Introduction: Indigeneity, Survival, and the Colonial Anthropocene

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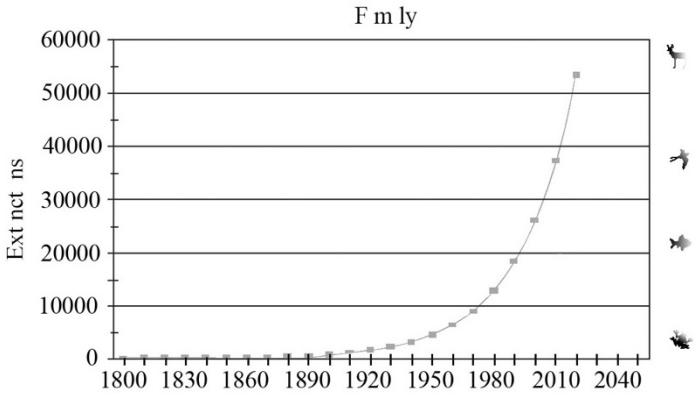
The past decade has given rise to a vast literature that explores the dynamics between climate justice and activism, environmental knowledges, and Indigenous storytelling in the colonial Anthropocene. A recent issue in the PMLA, for example, discusses how the "dialectic of Indigeneity" offers "an abiding refusal to surrender to either the limits or the logics of this ruined world" and "provides a map of untraveled routes rather than fallow destinations" (Benson Taylor 14). Moreover, in their 2017 essay, "Environmental Ethics through Changing Landscapes: Indigenous Activism and Literary Arts," Warren Cariou and Isabelle St-Amand "explore themes of environmental ethics and activism in a contemporary context in which resource extraction and industrialization are increasingly being countered by indigenized forms of thought and action" (9). And, to cite a final example, the collection *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies* "takes the pulse of current Indigenous artistic diversity and political expression" to examine how these forms "render ecological connections" visible for diverse audiences (Adamson and Monani 5). These various texts speak to a growing conversation amongst Indigenous scholars and allies about our increasingly urgent environmental crisis—and the capacities of artwork and cultural production for engaging with this dire issue.

Part I of this special issue pursued and expanded on several of the insights highlighted above. Our contributors examined the disruptive and empowering potential of Indigenous storytelling in the movement toward—and realization of—global climate justice. In this special issue's second installment, we continue this line of

exploration. To introduce this special issue's most pressing concerns, I'd like once more to turn to the poetry of Chamorro poet, scholar, and activist, Craig Santos Perez. As before, I will be focusing on one of his poems from his collection *Habitat Threshold*, which introduces questions of catastrophe, entanglement, kinship, survival, and healing—questions that are attended to by the essays that populate this second issue.

This poem, reproduced below, depicts the increasing frequency of species extinction in the colonial Anthropocene. This extinction event, known as the Holocene extinction, figures as the most recent mass extinction event of our earth's history. Scientists and scholars have suggested that mass extinction events share three common characteristics. Firstly, they are necessarily global in scope, and thus not determined or constrained by regional parameters or borders. Secondly, they occur when extinction rates rise significantly above background levels of extinction; or, in other words, they occur when the loss of species rapidly outpaces the rate of speciation. And finally, within a geological temporal framework, they occur across a geologically "short" period of time (the "event" might last for thousands of years, appearing to be quite slow from a human perspective). What's unique about the Holocene extinction, however, is that our present crisis is the first to have a human origin point. "Right now," Elizabeth Kolbert writes in her study on the topic, "we are deciding, without quite meaning to, which evolutionary pathways will remain open and which will forever be closed. No other creature has ever managed this, and it will, unfortunately, be our most enduring legacy" (88).[1]



Perez visually represents and complicates this "legacy" through several creative innovations. The graph's title offers us a useful starting point. Rather than use a more conventionally "scientific" word for his poemodel (such as "Species," for instance), Perez opts for a more intimate and familiar choice: "F m ly" (family). By referring to these non-human animals as family, Perez emphasizes the kin relations that generate and sustain life: "These are relationships of co-evolution and ecological dependency. […] These relationships produce the possibility of both life and any given way of life" (van Dooren 4). In other words, his poemodel recalls the importance of recognizing our co-dependence and profound intimacy with our non-human kin. In recognizing our rich entwinement with the web of life, Perez's graph also battles the perception that non-human animals are isolated "objects" for scientific analysis; and he destabilizes the tendency to understand species loss from a narrow, detached, statistical framework. The viewpoint presented by Perez's graph thus resonates with Sophie Chao and Dion Enari's observation that climate imaginaries from Indigenous communities in the Pacific "have always recognised the interdependencies of human and other-than-human beings" and it pushes us toward the "recognition that other beings, too, have rich and meaningful lifeworlds" (35, 38). This is a crucial recognition for surviving the Anthropocene, a time when the biocultural webs of life are being damaged and undone on a scale that has never been witnessed.

By dropping letters from the title, Perez's poem also gestures toward the broader losses in knowledge and understanding that accompany species extinction.[2] As Ursula Heise explains, animal extinction often functions as a "proxy" for the profound, surprising, and often intangible disappearances that accompany the loss of a species (23). This is due, in part, to the fact that species occupy crucial positions in our cultural and imaginative structures—when they disappear, the vital imaginative structures built around them are unraveled and eroded. Think, for instance, of the ways in which the death of coral reefs triggers anxieties over the disappearance of nature's beauty, of possible medical discoveries, and of crucial habitats for a stunning range of marine life.[3] Recognizing this allows us to more fully register the unexpected effects of species loss, and in turn, develop appropriate strategies for species preservation. Moreover, by dropping letters from these important reference points, we are pushed to more deeply and carefully engage with the information that is being presented to us—our gaze must linger on the graph in order to decipher and interpret its meaning.[4] Through this slowed down, dialectical interaction, fresh insights and understandings about the climate crisis can surface. Graphs like this one, Heather Houser explains, thus illustrate how new ways of thinking become possible when art speaks back to forms of epistemological mastery" (1-2). And without new ways of thinking, new relations may not be possible.

Perez's poemodel thus calls to mind Sophie Chao and Dion Enari's description of climate imaginaries, which are "spaces of possibility" and "ontological, epistemological and methodological openings for (re)imagining and (re)connecting with increasingly vulnerable places, species, and relations" (34). Climate imaginaries issue necessary calls for collective action that are driven by ethical, material, and political prerogatives, while simultaneously offering profound visions for inhabiting the world otherwise. In doing so, they demand a decolonial approach to the Anthropocene

and emphasize the absolute importance of recognizing Indigenous cosmologies, philosophies, and environmental knowledges.

The essays that follow offer inspiring engagements with Indigenous climate imaginaries. We begin with Conrad Scott's "'Changing Landscapes': Ecocritical Dystopianism in Contemporary Indigenous SF Literature." In this essay, Scott develops the term "ecocritical dystopia." In Scott's formulation, ecocritical dystopias diverge from more traditional dystopian fiction through their unique engagement with setting. Rather than imagine a future (even a near future) crisis to come, ecocritical dystopias are anchored in the real world, bringing us closer to crises that are already unfolding. As Scott puts it, "we are, after all, connected to stories through our relationships (however tenuous) with the real-world landscapes altered within the narratives." Scott develops this sub-genre of dystopian fiction through an analysis of Harold Johnson's *Corvus* (2015) and Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017), arguing that these texts depict societies extrapolated directly from the present, reminding us of the threat of environmental collapse.

Svetlana Seibel's "'Fleshy Stories': Towards Restorative Narrative Practices in Salmon Literature" introduces an archive of fiction from the Pacific Northwest focused on salmon—one of the most significant cultural symbols of the region. These "salmon stories" are organized around the "cultural and ecological significance of the fish for Indigenous nations," and they highlight the pervasive reach of the Anthropocene, which has materialized in numerous consequences for human-salmon interdependencies and kinship. Inspired by Todd and Davis's observation that "fleshy philosophies and fleshy bodies are precisely the stakes of the Anthropocene," Seibel examines how salmon stories create textualities of care aimed not only at criticizing the colonial economies, but at narratively restoring the threatened lifeworlds of both the

people and the fish." Seibel reaches this conclusion through a powerful reading of Diane Jacobson's *My Life with the Salmon* and Theresa May's *Salmon is Everything*.

"Healing the Impaired Land: Water, Traditional Knowledge, and the Anthropocene in the Poetry of Gwen Westerman" by Joanna Ziarkowska reads the work of Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate poet Gwen Westerman from the perspective of environmental humanities and disability studies. The essay draws on Sunaura Taylor's understanding that the use of "impaired" as a modifier demonstrates the extent to which Western preoccupation with and privileging of ableism—able bodies which are productive under capitalism—has saturated thinking about damaged environments. Through Westerman's poetry, Ziarkowska locates Indigenous survival in the preservation of traditions and attention to/care for the land that is polluted, altered, and in pain. She argues that, in Westerman's work, "'impairment' is an invitation to care and a construction (or rather the preservation) of a relationship with the land and its human, non-human and inanimate beings."

Emma Barnes situates her essay, "Women, Water and Wisdom: Mana Wahine in Mary Kawena Pukui's Hawaiian Mo'olelo" within recent conversations surrounding how the Anthropocene inaccurately unifies humans in their environmentally destructive behaviors and in their experiences of climate change, and overlooks the fact that the unequal effects of climate change disproportionately alter the lives of Indigenous peoples. Barnes provides a literary analysis of two short stories published consecutively by native Hawaiian writer Mary Kawena Pukui in her collection *Hawai'i Island Legends: Pīkoi, Pele and Others*. Barnes situates two narratives—"The Pounded Water of Kekela" and "Woman-of-the-Fire and Woman-of-the-Water"—as climate change fiction, and argues that they depict how drought and famine disproportionately affect Native women due to their cultural and social roles. Through her analysis, Barnes highlights "the resilience of native Hawaiian women in responding to a changing

environment, and to demonstrate the sacrifices Indigenous women make in their role as cultural bearers."

"The Crisis in Metaphors: Climate Vocabularies in Adivasi Literatures" by Ananya Mishra examines the role of Adivasi voices in climate change discourse and literary studies. While Adivasis are the perpetual subaltern in postcolonial studies, their voices offer a necessary critique of the global industrial complex, one that echoes calls for sovereignty issued by other Indigenous communities globally. Mishra unpacks this claim through an examination of Adivasi songs emerging from the particular geography of southern Odisha. In particular, she focuses on the usage of metaphors within early climate change discourse: "Indigenous literatures hold early warnings of the climate crisis in metaphors we do not yet center in climate discourse." These metaphors, Mishra suggests, serve as archives of interpretations of the climate crisis as already confronted by Indigenous communities within India.

Our final article, "Educating for Indigenous Futurities: Applying Collective Continuance Theory in Teacher Preparation Education" by Stephany RunningHawk Johnson and Michelle Jacob positions climate change conversations within the classroom. Drawing on their experiences as Indigenous university teachers, and from the experiences of their students who are training to become elementary and secondary classroom educators, RunningHawk Johnson and Jacob demonstrate how K-12 classrooms are vital sites for anti-colonial and Indigenous critiques of the settler-nation, neoliberalism, and globalization, all of which undermine Indigenous futurities while simultaneously fueling climate change. Their goal, they explain, is to "frame education as part of the larger project in which we can better understand our ancestral Indigenous teachings for the purpose of deepening our Indigenous identities and knowledges." This entails calling upon Indigenous peoples to work as teachers and leaders within educational contexts, and urging non-Indigenous allies to educate

themselves on how they might best ensure Indigenous resurgence, futurity, and "collective continuance."

Together, the contributions featured in this special issue remind us that "stories frame our beliefs, understandings, and relationships with each other and the world around us […] our lives are interwoven stories […] we live in an ocean of stories" (Kabutaulaka 47). And through their engagement with Indigenous storytelling, these essays posit new, vital directions for imagining Indigenous climate justice in the Anthropocene. Rather than foreground narratives of declension or demise in the context of anthropogenic climate change, these essays underscore the importance of telling stories that center self-determination, struggle, and solidarity. They emphasize, in other words, the importance of maintaining that better worlds are not only necessary, but possible. And in doing so, they open space for thinking and feeling our way through—and potentially beyond—the colonial Anthropocene.

Notes

[1] While humanity must reckon with its role in our present biodiversity crisis, we must also recognize that extinction is not simply an issue caused by an undifferentiated humanity, but it is a consequence of the expansion of capitalist social relations through European colonialism and imperialism, which drove what had previously been regional environmental catastrophes to a planetary scale.

[2] This strategy of dropping letters is re-deployed for both labels on the Y-axis: the one on the right reads "Ext nct ns" and the one on the left shows several creatures fading away.

[3] These anxieties take center stage in the documentary *Chasing Coral* by Jeff Orlowski. In its attempts at coral conservation, the film catalogues the many repercussions that accompany coral bleaching. For instance, one scientist describes coral reefs as the nurseries of the ocean—without them, up to twenty-five percent of marine life could vanish. This mass-death would then lead to food shortages on a global scale.

[4] This slowed engagement with the graph also allows for numerous affective responses to arise, such as shock, anger, grief, disgust, or fear.

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