' Similarly, María stated, 'We were poor, we didn't have a lot not like kids now... I think when I was there everyone was happy, even if you didn't have a lot of money' (SVOH).

In terms of socio-economic status, Lupe's and María's memories mark a time in which communal subsistence agriculture created a form both of economic and food security that today scarcely exists among the urban working class. Hunger is an embodied aspect of poverty that is exacerbated by the disruption of ancestral waterways. In addition, the fact that 'everyone had a hand in raising the neighborhood children,' shows a form of care that many participants associate directly with their childhood: being raised by a community, not only one's parents. In contrast, isolated child rearing is a common phenomenon in contemporary suburban life – which most participants point to as a root cause of contemporary ecocultural problems: 'I think one of the biggest problems in the South Valley is that we don't talk to each other anymore. We used to work together to make the South Valley a whole community' (Lupe, SVOH).

Lupe's memory also reveals part of why the myth of (tri)cultural harmony in New Mexico is so potent: the notion of 'everybody having a hand in raising the neighborhood children,' sharing in the harvest, and those lifeways creating 'happiness' and abundance, is a kind of ecocultural harmony. People shared in an ecocultural identity based in acequia-fed agriculture. While Lupe's and others' accounts do not acknowledge the violence and inequality caused by colonization, they do, in fact, speak of lifeways and waterways that, in their experience, are much more than a fetishized myth of harmony. Lupe's account speaks to life-supporting ecocultural practices from which she draws a sense-of-self in relation to human and more-than-human community, a 'relations-in-place'-based identity (Milstein et al., 2011).

Several other participants complicate the communal experiences Lupe describes. Molly, a third-generation Anglo resident of the South Valley in her mid 60s, provides a quintessential example of the myth of tricultural harmony:

I'm really drawn to the diversity. I'm really drawn to the history... the Spanish language. The culture. The Indian heritage. The mixture.... That valuable history that's Indian Hispanic Anglo cowboy hippie... all of that is part of the richness of the South Valley.

(SVOH)

While Molly paints a picture of 'value' in 'the mixture' of culture and heritage, she fails to acknowledge that the historical contact between each of these ethnic groups, particularly the arrival of Spanish and Anglo people, was violent and disastrous for Indigenous ecocultures.

Moreover, many participants of color do not share this perception of harmonious ‘mixture.’ For example, one self-identified Hispanic male participant in his 80s (who, upon request, was not audio-recorded, but allowed for notes to be taken during his interview) said that what the South Valley really needed was for all of the White newcomers to leave, to go back where they came from, and that would solve a lot of the problems. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss how these conflicting perspectives complicate the tricultural myth, and demonstrate how communities attempting to build restorative ecocultural identities must reconcile with the history of excessive violence done to human and more-than-human communities, before deeper trust, both human and more-than-human, is possible.

Self-identified Hispanic residents, and Chicano and Mestizo residents, describe another nexus of ecocultural identity: *Matanzas*, large community celebrations that involve the killing, preparing, and communal eating of a pig. Participants discuss specific memories of the killing of the pig, being physically close to the killing, or directly participating in killing to feed the community. For example,

I’m an animal lover, I’ve always been. We used to swim in the ditches with animals, we had all kinds of animals. *Borregas*¹³ and they used to kill them... like when they used to do the *matanzas* with the pigs... my mom used to get an axe and with the chickens and she would swing it around and take the head and (makes smashing sound) and put it in boiling water. They used to make us take the *plumas*¹⁴ off and I used to play with the eggs.... But you know... most kids today do not want to be anywhere near that. They’re too scared or think it’s too gross.

(Anonymous, SVOH)

This participant speaks to an ecocultural moment in which, in order to eat other animals, humans had to kill personally. Pointing to a complex emotional relationship with other animals, the participant identifies as an ‘animal lover,’ and in the same breath, graphically mimes witnessing the killing of that animal who she will consume alongside her community. Recognizing death as always necessary for life, and the appreciation, respect, and love that come from such recognition, are fundamental to her ecocultural identity. Ecocultural identity here encompasses both a specific ethic of care, especially for animals a person will eat, but so, too, the tension between anxiety and trust: trust built through long-term relationships between more-than-human life, anxiety about what present-day youth feel about the necessary death which is always part of eating. Other elder participants echo how especially their grandchildren cannot fathom experiencing such closeness to death, but still are likely to eat meat – a common perspective and practice among younger generations that signifies a fundamental shift in ecocultural identity.

While many elder participants describe more drastic ecocultural changes as occurring mostly within younger generations, participants with longer place-based memories (i.e., whose families have dwelled in the Valley for many generations) argue that loss of human and more-than-human closeness in ecocultural identity has much older roots. For example, Abe, a member of the Zuni Pueblo nation who lived in the South Valley, said,

During the ’20s and ’30s people were very closely knitted. There was a lot of community control over community affairs. Very little crime. A lot of respect for the elderly for the laws and traditions and customs that were in place. But wars change a lot and the Second World War changed the community sense in the South Valley by the communities changing from small farming subsistence farming communities to wage

communities where the wage earners were no longer fully participating in the communities but were employed by larger business organizations. And as they gained economic independence from reliance on the community they became more individualistic and they lost our sense of community awareness.

(Abe, SVOH)

Abe describes an older pattern of industrializing communities: the trading of community self-reliance and life organized around place-specific more-than-human ecologies and farming practices for individuals' 'economic independence' from communities. Abe directly names one casualty of this trade – community participation and awareness. Trust – an interdependent co-reliance among humans – is in tension with anxiety caused by the alienation of individual people from more-than-human communities in the name of 'economic independence.'

Chawla (1994) argues the capacity for people to understand themselves as integral lifeforms in complex and inherently valuable ecologies requires the ability to move between basic forms of trust and anxiety that make up all more-than-human and human relationships. That is, the balance between trust, which brings forces of symbiosis to ecosystems and elevates relationality over self, and anxiety, which shapes and delineates senses-of-self in relation to others as well as forces of change (Chawla, 1994), is essential to sustainable human ecocultural practice.

In more-than-human relationships to water inherent to the acequia system, for instance, this balance helps to explain why a *mayordomo*¹⁵ may limit the flooding of water in one field, even when anticipating a drought lasting a month. The anxiety for an abundant harvest is mitigated by the trust that the community will have enough food for everyone if the water is distributed more evenly. This balance extends to more-than-human influence upon human action: an acequia farmer may make a choice to flood the fields more heavily during a drought period upon noticing the cottonwood trees – a keystone species that provide riparian shade, contribute to soil health and balanced understory, and provide homes for multiple animal species – are too dry (Fieldnotes, SVFC). I now turn to analyze ways participants' memories of the past help them imagine a future in which South Valley neighbors collectively participate in ecological restoration. Participants struggle to describe the collective organizing necessary to building such a future, and point to several ecocultural forces that disrupt organizing.

Struggling for restorative futures

Many participants long for a collective restorative ecocultural identity as a force of placemaking in the South Valley. For example, Terry, a White, 88-year-old, lifelong resident of the South Valley and environmental scientist, discussed the destructive effects Bernalillo county's development and zoning practices have had on ancient waterways and agricultural practices that he calls 'the heart and soul of the valley:'

The shoestring annexation down Coors... they built houses exactly like those in Albuquerque... this was a turning point down here.... It told people if you've got power... you can do anything down here... put all the garbage dumps... the sewage plant down here... we're losing agricultural land... and I think it's just torn up the heart and soul of the valley. And there are a lot of people who are trying to counter that... trying to restore the agricultural base here and the powerful are still trying to frighten them with spot zoning changes... putting in industrial zoning right in the middle of thousands of A-1 zoning, where there's no facilities at all just to be tearing the place apart. We're

working on plans down here now... but they're not all ready yet... these zoning changes... undermine what people are trying to do... increase our quality of life and decrease our cost and enhance production and set up a sustainable community. But the powerful won't let it happen and are trying to keep us completely off balance about doing these things and it's devastating.

(Terry, SVOH)

Terry describes a complex history in which the City of Albuquerque has attempted or succeeded in annexing multiple tracts of the South Valley or strategically created industrial zones to breakup agricultural land, effectively 'tearing the place apart.' He presents community members as attempting to 'increase quality of life' and 'set up a sustainable community' but the city – 'the powerful' – continuously and devastatingly pushing the community 'off balance.'

Terry argues that, in the struggle for power that has played out in the South Valley to develop specific areas, the community has lost touch with its specific relationships of care for the land, and the water and wetlands that once filled the valley:

You know the water table. We have pumped the water table of Albuquerque down to 160 feet you know. And you want to know why? The Corps of Engineers drained all the constructed wetlands back in the '30s, well not all of them, maybe 80 percent. And then AMAFCA¹⁶ comes in and lines (with concrete) all of the arroyos and that was another source of recharge in the community. And people say well that must be the way to do it because that's the way they do it... so who is trying to enhance the water cycle? Nobody. They don't even think about it... And of course the mineral cycle is shot too. They are all related... I am here to protect the water cycle.

(Terry, SVOH)

In this case, water guides long-term residents' understanding of not only where they live, but also who they are. Terry identifies a very old more-than-human relationship that deeply shaped and shapes ecocultural identity in the Valley: the water cycle, and the specific role humans have in caring for the cycle. Water itself has powerful agency in delineating different ecocultural identities. Long-term agricultural practices in the South Valley depend on water's flow through arroyos and acequias, and eventual drainage back into the river and water table. Eventually, Terry explicitly names his ecocultural identity in relation to water – protector – a specific relationship of care that comes from a life spent with water.

One Indigenous participant who identifies as *genízaro*, describes a powerful example of human ecocultural identity in relation to water:

When you look at me what do you see?... Water. I am 60 percent water. Every one of us is mostly water. If we think about what we need to do to care for each other or any living being we have to first care for our water.... What I do is my cultural identity but it is also because I must care for my mother, for all of our mother, the Earth.

(Leonardo, SVFC)

Here, ecocultural identity is exemplified in all three forms of Chawla's (1994) model for identification: metaphors of feeling and sensing, empathy, and relationships of care. Leonardo's sense-of-self in relation to water is one of fluid integration – there is no difference between the body, self, health, or the imagination of caring for himself and others, and

caring for water ('every one of us is mostly water'). Through a fundamental and ever-present sensation, the work of perceiving that sensation empathetically, and the ecoculturally learned choice to care for water and self as one body, his identity is grounded in the flow and composition of water itself, and so, too, consciously or not, are all human identities.

Molly shows how the knowledge of such a relationship with water also breeds a great deal of anxiety, uncertainty, and pessimism about the future born from a present ecocultural crisis:

I'm worried about the pollution. I feel if anything people seem to be less concerned about the land and about taking care of it and taking care of the air and water.... I'm concerned that the area will be developed and developed badly in a way that really benefits only the developers and the politicians who work around that... everybody is gonna lose out on the land... I think that a lot of the health problems that people have in the South Valley... are linked to obviously some of the problems with the shallow wells and the bad water... we're paying the price of pesticides and herbicides.... Albuquerque smog rolling down the river... we're going to have tremendous health problems to deal with here in a community that's already underserved by the health-care process.

(Molly, SVOH)

Molly expresses a great deal of mistrust and anxiety toward elected politicians, citing a history of collaboration with developers that she believes contradicts the collective needs of the South Valley. Aligning with the collective memory of connectedness allows her to claim, 'everybody is gonna lose out on the land.'

In a subsequent utterance, Molly again integrates her present, living memory and ecocultural consciousness into the idealized ecocultural past discussed above:

I was at a meeting this past Saturday about sustainable agriculture and maintaining that... as part of the economic development for the South Valley that there really is every reason to hang on to the rural and agricultural aspect of the South Valley.... Sustainable agriculture is something that can bring everybody in... there were people there from Isleta Pueblo... the Sanchez farm project... the acequia association people there who want to farm ancestral plants like... more beans and squash and help young people turn to the land rather than to gangs and they're very exciting to hear talk.

(Molly, SVOH)

Finally, orienting her memory toward the future of life in the South Valley, Molly points to the possibility of stronger alliances between Indigenous nations, the acequia association – which ensures the proper annual reengineering of the ditches and participates in multiple ecological restoration projects – and the growing cooperative farming movement in New Mexico. She also argues that connection to ancestral and contemporary ecocultural identity, symbolized in her words by connections to 'sustainable agriculture' and 'the land,' can be an alternative to gang membership for youth in the 1990s. While many other participants from 1990 agree that sustainable agriculture is an important part of restorative identity, others still express anxiety about unresolved inequalities between ethnic groups. While these unresolved inequalities persisted in participants' memories from 2014 and 2017, many described renewed hope in youth to work through the anxieties of colonization. One example comes from an elder Indigenous farmer who has lived and worked in the South Valley his entire life:

They call them conquistadores,¹⁷ but they didn't conquer shit. They occupied foreign nations and still do to this day. We all have to learn to see one another in terms of what we share, but in this place that means respecting Native traditions and that starts with land and water.... But I will say I do see that the youth right now are more conscious and aware of the Earth.

(Fernando, SVFC)

In summary, elders in both the 1995–1996 oral histories and 2014–2017 interviews use ecocultural memory to shape how they understand younger generations' disconnection from more-than-human life, and the disruption of ancestral waterways through contemporary urban development practices. Ancestral relationships with water and the trust-based practices that hold Nuevo Mexicano ecocultural identity together (participation in traditional agriculture, food sharing, and community-based water systems) are in tension with anxieties about younger generations' disconnection from more-than-human life. Moreover, contemporary urban development practices, including suburbanization and privatization of water not only are understood as unsustainable, but as a direct affront to ancient and contemporary life, livelihood, and identity. However, critiques that remark on the racialized and class-based inequalities of development often are diluted or distorted by discourses like the myth of tricultural harmony, most often espoused by Anglo participants.

Both sets of participants (including Indigenous, Genízaro, Mestizo, self-identified Hispanic, Chicano, and Anglo), described taking up the cause of protecting the acequia ancestral water systems as a personal cause and integral to their ecocultural identity. As some participants point out, collaboration between different ethnic groups and the traditional farming community is a potential point of trust, and most participants in 2014 and 2017 had more hope in younger generations than did elders in the 1995–1996 oral histories. However, interethnic trust that participants describe as necessary to localized ecological restoration appears to be in tension with anxiety concerning how to approach cultural and political difference. In the final section, I discuss the implications of this tension for restorative human ecocultural identity in this region.

Futures: Communal waterways and survival

When waterways are disrupted, so, too, are ecocultural identities. When the closeness of communities based in communal waterways is disrupted, so, too, are communities' abilities to challenge, interrupt, or change ecologically and socially destructive forms of development. In the U.S., and much of the world, these forces have disproportionately and violently affected communities of color. In the present case study of Albuquerque's South Valley, I illustrate ways the ancestral practices and knowledges of multiple communities of color can be key parts of symbiotic more-than-human relationships – in this case, with water in the riparian Río Grande ecosystem.

This study demonstrates that contemporary ecocultural relationships with water, in part, are mediated by a dialectical tension between trust and anxiety. Specifically, I elucidate the tensions between trust-based, shared, ancestral water systems and the historical (and violent) redirection of water for privatized (sub)urban development. While shared, ancestral water systems survive because Indigenous, Mestizo, and non-Indigenous communities have consistently fought against privatization via trust-based networks (like the acequia association), the present global water crisis is exacerbated through mistrust and anxiety that come from capitalist-based water diversion and development practices. In the present study, many participants

highlight a present-day lack of community ‘closeness’ as a principal cause of community problems, including the community’s inconsistent ability to stop ecologically destructive development practices and collectively redirect the human role in the future of the South Valley and Río Grande riparian ecosystem.

The disruption of ancestral waterways seems to be an indication of specific ways in which most contemporary development practices do not prioritize the ecological systems upon which all life, including humans, depends. The anxieties that such development produces – loss of identity, loss of water and food security, loss of more-than-human life to which identity is tied – can be both motivators to push people to participate in collective resistance and a roadblock to collective organizing. Addressing these anxieties is and will be fundamental to human communities living symbiotically within and as part of ecosystems. I argue that addressing these anxieties among neighborhood residents is essential. However, as oral history participants’ critiques of city politics and planning, industry development, and zoning patterns suggest, policymakers also must be pushed to consider the survival of restorative ecocultural identity as fundamental to all survival. Following Chawla (1994), I argue that in the construction of restorative ecocultural identity, anxiety must always be balanced with trust. Trust in this case means acknowledging and repairing inequality, constructed materially through urban development and reinforced culturally through espousing the tricultural myth.

More generally, building trust means non-Indigenous people genuinely listening to Indigenous, Mestizo, and other marginalized communities when the latter tell the former what allyship looks like. For example, the Nuevo Mexicano Mestizo scholar Arellano (2014) argued that people who are not Indigenous to the area or do not have ancestral knowledge about the acequia system must learn to farm the land using traditional methods (as well as the best contemporary methods for water conservation) if they rent or purchase property on acequia land. This implies recognizing the leadership of the acequia association and developing a nuanced understanding and relationship with the more-than-human life that shares the ecosystem with humans, as well as passing this knowledge on to children.

The anxieties and violence imbued upon neighborhoods of color, especially those like the South Valley that struggle to survive direct attacks on ecocultural identity, are fundamentally ecological and cultural in and of themselves – they follow a logic of human domination and mastery over other ecological forces, forms of life, and systems such as the Río Grande. At the heart of my study about ancestral waterways, and the identities that emerge from the arrangements of human and more-than-human worlds to which these waterways give life, is a question about balance: what does ecocultural memory show us in terms of balancing the massive anxieties of today with old and new forms of empathy, care, and trust?

Waterways are essential to answering this question, because, whether they draw in and shape ecocultural identities that engender trust or, alternatively, are imbued with dominant urban development models’ pollution and anxiety, they remain the fundamental moving force that shapes all life. One powerful lesson from the stories of the emotional experience of ecocultural identity as based in continuity, happiness, and sense of relations-in-place is the collective anxiety about the healthy and balanced growth of the community’s youth. Just as powerfully as the ancient norms and laws that are guided by the flow of acequia water, the focus on youth and community education explains why, despite disruption, restorative ecocultural identities and practices survive.

The present study demonstrates a case in which ancient relationships with water have survived despite past and present injustices. When fortified through new forms of community trust, these aqueous relationships can be the basis for restorative ecocultural identity in the present and future. The present study exemplifies specific routes – through empathy, trust,

and relationships of care surrounding ancient agricultural and water practices – to addressing an overabundance of ecocultural anxiety. Activist organizations, as well as many traditional farmers themselves, are already engaged in dialogue and ecocultural practice-based work with youth, directly addressing historical and present injustices. The present study demonstrates an important way in which ecocultural memory can drive justice-based engagement with ecocultural identity and action.

Notes

- 1 The Río Grande is a nearly 2,000-mile river in the U.S. Southwest. The Río Grande's source is in the San Juan Mountains in the Southern part of the state of Colorado in the United States. The river flows through the length of New Mexico, forms part of the U.S.-Mexico border (see Tarin et al., 2020, Chapter 3 of this *Handbook*), and flows out into the Gulf of Mexico. In the Middle Río Grande Valley (and basin), a 100-mile stretch of the Río Grande, starting in northern New Mexico, flows southward. This section of the Río Grande is home to the bosque, a riparian ecosystem, and the city of Albuquerque. As the primary water source for all life in the valley, the Río Grande made it possible for Pueblo tribes to settle in the high desert, some more than 10,000 years ago, and for Spanish colonizers to settle in the valley starting in the sixteenth century.
- 2 Nuevo Mexicano is a Spanish language term that refers to an amalgam of place-based ethnicities and identities. This term includes local Indigenous First Nations, the descendants of Spanish colonizers, Mestizo (mixed-race, Indigenous), Genízaro (descendants of Spanish colonizers and Indigenous slaves), and Chicano (a political identity of people with Mexican heritage living in or born in the United States). New Mexico is in the present-day U.S. Southwest in which this study takes place, but I use the Spanish, Nuevo Mexicano, to reflect both local usage and the fact that, while these ethnicities relate to multiple languages, Spanish still is widely spoken in New Mexico. Finally, while some people may include Anglo people who have lived in New Mexico for multiple generations in the ethnic amalgam of Nuevo Mexicano, Anglo inclusion is almost always fraught, due to unresolved inequalities stemming from Anglo colonization, Anglo violence against Indigenous people, and ecocultural differences (such as the building of dams) addressed in the present study.
- 3 Present-day New Mexico is still home to 19 Indigenous First Nations known as Pueblo tribes. Pueblo Indians, a term used to self-identify in this area, are thought to be among the first human residents of the Río Grande valley.
- 4 Upon the request of the cooperative's members, the actual name of the cooperative has been changed to South Valley Farming Cooperative (SVFC).
- 5 The multiple ethnicities represented in the oral histories include Indigenous Pueblo Indian, Genízaro, self-identified Hispanic, Chicano, and Anglo.
- 6 Isleta Pueblo is one of the 19 Pueblo Nations.
- 7 Bernalillo County contains both the city of Albuquerque and the South Valley.
- 8 One lower socioeconomic neighborhood in Albuquerque mentioned in this article, 'The International District,' is still commonly referred to by many Albuquerqueans as 'The War Zone.'
- 9 Wilson and Kelling (1996) conceived of disorder not as a form of crime, per se, but as 'disreputable or obstreperous or unpredictable people: panhandlers, drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, prostitutes, loiterers, the mentally disturbed' (p. 201). Albuquerque even passed 'banishment' policies in which people arrested for just possessing drugs were not allowed to enter the neighborhoods where they were arrested sometimes for multiple months.
- 10 The original oral histories interviews are archived on audiotape in the Center for Southwest Research at the University of New Mexico. I transcribed the interviews from the archived audiotapes.
- 11 I live in New Mexico and I am considered Anglo in terms of ethnicity, although Anglo is actually not an accurate ethnic term for me and many other White U.S. American immigrants. Racially, I am White.
- 12 Chawla uses the term 'nature,' but, in her final analysis, deeply critiques the notion of separate 'human' and 'natural worlds,' and suggests, rather, a frame for 'identification' of self within ecology based on extra-linguistic metaphor, empathy, and specific relationships of care learned as children.
- 13 Sheep, lamb.

- 14 Feathers.
- 15 An elected elder who is responsible for overseeing the distribution of water, protecting the communal sharing of water, and mediating any conflicts between people using the acequias.
- 16 Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo Flood Control Authority.
- 17 Spanish term used for Spanish settler colonists, but, in this case, referring simultaneously to Anglo colonization.

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'Progressive ranching' and wrangling the wind as ecocultural identity maintenance in the Anthropocene

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The Anthropocene is most radically experienced as an unmooring of the human condition from the relatively predictable and stable 11,000-year period since the last major ice age in which civilizations developed, known as the Holocene (Mitchell, 2011; Rockström, 2009; Steffen et al., 2007; Steffen et al., 2015; Tsing, 2015). This sense of being adrift is both realized – as climate refugees, for example – and anticipated with forecasts of further disruption and catastrophe. However, the Anthropocene has also been convincingly critiqued as an idea that erases the exploitative relationships through which planetary crisis has been produced, including through capitalist and (post)colonialist processes (Moore, 2015). As a result, scholars in the environmental humanities and social sciences have proposed refined, critical understandings of the Anthropocene.

For example, Moore (2015) has proposed the term 'Capitalocene' to capture the role of capital in the unequal production of the Anthropocene and distribution of its consequences. Haraway (2015) describes the Anthropocene not as a geological epoch but as a boundary event, marking severe discontinuities between past Holocene conditions and those of the future. She emphasizes the more-than-human kinship required by what she calls the 'Chthulucene,' where kinship is a radical departure from predominantly Western notions of biological family. For Haraway, the Chthulucene is a reference to the at-stake present, in which old boundaries have dissolved and humans and nonhumans are bound together in the tentacles of the times (Haraway, 2015, 2016). These are 'precarious times, in which the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen – yet' (Haraway, 2016, p. 55). Part of this precarity is rooted in the ecological and interspecies relationships upon which we are all dependent (Haraway, 2015, 2016; Tsing, 2012, 2015). To emphasize this sense of precarity and disorientation, Morton (2013) has argued:

From the most vulnerable Pacific Islander to the most hardened eliminative materialist, everyone must reckon with the power of rising waves and ultraviolet light. This phase is characterized by a traumatic loss of coordinates, 'the end of the world.'

(p. 22)

We enter the discussion on ecocultural identity at this point of real and potential disorientation because individual and collective concerns about identity emerge in such moments of upheaval. Anthony Giddens (1991) argues along similar lines that self-identity becomes a problem when the certainties of tradition no longer are accessible to individuals and communities. For identity to be maintained, the need for some sense of continuity must be established despite historical disjuncture. This partly is done through cultural means, such as the production of identity narratives (Berzonsky & Moser, 2017). Radical ecological shifts, such as those inherent in our Anthropocenic present and near future, have helped us realize that at least some ecological continuity is one necessary condition for stable identities and existences. It, therefore, is no accident that the concept of ecocultural identity is being problematized at a moment when orienting coordinates, ecological and cultural, are becoming dislodged by fundamental planetary disruptions.

We assume some cultural and ecological stability as part of the minimum necessary conditions for ecocultural identity. However, this is a strictly theoretical point. The actual resilience of any particular ecocultural identity to radical change is an empirical question likely requiring extensive, long-term fieldwork and one that we will not answer here. Instead, our argument is more modest. First, ecocultural identity is partly structured by the problem of producing or finding a minimal sense of stability over some period of time. This problem becomes even more pressing in the Anthropocene, which initiates a further destabilization of already unstable processes. Second, and what will occupy the majority of this chapter, we can and should analyze cases where people are already attempting to create or maintain a sense of stability within which an ecocultural identity may persist. We do this by presenting the case of Mr. Green and the Big Green Ranch (pseudonyms). From there, we construct a model based on his and his family's sense of 'progressive ranching,' where ecocultural identity maintenance results from both innovative and conservative relationships with technology and ethical commitments to the stewardship of horses, cattle, grassland, and kin.¹ This model helps sustain the ecocultural identity of what we call the Progressive Rancher, an ideal type used to analyze our ethnographically grounded case based upon the family's use of the phrase. The use of an ideal type with ethnographic grounding is important because this aids us in thinking more generally about the tools and processes used in making and maintaining other ecocultural identities. Additionally, using an ideal type improves how ecocultural identities are described, thus making it possible to compare cases that may be far more politically or socially radical and in which ecocultural identities are implicated.

The Big Green Ranch in the United States West Texas grasslands provides empirical insight into the problem of ecocultural identity maintenance. Specifically, this case provides a model in which 'progressive ranching,' through technological innovation and ecosystem restoration, oriented by a pastoralist ethic centered on stewardship, forms a kind of temporal cocoon that works to buffer the ranch and the identity maintenance associated with 'progressive ranching' from relatively unpredictable economic and environmental shifts. The life maintained within the ranch is cyclical and takes its cues from seasonality and the lifecycles of non-human animals (ranch animals like cattle and horses as well as non-domesticated species), grass, and family members. In the following sections, we discuss these dimensions of the Big Green Ranch from an ethnographic perspective. The content of the case study informs a broader discussion of ecocultural identity maintenance related to 'progressive ranching' and pastoralist ethics. Specifically, stewardship is a domain of pastoralist ethics that contributes to the maintenance of a community and its environment. We illustrate ways an ethic of stewardship may contribute to identity and its maintenance can be explored ethnographically, examining the connections among stewardship, technology, and the maintenance of ecocultural identity on a specific ranch. Our primary contribution in describing the Big Green Ranch, therefore, is to sketch out a model for how

ecocultural identities come to be maintained over time. This is accomplished through a case that illustrates some dimensions of a 'progressive ranching' identity but one that is by no means comprehensive. Our primary goal is understanding an instance of identity maintenance rather than a comprehensive description of a broader 'rancher' ecocultural identity.

The ethnographic scene: The Big Green Ranch, Mr. Green, and the researchers' own ecocultural identities

For author Casper Bendixsen, fieldwork at the Big Green Ranch was part of more than 40 formal interviews between 2011 and 2014 across Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, Idaho, Utah, Montana, and Wyoming with ranchers, cowboys, cowgirls, stock contractors, and rodeo contestants, forming an ethnography of contemporary pastoralist ethics (Bendixsen, 2014). The case of the Big Green Ranch was the only time when Bendixsen's research interests overlapped with those of a fellow anthropologist, author Trevor Durbin, whose focus at the time was loosely gathered around themes of environmentalism, climate change, and political ecology (Durbin, 2018). Co-author Jakob Hanschu was not present for this fieldwork but joined the team during the writing of this chapter because of his research interests in identity, cultural communication, and the Anthropocene.

Our simultaneous interest in the Big Green Ranch was a coordinated collaboration between anthropologists bringing their projects into conversation through strategic fieldwork and common theoretical approaches. We are researchers descended from families whose lives depended on resource extraction – Bendixsen from ranching and Durbin from logging. We agreed lived experiences of these industries were only minimally informing emerging studies in the environmental humanities or social sciences. Drawing from similar backgrounds, we wanted to explore ecocultural identities with which we had significant connections, those dependent on classically anthropocentric relationships with the environment, where non-human life exists for exploitation at worst or as an ethical object of stewardship at best. We believed these identities were due additional inquiry because the senses of ethical commitment felt by people living and working in these ways often are misunderstood or, worse still, caricatured. More than anything, as we sat with Mr. Green, we felt in his own intense commitment to land and resource stewardship a particular formation of family-centered ecological care.

We met Mr. Green at his home, a two-story grey colonial house built by his father. At age 74, he wore a freshly pressed shirt and blue jeans with a clean, white cowboy hat resting on his knee. Photos of prized bulls and renowned Quarter Horses were hanging neatly on the walls. He beamed as he informed us his father and grandfather played important roles in the foundation of the Quarter Horse breed. He sat in an old cracked leather chair, chewing tobacco, and described how he was approached by a Houston-based wind company two years earlier. Mr. Green was relaxed, but his time is valuable, and there were only small windows of time in which he was willing to indulge anthropological inquiry. His engagement with our ethnographic efforts consisted of a few emails and phone calls as well as a day of formal and informal interviewing and a tour of the ranch and surrounding area.

As an interlocutor, Mr. Green was carefully selected because of his ranch's reputation and growing relationship with a wind energy company that was interested in leasing land for wind farm construction. Additional fieldwork included an interview with a representative from the wind energy company who, when asked why someone like Mr. Green agreed to build a wind farm, said bluntly that he and other landowners did so for extra revenue. However, it became clear in the conversations with Mr. Green that additional revenue for its own sake, Weber's 'spirit of capitalism' (1905/2002), was not the ultimate motivation for leasing land for wind energy production. Instead,

increased revenue meant a more secure legacy and a continuation of a multigenerational ranching tradition. Furthermore, the means of revenue – wind technology – were believed to be better suited than other technologies, such as the oil rigs also present on the ranch, to the cultural values and pastoralist ethics at the heart of the multigenerational ranching project.

As we shall see, all these elements (family, technology, land, revenue) for Mr. Green are bound up with other elements of *oikos*, the linguistic root of our words 'ecology' and 'economy' that refers to the classic Greek unit of family members, household property, and their combined management (Aristotle et al., 1920). As an analytical term, *oikos* makes visible Mr. Green's constant vigilance and personal sense of stewardship for an ecosystem that evolved to support native grazers, such as bison, but that he now harnesses for raising beef cattle and children. This sentiment is captured eloquently in the ranch's mission statement that Mr. Green embodies:

We are striving to improve the efficiency of converting God's forage into healthy, nutritious, great tasting beef to better feed His people. This progressive ranching operation will continue to grow as it raises more cows, kids, and Quarter Horses.²

Farming grass, wrangling wind, and 'progressive ranching'

Mr. Green explained to us that 'a good rancher is first and foremost a grass farmer' who invests significant time and resources into ecosystem management. His truck is rigged for semiannual controlled burns, which mimic wildfire, and he invests significant resources in controlling invasive prickly pear and mesquite, the latter of which is harvested and sold for use in the barbecue industry. In the interest of grass, Mr. Green lamented that his existing oil rigs, while revenue producing, also tended to spew grass-killing brine. It was partly for this reason that he welcomed the possibilities of a future wind farm on his ranch. Aside from a relatively small footprint, wind turbines do not kill grass. Mr. Green implied that this likely meant the discontinued use and perhaps removal of the oil rigs.

But this was not the only reason he was interested in wind energy. He continued, 'I'm a pretty futuristic type person, and I just knew it would be somethin' I might not get a lot out of in my lifetime [...] but my children, and I've got 17 grandchildren, could reap benefits off this for generations.' We asked Mr. Green how he thought new technologies like wind turbines for the generation of mass energy would change the future of ranching. He replied, 'I really don't see a lot of change in the ranching industry, I think we'll see our job continue to get better.' By 'better' Mr. Green further explained how he valued efficiently harnessing ecological resources, especially grass, for the growth and maintenance of the ranching tradition, especially as a system to pass on to his children and grandchildren.³ In this case, the heritage of cherished traditions and values is secured through technological innovation like wind farm development.

Taken together, these statements by Mr. Green provide a window into what this multigenerational family ranch means to him and how wind energy technology relates to ecocultural identity. First, Mr. Green describes himself as a kind of futurist. In fact, on the ranch's website he and his wife are described as visionaries. This attitude does not merely apply to renewable energy. Mr. Green and his family are innovators in several other domains. Their ranch has become well known for its state-of-the-art genetic approach. Composite, hybrid, and crossbred bulls are designed through careful breeding, embryo transfer, estrus cycle manipulation, embryo stimulation, and artificial insemination. They produce choice bulls to breed entire herds of cross-bred variations, yielding heavier, hardier, gentler, and better-tasting beef cattle. He also is very proud that his beef cattle are naturally grass-fed and do not need to consume grain, corn, or soybeans that could be used for human consumption.

Second, Mr. Green believes the future of ranching will not change significantly. However, since he and his family are actively pursuing technological innovation, this statement implies that good ranching, from his perspective, is not solely defined by any one innovation. Mr. Green's statement implies that new technologies are not intended to change what he considers the fundamentals of ranching: animal husbandry, land stewardship, and kinship. When he discusses new technologies, such as wind energy or genetically engineered bulls, it is in the context of 'doing things better,' that is, in terms of contiguous change, rather than disruptive innovation. This continuous need to do things better can be seen as a common theme through the history of the ranch itself. The ranch and the Green family have survived several major droughts, the fall of the U.S. beef market in the late nineteenth century, and the Great Depression through these sorts of innovative measures. 'Progressive ranching' is a part of Mr. Green's heritage, and one that he obviously hopes to pass on. This sense of multi-generational commonality is one line of continuity through which an ecocultural identity can tether itself to the land. For Mr. Green, ranching, in part, is a tradition of technological change.

More precisely, this form of traditionalism is one where technological change is done in maintenance, if not in amplification, of a way of life that should improve the stewardship of land and non-human animals toward the security of the particular kin group tied to a specific place. The ultimate value of a wind farm for Mr. Green is its contribution to the security and sustained livelihoods of his descendants. For example, profits from the wind farm would be invested in more ideal wind farm acreage or otherwise protecting the solvency of his ranch from the vagaries of beef and, because the ranch still depends on revenue from oil wells, oil markets. This strategy is important because three of Mr. Green's children and several of his grandchildren desire to make a living from the family ranch. This raises the financial stakes of ranching and increases his need for grassland. Revenue from Mr. Green's partnership with the wind company is, therefore, a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Building a wind farm on his ranch is just one of several ways he is working to ensure that even his distant descendants will be able to live and die in a similar way and in the same place as himself. This sense of financial and technological insulation from drastic changes in the rest of the world applies also to advanced breeding techniques and ecological restoration, both of which raise the carrying capacity and sustainability of his existing ranchland.

When asked what was so important about protecting and passing on his way of life, Mr. Green replied: 'I think raising kids in a rural area and making them work, and work around livestock, and to see birth and see death and having responsibilities and taking care of something... [well,] we just think it's a great place to raise kids.' In the context of Mr. Green's commitment to innovation, this statement suggests that he adopts new technologies, ultimately, in order to ensure the intergenerational continuity of his family's ranching tradition. 'Progressive ranching' helps Mr. Green envision a future where his grandchildren understand and value the lives and lifecycles of family, cattle, horses, and other non-domesticated animals present on the ranch. This means the Green family's use of new technologies such as wind farms, genetic technologies, or even cell phones plays a conservative role, in the sense of conserving existing social and ecological arrangements. From this perspective, then, his wind farm can be understood as one component of a temporal cocoon that protects the contiguous development of an intergenerational narrative about place and identity. It accomplishes this by decoupling the frenetic pace of technological, economic, environmental, and social change in the world at large outside the ranch from the less variable pace of human and non-human animal birth, life, and death within the Big Green Ranch. Within the ranch, the carefully selected technologies, economies, environments, and social relationships are then brought together in a manner that allows 'progressive ranching' to continue to thrive.

Technologies and ethics of stewardship: A model for 'progressive ranching' as a means of ecocultural identity maintenance

'Progressive ranching' as a means of maintaining an ecocultural identity begins from the ground up, literally with grass. Mr. Green said he was a grass farmer first and a rancher second. The ecological health of grassland in Texas, as in the U.S. Great Plains generally, depends historically on native grazers and fire (Courtwright, 2011). Mr. Green's ranching practices mimic these relationships through the use of controlled burns and the management of beef cattle. In turn, cattle are viewed as a means of transforming grass into beef, which not only is a valuable commodity that connects the ranch with broader capitalist markets but also is viewed by Mr. Green as highly nutritious. He also maintained that grass-fed beef is superior to corn-fed beef, not because of comparative environmental impacts, but because grass cannot be consumed by humans. Both income from the sale of cattle and the literal consumption of beef on the ranch are important dimensions of maintaining and reproducing Mr. Green's family as part of intergenerational kin relations. These kin relations, in turn, are sites of care that are extended as ethical commitments to stewardship of land and cattle.⁴

To situate these relationships within classic cultural ecology, grassland, cattle, horses, and kin form a 'cultural core' for a working ranch, where cultural core refers to the dimensions of a cultural system that are most intimately connected with ecological conditions and economic institutions (Steward, 1955) – in other words, the *oikos* of the ranch. In the broadest terms, the cultural core for much of the contemporary world is centered on the extraction of fossil fuels, (post)industrial capitalism, and political institutions that include both democracy and imperialism (Mitchell, 2011). In this case, grassland, cattle, and kin form a cultural core that is intimately linked with 'progressive ranching' as a means of maintaining an ecocultural identity. More precisely, it is entangled with technological innovation and ethical commitments to stewardship of land, non-human animals present on the ranch, and family. From the cultural core of the ranch, we build a model for 'progressive ranching' as a means of maintaining an ecocultural identity (see Figure 10.1), the bearer of which we refer to as the Progressive Rancher.

This analytical move to the ideal type of the Progressive Rancher is necessary because our focus is not on the specific terrain of an ecocultural identity allegedly shared by 'ranchers,' 'West Texas ranchers,' or some other group constructed for the purposes of research. Indeed, in our view, such constructions are too similar to thoroughly critiqued versions of the old culture concept. Instead, we focus on a system that helps support and conserve an ecological and cultural domain that functions in ways commonly referred to as 'identity.' In doing so, we move from identity as a thing to 'progressive ranching' as a process of identity maintenance. Central to 'progressive ranching,' specifically, is a particular way of relating domains of *techné*, including technologies and techniques and ethical commitments to stewardship within an *oikos*, composed of ecological and economic management of the ranch.

In the Anthropocene, partly characterized by ecological and economic instability at planetary scales, 'progressive ranching' performs a conservative function of adopting technological innovation in order to protect values integral to this particular way of life from both environmental and economic change. One effect of successful progressive ranching is the formation of a temporal cocoon, the use of technologies and techniques in an attempt to decouple a relatively stable rate of historical and ecological change on the ranch from the more unpredictable and frenetic pace of change in larger-scale systems. We argue this is one particular way the tensions between stability and instability, mentioned previously as inherent in Anthropocenic ecocultural identities generally, materialize. In what follows, we describe these relationships in more detail in order to better understand one way in which they are negotiated and, hence, one instance of how ecocultural identity is maintained in practice.

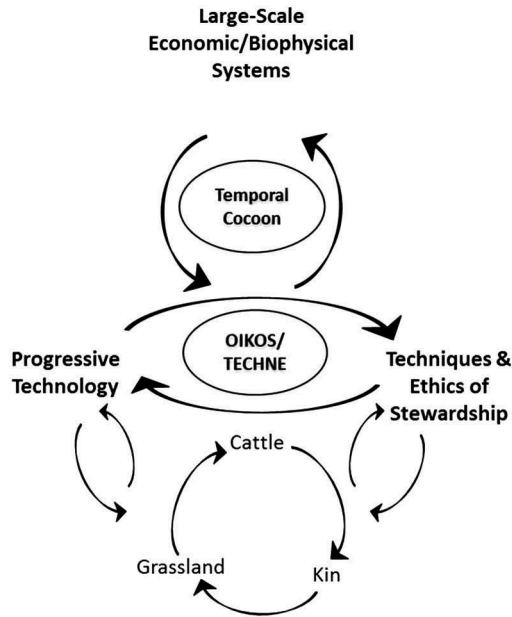


Figure 10.1 Modeling key features of progressive ranching as a means of maintaining ecocultural identity.

Progressive ranching and identity maintenance

In highlighting the problem of unstable identities in the transition from the modern to post-modern, Bauman (1996) argues identity has transformed from something built over the long term, within a stable environment, to a liability we keep open, flexible, and short-term. He reasoned that if modern identity was a kind of game, its postmodern equivalent must attempt to cope with the rules of the game changing during the course of play. As a result, individuals pursue a sense of self that is more fluid in an attempt to avoid the hazards of unanticipated change. He argues that:

To keep the game short means to beware long-term commitments. To refuse to be 'fixed' one way or the other. Not to get tied to the place. Not to wed one's life to one vocation only.... In short, to cut the present off at both ends, to sever the present from history, to abolish time in any other form but a flat collection or an arbitrary sequence of present moments; a continuous present.

(p. 24)

Bauman contends that movement through the world as modernist selves took the form of key figures: the stroller, the tourist, the player, and the vagabond. The vagabond, in particular, was a marginal figure of modernity, one that was viewed as suspicious or dangerous. In the post-modern, this marginal figure has become a central metaphor for the experience of identity, a wayfarer without a fixed home or social group. The situation is even more complex than Bauman presents in his essay, however, because the relatively stable planetary systems of the

Holocene, those assumed in his analysis, have become destabilized in the Anthropocene. Not only might the rules of identity games change over the course of play, but the ecological conditions that make the rules possible are destabilizing. Under these conditions, a fundamental challenge for any ecocultural identity becomes negotiating this tendency toward diminishingly short-term and increasingly unstable identity games.

Following Bauman's use of various ideal types of modern identity (such as the tourist and the vagabond), we consider particular dynamics of ecocultural identity maintenance in the Anthropocene by turning to a modernist figure that has become marginal: *the Progressive Rancher*. As an ideal type, this figure does not perfectly reflect any one specific rancher like Mr. Green. Rather, it is an analytical device intended to advance our discussion of identity maintenance in the Anthropocene while remaining close to our ethnographic case.

Unlike metaphors for postmodern identity building focused on the short term and always keeping options open at the expense of long-term attachments and commitments, the Progressive Rancher is committed to long-term intergenerational relationships and a multigenerational vocation. This human figure is embedded in a cyclical temporality, the recurrence of seasons and the life and death of cattle, horses, dogs, and family members. The Progressive Rancher is grounded, literally a person of the land. Far from being blown about, the Progressive Rancher may choose to sink wind turbines deep within the rock and soil to harvest profit from the wind, but any profits reaped are ultimately directed toward the production of a future heritage. The Progressive Rancher, therefore, is subject to capitalism and attached to local, regional, national, and international markets but also tied to specific places and their ecological transformations through dramatic material histories of landscape change and global climatic shifts. For this figure at the margins of the postmodern, the focus is on the *oikos* of ranchland, including the management of local ecology, herd management, small business economics, and family dynamics, as well as entanglements with global markets.

Somehow, despite these engagements with the liquid reality described by Bauman (1996), the Progressive Rancher maintains something much closer to modernist forms of identity described above, more committed to the long term and less willing to experiment with core values. The question is, how is this done? That is, how does the Progressive Rancher create a space for ecocultural identity work that is committed, long-term, and apparently more stable? We suggest that ecocultural identity maintenance is conservative in the broad sense of conserving existing arrangements. For the Progressive Rancher, these arrangements may include ethical values and commitments to stewardship, ecological relationships with grassland, inherited ranching techniques, and property arrangements. However, the Progressive Rancher also depends on the use of technological innovation. Understanding how the conservation of ecocultural identity relies on technological innovation, in this case, requires a better understanding of what technology is and what it does in the ranching context. To do this, we turn to a discussion of *techne*.

Technologies of stewardship and the temporal cocoon

In Boellstorff's (2015) ethnographic research in virtual worlds, which depend on 'the ability of humans to imagine places and then program them into a computer,' he draws upon the Greek term *techne*, from which the words technology and technique are derived (p. 54). He writes:

Techne refers to art or craft, to human action that engages with the world and thereby results in a different world. Techne is not just knowledge about the world, what Greek thought termed *episteme*; it is intentional action that *constitutes a gap* between the world as it was before the action, and the new world it calls into being.

(p. 55)

Virtual worlds, Boellstorff (2015) argues, are ‘real’ in how they are experienced but not ‘actual’ in a physical sense. Imagination and craft realize something virtual by means of a technology. Technology, Boellstorff states, is the extension of human ability. Breathing, for example, is natural, but breathing underwater is technological. What is most interesting from the perspective presented here is that *techne*, as an art or practice, is ‘above all intentional and *creative*’ (Boellstorff, 2015, p. 57). This brings to mind a contrast identified by Mauss (1973) in an essay titled ‘Techniques of the body’ wherein Mauss illuminated the technical development of the body by demonstrating that our habitual movements are expressions of social conditions. In doing so, he emphasized the constraining effects of *techne*. Instead of speaking of *techne* as ‘intentional and creative,’ as Boellstorff does, Mauss defines it as ‘effective and traditional’ (p. 75). For example, even though he notes that the technique of swimming had changed over his own lifetime, he contrasted this with his own inability to swim differently.

These two apparently divergent approaches to *techne*, one transformational and one conservative, provide a means of understanding a critical dimension of technological hope in the Anthropocene. Under conditions of ecological uncertainty and potential instability, the change that technological interventions are intended to effect often are precisely those of conservation and the re-establishment of the quotidian. For example, supporters of ‘clean coal’ claim they intend to not only lower greenhouse gas emissions and stabilize climate but also to maintain coal as an extractive industry along with all livelihoods and lifestyles that depend on it. In a technical sense, wind power is very different from ‘clean coal.’ However, in the context of climate change, both embody a common tension between the innovative – some might hope radically innovative – and conservative dimensions of technology. In short, when everything is changing, technological change may become a way of trying to keep things the same, or at least make change more manageable.

For the Progressive Rancher, Anthropocenic conditions threaten fundamental ecological and economic relationships among grassland, cattle, and ranchers. Technological innovation inherent in what we are calling ‘progressive ranching’ is an attempt to shore up these ecological and economic conditions in a way that draws on both the transformational and conservative potentials of *techne*. These dynamics can be seen at the Big Green Ranch, specifically, where ranching is progressive in its use of new technologies (wind power and genetic engineering) and improved techniques (like ecosystem restoration through controlled burns and invasive species eradication). More fundamentally, however, technologies and techniques are deployed as a means of passing on a particular way of life, including a sense of identity, to new generations of ranchers. This includes the ecocultural identity maintenance at stake in ‘progressive ranching’ as well as how those technologies and techniques play out in specific places and within kin groups.

Whereas in the previous section we talked about *how* ecocultural identity is maintained through technological innovation, in this section we explore important dimensions of *what* is being maintained, that is, the key elements of the ecocultural identity at stake. We argue that integral to this identity is an ethical commitment to stewardship of resources and that, while this is fundamentally an anthropocentric stance, it is one in which the human steward is responsible for caring for their environment. We end by showing that the ‘*what*’ is also a ‘*how*.’ That is, stewardship is comprised not only of values but also of technologies and embodied techniques (*techne*). Many of these technologies and techniques, in turn, are part of the ranching tradition and, when combined, function as part of the temporal cocoon that preserves the way of life and the ecocultural identities of those who live it. Finally, *techne*, ethics, and cocooning effects that maintain ecocultural identity come together within the *oikos*, or the total care and management, of the ranch.

For the Progressive Rancher, the ethics of ranching and the technologies and techniques of ranching are inextricably linked. A wind farm, for example, is thought to be better for

cattle than oil rigs because it has less impact on grasslands while still providing supportive income. Genetic technology enhances the ability of the cattle to utilize native grasses and provides increased market value. In this vein, the Progressive Rancher, as one who adopts techniques and technologies not only for profit but also for ecological benefits, fits well within what rangeland conservation organizer White (2008) calls a 'New Ranch':

Fortunately, a growing number of ranchers understand [that ranching may not be immortal] and are embracing a cluster of new ideas and methods, often with the happy result of increased profits, restored land health, and repaired relationships with others.

(p. 7)

This is not, of course, to make the claim that ranchers cannot also produce negative environmental impacts nor that 'progressive ranching' is the most ecologically sound way of life. It rather is to point out, first, that ranches that too strongly transgress their ecological limits do not exist for long and disrupt the ability to maintain a valued ecocultural identity. Therefore, it may be said that 'progressive ranching' at the Big Green Ranch insists on having some regenerative quality, insofar as the ranching family is preserved. Second, many successful ranchers persist precisely because they attend closely to how technological innovation can help care for and better manage resources. Environmental anthropologist Sheridan (2007) elucidates how progressive ranchers have learned from ranching ecological transgressions in the contemporary. Progressive ranchers, in particular, realized in a fundamental way that, 'because their cattle require grass, [they] depend on the forgiveness of nature for a livelihood while simultaneously nurturing its beneficence' (White, 2008, p. 6). The stubbornness and 'grit' of grass, White explains, becomes the more resolute resource, forgiving of changes in technology and land management that do not go so well, eager to reward ranchers when they get things right.

Stewardship is well-suited conceptually for describing the management of land, and therefore grass, because of its identification through place. Stewardship of a place demands that the steward become representative of its makeup (Basso, 2007). Many ranchers, cowboys, and cowgirls will line up to say they are good stewards. Many environmentalists, artists, politicians, and technocrats will say the same. However, the management of land in the western United States, harnessed as a place for livestock, is an important qualification for the form of stewardship taking place at the Big Green Ranch. Progressive ranching thrives in the deep knowledge of a place. Tenure in and care for a place over time provides deep connections – a type of environmental pedagogy that creates a localized value system. For example, Mr. Green commented about how upland game birds were returning to tracts of land with turbines, thought to be due to the improved grass and water habitats as well as secondary protection from predator birds. Localized value systems likely are highly influential in the maintenance of ecocultural identities. As such, the heterogeneous nature of identity narratives (i.e., what values and senses of self environmentalists, artists, ranchers, and politicians do and do not have in common) is equally likely to be influential upon ecocultural projects, like the management of grasslands.

Long-term tenure in a place is often best achieved through kinship and intergenerational teaching and learning. Faubion and Hamilton (2007) and Faubion (2011) have argued kinship is the most intimate space of identity formation, specifically when ethical training can occur. 'Progressive ranching' is normally a family matter; therefore, a family's interpretation of kinship as an ethical arena is relevant here. Becoming and being a good steward often begins where most identity formation does – in childhood. As Mr. Green expressed, ranching is more than the occupation; he described it as a lifestyle and an intimate classroom. Kinship, in progressive ranching, is where the knowledges of place and non-human animals are taught, where

technique is routinized and perfected. Moreover, it is where the values of further securing the ranch are fostered and the work of identity maintenance justified. Those maintaining that identity are further compelled to become virtuous stewards as part of fulfilling their roles as family members (Bendixsen, 2014). Fulfilling ethical commitments validates the individual through self-respect and the collective through family pride or dignity (Faubion & Hamilton, 2007). It seems ecocultural identity on the Big Green Ranch leverages kinship as another technique in sorting out the ranch's sustainability and identity maintenance. As mentioned earlier, Mr. Green views the ranch as ideal for child-rearing. He also forecasts their future as part of its sustainability as an intergenerational ranching project, albeit one where they will have new technologies and techniques at their disposal.

'Progressive ranching' as a way of maintaining ecocultural identity is not simply carried about in the mind; it is embodied. Animal husbandry at the Big Green Ranch serves as a good example. Most ranchers will often wake in the morning and think about the day, not in terms of *oikos* and *techné*, but content – as a good day for branding, irrigating, or attending a family member's christening (Bendixsen, 2014). The Progressive Ranch strives to keep this content in balance. Horsemanship is a well-preserved tradition at the Big Green Ranch, one that exemplifies *techné* and *oikos* in the control of strong animals (see Bridgeman, 2020, Chapter 5 of this *Handbook*). Strength is a good thing to have in a horse, but this requires an ability to control and harness that strength to fulfill designated tasks. This ability takes time and practice to develop and maintain. One's strength does not overcome the daily realities. The good management of livestock often requires a reasonable amount of physical strength as well as the ability to judge how and when it is applied. Good riders are thought to have the 'touch,' and this is representative not only of the ability to control one's use of force, but also one's calmness, presence, and awareness in working with the animal. The work of kin to replicate this careful balance in one another is an example of key elements within a pastoralist ecocultural identity. The same lessons can be applied to handling cattle and grassland management, and they all require practice, thoughtfulness, and have meaningful consequences (good or bad).

Strength and ability are points of articulation between the ethical and technological domains. Technology, as an extension of the body, is an elaboration of techniques of the body, and both concepts come together in the common term *techné*, as we have shown. Embodied technique, whether in horsemanship, handling cattle, or surveying grassland, is infused with ethical value for people like Mr. Green. The externalization of embodied technique as objective technology is similar in that the technologies chosen, how they are used, and where they are deployed also are objects of ethical consideration and values. For example, Mr. Green will allow oil rigs on this land, but he prefers wind turbines because oil production kills grass. The Big Green ranch uses advanced genetic and other techniques to produce better bulls, which Mr. Green described in technological terms as a means of turning grass into nutritious animal protein.

We can better understand Mr. Green's ethical commitments to his ranch by considering a photograph that he discussed as being particularly meaningful. It was a large photo-on-canvas carefully placed above his fireplace that depicted a man training a horse in a dusty arena. Along the arena fence were several attentive children. Mr. Green explained that the title of the work, 'The Lesson,' indicated an important dimension of ranching heritage, including values of care and stewardship, and embodied techniques and strength, being passed on to a new generation, the children sitting on the fence. He said he felt a direct connection to the photo – the people, the place, and the non-human animals (see Figure 10.2). In our analysis, the photograph serves as an instantiation of Mr. Green's particular sense of stewardship and exemplifies what is at stake for him in making decisions about how to care for grassland, cattle, and his family – the ranch's *oikos*. In this way, 'The Lesson' also illustrates how Mr. Green's values contrast with



Figure 10.2 'The Lesson.'

Source: Photo by David Stoecklein, used with permission.

Weber's (1905/2002) 'spirit of capitalism,' i.e., the rational accumulation of wealth for its own sake. Mr. Green is a capitalist, but he accumulates wealth to maintain an intergenerational ranching tradition. When we consider 'The Lesson,' an ecocultural identity is being executed, maintained, and built all at once.

In conclusion

The anthropocentric nature of ranching can be exploitative; historically, poor ranching practices in the United States and elsewhere have had grave consequences. The ecological and economic collapses of 1887 in the United States are frequently cited examples (Limerick, 2000; Slotkin, 1998; Worster, 1992). It also seems that, in the case of the Big Green Ranch, 'progressive ranching' can take land, livestock, and kin as ethical objects deserving stewardship. Mr. Green frames his ranch as better for having all three thrive in relation to one another, an *oikos* where humans are better for having sacrificed and whose successes are measured by the ecocultural arrangement. For Mr. Green, maintaining this important ecocultural identity is deserving of the best technologies and *techné* available. Given the large amount of technologies and frenetic pace of knowledge production, the ability to be selective of those innovations in time and according to ethical values is critical.

At face value, these concepts and practices might seem unrelated to the construction of a wind farm. As we have shown, however, traditional (often conservative) techniques and innovative technologies function similarly to create what we have called a temporal cocoon, which buffers the more cyclical and seasonally ordered life on the ranch from larger scale and more uncertain ecological and economic dynamics. We argue the cocooning effects of new

technologies and inherited techniques (*techné*) have become more salient and urgent in the Anthropocene, where minimal stable conditions for identity itself have come into question with particular force. Indeed, the Anthropocene is experienced as unmooring from both ecological and cultural coordinates, leaving the possibilities and opportunities for experimenting with identity radically more open while also making the maintenance of those identities costlier over time. What makes Mr. Green and the Big Green Ranch case valuable to the emerging discussion on ecocultural identities is how the techniques and technologies, new and old, oriented around ethical commitments to stewardship of resources and intergenerational care (*oikos*) form a system of ecocultural identity maintenance.

Notes

* These authors contributed equally to this work.

- 1 It is important to note that the use of ‘conservative’ and ‘progressive’ throughout this chapter are descriptions of Mr. Green’s attitude toward technology and family. There was no qualitative data that substantially linked these terms to his political views. He made his disdain for former U.S. President Obama as a Democrat politician very clear to us; however, Mr. Green grounded his discussion of wind turbines and oil rigs within the domains of growing grass, feeding cattle, and raising grandchildren. In other words, he has a progressive attitude toward the adoption of technology if it can be seen as conserving what is vital to ranching.
- 2 The family’s mission statement for the ranch clearly links their sense of ‘progressive ranching’ with Judeo-Christian religious beliefs. However, throughout the entire inquiry into how and why wind turbines were being considered for inclusion in the ranch ecology, Mr. Green continually framed his answers within the context of natural ecologies, improving beef products, and raising family on the ranch. As his interlocutors, we have chosen to do the same. Other scholarly works have addressed Christianity and its ties to ecology (Taylor, 2013; Kearns 1996) and ranching (Bendixsen, 2014; Dallam, 2018; Sheridan, 2007). An important community-based description of how ranching strategies and Christian values have overlapped also has been described by Wilkinson (2012).
- 3 Within ranching, Mr. Green insists that one of the primary domains is family, or kinship. This was an important theme through Bendixsen’s research (2014). The direct connection between ranching and/or farming and family has been established in multiple disciplines. For example, from family studies, ‘Few businesses have as much family involvement in the day-to-day operation as intergenerational ranching and farming’ (Zimmerman and Fetsch, 1994). See also, Bendixsen, 2014; Husa, 2009; Maczko et al., 2012; USDA, 2014). Globally, 90 percent of agricultural operations are family owned and operated (FAO, 2014).
- 4 Ultimately, Mr. Green does not believe the climate is changing, at least not as a result of human activities. Therefore, the adoption of wind turbines must be interpreted through a lens that locates the purposes of the turbines within the more local and immediate cultural values at work on the ranch.

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Constructing and challenging ecocultural identity boundaries among sportsmen

Jessica Love-Nichols

In 2013, a popular hunting personality conducted an ‘Ask Me Anything’ event on the social media website Reddit. The media figure, Steven Rinella, was known for his TV show on The Sportsman Channel, *The MeatEater*, which featured Rinella explaining techniques for preparing and cooking meat ‘harvested’¹ from wild animals. During this ‘Ask Me Anything,’ a fan asked, ‘How much longer do you think you can last in Brooklyn?’ implying a critique of Rinella’s decision to live in the densely populated Brooklyn, New York – often seen as urbane and effeminate – given his public persona as a sportsman. Rinella, in response to this critique, replied, ‘Hard to say, because I hunt 100 days a year. Who’d want to screw that up?’ emphasizing his dedication to a certain type of environmental interaction – hunting – and thus his authentic sportsman identity. This exchange highlights the centrality of both environmental and cultural connections within the sportsman identity in the United States, and shows this community may be a particularly rich site for the study of the constitution and possibilities of ecocultural identities.

Sportsmen and sportswomen² in the U.S. are a community of people who view hunting and fishing activities as a central part of their identity and tend to share an affiliation to firearms, a connection to the outdoors, an interest in conservation, and – although many are not White men – an orientation to rural White masculinity. This chapter will examine the constitution of this identity in the U.S. West, a region comprising substantial areas of undeveloped and publicly owned lands, a high proportion of the population holding hunting licenses, a correspondingly high level of political power exercised by sportsmen and women in this region (especially within the less populated states) (Randall, 2019), and a political and cultural divide felt between the sparsely populated areas and the urban centers within states with larger cities, such as California, Oregon, Washington, and Colorado (Branson-Potts, 2018).

I argue that an analysis of the sportsman ecocultural identity presents several important considerations for scholars of identity, culture, and environment. The first is a challenge to conventional notions of identity as composed of primarily demographic, cultural, or economic factors without considering the role of the ecological. Recent linguistic research, for instance, which complicates conventional approaches to identity and demonstrates its emergence in social interactional processes (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), still has not yet fully considered the role of ecological interaction in the production of identity. Because environmental practices and orientations are a fundamental part of the sportsman identity, differentiating it from other identities similar in their associations

with race, gender, class, and region, this community illustrates the need to view identity always as fundamentally ecocultural, seeing the ecological affiliations and practices of sportsmen as inextricable from other identity processes and as ‘mutually constituted with’ the sociocultural affiliations (Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020, p. xviii).

In addition to showing environmental practices and ideologies to be fundamental to the overall sportsman identity, this chapter also argues that the ecocultural nature of this identity challenges the erasure of variation in environmental practices and ideologies within politically conservative sectors. Most academic research on identity and environmental attitudes in the United States focuses on large-scale demographic classifications such as age, gender, ethnic or racial identity, or political affiliation (Goebbert et al., 2012; McCright & Dunlap, 2011; Swim et al., 2018), and extensive media and scholarly attention has focused on the polarized political environmental attitudes in the United States – where politically conservative individuals often are portrayed as being less concerned about, or even hostile to, environmental issues (Baldwin & Lammers, 2016; Kahan et al., 2012). This type of research, however, can obscure considerable variation in environmental ideologies and practices that exists within broad demographic categories (Howe, 2015), and erase diverse and important environmental connections felt by those segments of the population not considered ‘environmentalists.’ Because the majority of hunters consider themselves politically conservative, the contemporary association of pro-environmental attitudes with left-wing political affiliation can cause tensions among elements of the sportsman identity, as well as make it more difficult for politically conservative people in general to express support for environmental action.

This chapter aims to address the need for academic research on environment and identity that focuses on local communities by describing the environmental practices and ideologies that make up part of the sportsman ecocultural identity. This study also endeavors to show the possibilities of this ecocultural identity for creating new – or reviving historic Roosevelt-era – conservation alliances and regenerative futures in the rural western U.S. Before presenting the data, I first provide some background on the sociocultural context for hunters and fishers in the U.S., as well as a brief description of my data collection methods. I then present the main ideologies through which the sportsman identity is produced and performed: seeing hunting and fishing as ways to be connected to the more-than-human world; believing that embodied experience with that world is the best way to understand that world; understanding sportsmen as more knowledgeable about animals and ecosystems than non-sportsmen – especially environmentalists and those living in cities; and, finally, maintaining a strong affiliation toward undeveloped spaces and especially the rural past. This chapter then illustrates how community members police the boundaries of the sportsman ecocultural identity (see Milstein, 2020, Chapter 2 of this *Handbook*), how those boundaries can be challenged in the interest of politicized environmental policies, and how this ecocultural identity relates to conservation action and could enable possible regenerative futures.

Hunting and fishing in the United States

The current U.S. American conceptualization of the ‘sportsman’ arose near the end of the nineteenth century as the hunter-naturalist, encapsulating the notion of both a student of nature and a hunter and/or fisher (Altherr & Reiger, 1995). This emergent, largely masculine gendered identity arose, in part, in response to the ‘crisis of masculinity’ brought about by greater urbanization and industrialization (Jones, 2015). Middle-class men living in cities were perceived as having fewer opportunities to realize activities considered masculine, and hunting emerged as a primary way for them to recover that masculinity. The historian Karen Jones (2015), for instance, writes that the hunter-naturalist needed to possess ‘a full roster of passionate manhood,’ which included ‘frontier bravado and the ability to dispatch game with

alacrity’ and ‘referents of scientific and explorer acumen, natural history appreciation, self-awareness of the gravitas of the moment, and a performative bent’ (p. 41).

At the same time, however, by the end of the nineteenth century, the U.S. was experiencing sharp declines in wildlife – only a few hundred of the earlier 60 million American bison, for example, remained (Jones, 2015). Within this context, the development of the hunter-naturalist persona also included a strong focus on understanding wildlife and advocating for their conservation, which coincided with and reinforced early U.S. efforts to conserve wildlife populations. These efforts resulted in a collection of principles – used through today by U.S. governmental regulatory agencies as well as citizen conservation groups – contemporarily known as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (Altherr, 1978; Geist et al., 2001), which banned the sale of game meat and prioritized management for the maintenance of healthy wildlife populations.

As the decline in wildlife numbers during this time was partly due to excessive commercial hunting, the sportsman persona also was constructed in contrast to negative public opinions surrounding hunting, specifically in opposition to those commercial hunters who hunter-naturalists presented as lower-class, hypermasculine (as opposed to the restrained middle-class masculinity shown by the hunter-naturalist), and uneducated. Commercial hunters, for instance, often killed many wild animals for personal profit. They also, according to sportsmen, did not respect the ‘fair chase’ ethic of ensuring the prey an opportunity to elude the hunter, and furthermore did not strive for an understanding and appreciation of the wildlife they hunted. Theodore Roosevelt, for example, said,

All hunters should be nature lovers. It is to be hoped that the days of more wasteful, boastful slaughter are past and that from now on the hunter will stand foremost in working for the preservation and perpetuation of wild life.

(Jones, 2015, p. 278)

While hunter-naturalists drew on and valorized Indigenous knowledge, the emerging ecocultural identity was a fundamentally White, middle-class identity. Native American subsistence hunters, who sportsmen represented as being overly ‘savage’ – in line with racist ideologies of the time – were not seen as hunter-naturalists (Jones, 2015; Vibert, 1996), and Native Americans from some tribes were actively fighting against the incursion into their traditional lands by non-Indigenous people, including the hunter-naturalists of the era (Dray, 2018). A distinction was thus constructed between ethical hunters – ‘true’ sportsmen – and those seen as insufficiently moral: market hunters, wanton adventurers, and Indigenous subsistence hunters. Through this distinction, hunter-naturalists constructed themselves as the true champions of wildlife conservation, justifying policies that changed hunting access throughout the nation, including the removal of lands from Native American control for wildlife conservation purposes (Reiger, 1975).

In order to reinforce their positioning as civilized and moral, hunters and fishers of the time drew on ideologies of both class and gender to create an identity that was seen as the civilized and ethical opposition to the lower-class, hyper-masculine commercial, and subsistence hunters. Prominent magazines such as *Outdoor Life* and *Forest and Stream* dedicated columns to ‘Lady Sportsmen,’ and often published letters from female hunters, portraying them as important members of the community (although the magazines still did not often support issues such as women’s suffrage) (Smalley, 2005). These columns showed an ideologically feminized version of hunting, more concerned with contemplation of the wild and introspection than the conquering of wild animals (Jones, 2012). By drawing on ideologies of gender and class and their relationships with the natural world, hunting magazines of the era thus reinforced the ‘civilized’ and ethical nature of the sportsman identity.

The contemporary sportsman identity is tightly associated with conservation, a link which arose concurrently with the hunter-naturalist identity. According to the required hunter education classes all young U.S. hunters take (described further in the data and methodology section), sportsmen are responsible for galvanizing and sustaining the wildlife conservation efforts in the U.S. Hunter education students learn that, during the nineteenth century decline of many wildlife species, sportsmen mobilized and took several actions that ultimately contributed to wildlife conservation. They created the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (mentioned previously), and also promoted the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937, a law which included a ‘self-imposed’ 11 percent tax on firearms and other hunting equipment. The tax is presented as ‘self-imposed’ in that sportsmen are taught to be the original lobbyists for the act as well as the ones bearing the brunt of the tax – with proceeds required to be used for wildlife conservation efforts. This policy effort was, according to hunter education instructors, very successful, in part funding state Divisions of Fish and Wildlife and some Federal lands administrations, and eventually causing a significant resurgence in wildlife populations. The act has been amended several times, but still remains in effect, generating hundreds of millions of dollars a year that supporters say allow for substantial habitat preservation and other conservation efforts (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2018). In addition to the historical conservation efforts, contemporary sportsmen cite their continued support for groups such as *Ducks Unlimited*, *Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation*, etc., as well as the very act of hunting – which they see as a way to maintain healthy populations of wild animals – as evidence of their deep commitment to conservation.

Politically, the association of the sportsman identity and conservative political ideology emerged in the 1970s after the passage of the Gun Control Act of 1968. The National Rifle Association (NRA) – which had previously existed mainly as a community of hunters and target shooters – formed a lobbying arm and began to focus on politics. After the election of a politically conservative NRA president and other board members in 1977, the NRA began to expand its membership by concentrating primarily on political issues, creating coalitions with conservative politicians (Utter, 2000) and becoming what Leddy (1987) terms a ‘social movement.’ Currently, the majority of sportsmen identify as Republicans or Independents and identify ‘gun rights’ as either the most important issue facing sportsmen or one of the most important issues along with conservation (NWF, 2012). The association of the sportsman identity with political conservatism strengthened in the 2000s as geographic political polarization of the United States increased (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008). The sportsman ecocultural identity, for instance, includes strong orientations to sparsely populated spaces and rural, or ‘country’ culture, stances which have become increasingly synonymous with conservative political ideology in the U.S. One such example of this growing overlap is the tendency in the U.S. to call less densely populated areas ‘red’ counties, due to the use of the color red to represent counties won by Republican candidates in elections.

In the contemporary U.S., the term ‘sportsman’ refers to a relatively unified community of hunters and fishers (usually called anglers). The community includes both men and women, although, as previously stated, the identity is strongly associated with masculinity stemming from the initial construction of the hunter-naturalist persona as well as the rise of big-game hunting in the early twentieth century. Big-game hunting, which refers to the hunting of large wild animals – deer, elk, bears, cougars, etc. – was viewed at the time as a way to inculcate desirable masculine traits in young men, such as stoicism, perseverance, and robustness, but as inappropriate for the ‘gentler sex’ due to its ‘cruelty and bloodshed’ (McKenzie, 2005, p. 548). Although currently there are about 1.1 million female hunters, or about 10 percent of all hunters (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2016), the label ‘sportsman’ is generally used in the masculine form – although that is starting to change somewhat; the popular Twitter hashtag #girlswohunt, for instance, is often paired with the hashtag #iamsportsman, as in the following tweet (Figure 11.1).



Figure 11.1 Tweet by a female hunter.

Source: <https://twitter.com/GAHuntingGal/status/793775093239451648> (used with permission).

From its inception as the hunter-naturalist of the nineteenth century, the sportsman persona has shown strong ideological links to conservation, and hunters and fishers hold themselves to be some of the most authentic and dedicated conservationists. Little scholarly research, however, has investigated the ideologies and practices surrounding conservation within the contemporary sportsman community (Altherr & Reiger, 1995). By detailing the environmental practices and ideologies that constitute important aspects of the sportsman ecocultural identity, this chapter aims to fill this gap, as well as to show the possibilities of the identity for creating regenerative futures in the rural United States.

Data and methodology

This chapter takes an ethnographic and discourse analytic approach to investigate the construction of the sportsman ecocultural identity and its mobilization in the service of social, political, and environmental goals. During the summer of 2014, I conducted participant observation research with hunters in two contexts: in ‘hunting camp’ – a site where sportsmen and others will camp for a few days to weeks to be close to hunting areas – as well as during a hunter

education course. These scripted courses are run by the state-level Departments of Wildlife (known in some states as the Department of Fish and Wildlife), though with a great deal of investment and participation from non-governmental organizations, especially the National Rifle Association. The in-person hunter education courses are one option, along with partially online courses, through which prospective hunters may receive certification entitling them to purchase game licenses, and the courses are very similar across states. I also conducted nine ethnographic interviews with hunters from Montezuma County (the southwestern-most county in the state of Colorado). I then transcribed the interviews, videos of participant observation, and field notes, coding them for salient topics, and analyzed them to address the following research questions: (1) How is the sportsman identity constructed and mobilized? and (2) how do the ideologies and practices of environmental conservation within this community fit into and/or challenge the broader sociopolitical context of the rural western United States? Sections of the interviews that were especially pertinent to the analysis were then transcribed to a higher level of detail, including pauses and lengthening (Du Bois et al., 1993) and analyzed using a close discourse analysis approach, a method which allows for the analysis of micro- and macro-levels of linguistic structure to illuminate how identities are created and negotiated within discourse contexts (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Fairclough, 2013).

Many of my observations about the sportsman identity are informed by my experience growing up in a hunting family in southwestern Colorado. In an area with prevalent open spaces and public lands, hunting and fishing are common recreational activities for many members of the community, as well as a source of revenue for outdoor stores and locals who work as hunting guides. As a girl, I was less expected to participate in the actual tracking and hunting of game animals than the boys in my family; however, I grew up attending hunting camps and participating in the butchering and cooking of 'game meat,' the meat from 'harvested' wild animals. As someone who identifies as a member of a rural community, and as in some ways affiliated with sportsmen, I seek to situate this analysis as a respectful representation of the community while still highlighting problematic discourses and practices. To that end, throughout the research planning and analysis process, I discussed findings and interpretations with participants and other sportsmen and I intend for my findings to be shared with members of the community as well as academic audiences.

Producing the sportsman ecocultural identity

This study finds that the production and performance of the sportsman ecocultural identity occurs in three primary ways: through participation in shared activities such as hunting and fishing; an orientation to White, working-class masculinity; and three unifying ideologies and stances. The first of these ideologies is that hunting and fishing are ways to be part of the more-than-human world. The second is that embodied experience is more trustworthy than scientific ways of knowing, and, therefore, sportsmen are more knowledgeable about animals and ecosystems than non-sportsmen, especially environmentalists and those living in cities. The third is that sportsmen share a unifying orientation toward rurality, and especially the rural past, as inherently valuable.

Shared activities

For sportsmen, participation in hunting and fishing includes many aspects that each play a part in the construction of the sportsman identity. Participation involves preparation such as training and equipping, the time spent at hunting camp, and follow-up activities such as the butchering, sharing, cooking, and eating of the game meat, as well as mounting antlers or other trophies and tanning hides. Boglioli (2009), for instance, writes about the importance of deer hunting camps for

the creation and maintenance of male bonds, and describes this formation and reinforcement of male bonds as being equally as important to sportsmen as the hunting activity itself. The follow-up activities, as well, create and maintain social bonds, celebrate the 'harvested' wildlife, and highlight the hunters' successes, reinforcing their claim to the authentic sportsman identity. Sportsmen also consume extensive media surrounding hunting and fishing, such as the Sportsman Channel, and the magazine *Field and Stream*, which feature media about hunting and fishing (including addressing gear, meat preparation, and cooking, etc.). These media outlets also serve to reinforce and recirculate many shared ideologies of the ecocultural identity, as discussed in the next section.

Orientation to White working-class masculinity

The second fundamental building block of the sportsman identity is the performance of a truck-loving, meat-eating, White, working-class masculinity oriented to 'country spaces' (Campbell et al., 2006). 'Country,' and rural, in these cases, are not regional or geographic designations, but rather ideological categories, generally imagined as sparsely populated or agricultural areas. Although not all sportsmen are White and/or men, the prototypical sportsman is clearly a racialized persona (Herman, 2014), and people of color are severely underrepresented in the hunting population and tend to have less exposure to the activity and lifestyle (Floyd & Lee, 2002; U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2012). Individual sportsmen perform an affiliation to White working-class rural masculinity in many ways: by using elements of 'country talk' to linguistically position themselves as authentically oriented to rural spaces (Hall-Lew & Stephens, 2012; Love-Nichols, 2016), including the alveolar pronunciation of ING (i.e., 'running' as 'runnin'), and vowels exhibiting features of the Southern Vowel Shift, a shift in pronunciation found in many southern U.S. dialects (Podesva et al., 2015). Many of the shows featured on the Sportsman Channel also illustrate a link between White, working-class masculinity and the sportsman identity. Besides primarily featuring White men, many of the titles make explicit mention to working class-ness and/or masculinity, such as: 'Backwoods Life' (a term often used to describe very rural places with few educational and economic opportunities), 'Blue Collar Adventure,' and 'Brotherhood Outdoors.' Although non-White hunters do participate in the identity, they often draw on an affiliation to the same truck-loving, meat-eating rural White masculinity. Other non-White hunters may perform hunting activities but not affiliate with the sportsman identity to the same extent. One Hispanic participant, for instance, told me that, while many Hispanic people in rural Washington do hunt, in his experience they just do not 'wear as much camo' (camouflage hunting clothing) in public.

Ideology one: Hunting as a way to be a part of the 'outdoors'

Sportsmen produce and perform the ecocultural identity by espousing three central ideologies and stances. The first of these is that hunting and fishing is primarily a way to appreciate and be part of the 'outdoors.' Many of the hunters I interviewed, for instance, expressed that they hunt in order to spend more time in the wild and feel closer to nature. In the following excerpt from an ethnographic interview, Mark says that hunting is a way he can feel a connection to the 'landscape' as well as 'the animals.' He rejects criticisms of hunting as violent by stating his motivation is not 'wanting to kill something,' though he acknowledges these ethical critiques by saying 'it's not even about a bloodsport.' Many other hunters show a similar sensitivity to critiques about the ethics of hunting, but challenge them, asserting the true purpose of hunting is actually about spending time outdoors and forging a connection with 'the landscape.' Mark goes on to say, in a section not excerpted here, that hunting is 'just a good excuse to be out in the woods.'

Excerpt 1

1 Mark For me it's being out in the woods,
2 being out in nature,
3 and uh,
4 bowhunting with a long bow,
5 forces you to... quiet down,
6 you know and it's – it's,
7 honestly it's a spiritual connection.
8 Yeah.
9 So taking that time and becoming connected to the landscape,
10 and the animals you're – you're looking for.
11 And it's not even about a bloodsport or wanting to kill something,
12 it's about that connection,
13 for me.

Similarly, many interviewees responded that their primary motivation, or favorite aspect of, hunting was 'just being in the woods.' In South Dakota, Gigliotti (2000) illustrates similar ideologies in a study of hunters' motivations, finding that 'to enjoy nature, the outdoors, and the beauty of the area' was the most popular motivation for hunting (p. 38). Although to an outsider it may seem counterintuitive to appreciate the beauty of 'nature' through what could be seen as the destruction of life, many hunters view the 'harvesting' of animals not as a destruction, but as an integral part of the natural cycle. Every interviewee expressed, for instance, that they took no joy in the killing of a wild animal, but often portrayed themselves as natural predators, seeing outsider criticisms as mistakenly subject to anthropocentric, or human–nature binary, ideologies about the role of humans in natural ecosystems.

Ideology two: The importance of embodied experience

The second unifying ideology of the sportsman ecocultural identity holds that embodied experience is the most reliable way to understand and know about the non-human world. According to this ideology, the knowledge that comes from personal experience is deeper and more complete than other ways of knowing. The following excerpt comes from a publicly available recording of a book reading and question session with sportsman personality and author Steven Rinella. When he is challenged by a vegan audience member about the ethics of killing wild animals, he responds in the following way³:

Excerpt 2

1 Rinella I can assure you,
2 that I know more about deer,
3 than you ever will.
4 And I've learned that through hunting for them.
5 And I probably care about them in a way that's deeper,
6 than something you're going to experience from having
 a removed perspective on it.

Here, Rinella makes clear that he perceives his knowledge of wildlife, specifically deer, to be greater than that of his interlocutor, and specifically points out that this knowledge was acquired experientially. He argues that this experience not only allows him to know more than others who do not have this experience, but also allows him to care about deer in a deeper way than those who have a ‘removed’ perspective – which he ascribes to the vegan audience member – because the audience member’s interactions with deer are assumed to not have been as close or experiential. Rinella also begins by highlighting – before the excerpted section above – his interlocutor’s arguments as mistakenly anthropocentric, saying explicitly that he himself ‘looks at the grand spectrum of species on the planet’ and ‘treat[s] humans as a species, we’re one’ and that, ‘like all predatory animals with canine teeth, we eat meat.’ Rinella assumes, and asserts, that a non-hunting audience member would necessarily have a more removed perspective than he does, as a hunter. This assumption – that non-sportsmen cannot experience the same close relationship with wildlife and ‘wild’ lands as sportsmen – also was echoed by many interviewees. One present study participant, for instance, said,

For the non-hunter, it’s difficult for them, for a non-hunter to understand, but I have never felt more a part of nature than I do when I’m hunting.... so I feel that we’re very much still a part of the outdoor world, and those are just experiences that can’t be duplicated outside of hunting.

The privileging of the embodied experience of hunting as the best way to know about the non-human world functions as a response to critiques that hiking, backpacking, or photography could be better, more ethical ways to interact with the non-human environment. It also reinforces the construction of the sportsman identity as, in many ways, the opposite of the ‘removed’ urban identity, which is projected onto all non-hunters, rightfully or not.

Extending from this perception of closeness is the belief that sportsmen, by virtue of their first-hand experiences with wildlife, are more knowledgeable about animals and ecosystems than non-sportsmen. This advantage is held to be especially true in contrast to those people living in cities, who are perceived as unable to directly experience the land. In the following excerpt from an interview, for instance, Michael responds to the question of what he sees as the greatest challenge facing hunters, saying that it is actually the lack of knowledge and understanding by people who are ‘not tied to the land.’

Excerpt 3

- | | | |
|----|---------|---|
| 1 | Jessica | Do you think there’s challenges that hunters are facing today? |
| 2 | Michael | Yeah, |
| 3 | Jessica | My – I think the biggest challenge that we are facing today is the, |
| 4 | Michael | the change in the structure of the United States |
| 5 | | So many people are not tied to the land, |
| 6 | | and don’t have a clue, |
| 7 | | what goes on out – out in the sticks. |
| 8 | | They just don’t have a clue. |
| 9 | | So. |
| 10 | | Mmm. |
| 11 | | Does that threaten the sport of hunting? |
| 12 | | Mhm. |

13 It, it does because they –
14 they don't understand the need for it.
15 They don't understand the usefulness of it,
16 the depth of it.
17 They *just don't understand*.

In this response Michael points to the changing population distribution of the U.S., calling out greater urbanization by expressing that many people 'don't have a clue what goes on out in the sticks' (a term often used by U.S. West rural speakers to refer to sparsely populated areas). Because of this, he states, they do not understand the need and usefulness of hunting to local ecosystems, and he emphasizes this point by slowing down and articulating every word in 'They *just don't understand*' (italics shows lengthening and emphasis). He goes on to say, in a part of the interview not excerpted here, that because of this lack of experiential understanding, city populations have 'misconceptions' that 'make it harder to keep good regulations in place that are helpful to the animals.'

Ideology three: The value of rurality and the rural past

The third and final unifying ideology of the sportsman ecocultural identity is the value of the outdoors, rurality, and especially a nostalgia for the rural past imagined by the community, a racially homogenous (primarily White) past reminiscent of the post-World War II era. Whereas this ideology emerges in the interview with Michael, in his laments about people no longer being 'tied to the land,' it also becomes apparent in popular media surrounding hunting, such as the Twitter hashtag #whatgetsyououtdoors, the official hashtag of the Outdoor Channel account, with which they suggest users 'tag [their] best hunting, fishing, and shooting sports photos & videos.'

Metaphors of distance from the 'land' came up in many interviews, reinforcing projected divides between sportsmen – as those who most authentically are able to be 'close to' the landscape and wildlife – and non-hunters, who are constructed as 'removed,' without access to appropriate ways to experience the outdoors. One interviewee, for instance, lamented that in the U.S. most people 'are three generations removed from the land,' and discussed a time when he oversaw the search and rescue team for his county, saying that,

I had a big cadre of volunteers who worked for me and what I found was the guys and gals that hunted and fished were the best searchers that I ever had because they knew what to look for and when something was out of place they would notice it, where other people that were just birdwatchers and backpackers, they'd march right through, you know, blood, hair, you know, whatever.

Here the sportsman emphasized the terms 'birdwatchers' and 'backpackers,' showing disregard for their closeness to, and knowledge of, the ecosystems in which they were conducting searches. Through the construction of hunting as the only truly authentic way to perform a connection with the outdoors, hunters further crystallize the sportsman ecocultural identity in hierarchical opposition to what they position as non-authentic and primarily urban ways of being outdoors and gaining knowledge of places and species.

Crucially, environmental practices and ideologies are critical to the construction of the sportsman identity at every level: from the shared activities defining the identity, to the linguistic and cultural positioning, to the unifying ideologies. At each stage, the creation of the identity takes place primarily through cultural orientation to space and environmental activities, illustrating the need to conceptualize the sportsman persona as a fundamentally ecocultural identity.

The sportsman ecocultural identity in its sociopolitical context

While the sportsman ecocultural identity shares many aspects with other White, working-class, rural identities of the broader right-wing ecocultural political scene – such as ranchers, loggers, and oil industry workers (Huber, 1999) – it also differs in some important ways. Sportsmen share with these right-wing ecocultural identities an ideal of conservation that places an emphasis on personal responsibility rather than regulated compliance. For instance, they celebrate the money generated for conservation causes by individual hunters when purchasing sporting goods, game tags, and donating to organizations. They frame the Pittman-Robertson Act described previously as a personal pro-conservation action taken by historical sportsmen and continually bolstered by contemporary members of the community. In addition, the sportsman identity shares with wider right-wing ecocultural ideologies the skepticism of scientific ways of knowing – which are perceived within the sportsmen identity as disengaged and lacking the appropriate personal experience – and the valorization of embodied experience as the most appropriate source of knowledge. Furthermore, sportsmen, similar to ranchers, farmers, commercial fishers, etc., portray the more-than-human world as a resource to be used ‘wisely,’ as conservation is defined in hunter education classes, rather than something to be preserved for its intrinsic value.

Sportsmen do, however, prioritize different forms of management than do other right-wing ecocultural identities, as the needs of wildlife are very different from livestock or extractive industries. At the same time, however, sportsmen tend to be strongly opposed to the ‘preservationist’ goals of many left-wing environmentalists, which they perceive as wrongly preventing all human interactions with wild spaces. Finally, at a more abstract level, sportsmen share with the broader right-wing ecocultural scene the orientation to rural spaces as the vestige of an authentic national heart worth protecting. This can surface as an opposition to middle-class, urban norms, but also can be problematic given the racialized nature of space and geography in the contemporary U.S. While many rural spaces in the western U.S. are racially diverse, the mainstream perception of the rural U.S. American identity is extensively raced and classed, and the sportsman ecocultural political scene can have troubling connections to racist and anti-immigrant ideologies stemming from a prevailing orientation to a more racially homogenous imagined past.

Policing the boundaries of the sportsman ecocultural identity

The boundaries of the sportsman ecocultural identity contribute to the constitution of the contemporary sociopolitical environment of White, rural U.S. America and, because of their importance in that context, are policed by members of the community. One example of this policing occurred in the situation described at the outset of this chapter, when the hunting personality Rinella conducted an ‘Ask Me Anything’ session on Reddit.com. Sportsmen also may be vulnerable to identity policing when expressing stances on conservation that are non-homologous with conservative political ideologies. While environmental conservation has been a fundamental element of the sportsman identity since its inception as the hunter-naturalist, for the contemporary sportsman identity, the exact meaning of conservation has become contested. Conservation as a goal – and especially topics such as the climate crisis – have grown more

associated with left-wing political ideology (Dunlap et al., 2016) and, accordingly, less homologous with the White, rural, working-class identity that is one element of the sportsman ecocultural identity. Sportsmen taking stances on conservation-related issues must, therefore, be mindful of maintaining an authentic ‘country’ identity and often are subject to challenge when they are perceived as violating the boundaries of their political and ecocultural identity.

In one instance, Rinella partnered with a nongovernmental organization (NGO), the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, to create a video presenting evidence of climate crisis’s impact on hunting and fishing and urging sportsmen to take action to confront it. It is clear from both the framing of the video and the responses to it that the topic is non-homologous with the sportsman identity. For instance, although the video is titled ‘Sportsmen & Climate Change,’ Rinella does not actually say the words ‘climate’ and ‘change’ sequentially until the last sentence. The YouTube commenters on the video also identify a stance toward climate change action as unaligned with an authentic sportsman identity. Several commenters note that they ‘love Rinella’s other work, but can no longer watch [his TV show *MeatEater*]’ – because of Rinella’s acknowledgment of, and stance on, climate disruption, which the commenters see as a betrayal of Rinella’s sportsman identity – and 40 percent of the total comments are negative. One commenter suggests that in order for him to ‘ease [his] conscience about [Rinella] taking up this issue’ he has to believe that the only reason Rinella would do this – violate the boundaries of the sportsman ecocultural identity in this way – is that he is under some sort of authentic duress, that ‘the bill collector has got [him] by the nads,’ or that he is ‘just doing it to feed the wife and kid.’ The commenter works to reinforce Rinella as generally within the boundaries of the sportsman ecocultural identity by emphasizing his masculinity, pointing out his masculine anatomy (‘nads’), and that he is embodying the masculine ideal of feeding his ‘wife and kid.’ The commenter also says he takes reassurance from the fact that Rinella does not ‘look too happy doing this one’ and that he ‘is trying to be indirect when referring to climate change at the start,’ inferring these are not the authentic ideological stances Rinella would take if he were not short on money. Comments such as this highlight ways the boundaries of the sportsman ecocultural identity are policed and reinforced by other members of the community – sometimes in ways that hinder pro-environmental stances and behaviors.

The environmental practices and focus on conservation, however, which are foundational to the conception of the hunter-naturalist identity, allow for sportsmen to push the boundaries of White, working-class political affiliations in ways that other politically conservative ecocultural identities may not be able. Although wildlife management for hunting purposes has been criticized for its fundamentally extractive view of the more-than-human world and its ‘narrowly utilitarian focus’ (Geist et al., 2001, p. 59), the foregrounding of wildlife and wild lands as public resources creates very different land management implications for sportsmen than for other right-wing ecocultural political approaches such as ranching, oil and mineral extraction, or logging, and can challenge, to some extent, the exploitative goals of politically conservative ideology.

In the public lands debate, for instance – in contrast to other right-wing ecocultural identities like oil industry workers and ranchers – sportsmen emphasize the value of public lands and wildlife as a public resource held in trust for future generations, and have been vocal opponents of plans to sell federal lands. A recently introduced U.S. congressional bill to sell millions of acres of public land was withdrawn, for example, after public outcry, much of it from sportsmen (Gentile, 2017). This contrast was further highlighted during the Bundy standoff of 2014, when ranchers and other far right supporters occupied federal land in Nevada, an action with which most sportsmen disagreed (Makley, 2018). In another illustrative case, sportsmen and sheep ranchers in southwestern Colorado have clashed over the management of high-altitude lands (Blankenbuehler, 2018). Because domestic sheep can graze at higher altitudes than cattle, these

areas of the National Forests are often permitted to ranchers for sheep grazing. Domestic sheep, however, carry pathogens that have devastated the numbers of big horned sheep in the area. Sportsmen's groups, such as the Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, thus have advocated for limiting the grazing areas available to domestic sheep in order to protect the dwindling big horned sheep herd, bringing them into conflict with the interests of ranchers in the area.

In addition, both the orientation to outdoor activities and the development of a relationship with 'nature' are important building blocks to the sportsman ecocultural identity, contrasting with many other right-wing ecocultural identities. While the privileging of first-person experiences with wildlife and undeveloped spaces often leads to skepticism about environmental science and regulations, it also provides one of the bases for stretching the boundaries of the other aspects of the sportsman identity, as seen in the next section.

Challenging the boundaries of the sportsman ecocultural identity

The explicitly ecocultural nature of the sportsman identity allows media personalities and conservation groups, in certain cases, to challenge the identity's boundaries. Some groups, for instance, are expanding the sportsman identity to include concern about climate crisis while reinforcing their authentic affiliation to the identity through various strategies. For example, the sportsmen-created NGO Conservation Hawks draws heavily on all the elements of the ecocultural identity when urging sportsmen to take action on climate crisis.

Beginning with its name – the combination of 'conservation,' a concept central to the sportsman identity, and 'hawks,' a forceful predator also linked to conservative political ideologies – the NGO constructs itself as an authentic representation of the sportsman ecocultural identity, fundamentally concerned with conservation, but politically conservative. Furthermore, the founder, Todd Tanner, offers to give away a shotgun of great sentimental value to anyone who can provide scientific evidence that the climate is not changing. In another case, one of the organization's public service announcements features several hunters around a fire reminiscing about the areas they used to hunt but that no longer are available due to climate disruption, drawing on a spatiotemporal and ecological orientation to the rural past to reinforce their claim to the sportsman identity (Love-Nichols, 2017).

Regenerative futures

By illustrating the production and contestation of the sportsman ecocultural identity, this chapter highlights the potential for locally meaningful ecocultural identities to disrupt the currently polarized sociopolitical juncture and enable collaborative environmental actions across ecocultural identities and agendas. In addition to the examples highlighted in this chapter, such as successful initiatives around public land and habitat conservation, the sportsman ecocultural identity creates possibilities for more types of regenerative futures in the rural western U.S. Of the many conservation-oriented NGOs created for and by sportsmen, for instance, several now include within their goals public outreach and lobbying around politicized environmental issues such as the climate crisis and air and water pollution. By reinforcing their affiliation with the sportsman identity while advocating for new political and environmental actions, these individuals and organizations complicate the perception of environmental concerns as the sole purview of middle-class urbanites or left-wing politics, and showcase the variation among rural environmental attitudes (Howe et al., 2015).

Furthermore, by showing the importance of conservation to diverse ecocultural identities, sportsmen have the potential to complicate alienating (for White, working-class, rural people)

stereotypes of environmentalism and create new ecocultural identities and avenues for collaboration. Sportsmen also complicate the psychological finding that White men tend to be less concerned about environmental issues (McCrigh & Dunlap, 2011), as they are a group of primarily White men who consider conservation a core aspect of their identity, potentially creating a model for other raced, gendered, and classed ecocultural identities, such as ranchers or commercial fishers.

Finally, in addition to complicating the sociopolitical context surrounding environmental action, sportsmen create possibilities for regenerative futures through the depth of their commitment to hunting and fishing activities and conservation, the place of economic and political power they occupy, their connections with other politically conservative communities, and the time and resources they contribute to wildlife conservation projects. As one interviewee explained, sportsmen are good allies in the fight for environmental conservation because they are 'a group of individuals extremely passionate about the outdoors' who work '364 days a year' to conserve wildlife.

Notes

- 1 'Harvest' is a term widely used by state institutions, hunters, and hunting organizations primarily to mean killing an animal for food. The majority of hunters perceive it as a term that is more acceptable to non-hunters – a way to highlight hunting as a source of food similar to farm animals and plant crops, and a response to criticisms of hunting as a cruel activity.
- 2 In this chapter, I will use the terms 'sportsman' and 'sportsmen' to refer to both men and women hunters, as that is how it mainly is used by members of the community.
- 3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2N0Utg7KYE>.

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The reworking of evangelical Christian ecocultural identity in the Creation Care movement

Emma Frances Bloomfield

In this chapter, I illustrate ways Christianity is both a source of support for and opposition to environmentalism. In the process, I aim to complicate strict deterministic associations between faith and environmental attitudes. In his influential article in *Science* half a century ago, titled ‘The historical roots of our ecologic crisis,’ American historian Lynn White Jr. (1967) argued the Judeo-Christian faith justifies the human abandonment of nature, noting the Bible decrees ‘it is God’s will that man [*sic*] exploit nature for his [*sic*] proper ends’ (p. 52). There is considerable evidence aligned with White’s characterization of the exploitative relationship between Christianity and environment and, it would follow, environmentalism. Currently, some Christians oppose environmentalism because they see the movement’s goals as synonymous with anti-religious values (McCammack, 2007) and, at the same time, some see climate disruption as a sign of Jesus’s second coming and thus welcome its occurrence (Barker & Bearce, 2013). But such a strict deterministic association currently is being disrupted by the Creation Care movement, which primarily comprises Evangelical Christians and encourages Christians to rethink anthropocentric readings of the Bible.

The Creation Care movement, I argue, reinterprets Christian tenets by blending them with ecocentric beliefs and, in the process, constructs an ecologically ‘restorative discourse’ (Milstein, 2012, p. 162) as a unique facet of Christian identity. I define the Creation Care movement as ecocentric because it unites the value Christians place on God’s word with the value of God’s world. Although the Creation Care movement uses Christian vocabulary, the movement’s members employ those terms in service of ecocentric beliefs and behaviors in ways that are distinct from many other Christians. If we consider religion as the ‘sacralization of identity’ (Mol, 1977, p. 1), the inclusion of ecocentric interpretations in Christianity represents an innovative formation of sacred environmentalism. The Creation Care movement thus reworks Christian values and verses to foster a perspective that stewardship – the act of taking care of the world – is an integral component of discipleship, the act of following and spreading of one’s faith. Such a reworking is preliminary to fostering ecocentric behaviors and redefining what it means to be a Christian in the midst of climate crisis.

This chapter complements established knowledge on official environmental discourse within Evangelical Christianity (e.g., Danielsen, 2013; McCammack, 2007; Prelli & Winters, 2009;

Wilkinson, 2012) by delving into the Creation Care identity in members' own words. Milstein and colleagues (2011), drawing on Carbaugh (1996), discuss the 'importance of specific community-based case studies' as they add to scholarly knowledge about the nuances of particular ecocultural meaning systems, knowledges, and communication (p. 488). Specifically, Danielsen (2013) calls for additional research into Creation Care members and Carr, Patterson, and Young (2012) point out that research about Creation Care members 'in their own words is particularly uncommon' (p. 277). Some scholars have begun this important work, and I hope to contribute to it by using a multimodal approach to analyze Creation Care members' discourse (e.g., Arthur, 2008; Carr et al., 2012). I employ survey scales to explore respondents' demographics, characteristics, and beliefs, and use rhetorical criticism to analyze their open-ended responses to analyze how Creation Care members make sense of their multidimensional ecocultural identities.

The Creation Care movement provides an opportunity to interrogate how competing identities can be combined to construct a coherent religious environmental identity. Similar to Milstein and Dickinson's (2012) examination of the 'dialectical pulls within environmental discourses' (p. 511), I examine the Creation Care movement through a series of tensions between traditional tenets of Christianity and ecocentric interpretations. In addition to exploring the Creation Care movement for its scholarly contributions to understanding blended ecocultural identities, it is my hope this analysis can shed light on how varying hermeneutics, or biblical interpretations, offer productive opportunities for seeing cooperation even in the most seemingly incompatible ideologies. Although some scholars have denounced the Creation Care movement for failing to 'green' all Christians (e.g., Clements et al., 2014; Konisky, 2018), I take issue with the assertion that ecocultural identities only are important or meaningful if they constitute a majority or consensus. The increased attention to the Creation Care movement and its prominence in public deliberation, media coverage, and social, political, and environmental spaces complicates traditional assumptions that Christianity necessarily leads to anti-environmentalism; the movement's prominence offers opportunities to explore new prospects to engage an ever-growing circle of environmental advocates. This analysis of the Creation Care movement should also prompt additional scholarly attention to the rhetorical aspects of intersectional ecocultural identities.

In what follows, I give a brief history of the Creation Care movement in the United States and describe my methodology. Then, I analyze important themes in the study results through three emergent tensions: duty and dominion, unification and separation, and hope and fatalism. These tensions are of value to ecocultural identity studies as they encompass foundational attitudes and beliefs about the environment, even beyond religious contexts, that may indicate the likelihood of environmental advocacy. To conclude, I describe potential partnership opportunities between religious and environmental organizations given the Creation Care movement's identification with ecocentrism.

The Creation Care movement in the religious landscape of the U.S.

The Creation Care movement is not a formal designation, but rather a term that encompasses the growth of environmental advocacy groups among U.S. Evangelicals and Christians. The movement arguably started in 1993 with the founding of the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), which describes itself as 'a ministry that educates, inspires, and mobilizes Christians in their effort to care for God's creation' (Evangelical Environmental Network, 2011, para. 1). In 2006, the EEN launched the Evangelical Climate

Initiative, a declaration signed by 86 religious leaders including Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, and Leith Anderson, then-president of the National Association of Evangelicals. The EEN currently reports its membership at 3 million people (personal communication with EEN representatives, May 18, 2018).

While this chapter focuses on Evangelical iterations of religious environmentalism, it is important to note that other organized sects and religions actively integrate ecocentrism in their theologies. For example, environmental themes are prominent in Catholic rhetoric, as featured in Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which calls for Catholics to respect the environment as a common home (Burton, 2014). The group Interfaith Power and Light started as an Episcopal-affiliated organization but now spans a variety of 'faith partners' to advocate for environmental stewardship in its 18,000 congregations across the U.S. (Root, 2016). The Sierra Club (2015) notes it has partnerships with institutional representatives from Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, among other faiths. Although the Creation Care movement does not stand alone as an ecocentric religious identity, the movement does represent a unique dimension of Evangelical Christianity, a religious denomination that is traditionally associated with anti-environmental attitudes.

Rhetorical criticism

My rhetorical analysis is rooted in Burke's (1969) dramatism and the importance of naming. Coupe (2001) argues Burke's theories place humans and nature in balance 'without privileging the former and denigrating the latter' (p. 421). Indeed, Burke (1966) argued it is language, religion, technology, and other 'tools' that 'separate' humans from our 'natural condition' (p. 13) of unification with more-than-human life. Our words categorize and, in turn, mediate our experiences; for example, common usage of the terms 'nature' or 'the environment' serves to both reflect and inform an orientation of human separation from the more-than-human world (Milstein, 2011). Milstein and Dickinson (2012) argue that dominant Western discourses create environmental hierarchies where 'lower' (other-than-human) positions 'serve the needs' of 'higher' (human) positions, which can undergird and encourage environmental exploitation (p. 526). At the same time, words also can reflect and produce a recognition of two distinct things or people as sharing common substance, a symbolic action that Burke (1970) termed consubstantiality. For example, the term 'humanature' reduces, and even erases, verbal markers of difference expressed by using the separated terms humans and nature (Milstein, 2011).

The process of naming creates organizing frameworks called 'terministic screens' (Burke, 1969, p. 337), which are assemblages of vocabulary that filter and highlight some views of the world and obfuscate others. In this sense, a terministic screen is 'a set of coordinates' that determine one's perception of appropriate beliefs and actions (Burke, 1969, p. 377). In the case of the Creation Care movement, the movement has proposed alternative interpretations of Christian terms and frameworks and have altered ways its members understand human-nature relationships. Burke (1984) argued that interpretive shifts create 'totally different pictures of reality' because they evoke 'different orders of relationships' (p. 36). I explore how the Creation Care terministic screens reorder relations among the Christian God, human life, and non-human life, and reimagine the Christian Bible as a source of ecological restoration.

Burke (1970) argued the underlying motivation for human action is the removal of guilt, which stems from pollution – in the case of this study, literal environmental degradation. People can take three different paths to cleanse guilt: scapegoating, the act of placing the guilt onto another and then, figuratively or literally, killing them; mortification, the act of placing

the guilt onto oneself and then, figuratively or literally, sacrificing oneself; or transcendence, the act of recasting the guilt into something trivial or beneficial (Brummett, 1981).

Depending on the terministic screen guiding one's reality, some of these paths may be more difficult to access than others. For example, countries most responsible for climate disruption may be identified as scapegoats who should bear the most burden for correcting our climate crisis. While they are not responsible for the totality of our climate crises, in this case they are for the majority and thus become the symbolic vessel onto which the entire burden is placed (Klumpp & Hollihan, 1979). This framing requires countries who are producing the most fossil fuels to participate in mortification, or the recognition of their contribution to the climate crisis and of their duty to setting the environmental order right. This terministic screen of climate justice, or the idea it is morally reprehensible for those least responsible for climate disruption to suffer the most from it, promotes behaviors of sacrifice and mortification. Examining how guilt and responsibility emerge in Creation Care members' stories can help illuminate their attitudes and orientations towards collective and societal crises, and the role they see themselves playing in the environmental movement.

Methodology

To study the guiding values associated with the Creation Care movement, I reached out to two organizations that identify as Creation Care groups as origin points for snowball sampling, asking them to share the study questionnaire with other groups. The first group, Young Evangelicals for Climate Action (YECA), formed in 2012 to mobilize the youth in environmental engagement as an offshoot of the EEN. The second group, Restoring Eden, was founded in 2003 and advocates that the next generation of Christians should 'integrate their faith and their love of the creation into visible advocacy' (Illyn, 2003, para. 11). While I surveyed YECA and Restoring Eden directly, the questionnaire also received responses from dozens of active Creation Care members across the U.S. involved in other national groups such as Blessed Earth, the EEN, Interfaith Power and Light, and Interfaith Moral Action on Climate, as well as local and regional groups. Evangelical Christians accounted for 90 percent of respondents, with 5 percent of respondents identifying as Catholic and 5 percent identifying as agnostic or atheist. Although a small percentage of survey members did not identify as Evangelicals or as Christians, all respondents identified as part of the Creation Care movement, indicating the movement's resonance beyond its immediate Evangelical audience. The questionnaire had three sections: demographics, political opinions, and open-ended responses.

Results showed there were no significant differences in the gender of respondents (54 percent male and 46 percent female) and respondents had an average age of 41. Despite the survey questionnaire being distributed primarily through two youth-focused mailing lists, respondents ranged from 21 to 74 years old, likely due to snowballing sampling to non-youth-oriented lists. While some scholars argue youth are more actively engaged in environmental advocacy than older generations (e.g., Carlisle & Clark, 2018; Prelli & Winters, 2009), results from this survey provide evidence the Creation Care movement has active membership across multiple generations. Respondents' demographics were highly skewed racially: 94 percent of respondents identified as Caucasian, which is consistent with racial demographics of the larger Evangelical population being primarily Caucasian (Pew Research Center, 2015b). Survey-takers were politically active, with 90 percent voting in national elections and 80 percent voting in local elections, which supports the consideration of Creation Care members as influential political actors.

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their political orientation (Pew Research Center, 2012), opinions on human–nature relationships, knowledge of climate disruption, and fatalistic attitudes. Fatalism is defined as how much power respondents believe they have to influence future events (Leiserowitz, 2006). The fatalism scale in Leiserowitz’s study achieved an internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) of 0.71 and this survey found a comparable 0.68, meaning that the scale items are relatively consistent in measuring the proposed construct of fatalism. In addition to these scales, respondents were asked 11 open-ended questions to delve deeper into their perspectives about their membership in the Creation Care movement, their Christian identity, and their environmental beliefs.

Performative tensions in a Christian ecocentric identity

In the following sections, I interpretively group Creation Care member responses under three tensions (duty–dominion, unification–separation, hope–fatalism) that represent the negotiation members undertake in constructing and performing their religious environmental identity. Their responses respect traditional Christian beliefs but also show adaptation of those beliefs to make room for a faith-informed eco-consciousness. Notably, their responses reflect ecocentric values but the discourse they use to define those values still reifies the human–nature binary found in traditional Christian discourse. While the three paired tensions blend together as interconnected facets of the Creation Care identity, I separate them here to highlight important implications of each tension and how they emerge in members’ responses.

Duty and dominion

A Bible verse often referenced as evidence for Christianity’s anti-environmental stance (White, 1967) is Genesis 1:26, which states, ‘Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may *rule over* the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground”’ (New International Version, emphasis added). Genesis 1:26 can be interpreted as God’s will that humans dominate, conquer, and tame the environment (Wilkinson, 2012). A literal interpretation of this verse may stem from and contribute to a terministic screen where the Earth and its non-human inhabitants are tools that humanity can and should exploit. Only a few verses away, the dominion interpretation is challenged by Genesis 2:15, which reads, ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and *take care of it*’ (New International Version, emphasis added).

The present study’s questionnaire asked Creation Care respondents to describe their interpretation of Genesis 1:26 and 2:15. Creation Care members largely interpreted the verses as compatible. For example, one respondent wrote that Genesis 2:15 is a picture of what ‘Godly dominion can look like.’ Instead of reading dominion as ‘carte blanche permission to do what we want with creation,’ another respondent argued dominion should be interpreted as a call to be ‘gardeners’ and not ‘conquerors’ of the Earth. Another respondent noted that when ‘properly interpreted,’ dominion means to ‘protect and serve the natural world.’ The hierarchy implied by dominion is thus reversed through the Creation Care terministic screen, with humans being beholden to the wellbeing of the Earth instead of ruling over it.

When interpreting dominion, Creation Care members found a sense of duty and obligation. One respondent noted that dominion ‘means that we will be held to account by God

for how we manage his creation.’ The words ‘accountable,’ ‘judged,’ and ‘expectations’ appeared multiple times in responses, which framed dominion as a sacred task God has given humanity. For Creation Care members, to care for the Earth is ‘an act of discipleship’ where ‘to fail to do so is sin.’ Creation Care members do not disparage or ignore Genesis 1:26; they interpret it through a terministic screen where the word dominion takes on new meaning as a call to engage in cooperative, mutually beneficial acts with nature, which they view as a separate, but still important, part of God’s creation. Where traditional Christian associations see environmentalism as meaningless or tangential, Creation Care members recast environmentalism as a sacred charge.

Respondents connected caring for creation to other Christian values such as the pro-life movement and ministry to the poor. While these topics serve to link the Creation Care movement productively within the existing values of Christianity, they also shift the focus. Expanding the pro-life label associated with abortion, Creation Care respondents discussed caring for all stages of life, sometimes called the ‘womb to tomb’ interpretation of being pro-life (Thomas, 2014, para. 5). Many respondents connected the fate of the Earth to future generations. For example, one respondent noted, ‘Taking care of the planet’s ability to sustain life is my way of being pro-life.’ Another argued that we need to take care of the Earth ‘to keep it sustaining resources for future generations.’ Creation Care members stated that they were largely concerned with caring for the Earth as a way to create an Earth capable of providing ‘meat, energy, land, water, and other resources.’ In protecting the Earth, Creation Care members support the use of the Earth as resources to protect present and future *human* life, further reinforcing traditional hierarchies where human life is valued over non-human life.

Creation Care members’ responses also referenced the Christian duty to care for the poor. One respondent argued it is unfair that ‘first world’ countries, which have caused the most harm to the environment, will not be affected to the same extent as ‘third world, poorer countries that depend more directly on the land for food and sustenance.’ Respondents largely shared this opinion, with one respondent describing the Christian duty to care for ‘the weak and helpless,’ which they further noted should include care for ‘endangered species.’ Caring for the Earth and non-human animal life thus becomes an act of righting the scales of climate justice. When asked about how to mitigate climate disruption, respondents placed guilt on ‘fossil fuel industries,’ ‘First World countries,’ and ‘governments.’ Creation Care members considered it appropriate for those parties to ‘bear the cost’ as the primary producers of greenhouse gases. One respondent went so far as to hope that members of the ‘Fossil Fuel Lobby... rot in whatever Hell awaits.’ This process of identifying industry, governments, and Western countries as appropriate sacrificial vessels reflects the Creation Care members’ respect for justice and fairness where those who caused the pollution should bear the heaviest burden.

Despite Creation Care members’ tendency to condemn the worst polluters and carbon emitters, they also shared a sense of collective responsibility for environmental problems. Respondents noted that all people produce carbon emissions, albeit some far more than others, so humanity, in general, is at least somewhat responsible for climate disruption. This rhetorical move can be classified as a type of universal mortification, whereby guilt becomes the burden of society at large. One respondent noted, ‘we should all share the burden’ and ‘every human [is] responsible,’ echoing Prelli and Winters (2009) description of green Evangelicals as working to ‘rectify humans’ sinful degradation of creation’ (p. 231). Creation Care members actively recognized their personal contributions to the climate crisis, such as the ‘egregious and sinful’ human behaviors of ‘greed and hubris.’

Burke (1970) described mortification as ‘an extreme form of “self-control” through which one eliminates personal behaviors that ‘one thinks of as unruly’ (p. 190). By

eliminating what I refer to as climate sins in themselves and humanity as a whole, Creation Care members told a story about collective ‘social responsibility’ that implicates humanity as a whole and fossil fuel industries in particular (Anderson, 2012, p. 409). The notion of universal mortification both cuts against and works with notions of climate justice. On one hand, citing collective responsibility places a burden on those disproportionately damaged by climate disruption to have an equal role in its mitigation and resolution. On the other, collective responsibility also functions to include Westernized democracies, industry, and governments as responsible for sacrifice and engagement.

The Creation Care story of universal mortification is a markedly different story than the one told by Evangelicals and the general public who may doubt, deny, or remain apathetic toward our climate crisis. Jones, Cox, and Navarro-Rivera (2014) found that 64 percent of people who believe climate change is happening ‘say that major sacrifices will have to be made in order to solve the climate change problem’ (para. 14). Creation Care members, however, all shared a collective belief that everyone should be willing to make sacrifices, noting their own dedication of time and money to their local churches to promote environmental advocacy programs (such as cleaning parks and beaches as a church group), taking personal actions such as recycling and carpooling, and recruiting friends and family to participate in volunteer events. Because Creation Care members direct their feelings of personal responsibility toward action and advocacy, they create a ‘clear path to atonement’ that can mediate guilt’s otherwise paralyzing qualities (Dannenberg et al., 2013, p. 223).

While most of these actions are oriented toward private instead of public activism, Creation Care respondents did make conscious choices to consider the environmentally damaging consequences of their actions and behaviors, and adjusted accordingly. What was rarely present, however, in Creation Care members’ responses was a clear plan for how to cleanse the guilt from fossil fuel industries and Westernized democracies. Creation Care members are ready to point fingers at the most responsible, but they appear to see themselves as easier to change and focus on their own role in climate disruption, which potentially undermines their support for climate justice in their failing to address larger political players.

Creation Care members’ discourse also carried the marks of dominion and anthropocentrism that ‘other’ nature from its proper place in human–nature relationships. For example, respondents repeatedly described the Earth as an object. One respondent called the Earth a ‘temporary home’ and a ‘gift.’ Although the respondent noted that homes and gifts should be ‘treasured’ and not ‘destroyed,’ such framings position the Earth as a non-living thing to be used for the benefit of humanity. Another respondent argued that not taking care of the Earth is akin to ‘borrowing something from a friend and then returning it broken or soiled.’ The Earth is again referred to as a thing and the soiling of it appears to be sinful because it damages one’s relationship with God, who lent the object, and not that the object itself is intrinsically valuable. Creation Care members’ responses thus reflect a dynamic tension between having a duty to the Earth while still retaining some of Christianity’s anthropocentric language of dominion that perpetuates the binary framing of human and non-human life.

Unification and separation

The hierarchy of humans over non-human life expressed in Genesis 1:26 contributes to a terministic screen of separation. This same tendency to separate appears in the relationship between science and religion, which guides some Christians to be wary of climate science and its conclusions (McCammack, 2007). For example, the Pew Research Center (2015a) reported the majority of Catholics (59 percent) and Protestants (55 percent) view

science and religion as ‘often in conflict.’ This is not a uniquely Christian belief, as surveys show that 54 percent of the U.S. population consider science and religion to be ‘in conflict’ (Jones et al., 2014, para. 34). When asked about science and religion, however, no Creation Care respondents reported conflict between them, which distinguishes their religious identity and terministic screen as one that embraces climate science as compatible with the Bible.

For example, one respondent characterized the Earth and the Bible as vehicles for the voice of God, noting, ‘the Lord speaks both through natural revelation and through His word.’ Another respondent wrote that people may get information from either source, but ‘together they give a much richer story.’ In considering the Earth and the Bible as parts of the same story, Creation Care members unify them as valuable aspects of creation. Another respondent argued, ‘Science is an explanation of how God works,’ implying that by studying and understanding the Earth, humans create new knowledge about their faith.

Because they approach human–nature through a religious lens, many of the justifications for their beliefs link back to their religious identity. ‘Nature’ thus becomes infused with value because God made it and studying it helps them learn more about God and their position in the Christian narrative. There was only one respondent that deviated slightly from this consensus, who wrote that science and religion are compatible but ‘sometimes cranky with each other.’ This statement reflects a personification of science and religion as people who sometimes disagree and have emotional states onto themselves, but are still, on-the-whole, like-minded companions.

Respondents also used personification to describe the Earth as a child of God. One respondent referred to all life, human and non-human, as ‘brothers and sisters’ born of God, the Father. One respondent argued humanity and the Earth are consubstantial: ‘God made man [*sic*] from the same materials he used to create animals.’ Another noted that, while humans ‘may be the crown of creation, we are closer to the rest of creation than to God.’ These responses show an appreciation for the shared substance of the Earth, non-human animal life, and human life through their divine ancestry. While plant life was not explicitly mentioned as important, some respondents discussed preserving and honoring the beauty of ‘God’s creation,’ such as natural landscapes. Some Creation Care respondents used terminology that united life under the same generative act: ‘God created humans as part of the whole creation.’

Milstein and Dickinson (2012) illustrate ways the sometimes problematic labeling of Earth as ‘mother nature’ and ‘mother Earth’ in Western cultures (in contrast to such naming practices in some Indigenous cultures) can produce tensions between the inclusion of foregrounded feminine framing versus dominant and unchanged androcentric practices that exploit and discount the Earth (p. 526). Echoing Creation Care discourse about the Earth as an object, the overlaps between the exploitation of women and the exploitation of nature are ever-present in Christian discourse. Instead of viewing the Earth as a mother, however, Creation Care members used the vocabulary of siblings, exchanging a potentially exploitative relationship for one that represents humans and the Earth as sharing the substance of divine parents. Pope Francis echoed this familial swap in his encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, calling the Earth our ‘sister [who] now cries out to us’ (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, n.d., para. 2). Using this terministic screen of siblings may replace underlying exploitative associations between humans and their natural environment engendered by the framing of nature as mother.

While Creation Care members frequently referred to humans and the Earth as ‘equals,’ humans were described as unique because they were created specifically in God’s image. One respondent described humans as being ‘first among equals,’ meaning they considered human and nonhuman life to be relatively equal, but that humans still were the most

important and valuable. Through the Creation Care renegotiation of the human–nature hierarchy, humans occupy a unique place in service of God, one not held by the rest of creation. A respondent echoed this sentiment when describing humans as the ‘creature most god-like.’ At the same time, uniting humans and the more-than-human world under the same term, ‘creation,’ can foster consubstantiality and a recognition of equality and shared purpose. One respondent challenged the idea that Christians should prioritize human needs by arguing that faith is ‘about all of the cosmos – not just humankind.’ This respondent does the discursive work of uniting humans as part of a larger, equally valuable universe. Other respondents echoed this theme of unification, noting that believing that ‘all things are connected’ and valuing the ‘the balance of life’ are important components of Christianity.

Environmental scholars largely conclude that Western-dominant perspectives ‘often perceive [humans] as separate from and superior to nature,’ which is an attitude reflected in individuals’ discursive choices (Milstein & Dickinson, 2012, p. 512). Creation Care members partially challenge this hierarchy by using consubstantial terms, but their discourse still retains hierarchical markings. For example, in responding to Genesis 1:26, one respondent wrote, ‘Creatures God has created have integrity of their own apart from the use humans put them to.’ Within this thought is a complex dynamic. The response attributes value to non-human animals beyond mere utility and recognizes the innate importance of life from a common creator. But it also highlights that part of non-human animal life’s value is in its utility to human life.

Considering that traditional interpretations of Bible verses reify hierarchies, the move to recognizing the intrinsic value of non-human life is a significant ideological shift, even though it contains remnants of stratification. The Creation Care movement’s terministic screen echoes an understanding of ‘the people and the land [as] eternally connected’ (Endres, 2012, p. 335), which is prominent in other belief systems, including many Native American cosmologies and Eastern religions. The tension between unification and separation reflects the traditional biblical interpretations of God–human–non-human life hierarchies and the integration of Creation Care movement’s reframing of non-human life as valuable and meaningful. Within this reworked terministic screen, Creation Care members name and thus can envision a new future that downplays traditional Christian environmental discourses plagued by dominion, exploitation, and hierarchy.

Hope and fatalism

A fundamental Christian teaching about the planet is that true Christians will eventually leave it when Christ returns to Earth, which can be referred to by terms such as the Apocalypse and the Rapture. In some apocalyptic interpretations, the world is destroyed after Christian believers are raptured to Heaven (Barker & Bearce, 2013). Previous studies have linked apocalyptic beliefs with anti-environmental attitudes (Barker & Bearce, 2013). When asked about their belief in the Apocalypse, or their eschatology, many Creation Care respondents noted they held strong beliefs that the end would come as the Bible describes. But many of these same respondents referred to Matthew 24:36, which details that ‘only the Father’ will know the exact details of when it will happen. One respondent clarified, ‘what is important about eschatology is not *when* it will occur but *that* it will occur’ (emphasis added). Creation Care members reported they believed in the end times, but also stated they were not concerned with ‘speculating’ about specific dates and times and thought people should not ‘worry about’ the Apocalypse at the expense of the present.

Research suggests that feelings of vulnerability, helplessness, and a lack of agency, sometimes called fatalism, mediate one’s environmental beliefs (Leiserowitz, 2006). In other words, if

people consider themselves powerless to mitigate climate disruption, they will be immobilized and unwilling to even try (Salvador & Norton, 2011). Fatalism is thus linked to apathy, especially when issues such as climate disruption can be framed ‘as extra-human [and] driven by cosmic forces,’ unable to be stopped or forestalled (Foust & O’Shannon Murphy, 2009, p. 161).

Despite their eschatological beliefs, Creation Care members do not present as particularly fatalistic, an attribute ascribed to Christians who have apocalyptic beliefs (Barker & Bearce, 2013). Survey responses showed that respondents’ fatalism scores (11.47) did not differ significantly from the general U.S. public (11.79, $p > 0.05$, on a scale from 6–30). These results indicate that a belief in the Apocalypse does not necessarily result in paralysis or feelings of helplessness for Creation Care members. Instead of feeling paralyzed by the thought of an impending Apocalypse, Creation Care members find hope and inspiration in its inevitability. One respondent argued the work of the Creation Care movement is important because it ‘contributes’ to God’s work of creating and protecting life so it ‘has eternal significance.’ Another respondent noted, ‘what we do today to protect our world matters in the future.’

Despite the current obstacles to environmental protection in the United States, and their belief that Christian believers will eventually leave the Earth, Creation Care members seem not to view their actions as futile. For instance, one respondent argued that ‘meaningful action can still be taken.’ The Creation Care movement thus engages a perspective of hope, which contributes to feelings of obligation both to future generations and those left behind after the Apocalypse. One respondent wrote, ‘I am committed to the idea that if or when Jesus comes back, there is going to be plenty of clean power technology around for helping humanity proceed here on earth.’ Creation Care respondents expect to be raptured, but still want to make the world more inhabitable for those who are not raptured – and they interpret the Bible as calling them to these actions.

Some respondents felt the end of the world was imminently close. For example, one respondent said that, considering current environmental impacts, the Apocalypse ‘might already be happening.’ Another predicted ‘climate crisis could end the world as we know it’ if nothing is done. Nevertheless, far more respondents viewed the end times through a lens of renewal instead of destruction, arguing the eventual Apocalypse will cause the Earth to be ‘recreated and renewed,’ ‘refined and renewed,’ and ‘renewed and restored.’ Respondents also noted the Apocalypse will create a ‘new reality,’ start the process of ‘reconciliation,’ and produce ‘environmental restoration.’ This new reality, where previous environmental sins have been expiated, was described as a place of ‘rebirth, resurrection, and a renewal of consciousness and love.’ One respondent simply noted, ‘ends are new beginnings.’ For Creation Care members, their eschatology focuses on the redemptive aspects of the Apocalypse and positions them, through the act of mortification, as active agents who are obligated to enact change. This framework produces hope and optimism about the future, which appears to mitigate traditional correlations between apocalyptic beliefs, fatalism, and apathy toward environmental activism.

A sacred eco-consciousness

My analysis of how Creation Care members negotiate the tensions of duty and dominion, unification and separation, and hope and fatalism contributes to scholarly knowledge about the integration of religious and ecocultural identities. People who have sought out membership in – and identify with – Creation Care groups are involved in altering Christianity’s terministic screen. Despite carrying with them some remnants of othering and division, the Creation Care movement represents the hope that sacred identities can be altered and that Christianity in particular can be read as promoting ecocentric attitudes. This chapter provides evidence that some Christians are performing their own interpretations of Christian tenets to

foster a coherent eco-consciousness without abandoning their Christian identity. The Creation Care movement has spurred increased discussion about religious obligations toward the environment and has challenged traditional hermeneutic practices and deterministic assumptions about Christianity and environmentalism.

Burke (1984) argued that introducing new principles into old frameworks is incredibly difficult and is potentially destructive to the original frame. In retaining their original Christian framework and adding ecocentric components, I would characterize the Creation Care movement as participating in ‘casuistic stretching,’ by which they modify, without destroying, their old framework to make room for new information and beliefs (Burke, 1984). The Creation Care movement’s framework borrows from existing Christian vocabulary and rhetorical resources, which reinforce the separation of humans and nature, but the framework simultaneously incorporates ecocentric thinking to temper these imbalances and expand the scope of Christian stewardship. While this identity may not be considered progressive compared to the integrative work some other faiths have performed with environmentalism, it also can be argued the Creation Care movement is progressive in the sense that the movement has had to undergo a more ‘considerable enterprise’ (Burke, 1984, p. 184) in modifying Evangelical Christianity’s originating framework.

The political and social importance of the Creation Care movement is still unfolding. For now, it is rhetorically meaningful to note how the movement challenges and reworks traditional Christian relationships between humans and non-human life, creation and nature, and science and religion. Environmentalism has a strong ally in the Creation Care movement and other religious environmental groups, which are able to mobilize activists based on a blended, multidimensional understanding of the sacred importance of environmental relations. The formulation and expression of the Creation Care movement should spark hope in the scholarly community interested in ecocultural identity that new constellations of religious ecocultural identities are possible.

This inquiry also identifies advocacy gaps in Creation Care members’ discourse. As previously discussed, members participated in mortification and made sacrifices to remedy their personal role in contributing to climate disruption. However, their tendency to target fossil fuel industries and governments was not complemented by detailing concrete ways to hold these parties accountable. Scholars and environmentalists might reach out to these groups to start dialogues into ways to transform the personal, private actions of Creation Care members into more organized, concrete political engagement.

In a society plagued by climate denial and apathy, the Creation Care movement offers a corrective path that reimagines previously bifurcated belief systems as productive, emergent ecocultural identities. I do not mean to offer predictions for the movement and its growth. However, I hope that the movement’s narrative and unique positioning will spark further conversation and cooperation between faith communities and environmental movements. One Creation Care member noted that environmentalism and Christianity ‘are intertwined,’ indicating that environment advocacy, for some, is an integral part of their Christian identity.

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Navigating ecocultural Indigenous identity affinity and appropriation

Charles Carlin

‘The big lie is that we aren’t nature!’ Guides at a small non-profit organization in eastern California have adopted the phrase as their unofficial motto, a pithy summation of their effort to explore the inner workings of the human self through sojourns in wild landscapes. Guides at the school facilitate what they call nature-based rites-of-passage ceremonies, which center on four days and nights of fasting alone in desert landscapes. The school offers nearly 20 programs annually, and each includes 10 or so participants drawn to the school from around the world in order to mark major life changes, like partnership or divorce, transitions to adulthood or elderhood, or major shifts in the directions of their lives. Guides first teach a nature-based human development and psychology model that interprets major life phases and aspects of the human psyche as mirrored by the passing of the four boreal seasons. In this organic philosophy, psyche signifies not only one’s deepest sense of self, but also that one’s experience of self is produced by many nonhuman elements that extend beyond the individual (Carlin, 2017a). Participants then scatter across the desert landscape and fast alone for four days. After the fast, the group forms again and each participant tells the story of their experience, which is witnessed and reflected upon by the guides. Native American vision quest ceremonies are one important inspiration for the work (Benedict, 1922) along with Jungian psychology, systems theory, and the United States American wilderness tradition. The school’s work experientially weaves together inquiry into existential questions of life, love, and death with an experience of the world as animate or psychically alive.

For the past five years, I have conducted ethnographic research at the school. I do so from the positions of program participant, apprentice guide, and observer. As an experienced wilderness guide, I approached my first fast with a confidence that quickly evaporated in the face of anxiety and the unflinching desert landscape (Carlin, 2017b). The experience prompted me to inquire further into how retreating alone into a wild space for a time can spark dialogues that cross species boundaries and foster a sense of self as intimately connected to landscape. My inquiry is part of a long U.S. American tradition of sojourns to wild places to question and experience the immanent interconnection of self and world (Abbey, 1968; Austin, 1903; Childs, 2007; Emerson, 1849; Peacock, 1990; Turner, 1996). This study takes its place in a U.S. American wilderness tradition haunted by a politics of exclusion and

dispossession (Cronon, 1996), but that also recognizes that wild places beckon seekers who ‘hunger for a kind of experience deep enough to change our selves, our form of life’ (Turner, 1996, p. 104).¹ The wilds gnaw at the edges of the self, pulling it apart as patiently and insistently as the desert winds wear down mountains.

As I learned more about the school’s history, I became curious and anxious about its relationship to Native American mentors and spiritual traditions. Like me, most of the guides and participants are White Americans or Europeans. Are we appropriating Indigenous practices? What does it mean for a group of White people to facilitate a ceremony for mostly White participants that honors life transitions in conversation with an animate landscape? What does it mean to do so in North America, a site of ongoing colonial dispossession of Indigenous lands?

In this chapter, I delve into one narrow slice of the school’s history: the influential relationships Native American mentors had with school guides. I have left out many other influences that shape the school’s work, including Jungian psychology (Perluss, 2012), Buddhism (Davis, 1998), Christian mysticism, Gregory Bateson’s systems theory, various psychotherapeutic approaches, and ecopsychological scholars who theorize the immanent interconnection of human selves and the world (Fisher, 2013). What this chapter offers instead is a close study of how a body of practice that fosters a particular ecocultural identity – one in which the human psyche and the more-than-human landscape mirror one another – has navigated the complex and never-innocent relationship between the U.S. American wilderness tradition and colonialism. I first note trends in contemporary scholarship that draw renewed attention to Indigenous philosophies and their potential to inform efforts to address socio-ecological crisis. From places as disparate as Australia, the Brazilian Amazon, and the North American Great Plains, Indigenous activists and scholars speak from beyond the confines of Western environmental philosophy to describe a multi-natural world in which all kinds of beings participate in a single social fabric (Katz, 1997; Singer, 1974; Viveiros de Castro, 2015). Next, I narrate some of the ways school guides have been influenced by Native mentors. To do so, I draw on interviews and historical research. I then consider the broader context in which those guide-mentor encounters occurred by reviewing the parallel rise of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the largely White countercultural environmental movement. Finally, I argue that, instead of evaluating work like the school’s fasting ceremonies on the question of whether they constitute cultural appropriation, as some have done (Bendrick, 2000; Grimes, 2002), a more productive line of inquiry is to ask how ecocultural movements like this one can reckon with colonial legacies and establish lines of solidarity with socio-ecological movements around the world that insist on going beyond better resource management to reimagining humanity’s place in the ‘family of things’ (Oliver, 1992).

Ecocultural identity and animating philosophy

Naming identity as ecocultural is an assertion that identity, culture, and ecology are deeply implicated in one another, though one never strictly determines the other. We are material as well as discursive beings, of course. Nevertheless, the prejudices of conceptual worlds that presuppose a human–nature split are surprisingly sticky. For more than a century, scholars working in Eurocentric intellectual traditions have been critiquing the de-animation of the material world (Weber, 2015), exposing the mythology that enables the conceptual separation of meaning and materiality (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2001) and attempting to stitch discursive and material worlds back together again. From the American Transcendentalists (Emerson, 1849; Thoreau, 1882) to European phenomenologists (Heidegger, 1962; Husserl, 2010; Levinas, 2013; Marder, 2014; Merleau-Ponty, 2012), from Marxist critics (Katz, 1997;

Smith, 1984) to magical realist novelists (García Márquez, 1970; Murakami, 1997), thinkers struggle to remember and act as if landscapes, nonhuman animals, rocks, spirits, and others inform ecocultural identities and may be subjects in their own right. I side with prominent critics who argue that it is ‘madness’ to think the human psyche exists apart from the more-than-human world, but escaping that madness has proven to be quite difficult (Guattari, 2000; Latour, 2017; Shepard, 1982).

To escape the madness of the isolated psyche, scholars are turning to various strains of Indigenous philosophy. Instead of objectifying others, scholars increasingly ask, ‘what is it to think Native thought’ (Viveiros de Castro, 2015, p. 6), what does it mean to deploy philosophies positioned outside the traditional Western canon, to draw out their consequences? Doing so upends developmentalist approaches to comparing conceptual worlds as arranged in an historical hierarchy and instead imagines those worlds arranged spatially, as a ‘simultaneity of stories-so-far’ (Massey, 2005, p. 2). Turning to philosophical traditions that generally have not fallen into the traps of nature–society dualisms, therefore, is not looking back in time but instead asking, what does the world look like from over here?

Scholarly apprenticeships with Indigenous mentors offer one way to travel between conceptual worlds (Kohn, 2013; Viveiros de Castro, 1998). In Australia, non-Indigenous scholars and Aboriginal collaborators put animist and European philosophy in conversation with one another (Plumwood, 2013; van Dooren et al., 2016; van Dooren & Rose, 2016). Other scholars, however, argue there are limits to such apprenticeships and that dialogues across conceptual worlds involve feats of translation and imagination that never quite achieve meta-physical transformation (de la Cadena, 2015). One might learn what it is to inhabit another’s world, but experience of that world will always be mediated by an embodied or conceptual interpreter, which suggests a limit to the malleability of one’s ecocultural identity.

Non-specialist efforts to travel between conceptual worlds are less well-studied. Though, when Indigenous mentors work with non-Indigenous tourists, for example, the outsiders’ efforts to experience and appreciate an animate world often are written off as ‘New Age’ (de la Cadena, 2015, p. 25), which usually is code for cultural appropriation or commodification of spirituality (Aldred, 2000). There are exceptions, including scholars who describe New Age spirituality as an ‘attunement’ to landscape that softens the Cartesian self (Ivakhiv, 2003). Much scholarship to date, however, focuses on the naiveté of participants and derisively labels Indigenous people who share such teachings with largely White audiences as plastic medicine men or White shamans (Aldred, 2000; Churchill, 2003; Rose, 1992). In contrast, the history of the School of Lost Borders offers a rich story of one non-specialist setting in which so-called Western and Native worlds come together. I say ‘so-called’ because, while categories like Western and Native are convenient signifiers, their division doesn’t hold up under critical scrutiny, a point I’ll return to later in the chapter. Delving into the history of the School of Lost Borders reveals compelling texture and depth underneath what might at first look like spiritual tourism or romanticizing Indigenous culture as a foil to the failings of contemporary America. The stories told below demonstrate how lines of affinity formed across conceptual and lived worlds to develop a practice that encourages an ecocultural identity recognizing the world as animate and the self as emergent from that animate world.

The mentors

The school’s founders, Steven Foster and Meredith Little, became inspired to lead fasting ceremonies in wild places together after staffing a suicide prevention hotline. Little says:

a lot of the people that were phoning in, they didn't want to die. They wanted to die to what their life had been. They were caught in the underworld. But, they wanted to move into a new way of being. So we began to talk about meaningful rites of passage ceremonies.

(Little, 2016)

Foster had already been thinking about rites of passage in other ways. He was an English professor, and he loved epic poems like Homer's *Odyssey* (2012) that told stories of rites of passage and initiation. As Foster and Little began to experiment leading fasting ceremonies, they undertook a years-long research process into rites of passage traditions around the world (Mahdi et al., 1994), from which they derived the basic structure of their work. After they had been leading programs in wild places for several years, they and their guides forged influential relationships with Native American mentors who helped shape their work. Three of those relationships are described below.

Hyemeyohsts Storm

While Foster and Little were developing their practice, accounts of Native American spirituality were receiving increased attention through the reissue of Black Elk and Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* (1961), a first-person account of Lakota spiritual traditions, and Hyemeyohsts Storm's *Seven Arrows* (1972), which introduced and popularized the medicine wheel as a framework for philosophy and spirituality to White and urban-Native American audiences (Deloria, 2003; Jaeger, 1980). Medicine wheels are nature-based models of spirituality or philosophy most often associated with Indigenous nations from the American Great Plains. Storm's book was controversial, to say the least. Critics attacked Storm for 'vulgarizing one of the most beautiful but least known religions of Man,' but prominent scholars also defended the book as an 'important development in Indian literature' (Jaeger, 1980, p. 17). Some claimed that Storm's Native American ancestry was false (Carroll, 2007), while others say it was confirmed (Sayre, 1994). The controversy over Storm's writing was an expression of ongoing debates about authority, permission, and verification. Storm's description of what he claims are traditional Cheyenne ways ran afoul of the Cheyenne Tribal council who argued he was not authorized to speak for the Cheyenne people as a whole (Sturtevant, 1973). Storm imagined himself as working in an oral tradition where stories morph and change over time, while his critics pointed to ways his writing deviated from the written historical or ethnographic record as evidence that his claims were false. Such arguments point to the complexities of agency and voice in a colonial context where tradition has to be defended against appropriation, but in which that same act of defense can lead to strictly policing who may speak.

Foster and Little reached out to Storm before they published *The Book of the Vision Quest* (1980), because his work had shaped their thinking for that book and they hoped he would write a blurb for the book's dust jacket. Storm was eager to meet them and for the next several years he often would visit Foster and Little. Storm would sit at their kitchen table late into the night teaching countless medicine wheel models. One wheel, called the four shields of human nature, grabbed Little and Foster's attention. In it, major life phases are associated with the cardinal directions and the passing of the boreal seasons. What Storm offered as a brief 15-minute teaching, Foster and Little developed into a philosophical system for understanding the human experience of psyche as immersed in an animate world (Foster & Little, 1999). Foster and Little later parted ways with Storm

when they moved the school to a different part of California, but they have always cited him when they teach the four shields of human nature despite the controversy that swirls around him.

Grandpa Raymond Stone

When Foster and Little moved the school to a small town in California called Big Pine, tucked between the Sierra Nevada and Inyo mountains, a friend advised them to find the area's Native elders and ask for permission to do their work there. The area is historically Paiute country, and Little and Foster learned the local elder was Grandpa Raymond Stone. He ran sweat lodge ceremonies in his backyard and described himself as an 'Indian doctor.' Stone also took people into the mountains to fast. Little and Foster took him some gifts and sat down to talk with him. Little said:

He let us know that it would not be okay to do a sweat lodge, but that we could certainly do our work and take [people] into the mountains [to fast]. He was completely supportive and said to us again and again, 'you do it your way, these are your people. Don't do it my way, you're not a Paiute, you do it your way.' And he liked the way we were doing it.

(Little, 2016)

She went on to say, 'Storm had come along at a key moment in our lives, but Grandpa Raymond was the one who taught us about the Indigenous way of perceiving the world like no one else.' Stone would sometimes ask her to be the 'interpreter' in his sweat lodge. If he had a question for an animal guide with whom he worked, he would ask Little to listen for the answer. This meant, she says:

If he wanted to speak with Bear, he asked me to ask Bear the questions, and I was to tell him what Bear said. This took an enormous amount of trust for me to get out of the way and listen for what instantly came. This was a big deepening in my relationship with the land around me, and with life itself. Having the opportunity to practice asking and listening, and to do it with someone who immediately took whatever 'Bear says' as absolute, and who used it in a good way, really helped me trust that inborn ability to communicate without the mind [and to instead listen to the more-than-human world].

(Little & Foster, 2018, p. 99)

Little took this learning to listen to non-human languages beyond Stone's sweat lodge ceremonies, and it came to deeply inform the practice of interpretive listening she and Foster developed to witness participants' stories after their fasts. This interpretive listening, what they call mirroring, has become the guide's way of honoring the participant's experience and helping them meditate on its meaning. Little and other guides insist mirroring is not about the guide's interpretation but is a practice more akin to 'midwifery:' the guide's responsibility is to help the story be born in such a way that the participant can see the magic in their own story (Lentz-Snow, 2017). 'What we really got [from Stone],' Little says, 'is that it's not about us, it's the ceremony and it's the land.' The challenge is to reflect the story back to the participant without shaping it too much, just as Little practiced doing with Bear in Stone's lodge.

Stone's work was not without its own controversy. 'When he fasted to become an "Indian doctor",' Little says, 'the spirits told him that he was to let in anyone who came to

the door of his lodge.’ Many non-Native people came to attend his sweat lodge ceremonies, which angered some members of the local Paiute community who thought the ceremonies should be limited to Indigenous participants. Little and Foster also found their work judged by attendees of Stone’s sweats, but the judgement came from his White attendees who would criticize them for not running their ceremony in the ‘traditional’ way or for not having Native guides. As Little puts it, the White critics were ‘way more moralistic than Grandpa Raymond was,’ which ultimately became part of the reason they stopped taking their participants to his lodge.

Sun Bear and Joseph

Vincent LaDuke was born in 1929 into the Anishinabe nation on their reservation in northern Minnesota. He worked as an actor in mid-century television shows like *Broken Arrow*, but is perhaps best known as activist Winona LaDuke’s father (Silverstone, 2001). In 1971, he formed the Bear Tribe Medicine Society in eastern Washington and became known as Sun Bear. The Bear Tribe hosted apprentices and offered workshops to mostly White North American and European audiences. Sun Bear’s goal was to bring Native American teachings to non-Native audiences, and he argued that doing so was essential in order to inform an Earth-based spirituality capable of responding to the environmental crisis (Sun Bear & Wabun Wind, 1980; Sun Bear et al., 1991). Like Storm, Sun Bear attracted a lot of negative attention, especially from the American Indian Movement, which famously issued a ‘declaration of war’ against him and other ‘plastic shamans’ for sharing and selling Native American ceremonies (Churchill, 2003, pp. 332–333).

Joseph is one of the senior guides at the School of Lost Borders, and he has guided fasts for more than 20 years. He lived and worked at the Bear Tribe for five years where he learned from the Bear Tribe’s teachers to lead pipe and sweat lodge ceremonies. Joseph says, ‘it was hugely opening for me.... [The Bear Tribe] represented my first exposure to land-based ceremony,’ by which he means ceremonies grounded in landscapes understood to be both materially and spiritually alive. But his time at the Bear Tribe also sparked grief and doubt:

The core wound that came out of that for me was that I felt this deep, deep sadness that I didn’t know my lineage at all. I felt the richness of what Sun Bear was talking about, the incredible history and connection of the Native people who came there as teachers.

But Joseph felt a certain distance from those teachers:

I could feel the disconnect when I was having a conversation with somebody who was really steeped in the lineage that they came from. I could love it, I could get excited about it, but I didn’t know it in my bones. It was almost as if we were speaking two different languages. And that’s a beautiful thing.

In the sadness and the beauty that Joseph felt in his relationships with teachers at the Bear Tribe, one perceives the tension of continuity and difference in the broader effort to develop an ecocultural identity in conversation with land-based traditions, but without that same historical connection to place. In simultaneously feeling both sadness and beauty, Joseph laments the disconnect with his own lineage while appreciating the perspective of those who

can speak from that standpoint. When he went to work with Little and Foster, Joseph began to develop his own ecocultural identity through the practice of ceremony at the School of Lost Borders, which he was drawn to in part because he experienced their framework as open enough to engage people from many diverse ecocultural traditions.

By the late 1980s, Foster and Little were recognized as experts in nature-based rites of passage by community leaders, other practitioners, and scholars (Foster & Little, 1996; Plotkin, 2010; Squatriglia & Writer, 2003). The Bear Tribe sent their teachers, Joseph included, to the School of Lost Borders to train to facilitate fasting ceremonies. It was at the school that Joseph began transforming his experiences with the Bear Tribe into work that he could feel comfortable with in the context of his own ecocultural identity. Doing so allowed him to clarify his own discomfort in the Bear Tribe:

I got so much healing from learning about the pipe ceremony and being in the sweat lodge, but I also felt the great weight and guilt of permission. Even though I was getting permission [from teachers at the Bear Tribe], I still didn't feel that in my heart.

Joseph was aware of the broader politics of the sweat and pipe ceremonies, which led him to find his own way with land-based ceremony. After he trained with Foster and Little, Joseph stopped practicing the ceremonies he learned at the Bear Tribe and focused on facilitating fasts with Foster and Little. He says, 'the only thing I can offer the wounding and the misappropriation [of Native culture] is to just let those ceremonies go.' While fasting in the desert, he buried his pipe as a symbol of that severance. With Foster and Little, Joseph could work in the spirit taught by his mentors at the Bear Tribe – ceremonial practices borne out of a longstanding connection to land – but could do so in a way that felt better tuned to his own history and ecocultural identity.

Authority and appropriation

To a generous reader, these glimpses of the school's history may read as earnest attempts to develop an ecocultural identity that emerges from a ceremonial relationship with an animate landscape. More critical readers may wonder about a century of contentious debates about permission, authority, authenticity, and power that lie underneath the specific history of the school. Next, I consider the context in which the school's work arose that impacted the debates and tensions around permission and cultural appropriation that course through the specific vignettes described above.

When the school was developing in the 1970s and 1980s, there were important convergences and disconnects arising between the mostly White U.S. counter-culture and environmental movements and a resurgent Native American politics of resistance. 1970 marked the first Earth Day celebration, and was also the year American Indian Movement (AIM) activists and others occupied Alcatraz Island off the coast of California to draw attention to treaty violations and the outrageous impoverishment suffered by Native Americans. Between 1968 and 1978 the U.S. Congress passed landmark environmental legislation that included founding the Environmental Protection Agency. During that same decade, Native American activists organized in response to ongoing dispossession of tribal lands from which valuable resources were extracted. While AIM was met with violent persecution, environmentalists celebrated policy victories (see Johansen, 2013; Matthiessen, 1983).

Despite environmental regulatory progress that is nearly unfathomable in the contemporary U.S. political climate, many saw legislative action as an inadequate solution to environmental

problems. What was needed, critics argued, was not just effective environmental management but a reconsideration of what it is to be human, what nature is, and the ethical bonds that tie the two together (Roszak, 1969, 1992; Shepard, 1982). Interest in Native American spiritual traditions surged (Krech, 2000). Sun Bear's mission to 'reach out and help all people relate better to the Earth Mother' (Sun Bear & Wabun Wind, 1980, p. 4), and Storm's message that 'all things... have spirit and life, including the rivers, rocks, earth, sky, plants, and animals' (Storm, 1972, p. 5), found an eager audience.

At the same time, and with far less support from Whites, AIM, as a direct action political movement, confronted the ongoing process of colonization that left many Native Americans desperately poor and bereft of vital cultural traditions (Matthiessen, 1983). The movement reached a violent zenith during the 1975 occupation of Wounded Knee in South Dakota, the site of a violent massacre of Native Americans by White soldiers a century before. AIM activists also sought a spiritual foundation for their work. Founder Dennis Banks said in a documentary interview, 'I needed to understand spirituality, I needed something to grasp onto' (*A Good Day to Die*, 2011). Sweat lodge and pipe ceremonies became important spiritual practices for AIM, and those practices helped AIM activists emphasize their difference from White society. AIM leaders also invoked Mother Earth in a more militant way than Sun Bear or Storm. Russel Means, a prominent AIM leader, said, 'Mother Earth has been abused... Mother Earth will retaliate, the whole environment will retaliate, and the abusers will be eliminated' (Gill, 1987, p. 1). While Sun Bear hoped for a spiritual awakening that would draw people together in service of an animate world, Means hoped that same living planet would bring down colonialism. Tensions quickly rose between AIM activists and people who identified with the largely White environmentalist counterculture.

What further complicates this history is that as each group – the counterculture environmentalists and those allied with AIM – sought authentic and meaningful alternatives to capitalist constructions of nature and colonial politics, and turned to philosophies and practices that themselves were emergent from the endless reflection and diffraction of projection, differentiation, fantasy, and exploitation that have shaped colonial violence and resistance in North America. Both groups had to reckon with the fact there is no clear 'outside' to colonialism in North America.

Beyond orientalism, the projection of one culture's shadow onto an artificially constructed other (Said, 2006), White and Native worlds in North America might better be described as 'profoundly implicated in each other' (Taussig, 1993, p. 249). The two distinct worlds transformed into 'borderland,' a place 'where Self and Other paw at the ghostly imaginings of each other's powers' (Taussig, 1993, p. 249). The traditional ceremonies that AIM turned to and that crossover figures like Sun Bear and Storm most often carried with them to White audiences – the pipe ceremony, the vision quest, the sun dance – were themselves travelers, their modern incarnations produced in part by colonial violence and the Indigenous diaspora that traveled in its wake. A brief foray into how those ceremonies traveled from their Lakota home to far-flung places like Grandpa Raymond's backyard in eastern California offers some additional context for understanding the divergent ways the ceremonies were taken up and defended in the late twentieth century.

As the genocide and displacement of Native American communities intensified in the second half of the nineteenth century, a 'pan-Indian' ecocultural identity began to emerge (Deloria, 2007). Native American interlocutors, who worked to speak across worlds in order to make their philosophies and spiritualities legible and accessible to non-Native audiences, sometimes strategically deployed a pan-cultural identity that flattened differences between Native nations by contrasting a land-based Native ecocultural identity with

dominant White culture (see Black Elk & Neihardt, 1961; Eastman, 1914; Gill, 1987; Neihardt & Black Elk, 1984). Further, citizens of many Native nations experienced similar hardships as they were forced off their land and onto reservations. Shared ceremonial practices became a way to build bonds of solidarity across nations, reflecting common ecocultural identity commitments. The sweat lodge, vision quest, and sun dance ceremonies began to travel beyond the Lakota communities that had stewarded them for centuries, and the ceremonies became emblematic traditions of this new pan-Indian ecocultural identity that arose across the continent. Prominent Lakota writers also sometimes encouraged non-Natives to practice the ceremonies in an attempt to ensure their survival under colonial rule in addition to a belief that ‘these ceremonies do not belong to Indians alone. They can be done by all who have the right attitude’ (Fools Crow, in Owen, 2008, p. 54). Colonial violence was thus an impetus for translating the ceremonies for other worlds and a means of preserving and protecting a Native ecocultural identity that crossed national and ontological borders.

In the 1970s, when AIM activists claimed the pipe ceremony, sweat lodge, and other ceremonies as part of their expression of a newly politicized Native identity, they loudly advocated for limiting practice of the ceremonies to ethnically Native communities (Owen, 2008). Less than two decades earlier, when future AIM activists like Leonard Peltier first participated in the sun dance ceremony, practice of the ceremony was still illegal in the U.S., so their practice came to represent resistance to cultural and material death (Matthiesen, 1978, p. 47). There was never consensus among Native American communities beyond AIM on limiting non-Native participation in ceremonies, but colorful and vociferous polemics from AIM and allied scholars about ‘spiritual hucksterism’ and ‘pathetic’ spiritual seekers vulnerable to ‘every kind of mercenary hustler imaginable’ (Churchill, 2003, pp. 324–325) came to dominate a discourse about the practice of ceremony that had previously emphasized expanding their practice. The polemics have their merits, including but not limited to the fact that people have died at the hands of such spiritual hucksters (O’Neill, 2011) and that there is good cause for concern about the use of sacred ceremonies for self-help (Perluss, 2017). However, the polemics also short-circuit inquiry into ways that Native and non-Native worlds meet as ceremonies travel beyond their historic homes and disparate groups work toward shared ecocultural commitments.

Citation and affinity

The discourse around contemporary fasting ceremonies shapes lines of affinity that may be drawn or erased between worlds. How their history is told and who is cited in those histories can obscure or magnify parts of the complex path the ceremonies have traveled on their way to their current form. In this concluding section, I consider how Native influences are cited in contemporary fasting ceremonies in order to reflect more broadly on how scholars and practitioners can thoughtfully bring different worlds of knowledge and practice into dialogue with one another. While the previous section laid out the conflictual, entangled histories of the U.S. counterculture environmental movement and late twentieth-century struggles for Native American rights, here I will close by arguing that continued attention to these histories would help to establish lines of affinity between conceptual and practical worlds while also reckoning with the colonial context in which such connections are forged.

In the School of Lost Border’s programs, a double movement occurs with regard to citation and lineage. The first is to distinguish the school’s work from related Native American practices and to appeal to the universal nature of rites of passage ceremonies. I have often sat in the school’s programs and heard some version of the statement, ‘this ceremony is in our

bones, it's a human ceremony.' This helped Foster and Little largely to stay clear of the fray about permission and appropriation that swirled around Storm and the Bear Tribe because they distinguished their work from Native American practices. The school has occasionally been criticized for facilitating fasting ceremonies on what is historically Paiute land (West, 2010), but these critiques are infrequent. The second move with regard to citation has been to name Storm when teaching the four shields of human nature and Grandpa Raymond Stone when discussing the land and politics in the valley. Guides who worked closely with Storm, Sun Bear, or other Native American mentors will often talk about their experiences in Storm or Sun Bear's communities and will also name many non-Native influences in their work like those mentioned earlier: Jungian psychology, Gregory Bateson's systems theory, and contemplative traditions like Buddhism and Christian mysticism.

Beyond the school, while Foster and Little's work has been crucial to launching the field of contemporary rites of passage ceremonies, the specific history and geography of their work has been muted, and the significance of Native American mentors in the development of the practice has been obscured. A popular work on nature-based psychology, for example, presents a medicine wheel psychological model that is strikingly similar to Foster and Little's, whom the author acknowledges along with unspecified 'Native American teachings.' Readers are told, however, that the author's medicine wheel 'bears only cursory similarity to other models I know – Western or [I]ndigenous, ancient or modern' (Plotkin, 2008, p. 52). Doing so neatly sidesteps the problem of a non-innocent intellectual heritage. With Sun Bear, Storm, and their controversial history rendered mostly absent, the text is less likely to be drawn into debates on cultural appropriation or the use of inauthentic Native American traditions, but the chain of citation also is cut. Doing so makes it more difficult to work in the fraught tension of dialogues across worlds shaped by ongoing colonial legacies.

Toward solidarity

The ecocultural identity being fostered in this school works with psyche as witnessed by, and produced through, an animate landscape. While the ceremony in question here is distinct, lines of mentorship and affinity connect the ceremony to Native American philosophies and practices. An important question that remains at the conclusion of this chapter is: Can bonds of solidarity begin to form without needing to erase or resolve this ceremony's complex and never-innocent history?

While the strong critiques of a generation ago helped to rein in the commodification of Native American spiritual practice and served to define AIM as a political movement grounded in traditional spiritual practices, an approach that focuses on affinity while being mindful of difference may now render perceptible the many threads that connect so-called Western and Native worlds. Some have noted that, as environmental humanities scholars working in Western conceptual traditions begin to attend to an animate world that was long ignored, the Indigenous philosophies and traditions that articulated and nurtured that animate understanding and experience of the world for thousands of years have yet again been left out of the conversation (Todd, 2016). Other scholars, who have a deep appreciation of the legacies of colonial violence, emphasize that, while their attempts to experience the world as psychically alive owe a debt to Indigenous traditions, they nevertheless come 'to animism via our own worldly encounters' (van Dooren & Rose, 2016, p. 81). Taken too far, however, the distinctions between conceptual worlds comes to look like a new round of metaphysical bordering. It is as if scholars are afraid of falling prey to conceptual critiques along the same lines as AIM's criticisms of 'spiritual hucksters,' of 'doing the unforgivable, gauche, hippie

thing of dressing up like a Native American' (Morton, 2017, p. 11). Such concerns have merit, but the emphasis should be on 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016), not reinscribing borders.

Ecocultural scholarship can attend to difference, critique appropriation or erasure, and contribute to building a community with shared ecocultural commitments. To do so, scholars who describe and interpret work that travels between conceptual worlds must map potential bonds of solidarity among diverse communities who share a commitment to an ecocultural identity that emerges from an animate world. Problematic histories should be detailed, but they should not necessarily render practices illegitimate. Instead, critical inquiry into those histories can provide an opening through which scholars and practitioners reach through colonial wounds to begin forging bonds of solidarity.

Solidarity is about identifying distinct ways to work toward common goals. In the practice of the land-based fasting ceremony performed at the school, what is held in common with so many other traditions are its commitments to recognizing Earth as psychically alive, to the human self as emergent from immanent relationship with that living Earth, and to accessing sacred space through the practice of ceremony. This work will not stand on its own. It does not replace the need for ongoing struggles to address recognition, sovereignty, and exploitation.

As a contribution to the study of ecocultural identity, what critical narratives like those presented here do is detail how communities reach beyond the traditions of their own conceptual world for inspiration and mentorship as they work to weave the experience of self together with an animate world. As shown, inquiry into that embodied work allows scholars to map the potential lines of affinity and solidarity between distinct yet interrelated worlds, even as that mapping also draws attention to how the tensions of ongoing colonial realities must be reckoned with at the same time. The project of describing and theorizing ecocultural identity will require scholars to show enthusiasm for describing new efforts to weave together experiences of identity and place as well as to adopt a generous critical perspective that engages fraught debates precisely because they have the productive potential to shape more just and livable ways of being.

Note

- 1 The wild landscapes of the United States and the imaginaries that swirl around them are Janus-faced places of healing and insight for some and places of violence and wounding for others. The celebrated landscapes of the American wilderness tradition – the Colorado Plateau, the California Sierra, the Great Basin, Yellowstone – are sites of outrageous violence where many of the continent's Indigenous people were forced off the land and subjected to centuries of systematic oppression that often continues today (Denevan, 1992; Jacoby, 2001; Robbins and Moore, 2019). That wild places inspire feelings of awe mixed with fear – what some call the sublime – is a product of history and culture as well as the physical landscape itself; one's ideas of place inform how one experiences that place (Cronon, 1996; Garrard, 2012; see Thoreau, 1972). Place never strictly determines experience and many critical scholars resist the idea of any place having a fixed essence (Castree & Braun, 2001; Kosek, 2006; Massey, 2005), but there remains tremendous scholarly interest in the relationship between place and sense of self (Viveiros de Castro, 1998; Williams, 1999; Wylie, 2017).

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Part III

Mediating ecocultural identity

As sites of contested representations, media outlets and technologies (re)produce, challenge, and amplify ecocultural perceptions, practices, and identifications. Works in this part of the *Handbook* examine the complex interplay between the media sphere and the public sphere, illustrating an array of mediated contexts and consequences for ecocultural identities. Part III investigates mediated modes of identification around the globe – from Antarctica to Africa, from Europe to the Americas – drawing upon mediated ecocultural imaginaries of far-off yet intimately related polar places, the malleability of politicized identities of land-based extractive or sustainable occupations, and the techno-scientific subjectivation of watershed knowledges and relations.

In Chapter 14, ‘Identifying with Antarctica in the ecocultural imaginary,’ Hanne Nielsen examines ways forms of humanizing a place might create geographically and ecologically expanded senses of ecocultural identity. Nielsen looks at Antarctica as a far-off land represented in the public imaginary – first, as a place of famous Western masculine heroics and, more recently, as a place of penguin family-raising heroics. Specifically, Nielsen focuses in on very recent years and ways new film documentaries shift the imaginary of Antarctica from heroism into a place of recognizable mundanity, centering the daily lives of the scientists and support staff who temporarily dwell and work there. By connecting with the familiar in this unfamiliar place of ice, Nielsen argues documentary viewers in other lands have opportunities to identify with the many ecological, political, and cultural ways in which their seemingly distant lives are interwoven into this far-off place. Nielsen looks at how media representation challenges the remoteness of the icy existence of this continent and brings ‘Antarctica into the everyday consciousness of people around the world’ (p. 225).

Whereas Nielsen’s chapter, in part, provides an example of ways media can invite conversations about – and widen the range of stakeholders implicated in – the fate of a particular place, Eric Karikari’s, José Castro-Sotomayor’s, and Godfried Asante’s case study presented in Chapter 15, ‘Illegal mining, identity, and the politics of ecocultural voice in Ghana,’ exhibits ways media representations also can work to close conversations by stigmatizing group identities involved in – and impacted by – the global politics of extractivism. Through critical analysis of Ghana media texts framing mining-induced ecological disasters, the authors examine ways the identities of illegal mine workers are constructed within ongoing discourses of economic development and transnational capitalism. The authors reveal ways mediated discourses justify the criminalization of illegal mining – and the militarization of spaces in which this activity

takes place – and, at the same time, glorify and protect transnational corporate mining. The media framing under study exemplifies ways strategies of extractive neoliberal capitalism merge with governmental discourses, a merging familiar in countries throughout the Global South, as well as in the heart of the Global North (see Raynes and Mix, Chapter 18 of this *Handbook*). The authors posit *sankofa*, a Ghanaian Akan Indigenous symbol meaning to ‘return and take back,’ as an ontological shift to rekindle ecocultural knowledges and strengths of Ghanaian Indigenous identities and redirect the country away from its current nationalist identity built upon unrestrained development and corporate environmental exploitation. The authors argue *sankofa*, associated with the Akan proverb ‘*Se wo were fi nase wo sankofa a yenkyi*’ (‘It’s not wrong to go back to that which you have forgotten’), opens up spaces for counter-discourses of restorative ecocultural change.

Chapter 16, ‘Conservation hero and climate villain binary identities of Swedish farmers’ by Lars Hallgren, Hanna Ljunggren Bergeå, and Helena Nordström Källström, sheds light on media constructions of another ecocultural identity linked to impact on the land: cattle farmers. The authors use symbolic interactionism to reveal ways Swedish media transformed framing of Swedish farmers after the international scientific community classified cattle raising as a major contributor to climate disruption. The authors draw attention to ways media frames shifted from conservation heroes, which emphasized farmers’ roles in encouraging ecoculturally valued biodiverse landscapes through pasture grazing methods, to climate villains, which emphasized cows and meat production as major contributors to climate disruption. The authors illustrate ways farmers have responded and also point to ways this shift in ascribed identity potentially endangers the continuation of sustainable Swedish farming practices as farmers may cease to self-identify their activities as the source of positive personal, sociocultural, and ecological worth. The study highlights problems and closures that can result from mediated constructions of dichotomist ecocultural identities.

In Chapter 17, ‘Modeling watershed ecocultural identification and subjectivity in the United States,’ Jeremy Trombley examines the power of techno-scientific practice in the formation of ecocultural identifications of and with the more-than-human world. Trombley interprets data collected via ethnographic fieldwork with computational modelers and environmental management staff of the U.S. Chesapeake Bay watershed to trace the formation of a *watershed identity*. Trombley’s case illuminates and problematizes ways institutions use technocratic practices, such as modeling, which objectify more-than-human systems by conceptualizing them as financially quantifiable and subject these systems to certain kinds of human-centered management and conservation projects. This neoliberal techno-scientific management approach is not exclusive to watershed geographies, nor is it only furthered by computational modeling technology. As such, Trombley troubles forthcoming evolutions of new technologies intended for environmental management. At the same time, by situating modeling within a broader context of techno-scientific exploration and experimentation, Trombley questions ways different approaches to modeling and related technologies could potentially overturn neoliberal economic subjectivation and embrace ecospherical subjective identifications.

The chapters in this part provide multiple vantages to understand ways media and media technologies are formative in ecocultural identity production. The original research illuminates ways public and institutional spheres – and inherent powerful contestations over meaning – inform both individual and group senses of ecocultural identity. As sites of study, media pervasiveness and diverse technological modes help more fully paint a picture of whether and how people identify within contexts of ecological distress and social, political, and environmental complexity.

Identifying with Antarctica in the ecocultural imaginary

Hanne Nielsen

Antarctica often is omitted from the bottom of the map. Although the frozen continent is remote and relatively inaccessible, it is not ecoculturally insignificant. Melt in the far south drives global currents, while activity to the north, including events such as the industrial revolution and atomic bombs, is archived in the ice. This chapter examines the shifting ecocultural frames that have informed various ways of imagining Antarctica, and asks how these have helped to shape particular ecocultural identities. I argue the continent can be conceived of as a place for heroes and an ultimate testing ground for humans and machines or as a pure untouched ‘wilderness’ in need of protection. These conceptual framings, which inform both attitudes and actions, are neither static nor exclusive. As existing framings compete and global priorities shift, new ways of viewing Antarctica emerge in response. This raises the possibility that Antarctica could one day be considered as local rather than remote based on emergent narratives and shifts in international engagement. Antarctica, in this way may be in the process of becoming a part of the ecocultural identity of those in faraway places.

My first interaction with Antarctica occurred at 6 years old, when my teacher read our class the story of how Sir Edmund Hillary journeyed to the South Pole during the 1955–1958 Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition. It would be another 16 years before I experienced ‘The Ice’ firsthand; by that time, many more films, books, and stories of expeditions had combined to create a thriving Antarctic imaginary in my mind. Up until our plane touched down on the Ross Ice Shelf, that imagined version mediated my relationship with the far south, yet I arrived with a sense of connection to the place already intact.

In this chapter, I argue that imagined versions of place play an important role in why and how even distant locations such as Antarctica are valued. Taking Werner Herzog’s *Encounters at the End of the World* (2007) and Antony Powell’s *Antarctica: A Year on Ice* (2014) as case studies, I ask how film documentaries can help audiences challenge perceptions of faraway places to reimagine human interactions with the ice and to bring Antarctica into the everyday consciousness of people around the world. These two documentaries offer insight into the lives of those in the far south, and act as a starting point to discuss how viewers also can develop a sense of relationship with Antarctica. While Herzog offers a series of surprising vignettes, presented from the point of view of an Antarctic outsider, Powell provides intimate insights into the continent he has called home for more than 10 seasons.

Both documentaries subvert the dominant tropes of Antarctica as a place for heroes and wildlife by presenting a series of both human-to-human and human-with-more-than-human encounters in the far south. They challenge the audience to re-evaluate their existing notions about, and interconnectedness with, Antarctica. By focussing on the people who have called Antarctica home – whether this is for a few weeks, months, or years – the documentaries complicate notions of Antarctica as untouched nature, and prompt reflection about what it means to be human at the very end of the Earth. I, therefore, argue that Antarctic humanities have a key role to play in understanding ecocultural identities not only of those who visit, study, and work on the southernmost continent, but also those who imagine Antarctica from afar.

Humans and Antarctica: Challenging Antarctic exceptionalism

Antarctica, the frozen continent at the southern pole of our Earth, is more readily associated with natural than human history. However, oral histories suggest that Rarotongan navigator Ui-Te-Rangiora and his vessel Te-Ivi-o-Atea reached Antarctic waters as early as 650 CE (Fox, 2005). The first European sightings of Antarctica date to the 1820s (Baughmann, 1994), and those early human interactions with the far south were commercial in nature, with both sealing and whaling lucrative businesses in the Southern Ocean (Maddison, 2014).¹ This was followed by a period of land-based exploration, known as the ‘Heroic Era’ (1897–1922), when Europeans first explored the interior of the continent and raced to claim various sectors (Hemmings, 2008). The 1959 Antarctic Treaty, which now has 48 nations as signatories, put those claims ‘on ice,’ and designated Antarctica as a place for peace and science (Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty); this framing continues to influence human interactions with the far south.

Antarctica is currently home to about 5,000 scientists and support staff in the summer months, and 1,000 during the months of winter darkness. They live and work at more than 70 research stations, administered by National Antarctic Programs (government bodies tasked with overseeing Antarctic logistics and priorities). The U.S.A.’s McMurdo Station, located on Ross Island, is the largest, and can accommodate up to 1,200 people (Mars, 2018). Many of those people are undertaking research projects; scientific activity legitimates the contemporary human presence in the far south. However, those who head south are not only scientists. In addition, support staff, including chefs, engineers, carpenters, communications operators, and guides are vital to the operations. More than 50,000 tourists also visit the continent each summer season (IAATO, 2019). All the humans who call Antarctica ‘home’ – be they explorers, scientists, or tourists – only do so for short periods. There is no human permanent population, but rather a series of itinerant workers and scientists, whose time down south is managed and controlled by National Antarctic programs and tourism operators. Antarctica is not easily accessible, and the number of humans who will ever experience the continent firsthand remains small.

Antarctica often is cast as ‘the last wilderness’ (Tin et al., 2008, p.11), removed from everyday experiences and treated differently to the rest of the world. Chaturvedi (2011) claims the underlying reasoning for this Antarctic exceptionalism ‘has been that specific polar attributes and issues related to the Antarctic demand and deserve an exclusive treatment on their own merit’ (p. 22). Antarctic exceptionalism is problematic, as it places Antarctica in a category apart from other parts of the world, and limits the possibilities for considering ecological, climatic, conceptual, political, and economic connections. Glasberg (2012) also addresses scientific exceptionalism, or ‘the idea that scientific work is exempt from the political contexts within which it operates’ (p. 66), as an element at play in the Antarctic.

The continent, however, has both geopolitical and material relevance for the lives of those in very distant locations. Antarctica plays a vital role in global climate systems. For instance, it has global impacts as a driver of ocean circulation (Abernathey et al., 2016), while local rainfall in parts of Australia is linked to snow fall in East Antarctica (van Ommen & Morgan, 2010). Whereas the discourse of Antarctic exceptionalism frames the continent as removed from the everyday (Chaturvedi, 2011), engaging with anthropogenic planetary disruption means understanding Antarctica as part of a global system and recognizing the links between everyday activities and the ice at the end of the Earth.

This chapter suggests it is possible to develop an ecocultural identity that incorporates distant places by recognizing the interconnectedness of processes on planet Earth. It is not necessary to visit Antarctica in order to engage with the continent in meaningful ways. Rather, connections with the far south can be mediated through forms of cultural production, such as diaries, photographs, novels, advertisements, films, or documentaries (Schillat, 2014; Leane & Nicol, 2013). Indeed, as Roberts, van der Watt, and Howkins (2016) argue in their introduction to *Antarctica and the Humanities*, the field of Antarctic Studies articulates an ‘understanding that the Antarctic is a series of representations that are always selected, distilled, and packaged by humans’ (p. 14).

Milstein (2008) writes that ‘the nature we perceive and breathe is deeply rooted in the culture we use as our lens and filter’ (n.p.). Culture, and forms of cultural production, also colour the ways we think about remote locations, such as Antarctica. This chapter introduces documentary as a useful medium for considering humans in Antarctica, and for building connections with the far south. Taking examples from two case studies, I explore ways Antarctica can conceptually be brought closer into the lives of everyday people in distant locations. I argue it is possible for film and literary audiences to develop an ecocultural identity with regard to a place that is cast as remote and inaccessible, by engaging with texts about the far south and reconceptualizing notions of distance, impacts, and connections. This works against Antarctic exceptionalism, by shifting the continent from the periphery to a position of tangible relevance for audiences in their homes around the world. In doing so, Antarctica becomes more accessible, and the viewer is encouraged to reconsider their own ecocultural identification with the far south.

Imagining Antarctica

In 2014, geographers Nüsser and Baghel (2014) proposed the term cryoscape as ‘a conceptual framework to analyse the emergence of Himalayan glaciers in the context of a dynamic, globally imagined mediascape’ (p. 138). This concept also can be applied to the far south and the far north, where the icy landscape became known and mediated through the context of the global mediascape. As ice has entered into more and more conversations, it has come to stand for a range of larger ideas. Nüsser and Baghel (2014) argue, ‘glaciers do not *just* melt; they are imbued with cultural, scientific, political and aesthetic meanings’ (p. 150).

When thinking about the ice of Antarctica, in such a remote location, several stereotypes loom large. First, the heroism associated with the ‘Heroic Era’ of exploration (1899–1922) casts Antarctica as a place for masculine feats of endurance, and pits humans against nature, presenting Antarctica as a land of extremes waiting to be conquered (Howkins, 2010). More recently, international environmental protection discourse around Antarctica contributed to a framing of Antarctica as a wilderness in need of protection and led to the signing of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (Madrid Protocol) in 1991 (Summerson & Bishop, 2012).

As climate disruption has become a major preoccupation in the consciousness of the Western world, the media, advertisers, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are using the icy reaches of both poles of the planet to stand in for a fragile and threatened climate system (Williamson, 2010). While the notion of climate disruption may be recent in the consciousness of the Western/ized world, worlds that are not Western have been conscious of notions of disruption for much longer, often using terms such as harmony, equilibrium, and balance to articulate the purpose that must be constantly worked toward in ways of living.

Precise articulation of global disruption comes with challenges. Carvalho (2008) notes that 'climate change is particularly "invisible," given the nature of the problem and the temporal and spatial scales that characterize it' (p. 489). However, ice is visible, and footage of calving events provides dramatic visuals for stories about global climatic change. Geographically distant, Antarctic events, such as melting ice sheets, take on global import when, for instance, the impacts of sea level rise are considered (DeConato & Pollard, 2016). Gabrys and Yusoff (2012) highlight how climate change 'is being reimagined as an ethical, societal, and cultural problem that poses new questions and reconfigures the geographic imaginaries of the world' (p. 517). As a result of this reimagining, Antarctica has come to play a much more dominant role as a symbol for climate change, for fragility, and for the threat of melting ice, bringing its ecocultural importance to the fore.

Today's human relations with Antarctica manifests in physical ways across great distances. Indeed, thanks to industrialized lifestyles, the effects of everyday activities of those in faraway places have had a profound impact on the far south, meaning Antarctica is not as 'untouched' as it is often thought. Past human activity has been inscribed into the ice, with ice cores including traces of particulate from the industrial revolution and layers recording instances of nuclear fallout in distant locations (Delmas et al., 2003). The ozone hole (in reality not a hole but a thinner area of ozone), which British scientists discovered over Antarctica in the 1980s, was formed as the result of human populations using and releasing chlorofluorocarbons (CFC) into the atmosphere in other parts of the world (NASA, 2018). The impact of highly extractive and polluting ecocultural identities and histories, therefore, is present in Antarctica, even though the continent was not the site of the original activities.

In more recent years, Antarctica has come to function as 'a sentimental object of anthropocentric panic' (Glasberg, 2011, p. 222). In its fragility, Antarctica also makes humans fragile and vulnerable to the impacts of anthropogenic climate change, such as sea level rise and ocean acidification. The notion of anywhere on Earth as 'untouched' by humans becomes difficult to hold onto when actions taken in any place have implications for the far south, and when changes in Antarctica have the potential to impact upon the lives of those in faraway places. The 'othering' of Antarctica through Antarctic exceptionalism – by imagining the continent as apart from the industries and processes of the rest of the world – is potentially destructive. In an age of climate disruption, humans must act with the awareness that what we do impacts Antarctica. How Antarctica responds also has repercussions for the lives of everyday people, as well as the more-than-human world.

Documentary and the far south

Being aware of Antarctica's global importance is a prerequisite for acting with the place in mind. Film documentary has long been an important genre for Antarctica and has been one way of making the continent accessible; as Schillat (2014) asserts, 'Visions of Antarctica will most likely be taken from popular films' (p. 21). The use of film and documentary in Antarctica dates back to earliest human exploration of the continent – explorers of the 'Heroic

Era' (1899–1922) such as Ernest Shackleton and Robert Falcon Scott deliberately took cinematographers south to record the achievements of their expeditions (McKernan, 2000). Expedition leaders were well aware that photography was valuable 'not only as a scientific record of a new environment, but also as a means of promoting and generating funds' (Leane & Nicol, 2013, p. 129). These images often were the first encounters audiences had with the far south, so they held great intrigue and were powerful in shaping both imagined versions of the Antarctic continent and human ecocultural identity for those in situ. Early documentaries filmed in the far south were widely circulated. Herbert Ponting's Antarctic films *The Great White Silence* (1924) and *Ninety Degrees South* (1933), filmed during Scott's 1910–1913 *Terra Nova* expedition, were shown on several continents (McKernan, 2000). Photographer Frank Hurley also made a name for himself filming the expeditions of Shackleton and Douglas Mawson. Hurley's footage of Shackleton's *Endurance* crew, who survived two winters stranded in the far south, continues to circulate within popular culture, bringing (a mediated version of) Antarctica into the lives of those who view the recordings.

Documentary endures as an important polar genre today and can encourage viewers to consider their own ecocultural identities in relation to the poles. The BBC series *Frozen Planet* was viewed by more than 7 million people when it first screened in 2011 (Sweeney, 2011), while the award-winning *March of the Penguins* (2005) put both the lifecycle of the Antarctic-dwelling Emperor Penguins and the southern continent itself in the spotlight. As Nichols (1991) argues, 'documentaries provoke or encourage response, shape attitudes and assumptions' (p. x).

In the south polar context, documentary offers an avenue for viewers to build a relationship with a place they likely will never visit. Footage often focuses on wildlife and scenery, however, and on penguins rather than people, thus casting Antarctica as removed, faraway, and alien. When humans are shown, they historically have been depicted as heroes, setting out to conquer the landscape and claim new firsts (e.g., first to the geographic South Pole). The documentaries discussed in this chapter speak back against this trend of valorizing historic heroes by deliberately putting the spotlight on the mundane aspects of the contemporary human presence in Antarctica. They focus on the people who call Antarctica home, presenting a new narrative of domestication and anti-exceptionalism. Both documentaries add a further layer to an existing tradition of narrating the human presence in Antarctica and provide an avenue for viewers to engage with Antarctica through the stories of fellow humans. In doing so, they invite audiences to expand their own Antarctic imaginaries, reconsider their own relationship with the place, and start incorporating the far south into their own ecocultural identities.

Both documentary-style films examined in this chapter are about human relationships with the Antarctic continent. They focus on the stories of itinerant workers and their experiences. In both cases, the filmmaker is very present in the film and attempts to go beyond the clichés when representing Antarctica. Herzog spent just a few weeks in Antarctica, and his documentary focuses as much on himself as auteur as it does on (his perceived) essence of place. He examines how scientists relate to their research subject (Antarctica), emphasises larger-than-life itinerant workers who share unique narratives about what brought them south, and invites the viewer on a journey alongside him as he discovers Antarctica's quirks for the first time. Although much of the documentary is filmed around McMurdo Station, Herzog remarks 'from the very first day, we just wanted to get out of this place' (20:11) – out into the field, that is, and away from the bustling human presence at McMurdo Station, which mirrors the activities in cities back home.

Powell, on the other hand, is an Antarctic 'local,' and his documentary, which features many of his friends in domestic contexts, provides an insider view of Antarctica. Powell uses

the timespan of one year to examine what it means to be in place in Antarctica, a place he has called home for many seasons. By showing the audience how people work with the extreme environmental conditions and interspersing this with time-lapse imagery that showcases the many moods of the landscapes, Powell presents an Antarctica where the ecological is mutually constituted with identity, meaning, and experience.

These films help the viewer develop a relationship with Antarctica, offering an alternative perspective to those presented in popular penguin movies and travel brochures. This chapter asks how the two films address the themes of heroism, extremity, wildlife, and protection, and explores ways in which each encourages the audience to incorporate an awareness of Antarctica into their everyday lives and identities.

Herzog's *Encounters at the End of the World*

In his 2007 film *Encounters at the End of the World*, Werner Herzog presents an outsider's view of Antarctica. The filmmaker visited the continent as part of the United States Antarctic Program's Artists and Writers Program. This program, which sends artists, writers, or humanities scholars to U.S. Antarctic stations each summer, is designed 'to enable serious writings and the arts that increase understanding of the Antarctic and help document America's Antarctic heritage' (National Science Foundation, n.d.). Herzog consciously tries to subvert the stereotypes of Antarctica as a place for heroes, extreme endeavours, and endearing wildlife. Within the first five minutes of the film, Herzog has made it clear he will 'not come up with another film about penguins' (3:35). Rather, he contrasts classic wildlife shots (including extensive underwater scenes) with scenes depicting human–nonhuman interactions (such as scientists grappling with seals to take milk samples) that are designed to surprise the viewer. In the case of the seals, species differences are blurred, as nutritional ecologist Olav T. Oftedal explains how these seal milk samples 'may ultimately provide insight into human weight loss' (30:07). These scenes specifically show human–nonhuman in intimate relations, unsettling the traditional human/nature binary presented in earlier documentaries. At the same time, the scientist's insistence that any disturbance to seals was minimal, and the ultimately anthropocentric interest in the seals (it is humans, it is assumed, who would benefit from any weight loss advances), mean a mastery over nature orientation remains throughout the interaction. Ultimately, it is an anthropocentric intention that lies beneath the scientific approach.

Other scenes in Herzog's film anthropomorphise the Antarctic environment. For instance, a grey screen displays an image of undulating ice, reminiscent of an ultrasound image, while glaciologist Dougals MacAyeal narrates the journey of the iceberg, musing that it is 'frightening to see what happens to these babies once they get north' (18:31). MacAyeal appears to anthropomorphise the ice in order to articulate his close relationship with the far south, an example of what Carey, Jackson, Antonello, and Rushing (2016) characterise as the 'dynamic relationship between people and ice' (p. 771). Such language exemplifies the cryoscape model in action – it challenges the stereotype of the impassive scientist and invites the viewer to reconsider the global and relational importance of that ice using an unexpected metaphor. As Chakrabarty (2012) explains when reflecting on the challenge of climate change, it is 'through the employment of figures of speech – some telling metaphors and similes – that we make a human history of the empty vastness and ice of the South Pole' (p. 12). The reproductive metaphor is particularly interesting in the era of climate disruption, given the challenges related to human overpopulation – this choice of imagery links the birthing of both icebergs and babies to the future of the planet as a whole. Using unexpected juxtapositions of imagery and concepts, these scenes invite the viewer to reconsider their discursively constructed perceptions of, and relations with, Antarctica.

Dismantling the hero

During its early recorded human history, Antarctica was cast as a place to be conquered by humans – the ultimate battleground for romantic explorers and imperial heroes to pit themselves against the elements. This depiction is problematic – not least because of its associations with the performance of both heroic masculinity and empire (Jones et al., 2014). Herzog subverts the trope of heroism by choosing to focus on unusual characters in unexpected locations. Referring directly to the ‘Heroic Era,’ he notes that ‘Scott and Amundsen were clearly early protagonists, and from thereon it degenerated into absurd quests’ (1:08:40), before proceeding to interview Ashrita Furman, who holds the world record for the fastest mile in Antarctica on a pogo stick (Mincer, 2010). People continue to chase ‘firsts’ on the Antarctic continent, a practice that harks back to the 1911 ‘Race to the Pole’ when Norwegian Roald Amundsen and British Robert Falcon Scott led the first and second teams ever to reach 90 degrees south.

Such activities, predicated on conquest and priority, are problematic. They perpetuate the dominant Western premise of a human/nature divide, while the discourse of ‘firsts’ can reinforce colonial narratives of conquest and detract from the (classed) work of the teams that make any expedition possible (Maddison, 2014). In fact, there is far more to the continent than a territory to be claimed and conquered. As Dodds (2006) notes, Antarctica ‘was and is a lively and dynamic place that could and did call into question attempts to settle and colonise’ (p. 61). Sea ice regularly thwarts the movement of ships in the region, while the movement of ice shelves has destroyed a number of bases (Nielsen, 2012). Portraying Antarctica as a place to visit during a quest to break world records on all continents frames it as just another place on Earth. Herzog uses the absurdity of a pogo stick record to challenge the audience to reconsider their own conceptions of how humans can and should interact with Antarctica.

Herzog’s film also encourages the audience to make space for everyday humans in their imagined versions of the place. Rather than opting for explorers in the snow, Herzog focuses on mundane scenes, interviewing forklift driver Stefan Pashov in front of a timberyard, and linguist William Jirsa in a greenhouse. The director does so unapologetically, claiming that ‘staging is something everyone in documentary should do’ (quoted in McNab, 2008). In the greenhouse scene, Herzog’s subject stands amongst verdant plants, and beside the fire extinguisher. While the plants appear out of place in Antarctica, which is known for its expanses of ice, the fire extinguisher acts as reminder of everyday life, and the dangers associated with living on a remote and very dry continent. Including the fire extinguisher in the shot makes even the unusual space of an Antarctic greenhouse banal and everyday. Jirsa recognises the irony of ‘linguists on a continent with no [native] languages’ (59:23), but explains that he feels at home there: ‘I like to say if you take everyone who’s not tied down, they all kind of fall down to the bottom of the planet’ (59:02).

Pashov, too, explains how Antarctica ‘works almost as a natural selection for people who have this intention to jump off the margin of the map; and we all meet here, where all the lines of the map converge’ (12:14). This characterization is in line with Herzog’s narrative of the U.S. McMurdo Station as a place of misfits. It also stands in contrast to the image of the purposeful hero, exercising their agency over the landscape. Although Antarctica often is characterized as ‘unpeopled,’ those who do head south can develop a strong attachment to the place. The human presence on (and off) Antarctica also has global ramifications, due to globalized human–ecological interactions. Therefore, the question of who belongs to Antarctica is much broader than the question of who is physically located in Antarctica, and attachment to the place is not the sole domain of Antarcticans.

Machines, not 'pristine'

Herzog's film also includes a strong focus on machinery and foregrounds the human presence in all its noise. Historically, machinery has been used in Antarctica to demonstrate power over the landscape – the American aviator Admiral Richard Byrd's early flights to map Marie Byrd Land in west Antarctica are one famed example (Clancy et al., 2014). The machinery also represents the ultimate antidote to penguin imagery. Herzog muses,

Of course, I did not expect pristine landscapes and man living in blissful harmony with fluffy penguins, but I was still surprised to find McMurdo looking like an ugly mining town, filled with caterpillars and noisy construction sites.

(10:12)

The scene then cuts to footage of heavy machinery moving, accompanied by the sound of earthworks – a far cry from the silence associated with Antarctica or the soaring classical music that often accompanies Antarctic imagery. The inclusion of industrial imagery and sound challenges notions of Antarctica as pristine and quiet – ideas that regularly emerge in explorers' accounts of the continent. Focussing on the machinery foregrounds the human presence in Antarctica, presenting a new way of imagining Antarctica – as a workplace, and a location with unexpected links to the experiences of the everyday. Herzog seeks out unusual narratives that are intended to surprise his audience. He views Antarctica from the perspective of an outsider, yet builds his own connections with the place as he works in situ to create his footage. For the documentary's subjects, Antarctica is part of their ecocultural identity. Viewers can follow suit, experiencing shifts in their own perception and interaction with imagined versions of place – the first step in this process is developing an awareness of the continent as a place for humans.

Powell's *Antarctica: A Year on Ice*

New Zealander Antony Powell presents an insider view of Antarctica in his 2014 film *Antarctica: A Year on Ice*. In contrast to Herzog's 'auteur' approach, this work is filmed and produced by an Antarctic local, with footage collected in situ in Antarctica over a 10-year timeframe. Using time-lapse, Powell pays careful attention to the surrounding landscape, and captures colour, clouds, light, and the shifting of ice over time. This time-lapse takes the viewer through each season and cycle (summer, sunset, winter, sunrise), providing both a tangible sense of time and the chance to explore how human relationships with place change over time. Powell focusses on the support staff, whose presence in the far south rarely is acknowledged. He presents Antarctica as a domestic place and includes interviews with friends and colleagues in order to shine light on the mundane aspects of working in Antarctica, thus challenging dominant notions of Antarctica as a place for heroes and heroic endeavour. Many of the themes present in *A Year on Ice* are similar to those explored in *Encounters at the End of the World*, but where Herzog views Antarctica as an outsider and uses his documentary to present stories that trouble his own initial assumptions about the place, Powell works with and in the Antarctic environments, and provides insights into his own in-depth ecocultural relationship with the continent.

Life in Antarctica

Powell acknowledges history but focuses on the contemporary aspects of life on the ice. He explains 'there is a unique holiday in Antarctica that people from all over the world

celebrate' (59:35) – the Midwinter Dinner marks the winter solstice and the start of the slow countdown toward the light returning. Although solstice celebrations are not unique to Antarctica, the holiday has been adopted across the continent and every year is highly anticipated. It connects Antarctica to long-peopled regions and rituals in other parts of the world and acts as a reminder that Antarctica experiences extremes of the same seasons as those in the rest of the southern hemisphere. Those wintering in Antarctica send greeting cards to their counterparts at other stations, and Antarciticans back home in other parts of the world also celebrate (New Zealand Antarctic Society, 2018). The holiday, therefore, acts as a catalyst for connections and a celebration of the human experiences of Antarctica.

Powell highlights the connection between these modern-day expeditioners and their counterparts of the 'Heroic Era,' explaining the annual Midwinter celebration is a time to 'remember the history that brought us here in the first place' (59:41). The focus is not on the historic footage, however, but of New Zealanders celebrating at Scott Base (a station 3 km away from McMurdo) – he includes footage of the kitchen, the dining room, and the modern-day festivities. Attention, therefore, is drawn to a ritual that has been undertaken on the continent ever since the 'Heroic Era' expeditions to Antarctica (McWilliams, 2012), and has come to be an important cultural institution for expeditioners from a wide range of backgrounds. This portrayal of the celebration challenges the assumption that Antarctica is empty and people-less and encourages viewers to consider their own connections with Antarctica, be they seasonal, ritualistic, or historical.

The machinery featured in *A Year on Ice* is depicted as a tool for doing a job. Powell narrates his tasks on a winter journey over the ice to Black Island – what is a 10-minute helicopter ride away in the summer becomes a minimum 6-hour drive over the ice in winter. Powell notes that, although his job as a satellite engineer in Antarctica sounds glamorous, 'they failed to mention the other duties in the job description, like trying to thaw out frozen urine pipes in 90 miles an hour wind' (37:02). He is reflexive about the filming, explaining that,

although the camera is on the tripod, you can see that the picture is actually quite shaky. That's because the whole building's being shaken by the 100 knot winds we have at the moment.

(37:50)

This wind is so loud it necessitates subtitles for the entire section. Together, these elements help the viewer to understand the harsh nature of Antarctica's storms – but they also showcase a work environment, with Powell as the guide taking the challenges in his stride. Rather than work against the storms, he shows the need to work with the current conditions and adapt in order to survive. This is a practical solution for Powell, but it also negates the concept of human mastery in place.

Antarctic extremes

Powell acknowledges the impact the extreme environment has upon one's ability to do their job, as illustrated in the scene where his wife, Christine Powell, opens the door to demonstrate the ferocity of the Condition 1 blizzard. At such times, humans are relegated to indoors until the storm passes. While Antarctica often is cast as extreme, humans across the Earth are increasingly needing shelter from harsh anthropogenically caused environmental conditions, such as heat waves and hurricanes – while Powell does not explicitly address

these parallels in his documentary, analogues with extreme weather in other locations help make Antarctica more imaginatively accessible.

Powell also provides an intimate view of the flipside of the often extreme outdoor conditions. Rather than battling the elements, people spend most of their time shut indoors, and battle boredom and repetitive schedules. As administrator Tom Hamann notes, 'it can be tiring to do the same thing every day' (1:02:29). Boredom is not often associated with Antarctica in popular representations, but it can have an impact on workers' performance and wellbeing (Nielsen & Jaksic, 2018) and it is associated with higher levels of depression (Biersner & Hogan, 1984). Being under fluorescent lighting for the 6-day work week was also a challenge for documentary subject and fire dispatcher Genevieve Bachman, 'because I wasn't outside' (01:01:47). This is not a film primarily about the sweeping landscapes of the far south, but about the experiences of those who spend time working in the place – often indoors and protected from the harsh environment. These challenges are surprisingly similar to those faced by people elsewhere and, therefore, work against notions of Antarctic exceptionalism.

Personal stories help highlight the physical distance between Antarctica and the rest of the world, and how this can lead to a sense of isolation. These stories also foreground the connections between humans in Antarctica and those at home, reinforcing Antarctica's position as part of a connected global world. Chef Matt Sissman explains, 'for me what sucks is missing family, but more importantly, missing these big moments in my family's lives back home' (44:50). Christine Powell recounts how she received a phone call from her grandmother to say her father had passed away, and how, because she could not be home, 'it leaves things unfinished' (45:58). Powell's film, as such, includes insights into the emotional lives of Antarcticans, taking the gloss off the romance of living in Antarctica. It provides a glimpse into the everyday realities of those who call the continent 'home,' and makes Antarctica accessible through very human stories.

Agency and Antarctica

Non-human stories are presented in *A Year on Ice*, including the striking example of the mummified seals in the Dry Valleys. These seals are located 30 km from the nearest seawater and are 'an amazingly common occurrence' (43:20) – they wander in the wrong direction, become stranded, and are desiccated by the dry winds, remaining in place for centuries. They are of interest to soil scientists, because of the unique microbial communities under each carcass (Tiao et al., 2012) but also capture the public's imagination because they are so unexpected. Powell also includes footage of a disaster in progress for disoriented penguins, waddling inland. He notes that 'it's heartbreaking when you see animals in distress like this, because we're not allowed to interfere' (43:43) – rather, 'we just have to let nature take its course' (43:50). A similar scene is included in Herzog's film, where he intones 'The rules for the humans are: do not disturb or hold up the penguin... stand still and let him go on his way' (1:15:14). Herzog's bird will take itself 'off into the interior of the vast continent. With 5,000 km ahead of him, he's headed towards certain death' (1:15:30).

Such scenes are used to provoke an emotional response from the viewer and evoke sympathy for the birds. They also encourage the viewer to reflect on current Antarctic governance, in light of these individual avian tragedies. In both instances, human agency is curtailed by laws associated with the Antarctic Treaty, highlighting a paradox – the laws designed to protect the continent as a whole mean that individual animals ultimately will perish. In trying to protect Antarctica, the rules set humans apart from the wildlife, reinforcing a version of the human–nature binary that is accepted in the name of protection. Both the

documentary makers and viewers may find their emotional and ethical sensibilities challenged by such scenes. This offers an opportunity for the viewers to widen the scope of the environments and concerns that contribute to their own sense of ecocultural identity.

Although there are humans in Antarctica, they are not usually cast as belonging to the ecosystems of the far south. The politics of presence is complicated; under the Antarctic Treaty System, science legitimates the human presence. Access is governed by outside forces, namely National Antarctic Programs. Powell reflects on the tenuousness of his own presence in Antarctica, remarking:

I fully expect that my time here is not going to end on my terms. The programme could change, or I might not pass a physical, or there might not be a job. No one gets to stay here indefinitely.

(1:25:33)

The transitory nature of being in place in Antarctica makes Powell's film all the more remarkable – it is unusual for anyone to witness an entire season, let alone 10. The desire to share that experience with the rest of the world was one motivation for creating the film – it helps to bring a taste of Antarctica to those who never visit, and presents personal insights into life on the continent. In its final scenes, *A Year on Ice* encourages viewers to reflect on their own practices and how these impact the far south. As communications tech Andrew Velman puts it, Antarctica is remote, but what happens there has global importance: the continent may metaphorically be 'a cold room where nobody lives, but it's still a room in your house, and as such you have to care about this room, and know about what's going on there' (1:23:27). In this instance, the Earth is considered the house, and Velman suggests that humans have responsibility for the global impacts of their actions. Another of Powell's interviewees, retailer Keri Nelson, characterises these as the 'golden years of Antarctica.' Having experienced all of Antarctica's seasons and challenges, she is concerned that 'someday, someone's going to find a way to get oil commercially, and someday the treaty's going to end... I don't know that we'll always be able to play as nice as we can right now' (1:22:13). Although the Antarctic Treaty has no end date, and mining continues to be prohibited under the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, sharing these fears can encourage the audience to consider the future they would like to see for the far south, and for the rest of the planet. Raising awareness about the southern continent is one way of helping people care about the place and to incorporate it into their own ecocultural identities – as the Australian Antarctic Division puts it, the continent needs to be 'valued, protected, and understood.'

A complex continent

Antarctica is neither static nor homogenous. Antonello (2016) has noted that 'the Antarctic is often, even overwhelmingly, represented as an undifferentiated totality, a unified region' (p. 182), and suggests this may be due to 'apparent uniformity – ubiquitous and seemingly uniform ice, seals and penguins, harsh weather, tumultuous seas' (p. 182). However, this is an over simplification. Like all other continents, Antarctica has distinct biogeographic regions (Terauds & Lee, 2016). In addition, the more than 70 national bases have their own cultures and traditions, such as the Midwinter Dinner and Midwinter Swim (undertaken through a specially made hole in the sea ice, with safety harnesses for all who take a dip), many of which are showcased in the annual 24-hour Antarctic Film festival (Australian Antarctic

Division). Both documentaries examined here help the viewer think of Antarctica as a series of places: the McMurdo Dry Valleys, South Pole Station, and field camps are all presented as varied and distinct locations on a vast continent. This plurality helps turn Antarctica from a large abstraction into something more diverse and relatable for a wider audience. The documentaries turn space into place by layering each icy location with narratives and histories, both human and non-human.

Both Herzog and Powell's documentaries highlight that Antarctica is not empty. Neither is it irrelevant, to either global systems or to distant individuals. As glaciologist MacAyeal puts it in Herzog's film, 'now we're seeing [Antarctica] as a living being, that's dynamic, that's producing change' (18:15) – and that change is being broadcast 'to the rest of the world, possibly in response to what the world is broadcasting down to Antarctica' (18:23). Humans across the Earth must take notice of those broadcasts. As Chakrabarty (2012) puts it, 'humans, collectively, now have an agency in determining the climate of the planet as a whole, a privilege reserved in the past only for very large-scale geophysical forces' (p. 9). When human actions have global implications, places like Antarctica must be factored into both individual and collective ecocultural identities. Antonello (2016) suggests that 'engaging with places rather than the whole might inject a new dynamic into Antarctic Treaty politics and diplomacy' (p. 199). This also is true for engaging with Antarctica in an ecocultural capacity. Recognizing both the complexity of the Antarctic continent and the systems that link the far south to the rest of the world allows for a more nuanced conceptualization of Antarctica and its relevance for everyday life, both now and into the future.

Incorporating Antarctica into ecocultural identities

The emergence of Antarctic humanities – or what Leane (2011) has termed 'the cultural turn in Antarctic Studies' (p. 150) – indicates that a range of perspectives now are being taken into account when it comes to considering Antarctic futures. These more culturally and critically focused Antarctic studies have a key role to play in understanding ecocultural identities – not only of those who visit, study, and work on the continent, but also those who imagine the ice at the end of the Earth. Those with a vested interest in the future of the far south include scientists, policy makers, literary scholars, philosophers, social scientists, Indigenous peoples, artists, and coastal communities around the globe. Framing Antarctica as exceptional, emphasizing the heroic human in polar narratives, and casting a romantic frame around the continent all can make Antarctica seem removed from everyday life, and inaccessible to diverse and broad publics. Providing opportunities for a range of narratives to be considered – particularly those that surprise and disrupt the dominant framings of Antarctica – enhances accessibility by highlighting the continent's multifaceted connections and inviting further conversation with a wider range of stakeholders.

By recognizing the power of imagined landscapes (Schillat, 2014), and the role of imagination in making visible global connections, it is possible to develop an ecocultural identity that incorporates distant places. Given that ecocultural identity involves both embodied experiences and discursively constructed positionality and perception, it is important to draw parallels between everyday experiences and the ecocultural impacts human actions have on other parts of the Earth. I suggest documentary film is one of many useful tools for bringing multiple faces of Antarctica to the attention of audiences in distant locations, and for reminding viewers they live on a complex and fragile planet that deserves thoughtful attention.

Conceptualizations of Antarctica can be shared with broad audiences using a wide range of media, including films, novels, podcasts, social media, and even online games. My own Antarctic journey started with a classroom story, and continues to be enriched by both experiences in, and representations of, the far south. The first step to incorporating Antarctica into an ecocultural identity is having an awareness of the continent's existence, complexity, multidimensionality, and importance – and there are many ways to create that initial connection. This chapter argues that cultural production – in this case, documentaries – can help to humanise Antarctica, and highlight existing human and more-than-human connections. In turn, this can shift a viewer's perception of Antarctica away from that of a remote idealized stereotype, help audiences identify as part of a global Earth system, and aid viewers in developing more nuanced personal relations with the southernmost continent.

Note

- 1 European seal hunting was prolific in the region until the mid-1880s. Europeans first built shore-based whaling stations in the region in 1904, and dominantly did pelagic whaling from 1930 onward.

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Illegal mining, identity, and the politics of ecocultural voice in Ghana

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In 2017, images of the mercury-polluted Pra River circulated through Ghanaian local news media reports, as well as social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter. The images depicted a complete change in the color of the Pra river in the Central region of Ghana from its clear pristine color to golden brown. According to a news report from Ghana News Agency (GNA), the official news media organization for the Ghanaian government, the change in color of the Pra river was the result of the dumping of chemicals in its streams perpetrated by those performing illegal gold mining, known locally in Ghana as *galamsey* (Afriyie et al., 2016). This extractive practice has produced numerous ecological disasters – from land and water pollution to farmland degradation. Different from artisanal mining, which was present before British colonization, *galamsey* is a contemporary extractive practice of mining that uses mercury and cyanide to mine gold and is predominantly performed by men from communities living nearby the extractive sites.

Galamsey's resultant ecological disasters are usually reported as the cause of Ghana's degraded ecology (Ofosu-Mensah, 2012; Afriyie et al., 2016; Eshun, 2011). While the extractive practice of *galamsey* notably is an environmental problem that causes degradation of farmlands and forests, destruction of water bodies, and pollution of river streams, *galamsey* is far from being only a matter of local ecological concern. In recent years, the Ghanaian government also has labeled *galamsey* extractive activity as a 'threat to security and society' (Frempon-Ntiamoah, 2017, para. 1) as mining's destruction of water bodies has incited territorial conflicts among local community members and the *galamsey* workers, who sometimes are from the same community. This situation has given the Ghanaian government a justification to initiate mechanisms to stop illegal small-scale mining, which include militarization of zones in which *galamsey* activities are taking place.

Scholarly research that centers on the history of mining in Ghana (e.g., Afriyie et al., 2016) and the reciprocal relationships between forms of mining and local community livelihood (e.g., Adom, 2018; Eshun, 2011; Ofosu-Mensah, 2012) all come to a similar conclusion: that the government frames illegal small-scale mining as the primary force behind Ghana's environmental problems. As we show, the government's framing also exhibits ways Western ideologies of development – those that privilege economic arguments over ecological concerns – shape

notions of nationhood. For instance, state-owned journalistic discourse presents environmental concerns that emerge during moments of ecological disasters caused by intense illegal mining as hindrances to Ghana's economic advancement, based on decreased revenues from gold mining, rather than as impacting ecosystems. At the same time, any threat – as the government labels *galamsey* – to the generation of (financial) wealth is a menace to the nation's interest because the government does not profit, financially, from the minerals mined as a result of this illegal practice. *Galamsey*, then, needs to be eliminated insofar as the natural resources of the country belong to the state and, therefore, it is the prerogative of the state to appropriate their use. As such, the Ghana government's opposition to *galamsey* is not because illegal mining is an extractive practice that pollutes land and water, but because the unregulated extraction of precious metals is financially disadvantageous to the state.

Within this logic, the government's militarized response to dealing with illegal mining is justified and has criminalized the populations involved.¹ However, in many ways, the government has used *galamsey* as a scapegoat to sustain popular support for its pseudo-fight against environmental pollution while proclaiming *galamsey* as a menace that erodes the country's economic wealth, as well – basically, *galamsey* is theft. The government's justification for criminalizing *galamsey*, however, does not hold when tested against the level of theft attributable to legal corporate mining:

Every year, the vast majority of Ghana's natural wealth is stolen. The country is among the largest exporters of gold in the world, yet—according to a study by the Bank of Ghana—less than 1.7 percent of global returns from its gold make their way back to the Ghanaian government. This means that the remaining 98.3 percent is managed by outside entities—mainly multinational corporations, who keep the lion's share of the profits. In other words, of the \$5.2 billion of gold produced from 1990 to 2002, the government received only \$87.3 million in corporate income taxes and royalty payments.

(della Croce, 2019, para 1)

The Ghana government often has argued – though implicitly – that any set of narratives that does not support the mining of Ghana's natural resources is out of tune with the realities of the contemporary global economic society and, as such, does not need to be taken seriously. The result of such state-sanctioned discourses is that Ghana's Indigenous cosmologies, customs, and practices, which we argue here present more sustainable responses to Ghana's environmental challenges, have taken the back seat to global capitalist discourses.

Our analysis of how *galamsey* workers are described by the Ghanaian government and news media reports shows competing environmental ideologies that interact to illuminate a particular kind of ecocultural identity. In line with the core concept of this *Handbook*, we understand ecocultural identity as 'materially and discursively constructed' and 'at the heart of the positionalities, subjectivities, and practices that (in)form one's emotional, embodied, mental, and political sensibilities in and with the all-encompassing world' (Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020, p. xix). Through critical analysis of both government and privately produced media texts and comments from the public in media outlets, we investigate how media framing of the practice of *galamsey* has constructed workers' positionalities and subjectivities in relation to the ecological disruption of rivers, farmlands, and forests. We also examine the ethical, political, and economic sensibilities constructed and displayed in the government's responses to the environmental impacts of *galamsey*, media reports of ecological disasters, and public opinion regarding the situation of illegal mining in Ghana and its deleterious effects.

In the following sections, we examine the historical context of mining before colonization and the later introduction of corporate mining in Ghana. Next, we provide a critical overview of the assumptions supporting the global environmental discourse of development and its effects on Ghana's ecocultural identity as a country. Then, we describe the methods used in the data collection and present our media analysis. We argue that the securitization of the government's discourse about galamsey – and galamsey workers' and environmental protection groups' resistance to the government's discourses – shape the media framing of galamsey workers' ecocultural identities. In exploring these identities, it became evident that Indigenous traditional conceptualizations that embrace human–nonhuman interdependent relations remain subordinated to the interest of Ghana's development agenda based on neoliberal economic models that undermine human–nonhuman mutual dependency. This is because 1) these Indigenous perspectives are not strongly represented by any of the stakeholders in deliberations about Ghana's developmental agenda vis-à-vis the environment, and 2) before the Western republican system of governance came to Ghana, the traditional rulers (chiefs, queen-mothers and other elders of the traditional community) were the biggest advocates for Indigenous practices (Kendie & Guri, 2007). However, under the current system those leaders are subject to the nation's president and are, thus, subjected to the demands of the government to ensure adequate state resources are allocated to their communities.

The government's framing of the more-than-human world simply as 'natural resources' and the site for accumulating global financial capital is especially problematic as it represents a shift away from a local traditional system based on environmental reciprocity and connectedness and to a system based on environmental control and manipulation. Furthermore, galamsey workers are ostensibly framed as disastrous to Ghana's sustainable future, which has legitimized militaristic efforts to both control and protect the ecologies in danger. We end this chapter by emphasizing 'sankofa' – an Akan word meaning to 'return and take back' – as a linguistic intervention with the potential of rekindling intrinsic interconnections and mutuality between humans and the more-than-human world, a relationality that nurtured the formation of Indigenous ecocultural identities in pre-colonial Ghana and that we consider essential to redirecting the discussion on environmental issues in this African country today.

From artisanal to industrial: Galamsey in Ghana

Before the British invasion and the introduction of large-scale mining in Ghana, small-scale mining for gold was integral to the trade-based economy of most of the southern part of Ghana, such as the Asante, Denkyira, Akyem, and Wassa geographical areas (Ofosu-Mensah, 2011). Oral accounts and reports from early Dutch and Portuguese traders also mention the southwestern parts of Ghana, such as the Ahanta, Aowin, Nzema, Sefwi, and Assin areas, as linked to mining activity (Dumett, 1979). Pre-colonization, the search for gold and other minerals was among the top reasons the first Portuguese sailors came to the west coast of Africa (Ofosu-Mensah, 2011). According to Ofosu-Mensah (2017), although it is unclear exactly when gold mining began in Ghana, there is evidence the practice started several centuries before the arrival of the Portuguese in 1471, and later that it was Britain's strong interest in Ghana's gold that led the British to colonize the West African country in the early nineteenth century. Whereas mining itself is not new to most of western Africa, large-scale mining was introduced after the successive wars with the British in the late 1880s to early 1890s. Large-scale industrialized mining started as a result of the colonial government's privatization of land in mining areas of Ghana.

After the Ashanti Kingdom lost the war against the British in 1908, the colonial government privatized most of the areas with large deposits of gold and leased them to transnational corporations. However, after 1957, when Ghana gained independence from the British, gold production started to decline because the state took control of mining companies and a state ownership policy precipitated a period of low investments in the mining industry. This situation was compounded years later by Ghana's general economic hardships, which prompted the government to seek external help. According to Ofofu-Mensah (2017):

Out of economic desperation, Ghana opted for a World Bank/IMF packaged structural adjustment Program (SAP), with its prescriptions for neoliberal free-market reforms. Parts of the reform policies were aimed at boosting direct foreign investment into the national economy. Within this context, the mining sector, perceived as imbued with high potential for foreign-exchange revenue generation for the country, became a key target.

(pp. 75–76)

According to these neoliberal reforms, the government sold all state-owned gold mines to large multinational companies between 1985 and 2000. The arrival of these companies and the technology they brought with them severely challenged artisanal mining by, for instance, rendering obsolete tools and technology associated with small-scale mining practice, which mostly employed the use of simple tools like the pickaxe (Ofofu-Mensah, 2017). Moreover, large multinational companies saw small-scale mining as the ubiquitous competitor and a threat to their access to lands for mining and profit. The ensuing tensions caused sporadic conflicts between artisanal miners, local chiefs, and military personnel deployed to protect the financial interests of large multinational corporations. In response, the Ghanaian government ultimately outlawed artisanal mining, but, according to Ofofu-Mensah (2012), this legal situation failed to discourage small-scale miners, who have continued their practices mostly because Ghana still has large deposits of gold in many parts of the country. In fact, according to a U.S. geological survey report, Ghana is among the top 10 countries in terms of gold deposits, amounting to about 1,200 tons of still unearthened gold (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2016). This panorama strongly suggests that mining will keep its centrality in Ghana's economic history.

Before the industrialization of mining, traditional authorities – chiefs, Akan traditional priests, etc. – regulated gold extraction by using taboos aimed at respecting the land. The Akans are approximately 48 percent of Ghana's population, the largest demographic group in the country and one of the biggest ethnic groups in West Africa today (Index Mundi, 2018). The Akans comprise several tribes, most of whom speak different dialects of the Twi language. Akans traditionally occupy most of the middle and southern regions where the majority of the country's forest reserves can be found. It also is in these regions that gold mining is predominant. Eshun (2011) explains that Akan social taboos and customs shaped the ways local communities established their relationships with nonhumans. For instance, in Ghana's Akan tribes, '[humans] are not created alone. [They] are created to be in relation [to nature]' (Awolawu, 1972, p. 118). Clarke (1930) examines how Akan Indigenous practices also emphasize collectivity rather than individuality. Although they did not specify what this collectivity embraces, it is inferred from the Akan tribes' accounts that relationships include a living world beyond the human realm.

Akan people conceive of the world as consisting of two parallel realms: the spiritual and the corporeal. Religion – in this case, Akan traditional religion – takes center stage in people's lives in Akan communities. Akan Indigenous customs and traditions are necessary to keep the locals and foreigners from exploiting and destroying lands and water bodies for individual benefit. These restrictions, however, are overshadowed by the influx of imported religious and economic models. On the one hand, Ghana's colonization by the British saw a shift to Christianity for many Akans, which not only has confined Akan traditional religion to only certain communities that have managed to retain their traditional ways, but also has framed these traditions as antithetical to Christian modernity. On the other hand, neoliberal ideologies based on individuality and a free market inform the government's development policies such as those that support and emphasize the privatization of gold mining companies as an avenue for Ghana's economic progress (see Harvey, 2007). For instance, although activists and other civil society groups have spoken against the effects of large-scale industrial mining on the environment, the government and the media represent industrial mining companies in the Ashanti region as benefactors through their donations of goods and financial resources to local hospitals and communities affected by the activities of mining.

The contemporary legality/illegality of large-scale vs. small-scale mining benefits multinational gold mining companies. The Ghanaian government protects these companies' interests by placing their extractive activity within the frame of the law – thus, disregarding and undermining the negative ecological impacts of these transnational mining companies. In contrast, in relation to *galamsey*, the government uses ecological disasters to justify direct, militarized actions against small-scale mining and miners. As we show below, the discourse of development nuanced the fact that mining inherently is an extractive practice and has dire environmental implications – whether small-scale communal or large scale industrial – and the government's 'war' only on *galamsey* and not on the large-scale mining industry is misplaced as long as multinational gold mining companies continue to pollute, often with no repercussions. In the next section, we present the assumptions supporting a predominantly Western discourse of development that informs the Ghana government's media sphere around *galamsey*.

Development as global environmental discourse

As meta-narratives, global environmental discourses such as development reveal neo-colonial dynamics insofar as they construct the more-than-human world as Other, facilitating the positioning of 'nature' as a singular strategic asset, investment, and/or entity of management (Escobar, 2012; Scott & Dingo, 2012). Of all global environmental discourses, development is arguably the most entrenched in the heart of modernity. Scott and Dingo (2012) use Appadurai's term 'megarhetoric' to describe the way development, as a discourse, is 'propelled by taken-for-granted assumptions about development's goals, functions, and effects' (p. 5).

There are three assumptions underlying the dominant paradigm of development that shape institutional structures and eventually affect economic, social, and environmental policies, as well as everyday lives. First, Western development's epistemological assumptions fuse rationality and progress, both framed by international institutions as universal positives to strive for in order to propel economic growth (mainly read in gross domestic product [GDP] terms). The second assumption presents a temporal and technological bias. A commonsense rhetoric is implicit in the predisposition of conceiving development as a linear process, that is, 'a movement or progression from an economic, social, and cultural state of weakness and danger to one of strength and security' (Scott & Dingo, 2012, p. 5). The third assumption

supports the dominant paradigm of development by constructing development as apolitical and ahistorical. The construction of development as value-free renders it as a technical concept that furthers the presumption of rationality and stresses technological solutions. This allegedly pragmatic view leaves out considerations of power relations that influence ‘what counts as serious or legitimate knowledge about development’ (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 11). Moreover, the presumed ahistorical nature of the discourse of development make it a megarhetoric that, for instance, political institutions and NGOs often take as a given and as applicable to all contexts (Lewis, 2011).

In Ghana, governmental development discourses rationalize programs that limit spending on social services and leverage natural resources for economic gains. For instance, in June 2017, the vice president of Ghana, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, was in China to negotiate a deal that would see Ghana leverage its bauxite reserves in the Atewa forest in the eastern region of the country for about \$15 billion (Appiah, 2018). This arrangement would be a sort of barter system where Ghana would exchange bauxite for economic and technological support from China. Many civil society groups have spoken out against this decision because they perceive it as an economic threat to the future of millions of Ghanaians. For example, Dontoh (2018) writing for Bloomberg News reported ‘Ghana will have to use alternative sources to pay back China’s Sinohydro Corp. for \$2 billion in infrastructure if the revenue from an earmarked bauxite project is insufficient to meet installments’ (para 1). Additionally, scientists and environmental conservationists have warned that leveraging the Atewa forest Reserve would destroy a unique ecosystem – one found in only a few places in the world (Debrah, 2017). This quote from a Conservation International publication supports this claim:

In Ghana, one of the most important and largest forests is the Atewa Range Forest Reserve (23,663 ha). Atewa is unique because it contains Upland Evergreen forest.... Over the last 90 years, Atewa has been recognized as an important reservoir of biodiversity and has been officially classified in various ways: as a national forest reserve in 1926, a Special Biological Protection Area in 1994, a Hill Sanctuary in 1995 and as one of Ghana’s 30 Globally Significant Biodiversity Areas (GSBAs) in 1999. In 2001, Atewa was listed as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International.

(Rapid Assessment Program, 2007)

The predominance of economic logic over ecological logic in such decisions reveals the prevalence of assumptions supporting a Western discourse of development that informs Ghana government policies.

Discourse analysis of ecocultural voice

This study utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodology to examine how ecocultural identities of galamsey workers are constructed within ongoing discourses of economic development and transnational capitalism. We use CDA in the tradition of Norman Fairclough. Fairclough (2003) defines CDA as the ‘analysis of the relationship between concrete language use and the wider social-cultural structures’ (p. 16). He attributes three dimensions to every discursive event: text, discursive practice (which also includes the production and consumption of texts), and social practice. Every discursive event is simultaneously taking place within these three dimensions. This form of CDA includes more complex discursive and social practices that cannot be understood only by looking at the structure of the text

but also require illuminating the competing ideologies and power relations that form and inform the production of fields of signification (Richardson, 2006).

Our approach as researchers in collecting and analyzing the data is informed by our differentiated knowledge of and engagement with Ghana's contemporary socioeconomic and environmental situation. As an Akan from the Ashanti region of Ghana, a Christian, and a scholar whose work critiques the neoliberal foundations of global development discourse, co-author Eric Karikari recognizes the inherent contradictions of his identities in relation to this study – for instance, contradictions between his Akan ethnic beliefs, which support a healthy relationship among the human and the non-human elements of society, and those from his Western – dominantly Christian – education in Ghana that encourage exploitation of the non-human for economic gain. However, as a person whose entire life has consisted of navigating these contradictions, he maintains that his ecocultural identity is largely based on his respect for Akan traditions, which are in direct resistance to the neoliberal – and, in many ways, Christian – tendency to subdue and exploit spirited non-human actors.

While discussing the context in Ghana, as an Ecuadorian, co-author José Castro-Sotomayor identified parallels between ways the Ghanaian government speaks about mining and Ecuador's government attempts – currently and during his country's most neoliberal decade of the 1990s – to implement policies for further privatization and natural resource exploitation. Thus, José approaches the present study as a way of understanding the transnational character of extractivism – in this case, of small- or large-scale mining, whose effects are similar among countries that are part of the Global South as these countries' economies are strongly dependent on exploiting and exporting raw material (gold in Ghana's case, gold and oil in Ecuador's).

Godfried Asante, the third co-author of this study, is also an Akan from Ghana and a scholar whose work critiques a range of forms of normalizing discrimination. Working on this project with Eric and José has been a wakeup call for him to rethink how colonization has had a tremendous impact on his ecocultural identities. This study enabled him to search his own identity and understand how it is saturated with competing understandings of 'nature' and 'the environment.' Like Eric, Godfried's ecocultural identities are predominantly framed within Akan Indigenous traditions and customs that see the human and the more-than-human world as interconnected and constitutive. Similarly, his identity also is influenced by Christianity as it relates to Western colonization even though he does not currently identify as a Christian. The intersecting of all these historical and ontological journeys informs our analysis.

We conducted a critical analysis of media reports and stories, government narratives, and civil society discourses obtained from online sources between 2010 and 2018 that included: (1) Ghana governmental press releases and reports; (2) Ghanaian online news media reports, such as Ghana News Agency and news portals such as Myjoyonline.com and Citifmonline.com; and (3) public responses on Twitter and YouTube². One important feature of newspaper reporting in Ghana is the 'house style,' also known as 'who leads' journalistic style of writing. Hasty (2005) argues house style refers to a specific textual frame for shaping the narrative of most news stories of state-owned newspapers in Ghana. This frame structures a set of preferences by highlighting certain elements of an event while deemphasizing or obscuring other elements. The house style focuses on the pronouncements of 'newsmakers' such as government officials, political leaders, and comments from leaders in other countries as newsworthy stories. This process echoes an interpretative frame that legitimizes statements of officials and ministers of state as representations of newsworthy events and subordinates dissident voices – among those, Indigenous voices – hence, silencing traditional knowledges, customs, and practices.

In line with the goals of CDA, we combine language use with the specific social/cultural and ecological contexts to interpret what is being said and what is being omitted. In utilizing textual analysis as the initial step to identify themes and concepts, we used purposive sampling to collect media reports and stories, government narratives, and civil society discourses accessed via social media. Currently, all major Ghanaian newspapers and radio stations have a web presence, and their news content is shared through social media. This enables newspaper articles to be distributed widely across the country and beyond. ‘Together,’ Tetey (2016) wrote, ‘these online websites are valuable depositories of information that has a national resonance and global reach, with an audience that is largely Ghanaian but de-territorialized within global circuits’ (p. 90). The online nature of media organizations in Ghana presents easy access to past news reports and editorials, overriding the constraints of geographical distance and the challenges of obtaining physical copies of newspapers. In what follows, we show how Ghana governmental press releases and reports, Ghanaian online news media reports, and public responses on Twitter and YouTube frame ecological disasters associated with the activity of *galamsey*, thus discursively constructing *galamsey* workers’ ecocultural identities as dangerous to the nation.

Natural resources, nationhood, and the securitization of *galamsey*

The Ghana government’s discourse regarding *galamsey* and *galamsey* workers seems to bring together colonial histories that usually intersect and that are articulated by an imagined nationhood built upon an extractivist spirit infused by imported and imposed religious anthropocentric entitlements. A colonial dynamic pervades the contemporary relationship between Ghana’s mining ‘tradition’ and the country’s role in the current capitalist global economy. In a news report, writer Antwi Sarpong’s (2017) states:

Again, like the slave trade, those who are subjected to the drudgery earn very little, with their lives on the lifeline, while foreigners are the principal beneficiaries of *galamsey*, as most of the proceeds are taken out of the country.

Sarpong’s use of ‘slave trade’ as an analogy to denounce the political economy of contemporary *galamsey*’s trade circuit, suggests a historical continuity that positions Ghana in its role as a provider of human labor and raw materials. And while this role is not exclusive to Ghana’s economy, what is problematic is the Ghanaian government’s naturalization of the country’s extractive practices via historical accounts that praise Ghana’s exploitation of natural resources as ‘heritage.’ That is, extractivism is at the core of Ghana’s identification as a nation and Ghanaians have the historical usufructuary right to their land. In one article from the government’s news media outlet, Ghanaian President Akufo-Addo stated:

for many centuries, Ghana has been a country of mineral deposits and the exploitation of minerals. We are not trying to ban mining in Ghana. We cannot do that. The mineral deposits in our country are part of our heritage and are meant to be exploited for the benefit of this and future generations.

(GNA, 2017b)

Nationhood intersects with and reifies Ghana’s colonial history. In Ghana’s case, gold has become part of a history told to legitimize the very existence of the country. A halo of

national pride surrounds the country's heritage that, according to President Akufo-Addo, goes as far back as the fifteenth century when the Portuguese Christianized Ghana's first modern city as Elmina, meaning 'The Mine' (GNA, 2017a). Since then, Ghanaian governments have recognized mining as an important asset for the country's economy, which the government, and the nation for that matter, 'cannot' ban.

The conception of mining as constitutive of Ghana's national imaginary makes it difficult to reconcile the continuation of environmentally damaging activities, such as legal or illegal mining, and the government's promise of protecting the environment from the menace of galamsey. For instance, in one of his addresses, Ghana's president Akufo-Addo announced the government's resolution to stop galamsey. This directive is not to be confused with a ban on legal mining – legal mining was never banned. As stated earlier, galamsey always has been used as a scapegoat for Ghana's fight to reclaim its environment. After stating that small-scale mining was destroying lands and water bodies, he stressed that 'the Ghana bequeathed to us by our forebears is the same Ghana we must leave for the unborn generations' (GNA, 2017c). This determination demonstrates that the destruction of Ghana's environment is not only a matter of an ecological crisis but also, and more relevant in Ghana's case, a matter of the configuration of a nation 'bequeathed' to Ghanaians by their 'forebears.' To investigate the media construction of galamsey worker's ecocultural identities, more pertinent than stressing the economic or political dimensions of this mining practice, our analysis directs attention to land and water as constitutive nonhuman elements in the construction of Ghana's national identity insofar as 'the activities of illegal miners jeopardize the very survival of our nation,' according to President Akufo-Addo (GNA, 2017c).

Relatedly, the government's framing of illegal small-scale mining represents galamsey as a threat not only to the water bodies, farmlands, and communities' health, but also as a peril to the very ecocultural identity of the nation. The differentiated inscription of mining into Ghana's nationhood narrative exemplifies how ecocultural identities are 'historical, discursive, material, and temporal, and are contingent upon the dialectical process involving the formation of ecological subjectivities and environmental identities' (Castro-Sotomayor, 2020, p. 71). The dialectics between everyday practices of galamsey and the political project of nation building are infused with ambiguity insofar as the formation of Ghana's national ecocultural identity evolves within – and in inextricable relation to – the ecological conditions affected by the same practice of mining, whether legal or illegal, that the government claims to be the core of Ghana's nationhood. For instance, after assuring that his government was not 'against mining,' President Akufo-Addo stated:

after all, the minerals have to be extracted, but what we are not going to allow is compromising the future of our country, drying up of our rivers, pollution of our atmosphere by illegal small-scale mining. We are not going to allow that.

(GNA, 2017d)

In other words, galamseyers' ecological subjectivities – which may still refer to Akan traditions – are subsumed by a threatening ecocultural identity, ascribed by the Ghanaian media complex to galamsey workers, which portrays galamseyers as detrimental to the nation's wellbeing. However, the legalized large-scale miners – in the form of large mining corporations – are spared such characterization both by the government and by the media, although they pollute the environment in a similar and even more deleterious fashion than galamseyers.

Under the overarching idea of nation, there are legal and Christian religious elements relevant to understand how identities emerge within the extractive zone of galamsey where environmental damages of mining are unavoidable and undeniable. Thus, anthropocentric entitlements oscillate between rights and the divine, that is to say, the unquestionable authority humans have over the resources the Christian God placed in Ghana's territory. This divine link can be seen in the Society of Professional Journalists' call to halt extractivist activities – a.k.a. galamsey – which the Society describes as 'involved in this dangerous destruction of our God-Given land, water bodies and earthly resources, whether nationals or foreigners' (GNA, 2017a). This contrasts what the Indigenous religious practitioners – who also believe in a divine being – would advocate. For instance, Appiah-Opoku (2007) explained that Indigenous religious practices regard humans' relationship with the environment as one of conservation rather than exploitation. By the same token, the link between nation and the Christian religion in Ghana is reproduced at national governmental levels. For instance, in President Akufo-Addo's address in the graduation ceremony of the Trinity Theological Seminary in Ghana's capital, Accra, he called upon graduates:

to rise up to their religious responsibilities and stimulate the desired motivational spirit of renewal and transformation towards effective nation-building.

(GBC, 2017, para. 15)

In this way, Christian religious views profoundly shape and support Ghana's contemporary national imaginary. For instance, while critiquing and exposing the dangers of galamsey to the environment, Kwaku Yormesor (2017), a supporter of the government's actions against galamsey, states:

The youth in every community across the country have the obvious right to access and exploit the endowed local natural resources to their advantage in order to enhance livelihood in a sustainable manner devoid of jeopardizing the values for prosperity.

The evocation of (youth/human) rights reveals, on one hand, how the Western discourse of development based on 'prosperity' and articulated as sustainable livelihoods inoculates institutions and reproduces colonial arguments of civilization and a mythological/religious purpose of humans' manifest destiny (Merchant, 1995). The mention of the 'right to exploit... natural resources' points to the Christian belief that God put humans in charge of all creation to dominate and exploit it. On the other, the references to rights in Yormesor's quote and other similar quotes in the media, bring the discussion of galamsey into the frame of legality.

The legal frame is more explicit in a statement from Nana Akomea, a representative of a group of illegal miners (galamsey operators) from the western region of Ghana, who states:

We all know that gold cannot be left under the ground, it needs to be mined so we are pleading that we should be helped to do it in the right way.

(GNA, 2018)

In this context, the 'right way' does not mean to stop mining in the rivers or along river banks, but to legalize mining activity for galamseyers to 'operate on the land within the confines of the law' as Nana Akomea demands (GNA, 2018). The legalization of mining activity would certainly shift illegal miners' ecocultural identities – for instance, they would no longer be seen as galamseyers as their activity would be legally accepted – but we argue

legalization would not alter their ecological subjectivity as their relationship to rivers and their shores may remain utilitarian and, from the government's position, the ecological damages would remain deemed secondary or as expected externalities of mining practices.

The human right to exploit natural resources cannot be fully understood without the Christian religious element. In Ghana's history, the imported Christian God and gold are intertwined, as Ghanaian President Akuffo Addo iterates: 'Ghanaians were blessed with land and mineral resources and had the right to exploit it, the government had the responsibility to protect and not destroy the land and river bodies' (Yeboah, 2017). The notion of 'blessing' is collocated next to land and mineral resources that, as stated, constitute one of Ghana's core national elements. This discursive move reifies Ghana's nationhood while sanctifying human actions on the land as divine human rights which, in opinion leader Kodzo Abissath's (2017) words, 'those galamsey demons' are jeopardizing.

Similarly, in another opinion piece titled "Operation Vanguard" – A timely savior of our environment,' published on the government's website, after praising the government's military operations against galamsey, Kodzo Abissath (2017) states,

How beautiful and wonderful is nature!... Oceans, rivers, forests, flowers, beasts, birds, butterflies, rocks, and all other minerals that dwell in the belly of our Mother Earth, are all placed at the disposal of mankind.

(para 2)

This statement is a synthesis of the interplay among the securitization of galamsey, natural resources, nationhood, and Christian beliefs. Although caring for 'our environment' is highlighted, the author conceives the more-than-human world (oceans, rivers, forests, etc.) as resources 'at the disposal of mankind;' also, the use of 'Mother Earth' in this quote deeply differs from the meanings and imaginaries that this gendered metaphor of 'nature' has, especially when used by Indigenous peoples (see Magallanes-Blanco, 2015). Here, we see an example of the discursive tension between the Indigenous perspective and the neoliberal capitalist discourse when the author – who we guess is an Indigenous Ghanaian, judging from his name – invokes the natural environment as 'beautiful' and yet is 'placed at the disposal of mankind.' This interplay supports anthropocentric entitlements over natural resources whose exploitation is framed as vital to Ghana's nationhood survival and a justification for militaristic action.

The intersection of securitization and nation, as well as a Christian-based instrumental view on nature solely as a resource could explain the lack of critique in the Ghana government's media sphere of the activity of mining itself. On the contrary, what we found is the government advocates for mining – legal or illegal – as necessary and even righteous, but not without risk, as columnist Mawutidzi Kodzo Abissath (2017) states:

No Government of Ghana has ever denied Ghanaian citizens the right to engage in small-scale mining. What they have always said, and which Nana Akufo-Addo's government is also stressing is that, if you are a Ghanaian and want to engage in small-scale mining, please do so in accordance with the laws of the land. If care is not taken it is only lawlessness that may lead this peaceful country into a ditch one day.

Within this distressed context, dissident voices emerge and complicate the extractivist panorama of the Ghana government's discursive script. We turn to these voices in the next section.

Galamsey, resistance, and ecocultural identities

The Ghanaian government's construction of nation relies on utilitarian conceptions of the more-than-human world, which are amplified from a Christian religious perspective connected to the country's colonial history. From the intersection of these meta-narratives – nation, nature, and God – the government normalizes the country's extractive practices by framing them as necessary for Ghana's development agenda, which relies on 'God-given' natural resources such as gold and diamonds. Therefore, the securitization of discourse about illegal mining is a logical consequence of the historic link between extractivism and nationalism materialized in the militarization of galamsey spaces.

In the midst of a highly nationalized discourse regarding mining and securitization, there also is resistance from galamsey workers evidenced in ways galamseyers understand their extractive activity and its consequences. Although we were unable to find any evidence in the data to explain why the online reports and comments analyzed included very few sentiments from the galamsey workers, we speculate this was representative of the marginalization of galamsey workers' voices in the overall government's media sphere. However, dissident voices could be found in non-governmental media outlets, such as Hirsch's (2013) YouTube documentary on galamsey. In her piece, Hirsch interviews some illegal miners who claimed they armed themselves with handguns to prevent the local people from stealing from them. The illegal miners in this documentary also claimed what they did (their mining activity) was beneficial to the people of Ghana.

The galamsey workers voiced resistance to the government's anti-galamsey discourse – which portrayed them as polluters and as a threat to the nation – by framing their actions in technological terms (e.g., providing much needed equipment for mining), as well as in economic terms of 'survival' (e.g., buying guns to protect their source of income).

One consequence of mechanized mining, whether legal or illegal, according to Hirsch (2013) is that the machinery used often leaves behind significant amounts of gold that can only be extracted by hand. This creates a secondary industry where miners would extract the gold by hand, illegally. One gold trader, a local resident who had several small-scale illegal miners working for him, stated that galamsey 'hasn't helped us at all. Since the galamsey started all our water bodies have been polluted. Our farm lands have been destroyed' (Hirsch, 2013). He, however, admitted that he only engaged in galamsey as a means of economic survival. Ironically, the regions of Ghana known for the most intense galamsey activity also are collectively known for the high agricultural activity that occurs there (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009). Galamsey pollutes and erodes the land and waters putting at risk communities' food security and agricultural economy as chemicals used in mining seep into and deteriorate the soil, rivers, and lakes. The irony also lies in the fact that many of the galamsey workers and operators double as locals of the communities and, as the operator acknowledged, they are aware of the hazardous nature of their work for the entire community. However, as exemplified above, their pursuit of mining activities despite the environmental devastation it causes evidences a monolithic view of the more-than-human environment as a resource to be exploited, in this case, for human economic survival.

Here, we bring into focus two main issues. First, as stated earlier, the assumptions supporting the Western notion of development privilege rationality and progress, features that can be seen in both the state's and galamseyers' conception of nature as an object. Second, one of the issues that further complicates the discussion on galamsey is the increasing involvement of non-local illegal miners, notably from China, Niger, Burkina Faso, and non-mining regions of Ghana. Chinese miners, for instance, have received the bulk of the

criticism not only for their involvement on the mining activity, but due to their disregard for the laws of the country, as exemplified by the tone of the following tweet using the hashtag #StopGalamseyNow: 'Fuck the Chinese Mission, the Ambassador, in fact fuck the whole of China.' Another tweet using the same hashtag stated: 'There are people who go to China to get people to come and invest in galamsey.' Yet another tweet stated, 'you travelled all the way to #Ghana just to engage in #illegal mining n [sic] destroying our water bodies. Can we do same [sic] in China? @china.'

The tweets above seem to suggest that anti-galamsey discourse tends to position foreigners as the primary perpetrators of illegal mining – a position that is widespread in the reports and comments analyzed – and serves to divert attention from galamsey performed by Ghanaians. According to Luedi (2019), though it is unclear how many illegal miners there are in Ghana, about 50,000 Chinese migrants living in Ghana engage in galamsey. Hirsh (2013) reported that about 95 percent of all small-scale mining activity in Ghana was illegal. These numbers do not show the relative numbers of local and foreign – mostly Chinese – galamseyers. However, we add here that perhaps the attribution of much of the galamsey activities to foreigners is due to their relative visibility; they operate with more machinery and, therefore, cover more of the land area. As mentioned above, this also shows that the government's insistence on ending galamsey as a way of protecting the environment is only partly true. Much of the issue is that galamseyers do not remit to the state, hence the illegality of their operations. Aboka, Cobbina, and Doke (2018) revealed that both legal and illegal mining have long-lasting, adverse effects on the environment. Therefore, singling out galamsey operations for criticism and punishment is disingenuous.

The colonial dynamics embedded in the discourse of development seem to remain intact although the actors have changed, with China taking the place/role that the British played before as those 'helping' through international aid or investments (which usually equals privatization), a classic neoliberal script. In the operator's view from the excerpt above, the only thing worth considering is the economic benefit galamsey brings to the operators and their (local) workers. Ironically, the machinery brought by these investors helps hundreds of unemployed people find jobs but in the illegal mining business, which positions them as the target of the government's militaristic measures. Also, the economic framing of foreign actors implicated in galamsey allows investors to position themselves as contributing to (being helpful to) Ghana's prosperity. In economic terms, an instrumental ideology prevails; that is, reducing all wealth to financial gains and all ecological destruction to expected externalities. Wealth is equated to net financial gain, regardless of other costs or benefits.

The ecological dimension of galamsey workers' identities emerged within an ironic frame. It is ironic that, while the galamsey workers and operators deem it necessary to protect themselves and their gold haul from local people, the local people feel the former are increasingly robbing them of both their current and future wealth by destroying the bodies of water. Wealth, in this instance, signifies not only the possible economic value the local people place on the natural environment around them but also the ecological knowledge threatened by the disappearance of the spaces that ground people's ecocultural systems of meaning deeply rooted in agriculture. Our analysis focuses on the effects of this phenomenon on the promotion/destruction of a sustainable relationship between humans and non-humans. The discourse of (economic) survival is linked to our conceptualization of resistance in the sense that for galamsey workers much of what we theorize as resistance to the government's anti-galamsey discourse is intimately connected to the workers' struggle to reconcile short-term economic survival with longer-term survival of the traditional Akan relationship with the nonhuman. Among the Akan, this relationship has traditionally been sustained

through the authority of chiefs and queen-mothers, who are the custodians of the sacredness of the land and water bodies. Akan traditional and religious authorities and the inclusive relationships they guard have been ignored or, worse, co-opted by the government as another way to present and justify mining activities.

Traditional rulers as Government's neoliberal agents

Tweneboah (2012) argues that 'modernity has challenged Indigenous African societies with a compelling dichotomization of traditionalism and modernism, chieftaincy and democracy' (p. 118). The authority of the Akan traditional rulers has been reduced to acting as a galvanizing force for the government's agenda. That is, traditional rulers mainly play the role of the government's agent when the latter wants to mobilize support for a specific agenda. For instance, in this news report about the role of traditional rulers in the fight against galamsey, Awlesu (2017) noted:

Barimah Okogyeatuo Agyemang, the Adontenhene of the Dormaa Traditional Area, commended President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo for his commitment towards the fight against illegal mining and logging. He affirmed the Council's commitment to support the government in the implementation of policies and programmes that would facilitate accelerated national development.

(para 12–13)

In another example, Opoku (2017) reported that:

The President of the Western Regional House of Chiefs, Ogyeahoho Yaw Gyebi II has emphasized his unflinching support to the government in its efforts to stop illegal gold mining also called 'galamsey' in some parts of the country.

(para 1)

These examples show how Akan traditional leadership has been co-opted by contemporary social and political conditions to act as government agents, instead of acting on behalf of their traditional communities.

The above excerpts are, more importantly, contrary to Akan traditions, prior to colonization and Western democracy, where rulers had the power to sanction/punish individuals for flouting the laws of the land. This corresponds with Dei's (1994) study in which he explained that Akan Indigenous knowledge of the relationship between humans and nonhumans emphasized harmony, reciprocity, and partnerships. However, in these examples, the solutions being offered do not make any reference to such human–nonhuman relationships, and only suggest traditional leaders provide support for the government's neoliberal agenda.

Subsequently, capitalist environmental discourses such as development bring forward a galamsey ecocultural identity that is complex and contradictory. In the context of Akan traditional values of nurturing a healthy human–nonhuman relationship, the state is as guilty as the galamsey operators and workers. The general posture of the government has been to encourage mining as an extractive practice but reduce the incidences of illegal mining. For instance, the government's long-term solution to the problem is to train the illegal miners and legalize their practice. This is exemplified in Syme and Agbeve's (2018) story, which reported on a joint military and police operation government initiative to combat galamsey:

Describing the intervention of *Operation Vanguard* as highly successful, President Akufo-Addo said as an additional measure towards containing illegal mining, the government put measures in place to train more than 600 [illegal] miners at the University of Mines in Tarkwa in 2017 on proper mining methods.

(para 13)

Again, the regulations being operationalized here do not seek to protect the integrity of mining communities' ecosystems. They are meant to emphasize the logic of exploitation of the natural environment. In general, the government's opposition to galamsey is only partially based on concerns about how it impacts the human and natural resource capacity of the country. More importantly, galamsey is the scapegoat whose constant demonization is used as a means of assuring citizens that the government is working to halt environmental degradation. This is shown in the report of a statement by Ghana's Minister of Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs by Barimah (2018):

According to Mr. Dzamesi the rate at which galamsey was impacting the environment negatively and affecting the health of people in the mining areas gave cause for worry.

(para 6)

Even though several stakeholder groups showed disapproval for galamsey operations due to their recorded negative consequences, it is evident the solutions being offered ignored the ecocultural relationships grounded in Akan traditional religious practices that had sustained these same ecologies on which Akan communities have depended for sustenance for thousands of years. The above is the reason why we emphasize *sankofa* – an Akan word meaning to 'return and take back.' In the following section we propose *sankofa* as an approach to rekindling the vital, mutual relationships between humans and more-than-humans as a way to redirect the country away from its current extractive ethos.

Rekindling local Indigenous cosmologies

In this study, we posit that the ideology of neoliberal capitalism reconfigures pre-colonial ontological discourses about the more-than-human world from interrelatedness to separateness and legitimizes environmental exploitation in the name of financial and economic growth. The framing of ecological disasters by both government officials and galamsey workers conforms to development's epistemological assumptions, which fuse rationality and progress as universal positives to strive for in order to increase national or individual economic wealth. Thus, the Ghanaian government aligns its environmental discourse with those of global international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in an attempt to reconcile economic growth with ecological sustainability (Dryzek, 2013). The current environmental discourses used by the Ghanaian government frame large-scale corporate mining, small-scale mining companies, and galamsey workers (or illegal miners) within Ghana's historical dependence on large scale mining as necessary for Ghana's economic development. Contrary to legal large-scale mining, galamsey is represented as a threat to Ghana's national heritage and development ethos.

The disturbed ecological dimension is key to understanding the securitization of discourses and the militarization of spaces where galamsey occurs. While the militarization of spaces rich in natural resources is neither unique to Ghana, nor is it a new phenomenon (Brock, 1997; Fisher & Anderson, 2015; Trombetta, 2010), our analysis shows that in Ghana securitization is the discursive mechanism through which the government rationalizes

military enforcement by framing bellicose actions as necessary ‘to protect’ the nation-state’s ‘environment.’ However, the government does not claim to protect ecosystems from mining in general, but from illegal small-scale mining specifically. This legal distinction allows the government to support the large-scale exploitation of land and water bodies by national, and increasingly transnational, corporations, arguing economic benefits for the country. Similarly, galamsey workers reframe their illegality and justify their extractive mining activities as necessary for their own economic survival in the capitalist marketplace.

Within the government’s media sphere, Ghana’s historical dependence on the trading of gold is embedded in a chauvinistic spirit that facilitates a media construction of particular galamsey workers’ ecocultural identities whose subjectivity is not ecological but extractivist; that is, their relationship to the more-than-human world is informed by instrumentalist notions rather than ecocentric or biocentric ones. The shifting discourses from a pre-colonial understanding of the more-than-human world as interconnected to human existence, to a current iteration of natural resources as a necessary ingredient for the country’s economic development is not unique to Ghana but can be observed in other African countries. Debelo, Legesse, Milstein, and Orkaydo (2017) observed a similar discursive shift among the Gedeo of Southern Ethiopia with parallel influencing factors such as the pervasiveness of the market economy logic, imported Western Christianity and education systems, and urbanization. What the present media case study of galamsey shows is how pervasive these factors are and ways they shape the representations of ecocultural identities.

We posit *sankofa* as one possible way of reshaping ecocultural identities in Ghana. The *sankofa* symbol is associated with the Akan proverb ‘*Se wo were fi nase wo sankofa a yenkyi*,’ which translates to ‘it’s not wrong to go back to that which you have forgotten.’ The Akans’ ancient and rich cultural tradition has an extensive system of communication through pictographic symbols as a writing system. *Sankofa* – the symbol of a mythical bird flying forward but looking backward – is one of the most common and predominantly utilized symbols rooted in the Akan experience. There is an egg in the bird’s mouth indicating the ‘gem’ of knowledge of the past from which current and future generations can benefit. The symbolic value of *sankofa* in Akan cosmology opens up spaces to counter the epistemological assumptions of false linearity embedded in discourses of development. As a measure of time, *sankofa* looks at history as circular rather than as a linear construct of time, directionality that explains the facing of the bird. But it could also direct us to a place and time from which to reimagine possibilities for ecocultural identity, and social and ecological change, within the neocolonial and global context.

To draw on *sankofa* is not to unproductively return to historical traditional ways of ecocultural relations. In fact, scholars such as Kanu (2007) resist the notion of *sankofa* as simply a retrieving of past traditions and ways of being. She argues such recuperation should be creatively re-appropriated to fit contemporary needs. While Kanu (2007) employs *sankofa* as a form of ‘creative disruption,’ we invoke *sankofa* for its critical reflective effects.

Accordingly, we advance that *sankofa*’s self-reflective ethos could function as a way of pushing for an ecocultural ontology that relies on the collective notion of a ‘sense of relations-in-place’ (Milstein et al., 2011, p. 489). A sense of relations-in-place focuses on the ecocultural meanings that shape notions of ‘the environment’ in relation to dwelling, land, belonging, lineage, and the sacred. In Akan societies, as mentioned, taboos were utilized as a social control mechanism to regulate the relationship between human and the more-than-human world. For instance, farmers were not allowed to go to their farm on Thursdays and, at certain times of the year, they were asked not to farm in order for ‘*asaase yaa*’ (Mother Earth) to rest. In other areas, certain animals were not allowed to be killed, especially for sport. Water and mountains were sacred and inhabited by gods. Protective taboos constituted the environmental discourses rooted in ecocultural codes and histories, identities, and places.

It is clear that a return to the cultivation of a harmonious relationship between humans and the more-than-human is an urgent need. There needs to be a more substantive, paradigmatic change and sankofa, as a cultural framework for this change, goes far beyond an examination of social taboos. Stakeholders, including the government of Ghana and traditional rulers of gold mining areas of the land, need to help re-nurture a different kind of ecocultural identity. Consequently, our approach is not to unreflectively return to these practices (taboos, rituals, etc.), but to recover important aspects of the relationship between humans and the more-than-human that were communicated through those practices.

We advocate for an ecoculture where the question ‘what is the value of human relations with the more-than-human?’ is more important than ‘for what could we leverage these resources?’ Finally, and more importantly, in the spirit of sankofa, we encourage a critical reflection on the past as a way to forge forward ecocultural understandings that have been sacrificed to accommodate a neoliberal, extractive ontology that is pervasive within Ghana’s nationhood. Sankofa, thus, offers a path toward a new ecological ontology that may rewrite Ghana’s history and redirect the country away from its current extractive ethos.

Note

- 1 In answering to Parliament about the initiatives the government was implementing to minimize or eliminate galamsey, Ghana’s Minister for Lands and Natural Resources John Peter Amewu reported that many galamsey sites across the country had been closed down and 90 percent of heavy-duty earth-moving machinery at galamsey sites had been evacuated, while more than 3,000 floating platforms had been destroyed and more than 347 persons involved in illegal mining had been arrested and put before court (Frempon-Ntiamoah, 2017, para. 2).
- 2 We accessed the news that supports this study in 2018. During the time this *Handbook* was in process, some links to the news used for the analysis became inaccessible. This situation may be due to the Ghanaian government changing its official website, from Ghana.gov to presidency.gov.gh. We searched again for the news, by their titles and the quotes we used to present our argument. We found different websites hosted some news and others were partially accessible in Internet portals that led us back to the main (inactive) website, ghana.gov. When possible, we replaced and used the new links; in other instances, we added the portal with the partial news content. However, we could not find a link to Antwi Sarpong (2017), from which we extracted a quote key to our argument; in this case, we left the original link. Finally, it is worth mentioning that, in doing this new search, several of the Internet searches showed links to companies selling heavy mining machinery – the kind used in legal mining by big corporations. This sort of digital cooptation is in itself interesting, and could be read as another way of narrowing the media sphere about legal or illegal mining in Ghana and, thus, silencing dissenting voices emerging to contest the government’s development narrative.

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Conservation hero and climate villain binary identities of Swedish farmers

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Individuals and groups can relate to – and give names to their relationships with – the more-than-human world in various ways. In this chapter, we call this process the self-identification of ecocultural identity and suggest that statements of one's own dependence and influence on ecosystems are important for societal actors' decision-making about what to do environmentally. However, there is limited clarity on what happens when the expression for ecocultural identity available in public discourse is limited to a choice between two mutually exclusive alternatives – hero or villain. Binary ecocultural identity constructions appear when contemporary language and discursive norms classify and categorize actors in ways that limit their choices of self-identification, self-presentation, and self-understanding. In this chapter, we exemplify this dilemma by analyzing changes in public media's ascription of identity to Swedish livestock farmers from 'environmental heroes' to 'environmental villains.' We analyze how these two identities are discursively constructed in media representations, and how farmers' choices of self-presentation are limited by the binary construction. We conclude there is a risk that such mutually exclusive constructions reduce farmers' motivation and engagement in acts of sustainability that are related identity work.

The *environmental hero* identity is related to conservation practices farmers perform to benefit biodiversity in the Swedish agricultural landscape, whereas the *environmental villain* identity refers to impacts that agricultural activities of milk and meat production have toward human-induced climate disruption. The problem we address is not limited to a problem with how journalists frame farmers but rather how binary discourses are constructed in society, with media as just one example within public discourse. What we mean by public discourse is the different ways in which things, in this case farmers and farming practices, are talked about in society, and the framing capacity of language and social norms that allow (and limit) certain representations of reality.

In what follows, we explain the contexts for the case study of livestock farming in Sweden followed by a discussion of an interactionist theoretical understanding of ecocultural identity, identity work, and attribution, based in symbolic interactionism, which serves as the framework for analyzing the case (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Thereafter, we examine extant research regarding farmers' identity, which shows ways farmer motivation is strongly connected to their self-identification. This implies that shifts in identity induced by changes in society's

attributions can induce shifts in farmers' motivations. Subsequently, we present data and analyze news media framing of Swedish livestock production and farmer responses to these narratives. Finally, we discuss how this case contributes to the understanding of ecocultural identity work in general, and conclude by highlighting the potential problems of decreased motivation to engage in sustainability efforts due to binary identity constructions that deny positive ecocultural recognition.

Appreciation for farmers' contribution to environmental conservation

In Sweden, and in some other European countries, since the early 1990s, environmental conservation authorities and public environmental associations have considered grazing of seminatural pastures¹ to be an important, if not the most important, conservation measure in the agricultural landscape (Burger-Scheidlin, 2003; Vesala & Vesala, 2010). In particular, farmers with low-intensity grazing cattle and sheep have been acknowledged (and economically compensated) by governmental and nongovernmental organizations for their practices' positive effects on biodiversity. Biodiversity researchers and governmental and environmental protection associations have expended efforts to promote the production of cattle and sheep on seminatural pastures. The background for this current initiative of researchers, authorities, and nongovernmental organizations in maintaining human-facilitated grazing is that European landscapes have historically been shaped by this kind of grazing. Also, diverse ecosystems, including vulnerable and endangered flora and fauna, are thought to depend on the maintenance of human-facilitated ungulate grazing² (Ekstam & Forshed, 1997).

The intensification of agriculture during the past century resulted in the abandonment of these less productive seminatural pastures, and was followed by shrubification and a decrease in the abundance of grazing-dependent ecosystems and species (Ingelög et al., 1993; Lindborg et al., 2008). Swedish society expects farmers to contribute to sustainable development and environmental conservation management and the Swedish government pays farmers for adopting measures that maintain or enhance their land's environmental quality. Among the Swedish parliament's 16 environmental objectives is 'a rich agricultural landscape' (Sveriges miljömål, 2018).

Public appreciation of cattle farmers' contribution to the common good of society, however, increasingly is being challenged. In 2006, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations published a report titled *Livestock's Long Shadow*, which described cattle production as a major contributor to human-induced climate change due to cattle's high methane emissions (Steinfeld et al., 2006). This global claim has influenced the public debate in Sweden regarding milk and meat production and consumption.

This far, we can conclude that agriculture in Sweden, which includes cattle grazing of seminatural pastures, simultaneously both maintains biodiversity-related values appreciated by society and creates unwanted emissions with negative climate consequences. These are biophysical facts. However, in this study we are concerned with ways the discursive representation of these biophysical facts creates and limits space for a diversity of ecocultural identifications for the farmers who conduct these kinds of activities. To deepen our understanding of these questions we turn to symbolic interactionism's theorizing of identity and previous studies of farmers' identity work.

Identification, social categorization, and recognition

To understand the construction of binary ecocultural identities, the authors use the lens of symbolic interactionism, in which an actor's language-mediated interpretation of a situation

is considered crucial for action. Charon (2009) describes identity as ‘the names we give ourselves’ (p. 144). When individuals talk about themselves, they identify with a social group or a category of other actors, including those who individuals refer to when they say ‘we’ and ‘us.’ Individual farmers pursuing grazing-based livestock production define themselves as belonging to different social categories related to agriculture and these categories often overlap. The choice of which social category to affiliate with is situation dependent as well as related to, and sometimes in contestation with, the category attributed by society. Individuals present themselves in relation to other members of the social category, take on the action that they associate with this particular category, and expect to be accepted on the basis of this self-presentation. Individuals face interpretations, descriptions, and recognition of their self-presentation made by other actors and negotiate their self-definition to these responses.

According to Charon (2009), ‘the cause of action is almost always definition... How he or she defines the situation is central to how he or she acts in it’ (p. 126). Therefore, when defining a situation, the individual constitutes a context-specific definition of self. This includes giving oneself an identity and attempting to establish (through action) a relation between oneself and a particular social category. Charon (2009) suggests that ‘creating identity is an active negotiation process between who others tell us we are and our continuous attempts to present who we think we are to others’ (p. 148). An ecocultural identity framework expands the scope of negotiations to also include one’s orientation with the more-than-human world. Moreover, ecocultural identity work includes how a person responds to the reactions of other human beings to one’s own relations with the more-than-human world.

According to Mead (1934), the individual sense of self is based on learning to view oneself through the eyes of the surrounding world, which is an act of interpretation. This sense of self-identification guides individuals’ perspective and choices in a specific situation. They view themselves as they imagine the social world views them and, thereby, are dependent on Mead’s concept of the *generalized other*, or individuals’ understandings of how they themselves are generally viewed. Mead argues further that objects contribute to identification: a social agent gives meaning to an object by engaging with the object; similarly, the agent gives meaning to oneself by acknowledging the object’s response to their engagement (Hewitt, 2003). In simpler words, I watch birds (birds respond to the bird watcher through being watched); I am a bird watcher. I catch fish (fish is the responding object); therefore, I am a fisher. It is the social individual’s idea of these responses that forms self-understanding.

Mead’s articulation of symbolic interactionism as an epistemological social constructivist theory about how agents construct intersubjective meaning in relation to their social and physical reality includes no explicit inclusion of the more-than-human world and no embedded normativity. The core idea of this theory is that agents construct and define objects and give meaning to objects through social interaction, engagement, and manipulation of the object. This theory addresses the question of why and how humans act toward ‘things,’ including themselves and each other. The theory is not justifying or legitimating the way actors act toward things; nor is it trying to answer ontological questions about what reality is or what essential values exist independent of human society. Meaning, in this theoretical context, is the meaning something (an object) has for someone (an agent) who is relating to the object. Objects have no essentialist meaning (their meaning is not embedded in the object) and no predefined entities or borders exist. Instead, they are defined (for humans) by the human gaze, the human action, and human interaction. Symbolic interactionism is an anti-essentialist epistemological theory.

Similarly, when defining oneself in a context, members of a social category perform an action that they expect a member of this category to pursue. This self-definition can be

perceived as a two-sided phenomenon, which occurs through the convergence of two mutually occurring processes. That is, individuals identify themselves with, for example, the social category of farmer based on personal observations regarding their own action as a farmer ('I notice I have many things in common with people who by others are called, and call themselves, farmers: I cultivate crops, I feed cattle, I drive a tractor'), while also performing actions they associate with the social category of farmer they are attempting to identify themselves with ('I notice other farmers who cultivate crops, feed cattle, etc., also restore, and have their cattle graze, seminatural pastures'). Farmers' self-definitions and identity work involve both day-to-day farming practices (plowing, milking, feeding livestock) as well game-changing decisions (investing in new equipment, changing crops, and increasing or decreasing farm size). One's self-definition of farmer also is dependent on other actors' interpretations and attributions of this social category, as well as other actors' willingness to accept the individual as a representative of the category. Thus, individuals are dependent on social forms of recognition for developing identity (Honneth, 1994; Marcelo, 2013).

When a person is acting in a social situation and, through his or her action, presents oneself as being affiliated to a social category, the person is evaluating the extent to which this affiliation will create personal opportunities to be recognized as someone who is valuable and unique, morally accountable, and contributing to the constitution of the social category (Honneth, 1994). When dissonance occurs between the category members' personal interpretation and other individuals' definitions of this category, shifts in self-definition and identity will occur.

Ascription of a social category to others occurs in all types of social interactions, including close relationships with specific others, formal relations with representatives of institutions, and images, for instance, presented by the media. In this respect, identity is negotiated both in face-to-face situations and through media. Accordingly, media representations are important because they not only represent an event but also play a constitutive role in how that event is perceived (Pietikäinen, 2003). In contemporary society, news media are important as one of the most visible and significant arenas for ascribed identity construction since news representations affect people's lives, identity, rights, and position in society (Hall, 1997).

Research proves that minorities are more exposed and vulnerable to media images (Pietikäinen, 2003). Such studies have mainly been carried out on minorities based on ethnicity, sexuality, and gender. Relatedly, we note that, although farmers in Sweden to some extent are a privileged and resourceful group, they also classify themselves as a minority group. Farmers, as well as people relating to other rural identities, understand the majority's urban livelihoods and cultures as detached from the foundational aspects of life and death (see Love-Nichols, 2020, Chapter 11 of this *Handbook*). Because of this, they see themselves, through their hands-on work with soil, plants, and animals, as more closely attached to life-supporting processes and, therefore, better equipped to make environmental judgements than the dominating urban majority culture (Von Essen & Allen, 2017a, 2017b). Farmers also consider themselves to be isolated and vulnerable to economic, political, and value-oriented changes in society (Nordström Källström, 2008; see Bendixsen et al., 2020, Chapter 10 of this *Handbook*).

The media's representation of minority groups tends to be very limited (Pietikäinen, 2003). In addition, news media tend to overemphasize homogeneity within a minority group, which can lead to detrimental generalizations for a group (Ter Wal, 2002). Often, minority groups are portrayed as playing either a passive role, affected by the actions of others, or as being active in negative behavior, such as crime or violence (Teo, 2000). As pointed out by Weeks

(1994), a group's struggle to constitute its identity also is a struggle to articulate how that identity is represented in media. Vahini (2016) describes how stereotypical negative representations of the Indian farming community by Indian media have had a lasting impact on members of that community. A German study on farmers and environmental discourse in a regional German farming newspaper found that, even when farmers do not agree with the positions taken by the media, negative media representations reinforce group identity as the condition of being under attack can unify the farmers as a group (McHenry, 1996). We add to these understandings by examining ways news media attributions of the social category of farmers – and specifically binary attributions – influence farmers' ecocultural identities and the development of their motives for ecologically restorative action.

In a study of agricultural extension in both Great Britain and Syria, Seabrook and Higgins (1988) describe how the images held by farmers about themselves significantly affect their farming-related decisions. In other words, farmers' ecocultural identities have an impact on the materiality of the land (biodiversity) and the related more-than-human world. Other studies have illustrated how self-identity is important for predicting farmers' commitment to organic farming (McCarthy et al., 2007), and self-identity and environmental connectedness are key factors influencing farmers' intentions regarding environmental conservation measures (Lokhorst et al., 2014). Further, other recent studies have shown how farmers are guided by their own understanding of themselves as good farmers when making farm operations-related decisions (Morton et al., 2017).

A study conducted by Wilson et al. (2003) examined reasons farmers in east-central Illinois, United States, continue to use controversial agricultural practices, such as conventional plow tillage, application of toxic agricultural chemicals, and farming up to river banks, despite these practices being identified and criticized as being harmful to the environment. These authors show that, for the Illinois farmers, these practices were viewed as important undertakings in the realm of constituting farmer identities and were meaning-laced endeavors revealed as performative acts that reinforced a farmer's sense-of-self.

In summary, previous research shows farmers' motivation regarding whether to maintain or change their farming practices is dialogically connected to their identity work and the ways in which old and new farming approaches fit with their ecocultural identity construction. The research presented in this chapter contributes to this picture with a case study in which the discursive resources for identity construction are constrained by a media-constructed identity binary of environmental hero–environmental villain. This research may provide valuable insight into questions raised by Wilson et al. (2003) about tensions between identity work and external demands on changes in farming practices.

Method

After the publication of *Livestock's Long Shadow*, we noticed indications of changes in ways news media represented livestock farming, which seemed to contrast ways livestock and grazing had been written about previously. To investigate the potential shift and its possible relationship to shifts in farmers' ecocultural identities, we collected both printed and online texts published between 2003 and 2010. For this purpose, we used Google as the search engine to locate texts related to farmers or ruminants in combination with the words 'meat from seminatural pastures' (*Sve naturbeteskött*), 'environmental hero' (*Sve miljöhjälte*), 'environmental villain' (*Sve miljöbov*), and 'climate' (*Sve klimat*). To understand how environmental villains and heroes are written about in the news media in general, we also included texts that were not related to farmers or ruminants but were relevant as a reference point for

how environmental hero and villain, as concepts, are used in Swedish media. Further, we searched the home pages of some of the major organizations of relevance, such as farmers' organizations and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation. In addition, we searched the websites of Swedish local brands of meat from seminatural pastures. Through these searches, we found texts originating from different parties ranging from individual farmers and farmers' organizations, to local brands of meat, to environmental organizations, to journalists for different newspapers, all with varying aims and agendas. In total, more than 60 texts were analyzed.

In analyzing the texts, we applied intertextual analysis inspired by Fairclough (1995), in which cultural texts, discourse practice, and sociocultural contexts are considered. We examined the connection between representations and the construction of identities. To clarify these processes, we searched for metaphors, wording, and labels in the texts. In what follows, we focus on analyzing media representations of Swedish farmers to which farmers and other readers were exposed and discuss the implications for farmers' ecocultural identities and public recognition of farmers. In particular, our analysis evaluates ways binary ecocultural identity ascription might impact farmer motivation for making environmentally sound choices in their farming practices.

Social representations of farmers in Swedish media texts

In our data sorting, three general categories became apparent: (a) texts in which farmers are portrayed as heroes, (b) texts in which farmers and their related activities are portrayed as villains, and (c) responses to the aforementioned texts. The three categories do coexist, but the first ascribed identity category was dominant before the *Livestock's Long Shadow* report and the second arose later in contrast to the still existing first category. We argue, based on our analysis, that this new ascribed 'villain' category is an effect of the report's agenda setting of agriculture's and farmers' responsibility for climate crisis, which, in turn, has informed media framing of farmers and their practices. The following subsections investigate these two categories and lead to a discussion of the third category, the responses, which reveal ways farmer-avowed ecocultural identities are affected by the media texts.

Environmental hero

In this category, overall the farmer is portrayed as a prerequisite for the management of a biodiverse landscape that is socially valued and appreciated. This individual is presented in the various texts under study as a skillful professional who has unique knowledge and delivers high-quality products and values that are desired by the society, including biodiversity. The farmer acts morally toward animals, ecosystems, the planet, and its inhabitants, and has restorative effects on both the local and global scales. This individual also is empathetic toward consumers, as is often mirrored by the message that farmers deliver the healthy food that the public needs.

The hero image of farmers, farming, and farm products differs depending on the sender of the information. Some of the texts in this category originate from companies or organizations whose business depends on meat production, other senders are environmental conservation organizations, municipalities, daily newspapers, and tabloid papers. We interpret that the core aim of the meat companies is to promote meat products, while simultaneously attempting to convince the reader that seminatural pastures add extra value to meat.^{3, 4, 5} The texts represent pastoral land as an attractive characteristic of the Swedish landscape and as having important

biological values. Additional arguments for the values of grazing livestock are that (a) pastures are beautiful, (b) pastoral aesthetic, cultural, and biological values depend on grazing, (c) production of the meat brand mentioned in the text contributes to grazing, and (d) the meat comes from animals that were grazing in a beautiful landscape.

Compared to competitive products, such as conventionally produced meat, the seminatural pasture meat is presented as both a healthier alternative with higher nutritional value⁶ (e.g., omega-3 content⁷) and a higher quality product with respect to taste.^{8, 9} Companies also highlight that the meat is often locally produced, which, in turn, is described as a positive aspect with respect to improving animal welfare and regional employment levels and lowering transportation-related emissions. Moreover, brand names allude to several of these added values with some named after the specific region or the type of ecosystem in which they are produced: meat from pastures by Mälaren¹⁰ (a lake), Green Pasture Meat,¹¹ Honeysuckle Meat¹² (produced in a county which has honeysuckle as its symbol), etc. Through emphasis on the place and its symbolism as consequential for meat-production, the farmer also is pulled out of the otherwise anonymous production chain of industrialized meat production and moved into the hero position. Farmers appear as place-based agents whose practices are constitutive for the place. Through the place-connected meat-brands, the farmer is constructed as someone not only producing meat, but also producing place and, specifically, a place of environmental, social, and cultural value.

Other texts in this category stem from environmental conservation organizations and authorities that are trying to either convince consumers to support seminatural pasture production, or persuade farmers to maintain seminatural pastures. Place-making also is important in these texts and the texts suggest that the consumption of the specific brands of meat will produce places with certain characteristics that consumers appreciate.

If we care about the summer meadows, we should choose meat from cows and lamb.¹³
Meat for open landscapes.¹⁴

In some texts the making of places is explicitly tied to the farmer. These texts express that maintenance of the appreciated landscapes is dependent on the farmer, who is celebrated for doing what he or she is doing and for not doing what is indicated as the feared alternative, quitting facilitating grazing which in these texts is assumed to result in degradation of appreciated places and landscape qualities:

Many [people] believe the landscape is provided by nature and assume the farmer is only using it. If the farmer takes his animals away the landscape will still be there. But that is not the case.¹⁵

In this text it is emphasized that the maintenance of landscapes is, although it is easily forgotten, dependent on farmers' continuation of grazing practices. In this formulation, it also is indicated that there is a risk involved in taking maintenance of landscapes for granted and not recognizing the importance of farmers. Some texts position the farmer as not only an important producer of appreciated place-bound values but also for doing this potentially under threat from challenging circumstances:

The farmer, an endangered key species¹⁶

In this quote, ‘endangered key species,’ terminology commonly used to describe flora and fauna that serve as indicators of threats toward ecosystems in environmental monitoring reports, is here used to describe farmers. The analogy seems to be that farmers protect endangered key species through facilitating grazing of seminatural pastures and, at the same time, is both a ‘key species’ and ‘endangered.’

These texts all present the farmer as an irreplaceable producer of biodiversity. And, as exhibited in the quote above, the farmer himself or herself, also is presented as vulnerable. In all the narratives there is an underlying protection of place performed by farmers and the reader is told to appreciate the farmer or the farming activities or to buy farm produce, with the underlying threat that, if they do not, the place-making performed by farmers – and even the farmers themselves – will disappear.

Through these texts the ecocultural identity of someone who is valuable and esteemed by society for environmental conservation measures is ascribed. One common message is that society should be aware of and thankful for the farmers’ contribution to biodiversity maintenance and production as expressed in the following quote:

The farmer and his animals play a key role [in saving our heritage].¹⁷

In essence, through these texts the farmer is told that society is thankful to farmers and society is told to continue supporting farmers because they do an important job, despite hard conditions, and therefore deserve to be considered heroes. In summary, in this category of text, the farmer is represented as hero, although the explicit term ‘environmental hero’ is seldom used.

Environmental villain

The second group of texts includes arguments that present farming, farm products, or consumption of farm products as responsible for the pressing environmental crisis, and often more specifically the crisis of climate disruption. Daily newspapers constitute the majority of these texts. In contrast to the group of texts ascribing environmental hero identity, in this group, the actual term ‘environmental villain’ (*Sve miljöbov*) is frequently used. However, the concept is not defined, which indicates that the expression is well assimilated into the Swedish everyday language for different situations. In only two cases was a synonymous word, *miljöskurk*, (environmental villain) applied, but it appears that ‘miljöbov’ is the established word in this discourse.¹⁸ The texts under study take for granted that no one wants to be the villain garnering the blame for climate crisis, as exemplified in this quote from a journalist: ‘I realize that I am an environmental villain in many areas and that in fact feels kind of brutal.’¹⁹ On the other hand, the word *bov* (villain), as well as the synonymous word *skurk*, are not very strong words in the Swedish language. Rather, they have a slightly comic nuance, which we interpret as functioning as having a mitigating effect when it comes to blame.

The actor(s) put forward as ‘the villain’ varies between the texts and also throughout a text. In the analyzed articles, the villain was defined as the meat industry, agricultural production, methane gas, the cow, meat, beef, milk, and the consumer. In several texts, the cow is in focus and depicted as ‘a real/true environmental villain.’^{20, 21} In addition, several of the presented villains are non-intentional agents, which means that rhetorically the human agents (the farmer, the meat manufacturer, the consumer) are hidden or undesignated. Within the word ‘villain’ rests an intentionality that is mitigated when talking about meat per se. That is, by using meat as scapegoat, it is up to the reader to decide who is to blame.

Quite often, the main accusation is directed toward the meat itself. In the end, however, it is the consumer who is encouraged to change consumption choices and habits. The consumer is made responsible for whether villainous practices are maintained or cease.

In these texts, mostly originating from daily newspapers and tabloid papers, farmed meat production is used interchangeably with meat industry. This usage contrasts with hero texts, which present farmers as being weakly associated with industry but strongly with pastoral landscapes. The significance of this difference is displayed when texts suggest that consumers should choose meat from pastoral landscapes instead of from industrial farms.²²

The farmers themselves are absent in the texts on villains, instead it is the cow, the meat, the meat industry, farmed meat production, or the meat consumption that are made into villains. In only one single text, the farmer was directly presented as the villain²³ and, in that case, it concerned tomato production rather than meat. However, as we will show in the next section, farmers and their organizations respond to the texts that ascribes an environmental villain identity to cows, meat, meat production, and meat industry. Some of these responses are explicitly responding to, and denying, the ascription of the villain identity to the farmer.

Responses to the two social categories of farmers

Currently, farmers keeping cattle on seminatural grasslands are facing two conflicting images of themselves represented in a range of Swedish media. Some texts present farmers as environmentally responsible people who have taken measures to become ecologically friendly, whereas others present the farmers' meat production as a serious societal and environmental threat. These two attributions coexist simultaneously and are expressed differently in different media, as seen above.

Swedish newspapers and websites publish texts in which individual farmers or farming organizations give defensive answers to the image of meat production being a societal and environmental threat. In a newspaper, the headline of an opinion piece written by a farmer reads as follows: 'Meat producers are not environmental villains.'²⁴ Another states 'Do not call me an environmental villain.'²⁵ As stated, we found only one text that directly accused the farmers themselves of being villains; however, as is visible in these two examples, when farmers respond to the villain narrative, they appear to interpret the debate as a critique of themselves.

On its website, under the tab titled 'climate,' the Swedish Farmers' Association (LRF)²⁶ explains its views on farming and climate change.²⁷ The fact that such a tabbed web page exists on the website testifies to LRF's acknowledgment of the relationship between climate disruption and farmers' activities. A majority of Swedish farmers are members of LRF – a steady 80 percent from the 1980s until the 2010s, with a small dip during the 1990s (Nordström Källström, 2008, p. 98; Statistics Sweden et al., 2012, p. 67) – and LRF membership is one of the actions that manifests farmer identity. When this organization responds to images of farmers presented by the media, it represents the social category of Swedish farmers. We consider this text to be a good illustration of farmers' motives of action and reaction to attributions to their social category and therefore scrutinize LRF's climate web page in the following paragraphs.

The text by LRF starts by stating that Swedish beef is a good choice with respect to the environment and climate crisis. Later in the text, the condition 'in comparison to meat from other parts of the world' is mentioned, without further specifying the comparison. The text continues to highlight the benefits of beef, such as its nutritional value and the positive effects of beef production on employment levels and the natural landscape. In several instances within the text, the traditional – or cultural – aspects of meat production and consumption are emphasized by referring to beef as 'deeply rooted in the Swedish food tradition.'

The text represents Swedish farmers as well aware of the climate disruption situation. It describes the reason for high methane emissions as an effect of the processing of food by cows. This formulation is far more precise and technical than the formulations in some of the texts presented in the tabloid papers analyzed, in which cows are described as ‘burping’ and ‘farting.’²⁸ In a precise manner, the text by LRF presents the view that cows do not emit the gasses without any reason nor due to bad manners, which might be implied by the words burping and farting. Rather, cows do so merely for physiological reasons. This explanation seems to be an attempt to give a balanced view and establish trustworthiness, in contrast to the colloquial descriptions given in the tabloid paper.

The LRF text explains the debate about methane is a result of ‘more people being more aware of the gravity and risks of global warming.’ This formulation implies that the situation is not objectively worse, but rather emphasized in the societal discourse and hence socially constructed as more serious, which according to LRF has negatively affected beef producing farmers. We note that the text does not argue for or against beef production. Instead, it proposes the idea that Swedish people prefer Swedish meat and will probably continue to eat beef since it has a good taste and beef eating is aligned with the Swedish food consumption tradition.

With respect to climate, as well, there is a description regarding the benefits of choosing Swedish meat over meat from other countries. The text presents Swedish farmers as being responsible and reliable people who have been aware of – and engaged themselves in – environmental issues for a long time. It also presents Swedish farmers as intensifying their efforts in recent times and utilizing opportunities to further mitigate the harmful effects of their production by, for example, optimizing forage use. The text depicts the uncertainties about the effects of beef production and recommends that further research be performed. Moreover, it ends by formulating a shared ambition of farmers and consumers to fight against the detrimental effects of ‘global warming.’

When considering other texts formulated as responses to media portrayals of farmers and farming production, it is clear farmers perceive themselves as being ascribed the villain role in the wider environmental debate. One farmer writes the following opinion piece in a daily newspaper²⁹ providing arguments for the added values farmers are contributing:

If we did not have the cows eating grass, decomposition of the grass would cause methane emissions, but we would not have anything to eat anyway. Our cultural heritage landscape, which is appreciated by many, and nature would grow to an impenetrable wilderness.

The farmer continues:

To walk with the animals [cows] and experience the harmony they generate is good for one’s soul. There is no reason to fly to Thailand to relax. So, let’s agree that the biggest environmental villain on Earth is humans.³⁰

This text suggests that the cow does not deserve the climate villain attribution and, indirectly, that emissions from cows should not be compared with other human sources, such as airfare and tourism, since the added values of cows exceed those of tourism. This text also implicitly constructs a tension between the rural lifestyle, which includes both producing and eating meat, but also includes contact with animals and landscape, on the one hand and, on the other, the post-modern urban lifestyle that generates the need for recreation (e.g., flying to Thailand), which demands resources and generates emissions. It appears the author of

‘The cows are no environmental villains’ suggests that the villain accusation against the cow – and implicitly against rural lifestyle and farm production – originates from urbanites, which, according to this text, have their own more problematic sustainability impacts caused by the absence of rural experiences, including cow contact. Here, the farmer might not argue for his or her ecocultural identity as hero, but instead highlights contradictions in criticism about who the environmental villains are.

The farmers sense, respond, and resist any ascription of the environmental villain identity. Another opinion text by another farmer, with the heading ‘Meat producers are no environmental villains,’ expresses how farmers react against the ascribed social category: ‘We who are working with agriculture and who have experienced saving nutrients, reducing tractor hours per hectare, reducing fuel use, we know through our farmers’ commonsense that we cannot be the environmental villains that we are attributed as being.’³¹ This quote illustrates that, despite the fact that farmers themselves are very seldom in texts explicitly designated as the villains, they sense this accusation and react accordingly.

Potential consequences of binary ecocultural identities

From the empirical material, it is clear that Swedish livestock farmers are ascribed two contrasting ecocultural identities: the environmental hero and the environmental villain. Certainly, more categories can be attributed to farmers – and the ascribed ecocultural identities are neither static nor everlasting; rather, identities change depending on the situation and context. The idea of the farmer as environmental villain was in focus also in a recent study on Swedish social media discussions on livestock production (Olausson, 2018). The study comprised the online responses of farmers and other people to the two most extensively shared newspaper articles about the environment during 2016 in Sweden. Both articles, which were written by farmers, defend livestock production and compare the climate consequences of livestock production with those of vacation air travel, a parallel to what we found our empirical data, as exemplified above. In addition, both newspaper articles examined have similarities to the group of texts in our category of responses in terms of how they demonstrate that farmers are feeling accused by what they consider public representations of themselves in media and how they defend themselves by drawing attention to the inconsistencies in environmental behavior among non-farmers. Olausson’s focus is on the online debate over livestock farming whereas our study’s focus is on the binary ecocultural identities ascribed to farmers via representations in a variety of media.

From what we have examined, when farmers reflect on the kind of texts presented in this study, they realize they need to adapt and adjust their behaviors through constant negotiations with the given social categories – hero and villain – as well as their own self-presentation. When actors who keep livestock grazing on seminatural pastures see narratives presenting grazing-based production as environmentally friendly and contributing to biodiversity, some of them will identify themselves with a social category that is coherent with the image of environmental hero. Previous studies of farmers’ motivation have shown that identity is an important motivation for farmers when making decisions about farm activities, and that farmers are motivated to perform actions that are in line with, and contribute to, their avowed identity (Lokhorst et al., 2014; McCarthy et al., 2007; Morton et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2003). Consequently, when actors identify themselves with the environmental hero ecocultural identity, they will be motivated to perform actions that correspond with the social category and, hence, their environmental conservation activities will likely increase. As part of this self-presentation process, we assume the actor also would estimate

how an identity in alignment with these esteemed values of biodiversity would affect his or her opportunities to be recognized as someone who is unique and valuable, morally accountable, and contributing to the constitution of the social category (Honneth, 1994). The environmental hero identity offers the meat-producing farmer with seminatural pastures social recognition as a farmer who is unique and valuable, is morally accountable, and adheres to general societal values.

When the farmers who have identified themselves as environmental heroes read articles depicting meat production, including seminatural pasture grazing-based production, as a contributor to climate disruption, they might reconsider whether the environmental hero identity is still within reach and available to provide the expected social recognition. When reading the statement ‘the cow – a real environmental villain’³² in a national newspaper, potential confusion regarding farmer self-presentation may arise. In this context, farmers may question the potential opportunity of receiving recognition as a member of the environmental hero social category. We question whether it is possible to affiliate oneself with the environmental hero category while at the same time being ascribed an ecocultural identity from the other end of the dichotomy pair – that is, the environmental villain. Based on our research, we argue media ascription of farmer ecocultural identity to the environmental villain category does not offer opportunities for positive recognition, but rather engenders misgivings in pursuing farming. However, when individuals who engage in facilitating livestock grazing of seminatural pastures perceive themselves and their social category to be understood as the climate villain, they also do work to alter their identity in a direction that provides opportunities for positive recognition.

One way to cope with the hero–villain paradox is to renegotiate the definition of the available social categories. We can see from the responses from individual farmers and farmer organizations that there are attempts to renegotiate the ascription of meat production as a climate villain in the media by actively rejecting this characterization. Another way to cope with the villain identity is to change the behavior that initially caused the villain attribution – that is, to stop producing ruminants or stop being a farmer. According to the results of a survey conducted in 2010, overlapping with the period when the analyzed texts were published, more than 14 percent of the farmers with extensive grazing-based cattle production planned to quit within two years (Statistics Sweden, 2010, p. 33). While we do not argue the climate villain attribution alone would motivate a farmer to cease ruminant production or stop being a farmer, this aspect, in combination with other situational factors, could ultimately contribute to this decision.

Since many farmers already find their situation to be economically weak, their workload to be huge, and farming to be a lonely pursuit (Nordström Källström, 2008), one motivation to continue farming is the thought that society appreciates the products and landscapes associated with their work. From the same survey by Statistics Sweden, approximately 70 percent of Swedish farmers with extensive grazing-based cattle production claimed that the main motivation for starting with this type of production is to maintain an agricultural and pastoral landscape scenery (Statistics Sweden, 2010, p. 14). In this case, if society expresses that the work done by farmers is unwanted or even villainous when it comes to the climate, they have little incentive left to continue production, which ultimately leads to biodiversity loss.

Hero and villain identities relationship to motivation to do sustainability work

This chapter describes media attribution of ecocultural identity to farmers before and after the 2006 report *Livestock's Long Shadow*. The findings demonstrate a shift in terms of the

kind of recognition obtained by farmers, which hinges on a binary ecocultural identity construction with a variety of media shifting from previous representations of Swedish livestock farmers as heroic producers of biodiversity to farmers' livestock production being an environmental villain with respect to climate disruption. The polarization of media ascriptions of ecocultural identities to farmers appears to have continued after the empirical material for this study was gathered (Olausson, 2018).

The attribution of farmers as environmental heroes creates a social category with which farmers can identify and that motivates them to pursue their business in alignment with ecologically sound ideals. Identification with this category may increase farmers' motivations to perform environmental conservation activities since the identity of a conserving farmer offers positive ecocultural recognition. However, this social category is being challenged by narratives that categorize farmers as climate villains. As shown in this study, farmers have reacted and declared that they perceive a conflict in the binary attribution of ecocultural identities. This binary construction of livestock farming offers limited space for recognition of varied or nuanced ecocultural identities and may constrain farmers' identity work that entails showing concern about the environment in terms of local biodiversity and, at the same time, attending to environmental concerns in terms of climate crisis. Ultimately, when society does not recognize the ecocultural identity of livestock farmers as environmental heroes, this could result in reduced farmer motivation to perform other sorts of actions and activities that would be ecoculturally valued, acknowledged, and requested.

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Notes

- 1 The term seminatural pastures is used to describe pastures that have not been actively cultivated, sown, or planted, but where the land's naturally occurring plant society has slowly adapted to the impact of human-facilitated grazing, often resulting in diverse flora and fauna.
- 2 Animals have been grazing the European landscape since the last Ice Age; however, 2,500 years ago, people started keeping grazing animals indoors during winter, due to which three types of agricultural land were created: (1) arable fields, where grains were grown; (2) meadows, where naturally occurring grass and leaf were harvested to feed animals in winter; and, (3) pastures, where animals grazed during summer (Pedersen & Widgren, 2011, p. 48). During winter, indoor animals produced manure that was spread on fields by farmers to increase grain production during summer. Pastures and meadows slowly became deprived of nutrients, since farmers, together with their domestic animals, moved the nutrients from meadows and pastures to fields; over time, this system shaped ecosystems that were adapted to the disturbance and stress caused by hay cutting, grazing, and low nutrient levels. These seminatural ecosystems host a diversity of plants that are equipped to survive and reproduce in spite of the frequent stress, as well insects, fungi, and lichens that are dependent on this kind of ecosystem and environment. The pastoralist ecosystem and its rich diversity of species is also considered charismatic and connected to European rural culture and, as such, appreciated. This system was maintained for more than 2,000 years and characterizes Scandinavian landscapes. However, due to the changes that occurred in agricultural procedures during the 20th century, meadows and seminatural pastures lost their previous agricultural importance and, gradually, grazing and hay harvesting ceased, which caused further changes in the ecosystem. In abandoned pastures and meadows, plant species that had adapted to survive the stress caused by grazing and harvesting were outcompeted by a few plants, scrubs, and trees that were more adapted to compete for light and space in the new, undisturbed environment. With the disappearance of

- grazing, landscape changes occurred and the abundance of certain charismatic species appreciated for their cultural values gradually declined. Although this was a slow process, biodiversity researchers and nature conservationists recognized by the 1970s that the previously common meadows and pastures, and their grazing-dependent biodiversity, had become rare. Accordingly, they demanded restoration measures, such as maintained or reinvented human-facilitated ungulate grazing. The grazed seminatural pastures and meadows that still remain are the hosts of the richest biodiversity among all ecosystems in Scandinavia. A traditional meadow or pasture houses more than 50 different species of plants per square meter. Further, this is one of the main reasons farmers, who facilitate the grazing of pastures and meadows, have been considered environmental heroes in Swedish society (see Gustavsson et al., 2007; Prévosto et al., 2011; Olson, 2008).
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 - 18 In SAOB etymological lexicon the explanations of Bov and Skurk are the same, and the two words Bov and Skurk are used by SAOB as mutual explanation: Bov = Skurk, Skurk = Bov.
 - 19 Jag lever inte som jag lär [I don't live as I preach] *Aftonbladet* February 26, 2007. Retrieved December 15, 2009 from <https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/BjxkXQ/jag-lever-inte-som-jag-lar>.
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Modeling watershed ecocultural identification and subjectivity in the United States

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Ecocultural identity combines the act of identification (i.e., naming or defining) with the formation of broader social frameworks that delineate relationships among human and non-human beings. The act of naming organisms, for example, is intimately connected with the relationships between the humans doing the naming and the non-human organisms being named (Milstein, 2011; Tsing, 2011). Increasingly, these identification processes are entangled with processes of subjectification and governmentality – the ways in which we define who qualifies as a subject and in what ways those subjects can think and act (Agrawal, 2005; Brown, 2015; Foucault, 2010). In this chapter, through an ethnographic engagement with computational modeling and environmental management in a northeastern United States watershed, I examine ways in which ecocultural identification has been caught up in subjectification and governmentality. Drawing on Guattari's (2008) concept of the 'three ecologies,' I explore what kinds of subjectivities are produced in this convergence and, using his 'ecosophical approach,' I examine the potential for alternative ecocultural identification practices to produce new subjectivities, better able to engage with the non-human world in its full complexity and on its own subjective terms.

This chapter focuses on the Chesapeake Bay watershed where I conducted ethnographic field work with computational modelers and environmental management staff to understand the multiple roles that computational models play in the watershed management process. The case study itself provides a valuable reference point, because, over the past 35 years, the Chesapeake Bay has been the site of an intensive watershed-scale management effort led by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the watershed jurisdictions (Washington D.C., New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia) making up the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP). The CBP is considered an exemplary case for watershed-scale water quality science and management in the U.S. (Ernst, 2003).

In the following sections, first, I describe the techno-scientific practices that contributed to the identification of the watershed as the unit of management for water quality in the multi-state Chesapeake Bay region. Second, I discuss ways in which these techno-scientific practices are entangled with the emergence of watershed-scale governance in the form of the CBP partnership. Third, I examine the subjectivities that are produced from the combination

of identification and governance in the region. Finally, I draw on Guattari's (2008) 'ecosocial approach' to explore the possibility for computational modeling to contribute to alternative subjectivation processes and new relationships with the watershed.¹ Before I embark on this series of discussions, it is important to understand the historical background that frames watershed management, science, and identity in the Chesapeake Bay region.

The Chesapeake Bay

The Chesapeake Bay is often described as an iconic feature of the U.S. landscape (Ernst, 2003). Jutting up into eastern seaboard, it has a long and complex history that underlies the present-day effort to restore the estuary. Prior to European colonization, the region was inhabited by several Indigenous nations – most prominently, the Powhatan tribe (Wennersten, 2000). Archaeological evidence shows that these Indigenous peoples depended on the estuary for fish, shellfish, and other sources of sustenance (Rick et al., 2016). They appear to have had a relatively sustainable relationship with the Bay, contributing, in fact, to the health and diversity of the estuary through regenerative use of the landscape and aquatic life. For example, Rick et al. (2016) have shown that, over a 3,500-year time-span, Indigenous peoples on the Chesapeake Bay practiced nearshore oyster harvesting, which limited the impact of the harvest on the oyster populations by preserving offshore oyster reefs and also appears to have maintained a stable population over millennia despite climatic changes and sea level rise.

It was not until the early seventeenth century that a permanent European colony was established in the Chesapeake region by British settlers, known as Jamestown (Wennersten, 2000). One of the residents of Jamestown was the explorer John Smith, who ventured up the estuary on two voyages, describing its natural beauty and his encounters with the Indigenous peoples of the area (Smith, 2006). Over time, European colonization brought more people to the region. In addition to European migrants, traders brought millions of enslaved Africans to work the cotton and tobacco plantations that wealthy settlers had begun to establish on much of the regional landscape. In addition to increasing the human population – and human suffering – in the region, these plantations also caused severe soil depletion, requiring the application of external fertilizers (Mancall, 1991). Meanwhile, European watermen – people who work on the water – began harvesting oysters, crabs, and other fish for newly globalized markets. The result was an approximately 100-fold decline in the oyster populations from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century (Rick et al., 2016; Newell, 1988). In addition, fur trappers were busy depleting the beaver populations in the upper watershed (Wennersten, 2000). Beavers create wetlands that can slow the flow of water through the landscape resulting in reduced erosion and the removal of nutrients and sediment from the water (Mancall, 1991). However, before the Revolutionary War, trappers had essentially eliminated the beaver population in the region (Brush, 2009).

The result of these activities was that water quality in the Chesapeake began deteriorating very soon after the arrival of Europeans to its shores as a result of nutrient pollution. While nutrients can have both non-human and anthropogenic sources, without extractive or polluting human interference they tend to exist in a relatively stable nutrient cycle (Howarth et al., 2000). Increasing human population in the watershed and activities like the decimation of the beaver population and the depletion of soils contributed to increases in nutrient and sediment runoff from the landscape. The problem was further exacerbated by the watermen's overharvesting of oyster populations, which caused a reduction of the estuary ecosystem's ability to remove those nutrients and sediments from the water. Higher concentrations of

nutrients and sediment reduce water clarity, which depletes quantities of submerged aquatic vegetation, which reduces dissolved oxygen in the water causing fish and other macro-organisms to die off (Ernst, 2003).

In the twentieth century, improvements to wastewater treatment led to improved water quality (Ernst, 2003). However, a new form of agriculture was taking shape that would reverse these gains. With the discovery of the Haber process for nitrogen fixation in 1909, which allowed for the production of synthetic fertilizers, agriculture was no longer dependent upon guano mined from islands in Latin America (Topham, 1985). This began the era of industrial agriculture. Synthetic fertilizers could be applied liberally and the excess allowed to run-off into streams and rivers (Wennersten, 2000). Exacerbating this overabundance of nutrients was the rise of large-scale chicken farming on the Eastern Shore (the peninsula formed by the gouge in the Mid-Atlantic coast created by the Chesapeake Bay; the Eastern Shore includes portions of Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia, and so is often called the Delmarva peninsula). Manure from the chickens was also dumped into streams and rivers, and ultimately, both of these nutrient sources made their way into the Chesapeake Bay (Wennersten, 2000).

Dissolved nutrients provide an exceptional resource for plankton, resulting, eventually, in a condition known as eutrophication: as the quantity of plankton increase, the amount of sunlight able to penetrate the water decreases. This causes aquatic plants to die off, which leads to a decline in the oxygen content of the water creating hypoxic or anoxic (low or no oxygen) conditions in parts of the estuary. Without dissolved oxygen, fish and other macro-organisms die off as well. For this reason, hypoxic and anoxic regions in a water body often are referred to as 'dead zones' (Kemp et al., 2005).

Scientists have documented anoxic and hypoxic conditions in the deepest portions of the Bay since the 1930s (Newcombe, 1938). However, it was not until the 1980s that the states and federal government began to meaningfully address the problem (Ernst, 2003). In the following section, I argue that fully addressing the Chesapeake Bay's nutrient pollution problem required a transformation in ecocultural identification processes in the region. Specifically, the Chesapeake Bay had to become identified with its watershed before an effective management solution could be enacted.

Identifying the watershed

Looking into the history of the Chesapeake Bay science, I found very few maps of the watershed in publications prior to the 1980s, despite the fact that the watersheds had been mapped in the early twentieth century (Drainage Basin Committee, 1937). This is striking because the watershed map is ubiquitous in the scientific literature around the Chesapeake Bay today. It sparked my curiosity and I began to wonder, how did the watershed map come to have such abrupt prominence? Where did the map come from? Who made it?

I asked my collaborators at the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) about the map and none of them knew its origin. It is clear the estuary's tributaries were well known, and the drainage basins for these rivers had been mapped in the 1930s as part of a national drainage basin mapping project by the U.S. federal government. I looked at the report of that project and, strikingly, the section on the Chesapeake Bay does not include the Susquehanna River drainage basin – the largest portion of the estuary's watershed and the river that forms the Bay's main stem. Instead, in the report, the Susquehanna River is associated with the Delaware River basin, though it was known that the Susquehanna flows into the Chesapeake (Drainage Basin Committee, 1937). This suggests that, despite an understanding of the sources of water in the

Chesapeake Bay, the estuary was not well identified with its watershed; rather, it was conceptualized as an extension of the ocean into the landscape. The result is that efforts to curtail increasing nutrient pollution in the estuary focused on the immediately surrounding region and the upper portions of the watershed were not included in the process.

The earliest map of the entire Chesapeake Bay drainage basin I have been able to track down is from a 1946 publication on the effects of Susquehanna River flows on salinity in the estuary (Beaven, 1946). But, even after this publication, the watershed map remained scarce in the scientific literature. I have not yet been able to definitively track down the origin of the watershed map – who first outlined it and for what purpose. However, I argue the reason for the sudden prominence of the watershed map in the 1980s has its start in the 1970s with a process of watershed identification – marking the watershed as an identifiable unit that can be understood scientifically, and, ultimately, governed. This era corresponds to the emergence of other similar environmental management efforts including the development of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the beginnings of the international efforts to address climate disruption (Edwards, 2010).

Prior to the 1970s, the Chesapeake Bay had been thought of as an extension of the ocean inland rather than as the tidal portion of the Susquehanna River. That is not to say that scientists were unaware of the connection between the estuary and the watershed, but that they considered this connection relatively unimportant. Identification of the estuary with the ocean rather than the watershed explains the lack of interest in identifying the watershed as a scientific unit and, thus, the lack of watershed maps. The result was that oceanographers dominated the scientific research on the Chesapeake Bay, and their primary focus was tidal influences rather than runoff from the landscape. In terms of management, only the jurisdictions most closely associated with the estuary took responsibility for cleaning it and the upper-watershed states did not participate in restoration efforts. In that sense, the identification of the estuary with its watershed also identified those who were responsible for the estuary's water quality management. How, then, did the watershed come to be recognized as an important context for the Chesapeake Bay?

It starts with a flood. In 1972, Tropical Storm Agnes made its way up the U.S. East Coast and made landfall around New Jersey. It then migrated west into the Chesapeake Bay watershed where it finally stalled out over the Finger Lakes in New York, straddling the boundary between the Chesapeake and Great Lakes drainage basins. Once there, it proceeded to pour an enormous amount of water on the region resulting in extreme flooding that migrated down the Susquehanna River causing devastation as it went. The gates on the Conowingo Dam, located at the base of the Susquehanna where it becomes the Chesapeake Bay, were fully opened for only the second time in its existence. Charges were placed on the dam in order to demolish individual sections to prevent catastrophic failure. Fortunately for the communities living downstream, the dam was not demolished, but the destruction that resulted from the flood cost 117 lives and \$3.1 billion in damage (Horton, 2012).

Agnes is arguably *the* watershed moment – historically speaking – for the Chesapeake Bay. Malone, Boynton, Horton, and Stevenson (1993) claim it was this event that turned the attention of scientists and management staff toward the watershed as a source of the estuary's eutrophication problems. The flood brought with it a deluge of nutrient and sediment runoff to the Chesapeake Bay, forcing researchers for the first time, to recognize the effects of the watershed on the estuary.

The rains and resulting floods carried massive amounts of nitrogen and phosphorous compounds into the Bay. For instance, between 28 June and 30 August 1972, nearly

600 metric tons of dissolved nitrogen and 50 tons of dissolved phosphorous were delivered to the head of the Patuxent River estuary. During the flood peak the Susquehanna River delivered nearly 1500 tons of orth- and poly-phosphate and 2500 tons of nitrate to the Bay per day.

(CRC, 1977)

In the wake of Agnes, a study was commissioned to evaluate the effects of the tropical storm on the Chesapeake Bay. The report of the study was published in 1977. Following the report, the U.S. Senate commissioned a second study of the environmental health of the estuary. The results of this study finally emerged in the early 1980s and pointed clearly to nutrient runoff resulting from human activities on the watershed as the primary causal factor for declining water quality in the estuary (Flemer et al., 1983).

This process of identifying the Chesapeake Bay with its watershed rather than with the ocean resulted in several changes in the science and management of water quality in the estuary that led to an intensification of watershed identification – an ecocultural process that resulted in the development of watershed-based science and a watershed management structure in the CBP. In the next section, I discuss ways in which the process of watershed identification described above has continued through techno-scientific practices like computational modeling and how these identification practices have helped to consolidate the watershed identity in the CBP.

Modeling and the formation of watershed identity

The story of Tropical Storm Agnes illustrates the process by which the Chesapeake Bay became identified with its watershed. However, other changes taking place in the following decade led to the consolidation of an institutional structure that materialized watershed identity in terms of social relationships, norms, and regulations. This consolidation began with another watershed moment for the Chesapeake Bay (Trombley, 2018): the first Chesapeake Bay Agreement (1983), signed by the states of Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, along with the U.S. federal government. The document is just over a page long and does not lay out a goal or a plan for the clean-up effort. However, it was the beginning of what would become a much broader management process (CBP, 1983). For the Chesapeake Bay, the year 1983 was important in terms of water quality management. The scientists, management staff, and others involved in the process often refer to it as the beginning of the turning point for the estuary (Horton & Chesapeake Bay Foundation, 2003).

The primary result of the 1983 agreement was the establishment of the CBP as a watershed-scale management organization, structured as a collaboration between the three signatory states and the U.S. government. Collaborations like this had existed in the past – for example, the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Delaware Basin Commission – but these were primarily organized around managing water *quantity* for hydroelectric production rather than addressing water *quality*. The CBP was the first collaboration to emerge around water quality. The result was that federal, state, and local management staff increasingly were identified with the watershed management process, which was focused more on bioregional and ecological relationships and boundaries rather than on human-centered relationships and boundaries.

This unique collaboration was made possible by a number of legislative and administrative changes that had emerged in the 1970s – specifically, the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) usurped the Army Corps of Engineers' (ACE) role as the primary

agency involved in managing water quality across states. In conjunction with other agencies, the ACE's sole responsibility was to manage these waters to prevent flooding, provide water for hydroelectric production, and ensure the navigability of the waterways (Malone et al., 1993). With the shift to the EPA, water quality could be the primary focus. However, in order for the EPA to have the authority to manage water quality, a legislative change was needed, and this came in 1972 with the enactment of the Clean Water Act (CWA). Prior to this, water quality was managed by the states. The CWA granted the U.S. federal government the authority to address interstate water quality issues (Malone et al., 1993). Together, these developments helped to override state boundaries within the U.S. and made the bio-regional management of the CBP possible by creating an overarching structure that the states could participate in while allowing the EPA to take the lead. The CBP essentially institutionalized the watershed identity for the Chesapeake Bay and began the process of orienting state agencies, management staff, scientists, and others toward the watershed as a unit of management. However, the consolidation of CBP would not have been possible if not for the development of a computational model to continue the identification process that had begun with the original watershed map.

Simultaneous with the 1983 Bay Agreement was the release of the first Chesapeake Bay Watershed Model, which simulated the flow of water through the landscape, but did not include a simulation of the Chesapeake Bay itself. Developed by a private engineering firm for the CBP, the model was built on a proprietary version of Hydrological Simulation Program Fortran (HSPF) (Hartigan, 1983). It resolved the watershed into 64 segments and simulated five land uses. Over time, the model would evolve with increased resolution (the latest version has more than 1,000 segments) and additional land uses (more than 20 are now represented), and would include additional components, including a simulation of the estuary itself, as well as the airshed – the geographical region which can be expected to contribute airborne pollution to the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Together, this suite of models is known as the Chesapeake Bay Modeling System (CBMS) (Linker et al., 2002; Shenk & Linker, 2013).

Modeling contributes to the construction of watershed identity by integrating the data needed to characterize the human and non-human processes involved in shaping the landscape and water quality. For example, it was through modeling that it became apparent that agriculture was a significant source of nutrient pollution on the landscape (Linker et al., 2002); thus, identifying farmers as significant contributors of pollution, which contradicted the popular imagination that farming was relatively harmless when compared with industrial pollution. Models also helped to identify the quantity of nutrients the estuary can handle, and the pollution reductions that would be necessary to restore the Bay. In 1987, the models showed that a 40 percent nutrient load reduction would be necessary to clean the estuary and prevent the formation of dead zones. In the years since, the nutrient reduction quantities have changed but the role of the model remains central to the process (Shenk & Linker, 2013).

Modeling also allows researchers to identify the specific human practices – such as planting cover crops, restoring stream banks, and switching to no-till agriculture – that can contribute to nutrient load reductions to identify the potential pathways by which the watershed can be cleaned. In the process, modeling requires farmers, land-owners, watermen, and others to adopt management practices, and shift existing ecocultural identities toward thinking of the watershed as a manageable unit in the process. Models can show the different effects of these practices on the future of this place – the watershed – as they are applied in different parts of the landscape. As a result, modeling is part of the broader identification process that makes management possible for the CBP. Indeed, I argue that, without

modeling, the CBP could not exist – the partnership depends upon the watershed imagery that the model produces in order to maintain the relationships that form the CPB's foundation. In that sense, identification of the estuary with its watershed also identifies those who are responsible for its water quality – the individuals and jurisdictions who must take part in the restoration efforts. Prior to this process of watershed identification, responsibility was identified only with the individuals and jurisdictions immediately surrounding the Bay.

Over time, both the CBP and the model coevolved – updates to the CBP often coincided with new developments in the management of the watershed. Originally, the CBMS was primarily a scientific tool that would help the newly formed CBP understand the sources of nutrients on the watershed and the effects these nutrients would have on the Bay. Once a better understanding of the causes and effects of nutrient pollution had emerged as a result of the model, it was then used to establish a baseline nutrient reduction goal for management purposes and, in 1987, a second agreement was signed that committed the states to a 40 percent nutrient pollution reduction (Linker et al., 2002; Shenk & Linker, 2013).

Eventually, it became clear that the 40 percent reduction was insufficient to curtail eutrophication in the estuary (Ernst, 2003). In 2000, a third agreement was signed in which the states agreed to submit 'tributary strategies' that would be evaluated by the CBP with the use of the model. This agreement, for the first time, included West Virginia, New York, and Delaware as collaborators, though not as signatories to the agreement (CBP, 2000). However, the process was still voluntary, and there was growing pressure from environmental groups to create an enforceable regulatory structure for the watershed (Ernst, 2003). In 2010, the EPA created such a regulatory structure in the form of a 'total maximum daily load' (U.S. EPA, 2010).

Since 2010, the management approach of the CBP has taken this total maximum daily load (TMDL) form, or, more colloquially, a pollution diet (U.S. EPA, 2010). The TMDL imposes a maximum amount of a specific pollutant or set of pollutants that is allowed to be discharged into a waterway. The states and local jurisdictions are then expected to develop a plan to reduce the pollutant load below the maximum through regulations and/or incentives. If the EPA does not approve the plan, the EPA can develop its own and force the jurisdictions to follow it. Over time, if the required reductions are not made, the jurisdictions can face penalties, though no such penalties have been imposed to date (U.S. EPA, 2010).

The pollution diet approach has been utilized in many waterways throughout the U.S., however, the Chesapeake Bay pollution diet is currently the largest ever implemented, since it covers the entire watershed – an area of 64,000 square miles. The CBMS plays an essential role in this process, too, and the implementation of the pollution diet coincided with the release of the 'Phase 5' version of the CBMS (Shenk & Linker, 2013). The model is used to set the maximum nutrient load for the estuary, distribute the load across the watershed, and evaluate the plans that the states develop to achieve their load reductions. The final evaluation of success or failure will be based on empirical data, but, in the meantime, the model will point the way.

Altogether, modeling plays an essential role in consolidating an identity for the Chesapeake Bay watershed in the form of the CBP institutional structure. Further, the model identifies those who contribute to nutrient pollution and, therefore, are responsible for watershed management at every level. Within this identification and institutional framework, a set of governance and subjectivation processes have taken shape. The following section explores the ways in which modeling and management converge to produce a certain eco-cultural subjectivity for the Chesapeake watershed.

Modeling watershed subjects

So far, I have focused on ways that watershed identity forms around scientific practices like mapping and modeling and ways in which these practices contribute to the development of ecocultural governance. The third goal of this article is to examine how these two processes contribute to the production of a particular ecocultural subjectivity for the scientists and management staff involved. In other words, how does the combination of governance and computational modeling affect people's interactions with the watershed landscape? What motivates action? What behavioral and cognitive frameworks are called upon by the governance structures that have taken shape around the watershed identity?

The period in which watershed identification and governance emerged in the Chesapeake Bay region corresponds with the time in which neoliberal governance began to consolidate in many parts of the world (Harvey, 2007). Foucault (2010) argues that neoliberalism attempts to apply market principles to the overall exercise of power. According to Brown (2015), neoliberal governance relies upon quantitative benchmarks and other metrics that incentivize – often in monetary terms – specific management practices seen to be beneficial. The result is not only a different style of governance, but also the production of a particular subjectivity motivated by these market principles. Environmental governance has not been immune to the effects of neoliberal governance (Agrawal, 2005). Water quality governance in the watershed has been characteristically neoliberal – based on quantitative measures (modeling) and the use of 'best management practices' or BMPs and other forms of benchmarks to channel people's behavior toward a specific outcome – the reduction of nutrient pollution in the Chesapeake Bay. While this may be a worthwhile goal, I argue the neoliberal approach taken by the CBP might have long term consequences that ultimately may be counter-productive in terms of improving ecological quality on the whole.

The CBP's management approach is best articulated by the phrase – often repeated by environmental management staff I worked with – 'biggest bang for our buck.' This terminology suggests an ecocultural subjectivity that is predominantly financial. In other words, management staff are primarily concerned with achieving the largest nutrient reduction possible with the lowest cost. In large part, this approach is implicit in the TDML process itself. By setting a quantitative limit and enforcing pollution reductions, the TDML obliges management staff to focus on quantitative evaluations. However, modeling also plays into the process in multiple ways.

In the TDML, the Chesapeake Bay Model is the primary arbiter of the 'bang' that management practices will have. As mentioned above, the nutrient management plans developed by the state and local jurisdictions are processed through the model to evaluate their effect on water quality in the estuary. While monitoring data will be used to conduct the long-term evaluation of the TDML process, at the planning phase, the effect of the management process on the model is the primary concern. As a result, in order to 'get the biggest bang for their buck,' the management staff in the region have to know how their scenarios will play out in the model, first and foremost.

This is evident in the development of the Assessment Scenario Tool (AST) suite of models. The AST models are simplified models used by managers to evaluate different scenarios without having to run them through the full CBMS, which takes a lot of time. The first of these models, known as the Maryland Assessment Scenario Tool (MAST), was developed by a private firm for management staff in Maryland. As they were in the process of producing their first management plan for the TMDL, they found they were flying blind because they had no way of knowing how their plans would impact water quality until they were analyzed in the

model, which stands in for the watershed itself. As a result, the state and local management staff were stuck in a continual back-and-forth process of developing a plan, asking the CBP to run it through the model, waiting for a response, and then making modifications to the plans. In the end, they still could not fully comprehend the impacts of their plans. After a few rounds of this back-and-forth process, the Maryland's management staff decided to find a way to evaluate their plans independently before sending them to the CBMS. MAST was designed to serve as a stand-in for the CBMS – literally a model of the model – that would enable management staff to evaluate their management plans without processing them through the full watershed model. The MAST tool was so successful that other similar models were commissioned by Virginia (VAST), the federal government (BayFAST), and ultimately by the CBP itself (CAST). More recently, the entire AST project has been folded into the CBMS so the watershed model can utilize the same calculation as CAST. This means management staff can now get the same exact results from CAST that they will from the watershed model (Devereux & Rigelman, 2014). As a result of this process, the model now allows management staff to quantify the benefits of their management plans as well as the cost of implementation because the model includes cost estimates for different BMPs. In other words, the model evaluates not only the 'bang' but also the 'buck.'

The subjectivity that results from modeling the watershed is one in which the vast complexity of the watershed as an ecological and social complex is reduced to a quantitative – and specifically financial – evaluation. Furthermore, the solution to the estuary's nutrient pollution issue is also reduced to individualized cost-benefit analysis. Both these aspects reinforce the *homo economicus* subject position of neoliberal management in which rational actors respond to economic costs and rewards (Brown, 2015; Foucault, 2010). While this approach might be an expedient way to encourage beneficial practices, it serves to further exacerbate the instrumental, objectifying conceptions of the non-human world rather than fostering qualitative and intersubjective relationships with the landscape.

In his *Three Ecologies*, Guattari (2008) argues that processes of subjectivation cannot be separated from the social and environmental contexts in which they take shape. In that sense, the neoliberal subject position utilized by the CBP management process cannot be extricated from the context of the capitalist exploitation of the more-than-human world. Indeed, this quantitative, functional stance toward environment and environmental issues naturalizes capitalist social and environmental relations, in which natural systems are objectified and conceptualized as resources that can be quantified in financial terms, exploited, managed, conserved, or restored. While the system of costs-and-benefits may effectively encourage the people in the Chesapeake Bay watershed who are subjectivized to respond to market incentives to reduce nutrient pollution, it does nothing to address the broader causes and ecocultural consequences of capitalist exploitation. Guattari calls for an ecosophical approach to this ecological framework, in which all three ecologies – natural, social, and subjective – are considered together (Guattari, 2008). In the following section, I examine the potential for an ecosophical approach to the watershed, and the possible role for computational modeling in that process.

An ecosophical subjectivity for the Chesapeake Bay

To date, the watershed has been composed and managed through a technocratic and neoliberal approach that tends to reduce the complexity of the social and natural system to quantitative costs and benefits. If this approach further reinforces and naturalizes a capitalist subjectivity and objectified ecocultural relationships, it is worth asking whether alternatives

are possible, and the role that computational modeling and watershed identity could play in the development of such alternatives. As Guattari (2008) points out:

Political groupings and executive authorities ... are generally content to simply tackle industrial pollution and then from a purely technocratic perspective, whereas only an ethico-political articulation – which I call *ecosophy* – between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity) would be likely to clarify these questions.

(p. 19)

It is arguable that computational modeling can only contribute to neoliberal management simply because of the nature of the models themselves. By reducing complex systems to simplified quantitative outputs, it could be argued, models are inherently incapable of playing a role in developing a more holistic understanding of and engagement with the more-than-human world. In order to evaluate this assumption, one can examine the intersection of modeling practices and subjectivation in contexts that are not overtly neoliberal. With that in mind, I turn to modeling more generally as a scientific practice for understanding complex systems.

Taken in themselves, models are reductionist. In fact, they are so necessarily since not all of the physical processes in a watershed can be represented fully and, even if they could, doing so would result in an overly complex and unwieldy model. Instead, the nature of modeling is to simplify and reduce the system to a few basic parameters in order to estimate outcomes rather than to seek perfectly accurate models that would take enormous amounts of computing power and time to run.

The result is, to use a common phrase in the modeling community, ‘all models are wrong.’ No single model captures all of the processes and parameters of a system. ‘But some models are useful’ the saying often continues (Box, 1979). While this pragmatic approach does not, in itself, break with instrumental and objectified conceptions of the non-human world, it nevertheless situates modeling within a broader context of exploration and experimentation. As a result, in a scientific context, models cannot be considered apart from this broader context of feedback and revision in response to the non-human processes and activities taking place on the actual landscape.

Within that context, models are continually interacting with empirical data as well as other models – being compared with and modified in response to them. For example, one of my collaborators described a modeling project in which one of the goals was to evaluate the present limits of a model by comparing a calibrated and an uncalibrated version. As he describes:

One thing we’re also looking at for this project is using that methodology but then going with the full model calibration and looking at the difference, that difference between the uncalibrated and calibrated basically tells us what we don’t understand about the system. Where we need to improve our input data. Where we need to improve our process understanding.

The difference between these models can reveal the gaps in our understanding of the physical processes that shape the watershed. In my research with the CBP modelers, one aspect of the model being improved was the lag time between when nutrients are applied to the landscape and when they enter rivers and streams. In prior versions of the model, there was

no lag time included, which meant there essentially was an immediate flow of nutrients from the landscape to the stream in the simulation. However, the flow of water through the ground is not something that can be easily observed or measured. As a result, multiple researchers were working on different methods for simulating these lag times, using empirical data as a guide. This process led to a new understanding of how water and nutrients move through the landscape, which will lead to models that can more effectively represent the physical processes that shape the watershed. With improved models, understanding of the watershed expands further and indicates new questions that must be answered either with empirical data or additional modeling in an ongoing cycle.

Within this broader context, modeling cannot be reduced to simple quantitative inputs and outputs. Instead, it is what De Landa (2011) refers to as ‘synthetic reason.’ In synthetic reason, models are part of an ongoing process of understanding and engaging with non-human systems in order to build better models and, ultimately, a better conception of and engagement with the more-than-human world. The simplicity of a model, in that sense, is not a limitation, but rather an asset that allows researchers to experiment and investigate aspects of the non-human world that are not fully understood. Synthetic reason is an ecocultural subjectivity that differs sharply from the neoliberal subjectivity currently at work in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

This synthetic scientific practice does not, in itself, constitute an ecosophical approach of the kind Guattari describes, since synthetic science and neoliberal management currently intersect in the watershed. However, by uncoupling computational modeling from reductionism and neoliberal management, synthetic science suggests the possibility that modeling could be part of an ecosophic orientation to the watershed. What would this ecosophical approach look like? What would the role of modeling be in it? Answering these questions would require a great deal of experimentation that has yet to be done. However, we can consider what it might entail by following the three ecologies.

First, an ecosophical approach would need to transform the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world. On this point, Guattari (2008) is insistent that the Western nature/culture dichotomy must be dismantled. Models already allow us to examine the complex feedbacks between social and ecological systems (e.g., Filatova et al., 2013). However, the modeling of social systems often is reduced to economistic behavioral frameworks. An ecosophical approach would require the social dimensions of the computational model to undergo the same kind of synthetic processes as the ecological systems – where social models are used to probe poorly understood processes rather than being treated as primary explanatory tools. Currently, many social dimensions models assume an economistic attitude to the watershed and treat humans as cost-benefit seekers. An ecosophical approach to modeling human behavior would have to break with these assumptions and explore different attitudes and motivations related to the non-human world.

In addition, it would be necessary to recognize the modeling process itself as formative of ecocultural relationships in ways described in this chapter. This kind of reflexivity could be fostered through an ongoing engagement between computational modelers and social scientists specialized in the study of science and technology. Together, the methods described above could foster a renewed conception of the watershed as a complex social and ecological system, in which modeling and other scientific practices play a conscious formative role in producing rather than being perceived as simply being methods for understanding.

Second, an ecosophical approach must reconfigure social relations. Guattari (2008) points out that:

An essential programmatic point for social ecology will be to encourage capitalist societies to make the transition from the mass-media era to a *post-media age*, in which the media will be reappropriated by a multitude of subject-groups capable of directing its resingularization

(p. 40)

In other words, media – such as computational models – must become accessible and available to everyone as tools for communication and interaction contributing to more democratic media systems. In many ways, through the interventions of social media this process already is underway with mixed results (Tucker et al., 2017). Nevertheless, this means modelers must engage a broader array of people in the synthetic process through collaborative modeling projects, citizen science programs, and other forms of outreach. This would encourage people to engage with the complexity of the watershed landscape rather than reducing it to quantitative and economic indicators. This engagement contributes to the process of exploring dimensions currently unknown or not fully understood by management staff, scientists, and members of the public alike. This would further contribute to the generation of a more inclusive ecocultural subjectivity, recognizing the subjectivities of the non-human world.

In addition, Guattari (2008) also suggests that social ecology will require identifying alternative forms of valuation that are not ‘characterized by general equivalence’ (p. 43). Modeling could be used to identify ways of representing non-quantitative and noncommensurable values, such as aesthetic value, intrinsic value, ecological value, and social value. The challenge will be representing these qualitative values within a quantitative system, but this might lead to new modeling methods. In any case, the temptation to represent these values as ‘ecological services’ or other monetary benefits – thus reducing them to commensurable value – must be avoided as they far too easily can be coopted by neoliberal subjectivity.

Finally, an ecosophical approach must engage computational modeling in new forms of subjectivation. This would entail finding ways to break with the cost-benefit-analysis subject position produced through neoliberal management. This may require breaking with concepts like the Total Maximum Daily Load and Best Management Practices and instead promoting activities that foster more qualitative engagements with the watershed. One possibility, explored in the work of McCormack (2001), is the use of computational modeling to create artistic works that depict complex ecological interactions in an aesthetic way and engage viewers in the process of artistic production. In a similar way, models might be used to create artistic representations of watershed dynamics that allow viewers to manipulate the simulation to produce generative aesthetic effects. This would help provide viewers with a more ecocentric sense of the complexity of the watershed and their place within it. While there has been some interest among the modelers I spoke with in using participatory or collaborative modeling techniques (see van Eeten et al., 2002; Whatmore et al., 2011) or in making models for public engagement (Learmonth et al., 2011), the underlying logics of these approaches continue to rely on benchmarks and management practices. Qualitative modeling that abandons these market logics remains out of the scope of current modeling efforts and interests.

These are only initial suggestions. A truly ecosophical project would emerge from the interactions of multiple human and non-human collaborators and would produce unexpected modes of social, subjective, and ecological interaction. However, as computational modeling is an intrinsic part of watershed identification and the formation of ecocultural relationships, it is necessary we explore ways that models can be mobilized in an alternative ecosophical process that can overturn the economistic subjectivation of neoliberal governance.

A future for ecosophical modeling?

This chapter has traced the intersections of computational modeling, identification practices, and subjectivation processes. As we increasingly confront anthropogenic ecological disruptions – particularly at larger scales like watersheds – computational modeling will play an increasingly important role in consolidating the human and more-than-human identities that take shape around these issues. Computational models not only provide a scientific understanding of the ecological processes that underlie the problems, but also play a role in forming the social and institutional relationships that make it possible to confront and transform those problems. So far, models have contributed to a predominantly technocratic and neo-liberal management methodology – in fact, they are excellent tools for such management because they allow complex processes to be reduced to simplified, quantitative results.

Models, however, also can participate in a broader context of engagement with the complexity of non-human systems through a process of synthetic reason in which modeling could allow researchers to investigate ecocultural dimensions of the systems that are not well understood or easily studied through empirical methods. This suggests that models might contribute to an alternative to neoliberal management and subjectivation processes. Guattari's ecosophical approach, which entails working with the three ecologies – environmental, social, and subjective – provides a framework for potential alternatives. My hope is, by thinking through these intersections of ecocultural identity, science and technology, management practices, and subjectivation processes, we might be able to craft more effective approaches to addressing the ecological challenges we face in the coming decades and centuries.

Note

1 Stibbe (2020), in Chapter 25 of this *Handbook*, also uses the term 'ecosophy' in his analysis. Stibbe uses the term to refer to an ecolinguistic framework for evaluating ecocultural claims. This differs from Guattari's use of the term to indicate the integration of different ecological registers – the social, mental, and environmental.

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Part IV

Politicizing ecocultural identity

This fourth part of the *Handbook* delves into the power and politics at the constitutive core of ecocultural identities and also illuminates ways ecological dimensions and forces shape political identities. The chapters within examine identity tensions, transitions, hybridities, inclusions, and exclusions that become articulated within – and shape – politics. Understanding the role of ecocultural identity in the political sphere is crucial because it is within this sphere that anthropogenic ecological crises can be widely addressed and transformed.

In the first chapter of this part, Chapter 18, ‘Induced seismicity, quotidian disruption, and challenges to extractivist ecocultural identity,’ authors Dakota Raynes and Tamara Mix provide key insights into ways direct experiences with major environmental disruptions, such as category 5 cyclones, flooding, and bushfires, can lead to reassessed values, realigned politics, and transformed ecocultural identities. The authors illustrate ways extractivist industries, such as the fossil fuel industry, transform economic power into political and cultural power, creating platforms through which to indoctrinate extractivist ecocultural identities and position those dwelling in highly extractivist states to accept and support industry practices regardless of potential and actual adverse consequences. The authors also vividly illustrate ways the Earth responsively shakes and shifts those identities into radically new forms, including from compliant resident into grassroots activist against extractivist industries. Based on extensive archival and ethnographic research in Oklahoma in the U.S. West, the authors illuminate ways hydraulic fracturing (fracking)-induced earthquakes over the past decade have disrupted residents’ daily lives, senses of normalcy, and expectations of safety and security. The chapter shows how these induced earthquakes shake extractivist ecocultural identities into new interconnected ecocultural identity forms as peoples’ built foundations literally crack and crumble and residents formerly in favor of the industry demand moratoriums on fracking and work toward protecting quality of life and the land they love.

In Chapter 19, ‘Political identity as ecocultural survival strategy,’ John Carr and Tema Milstein outline a hypothesis regarding the potential ecological functions of political identity. Drawing together strands of research on the roots of political identity from multiple disciplines, the authors posit that the longstanding tension between ‘left’ and ‘right’ political biases may be ecologically responsive and purposeful. To illustrate, Carr and Milstein engage in an experimental re-reading of pre-European contact Hawai’ian history as a case for presenting two ecopolitical identities that remain dominant today, *expansive* and *rivalrous*. The authors connect expansive

identities to the principles of left politics, as those likely to succeed in times of perceived ecological abundance, and rivalrous identities to tenets held by right politics, as those likely to emerge in times of perceived ecological scarcity. In postulating a link between ecological vicissitudes and the responsiveness and success or failure of political identities, the authors offer a starting point to explore how today's left and right political identities potentially could be reframed such that essential ecological functions of both come to the fore in ways that help regain balance between human conditions and ecological capacity and well-being.

In 'The making of fluid ecocultural identities in urban India,' Chapter 20, Shilpa Dahake investigates identity formations within the contested urban environmental politics of India. Dahake illustrates socioecological transformations along a sacred and mythic city riverscape, arguing that city dwellers are experiencing an urban environmental awakening that entails continuous negotiations of the symbolic imagery of the riverscape. Engaging with ecocultural identity fluidity, Dahake illustrates ways subjectivities emerge not only from associations with immediate sociocultural contexts but also through quotidian interactions with immediate ecologies and their material forces. This chapter evidences the agentic power of nonhuman actors in the formation and development of the politics of ecocultural identity, a power that must be taken into consideration in planning for both resilient and regenerative cities.

In Chapter 21, 'Competing models of ecocultural belonging in highland Ecuador,' Joe Quick and James Spartz center the Andean metaphysical concept of *pacha*, or world, in their identity framework for understanding ecocultural frictions between Indigenous governing bodies and state environmental bureaucracies. Drawing on an extensive case study in Ecuador, the authors explore ways competing forms of environmental responsibility and ecocultural identity are intimately linked to inherently divergent models of civic participation and shaped and reshaped by a history of contact and cosmopolitical confrontations between ethical codes originating in disparate worlds. The authors delve into the politics of recognition and sovereignty as Indigenous communities encounter government attempts to control and gain authority via the superimposition of environmental resource management logics over lived ecocultural systems of meanings. This chapter illuminates ways Andean Indigenous communities construct discourses of ecocultural memory and pursue institutional means to invent ways of being into the future without giving up rights of local autonomy vital to maintaining territory and sovereignty.

In Chapter 22, 'Scapegoating identities in the Anthropocene,' Leonie Tuitjer demonstrates how contemporary ecological struggles often are profoundly urban. In particular, this chapter illustrates ways Bangkok's urban poor are blamed for flooding events that instead emerge from histories of Thailand embracing Western terrestrial – and, more recently, neoliberal – development schemes and eschewing the affordances of former water relations and mobilities organized according to the ecological milieu of the delta. In particular, the author looks at canal-dwellers, their resistance to government eviction, and ways ecocultural identities are constructed within unequal power dynamics at work in urban adaptation measures. The chapter offers a lens into how contemporary struggles to 'stay put' in today's shifting ecologies involve ecocultural identity mobilizations and contestations.

Environmental and social movements, government and economic institutions, and civil society all are fundamental and interdependent parts of the political matrix within which practices that dangerously advance extinction can be reimaged and transformed. As a species, we construct the diverse political systems that form our structural and interconnected relations with each other and the more-than-human world. This part shows that ecocultural identities are an integral part of those political systems, and begins to articulate ways an ecologically and culturally inclusive identity framework can help inform and fortify political proposals, mechanisms, and resolutions to address the current ecocultural moment.

Induced seismicity, quotidian disruption, and challenges to extractivist ecocultural identity

Dakota K. T. Raynes and Tamara L. Mix

Oklahoma, once known as the ‘Last American Frontier,’ is now flyover country (flown over by airlines hopping between United States coastal metropolitan hubs). The state is unique, hosting 11 distinct ecological regions. Driving across the Oklahoma countryside – from the semi-arid northwestern plains and mesas of the panhandle through tallgrass prairies, oak savannahs, and patchwork farmland to the low wetlands and deciduous forests dotting the hillsides along the Arkansas River – it is easy to see why many Oklahomans love the land they call home. It also is easy to see why some feel this serene, diverse, and beautiful rural landscape is under attack.

Along the interstates are more nodding donkeys (pumpjacks that pull oil to Earth’s surface) than one can count. Traveling long-forgotten backroads, through boomtowns turned ghost towns with each bust, one can see how the oil and gas industry (hereafter simply industry) is rapidly working to ‘put a rig on every square mile’ – a comment frequently made by industry representatives. Placement of hydraulic fracturing (HF, commonly referred to as fracking) machinery and fracking wastewater disposal wells (WDWs) in increasingly close proximity to human communities is not the only encroachment upon residents. In 2016, a record-breaking 907 individual M3.0+ earthquakes¹ rocked residents, frightened children, disturbed pets, and damaged homes, businesses, and infrastructure. Prior to 2009 – the start of the HF boom – Oklahoma averaged one or two earthquakes of any magnitude annually; geologists and seismologists attribute the exponential increase to HF and WDWs (Holland, 2011, 2013; Keranen et al., 2013; Keranen et al., 2014). In 2014, the United States Geological Survey released the first earthquake hazard map that included *induced seismicity*, or earthquakes caused by human extractive practices, initiating what was to become a continued conversation about this hazard and its associated risks across the U.S. and particularly in Oklahoma.

Using Erikson’s concept of ‘a new species of trouble’ (1994), we analyze constructions and experiences of induced seismicity as an emergent socioenvironmental problem. The notion of ‘quotidian disruption’ (Snow et al., 1998) – a disturbance of everyday routines and expectations – provides insight into nascent anti-fracking grassroots social movement responses to induced seismicity. We rely on qualitative content analysis of archival materials

triangulated with 4 years of ethnographic fieldwork to ask: How have historical ecocultural conditions affected contemporary constructions, understandings, and experiences of induced seismicity? And how have sensorial experiences of induced seismicity influenced the development of counter-narratives, mobilization of collective action, and new forms of ecocultural identity? To date, the ecocultural framework is not explicitly used by sociologists attending to the intersection of environmental issues, space/place, identity, and/or environmental justice movements. Our work seeks to spark an interdisciplinary bridge-building process, demonstrating how sociologists can use an ecocultural approach to analyze socioenvironmental issues, ecocultural identity dynamics, and environmental justice movements.

We chronologically trace a nascent shift in the ecocultural identity of Oklahomans who, due to disruption caused by daily earthquakes, became concerned about the adverse effects of HF. Our study's findings illustrate how stakeholders struggled to make sense of, and influence perceptions of, a new socioenvironmental problem – injection-induced seismicity. We show how induced seismicity and industry and state recalcitrant responses (Mix & Raynes, 2018) shook some Oklahomans' attachment to *extractivist ecocultural identities* – subject positionalities revolving around acceptance/support of extractive industry activities – and created ideological space for alternative ecocultural identities, wherein residents demand people and the broader natural environment be protected from risks associated with HF. This shift was manifested in a nearly 20 percent increase in the number of archival texts showcasing a contentious debate among industry, regulators, state officials, hydrogeological experts, residents, and activists. The following sections outline pertinent literatures, delineate methodological dimensions of the piece, and illuminate ways extractivist ecocultural conditions shape understandings of technological risks and how quotidian disruption can serve as a catalyst for ecocultural identity transformation.

Literature review

We examine how anti-fracking activists challenged Oklahoma's extractivist ecocultural history, which is shaped by the development of institutional structures that facilitate and demand acceptance/support of extractive industry activities. To understand the impact of this history on contemporary Oklahomans' identities and practices, we outline the tenets of ecocultural identity theory, discuss the prevalence of technological hazards in contemporary post-industrial societies, consider how such hazards can cause quotidian disruptions, and illuminate power dynamics associated with relations of definitions in technological risk identification, perception, and assessment.

Ecocultural conditions, identity, and disruptions caused by technological hazards

Ecocultural theory offers insights into historical conditions that shape material and ideological landscapes. Ecocultural approaches examine everyday and institutionalized structures and practices – such as ecology and culture, economy and labor, education and research, law and politics – through which conceptualizations of and relationships among components of the world are articulated, legitimated, imposed, contested, resisted, and/or marginalized (Ivakhiv, 1997). As previously mentioned, environmental sociologists tend not to explicitly use the term ecocultural; however, many engage in research and theorizing focused on the same dynamics and processes found in transdisciplinary ecocultural approaches.

Some scholars highlight how extractive industries shape ecocultural conditions, noting how mineral-based economies can degrade U.S. democratic structures (Goldberg et al., 2008), illuminating ways neoliberalism leads to a ‘culture of complacency’ by facilitating state-corporate crime and normalizing/institutionalizing deviant/recreant industry practices (Bradshaw, 2015), and showing how the ‘polluter industrial complex’ engages in ‘strategic philanthropy’ that influences think tanks, university researchers, media, and government and leads to corporate colonization or capture of each (Faber, 2009, pp. 77, 87–89). Hudgins and Poole (2014) examined HF discourse in Pennsylvania, illustrating how the industry and state used their authority to frame natural resources as sources of profit to ‘corral public opinion to the goal of extracting and amassing capital’ (p. 303). Other scholars note how extractive industries’ colonization efforts, including control over land and production therein, affect community-based social movement responses to corporatist representations of place, nature, and relationships between humans and the rest of the natural world (Cope, 2013; Guignard, 2013; Malin & DeMaster, 2016; Said, 2013; Williams & Brandt, 2013). Each study uncovers the phenomenal resources and power that extractive industries use to shape sociocultural institutions, structures, and practices such that democracy is constrained, undermined, and/or corrupted to benefit those in power to the detriment of others, including residents and the more-than-human world. Uniting existing research more explicitly with the concepts of ecocultural conditions, identities, and practices could enhance scholars’ ability to connect sociocultural dynamics to ecological outcomes to further holistic analyses of environmental issues and environmental justice movement responses.

Many of the greatest socioenvironmental problems of our time involve risks and hazards associated with ‘a new species of trouble’ (Erikson, 1994, p. 139), a concept based on research in communities experiencing disasters such as earthen dam/levee failures, water contamination, gas leaks, and nuclear energy plant meltdowns. The term highlights contradistinctions between natural and technological (anthropogenic) disasters. Gill and Ritchie (2018) note natural disasters are rooted in nature,² are predictable but not necessarily preventable, and are associated with a perceived lack of control. Technological disasters, however, are caused by humans, are not predictable but perceived as preventable, and associated with a perceived loss of control. Significant differences also exist in the characteristics of physical damages, types of response, and effects on individuals and communities (Gill & Ritchie, 2018). Natural hazards often cause immediate damage, technological hazards may not. The latter frequently involve release of contaminating toxins across time and space and are characterized by high levels of uncertainty as stakeholders debate the existence of risk, its severity, mitigation potential, and possibility or extent of recovery.

Natural and technological disasters disrupt everyday activities in affected communities. Snow and colleagues (1998) rearticulate quotidian (Latin for routines of daily life) as a ‘state of being in which things are done in a taken-for-granted way’ (p. 5). The four types of quotidian disruption are: accidents or disasters, incursion of privacy or control, interruption of subsistence routines, and significant changes in social control structures. Each facilitates emergence of collective efforts to define and make sense of what has happened and, in some cases, can lead to sustained social movement activity. Accidents and violations of privacy/control types of quotidian disruption are most pertinent to our case study.

Accidents like major oil spills, gas leaks, industrial explosions, or induced seismic events are ‘especially likely to generate collective action insofar as they (a) disrupt the quotidian, and (b) can be attributed to human negligence and/or error rather than to natural forces’ (Snow et al., 1998, p. 7). Walsh (1988) demonstrates how anti-nuclear organizations in eastern Pennsylvania experienced recruitment challenges before the partial meltdown at the

Three Mile Island nuclear energy plant in 1979. Afterward, meeting attendance and active membership significantly increased. Those who became activists did so due to disruption and suffering during the emergency and subsequent evacuation. In short, residents were forced to confront taken-for-granted notions of safety and had to face uncertainties associated with living near a nuclear facility.

The second type of quotidian disruption we focus on is ‘actual or threatened intrusion into culturally defined zones of privacy and control by strangers, uninvited persons, [or] corporate and/or governmental agents’ (Snow et al., 1998, p. 9). In such cases, some individuals engage in collective action to reestablish privacy and control. Snow and colleagues provide examples from Mothers Against Drunk Driving (McCarthy, 1994), anti-busing campaigns³ (Rubin, 1972; Useem, 1980), and ‘Not In My Back Yard’ (NIMBY) movements (Snow & Anderson, 1993). In each case, participants in collective action ‘perceived themselves, their families, and their neighborhoods as being violated and victimized’ (Snow et al., 1998, p. 9). Because quotidian disruptions disturb ordinary operations of everyday life, they can result in perceived and/or actual social disorder at various levels of society. We argue that experiences often lead to contention, as key stakeholders struggle to make sense of what happened, why it happened, whether it could be prevented, and how to identify who is responsible for damages and deterrence of future incidents.

Risk and the relations of definitions

Risk scholars highlight how risks emerge from everyday, ongoing societal features and processes (Hewitt, 1983) and build over time as a result of long-term social, political, and economic dynamics (Blaikie et al., 1994), stemming from decisions communities, corporations, states, and nation-states make or fail to make (Mileti, 1999). Hence, ‘processes that generate risks of all types ... are part of the social fabric itself’ (Tierney, 2014, p. 39). These processes – and the context in which they occur – also influence risk communication. Beck’s (2007) conceptualization of the ‘relations of definitions’ highlights how forms of domination create systemic inequalities. Relations of definitions refers to the explicit and implicit rules that structure risk identification and assessment, enabling examination of institutionalized social norms that ‘equip specific groups with the power to impose their definitions and interests against the will of other groups’ (Beck, 2007, p. 33). The concept aids analysis of the interconnections that comprise the ecocultural matrix of risk politics.

Risk researchers further illuminate how imbalanced power dynamics affect sensorial experiences and communication practices. Generally, populations facing technological risks want to believe various stakeholders are acting properly (Gamero et al., 2011; Pilisuk et al., 1987). Trust, however, can erode when accurate and timely information is withheld, a perceived or actual lack of impartiality in decision-making exists, and/or there seems to be a lack of concern for the common good or public safety. People who believe they are dependent on a company or industry are more likely to defend corporate and regulatory authorities (Gamero et al., 2011). Cable et al. (2008) demonstrate how bureaucratic secrecy at nuclear facilities in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, facilitated control of information and denial of workers’ experiences through victim-blaming, recalcitrant decision-making, and severe reprisals against anyone who spoke out. Dilemmas that arise when information is tightly controlled and/or presented in a purposefully obfuscated format often contribute to a reliance on the opinions of university-affiliated scientists (Pilisuk et al., 1987), but experts can be caught in relations of definitions that, at best, delimit their ability to remain trustworthy and, at worst, demand complicity in the perpetuation of harm (Cable et al., 2008).

Other scholars attend to environmental rhetoric and the ecology of place, employing the concept of ‘eco-seeing’ to better understand ‘how humans use images to construct ideas of nature and environment’ (Dobrin & Morey, 2009, p. 8). Goggin (2013) and Cope (2013) both illuminate how extractive industry boom-and-bust cycles create a ‘sense of deprivation’ enabling industry, its representatives, and state officials to frame activities as necessary economic developments, regardless of concerns over potential and/or actual adverse, long-term cultural, ecological, environmental, and physical effects. More specifically, Cope (2013) details how the HF industry used greenwashing techniques, (re)produced images of the pastoral idyllic, and created false exigencies in an effort to convince Pennsylvanians of a potential economic windfall while downplaying or denying concerns about long-term effects. He demonstrates how Pennsylvanians’ increasing awareness of the industry’s insouciance prompted grassroots activism and development of alternative narratives about the types of relationships existing among humans, non-human animals, and the broader natural environment they share.

Prior studies note how social construction of emergent technological risks involves discursive processes controlled and leveraged by those with the most power within relations of definitions. They also underscore how actors associated with institutions that comprise ‘the power elite’ (Mills, 1956) can effectively control technological risk discourse, avoid responsibility for adverse outcomes, and suppress emergence and development of counter-narratives. The relations of definitions are controlled to a great extent by the very industries responsible for creating technological risks, politicians or other government officials responsible for regulating and mitigating risks, and experts (such as medical doctors, etc.) responsible for caring for those exposed to risks. Public input is ignored, regardless of the democratic principle ‘that the people affected ought to be most important in determining the outcomes of decision making in matters of public safety’ (Pilisuk et al., 1987, p. 411).

The ecocultural context: Fossil-fuel roots and induced seismicity

Even before statehood, the industry was a dominant ecocultural force in Oklahoma. In 1897, the first commercially viable well marshalled a new era of oil. After the Land Runs, in 1907, what had been known as Indian Territory became the state of Oklahoma⁴ – ‘the largest oil-producing entity in the world’ (Boyd, 2002). Since then, residents have witnessed booms and busts as the ebb and flow of technological advances in fossil fuel extraction – and market whims – shaped the state.

The process of hydraulic fracturing (HF) is not new to Oklahoma. The state has long been a site of industry experimentation; one of the first commercial HF operations in the U.S. occurred in 1949 near Duncan, Oklahoma (Montgomery & Smith, 2010). The early 2000s marked the start of Oklahoma’s shale boom, in which unconventional resource plays (underground accumulations of hydrocarbons) came to be considered viable due to the combination of new extractive technologies, including HF, horizontal drilling, and multi-well construction. Horizontal HF began in earnest in 2002–2006 in the Woodford Shale. Since then, a rash of multi-well sites in increasingly closer proximity to communities has caused turmoil and disorder as many city, county, and state statutes have not kept pace with industry innovations.

In 2014, mining contributed 3 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product but, in comparison, 15 percent of Oklahoma’s gross state product. The advent and rise in HF activities resulted in the state’s first significant increase in oil and gas production since the oil boom of the 1980s. Consequently, in 2015, Oklahoma was the third leading producer of

natural gas and fifth leading producer of oil in the U.S. (USEIA, 2016). The industry is commonly referred to as the economic lifeblood of the state. The Oklahoma Corporation Commission (OCC) estimates that, since official record keeping began in 1915, when as many as 700–900 new wells were being drilled each month (Fay, 1997), a total of 500,000 wells have been drilled across the state. At least 193,300 remain active (including at least 6,600 HF wells and 4,200 WDWs).⁵ Additionally, nearly 41,000 miles of pipelines crisscross the state (Griffith, 2013). New applications for extraction sites, gathering/transport lines, compressor stations, or WDWs are submitted and approved almost daily. The industry dominates the economic and physical landscape, two key ways in which it shapes ecocultural conditions.

In many plays (underground reservoirs of oil and gas), produced water (fluid that coexisted with hydrocarbons underground and/or was injected to force resources to the surface) accompanies production of oil or gas. This wastewater must be separated from the oil or gas and disposed; WDWs are the most common means to do so in Oklahoma. From 2011–2015, high pressure pumps forced 10,655,395,179 barrels (410,232,714,392 gallons) of briny, chemical-laced, sometimes radioactive wastewater beneath Earth's surface in Oklahoma alone (Auch, 2016). Due to the complexity of ecological systems, consensus regarding disposal practices is lacking, specifically regarding the conditions in which wastes migrate after injection and whether groundwater/aquifers can be contaminated (see CHPNY & PSR, 2018). However, it is clear HF and WDWs can create induced seismicity.

A precipitous increase in seismicity began in Oklahoma in 2009. Historically, earthquakes in central U.S. have been rare and most went unnoticed. Yet Oklahoma's total earthquake count for 2015 was 5,691 (907 of which were M3.0+). Researchers used geospatial analysis to demonstrate occurrence of induced seismicity during or after wastewater disposal (Keranen et al., 2013; Keranen et al., 2014), HF operations (Holland, 2011, 2013), and heightened oil and gas production activities generally (Hough & Page, 2015). In response to the exponential increase in induced seismicity, the seismic hazard in Oklahoma and the central U.S. was re-evaluated (McNamara et al., 2015a; McNamara et al., 2015b; Murray, 2014a, 2014b). The U.S. Geological Survey released new seismic hazard maps (see <https://earthquake.usgs.gov/hazards/hazmaps/>) to account for the emergent risk spreading across the midcontinent. Likewise, Oklahoma stakeholders began discussing, researching, and evaluating the new risk of induced seismicity; and some stakeholders had far more influence and reach in these processes than others.

A major political donor for decades, the industry annually contributes millions of dollars to local campaigns (Open Secrets, 2016) and has successfully lobbied since the 1990s for exemptions from the state gross production tax. The growing cost of subsidies (corporate tax breaks and incentives) matched the frenzy of production, totaling more than \$1 billion between fiscal years 2012 and 2015 alone. In the 1990s, the industry also lobbied for creation of the Oklahoma Energy Resources Board (OERB). Comprised of industry representatives, petroleum purchasers, and royalty owners, the OERB's mission is stated to be 'to use the strength of Oklahoma's greatest industry to improve the lives of all Oklahomans through education and restoration' (OERB). The OERB Home Room program develops pro-industry curriculum used in K-12 school classrooms, which allows industry to shape young Oklahomans' ecocultural identities, particularly attitudes, values, and practices concerning energy extraction, production, and consumption. The OERB's Home Room webpage includes the number of teachers trained in the curriculum; at print it was a total of 16,030, nearly 38 percent of Oklahoma's teachers. OERB also creates and distributes pro-industry commercials via local radio, TV, and online platforms (HULU, etc.).

Many Oklahomans are proud of the industry. In 2010, Tulsa designated its central downtown business area the ‘Oil Capital Historic District’ in the National Register of Historic Places (Overall, 2010). Each summer Oklahomans celebrate ‘Black Gold Days,’ the ‘Summer Oil Patch Festival,’ and ‘Oil Field Days’ (AOGHS), which have been held for a half-century, last for several days, and draw tens of thousands of participants from across the region. The events are often the largest yearly social gatherings in small rural towns. Alongside stages for performers and vendors’ booths, industry representatives distribute brochures and giveaways emblazoned with logos. Thus, the industry transforms its economic power into political and cultural power allowing it to dominate the political and cultural arenas in much the same way it dominates the physical landscape.

The industry has and continues to be ecoculturally embedded in local communities and the state as a whole. Its ability to transform economic power into political and cultural power provides platforms through which to indoctrinate residents into an extractivist ecocultural identity that encourages them not only to accept but also to support industry practices regardless of potential and actual adverse consequences. This position, however, is being shaken, literally, as houses crack and crumble, evidence of WDWs as a causal mechanism of induced seismicity emerges, and residents demand a moratorium on injection. Echoed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2016, citizen calls for a moratorium were reversed after U.S. President Trump named Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt EPA Administrator (Dennis & Mufson, 2017). The industry has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to Pruitt’s election campaigns and Pruitt has a long history of serving as an industry mouthpiece, even submitting industry-produced briefs and reports on Oklahoma State letterhead, as if they were his own, to federal agencies (Lipton, 2014).

From extraction machinery, old and new, littering the countryside, to the Oil Capitol Historic District in Tulsa, from summertime street festivals to educational propaganda, and from political donations to the writing of briefs or drafting of legislation, the industry has woven itself into the ecocultural fabric of the state. The industry has unceasingly worked to transform its economic power into cultural, legal, political, and technological power – a power it uses to shape the material and ideological landscape of Oklahoma and construct an extractivist ecocultural identity among Oklahomans.

Research design

Our analysis draws on a subset of data from a larger project consisting of a wide range of archival materials, including: major newspapers, state and industry documents, and social media platforms; semi-structured stakeholder interviews; and four years of participatory action ethnographic fieldwork. For this chapter, we make use of articles and editorials in the *Daily Oklahoman* (DO), key activist interviews, and ethnographic field notes. The DO, a daily newspaper, is regarded by most Oklahomans as a conservative news outlet and is owned by an oil magnate. It is one of the most widely read newspapers in Oklahoma, with an estimated circulation rate of 147,212. Due to its conservative focus and wide circulation base, this portion of the dataset offers the best opportunity to clearly examine and explain the mechanisms that stretch ecocultural identity, such as unexpected environmental risks.

We used keywords (earthquake, quake, tremor, temblor, trembler, etc.) to identify articles and editorials. Materials were collected from January 1, 2009 – the start of the exponential increase in earthquakes – to May 31, 2015 – when Senate Bill 809, state legislation removing chartered municipalities’ right to regulate or ban oil and gas activities within their jurisdiction, was passed. A headline-specific search returned 642 items. After removal of unrelated

materials, 336 remained for analysis. Items directly addressed induced seismicity and resident/activist,⁶ expert, media, industry, regulatory, and legislative reactions. We triangulated archival data with extensive field notes from fieldwork conducted throughout the state from 2014 through 2018 and semi-structured in-depth interviews with five key residents/activists in the largest, most active anti-fracking social movement group in the state.

We organized and analyzed data following constructivist grounded theory procedures outlined by Charmaz (2006), which demand a search for and critical questioning of both explicit and implicit statements regarding values, beliefs, and ideologies. The method requires immersion in the data and embedding the narratives present in discussions of findings. Line-by-line coding, focused coding, and memo-writing throughout the process allowed us to record and evaluate our interactions with the data, the development and use of codes, and relationships among emergent themes. We identified principal themes including but not limited to: ecocultural context, social control, legal/political issues, dependence on industry, environment, fear, risk, trust, social movement groups/organizations, and perspectives on science. The identification of these themes and relationships among them helped us interpret how an extractivist ecocultural identity developed in Oklahoma, and how the quotidian disruptions associated with induced seismicity troubled that identity, leading some Oklahomans to engage in anti-fracking activism.

The study faces some limitations as we examine news materials obtained via Lexis-Nexis, which does not archive images nor indicate whether items originally appeared in print, online, or both. However, much extant research on fracking is limited in other ways, tending to focus on chemical, ecological, geological, or engineering processes or on social dynamics in large shale plays or densely populated areas. We offer a distinctly sociological ecocultural perspective to illuminate how induced seismicity constitutes a new technological risk and creates quotidian disruptions that catalyze waves of collective action. Our analysis adds nuance to existing understanding of the social construction of risk, related social movement activity, and construction and transformation of ecocultural identities, particularly within hostile ecocultural environments controlled by addiction to extractive economies (Freudenberg, 1992).

'Like a 747 in the neighbor's yard': Earthquakes shake extractivist ecocultural identities

In 2009 when the first injection-induced earthquake swarms (series of earthquakes concentrated in time/space) began, many were surprised. Some thought a plane or vehicle had crashed nearby or an explosion had occurred, exclaiming 'I'd never felt anything like it before!' (*The Oklahoman*, 2010). People felt a bounce, shake, rattle, rumble, roll, or jolt accompanied by loud noise, described as 'the boom and shake' (Johnson & Dinger, 2009). Quick, successive earthquakes caused distress – 'the most unsettling thing was [the quakes] were within minutes of each other' (*The Oklahoman*, 2010). Physical damages were relatively minor: picture frames fell and shattered, momentary power outages occurred, and pipes burst as water heaters were shaken out of place.

As the shaking continued into 2010, many began to express concern. Commuters were anxious about the stability of backroad bridges along their daily drive. Choctaw City Manager Robert Floyd was uneasy because the city, like many others, 'has a lot of 50-year-old water mains that could be taking some extra wear and tear ... there have been recent breaks' (Johnson & Slipke, 2010). Few people had earthquake insurance (an addition to standard home-owners' insurance policies); several insurers began recommending it. Approximately half of earthquake damage occurs due to shaking, the other half due to related fire or water damage, which standard policies may or may not cover.

Many were unsure of what was happening and why. Emergency 911 dispatchers were inundated with calls from frightened residents. Others checked social media, 'I thought that was what it was ... but hearing the news that there really was an earthquake was confirmation' (*The Oklahoman*, 2010) or 'Never thought I'd feel an earthquake in Oklahoma!' (Painter, 2010). A few, like Choctaw Police Captain Marsha VanHoutte, knew exactly what was happening. After a 3.3M quake woke her at 4:05 a.m., she couldn't go back to sleep. She notes, 'this one concerns me more than any of the others because it reminded me more of the ones in California' (Medley, 2010). Regardless of whether people had previous earthquake experience, responses to the emergence of daily quakes in Oklahoma was similar – they were quotidian disruptions that evoked curiosity, anxiety, and/or fear.

The Oklahoma Geological Survey (OGS), housed at the University of Oklahoma and well connected to local industry representatives, noted that, even though Oklahoma 'isn't known for its earthquakes' (Coppernoll, 2009), approximately 50 happened in Oklahoma annually between 1978 and 2008. Overall, fewer than five were felt because, generally, people only feel those above M2.5. Several local geologists claimed the more recent tremors were normal and natural, that Oklahoma was not at risk for a larger earthquake, that smaller earthquakes made the area less susceptible to a larger one, and that there was no cause for alarm.

Other OGS geologists noted the increasing number of felt quakes was unusual, but attributed the phenomena to bedrock under Oklahoma, a better-than-average conductor of seismic waves, making smaller earthquakes likelier to be felt. OGS geologist Kenneth Luza discussed the largest earthquake recorded in Oklahoma history – a 5.5M in El Reno in 1952 that 'toppled chimneys, cracked foundations, loosened bricks, broke windows,' injured a woman, 'produced a crack at the State Capitol that measured 15 meters (49 feet) long,' and was 'felt as far away as Des Moines, Iowa, and Austin, Texas' (Coppernoll, 2009). As concerns about injection-induced seismicity spread across the region, the *Daily Oklahoman* covered developments in Cleburn, Texas, where Oklahoma City-based Chesapeake Energy opted to shut down two WDWs after a series of quakes nearby. When asked about connections to recent earthquakes in Oklahoma, the OGS stated they 'did not know of any correlation between Oklahoma quakes and oil field activity' (Marks, 2009). OGS geologists did not publicly discuss a possible link between earthquakes and WDWs until October 2010.

During the first two years of increasing induced seismic activity – 2009 and 2010 – OGS narratives bolstered the pre-existing dominant extractivist ecocultural identity in Oklahoma, sought to assuage residents' curiosity, fear, and anxiety about the new species of trouble they were facing, and denied the possibility that the earthquakes were industry-induced rather than naturally occurring, despite empirical evidence to the contrary (see Foulger et al., 2018 or McGarr et al., 2002). Thus began a years-long process through which industry, industry representatives, state officials, and OGS scientists, who all were embroiled in construction of an extractivist ecocultural identity that denied the problem, disinformed the public and delayed action (Mix & Raynes, 2018). This strategy fueled debate about relationships between HF and induced seismicity and slowed ecocultural identity transformation for some residents, but sped it up for others, as demonstrated in resident responses to a large earthquake that occurred in 2011.

'When is this going to stop?': Extractivist ecocultural identities begin to crack

In March 2011, the Arkansas Oil and Gas Commission (AOGC) ordered Oklahoma-based Chesapeake Energy and Clarita Energy to shut down two WDWs after more than 1,000 earthquakes occurred in the Fayetteville Shale. Chesapeake's Senior Director of Corporate

Development eschewed responsibility, claiming, ‘The science continues to point to naturally occurring seismicity;’ yet the Arkansas Geological Survey noted more than 100 earthquakes the week before the shutdown, but fewer than 50 the week after (AP, 2011). Two days later *DO* editors criticized those in support of the shutdown for allegedly overreacting to the ‘unsubstantiated belief that petroleum exploration is responsible for seismic activity [in the central U.S.]’ (*The Oklahoman*, 2011a). Commenting on the AOGC’s order, an OGS spokesperson argued, ‘It seems like we’re jumping the gun’ (*The Oklahoman*, 2011a). In May, as an estimated 10,000 residents participated in a ShakeOut drill, the first-ever earthquake preparedness exercise in businesses and schools across Oklahoma, several insurance companies dropped earthquake coverage in Oklahoma. Residents who had earthquake insurance costing as little as \$12 a year were angry, scrambling to find new coverage; to their dismay, premiums at the few companies still selling earthquake coverage had skyrocketed to as much as \$200 a year.

On November 5, 2011, a M4.7 quake at 2 a.m. followed by a M5.6 at 10:53 p.m. struck rural communities surrounding the small town of Prague; the earthquakes were felt across 17 states and more than 64,000 people logged their experience on USGS’ national website *Did You Feel It*. In Oklahoma, many lay in bed hoping their houses wouldn’t collapse on them. As hundreds of aftershocks rattled homes and nerves, damage reports poured in.

Most injuries were minor, but more than 460 properties, many within 20-square miles of the epicenter, were damaged. Parts of U.S. Highway 62 buckled, several bridges were temporarily unusable, and nearby schools closed for days. Benedictine Hall, a central building at St. Gregory’s University, suffered extensive damages (estimated at \$2.5 million). The following quote from the *DO* details how damages upset the everyday routines of university life: ‘Classrooms and offices are displaced Routines will be disrupted, requiring flexibility and good spirits’ (*The Oklahoman*, 2011b). Additionally, telephone lines went down and water lines burst.

The large earthquakes and aftershock swarms caused Oklahomans to ‘fear what might be ahead’ (*The Oklahoman*, 2011c), perpetuating rumors that a ‘larger earthquake sure to strike soon was being denied by authorities who knew it was coming’ (Kimball, 2011). The American Red Cross ‘continue[d] to hear stories about children having to sleep with parents and adults ... having trouble sleeping’ (*The Oklahoman*, 2011d) and held a community meeting to address emotional impacts. Residents were frustrated with local experts and state officials, who did not provide clear-cut answers about the cause of the quakes nor what authorities were doing to help. One resident summarized widespread feelings of uncertainty and the sense that local, state, and national authorities were not paying enough attention:

The ground still shakes four or five times a day, even though it doesn’t get reported on the news. A lot of them don’t pop up on that USGS website, but we’re feeling them every day. Can’t they tell us something? When is this going to stop? If it happens overseas, they send help right away. When people pay their taxes, they deserve the government’s help. We are U.S. citizens out here. We just want to know what’s going on. It’s a pretty helpless feeling.

(Knittle, 2011)

Republican Governor Mary Fallin declared a state of emergency for 20 counties, nearly a third of the state, in part due to earthquake damage. Victims without earthquake insurance (90 percent of those reporting damages) were offered low interest, long-term disaster loans through the U.S. Small Business Administration. By February 2012, \$1.8 million in loans

had been approved. However, some Oklahomans were so devastated they packed up and moved out of state. Communities struggled to recover. At the same time, regardless of lack of data concerning the Wilzetta fault line (one of two major existing tectonic faults in Oklahoma) along which the earthquakes occurred, in December 2011, the Oklahoma Corporation Commission (OCC) approved Oklahoma City-based South Star Exploration's application for a seismic study of 50,000 acres near Prague to prepare to drill new oil, gas, and disposal wells.

Because earthquakes in Texas and Arkansas had been linked to industry activities, many began to wonder if Oklahoma earthquakes also were induced. While communities were reeling from ongoing swarms, *DO* editors penned articles that relied on unnamed 'experts' who conflated the impacts of HF and WDWs (the former typically produces 'micro-seismicity' [$<3.0M$] whereas the latter can produce sizeable and damaging quakes [$>5.0M$]) and accused those suspecting technological causation of being speculative alarmists,

In the words of one expert, the energy released in tremors linked to fracking 'is equivalent to a gallon of milk falling off the kitchen counter.' A gallon of milk at Homeland will cost you \$3.79 ... about \$3.77 more than the value of the opinion that major earthquakes result from oil field activity.

(The Oklahoman, 2011e)

Later, in 2012, as research began suggesting Oklahoma's exponential earthquake increase was technologically induced by HF and use of WDWs, *DO* editors continued to perpetuate debate (Mix & Raynes, 2018):

Some isolated earthquakes may be related to saltwater injection ... but that's only a supposition at this point. To conclude that a swath of earthquakes across America is attributable solely to oil and gas activity is a seismic leap. For the anti-fossil fuel activists, the two things can't be separated. Earthquakes are increasing. Fracking is increasing. Ergo, fracking is causing earthquakes. To stop the earthquakes, we must stop the fracking! We'd like a little more certainty ... before we derail the economy over an 'almost' certain belief.

(The Oklahoman, 2012)

As this quote demonstrates, the *DO* editors imposed an anti-fossil fuel ecocultural identity on those who dared to speak out about the problem of induced seismicity, whether those speakers were Oklahomans or not. Oklahomans engaged in anti-fracking activism repeatedly stated in interviews and at town halls that they were not necessarily taking an anti-economy or anti-fossil fuel stance, they simply wanted the industry to be responsible in its practices, accountable to the communities it works within, and transparent and respectful in its interactions with residents. The highly contested debate among industry representatives, hydrogeological experts, state officials, and residents continued throughout 2013.

In March, Keranen and colleagues' (2013) geospatial analysis provided evidence the Prague swarm was induced by WDWs, contradicting dominant narratives (re)produced by industry representatives and state officials devoted to perpetuating extractivist ecocultural identities. Despite scientific findings, the OGS reiterated a narrative of natural causes. Two days later *DO* editors discussed the situation of 'dueling seismographers' – wherein industry affiliated geologists and seismologists contradicted non-industry geologists' and seismologists' findings:

Those who oppose fossil fuels in general and certain drilling practices (HF, for example) ... will trumpet this report. Those who celebrate one of the state's heritage industries and support fracking will continue doubting that people can cause earthquakes. Count us among the skeptics ... The question is what to do ... Should certain areas be off limits to the type of drilling activity taking place around where the 2011 earthquake happened? Oil and gas activity has always involved tradeoff between its benefits and its detrimental effects. Will tolerance for the occasional tremor become part of that tradeoff?

(*The Oklahoman*, 2013a)

The quote above illuminates how extractivist ecocultural identities were cracking, but with different results depending upon positionality. For the *DO* editors, disruptions associated with induced seismicity necessitated a reframing of the importance of the industry and the suggestion that earthquakes, like oil spills or rig explosions, are just part of modern life, business as usual in a society that extensively relies on hydrocarbons to provide a comfortable standard of living. For some Oklahomans, disruptions caused by induced seismicity meant business as usual needed to change, the industry needed to alter its practices to cause less (or no) seismicity, and individuals and institutions needed to find ways to reduce dependence on oil and gas. Later in July, *DO* editors reiterated, 'managing tradeoffs is what government, working with industry, is supposed to do' and cautioned 'the public and anti-fracking zealots to avoid reaching scientific conclusions and forcing policy changes without scientific backing' (*The Oklahoman*, 2013b). Editors also claimed, 'Every stakeholder in this debate needs a seat at the table' (*The Oklahoman*, 2013b). That the editors continued to stigmatize residents and resident/activists suggests they did not see the general public, affected communities, or environmental activists as stakeholders.

Other significant developments included OCC orders to a Love County WDW to reduce operations after OGS indicated the WDW might have caused an earthquake swarm resulting in building damage. Additionally, a local reporter, reviewed the state's emergency response plan and found, notably, that 'at M6.6 or greater, the state plan anticipates widespread destruction and panic,' extensive damage, injuries, and loss of life (Kemp, 2013). Critical services and day-to-day activities would be disrupted by dam and levee failures, impassable roads, power and water outages, fires, and broken gas or sewer lines. 'Despite the potential for chaos, emergency response officials acknowledge the state is woefully unprepared' (Kemp, 2013) to deal with widespread devastation that could occur as a result of a large earthquake. State funds allocated for preparedness, response, and mitigation are based on a list of disaster priorities, at that time earthquakes were in 11th place.

As induced seismicity worsened between 2011 and 2013, the industry, local geologists, state officials, and *DO* editors perpetuated an extractivist ecocultural narrative. The Prague quakes and weeks of swarms, however, caused such severe damage, quotidian disruption, fear, anxiety, and anger that residents began demanding answers and assistance in dealing with this new species of trouble. Additionally, evidence suggesting a correlation between WDW locations and earthquake epicenters began to emerge publicly. These events threatened extractivist ecocultural identities – and those with the most power in the relations of definitions began employing a number of rhetorical tactics to confine and stigmatize the threat. Hence, *DO* editors' shift, illustrated above, into protective overdrive, conflating residents and activists by labeling anyone who questioned or critiqued HF processes and outcomes as 'speculative alarmists' and 'anti-fracking zealots' who may 'derail the economy' and one of Oklahoma's 'heritage' industries over an occasional tremor.⁷

'Moratorium now!' Extractivists become activists

Several local, grassroots anti-fracking groups, including Stop Fracking Oklahoma, Stop Fracking Payne County (SFPC), and the Coalition Against Induced Seismicity, emerged in 2014. SFPC was the largest, most active anti-fracking social movement group in Oklahoma. In 2014 and early 2015, they held more than 30 town halls in seven towns and cities, started a WDW moratorium petition, and engaged in a 6-month-long city-level zoning debate to update oil and gas site regulations. SFPC's work to provide information, offer education, and network with impacted residents in local communities highlights how extractivist ecocultural identities, in states of disruption, can be transformed.

Regardless of increasing evidence that industry activities generated induced seismicity (Holland, 2011, 2013; Keranen et al., 2013; Keranen et al., 2014; Murray, 2014a, 2014b), industry and state narratives continued to claim the cause was unclear and more research was warranted before action could be taken. The official narrative promulgated by the industry, state officials, and the media steadfastly argued the increase in seismicity was due to natural causes, treated HF and WDWs as unrelated, and suggested smaller earthquakes reduced the risk of larger ones. In August 2014, *DO* editors claimed, 'An industry that has done so much to create this state's fortunes is an easy target for outside groups that have no interest in our prosperity' and accused researchers who linked industry activities to induced seismicity of 'seeking to make a name for themselves' and jumping to conclusions that later may be 'deconstructed' (*The Oklahoman*, 2014c). The editors' claim that outside groups were targeting the industry was unfounded as all anti-fracking groups mentioned in *DO* interviews were locally based.

As quake after quake rocked the state, key themes present in residents' narratives shifted from individual curiosity, descriptions of how earthquakes felt, or details of the damages they suffered to broader questions concerning the level of risk across the state and region and what politicians and regulators were doing or failing to do to protect people, structures, and the environment. At town hall events sponsored by SFPC and other social movement groups, community members' comments and questions became assertive. Clear demands were issued. Often, the first question residents asked was why use of HF and/or WDWs had not been halted. As demonstrated below, residents also challenged state and industry narratives fostered through Oklahoma's educational system and perpetuated by continued emphasis on extractivist orientations, and demanded the government mitigate the risk and hold the industry accountable for its role in creating the hazard. Several residents summed up their experiences and positions within a newly emerging ecocultural identity in a live Energy Chat with business reporters:

Why don't you [the industry] stop injecting wastewater now? You are putting Oklahomans at risk. Are you waiting until people get hurt or die? We just broke a record for earthquakes and they are getting stronger. There is a link between injection wells and quakes. You know there is a connection and so does OGS. Be responsible and stop injecting wastewater before it is too late and people get hurt ... Why have these methods been disallowed in other states and yet Oklahoma continues? Did they just arbitrarily regulate this or are we ignoring their data and reasoning?

(Monies et al., 2014)⁸

Others accused regulators, researchers, and the industry, saying, 'You want to study us like [wild] animals,' or demanded a 'one-year moratorium on injection wells' (Marks, 2014) – an

idea that drew resounding applause. Residents who participated in anti-fracking protests in Oklahoma frequently chanted, 'No More Research, The Science Is In, Moratorium Now!' and signs declared, 'We Will Not Be Collateral Damage!'

In 2015 the City of Stillwater began efforts to update oil and gas zoning regulations originally written in the 1960s. Industry affiliates addressed the city council in open comment periods. They argued against development of stricter noise and lighting restrictions, larger setbacks (the distance required between industry infrastructure and other buildings), increased bonds, and expectations of greater transparency with residents. Concerned residents, many living close to HF and/or WDWs, presented peer-reviewed research, experiential knowledge, and supporting documentation. They requested the council protect the environment and residents from adverse effects of HF, including earthquakes, industrialization of the rural landscape, disrupted sleep, air/water/soil contamination, harm to wildlife, illness, infrastructure damage, and decreased property values. Industry actors retaliated, lobbying the city council and state legislature to affirm OCC primacy in industry regulation. In May 2015 the state legislature delivered another quotidian disruption to social movement groups and residents when they passed SB809, striking down a 100-year-old constitutional provision granting chartered municipalities the right to 'home rule,' declaring that any city- or county-level regulations must be less restrictive than the OCC's.

Resident-led grassroots anti-fracking groups had emerged, developed, and mobilized throughout 2014–2015, organizing stakeholders (residents, farmers, ranchers, business owners, politicians, and scholars) across the state and encouraging challenges to dominant extractivist ecocultural identities. In the process, these groups began to foster the development of an *interconnected ecocultural identity*, defined by an interest in and work toward protecting quality of life and the land they love. Increased earthquake activity and greater understanding of the human source of risk caused disruption and resulted in transformation. State and industry actors mobilized policy change in the form of SB809 to suppress community engagement and force reemergence of extractivist ecocultural identities. Residents and activists felt their attempts to mobilize grassroots efforts actively stifled by the state and industry, yet, shaken aware, stakeholders continue to organize (Raynes et al., 2016). With each earthquake threat representing a new quotidian disruption, anti-fracking groups remain committed to seeking justice.

Concluding thoughts on shifting ecocultural identities

Induced seismicity, a form of quotidian disruption (Snow et al., 1998), literally shook and realigned residents – otherwise unwilling to speak or act against the powerful oil and gas industry – into grassroots activism. Our case study outlines how industry representatives, state officials, and local news media encourage specific relations of definitions (Beck, 2007) to continuously reconstruct and reinforce an extractivist ecocultural identity in Oklahoma through economic dependence and control of the cultural and physical landscape. As the frequency and intensity of earthquakes continued exponentially increasing, however, some residents' experiences and understanding of induced seismicity catalyzed a shift away from an extractivist orientation toward a more holistic, interconnected ecocultural identity. As a result, some Oklahomans began engaging in various forms of individual and/or collective environmental justice action.

As natural and technological environmental risks, in the form of a new species of trouble, become daily reality, communities experience related cultural, social, economic, and political challenges (Erikson, 1994; Gill & Ritchie, 2018). We all undergo, to a lesser or greater

extent, ecocultural quotidian disruption as climate disruption and other anthropogenic changes bring floods, drought, fires, increased temperatures, and rising coastlines among other events that disrupt everyday life. Even with enhanced frequency of such risks, a shift in ecocultural identity appears to occur incrementally. In Oklahoma, extractivist ecocultural identity is dominant and heavily reliant on human control of the human and more-than-human world. A shift toward a more holistic, interconnected ecocultural identity in this space/place marks a departure from a normative culture reliant on social, political, and economic influences of the oil and gas industry.

While there is much room for Oklahomans to move toward greater stewardship and regenerative engagement with the more-than-human world, the ecocultural identity shift illustrated in this chapter is remarkable, given the embeddedness of extractivist ecocultural identity in the history and culture of the state. Thus, we argue quotidian disruptions can spur ecocultural identity shifts in a range of places and with respect to diverse issues. Our work demonstrates how sociologists and other researchers can use an ecocultural approach to analyze socioenvironmental issues, shifting ecocultural identity dynamics, and environmental justice movements. Further research can explore the nuances and contexts of ecocultural identity shifts to better understand ways such dynamics foster the emergence and development of grassroots environmental social movements that work toward proactive ecocultural change.

Notes

- 1 Many geologists claim earthquakes of magnitude 3.0 or larger are more likely to be felt by nearby humans than earthquakes of smaller magnitude; however, thousands of Oklahomans frequently reported feeling many of the smaller magnitude earthquakes, as well.
- 2 One of the key issues we faced in developing this draft was, on the one hand, resisting the binary opposition of nature/culture or environment/society, while, on the other, adequately and accurately representing the literature and the way these binary terms are used within it, as the extant terminology distinctions are important for a wide variety of disaster research reasons. We use binary-reproducing terms like ‘nature’ only where it reflects extant research usage and note both the reasons and limitations of these extant lexical choices.
- 3 Anti-busing campaigns were a common pro-segregationist response to state and federal efforts to racially desegregate schools in the U.S. (see Delmont, 2016).
- 4 The first peoples living in what is now Oklahoma were the Wichita, Comanche, Quapaw, Osage, and Plains Apache tribes. During the Trail of Tears (1820–1887) the U.S. government forcibly removed tribes from ancestral homelands and relocated them to what it termed Indian Territories. Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River included parts of what are now Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, Montana, and the majority of Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, North Dakota, and Minnesota. Various legislative and judicial efforts disenfranchised tribes and dismantled their sovereign powers. Notably, the final Indian Appropriations Act in 1889 allowed the U.S. government to claim nearly 2 million acres of tribal land and rename Indian Territory as Unassigned Lands, which were then opened to white homesteaders. The newly available properties were then advertised as a land run or land rush. Whomever could stake a claim to occupancy first was able to purchase that land from the U.S. Land Office, which then was supposed to transfer the money to the various tribes. The Oklahoma Land Run of 1889 was one of the most notorious, prominent land runs (see Oklahoma Historical Society’s ‘Settlement Patterns’ <http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=SE024>).
- 5 All well counts are approximate numbers as the OCC has a long history of data collection, validation, analysis, and accessibility issues. In the past, the Environmental Protection Agency has repeatedly criticized OCC’s data management and distribution (for an example, see Wertz, 2015).
- 6 The resident/activist term highlights how many residents initially and/or continuously refused to be called activists. This in part was because at town hall meetings activists’ patriotism was routinely questioned, implying that to be an activist is un-American. This is a phenomenon across environmental justice literature, particularly in research related to resource extraction (see Luke et al., 2018).

Thus, the experiences of residents who became activists demonstrate how induced seismicity shook not only the ground but also perceptions of ecocultural identities, dislodging derogations of activism, empowering people to be proud of their engagement, and thus transforming ecocultural identity orientations and practices.

- 7 For another example of extractivist activities framed by the media as heritage, see Karikari, Castro-Sotomayor, and Asante, Chapter 15 in this *Handbook*.
- 8 The Energy Chat is a livestream chat between *DO* staff and the public that is then transcribed and printed by the *DO*. The chat happens a few times a month, and the conversation is led by Monies, Wilmoth, and Marks, each of whom is a key energy, business, and politics reporter for the *DO*.

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Political identity as ecocultural survival strategy

John Carr and Tema Milstein

The contemporary polarization of politics throughout the United States, Europe, Australia, and other countries of the core has reignited longstanding debates about the nature and persistence of cultural and political identities, with particular focus on the failure of widespread concern about environmental crises to translate into effective policy action (Han & Barnett-Loro, 2018; Hart & Nisbet, 2012; Pietsch & McAllister, 2010; Shwom et al., 2010). Literatures from a variety of traditions, ontologies, and epistemologies have long engaged with the proposition that human identity is, at least partially, based on the persistence of political biases that neither are purely rational nor purely political per-se. This chapter experimentally engages with a broad range of literatures in order to start to re-think how political bias might serve potentially generative ecocultural functions. While work from a variety of disciplines has explored ways political tensions between left and right¹ (for example, progressive/dove/socialist and conservative/hawk/capitalist) have served social and cultural functions, we offer this chapter in hopes of adding an ecocultural perspective to this longstanding and pressing literature on political identity. Specifically, we suggest that political predisposition at different times may have served as an important but as yet understudied resource for environmental adaptability and for ecosystems themselves as a whole, interacting with a complex variety of cultural, technological, biophysical, communicative, and geographic factors now understood as informing human responses to and interventions within ecosystems (Radkau, 2008; Rival, 2018). Thus, we proceed from the proposition that drivers of human behavior often subject to study in disparate academic silos – including culture, affect, psychology, discourse, governmentality, and political ecologies – coalesce in the form of political identities that may have and could now serve essential ecological functions (Harman, 2018).

Based on a cross-section of literatures, we argue that left/right politics characterizing many countries today correspond to a more profound articulation of cultural and ecological belonging. We articulate left politics as tracking onto a long-standing tendency to define social belonging expansively and to stress cultural values of commonality, abundance, and possibility – what we describe as an *expansive* disposition. In contrast, right politics track onto a tendency to define social belonging narrowly and in terms of scarcity of resources and outside threat – what we describe as a *rivalrous* disposition.

We argue there is intriguing evidence that these competing tendencies may have served important ecocultural functions at certain times and places in human history: during times of

access to plenty, *expansive ecopolitical identities* have the potential to come to the political fore, stressing commonality, interlinkage, and exchange as a means of expanding populations to capitalize on environmental abundance. In contrast, during times of scarcity, *rivalrous ecopolitical identities* have the potential to come to the political fore and help fuel conflict and warfare, effectively lowering human populations to prevent outstripping available resources and upending ecological balance. In each case, we argue ecopolitical identity can serve as a potential resource to help adjust human populations within ecosystems, ostensibly enhancing opportunities for human species survival and more-than-human ecological thriving.

With the rise of societies premised on complex divisions of labor, agricultural surpluses and storage, urban aggregation, uneven distance-based patterns of mass consumption, the cultural/political/legal separation of humans from ecosystems, and experiences of perceived plenty or scarcity unrelated to ecological conditions, these tendencies toward expansive or rivalrous ecopolitical identities have become unmoored from what may have been their place-based habitat, species, and local ecosystem relational survival functions. Instead, more recently, these political dispositions have begun to undermine the possibility for human and countless other species survival on Earth. Accordingly, we argue these same identities that may have ecological survive-and-thrive roots and reasons – whether rivalrous or expansive – in recent times have substantially contributed to our current moment of ecological crisis.

The embrace of the climate-crisis profit and denial industries by the political right in much of the world – and the right's overall hostility to efforts to institutionalize climate and ecosystem protection, efforts framed as merely attempts by outsiders using 'fake' science or news to manipulate and harm communities – may be seen as a manifestation of rivalrous ecopolitical identities. That said, expansive identities with their focus on novelty, resource abundance, and expansive human interconnection also have contributed to our current crisis, by helping fuel transnational trade-enabled global overconsumption. Thus, we use our ecologically undergirded rivalrous/expansive identity hypothesis to examine past and present ecocultural identity-political tendency connections and, then, to argue for a reframing of political identities of both the left and right such that essential regenerative ecological functions of both identities return to the fore – albeit in radically different ways from how these identities may have been practiced in the more emplaced past.

In what follows, we seek to span several literatures rarely put in conversation – a challenging and at times fraught exercise but also an essential practice at an earthly moment when diverse knowledges must be put into novel dialogues in order to remember, reconstruct, and reimagine ecological ways of being. In the next section, we sketch some of the literature on political disposition, including research from behavioral and cognitive psychology, communication, political science, neurobiology, and a groundswell of work across the disciplines engaging with affect as a driver for decision-making. Based on this review, we argue, for the purposes of examining the potential ecological functions of these tendencies, that the potentially heritable tendency toward either right or left politics instead should be conceived of as 'rivalrous' or 'expansive' identity tendencies.

Interpreting these literatures through a critical social science and ecocultural lens, we seek to interrogate the possibility that these dispositions have served vital functions for human societies that are emplaced and unmissably environmentally dependent. We do so through an experimental re-reading of pre-European contact Hawai'ian history and political ecology to evaluate what the factor of expansive/rivalrous articulated political disposition might add to our understanding of ways a multiplicity of already researched factors – cultural, political, economic, technological, spiritual – drive human adaption to, and interaction within and as part of, ecosystems. This reevaluation suggests the possibility that Polynesian arrival in the

Hawaiian archipelago around 1000 CE was characterized by a broadly expansive approach to ecopolitics fostered by these early arrivals' encounter with a land of (what must initially have seemed to be) boundless resources. Yet about 700 years later, not long before European contact, this expansive tendency was disrupted as human population growth and the demands of political elites outstripped the productivity of ecosystems and advances in agricultural technology. With this convulsion came a shift to a more rivalrous approach to politics by which inter- and intra-group rivalry, territorial conquest, and war simultaneously sought to address groups' struggles with ecological scarcity while incidentally reducing populations through attrition and, in turn, leveling off the demand on the ecosystem.

Following this historic case study, we proceed to heuristically generalize potential lessons to be gained from Hawai'i's apparent transition from expansive to rivalrous ecopolitics during times of ecological scarcity, explicitly contrasting the transformations in pre-contact Hawai'i with contemporary political ecologies around the world. The case study offers a productive contrast to the present era, in which ever more humans are increasingly mobile and urban, no longer intimately knowing the distant or immediate ecosystems they rely on for all aspects of their sustenance and survival. In this contemporary ecologically disconnected moment, with identities rarely formed in conscious close contact with and response to local ecosystems and their cyclic abundances and scarcities, there is an urgent need for new ways of encountering and performing rivalrous and expansive ecopolitical identities. We conclude by interrogating what this chapter's heuristic multidisciplinary exploration might mean for understanding and regeneratively engaging both left and right ecopolitics today, and suggest beneficial directions forward.

The literatures on political identity and bias

Our analysis begins from the premise that political decisions – and thus political identity – are not solely a matter of rational choice, but rather a mix of pre-existing, potentially life-long personal bias based, among other factors, on one's emotional responses to the world. While the tendency of such factors as identity, bias, passion, hatred, and xenophobia to drive politics has been a longstanding source of study across a variety of disciplines, the contemporary shift toward authoritarian populism, and the resurgence of an anti-immigrant identity politics in many countries of the core and semi-periphery, has made such research increasingly relevant. Post-Enlightenment western democracies are premised on the idea that sovereignty should be vested in the citizenry at large, under the belief that people are rational decision-makers who, when provided the opportunity to weigh a range of policy approaches in a free-flowing 'marketplace of ideas,' will tend to make good decisions for society as a whole (Gordon, 1997; Hindess, 1992; MacPherson, 1962). A range of work from across academia, however, has begun to question the validity of these fundamental cultural and political premises, recognizing the extent to which affect, emotion, and other forms of bias often animate our decision-making in general, and our political decision-making and identities in particular.

Based on an experimental reading across these literatures, we posit the existence of two forms of long-standing political-cultural bias among humans, which we describe as rivalrous and expansive. As explored in more depth below, *rivalrous political dispositions* tend toward more narrow definitions of 'in group' belonging, a greater attunement to hierarchy, rules, and order, heightened reactions to threat, and negative perceptions of outsiders and difference. In contrast *expansive political dispositions* tend toward broader definitions of 'in group' belonging, a greater openness to difference and interest in novelty, and a greater flexibility in

social arrangements. One of the main premises that we derive from an experimental reading across this broad-based set of literatures, and upon which our hypothesis is based, is the heuristic proposition that the range of affective, emotional, and potentially cognitive responses underlying these two poles of political identity may be long-standing, and may have provided not only social but also ecologically adaptive capacity in various ways in various times and places.

The role of pre-existing affective bias in driving political identity has long been a concern across a variety of disciplinary contexts. Our discussion of the diverse literature in this section should not be considered an endorsement of any one given methodology, ontology, or epistemology of political identity. Indeed, some of the work we cite is premised on approaches about which we have strong concerns. Rather, we offer this fairly eclectic reading as a way of tracing the extent to which consideration of the role of non-rational political bias has taken place across a range of studies and academic disciplines. Moreover, we are careful not to conflate political bias with choice of political party or specific policy positions, instead treating these as imprecise analogs for an individual's deeper attitudes toward issues of power, group dynamics, risk, and threat. Likewise, we recognize that, while much of this work is articulated in terms of a left/right opposition, people's political dispositions lie along a spectrum of attitudes that do not always group neatly around two poles.

That said, there is an intriguing range of work starting to interrogate ways these deeper attitudes translate into decision-making in general and political identity more specifically. Standing in stark contrast to a longstanding Western-liberal system of knowledge premised on a community of rational economic and political actors (Hindess, 1992; MacPherson, 1962), emerging research has stressed the extent to which human decision-making is produced by both conscious processes of logic, reason, and deliberation associated with rationality, as well as the deeper intuitive, often pre-conscious and emotion-based system of decision-making associated with affect (Ångman et al., 2016; Flemming et al., 2018; Slovic et al., 2005). In part because affect is inconsistent with how the concept of rationality legitimates liberal democratic political systems, this often pre-conscious driver of decision-making has been often been viewed negatively in traditional explanations about decision-making (Slovic et al., 2004). Affect in politics is manifested, for instance, in confirmation bias – the tendency of individuals to interpret and filter new information in ways that serve to buttress existing belief systems – which, in the case of environmental and climate disruption, tends to undermine scientific knowledge (Nickerson, 1998).

A substantial part of what drives political disposition and identity is not the cool rationality of John Stewart Mill's 'marketplace of ideas' (Gordon, 1997), but rather deeper, more emotionally laden responses to other humans and our social, political, economic, and physical environments. This tension between political choice as rational process and the realities of a messier passion- and identity-driven politics were explored by Michel Foucault in his 1976 lecture to the *Collège de France* as part of a broader excavation of the untold history of sovereignty, politics, war, and race in Europe (Foucault, 2003). For Foucault, the dominant mode of explaining, justifying, and positioning the history of sovereignty since the end of the medieval period – what he termed the philosophico-juridical discourse – has sought to tell a story by which society has evolved out of a state based on continual warfare. This discourse posits law, order, prosperity, and peace as conjoined in a narrative of progress, truth, and rationality – with war a professionalized state function existing solely at the far limits of the state. In contrast, Foucault sought to expose what he described as the historico-political discourse – an informal history of sovereignty that serves as a constant counter-discourse, challenging the

discourse of war as marginal to society and the long association of ‘truth with peace or neutrality’ (p. 52).

Under the historico-political discourse, war is the ubiquitous condition of society, as groups constantly struggle against each other for power and advantage. History is thus defined in terms of

a series of brute facts, which might already be described as physico-biological facts: physical strength, force, energy, the proliferation of one race, the weakness of the other, and so on. A series of accidents, or at least contingencies: defeats, victories, the failure or success of rebellions, the failure or success of conspiracies or alliances; and finally, a bundle of psychological and moral elements (courage, fear, scorn, hatred, forgetfulness, et cetera). Intertwining bodies, passions, and accidents.

(p. 54)

Painted in broad strokes, the historical struggle around history and meaning that Foucault traces is a constant battle between two visions of society – one based on the discourse of society as expansive, idealist, rational, and inclusive, and the other based on a discourse of scarcity, rivalry, struggle, conquest, and ever-present intra-group conflict. While Foucault’s analysis springs from an admittedly Eurocentric historical focus, our multidisciplinary reading across converging strands of research suggest that Foucault’s articulation of this tension between the philosophico-juridical and historico-political discourses of sovereignty may potentially track onto a deeper tension between rationality and affect as they play out in the forms of political identity and political bias.

In particular, a large body of work from a variety of disciplines has recognized the ways emotion and bias play out in forming political identities (Crigler, 2007). Thus, we are particularly interested in exploring the growing consensus across disciplines that the competing worldviews underlying contemporary polarized cultural-political perspectives are based on differences of emotional response between those who identify as politically left or right. Further, we are most interested in illustrating through a multidisciplinary lens how these contrasting political identities might tie directly to imbalances at the root of climate disruption and ecological crises.

A number of cognitive scientists have sought the psycho-physiological roots of human political disposition while recognizing that political identity is also driven by a host of experiential and cultural dynamics (Lewis & Bates, 2011). While we recognize the longstanding problems with cognitive research, and particularly the problematic nature of much prior work linking physiology, climate, and culture (Huntington, 1924; Ratzel, 1882), we have engaged with this work not for any potential claims of causation or to endorse its model of personhood, but rather because of its thoroughness and consistency in recognizing the links among emotion, bias, and political identity. Indeed, although there is a long tradition of searching for the psychological roots of political disposition (Jaensch, 1938), including the work of such essential theorists as Fromm (1947, 1964) and Adorno (1950), much early research problematically articulated the psychological left vs. right distinction as one typically defined in terms of rejection vs. acceptance of inequality and preference for social change vs. preservation of societal status quo, reflecting an articulation of political identity overdetermined by the politics of the day – often in the context of the United States (Carney et al., 2008; Tomkins, 1963). More recently, the research has taken a more nuanced approach, recognizing that deeper inherent political tendencies are manifested in a specific contemporary political context rather than in generalizable human experience (Harman, 2018).

That said, there are aspects of the existing literature that potentially bear on the deeper question of which drivers potentially underlie political disposition across historic and geographic contexts. In particular, Carney et al.'s (2008) review of the literature from 1930 to 2007 indicates a persistent association between left political disposition and (a) openness to experience, (b) curiousness, (c) openness, tolerance, and flexibility, and (d) a desire for novelty and diversity, amongst other characteristics not as centrally relevant to an ecocultural analysis (Carney et al., 2008). In contrast, the same review associates right political disposition with (a) fearfulness and a sense of threat, (b) aggressiveness, angeriness, and vengefulness, (c) toughness and firmness, (d) xenophobia and prejudice, and (e) adoption of moralistic codes, again amongst other characteristics not as relevant to our analysis.

Subsequent work has tended to reinforce a sense that the psychology of left/right political disposition is animated, at least in part, by characteristics of potential openness or aversion to individuals, groups, and experiences that are perceived as different, unfamiliar, and new (Harman, 2018; Hibbing et al., 2014). In turn, these characteristics can translate into a broader tendency toward either an expansive and open approach to in-group bias (the psychological tendency to define social life in terms of the boundaries between one's group and other, less favored groups) (Tajfel et al., 1971) or a protective and more narrowly articulated definition of one's in-group (Lewis & Bates, 2011; Oxley et al., 2008; Schaller & Park, 2011). Because of centrality and consistency of attitudes toward dynamics of novelty, belonging, unfamiliarity, and threat to left/right political identities identified by this review of the research, we group those biases associated with left identities as describing a tendency toward an *expansive* political identity. Likewise, we describe those biases the research associates with right identities as tracing a tendency toward a *rivalrous* political identity.

Despite the preliminary – and in some cases temporally and geographically biased – nature of extant literature reviewed thus far, other scientists working in neuropsychology, which focuses on the brain's structure and function, have started to explore the possibility that the psychology of political disposition may also be physiologically based, transcending cultural and social contexts. Though largely silent on issues of causation, this growing literature has sought to determine whether left/right political bias is consistently ingrained in the fundamental ways human brains function (Amodio et al., 2007). These studies suggest there are neuroanatomical bases for political disposition, correlating left and right political bias with different cerebral structures and proportions (Amodio et al., 2007; Kanai et al., 2011; Nam et al., 2018). Within this literature, a number of studies have traced ways political ideology corresponds to individuals' responses to disturbing or threatening non-political images. For example, one study indicated that 'brain responses to a single disgusting stimulus were sufficient to make accurate predictions about an individual subject's political ideology' with those identifying as conservative (right) showing a higher level of activity in those parts of the brain involved in disgust recognition than those identifying as liberal (left) (Ahn et al., 2014; see also, Oxley et al., 2008). Again, we touch on this work not as experts, nor to endorse its claims of causation, but rather to highlight the persistence of analyses correlating affect and political disposition across disciplines.

The sense that political disposition is at least partially 'baked in' to individuals' psychology is reinforced by work tracing ways these characteristics are potentially life-long and heritable. For example, one study focused on educators' descriptions of preschoolers who later self-identified in adulthood as 'liberal' (left), indicating a tendency toward being 'self-reliant, energetic, emotionally expressive, gregarious, and impulsive,' whereas students who later self-identified as 'conservative' (right) were perceived as 'rigid, inhibited, indecisive, fearful, and overcontrolled' (Block & Block, 2006). The sense that left/right political disposition is

to some extent innate has been reinforced by studies suggesting there is a heritable component of political attitudes (Alford et al., 2005; Martin et al., 1986; Settle et al., 2009).

Seeking to evaluate such work through the lens of political science, Dodd et al. (2012) have sought to excavate the psychological and evolutionary roots of the persistence of political orientation, testing ‘the possibility that differences relevant to cultural conflict are embedded in broad biological processes’ (p. 640). Rather than testing political disposition through the evaluation of potentially geotemporally situated attitudes, these researchers instead sought to trace the ‘downstream commonality’ between various characteristics commonly associated with left/right political orientation. In particular, the authors trace the broader manifestation of left/right political disposition to the functioning of different neurological systems of the brain in response to either positive or negative stimuli, respectively. Their research illustrates that, compared to individuals with a left political orientation, those on the right of the political spectrum not only have a stronger physiological response to negative stimuli, but also ‘direct more of their attention to the aversive,’ which is consistent with ‘the fact that right-of-centre policy positions are often designed to protect society from out-group threats (e.g., by supporting increased defense spending and opposing immigration) and in-group norm violators’ (Dodd et al., 2012, p. 646).

Beyond the realm of behavioral psychology and neurobiology, studies from a variety of disciplines have traced the persistent links between affect and political disposition. For example, work in the communication discipline has attempted to trace the links between emotion, the information an individual seeks out, and political policy preferences (Nabi, 2003), between anger and anxiety, on one hand, and the politically partisan analysis of deliberate misinformation, on the other (Weeks, 2015), and the role differing degrees of left/right political outgroup hostility have in driving partisan sharing of political information (Shin & Thorson, 2017). Likewise, work from political science has traced the inseparability of emotional communication and political disposition (Marcus, 2002), the links between pre-existing affective bias and receptivity to political arguments (Arceneaux, 2012), and the ties between anxiety and political disposition regarding policy reactions to terrorism (Huddy et al., 2005). While the work from across these disciplines differs widely in the issues interrogated, theoretical and methodological approaches, and even disciplinary language and concepts mobilized, there is a shared curiosity about the extent to which preexisting affective bias animates and reinforces political identity – as well as a broader consensus on the existence of that link.

Taking these overlapping literatures as a launching point, we seek to explore the potential ecological functions of political identities based, in part, on what appears to be innate, affective political dispositions. Before we do so, we must recognize that our exploratory engagement with the burgeoning research on the affective bases of political orientation – and particularly the psychological and neuropsychological research – is potentially subject to several criticisms. First, there is an obvious and deeply problematic history of tracing political difference – broadly stated – to physiological difference, including scientific racism and sexism, eugenics, environmental determinism, and the like. That said, the research we survey in no way suggests a link between the physiology of political identity and such vectors of identity as race, class, religion, or gender. Moreover, political bias is clearly just that, a bias that along with a host of other personal, group, historical, and geographic factors goes into forming political identity. And, while we are deeply concerned with the interplay between human politics and environmental change – a topic that may superficially raise the spectre of environmental determinism – our reading of this dynamic through the following case study actually contradicts the tenants of determinism by seeking to explore the extent to which

human societies are adaptable, dynamic, and influenced by latent capacities that may persist across geographic, climatological, and historical contexts.

Further, our review of the contemporary work is not intended to articulate forms of hierarchy between left and right. Rather, we seek to initiate a critical transdisciplinary ecocultural conversation with the current literature on affect, political disposition, and identity to examine under what circumstances these tendencies – both left and right – may or may not be well suited to human and more-than-human ecological thriving. We also do not presume or argue that the dynamics underlying political disposition we focus upon exhaust the manifestations or potential functions of left/right political disposition, or that they are the sole drivers for ecopolitical identity. Likewise, the contemporary Western bias that clearly operates within the extant literature could also color our own examinations and conclusions, though we aim to have more multi-temporal and multi-spatial global reflections and applications. And, finally, the literature itself is far from resolved, offering as many questions as it does answers. Even so, we believe that starting now, with some urgency, to think expansively and transdisciplinarily about the potential ecological functions of political disposition and identity is not only possibly very productive but also pressingly essential in this moment of environmental and climatic political brinkmanship.

Exploring the potential ecological functions of political orientation

Our hope is we might start to identify and illustrate ecological functions of left/right political dispositions by excavating their potential functioning within a case civilization that developed within the emplaced and relatively geographically bounded ecological relations that have characterized much human experience, but that have changed recently in the temporal existence of our species. As leading environmental historian Joachim Radkau (2008) has argued, '[t]he solutions to environmental problems are often hidden within social and cultural history, and it is there that we must first decipher them' (p. 9). This, of course, is a powerfully challenging task as the very characteristics that might suggest a given emplaced and ecologically bounded society as a useful focus – namely relative social isolation and low mobility, as well as political ecologies that are directly tied to specific bioregions (D'Arcy, 2003) – typically are those that have the least historic record or, contemporarily, the least research access (Radkau, 2008).

That said, there are a number of such decidedly emplaced and relatively isolated historic cultures that offer a potentially intriguing window into roles that rivalrous and expansive political dispositions may have played in close interdependency with ecological cycles. In particular, we see pre-European-contact Hawai'ian culture, which has received intensive scholarly attention, as a promising focus for several reasons. The peoples who encountered Thomas Cook in the late 1700s had, over an extended time and almost entirely in isolation from other cultures, developed a very particular set of political ecologies, agricultural technologies, and environmental practices in adapting to the novel environmental conditions they encountered upon arriving upon the volcanic Hawai'ian islands (La Croix, 2019). And, while the initial voyages of the long canoes that brought people from Tahiti to Hawai'i involved and transmitted a number of advanced technologies, they also transported a people who faced many of the same challenges under similar conditions that humans at large had to survive and surmount as they spread across the globe. Notwithstanding their sophistication, the Hawai'ians had to reinvent many aspects of their technologies, culture, politics, and economies to adapt to an unfamiliar and ecologically varied archipelago (Kirch, 2012; La Croix, 2019). Moreover, the reliance of Polynesian peoples on such non-storable staples as

taro, breadfruit, and fish rendered the Hawai'ians particularly susceptible to, and thus closely linked with, the vicissitudes of their ecosystems – in contrast to such grain storage-based societies as the Maya and pharaonic Egyptians, whose societies developed centrally to shield their populations from ecological cycles of plenty and scarcity (Kolb & Dixon, 2002). And, unlike many other pre-European contact human societies, Hawai'i offers the contemporary scholar a largely unequalled body of knowledge due to both the emerging archeological record (Kirch, 2012) and a relatively contemporary written archive of Hawai'ians' rich and detailed oral histories, often preserved by native Hawai'ian historians and scholars (Brown, 2016; Kamakau, 1992; Malo & Emerson, 1951). Accordingly, it has been argued that the archipelago offers an example 'par excellence' for investigating emplaced human environmental relations (Kirch, 2007; Vitousek, 1995).

Indeed, now is a particularly apt time to revisit pre-contact Hawai'ian culture, as a new wave of research has been linking Hawai'ian oral histories with contemporary analyses of the archipelago's historical environment, agriculture, and archeology. As typified by the work of Kirch (2017), this emergent literature seeks to correct centuries of European dismissal of Hawai'ian oral traditions by painstakingly tracing clear links between narrative historical accounts and the archeological and environmental record of the political ecologies of the islands. And the research does so by adopting new approaches to excavating the ecology, agriculture, political history, and demographic trends of the archipelago through innovative reevaluations of an archeological and ethnobotanic record previously dismissed due to its paucity of durable artifacts such as ceramics or metalwork (Kirch, 1990a, 1990b; Kolb & Dixon, 2002). This newly emergent literature thus offers a particularly vivid picture of the interrelationships among political evolution, social change, physical geography, and ecosystem transformation – one that has been embraced by Native and non-Native Hawai'ian scholars and commentators (Allen, 2017; Fitzpatrick, 2014; Genz, 2014; Risser Chai, 2012). Notwithstanding its complexity, this reinvigorated understanding of Hawai'ian pre-contact political ecology provides a number of potentially generalizable dynamics that speak to the relationships between political disposition and humans' efforts to survive and thrive within and as part of their ecosystems.

We offer the following, necessarily overly simplified overview of historic Hawai'ian political economy to illustrate several tendencies. Most importantly for this chapter's analysis, the case study offers an evocative illustration of the potential links between ecological change and the apparent rise of certain forms of political organization and identification that parallels the contemporary research on political disposition. From the early days of human arrival to the late seventeenth century, Hawai'ians simultaneously experienced environmental abundance, population expansion, and a political economy that was typically characterized by agricultural and organizational innovation, fairly modest elite demands for tribute, strengthening of intra-group ties, and a lack of large-scale violent political conflict. It is a short jump to see these dynamics during times of plenty as at least partially the product of predominantly expansive political identities that track onto Carney et al.'s (2008) typography of left political disposition, namely: (a) openness to experience, (b) curiousness, (c) openness, tolerance, and flexibility, and (d) a desire for novelty and diversity. What is certainly clear is that this apparently expansive orientation correlated with a human population increase at a time of ecological abundance that supported such an increase.

In contrast, when Hawai'ians were faced with scarcity after the seventeenth century due to growth of population, escalating elite demands for tribute, and a failure of agriculture to keep pace with population, leaders came to the fore who focused on aggression toward

other chiefly groups and islands, military strength, and the need for constant vigilance against – and violent preemption of – potential threats from political rivals. And, whereas there are many factors that have been identified as potential causes of war in pre-contact Polynesian societies (Kolb & Dixon, 2002), it is clear how such times of scarcity would be opportune for chiefs who exhibited many of the characteristics Carney et al. (2008) associated with right political disposition, including: (a) fearfulness and a sense of threat, (b) aggressiveness, angriness, and vengefulness, and (c) toughness, firmness. What is also clear is that this apparently rivalrous orientation correlated with a reduction of population growth in an emplaced temporal-spatial existence that precluded further growth due to declining ecological (food and land) abundance (Kolb & Dixon, 2002; Younger, 2008).

Re-reading pre-contact Hawai’ian history through the lens of ecopolitical identity

In broad strokes, it is now well established that the first human settlement of the Hawai’ian archipelago represented one of the final, and in many ways most daunting, chapters of an eastern migration by peoples tracing their roots back to voyages originating in the South China/Taiwan region as early as 4000 BCE. These small groups of travelers made their way into what is now the Philippines and Indonesia, passing New Guinea and onward throughout the islands of the Pacific. Approximately 2,000 years ago, these immensely skilled sailors and navigators had settled in the region surrounding the Marquesas Islands, including Tahiti and the Cook Islands. Around 1000 CE an initial Polynesian expedition set forth from this area, heading northward – likely following the migration patterns of the Pacific golden plover – to the Hawai’ian archipelago (Kolb & Dixon, 2002; La Croix, 2019). Bringing food staples, including taro, yam, banana, kava, and sugarcane, as well as dogs, chickens, and pigs for meat, these voyagers set off on an epic, 2,400-mile journey (Vitousek et al., 2004).

When they arrived at the volcanic Hawai’ian archipelago, they found a comparatively vast, diverse, and immensely promising set of island ecosystems. The geologically ‘middle aged’ islands of the north – particularly Kaua’i and O’ahu – were lush, with volcanic rock eroded into broad fertile valleys fed by freshwater springs and surrounded by life nourishing systems of coral reefs. And, though all the islands soon experienced human populations, it was in these promising ecosystems of Kaua’i and O’ahu that irrigation-based agriculture first flourished and populations most rapidly expanded, mobilizing much the same ancient cultural patterns of ancestral rights to land that had been brought from the Marquesas (Kirch, 2012; La Croix, 2019; Vitousek et al., 2004). The archeological record suggests the newly arrived human populations expanded exponentially on these ecologically abundant mature islands for the first centuries after human settlement – from about 1100 CE to about 1500 CE – with an annual population growth rate of approximately 1.2 to 1.8 percent, translating to ‘a doubling of the population every one to two generations’ (Kirch, 2012, p. 165). This was a time of environmental abundance, rapid human population expansion, and what we infer to be a generally expansive political climate by which large scale violent conflict was absent, notwithstanding smaller local clashes within groups over chiefly succession and ancestral rights to land (Kirch, 2012; La Croix, 2019). In contrast, the younger islands of the south – including Maui and the ‘big island’ of Hawai’i² – presented greater ecological challenges to human dwelling, and, with their stark lava slopes and lack of reliable surface water, remained sparsely populated up through the end of the fourteenth century.

The first great political transformation of Hawai'ian society was implemented in the mid-fourteenth century by the pioneering O'ahu king, Mā'ilikūkahī, who overturned the long-standing tradition of ancestral ties to land in favor of a geographically bounded, hierarchical approach to land use and tribute (Kirch, 2010). Under Mā'ilikūkahī's new system, O'ahu was divided into parcels, each of which was under the governance of a chief appointed by the king (La Croix, 2019). In turn, each chief subdivided their territory to sub-chiefs, and so on, down to the individual fisher or farmer. In addition to increasing kingly control, and enhancing agricultural organization and outputs, this new system was widely credited with reducing localized conflict endemic to the prior system. Rather than having the island's families engaged in a continual set of conflicts over ancestral rights to land as populations swelled and land did not, the ruling class largely disposed of land rights as a matter of executive fiat.

These effectively expansive innovations – redefining the entire Island of Oahu as one political entity united under the influence of Mā'ilikūkahī, and swiftly adopted across the other major islands – appear to have simultaneously increased interlinkages across the island, reduced political conflict, and enhanced internal political cohesion over larger groups while allowing for the continued expansion of human populations. At the same time, these periods of high population growth and low-level conflict were accompanied by a fairly peaceful transition from kinship-based chiefdom overseeing a network of overlapping and conflicting ancestral claims to land, to an orderly, hierarchical, state-based society based on divine kingship with an increasingly ambitious system of annual tribute to elites – including foodstuffs and the feathers that formed the basis for the royal helmets and cloaks (Kirch, 2010). And this transition both accompanied and enabled the expansive growth of increasingly sophisticated cultural and familial interlinkages within and across all the major islands, as intermarriage, mobility, and the adoption of technological and cultural innovations (including Mā'ilikūkahī's system of land management) across groups predominated (La Croix, 2019).

Notwithstanding the greater political stability and agricultural production that Mā'ilikūkahī's expansive innovations enabled, the finite nature of agriculture – even on the fertile northern islands – along with increasing population pressure and the demand among a growing royal family for land and tribute led to a number of O'ahu elites establishing expanded settlements across the southeastern isles. Enabled by an innovative approach to rain-dependent dryland cultivation, and intensified agricultural management by a growing chiefly caste, both of which increased the ecological abundance potential of previously less-human-life-supporting islands, these younger southern islands of Hawai'i and Maui saw a rapid increase in human population from the fourteenth century up to the middle of the sixteenth century while employing the same, stable, expansive political form pioneered by Mā'ilikūkahī (Kirch, 2012; Vitousek et al., 2004).

It was the environmental vicissitudes of the southern islands, however, combined with expanding populations across the archipelago and increasing elite demands for resources, that ultimately changed the expansive political complexion of the archipelago to a rivalrous one characterized by widespread warfare. Dependent on seasonal rains, and subject to both drought and flooding, the dryland cultivation of the younger islands meant that human survival was never ensured, thus testing the limits of the previous expansive approaches to political identity, and increasingly encouraging political approaches among its leaders that centered on conflict and war (Vitousek et al., 2004). Indeed, the growing archeological record establishes that, by the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, agricultural outputs no longer were increasing – particularly on Hawai'i and Maui – and, as a result, population growth was evening out at the very same time interpolity warfare was increasing in frequency (Kirch, 1990b; Kolb & Dixon, 2002). As Kirch (2012) has noted,

On these dynamic large islands, the cult of Lono [god of rain] grew and thrived, along with the cult of the war god, Kū. The natural resources of Maui and Hawai'i dictated that irrigation would never be sufficient to support their populations... . [P]erhaps as a result of the periodic droughts and famines that could not be averted – their leaders were drawn increasingly to engage in war and territorial conquest.

(p. 155)

Accordingly, the eighteenth century saw a rapid escalation in warfare between and within all of the islands, as the chiefs of Hawai'i and Maui realized that rivalrous conquest of the northern islands could address the southern island problem – namely, that of population growth outstripping existing systems of ecological food security under a dryland agricultural system that had been pushed to its limits (Vitousek et al., 2004).

The expansive stability that the Island of Hawai'i had previously enjoyed under a single chief as late as the end of the sixteenth century was disrupted by a new period of civil war around the turn of the seventeenth century as elites battled to increase their status, access to agricultural surplus, and annual tribute against a backdrop of decreasing agricultural outputs on this dryland island. Against ecologically diminishing resources, and often sparked by fears over usurpers, a line of chiefs engaged in increasingly pitched rivalrous battles for control of the agriculturally productive sectors of the big island. By the eighteenth century, with its continuing agricultural scarcity, this strife had opened the door for a Maui Chief, Alapa'inui, to invade and conquer much of the big island, only to face a new challenge from his own rivalrous brother, the Maui Chief Kekaulike. The fleet raised by Alapa'inui to battle Kekaulike soon found itself dispatched to Moloka'i Island, where an Oahu chief had invaded, looking to depose a relative of Alapa'inui. The subsequent seasons of war ultimately spanned all of the major populated islands except for Kaua'i. This state of almost constant warfare was not abated by the successful conquest of the Island of Hawai'i around 1754 by Kalani'ōpu'u, one of Alapa'inui's warrior chiefs, who continued a consistent campaign to conquer the fertile lands of eastern Maui. For the common people of Hawai'i and Maui who raised the food and filled the chiefs' armies, the annual season of Lono, a 'peaceful period for cultivation and harvest' soon became regularly followed 'by a time for building up armies and launching campaigns of conquest against other districts and neighboring islands' as elites sought to mobilize rivalrous strategies to address the shortfall between the harvest's bounty, on one hand, and the needs of existing populations as well as their own demands for resources, on the other (Kirch, 2012, p. 233).

Indeed, the pursuit of environmental resources through rivalrous group conflict and warfare (and related decrease in populations) was most fully manifested by Kalani'ōpu'u's successor, the legendary Kamehameha who first united the entire archipelago under a single regent. Using newly available firearms sourced from European whalers with their arrival at the end of the eighteenth century, Kamehameha ultimately consolidated power over Hawai'i, conquered Maui, O'ahu, and Moloka'i, and negotiated the subjugation of Kaua'i under threat of force. By the time European settler colonialism had taken hold of the Archipelago (with those settlers, arguably, engaging in one of the most deadly examples of rivalrous techniques for overcoming the limits of ecosystems they had left behind in search of abundance), and European diseases started to decimate Hawai'ian populations, the chiefly logics of overcoming environmental limitations through territorial aggression had reached its fullest fruition under Kamehameha, the man who would become the founder and first monarch of the Kingdom of Hawai'i. And earlier, upon Captain Cook's arrival, absolute agricultural surplus likely was declining, with a series of droughts and famines occurring on

the island of Hawai'i. Thus, rivalrous territorial aggression 'provided a way out of the trap of declining production in [the southern islands'] dryland base' for both Kamehameha and his predecessors (Kirch, 2012, p. 299).

Our point here is not that every pre-eighteenth-century Hawai'ian chief had an expansive political disposition and that every Hawai'ian chief in the eighteenth century had a rivalrous disposition. Such a proposition is both implausible and contrary to the historical record. Indeed, early Hawai'ian history is also replete with chiefs who were warlike, aggressive, and sought to enrich their inner circle at the cost of the livelihoods of the common people or other chiefdoms, just as late Hawai'ian history is also replete with chiefs who were not aggressive, sought compromise, and had a high threshold for threat (La Croix, 2019). What is noteworthy, however, is that these chiefs typically failed to thrive in their times. During times of plenty, the aggressive, rivalrous chief rarely managed to expand territory substantially, and lacked the support of the common people. During times of scarcity, the non-aggressive, expansive leader failed to succeed in the struggle against an aggressor (Kirch, 2012). While ecological abundance or scarcity could not determine the chiefly line of succession, we argue pre-contact Hawai'ian history suggests that environmental vicissitudes could substantially influence the social conditions by which a leader with a given rivalrous or expansive political disposition was more likely to succeed or fail.

Ultimately dependent upon the political dispositions of common people whose labor provided the agricultural surpluses that supported a chiefly caste, and whose bodies filled that caste's armies, the successful chief had to find timely political solutions that resonated with those most directly impacted by ecologically informed surplus or scarcity. And, while the victories of Kamehameha likely could not have been achieved without the outside intervention of European traders and their introduction of firearms to the archipelago (Kolb & Dixon, 2002), a political figure as successfully focused on rallying mass support behind a program of environmentally motivated conquest, political subjugation, and adherence to the cult of the war god Kū is certainly indicative of the rise of a more rivalrous political disposition. In other words, in this decidedly emplaced and largely ecologically bounded society, successful leadership style and political orientation – expansive or rivalrous – often directly correlated with ecological relations and exigencies. Likewise, the tendency of dominant political identities to track patterns of relative abundance or scarcity had direct effects on human species population growth or decline – and on that growing or shrinking population's impact on the regeneration of the ecosystem as a whole.

Thinking about past and present ecopolitical identity from pre-contact Hawai'i

While it is not possible to completely correlate changing political ecologies in the Hawai'ian archipelago with the affectively backed, political dispositions of centuries of Hawai'ians and their chiefly leaders, all acting within a set of highly complex social, personal, agricultural, and environmental contexts, our review of pre-European contact Hawai'ian oral and archeological history suggests that evidence of larger consistent patterns and linkages between ecological abundance/scarcity and human politics should not be overlooked. Rather, the general ability of expansive or rivalrous chiefs to rise or fall during respective periods of abundance or scarcity may suggest that political disposition served an essential ecological function for those societies that are (a) closely tied to local ecological vicissitudes, (b) unable to fortify themselves against times of scarcity by storing away large amounts of staples, and (c) characterized by fairly close ties between leaders and the greater populace, such that leaders' rivalrous or expansive dispositions could effectively resonate with common people during times of scarcity or abundance, respectively.

Chiefs faced with ecological abundance and the opportunities afforded by new lands, new agricultural techniques, and new land management techniques benefitted from an open approach to the fresh opportunities provided by all three. An expansive openness to novelty and innovation – such as that seen in the rapid adoption of Mā'ilikāhī's land management reforms across the archipelago or in the rise of dryland farming techniques across the southern islands – as well as a broad definition of in-group and interlinkage within and across the islands helped ensure political stability and the spread of new technologies. And this, in turn, enabled the expansion of populations at a time when local ecosystems could support such growth, thus helping ensure group survival. In turn, the potential expansion of those populations under chiefly authority also promised to increase the surpluses claimed by the successful chief, benefiting expansive leadership during times of abundance. In contrast, during later times of declining ecological abundance, rivalrously oriented chiefs' sensitivity to the threats posed by other chiefs, a contempt for outside social groups, and the pursuit of violent intra-group conflict did more than bolster the successful chief's 'mana' or divine power and prestige. It also put a substantial portion of at least two chiefs' armies at substantial risk of loss of life and limb at the very moment when human populations had proven too great to be ecologically sustained at their current levels. Thus, at a large scale, the chiefly logics of differing approaches to intra-group politics during times of relative abundance and scarcity appear to have tracked coherently onto the survival needs of the human population and the ecosystems at large.

Moreover, these patterns appear to be more generalizable. For example, Melanesian history is also characterized by periods of relative peace during times of ecological plenty followed by rivalrous warfare, population decline, and territorial expansion during periods of ecological scarcity (Younger, 2008). Likewise, the tendency of warfare driven de-population to be a product of, and effective fix for, growing populations and/or disruption of the food supply has been observed in a number of other pre-contact Polynesian cultures (Ember & Ember, 1992; Field, 2004; Firth, 2004; Kennett et al., 2006; Younger, 2008). Indeed, the potential ecological role of rising political animus to outsiders during periods of ecological imbalance has been recognized as a possibly generalizable tendency across human cultures and temporal/geographic contexts (Diamond, 2005; Homer-Dixon, 2010). Moreover, Radkau (2008) suggests this tendency may be partially attributable to scarcity related contractions in how in-groups are defined, noting, '[x]enophobia, today for many the very embodiment of political pathology, may well have served a purpose under premodern conditions, since the balance of the relationship between humans and their environment in agrarian-pastoral microcosms was indeed upset by migratory movements' (p. 3) and other incursions by out-groups. Indeed, one cannot help but wonder whether contemporary violent conflicts in such resource scarce and emplaced settings as Sudan are not partially influenced by the ecologically correlated rise of rivalrous political identities.

That said, we do not intend to imply an inferential leap from recognizing the ecological function that political disposition – either expansive or rivalrous – could have served in pre-contact Polynesia to arguing that these political dispositions served a similar function throughout human spatio-temporal experience. We do argue, however, the Hawai'ian example is potentially informative for starting to think through what more-than-human and human ecological benefits may come from having portions of the same human populations identify with expansive or rivalrous kinds of psychological biases in judgment and evaluation of their environments and societies.

While early Hawai'ian culture was more sophisticated technologically than many similarly timed human societies – with advanced systems of maritime navigation, agriculture, warfare, and arts – the exigencies they faced in trying to ensure their subsistence and survival within

and based upon their own very local and bounded ecosystems have persisted for the duration of our species' existence until recently, leading many archeologists to look to pre-contact Hawai'ian culture when trying to understand earlier and even ancient human cultures (Kirch, 2007; Kolb & Dixon, 2002; Vitousek, 1995). As was the case for the Hawai'ians, early human survival depended on finite and temporally and often spatially limited environmental sources of sustenance (McMichael, 2002; Trauth et al., 2010). Like the Hawai'ians, early humans depended on the cooperation of other humans within highly complex, kin-based societies (Foley & Gamble, 2009; Fuentes, 2004). As with the Hawai'ians, early human society was characterized periodically by both intra and inter-group violent conflict (Lahr et al., 2016; McDonald et al., 2012; Younger, 2008). And, as was the case for Hawai'ians, the experience of environmental scarcity drove these groups to continually seek new areas of resource abundance (Verpoorte, 2009).

Indeed, it is not until the rise of complex, hierarchical, food-storage based societies that humans were typically able to start to break the previously iron link between ecological vicissitudes, social organization, and the question of survival. Thus, while much more research and analysis is needed regarding this ecocultural political identity link, it is difficult to imagine how there would not be species and ecological survival advantages to having within any group a substantial number of individuals with the proper latent political disposition (whether expansive or rivalrous) to come to the fore depending on the relative ecological abundance or scarcity the group – and wider ecosystem – was facing at a given time.

Discussion: From pre-contact Hawai'i to present

If our hypothesis is correct, it opens the door for rethinking fundamental questions of politics, ecologies, and ecopolitical identity. If we can re-read much of human histories as partially produced by the struggle between expansive and rivalrous approaches, then the question becomes whether these forms of social organization have been reciprocal responses to the very ecological conditions under and within which these political dispositions function.

In contrast, contemporary political ecologies – characterized by industrialized technologies of food storage, global trade networks, extensive human built environments, urban agglomeration, and large-scale corporate agriculture – all attempt to insulate humans from the ancient links between survival, human ecological impact, and ecological response and variability. And, under our hypothesis, to the extent they are successful in doing so, these contemporary innovations may likewise serve to unmoor our ecologically keyed political dispositions and our related ecopolitical identities from their functions of locally ensuring survival and enabling thriving – the result of which may be evidenced by the growing number of political leaders across the world adopting rivalrous political postures, fueled by discourses of scarcity and threat from internal and external enemies. During a time of human-induced climate and planetary disruption in societies where increasingly fewer perceive they are ecologically emplaced and related (Carr & Milstein, 2018; Turner et al., 2004; Vining et al., 2008), we are creating our own global conditions of ecological scarcity and crisis. The question then becomes whether the contemporary broad shift toward rivalrous political identities will once again lead to ecologically responsive mass human population decrease or even human and non-human species extinction.

Of course, scarcity – of one kind or another, and produced under a variety of modes of production – has never been far from human experience, even as the impacts of anthropogenic environmental disruption on our current survival prospects are effectively concealed

from large, often urbanized populations of the core. What has changed is that, for the human populations causing the fiercest destructive ecological impacts, scarcity and abundance are no longer directly understood as driven by ecological conditions and cycles, but rather as the economic products of market logics and an abstracted distanced global system of over-production and overconsumption strategically framed and obscured by a host of political and media discourses.

While the ramifications of this changing dynamic demand much greater analysis, examples from such countries of the core as the United States, Australia, and Russia may prove illustrative. In each case, right wing leaders adopting profoundly rivalrous policies – mobilizing discourses of fear that vilify and call for acting aggressively toward those seen as internal and external threats – have enjoyed broad popularity among those most vulnerable and subject to scarcity. Perhaps because these forms of scarcity no longer are solely, or even primarily, bio-regional but instead often experienced economically, through a largely invisible network of distance-based extraction, production, and consumption, the resulting rivalrous politics in these countries have failed to translate in the short-term into approaches that seek directly or indirectly to adjust human conditions to meet ecological carrying capacity – in contrast to what appears to have occurred in the emplaced and ecologically bounded island case of Hawai'i. Instead, contemporary rivalrous politics have translated to policies that exacerbate failures to adjust to ecological carrying capacity, whether in the form of denying the human source of climate crisis, aggressively promoting carbon-based energy, or otherwise rolling back already limited market controls that seek to protect ecosystems and related systems of food, water, and life security.

This is not to say, however, that, in an era in which scarcity is produced less by locally and bioregionally emplaced interactions and more by transnationally networked economic, social, political, media, and corporate structures, our current moment of ecological crisis is due solely to the recontextualization of rivalrous political disposition. Because perceived abundance now is often a product of diffused market-based systems of human ecologies rather than emplaced human impacts and ecological vicissitudes, expansive political identities likewise contribute to a politics that undermines the balance between dominant human practices and planetary carrying capacity. In countries of the core, periods of market-based abundance have given rise to an expansive politics that favors openness, tolerance, and flexibility, as well as a desire for novelty and diversity. And, while some of the resulting policies are central to a just society – valuing human dignity, equality, and inclusion – others can be profoundly ecologically destructive. A hunger for experience, difference, and novelty animates the very policies that enable and promote global mass overconsumption, transnational free trade agreements, overtourism, and the rapid accretion of human settlements and populations on a finite planet.

While at first glance our analysis may seem Malthusian, it shares with this tradition only a concern about the potential for human consumption and production practices to outstrip the available nutrients and other resources needed to ensure healthy, thriving lives. We certainly reject both the colonial and racist dimensions associated with traditional Malthusian analysis – namely the idea that non-White, poor, colonized population expansion is a risk and such populations must be reduced to ensure White, elite, core survival (Chase, 1980; Ross, 2003). Nor do we seek to ignore the link between scarcity and political ecology underlying the concept of carrying capacity, unlike much Malthusian analysis. We are very cognizant that the question of how many people can survive and thrive at a given time is driven by human institutions, practices, and modes of production in concert with ecological conditions (Perelman, 1979).

Finally, we do not mean to imply that because the rise of rivalrous political approaches during previous times of scarcity could have led to violent conflicts that contributed to the ecologically stabilizing reduction of human populations that the same dynamic should function the same way now – though it may, at a catastrophic mass scale, end up doing so if climate denial and the related rising tendency toward doomism³ continue to be a key tactic of the political right. Instead, we offer our hypothesis to start to explore how societies today might articulate and perform ecopolitical identities – both rivalrous and expansive – in ways that help humans intrinsically know our species as ecologically impactful and responsive, and become mindful in ways that help us, quickly, regain balance between human conditions and ecologies. Unlike Malthus and his contemporaries, we do not see our moment of crisis as the wrong population outstripping resources. While current mass population growth clearly plays an ecological role, far more ecologically pressing are the conditions under which human populations live, such as the increasingly dominating and idealized condition of destructive ‘me-first’ excess reflected and reified in politics in much of the Global North and in ever increasing parts of the Global South in contrast to alternative conditions of mutuality and/or degrowth exhibited in far fewer places (Alhinai & Milstein, 2019; D’Alisa, Demaria & Kallis, 2014; Regassa Debelo et al., 2017).

Indeed, our hypothesis potentially disrupts current dominant understandings of what makes a good human society and life. If we recognize the drive for survival and good living as one of the vital forces animating human histories, the finite capacities of our planet as presenting an ultimately unavoidable limit on human (and more-than-human) populations and/or ways of life, and political identity as the lens by which we navigate survival, well-being, and ecological limits, then the only one of these factors we can meaningfully and potentially expeditiously impact is how we frame, understand, and perform the ecopolitical identities that shape anthropogenic ecological decision-making and direction. And here the ecological function of political dispositions may be particularly fruitful.

For both pre-contact Hawai’ians and early emplaced and immediately ecologically limited human societies, many of the characteristics associated with rivalrous political identities likely were essential. Whether taking the form of vigilance against threat, willingness to aggressively defend oneself or one’s community, toughness, or a commitment to moral codes that reinforce group cohesion, rivalrous predisposition would have served vital survival and ecological functions, and could continue to have an essential role in our survival moving forward.

Indeed, the question today is not whether rivalrous political disposition is important, but what kind of rivalrous political disposition we need. Now, more than ever, a sensitivity to threat and risk is essential given the immense dangers posed by anthropogenic climate disruption and the host of other human-induced environmental disasters unfolding at an accelerated pace. In some right-wing rural spaces, the beginnings of such reconfigurings of rivalrous political identity may be at play, including in the form of adopting renewable energy propagation to maintain and continue one’s in-group and conservative and pastoral way of life (see Bendixsen et al., 2020, Chapter 10 of this *Handbook*). The rivalrous desire to protect those to whom one is connected – including more-than-human relations – is essential during a time when the risks of environmental degradation fall most heavily on those most vulnerable. Indeed, given the interdependence of all species, it is essential that we all understand the planetary biosphere as our intimate in-group. Even the rivalrous suspicion of novelty and difference could be mobilized in response to the profoundly disruptive ecological changes the Earth as a whole is experiencing at this moment and the pressing need to rein in a system of production fueled by the drive for consumption of novelty. As we have written

this chapter, an unprecedented polar vortex drove temperatures to deadly freezing levels in the Midwest of the United States, and the bush of Australia, the rainforests of the Amazon in Brazil, and many of the forests in Africa burned at record levels. These changes – provoked by our climate-altering dominant system of overproduction and consumption – are untenable, and a rivalrous response that would rework this system is not only appropriate, but essential, if it were directed at fundamentally and expeditiously reducing human impacts on the planet.

Likewise, a refocused expansive ecological politics is essential for human survival. Under such a politics, openness to difference and novelty, curiosity, and tolerance would be expressed through regenerative ecocultural relations and growth of personal and community well-being rather than over consumption and expansion of gross national product. Expansive approaches to in-group definition could be activated to encompass more-than-human species and ecosystems as a whole. That said, the presumption that a long, healthy, engaging, thriving life is based upon the non-stop increasing attainment of personal wealth or consumption patterns can no longer be sustained. Instead, the growing concentration of populations in increasingly diverse cities offers a space for a current emergence of expansive ecopolitical identities that forefront novel restorative and accessible forms of urban food agriculture, resource sharing, reusing and recycling, and condensed metropolitan bioregionalism (Carr & Dionisio, 2017). These shifts, already at play in some pockets in many metropolises, could be massively expanded by large-scale political drive and policy. And, with the changes anthropogenic climate disruption and environmental degradation have already wrought, the expansive disposition toward openness and flexibility will be essential – in redefining our politics and in reimagining our ecopolitical identities as a species.

Notes

- 1 We use ‘left’ and ‘right’ to signify general political orientation instead of ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ as is often used in the literature. We choose these terms to avoid confusion, as ‘liberal’ is associated with classical liberal thought and neoliberalism, both of which have substantial political ‘right’ connotations. Indeed, many politically right or center right parties self-identify as ‘Liberal,’ such as those in Australia and Japan.
- 2 The Hawai’ian archipelago is made up of 137 islands, of which there are eight major islands, including what is commonly referred to as the ‘big island’ of Hawai’i. When discussing the archipelago as a whole, we refer to it as the Hawai’ian Archipelago and, when discussing the ‘big island,’ we refer to the Island of Hawai’i.
- 3 See this recent Guardian article on doomism as a new tactical front of climate denial: https://www.theguardian.com/science/2019/nov/09/doomism-new-tactic-fossil-fuel-lobby?fbclid=IwAR3AweKQxj1XItU3l1NfzNsoSTEPI_ji6bZyUdVJmY9hbzh8C7dFx14LMc

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The making of fluid ecocultural identities in urban India

Shilpa Dahake

Upon being asked about the nature of environmentalism in the city of Nashik, one of my respondents, a locally acclaimed environmentalist, said,

I perceive the increasing human encroachments of Godavari riverscape as Ravan Neeti [Devil's strategy], and we [environmentalists] are trying to inculcate Ram Neeti [God's strategy] among the city dwellers.

In this narrative, the environmentalist draws connections among the ecological degradation of Godavari River, the Ramayana (one of the two epics in the Hindu scriptures), and emerging environmentalism in the city of Nashik in India. Lord Rama is a divine character in the allegories of Ramayana, who is represented as the most ideal and utmost responsible man who ever existed, whereas the Ravana is a demon-king whose actions led to the destruction of himself and his empire. The Godavari River itself figures prominently in the Ramayana in a section that refers to the Godavari riverscape not only as a water body but also as a sacred site, shared by both human and more-than-human entities. The environmentalist study participant's distinguishing between positive and negative human interactions with the river emerges from today's contexts in Nashik. During the 2015 preparations of the Kumbh Mela, a local Hindu Pilgrimage festival, many locals began re-examining their ecocultural positioning and sociocultural interactions with Godavari.

Nashik is a rapidly urbanizing and a religiously significant tier II¹ city, deep-seated in the upper reaches of Godavari River in the Indian state of Maharashtra. Recent efforts by Nashik city's administration to transform the Kumbh Mela from a religious gathering to a spectacular event resulted in shifting several developmental, religious, and environmental discourses in the public domain about past and ongoing transformations of the Godavari riverscape. These emergent discourses, in highlighting the continuous degradation of Godavari, began to question the responsibility of the administration and civil society toward the river and led to the production of multiple strands of subjectivities associated with the river among both state and non-state actors.

Using ethnographic research along the urban stretch of Godavari River in Nashik, in this chapter I illustrate how the changing materialities of a river intertwine with the ecocultural identities of urban dwellers to produce new environmental subjectivities. Drawing from the literature on identity and subjectivity, I define ecocultural identity as sociocultural, political, and ecological categories individuals subscribe to and which construct their subjectivity and shape their interactions with the more-than-human world (Probyn, 2003; Wetherell, 2008). I question how the portrayal of the ecologically distressed condition of Godavari in digital and print media may have led to the emergence of environmental subjectivities in Nashik. I also ask: How do state and non-state actors' ecocultural identities inform their perception of Godavari riverscape? And how do the performances and contestations of actors' multiple identities engaging with the Godavari transform the river's ecology?

The data discussed in this chapter are part of an ongoing project investigating the intersection of religious legacies, neoliberal developments, and popular perceptions that are (re)-producing the Godavari riverscape in Nashik. I conducted fieldwork in phases, beginning with pilot research carried out during the Kumbh Mela of 2015. During fieldwork, I interviewed multiple stakeholders associated with the Godavari, including pilgrims, religious leaders, locals, religious organizations, administration, environmental groups, local traders, journalists, and other researchers working in Nashik. In addition, I analyzed policy documents, media reports, and regional texts to understand various implemented, ongoing, and proposed urban development projects along the river.

I argue that Nashik is experiencing an 'urban environmental awakening,' which, as proposed by Follmann (2015), is evident in many Indian cities, and can be seen in the increased impetus to address the problems affecting the ecologies of cities among both state and non-state actors. This urban environmental awakening has become evident after the introduction of neoliberal policies in India, based on local peoples' recognition of uneven power geometries that are producing environmentally and socially unjust geographies in cities. Scholars have widely acknowledged the fundamental shifts in Indian social, political, and economic structures since the 1990s, especially in cities, in the course of economic liberalization. Recently, scholars are also exploring how the neoliberal sociopolitical and economic shifts are intertwined with urban environmental governance (Zimmer & Cornea, 2016). In this vein, urban environments have attained new meaning and value with large-scale beautification and urban renewal projects emerging as 'idioms through which the cities position themselves in the global arena' (Coelho & Raman, 2013, p. 147). The process of reclaiming land of riverbanks or waterfronts to transform them into leisure spaces, like the Sabarmati Riverfront Development in Ahmedabad (Mathur, 2012) and the Yamuna Riverfront Development in Delhi (Follmann, 2015), is becoming a common trend of urban renewal projects in Indian cities.

Situating urban environmental politics within the metanarrative of the current geological epoch of the Anthropocene, this chapter explores the perception, embodiment, and adaptation of environmental change by urban dwellers through the lens of ecocultural identity. To do this, in the following section, I adopt the Urban Political Ecological (UPE) lens from critical geography, which highlights that, within a specific sociopolitical and ecological context, every actor experiences environmental transformations in highly differentiated ways informed by their avowed identities. After discussing the framework, I delve within the ethnographic case of Godavari to illustrate the construction and inherent fluidity of three environmental subjectivities – civic, religious, and institutional – in Nashik. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a discussion to foreground the Anthropocene as a sociohistorical

framework to expand the realm of understanding and enacting urban environmental politics, highlighting ways cities are becoming essential sites of exploration in which local and regional diversities can nuance and contextualize the experience of and response to notions of the Anthropocene.

Linking the Anthropocene, urban environmental politics, and ecocultural identity

The term Anthropocene was coined during a period of ‘dawning realization that human activity was indeed changing the Earth on a scale comparable with some of the major events of the ancient past’ (Zalasiewicz et al., 2010, p. 2228). At the global level, the Anthropocene narrative is dominated by natural sciences, which has foregrounded ways the Earth is ‘being anthroposized at high speed’ (Crutzen & Schwägerl, 2011), but has failed to consider ‘the multiplicity and unequal social values, relations, and practices of power that accompany actual humans’ (Baskin, 2014, p. 8). Scholars across the social sciences have elaborately criticized this homogenizing effect. Addressing this lacuna, scholars have argued for ‘reengagement with the Anthropocene as a multiple object with different meanings and unequal consequences for particular places and social groups’ (Löwbrand et al., 2015, p. 216). To incorporate such concerns, scholars have proposed other terms such as Capitalocene, as suggested by Moore (2017), regarding this historical era being ‘shaped by the relations privileging the endless accumulation of capital’ (p. 596), and Oliganthropocene, described by Swyngedouw (2014) as ‘an epoch of a few men and even fewer women’ suggesting that a small fraction of humanity has exploited the Earth and neither the causes nor the consequences of socioenvironmental transformation are equally distributed and experienced. These contestations suggest there is a need to ‘break down the globality and uniformity of the construct of a “humankind in the Anthropocene” and transform it into a more context-dependent, localized and social understanding’ (Biermann et al., 2016, p. 342).

Moreover, as we are living in an urban age and 68 percent of the global population will be living in cities by 2050 (United Nations, 2018), burgeoning environmental discourses are highlighting the interconnectedness between the Anthropocene and the urban. India, with 60 percent of its population urban, is predicted to be one of three countries, along with China and Nigeria, to witness maximum urban growth by 2050 (United Nations, 2018). Swyngedouw (2014) suggests, ‘the Anthropocene has arrived ... and planetary urbanization is its geographical form’ (p. 24). To further deepen the engagement of these two processes, Ljungkvist et al. (2010) proposed the concept of ‘urban Anthropocene.’ The pace of urbanization is ‘a classic manifestation of the changing human–environment relationship conceptualized by the Anthropocene’ (Biermann et al., 2016, p. 345), which makes cities suitable sites of experimentation ‘for the unraveling of a politics of the Anthropocene’ (Karaliotas & Bettini, 2016, p. 75). In this chapter, through a situated case of the transforming of an urban Indian river stretch, the Godavari riverbank, I build upon these multi-layered linkages to highlight the need to develop a socially embedded and politically mobilized account of the Anthropocene.

Accordingly, I adopt the UPE framework to add to the critical understanding of the Anthropocene and connect it with local environmental politics in urban India. The UPE framework conceptualizes cities as a co-product of anthropogenic manipulations and environment. By assuming this, the UPE posits that socioecological transformations in cities are the product of contested and multi-scalar processes (local, regional, national, and global) shaped by flows of capital and uneven power relations (Keil, 2003; Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003; Heynen, 2014). Overall, there are multiple actors and claims (re)shaping urban

environments, rendering cities as continuously evolving ‘politicised environments’ (Bryant & Bailey, 1997, p. 27). Similarly, the Godavari riverscape in Nashik is a politicized site emerging through interactions among established religious claims to the river, ongoing urban transformations, and the river’s ecology.

Here, UPE scholarship is particularly useful as it considers water a useful agent with whom to explore human–more-than-human relationalities, and as the framework operates across a wide range of ‘scales, sites, and social actors’ (Baviskar, 2007, p. 2). Within this strand of scholarship, researchers have widely explored the circulation and commodification of drinking water in the Global South (e.g., Bakker, 2003; Gandy, 2004; Anand, 2011; Ranganathan, 2014). Recently, in the Indian context, scholars are shifting their focus to the socioecological transformations of urban water bodies, including ponds, lakes, and rivers, due to multiple factors of urbanization, such as aspirations of becoming world-class cities and urban everyday governance (Desai, 2012; Follmann, 2015; D’Souza & Nagendra, 2011; Cornea et al., 2016). Acharya (2015) notes three broad themes emerging within scholarship on the political ecology of waterscapes – ‘water and power, water’s unruly materiality, and water as an emancipatory object’ (p. 375). The first theme deliberates upon the mutually constitutive interaction between water and power, by exploring the role of power in the production of waterscapes. The second, extending water–power dynamics, underlines the inherent fluidity of water’s materiality that significantly (re)shapes waterscapes. The last theme unveils the potential of social emancipation through different narratives of water crisis, scarcity, and insecurity.

However, the UPE framework is criticized for downplaying the cultural dimensions of urban environmental struggles (Oliver, 2005). In this vein, as noted by Acharya (2015), the study of the political ecology of urban waterscapes does not engage sufficiently with the cultural politics of water. Engagement with the cultural politics of human ecological relations is essential to nuance and deepen the understanding of environmental struggles because ‘cultural beliefs trump realities in stunning ways’ (Orlove & Caton, 2010, p. 403). This accommodation of cultural dimensions is termed the cultural turn within UPE analyses. To incorporate the cultural turn, Acharya (2015) highlights symbolism, consumption, belonging, and landscape as four significant elements that can theoretically and conceptually broaden understandings of urban waterscapes. Adopting this evolved culturally turned toolkit of UPE in my analysis of identification with the Godavari riverscape, I extend Acharya’s work by exploring how symbolism, consumption, belonging, and landscape of Godavari intersect with the ecocultural identities of the residents of Nashik.

Situating ecocultural identity in the urban context

Ecocultural identities are dynamic and interlinked, informed by social categories and ecological contexts. Through diverse case studies, political ecologists have established that ‘people’s understandings of and actions towards their environments are linked to their social identities ... leading to very different management options for coping with environmental change’ (Nightingale, 2006). A majority of these works assumes that people’s identities – and discourses they invoke through those identities – remain fixed within a socioecological context. However, scholars have argued for frameworks that recognize a fluidity of identities that change with context and over time (Bondi & Davidson, 2003; Nightingale, 2006). The fluid notion of identity is conceptualized as a ‘relational and contextual understanding of subjectivity allowing an exploration of how subjectivities are linked to particular ecological and social contexts’ (Nightingale, 2006, p. 5).

Engaging with this fluid understanding of identities, I argue that subjectivities emerge not only from people's association with the immediate sociocultural context but also through their quotidian interactions with the surrounding ecological environment. Moreover, these subjectivities are expressed differently in particular times and places, stimulating certain actions while prohibiting others.

Further, I adopt Mawdsley's (2009) reappraisal of Agrawal's conceptualization of environmental subjectivity in an urban context. Critiquing Agrawal's (2005a, 2005b) assumption that environmental subjectivity implies 'people who care' and who are positively engaged with the environment, Mawdsley suggests that the intrinsic positive engagement with the environment assumed in Agrawal's definition overlooks 'regressive and authoritarian environmentalism' that might create unjust geographies (Mawdsley, 2009, p. 243). She also highlights that processes of subjectification in an urban setting are more complex than in a rural setting, primarily due to the scale of the settlements, heterogeneity, diverse needs and perceptions, and occupations. All these factors are always challenging one's negotiations and associations with more-than-human entities in the urban setting.

Expanding on this work, I attempt to underline the importance of the notion of ecocultural identity to urban presents and futures by examining the dialectic between continuously transforming cities and subjectivities of urban dwellers. By integrating ecocultural identity with the enquiry of socioecological transformations, this chapter supports the claim of critical Anthropocene research to resist a 'unified account of "the human" and instead work to situate people and social groups in the rich patterns of cultural and historical diversity' (Löwbrand et al., 2015, p. 216). The following sociocultural, religious, and historical overview of dynamics between the Godavari River and the city of Nashik helps situate the ethnographic case and the emerging urban environmental politics found within.

Godavari as a socioecological assemblage

Nashik and Godavari are coevolving and (re)shaping each other in myriad ways. Their relationship is manifold, linking economy, religion, and development, and also waste and pollution. In this section, I attempt to present an ecoculturally embedded account of the Anthropocene by tracing the changing ecological make-up of the Godavari within the sociocultural fabric of Nashik. Beginning with a discussion of the symbolism associated with the Godavari in Nashik, the section traces how the symbolic significance of the river induced socioecological transformations of the riverscape and consumption of religious imaginaries of the river. In addition, I take the Kumbh Mela of 2015 as a critical moment that led to a surge of river-related discourse in the city and a sense of belongingness among locals.

Symbolism and consumption of the Godavari riverscape

The Godavari River is a quintessential aspect of the identity of Nashik. It chronicles several cultural, religious, and ethnic eras of the city in the form of tangible and intangible riverine entities. Describing Godavari's identity and importance in the city, one of my respondents suggested, 'The mythological industry of Nashik is the biggest tourist attraction, on which many communities in the city are surviving. And the Godavari is the basis of this industry.' Representations of Godavari as a pure and sacred mother are dominant in the administrative and public spheres of Nashik. I examine ways this symbolic imagery of Godavari is continuously negotiated by government officials, as well as other interest groups.

Believed to be the elder sister of the river Ganges, Godavari River is one of the seven rivers considered sacred in Hinduism. Godavari River, originating from the Brahmagiri Mountain range in the Western Ghats near the temple town of Trimbakeshwar, traverses the fast developing city of Nashik (Figure 20.1). Nashik is the third largest city located in the Indian state of Maharashtra, with a population of ~1.8 million. About 13 km of Godavari River meanders through Nashik, dividing the city into two halves.

Precisely at the heart of the city, the river turns perpendicularly toward the south. This is the reason Godavari is also popularly known as *Dakshin Vahini Ganga* (or South Flowing Ganges). From this particular spot begins the famous *Goda Ghat*, colloquially referred to as Ganga Ghat, a series of *Kunds* (pools with stairs along the edges leading toward the water), and many temples along the river. The royal family of the Peshwas of Pune initially developed the Goda Ghat in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries under the reign of the Maratha Empire. During this period, several political and army leaders of Peshwas constructed 17 Kunds in the Godavari riverbed, by carving out the bedrock. Every Kund was assigned a specific utility, ranging from drinking water, domestic chores, and animal washing

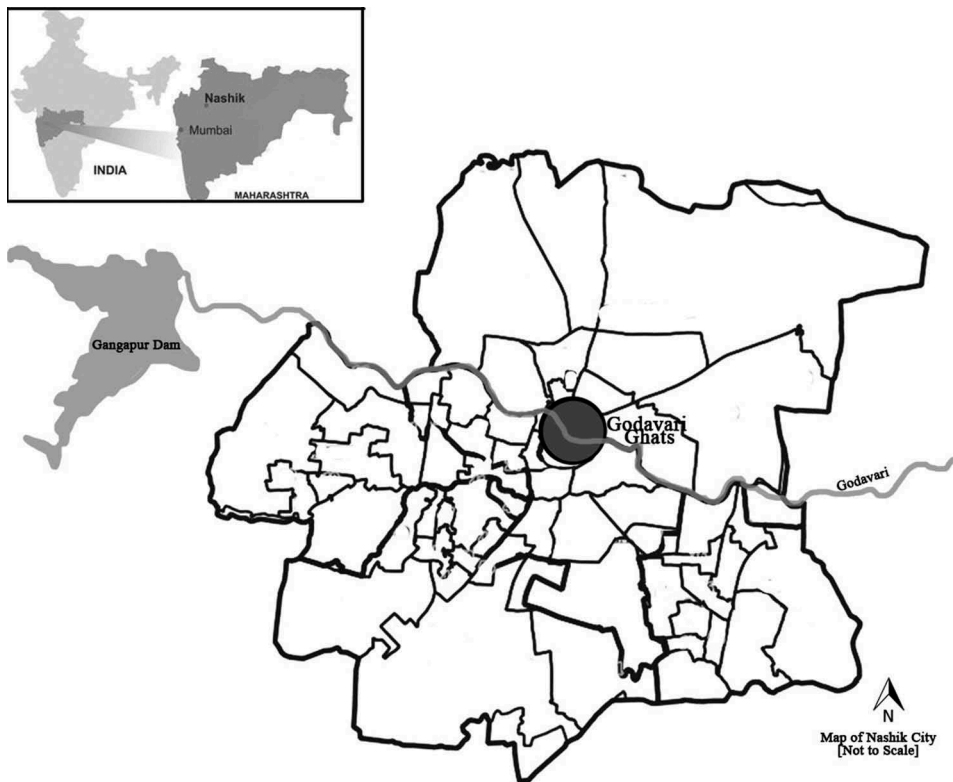


Figure 20.1 Map of Nashik.

Source: Extracted GIS layers from Nashik City administration's website <https://nashikcorporation.in/>. The author has edited the layers to highlight the river and other specific areas on the map.

to religious rituals, solidifying the position of the riverfront as a central urban space. Out of these 17 Kunds, Ram Kund is believed to be one of the holiest spots along the stretch, as here the Godavari meets six small sacred streams, namely Aruna, Varuna, Sarasvati, Medha, Savitri, and Gayatri (Campbell, 1883). Ram Kund also is a vital mythscape as locals and devotees from many parts of the country associate it with one of the sites illustrated in the Ramayana. Most of the religious economy of Nashik revolves around the Goda Ghat, particularly Ram Kund. Ram Kund has been an important center for many Hindu rituals, such as holy ablutions (*snan*), after death/funeral rituals (*shraddha*), and immersion of mortal remains (*asthi visarjan*).

At present, the Goda Ghat runs along about 1.25 km of the river lying between Nashik's Ahilyabai Holkar Bridge and Talkuteshwar Bridge. While the religious-cultural cosmos heightens around Goda Ghat, the area is also the oldest part of the settlement and most urbanized section of the river. Moreover, the Goda Ghat is one of the sites of the Kumbh Mela, one of the world's largest Hindu pilgrimage festivals, which is celebrated at four Indian cities situated along rivers: Haridwar and Allahabad along the Ganges, Nashik on the banks of Godavari, and Ujjain along Shipra. These pilgrimages occur in a cycle of 12 years at each site. At every site, the auspicious moment of the Kumbh Mela is decided by a distinct combination of astrological positions of the Sun, the Moon, and Jupiter. On this occasion, as the river waters are believed to attain holy powers, pilgrims from all over India converge along the banks of the Ganges, Godavari, and Shipra rivers to take a dip in the sacred waters to cleanse themselves of their sins.

Owing to the sacredness of Godavari, since time immemorial the city of Nashik has enjoyed the status of an important religious center. However, over the past few decades, due to industrialization, wine tourism, and proximity to the two major metropolitan cities of Mumbai and Pune, Nashik is also striding toward modernity and aspiring to become a 'world-class' city.² Such urban aspirations are engendering multiple large-scale urban renewal projects along the banks of the Godavari in the city. These steps toward modernity are perceived by some locals to be overpowering the sacred image of Godavari in Nashik. As a result, apart from symbolic significance and religious consumption, the Godavari riverscape is also appropriated to cater to the criteria of becoming a world-class city. Moreover, Nashik, by oscillating between its traditional identity as a place for pilgrimage and religious observances and aspirations of becoming a competitive world city, is a site of contestations. In this way, Godavari is a waterscape that emerges through complex interactions and negotiations, whereby river and city are continuously shaping each other and producing diverse ecocultural assemblages.

Kumbh Mela of 2015 as a turning point

The Kumbh Mela of 2015 is one such moment in the life of Nashik city where religious associations with Godavari and visions of urban development reshaped river-society interactions in the city. Every Kumbh Mela attracts the attention of the administration and the political society of the city to the Godavari. As clarified by a respondent, 'Kumbh attracts lots of funds, which is almost ten times the budget of Nashik Municipal Corporation.' Since 1991, the State Government of Maharashtra and the Government of India began funding the Kumbh Mela in Nashik (Dolas, 2015). The amount of funding increased from 3.5 Billion INR in 2003 to 23.78 Billion INR in 2015 (Patil, 2015).

The increasing incoming funds have converted the Kumbh Mela from a religious activity to a mega event. During every cycle of the Kumbh Mela, the majority of incoming funds

have been utilized for Godavari riverfront development projects. These projects, in turn, have transformed the Goda Ghat drastically. Official records show the riverfront development projects, beginning with the Kumbh Mela of 2003, have included construction of parks and leisure spaces, beautification of the Goda Ghat, and several pollution control measures. On paper, these projects seem to integrate plans for conservation and development of the riverfront. However, in the past, as suggested by local study participants, these projects included massive haphazard concretization of the banks and even the riverbed (Figure 20.2). According to one participant, ‘In the name of riverfront development, the administration has poured cement in the rivers of Nashik. From the Ram Kund to Talkuteshwar Bridge [Godavari Ghat stretch], the river is concretized.’ The administration not only concretized both the banks and the riverbed, but also constructed bridges cutting across the river, as well as in the middle of the riverbed parallel to flow of the river.

The administration justified their interventions by pointing out they were implemented to make the movement of pilgrims comfortable and safe. These anthropocentric projects of the administration in the Godavari Ghat stretch replaced the free-flowing Godavari River with a concretized landscape, erasing the wild body and course of the river entirely from existence. The locals did not resist these acts of the administration. At that time, the Godavari was, in Markusen’s words, a ‘forgotten place,’ which was ‘deprived of leadership by the actions and attitudes of people’ (Markusen, 2004, p. 2303). Every cycle of renewal of Godavari Ghats for the Kumbhs stresses the mythscapes of the Godavari, thus wiping off layers of local history and thinning the existence of the river.

Every Kumbh Mela is preceded by a survey of the Goda Ghat and other river stretches before preparation of the plan of action for the event. This cycle of surveys of the Goda Ghat and proposals of development projects along the riverbanks reemerged before the



Figure 20.2 Godavari Ghats after a series of concretization.

Source: Photo by the author.

Kumbh Mela of 2015. In 2012, the Tourism and Finance Corporation of India (TFCI) surveyed the Godavari River stretch before the commencement of preparation for Kumbh Mela. For the first time, due to a pronounced increase in religious tourism, the administration reflexively looked at the health of the river by means of this survey. With support of the findings of the survey, the Tourism and Finance Corporation of India (TFCI) declared that ‘Godavari is too polluted for ritual bathing, leave aside for drinking purposes’ in Nashik (Botekar, 2012, par. 1). Such a remark ahead of the Kumbh Mela, which was to be held in 2015, made the debased state of the Godavari the focus of public discourse in the city. Along with the administration, civil society started rethinking their interactions with the Godavari. In addition to the concretization of the Goda Ghat, the direct intermixing of untreated or insufficiently treated sewage was also threatening the ecology of the Godavari. As described by one respondent, ‘Godavari River [before the Kumbh Mela of 2015] was physically invisible to eyes, as the whole course of the stream was covered with water hyacinth.’

The Godavari’s degraded state endangered the celebration of the age-old tradition of Kumbh Mela in Nashik. For the local population and the administration, this occurrence was perceived as an ecological crisis within a cultural crisis. An ecological crisis, as Ivakhiv (1997) suggests, is always ‘a cultural fact [which] is conceived, imagined, discussed, and acted upon through the diverse cultural expressions of humanity’ (par. 3). To invoke the interlinking of ecological and cultural crises, I use the term ecocultural crisis to bridge the cultural beliefs and materialities of the river, which, though always intertwined, had their intimate relations become publicly evident at this juncture.

Thus, during the preparation of Kumbh Mela of 2015, to revive the symbolic as well as the consumption value of Godavari, three strands of subjectivities arose in Nashik, which I term civic, religious, and institutional. These strands of environmental subjectivities emerged as a response to ecological change within particular sociocultural, political, and historical contexts, and were shaped by multiple and overlapping or contested identities.

Exploring production and fluidity of environmental subjects

The looming ecocultural crisis forced local civic communities along with the city administration, and larger scale political powers, to address the issues of the degraded Godavari in order to maintain the image of Nashik as a pilgrim center of great significance. Every actor according to their ecocultural imaginings constructed specific agendas and discourses of conserving the Godavari. Deliberating upon diverse embodied experiences of the changing Godavari riverscape, this section diversifies the account of the Anthropocene by examining the process of subjectification and production of the civic, religious, and institutional strands of subjectivities.

Civic environmentalism

The symbolic sacredness of Godavari is deeply embedded in the public imagination of Nashik. For any Nashikite, the Godavari is equivalent to the Ganges, the holiest river of India. Moreover, it is colloquially referred to as Ganga because the Godavari is believed to be the elder sister of the Ganges, also known as Budhi Ganga, or Elder Ganga. However, as stated earlier in the chapter, by highlighting the degraded materialities of Godavari, the survey by the TFCI conducted in 2012 complicated and materially drew attention back to

the symbolic sacredness of the river and precipitated an ecocultural crisis by endangering the celebration of the Kumbh Mela of 2015.

The ecocultural crisis spawned by the fear of losing the sacred identity of Godavari, a matter of civic pride in Nashik, provoked Nashikites to rethink their relations with the river. As a result, like-minded middle-class residents of Nashik coming from diverse professions and backgrounds congregated with a common aim of reviving the image and materialities of the Godavari in the public domain. With this newly formed collective vision, the Nashikites manifested a civic movement under the banner of Godavari Gatarikaran Virodhi Manch (GGVM) (translated as Forum against Sewage Pollution in Godavari). Seeing the degraded condition of the Godavari due to continuous intermixing of sewage and other wastes of the city, the group termed the phenomenon ‘Godavari Gatarikaran,’ or the conversion of a river into a sewage carrying stream.

The group started off by putting forth demands for a sewage-free Godavari River via various protests and public demonstrations. The city administration, however, ignored and tried to curb these efforts and responded to the ecocultural crisis differently (discussed below). As the protests were unable to motivate the administration to focus on the ecological renewal of the Godavari, the group decided to approach the judiciary branch of the state. The group, to strengthen the case, developed its data source through field surveys, by interacting with several experts in and around the city, and by establishing networks with groups working in different parts of the country, which led to the production of a collective identity for the group with a river-centric vision. This vision, as described by one of the founding group’s members, repositions the city by understanding that

in the entire 1,456 km stretch of Godavari, the Nashik city only engages with 20 km of the river. So, Nashik is existing because of the Godavari, not the other way around.

This collective ecocentric vision of the group surfaced in relation to the ecocultural nature of the crisis, where the ecological imbalance was the root cause of the cultural shift. Hence, the group began collectively with a river-centric approach in order to cope and shift ecocultural awareness and identification.

Further, as the collective river-centric consciousness deepened with surveys and alliances, the group filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) on November 26, 2012, in the Bombay High Court against the Nashik Municipal Corporation (NMC). Their primary demand was formulation of rules and regulation to safeguard the *rights* of the river. For the group, the rights of the river involved maintaining the natural flow of the water in the river, devoid of contamination of any kind. In spite of being a middle-class dominated group, this strand of environmentalism does not exclusively serve middle-class interests but instead strives for long-term sustainability of Godavari. The litigation, with the support of media coverage, was able to pursue the High Court to act immediately to force the NMC to focus on segregating the mixing of sewage from Godavari (Pandit and others vs NMC, 2014). During the initial proceedings, the court focused on formulating immediate short-term solutions to revive the Godavari for the Kumbh Mela. The proceedings are still ongoing toward the final judgment of the litigation.

The GGVM began the civic movement in Nashik for the river’s rejuvenation with the motive to ensure the continuity of the tradition of the Kumbh Mela. However, after the Kumbh Mela, the collective ecocultural interest started losing its event-driven significance, which led to the diversification of this group into smaller groups focusing on specific agendas for the conservation of Godavari according to their own interests. The changing

socioecological conditions of Godavari began reshaping the collective identity of Nashikites by intersecting with other ecocultural categories of individual identification such as public image, economic interests, family legacy, etc.

In 2016, soon after the Kumbh Mela, the city faced extremes of water scarcity and floods affecting the majority of the population. Owing to such drastic upheavals, the Nashikites were forced to continue to engage with the Godavari at different scales and through different mediums. For example, one of the founding members, a well-known environmentalist in the state of Maharashtra, along with some other members of the GGVM, is carrying forward the river-centric approach of the movement. In responding to a question about the motivation behind continuing this river-centric orientation, one of the members of the group stated, 'We [Nashikites] have been enjoying water secure lives and exploiting our mother [Godavari] since very long. But now through a series of water issues, floods, etc., she [Godavari] is trying to speak to us to correct our actions.' This narrative reveals two motivations for pursuing the river-centric approach – first, the religious connection, as in Hindu mythology rivers are given the status of mother as they nurture and sustain life and, second, fear of acute ecological disturbances. Thus, by acknowledging the intertwining of the river with their lives, members of the group along with other actors like local traders along the river, people living along the river, etc., are redefining their ecocultural identities.

Some other members of the group, who are living in the newly developed housing areas along Godavari, are specifically focusing on direct outflow of sewage and industrial waste into the river. Intermixing of wastewater generates foul odors and increases breeding of mosquitoes, deteriorating the living environment of the residential areas. Another member of the group, owing to his family's long association with the religious tradition of Godavari, is leading the strand of religious environmentalism in Nashik, discussed in the following section.

Religious environmentalism

The strand of religious environmentalism is an offshoot of local civic environmentalism, where individuals began to argue for the conservation and rejuvenation of Godavari from a religious standpoint, but equally emphasizing the ecological sustainability of the river. Nanda (2004) utilizes the term religious environmentalism to describe conscious application of a religious attitude to promote environmental and other public welfare objectives. However, in my discussion, I align with Luthy's (2016) conceptualization of similar processes as 'religiously motivated conservation' as 'it highlights the distinction between the philosophical viewpoints that motivate restoration efforts, and the efforts themselves' (p. 94).

The *Godapremi Nagari Sewa Samiti* (Civil Service Committee of Devotees of Godavari) is at the forefront of this strand in Nashik. This group is headed by an individual whose family has lived alongside the Goda Ghat for four generations and is closely associated with the religious affairs of the river. Owing to deep cultural and ecological relations with this religiously and historically significant stretch, the group decided to focus on rejuvenation of Goda Ghat. As the concretization of Goda Ghat that happened during the previous Kumbh Melas (1991, 2003) was highlighted as one of the major causes of the degradation of Godavari, the de-concretization of the riverbed became the primary focus of this group. Addressing the gap of 15 years between the concretization of the river and people's delayed reaction, the representative of the group stated,

At the time of concretization, there was not much awareness regarding environmental or river issues among various stakeholders along the Ghat. Due to lack of awareness and

also the understanding of the river as a system, we could not raise concerns. Therefore, I consider myself equally responsible for this serious damage.

With time, when the concretization of Goda Ghat started producing environmental issues like incessant urban flooding and drying of the riverbed, locals began analyzing and questioning the riverbed concretization. The changing ecological make-up of Godavari turned locals from passive bystanders to active participants in the governance of the river.

As described by one member of this group, 'The concretization of the Ghats and the riverbed have killed the Godavari, as it blocked the natural springs that were feeding water to the stream of the river.' Apart from the ecological destruction of the riverbed of Godavari, one of the members of the group suggested that, 'by concretizing the Kunds of Goda Ghat, the NMC destroyed all the natural characteristics of Godavari, as described in the religious texts, which define the sacredness of the river.' Here, the respondent refers to the tirthas or holy spots along the Godavari in Sri Godavari Mahatmya, a holy text written in Marathi by Dasganu. For example, a verse from Sri Godavari Mahatmya describing the sacredness of Ram Kund along the Godavari describes how at Ram Kund 'Daughters of Sun God Aruna and Varuna meet the Godavari in the form of rivers' (Dasganu, n.d., p. 31). Today, due to urban administrative development, Ram Kund has become a concretized water tank and the streams of water, namely Aruna and Varuna, are disturbed.

In an attempt to regain the historical and religious attributes of Goda Ghat, the group filed a PIL to convince the NMC to focus on de-concretization of the riverbed, along with other interventions to reduce the pollution of Godavari. Attempting to revive the symbolic religiosity of the Godavari along with the river's material conditions, the group is also promoting the re-reading of the religious scriptures associated with the Godavari to inculcate sustainable religious practices along the rivers. The head of the group gives an example of Gautami Mahatmya (Glorification of Gautami – Godavari is also known as Gautami), which is part of Brahma Purana, a Hindu religious text. The Gautami Mahatmya includes two sections, Tirtha Mahatmya and Sthaan Mahatmya, which both highlight reasons behind the sacredness of this stretch of the Godavari. For example, the following verses describe the religious significance of sacred spots like Lakshmanatirtha or Lakshman Kund and Sitatirtha or Sita Kund:

The place where the holy bath and the worship of Sankara [were] performed by Lakshmana, became Lakshmanatirtha. So also is the case of Sitatirtha. It is capable of dispelling sins of different types entirely. Where Ganga the sanctifier of three worlds, had contact with the feet of Visnu (i.e., Rama) and where Rama took [a] bath, that is the holy center Ramatirtha. How can its special excellence be described? There is no holy center anywhere equal to that [of] Ramatirtha.

(Sashtri, 2003, p. 991).

Describing the current religious practices along the Godavari Ghats, the leader of this group suggests, 'Nowadays, the priest community has forgotten the importance of the religious texts, they just chant the verses without understanding the meaning of them. This is creating a huge gap between our symbolic and physical associations with the rivers.' To combat this lack of environmental subjectivity among the people, these activists are focusing on religious practices and beliefs. Such an effort is gradually changing the attitude of locals toward the river to the extent that now one can see locals on their own stopping others from pouring religious offerings, such as flowers, sweets, incense sticks, and clothes in plastic packaging, directly into the river.

Institutional environmentalism

Institutional environmentalism here refers to state-sanctioned and politically influenced environment renewal projects that claim to be conservation and preservation oriented. Building upon this conceptualization, this section examines the initiatives of the Nashik Municipal Corporation (NMC), the governing body of the city, dealing with questions of conservation of the Godavari. The NMC consists of three bodies – the Council, the Standing Committee, and the Commissioner. The Council of NMC is headed by a mayor, who is publicly elected and responsible for managing 61 zones of the city and their 122 elected public representatives. As a subset of the Council, the Standing Committee makes decisions regarding implementation and modification of projects, policies, and schemes in various urban sectors. The Municipal Commissioner, who is an Indian Administration Service officer appointed by the state government of Maharashtra, is executive head of the NMC and responsible for the implementation of the decisions taken by the Standing Committee.

Following the country-wide neoliberal trend of reclaiming urban riverfronts and redeveloping them as an urban spectacle to compete in the league of world-class cities, in 2012, the NMC developed a Goda Park project to transform the entire river's edge in the city. The Goda Park project was formulated with the aim of transforming the edges into carefully manicured spaces to present them as world-class infrastructure to lure capital investments; the project also claims to reduce pollution as well as ensure flood management. About 2.5 km of walkways were constructed along the riverbanks in the earliest phase of the project during 2010–12. These walkways were an encroachment on the river. They were built within the flood-lines by leveling the river edges and in turn reducing the river width, reflecting a lack of ecological consciousness. Besides, the intermixing of untreated sewage, through open and natural drains, with the river water produced foul odors, polluting the river and making the walkways unwelcoming. Also, the walkways were planned in less dense settlements because the river edges here were perceived as unexplored land resources waiting to be appropriated by the developers. Their location in less dense settlements at once made them breeding grounds for illegal activities like drug dealing (Pradhan, 2014) and paved the way for future human conquering of the riverfronts.

In 2013, Maharashtra *Navnirman Sena* (MNS), the political party-in-power, introduced a revised version of the riverfront development project. In dire need to recreate the image of Godavari riverscape before the Kumbh Mela, the head of the ruling party foregrounded the idea of building a 'world-class' riverfront by revising Goda-Park project. This included a 13.5 km long beautification project to be developed on both riverbanks (Pradhan, 2014). However, having experienced the ignorance of riverine ecology in the previous versions of state-sanctioned conservation attempts, the civic and religious environmentalists opposed the riverfront project (Sarkar, 2014). Moreover, the revised version of the project was handed over to a private corporation for its implementation, and without any public consultation. Arabindoo (2011), investigating similar projects in other cities of the country, rightly describes such projects as 'vigorous state-led bourgeois imaginary based on an aestheticized model of order and cleanliness' (p. 379).

The Goda Park project symbolizes the ambitions of the NMC and the political society of Nashik to enter the race to become a world-class city. For many local activists such massive beautification projects may benefit certain sections of the society, such as the real estate lobby, but, as one study participant said, are 'becoming the burden for the locals and local government, and also neither are they demanded by the people, nor are they proving useful for the river.' The implementation of the Goda-Park project is still in progress (Figure 20.3).



Figure 20.3 Revised Goda-Park project.

Source: Photo by the author.

Also, under the Smart City scheme of the Government of India, the NMC has proposed several more such beautification projects. Like before, the projects claim to conserve and revive the Godavari, but, unfortunately, the ecological needs of the Godavari are missing from these proposals. The continuous reappraisal of a massive beautification project along Godavari reflects a gap between the administration's lack of ecological consciousness and a civil society with a rising ecological consciousness.

Situating the Anthropocene in Nashik

This chapter has explored how the changing Godavari riverscape in Nashik intersects with ecocultural identity to produce individual and group subjectivities. Up until 2012, the degrading Godavari was normalized in the public sphere of Nashik. As discussed, in 2012, when the polluted condition of Godavari risked interrupting the continuation of the age-old tradition of the Kumbh Mela, a symbol of prestige and honor for Nashik, the degraded materiality of Godavari was perceived as an ecocultural crisis. While most accounts of state and non-state actors focus on the continuation of Kumbh Mela as the primary driver of the emergence of environmental subjectivities, I encountered deeper connections. Although there is no doubt that the Godavari's religious significance dominates public discourse, the river's significance is also linked to a sense of belonging and the ecological make-up of the city, which is reflected in the river-centric perception of the locals. The case of the Godavari riverscape, thus, combines two worldwide phenomena – the Anthropocene and urbanization – by linking environmental politics and cultural politics in a particular sociopolitical context.

The Kumbh Mela of 2015 was followed by occurrences of water scarcity when the Godavari ran dry for the first time in 139 years (Sarkar, 2016) and then experienced flash

floods that gravely affected many in the city (PTI, 2016). Such extremities within a short span of time were also emotionally experienced by the city dwellers. Expressing anger about the situation, one of the locals suggested,

The impact of initial social and administrative nonchalance towards the Godavari, and ever-increasing developmental encroachment over the Godavari is now emerging in the form of extremities.

This instilled a sense of fear or ‘topophobia’ (Tuan, 1990, p.4) toward the Godavari among several groups living along the river, producing a sense of insecurity and socio-ecologically uneven geographies in the city. Thus, even after the culmination of the Kumbh Mela, strands of civic-centered environmentalism continue to (re)shape claims over the Godavari owing to the fluid nature of the riverscape and, hence, affected fluid identities in the city.

By taking the Kumbh Mela of 2015 as a critical moment in the life of Nashik, the chapter exhibits how the symbolism, consumption, belonging, and landscape of the Godavari influences ecocultural identities of the urban dwellers. The strands of civic and religious environmentalism illustrated ways that sociocultural drivers led to the emergence of affective relations with more-than-human entities and motivated people to come together to take care of their shared environment. In contrast, institutional environmentalism was exclusionary, driven by the urge to (re)create the image of the Godavari riverscape as an urban spectacle through a series of infrastructural developments where ‘humans are perceived as not merely separate from, but also audience to, nature’ (Milstein, 2016, p. 228). In turn, the state-sanctioned projects are perceived by the other two strands as developmental encroachments. One of the local activists suggests,

My rivers and my favorite natural locations associated with my childhood memories are erased from existence in this present developing era. Similarly many like me in this country lost their rivers and memories due to various anthropogenic factors and current visions of development.

This narrative underlines the tendency prevalent in environmental governance to downplay ecocultural associations (see Hoffmann, 2020, Chapter 9 in this *Handbook* for more on the importance of water and ecocultural memory and the detrimental impacts of development). Further, the analysis of the impact of state-sanctioned interventions breaks the homogeneity of the notion of the Anthropocene at a local level in the Global South by highlighting who is powerful, who resists, and how power is enacted at this particular scale.

In highlighting the dialectic between changing spatial and ecological materialities of the Godavari and ecocultural identity, this chapter unveils the inherent fluidity of ecocultural identity. The diversification of civic environmentalism after the Kumbh Mela – due to continuous ecological changes of the Godavari – into river-centric, religious, and other-focused groups reflects the influence of different ecocultural categories of identification with environmental subjectivities. This chapter demonstrates that one way to help to unravel power hierarchies and socioecologically unjust geographies in cities is to examine environmental changes through embodied and enacted behaviors of state and non-state actors. Moreover, as cities emerge as paramount governance sites in the Anthropocene, there is a need to embed local solutions, and emergent context-specific ecocentric ecocultural identities, within the broader framework to inform and improve global environmental governance.

Notes

- 1 In India, cities are classified on the basis of their population. The current categories are X or Tier I, with population 5 million and above, Y or Tier II, 0.5 million to 5 million, and Z or Tier III, with population below 0.5 million.
- 2 The concept of the ‘world-class’ city highlights the aspirations of the city to become part of the league of major cities in the globalized economy. This neoliberal phenomenon is often manifested in economic policies designed to intensify and accelerate capital accumulation in the hands of a few and in turning cities into competitors. The mass reconfiguration of urban spaces, waterfront developments, and privatization processes are a reflection of this interurban competition (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Jenks et al., 2013).

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Competing models of ecocultural belonging in highland Ecuador

Joe Quick and James T. Spartz

The Lago Verde Quilotoa Center for Community Tourism (CTC Quilotoa) is a trade association formed by Indigenous Kichwa entrepreneurs from the Ecuadorian highlands. Named after the emerald green lake that shimmers within the caldera of the inactive Quilotoa volcano, the association takes responsibility for building, maintaining, and managing tourism-related resources and infrastructure. The CTC Quilotoa asserts the authority to physically exclude from the community any business ventures that are not run by its member households, to control the admission of visitors to the site, and to administer local development and conservation projects. Local authority of the CTC Quilotoa is such that it occasionally takes de facto responsibility for certain functions of the comuna (legally-defined community) of Ponce-Quilotoa. Its exercise of authority in local decision-making processes makes the CTC Quilotoa an attractive point of local contact for many branches of the Ecuadorian government.

In late June 2014, when the Ministry of Environment (MAE) sought to promote its Socio Bosque conservation program to Quilotoans, it dispatched a delegation to a general assembly meeting of the CTC Quilotoa. As the MAE visitors explained during their presentation, Socio Bosque and its subsidiary programs offer economic incentives to peasant and Indigenous communities in return for contractually binding commitments to conserve forests and other native ecosystems. In this case, Quilotoans interested in joining would be enrolled in the Socio Páramo subprogram, which is specifically dedicated to high-altitude grasslands known as páramos. Quilotoans with clear title to their lands could join individually, but the MAE delegates hoped to enroll the CTC Quilotoa as an institutional socio (member/partner).

In several respects, the CTC Quilotoa would seem an ideal candidate for inclusion in Socio Páramo. Most notably, the trade association and its members have an economic interest in protecting the páramos surrounding the lake that draws tourists to the community. Their interests speak directly to MAE officials' characterization of Socio Bosque 'as part of a strategy that seeks to encourage conservation, while at the same time reconciling the apparent duality between conservation and development' (SPN, n.d., p. 2). Moreover, the CTC Quilotoa has demonstrated institutional capacity and political will to invest in the collective advancement of its members through community-oriented development projects, so it is well prepared to meet the requirement that institutional enrollees in Socio Bosque create and adhere to a community investment plan for disbursements received through the program.

Nonetheless, the general assembly of the CTC Quilotoa declined to enroll their organization in Socio Bosque even as the CTC Quilotoa president assured the MAE delegates that he and his neighbors are committed to protecting their lands. This rejection was not without context or precedent. For instance, the assembled heads of household who attended the June 2014 meeting undoubtedly recalled how they successfully pulled together to resist efforts of past MAE officials to eject Quilotoans from the Ilinizas Ecological Reserve, the boundaries of which were formed around the fledgling community in 1996. Such past conflicts with MAE and other Ecuadorian government ministries have predisposed Quilotoans to distrust the exercise of governmental authority over their lands, and some may have flatly rejected any proposal made by government agents. Close consideration of such conflicts, however, reveals they are not inevitable. Rather, these conflicts arise out of the inattention governmental officials and policies pay to Quilotoans' ecocultural identities – their culturally and historically informed senses of belonging within a vast web of social-ecological relations and their understanding of the rights, obligations, and inequities that arise out of their location within that web.

In this chapter, we use the June 2014 meeting between CTC members and MAE delegates to illustrate how Quilotoans' ecocultural identities arise at the intersection of multiple understandings of responsibility toward the windswept páramos of Ecuador's rural Andes. We focus on three major elements of Quilotoan ecocultural identity construction. As Indigenous Kichwa people, Quilotoans are the inheritors of an Andean agrarian worldview prompting them to join with people of neighboring communities to celebrate annual cycles of exchange of vital energies between human communities and the páramos. As members of the CTC Quilotoa, they take collective responsibility for managing the infrastructure and natural resources upon which their tourism-oriented livelihoods depend. As citizens of Ecuador and residents within the Ilinizas Ecological Reserve, they are subject to conservation programs administered by ministries of the Ecuadorian government. Quilotoans' rejection of Socio Bosque typifies the conflicts that emerge at points of disjuncture among these regimes of eco-governmentality (Ulloa, 2005).

Based on extensive ethnographic and oral history research conducted by Joe Quick between 2012 and 2015, our discussion of Quilotoans' multifaceted ecocultural identities proceeds in stages. We begin with a brief sketch of our theoretical approach to ecocultural identities. We then examine traditional Kichwa agrarian relationships to the páramo as celebrated through the fiesta of Corpus Christi; the resource management practices developed by the CTC Quilotoa as a Kichwa membership organization; and the approach to conservation embraced by the governmental architects and implementers of Socio Páramo. We draw these threads together in a discussion of Quilotoans' multi-faceted ecocultural identities and conclude by reflecting on how Kichwa activists and intellectuals understand their perspectives on community development in relation to global discourses of economic advancement and environmental protection. We argue that Quilotoans do see themselves as social partners in the páramo, but they do so in modes that went unrecognized by the visiting MAE officials.

Social-ecological worlding

We regard ecocultural identity in relational terms as an individual and/or collective sense of belonging within a world defined by complex social-ecological relations. This perspective is inspired by the Andean metaphysical concept of *pacha* (world) and informed by a recent theoretical shift in the humanistic social sciences toward concerns about worlding – the constitution of social-ecological worlds (Blaser, 2016; Tsing, 2010). *Pacha* entails the understanding that: (1)

a world is defined by the geographic and temporal extension of systems of meaningful relations among human and non-human beings; (2) worlds are distinct from one another to the extent they are governed by different systems of meaningful relations; (3) worlds interact to the extent that systems of meaningful relations overlap or come into conflict; and, (4) worlds may be nested within one another to the extent that one system of meaningful relations is contained by another system or systems of relations (see Allen, 1998). Emerging theoretical frameworks treat worlding practices as conscious or unconscious determinations about which relationships matter and how they matter. Such frameworks explore how human actions, understandings, and identities take shape according to which relationships are regarded as meaningful within a particular world (Blaser, 2016; Tsing, 2010), how ‘friction’ characterizes the contact zones among worlds (Tsing, 2005); and how traditional social scientific scholarship is hampered by modernist worlding practices (Ingold, 2013).

Bureaucratic land management programs such as Socio Bosque belong to the modernist worlding project that has dominated Western thought since the Enlightenment. As Latour (1993) writes, this project establishes ‘a separation between the scientific power charged with representing things and the political power charged with representing subjects’ (p. 29). In this worldview, the concept and practice of natural resource management belongs within the former category: resources are things, and their management is accomplished through apolitical applications of scientific techniques. This logic renders modernist bureaucracies largely blind to non-modernist worlding projects such as those of Indigenous peoples who understand themselves as enmeshed in more-than-human webs of sociality. Consequently, the relations that many Indigenous people maintain with non-human beings are routinely misrecognized or disregarded by modernist bureaucracies. Although there may emerge points of productive miscommunication (Nadasdy, 2011), it is common for cosmopolitical confrontations to emerge in which incommensurable worlding projects disrupt one another (de la Cadena, 2015; Blaser, 2016). Given the persistent social, political, and intellectual marginalization of Indigenous peoples within modern states, bureaucracies like Ecuador’s governmental ministries often displace the worlding practices of Indigenous people such as the Kichwa residents of Quilotoa.

In efforts to defend their territories and the systems of more-than-human relations that predominate within those territories, Indigenous people globally have sometimes found common cause with international environmental activist networks. However, many non-Indigenous activists judge Indigenous people as authentic only to the extent that they enact the role of ‘natural conservationists’ (Conklin & Graham, 1995, p. 697). Indigenous activists and Indigenous politicians are well aware of these expectations and many are adept at deploying the images and discourse of the ‘ecological native’ as ‘a useful and effective means of Indigenous self-representation in non-Indigenous arenas’ (Ulloa, 2005, p. 134). However, this tactic can be risky: as Yeh and Bryan (2015) write, environmentalist renderings of Indigenous peoples’ relationship with ecological systems ‘can become a form of eco-incarceration that denies the possibility of modernity to those who are deemed authentically Indigenous’ (p. 536).

As Radcliffe (2012) points out, ‘the authority of subaltern perspectives remains subject to the epistemic violence associated with colonialism’ (p. 247) even when Indigenous peoples’ social-ecological identities are celebrated. Consequently, Western social scientists often find it difficult to understand Indigenous worlding practices. Nadasdy (2007) writes, ‘Even as we argue for the importance and legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge and practices, our own theories remain rooted in Euro-American ontological assumptions that are fundamentally incompatible with them’ (p. 26). However, recent scholarship in the humanities and social

sciences has begun to embrace non-modernist understandings of how human and non-human lives are entangled, allowing scholars to open themselves more fully to Indigenous ontologies.

Our adoption of the Andean concept of *pacha* represents an effort to make explicit such an embrace of Indigenous worlding practices. This framework takes as self-evident that social and ecological relations are inseparable. It regards friction between worlds as simultaneously creative and disruptive, prompting consideration of how worlds are remade through contact and exchange. This perspective also highlights the nesting of worlds within one another, providing a frame for understanding how the perennial conflicts between Indigenous people (such as the Quilotoans) and state bureaucracies (such as the MAE) unfold in larger, encompassing systems of relations.

Like other Indigenous peoples, Quilotoans' ecocultural identities are continually shaped and reshaped by a history of contact among ethical codes originating in disparate worlds. This chapter explores how Quilotoan ecocultural identities emerge through cosmopolitical confrontations among these worlds. We illustrate how Quilotoan lives and identities are shaped by non-modern Indigenous cosmology, Quilotoans' interactions with modernist institutions of Ecuador, Kichwa histories of grassroots struggle in response to Indigenous peoples' ongoing marginalization within Ecuador, and increasing contact with national and international flows of social, financial, cultural, and epistemic capital. Each section begins with descriptive fieldnotes from the CTC Quilotoa meeting, which itself forms a core part of the data for this chapter.

Socio Páramo

The leader of the delegation from the Ministry of Environment, a white-mestiza woman, was assisted by an Indigenous man. Both spoke with confidence and appeared to be well informed about the project they were there to promote, but the assistant's primary role that day was to translate between Spanish and Kichwa. Once the locals in attendance had settled into the lines of white plastic chairs that are set up before each general assembly meeting of the CTC Quilotoa, the leader of the delegation began her presentation by explaining the basic provisions of the Socio Páramo program.

Socio Páramo is a subprogram of Socio Bosque, a national conservation initiative established in 2008 by the MAE, which is dedicated to 'the delivery of an economic incentive to peasants and Indigenous communities that voluntarily agree to the conservation and protection of their native forests, páramos, or other vegetation' (SPN, n.d., p. 2). The subprogram was added in 2009 to adjust incentive structures related to characteristics of land tenure in the highlands and the unique challenges of high-altitude grassland stewardship. Socio Manglar, a subprogram focused on coastal mangroves, was added in 2014 for similar reasons.

Participants in Socio Bosque and its subprograms may enroll as individual landowners, as legally recognized communities, or as collective organizations. To join, an individual landowner must submit copies of their *cédula* (national identification card), information for an active bank account into which disbursements will be automatically deposited, formal title and a map of the land they will enroll, documents relating to any mortgage on the land in question, and a plan for how they will use the incentives. A community or organization must submit similar documents, as well as a copy of its official statutes and an official act in which the institution's general assembly certifies both the decision to enroll and a community-oriented investment plan.

Contracts are for 20 years and are designed to renew automatically. Enrollees take responsibility for not cultivating, burning, hunting, grazing animals, or introducing exotic species within the registered land. Participants also agree to permit government officials to monitor their (non)use of the land, and to promptly file a report if the land is sold or adversely affected by the intentional or accidental actions of the landowners or others. Enrollees pledge to adhere to the investment plans submitted during enrollment, comply with environmental legislation, and submit sworn statements annually affirming they have followed all rules. Upon breach of contract, enrollees may be held responsible for repayment of part or all of the disbursements received. For its part, the MAE takes responsibility for transferring incentives directly to the bank account provided at the time of enrollment, monitoring enrollees' adherence to contractual responsibilities, and providing limited assistance during the registration process.

Although scholars generally discuss Socio Bosque and its subprograms in the context of payment for ecosystem services programs (e.g., Bremer et al., 2014), the administrators of Socio Bosque carefully avoid the term 'payment.' Bureaucrats point out that, unlike cases of emissions trading or carbon credits, the ecological functions Socio Bosque seeks to conserve are not bought or sold as commodities. Administrators prefer to speak about the disbursement of incentives, in the absence of which 'landowners find themselves under great pressure to put their forests [and other landholdings] to other uses' (SPN, n.d., p. 2). From this perspective, Socio Bosque and its subprograms are comparable to the suite of conditional cash transfers that became a cornerstone of Ecuadorian social welfare policy during the 2007–2017 presidential administration of Rafael Correa. In such programs, cash disbursements are meant to influence Ecuadorian citizens by encouraging certain behaviors and discouraging others.

The tedious and time-consuming engagements with state bureaucracy required of participants in Socio Páramo and other cash disbursement programs initiated during the Correa presidency 'often convey a state demand for compliancy by governing recipients' time and behaviors' (Falconer, 2018, p. 325). In the case of Socio Bosque, target behaviors are precisely those most deeply rooted in the ecocultural identities of rural people. The program seeks to replace histories of agrarian land use practices with a preservationist ethic of non-use – an historically fraught version of nature conservation (Neumann, 2015) – that punishes those who use land for agricultural purposes. As Stolle-McAllister (2015) writes,

By signing long-term contracts with the state, Indigenous communities not only are compromising their philosophical principles about their relationships with nature but also, in a sense, voluntarily giving up their rights to local autonomy.

(p. 22)

To understand why Quilotoans were reluctant to enroll in Socio Bosque, therefore, we must consider existing social-ecological relations that the program would interrupt and the history of institution-building upon which their collective authority to manage those relations rests. Thus, we turn to a discussion of Corpus Christi, an annual celebration of human exchanges with the páramo.

Corpus Christi

The leader of the delegation spoke clearly throughout her presentation, but her attitude was patronizing toward her audience. She repeatedly told them to pay attention and, on several

occasions, asked whether they were distracted by thinking about the Corpus Christi festivities that were underway in the parish center of Zumbahua. Accustomed to such treatment by the agents of governmental and non-governmental agencies, the Quilotoans in attendance patiently tolerated her comments. The speaker's patronizing attitude was stymied only once, when she asked whether anyone knew the source of their drinking and irrigation water. She seemed to expect the Quilotoans to be ignorant of the role the páramo plays in regulating local hydrology, but she received a nuanced description of the local water cycle from the president of the organization. Stumbling over her words for a moment, she explained she had asked the question because sometimes children think water simply comes from the faucet, which isn't true. Then she responded to the mistake she had expected but no one had made. She explained that the páramo acts like a sponge, and regained her composure by asking, 'Do you know how a sponge absorbs water?'

The speaker's patronizing attitude aside, she might have been right in suspecting that the Quilotoans were thinking about Corpus Christi. After all, the other big item on the agenda that morning was to plan for the CTC Quilotoa's participation in the grand civic parade that was scheduled to take place the following weekend in the parish center of Zumbahua during the culmination of the Corpus Christi festivities. What the speaker probably did not know is that the celebration of Corpus Christi in Zumbahua parish is intimately connected to the role that the páramo plays in the hydrology of the highlands. She did not seem to realize that she was asking her listeners to stop thinking about their annual celebration of human relationships with the páramo in order to listen to her talk about human relationships with the páramo.

According to Weismantel (1998), 'not a whisper is heard in the records of pre-Hispanic Indigenous life' in what is now Zumbahua (p. 60), the predominantly Kichwa parish to which Quilotoa is administratively subordinate. As Weismantel suggests, 'It is possible that the area was completely uninhabited, or that these páramo lands were exploited only by people who "belonged" elsewhere' (ibid.). In other words, prior to Spanish colonization of the northern Andes in the mid-sixteenth century, any people who used páramo resources probably understood their ecocultural identities as territorially rooted elsewhere. A permanent population developed only after social, economic, productive, and technological changes were wrought by Spanish colonization.

In the language we have adopted for this chapter, a new *pacha* or social-ecological world emerged in the wake of these changes. This period, during which the Indigenous Kichwa residents of the area were subjected to a system of debt servitude called *huasi-pungo*, lasted from the mid-seventeenth century until the mid-twentieth century. Contemporary Kichwa residents of Zumbahua refer to it as the *hacienda timpu* (time of the hacienda) or *patrones timpu* (time of the landowners), reflecting how social-ecological relations were dominated by the colonial Spanish-descent owners of large estates called haciendas. The ecocultural identities that Quilotoans have inherited from their Kichwa ancestors are rooted in the interwoven religious syncretism and agrarian livelihoods that took shape during this period.

Highland Kichwa identities are inseparable from Indigenous knowledge of the páramo's hydrological cycle. Weismantel (1997) writes about the cultural significance of 'springs and watersheds, places which parish residents have named and which they visit regularly' (p. 134). These are sacred sites of the páramo, and knowing them 'is a way of establishing an identity with the place and its human community' (ibid.). As Weismantel reports, Kichwa residents of Zumbahua may visit these sites in preparation for major fiestas such as Corpus Christi, a Catholic festival that takes place in late June and early July, which some Zumbahuans have begun to

call *Inti Raymi* (festival of the sun) as part of a broader Indigenous political effort to revive pre-Hispanic Andean celebrations marking annual phases of the sun connected to the Andean agricultural calendar. In contemporary Zumbahua, *Corpus Christi* marks the harvest season and celebrates the exchange of vital forces between the páramo and the human community.

A painting by Klever Latacunga of Quilotoa illustrates how traditional ecocultural identities continue to inform present-day Kichwa celebrants' understandings of *Corpus Christi*. Klever is among the most accomplished tourist-oriented artists in Quilotoa, and relishes the opportunity to tackle projects that stretch his repertoire beyond the relatively simple pastoral scenes that many tourists prefer. He enthusiastically accepted the commission when chapter co-author Joe Quick asked him to reproduce a scene Joe had captured in a photo during the 2014 celebration of *Corpus Christi* in the parish seat of Zumbahua.

Both versions of the scene – the photo and the painting – show a bull being released into the temporary corral constructed for the *Corpus Christi* festivities in an open area just below the town center. This and the other bulls released into the ring every afternoon throughout the fiesta are regarded as ‘the denizens of the páramo’ (Weismantel, 1997, p. 130), so their arrival in the town center is a potent symbol of the exchange between the páramo and the human community. Both versions of the scene show a crowd of Zumbahua residents watching as the *hombre gordo* (fat man), a fiesta character that accompanies the ritual sponsor of each day's festivities, prepares to dodge an anticipated charge by the bull.



Figure 21.1 Photo of 2014 *Corpus Christi* bullfight in Zumbahua.

Source: Photo by Joe Quick.

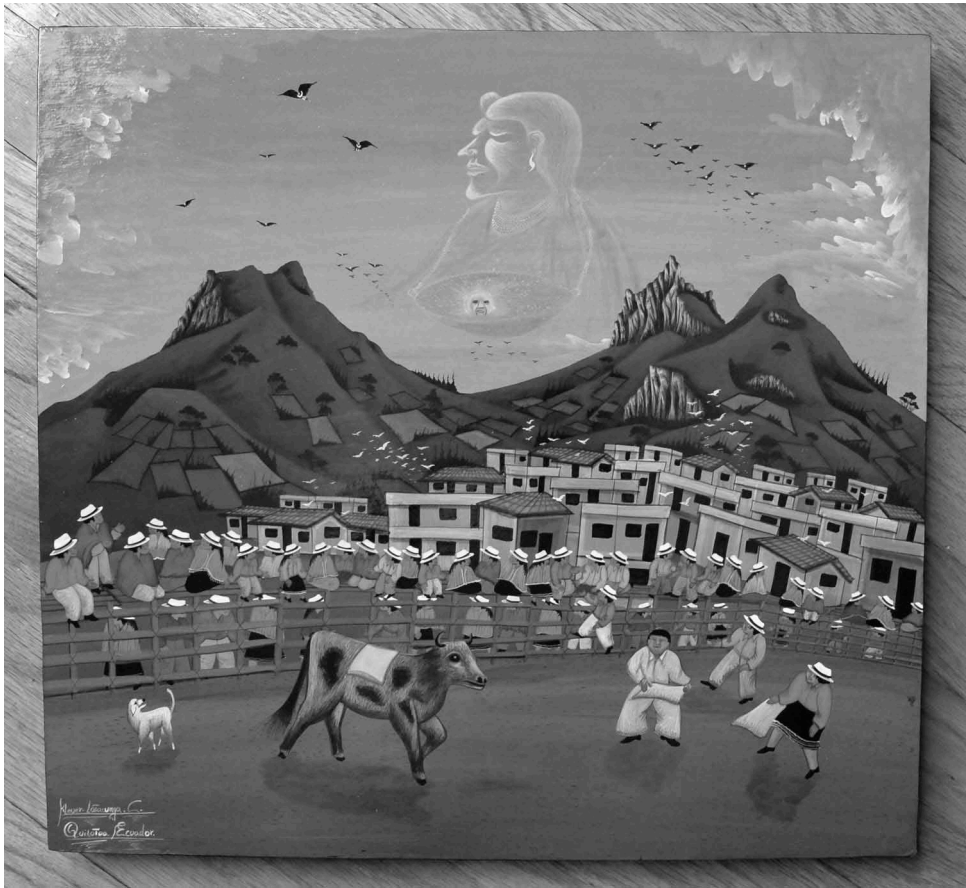


Figure 21.2 Painting based on Figure 21.1.

Source: Painted by Klever Latacunga; in the personal collection of Joe Quick.

Klever's painted version of the scene introduces several important adjustments to Joe's photographed version. For instance, the *guaricha*, a female companion character to the *hombre gordo*, was cut out of the scene by the composition of the original photo, so Klever added her back into the scene. He also added a depiction of two supernatural entities in the sky above. The larger, transparent figure is an anthropomorphic manifestation of the *Pachamama*. As the most encompassing *pacha*, the *Pachamama* may be regarded as the totality of all biosocial relations in the cosmos. A cord around the *Pachamama*'s neck supports a large bowl full of grains at her bosom. The second character is *Tayta Inti* – father sun – shining through the bowl, imbuing the grains with his energy as he observes the festival below.

Drawing on Colloredo-Mansfeld's (2011) exchanges with painters from nearby *Tigua*, we can infer that Klever made these changes to the original scene because elements of the original photographic composition introduced 'omissions or false connections' to the scene in the eyes of the *Kichwa* artist (p. 14). Most obviously, the presence of the *hombre gordo* didn't make sense without the *guaricha*, so she needed reintroduction. In the same way,

including supernatural entities in the sky must be understood as meaning-making rather than mere embellishment. Indeed, Klever chose these characters with clear intention: as he was working on the painting, he commented that he first thought to fill the space in the upper portion of the painting with a hummingbird but then decided the Pachamama was more appropriate. The Pachamama and Tayta Inti embody vital forces facilitating the agricultural bounty that the Corpus Christi fiesta celebrates; the energy that Tayta Inti imparts to the grains in the bowl around Pachamama's neck evokes the larger flow of vital energies upon which agriculture in Zumbahua depends.

In other words, Klever Latacunga's painting of Corpus Christi depicts a celebration of the web of more-than-human relations within which native Kichwa residents of Zumbahua parish have traditionally understood themselves to belong. Yet the worlding practices that inform modernist bureaucratic projects to manage and preserve natural resources do not allow for the participation in social life of entities such as Tayta Inti and the Pachamama because these entities violate the separation of ecology and society into distinct spheres of interaction. Thus, when the MAE delegate insisted that her Quilotoan listeners stop thinking about Corpus Christi and attempted to teach them about the hydrological cycles of the páramo, two worlding projects came into friction. Whether or not she was aware of doing so, her admonishment of Quilotoans for thinking about Corpus Christi was a direct act of epistemological violence against the worlding practices Klever depicted in his painting.

We discuss below how such acts perpetuate the historical colonization of Indigenous ecocultural identities in Ecuador. However, traditional Kichwa understandings of the more-than-human world were not the primary site of contention that led to Quilotoans' rejection of the MAE invitation to join Socio Páramo. Rather, the Quilotoans who spoke out most vociferously against the MAE delegates did so from the perspective of ecocultural identities rooted in the local histories of institution building that have shaped the CTC Quilotoa's exercise of territorial authority over the páramo spaces within which its members pursue their livelihoods in the tourism industry (Colloredo-Mansfeld et al., 2018). We turn to their concerns in the next section.

Kichwa institution building

Once the delegation from the Ministry of Environment had finished their presentation, they opened up the floor for comments and questions. Most of the Quilotoans' questions focused on pragmatic concerns. In their responses, the MAE delegates gave voice to the legal authority of the ministry they were there to represent. When an elderly Quilotoan asked why they could not plant pine and eucalyptus for much-needed firewood, the leader of the MAE delegation responded that it is illegal to plant non-native species above a certain altitude. When other listeners asked how the government would ensure the participation of everyone, the MAE delegate said her ministry cannot compel Quilotoans to join Socio Páramo, but it has the right to enforce laws restricting the cultivation of land within the boundaries of the Ilinizas Ecological Reserve. If the MAE were to exercise this authority more than it has in the past, she suggested, Quilotoans would have to cease their use of lands within 500 meters of the volcanic caldera without receiving any disbursements from Socio Páramo.

Visibly frustrated, a small group of Quilotoans who were old enough to remember the end of the hacienda period complained loudly that they had suffered under the labor exploitation of the hacienda and that their long struggle to gain control of their land gave them the right to make their own decisions about how to use it. They angrily stormed out. It had become clear that the CTC Quilotoa would not join the Socio Páramo program as an organization, so the president of the organization

concluded this part of the assembly meeting by telling the MAE visitors that whether the program turned out to be possible or not, 'we want to safeguard the protected area.'

From a strategic perspective, it was a mistake for the MAE officials to invoke the legal authority that the ministry exercises over the Ilinizas Ecological Reserve. To understand why, we must consider how Quilotoans understand the source of their own authority to make decisions about protecting the páramo lands upon which their post-agrarian livelihoods in tourism depend. As the most vocal opponents of enrollment in Socio Páramo made clear during their protest, this authority is rooted in the struggle to create viable livelihoods.

This struggle – involving the individual and household-level pursuit of fulfilling livelihoods as well as community-level histories of institution building – took shape in response to severe agricultural land shortages in the Ecuadorian highlands following agrarian reforms instituted in the mid-twentieth century. Although these reforms put an end to the abuses of the hacienda timpu and granted land title to former hacienda peons, they were not designed with the best interests of Indigenous agriculturalists in mind. Most former peons received only small plots of low soil quality. They also lost access to the water, pasture, and other resources of the hacienda. Many households were forced to employ increasingly intensive farming techniques, which sustained human life but depleted the land.

Then, as overburdened plots were divided through inheritance, Kichwa agriculturalists were compelled to undertake illegal encroachments on public lands and expand the agricultural frontier farther and farther into the páramo. Weismantel (1998) reported that by the 1980s, Zumbahua residents regarded 'the lack of adequate farmland to be one of the most pressing problems they face' (p. 40). The situation deteriorated through the 1990s, by which point Zumbahua and its neighboring parishes constituted 'the poorest region in all of the Ecuadorian highlands' (Sánchez Parga, 2002, p. 16). Poverty and landlessness put increasing pressure on young people to leave their communities in search of wage labor in the city or on the coast, and contributed to the fraying of social ties in the parish.

Given limited resources, local leaders had few options when seeking to stem the flow of young people out of their natal communities. In an effort to reduce outmigration, local leaders decided to formalize the encroachment of several young households on the pastureland along the caldera rim of the Quilotoa volcano, parceling out the remainder of the site among other recently married couples. The low productivity and small size of these plots caused many young couples to rent or sell their land in order to pursue livelihoods elsewhere, but a few stalwart couples invented new livelihoods for themselves by offering guide services, food, and lodging in their homes to the tourists who began arriving in greater numbers to visit the volcanic lake. Control of the plots closest to the volcano's rim made these innovators 'like owners of Quilotoa,' according to one local informant.

Soon, the so-called owners were challenged by a group of students, who enlisted the help of their teacher and a parish priest to help them learn to paint in the folkloric art style that had spread from nearby Tigua to Quilotoa. The students came to call themselves 'founders' of Quilotoa sometime after 1988, when they registered the Association of Painters and Weavers of Quilotoa through the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture, and Fisheries. The young 'founders' deployed the *personería jurídica* (legal personhood) of their new association strategically by forcing the 'owners' to join the organization, thereby establishing collective control over the budding tourist economy in Quilotoa.

When the Ecuadorian Institute of Forests, Natural Areas, and Wildlife (INEFAN) established the Ilinizas Ecological Reserve in 1996, it designated Quilotoa as the smallest of the reserve's three sectors, consisting of the lake and 'a radius of approximately 500 meters around it' (INEFAN, 1996). INEFAN officials insisted that in order to protect the land within the reserve, all Quilotoans were required to move their homes and businesses outside of the reserve's boundaries, but Quilotoans insisted they had the right to stay. As the conflict intensified, Quilotoans reorganized their trade association as the Artisan Center of Ponce-Quilotoa through the Ministry of Foreign Trade, Industrialization, Fisheries, and Competitiveness. They also reached out and received support from the Indigenous and Campesino Movement of Cotopaxi. The issue came to a head when the Ecuadorian state dispatched military troops in support of INEFAN; Quilotoans responded by seizing an INEFAN representative, holding him for several days until troops were withdrawn. In the end, INEFAN ceased its demands for relocation in exchange for the Artisan Center's commitment to manage natural resources within the crater.

Over the years, Quilotoans have reorganized their organization several times (Collor-edo-Mansfeld et al., 2018). Subsequent reorganizations have not been prompted by events as dramatic as the standoff with INEFAN, but Quilotoans have remained consistent in their institutional assertion of authority over the volcano. Much of this authority is rooted in Quilotoans' demonstrated capacity to create, maintain, and control access to touristic infrastructure, including a well-maintained path from the crater rim to the lake-shore, running water, an information booth, a communally run restaurant, two communally run hotels, a handicrafts gallery, a spacious parking lot, a scenic overlook, and a boathouse for kayaks. Construction and maintenance of these resources entails extensive management of social-ecological relations, providing livelihood opportunities to members of the CTC Quilotoa and shaping its members' collective sense of belonging within those relations.

A key aspect of Quilotoan ecocultural identities is the assertion of the right to control the resources and infrastructure created through their investment of collective labor. Indeed, long-time members of the organization sometimes imply that newer members, having contributed relatively less labor, are less deserving of the benefits of membership. Such tensions notwithstanding, members of the CTC Quilotoa quickly form a united front whenever the institution's authority is threatened, because their individual livelihoods, their families' wellbeing – indeed, their very identities – depend on continued access to the resources that CTC Quilotoa controls.

Quilotoans' exercise of collective authority over human-created resources generates *de facto* territorial control of the site and fosters a collective sense of stewardship over the social-ecological world in which they live and work. This aspect of Quilotoans' ecocultural identities could be understood as essentially modernist, because it results from struggles over sovereignty – the right to exercise instrumental control over local lands. Yet this does not mean that Quilotoan institution-building disrupts traditional non-modernist ecocultural identities in the same way that bureaucratic modernism often does. As we have discussed elsewhere (Quick & Spartz, 2018), throughout Ecuador the Indigenous activists and intellectuals who advocate for revitalizing traditional Indigenous cultural forms, social organization, and ecocultural identities have often begun their careers as leaders in grassroots institutions similar to the CTC Quilotoa. By matching the modernist stance of governmental ministries such as the MAE, Indigenous institutions generate the authority that they require in order to support new ways for Indigenous people to engage old and enduring social-ecological relationships. This brings us to our concluding discussion.

Inventing ways of being Indigenous into the future

In its public presentation of Socio Bosque, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Environment links the objectives of the program to *sumak kawsay*, a Kichwa conceptualization of living well that is drawn from Indigenous worlding projects and enshrined in Ecuador's 2008 constitution. Indigenous scholars and activists derived this discourse of good living from the same ancestral Andean worldview that Klever Latacunga invoked in his painting of Corpus Christi. Yet, as we have discussed elsewhere (Quick & Spartz, 2018), the form in which *sumak kawsay* is invoked in national development plans and conservation initiatives does not reflect the notion of good living that emerged out of Ecuadorian Indigenous communities' generations-long struggle to improve their lot. In many respects, governmental deployments of *sumak kawsay* actually do symbolic violence to Indigenous worlding projects.

When the MAE delegation visited Quilotoa to promote the Socio Páramo program, the speaker scolded Quilotoans for thinking about the annual celebration of their relationship with the páramo through the ecocultural relations embodied by the Pachamama. The MAE representative insisted on communicating the value of the páramo in modernist terms, and invoked governmental authority over the páramos of Quilotoa by referencing the laws defining natural resource management within the Ilinizas Ecological Reserve. In other words, in the course of a few minutes, she rejected both the traditional Andean conception of good living through harmonious ecocultural relations that Quilotoans have inherited from their Indigenous ancestors, as well as the sense of stewardship over ecocultural relations that Quilotoans have gained through their contemporary institutional efforts to build better lives.

In the Ecuadorian context, an essential purpose of an Indigenous association like the CTC Quilotoa is to establish and defend territory, understood here as 'a space for social relationships with each of the ecosystem's elements' (García Hierro & Surrallés, 2005, p. 20). In other communities, enrollment in Socio Páramo has been found to bolster institutional capacities of such associations, because the program provides funding to support the 'long-term continuation of the communities' pre-existing desire to conserve' (Bremer et al., 2014, p. 157). However, in the offhand comments made by Quilotoans in the days after their 2014 meeting with the MAE delegation, it was clear they felt joining the Socio Páramo program would undercut the advances toward the true *sumak kawsay* of Indigenous revitalization that have been achieved through generational struggle and collective participation in the CTC Quilotoa.

As García Hierro and Surrallés (2005) point out, 'superimposed on Indigenous territorial space are now many other spaces in which alternative identities and symbolic ties have been built' (p. 9). Worlding projects that define these spaces are interlinked. Thus, traditional Andean understandings of humans' co-participation in the great web of social-ecological relations that make up the Pachamama is revitalized by the territorial authority asserted through Kichwa histories of institution building, which responds in part to the Ecuadorian state's injunction against practices of traditional agrarian land use. If, as we have suggested, ecocultural identity may be understood as a sense of belonging within worlds defined by complex, nested, contested, and reciprocal systems of social-ecological relations, then Quilotoan ecocultural identities are shaped by the superimposition of these dynamic and emergent worlding projects and cannot be considered, as modernist social science tends to do, as independent of ecological relations but instead as comprehensive heterogeneous social-ecological worlds within worlds. Quilotoans understand themselves within webs of human and more-than-human relations at the local, regional, national, and international scales. They engage the Pachamama as well as the Ministry of Environment. They participate in constructing discourses of cultural memory and pursue the institutional

means to invent new ways of being Indigenous into the future. Each of these influences is omnipresent but emerges in unique contexts and configurations. In short, Quilotoan ecocultural identities arise out of efforts to negotiate perspectives and agency among diverse actors in plural worlds.

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Scapegoating identities in the Anthropocene

Leonie Tuitjer

Ecological crises have dominated the end of the last and beginning of the current century. Concerns over loss of biodiversity, acid rain, ozone depletion, and desertification have been among the most recent environmental emergencies. Moreover, anthropogenic climate disruption has altered ways we as humans think about our collective future. Climate crisis has added another level of risk and insecurity to human and non-human lives alike on a planetary scale (Alberts, 2011). Increasingly, scientists stress the role of the human species in such processes (Lenton, 2016), leading to a proposal by the Dutch chemist Paul Crutzen in 2000 to term the geological epoch we live in the Anthropocene (Zylinska, 2014). A distinct element defining this phase is human awareness of our role as geological agents. Humans, thus, have not only shaped various features of the Earth's landscape, but our activities now also can be recorded by digging deep into the geological strata that make up the planet. Oil extraction and the testing of atomic weapons are among some of the human activities conserved within the planet's layers (Yussof, 2017).

Yet critical scholarship rightfully was quick to point out that participation of humans in shaping the Anthropocene is differentiated along class, race, gender, and other lines (Haraway, 2015). Capitalist relations mediate the power of differentiated groups of people as geological agents, leading Moore (2017) to propose the alternative term Capitalocene. Within the Capitalocene, class lines are crucial to understanding how (economically) powerful individuals tend to be far more involved in setting the historical conditions under which the reshaping of the Earth for extracting profits is organized.

While Moore's insights are crucial for reminding us to pay attention to ways capitalist modes of production and economic power relations inform this age, I use the term Anthropocene as it is more widely used and furthermore offer another critical dimension. According to Zylinska (2014), the Anthropocene not only is a distinct geological phase but also functions as an 'ethical pointer' that forces us to critically reflect on particular and situated human responsibilities within the processes of ecological and geological unfoldings. The term Anthropocene refers to global, potentially devastating events that will impact humans unequally. In this way, I understand the Anthropocene as inviting reconsiderations of how ecological identities not only are formed along class lines under capitalist modes of production, but how they are embedded within wider ecocultural divides. Human identities thus emerge in conversation with changing ecological milieus and situated ecological knowledges

and practices. The concept of ecocultural identity can be used to reflect on these interactions among cultural-economic-ecological processes in which identities are constructed in the Anthropocene.

Hodson and Marvin (2010) have pointed out that the Anthropocene is a profoundly urban age in which not only well above half the Earth's human population lives in cities but cities also advance as key sites of ecological contestations and inequalities. Cities are highly complex, densely populated, yet unequal ecocultural systems comprised of urbanized flows of water, concrete, clay, infrastructures, and socio-cultural activities (Amin & Thrift, 2017). In short, cities must adapt to changing environments and climatic disruptions within the Anthropocene under conditions in which urban places are already fragmented and riddled with socio-ecological inequalities.

Extensive scholarship on urban ecological governance (e.g., Castán Broto, 2017; Bulkeley & Betsill, 2003) has demonstrated that cities play a key role in global governance processes to mitigate and adapt to climate disruptions and, furthermore, function as valuable sites of experimentation for new adaptation measures (Bulkeley & Castán Broto, 2013). The particular role of cities within debates on climate adaptation and transitions toward sustainable lifestyles was acknowledged by the UN's eleventh goal for sustainable development. Released in 2015, this goal strives to: 'Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable' (United Nations, 2015). Yet factors like urbanization, unequal development, and prevailing high degrees of informal living arrangements complicate urban quests for environmental adaptation in the Anthropocene. In particular, within cities of the so-called Global South, urban government interventions to enhance the resilience of particular neighbourhoods can lead to contestations and increase inequalities. Re-development for flood control of the riverfront in Jakarta in Indonesia, for example, has led to apprehension within the local urban poor population as they now are threatened with being evicted from the river banks to make room for more volatile urban flood levels (Padawangi et al., 2016). This chapter explores the contestations around ecocultural identities in a similar urban adaptation project as such projects reveal how conflictual urban adaptation can be in densely populated settlements. In doing so, I centre the concept of ecocultural identities to problematize the unequal power dynamics at work within such urban adaptation measures.

This chapter offers a case study on a community's struggle against being evicted from informal khlong (canal) settlements at Khlong Bang Sue in the city of Bangkok, Thailand.¹ As the Bangkok Municipality Administration (BMA) pushes for enhancing the flood resilience of the inner city by clearing settlements from the waterfront to widen the khlong, it trespasses on the livelihoods of urban poor communities. I argue that historical urban change under semi-colonial conditions, capitalist relations of power, and the misrepresentation of urban poor communities as environmentally harmful hampers a democratic and participatory development of urban flood adaptation. In particular, by ascribing negative ecocultural identities to the khlong communities in urban discourses and national addresses, the communities' chances to remain in their settlements are diminished.

The chapter is divided into seven sections. The first provides a brief background. As the Anthropocene is in part a temporal marker, the historical approach of this section outlines how Bangkok's gradual transformation from water-based to land-based city has had dire consequences for the city's flood vulnerability, as well as for the collective ecocultural identities of Bangkokians. In section two, I reflect upon the methodology used for this case study and introduce the research site. Section three illustrates how economic class relations underpin the ecocultural identity of the Khlong Bang Sue community and how these class relations influence processes of making the city more flood resilient. Section four shows how the

struggles over framing identities among the Khlong Bang Sue community, however, are irreducible to class relations and argues for an ecocultural understanding by demonstrating how the community tries to preserve and remember its water-based ecocultural khlong heritage. Section five foregrounds how a statement by the current military government negates these identities and presents khlong communities as threatening to the flood resilience of the city. Section six relates the eviction struggles and the contestations over framing ecocultural identities to wider debates on climate disruption and displacement in the Anthropocene. Finally, in section seven I conclude by arguing that urban flood adaptation is politically limited when ecocultural identities are misrepresented by powerful urban agents, turning communities into scapegoats of the Anthropocene. By focusing on critical insights into the politics of urban adaptation projects, this chapter contributes to understanding contextualized and classed constructions and contestations around ecocultural identities in the city spaces where an increasing majority of humans now dwell.

From fluvial ecocultural identity to sedentary modernity – and back?

Bangkok was founded in 1782 as the new capital polity of the Siamese kingdom after the fall of the former capital Ayutthaya (Terwiel, 2011). A (brief) history of the low-lying delta city begins not so much with the fixed state of the land, but with the fluidity of the Mea Nam Chao Phraya river that runs through it from north to south, bisecting the city. Water in Bangkok's history emerges as a material valued for its strategic as well as relational properties. The hydro-geo interface of the delta was strategically chosen by the ruling Chakri Dynasty to maximise the water's capacity, protect the polity, enable trade, and transport people and goods (Askew, 2002). Human-water relations, however, exceed the strategic/material and, furthermore, assumed a cultural, spiritual, and metaphorical status in the polity.

Water serves as a medium to connect and forge relations across bodies and scales, constantly spilling over and opening new lines for meaning, metaphor, and material relations (Strang, 2014). Bangkok's historical waterscape speaks of such a multiplicity of symbolic and material functions as it was simultaneously used for mundane travels, commercial activities, security, warfare, fishing, agriculture, religious ceremonies, and leisure (O'Neil, 2008). Crucially, the ecological hydro-milieu of the delta can be perceived as mutually enabling and shaping the identity, meaning making, and everyday experiences of the local population.

The multiple functions of water shaped the quotidian lifestyle and identity of the urbanites. In the early Bangkok period (1782–1850s), commoners lived in houseboats or raft houses on human-made khlongs or built stilted houses near the khlongs and Chao Phraya river (Askew, 2002; O'Neil, 2008). In Bangkok's fluvial heyday, shortly before the mid-nineteenth century, more than 7,000 houseboats populated the city, hosting a population of approximately 350,000 people (O'Neil, 2008). Life on rafts and houseboats revealed an adaptive logic to organizing urban environments, transport, and commerce in accordance with the environmental milieu of the city. Mobile floating homes had the distinct advantage of allowing commoners to simply follow the changing tides during dry or monsoon seasons. In Bangkok, urbanism was not achieved in spite of the liquid streams of the delta but rather enabled through such flows.

Yet this fluvial past was structured along rigid social hierarchies. Terrestrial living was predominantly reserved for members of the large royal family or for monks and novices of the temple (Terwiel, 2011). Moreover, the labour needed for maintaining the urban khlong infrastructure was predominantly appropriated from war slaves and through the local phrai system of serfdom (Noparatnaraporn & King, 2007). Thus, the ecocultural embeddedness of

this fluvial lifestyle was dependent on social hierarchies that mediated whose labour was appropriated to maintain the urban infrastructure and who could enjoy the benefits and protection of the khlong system. Even within the historical past of the city, the urban streams of water were thus entangled with wider systems of status, identity, and privilege.

Historical sources such as diaries, travel reports, and letters produced by *farangs* (Thai for international foreigners) offer a glimpse of the former fluvial capital. O'Neil (2008) draws on Joseph Conrad's memories of Bangkok's fluvial architecture that capture both the fascination as well as a feeling of awkwardness some Western travellers had in the water-based city:

Some of those houses of sticks and grass, like the nests of an aquatic race, clung to the shores, others seemed to grow out of the water; others again floated in long anchored rows in the very middle of the stream.

(Joseph Conrad, cited in O'Neil, 2008, p. 78)

The light materiality of the local architecture and the embeddedness of human life in the hydrological milieu served as markers of what Conrad perceived as an 'aquatic race.' Here the environmental milieu is singled out as a way of marking a people as distinctly different, and living with and within water was perceived by Conrad as the defining feature of the Thai population of the time. Within such a remark, the complex local assemblage of socio-economic, material, and more-than-human elements enrolled in enabling and (crucially) maintaining urban life in Bangkok (see reference to local slave labour above) were conflated. Such a reductionist and essentializing approach, which can be traced to various historical travel reports by *farangs* to the city (O'Neil, 2008) not only negates internal differences but also reified a racialized ecocultural 'otherness.' Over the centuries, this foreign notion of an aquatic lifestyle as some form of 'otherness,' distinct from a predominantly land-based Western (and thus modern) way of life, was taken up by the local elite (e.g., monarchy, civil, and military governments).

A series of events during the second half of the nineteenth century (including the signing of a free trade agreement with Great Britain in 1855 and French colonial threats in 1893) helped trigger a gradual turn away from a fluvial to a terrestrial organization of urban life in Siam (Terwiel, 2011). While conservative Thai scholars tend to congratulate historic Siamese rulers for their wise adoption of Western material culture, lifestyles, and practices to secure an independent Siam amidst colonial Southeast Asia, critical scholarship has produced more nuanced insights into the work of power and domination in this period (Winichakul, 1994, 2000; Lysa, 2004). Authors who speak of 'semi-colonialism' (Winichakul, 2000) stress the ambivalent role of the elite, in particular of the monarchy, in securing independence. In fact, the ruling dynasty embarked on a cultural modernization quest to appear as equals in the eyes of foreign powers and to escape the fate of colonization (Terwiel, 2011; O'Neil, 2008). Their quest for *siwilai* (a Thai transliteration of 'civilized') inspired both a transition toward Western artefacts and material culture as well as toward particular practices and scientific knowledges (e.g., cartography, ethnographic studies, astronomy) (Winichakul, 1994), displacing local wisdom, lifestyles, and cultures. The semi-colonial condition of Siam and the quest for *siwilai* combined put pressure on the Thai population – exercised from within – to conform to a more Western way of life, which consequently worked toward diminishing previously formed water-based ecocultural identities in the delta city.

Within the capital, this quest to appear modern and 'civilized' was most pronounced through the gradual terrestrial turn of the polity. Seeking affirmation from the *farang*

community, Bangkok's royal elite gradually embraced Western city planning schemes and implemented the building of boulevards and grand avenues along the palace for royal display of power and parades (O'Neil, 2008). As a consequence, the elite abandoned the affordances of water's relations that had previously turned Bangkok into a prosperous and environmentally well-adapted capital, where transport and housing was organized according to the ecological milieu of the delta. Moreover, modernizing the city turned the aquatic lifestyle and water-based ecocultural identities of the majority of Bangkokians into firmly terrestrial ones, promoting new, Western inspired 'modern' architectural principles.

Although the ancient network of khlongs was never fully destroyed, roads, boulevards, terrestrial intra-urban transport, the car, and Western-style buildings and houses gradually replaced most of the khlong infrastructure. After the end of absolutist rule of the Thai monarchy in 1939 and the renaming of Siam to Thailand, the subsequent military and (a few) civil rulers continued this terrestrial project. The period after World War II – seen as a period of great acceleration by some scholars theorizing the Anthropocene (Lenton, 2016) – coincides with Thailand's spectacular economic rise, which also led to a rise of carbon emissions and other environmental pollution in the capital. The onset of the Cold War and its geopolitical constellations of two opposing blocks (East vs. West) saw Thailand advance as the strongest ally of the United States in the region with far-reaching consequences. Discourses of development now replaced the quest for *siwilai*, prolonging a socio-cultural orientation toward Western lifestyles and material culture as well as architectural and infrastructural designs (Molle, 2005; Baker & Phongpaichit, 2009). Discourses of development were now heralded as promising economic prosperity across the country and, secondly, as a way to keep away the looming communist threat feared by the military governments of the 1960s and 1970s, by the monarchy that remained socially and culturally very influential in the country, and by Western allies. Development discourses were strategically used by powerful agents, as with the previous discourses of *siwilai*, to justify various government interventions (Handley, 2006). Equally similar to the historical quest for *siwilai*, development initiatives involved a series of infrastructural as well as cultural programmes. For example, hydrological initiatives (building dams, increasing irrigation networks outside of Bangkok) went hand-in-hand with organized educational expansion involving classes to teach Thais to be 'developed' citizens (*ibid.*).

Development within the capital city meant more and more roads were built. As a consequence, the urban waterscape deteriorated and lost most of its previous functions. Today, 'The city's 1,300+ khlongs (canals) contain a complex mix of both domestic and industrial waste' (Storey, 2012, p. 112), mainly functioning as open sewage. Khlongs' importance for enabling livelihoods, transport, fishing, and leisure activities, such as swimming or bathing, are severely diminished. Apart from a commercial transport service along the Sean Seab Khlong, and one or two smaller pilot projects to revitalise the waterways for transit, water transport has now almost completely disappeared within the city.

This historical transformation toward becoming a terrestrial city has had increasing negative effects on the urban ecology and is interlinked to trends of global climate disruption (Marks, 2011). Since the 1990s, Bangkok's reports on climate impacts have warned against the combined effects of greenhouse gas emissions (mainly from ground transport and waste), ground water depletion, and consequent subsidence (or slow sinking) of the city through the uncontrolled urban sprawl (Marks, 2011; Davivongs et al., 2012; Berquist et al., 2014). The grave effects were felt in 2011 when the Thai capital was severely impacted by one of the worst floods in its recent history with a total duration of 185 days. The monsoon brought 30 percent more rain than usual that year and was further intensified by four

tropical storms that hit the country between June and September. More than 600 people died in the course of the flood and the financial loss Thailand endured was calculated at US\$43 billion (Lertworawanich, 2012). When the water stagnated in the central plain and the greater Bangkok area, it put 20 million people, roughly 30 percent of the Thai population, at risk of being inundated by water (Gale & Saunders, 2013). The historical transformation of the city from water-based to a *siwilai*/developed capital thus painfully reveals its limits as the seasonal flood water no longer has any place to go. As urban floods within the Anthropocene increase (Marks, 2011), Bangkok is on the forefront of cities threatened by inundations. Bangkok specifically is haunted by its own historical transformation and the loss of adaptivity to floods this transformation entailed.

Various studies have since championed a revival of the past fluvial lifestyles – and the ecocultural identities that comprise living in stilted houses and houseboats along the city's *khlongs* – as more sustainable and flood adaptive (Berquist et al., 2014; McGrath, 2007; Thaitakoo & McGrath, 2010). Increasingly, a return to the water-based way of life in the city is seen as holding a key to combat the challenge of floods, although some authors critically reflect that revitalizing all waterways may not only be impractical but also involves an element of nostalgia for a (real or imagined) more sustainable past. Apart from revitalizing *khlongs* for fluvial living, the recently opened Millennium Park in the inner city provides a fresh project to combat increased urban flooding. The park contains retention basins below its surface to help absorb surplus water during the monsoon season to make way for water (Fullerton, 2018).

Yet, while such pilot projects as Millennium Park are well received within the media, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), backed by the national government, has predominantly initiated so-called 'hard measures' like flood walls and dykes (Wancharoen, 2017; Frederickson, 2015; Whittington, 2013, 2016). Along these hard measure lines, in the northern district of Huay Kwang, the BMA plans to enhance the drainage capacity of *Khlong Bang Sue* and *Khlong Lat Prao* by clearing the waterfront that is currently home to several informal *Khlong* communities.

This section has illustrated that Bangkok's political economic historical transformation from water- to land-based city holds the key to understanding the present day flooding challenges the city has to meet. Moreover, this urban transformation crucially involved the mobilization of ecocultural identities. Through semi-colonial influences and the quest for *siwilai*, for example, the water-based lifestyle in the city could be identified as 'other' to Western practises and lifestyles. This 'otherness' was readily associated with a racial difference by *farangs* and taken as a sign of un-*siwilai* by the local elite. Discourses of development, which further championed the terrestrial turn of the city and the subjugation of water's forces through modern irrigation technology and the building of dams within the country, further diminished the positive connotations of a water-based lifestyle and ecocultural identity.

Historically, the ecocultural identity of mainstream Bangkokians thus became increasingly alienated from the fluvial delta milieu. It is only now, in the age of the Anthropocene, that increasing flooding events like the 2011 flood trigger a hesitant debate among more progressive Thai academics, activists, and some institutions on the merits of a more water-based way of life. The powerful BMA and national government, however, seem to prefer hard measures like dykes and drains that prolong the subjugation of the flow of water and its separation from the city. The following section attends to the role of ecocultural identity formation in the struggles of the *Khlong Bang Sue* community to remain close to the *khlong* and defend its urban niche against an adaptation that involves only hard measures.

Exploring Khlong Bang Sue and Khlong Lat Prao through farang eyes

The following case study is based on six months of ethnographic observations, expert interviews with BMA officials, as well as an interview with the Thai professor Pongporn and national government employee Thongchai, walk-along interviews with community leaders Auntie Lek and Jumras, and several talks with khlong community residents during visits to the Bang Sue Khlong community conducted between October 2015 and February 2016. ‘Auntie Lek’ is a nickname, translating to ‘Little Aunt,’ which everyone in the community uses to refer to the community leader now in her 70s. Jumras (a male community leader in his 40s), Pongporn (a male Thai professor in his 60s), and Thongchai (a male city planner in his early 60s) gave me permission to use their first names in my writing as is common in Thailand. I gladly accepted their wishes to use the names they suggested in this text after careful discussion about their right to anonymity. The current military dictatorship in Thailand and their reported human rights abuses (Chachavalpongpun, 2014) make it necessary to refrain from giving too many other personal details. The aim of the research visit to Bangkok was to learn more about the relations between climate disruption and urban displacement. Without speaking Thai and with only few prior contacts in the city, this research was enabled through the support of two Chulalongkorn University students² who helped with translations.

I was first introduced to the BMA project along Khlong Bang Sue by two publicly engaged Thai academics who functioned as gatekeepers to the community. Joining them during community visits allowed me to reflect on my farang positionality and encouraged me to continuously check my approach to the community and my perspective on their struggles. As the community is situated within a busy – thoroughly Westernized – district dominated by skyscrapers, shopping malls, and inner urban highways, the small canal community at first appeared profoundly different from the rest of the city. Visiting their community centre and Auntie Lek’s home provided an important learning trajectory to rethink both my spatial and temporal imaginations of this ‘otherness’ as at first to me the community not only appeared stuck in a particular location but also stuck in (a past) time.

Following King and Dovey’s (2013) observation on informal space in Bangkok, Auntie Lek’s community not only is a bricolage of recycled building materials, do-it-yourself concrete paths, non-human animal dwellings, human housing, and community centres, but also a temporal bricolage where time appears as asynchronous, forming a time-space where past-present-future intermingle and co-exist. The repeated visits and exchanges helped me to appreciate the profound historical changes (e.g., urbanization, industrialization) that had not left the community untouched. Conversations with the Thai professors, Jumras, and Auntie Lek alerted me to the wider socio-political struggles in the city that focused on displacement and urban development and helped me better chart the complex socio-economic and institutional power relations that characterize the Thai capital. Gradually, I learned to use my farang eyes more critically and search both for commonalities and differences among the community’s way of life, their built environment, and ecocultural identities and other sites and people I met in the city. It became increasingly obvious that the specific struggles of the community echoed wider socio-ecological struggles not only within Bangkok but of the urban poor across the globe to (re)define their own needs, aspirations, and identities (Storey, 2012; Robbins, 2012; Martínez-Alier, 2002).

Through these encounters at Khlong Bang Sue, I also dived deeper into the literature on Bangkok’s khlong communities, which demonstrates wider patterns of informal khlong settlements and threats of eviction, stressing the relevance of conducting research on the topic. As Storey (2012) points out, data are limited on canal/khlong communities

‘but a 1998 Bangkok Canal Survey recorded that there were 184 canal settlements in Bangkok, made up of 11,653 households. This equated to an estimated population of 52,438 – although this figure is considered to be a serious undercount. Most khlong settlements are located on Royal Irrigation Department (RID) land, and thus are under constant threat of eviction for infrastructure development and canal works’

(p. 112)

Bangkok’s remaining waterscape is thus a veritable site of socio-political contestation where infrastructural projects of the government clash with people maintaining ecocultural identities tied to the waterscape. These clashes involve not so much violent physical encounters between the government and the people, but strategic struggles over framing the identity of Khlong people. As I argue in the next section, class relations and economic inequalities within the city form an important backdrop to the framing and (mis)representation of urban poor communities in Bangkok.

Class and eviction in the Anthropocene

As city planners and architects now view redigging the historical khlong infrastructure as key to enhancing Bangkok’s flood protection (Berquist et al., 2014; McGrath, 2007; Thaitakoo & McGrath, 2010), conflicts over the maintenance and preservation of the khlongs soar. Redigging the old khlongs, however, proves to be a tedious logistic and juridical affair, as senior government employee Thongchai, who works for the National Ministry of Town Planning, stated in an interview. Redigging khlongs, he explains, not only involves the eviction of urban poor communities but also forces the city to engage with wealthy, urban landlords:

THONGCHAI: So... today we try to bring the waterways back. But it is not easy. In particular, because of the land titles. [...] You can see the big buildings [built over old khlongs] and that means we would have to buy the big buildings and knock them down... So, the government does not want to do that.

INTERVIEWER: This seems to be a complicated juridical issue... So, may I ask... if I bought land here, would that mean that I automatically also own the waterways?

THONGCHAI: No. The waterways no one can claim. And you have a government declaration stating that. The waterways are national waterways. No one could ask for the land titles [for them]. But again, it becomes politics! [...] The most difficult thing is to talk to the landlords. Because those are millionaires who have the biggest land titles.

(Thongchai, January 2016, Bangkok)

As the interview continued, Thongchai remarked that resettling the urban poor seems easier to implement for the BMA than entering into a legal battle with well-off Bangkokian landowners. During this exchange, thus, the economic power structures at play are explicitly named, and it is clear they are currently complicating the efforts to flood adapt segments of the waterscape. These power structures can be read in the light of Roy’s (2011) analysis of urban informality as ‘a heuristic device that uncovers the ever-shifting urban relationship between the legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, authorized and unauthorized. This relationship is both arbitrary and fickle and yet is the site of considerable state power and violence’ (p. 233). Roy has long remarked that the shadow-deals and illegalities committed by urban elites are rarely punished in the same manner as the transgressions committed by the urban poor. The private appropriation of waterways, and their filling for creating larger

plots of land to develop shopping malls and condominiums, has been a major obstacle to enhancing the former drainage capacity of the urban khlongs (Davivongs et al., 2012).

Thongchai's upset remarks about the impossible task to reclaim the waterways shows that ecological urban adaptation efforts are often confronted with legal realities that exceed the power of local governance and, moreover, test the limits of the willingness of the state to exert power over the rich. Questions of class may become even more pronounced in the Anthropocene – or Capitalocene, to come back to Moore's proposed terminology – as ever increasing climate disruption appears to equip the Thai government with further legitimization to push for eviction of local poor communities along Khlong Bang Sue. As Thongchai's report suggests, for state and city administrations, evicting the urban poor appears politically and economically more feasible than engaging in a long legal battle over land titles with more powerful sections of the urban population.

The acute awareness of class-based marginalization also becomes apparent within interviews with Khlong Bang Sue residents themselves. Tucked away between skyscrapers and shopping malls in the busy district of Huay Kwang, Khlong Bang Sue runs slowly toward the Chao Phraya River. Behind every twist of the small lanes running through the community lurks the reality of social hardship, and socio-political and economic marginalization. Most families in the community live on 200–300 Thai Baht per day (approximately 6–8 Euros). Community leader Jumras explains how the marginalization of the community seems to be based on socio-economic disparities and social stigma. Jumras says: 'Economically, well ... we are all poor here' (Jumras, December, 2015, Bangkok) and he continues to express that he thinks this is one of the reasons why the BMA does not care much about their needs. Furthermore, drug abuse, poverty, and precarious jobs in massage parlours³ or on construction sites and in retail are common within the community, Auntie Lek reports. Combined, both stigma and poverty render the community alienated and in a weak position to fight against the BMA's plan to evict them to redig the khlong.

This perspective is further shared by academic and community activist Pongporn, who explains: 'The canal and [...] community [...] is kind of very slummy ... you know. Drugs and poverty and things like that' (Pongporn, January 2016, Bangkok). This remark is significant as poverty and social deprivation are brought together in spatial vocabulary. Such remarks fit into urban discourses that link poverty to other social problems (drugs, crime, etc.). Specifically, with linking poverty to lifestyles, activities, and the urban form, class relations begin to take on aspects of identity formation. Within the spatial rhetoric of the slum, for example, khlong community inhabitants are associated with being not only poor but also socially problematic and – as the following paragraphs will show – also ecologically problematic.

Ecocultural identities at Khlong Bang Sue

After meeting community leader Auntie Lek for an interview close to the nearby metro station Lat Prao, she led my interpreter, Stamp, and me through the labyrinth of small streets and backyards along the khlong that make her community. This space is home to lizards and fish, birds and stray dogs, cats and roosters. On the narrow strip along the khlong a semi-rural /semi-urban 'other' emerges, sharply contrasting the image of Bangkok as a developed South-east Asian hub and the shopping malls and skyscrapers that dominate much of the Huay Kwang district. People at khlong Bang Sue live in small stilted houses on the waterfront where the architecture echoes Bangkok of the past when wood was the dominant building material, social life took part on the piers along the waterfronts, and mobility was dependent upon boats. A cluttered, crowded more-than-human community with zig-zagging streets among the houses too narrow for a car but still well-travelled by roaring motorbikes.



Figure 22.1 Khlong Bang Sue community, Bangkok.

Source: Photo by the author.

Sitting with a community elder like Auntie Lek, a nostalgia for a life supported by the klong becomes apparent in her story. She remembers well the days when she could support herself and the family by fishing in the klong and using its water for her paddy fields and fruit orchards when plots of land along the klong were used for subsistence farming. Auntie Lek tells us how the klong water was used for growing produce and at the same time served as transportation channels. During the 1960s and for some time afterward, until Huay Kwang became more integrated into the city (roughly the early 1980s), she paddled along the klongs by boat, selling her produce to neighbours from her floating boat-shop. Today, Auntie Lek still cultivates plants and herbs in little pots in her backyard, but she stopped selling them and is wary about using the murky water from the klongs for growing them. Floating markets have all but disappeared from Huay Kwang; one can only find some left as tourist attractions on the western side of Bangkok. Although farming activities have long



Figure 22.2 Traditional wooden plough at Khlong Bang Sue Community, Bangkok.

Source: Photo by the author.

been abandoned by necessity, the community is still proud of their roots. Jumras showed us a wooden plough still kept close to the pier by the khlong to honour their traditions. Returning to a more interwoven, water dependent lifestyle animates both Jumras' and Auntie Lek's dreams and visions of a future for their community.

Living a water dependent lifestyle – where producing food, transport, and leisure inter-related with the same stream of water – once formed the backbone of the khlong communities' identity. Bitterly, Auntie Lek remarks how today they cannot relate with, or use, water in the same ways anymore. Swimming and bathing in the khlong pose a health risk and drinking water now needs to be bought from machines set up by officials throughout the community. Decades ago, when she was still a young woman, all these needs could be satisfied from the khlong.

The development of the city has turned the former farming community into an urban poor neighbourhood, as their subsistence lifestyle has become harder and harder to maintain due to the deterioration of the khlong water. Ecological and economic deterioration reinforced each other, impacting on the ecocultural identity of the community residents. Their identity appears torn between the awareness that their community is poor and 'slummy' and, at the same time, that they are proudly trying to maintain their khlong-dependent economic and ecocultural heritage. Especially, within the interviews with Auntie Lek, this tension is felt when she honours the skill and labour involved in paddling through the dense khlong network and selling home-grown produce to neighbours, and expresses her bitterness about the current deprived state of the community.

As the water lost much of its vitality for supporting the community, other settlements in Huay Kwang district came under further socio-economic and political pressure. The displacement of urban poor khlong communities in Huay Kwang is historically documented. Through decades of urban sprawl, Huay Kwang became a part of central Bangkok. Since the 1980s, the development of new roads and highways has led to evacuations and

displacements of local poor communities in Huay Kwang as well as in other districts of Bangkok. When King Rama IX Road – a large inner-city highway – was built in the 1980s and the Thai economy was caught up in a spectacular boom (which lasted until the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis), to make space for the new highway and connected infrastructural and housing development many urban poor communities were resettled from Huay Kwang to other newly developed districts at the city fringes (Viratkapan & Perera, 2006; Leeruttanawisut & Yap, 2016). The results of these resettlements often resembled evictions more than the promised facilitated resettlements by the city authorities, as compensations were small and often led people into dismal socio-economic conditions at the urban outskirts (Viratkapan & Perera, 2006).

While Auntie Lek's community was spared eviction at that time, her community is under threat of displacement now due to efforts to 'flood proof' the Thai capital. Thus ironically, today the community is not under threat to be pushed aside for housing or road development schemes but for grand infrastructure projects designed to combat floods and climate disruption made necessary because of the city's previously uncontrolled urban sprawl. In a bitter irony, the community's displacement is thus linked to previously misjudged development schemes and a historical change of perceiving the ecocultural identities of khlong dwellers as no longer wanted. The next section exhibits ways media discourses and an official media address by the military government leader from 2015 skew the presentation of such a complicated ecocultural identity toward the interests of the urban elite. Specifically, the section demonstrates how urban poor communities like Auntie Lek's are misrepresented and singled out as the cause of urban floods. They emerge within these discourses as the scapegoats for a much larger historical problem.

Constructing the scapegoats of the Anthropocene: Khlong Bang Sue ecocultural identities in public discourse

I argued in the previous section about the historical transformation of Bangkok that, as the overall city changed from water to land, so did the perspective on people maintaining a waterfront lifestyle in stilted houses by the khlongs and river. The present-day perspective that khlong communities are somehow undesirable 'others' within the city thus has historical roots. Today the perception that khlong communities in the city are 'slummy' is strengthened by official statements, media reports, and prevailing false perceptions that the urban poor – rather than the persistent increase in built terrestrial urban development – are to blame for recurring flooding problems in the city. I, therefore, argue in this section that the misrepresentation of khlong ecocultural identities amounts to singling them out as urban scapegoats.

Indeed, it was the increasing pollution of the khlong water that first brought the BMA into Auntie Lek's and Jumras' community. Both national government and the BMA have started to intervene in the daily life of the community. In 2000, the Thai government sought to solve the challenge of urban poor housing in the city and supported the foundation of the Community Organisation Development Initiative (CODI), which since has worked on improving the lives of Thailand's urban poor by facilitating workshops on community savings to bring informal squatter communities into a position where they can take up loans to purchase the land they live on. CODI particularly focuses on khlong communities in the capital as well as on communities squatting on other public land, such as land by railroad tracks (Archer, 2012; Usavogitwong & Posriprasert, 2006).

At the Bang Sue and Lat Prao community, CODI has regularly organized so-called ‘garbage days’ to collect waste and clean the khlongs, Jumras said. Moreover, CODI helped install rubbish bins for waste collection to improve the health of the community, Auntie Lek explained. Crucially however, these measures are aimed at reducing incidents of flooding due to clogged khlongs as opposed to flooding events related to climatic disruption. While Auntie Lek was happy to participate at the regular khlung cleaning days, she also pointed out that many smaller drainage tunnels lead into the khlung, swamping the community with further waste and polluting the main stream. The networked character of the urban sewage systems thus makes it hard to attribute pollution to one static source as waste circulates through the network.

Yet within military government leader General Chan-o-cha’s speech on the quality of khlung water in Bangkok on national television, he made clear the culprits of pollution and flooding are easily identified:

Most of the trash accumulation is in canals whose banks are also populated. The dwellers would dump waste into the canal, even household trash. The trash then flows through the canal until it meets the drain joining the canal with the main sewer pipe. Consequently, there is flooding.

(Chan-o-cha, official statement, 15 August 2015, online)

To blame the poor for environmental pollution is neither new nor specific to Bangkokian discourses (Storey, 2012). Wider causes of urban flooding, such as urbanization, climate disruption, or loss of run-off areas to urban development, are strategically ignored within the statement, and reveal a form of scapegoating. In this case, officials single out the individual communities as causing floods, rather than engaging with the politically and environmentally more complex task of tackling the multi-causal roots for inundations.

Importantly, the above statement thus touches not so much on an economic dimension of representing the identities of khlung communities but an ecocultural identification dimension. Within the alleged unsustainable dumping of household waste, the urban poor khlung communities emerge as irresponsible city dwellers. Around such a statement, a profoundly negative identity is created. Rather than acknowledging the khlung communities as struggling to maintain an ecocultural identity worth preserving, their efforts and visions for a more khlung-centred future are framed as detrimental to the health and safety of other urbanites within the city. Rather than blaming contemporary and historical forms of elite urban development for recurring floods, the urban poor serve as scapegoats for reoccurring inundations.

Local media reports equally blame khlung communities across the city for the deteriorating quality of the waterways (Storey, 2012). In a report by the *Bangkok Post*, the most widely read English speaking newspaper in Thailand, khlung communities are blamed for water pollution through dropping litter and dumping household waste water into the khlung (Fernquest, 2013). Similarly, in *The Nation*, another English-language Thai newspaper, this sentiment is echoed when khlung communities are urged to stop littering the khlongs to avoid flooding (Rujivanarom, 2017). Within this spirit of framing the urban poor as a cause for flooding, Kangwan, the director of the BMA Water Drainage and Sewerage Department, was reported to have ‘praised the government for its courage acting to end the encroachment on the canals [by evicting the urban poor]’ in the *Bangkok Post* (Bangkok Post, 2015).

Malthusian perceptions, in which the poor are to be blamed for environmental deterioration and resource shortages (e.g., Robbins, 2012; Martínez-Alier, 2002), receives periodic revivals in Thailand and elsewhere without ever completely disappearing. During the 1970s,

for example, David Harvey (1974) fought back against such lines of argumentation found in debates on the resource–population nexus, pointing to their ideological underpinnings. Harvey explained how blaming the poor remains a popular reflex within debates on ecological deterioration and how behind such a reflex lies a strategic neglect of engaging with wider (social, political, economic) processes that cause environmental deterioration. In more recent times, neo-Malthusian lines of argumentations have been exposed in debates about climate change and human mass displacement and the emergence of ‘climate refugees’ who are seen as a threat to peace and security (Bettini, 2013). The poor remain the ideal scapegoats, a necessary excuse to not engage with underlying structural factors of deterioration and the powerful interests and players behind these factors. Within the urban setting of this chapter’s case study, blaming local poor communities for causing flooding through their allegedly damaging lifestyles and polluting behaviour serves as a justification for their displacement.

Displacement, justice, and ecocultural identities in the Anthropocene

Before concluding this chapter, I contextualise the experience of displacement in Huay Kwang within wider socio–ethical debates on displacement and relocation in the contexts of climate disruption and related weather events. While academic debates have particularly focused on the fate of populations living on small island states or within coastal villages (e.g., Gromilova, 2014), the city, too, is a paramount site where displacement and relocations are playing out.

Post-colonial scholars insist that discussions about relocating entire island state populations under possible ‘climate refugee’ schemes might not serve the interests of local populations but instead those of countries of the Global North reluctant to invest in costly mitigation schemes. In such cases, resettlement is seen as a form of sacrifice, possibly re-evoking wounds of past resettlements endured for national development schemes or colonial projects (Farbotko, 2005; Farbotko & Lazrus, 2012; Millar, 2008). Moreover, these scholars highlight that representing entire island populations as mere victims violates their identities by misrepresenting their agency. According to McNamara and Gibson (2009), the rejection of the ‘climate refugee’ category and the reassertion of the right to self-determination of the island nations highlight the different geopolitical visions for the future of the Pacific island nations. While Pacific ambassadors to the UN advocate for taking climate change mitigation seriously, they worry that advocating for the new category of ‘climate refugees’ risks legitimizing ‘future visions of a climate change affected world in which mass population mobility and loss of homelands are considered unfortunate, but acceptable “solutions” to the problems of the social impacts of climate change’ (McNamara & Gibson, 2009, p. 482).

Furthermore, within critical debates on displacement and climate disruptions, scholars have also scrutinized the role of popular media and the work of NGOs that utilize the discourse of ‘climate refugees,’ wherein the figure of the ‘climate refugee’ has been reduced to functioning like the ‘canary in the coal mine’ to alert the global public to become active on climate change (Farbotko, 2010). As the complex and situated ways in which local populations negotiate livelihoods and identities in the context of climatic disruption are ignored, Farbotko (2010) states, so, too are their resilience and adaptation strategies.

Particularly within Baldwin’s (2012) analysis, a further dimension of critique to ‘climate refugee’ narratives is added, as he emphasizes the ‘climate refugee’ functions as a particular, racialized ‘other’ (at times in the function of a passive victim, at other times as an impending threat to peace and stability) who rests in opposition to the environmental citizen of the Global North. Baldwin’s work also attends to the futurology of climate disruption by

pointing out how racialized understandings of climate migrants not only stem from inherited colonial discourses continuously shaping our present, but that these images also serve to structure ways we think about legitimate climate futures yet to come (Baldwin et al., 2014). These compelling critiques show ways Anthropocene discourses on climate displacement involve (mis)representing the identities of marginalized communities not only as scapegoats but also as tragic (yet acceptable) potential victims. Wider questions of responsibility and solidarity are obscured within these debates.

The displacement of the communities along Khlong Bang Sue and Lat Prao echo the thorny question about whose homes will be saved under conditions of climate disruption in the Anthropocene. As such, Auntie Lek's community and their struggles touch upon important global themes of justice and equality in increasingly volatile times. What ecocultural identities are worth defending when preparing for climatic disruption? What scales for negotiating justice and social rights are relevant for these discussions? While clearing and widening Huay Kwang's khlongs may serve the larger city (and, in particular, the more prosperous parts of the urban population) in the very short term, these actions put a small albeit longstanding local community at risk. Class-based interests, lifestyles, cultural heritage, environmental realities, and ecocultural identities here are pitted against each other, placing powerful landlords against 'slummy' communities. In the Anthropocene, the right to the city and the right to stay put in one's place (however informal this place might be) are hence political, as well as ecocultural, questions of identity that are becoming pivotal in Bangkok and other cities across the globe.

Again, as the Anthropocene is a profoundly urban age, it is important to attend to such struggles. While adaptation measures may become necessary to enhance the security of the urban population, local measures may threaten livelihoods that have emerged over decades in urban niches. Trapped in a precarious legal position in which few occupants hold official land titles, the government's obligations toward compensations are limited, increasing the vulnerability of the urban poor within resettlement schemes. As this case study has shown, ecocultural identities and their (mis)representation are at the heart of these historic settlements and forced resettlements. The geopolitics within resettlement in the Anthropocene becomes material within the local grievances of urban populations threatened to be evicted to ostensibly flood-proof a city like Bangkok. The number of people displaced – and the distance between their origin and place of resettlement – might be less dramatic than in debates about relocating entire island populations, but the potential grievances caused by these policy measures are neither less harsh nor less violent.

Defending one's niche in the Anthropocene

This case study has shown that the struggle to 'stay put' in the Anthropocene is a struggle that involves the mobilization and contestation of ecocultural identities. The urban situation of displacement I have analysed in this chapter is shaped by a long history of deteriorating urban ecologies and processes of historical change, in which the relationship between the floating city and corresponding water-based ecocultural identities became increasingly disrupted. Today, processes of displacement are marked by socio-economic inequalities that put unregulated, poor communities at risk of losing their right to, and place within, the urban khlong ecology by misrepresenting their identities as posing an environmental threat within the city. Such misrepresentation obscures relations of power and wealth within the city and instead presents the khlong communities as scapegoats. Within the process of scapegoating, official discourses privilege a Western terrestrial ecocultural identity over a fluvial khlong ecocultural identity. While seemingly justified by the imperative of 'flood-proofing' the city,

the displacement of the Khlong Bang Sue community is easier to politically justify than tackling root causes, such as capitalist development schemes and land appropriations by the rich and powerful.

I have contextualized my findings in this case study of ways historic, economic, and ecocultural factors combine to inform struggles over ecocultural identities in the urban Anthropocene within wider literature on climatic disruptions and displacement to demonstrate that such struggles transcend geographic locations and scales. I concur with Storey (2012) that, ‘for the urban poor [specifically], whom are often the target of blame for pollution (despite mixed evidence), sustainability is as much about tenure, rights, livelihoods and, more broadly, citizenship’ (p. 110). While compensation is an important principle for resettlement in times of climatic disruptions, de facto absences of documents and legal possessions of land increase the vulnerability of the urban poor within climate disruption-related resettlement schemes. With the urban struggles ahead in the Anthropocene centering on socio-ecological components, investigating the formations and representations of ecocultural identities may hold a key to becoming more attuned to the inequalities involved in such struggles.

Notes

- 1 Siam (as the Kingdom of Thailand was known before its renaming in 1939) was the only country in Southeast Asia to escape direct colonial rule. The renaming of the country to Thailand thus does not mark a liberation from colonial rule but a break with the former absolutist Siamese monarchy. However, Thai scholar Winichakul (1994) has pointed out that: ‘changing the name of the country and its people was the political act of a chauvinist [military] regime to promote the domination of the ethnic Thai and their culture over others’ (p. 18). Notwithstanding the on-going controversies about the renaming, I am using the terms Siam/Siamese to describe events dating prior to 1939 and Thailand/Thai for events post-1939.
- 2 Fai and Stamp, thank you once more!
- 3 Some of these massage parlours are linked to the flourishing international sex industry of the city. Yet, within this particular area there are also plenty of traditional massage parlours that offer no sexual services, as well as parlours that cater sexual services to the local population. In short, the term ‘massage parlour’ here involves a range of facilities, services, and occupations and is not intended to be understood as a code word for a place linked to the sex industry for tourists for which Bangkok is (in)famous.

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Part V

Transforming ecocultural identity

The *Handbook's* final part features a collection of studies reflecting on ways to consciously evolve ecocultural identities and, in turn, the sociocultural systems and conflicts at the heart of environmental relations. The chapters demonstrate the interpretive power of an ecocultural approach to illuminate dynamics often overlooked or undermined by exclusively cultural or environmental lenses, and, at the same time, work to illustrate, examine, and pose restorative ways forward.

In Chapter 23, 'A queer ecological reading of ecocultural identity in contemporary Mexico,' Gabriela Méndez Cota reflects on the malleability and critical potential of ecocultural identity as played out in activist narratives that foreground agroecological systems such as Indigenous small-scale, subsistence-oriented milpa farming. Drawing on philosophical discussions in cultural studies and queer ecology, she sets out a *queer act of wondering* and focuses on the growing presence of quelites (from Náhuatl: 'tender edible weeds') and rural women in activist narratives that seek to redefine the nation toward more just and sustainable futures. Méndez's study illuminates a shift in Mexican ecocultural identity – from 'men of corn' to 'people of milpa' – that displaces the centrality of a masculine symbol of nationhood and instead creates a space in which more democratic representations and practices of belonging can gain ground. Through bringing forth the standpoint of weeds, Méndez highlights ways more-than-human beings and ecological issues have deconstructive power and expands the cultural studies lens 'to radically contextualize and account for the temporality and fragility of our interpretive practices as part of a material, dynamic universe' (p. 391).

Chapter 24, 'Wildtending, settler colonialism, and ecocultural identities in environmental futures' by Bruno Seraphin, presents the author's ethnography of an inchoate nomadic movement, the High Desert Wildtending Network. Wildtenders' seasonal round lifeways, centered in reciprocal planting and gathering of Indigenous first foods in the U.S. Northwest, are both continuous and discontinuous with Indigenous modalities of relationship that have existed since time immemorial. Seraphin reflexively shows how even nominally counter-hegemonic environmental movements such as Wildtending risk replicating settler colonial norms. At the same time, by centering scholarship pertaining to North American Indigenous resurgence, futurisms, and speculative/science fiction, as well as Black feminist Afro-futurism, Seraphin makes the theoretical argument that 'ecocultural identities emerge not only within networks of human and nonhuman relations, but moreover in the ways those

relations are imagined into the future' (p. 404). In this way, Seraphin offers a conception of social movement-building as a form of *practical science fiction* that opens space for hopeful and active orientations toward multiple viable ecocultural futures and, in the process, highlights the speculative nature of ecocultural identity more broadly.

In Chapter 25, 'Toward a grammar of ecocultural identity,' Arran Stibbe focuses on *positive* ecocultural identity – or those identities that support and promote reciprocal and regenerative ecocultural relations. Stibbe uses Positive Discourse Analysis as a research methodology that seeks out and amplifies ways forward out of destructive dominant discourses and into just discourses of mutual and interrelated wellbeing. As a case study, Stibbe examines Luther Standing Bear's *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, identifying language that instantiates ecologically inclusive identities that summon interhuman and internatural equality. In addition, Stibbe offers several study-derived linguistic devices, including metaphor, appraisal patterns, agency, pronoun use, and semantic inclusion, which could be selectively combined, with careful consideration of context, to promote an 'ethic of care' that extends beyond the human to include other species, future generations, and wider ecosystems upon which life interdepends.

In Chapter 26, 'Perceiving ecocultural identities as human animal earthlings,' Carrie Freeman presents research on overlapping but distinct realms – social justice, animal rights, and environmental movements. Freeman looks to definitive international declarations – central texts that inform, and are informed by, these movements – to pointedly identify key unifying values that could help bring about fundamental shifts in ecocultural identity to support mutual wellbeing of all lives on Earth. The findings she puts forth are intended to provide explicit core direction to activists and practitioners working (in tandem with specific causes and campaigns) on seeding paradigm shifts in public and collective ecocultural values, perceptions, and identities. Freeman posits that combatting humanity's unprecedented mass exploitation of life requires the unified efforts of all social movements (on behalf of human and nonhuman species) and pinpoints terminology and concepts for reframing values in biocentric and ecocentric ways that include the more-than-human world within the sphere of moral concern.

In Chapter 27, 'Fostering children's ecocultural identities within ecoresiliency,' Shannon Audley, Ninian Stein, and Julia Ginsburg bring us to childhood as a foundational origin of ecocultural identity. As education-focused scholars, the authors examine ways of teaching young children that could help support responsive, adaptive, and persistent ecoresilient identities that foster empathetic relations with/in the more-than-human world. Specifically, in children's playground narratives, the authors look at ways teachers and parents can engage children in questions that build and reinforce ecoresiliency frames. The authors argue the use of ecoresiliency frames functions as an intervention, interrupting ecocultural mastery narratives dominant in industrialized neoliberal cultures (such as abundance or individualism) and providing children and teachers with building blocks for developing Earth regenerative ecocultural identities.

In this part's final chapter, Chapter 28, 'Empathetic ecocultural positionality and the forest other in Tasmanian forestry conflicts,' Rebecca Banham confronts normalized two-sided ways of talking about and understanding environmental conflicts. Banham presents a case study based on Australia's Tasmanian forests, which have been the site of a decades-long conflict popularly, politically, and provocatively termed the 'forestry wars.' Banham argues such conflicts – wherein the notion of 'jobs' versus 'the environment' has often dominated the dispute – require a new language, one that takes seriously the embodied and emotional nature of human–nonhuman relationships. Based on her research on Tasmanian meanings around forests, Banham illuminates

and argues for recognition of a form of ecocultural identity she terms *empathetic positionality*, which is informed by lived perceptions of forestry practices as violent acts committed against the forest other to whom one has an ethical obligation. In offering empathetic positionality as an articulation of complexities beyond incompatible opposing sides, Banham tends to the interaction between power dynamics and emotional responses (such as grief) to extractive practices and, further, advocates for respect of the forest as a participant in discussions of its own fate and in reshaping dominant conversations underpinning conflicts over extractive industries.

The paths forward to profound ecocultural identity transformations are multiple and unspooling. Whether the path is crafting and proposing new language, or reassessing symbols and spaces that reproduce fixity, or revisiting and reframing notions about roles and relations on this planet, an ecocultural perspective provides ways to move beyond the impossible imaginary of surviving and thriving as something uniquely separate from ecological conviviality. Disabusing and overcoming dominant Western/ized and/or industrial/ized culture binaries, such as human versus nature, jobs versus environment, and people versus animals, allows for integral shifts, including developing and recalling creative and radical ecocultural ways of speaking, framing, feeling, being, and doing. Along the paths forward, some with signposts and others unfurling with each footfall, ecocultural identity awareness can help us find our way into transforming our presents and futures.



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A queer ecological reading of ecocultural identity in contemporary Mexico

Gabriela Méndez Cota

In December 7–10, 2017, I attended an international meeting of rural women engaged in what they call ‘defensa del territorio’ – that is, in the self-defense of rural spaces and communities against violent assaults led by criminal groups or even by the Mexican state in the interests of energy-extraction megaprojects.¹ The meeting, which took place in Cuetzalan, an Indigenous town in the beautiful northern highlands of the Mexican state of Puebla, was organized by the urban feminist organizations Instituto de Liderazgo Simone de Beauvoir and Fondo Semillas. Most of the women who attended were community leaders from all over Mexico and Central America, especially Guatemala. Listening to the rural women speak alongside their urban feminist supporters was an extraordinary experience. It allowed me to understand that ‘defensa del territorio’ is not merely a matter of asserting and fighting for property rights against aggressive external invaders, but also a matter of people re-discovering their material habitats, getting to know each other, exchanging strategies, striking alliances, and creating and sustaining women’s political leadership. Witnessing the impressive collective efforts of some of the most disadvantaged citizens of my country suggested to me the image of another Mexico, one no longer represented by abstract, masculine nationalist symbols related to conquest and war. I came up with the alternative idea of a critical ecology of weeds, a vegetal infrastructure that is both infinitely fragile and amazingly strong, and which places ethical demands on all humans as much as it allows for genuine enjoyment in shared vulnerability. To the women I met in Cuetzalan, and to the Guatemalan communitarian feminist leader Lorena Cabnal, I dedicate this chapter.

Even though the majority of Mexicans dwell today in urban areas, rurality continues to provide both material and symbolic resources to the national imagination. In particular, a consensus still holds that, for all Mexicans, corn ‘provides the essence of their identity’ (Pilcher, 1998, p. 11). Whereas the symbolic exploitation of corn as a unifying metaphor for Mexican society derives from twentieth-century state-led cultural nationalism (1946–1982), contemporary civil resistance to the social and environmental devastation of state-led neoliberalism (1982–present) has come to foreground a much longer ecocultural history of ‘native corn.’

With the exception of its United States-bordering northern half, Mexico’s geographical territory belongs to Mesoamerica, an anthropological region where corn has been cultivated for millennia according to the ecological principles of the milpa. The milpa is a small-scale,

subsistence-oriented farming system based on generations of Indigenous knowledge resulting from direct observation and trial-and-error selection of seeds, and transmitted via practical apprenticeship and free exchange of selected seeds. Most importantly, milpa knowledge reaches from seed development to identification and encouragement of beneficial interactions among multiple organisms and environmental conditions. Thus, even in non-optimal conditions – ranging from weather instability, pest attacks, and soil erosion to very limited access to land and freedom due to adverse political circumstances – well-kept milpas have been able to provide the rural dwellers of Mesoamerica with plenty of food security, exceptional culinary diversity, and effective medicinal resources.

Throughout most of Mexico's colonial and independent history, however, the epistemic legacy of European colonialism associated milpa agriculture with ignorance – that is, with a racist image of non-European societies as fundamentally lacking technical skills and achievements (Rozat, 2004, 2005). Such an image later underpinned legitimation of the modern industrial paradigm that came to dominate Mexico's cultural and political imagination in the twentieth century. First under the influence of North American agriculture's scientification toward the end of the nineteenth century (Esteva, 1996b) and then under the influence of post-war modernization theory and development discourse (Escobar, 1995), twentieth-century Mexican governments understood the nation's progress as depending exclusively on expert scientific knowledge, mechanization, agrochemicals, and the constant replacement of improved crop varieties. Moreover, after such technical recipes associated with the Green Revolution were shown to fail disastrously, neoliberal governments still continued to regard them as more adequate to contemporary needs and aims than small-scale, subsistence-oriented agroecological systems such as milpa.

In this chapter, I describe how ecocultural narratives against neoliberalism are refiguring the milpa as a political map for a post-neoliberal Mexico. My aim is not only to analyze how the milpa has belatedly acquired such a dignified place in Mexican cultural politics, but also to reflect upon the democratizing potential of contemporary milpa narratives as well as on their inertial pitfalls. Such a reflection expands on earlier work on Mexican controversies around the cultural and political impact of genetically modified corn, which deployed philosophical approaches from within the field of cultural studies (Méndez Cota, 2016b). The first section makes an argument for sustaining the philosophical critique of essentialism as an indispensable theoretical framework for the analysis of milpa as ecocultural identity, and for a queer ecological approach that supplements the political commitments of cultural studies with a non-instrumental and speculative orientation. The second section describes recent shifts in milpa narratives as they are formulated in selected issues of *La Jornada del Campo*, which is a monthly dossier on rural issues published within the print and online newspaper *La Jornada* and catering mostly to an urban, progressive readership. A third section focuses on the gender of the agricultural imaginary by contextualizing and critically analyzing a feminist intervention in *La Jornada del Campo*. The fourth section interrogates the hetero-anthropocentrism of even the most progressive milpa narratives and calls for a queering, or de-essentialization, of the milpa in a deconstructive sense. Finally, in a concluding section, I offer a practical example of queering my own academic work on agricultural nationalism by describing an experimental intervention in my adoptive Mexican home town of Cholula, Puebla.

Ecocultural identity and the critique of essentialism

Since the 1980s, a philosophical critique of essentialism has informed the project and methods of cultural studies (Birchall & Hall, 2006). One version of such a critique draws on

deconstruction, a philosophy of writing primarily associated with the work of Jacques Derrida (Royle, 2000). Derrida's work has shaped cultural studies by instilling 'resistance to any idea of identity as fixed and inherent rather than malleable and relational' (Gilbert, 2008, p. 54). Identity is seen as malleable and relational because, from a deconstructive perspective, it is nothing but being in time. As Derrida puts it in a conversation with Bernard Stiegler: 'the at-home [that is, identity] has always been tormented by the other [that is, by time], by the guest, by the threat of expropriation. It is constituted only in this threat' (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002, p. 79). In other words, cultural narratives of identity do not describe eternal essences but rather they articulate temporal relations through the work of representation. Since representation attempts to domesticate time, cultural narratives of identity necessarily tend toward essentialism, or the assertion of a non-temporal nature of identity. Yet, the political contestation of cultural narratives throughout history testifies to the fact that such narratives are nevertheless malleable and relational, precisely because they have temporal nature.

In the 1980s, deconstruction became global currency in cultural studies partly through the influence of the Birmingham School. According to Stuart Hall (1996), while identity could no longer be understood as a given fact or an ahistorical reality, it remained an indispensable focus for cultural studies, given the latter's primary concern with questions of politics and agency. The key, for Hall (1996), became to understand that agency is never merely about asserting an identity, but rather involves a critical and creative task of 'using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being' (p. 4). Thus, deconstruction provided cultural studies with a powerful argument that grounded the notion of agency on the constitutive temporality of all identities, and even allowed cultural studies to understand itself as a project that articulated critical and creative interventions in a 'textual' sense (Mowitt, 1992; Bowman, 2007). All of the above suggests to me a continuing practical relevance of philosophical anti-essentialism to the more contemporary focus on ecocultural identity.

The notion of ecocultural identity can be understood as incorporating three core assumptions – namely, that communication practices shape environmental perceptions, that these perceptions inform behaviors, and that the shaping of both perceptions and behaviors is influenced by powerful interests, including along the lines of class, race, gender, etc. (Milstein et al., 2017). If the critical mission of a transdisciplinary engagement with ecocultural identity is to transform dominant perceptions and behaviors toward the environment by means of alternative communication practices, to such a mission this chapter contributes two things: first, a diagnosis of the complexity, the ambiguity, and the non-determination of ecocultural narratives in the Mexican context; and, secondly, a reflection on the critical potential of changing narratives that increasingly foreground connections between cultural politics and ecological ethics. In response to criticisms that cultural studies has historically neglected ecological issues due to a scepticism regarding anything that might smell of naturalism, Gilbert (2010) observes that such a neglect can be corrected because the neglect is not essential to cultural studies, since ecological issues take place, at least partly, in a cultural terrain. Hence, a critical ecology can be pursued by drawing on the resources of language and history of ecocultural identity narratives in the Mexican context.

In this vein, Timothy Morton (2010a) has traced the cultural emergence of ecological thought back to mainstream European Romanticism, which responded to the experience of industrial alienation through an essentialist fantasy of 'Nature.' The Romantic image of Nature was designed to exclude 'pollution' by 'performing Nature as pristine, wild, immediate, and pure' (Morton, 2010a, p. 274). Figured as an organic or holistic entity, Romantic Nature supposedly enveloped a human who could thereby feel 'at-home.' Morton's own

ecological thought unfolds instead as a subversive critique of mainstream Romanticism, that which is ideologically founded on inside–outside structures. Such structures, Morton argues, produce boundaries to this day policed by racism and heterosexism. I want to suggest that Morton’s argument is applicable to the Mexican context to the extent that Mexican cultural politics have not been immune to Romantic aesthetics ever since the search for an Indigenous origin inaugurated Mexican nationalism in the nineteenth century.

After the Mexican Revolution (1910–1921), an emerging political regime mobilized cultural narratives of national identity as based on *mestizaje*, which is a progressive interpretation of ‘racial’ mixing among Spanish and Indigenous bodies and heritages. In practice, however, the image of a Mestizo nation constituted itself as homogeneous by excluding those considered as racially inferior, undesirable, or sexually deviant, primarily Indigenous peoples and peasants but also women and non-European foreigners as well (Gleizer & López Caballero, 2015). The narrative of a hybrid identity thus failed to revert the social inequalities and the political violence that Mexico had inherited from a history of conquest and imperialism. Since the description of Mexican people as ‘racially hybrid’ or culturally Mestizo does not imply by itself any notion of a democratic polity, it instead easily could be used to occlude the continued operations of racism and sexism at the societal level. Moreover, as María Josefina Saldaña Portillo (2003) has argued, *mestizaje* actually operated as a norm, or an imperative to become whiter, more masculine, more urban, and so on, by leaving behind any feminine or Indigenous traits, such as rurality, economies of subsistence, and other activities associated with dependency on and care for a non-economic ‘nature.’ Eventually, critical anthropologists such as Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1987) started calling for an alternative national project based on the Indigenous practices of ‘deep Mexico.’ Under Bonfil Batalla’s influence, Víctor Toledo (2015), a leading political ecologist in contemporary Mexico, continues to call for a change of civilizational paradigms based on a recuperation of Indigenous values and respect for nature, including *milpa* agriculture. A question that emerges for me in this context is whether and how the narratives of political ecology eschew the philosophical as well as political pitfalls of mainstream Romanticism as diagnosed by Morton.

Morton’s approach calls for de-essentializing readings of ecocultural identity, which would necessarily go beyond politically asserting either *mestizaje* or ‘pure’ Indigenous values toward a radical questioning of the philosophical infrastructures of environmental imaginaries and environmental politics, whatever their cultural filiation. In addition to highlighting the racist and heterosexist logic of civilizational ecocide, Morton has redefined ecology as queer, and queer ecology has become for him a way not so much of designating particular forms of sexual dissidence but rather a critical and creative, and a speculative rather than instrumental, engagement with the non-holistic, non-organic, and non-coherent qualities of the material universe (Morton 2010b, 2010c). How could a queer ecological reading contribute to a re-thinking of Mexican ecocultural identity, which to this day continues to manifest as a political struggle among human oppressors and oppressed humans? Before attempting to answer, I want to end this section by suggesting that queer ecology is an efficacious approach to the question because it starts by radicalizing the foundational commitments of cultural studies through a recognition of the deconstructive force of ecological issues themselves.

Morton’s ‘ecology without Nature’ is both queer and textual in a deconstructive sense, yet well before its appearance in the field of cultural theory, deconstruction had already allowed cultural studies to understand itself in the – arguably ecological – terms of textuality (Mowitt, 1992; Bowman, 2007). In deconstruction, textuality is neither a type of object nor a methodology that generates knowledge in a representational sense. Rather, it takes place materially through the performative capacity of language to produce effects beyond

representation (Royle, 2000, p. 5). Cultural studies engages with the textuality – which also is the temporality and, as suggested earlier, the possibility of agency – of cultural artefacts by reaching from within such artefacts ‘to the paradigms that govern their interpretation and beyond these paradigms to the structures of disciplinary power that support them’ (Bowman, 2007, p. 64). Morton’s (2013) ecological writing, for instance, exposes and displaces the limits of human-centered, gendered, familiar, organic-centered narratives inherited by cultural studies from the Western intellectual tradition.

Such an intervention must not be confused, however, with a voluntaristic deployment of literary techniques, for deconstruction is instead and ultimately about an ‘opening to freedom, responsibility, decision, ethics and politics’ (Derrida, 1992, p. 200). More like a passive opening to the temporality of being as such, deconstruction entails genuine risk and danger for cultural studies itself, insofar as cultural studies tends, like any field, to fixate or essentialize its paradigms and structures of disciplinary power. As ecological issues such as climate chaos and species extinction patently exceed the human-centered paradigms and structures of disciplinary power that have historically supported cultural studies, such issues themselves expose and displace cultural studies by demanding from the field a decision and a responsibility toward events that it cannot fully know or master. Acknowledging the deconstructive power of ecological issues themselves – including writing itself as an ecological issue – entails, I argue, that we practitioners of cultural studies cannot reduce such issues to another cultural topic to be addressed in routine academic ways. We must instead radically contextualize and account for the temporality and fragility of our interpretive practices as part of a material, dynamic universe.

In what follows, I part ways with Morton in order to situate my own queering or de-essentializing intervention in the modest scale of Mexican ecocultural politics. While the philosophical critique of essentialism as deployed by cultural studies and queer ecology remains for me an indispensable theoretical framework for the study of ecocultural identity – in a textual or deconstructive sense – in Mexico, my aim is not simply to illustrate the adequacy of such a framework but moreover to activate, through reading, an opening in reified notions of ecocultural identity so that freedom and responsibility can still take place. In what follows, I hope to show that such an opening can take place within particular ecocultural narratives, and that it has implications for the theory and practice of ecocultural studies.

The expanded milpa: Democratic openings within Mexican ecocultural identity

Milpa agriculture has become most visible as an ecocultural asset of the Mexican nation in the context of civil resistance to neoliberal policies. Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has gradually eliminated the state’s commitments, inherited from the Mexican Revolution (1910–1921), to land redistribution and to food sovereignty. When, in 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) exposed fragile medium and small-scale Mexican businesses to international competition, most of them collapsed as Mexico was abruptly flooded by imports of, among other commodities, heavily subsidized genetically modified corn from the United States. In 2001, scientists found transgenes in corn plants from the Mexican state of Oaxaca, which could only come from genetically modified seeds imported from the U.S. and grown in Mexico. Upon hearing about evidence of ‘transgenic contamination’ of native corn, a social movement quickly rose to defend native corn as ‘the symbol of nationalism and the country’s political and cultural resistance’ (Antal, 2007, p. 2). Yet, beneath the apparent simplicity that reduces Mexican ecocultural politics to the image of native corn, there is a complex and

ongoing political and legal struggle against neoliberal policies and institutions sustained by a widening coalition of rural and urban activists within and outside national and international academia (Fitting, 2011; Kinchy, 2012; Baker, 2012). This complexity is more aptly conveyed by the image of the milpa, which figures prominently in activist narratives against neoliberalism.

Concerned scientists from Mexico argue that transgenic ‘contamination’ threatens not just corn but milpa agriculture in its entirety. Due to the high biodiversity of the milpa and to the existence of wild relatives of corn in the Mexican countryside, they explain, the risks of spontaneous hybridization of transgenic and non-transgenic plants are very high (Álvarez-Buylla et al., 2013). ‘Gene flow,’ or the incorporation of genes from one population into the gene pool of another population, could also impact non-target organisms such as beneficial insects, pollinators, and worms that preserve soil nutrients (Álvarez-Buylla et al., 2013, p. 87). Beyond the agricultural plot, herbicide-tolerant transgenes can reach the genome of teocintle, the wild relative of maize that is abundant in Mexico, where the transgenes can allow the development of herbicide-tolerant weeds that could, in turn, replace local biodiversity. Such ecological arguments have slowly permeated activist narratives that initially foregrounded corn as a symbol of national identity. In this section, I describe recent shifts in Mexican ecocultural politics as they can be traced within selected issues of *La Jornada del Campo*.

Since 2007, *La Jornada del Campo* has been the mainstream communicational outlet of grassroots struggles against neoliberalism in Mexico. The first issue was titled ‘There is no country without corn,’ which is the slogan of a movement against the biotechnological ‘contamination’ of the Mexican countryside and food chain. Armando Bartra (2009), chief editor of *La Jornada del Campo*, soon declared in one of his editorial introductions that, ‘more than men of corn, us Mesoamericans are people of milpa’ (p. 42). Subsequent issues typically feature testimonies by critical scientists and public figures who address the urgency of rural and ecological issues, celebrate Indigenous knowledges, and demand state commitment to national food sovereignty through the preservation of local agriculture.

The rhetorical figuration of the milpa as a political metaphor became most explicit very recently, in the 2017 tenth anniversary issue of *La Jornada del Campo* (2017, October 21), which is themed ‘The expanded milpa.’ In it, Bartra explains that milpa-making is a concept that expands beyond traditional agriculture, since it relates to a pluralistic sensibility inspired by, but not restricted to, Indigenous and rural ways of life. The plural composition of both rural and urban movements, Bartra asserts, makes them comparable to ‘multicolored milpas,’ the essence of which is not literally agriculture but rather ‘ways of getting organized for thinking and social existence’ (pp. 4–5).

Milpa-making thus encompasses many different milpas such as the home and the city, where women and city-dwellers engage in reproductive labor that often goes unrecognized, and even ‘metaphysical milpas,’ where collectivist imaginaries of cross-cultural dialogue are cultivated through activist writing. Published less than a month after the occurrence of a moderately destructive earthquake in central Mexico,² ‘the expanded milpa’ even came to include civil society’s response to earthquakes and other disasters, since such a response involved spontaneous solidarity and complex cooperation, including conflict resolution, among heterogeneous actors. Thus, the ecological arguments of concerned scientists are refigured in *La Jornada del Campo* as a metaphor of political hope for Mexican society.

It is worth referring to some other contributions to ‘the expanded milpa,’ which illustrate the ecocultural operations of milpa-making. In her reflection on 10 years of popular resistance against neoliberal policies, senior activist Adelita San Vicente Tello (2017) points out

that such a resistance has helped rural communities rediscover and strengthen their deep ecocultural connections with local food and agriculture, which has in turn made possible the persistence of communities who defend their territories today against state violence and extractive megaprojects promoted by neoliberal governments. Importantly, the content of such a self-rediscovery is shared ecocultural knowledge and survival strategies. Echoing San Vicente Tello's view, biologist and anthropologist César Carrillo Trueba (2017) points out in another short contribution to 'the expanded milpa' (p. 6) that in milpa farming, local seed varieties result from creative experimentation and aesthetic preferences related to the quality and enjoyment of food rather than to competitive productivity and profit.

Whereas the creation and enjoyment of food in milpa farming sustains social bonds that are crucial for survival, the milpa also expresses itself politically through practices of direct democracy and self-government within rural communities. Rural activist Mauricio González (2017) directly compares rural community direct democratic self-governance to the milpa, clarifying that 'some people say that milpa is about domestication, but we believe that the milpa is about socialization [understood as a] human/nonhuman complex that stretches the limits of society as it was imagined by the Europeans' (p. 7). Like the complex interaction of multiple species in the milpa, collective decision-making is figured as patient consensus-building through a non-arrogant treatment of differences, as well as sustained attention to multiple factors, risks, and uncertainties. With similar reasoning, environmental activist Catherine Marieille (2017) explicitly asserts that the milpa 'gives us the best metaphor for the civilizational change that we need in the present [for] it is the symbolic and concrete space of community resistance, sustainability and buen vivir' (p. 22). Another contributor, Jesús Ramírez Cuevas (2017), describes the milpa as 'the community's path toward national reconstruction' (p. 24). In sum, the contributors to 'the expanded milpa' are deploying milpa-making as an ecocultural image of Mexico that is directly opposed to state-policed neoliberal globalization.

In the following section, I look at the possibility that such a shift in ecocultural identity – from 'men of corn' to 'people of milpa' – effectively displaces the centrality of corn as a masculine symbol of nationhood and creates a heterogeneous symbolic space in which more democratic representations (and hence practices) of national belonging can start to gain ground. After considering the narrative treatment of rural women in another recent issue of *La Jornada del Campo*, I explore the increasingly visible significance of the so far most under-represented nonhuman elements of the milpa system – namely, the weeds called quelites – for thinking about the ecological and ethical potential of such democratic openings in ecocultural identity narratives.

The Milpa without nature, or feminist interventions in ecocultural identity

In this section, I contextualize a recent interest in rural women as active milpa-makers in order to introduce my argument about the need to queer the milpa in a philosophical sense. In most issues of *La Jornada del Campo*, the farming space and activity of the milpa are acknowledged as male territory. Only in recent times – and presumably attuned to the global explosion of feminist media – has women's participation in the rural economy been explicitly described in terms of a 'feminine milpa.' The latter is better known as the *traspatio* or *solar*, which refers to the rural home's backyard, a space in which rural women tend their own choice of plants, raise small animals, and store their domestic tools. A recent issue of *La Jornada del Campo*, guest-edited by feminist rural sociologists

Ivonne Vizcarra, Yolanda Castañeda, and Yolanda Massieu, is entirely dedicated to rural women and their specific milpa-making activities. In the preface, Armando Bartra (2018, February 17) declares that throughout his writing career he has insisted on the need to acknowledge and value the ‘darkened half, the undervalued and feminine half of the milpa’ (pp. 2–3). After observing that pre-Columbian Mesoamerican cultures were no less gender-oppressive than modern capitalism, Bartra once again rhetorically expands the milpa in order to include rural women:

if milpa-making is the metaphor of a virtuous social order, then it cannot start and end at the plot, but has to encompass the home as well.

(pp. 2–3)

In their own introduction to the issue, Vizcarra, Castañeda, and Massieu (2018) assert the practices that truly sustain the Mexican culture are those of rural and Indigenous women. Such practices have paradoxically been silenced and rendered invisible, they argue, by the widespread circulation of their aestheticized image. In particular, the popular image of a semi-naked Indigenous woman kneeling over a grinding stone – as exemplified by Diego Rivera’s painting *Mujer con metate* – has confined the figure of rural woman to the sphere of domestic service through tortilla-making, as opposed to showing the variety of productive activities in which rural women engage inside and outside the home.

Vizcarra, Castañeda, and Massieu instead set out to insert a gender equality agenda into the narratives of milpa as an ecocultural image of the Mexican nation. They even propose to modify the slogan ‘there is no country without corn’ into ‘there is no corn and no country without women.’ What such a feminist intervention suggests to me is that milpa narratives must effectively displace the gendered structures of ecocultural identity if such narratives are to actualize their critical potential and, moreover, that such a displacement cannot be achieved if milpa narratives adopt the form of Nature in the Romantic sense, that is in the form of a pure, unpolluted, harmonious space. Instead, like Morton’s ‘ecology without Nature,’ a critique of the gendered structures of ecocultural identity entails a certain ‘pollution’ of Nature in the sense of a recognition of the contingent power and agency that operate in its construction. *La Jornada del Campo*’s issue on rural women provides multiple elements that work in this direction.

As the guest-editors point out, a feature of the ‘new rurality’ is the incorporation of women to work outside the home, which often means that women’s workload is doubled without the guarantee of economic security. Nevertheless, the economic dislocation of rural spaces has offered opportunities for a rethinking of the gendered structures of ecocultural identity. Here, a brief overview is in order regarding the gender dimension of the cultural history of corn agriculture. As anthropologists Lind and Barham (2004) observe, in the Mesoamerican cultural situation the role of woman is that of ‘a gatekeeper to the inside meanings of culture, the family, the home, and the meal’ (p. 54). Femininity has a reproductive role and a spiritual dimension that underpins the sacredness of corn – of culture, the family, the home, and the meal – through its complementarity with a masculine counterpart. The political economy of colonialism disrupted the continuity of such a gendered sacredness of corn by imposing new kinds of sacredness related to other cultural sources – for instance, the sacredness of a Catholic, wheat-centred religion.

After centuries of colonial contempt and outright rejection of Indigenous foods, the post-colonial Mexican state slowly recovered the sacredness of corn through the mediation of a liberal framework that regards corn as an agricultural commodity with the potential to

signify modern national identity. In particular, the post-revolutionary state (1921–1982) renewed the sacredness of corn by positioning itself as a welfare provider under an import-substitution regime, which embraced corn as a protected agricultural commodity and as a subsidized urban consumer item (Ochoa, 2000). Thus, corn went from symbolizing a stigmatized (and feminized) ethnicity to symbolizing masculine modernization and its emancipatory counterpart. A large, state-owned industry of corn-related products, employing mostly men, provided raw matter to a network of small tortilla factories in which mechanical technology liberated women from long hours kneeling at the metate, giving them a chance to participate, though marginally, in the discourse of revolutionary nationalism. The latter related in mostly nostalgic ways to the Mesoamerican cultural situation, which nevertheless survived in the practices of traditional farming.

Finally, in the neoliberal situation (1982–present), the Mexican state withdrew from its welfare commitments and embraced corn as a global commodity that, wherever it came from and whatever the methods of its production, had to be readily accessible in supermarket chains. Through neoliberal policies of labor flexibilization (wherein it is optional for corporations to provide health care or any kind of insurance, wherein labor unions are banned, wherein there is no overtime pay, etc.), Mexican people – especially women – were turned into disposable individual workers for export-oriented transnational industries. Against such a violent desacralization of corn, the Indigenous rebellion and social movement called Zapatismo – in honor of Emiliano Zapata, peasant leader during the Mexican Revolution, who fought for land redistribution – reacted early in the 1990s, rendering visible first the racial and then the gendered dimensions of mainstream economic discourse. While Zapatismo has significantly influenced the contemporary interest in the political recognition and empowerment of rural women, the relationship between traditional rural values and feminist politics continues to be fraught. In this context, one kind of feminist intervention in ecocultural identity attempts to foreground the malleability and relationality of ‘rural women’ at the same time that it emphasizes the specific material hardships that have come to define the position of rural women in Mexican society.

Having sketched out a history of the gendered narratives of corn agriculture, I now turn to describe the emphasis on transformation and agency within *La Jornada del Campo*’s issue on rural women. The issue is framed by empirical evidences regarding the active contribution of women since ancient times to seed selection and preservation directly in the milpa plot (and not just in the home or in its backyard), as well as by the fact that women have been traditionally responsible for the identification, selection, and treatment of plants for food and medicinal purposes. Thus the *traspatio* is redrawn as a space for freedom rather than subordination because, in that space, women actively take part in the virtues and benefits of the milpa paradigm: food sovereignty, autonomous production, biocultural diversity, health, and identity-making.

For the most part, the issue features testimonies that do not relate directly to the *traspatio* or ‘feminine milpa.’ There are some by young Indigenous women paying tribute to their elders, who encouraged them to get an education and make a place for themselves in the wider society without losing touch with their cultural origins. Another tells the story of a migrant woman in the U.S. who discovers her ability to survive on her own after her husband’s deportation by putting into commercial use her otherwise undervalued domestic knowledges about food preparation and medicine. There is also the story of organized women in the Tehuantepec and Tlaxiaco regions of the state of Oaxaca, who transform the unpaid labor of cooking and tortilla-making into a collective public enterprise led by women. Thus, economic entrepreneurship gives women a space to reflect on the meaning

of autonomy and to open themselves to the changing prospects and possibilities of younger women who grow under the influence of urban lifestyles. By emphasizing change and possibility, editors Vizcarra, Castañeda, and Massieu paint a novel picture of rural women as dynamic, heterogeneous, economic, technical and political agents who exist within history and in a process of becoming rather than being.

In contrast to straightforward corn nationalism, and as the example of rural women shows, contemporary milpa narratives seem to better accommodate the historical complexity, the ambiguity, and the non-determination of ecocultural identity in Mexico. Although democratic openings are made possible by the relationality and malleability of ecocultural identity in general, the ecological image of milpa seems to specifically favor such openings at least as it plays out in contemporary activism against neoliberalism in Mexico. However, as the history of gendered structures of corn agriculture suggests, such an ecological image could not be simply of a Romantic kind, or it would tend to neutralize a feminist critique of ecocultural politics. If milpa narratives are to signal a genuine shift in Mexican ecocultural identity, they must be 'without Nature' (Morton, 2007) – that is, without a fantasy of essential harmony, equilibrium, homeliness, or indeed fully achieved human identity.

But are milpa narratives really without Nature in this sense? And, is the visibilization and inclusion of women (or any other marginal subject) enough to establish a more responsible connection between human-centered cultural politics, on one hand, and, on the other, the more-than-human processes of which cultural politics is only a small and rather fragile part? In order to reflect upon these questions, I now turn to some of the nonhuman elements of the milpa, which allow me to interrogate the milpa's constitution as an ecocultural identity or, in Derridean terms, an 'at-home.' As I explained at the beginning of this chapter, identity or the 'at-home' is only constituted in, and comes into being through, the threat of expropriation. In the absence of a real or imagined threat, there is no 'at-home,' no inside–outside structure that grants representation or meaning to a temporary set of relations. If we regard representation or meaning as in this case pertaining to the human – by way of pertaining to cultural politics and family values – the nonhuman elements of the milpa might give us instead a sense of the milpa's relative temporality and material fragility, a sense that queers the milpa and thereby opens up the possibility of a critical ecology of weeds.

Queering the milpa: Toward a critical ecology of weeds

Morton's queer ecology, among others, opens the radical democratic project of cultural studies to an expanding awareness of the problematic constitution of 'the world' as human. In close affinity, philosopher Claire Colebrook (2012) develops a queer feminist critique of contemporary salvationist narratives in cultural theory that aim to guarantee, by means of romanticized notions of women and non-human agents, the symbolic survival of the human as a bounded organism. I follow both Morton and Colebrook in refusing to simply affirm the milpa against neoliberalism, ecology against pollution, the feminine against the masculine, and so forth. Rather than endorsing 'new' ecocultural identities guided by 'better' human values, I stay in the gap between what appears to be any given identity (e.g., Mexican, Indigenous, feminine, human) and whatever that identity may become due to its inherent temporality, textuality, and performativity. Such a choice can also be described as a queer act of wondering. As Giffney and Hird (2008) state in their introduction to *Queering the Non/Human*, 'it is in this moment of wondering – of wondering about wondering – that queering the non/human begins because "queering", as Jeffrey J. Cohen reminds us, 'is at its heart a process of wonder"' (p. xxiv). My wondering is nevertheless situated, and thus once again

with the help of a special issue of *La Jornada del Campo*, I set out in this section to investigate whether a process of wondering can be ignited by a critical interrogation of the milpa from the standpoint of weeds.

The word quelite, from the Indigenous language Náhuatl, means ‘tender edible weed.’ Quelites are weeds that grow themselves in the milpa at the feet of corn plants, entangled with bean and squash leaves. Unlike commercial farmers, traditional farmers do not regard such weeds as something to get rid of. According to the complex rationality of milpa agriculture, farmers must tolerate and even encourage quelites since they are good to eat and can help with the treatment of common ailments. According to Mexican ethnobotanists (Mera Ovando et al., 2011), hundreds of species of quelites would have existed throughout Mesoamerica when the Europeans arrived, but many of them are likely to have disappeared with the loss of milpa farming practices, first under colonization and then under capitalist modernization.

Colonialism and modernization introduced contempt for Indigenous food and lifestyles, which were regarded first as savage or barbarian and then as ‘backward’ (Escobar, 1995). Eating weeds was, and continues to be, regarded by Spanish mainstream culture as more adequate for domesticated animals than people; hence the contemptuous Spanish phrase ‘me importa un bledo’ (which literally means ‘I don’t give a weed,’ as in ‘I don’t give a damn’). Yet, a cultural contempt for weeds may come not from Spain in particular but from a Christian agricultural philosophy that makes it difficult to conceive of food as proper if it does not result from an elaborate process of extraction and domestication (White, 1996). As a result, though they are still remembered by senior generations of people who grew up in agricultural regions, quelites have been replaced in most locations by industrially produced greens such as spinach and lettuce.

Today, the use of the term quelite varies widely across Mexico’s diverse regions. Most often it is used to designate a particular plant that is thereby differentiated from other plants which may, however, be identified as quelites by the ethnobotanists as long as the plants satisfy the more generic definition of ‘tender edible weed.’ For the ethnobotanists, there are quelites native to Mesoamerica, such as quintoniles, or the tender leaves of amaranth (*Chenopodium berlandieri*), as well as ‘adopted’ quelites, such as coriander and parsley, which were brought by Europeans. Since quelites have provided diversity and nutrition to rural communities despite the hardships imposed on them throughout Mexican history, ethnobotanists advocate rescuing quelites from oblivion, which also means rescuing rural knowledges associated with them and using those rural knowledges to formulate locally based solutions to the health crisis introduced in contemporary Mexico by the replacement of traditional rural diets with high-fat, high-sugar, imported industrial food. Considering the magnitude of socio-environmental devastation in the Mexican countryside, the decimation of rural populations through forced migration, and the degree of disinformation (and residual colonial contempt) regarding rural issues in urban Mexican society, the ethnobotanists’ proposal seems hard to realize, yet it provides an index of the utopian imagination at play in milpa narratives of Mexican nationhood.

La Jornada del Campo’s issue of 18 November 2017 was dedicated to quelites. As in the cases of the ‘feminine milpa,’ contributors reflect on the place and the worth of quelites as members of the expanded milpa family. This time, milpa intellectual Bartra (2017, November 18) suggests that because they emerge spontaneously and ‘because of their extreme modesty and zero protagonism, quelites could be the true image of the milpa’ (p. 3). After speculating that quelites would be ‘too modest’ to assume such a representational role, Bartra writes that quelites have at least some political lessons to teach:

On the one hand, they are competition for corn, beans and other important species, and so quelites must be eliminated. On the other hand, farmers recognize them as valuable foods, to be cared for and tolerated. Like everything else, this gives us a lesson. Making milpa is about making friends, about promoting the kind coexistence of diverse parts. But not everything in life is easy and spontaneous complementarity; there is also competition and potential conflict. The two faces of quelites teach us that perfect harmony is a mirage, that coexistence includes fighting and that to preserve a dynamic equilibrium one must know when to eliminate weeds and when to preserve them.

(p. 3)

In Bartra's introduction, quelites are figured as carriers of political wisdom for an 'expanded milpa.' In her contribution, food activist Cristina Barros (2017) argues for a recognition of the dignity of quelites based on the labor required to sustain them. Quelites might grow spontaneously, she observes, but farmers must actively distinguish between noxious and desirable weeds for quelites to become recognizable as such. In that sense, quelites do embody, after all, the value of human labor – including the labor of discernment – even at the margins of the Christian agricultural philosophy that would otherwise despise them. Contributors Sarah Bak-Geler and Luis Alberto Vargas (2017) reinforce this point by declaring, elsewhere in the issue, that to let ourselves be 'seduced' by quelites (p. 23) means acknowledging quelites are a considerable source of energy and health benefits that has resulted from centuries of complex human–weed interaction.

What all these contributors seem to share is a conviction that quelites have value and usefulness within the political imaginary of the expanded milpa, a conviction that perhaps needs to be given some thought. While in the case of rural women it seemed straightforward and adequate to praise milpa narratives for better accommodating feminist de-naturalizing interventions, in the case of quelites it seems less clear that contributors articulate an ecological intervention beyond asserting the immediate instrumental value of quelites to human beings. I wonder: does such a humanist reduction of quelites do justice to the accumulated histories of socioenvironmental violence that today threaten multiple species, including the human, with nothing less than extinction? Could quelites be acknowledged in ways other than as healthy resources or metaphoric place-holders for human narratives of self-reproduction? Could they perhaps suggest an unexpected, post-anthropocentric starting point for a queer ecology, and an opening to freedom and responsibility of milpa narratives?

Queering the milpa does not underestimate but does seek to go deeper than a progressive repositioning of marginal subjects or objects within the representational field of ecocultural identity. As anticipated in the first section of this chapter, queering involves conceiving such a field less in the Romantic terms of a stable Nature or an organic community (a holistic, inside/outside structure, such as is produced through traditional gender and family roles, including those of the Mesoamerican cultural situation) than in the deconstructive terms of precarious being in time. Morton (2010a) alludes to the temporal failure of every identity through the figure of 'intimate strangers.' Rather than turning quelites into a new identity flag, a queer ecological perspective would open itself to the strangeness of quelites, first by dissociating them from ideals of either political or nutritional balance, and then by associating them with the temporality of being as such. Yet the sheer strangeness of quelites is not a big focus of milpa narratives so far. Bartra's narrative about quelites as both modest and politically wise instead suggests gendered associations with the feminine, with the invisible and forgotten places that have become new sources of representational legitimacy for a human community now called 'the expanded milpa.' Thought as intimate strangers rather than as familiar resources, however, quelites invite questioning of the self-sameness or the 'essence' of the human community.

If we regard the milpa as an ecological text, quelites do not merely designate plants in the world but, rather, they relate in a peculiar way to every other element of the milpa. Even their supposedly spontaneous growth is in fact dependent on the complex environment of the milpa, which is why quelites tend to diminish and even disappear in the less biodiverse conditions of industrial monocultures. While the dependence of quelites on a hospitable milpa system, as well as the fact that they must be picked while tender, has led Indigenous cultures and contemporary rural people to routinely compare them with children,³ here I wonder about the temporal perspective that quelites offer on the metaphor of milpa-making. Could their short-lived perspective explain the conflicted status of quelites, the fact they are loved but also despised, that they are both admired for their joyful spontaneity and violently domesticated through notions of usefulness and political meaningfulness? Perhaps – and, after all, like childhood – quelites threaten the milpa-making imaginary with an acute awareness of its own temporality and fragility, also at the core of the uncertain situation of human beings in a changing universe. Like climate chaos, mass extinction, resource depletion, war, desperate refugee multitudes, and the multiple forms of violence that underpin desired lifestyles, the fragility and fading memory of quelites induce anxiety rather than straightforward tenderness or appreciation. Yet, thought of as ‘fragments of an exploded consciousness’ (Marder & Tondeur, 2016), perhaps quelites open up the possibility of an ecological queering of the milpa, which is also a questioning of ecocultural identity as a tendency to forget or domesticate the fundamental dependency and precariousness of being. In the final section, I recount ways I have addressed the forgetfulness of ecocultural identity, not by means of an academic reflection but rather through an artistic cookbook.

Queering the milpa, in practice

Cholula is an ancient Indigenous town located in the state of Puebla, in central Mexico, the rural economy of which underwent dramatic transformation in the past 30 years. Today, the two largest municipalities of Cholula have a combined population of almost 250,000 people from all over the country and the world, including many students and professors working in the three large universities that settled in its territory. In 2014, a substantial group of residents united to undertake civil resistance against the state government of Puebla, which announced development plans including an expropriation of the agricultural lands that surround Cholula’s archeological site and main religious worship center – a Catholic church standing on top of a pre-Columbian pyramid or ceremonial center, and surrounded by a spectacular agricultural landscape that connects the present with the long ecocultural history of the Indigenous town. Although the state government eventually succeeded in expropriating and concrete-paving for commercial occupation some of the agricultural plots, civil society organized numerous protest events under the banner ‘Cholula Viva y Digna’ and sparked public debate around the value of tangible and intangible heritage versus the modernizing initiatives of an authoritarian government.

As a witness of this struggle, I decided to intervene by subtly adding another kind of consideration to the civil movement’s narrative, which revolved around popular culture and archaeological patrimony. When my late friend Yara Almoina asked me to help with fundraising for one of her projects – the publication of a cookbook authored by a senior woman from Cholula – I conceptualized and obtained a grant for an artistic project of culinary activism. The ecological point I meant to address was related to the fact that agricultural lands provide Cholula’s residents with an aesthetic connection with the land, a stunning spectacle of milpa agriculture throughout the seasons, including flowers and insects and, of

course, farming practices. In a queer ecological gesture of subversion of my own Romantic attachment to local ecocultures, I chose to not only foreground the connection between agricultural spaces and culinary heritage but, within that connection, to foreground quelites. Furthermore, I chose quelites not only because these have been the almost completely forgotten elements of a rapidly changing food repertoire, but also because they remind me of the underlying fragility of all human endeavors.

Together with photographer Ángela Arziniaga and artist Luz Elvira Torres, we composed an artistic book⁴ that included a literary essay on quelites in which I fictionalized my own impossible yet joyful search for ecocultural identity under the Proustian title ‘In search of the lost quelite,’ a visual essay that documented the contested urban transformation of the rural spaces of Cholula in which quelites figured not only in the plots but also through the cracks of urban walls covered by protest-themed graffiti, and a quelite recipe section provided by the senior citizen of Cholula, Margarita Ortega Toxqui. We developed these contents throughout a year that included field trips to extant milpas and workshops for the general public in which we invited assistants to share not just their culinary or botanical knowledge, but, above all, their memories of Cholula as a rural space in which biodiversity shaped social life and social relations, as well as their thoughts on the implications of losing practices, such as milpa farming, which sustain human existence.

Clearly, the local success of the resulting art book was due to the combined popularity of the topic of food and the beautiful artwork of Ángela Arziniaga and Luz Elvira Torres. Its invisible infrastructural aim, however, was to confront, via literary and visual juxtaposition, the joys of food with the ecological dimension of life, thus providing a contrast, an alternative perspective on the human-centered conflict over land ownership and the right to preserve tangible and intangible heritage. Through its emphasis on the vulnerability of memory – our forgetting of quelites – and on the strangeness of my own search for them, the book seeks to stimulate an ethical reflection beyond the culinary value of agricultural resources. It seeks to remind of the temporal limits of every construction of human ecocultural identity, including academic identity or discipline. Thus the project was an effort to queer my own academic critique of corn nationalism, which eventually took the specialist, conventional form of an academic monograph in English (Méndez Cota, 2016b). Only as an experimental, speculative – rather than conventionally ‘knowledgeable’ – intervention in my immediate surroundings could that critique truly open itself to the materialities that sustain me, that elude me, that demand from me an infinite responsibility not just over there in the actual milpa but right here, in the metaphysical milpa, as well.

Notes

- 1 As diagnosed in 2014 by the Mexican chapter of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal (PPT), economic, political, and criminal agents have become indistinguishable from each other in the context of the ‘war on drugs,’ resulting in massive bloodshed and impunity. Thus, the alarming proliferation and the expansion of mining, fracking, and energy-extraction megaprojects advanced by national companies and transnational corporations in the Mexican territory have come to rely as much on paramilitary violence disguised as the ‘war on drugs’ as on neoliberal policies and political corruption. The victims of most violence related to the expansion of extractive megaprojects are Indigenous peoples.
- 2 The earthquake happened on September 19, 2017, on the same calendar day as the historic 1985 earthquake that sparked the emergence of Mexican civil society, according to cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis.
- 3 This is folk knowledge. In pre-Columbian times, children were called ‘quelites’ because they were ‘tender’ like the ‘tender edible weeds’ that quelites are.
- 4 The book is freely available for download at www.enbuscadelqueliteperdido.com.

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Wildtending, settler colonialism, and ecocultural identities in environmental futures

Bruno Seraphin

I'm amazed they've made this house of cards last ... but in reality, how long can they keep it up? How much shoe goo and duct tape do you got in your bag? ... when logic says let it fall so we can build something real, something that can last or endure. No, there is no 'kum-bah-yah' in nature. It's ugly and rough. And there's maybe just as much ugly in nature as there is in civ. But here's a major difference between the two: one has a future and the other does not.

(Otter, a wildtending teacher)

Otter, a non-Indigenous man in his late 50s living in southern Oregon, holds out no hope for a future utopia, yet still believes that the world will be better off once 'Babylon,' or 'civ' (civilization), has collapsed. His ecocultural identity, like that of others involved with wildtending, emerges in relation to an abundant future that he knows he may never see.

This chapter centers on an inchoate nomadic movement bound by shared environmental practices, here called wildtending. My research entails participant observation, personal self-reflection, interviews, and analysis of online and print texts written by wildtenders and rewilders. I began visiting with wildtending camps in summer 2014 and transitioned into formal participant observation in summer 2015 (Seraphin, 2016). I consider ways that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the United States Northwest may imagine an array of contradictory environmental futures. *Wildtending ecocultural identity*, though emergent and heterogeneous, is grounded in feelings of ethical obligation to the more-than-human world. *Wildtending* consists mainly of White non-Indigenous aspiring nomads who appropriate environmental care practices of Great Basin and Columbia River Plateau Indigenous peoples. Living as poor, itinerant nomads, wildtenders travel seasonally throughout the U.S. Northwest, gathering and planting the seeds of Indigenous first foods, such as breadroot, wild carrot, and huckleberries. Wildtenders seek to approximate a seasonal round lifeway, gathering particular foods in certain locations at specific times of the year. They refer to their seasonal round as the 'Sacred Hoop.' Camping mostly on national forest land in eastern Oregon and throughout the Northwest U.S., sometimes living out of cars, or traveling with horses or goats, wildtenders (or hoopsters) endeavor to practice a kind of informal but networked

ecosystem restoration project, eating foods provided by a landscape understood to be agentic and enspirited, and striving to tend ancestral Indigenous gathering places into abundance. Many aspire to practice wildtending – to be ‘on the Hoop’ – year-round. Wildtenders assert that they value, above all, reciprocity, and they seek to enact this concept in their relations with both human and nonhuman beings.

This chapter situates wildtending ecocultural identity formation within the ongoing structural conditions of U.S. settler colonialism. Following the scholarship of Whyte (2018a), Dunbar-Ortiz (2014), Tuck and Yang (2012), and Wolfe (2006), I understand settler colonialism to be both a structure and a set of socio-material technologies (Yang, 2017) for imperial conquest and governance through which colonization is carried out not only by state military forces but also by civilian non-Indigenous settlers. In settler nation states, colonial power extracts and exploits Indigenous land and labor and also attempts total permanent occupation, ecological transformation, and obscuration of ongoing Indigenous presence. The settler colonial U.S. continually functions through coerced labor at home and abroad, persistent accumulation by dispossession, and capitalist expansion and exploitation coterminous with racial hierarchy. Not a project of the state alone, settler colonialism involves an array of civilian actors, even nominally counter-culture ones, to appropriate, transform, and occupy Indigenous lands.

I contend that wildtending and other radical environmentalisms could more fully realize their liberatory potential by entering into relationships of direct accountability with contemporary Indigenous efforts toward land repatriation, resurgence, and self-determination. Drawing attention to the multiple and sometimes competing visions for wildtending’s possible trajectories, this chapter makes the theoretical argument that ecocultural identities emerge not only within networks of human and nonhuman relations, but moreover in ways those relations are imagined into the future. In the early twenty-first century, conversations around the environmental future are highly charged, and questions of political inclusion and exclusion, sovereignty, and self-determination loom large. Wildtending ecocultural identity constitutes a potent locus, a phenomenon on the fringe of the norm that nonetheless constitutes a convergence point for many enduring and exigent questions about the environmental futures of U.S. empire.

Above, Otter offers his take on a central theme in wildtending, the assemblage of stories known as ‘the return.’ ‘Returning’ is a frequent topic of discussion among wildtenders. The term is understood to mean relocating to rural areas, employing gathering and planting practices to restore landscapes to pre-colonial conditions, and transforming one’s self to a more ‘natural’ and less ‘civilized’ way of being human. The essence of the narrative is presented by wildtending supporters Adrain Chesser and Timothy White Eagle (2014) in *The Return*, their art photography book. Glossy images of wildtenders are accompanied by sparse text (for details on ‘the return’ narrative see Seraphin, 2017). White Eagle writes that, ‘the world was once a wild garden’ tended by the ‘First People.’ He continues:

the Garden will go untended for seven generations it will be close to death/a new tribe will arise/a Rainbow tribe/the in-betweens/the dispossessed/and heroic youth/will be the first to walk this path....

‘The return’ is an environmental narrative with far future and deep past implications. According to this story, the original ‘first people’ of North America have seemingly disappeared, yet their sustainable lifeways can be resurrected and carried into the future by new

heroes – wildtenders – a vanguard movement that transcends racialization and settler colonial privilege. The mythic journey of ‘the return,’ according to its own exceptionalist logic, supersedes conversations about geopolitics, settler colonial positionality, and appropriation. ‘The return’ story is often meant well. For example, one White non-Indigenous wildtender named Spider expressed to me a desire for ‘racial unity’ in wildtending, articulating a vision of diverse people coming together: ‘If you love your Mother [Earth], and if you are tending her gardens, then you’re in my camp. That’s what I would like to see.’¹ However, such a universalizing, color-blind narrative obscures colonial systems instead of confronting them (Seraphin, 2017). ‘The return’ is teleology that constitutes wildtending in the present through a predestined future on the horizon and imagines it exempt from material complicity with ongoing settler colonialism.

Most wildtenders know the narrative outline of ‘the return,’ but wildtending futurity is not singular. I begin this chapter by engaging the diverse and contradictory futures imagined, described, and enacted by, wildtenders. I also suggest that wildtending offers some necessary interventions into conventional U.S. environmental thought, even while it too often defaults to logics of settler colonial extraction (Simpson, 2017), elimination, and replacement (Wolfe, 2006).² Second, I complicate these settler futurities by centering scholarship pertaining to North American Indigenous resurgence, futurisms, and science fiction. Indigenous science fiction denaturalizes conventional Western concepts of science, technology, and progress, and reveals imaginative possibilities for building multispecies relational worlds of reciprocity, regeneration, and environmental justice. Such futurisms challenge the sometimes solipsistic self-narration of some wildtenders. Third, I argue that work by two Black feminist science fiction scholars and community organizers, adrienne maree brown (2017) and Walidah Imarisha (2015), provides a framework for thinking about ways that non-Indigenous environmental futures, such as those articulated by wildtenders, might transform to ally themselves with twenty-first century Indigenous and anti-racist movements. Ultimately, I propose that thinking with wildtending, Indigenous futurisms, and brown and Imarisha’s conception of community organizing as a form of practical science fiction opens space for a hopeful orientation toward viable ecocultural futures and disrupts the predominantly apocalyptic tone of twenty-first century global warming discourse.

In this chapter, I intend to both represent and enact the stated goals of many wildtenders: namely, the generation of potentialities for livable environments and just ecological relations. In this, I follow Miyazaki’s (2004) work to reorient social science knowledge toward futurity. Personally, as a White, non-Indigenous person who lives on occupied Cayuga lands and participates in settler capitalism – yet aspires to collaboratively imagine and actualize more just and sustainable futures – I encounter many commonalities with my wildtending interlocutors. At the same time, my work is meant to gesture beyond wildtending’s explicit ambitions, toward the decolonizing potential of antiracist environmentalisms.

Wildtending origins, relations, and futures

The ‘Hoop,’ or wildtending, movement has existed for between 10 and 15 years, and it has continuously comprised a heterogeneous collection of individuals who do not necessarily spend time with, know, or like each other. Most hoopsters are White and non-Indigenous, but ages, locations of upbringing, and degrees of socioeconomic privilege vary. A relatively high proportion of wildtenders are queer, trans, or gender non-conforming. I have interacted with about 30 individuals who would consider themselves current or former ‘hoopsters.’ However, there is no generally agreed upon criteria for what makes a ‘hoopster.’ Regarding

the total population, estimates differ depending on who is asked, and numbers range from just a small handful to several hundred. Some wildtenders are ‘on the Hoop’ all the time, some only in warm months, and some only intermittently. Despite their many differences – and frequent disagreements about planting practices, how to ethically utilize ‘modern’ technologies, and more – all hoopsters share a desire to engage in environmental care praxis, and a willingness to live as poor, migratory nomads (Seraphin, 2016).

The ‘Hoop’ movement – also known as ‘wildtending’ – began to assemble during the mid 2000s. At that time, Finisia Medrano, who had been a nomadic recluse in the U.S. Northwest for decades, started informally sharing her knowledge about wild foods and nomadic living with members of the rewilding movement, the eco-spiritual queer Radical Faeries movement, and other communities. Medrano states that she first learned about harvesting ancestral foods from Indigenous elder women teachers in Oregon in the 1970s. As a trans woman, political radical, and practitioner of an esoteric Christianity rooted in her own holy visions, she felt like an outcast during those years. Finisia found solace in the work of digging and planting roots.

After learning a bit about Indigenous first foods of the Great Basin region, Finisia decided to dedicate her life to harvesting and planting biscuitroots and other edible plants that grow in remote places. She spent the next several decades travelling around the U.S. Northwest, and across the U.S., sometimes with a string of horses, sometimes in a covered wagon. Today, like many ‘hoopsters,’ she attests that she encounters her own humanity most fully when she is digging and planting root foods. She elaborated on her story when I interviewed her. Tearing up, she recalled,

I heard their voice – the voice of these plants – the ones that I’d been planting – blooming. And there they are: biscuitroots. And they said, ‘You know, maybe all that they say about you is true, Fin, every bit of it. But you’re this person too. You’re also this.’

(Finia Medrano)

In her narrative, Finisia describes discovering another way to be. Her years traveling ‘on the Hoop’ precipitated the formation of a new ecocultural identity. Through relationships with roots, nut trees, and berry bushes, Finisia came to experience herself as interdependent with and co-constitutive of the more-than-human world. Likewise, for practitioners, wildtending ecocultural identity is based on giving life to those plants that could nourish and sustain human beings.

Now in her 60s, Finisia has helped galvanize wildtending, but she has never sought to build a human community around herself. Still, I have spoken to numerous wildtenders who stressed that meeting Finisia transformed them for the better, and even saved their lives in some cases. Echoing a sentiment I heard many times, a wildtender named Cortni told me, ‘I didn’t know there was a possibility of being *for* life.’ Learning about wildtending was, for many like Cortni, a revelation of a new, reciprocal way to be human. Wildtending ecocultural identity emerges relationally from the practices of gathering and planting seeds – being ‘for life’ in the midst of what wildtenders see as a cruel, industrialized, consumerist culture of death. For most practitioners, the primary emphasis of wildtending is nurturing human-plant relationships toward the mutual promotion of abundant life.

Wildtenders participate in numerous other counter-cultural movements. Examples include the ‘rewilding’ and ‘primitive skills’ communities. Wildtending is distinguishable from these in that wildtending is founded on the specific work of gathering and replanting seeds in the Great Basin and Columbia Plateau regions, whereas primitive skills and rewilding

communities focus more on spiritual connection to land, outdoor survival skills, and environmentally ethical consumption and production practices, and can be found globally. Some wildtenders do also identify as rewilders, yet assert that wildtending is a distinct way of life because of its year-round commitment, focus on gathering and planting seeds, and overarching ethic of socio-ecological reciprocal care (Seraphin, 2016). Many hoopsters stereotype rewilders as mere ‘hobbyists’ – urbanites more interested in fleeting performances of ‘primitiveness’ than in a long-term commitment to tending the wild (Finisia Medrano, personal communication).

Another influence on wildtending is *anarcho-primitivism* (e.g., Perlman, 2010; Zerzan, 2012), less a movement than a socio-philosophical critique of ‘civilization,’ capitalism, and sometimes patriarchy with numerous conflicting iterations. Anarcho-primitivist ideas that influence wildtending ecocultural identity may include the notion that societal collapse is inevitable and that only pre-Neolithic technologies are truly sustainable. Many wildtenders criticize anarcho-primitivists, asserting that all such philosophy is useless if it fails to manifest in the practical and all-important work of digging roots and gathering and replanting seeds. Several hoopsters are also involved with the Radical Faeries, neo-paganism, and the communalist eco-spiritual ‘Rainbow Gathering’ festival movement, each of which, like wildtending, continues to negotiate complex relationships with Indigenous peoples, and struggles with the problem of cultural appropriation (as explained by Morgensen, 2011; Niman, 2011). Further, wildtending has been influenced by the long history of regional separatist organizing in the U.S. Northwest, which has at times taken the form of right-wing militia and White nationalist movements (Sunshine et al., 2016). Ultimately, various hoopsters might identify with or differentiate themselves from any of these and other groups at any given time.³

Wildtenders move in the Great Basin and Columbia River Plateau regions, on the ancestral lands of the Nez Perce, Northern Paiute, Western Shoshone, Yakama Nation, the Klamath and Modoc Tribes, as well as other Indigenous peoples, in what is currently referred to as eastern Oregon and Washington, southern Oregon, northern California, Idaho, and Nevada. Wildtenders learn their ecological skills from Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers, from books, the internet, and direct experimentation. Although most hoopsters are aware that the ‘wild gardens’ they tend continue to be sacred or culturally significant locations for Indigenous peoples of the region, many struggle or neglect to form solidarity relationships with local Indigenous communities. I argue that wildtending’s ecological praxis should be understood as being both continuous and discontinuous with Indigenous modalities of relation that have existed since time immemorial – continuous because the praxis comprises ancient techniques that have been recently appropriated, and discontinuous because the context for such transmission has been war, genocide, and a settler colonial regime that has made it nearly impossible for Indigenous peoples to continue practicing their own seasonal round lifeways.

Wildtending thus constitutes a movement that at once is both strikingly unique and typical of the broader problems of race and colonial privilege in Euro-American environmentalism.⁴ Wildtenders endeavor to build ecosocial worlds of reciprocal care and nurturance. Yet, as I have argued elsewhere (Seraphin, 2017), when they appropriate Indigenous ecological practices, aesthetics, bits of language, and philosophical concepts without consultation or accountability to Indigenous communities, wildtenders default to ‘extractivism,’ a term used by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) to mean the dismemberment and commodification of Indigenous peoples’ lands, bodies, and knowledge for the benefit of settler world-building. White non-Indigenous wildtenders’ acquiescence to legal, economic, and social privileges, their myopic ‘settler common sense’ (Rifkin, 2014) about the seemingly

self-evident availability of Indigenous lands and cultures, and their objectifying practices of 'playing Indian' (Deloria, 1998) ultimately sustain the oppressive systems they strive to resist. The practices of wildtending may constitute, on one hand, an epistemological challenge to settler colonial norms of private property ownership, wealth accumulation, heteronormative domesticity, and human dominance of the nonhuman world. On the other, systems of racial privilege instituted by the U.S. settler colonial political and legal order constitute wildtending's irreducible conditions of possibility. Wildtending ecocultural identity is fraught and dynamic, with potential to both re-inscribe and disrupt the settler colonial status quo.

Wildtenders wonder where their movement is heading and discuss the future often. Concern with the contemporary climate crisis is a central animating force for the wildtending movement, and although narratives about possible apocalyptic scenarios proliferate among wildtenders, the scope, significance, and temporality of the end of the world remain in dispute. Among many wildtenders, scenarios of environmental disaster, the collapse of infrastructure, and societal chaos are anticipated with simultaneous terror and relish. Such scenarios are sometimes called 'when the shit hits the fan,' but also are referred to as the 'fall of Babylon.' Drawing on associations of decadence, unsustainability, and brutal hierarchy, and indexing a lineage that connects contemporary social problems to the earliest Neolithic civilizations, hoopsters imagine Babylon as the antithesis of the regenerative and symbiotic 'Hoop.' 'You believe in Babylon, we be leavin' Babylon' (Michael, personal communication), quip some pun-loving wildtenders. For many 'hoopsters,' Babylon represents ecocide, slavery, hypocrisy, and misery. In addition, Babylon should be abandoned because it is going to fall. However, this fall is understood in multiple and contradictory ways. Some, like Otter, hope that Babylon will collapse soon so that 'we can build something new,' more just, equitable, and sane. In contrast, some wildtenders reject any kind of redemptive narrative and imagine that the climate crisis will bring an end to all life on Earth. Some aspire toward a mythic 'return' to a more reciprocal and harmonious relationship to nonhuman nature, possibly several generations in the future, while others believe this to be a naive delusion. Most hoopsters subscribe to several of these narratives at once (Seraphin, 2016). Among wildtenders, multiple futures proliferate, which reflects that wildtending ecocultural identity is heterogeneous.

The case of wildtending illuminates ways ecocultural identity emerges through quotidian ecosocial practice, as well as the profound degree to which even nominally counter-hegemonic environmental movements may replicate settler colonialism. Further, wildtending reveals that ecocultural identity is in part a project of imagining and enacting futures. Wildtending is a process of future-making in ways that may exceed the intentions of wildtenders. I contend that wildtenders' complex relationships with human and more-than-human communities in the region at once derive from and index contradictory ideas about what kinds of futures are desirable and possible. Wildtenders' diverse and fraught visions for regional and global environmental futures emerge as a field of negotiation for unresolved tensions around race, power, and belonging. The next sections turn to Indigenous and Afro-futurisms in order to complicate and expand the futures imagined by wildtending.

Settler colonialism and Indigenous science fiction

Because wildtenders occupy the homelands of dispossessed Indigenous peoples, and because wildtenders seek to revitalize the environmental practices of these peoples largely without Tribal awareness, involvement, or consent, wildtending benefits from and is complicit in settler colonialism. Despite explicit critiques of capitalism and ecocide, many hoopsters default

to self-mythologizing exceptionalist narratives – ahistoric iterations of ‘the return’ story – that inhibit them from analyzing their own material involvement in ongoing Indigenous dispossession. Wildtending praxis thus has the troubling capacity to serve as a ‘settler [move] to innocence,’ to borrow a term from First Nations scholar Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012, p. 1). These theorists define settler moves to innocence as the striving to be rendered blameless (*ibid.*). They explain that settler society must constantly produce narratives that construe occupied land as a gift from the dispossessed rather than a theft. They stress that, ‘this is a fantasy that is invested in a settler futurity and dependent on the foreclosure of an Indigenous futurity’ (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 14). As I have argued elsewhere (Seraphin, 2017), wildtending’s ‘return’ story, as a ‘move to innocence,’ effaces historical and current settler colonial oppression by suggesting that the world’s ecological problems can be solved by settlers appropriating Indigenous peoples’ knowledge. The narrative imagines a future for settlers yet overlooks Indigenous peoples’ rights to their own practices as well as the persistence and efficacy of Indigenous land tenure in the U.S. Northwest.

In spite of centuries of relentless settler efforts to foreclose Indigenous futurity, the twenty-first century has seen a proliferation of United States and Canada-based Indigenous critical scholarship on Indigenous resurgence. Nishnaabeg artist, activist, and theorist of Indigenous resurgence Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) stresses that, ‘Indigenous futures are entirely dependent upon what we collectively do now as diverse Indigenous nations, with our ancestors and those yet unborn We must continuously build and rebuild Indigenous worlds’ (p. 246). Such work has been intertwined with an accelerating momentum of Indigenous-centered movements for self-determination and environmental justice, such as Idle No More (beginning in 2012) and the movement against the Dakota Access Pipeline (beginning in 2016), as well as local and Tribally specific initiatives to recover, govern, and protect Indigenous lands on the Columbia Plateau and beyond. Indigenous resurgence, for Simpson as well as Yellowknives Diné scholar Glen Coulthard (2014), is a multitudinous and emergent project of decolonial possibility grounded in daily activities of community and land regeneration.

Much Indigenous writing on resurgence and futurity intervenes in the Euro-American environmentalist tendency to cast global warming and the so-called Anthropocene in apocalyptic terms. Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd (2016) rethinks the chronology of apocalypticism when she notes that, ‘over the last five hundred years, Indigenous peoples faced (and face) the end of worlds with the violent incursion of colonial ideologies and actions’ (par. 5). Likewise, Potawatomi philosopher Kyle Whyte observes that Indigenous peoples in North America currently may be living their ancestors’ dystopia. In the Anthropocene, writes Whyte (2018b), many Indigenous peoples ‘already inhabit what [their] ancestors would have understood as a dystopian future’ (p. 4). Indigenous peoples have for hundreds of years resisted and survived socio-ecological collapse, and continue to actively fight against settler colonialism and its attendant environmental justice catastrophes. Resurgent Indigenous theory unsettles wildtending’s environmental apocalypticism by revealing that apocalypse is an ongoing structural aspect of settler imperial expansion.

Indigenous-centered perspectives on possible futures, ‘Indigenous futurisms’ (Dillon, 2012), are explored through science fiction in works of literature, film, video games, and other media. According to First Nations scholar Grace L. Dillon, Indigenous science fiction and speculative fiction stories have the power to dismantle the romantic colonial trope of the ‘disappearing Indian’ and write Indigenous peoples back into the future (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Dillon and others assert that Indigenous science fiction may conceptualize alternative kinds of futures, built with alternative kinds of technologies. Such futurisms would center Indigenous perspectives and blossom from ‘Indigenous scientific literacies,’ which Dillon

defines as, ‘practices used ... over thousands of years to reenergize the natural environment while improving the interconnected relationships among all persons (animal, human, spirit, and even machine). Some ... features include sustainable forms of medicine, agriculture, architecture, and art’ (p. 7).⁵ Indigenous science and speculative fiction may thus stimulate the decolonizing imagination, critique misrepresentations and erasures in mainstream science fiction, and explore conversations about what more just and regenerative Indigenous futures might look and feel like.

This broad understanding of Indigenous science fiction interlinks narrative works and social movements. Creative and theoretical works of Indigenous science fiction are complemented and actualized by more local, regional, community based, and tribally specific initiatives. Throughout the Northwest United States, and specifically on the Columbia River Plateau, Indigenous communities forward ambitious land tenure projects that center ancestral forms of environmental care-taking. In her book, *Yakama Rising: Indigenous Cultural Revitalization, Activism, and Healing*, Yakama scholar of education Michelle M. Jacob (2013) describes the resurgence of cultural dance, language, food, and activism in her community, theorizing a ‘Yakama decolonizing practice’ (p. 16) as a way to heal from and resist settler colonial violence. Also in this region, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation have documented their revitalizations of language, environmental knowledge, and ancestral food practices in the book *Cáw Pawá Láakni: They Are Not Forgotten: Sahaptian Place Names Atlas of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla* (Hunn et al., 2015). This atlas provides dozens of maps featuring place names in the language Saháptin, locations of culturally important sites, and information about food gathering. Such ‘resurgence’ projects might situate ancestral Indigenous teachings as methods for building futures for Indigenous communities.

Hoopsters, I argue based on my research, too infrequently consider their own environmental futurisms in relation to the Indigenous resurgence movements of their region, exemplified in the above literature. For example, wildtender Finisia and others sometimes lament they are the ‘only people out of seven billion’ who choose to seek out a symbiotic relationship with the Earth. Instead of pursuing alliances with Tribes or considering ways that wildtenders and U.S. Northwest Indigenous communities may have some shared goals, some wildtenders dismiss all Tribal governments as ‘corrupt’ and paint them as environmentally exploitative capitalists. Sentiments to this effect demonstrate a solipsistic absolutism in the thinking of some ‘hoopsters.’ These wildtenders implicitly assert that any work that diverges from their own specific praxis is merely part of a wicked, dying system.

When wildtenders cast their group identity as the lone group of pioneers striving to ‘return’ to an abundant future, they efface the resurgent work of Indigenous communities. Many Indigenous environmental futurisms create capacity to imagine a multiplicity of more just and regenerative futures, envisioned not as a return to a lost golden age, but as emergent political resistance and adaptive revitalization. For Simpson (2017), resurgence is in part a process of activating and invigorating relations with land, plants, and non-human animals. Indigenous science fiction transports such human–nonhuman networks into distant or alternative worlds. Indigenous communities throughout the Northwest are enacting resurgent presents and futures in the twenty-first century. Works such as *They Are Not Forgotten* and *Yakama Rising*, and the ecocultural projects they describe, challenge wildtending’s tendency toward exceptionalist self-narration. These works articulate a vision of what Simpson (2017) calls a ‘radical resurgent present’ (p. 1) for Indigenous communities – a stark contrast to ‘the return,’ which is imagined as a renewed future for a heroic few.

Adopting resurgent Indigenous science fiction as a lens, the future-directedness of wildtending ecocultural identity is revealed to be as much settler survival fantasy as hopeful vision of environmental abundance. Indigenous futurisms, by contrast, assert the struggle to achieve reciprocal human–nonhuman relations must be situated within resistance to the violence of settler colonialism. When wildtenders default to a simplistic ‘return’ story they may foreclose the possibility of engaging solidarity relationships with Indigenous communities. When wildtenders narrate their group identity as an exceptional coterie of pioneers, they expose an anxious settler longing for innocence. When wildtenders deny their own ongoing participation in Indigenous dispossession, they turn a blind eye to the same oppressive structural conditions they seek to critique, resist, and unmake. However, an abundant future for the lands hoopsters love may best be achieved through support for Indigenous land repatriation and radical resurgence.

Critical solidarity and the science fiction of everyday life

Although a few hoopsters have worked closely with Indigenous peoples, wildtending as a whole does not appear to be a decolonizing movement. However, wildtenders’ praxes might offer potential for a kind of critical solidarity with what Coulthard (2014) envisions as Indigenous ‘critical’ resurgence, which draws ‘on the past with an eye to radically transform the colonial power relations that have come to dominate our present’ (p. 157). Wildtending could be well placed to act in solidarity with the kinds of resurgence movements Coulthard describes.

Yet settler–Indigenous solidarities can be hard won. Barker and Pickerill (2012) comment that such solidarities are always experimental, always situationally specific, a set of maneuvers for which there is no established protocol, a ‘complex, slow journey of learning’ (p. 1721). A vital step for many non-Indigenous environmentalists could perhaps be the recognition that ‘Indigenous lessons about sustainability are not just for “all humanity”’ (Whyte et al., 2018). In this regard, these authors note that some non-Indigenous groups instrumentalize Indigenous knowledge in order to secure a future for ecologically threatened settlers. When wildtending ecocultural identity is constituted by the appropriation of Indigenous ecological practices yet refuses accountability to present day Indigenous communities, it upholds the settler colonial future.

A conception of science fiction, or speculative fiction, as a practice of everyday life may offer productive avenues for non-Indigenous people working toward solidarity with Indigenous resurgent presents and futures. Community organizers and science fiction scholars adrienne maree brown (2017) and Walidah Imarisha (2015) note that social movements are often inspired by speculative narratives about possible futures, but moreover, they insist that collective political action is itself a method of practicing science fiction, of imagining and enacting worlds that are yet to be. Imarisha (2015) writes, ‘Whenever we try to envision a world without war, without violence, without prisons, without capitalism, we are engaging in speculative fiction. All organizing is science fiction’ (p. 3). These authors build on Black feminist Afro-futurist traditions, in particular the literary works of Octavia Butler. They assert that futurity inheres in the building, maintenance, and reconfiguration of networked accountability relationships. Such a practical science fiction, a lived present futurity, constitutes a negotiation between what is possible right now, with the resources at hand, and what kinds of worlds may be realizable at a more remote future time. Future imaginaries that disrupt contemporary colonial trajectories are co-constitutive with the improvisational tactics, multispecies encounters, and cultivated social habits involved in building socio-environmental movements in the present.

brown and Imarisha join scholars of Indigenous science fiction to emphasize that hetero-patriarchy, White supremacy, and climate crises are the results of historical imperial imaginations. As a response, brown (2017) advocates imaginative, adaptive praxes – emergent strategies of building science fiction worlds in the present:

For those of us from communities with historical collective trauma, we must understand that each of us is already science fiction walking around on two legs. Our ancestors dreamed us up and then bent reality to create us ... [A]s two [B]lack women, we think of our ancestors in chains dreaming about a day when their children's children's children would be free. They had no reason to believe this was likely.

(Imarisha, 2015, p. 5)

For brown and Imarisha, contemporary inheritors of collective trauma are both potential authors of speculative futures and themselves science fiction, the realization of their ancestors' hopes. If we consider the potential more-than-human dimensions of this emergent strategy framework, Indigenous resurgence and non-Indigenous efforts toward solidarity might appear as forms of practical science fiction. Central to this process, however, must be dedication on the part of wildtenders and other White non-Indigenous environmentalists and aspiring allies to place themselves and their own ancestors within the painful histories – and present realities – of settler colonialism and White supremacy that continue to shape political and ecological relations in the U.S. (and beyond). Environmental futures are inextricably bound up in present power relations.

Wildtending has the capacity to disrupt the conventional ecocultural practices and worldviews that have instantiated settler colonial world building for the past five centuries. At the same time, wildtending reflects its imperial origins when it excludes Indigenous resurgence from its future imaginaries. The concept of ecocultural identity draws attention to ways that personal identities are always more than individual; they are cultural, social, ecological, place-based, and bound up in power relations across contested geographies. Subsequently, theorizing from Indigenous and Afro-futurisms, a notion of science fiction as practice suggests that the assemblage of human and non-human relations that comprise an ecocultural identity are a 'slipstream' (Dillon, 2012) of far and near futures and pasts. Indigenous and Afro-futurisms insist those pasts must be faced before abundant futures can be realized.

'Hope kills'

Wildtenders are already partially enacting what brown and Imarisha and Indigenous futurists might consider organizing-as-science fiction, with roots, berries, grasses, fruit and nut trees, horses, and goats, and with each other. 'Hope kills,' wildtenders say, summing up their affective orientation toward the future. The word 'hope' here refers narrowly to a desire for a particular outcome. Seda, a Wildtender in his early 30s who has practiced wildtending for more than 10 years, offered his personal take on this oft-repeated wildtender phrase. Seda explained to me that for years he hoped for wildtending to grow into a large, active, diverse, multigenerational movement. He used to place desperate hope onto inspiring people and promising situations. He would then feel crushed when those hopes were disappointed. 'I realized that I needed to stop putting hope out,' Seda told me. 'I needed to stop hoping in the way that I was... It will kill you. Eventually, if you just keep going down that road, it will fucking consume you and you will fucking die.' For Seda, and for many of the hoopsters I have spoken to, the ecological devastation they perceive in the world around them is

tragic, a source of great sorrow and anger. In order to function, wildtenders must protect themselves from their own hopes.

Seda articulates a fundamental aspect of wildtending ecocultural identity. The true hopefulness in wildtending is found in disjunctures between multiple incompatible futures – in the practice of non-attachment to a singular imaginary. Wildtenders improvise their ecocultural identities as they go along. They are liberated from their own self-defeating hopes by a vigilant, tactical openness to adaptation. Not a singular, linear project, wildtending is rather a cluster of narratives, a bundle of possibilities.

‘Hope kills’ disrupts any unilineal wildtending story. Many wildtenders do not see themselves as the vanguard of humanity’s progress toward ecocultural enlightenment, but rather view their nascent movement as constantly negotiating multiple possible futures. The hopefulness in wildtender ecocultural identity orients toward the practices of digging, gathering, and planting, and emerges in the resilience of the relation between human beings and edible roots. In wildtending, hope is the force that destroys teleology, revealing the otherwise and the multiple.⁶

This form of hope is the radical capacity and willingness to reorient and renew one’s ways of thinking and doing. Wildtending, to borrow a concept from Miyazaki (2005), exemplifies hope not in the ends but in the means.

Perhaps this orientation of hopeful anti-hope openness positions wildtending to engage in the slow, complex, self-critical, and experimental work of aspiring toward allyship with Indigenous resurgence and other liberatory futures. Hoopsters can more fully embody their vital and trenchant critiques of capitalism, consumerism, and planetary ecocide by adapting their practices toward antiracist solidarity with Indigenous futurisms. Indeed, this is work that some wildtenders are attempting to undertake, as evidenced by the High Desert Wildtending Network website, which recently has been updated to pledge ‘direct support of Indigenous Peoples who are sustaining and reclaiming their traditional life-ways.’⁷ Such a development attests that wildtending hope is capacious.

Conclusion: Anti-racist ecocultural futures

Wildtending most fully realizes its liberatory and ecological ideals when it strives to undermine White supremacy and settler colonialism, that is, when it strives to undermine its own conditions of possibility. Thinking about social movement building as practical science fiction interlinks difficult questions around progress and technology, the environmental and the political, and asserts the speculative nature of ecocultural identity and of social life more broadly. For wildtenders, and other non-Indigenous environmentalists and aspiring allies, solidarity with Indigenous science fictions and Afro-futurisms in part means dismantling settler colonial logics of extraction and replacement. Critical solidarity demands a non-state-based recognition of Indigenous continued presence and a reckoning with the histories and ongoing structures of U.S. white supremacy. The case of wildtending attests to ways in which ecocultural identity is a process of political future-making, a more-than-human project irrevocably bound up in – yet never fully determined by – extant power relations. The contradictions that emerge in wildtending illuminate the mutual imbrication of settler colonial concepts of race and nature, and reveal that environmental restoration and anti-colonial action must be pursued simultaneously. To this end, I have suggested that the wildtending idiom ‘hope kills’ is in fact a hopeful proposition. This anti-teleological axiom keeps wildtenders receptive to strategies that may prove generative for viable, antiracist, and decolonizing ecocultural futures.

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Notes

- 1 Most interviewees elected to be identified by first name only, a pseudonym, or not at all (and are quoted anonymously). Finisia Medrano offered her first and last name.
- 2 See Wolfe (2006) and Tuck and Yang (2012) for the settler colonial drive to eliminate Indigenous peoples and replace them with settlers who must be rendered 'innocent.' See Simpson (2017) for a discussion of settler colonial 'extractivism.'
- 3 In 2016, some hoopsters asserted through social media that, despite superficial similarities, wildtending does not find common cause with militia movements (Seraphin, 2017).
- 4 For settler colonialism in Western environmentalism, see Tuck and McKenzie (2015) and Whyte, Caldwell & Schaefer (2018). For racial privilege and conservation, see Outka (2008) and Finney (2014).
- 5 See also Berkes's (2012) 'sacred ecology' and Hunn et al.'s (2015) writing on Indigenous land management in the Columbia Plateau region.
- 6 I am indebted to Paul Ricoeur's (1995) conception of hope as an anti-teleological impulse.
- 7 My previously published articles (Seraphin, 2016, 2017) erroneously conflated this non-profit organization with a broader array of social formations around wildtending. The term 'High Desert Wildtending Network' in these earlier works should be read as pertaining to this broader movement and neither specifically nor solely the non-profit organization.

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Toward a grammar of ecocultural identity

Arran Stibbe

Of course, it is easier to abuse or destroy one of ‘them’ than one of ‘us.’ History is replete with examples of people coming together to form groups that then attempt to harm or annihilate other groups. And the criteria for separating the groups is often paper thin – a different religion, perhaps a different sect of the same religion, a different skin colour, a subtle difference in ancestry. Dividing the world into groups requires *identity work*, where particular characteristics are selected and represented as being an overridingly important distinction separating ‘us’ from ‘them.’ As it seems easier to care about and protect one of ‘us,’ who exactly the ‘us’ includes becomes a vital issue. Such identity work is primarily carried out through language, and it is the linguistic construction of identity that I am exploring in this chapter.

The relationships between powerful and powerless groups of humans, between the oppressors and the oppressed, is the central theme of Critical Discourse Analysis. However, there has been an ecological turn in humanities and social science subjects, where consideration extends beyond humans to other animals, plants, rivers, oceans, forests, and the ecosystems that life depends on. This wider ecological perspective brings an additional level of focus: the relationships of humans not only with other humans but with other species and the wider physical environment.

Identities can be considered to be nested at different levels. The first level is *individual identity*, where attention is on individual humans. The second is *social identity*, where individuals are recognized but are also seen as part of larger social groups. The final level, articulated and explored within this *Handbook*, is *ecocultural identity*, which includes consideration of individuals and groups but expands the groups beyond the human world to include other species and the physical environment.

The three levels of identity are not intrinsically positive or negative in themselves. A focus on the individual could be used to promote respect for people as unique and irreplaceable beings, but also could be used to promote the pursuit of selfish self-interest. A focus on social identities could be used to encourage people to work together toward the common good, but also could be used to encourage them to work against the interests of other groups. And, whereas ecocultural identities could encourage respect and care for the wider community of life, they could equally lead to a view of other species as merely resources for human exploitation.

It is important, therefore, to consider carefully what makes an ecocultural identity positive or negative. That is a question for the ecological values system (or ecosophy) of the analyst. I am basing this chapter on an ecosophy that can be summarized in one word – *care!* – with the exclamation mark having a normative meaning that care is something to be celebrated and promoted. This ecosophy is based on an ‘ethic of care’ (see Tronto, 1993), but one which extends beyond the human to include other species, future generations, and the wider ecosystems that life depends on. I will therefore consider ecocultural identities to be positive if they promote care for individuals, social groups, other species and ecosystems – both those existing now and those who will exist in the future.

The predominant discourses that construct identity in industrial societies tend to be highly anthropocentric. This is problematic since identification beyond the human-only world is key to behaviour that protects the environment. Crompton and Kasser (2009) describe how ‘(s)tudies of environmental identity and connectedness with nature have indeed established that connectedness is strongly correlated with environmental attitudes and behaviours’ (p. 12). Thomashow (1995) examines evidence from psychological studies and concludes that ‘there is evidence suggesting that people take action, or formulate their personality based on their ecological worldview’ (p. 4) (for more discussion on this strand of research as it relates to ecocultural identity, see Parks, 2020, Chapter 6 in this *Handbook*). Harding (2010) states that from a sense of ecological identity ‘arises a deep appreciation of the reality of interdependence, and from this comes the urge to be involved in opposing all sorts of ecological abuses’ (p. 41). Perhaps Aldo Leopold (1979), puts it best when he states, ‘We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity. When we see land as a community to which we belong we may begin to use it with love and respect’ (p. viii).

The contribution of this chapter is to describe how linguistic analysis can assist in the task of promoting positive ecocultural identities. My focus is on one book, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* by Luther Standing Bear, and I use Positive Discourse Analysis to reveal the linguistic devices that are used to perform individual, social, and ecocultural identities. The conclusion presents a short list of features that can be used to perform positive ecocultural identities and suggests that with further research it may be possible to provide a fuller grammar that speakers and writers can draw on.

Positive Discourse Analysis

Discourses are clusters of linguistic features that combine to tell particular stories about the world (Stibbe, 2015). Dominant discourses convey stories so frequently that they become common ways to view the world within a culture. Examples would be the stories that economic growth is the main goal of society, that competition is more important than cooperation, that success is defined in terms of salary or status, or that humans are superior to other animals or nature. The stories are not necessarily false but are just one possible outlook on the world, which can be challenged and replaced with other ones. Of importance for this chapter are linguistic features that perform ‘positive’ ecocultural identities, or which represent individuals as part of social groups and part of the wider community of life. An example of a linguistic device that contributes to ‘positive’ ecocultural identity is the metaphor of *nature as a web*:

Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.

(Chief Seattle)

Within this metaphor, humans, other animals, and plants are all equally and equivalently threads within the web – humans are not different from, separate from or above the rest. The metaphor has great power to convey the entailment that by destroying the natural world we also are destroying ourselves. As Raymond et al. (2013) point out in a study of metaphors that structure the human–environment relationship, ‘humans are one part of a wider ecological system and have the responsibility to understand their impacts on the various components of the broader system’ (p. 540).

Furtwangler (1997) describes how the quotation above about the web of life is often attributed to Chief Seattle, but has a more hazy origin – a recollection quite some time after the event of the words of a simultaneous interpreter at one of the Chief’s speeches. However, what matters primarily is not the origin of the metaphor but whether it is a useful linguistic device that can be employed in other discourses to influence the public imagination. An example of this is the way that a museum used this metaphor:

Our planet is literally teeming with life. An amazing variety of habitats, people, plants, and animals – everything from penguins to peas and bacteria to buffalo – are all interconnected in a fragile web of life.

(Field Museum, 2014)

Linguistic features such as this metaphor can be considered part of a *grammar of positive ecocultural identity*. A grammar in this sense does not mean creating a list of ‘ecologically incorrect’ ways of phrasing things and a list of ‘correct’ alternatives that must be used. A path that echoes that of political correctness could stifle creativity and lead to the kind of twisted language that is easily ridiculed. An example would be the insistence on using the word ‘anyimal’ to emphasise that humans are animals too (Kemmerer, 2006), or clumsy expressions such as ‘non-domesticated non-human’ as an ecologically correct way to refer to a ‘wild animal’ (Dunayer, 2001). Instead, a grammar of positive ecocultural identity would consist of a list of linguistic features that could be drawn upon selectively and creatively in a diversity of forms of writing in order to inspire people to see themselves, and humans in general, as part of a wider community of life.

One path toward building a grammar of positive ecocultural identity is to search for discourses that already establish positive ecocultural identities, and then analyse them carefully to discover the linguistic mechanisms they use to do so. There are many places to look, from innovative contemporary nature writing to ancient texts from cultures around the world.

This approach to analysing texts in the search for new stories is a form of Positive Discourse Analysis (Martin, 2004; Bartlett, 2012; Stibbe, 2017a). Positive Discourse Analysis is similar to Critical Discourse Analysis, an approach which looks closely at linguistic features to reveal how they structure unequal power relations among groups (Fairclough, 2003). Positive Discourse Analysis, however, has a clear focus on discourse that ‘inspires, encourages, heartens; discourse we like, that cheers us along’ (Martin, 1999, pp. 51–52). The aim is to analyse texts and discover linguistic features that tell positive stories about the world, and then promote these features in order to contribute to beneficial change in society. Bartlett (2012), for example, uses Positive Discourse Analysis to describe how Amerindian communities in Guyana use language in useful ways that help them reclaim their heritage. The next section applies the Positive Discourse Analysis framework to one particular text, the book *Land of the Spotted Eagle*.

Land of the Spotted Eagle

In this section, I analyse the linguistic features in the book *Land of the Spotted Eagle* by Luther Standing Bear (2006, originally published in 1933) in the search for forms of language that help establish positive ecocultural identities. The aim is not to try to create a full grammar of positive ecocultural identity from just this one text, but rather to demonstrate Positive Discourse Analysis in action, create an initial starting point, and then encourage others to analyse other texts from around the world to contribute to, amend, and develop the grammar.

The reason for focusing on the work of Luther Standing Bear is that he is one of a very few writers who grew up within a traditional Native American oral culture (in his case, Lakota), then learned English, and used the English language to convey the wisdom of his culture. Standing Bear is one of a small group of Lakota writers such as Ohiyesa (Charles Eastman) and Zitkala Sa (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin) who ‘used autobiographical storytelling to preserve traditional values and to challenge their readers’ preconceptions of what it meant to be “civilized”’ (Eick, 2013). *Land of the Spotted Eagle* particularly suits the goal of building a grammar of ecocultural identity since it is an extended non-fiction account that explicitly comments on relationships between the Lakota people and the natural world.

Of course, the book itself cannot be seen as a transparent representation of oral Lakota culture. For a start, the text is written down, written in English, and written with an active goal of overturning stereotypes and encouraging respect for the Lakota people. As Ellis points out in the forward of the book: ‘Standing Bear presents a very positive view of Sioux life, but occasional errors exist and some statements remain controversial’ (Ellis, in Standing Bear, 2006, p. xviii). However, the fact that the text is written in English is important since we are interested in forms of language that can be practically used as an alternative to hegemonic discourses in industrial societies. Standing Bear has already done the work of taking Indigenous wisdom and using the resources of English to express this wisdom in ways that counter the dominant stories of industrial society. The text, therefore, provides a useful source for resisting dominant discourses in English-speaking industrial countries.

Method

The research question is quite simply: What linguistic features in *Land of the Spotted Eagle* perform positive ecocultural identities? Identity performance consists of using language to divide the world into groups, place the self and others in groups, and represent the groups positively or negatively (see the ‘ideological square’ in Van Dijk, 2008). The performance of identities is ecoculturally positive if it promotes *care* for humans, other species, and the ecosystems that life depends on (according to the ecosophy of *care!*).

In conducting positive analysis there is a danger of romanticizing indigenous cultures and constructing an unrealistic ‘Ecological Indian’ (Garrard, 2012), including attributing ecological behaviours and attitudes to Indigenous people that were not actually part of their cultures. Garrard (2012) points out that ‘The Ecological Indian is clearly a stereotype of European origin’ (p. 135), and ‘at its cruellest, the Ecological Indian represents a homogenisation of ... 600 or so distinct and culturally diverse societies’ (p. 136). It is necessary therefore to be clear at the outset that the task is one of searching for linguistic resources that can be useful for instantiating and promoting positive ecocultural identities, without claiming that these are the *only* forms of identity performance in the text examined or that they are representative of wider Native American or Indigenous cultures. There may well be negative aspects of the text, e.g., where plants and animals are treated as resources, but exploring and commenting on these is beyond the research question.

Also, beyond the research question are considerations of whether the general culture that authors belong to is (or was) ecologically beneficial or destructive. It is perfectly possible for someone from an ecologically destructive culture to write in ways that oppose the dominant stories of their own culture and inspire change. The criteria for judging language, therefore, are purely linguistic and based upon whether the underlying stories they tell accord with the ecosophy of the analyst.

Practically, the method includes close reading of the whole text and examining a wide range of linguistic features from pronoun use, vocabulary choice, and presuppositions to metaphors, framings, and evaluations. These are the typical linguistic features examined in any discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Stibbe, 2015; Flowerdew & Richardson, 2017), but in this case, the focus is on whether, and how, these features establish positive ecocultural identities. The following sections examine the linguistic devices that perform ‘positive’ ecocultural identities, including both the social and ecological aspects which make identities ecocultural.

Inclusion in social groups

There are many lexical, grammatical, and cognitive devices that build social identities in Luther Standing Bear’s *Land of the Spotted Eagle* and the following is an example:

The medicine-man was a true benefactor of his people in that his work was founded upon and promoted the Indian ideal of brotherhood, and all service rendered to fellow beings was for the good of the tribe.

(p. 203)

In this example, the family frame triggered by the word ‘brotherhood’ goes beyond the literal family to include others. People are described as ‘fellow beings,’ placing others within the same category as self, and the word ‘tribe’ subsumes the individual into a collective social entity to be respected in its own right. Another example that establishes social identities and responsibilities to a group is the following:

the child will be devoted ... to the service and welfare of other members of his band.

(p. 28)

This creates a part-whole relationship between the band as whole and a series of ‘members’ that constitute it. The ‘child’ is represented as one of these members in a relationship of identity with all other members (i.e., all are identical insofar as being members of the band).

A potential downside to a strong focus on social identities is that the individual is erased and the good of minorities is sacrificed for the good of all. However, Standing Bear still gives salience to the individual through explicit reference to *individuals* and being *individualized*:

To the Lakota every other individual in the tribe was as important as himself and it was his duty to preserve the identity of the tribe.

(p. 67)

There must be no hungry individuals; so long as one had food, all would have food.

(p. 69)

Though each person became individualized – could be as truthful, as honest, as generous, as industrious, or as brave as he wished – could even go to battle upon his own initiative, he could not consider himself as separate from the band or nation.

(p. 124)

While respecting the individual in these examples, Standing Bear simultaneously reinforces the social identity through placing the individual with ‘the tribe,’ ‘band,’ ‘nation,’ or ‘all.’

There are examples of this linguistic building of social identity and solidarity throughout the book, and these provide an important counter-story to industrial civilizations’ atomistic representation of humans as selfish individuals concerned only with their own advancement and material accumulation. However, social identities are only part of ecocultural identities, which by definition extend beyond the human world to position the self and one’s species with the wider community of life.

Inclusion in the wider community of life

Hogg (2016) describes how people perceive the world to be split into groups and gain a sense of pride and belonging from seeing themselves as part of a group. Members of the group, therefore, will tend to represent their own group positively, while representing other groups negatively, since any enhancement to the status of the group is an enhancement of the individual. However, taken to the extreme, this can lead to one group damaging the chances and prospects of another group, or, in cases of genocide, even attempting to destroy them.

Language plays a key role in this process because it can separate the complex world into a series of groups, focus attention on a particular group, assign members to a group, and represent one group as superior to all others (Van Dijk, 2008). This is a very familiar process when it comes to the classic sociological distinctions of race, gender, class, sexuality, etc., but it also is a key factor in ecological issues. If the world is divided into humans in one group, and all non-human life in another group, then there is a danger that humans are seen as superior and the natural world as exploitable and expendable.

The question that this section explores is how the language in *Land of the Spotted Eagle* instantiates ecologically inclusive identities, that is, identities where humans are seen as equal members of groups that include both humans and other members of the wider community of life. An example is the following:

The character of the Indian’s emotion left little room in his heart for antagonism toward his fellow *creatures*.

(p. 195 [emphasis added])

The word ‘fellow’ establishes a relationship of hyponymy (i.e., category/member of category), where ‘the Indian’ (referring to Native Americans in general) is represented as a member of a category ‘creatures’ that includes beings from the more-than-human world. In doing so, humans are made identical to other species, identical that is, as far as being creatures. The following are further examples:

By acknowledging the virtues of other *beings* the Lakota came to possess them for himself.

(p. 204)

In order to place himself in communication with the other *earth entities* the Lakota submitted to a purification ceremony.

(p. 204)

The acceptance of a kinship with other *orders of life* was the first step towards humanisation.

(p. 202)

To sit or lie upon the ground is to be able to think more deeply and feel more keenly; he can see more clearly into the mysteries of life and come closer in kinship to other *lives* about him.

(p. 192)

[Lakota] appreciated that life was more than mere human manifestation, that it was expressed in a multitude of *forms*.

(p. 195 [emphasis added in each example])

From these examples we can see that humans are placed in categories that contain more than just humans through the use of the terms ‘too,’ ‘more than,’ ‘other,’ and ‘fellow.’ The superordinate terms (the names of the categories) are ‘creatures,’ ‘beings,’ ‘earth entities,’ ‘orders of life,’ ‘lives,’ and ‘forms.’ If other species are part of the same group as humans (i.e., the in-group), then this makes it more difficult for ethical duties, such as care, to be overlooked.

Kinship beyond the human world

Family are usually the people we care about most, and the ones we are most likely to protect from harm. And being a member of a family (a mother, father, uncle, or sister) is often one of the strongest identities people have. In *The Land of the Spotted Eagle*, Standing Bear uses the explicit term ‘kinship’ to place humans within a family that includes other living beings who are not human: ‘kinship with other orders of life’ (p. 202), ‘kinship to other lives’ (p. 192), ‘all things were kindred’ (p. 193), ‘kinship with all creatures of the earth’ (p. 193), and ‘kinship and unity of life’ (pp. 186–187). This builds ecocultural identities through including humans firmly and directly within the larger related community of life.

Another way that ecocultural identities are built is through metaphor, where the target domain (the area of life that is being talked about) is *the Earth* or *animals*, and the source frame (the area of life that words are being drawn from) is *a family*. In these examples I’ve highlighted the words that trigger the source frame (or bring the source frame into the mind of readers to establish the metaphor):

The Indian, as well as all other creatures that were given birth and grew, were sustained by the common *mother* — Earth. He was therefore *kin* to all living things and he gave to all creatures equal rights with himself. Everything of Earth was loved and revered.

(p. 166)

In talking to children, Lakota would place a hand on the ground and explain ‘We sit in the lap of our *Mother*. From her, we, and all other living things, come...’

(p. 195)

For the animal and bird world there existed a *brotherly* feeling that kept the Lakota safe among them. And so close did some of the Lakotas come to their feathered and furred friends that in true *brotherhood* they spoke a common tongue.

(p. 193)

When metaphors are triggered then particular elements of the source frame map onto (or correspond to) elements of the target domain. Within the first example, the Earth maps on to the 'Mother,' and both 'The Indian' and 'other creatures' map onto children. This not only places humans directly within the same category as other creatures, but also makes them siblings. The third example represents this explicitly with the term 'brotherhood' applied to the Lakota, animals, and birds, while the first two examples extend the sibling-hood to all living things. There is an important entailment of this, which is explicitly drawn out in the first example: that, if all living things are siblings, then we must love, revere, and protect them.

Friendship with other species

When the Earth or non-human beings are described using the family terms of *brother* or *mother*, then this is a metaphorical framing, since the Earth did not literally give birth to people. However, the use of friendship is a literal framing, since humans can be described literally as friends with other creatures.

Standing Bear explicitly applies the framing of *friend* not only to other humans but to horses, buffaloes, birds, animals, feathered beings, furred beings, spiders, and foxes, bestowing on them not only personhood but, at the same time, respect. Sometimes the respect is reinforced by adjectives such as *noble*, *immemorial*, and *trusted*.

So down went the Black Forest and to death went the last buffalo, noble animal and immemorial friend of the Lakota.

(p. 44)

The horse was the Lakota man's most trusted friend in the animal kingdom.

(p. 22)

If other creatures are friends or family, then an important entailment (or logical consequence of using the metaphor) is that they are seen as deserving of consideration, respect, and protection. In the following example, this entailment is explicitly drawn out:

If a man could prove to some bird or animal that he was a worthy friend, it would share with him precious secrets and there would be formed bonds of loyalty never to be broken; the man would protect the rights and life of the animal, and the animal would share with the man his power, skill and wisdom. In this manner was the great brotherhood of mutual helpfulness formed, adding to reverence for life orders other than man.

(p. 204)

The trigger words for the framing are 'friend,' 'bonds,' and 'brotherhood,' and the entailments are that humans would protect the rights and life of animals and feel reverence for other orders of life.

Commonality with the more-than-human world

The story of human exceptionalism is one of the most dominant ways of imagining the world in industrialized countries. According to this story (for it is just a story), the essence of being human lies in those things that are said to distinguish humans from other animals: language, rationality, religion, literature, music, and the sophisticated use of tools. In these differences lie not only human separation from the animal world but also human superiority.

It is possible to tell a different story, however: that the essence of being human lies not only in those things that distinguish us from other animals, but also in what we share – bodies, emotions, social bonds, and a dependence on ecosystems for our survival. In this alternative story, self-respect comes from respecting all life rather than from a feeling of superiority to other forms of life. It can help challenge what Kingsnorth and Hine (2009) call the most dangerous story of all: ‘the story of human centrality, of a species destined to be lord of all it surveys, unconfined by the limits that apply to other, lesser creatures.’

In contrast, Standing Bear draws out and gives salience to commonalities between humans in the following examples:

The world was a library and its books were the stones, leaves, grass, brooks and the birds and animals that shared, *alike with us*, the storms and blessings of the earth.

(p. 194)

From Wakan Tanka there came a great unifying life force that flowed in and *through all* things – the flowers of the plains, blowing winds, rocks, trees, birds, animals – and was *the same* force that had been breathed into the first man. Thus, all things were kindred and brought together by *the same* Great Mystery.

(p. 193)

[There is] a place *for all* things in the scheme of existence with equal importance *for all*. The Lakota could despise no creature *for all* were *of one* blood, made by *the same* hand, and filled with the essence of the Great Mystery.

(p. 193 [emphasis added in each example])

The commonalities are given salience through the words ‘the same,’ ‘alike with,’ ‘through all,’ ‘for all,’ and ‘of one.’ These examples are notable because they indicate commonalities not just between humans and other animals, but also between humans and flowers, winds, rocks, trees, stones, leaves, grass, and brooks. Emphasizing commonality in this way helps to expand the moral sphere to encompass all life and aspects of the physical environment. The third example explicitly draws out the entailment that sharing a morally relevant commonality entails equal treatment for other beings, that all beings have a place in the scheme of existence, and that there are no grounds for despising them.

In the first example above, the pronoun use of ‘us’ in the expression ‘animals that shared, alike with *us*, the storms and blessings of the earth’ places humans in an in-group of ‘us’ and implies that ‘animals’ are an out-group (because they are not ‘us’). However, simultaneously, the expression creates a superordinate group that both animals and humans belong to. This group does not have a name such as *living beings* – it is, instead, an ad-hoc category (Barsalou, 1983). The category is a group of entities who have in common that they are subject to ‘the storms and blessings of the earth.’

The other examples above also set up ad-hoc categories. The second example is a group of entities who all share a life-force flowing in and through them and the third is a group of beings who share one blood and were made by the same hand. In this way, the language initially separates humans from other species, but emphasises commonalities rather than differences and subtly includes humans and other species within higher, ad-hoc categories.

While this section has discussed commonality, the next section discusses how vertical metaphors can be used to place one group above, below, or at the same level as another group. The relative levels of groups of humans and other groups from the wider community of life are key indicators of ecocultural identity.

Spatial metaphors

There are two conditions that need to apply for discrimination to take place. The first is that two groups are represented as different from each other. The second is that one group is represented as better than the other. Spatial metaphors (Cian, 2017) are often used to convey both difference (far, distant) and quality (superior, higher). In the following examples, Standing Bear uses spatial metaphors to point out and resist the discrimination of ‘the white man’ or ‘the Caucasian,’ and replaces this discrimination with a story of equality. I’ve highlighted in bold the expressions which trigger spatial metaphors:

The Indian and the white man sense things differently because the white man has put *distance* between himself and nature; and assuming a *lofty* place in the scheme of order of things has lost for him both reverence and understanding.

(p. 196)

But the old Lakota was wise. He knew that man’s heart, *away from* nature, becomes hard; he knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to a lack of respect for humans, too. So he kept his youth *close* to its softening influence.

(p. 197)

Everything of earth was loved and revered. The philosophy of the Caucasian was, ‘Things of the earth, earthy’— to be belittled and despised. Bestowing upon himself the position and title of a *superior* creature, others in the scheme were, in the natural order of things, of *inferior* position and title; and this attitude dominated his actions toward all things.

(p. 166)

Here ‘distance’ from nature, being ‘away from’ nature, considering oneself ‘lofty’ in the scheme of things or a ‘superior’ creature are represented negatively. This is achieved by associating them with a loss of reverence and understanding, a lack of respect, and generally being associated with the ‘white man’ (which in the context is not a positive appraising item). The negative story is replaced with the explicit story that it is better to keep nature close, and better to see oneself as equal rather than superior.

Vertical metaphors can therefore be seen as performing positive ecocultural identities when there is an *appraisal pattern* (Martin & White, 2005) of linguistic devices which represent humans being close or at the same level as other species as positive, and far or above as negative.

Personhood

It is hard to harm a person. In genocides, massacres, and executions the victims are often represented instead as monsters, objects, or an undifferentiated horde or mob – anything to deny individual personhood. There is a continuous discursive struggle to define and redefine the boundaries of the category of *person*, with interested parties placing those they want to protect within the category and excluding others, often through subtle linguistic means such as metaphor or pronoun use. The United States Government states that ‘the words “person” and “whoever” include corporations, companies, associations, firms, partnerships, societies, and joint stock companies, as well as individuals’ Congress (2019: section 1), which has served to increase corporate power by giving corporations rights usually associated with humans. On the other hand, in New Zealand, the Whanganui River has recently been recognized as a person under domestic law, with full human rights, and the Ganges and Yamuna rivers in India have received similar recognition.

There are several linguistic techniques that Luther Standing Bear uses to give personhood to those who happen not to be human. Firstly, he accords personality to ‘everything,’ not just humans: ‘Everything was possessed of personality, differing only from us in form’ (p. 194). He also uses metaphor to personify aspects of nature:

Wherever the Lakota went, he was with Mother Earth. No matter where he roamed by day or slept by night, he was safe with her.

(p. 192)

The rain fell in streams and the storm warriors threw their lightning sticks to earth and shook our tipis with their thunder...The mental reaction of the Lakota was one of unity with these tremendous forces [of nature].

(p. 42)

In the first example, the Earth is personified as a mother, while in the second, storms become warriors who act wilfully and violently. While this second example could have led to an entailment that the storms are an enemy, instead Standing Bear draws out the entailment that, if storms are persons and so are the Lakota, then they are unified.

In the following example, rain is personified through being referred to by a proper noun, Rain, with a capital R:

I have seen a brave, without uttering a word, strip himself to breechclout and walk out into a rain falling so heavily in sheets that a few paces from the door his form was lost to sight. He went out to be alone with Rain. That is true love of Nature.

(p. 42)

The entailment that is drawn out here is that Rain is a valued and loved companion. The appreciation of rain and all forms of weather is a way of building ecological consciousness and a sense of belonging to the Earth, as described in my previous work (2017b).

There are also more subtle ways that Standing Bear implicitly gives personhood to beings who are not human. A key aspect of being a person is agency, or the carrying out of actions according to will. Linguistically this is signified through placing beings in the agent position of material processes, or the active processes of doing something in the world. As well as humans, Luther Standing Bear places a spider, birds, insects, animals, pines, buffalo, and his horse in the position of agent:

Even the spider came to the brave on the mountain top with a message of friendship.
(p. 26)

birds, insects and animals filled the world with knowledge.
(p. 196)

the tall pines at the top of the cliff arched their boughs.
(p. 43)

There was one very beautiful and easy pass through which both buffalo and Lakota entered the hills.
(p. 43)

If we found deep water, we [Luther Standing Bear and his horse] swam together, my hand clasping his mane.
(p. 23)

The agent of 'entered' in the third example is not just 'buffalo' but also simultaneously 'Lakota.' Similarly, in the final example, the agent of the verb 'swam' is 'we,' which includes both Standing Bear and his horse simultaneously. This sets up an equivalence in the agency of humans and other beings, highlighting their personhood.

Boundary crossing

There is another kind of personification that occurs when Standing Bear describes traditional Lakota rituals where humans communicate with animal and stone spirits:

Many songs were dreamer songs received while in communion with spirits of beings personified as humans. Some of the dreamers who brought songs to the people were Elk, Duck, Thunder, Hawk, Wolf, Spider, Fox, Crow and Stone. The wisdom of these beings was given to the dreamer in song and he in turn sang them to help his people.
(p. 214)

In this excerpt, the terms *Elk, Duck, Thunder, etc.*, play a dual semantic role. Firstly, they refer to the 'dreamers,' i.e., the humans, and then they refer to the 'beings,' i.e., the nature spirits. This could be considered a constructive ambiguity since it blurs the boundary between humans and nature.

The spirits in the traditional rituals are represented actively ('activated' in the terminology of van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 33) through their thematic roles, for example:

The fox had knowledge of underground things hidden from human eyes, and this he shared with the dreamer, telling him of roots and herbs that were healing and curing.
(p. 215)

Here the fox is the *senser* of an implied mental process of knowing, *agent* of the material process of sharing, and *sayer* of the verbal process of telling – these are all activated roles which give autonomy to the fox and implicitly convey personhood. Stones follow a similar syntactic pattern to the fox:

The stones were possessed of extraordinary knowledge, for they were on the earth, in the earth, and in the sky visiting the sun and moon, so they taught the following song to the dreamer.

(p. 216)

The people in communication with the spirits in these rituals are referred to with the compound terms Elk Dreamer, Fox Dreamer, Bear Dreamer, and Stone Dreamer, mixing the human (dreamer) with the more-than-human. The dreamers dress in costumes and mimic the actions of the animals.

In this way the boundary between human and animal, and even human and stone, becomes blurred, and elk, fox, bear, and stone are personified by being channelled through the human. Of course, Standing Bear and many others mentioned in the text, are named after animals or aspects of nature: Sorrel Horse, Rising Sun, White Hawk, Whirlwind, Little Thunder Spotted Bear, Fast Whirlwind, Bull Bear, White Blackbird, Conquering Bear. This again brings the human and more-than-human worlds together, dissolving boundaries.

This is an interesting form of personification because it is different from anthropomorphism – the animals are becoming human in a way, but at the same time the humans are, to use Abram's (2010) expression, 'becoming animal.' Either way, it is done with the greatest of respect and reverence for beings from the more-than-human world and brings them into the heart of the human community.

Conclusion: Identities within and beyond the human world

This chapter has discussed positive ecocultural identity as an identity performance that considers and shows care for the more-than-human world, social groups, and individuals. Individual identities are essential in recognizing the intrinsic worth of everyone – after all, as Eisenstein (2011) points out, sacredness lies in recognition of uniqueness and irreplaceability. Exactly who is recognized as an individual is determined by discursive struggle, with some humans represented as more individual and special than others (Machin & Mayr, 2012). However, if the individual is all that there is, then there is a danger of building a society that focuses on selfishly pleasing consumers at the expense of others and the environment. The discourse of neoclassical economics takes this to the extreme and is one of the discourses at the heart of industrialized civilizations (Stibbe, 2015).

In the construction of social identities, individual humans are part of larger social groups where there is cooperation toward the common good. This is essential for building a caring and sharing society. However, if the groups are just groups of humans, then the many other beings who are leading their lives in their own way according to their nature are excluded. The danger of excluding these others is firstly that harm could come to them if they are seen as members of the out-group and their lives treated as secondary and subordinate to human lives. Secondly, there is potential harm to everyone since all life is interconnected in a delicate web (to borrow a metaphor discussed above), and disregarding and destroying part of the web destroys us all.

Building identity is a discursive act. The world does not come pre-divided into individuals, in-groups, out-groups, superior beings or inferior beings – these are created in a complex interaction of language, performance, cognition, and the physical world. This is why the key question for this chapter was *what linguistic techniques can help create positive ecocultural identities?*

Examining Luther Standing Bear's *Land of the Spotted Eagle* provided some ideas toward a grammar of positive ecocultural identity. There are linguistic devices within the book that respect humans as individuals but simultaneously, and firmly, place individuals within larger groups where all work cooperatively toward the common good. And, most importantly, there are devices which place humans within the larger life community. Some of the linguistic devices discussed in the chapter are illustrated in Table 25.1.

This is just a small selection of features, and there is much more to be said about each of them. However, it would be useful for future research to critically examine a great diversity of other sources from traditional cultures across the world and build up a large library of resources for constructing positive ecocultural identity in a number of languages. These resources could then be drawn on for all kinds of genres: nature poetry, novels, non-fiction, natural history programmes, biology textbooks, children's teaching materials, news reports, even economics books to inspire respect and care within, and beyond, the human world. Perhaps one day, the dominant story of industrial civilizations will have moved beyond the model of individual humans selfishly trying to accumulate as much as possible, and instead toward a more generous view of humans as altruistic beings working toward the good of their community and the larger community of life of which they are part.

Table 25.1 Linguistic devices that build positive ecocultural identity. All examples are from *Land of the Spotted Eagle* except for the first which is from Chief Seattle.

<i>Linguistic device</i>	<i>Example</i>
Metaphor	Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it.
Social group name	band; tribe; community; nation
Semantic inclusion (other/fellow)	fellow creatures; other beings; other earth entities; other orders of life; other lives
Kinship (explicit)	kinship with other orders of life; all things were kindred; kinship with all creatures of the Earth
Kinship (family framing)	for the animal and bird world there existed a brotherly feeling; Wherever the Lakota went, he was with Mother Earth
Friendship framing	feathered and furred friends; bonds of loyalty
Commonalities	birds and animals that shared, alike with us, language, the storms, blessings of the earth
Personhood (personification)	He went out to be alone with Rain. That is true love of Nature.
Personhood (agency)	birds, insects and animals filled the world with knowledge
Personhood (sayer)	[the fox was] telling him of roots and herbs that were healing and curing
Shared agency	There was one very beautiful and easy pass through which both buffalo and Lakota entered the hills
Pronoun use (inclusive 'we')	If we found deep water, we [Luther Standing Bear and his horse] swam together
Pronoun use (he/she rather than it)	my hand clasping his mane
Names from the more-than human world	Sorrel Horse, Rising Sun, White Hawk, Whirlwind (as human names)
Spatial metaphors	he kept his youth <i>close</i> to [nature's] softening influence; [the white man] bestowed upon himself the position and title of a <i>superior</i> creature

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Perceiving ecocultural identities as human animal earthlings

Carrie P. Freeman

Considering that our planet is suffering through a human-induced mass extinction of species, and that global anthropogenic climate disruption, corporate exploitation, and militarization threatens the health and existence of all living beings, it seems vital for social movements to work together to strengthen efforts to protect living beings, wild and urban habitats, and the natural resources upon which all life depends. Change strategist Tom Crompton and psychologist Tim Kasser (2009) conclude that the mainstream environmental movement's current approach of campaigning for organizational policy changes and consumer behavioral changes has been inadequate to solve the environmental crisis. They call instead for more identity-based campaigns to cultivate benevolent intrinsic values in the public. Even if advocacy organizations within a coalition do not seek the same specific policy change, Crompton and Kasser argue all should focus on cognitive impacts by agreeing to frame their various campaigns around the same set of specific, deep, intrinsic values. In this way, even if identity campaigns fail to change practices in the short-term, they may succeed in the long-term goal of mutually promoting a needed cultural values shift. The conceptual framework of ecocultural identity introduced in this *Handbook* indicates that everyone's identity already has an ecological component, whether it could be considered 'green' or not or whether it consciously is acknowledged or not. To play a deliberate role in (re)shaping the public's ecocultural identity, I support Crompton and Kasser's normative stance in actively fostering a non-anthropocentric, restorative ecocultural identity as a fundamental way to collectively advance the environmental movement.

My work embraces the broader goal of merging social movements (for the human and more-than-human world) to create more empowered alliances that can support respectful relationships, justice, and social and ecological responsibility, while fighting against exploitation of life on an international level.¹ To contribute to my larger goal and the goals of this *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity*, I concentrate here on the opportunity for all advocacy campaigns to embody values that predispose people toward ecologically responsible and altruistic outlooks. I advocate for social movements to coordinate communication efforts to foster an ecocultural shift in human identity away from an egoistic anthropocentrism that often allows the interests of the more-than-human world to go unacknowledged and toward a humbler universal benevolence where people begin to see themselves as *human animal earthlings*.²

In this chapter, I address not only what we value but, in addition, whom we value. The goal is to identify core values among causes supporting humanity, other animals, and the environment. These mutual values are ones all social movements can use to collectively frame transnational campaigns influencing human identity – whether working independently or as global coalitions among human rights, animal rights, and environmentalists.

To begin, I review scholarship recommending that social movements promote self-transcendent, biospheric values to cultivate an ecocultural identity apt to produce needed belief and behavior changes. I also introduce a framework for the basis of the human animal earthling identity that embeds humanity within the animal community on planet Earth. I then identify values common to environmentalism, animal rights, and human rights movements, drawing these from global rights declarations where I interpretively categorize all the values they support in terms of life, fairness, responsibility, unity, and pleasure. I end by discussing how social movements could reframe shared values to be less anthropocentric and more inclusive of nonhuman life to cultivate a human animal earthling identity. I do so by providing terminology recommendations for respectfully referencing living beings, as well as highlighting how strategic application of humility, diversity, kinship, reciprocity, and sentience help frame the shared values of justice, caring, and respect in ways that encompass all life.

Values and identity-based eco-campaigning

This literature review highlights communication and social psychology views supporting social change campaigns that are not driven primarily by persuading people to change behaviors but instead by appealing to people on a deeper level related to morality, values, and identity. It starts broadly then narrows to the context of environmental campaigns and ecocultural identity.

Human values and communication campaigns

For campaigns to resonate, Lakoff (2004) suggests advocacy organizations should talk in terms of a clear set of simple values that accurately reflect what the organization stands for and truly express its ‘moral vision’ (p. 74). While campaigns surely must include rational arguments and facts, these should be embedded within a moral message that reflects and helps shape our cultural identities and values (Lakoff, 2004). I start with a discussion of values, as they are essential building blocks of one’s self-identity. For example, Crompton and Kasser (2009) note that ‘values and life goals are the aspects of people’s identities that reflect what they deem to be desirable, important, and worthy of striving for in their lives’ (p. 8). People’s identity, or sense of themselves, is quite influential in determining how they ‘respond to the broader social world and how they choose to live their lives’ (p. 7).

Values are influential to humans, as they represent ‘enduring beliefs’ about the conduct and states of existence one prefers (Rokeach, 1973, p. 5). Values researcher and psychologist Shalom Schwartz (1994) defines values as ‘desirable trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity’ (p. 21). Values represent ‘ideals’ (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004, p. 361) and shape, and are shaped by, ideology (Maio et al., 2003). Values influence both attitudes and behaviors to varying degrees. For example, if campaign messages provide cognitive support for how someone’s values relate to the issue at hand, that message can activate the values’ influences on behaviors (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003).

Campaigning around deep environmental values

Applying the usefulness of values to environmental campaigns, Jamieson (2007) recommends environmentalists frame the climate crisis as a *moral* issue, appealing to values such as responsibility and care in calling for ‘long-term sustainable changes in the way we live’ (p. 481). Crompton (2008) also calls for values-based environmental campaigns, saying environmentalists should not continue to rely on pragmatic green consumerism messages or expedient appeals to consumers’ financial self-interest. He argues that the ecological crisis’ severity requires major changes (not ‘simple and painless’ small steps) that necessitate a reevaluation of our identity and self-centered values.

Crompton’s studies on human identity with psychologist Tim Kasser (2009) find that promoting and activating intrinsic values (inherently rewarding pursuits) in the broader culture is vital to inspiring major lifestyle changes to solve ‘bigger than self’ problems like climate disruption. Intrinsic values include community and friendship, self-respect, creativity, social justice, and benevolence, in opposition to more extrinsic values focused on external rewards such as social status and prestige, popularity, power, or money. Drawing upon Schwartz’s (1994) work identifying universal (cross-cultural) values, Crompton and Kasser (2009) align intrinsic with self-transcendent values in opposition to extrinsic or self-enhancing values. Therefore, they recommend that all social movement campaigns encourage intrinsic values such as community (make the world a better place), affiliation (healthy interpersonal relationships), and self-acceptance (trying to grow as a person) along with self-transcendent values, such as benevolence (honesty, loyalty, and helpfulness) and universalism (caring about the environment, social justice, and peace), and self-direction (freedom to pursue one’s own goals).

They discourage environmental campaigners from instrumentally using appeals to extrinsic values as doing so can inadvertently exacerbate the underlying cause of environmental problems. As proof, the authors cite a variety of studies showing people who endorse self-enhancing and materialistic values are less likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviors, express more negative attitudes toward nature, and exhibit lower levels of biophilia (affiliation with living beings), as they generally see themselves as consumers of nature and focus on how things affect them directly (Crompton & Kasser, 2009, p. 9). Similarly, based on a review of environmental value studies, Steg and De Groot (2012) conclude ‘individuals who strongly endorse self-transcendent values are more likely to have pro-environmental beliefs and norms and to act pro-environmentally, while the opposite is true for those who strongly endorse self-enhancement values’ (p. 84).

Steg and De Groot (2012) parse the self-transcendent values category into distinct sub-categories: biospheric (inherent valuing of nonhuman nature) and altruistic (inherent valuing of human welfare). I believe an oversight is that this self-transcendent values typology leaves out sentientism (inherent valuing of animal individuals). Studies find that biospheric and altruistic values are correlated with pro-environmental and pro-social beliefs and actions, in opposition to egoistic or self-enhancement values. But when conflicts between biospheric and altruistic values arise, predictably, people who identify more strongly with altruism are more likely to side with humanitarian over environmental choices (Steg & De Groot, 2012). This implies that cultivating self-transcendent values alone (be they altruism, benevolence, or universalism) may be insufficient to ensure a needed cultural shift toward also valuing nonhuman life if anthropocentric identities continue to prevail, leaving nonhumans at a disadvantage.

The benefits of cultivating an ‘environmental identity’

Values and goals influence one’s identity, defined as self-perception or whom one thinks of oneself as being (Crompton & Kasser, 2009). Certain parts of one’s identity may be more

flexible and open to choice in response to personal preferences and changes in circumstances (Clayton, 2012). Identity helps someone locate oneself in a social context and feel a sense of belonging, such as to a variety of in-groups of similar individuals; one may do so in part by creating prejudices toward others, or out-groups (Crompton & Kasser, 2009). For example, due to anthropocentric identities, most people view nonhuman animals and nature as the 'ultimate out-group' (p. 14), and tend to think less of nonhumans' abilities, creating a sense of indifference toward them.

Crompton and Kasser caution against social justice campaigns that increase this prejudice, such as environmental campaigns that fail to account for nonhuman animal suffering in their policies or ignore the interests of individual animals who are not endangered. The authors propose an identity-based solution to reducing this discrimination by activating the values of empathy and egalitarianism, while positioning humans as part of nature and the animal kingdom. This positioning is part of creating an 'environmental identity,' which Clayton (2012) defines as, 'a sense of connection to some part of the nonhuman natural environment that affects the way we perceive and act toward the natural world; a belief that the environment is important to us' (p. 167). This can be nurtured in part by time spent with nonhuman animals and in the outdoors. People with higher notions of environmental identity are more likely to support animal rights and believe that other species' interests and future human generations should be considered in decision-making (Clayton, 2008). The more a person relates to the natural environment as part of their self, the more pro-environmental behaviors can be predicted, according to Schultz's (2001) notion of 'inclusion of nature in the self' scale. A feeling of interdependence is a key component to an environmental identity, as Clayton (2012) explains: 'This interdependence should imply an increased perception of similarity with, and moral standing accorded to, nonhuman natural entities, and a sense that threats to the natural world are personally relevant' (p. 172). Clayton's notion of environmental identity is similar but more normative than this *Handbook's* notion of ecocultural identity, as the latter affirms every culture and individual have ecological orientations that are part of their cultural identities and that these orientations can range from instrumental to respectful and regenerative and also can remain overlooked. Conversely, Clayton's notion of environmental identity is normative and understands people as not having much of an environmental identity unless they feel more connected to and protective of the natural world as part of their sense of self.

Identity as a just and sustainable humanimal

Self-transcendent values of justice and social well-being often are lacking in environmental rhetoric, according to Agyeman (2007). He calls for a merger of social justice (altruistic values) and environmentalism (biospheric values) via a notion of 'just sustainability.' In this chapter, I build on Agyeman's notion of 'just sustainability' and my suggestion (Freeman, 2010a) that environmental advocates incorporate a missing animal rights ethic acknowledging all sentient beings, by proposing that advocates strive for a 'just and sustainable humanimality.' The incorporation of the neologism humanimal³ situates humans in context of their place within the animal species domain and implies that the principle of fairness extends to other animals as well as *Homo sapiens*. This helps mitigate the anthropocentrism connoted in many notions of justice and sustainability.

Having an anthropocentric movement such as human rights see the value in collaborating with animal rights and environmental movements requires cultivating a new, humbler, integrated ecocultural identity as human animal earthlings. Here humans would begin to identify not just egocentrically with their own species but with all animals as a whole and with the mutual

status shared as sentient living beings on Earth. I argue that any ecocultural identity that privileged humans as the most important animal and merely lumped the diversity of nonhuman animals within a reductionist notion of nature (essentially reinforcing the human culture/animal nature dualism) would not be as regenerative or productive for healing the ecological crisis and would not maintain important rights for sentient beings. An ecocultural identity for human animal earthlings must be more profound than simply starting to reduce our impact on the environment.

I believe each component of this post-humanist, multi-faceted identity that I am proposing is important for mutually reinforcing a holistic outlook necessary to repair and foster harmonious relationships between humans and other species. For the human animal earthling identity, I strategically situate the animal component as a logical bridge between the narrowest category – humans (comprising but one animal species) – and the broadest category – earthlings (comprising all species, not just animals):

1. The *earthling* component places humans into a much larger context of all life on Earth (transcending the categorization of species); humans become yet another species interdependent upon thriving ecosystems, part of a much larger and diverse family sharing planet Earth amidst a vast universe.
2. The *animal* component represents a narrower categorization than earthling, but still transcends the species barrier. Reminding humans that they are indeed animals is a key link bridging human culture with nature (where many humans typically situate nonhuman animal cultures) and breaking problematic Western culture/nature and human/animal dichotomies. Humans are each asked to identify with being a fellow animal – an individual with some drive to live, some conscious ability to think and problem-solve, some similar and unique sensory experiences in our shared habitats, and some subjective emotional perspective and feelings about our living situation and treatment. The animal component asks people to recognize kinship and appreciate the sentience and desires of other animals besides just the human animal.
3. The *human* component recognizes there are some unique aspects to being part of a species (any species) – aspects that are influenced both by biology and culture. This acknowledges that while animal rights share some basic similarities with human rights in terms of respecting the life of sentient individuals, the culture of human communities is unique in some ways from other animal cultures, and therefore helps determine what constitutes uniquely human rights (i.e., voting rights, education, clothing, etc.).

Identifying common values in rights declarations for humans, other animals, and environment

To summarize what values that advocates for humans, nonhuman animals, and environment view as central to supporting these beings, I conducted a descriptive study where I searched for common values articulated on behalf of humans, other animals, and environment in the discourse of key global rights declarations,⁴ selecting the following six declarations as representative texts:

1. **The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights** was adopted December 1948 by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to affirm every human's rights as a result of the atrocities of WWII (United Nations General Assembly, 1948).

2. **The Universal Declaration of Animal Rights (1989)** was conceived by French intellectuals and eventually drafted by the International League of Animal Rights in Geneva. Proclaimed in a ceremony before the UN's Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in October 1978, it has not been officially adopted by the UN. It was inspired by the UN's Declaration of Human Rights. Many of the drafters were scientists, as it draws upon scientific progress in evolutionary biology to propose 'a moral code based on respect for life in its universality' (Neumann, 2012, p. 95). The principles were revised in 1989, and I use the latest version for my sample.
3. **The Universal Declaration of Animal Rights (2001)**, drafted by Uncaged in the UK (an organization that recently evolved into the Centre for Animals and Social Justice), was adopted December 2001 and signed by more than 75 animal protection organizations worldwide. It was based upon the UN Declaration of Human Rights, halfway to its 2048 centennial, by which date they hope the UN will have adopted this animal rights declaration (Uncaged, 2001).
4. **The Principles of Environmental Justice (1991)** was adopted in October 1991 at The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. The Preamble states its goal as being 'to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves' (People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, 1991).
5. **The Earth Charter (2000)** was adopted in 2000 by the international coalition The Earth Charter Initiative, which originally began as a UN initiative. The Earth Charter is a 'declaration of fundamental ethical principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21st century.' Recognizing that social justice and ecology are interdependent, it is an 'inclusive, integrated ethical framework' formed through 'cross cultural dialogue on common goals and shared values' (The Earth Charter Initiative, 2000).
6. **The UN World Charter for Nature (1982)** was adopted in October 1982 by the UN General Assembly based on a concern that 'the benefits which could be obtained from nature depended on the maintenance of natural processes and on the diversity of life forms and that those benefits were jeopardized by the excessive exploitation and the destruction of natural habitats,' and thus recognizing 'the need for appropriate measures at the national and international levels to protect nature and promote international co-operation' (United Nations General Assembly, 1982).

In analyzing these declarations/charters, I asked the following descriptive⁵ research questions:

- RQ1: Who matters and what terminology do they use to describe these significant entities?
- RQ2: What is valued as good/right/ideal?
- RQ3: Which of these values overlap among causes and thus are more universal?

I then address a prescriptive research question:

- RQ4: In what way do these values need reframing to be less anthropocentric or more sentient or biocentric in their application and scope?

The goal is to use these research findings to ground my prescription of core values for the human animal earthling ecocultural identity because each of those three elements (human–

animal–earthling) correlates with the charters advocating on behalf of humans, other animals, and the natural world respectively. By analyzing each advocacy declaration and identifying which beings it frames as the primary subjects deserving of protection, and for what reasons, I created lists of who and what matter and why. In this chapter, I synthesize the lists, identifying valued items that are common to all or most of the social movement causes (human rights, animal rights, and environmentalism). I envision these shared values among the three causes outlined here serving as a basis upon which to build recommendations for the kind of values one would likely identify with if they were to be less anthropocentric and adopt a human animal earthling identity. These would be the types of values I would then recommend that activists promote in advocacy communication to help foster this expanded ecocultural identity.

RQ1: Who matters and what terminology do they use to describe these significant entities?

The human rights declaration and the animal rights declarations (especially the more recent 2001 version) focused mainly on individuals, with the former limiting individuals to humans and the latter to ‘human and nonhuman animals,’ as the animal rights declaration sought to emphasize kinship and continuity with ‘all animal life.’ The 1989 animal rights declaration also expanded beyond the animal realm by alluding to species and habitat. The three environmental charters tended to have an understandably broader focus not only on ‘people’ but also ‘other living things,’ ‘living beings,’ and ‘life forms,’ that make up ‘the natural world’ or the ‘community of life.’

All the environmental declarations expressed great concern for the health of the natural world, but largely based on sustaining *human* life now and for ‘future generations’ (presumably future generations of humans). And, while the Earth Charter also reflected this utilitarian respect for nature, it did make the unique recognition in its principle 1.a. that ‘Every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.’ The Earth Charter incorporated all species, frequently invoking collectivity and kinship through use of terms such as: ‘the human family,’ ‘the Earth community,’ the ‘community of life,’ and ‘Earth as home.’ The Principles of Environmental Justice used Indigenous spiritual language, describing ‘our Mother Earth’ as ‘sacred.’ The UN World Charter for Nature often focused ecocentrically on life support ‘systems’ and ‘processes,’ even though it was anthropocentric in many respects, using terms such as ‘civilization’ and ‘mankind.’ All rights declarations include an inherent respect for ‘human dignity,’ but it was only the animal rights declarations that attempted to extend this level of respect to other animals.

Regarding nonhuman animals, the UN World Charter for Nature and the Earth Charter sometimes mentioned ‘animals,’ but separately from humans. The only environmental charter not to specifically mention ‘animals’ was The Principles of Environmental Justice, as it focused more on peoples and cultures who have been colonized and oppressed, and tended to lump nonhuman animals in with nature (presumably), under phrases such as ‘other living things’ or ‘other life forms.’ The oldest declaration, the UN Human Rights declaration, was predictably anthropocentric by design, not mentioning animals or nature either, focusing primarily on individual humans embedded in their human communities. So when this declaration frequently referenced ‘all’ or ‘everyone,’ this inclusivity was limited to humanity.

In summary, all declarations privileged the entity they were designed to affirm (see Table 26.1), but the most exclusionary was the Human Rights Declaration, which left out the more-than-human world, demonstrating a denial of the ecological realm of ecocultural identity. All other declarations acknowledged humans as well as other living beings (most mention animals specifically except the Principles of Environmental Justice). Humans are rhetorically separated from animals in all declarations with the exception of the most recent Animal Rights Declaration (2001), where it

Table 26.1 References to who matters: terminology used by the rights declarations under study

<i>UN World Charter for Nature (1982)</i>	<i>Earth Charter (2000)</i>	<i>Principles of Environmental Justice (1991)</i>	<i>Universal Declaration of Animal Rights (2001)</i>	<i>Universal Declaration of Animal Rights (1989)</i>	<i>UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)</i>
Every form of life	Earth our home	Our Mother Earth	Individuals	Individuals	Everyone
Life forms	Earth	Our lands and communities	Nonhuman animals	Living beings	All
Life support systems and processes	community Larger living world	Our cultures People(s)	Human and nonhuman Fellow creatures	Life All animal life Animal Species	Human beings Men and women
Nature	Community of life	Native peoples	Kinship of all animals	Human	Community
Living resources	Biosphere	People of color	Natural world	Man	
Civilization	Human family	Natural world		Nature	
Man or mankind	Peoples of the Earth	Other living things		Habitat	
Animals	Humans	Other life forms			
Future generations	Animals Living beings Resources Future generations	Future generations			

used the terms ‘nonhuman animals’ and ‘kinship of all animals.’ The Earth Charter is the most inclusive of all species and affirms an ecocultural identity that focuses on the larger ‘community of life.’

RQ2: What is valued as good/right/ideal?

In Table 26.2, I categorize the dozens of values promoted in the declarations into five broad values-categories: life-supporting, fair, responsible, unifying, and pleasurable. In analyzing, I was less interested in comparing the declarations and more interested in comparing the three causes (environmental, nonhuman animal, and human causes). So I positioned the human rights declaration as representing human rights causes, the two animal rights declarations as representing animal rights causes, and the remaining three environmental declarations as representing environmental causes. This is, of course, imperfect in the sense that these three types of causes are interrelated, not mutually exclusive, and thus all declarations incorporated human rights with the rights of non-human life, especially The Principles for Environmental Justice (with the exception of the UN Human Rights declaration which exclusively focused on humans).

In terms of commonalities, every cause (environmentalism, animal rights, and human rights) had values in each of the five categories outlined in Table 26.2, indicating a general support for humans acting fairly and responsibly in their treatment of other individuals and ecosystems, humans preserving and respecting life and living systems, the role of pleasure in the wellbeing of sentient beings, the benefits of coexistence/peace and connection through

Table 26.2 Values represented as good/right/ideal in one or all of the rights declarations under study

<i>Life-supporting</i>	<i>Responsible</i>
Protection Care Peace/Nonviolence Life Health and Well-being	Respect (for life, human and animal dignity, sacredness of Mother Earth...)
Biodiversity Uniqueness Interdependence Human development	Moral progress Ethics Duty
Security Safeguarding Sustainance	Moral consistency/Integrity Courage
Balance Harmony Sustainability	Compassion Humaneness
Clean Pure/Natural	Reprioritizing lifestyles Leadership
Ecological integrity, vitality, and stability	Moderation Frugality Precaution
Regeneration Capacity	Conservation Recycling Restraint
	Accountability Gratitude
	Education/Wisdom/Learning
	Long-term planning Legacy
<i>Fair</i>	<i>Unifying/Connecting</i>
Democratic participation Equality	Community Family Kinship
Liberty/Freedom Emancipation	Universality Multi-Culturalism Understanding Love
Justice Self-determination Dignity	Partnership Solidarity
Diversity Inclusivity Mutuality	Coexistence Expression
Compensation/Reparation Humility	Capacity for sentience and/or reason
Healing and Recovery Recognition	
Shared wealth Access to resources	
Open-mindedness	
<i>Pleasurable</i>	
Flourishing Beauty Happiness	
Expression Pursuit of aspirations	

community, and acknowledgment of similar/unifying traits across cultures and species. While the sentience of human and nonhuman animals was often acknowledged in various declarations as a basis for being concerned about welfare and nonviolence, it did not seem to garner the nonhuman animal any equality or closer connection to the human animal except in the animal rights declarations. This is indicative of the fact that all causes may value life or nonviolence or fairness but apply them in a hierarchical fashion (inequitably) to various beings. This is why I do not just ask what is valued (RQ2) but also who is valued (RQ1).

RQ3 Which of these values overlap between causes and thus are more universal?

These are the values I determined to be universal to all three causes addressed in the declarations:

- life and health;
- nonviolence, coexistence, and peace;

- protection and care-taking;
- justice and fairness;
- respect;
- liberty;
- equality;
- recognition (of rights);
- dignity;
- sentience/capacity for feeling; and
- education.⁶

Of the universal values, respect is more like a modifier for other values (as in ‘respect for what/whom?’) or a verb that encourages recognition of the other values. In fact, in considering what actions or resulting states of being the declarations condemned as wrong, I would describe them as any action that showed a lack of respect for others (non-human nature or all animals) – disrespecting their physical health and wellbeing, their equal rights and opportunities and liberties, or our shared resources. Thus, I conclude what was universally condemned by all three causes were unfair, irresponsible, and/or harmful actions that represented a denial of the dignity or inherent value of others.

Recommendations: Framing values befitting the human animal earthling’s ecocultural identity

After identifying the overlapping values found in rights declarations on behalf of humans, nonhuman animals, and nature, in this section I answer the following prescriptive and analytical research question: In what way do these values need reframing to be less anthropocentric or more sentient or biocentric in their application and scope?

In answering this, I draw upon many of the overlapping values and other popular values in Table 26.2, displaying them in italics to explain how I recommend these values could be (re) framed to cultivate an ecocultural identity as human animal earthlings. The challenge is not only to cultivate a more benevolent/caring social identity, as most cultures already tend to rank benevolence as the premier value (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). Instead, the challenge is to ensure that humanity envisions this benevolence applying to many forms of life, not just to humankind, one’s immediate kin, local environment, or private land. As Crompton and Kasser (2009) note, an anthropocentric identity must be confronted so other animals and nature become part of humanity’s ingroup, which is essential to developing an ‘environmental identity’ (Clayton, 2012). This incorporation of nonhuman animals as members of one’s community is key to Steiner’s (2008) philosophy on animal ethics. He asks that humans empathize with nonhuman animals and ‘acknowledge their plight and their prospects in a world that has been dominated by human beings’ so that we can start to ‘identify with animals, to see ourselves in them and them in ourselves’ (p. 137).

In order to foster a human animal earthling identity that is sustainable, social movements should promote a less human-privileging core *justice* ethic that begins to situate the human, particularly in contemporary industrialized consumer cultures, more *humbly* as an animal who has unfairly exploited rather than shared the communal resources of our home planet (see Diamond, 1992; Mason, 1997; Nibert, 2013). Thus, social movements should build critical rhetoric around values of *justice* and *responsibility* that make industrialized human societies feel *accountable* for solving the life and death problems they have caused other animal species. To *care* enough to be accountable would require that humans also value their own *moral integrity* and take pride in

living their values by being *responsible* global citizens.⁷ Citizenship engenders a sense of a global *community* and *interdependence* upon each other as earthlings.

Respect for life is also a core value of all movements, and I recommend this respect needs to be inclusive of all living beings, but we may respect different forms of life in different ways. For instance, fellow sentient animals might be valued inherently as individuals, while plants, natural objects, and living systems might be valued more holistically as groups that support the lives of sentient beings (Jamieson, 2002). In a strictly ecological sense, *sentience* is not a valid reason to privilege any living being (Taylor, 1993), but I am attempting to blend ecological, human, and animal ethics by using animal rights (based on privileging sentience) as the logical bridge between the human and nonhuman world.⁸ Further discussion is merited about which non-animal life forms may still qualify as sentient or should be valued as individuals, such as trees, for example.

Humans should note our *kinship* with fellow animal species while also embracing the *diversity* and *uniqueness* inherent among not only species but individual members of species (Bekoff & Pierce, 2009), as diversity is valued both in culture and nature – for instance, *diversity* is important to the civil rights movement and also to environmentalism, specifically as in *biodiversity*. In my experience studying animal rights discourse in the United States over the past several decades, I do not find that the animal rights movement has emphasized diversity as much, but I believe it should begin to play an important role in defeating the anthropocentrism inherent to privileging only the other animals who most resemble humans. We should respect fellow animals for their similar sentient capacities but also must appreciate the splendid and impressive differences between and within species, and not view other animals as diminished versions of humans (Freeman, 2010b).

Social movements can raise the status of nonhuman animals in the process of promoting eco-friendly, *moderate* lifestyles, by noting that we should follow nonhumans' cultural example of living *sustainably* and avoiding excess, gluttony, and waste (core values of an extractive capitalist system). In this way, human animal earthlings can be framed as *team players* on planet Earth; here team members practice *reciprocity* by returning the favor of living in a simpler and more *natural* way, as other animal societies do, which justly allows other sentient beings to flourish as well. This view of other animals as wise, sustainable, and ethical⁹ role-models is a useful part of furthering humanity's respect for other animals while also practicing *humility* so humans do not exalt their own ethicality to justify human superiority.¹⁰

See Table 26.3 for a list of terms I recommend ecocultural communicators use to more inclusively and respectfully refer to various beings and denote their importance, value, and relationships to each other. This terminology is informed by human animal earthling values I outline above, rhetorically enabling humans to perceive themselves as embedded within the more-than-human world. All the terms are meant to be respectful ways to describe categories of living beings – some broader categories containing many species and some narrower categories containing only one species.

Path forward for human animal earthlings

In this chapter, I have identified ways that anti-exploitation movements can strategically ally in support of the broader goals of justice and protection of life. By allying, I don't just mean providing ideas for pragmatic coalition campaigns (such as simply suggesting everyone join forces to fight factory farming or greenhouse gas emissions). I mean going deeper to design campaigns (on any issue) that cultivate a unified, core set of intrinsic values meant to foster more responsible and benevolent human ecocultures that transcend anthropocentrism.

Table 26.3 Recommended terminologies for referencing living entities

← Broader — Species Categories — Narrower →			
<i>All Earth's animate and inanimate inhabitants</i>	<i>All animals (human and nonhuman)</i>	<i>All animals except for humans</i>	<i>The human animal only</i>
Earthlings	Living beings	Nonhuman animals	Humans
Community of life	Animal kingdom**	Other animals	Human beings
All living things	Everyone*	Fellow animal species	The human animal
All forms of life	All animals	Nonhuman animal cultures*	Humanimality
The living world	All of us, we	Nonhuman animal societies and communities	Human cultures
The natural world	Cultures*		Human society
Nature	Individuals		
The environment	Person(s)*		
Ecosystems			
All species			
Future generations*			

* I recognize these are non-traditional uses of these terms to be more inclusive of nonhuman species. Therefore, when using these terms in novel ways to promote novel thinking that deconstructs nature/culture and animal/human dualisms, they may need explanation to broaden the notion of whom they represent.

** While 'animal kingdom' is a common, recognizable term in scientific categorization of species, anachronistic references to 'kingdoms' is patriarchal and hierarchical, so I prefer to use a more general term such as 'all animal species.'

I believe values that foster such just and sustainable ecocultures start by respecting life – the lives of fellow, sentient individuals and the living world upon which we all depend. Ecocultural communication should incorporate a variety of the values supporting life, fairness, responsibility, and unity (as categorized in Table 26.2), especially privileging the universal values I identify above in RQ3 that are common to human, nonhuman animal, and environmental causes. An interconnected and restorative ecocultural identity will be foregrounded by strategically using terms such as those I recommend in Table 26.3 to foster respectful and inclusive language that highlights humanity's kinship and larger community with fellow animals and other living beings.

While I have attempted to be globally relevant and culturally inclusive, my Western perspective creates a bias that hopefully can be overcome by other scholars and activists using this chapter as a reference for discussing how their ecocultural perspectives can enhance the goal of creating a more universal human identity as earthlings. Rectifying the injustice of mass exploitation will take a team effort on behalf of an expanded notion of a planetary community openly acknowledged in our ecocultural identities, where no individual's life is expendable, and human animal earthlings step up to protect fellow living beings and our shared ecosystems.

Notes

- 1 For theory on social movement organization advocacy, see McAdam et al. (1996).
- 2 A version of this *Handbook* chapter appears as a chapter in my book on the *Human Animal Earthling Identity* (2019, UGA Press), along with parts of the literature review.
- 3 William Mitchell used the term 'humanimal' in the introduction to Cary Wolfe's (2003) book. There is also a posthumanist journal named *Humanimalia*. And a chapter on deconstructing the human/animal dualism also expands on the term's usefulness (Freeman, 2010b).

- 4 My recent book on the *Human Animal Earthling Identity* (2019, UGA Press) builds and expands upon this legal/rights-oriented sample by analyzing campaign discourse of major advocacy organizations.
- 5 Notice that I am not conducting a full critical discourse analysis that seeks to interrogate the distinctions, goals, and claims of these documents in socio-historic context. I am being more utilitarian in mining them for descriptive indications of whom and what we value.
- 6 Education is mainly a global human rights value meant to provide equal opportunity, but the 1989 Animal Rights declaration encouraged the education of children as a way to create citizens who are understanding and respectful toward other animals.
- 7 This notion of global citizenship should embrace environmental justice principles, as problematized by scholars such as Carmin & Agyeman (2011) and Latta & Wittman (2015).
- 8 The main philosophy yet to overtly blend environmentalism with civil rights and animal rights is the pioneering work of ecofeminist animal rights scholars like Adams (1990) and Kheel (2008).
- 9 For a discussion of nonhuman animals as ethical beings, see Bekoff and Pierce (2009). I recognize that not everything various animal cultures practice is something that a just human culture would want to emulate (i.e., fratricide or rape).
- 10 This move to humility also is related in a decolonial sense to more industrialized human cultures gaining more respect for the sustainability and wisdom of many 'less developed' traditional cultures.

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Fostering children's ecocultural identities within ecoresiliency

Shannon Audley, Ninian R. Stein and Julia L. Ginsburg

All personal narratives are ecocultural and thus shape the development of ecocultural identities. As evidenced below, in this fourth grader's narrative¹ about a conflict on the playground, our relationship with the more-than-human world is not separate from our interactions with other humans but is a reflected embedded whole.

One day at the playground Alice (3rd grade) stepped on a frog and I saved it. we named him Froggerton. All the other 3rd grade[r]s SCEAMED. At the end of recess we let him go. Alice just said (last year) that she 'acesadently' stepped on him aginn. He died from a heart attack. I AM SAD.

Not only does the fourth-grade author tell what happened, what Jerome Bruner (1990) refers to as the 'landscape of action,' the author also evaluates what occurred, or the 'landscape of consciousness.' It is through the author's evaluations of what happened, including her emotional reaction to the event – 'I AM SAD' – that the child's ecocultural identity emerges. As Cronon (1992) reminds us,

narratives remain our chief moral compass in the world. Because we use them to motivate and explain our actions, the stories we tell change the way we act in the world. They are not just passive accounts. The frontier stories helped cause the Dust Bowl just as the New Deal stories helped cause government response to that disaster.

(p. 1375)

Like the ecocultural master narratives that shaped (and shape) policy regarding responses to natural disasters, children's narratives also shape and influence how they interact with the world (Daiute, 2013; McAdams, 2001). This author's framing of her narrative as sad, in conjunction with her use of quotations indicating disbelief in Alice's story, suggest an ecocentric ecocultural stance on how non-human animals should be treated. Yet, many children's narratives of non-canonical life events do not explicitly discuss elements of the non-human world. Children often omit this world in their stories because, at least in the Western world, the ecocultural master narratives through which children interpret their stories do not include an ecocentric relationship

with the non-human world (Cronon, 1996; Everden, 1985). The non-human world, or ‘the environment,’ is where the action happens; it is the setting rather than the actor.

To challenge anthropocentric ecocultural identities, and the behaviors that accompany them, humans must reframe how we tell stories, especially to children. How can this occur? Although some parents have views that may not align with environmental sustainability, schools and teachers have the opportunity to provide children with frames, or scaffolds, that will help them think about the world differently – frames which are not anthropocentric but rather ecoresilient, or responsive, anticipatory, and adaptive, as well as capable of fostering relational empathy toward the non-human world.

This chapter extends narrative identity development (e.g., Fivush, 2011; McAdams, 2001; Nelson, 2003) to explicitly include how early childhood educators can foster *ecoresilient ecocultural identity development* in young children. First, we define ecocultural identity, resiliency, ecoresiliency, and common frames, including those of pulling one’s self up by one’s bootstraps (individualism discourses) and abundance. Next, this chapter utilizes oral interviews with teachers from 21 nature-based² preschools in the northeastern United States to discuss children’s exposure and interaction with ecocultural master narrative frames. Then we present an overview of how autobiographical personal narratives help construct children’s emerging ecocultural identities, providing examples from written narratives about playground experiences drawn from a more extensive study about peer relations at a public urban elementary school in the mid-South United States. Next, we connect frames to ecocultural identity development by focusing on autobiographical memories, to discuss how to reframe children’s personal stories through conversations. Although not all schools and teachers may share an ecoresilient way of thinking, our research with preschool teachers suggests that some teachers purposefully utilize ecoresilient frames with their students, making narrative reframing – as an origin of change – possible. We conclude with suggested interventions for how preschool teachers and parents can help children reframe everyday experiences through an ecoresilient lens.

Everyone has an ecocultural identity: Definitions of ecocultural identity and resiliency

This chapter recognizes ecocultural identity as comprising the materially and discursively constructed positionality, subjectivity, perception, and practice that ‘(in)form one’s emotional, embodied, ethical, and political sensibilities in and with the all-encompassing world’ (Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020 pp. xvii–xxiii). Ecocultural identity includes how individuals and communities conceptualize, understand, and tell stories about their relationships to local or distant regions, ecosystems from which they draw resources, and the planet as a whole. Ecocultural identity is influenced by how one understands oneself in relation to one’s participation in community activities that occur in and with the life systems that surround and include us. It is within this web of life that humans develop simultaneously a sense of vulnerability and empowerment.

A key term throughout this chapter is resiliency. Resiliency is often positioned as an ability to cope, as McGreavy (2016) critically points out:

[R]esilience as coping relies on humans working together to *bounce back* to normal as quickly as possible. Normalcy means finding ourselves at the center of the world. Our strength to weather the storms, our resiliency, grows as we find ways to reduce vulnerability and resist the world as it changes.

(pp. 104–105)

This view of resiliency as coping is anti-vulnerability, anthropocentric, and reinforces a binary of social versus ecological positioning (Milstein, 2009). However, this does not have to be the case. Resiliency can be ecocentric and should, as McCreavy (2016) notes, 'make sense based on specific assumptions about reality' (p. 109). Given that the world is now in a precarious state because of climate crisis, Stormer and McCreavy's (2017) thinking of resiliency as 'responsive, adaptive, and persistent,' where vulnerability is a necessary feature of adaptability, is a timely conception of resiliency (p. 18). More so, building relations and empathy among humans and with the more-than-human world make this form of resiliency possible by forgoing the Western social-ecological dichotomy. We choose to embrace McCreavy and colleagues' conception of resiliency, which this chapter makes explicit by calling it *ecoresiliency*, in order to reflect the current reality of climate crisis and identify human and non-human vulnerability as a source of potential strengths in a changing world. *Ecoresiliency* then, is responsive, adaptive, persistent, and fosters relations and empathy among humans and the more-than-human world.

Cognitive scientist Lakoff (2008) argues that effective communicators build arguments not through numbers, but through stories embedded in language. Embedded in some of the most deeply held cultural stories are what Lakoff calls 'frames,' single words or small groupings of words that convey a story or an idea. Frames help guide human interpretations of the world, including events, behaviors, and thoughts, by providing scripts, or culturally commonly held assumptions about how people should think about interactions. In essence, frames are 'a kind of interpretative background [in] which individuals position their own acts and those of others' (Goddard, 2002, p. 38). Three frames are of interest to this chapter: bootstrap, abundance, and *ecoresiliency*. Two of these frames, bootstrap and abundance, are classic examples of U.S. American frames that are culturally embedded in language (i.e., master narratives) and contribute to and reflect an anthropocentric ecocultural identity. The bootstrap frame promotes the American idea of rugged individualism by celebrating persons who 'pull themselves up by their bootstraps' and, through hard work and without help from others, move from working class to middle or upper class while reinforcing the class structures and the status quo that keeps other persons in place (Weiss, 1969). The master narrative of abundance references the mythical and real elements of abundance in the U.S. (e.g., 'streets paved with gold') that remain despite the myth moving out of reach for increasing numbers of U.S. Americans (Chetty, 2017). Together these two frames promote an anthropocentric ecocultural view within which only human improvement that occurs from individual hard work has value, while other entities are identified as plentiful resources that should be used for human consumption. These ecocultural master narratives provide default frames for children, and, if they are not contested, these narratives develop into the default frame for adults' interpretation of experiences and environmental behaviors (Nelson, 2003). However, in contrast, the *ecoresiliency* frame supports an ecocentric worldview by emphasizing relation building and empathy among humans and with the more-than-human world. In this way, *ecoresiliency* is an alternative scaffold to the current anthropocentric ecocultural master frames. *Ecoresiliency* as a frame highlights the embedded and reciprocal nature of our daily interactions with the more-than-human world. In addition, *ecoresiliency* prepares frame-holders to respond with flexibility to world events by highlighting that 'bouncing back' to normalcy is not the only option when responding to natural disasters or other world events. Rather, because the *ecoresiliency* frame fosters multiple perspectives, thinking through this framework allows one to consider alternative solutions that may not otherwise be evident.

Children's exposures to and interactions with ecocultural master frames

Conversations with parents and teachers, in addition to books and other media (such as television and electronic games), expose children to ecocultural master narratives. Children in the U.S. commonly hear the bootstrap frame when their parents insist: 'if you work hard, you will get good grades, go to college, and get a good job.' Abundance, such as 'we can just buy another one' or 'throw it away if you don't like it,' is also a commonly employed frame, even though parental access to resources differs. Classical and popular U.S. children's literature, such as Waddy Piper's version of *The Little Engine that Could* and Mo Williams' *Knufflebunny*, reflect a bootstrap mentality through themes of perseverance and trying again and again, without changing strategies or asking for help. Marsha Brown's version of *Stone Soup* and Anika Denise's *Pigs Love Potatoes* highlight themes of abundance while also teaching children how to count. Although these stories are beloved in U.S. culture and promote emotional resiliency, empathy, and numerical literacy, they undermine ecoresiliency because they reinforce and promote an idea of resiliency that focuses on returning to normal, and coping or utilizing one strategy, rather than adapting or using vulnerabilities as strengths. Subconsciously, through repeated exposure and positive story outcomes (e.g., the toys make it to the children, the child finds the bunny, there is enough food for everyone), bootstrap and abundance are the frames that children will predominantly use to interpret their experiences and guide their future behaviors.

Indeed, our research with nature-based preschool educators suggests that themes of abundance are present in early childhood classrooms. Although about one-third of the participants reported having a zero-trash lunch policy in their school or classroom, the other two-thirds talked about how either the initiative failed or they faced reluctance, mainly because of parents' reliance on pre-packed foods. One teacher in our study noted how these themes played out in her classroom when she tried to get her students to use reusable containers.

Well, we tried to do something like that [have a zero-trash lunch policy], it was a feeble attempt, but we tried to get students to take their lunch trash home. Pack in, pack out was the idea. The idea was that you will be more likely to put things in reusable containers if you have to pack it back in and take it home. Kids did not want to put half eaten sandwiches back in their lunch boxes. It was too messy and too gross. Or, a yogurt cup that had yogurt still in it, they really didn't feel like they had the time or space to take care of their dishes properly. So, they would either throw things in the trashcan anyway or be really mad about it.

This story suggests that even in schools where policies are sustainability aligned, children may encounter counter-narratives in their lives outside of school that contrast the policies promoted at school. Frames of abundance influence the children's action of throwing food away and their evaluation of labeling leftover food as 'messy' or 'gross.' While these frames directly influence these particular children's thoughts and behaviors (why is discarded food gross or yucky? Why does it have to be thrown away?), they more broadly influence the amount of consumer waste present in countries like the U.S. (Bloom, 2011). Dismantling and replacing these common anthropocentric ecocultural master frames (bootstrap/abundance) may be one of our best hopes for reducing consumer-side food waste, promoting sustainable behaviors and ecoresilient ecocultural identities, and adapting and responding to climate crisis.

An ecoresiliency frame to foster an ecoresilient ecocultural identity

Children's early experiences – and their interpretations of those experiences – shape their adult environmental attitudes, responses, and behaviors (Sebba, 1991; Wells & Lekies, 2006). This child-to-adult environmental synchrony occurs, in part, because adults carry frames, the lessons they learned as children, throughout their lives and use those frames to interpret past and possible future experiences (McLean et al., 2007). Frames are influenced and reinforced through interactions with three primary agents. These agents include (1) other individuals (including friends, parents, and teachers), (2) the society in which one lives, and (3) the broader culture through which master narratives tell one 'what to expect' about the world in which they live (McLean & Syed, 2015). The ways in which one comes to know, choose, and use frames from other individuals, society, and the broader culture include telling and retelling our stories with others (McLean et al., 2007), structured reminiscing with parents (Fivush et al., 2006; McAdams & McLean, 2013) and teachers (Neale & Pino-Pasternak, 2017), and cultural mediation (Hammack, 2008). These activities, among others, help shape the frames, or scaffolds, through which humans interpret experiences. In turn, these frames reflect and are shaped by autobiographical personal narratives.

Autobiographical personal narratives – stories about personal experiences that have been reflected upon and involve evaluation through a frame (Nelson, 2003) – shape an author's ecocultural identity. When people tell autobiographical personal narratives, they express, sometimes unintentionally, their ecocultural identity (and emergent identities) through the evaluative features of their stories – including emotions, motivations, and mental processes (i.e., landscape of consciousness, Bruner, 1990). Consider the following modified fifth-grade author's personal narrative about Kito and the ladybug:

One day on the playground I found a ladybug. I went to go show it to my friend Amber. I went to go show Kito. She took the ladybug and placed it on the ground and she stepped on it and killed it.

Here, the author only highlights the landscape of action (i.e., what happened) – she finds a ladybug, shows it to Amber, and then to Kito, who steps on it and kills it. In this story, there is no interpretation or meaning given to these events. How does the author evaluate these events – was it good or bad that Kito stepped on a ladybug? What will the author do next time Kito wants to see a ladybug? As there is no landscape of consciousness (i.e., evaluation of what happened), the fifth-grade author's moral framing of the event is unknown.

Now, reconsider the story in its unmodified original form – that of an *autobiographical* personal narrative:

One day on the playground I found a ladybug. I went to go show it to my friend Amber and she loved it. I went to go show Kito. I thought Kito liked ladybugs but obviously she didn't. She took the ladybug and placed it on the ground and she stepped on it and killed it. It was sad. No[w] I [k]no[w] not to give/show Kito a ladybug anymore.

Here, there is evidence of the landscape of consciousness, as the author references her thoughts, emotions, and motivations (Walton et al., 2009). In particular, the author evaluates her experience, not through a frame of abundance, where there would be an indication that the ladybug is

replaceable, but instead through a frame of harmony – that is, valuing harmony over mastery with the more-than-human world (Milstein, 2009). It is directly through this relational and empathic lens that the author interprets and makes meaning of what happened. The author tells the reader that she only showed Kito the ladybug because she thought Kito loved ladybugs; this motivational statement lets the reader know the author would not intentionally harm a ladybug; she was not aware of Kito's intention. The author suggests an anticipatory adaptation, or anticipating changing her future behaviors in response to her interaction with Kito. In this instance, the landscape of consciousness may potentially affect future behaviors. It is through this emergent ecoresiliency frame (and others this author is exposed to), that the child will continue to develop her ecoresilient ecocultural identity. However, not all children's narratives are driven by such ecocentric ecocultural frames.

In our narrative data-set, which contained 238 elementary school children's stories about something that happened on a playground, most children wrote narratives focusing on the landscape of action and peer-to-peer conflicts, a common occurrence in this age group (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010). They also often excluded the more-than-human realm, which reflects the common anthropocentric worldview of non-Indigenous children in the U.S. (Kahn, 2003; Kahn & Friedman, 1995). However, some stories did involve interactions with non-human creatures, including ladybugs, frogs, birds, and wasps, as seen in the following narrative by a fourth grader:

Once I killed five wasps in one day. so I was running and a wasp landed on me, so automatically [automatically] tried to get im off. so it came off but it was alive and it flew away but I follow it. to the hive soon theywere flying around me. so I reached out my hand and killed one, then another and another. the last two where fast. but I got then I the last one. so I was done then the wislel [whistle] blule [blew]. and resses was over and as I lined up, I said to myself oh man.

For this fourth-grade author, an anthropocentric frame, one that evokes abundance and mastery over nature, shapes his interpretation of the experience. The author's story does not mention that his killing wasps could lead to the decline of the wasp population. Instead, the author uses the phrase, '[automatically] tried to get [h]im off' and 'but it was alive,' to suggests that killing wasps was automatic; and he spent his entire recess killing all the wasps he could find. He did not indicate why he believes he should kill wasps; perhaps it has never occurred to him that he should not. The author's emergent ecocultural identity is one that centers mastery over the more-than-human world. Although harder to identify, the behavior of the boy is likely a result of the ecocultural narratives that he was told and are implicit to his larger community.

The child authors of the playground narratives used in this chapter are in middle childhood, the developmental stage before adolescence where psychological literature places identity development (McLean, 2005; Syed & McLean, 2016). However, all narratives, even those that young children tell, can provide glimpses of emergent ecocultural identities, both ecocentric and anthropocentric. The frames through which people develop identities are present in early childhood and begin to form as early as age two (Fivush, 2011). Recent research suggests that early memories and the frames through which these actions are interpreted are the building blocks for identity development that begins in earnest in adolescence (Reese et al., 2010a). Thus, it is imperative to understand how children come to know, choose, and use specific frames for evaluating their experiences when constructing their ecocultural identities.

Connecting frames and ecocultural identity development through autobiographical memories

As previously highlighted, connection to personal meaning is what connects autobiographical memory to one's personal (and therefore ecocultural) identity. According to Nelson and Fivush (2004), autobiographical memory is a 'declarative, explicit memory for specific points in the past, recalled from the unique perspective of the self in relation to others' (p. 488). That is, autobiographical memories are autobiographical personal narratives that contain the landscape of action and consciousness. However, it is important to understand the distinction between two types of memories – autobiographical and episodic – when examining how children form ecocultural identities. First, an autobiographical memory must be a specific memory of an event that occurred in a specific time and place in one's personal past (Tulving, 2002). Although most personal memories are based on specific episodes, not all are considered autobiographical. For a personal memory to be considered autobiographical, it must be about a specific episode (an episodic memory) and include events that have personal meaning. For example, 'I remember the day that I found a nest with eggs in it' is about a specific episode, and thus an episodic memory, while 'Birds lay eggs in nests' is not. Personal meaning, which was absent from the previous examples, comes from 'emotions, motivations, and goals that are constructed in interaction with others in the world' (Nelson & Fivush, 2004, p. 488) – in other words, a landscape of consciousness. The example, 'I remember the day that I found a nest with eggs in it; it made me happy' is an example of an autobiographical memory because it is both about a specific episode (episodic memory) and holds personal meaning.

Autobiographical memories develop when episodic memories become 'autonoetic' or 'self-knowing' (Gardner, 2001). This occurs when one remembers personal experiences of events in which one was present (Nelson, 2003) and interprets the events either through frames of ecocultural master narratives (Harbus, 2011; Thorne & McClean, 2002) or through co-constructing the memory during social interactions with others (Fivush, 2007). Ecocultural master narratives as frames allow one to interpret the event through the norms and expectations of a particular culture, while social interactions with others may introduce new ideas about what happened through the introduction of multiple perspectives (Fivush & Waters, 2013). See Table 27.1 (modified from Walton et al., 2009) for examples of questions that can help children consider multiple perspectives and help them develop their landscape of consciousness.

Autobiographical memory, when told through the frames from ecocultural master narratives or co-constructed during social interactions, form the basis of an individual's identity (Fivush & Waters, 2013; McAdams, 1996). See Figure 27.1 for an overview of the process as we see it. Social interactions, including telling and hearing stories with and from (a) other humans, (b) society and its artifacts, and (c) ecocultural master narratives, provide humans with questions or frames to construct and reconstruct what happened, and also influences the development of emotions, motivations and goals, and who we are. This is an embedded and recursive process, as humans cannot be removed from their local geographies, ecologies, and cultural artifacts and practices. Autobiographical memories develop when episodic memories, or memories about an event, become 'autonoetic,' where one remembers personal experiences of events in which one was present, and these episodic memories become structured or interpreted through frames. These frames help shape how individuals think about and evaluate their experience by structuring them in ways that are meaningful to the society or culture, such as elaborating on why something happened or providing justifications for negative behaviors.

Table 27.1 Example questions for helping children develop 'landscape of consciousness'

	<i>Includes</i>	<i>Example questions to ask children</i>	<i>Information to share with children</i>
<i>Emotions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional states (happy, mad, sad) Emotional traits (shy proud) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does that make you feel? How does that make (other person, animal, plant) feel? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share how X makes you feel. Share how you think it makes other (person, animal, plant) feel.
<i>Motivations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intentions Reasons Goals Desires 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What was your reason? What was the other's reason? What was your goal? What did you mean to happen? Do you think the person was serious? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My reason was... Could your goal also have been? I think x's goal might be...
<i>Mental Processes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wondering Thinking Pretending Believing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What were you thinking when it happened? What did you believe would happen? Why were you pretending? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think... I wonder... I believe...

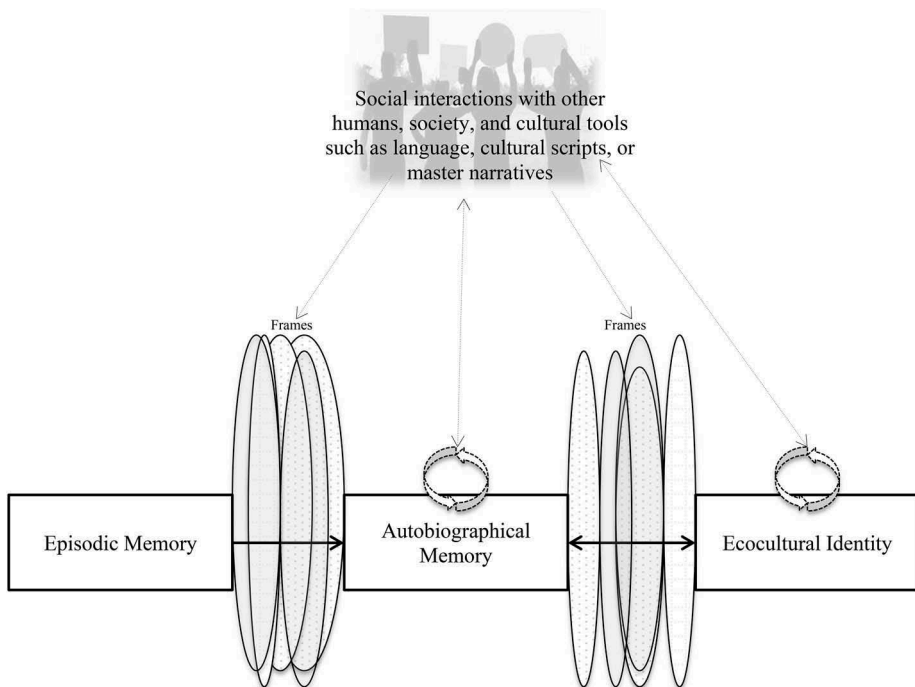


Figure 27.1 Overview of the process of the development of ecocultural identity.

Autobiographical memories, when told with others and interpreted through old and new frames, can form the basis of one's ecocultural identity. In turn, one's identity can influence the re-interpretation of autobiographical memories. Through telling and hearing stories with others (via social interactions), identities and autobiographical memories are created and re-created. Thus, they are not static but an iterative process that is constantly mediated through our social interactions with others and the larger culture. This recursive process is true for ecocultural master narratives as well, and individuals' autobiographical and ecocultural identities in turn shape social interactions and reshape ecocultural master narratives.

Indeed, research suggests that early childhood autobiographical memories form the basis of identity development during childhood (Fivush & Zahman, 2015; Reese et al., 2010b) and in adolescence (Reese et al., 2010a). By influencing how young children frame autobiographical memories from episodic memories, adults can unintentionally or intentionally help shape children's ecocultural identity.

Framing episodic and autobiographical memories through conversations

There is growing evidence that the ways in which adults talk about past events with young children influence how children come to understand those events (Fivush, 1991, 2007). Children as young as 16 months can participate in scaffolded conversations with parents about what happened (Reese, 2002) and children's storytelling style (e.g., whether they add in emotional details) is related to how the parent reminisces with the child (Fivush et al., 2006). Although young children between the ages of three and five actively engage in conversations about what happened to them, they still require an adult to help them scaffold their experiences into coherent stories (Fivush, 2007). In narrating their personal past, children simultaneously organize and understand their experiences through the frames, or scaffolds, that the adults provide by sharing their stories. Indeed, this was the case at the nature-preschools that we examined in the north-eastern U.S., where several teachers recounted that it was not as challenging as expected to get kids to reframe their experience. As one teacher told us,

Even children who say 'I hate spiders, I want to squish a spider,' or don't like snakes, as soon as you get a child to act out becoming one, or they see a live one, or they get more information about one ... the more information they have, the more empathy they have for that creature, and the more connections they develop.

When kids are exposed to commonly misunderstood non-human animals (such as snakes and spiders) the experience of exposure, whether through interaction or talking about the non-human animal, provides a scaffold to help children reframe the lens through which they had previously interpreted and judged the world. In this particular case, by talking about the creatures and the children's fears, the teacher was able to help her students develop empathy for non-human creatures, a core element of an ecoresiliency frame.

Our study focused on nature-based preschools, but we believe our findings are generalizable because all preschool teachers (once they understand and accept an ecoresiliency frame) can play an active role in helping children frame and re-frame their experiences into ecoresilient coherent narratives. Neale and Pino-Pasternak (2017) argue that because many children are spending increasing amounts of time in formalized early childhood settings, teachers may act as *in loco parentis* in children's autobiographical memory development. That is, teachers reminisce about experiences with their students, including formal and unintentional conversations about an event

that was experienced or shared. When teachers ask elaborative questions, offer information and insight, and provide children with tools and motivation for interpreting experience, they help create a frame for children to interpret their experiences. This shared reminiscing gives meaning to episodic memories, turning them into autobiographical ones.

In interviewing preschool teachers about their views of sustainability education, one teacher shared with us this story about how she framed an outdoor experience that she and her students shared as magical and worth protecting:

The magic mushroom is the perfect preschool example... there's a swamp, and there's a path that goes across the swamp that my own kids made with logs, ... and there's this mushroom on the log that the kids found. It's huge, it's like two hands big... Of course, it's magical, it looks like it has a face, and of course we made a big deal out of it saying: 'this is a magical mushroom, you have to be really careful.' It was right at the end of the log bridge and so the kids had to go around it in order not to break it. What was so amazing was that over the winter... we were playing out in the swamp, and the mushroom was still there, and the same kids who saw it in the summer immediately went into protection mode, and they took turns standing guard over the mushroom while the other kids played around so that it wouldn't get broken... that idea of creating this reverence for this cool thing in nature... they would yell at each other as they were coming down the hill saying, 'Remember the mushroom! Don't break the mushroom!' I think that's a perfect example of being there with them when they found it and taking that moment to help them be in awe of how beautiful it was instead of that impulse to kick it over, which I probably would have done when I was a kid... but to have an adult there to be like, 'Wait, this is a really special thing, I've never seen this before.' So, it's that idea of grasping those moments and creating a story or a narrative for the kids, and I know that some of those kids will remember that for the rest of their lives. And having that experience of caring for a thing simply because it was uniquely beautiful in nature is really powerful, and nothing we planned for.

This participant noted how she spontaneously framed the children's discovery of the mushroom using narrative elements that are reflective of an ecoresiliency frame. That is, first the adult pointed out 'the special thing' and reinforced the children's connectedness to the mushroom by suggesting that it had eyes and a face (as pre-school aged children retain animistic thinking, Piaget, 1960). The children adapted their exploration, so they would not destroy it, and even adapted their future play behavior to preserve the mushroom. Although this story is not meant to reflect a fully developed ecoresiliency frame, the teacher's frame does include a reciprocal relationship with the more-than-human world and continual persistence in developing those relations. More important, however, is that the children re-utilized the same frame over time, shared and co-constructed that frame with other children, and used it to transform the experience from an episodic memory to an autobiographical one, organized around magic and reciprocal relationships. The teacher notes at the end that she believes that this experience can affect them for the rest of their lives, reinforcing an environmentally positive ecocultural identity, which is not based in fear, but in vulnerability and awe.

Co-constructing an ecoresiliency frame with children

The key for teachers and others is to help children co-construct an ecoresilient landscape of consciousness for their personal experiences. Again, a frame is considered ecoresilient when it

considers resiliency as responsive, persistent, anticipatory in adaptation, and built on relational empathy toward the non-human world. In order to facilitate ecoresilient framing, when sharing stories and experiences, adults can ask children about and share their own emotions, motivations, and mental processes in ways that reinforce ecoresiliency. That is, adults can help children refocus their emotion, motivations, and mental processes in ways that help them connect to current climate crisis, identify human and non-human vulnerability as sources of potential strengths in a changing world, be responsive, adaptive, and persistent, and also reflect on the importance of relations and empathy among humans and the more-than-human world. We think it is also important to point out that children often help adults reframe experiences to be more empathetic, relational, and ecocentric, as adults are often thoroughly steeped in the master narratives, and children's experiences in school may not align with those at home. Thus, adults should carefully listen to the questions that children ask about the stories that adults tell, as well, and respond to those questions appropriately. As one teacher in our nature-based preschool study noted,

I hear from the parents that then they [the children, ages three to five] go home and share these activities, so I'm getting messages from the parents like, 'I heard from [my daughter] that the butterflies were fed today,' or, '[my child] told me that one in three bites of food comes from pollinators,' so, it's clearly getting in. They're [children] not only just absorbing it, but they're also sharing it, which I feel like is a really good way to gauge that it's not just going over their heads. It's laying the groundwork for work that's going to happen when they get a little older.

Based on our study, we suggest a few guiding points that educators and parents can use when encouraging children to re-frame experiences within this ecoresiliency framework:

- Remember that we are not separate from, but part of 'the environment.'
- Non-human animals have perspectives, wants, needs, and motivations.
- Our interactions always influence others, including non-human and non-animal others, even if we cannot immediately see the impact.
- How are our actions connected to what happens 'outside?' How does what happens 'outside' influence our actions?
- How can we help children think beyond the now and imagine new Earth futures?
- Consider all conversations, even if they don't directly connect with the 'outdoors,' as opportunities to instill and model an ecoresiliency frame for children.

Using this list of questions and claims as a guide, consider the following episodic story.

Me and my best friend Abriana saw a bird nest in a tree and there were eggs in it. and then we made a nest of our own made of hay.

How could a teacher reminisce about this experience with a student in order to help the child focus on emotions, motivations, and mental processes that are ecoresilient? In this example, a teacher could first ask the child how the experience made her feel (How did finding the bird nest make you feel?) and then ask the child to consider the birds' perspective (How do you think the birds felt when you found their nest? Do you think they were glad that you didn't touch the eggs; why do you think that? Do you think the bird might have wanted you to be near her eggs?) followed by reasoning focused on person-animal relations (Why do you think there were eggs in the nest? Why do you think the birds built their nest in

a place where you could see it?), and motivations (Why didn't you play with the bird nest? What do you believe would have happened if you had touched the nest?). In concluding the discussion, the teacher could ask the child to consider the situation in light of climate crisis (If the nest were accidentally broken, would there be another place the bird could go?) or develop relational empathy (Do you like it when people you don't know touch things that are important or special to you? Do you think your reaction would be different from a bird's reaction?).

Depending on the ecocultural frame that the child's community commonly endorses or uses (e.g., abundance, bootstrap) the teacher could include a question or a fact, such as the energy it takes for a bird to have to rebuild its nest may mean that it does not lay eggs, to challenge those frames of individuality and self-sufficiency. In order to challenge the framework of abundance, the teacher could also focus on whether there will be adequate resources for the bird to even build a nest the following year. The teacher could also encourage her student to think about how the child could behave in the future in a similar situation. In this way, the teacher is providing a structure about what kind of questions are important to ask and think about when interpreting an experience.

Talking to students, as noted above, is something that teachers often automatically do. More so, teachers naturally tailor their conversations to reflect the local geography. For example, when asking questions about the weather, teachers may discuss hurricanes with children who live on the coast but may discuss tornadoes with children who live in the U.S. Midwest. Indeed, research suggests that children's ecocultural identities are often reflective of their local geography (Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2003). However, what teachers often lack is an explicit framing of the questions to reinforce an ecoresiliency frame; often their questioning reinforces the ecocultural narratives that they participate in as adults or were socialized into as children. This can create potential pitfalls for teachers when they attempt to help children reframe their episodic and autobiographical narratives.

Common ecocultural master narrative pitfalls

Ecocultural master narratives are so engrained as interpretative frames in everyday interactions that teachers likely may not be aware they are using them to guide and interpret children's experiences. In addition, teacher's beliefs about children's emotional capabilities may also limit their use of ecoresiliency frames, as ecoresiliency depends on recognizing the current state of the world and adapting future behaviors to reflect reality, both of which may seem emotionally scary to children. For example, consider this teacher–student interaction:

We have switched from letting children have water from the plumbing [to play in] to only using rainwater. So, we teach them: 'you have water when it rains, and water is a precious commodity.' When they ask, 'I need water for something I'm building,' sometimes we have to say, 'we can't it hasn't rained in a while, we should do a rain dance and hope that it rains.'

In this story, the teacher initially stated that water was a limited resource (ecoresiliency frame). However, the teacher then contradicts this frame when she suggests that the children 'do a rain dance and hope that it rains, perhaps' suggesting to the children that they have mastery over nature and do not need to change their water-use behaviors in response to the lack of water, a reflection of the U.S. ecocultural master narratives of abundance. Furthermore, telling a child to 'do a rain dance' could be understood as appropriating specific Indigenous beliefs without cultural specificity or sensitivity. Although this response may seem comforting, as it appears to give children control, it

does so at the expense of not letting children experience and handle disappointing situations, which research suggests children are quite capable of (Luthar & Zigler, 1991). According to our research, this assumption also takes away children's ability to develop their own ecoresiliency frames. Also, it undermines the impact of anthropogenic effects on weather through climate disruption – such as in locations of increasing droughts – and, thus, disengages children from relationally connecting everyday human behaviors with climate conditions and weather events.

It is crucial for children to encounter ecoresiliency frames when they are young, and practice utilizing them throughout their development, as frames evolve and become more complex when they are utilized, told, and retold with others over time. Young children's ability to think about and interpret events is limited by their cognitive ability (Piaget, 1960). Thus, they may not be able to simultaneously think about the multiple perspectives that ecoresiliency requires (e.g., adaptation, persistence, vulnerability). However, new experiences will allow children to reengage with the frame – and as their cognition develops, so will the complexity through which they are able to evaluate their experiences. When they begin engaging fully in identity development in adolescence, they will be able to deeply engage with the ecoresiliency frame and develop an ecoresilient ecocultural identity. Without a competing ecoresiliency frame, both youth and adults will continue to rely on ecocultural master narratives, such as bootstrap and abundance, to frame their experiences and develop ecocultural identities that lead to continuing destructive environmental behaviors.

Conclusion: Promoting ecoresilient ecocultural identities for the new world that awaits

To better prepare children and their future communities to respond to the present-day climate crisis, we propose reframing the stories we tell, especially in conversation with children, to reflect an ecoresiliency frame. Telling others our stories allows narratives to be reshaped because (a) social interaction changes or introduces multiple perspectives and (b) ecoresiliency narrative frames can readily be addressed and called upon to help children understand how/why they behaved the way they did.

The key to promoting ecoresilient ecocultural identities is to encourage teachers and parents to move away from framing stories through the lens of resiliency as coping, abundance, and bootstrap, and move toward framing stories through an ecoresilient lens, one that considers resilience as responsive, adaptive, anticipatory in adaptation, and capable of fostering relational empathy toward the non-human world. To do this, teachers should be thoughtful about the questions they pose to their students and the stories they read with and to children, and specifically examine whether there are ecocultural master narratives present in the stories that, unexplored, would compete against ecoresilient framing. If these narratives are present, teachers can help children question the voracity of the ecocultural master narrative framing while simultaneously helping them reflect on questions that support the co-construction of an ecoresiliency frame.

Although these small interactions and reframings of experiences and stories of preschool-aged children may seem far removed from the development of ecocultural identity in adolescence or adulthood, we want to again highlight Figure 27.1. The process of developing an ecocultural identity does not begin in adolescence, but in early childhood (McLean, 2005). Ecocultural identity stems from everyday episodic and autobiographical memories that are framed and reframed through the sharing of stories with others. Through framing and reframing, children not only have a chance to interpret their experiences and give those experiences meaning, but through conversations with others, including parents and teachers, children can help inform adults'

ecocultural identities as well. One preschool teacher, when recounting a conversation she had with her class about Indigenous land and gas pipelines reminded us:

With [young children] everything is so clear-cut – fair or unfair, just or unjust – so these conversations are really easy to have with them, whereas, with adults, we carry all this baggage.

As the teacher notes, adults carry with them ecocultural master narrative ‘baggage’ and may interpret world events, including responding to climate crisis, through those lenses because they have no other frames available. When teachers provide ecoresiliency frames to children, and help children use and develop these frames, adults, too, will be exposed to another way of thinking about the non-human world. Everyone, humans and non-humans alike, benefits from replacing narrative baggage with ecoresiliency frames that promote ecocultural identities and Earth regenerative behaviors better suited to the current climate crisis and the new world that awaits.

Notes

- 1 Children’s narratives have been transcribed verbatim, including spelling and grammar errors. Brackets are included only when it makes the child’s intention clearer.
- 2 Nature-based preschool is the terminology used by the North American Association for Environmental Education to refer to schools that use nature as an organizing principle for their programs.

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Empathetic ecocultural positionality and the forest other in Tasmanian forestry conflicts

Rebecca Banham

I grew up in Hobart, Tasmania, a beautiful Australian city nestled against the forests at the base of *kunanyi* (Mt. Wellington). Tasmania is a significant site of environmental history, including being the home of the world's first Greens Party, the United Tasmania Group (UTG) (Lester, 2007). The state's forestry industry routinely employs radically destructive practices such as clear-felling (clearcutting) and, though I use timber products and am surely complicit, these practices that have marked my home state sadden me deeply. Why do I feel this way? I am not an activist, nor do I belong to any environmental groups. I have relatively little experience visiting forest spaces. I proudly align myself with the tree-huggers and lovers of the forest, but these labels do not define me either. I feel that I both do and do not fit my society's expectations for who I should be – what I should look like, do, or whom I should associate with – while holding these views. My ecocultural identity is too complex to reduce to a label or stereotype.

The sight of clearfelled forests makes it seem clear to me that humans pitch themselves needlessly against the world. Flanagan (2007) describes the 'hellish landscape that results from clearfelling [as] akin to a Great War battlefield' (p. 22), and I see what he means. When I think of forestry in Tasmania, I feel sorrowful, outraged – feelings not unlike those I experience when hearing of violence inflicted upon a fellow human. How am I (and others) shaped by these feelings of empathy?

The long-term conflicts surrounding Tasmania's forestry industry have earned a divisive moniker: 'the forestry wars.' This conflict is often framed – by politicians, media outlets, and colloquially – through questions of 'which side are you on?' with the nuances of the debate dissolved into simplistic arguments about jobs versus trees, or Greens¹ versus loggers. But this dichotomisation is neither accurate nor useful, obscuring as it does the complexities inherent in individuals' encounters with the nonhuman world.²

In this chapter, I draw upon my research to propose an alternate approach to this conflict, or to 'Australia's longest running environmental dispute' (Lester & Cottle, 2015, p. 103). The chapter opens with a description of *empathetic positionality* – a form of ecocultural identity in which, I argue, empathetic response shapes one's position in an environmental conflict. I then discuss the theoretical literature informing this argument, including Ezzy's (2004) response to Levinas's concept of 'the face.' A brief history of Tasmania's forestry conflicts follows and then an introduction to my research methodology and findings. I then discuss how empathetic

positionality can reframe understandings of ecocultural experiences and forestry practices, bringing to a critical and creative light poor conceptualisations of conflict as a matter of sides, recognition of emotional response to forests (and insight into the delegitimising of such responses), and acknowledgment of the forest as a participant in forestry conflicts. Through a recognition of empathetic positionality, I call for a reshaping of dominant conversations underpinning conflicts over extractive industries, not only in Tasmania but also transnationally.

Empathetic positionality

Following Levinas, Ezzy (2004) argues for a view of forests as nonhuman others to whom one has ethical obligations. Drawing on this argument, I explore what I term *empathetic positionality*, an aspect of ecocultural identity in which an individual's position in an environmental conflict is informed by their response to the ethical demand of that particular environment as other (in this case, Tasmanian forests). I illustrate this process through the experiences of 27 Tasmanians, with whom I spoke about their experiences with/in Tasmanian forests as part of a qualitative research study. Of the participant sample, 19 used violent terminology to describe forestry practices. This perception of violence reflects a process of ethical demand and response, drawing the forest into the conflict as a participant – that is, as an other with the agency to make an ethical demand of humans (this ethical demand also influences intercultural relations, see Castro-Sotomayor, 2020, Chapter 4 in this *Handbook*). Acknowledging empathetic positionality involves recognising forest conflicts as constituted by networks of relations – including those between humans and forests – rather than as a matter of diametrically opposed sides positioned against an object (be it the forest, industry, an organisation, or person). This chapter, therefore, speaks to the relational turn within the social sciences and humanities, a mode of thinking that is 'a call to question Western dualisms between ... nature and culture' through acknowledgement of relations and interdependency (Dépelteau, 2018, p. 11).

The ethical demand from the forest other has implications for the identities of those who respond, with the perception of violence acting as a commonality amongst seemingly disparate individuals. The participants who perceived forestry practices as violence were anti-clearfelling, often concerned about unsustainable practices, and criticised current forestry practices. Emotional response informs empathetic positionality, with experiences of joy and awe (felt while in the forest) contrasted with the sadness and despair felt in the face of the forest's destruction. Who perceives violence, who perpetrates violence, and what does it mean to oppose such violence? These questions present a more critical and creative starting point than the question, 'which side are you on?'

Through empathetic positionality illustrated via this Tasmanian case study, I demonstrate that considerations of ecocultural identity enrich understandings of forestry conflicts. Such an approach could also contribute to understandings of other conflicts centring on extractive industries and nonhuman rights (such as anti-fracking or anti-whaling movements). Dichotomous views of conflict rely on assumptions of economic and political aspects of identity (or stereotypes thereof) – a blue-collar worker who is pro-jobs, for example, or a left-wing voter who demands the cessation of extractive industry. An individual's position in the forestry wars, however, is not necessarily a causal result of social roles, economic statuses, or political leanings. Relational modes of thinking and talking about forests are not synonymous with anti-industrialism. Understanding perceptions of forestry practices as violent acts complicates this image by taking into consideration the relationships humans form with the nonhuman world. In this chapter, I begin a conversation of new ways forward – in Tasmania, if not globally – that take into account the ethical and emotional aspects of future human–forest engagements without necessarily advocating for an end to forestry industries.

Background: Tasmania and the forest other

Following Davy's (2003) argument for an extended Levinasian ethics acknowledging responsibility to the nonhuman, Ezzy (2004) explores forests as an other with whom one experiences an ethical relationship. Here the forest is the 'face' that makes an ethical demand, vulnerable to but forbidding violence. This contact with the forest other may encourage the domineering violence of (Western, industrial) forestry, as the other is 'two-faced' – it 'invites violence, yet forbids it' (Ezzy, 2004, p. 26). If one opposes this violence, the other's ethical demand may profoundly shape the individual, and prompt an empathetic response. As Cianchi (2015) explains, there is recognition of the power of emotion and empathy in shaping experiences of environmental activism and defence. However, the influence of these processes in environmental conflicts requires further consideration.

Levinas's conceptualisation of the other differs from othering, in which the other is pushed away on account of difference. In Levinas's account of the face, interaction is the immediate catalyst for ethical obligation and response. One recognises the other to whom one has an ethical obligation – Levinas's 'face' – as not the self, and as demanding a (potentially empathetic) ethical response. As Benjamin (1988) puts it, '[t]he issue is not how we become free from the other, but how we actively engage and make ourselves known in relationship with the other' (p. 18). The command classically attributed to this process is 'you shall not kill' – 'the first word of the Other, inscribed in their face' (Ezzy, 2004, 23). This other can prompt recognition and empathetic response.

An understanding of nonhuman agency aligns with Levinas's concept of the face, as the ethical demand of the forest other is a potential expression of forest agency. A vast array of literature discusses nonhuman agency. Following Todd (2016), I acknowledge that Indigenous concepts from across the globe pre-date many of these ideas (as mis/represented in Western literature). Nonetheless, insightful examples include Ezzy's (2004) and Cianchi's (2015) discussions of Tasmania and Jones and Cloke's (2008) model of non-human agency, the work of Latour (2005) and Plumwood (2001), deep ecology (Devall & Sessions, 1985; Naess, 1989), ecofeminism (Radford Ruether, 1995), philosophical bases to more-than-human rights (Benton, 2009), and environmental criminology (White, 2018). Beliefs and practices such as environmental personhood, animism, and personified nature also acknowledge nonhuman agency in diverse religious, spiritual, political, and legal contexts (Drew, 2013; White, 2018). If dominant conversations about forestry conflicts are to shift their focus from economics, politics, and anthropocentric interests, there must be acknowledgement of nonhuman agency in some capacity.

Tasmania environmental politics

Tasmania's forests are environmentally, politically, and culturally significant. An understanding of environmental politics in Australia requires a consideration of the opposition to extractive industries in Tasmania. The state has been a significant site of key political movements, campaigns of resistance, and violent dispute (for further reading, see Ajani, 2007; Lester, 2007; Buckman, 2008; Krien, 2012; Beresford, 2015). For a century and a half, starting with British settlement in the early nineteenth century, Tasmania's economy relied upon primary industries such as forestry and mining (Lester, 2007). Today, tensions remain high between competing cultures of forest industry support, environmentalism, and the proliferation of ecocentric tourism branding. Since the 1990s, government-owned Forestry Tasmania – rebranded as Sustainable Timbers Tasmania (STT) in 2017 – has overseen the management of plantations and native forests (non-plantation timber harvest areas), road construction (allowing access to forestry operations), and fire

management (including firefighting efforts, and planned burns to reduce fuel loads and assist regeneration of some eucalypt species). These activities contribute to the supply of more than '1.4 million tonnes of forest products each year' for industry (STT, 2018a, 2018b, para. 1).

The sustainability, regulation, and transparency of forestry operations have been sources of major concern and controversy, generating what Flanagan (2007) describes as 'a culture of secrecy, shared interest and intimidation' (p. 23; see also Green et al., 2009). Both the Tasmanian Labor Party (an Australian centre-left political party) and the Tasmanian Liberal Party (Australian centre-right) have displayed 'enthusiastic complicity' in forestry operations (Green et al., 2009, p. 123). Once Tasmania's largest company and a major global woodchip exporter, Gunns Ltd. monopolised the industry before the company's 2013 demise, following political scandals and financial woes (for a detailed account of Gunns, see Beresford, 2015). Under the spectre of Gunns, ongoing problems with STT's economic model have remained hugely contentious. Despite receiving Government subsidies, Forestry Tasmania reported a loss of \$67 million – attributed to timber devaluation and 'ongoing debt' – the year prior to its restructuring as STT, triggering criticisms of the Liberal Party from the Labor Party and the Greens Party (Burgess, 2016, para. 8). The Liberal Party's dismantling of the Tasmanian Forest Agreement (TFA) has raised further tensions (Warman, 2014). In 2013, the State Government passed the TFA, described as a 'peace deal' as it represented unprecedented compromise between the industry and environmentalist stakeholders who acted as TFA signatories. However, alongside controversial anti-protest laws, which Australia's High Court later found to be unconstitutional (Morton, 2018), new industry-boosting forestry laws passed in 2014. These laws saw in the abandonment of the peacekeeping potential of the TFA.

The practices through which STT carries out its operations – particularly clearfelling (clearcutting) and woodchipping – also are controversial. Clearfelling, STT's 'preferred method of harvesting in wet eucalypt forests,' involves felling most of the trees in a given area, with a high-intensity burn often following (STT, 2018c, para. 9). Ostensibly, this burn ensures eucalypt regeneration (STT, 2018c), yet the 'resultant fire is of such ferocity it produces mushroom clouds visible from considerable distances [demonstrating] that clearfelling means the total destruction' of the harvested area (Flanagan, 2007, p. 20). Woodchipping (the chipping of felled timber deemed unsuitable as saw logs, often following clearfelling) is also problematic as a manifestation of clearfelling's inherent wastefulness. Buckman (2008) describes woodchipping as Tasmanian conservationists' 'public enemy number one' (p. 79). Tasmanian forestry comprises 'highly destructive but generally lawful practices' (Green et al., 2009, p. 116) and, perhaps in response, Tasmania has a strong history and enduring culture of environmentalism. The United Tasmania Group (UTG), co-founded by environmentalist (and eventual Federal politician) Bob Brown, was launched in 1972 in response to the flooding of Lake Pedder as part of the state's hydro-electric scheme. Head (2016) argues that 'the rise of Green politics ... can be traced to mourning as a result of the flooding of Lake Pedder (p. 38); as such, the flooding was a 'seminal moment' in Australian environmentalism (Lester, 2007, p. 5). Another watershed event was the 1983 protection of the Franklin River in the state's west from damming proposals, following a momentous groundswell of support across the country. The UTG – whose founding principles underlie Green politics globally – ushered in the Tasmanian Greens. Subsequent campaigns to protect the state's forests have been enduring, dramatic, even violent (Lester, 2007; Buckman, 2008).

This brief account gives some indication as to the turbulent history that influences contemporary perspectives of Tasmanian political processes, industry, and Tasmanian forests themselves. This history is a narrative of threat – to democracy, trust, and place. This case study is just one example of the global 'wicked problem' of forestry conflicts (Head & Alford, 2015), but it is a useful one to better understand the links among identity, ecological engagement, and conflict.

In Tasmania, forests are salient, accessible, and rub shoulders with a largely urbanised population; thus, Tasmanians relations with forests provide an ideal case study in which to elucidate ecocultural identities and reconceptualise dichotomised conflicts. Ezzy (2004) argues that Tasmanians live ‘with a strong awareness of the forces of nature’ (p. 20), making Tasmania an exemplary context to invite the forest into the conversation and disrupt unproductive patterns of conflict.

Methodology

I have developed the notion of empathetic positionality from my interpretations of semi-structured interviews I conducted with 27 Tasmanians (11 women, 16 men) from across the state. Participants’ occupations and ages varied widely, although about half were past or approaching the age of 60. Participants responded to a call for those with an interest in forests and forest issues. Through a framework of Giddens’ (1991) ‘ontological security’ – a sense of trust in the continuity and stability of the world and self – part of my analysis focused on the forest’s role in constituting identity; for example, the role that regular visits to a particular forest play in creating a consistent self-narrative. More than two-thirds of participants’ descriptions of forestry practices invoked violence, and these are the participants whom I believe empathetic positionality best represents. Several further participants also identified the Tasmanian conflict in sided or militaristic terms. I have attributed all quotes to pseudonyms.

Those who perceived violence were heterogeneous; the participants featured here includes students in their twenties, retirees, men, women, people born both in Australia and overseas, and people employed in a range of occupations. Very rarely did this group of participants call for the forestry industry’s dismantlement; participants acknowledged the usefulness of services provided by STT (such as road maintenance), and the rights of specialist producers and forestry workers. One participant, for example, was a passionate environmentalist and sawmillier. Four participants spoke about their involvement with direct action activism; several others discussed occasionally attending environmental rallies. Conventional identity markers such as voting habits or economic position rarely featured as means of expressing environmental views; instead, participants emphasised relationships and experiences with/in forests as factors informing environmental positions. This group was essentially united in their opposition to destructive, unsustainable forestry practices, with similarities to Hay’s (2008) ‘third cohort’ (based in Tasmania’s north) which he describes as articulating:

a clear moral sense of what constitutes socially appropriate economic activity, but to this is added a profound sense of the extent to which this nexus nests within a third relationship, that between the community, its socio-economic norms and practices, and the natural world upon which they draw – and this, too, is an ethically constructed relationship.

(p. 229)

Hay (2008) emphasises the role of place in human–forest engagements and identities. Accordingly, it is significant that all but one of the study’s participants drew upon their experiences of bushwalking (hiking) in Tasmania. This supports the notion that embodied experiences with/in landscapes inform emotional connections (Jepson & Sharpley, 2015) and identity (Banham, 2017), shaping human–nonhuman relationships.

The forestry wars

Understandings of individuals’ attitudes toward environmental policies often lean on assumptions that those individuals will either be pro-environment or pro-economics (Kaplowitz et al., 2011),

as if the two positions were mutually exclusive. Likewise, political, media, and popular representations of Tasmania's forestry conflicts frequently invoke a sense of battle between two incompatible sides – those who are pro-forestry against those who are pro-environment, or what Hay (2008) calls 'a simple rural-urban configuration' of those for or against industry (p. 225). This tension carries into everyday conversation. Ben explained that, 'I'm 52, and for almost all my adult life it's been the same divisiveness in forestry and the environment.' Other participants were deeply critical of what they perceived as tactical conflict; that is, using the proliferation of conflict to generate support for political parties. Matthew described the Liberal Party as being 'like junkies' for this framing of the conflict, arguing 'what they inject into their bloodstream is this conflict between jobs and the environment.' Similarly, Peter said:

The essential problem with the timber industry in Tasmania is that ... political parties have used it as a vile political wedge to divide communities.

Matthew and Peter's comments reflect what seemed a common sense of disdain or despair amongst participants about the warring state of Tasmanian society. Descriptions adopted militaristic connotations, indicating the perceived seriousness of the situation:

It sort of seems to be heading back to the barricades.

(Matthew)

I will bloody fight until my last breath, to maintain what I believe to be right.

(Reg)

These views echo metaphors of violence found in environmental activism literature (Cianchi, 2015), as well as oft-repeated Western rationalist views that see the nonhuman not as 'something to be respected, as Other ... but violently incorporated into the Same' (Ezzy, 2004, p. 29).

The narrative of two sides implies the existence of cohesive groups with clear identities. Some participants' descriptions of Tasmanian society reflected this assumption:

There was a lot of argument in the community about it ... I started talking to people on both sides, and getting enough information to form my own opinion.

(Daniel)

I suggest that the concept of sides allows individuals to identify and analyse the conflicts by providing a useful shorthand to labelling others. However, participants' approaches to forestry and forests indicated a much more ambiguous way of being. Labelling individuals as pro-this or anti-that does not capture the complex reality of environmental conflict. An acknowledgement of aspects of ecocultural identity, such as empathetic positionality, encourages a more nuanced understanding of, and approach to, conflict.

Violence against trees

The participants who described forestry practices as acts of violence did so in two key ways. Firstly, there was a perception of forestry practices as violent in their results. Secondly, there was a perception of forestry practices as inflicting violence against the embodied forest. Seven participants (of the 19 who invoked violence) engaged in both discourses, while other participants referred to either view. The first view of violence employs language that describes forestry

practices – particularly clearfelling and woodchipping – as indiscriminate expansion and extraction, resulting in destruction:

[Logging old-growth] destroys the undergrowth of the forest.

(Helen)

I just don't understand why people have to go and destroy everything.

(Zoe)

[Woodchipping is] destroying and degrading an asset which we have for little, little benefit.

(George)

Other terms used to invoke these ideas of excessive violence included the forest being 'trashed,' 'wrecked,' and 'ruined:'

When they log an area of wet forest ... that gets trashed and burnt.

(James)

I just hate to see how wrecked it looks ... let's not just ruin this whole valley.

(Claire)

Additionally, many participants perceived Forestry Tasmania's regime as excessive. Peter's objection to the 'rapacious nature and the volume of [the destruction]' echoes Reg's view that:

because of [Tasmania's] obsession with logging the shit out of old-growth forests, huge amounts of myrtle, of sassafras, of celery-top, was just trashed, burnt on the floor of the forest over the past 40 years.

The language employed by these participants is striking. Concepts such as degradation move descriptions of forestry practices far past neutrality, instead implying a forest other to whom one has the obligation not to 'trash.' As Ben put it, these are 'forests that deserve better.' The emotional effects of this destruction are evident in the recounting of memories:

I've watched [pauses] watched the destruction of some really beautiful places ... [if I] go and stand in a logging coupe after it's been trashed, that's a pretty sorrowful thing.

(Hugh)

we were watching forests being destroyed ... [it felt] sickening. You went through periods of just feeling helpless ... you'd go back to the river and all the work was still happening. There's still destruction occurring, and you'd feel, feel sick, feel sickened by it.

(Matthew)

It is clear in these recollections that the reaction to destruction is one of empathy for the forest other. It is not insignificant here that Tasmania is a settler colonialist state. The violence of forestry practices connects conceptually to the violence of colonisation; or as Reg put it, 'we white Western[ers] just trash it.' While this statement echoes a long and problematic history of the perception of diverse Indigenous populations as 'closer to nature,' of interest here is the association of violence with colonial and industrialised modes of being. Participants located violence

globally. Reflecting on her time in the Philippines, Catherine described ‘swathes of forests ... just being logged and smashed,’ while Gordon lamented that ‘we like buying cheap Chinese goods, in the knowledge that they are trashing their environment to produce them.’ It is notable that participants connected forestry practices in Tasmania to transnational (and characteristically colonial) patterns of exploitation, consumerism, and industrialised deforestation. I suggest that violence against the forest other has an intimate connection with violence against the human other. Reacting to the forest other with alienation perpetuates colonial structures that have advanced and aggravated the degradation of Indigenous cultural heritage and erasure of place connections. As such, understandings of any forestry conflict require an acknowledgement of that conflict’s position within transnational networks and history.

Some participants perceived forestry practices as acts of bodily violence. This was often intimated through the concept of murder, as in Priscilla’s statement that ‘Forestry [Tasmania] have killed the environment,’ or Peter’s assertion that forestry practices have ‘massacred’ some areas. Catherine’s recollection demonstrates the emotional impact of confronting this killing:

I don’t know if you’ve ever gone to a clearfell, but it’s like ... it’s murderous, it’s horrible, they’re shocking ... I’ve had to go into clearfells for certain reasons, and they make me physically sick ... [they have] killed a part of our planet for no good reason, and left all this around and they’re gonna burn it. You know, what, what ... it doesn’t make sense.

(Catherine)

‘Abuse,’ ‘rape,’ and ‘molestation’ were similar terms used to portray embodied suffering:

I find some traits of [some] Tasmanians a bit hard to take, because they sort of abuse the environment.

(Henry)

[In] forestry plantations ... it’s a very different landscape and one which I kind of feel like it’s been a little bit ... raped?

(Claire)

You can see where the old foresters have been, but they didn’t clearfell ... they haven’t raped it. They haven’t destroyed it.

(Diane)

[I also had] a major concern for forest types which were threatened or becoming rare or had been heavily, um, heavily molested by [the] logging industry.

(Matthew)

The powerful language of these participants implies the forest has a body against which these acts are committed. This is not an anthropomorphising of the forest, with the forest seen as if it were human. Rather, participants encountered the forest as an embodied (but nonhuman) other against whom humans commit violence, triggering an empathetic response. This perception of violence relies upon the metaphor of the forest’s body (echoed in descriptions of forests as ‘the lungs of the Earth’). This metaphor informs Diane’s analogy of an environment sickened by forestry, the same way chemotherapy sickens a human body:

I had a niece who had cancer and when she had chemotherapy you lose all your eyebrows and your eyelashes. Just didn't look like her ... and she was sick, and she looked sick ... and so it's the same with clearfelling ... it's just so clearly defined by getting rid of everything. And then you see those burning heaps, and you think that's sick.

Diane's account is strongly relational, with the forest reacted to empathetically as a sick, embodied other. As described above, Levinas's archetypal relational response is to not kill the other, but to react relationally. This is clear in Jane's decision to:

build a garden that has no lawn, but every single plant has a role in terms of insects or plants or birds ... People say 'don't feed them!' and you say, 'well actually, you know, we've just killed their environment' ... It's like moving into a housing block and just killing all the people in the housing block because you wanted to convert it into luxury flats, you know?

Jane's wording implies a common-sense interpretation of the ethical imperative not to kill the forest other. This suggests that for some people – those whose ecocultural identity reflects empathetic positionality – understandings of forestry are as much to do with empathetic response to the other, as they are about economics, politics, or any number of other (more usually emphasised) cultural factors.

The language of violence exposes a process of ethical demand and response, blurring the political, economic, and cultural lines of environmental conflict. Conversations about forestry in Tasmania should not simply be conversations of economic or political interests. Participants' recognition of violence against the forest other indicates that Tasmania's conflicts involve much more complex processes of relationality and ethical response (as in Jane's argument above). The recognition of empathetic positionality, therefore, challenges the Western assumptions of rationality, instrumentality, and human dominance that underpin Tasmania's forestry industry and conflicts.

Re-evaluating sided conflicts

To recap, empathetic positionality is an aspect of ecocultural identity, in which one's position in an environmental conflict stems from that individual's recognition of the involved nonhuman as the other to whom one has ethical obligations. Various participants' responses also reflect that notions of sided, sustained, militaristic conflict continue to dominate perceptions of Tasmania's forestry conflicts, concealing the existence of empathetic responses to Tasmanian forests. The words of those participants who perceived forestry practices as violence against the other, however, undermine this sided narrative. These individuals related to Tasmania's forestry conflicts not through conventional identification with a side, but through processes of relationality and ethical response.

Reductionist labelling works to perpetuate the perception of sides in Tasmania. An illustrative example of this process is Tasmanian Liberal senator Richard Colbeck's 2016 news article 'Fire hysteria the anti-industry green agenda,' which links the Tasmanian Greens with 'hysteria,' attacking industry, 'unscientific, ideologically driven rhetoric,' wilderness areas, and environmental protest (para. 5). As Colbeck's statements show, describing someone as being pro-environment or pro-forestry invokes any of a number of associated labels and assumptions based on a rhetoric of sides that relies heavily on the proliferation of (largely unacknowledged) assumptions about group membership, values, and interests, and the reproduction of problematic human–nonhuman binaries. Table 28.1 presents a compilation of the discourses I have observed in my experiences as a Tasmanian, alongside a dedicated reading of political,

news media, and scholarly sources, and the empirical research detailed in this chapter. This table illustrates the sociocultural context in which participants’ experiences of ethical obligation have taken place: where they are assumed to be of a side, yet are engaging in relational, ethical, and experiential processes.

These associations do not require accuracy to gain traction; many are absurdly moralistic and rely on fallacious assumptions of unified cultures within segments of the community (see Hay, 2008). Conventional identity markers such as class, economics, politics, and ethnic identity underpin these assumptions, and this labelling process exposes sensitivities enmeshed in Tasmania’s structural inequalities and hegemonic values – with dichotomous constructions of conflict likely exacerbating these very structural divisions. I do not suggest that such social roles are irrelevant to Tasmanian identities. Rather, I find it problematic that sided views of conflict leave little room to acknowledge the intimate connection between (some) human identities and relationships with the nonhuman. Reducing such intricacies to a dichotomy encourages division, and obscures the processes of identity experienced by those individuals grappling with ways to articulate how they feel about forests:

It’s actually a hard thing to actually explain. Um ... but I’m sure other people feel it.
(Catherine)

Table 28.1 Labels and assumptions associated with the sides of Tasmanian forestry conflict, as observed by the author

<i>Area</i>	<i>Pro-environment</i>	<i>Pro-industry</i>
Practices (endorsement)	Conservation	Forestry
Values (priorities)	Protest; activism (Eco-)tourism Bushwalking (hiking)	Employment (Eco-)tourism 4WD (four wheel drive) access
	Wilderness; untouched nature	Money; economics
Groups (membership)	Anti-progress	Development; growth; ‘Securing the future’
	Ecocentric; tree-huggers	Anthropocentric; protecting the rights of workers
	Left-wing Emotion; experience	Right-wing Tradition; inter-generational
	The Tasmanian Greens	The Liberal Party; The Labor Party
Labels (normative)	Urban areas	Rural areas
	Indigenous Tasmanians/Australians	Western/Industrial society
	Environmental groups (e.g. The Wilderness Society)	Forestry Tasmania/STT; workers’ unions
	Middle-class ‘Loony lefties’	Working class; blue-collar Rednecks
	Irrational Hippies; ferals Trouble-makers	Outdated Corrupt ‘Honest, hard workers’

I think I always feel when I'm in the forest some kind of link. It may be a bit of a mixed-up thing in my head, but I know that we're all part of that.

(Ben)

As relational approaches to social sciences emphasise, identity is not simply a bundle of discrete and stable qualities; rather, processes, situations, and relations help construct identity (Emirbayer, 1997). Difficulties in expressing these connections, as seen in Ben and Catherine's comments above, suggest that a fixation on identifiable sides obscures ecocultural elements of Tasmanian identities. Further, this fixation contributes to an erasure of the forest (as) itself, or to the selective invocation of the forest only to delegitimise emotional responses – particularly in contrast to the supposedly rational pursuit of economic growth (as I will explore below). I argue that participants' perceptions of forestry practices as violence constitute the concerns they have about those practices, rather than being a reflection of a stereotyped anti-industry identity that begets opposition to the forestry industry itself.

Emotional responses to forests

In moving beyond incompatible or opposing sides, empathetic positionality implicates the respect of the forest as a participant in discussions of its own fate. In legitimising the emotional dimensions of human–nonhuman engagements, empathetic positionality advocates regenerative ecological futures, sustainable practices, and respect for the forest other. The practicalities of how this emotional dimension might influence praxis and policy are beyond the scope of this chapter (although see Singh, 2013); acknowledging emotion and empathy, however, is the first step in questioning existing practices.

Emotion is inherent in many of the recollections detailed above. Krien (2012) depicts how these empathetic reactions to forestry might look from the perspective of those doing the logging, through a tree-faller's bewilderment when faced with a protester's grief:

There was this one time we'd started logging a coupe in the Styx, 10F, and this woman she came out of nowhere and was going crazy at us. She was sobbing, a 30-something-year-old woman, sobbing over a few trees.

(p. 80)

Acknowledging emotional response exposes power dynamics of whose (and which) reactions are seen as legitimate. This reflects Western privileging of rationality over emotion and empathy (Ahmed, 2004); associating the nonhuman with irrationality – as in assessments of those with conservationist sympathies as emotional, untrustworthy, or anti-progress (see Table 28.1) – implicitly privileges instrumental and/or anthropocentric relationships with the nonhuman as reasonable responses. These power dynamics extend to structures of decision-making and loss-bearing, such as who is in a position to approve acts of forestry, who subsequently experiences grief, and the extent to which this grief is acknowledged or dismissed. Those in powerful positions (government or corporate) have greater means by which to make decisions, the effects of which they are also equipped to withstand, ignore, or dismiss (Vail, 1999). Further, as Ben explained to me, frustration arises:

because we have democracy everyone has a say, and it's sad that a lot of things are lost because of decisions made by people who either don't care or will never know it ...

I think losing things [because of] people who haven't seen it [and] haven't experienced it is pretty sad.

(Ben)

Emotional connections with the nonhuman deserve recognition as a shaping force in environmental conflicts. Wider acknowledgment of the forest's emotional impact may also reshape the (often vitriolic) human-to-human relationships, reintroducing the forest to the conversation. Where there is currently a view of Tasmania's forestry wars as an unsolvable battle, empathetic positionality suggests a reframing of conflict as opposition to violent practices rather than opposition to (or even hatred of) individuals. This is a new language through which Tasmanians may engage with these conflicts – one which takes seriously the transformative nature of human-nonhuman relationships.

Conclusion: Toward relationality

Empathetic positionality presents an ambivalent relationship with the agency of the forest other. The perception of forestry as destructive violence focuses on human agency; these observations imply that humans are the dominant, agential actors of the exchange. This is not necessarily referring to dominance in the sense that it is ethical or natural for humans to treat forests as they have done (and continue to do), but rather, dominance as human agency that imposes on forest wellbeing and agency. The perception of the forest as embodied, however, recognises a body that precedes the choice to commit forestry acts, with the forest's ethical demand thus taking precedence. Regardless, the forest (embodied or not) makes an ethical and ontological demand that shapes human identity – an expression of the forest's voice, transforming relationships between humans (those who perceive, perpetrate, and oppose violence), and between humans and forests. In recognising related emotional and ecological aspects of identity, those involved in environmental conflicts may turn away from dichotomised rhetoric and instead accept more nuanced and empathetic responses to the nonhuman. These responses do not necessarily exist in mutual exclusion with extractive industries but do emphasise the need for respectful and regenerative treatment of the forest other, and other nonhuman others globally.

Jones and Cloke (2002) state that the 'fate of trees is often emblematic of the wider environment' (p. 2). Forests are place-specific but implicate a broad range of issues in their protection, from climate disruption and resource security to urbanisation and globalisation (Ambrose-Oji, 2010). I have focused on Tasmanian forests (a more specific label for the ecocultural identity detailed here could perhaps be Tasmanian empathetic positionality), and the experiences recounted in this chapter have been about this place. However, the island's story is 'universal – and what goes on in Tasmania goes on in the mainland, goes on in the Pacific islands, in other continents, until it comes straight back to Tasmania again' (Krien, 2012, p. 296). Or, as Hugh told me:

all the natural systems are under threat and degrading, and that includes Tasmania's forests, but that's by no means the only example, it's just – it's an example.

Identity, meaning, and emotion are central to my own experiences of perceiving violence against trees – after all, Tasmania is my home. Milstein (2012) notes that some researchers 'choose research sites and approaches that ensure they are not merely observers but also advocates in their case studies' (p. 166). In attempting to better understand my own despair at the violence committed against Tasmanian trees, I hope to have legitimised the role of ethical engagement with the nonhuman other not only in this conflict but in forestry conflicts and other extractive environmental conflicts

globally. The silencing of the forest's ethical demand by global structures of rationality, colonialism, and instrumental interests obscures something vital. Singh (2013) explains that "[o]pportunities for [care and loving] engagement need to be fostered instead of clamped shut by policies that assume that human being[s] are disembodied rational economic actors driven solely by "self-interest" (p. 197). This encouraging of ethical engagement is what I wish for Tasmania, as well as humans and forests across the globe. Empathetic positionality is a means of acknowledging the possibility for a gentler, more sustainable way forward for humans and the forest other – a means of allowing the forest to speak in a world that too often demands its silence.

Notes

- 1 By Greens, I refer to The Greens Party members/voters. Many Tasmanians will assume that anyone who expresses environmental concerns must be a Greens Party voter.
- 2 While the phrase 'more-than-human' is increasingly common throughout the social sciences, 'nonhuman' is my preferred terminology. Using nonhuman highlights participants' reactions to the forest as something that is distinctly not human yet begets a response similar to that of the suffering of humans.

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Afterword

Surviving and thriving: The ecocultural identity invitation

Tema Milstein and José Castro-Sotomayor

How do you conclude an open invitation? This *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity* is an urgent and welcoming call for transdisciplinary and international participation and action in ecocultural inquiry. Past, present, and possible worlds open up with an ecocultural lens, expanding the scope from which academics, practitioners, and publics can understand and approach existence with/in a more-than-human world. Understanding embodied notions such as identity as not purely sociocultural constructs but as always ecologically enfolded offers a way forward for approaching reciprocal surviving and thriving. This *Handbook's* invitation to start ecocultural inquiry from the experience of identity is an enticement to recognize and rethink the selfhood underpinnings that profoundly impact each other as interlaced within the wider biosphere.

A more-than-human lens on identity vitally expands notions of self, ecologically and internationally broadening and intersecting sociocultural identity engagements and performances in and across increasingly atomized and dissociated societies. The array of original theory-building and research in this volume illustrates how an ecocultural identity frame of inquiry and understanding is by no means a normative lens but rather an inclusive aperture through which to begin to reencounter and reimagine the range of human belief and meaning systems, values and norms, and everyday and institutional interactions that symbolically and materially inform our own species' and countless others' realities.

Embracing an ecocultural perspective to expand the scope of analysis also is an invitation to draw meaningful links among diverse but interrelated disciplines. Today's human-disrupted ecological conditions demand a profound shift in praxis that demystifies the difficulties of collaborating across ostensibly incommensurable fields of knowledge production. The work emerging in conversation throughout this *Handbook*, and the fertile extant literature it grows from, demonstrates ways interdisciplinarity goes hand-in-hand with the ecological turn in scholarship. This kind of dialogue among epistemological communities asserts that research is a critical engagement with – and a path toward – a 'transdisciplinary horizon' in which 'de-colonial knowledge places life (in general) first and institutions at the service of the regeneration of life' (Mignolo, 2010, p. 11).

While a core aim of the *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity* is to shrug off illusory constraints – of humancentric lenses, of singularly focused disciplines – it also is important to note

the limits of this collection. While a wide range of voices from the social sciences and humanities compose this *Handbook's* conversation, of notable absence are voices from the natural sciences. Bringing these knowledge producers into the transdisciplinary conversation – with their integral biological, ecological, and geological understandings – is a crucial next step. Considerations of ecocultural issues and experiences in general will be far more robust with a spanning of enduring sociocultural and natural science divides that continue to segregate knowledge-makers from each other.

Also, while this *Handbook* introduces a wide array of diverse ecocultural case studies and theoretical work that nuance understandings of, for instance, interculturality, quotidian interactions, governmentality, intersectionality, political division and resistance, media representation, and much more, there remain myriad areas of identification and experience the chapters do not reach. As this collection is by no means conclusive but rather invitational, we see these lacks more as lacunas of ecocultural depths to dive in and come to know. Lacunas in the *Handbook's* conversation include but are not limited to ecocultural identities in screen-addicted presents, in climate denial industries, in ecosexual encounters, among others.

All such work invites both sociocultural and more-than-human reflexivity – or ecocultural reflexivity (Milstein et al., 2019). Our engagement in this *Handbook*, as editors and contributors across disciplines, demonstrates how this reflexive work ought to be at the forefront of transdisciplinary dialogues. Such reflexivity consciously engages with the anthropocentric frames that limit our scholarly language and advances a more ecocentric shared language of ecologically and socially responsive and responsible scholarship. Indeed, our ways with words – the symbolic force behind not only re/presenting but also re/configuring extensive worlds (Milstein, 2012) – will become more dynamic and vital with ethically creative and constructive use. We sought to adopt and craft a modest common ecoculturally attentive language within the *Handbook* in reflexive collaboration with chapter authors. In the process, we reconfirmed that, though we share a profoundly committed interest in earthly well-being, we also all struggle within the confines of dualistic framing embedded and reproduced in dominant cultured (and specialized disciplinary) discourses (Alhinai & Milstein, 2019; Regassa Debelo et al., 2017). However, immense potential lies in being ecoculturally conscious in the ways we speak/listen and write/read. As Abram et al. (2020) states in this *Handbook*, 'our languages were not born just of humans speaking to one another, but were born in a kind of call and response with a speaking, many-voiced world' (p. 10). We wholeheartedly agree that it is all of our responsibility 'to always be tending the language to keep it from desiccating, keeping our language alive and brim full with meaning' (ibid., p. 7).

Though the dialogue within the *Handbook* is international in scope and scholarly voice – and while we sought out broad and diverse perspectives – another limitation is that case studies disproportionately are located in the United States and voices disproportionately are those of scholars working and/or trained in North American universities. We worked closely with a committed assembly of authors to expand the interculturality and globality of this collection, but more interlinking work is to be done to more evenly represent and kindle international exchange in ecocultural inquiry. In some regions, however, a density of case studies begins to provide a glimpse into interconnections within wider global webs of ecocultural identities – for instance, in the *Handbook*, the U.S. Southwest–Mexico borderlands focally emerge in several case studies crisscrossed with overlapping ecologies, histories, politics, and economics (see Chapters 3, 9, 10, and 23). Future work can take such focused glimpses as starting points to weave contemplations of identities in interchange, within and from one bioregion to the next, and in constant ecological and cultural translation (Castro-Sotomayor, 2019), bringing to light abundant allied and divergent ways of ecocultural knowing and being. Extended webs of ecocultural

inquiry – from the depths of megacities to the rural reaches to the mobilities of migrants – will help clearly connect the ways we understand our selves with how we identify with each other and the wider Earth.

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