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Representations of Ecocides in Settler Colonial Arts and Literatures Environnement

sous la direction
de Marine Berthiot

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Representations of Ecocides in Settler Colonial Arts and Literatures

Représenter les écocides dans les arts et les littératures des colonies de peuplement

Edited by Marine Berthiot

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ISSUE CONTENTS

Marine Berthiot
Representing Ecocides in Settler Colonial Arts and Literatures in a (Post-)*Terra Nullius* Era: An Introduction

Jamie Ashworth
"Praying to the Devil": Māori-Centered Histories of Resistance Against Environmental Alienation in Wairarapa, 1843-1853

Patrick Aura
Sacrificed Pasts, Lost Futures: Subjective Inanimacy, Sacrifice Zones & Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (Canada, 1925)

Mallika Bala and Madhumita Roy
A Postcolonial study of *Aranyak: Of the Forest* (1939) by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay: An Ecocidal Fiction of Colonial India's Indigenous Lands

Atreyee Chakraborty
"This coal is gobbling us up": Narrating Slow Violence Through Somatic Landscapes in the Fiction of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar

Marine Berthiot
A Transpacific Approach to Environmental Dis-Asters in Aotearoa New Zealand Ecopoetry

Lisa Renard and Awhina Tamarapa
Where Will the Bellbird Sing, if Not on the Harakeke? Kaitiakitanga (Guardianship, Custodianship, and Protection) in Te Ao Māori

Representing Ecocides in Settler Colonial Arts and Literatures in a (Post-)*Terra Nullius* Era: An Introduction

*Représenter les écocides dans les arts et les littératures des colonies de peuplement dans une ère (post-)*Terra Nullius : *une introduction*
*Representar los ecocidios en las artes y las literaturas de las colonias de poblamiento en una era (post-)*Terra Nullius: *una introducción*

Marine Berthiot

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TEXT

I would like to express my gratitude and my thanks to Alvar De La Llosa for enabling me to complete this project, the authors who participate in this issue on ecocides, and the peer reviewers who accepted to read the articles anonymously.

1 Settler colonialism is a structure [1] that is expanding in a (post-)*Terra Nullius* era, at a time of ecological recession and geopolitical instability. The *Terra Nullius* doctrine (meaning "empty land" in Latin and literally translated as "land belonging to no human") regarded unoccupied territories as land that could be appropriated. [2] The notion of property and the concept of utilitarianism were later added by British colonists, while the *Terra Nullius* doctrine adhered to a racialized discourse during the colonial era, empowering western imperial nations with the right to claim any land inhabited by a people deemed "savage," "irrational," and "without history" in a Eurocentric understanding of culture and civilization. [3]

2 Joseph Ooko Nyangaga contends that "It is clear that *terra nullius* as a doctrine has undergone numerous transformations over time." [4] Nowadays, the *Terra Nullius* argument can only be claimed by a (landless) people whose motive is self-determination. [5] The history of the *Terra Nullius* doctrine leads some scholars to call its imperialist readings "a work of fiction" [6] or even "a myth" [7] itself undergirded by a racist belief in white supremacy from the

18th century onwards. In a postcolonial and decolonial environmental perspective, I argue that the concept of a "(post-)*Terra Nullius* era" emphasizes the steadfastness of imperialistic readings of the *Terra Nullius* doctrine in the 21st century. The brackets surrounding the prefix "post-" contest the timeframe of this legal practice that has long been used to justify the annexation of Indigenous lands – therefore raising doubts on its pastness, as in the concept of postcolonialism. This concept also accounts for the ripples and trauma generated by imperialist *Terra Nullius* claims on Indigenous peoples, Indigenous land and water as well as the natural resources that they contain. In the case of Australia, the *Terra Nullius* doctrine was overturned in 1992 by the High Court during the *Mabo v. the State of Queensland* (No. 2), yet its reversal did not give Aboriginal Australians their sovereignty back. [8] The consequences of colonization and of forced acculturation have been unearthed by the Truth-Telling Commission since 1991, as this Truth and Reconciliation Commission is still listening to testimonies of Australian Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

3 Working with the concept of a (post-)*Terra Nullius* era underlines the longevity, persistence, and resurgence of settler colonialism alongside its chronic violence on Indigenous communities whose sovereignty is still contested today. As Russell McDougall, John C. Ryan, and Pauline Reynolds note in their "Introduction to *Postcolonial Literatures of Climate Change*" (2022), Indigenous knowledge, practice, and epistemologies could preserve whole ecosystems from further damage, and yet Indigenous peoples are systematically underrepresented in political decision-making groups concerning climate change issues and solutions. [9] The current capitalist scramble for natural resources especially affects Indigenous peoples in the Arctic region and the Amazonian forest. Deep-sea mining worries Pacific Islanders while warzones are imagined as potential tourist resorts, [10] as though territories and the people living there were mere commodities that could be subjected to a *tabula rasa* wiping out humans, non-humans, and more-than-humans from the map. In a (post-)*Terra Nullius* era, the logic of elimination that Patrick Wolfe described as a key element of settler colonialism [11] is rendered more and more visible in the media as it has become normalized in some nationalist ideologies. This Issue investigating the literary and

artistic representations of ecocide in three anglophone settler colonies – India, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Canada – effectively questions the temporal, scientific, and legal limits of this western ideology, marginalizing waves of decolonial resistance in official history, and racializing mankind to exploit non-whites, non-male thinking beings, non-humans, and more-than-humans.

4 Etymologically speaking, the word "ecocide" means the destruction of a home, a reality that can be measured in many ways and on many levels, from local biodiversity loss, the gradual or sudden disappearance of whole ecosystems, to the full annihilation of natural habitats around the globe. For decades now, scientists have warned against the irremediable damage human-made climate change triggers, and, despite international Agreements and Conventions, the situation has never been worse. [12] Bruno Latour, known for theorizing the passage from a science in action to a form of general truth in science, explained that environmental scientists and humanists should work hand in hand to combat climate change effects and affects. In his last and posthumous book, *Habiter la Terre* (2022), Latour argued that "vous ne pouvez pas aborder toutes ces questions écologiques sans les arts. Si vous n'avez pas les affects capables de métaboliser la situation écologique, c'est beaucoup trop lourd. Vous avez simplement l'angoisse au ventre et le travail est insurmontable." [13] In this context, the articles composing this Issue are ordered in a chronological order to shed light on the long fight for the preservation of the land and natural resources which started from the first contacts between Indigenes and settlers, as well as the variety of genres and artworks used to express humans' concern, awe, and respect for "nature" – an umbrella term whose meaning changes over time and place, depending on cultures and languages, and a term which has often proved its inadequacy to express the very field it is supposed to embrace, leading Patrick Aura in Article 3 to formulate his own theory of "eco-geology" [14] to not exclude rocks and minerals from the landscape.

5 In "The Fifth International Crime: Reflections on the Definition of 'Ecocide'" (2023), Liana Georgieva Minkova explains that the term "ecocide" was first mentioned in relation to the Vietnam War by Arthur Galston who decried the use of Agent Orange on agricultural fields between 1961 and 1971 – a chemical whose dioxin is deemed

responsible for cancers and birth defects [15]. Richard Falk then used the term "ecocide" to compare the ecological harm perpetrated by the American army in Vietnam to the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis during the Second World War. [16] In "Environmental Warfare and Ecocide – Facts, Appraisals, and Proposals" (1973), Falk could write:

> The Indochina context, given the public outrage over the desecration of the land at a time of rising environmental consciousness, creates a target of opportunity comparable to Nuremberg. Surely it is no exaggeration to consider the forests and plantations treated by Agent Orange as an Auschwitz for environmental values, certainly not from the perspective of such a distinct environmental species as the mangrove tree or nipa palm. And just as the Genocide Convention came along to formalize part of what had already been condemned and punished at Nuremberg, so an Ecocide Convention could help carry forward into the future a legal condemnation of environmental warfare in Indochina. [17]

6 In June 2021, ecocide was presented by the International Expert Panel (IEP) to be included in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court alongside the four recognized international crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression. [18] The IEP formulated the definition of ecocide in these terms: "'ecocide' means unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts." [19] In May 2024, the European Union legally enforced ecocide as an environmental crime. [20] The 2024 Environmental Crime Directive notes that environmental crimes represent the fourth largest organized crime activity in the world and that they generate an 80-to-230-million-euro loss every year. Environmental crimes are defined as "infringements of relevant legal obligations, such as wildlife crimes and deterioration of habitats, illegal shipment or dumping of waste, pollution crimes and illegal trading in hazardous substances." [21] Ecocide is therefore at the forefront of current interdisciplinary and international preoccupations.

7 Destabilizing the traditional settler colonial narrative, too often opposing white settlers to Indigenous peoples, articles composing this Issue interrogate how the overexploitation of natural resources

and the destruction of endogenous fauna and flora are perceived by the various communities who co-exist in settler colonies, whether they are Indigenous peoples, white settlers, non-white settlers, migrants, or political and environmental refugees. Too often, ecocide is framed in the "dying" discourse settler colonialism itself constructs to justify inaction, exactions, and the overexploitation of local natural and human resources. Sometimes, the national narrative can deny its own ecocidal measures altogether, as in Aotearoa New Zealand where some brands do not hesitate to herald its "100% Pure" myth despite the fragility of many endogenous species, massive agricultural production, and the growing number of endangered endemic plants. As Filippos Proedrou and Maria Pournara note, "Ecocide literally means the killing of our home," [22] interpreting ecocides as ecological genocides. Narratives of ecocides can be analyzed from various standpoints, such as environmental humanities, trauma studies, disaster studies, postcolonial and decolonial studies, ecofeminism, and Indigenous studies. Grace Dillon (Anishinaabe) refers to settler colonialism as a "Post-Native Apocalypse World," [23] a concept which proves relevant for the Issue at stake as many Indigenous epistemologies promoting a form of symbiosis and respect between humans, non-humans, and more-than-humans have persisted over the years despite massive land confiscation, the loss of sovereignty, a long process of assimilation, and genocides. Texts on ecocides can often be read as a counter-discourse to official history in settler colonies, despite presenting scientific facts.

8 The Issue on "Ecocides in Settler Colonial Arts and Literatures" is composed of six peer-reviewed articles. The whole volume abides by American English, hence the italicization of languages perceived as "foreign" in this framework, although the authors of this volume would have liked to de-italicize Indigenous languages. In "'Praying to the Devil': Māori-Centered Histories of Resistance against Forest Alienation in Wairarapa, 1845-1849," Jamie Ashworth focuses on the *niupepa* (newspapers), *pukapuka* (private letters), and *korero* (speech) produced by the Māori *iwi* (tribes) of the Wairarapa region after the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi on 6 February 1840. His analysis highlights the resistance and defiance of Māori against settler practices of deforestation and extractivism, which contradicts colonially inflected theories imagining Māori as passive in front of the

degradation of their environment. In "Sacrificed Pasts, Lost Futures: Subjective Inanimicy, Sacrifice Zones, and *Wild Geese* by Martha Ostenso (Canada, 1925)," Patrick Aura develops an "eco-geological" perspective that encompasses human and non-human interactions to better amplify the role of geology in what is traditionally referred to as "nature." His reading of *Wild Geese* by Martha Ostenso offers new insights in the way Canadian settlers appropriate wilderness and the Indigenous cultures alike while writing their own sacrificial destinies by imposing on the land a narrative of exploitative agri-culture which engulfs them too. In "A Postcolonial Study of *Aranyak: of the Forest* – An Ecocidal Fiction of Colonial India's Indigenous Lands," Mallika Bala and Madhumita Roy offer an environmentalist critique of Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's novel *Aranyak: Of the Forest* (1939). Santal Indigenous perspectives on the wilderness and on deforestation are presented alongside western ecocritical texts to discuss the impact of human activities on the land and on exploitative forestry practices. Contrasting ecological discourses from the North and from the South, this article interrogates humans' place within the universe. In "'This Coal is Gobbling Us Up': Narrating Slow Violence Through Somatic Landscapes in the Fiction of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar," Atreyee Chakraborty observes how Rob Nixon's theory of "slow violence" illuminates Hansda's descriptions of the Santal in his novel, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2013), and in the short stories composing *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2017). The violence endured by the Indigenous communities in the mines of Chotanagpur, and especially the sexual exploitation of Santal women, is compared to the violent treatment of the land itself in an extractivist and turbo-capitalist understanding of human, non-human, and more-than-human relations. In "A Transpacific Approach to Environmental Dis-Asters in Aotearoa New Zealand Ecopoetry," Marine Berthiot analyzes "Unity" by Selina Tusitala Marsh (Sāmoan, Tuvaluan, English, Scottish, and French New Zealander) and "Poem for the Commonwealth, 2018" by Karlo Mila (Tongan, Palagi, and Samoan New Zealander). Methodologies devised in the Pacific, such as the *vā* (the space between), *talanoa* (conversation), and *aroha* (kindness, empathy, love), but also Fuimaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann's *fonofale* health model, are used alongside Rob Nixon's theory of "slow violence" and Maurice Blanchot's perspective on "dis-aster" studies to

analyze the environmental trauma affecting inhabitants in Oceania. The closing paper, “Where Will the Bellbird Sing, if Not on the Harakeke? Kaitiakitanga (Guardianship, Custodianship, and Protection) in Te Ao Māori,” was offered by Lisa Renard and Awhina Tamarapa and reflects the curatorial and sustainable work they are performing with *harakeke* (a flax from Aotearoa New Zealand), *whatu* (weaving), and *raranga* (basketry) both in dedicated gardens and in museums. [24] They draw our attention onto the fragility of Aotearoa New Zealand’s unique ecosystem and, by repercussion, onto the sensitive maintenance and preservation of Māori arts, Māori methodologies, and Māori epistemologies, which are all interrelated and co-dependent.

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INDEX

Mots-clés
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Keywords
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Palabras claves
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AUTHOR

Marine Berthiot
Researcher affiliated with LCE (Lettres et civilisations étrangères), F-69007 Lyon, France; MSCA Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Galway (Ireland)

“Praying to the Devil”: Māori-Centered Histories of Resistance Against Environmental Alienation in Wairarapa, 1843-1853

« Adresser sa prière au diable. » Histoires de Māori résistant contre l’aliénation environnementale à Wairarapa (1843-1853)
«Rezar al Diablo»: Historias maoríes de resistencia contra la alienación ecológica, Wairarapa (1843-1853)

Jamie Ashworth

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OUTLINE

Introduction
Historiography and Methodology
Niupepa (Newspapers)
Pukapuka (Private Letters)
Kōrero (Speech)
Conclusion

TEXT

Introduction

1 In 1878, Ngāti Kahungunu politician and writer Henare Tomoana published a highly critical essay in the Māori-language newspaper *Te Wananga* concerning European colonial land acquisition. The article, referencing settler-colonial efforts to alienate land from its Indigenous stewards, argued that “to unravel a Maori title requires a knowledge of so vast an amount of the old history of the race, that it excludes any European from being able to sit as a Maori claim to land.”[1] Tomoana’s words were a clear expression of resistance against imperialist expansion in Aotearoa New Zealand, symbolic of

wider anti-colonial tendencies within Māori literature. Invoking *whakapapa* (ancestry) in explaining the inseparability of the land and its people, Tomoana aimed to combat prevailing European ideas of land resource possession from a Māori standpoint. In doing so, he contributed to a regional literary tradition of resistance against imperialistic resource exploitation.

2 The south-eastern districts of Te Ika-a-Māui, Tomoana's home, had for decades been the subject of what Cameron Boyle labels "the settler-colonial project of mass migration."[2] From 1841 onward, European colonists settled and occupied Wairarapa, a remote district within this area. Wairarapa constitutes a series of valleys separated from Wellington by mountain ranges, and was at the time dominated by "belts of forest"[3] variegating fertile alluvial land, providing Māori with resources for subsistence horticulture. This land was the *tūrangawaewae* (ancestral home) of numerous *hapū* (autonomous clan-groups), including Ngāti Moe, Te Hika a Pāpāuma, and Ngāti Hamua, among others. To the Indigenous Ngāti Kahungunu and Rangitāne *iwi* (tribal groups) of the region, settler-colonialism imposed upon the socioeconomic stability afforded by traditional cultivation of the *whenua* (land). In further modifying these environments, settlers threatened the traditional attachments of Māori to the resources that formed the foundation of their culture.

3 While Māori had effected their own changes to the land in centuries prior, Europeans viewed these alterations as insignificant and incompatible with settler capitalism. Environmental historian Anna Boswell characterizes this "continuing crusade"[4] of imperialism as part of a wider "ecocide"[5] enacted by European colonists. Here, "scorched-earth colonial policies"[6] contributed to imperialist efforts toward eradicating Māori connections to their land. As analyst Kate Riddell explains, settler-colonists aimed to minimize the significance of this ecocide through cultural supplantation: as "the land was cleared and 'improved' by European toil […] the native was supplanted by the introduced."[7]

4 Against the backdrop of these prevailing ideologies, settlers also characterized Māori as passive observers of this ecocide of land alienation rather than resisting it. However, the surviving corpus of Māori-language primary literature refutes such allegations. This

paper contends that, during Wairarapa's early colonization from 1841 to 1853, Māori consistently asserted *mana whenua* (sovereignty over land) in their literary expressions of resistance. In examining three types of oral and written works, this paper explores the varying techniques by which Māori would engage with colonial land resource exploitation. First, Māori-language press publications on land alienation are analyzed, contextualizing such disruption within the Indigenous sociopolitical milieu. Second, this article investigates the role of personal letters in constructing environmentalist opposition. Finally, this paper scrutinizes the missionary corpus of recorded oral testimony by Wairarapa anti-colonial activists. It is argued that these assertions of *mana whenua* center the agency of Wairarapa Māori in defying colonial encroachments on their *tūrangawaewae*.

Figure 1. Map of Wairarapa, created c. 1860 by unknown colonist

Grassland, mountains, swamps, and forest are noted on the map. Pink shaded areas represent land under Māori ownership by this time.

Repository: Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, reference number: MapColl-832.45gbbd/[ca.1860]/Acc.36640

5 Courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library

Historiography and Methodology

6 Until fairly recently, relevant historiography was dominated by what Kerry Howe describes as an "overarching paradigm of Māori as victims"[8] in the face of colonial ecocide. In general, previous scholarship has reinforced colonial narratives of passivity in the region, presenting Māori as mostly indifferent to European expansion into local environments. Environmental historian Paul Star emphasizes that prior research characterized European attitudes toward Aotearoa's natural environments in a relative vacuum, "cut without awareness of [...] the indigenous environment."[9] Michael Roche's *History of Forestry* (1990), for instance, portrayed Māori as prioritizing environmental conservation, but not necessarily actively opposing ecocide.[10] In public histories such as Rebecca O'Brien and Robert McClean's *Environmental Issues Overview Report for the Tararua District* (2001), Māori are described as "struggling people"[11] almost helpless against the "systematic destruction of taonga and cultural rights."[12]

7 Significant work has been done within historiography toward rectifying these issues, especially by Māori themselves. A now-substantial bibliography exists in characterizing the overall body of early environmentalist works produced by Māori. These sources, in general, have examined Māori responses to land alienation and their consequences during the time period in question, emphasizing their agency and retention of *mana* (spiritual prestige) in creating anti-colonial texts.

8 Eva Rask Knudsen's foundational *The Circle and the Spiral* (2004) establishes a critical postcolonial framework for analyzing anti-ecocidal Māori literature, especially relevant to investigations from an "outside-in perspective"[13] such as this paper. Knudsen notes that the writers of anti-colonial literature tended to separate themselves from settler viewpoints, opposing ecological threats through concepts grounded in Māori tradition. These writings, Knudsen argues,

functioned as socially functional objects and promoted "the perseverance of Indigenous spirituality and tradition"[14] in the literary construction of Māori anti-ecocidal arguments. Knudsen emphasizes the role of *wāhine* (women) in this literature, contrasted with the patriarchal "Pakeha environment."[15] Similarly, in Vincent O'Malley's *The Meeting Place* (2012), it is argued that women played a major role in recognizing and resisting ecocide, representing part "of the wider community"[16] that would "adjudicate upon [...] daily living"[17] equally to men. *Wāhine* contributed regularly to *komiti* (council) discussions, in deliberate contrast to European patriarchy.

9 Paola Della Valle, in *From Silence to Voice* (2010), reaches similar conclusions informed by this postcolonial view, commenting that "a site of Maori resistance – a chink in the armor of colonial authority – originated in the production of texts."[18] Literature aided in preserving the memory of significant locations, including those rich in resources important for *mahinga kai* (traditional food-gathering practices). Della Valle also notes that Māori subverted settler-colonists' "dominant discourse"[19] in literature, producing "cracks within"[20] colonial knowledge systems. O'Malley argues that this opposition was based on the "far from [...] trivial infringements"[21] of colonists in violating *tuku whenua* (the traditional systems underpinning communal land transference) with "the aim to restore balance"[22] motivating this rejection.

10 Other authors typify Māori literary responses to ecocide in terms of their own experiences, an Indigenous-led collection of views that are privileged throughout this investigation. Works framed around collective resistance, for instance, have been examined as forms of anti-ecocidal rhetoric. As Danny Keenan (Te Āti Awa) writes in *Environmental Histories of New Zealand* (2002), "Māori expressed their responses to vanishing landscapes in many different forums [...] [They] perceived the totality of environmental change and sought to relate to it."[23] Frith Te Aroha Driver-Burgess's 2015 thesis "Korero Pukapuka, Talking Books" also describes popular literature among Māori as part of a pattern of "cohesive action."[24]

11 It is important to consider the place that written and recorded texts held within Māori cultural conceptions of the world during this early period of colonization. Arini Loader's (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Whakaue,

and Te Whānau-a-Apanui) chapter in *A History of New Zealand Literature* (2016) described, similarly, how Māori considered written material on environmental policy politically. In the circulation of these works, narratives coalesced around Māori cosmological connections to the land, especially referencing *whakapapa* as part of this historical record. Literary resistance, including that which was spoken, centered on "demonstrating and reinforcing"[25] such relations to the land. Keenan, likewise, expresses that "Māori sought to control the meanings"[26] of their experiences through "assertions of identity and mana,"[27] calling upon "specific historic landscapes"[28] in formulating resistance. Nēpia Mahuika (Ngāti Porou), in *Rethinking Oral History and Tradition* (2019), notes that political literature on ecocide could be contextualized within "the same whaikorero (speechmaking) conventions of the marae."[29] Loader has also noted that *wāhine* were heavily involved in literary processes, defining *whakapapa* relationships through their creative work.[30]

12 Collectively, these sources provide a strong framework for the analysis of Māori anti-colonial texts and their opposition to the early European ecocide in Wairarapa. Evidently, literature, including speech, occupied a significant place in Māori societies throughout the period. In the dissemination of literature, *tangata whenua* (Indigenous people) displayed a strong sense of agency against European-led environmental disruption.

Niupepa (Newspapers)

13 Coinciding with the first European incursions into Wairarapa was the colony-wide establishment of a number of *niupepa* (newspapers published either fully or partially in the Māori language). This constituted a major change in the methods by which Māori could communicate with each other.[31] The public dissemination of the written word allowed for the transmission of ideas beyond the *marae* (meeting place), promoting wide-scale political discussions.

14 Initially, *niupepa* were often used as an instrument by which the Crown (colonial government) attempted to mitigate attitudes of resistance among Māori, both in Wairarapa and beyond. *Niupepa* such as *Te Karere o Niu Tireni* aimed, according to contemporary

English settler Thomas Hocken, "to explain the beneficent laws of civilization,"[32] with a view to subsume Māori cultures under European rule. No Māori served on or with the editorial board of *Te Karere o Niu Tireni*, administrated by English-born Chief Protector of the Māori, George Clarke.[33] Clarke's main interest in publishing the paper, according to Hocken, was to promote "the cultivation of land":[34] that is, forest clearance. An article of 1842, for instance, appropriated the perspective of an anonymous Māori correspondent in arguing for land clearance: "me tango i tenei ritenga rangatira mo koutou."[35] These positions continued to define Crown *niupepa* as organs of colonial propaganda throughout this period of imperialist expansion.

15 The publication of independent *niupepa*, however, somewhat countered these propagandistic attempts at persuading Māori toward passivity regarding land alienation. Among these *niupepa* was the *Southern Cross*, published in Auckland by Scottish settler John Logan Campbell, a critic of then-Governor George Grey's regime of land acquisition, which he described as benefiting only "speculators, fly-by-night land jobbers, and adventurers."[36] Moreover, he was outwardly sympathetic to local Māori. As such, the *Southern Cross* was unusual in that it offered a generally pro-Māori viewpoint that published written statements opposing Crown policies and asserting *mana whenua*.

16 In 1849, the *Southern Cross* published a notice from a number of *rangatira* (hapū leaders) criticizing the methods by which land was acquired, discussing how *tuku whenua* (traditional land transference) was subverted during Crown land sales throughout Wairarapa. At this time, Governor Grey and Land Purchase Commissioner Donald McLean aimed to acquire the district's "valuable" land, which ultimately occurred in 1853.[37] Among these *rangatira* were Wiremu Kingi Wairarapa (Te Āti Awa) and Ernest Porutu (Ngāti Hamua), residents of Wairarapa who were known for hardline stances on land resource exploitation.[38] Citing proposed Wairarapa land sales, the notice argued against laws allowing for the alienation of Māori-held *whenua*:

> kihai matou i whakaae ki a te Kawana te mana o to matou Motu me tuku ano ki nga pakeha na tau tikanga i rawa kore ai matou. Kua

> rongo nei matou ko nga tangata o Wairarapa e tuku ana i a ratou kainga ki nga pakeha [...] na te Kuini i mea mana ano matou e ti aki me o matou taonga ho mai ra te ritenga o nga tangata o te Kuini. [39]

17 The letter illustrates a literary current among Wairarapa Māori wherein *niupepa* created "a sense of community engagement," [40] as Driver-Burgess explains, using the newly introduced medium of print to argue against colonial land exploitation. The contents of *niupepa* were generally read aloud to groups, reinforcing political discourse as a communal, literary activity. [41] N*iupepa* contributors were aware of this custom and often addressed it directly. For instance, an anonymous contributor alluded: "as Sir George Grey read [...] to the Natives, so I hope all white men that live near the pahs at Wellington, at Wairarapa [...] will read mine to them also." [42] In recognizing collaborative Māori reading practices, these contributions became effective counter-propaganda against land alienation and, consequently, ecocide. N*iupepa* quickly became cemented within Māori literature as a method by which concerted opposition to land seizure could be widely distributed among *iwi*, *hapū*, and *whānau* (families). [43]

18 While the writings featured in *niupepa* such as the *Southern Cross* were deeply connected to Māori literary traditions emphasizing the *whakapapa* of *whānau* and their ties to the land, many writers chose to use techniques unconventional to the medium. The integration of these complex techniques often subverted conventions of Māori information systems as a whole. According to Hemopereki Simon, traditional forms of Māori literature such as *mōteatea* (chants) and *waiata* (songs), often created by *wāhine*, typically used *hapū*-specific idioms opaque to outsiders. [44] In creating literature intended for wider consumption, writers extended what Knudsen describes as "symbolic meditation" [45] outward into the wider Māori "political unconscious" [46] throughout the colony by reducing their use of such idioms in the interests of accessibility.

19 Authors of *niupepa* correspondence occasionally acknowledged this functionality. In a letter of 1843, for instance, prominent Te Āti Awa statesmen and Wairarapa landholders Wī Tako Ngātata and Te Ropiha Moturoa wrote to the *hapū* of Cook Strait about Land Commissioner William Spain's effective nullification of their *iwi*'s land claims, stating

"ama uake nei kiakite tatou i te he otira kaua e wakanuia te korero ki te ngutu o te tangata otira ki a mohio nga tangata katoa, o nga kainga katoa o nga Maori. Heoi ano a matou korero."[47] The letter, published in the New Zealand Colonist, urged the Māori inhabitants of coastal *kāinga* (settlements) to acknowledge colonial transgressions. While also encouraging them to refrain from direct violent resistance, it reinforced to *hapū* that concern surrounding environmental preservation existed outside of their local communities.

20 Notably, the letter contains few allusions specific to Te Āti Awa while retaining poetic techniques familiar to a wider Māori audience. Structural references to *waiata* and *mōteatea* appear in the correspondence, exemplified by "short, quick, self-evident phrases"[48] of the type identified by Loader and Jane McRae as a feature of *waiata tangi* (mourning songs) and *whakaaraara pā* (sentry chants), signaling the seriousness of the authors' intentions in expressing their "complaints."[49] Its framing as an open letter, incorporation of poetic techniques, and secondary translation into English indicate that Wī Tako and Moturoa desired for readers to internalize this ecocide across gender and ethnic boundaries, retaining a deliberately broad audience.[50]

Pukapuka (Private Letters)

21 By 1841, letter writing had become a common form of literary production in Māori societies throughout the archipelago. *Pukapuka* (in this context, direct correspondence) had, since at least the first decade of the 19th century, gained an important status among Māori. As pieces of anti-colonial literature untethered from the intent of public display, unlike in *niupepa*, direct correspondence allowed Māori writers to establish, as Knudsen notes, their "own centers and foundations in [their] narratives,"[51] deeply entwined with traditional knowledge systems.

22 These sources must be evaluated in context. Many incoming letters penned by Māori were destroyed or altered by the receiving administrators if, as Loader comments, the correspondence did "not paint [them] in a good light."[52] A notable exception was the collection of Land Purchase Commissioner Donald McLean, a Scottish colonist who spearheaded mass land alienation in Wairarapa from 1848

onward. According to historian Jim McAloon, McLean's intent was "inculcating the moral economy of capitalism" [53] and "imposing state control" [54] upon Wairarapa Māori. Such convictions likely contributed to McLean's diligent preservation of inbound correspondence, which could serve as evidence in later European-led legal cases involving land seizure. [55] As such, the collection is especially relevant to this investigation.

23 Expressions from McLean's collection reinforce that Māori employed traditional knowledge systems in opposing land seizure. Maintaining connections to *whakapapa* was one aspect of this resistance, entirely separated from the land's financial value. For instance, the Ngāti Kahungunu inhabitants of Ahiaruhe, a *kāinga* on the plains of southern Wairarapa, retained decades-old ties to the *whenua* that entirely overruled land sale negotiations. The landholders clarified to McLean in a collective letter, scribed by Koroniria Rangataiki of Ngāti Porou:

> tenei ano taku tikanga, ko nga kari e kore e tukua atu, kore rawa, kore rawa, kore rawa atu. Koi puta atu te tangata homai koe i au moni, inahoki he tokomaha nga tangata nona taua kainga. […] Ina hoki he wahi iti hoki tenei wahi e puritia nei e matou, ina hoki he uri ano toku; e kore e pai kia rere ki runga ki te puhi o te rakau noho ai. Heoi ano. [56]

24 Clearly, the maintenance of this ancestral *tūrangawaewae* superseded all other factors. Merely months prior, British surveyor Charles Pelichet had expressed to McLean that the land was "generally poor, barren, and very broken." [57] In a spiritual sense, then, the fertility of the land did not affect its heritage; McLean received similar letters from the forested northern settlement of Te Kāuru. [58] Evidently, the continued observation of such traditions amounted to anti-colonial resistance by the residents of the land. [59]

25 *Wāhine* also engaged in anti-ecocidal resistance through letters. As Mahuika has commented, *wāhine rangatira* (female *hapū* leaders) occupied a unique position in defying colonial authorities, combining "a collective tribal sense of self-determination" [60] with a heightened awareness regarding the "creeping colonial patriarchy." [61] The letters of Hine-i-paketia of Ngāti Kahungunu provide highly illustrative

examples of these gendered responses to ecocide. Among the Indigenous custodians of Te Taperenui-a-Whātonga, a vast and heavily forested region in North Wairarapa, McLean described Hine-i-paketia as the "Principal person of the whole District." [62] After negotiations, McLean received a letter containing Hine-i-paketia's demands, accompanied by a short message: "Koi riri mai koe ki tenei korero. […] Kia wawe te tae mai. Ka mutu naku." [63]

26 Hine-i-paketia, through the "quick, self-evident phrases" [64] of her letters, "sheltered" [65] her *whenua*, as anthropologist Lyndsay Head has commented, exuding "the *mana* of chiefs." [66] In doing so, Hine-i-paketia effectively rejected European ideas of patriarchy, proving that "she was well able to attend to her own affairs," [67] including that of land administration and the recognition of *whakapapa*. Such a subversion of colonial expectations also existed in her reluctance to sell the land, perhaps also motivated by a defiance of European gender roles. Paola Della Valle has noted that Māori "women have always been […] given a special social function" [68] in the preservation of *whakapapa*. A self-proclaimed Queen, Hine-i-paketia was clearly familiar with this role as it applied to her. [69] In subverting colonial gender roles while reinforcing *mana whenua*, Hine-i-paketia's letters serve as a rich example of Māori women's collective resistance to the seizure of Indigenous-held environments.

Kōrero (Speech)

27 The spoken word constituted a major part of Māori society. Oral history was a microcosm of what Mahuika terms "the collision of fundamental political ideas […] related to the communal and inclusive self-determining of inter-tribal genealogies," [70] and constituted "the continuation of living tradition." [71] Written recounts were often noted in missionary journals during what Warbrick terms "a process of engagement" [72] informed largely by British ideas of colonial supremacy. "This subjection of Māori oral history to tradition and Western modes of analysis" [73] has led to inaccuracies in the portrayal of overall "native understandings of oral history," [74] Mahuika argues, filtering these *kōrero* through a distinctly colonial lens. Indeed, this filter between speech and recording limits the utility of oral testimonies recorded in this manner. Nonetheless, these texts

illustrate the significant role that orality played throughout the period. Overwhelmingly, these surviving oral statements portray a cultural environment of anti-ecocidal resistance.

28 A prominent angle of recorded oral anti-ecocidal resistance would constitute anti-Christian dissent, especially regarding missionaries. As McAloon has argued, missionaries "regarded agriculture as the catalyst of Christianity and civilization"[75] and integrated "botanical change"[76] into the "religious and moral instruction"[77] of Māori. These threats to the "coherence of Māori culture"[78] did not stand unopposed, as Head argues. Many observers resisted what they perceived as a religiously motivated inequality in distributing ecological resources.[79] An integral aspect of environmental management, the equitable redistribution of "valued resources"[80] remained a priority for Wairarapa Māori, oppositional to Christian doctrine.

29 Head notes that missionaries were often perceived by rural Māori "as agents of the state [who] challenged traditional ideas about the value of land as strongly as Christianity challenged Māori morality,"[81] emphasizing the intertwined perceptions of religious indoctrination and land resource exploitation. As such, rhetoric warning missionaries of resistance extended this defense of *mātauranga Māori*. For instance, Kawepō also encouraged *tangata whenua* to openly mock "the sagacity of the white man"[82] in the presence of missionaries as a method of discouraging local colonial settlement. One *rangatira* warned missionary William Colenso: "e mea ana oti koe, tera e tu tau Hahi? Nana, akuanei, akuanei, maku ka hora ai nga Hahi o Heretaunga. Maku tenei wenua ka uhi ai ki te taonga."[83] Te Wereta (Ngāti Hinewaka) summarized this attitude to Colenso in 1845, writing "be thine the praying to God – be mine the praying to the Devil."[84] The cultural appropriation of environments was consistently linked to a collective resistance against their destruction.

Conclusion

30 Through *niupepa*, *pukapuka*, and *kōrero*, Wairarapa Māori would express their agency and conviction in resisting the environmental alienation perpetuated by European settler-colonists from 1843 to

1853. The authors of these literary works drew on fundamental aspects of Māori culture in constructing their rhetoric. The incorporation of traditional compositional methods, subverting European colonial ideals, would aid in their wider distribution. *Niupepa*, in widely dispersing works collectively opposing ecocide, and *pukapuka*, through their direct expression of discontent, became powerful methods by which imperialist expansion was defied and resisted throughout the district. Recorded *kōrero* also played a decisive role in asserting Māori ecological self-determination, preserving arguments against environmental destruction as they were expressed to colonists and among *tangata whenua*. Overall, these literary productions constituted sources of anti-ecocidal knowledge throughout this early colonial period, representing a strong undercurrent of resistance and defiance among Wairarapa Māori concerning the conservation of *mana whenua*.

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ABSTRACTS

English
In 1842, Māori throughout the Wairarapa region of Aotearoa New Zealand were confronted with British colonists’ efforts to occupy and exploit environmental resources. Over the next decade, they remained the subject of a range of cultural, social, and ecological changes, amounting to the beginnings of a larger-scale colonial ecocide that would permanently affect environments and peoples in the district. Previous scholarship has often tended toward colonial narratives of passivity on the part of *iwi* (tribes) in the region, pejoratively portraying Māori as largely insensitive to European imperialist expansion and environmental exploitation. However, these narratives ignore the contemporary Māori attitudes toward the clearance of Wairarapa bush lands, and entirely overlook local perspectives on the issue at hand. This article serves as a postcolonial examination of three types of primary literature produced by Māori during the brief yet crucial period between 1843 and 1853, a time wherein European settlers were first beginning to regularly and significantly interact with Wairarapa Māori and their land. Newspapers produced in the Māori language are examined as items representative of early mass expressions of Indigenous culture through public written rhetoric. From a more private viewpoint, letters are systematically analyzed in relation to Māori literature as a whole, as well as illustrating direct opposition between colonists and the colonized. Finally, the paper explores the recorded oral testimony of Wairarapa Māori, and how resistance to ecocide could be effectively expressed within. In doing so, the article argues that Māori resistance and defiance against imperialistic forest alienation during this period was indeed present, and that colonial narratives of Māori passivity in the face of ecological collapse have been greatly exaggerated.

Français
En 1842, les Māori de la région de Wairarapa, en Aotearoa Nouvelle-Zélande, ont été confrontés aux tentatives des Européens pour occuper et exploiter les ressources environnementales. Au cours de la décennie suivante, les Māori ont subi une série de changements culturels, sociaux et environnementaux, ce qui a marqué le début d’un écocide colonial à grande échelle qui a affecté de façon permanente les écosystèmes et les

populations de la région. Les études antérieures ont souvent mis en avant des récits coloniaux soulignant la passivité des tribus de la région, décrivant les Māori comme un peuple qui était largement insensible à l'expansion impérialiste européenne et à l'exploitation de l'environnement. Cependant, ces récits ignorent les attitudes contemporaines des Māori à l'égard du défrichement des forêts de Wairarapa, et négligent totalement les perspectives locales à ce sujet. Cet article constitue un examen postcolonial de trois types de littérature primaire produite par les Māori au cours de la période brève mais cruciale comprise entre 1843 et 1853, époque à laquelle les colons européens ont commencé à interagir régulièrement et de manière significative avec les Māori du Wairarapa et leur terre. Les journaux produits en langue māori sont examinés en tant qu'éléments représentatifs des premières expressions de masse de la culture indigène par le biais de la rhétorique écrite publique. D'un autre point de vue, les lettres sont systématiquement analysées en relation avec la littérature māori dans son ensemble, et illustrent l'opposition directe entre les colons et les colonisés. Enfin, l'article explore les témoignages oraux enregistrés des Māori de Wairarapa et la manière dont la résistance à l'écocide a pu s'y exprimer efficacement. En somme, l'article affirme que la résistance et la défiance des Māori face à l'aliénation impérialiste de la forêt étaient bien présentes à cette époque et que les récits coloniaux sur la passivité des Māori face à l'effondrement écologique ont été largement exagérés.

Español

En 1842, los maoríes de la región de Wairarapa, en Aotearoa Nueva Zelanda, se enfrentaron a los esfuerzos de los colonos británicos para ocupar y explotar los recursos medioambientales. A lo largo de la década siguiente, aquellos fueron objeto de una serie de cambios culturales, sociales y medioambientales, que supusieron el inicio de un ecocidio colonial a mayor escala que afectó permanentemente las ecologías y a los pueblos del distrito. Los estudios anteriores se han inclinado a menudo por relatos coloniales de pasividad por parte de las iwi (tribus) de la región, que describen peyorativamente a los maoríes como en gran medida insensibles a la expansión imperialista europea y a la explotación medioambiental. Sin embargo, estos relatos ignoran las actitudes contemporáneas de los maoríes hacia la tala de los matorrales de Wairarapa y pasan totalmente por alto las perspectivas locales sobre el tema. Este artículo sirve de examen poscolonial de tres tipos de literatura primaria producida por maoríes durante el breve pero crucial período comprendido entre 1843 y 1853, época en la que los colonos europeos empezaron a interactuar de forma regular y significativa con los maoríes de Wairarapa y sus tierras. Se examinan los periódicos redactados en lengua maorí como elementos representativos de las primeras expresiones masivas de la cultura indígena a través de la retórica escrita pública. Desde un punto de vista más privado, se analizan sistemáticamente las cartas en relación con la literatura maorí en su conjunto, además de ilustrar la oposición directa entre colonos y colonizados. Por último, el artículo explora los testimonios orales grabados

de los maoríes de Wairarapa, y cómo la resistencia al ecocidio podía expresarse eficazmente en ellos. Al hacerlo, el artículo argumenta que la resistencia y el desafío maoríes contra la alienación forestal imperialista durante este período estuvieron realmente presentes, y que las narrativas coloniales de la pasividad maorí ante el colapso ecológico han sido muy exageradas.

INDEX

Mots-clés
écocide, préservation des forêts, anti-impérialisme, histoire māori, histoire postcoloniale

Keywords
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AUTHOR

Jamie Ashworth
School of Humanities, Media, and Creative Communication, Massey University (ANZ)

Sacrificed Pasts, Lost Futures: Subjective Inanimacy, Sacrifice Zones & Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (Canada, 1925)

Passés sacrifiés, avenirs perdus : inanimité subjective, zones de sacrifice et Wild Geese *de Martha Ostenso (Canada, 1925)*
Pasados sacrificados, futuros perdidos: inanimación subjetiva, zonas de sacrificio y Wild Geese *de Martha Ostenso (Canada, 1925)*

Patrick Aura

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OUTLINE

Introduction
Caleb Gare: Subjective Inanimacy and Patriarchy
The Possibility of a Non-Oppositional *Wild Geese*
Wild Geese and the Indigenous Palimpsest
Conclusion

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This paper is adapted from an in-progress dissertation chapter; this paper contributes to the ongoing thought process behind my research.

TEXT

Introduction

1 This paper contributes an answer to the question posed by Margery Fee: "how does literature claim land?"[1] It does so by analyzing Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (1925) from an eco-geological perspective that leads us to consider what are known as "sacrifice zones" and Canada's ongoing ecocide, a process that has namely led to what has been termed "lost futures"[2] for many communities such

as the Indigenous ones addressed here. I have coined the term "eco-geological" to refine conventional notions of "nature" by emphasizing the interplay between ecological systems and geological formations in shaping human and non-human interactions. This perspective recognizes geology not as inert or merely a backdrop to human activity but as an active agent in the formation of social, cultural, and environmental dynamics. Drawing from Jane Bennett's "thing-power" [3] and Elizabeth Povinelli's theorization of "geontologies," [4] the eco-geological lens foregrounds how geological elements – such as the land in *Wild Geese* – mediate power structures, cultural identities, and modes of dispossession. This perspective entails examining interrelated ecological, geographical, and geological components, and how they manifest through nonhuman and human entities, digging into literature's construction of the environment while keeping in mind "the extent of [human] transformations [on] environments" [5] through such narratives.

2 Ostenso's work contributes to Canada's ecocidal and genocidal dispossession by creating a subjective inanimacy in its characters and the land. Subjective inanimacy is a literary act of inanimizing peoples, things, or even histories that had (or continue to have) recognized forms of agency in non-colonial/decolonial contexts. Inspired in part by Terry Goldie's classic study *Fear and Temptation* (1989), [6] this concept can partly be seen in the settler dehumanizing process of Indigenous peoples, or the subduing of eco-geologies to extractive capitalism. "Inanimizing" shapes the human and nonhuman into "nonliving" to produce discursively and physically exploitable *things*; thereby under*mining* such elements as Indigenous life, action, and histories – or those of ecological spaces.

3 Though Ostenso drew inspiration from her time in Manitoba, she left the novel's location unmarked. This choice, coupled with a portrayal of "the pioneering farmer as a figure confronted by an implacable natural world", [7] creates a sense of mutual emptiness between land and settlers. However, most analyses do not consider how this affects Indigenous subjectivity, [8] as Indigenous presence is conflated with the "inanimate" land throughout the novel. Contemporary ecocritical readings of *Wild Geese*, such as Deborah Keahy's consideration of the role of place in the novel, [9] have attempted to rectify this, though not to the extent I propose. [10] Examining how colonial meanings of

possession are created through characters that become the very matter they desire, I unsettle the misconception that the [Indigenous] land and the settlers are mutually empty. Such misconceptions have been addressed in Canadian literary studies, and I push them further by demonstrating how Ostenso's text contains the seeds of its own unraveling, portraying matter as something that re/creates itself in a quest for meaning.

> The way *Wild Geese* works towards a project of dispossession can be illuminated by Terry Goldie's *Fear and Temptation*. Explicating how Indigenous relations to nature were constructed in literature, Goldie asserts that: [i]t [is] possible to divide much of the semiosis of [White] society [...] [between] the natural earth and the artful world. The [Native] is often used to present the possibility of nature in human form. In the same way, the [Native's] closeness to nature is used to justify an emphasis on the [Native] as the land. In the one, nature becomes human, in the other, human becomes nature. Elements of each of the standard commodities in which the [Native] participates are valorized [...] through their emphatically natural genesis. [11]

4 In the literary logic of colonialism, if Indigenous people are nature, and nature is full of resources to be emptied out of, then the Indigenous population is empty and can be overlooked as their lives and resources are mined, as Cherie Demaline's novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) makes plain. [12] The paradox of the subjective inanimacy is thus revived, as settlers must also acknowledge the existence – even if inanimate – of Indigenous populations. Indigenous peoples may have been construed as inert (i.e. non-modern, nonhuman, etc.) but they were never inanimate, which is why they posed a threat. It is no surprise, then, that Indigenous resurgence practices encourage the formation of "a new politics in which many identities and strategies for making real change are fused together in a movement to challenge white society's control over Onkwehonwe [original people] and [their] lands." [13] The attribution of meaning to land is one that was weaponized and recognized as a reason "for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of communication, [...] the ultimate protection for changelessness," [14] despite the dynamism of the colonial system that introduced such a view.

5 In this context, this article examines how sacrifice zones emblematize a discourse about the land that emerged from a narrativization of human/nonhuman relations. *Wild Geese* reflects this discourse; reframing land and its inhabitants – human and nonhuman – as dispossessed resources, perpetuating colonial ideologies that render certain lives and spaces expendable in the service of settler-capitalism. Here, "lost futures" are those of Indigenous peoples living near what became known as sacrifice zones, since those (non) futures necessitate the mining of Indigenous bodies and futures. An eco-conscious approach of the inanimate reveals a further contradiction of the Canadian project that reduces life to what Povinelli refers to as Non-life. To overcome this contradiction, we must recognize the value of (non) life beyond subjectivity. I do so by analyzing the characterization of *Wild Geese*'s antagonist Caleb Gare, before examining his relation to the land and the novel's Indigenous characters, John and Malcolm, culminating in an analysis of subjective inanimacy's full realization in the novel.

Caleb Gare: Subjective Inanimacy and Patriarchy

6 The concept of sacrifice zones, as distinct from imperialism, is central to understanding the relational dynamics explored in this analysis. While imperialism involves the outright domination and extraction of resources by a colonial power, sacrifice zones emerge as spaces that are constructed within the logic of disposability, where both human and nonhuman entities are rendered expendable in the service of capitalist or colonial advancement. This distinction highlights the layered processes of subjective inanimacy, whereby agency is systematically stripped from beings or environments, allowing them to be framed as inert commodities. Attributing inanimacy, however, paradoxically requires the attributor to possess and recognize their own subjectivity, an act that reveals a form of lack or absence in the self. This tension, situated at the intersection of literature, history, and eco-geology, serves as the theoretical foundation for the discussion that follows.

7 For the sake of clarity, a brief synopsis of Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* is in order, with a focus on the points I will be developing

below. The novel centers on the Gare family, who live on a remote farm in Manitoba, dominated by Patriarch Caleb Gare. Caleb's authoritarian control over his family – particularly his daughter Judith – and his obsession with land ownership reveal a relentless desire for power and self-preservation. As Judith dreams of escaping her father's authority and embracing a freer life, Caleb's manipulations unravel the family's relationships with themselves and the world they seek to settle. His grip even extends beyond his family, as he exploits everyone's economic dependence on him, ensuring his dominance over the landscape and its inhabitants. The Prairie landscape emerges as both a backdrop and a character in its own right – unyielding, vast, and indifferent, reflecting the characters' struggles. These themes of abuse, manipulation, and power (over human and nonhuman entities) lead to the novel's culmination in Caleb's demise at the hands of the feminized and fetishized land he harmed throughout the novel.

8 While the Gares are the central element driving the plot, *Wild Geese* more specifically follows the story of Lind Archer as she boards with the Gares in Manitoba. Described as "a spiritual counterpart of the land,"[15] Caleb's patriarchal violence is nonetheless compared to that of the land in its unpredictable harshness and is demonstrated through his blackmailing of his wife, Amelia. However, his conservatism is met with opposition from his daughter Judith, who is defined as having a "vivid and terrible"[16] strength and a sexuality as "some fabled animal – a centauress"[17] that contrasts Lind's delicacy. The novel showcases the overlapping of realistic and unrealistic elements through the association of Judith with fabled animals and Caleb with spiritual and animistic terms – paralleling how the realities of eco-geologies in Canada are warped to benefit settler imaginations.

9 The creation of subjective meaning in the act of separation from the eco-geologies is central to *Wild Geese*. Subjective inanimacy imposes a framework of meaning on the world, reducing entities that already possess intrinsic significance to passive objects within a human-centric order. This approach stands in contrast to Jane Bennett's theorizing, which seeks to give "voice to thing-power" and acknowledges the "active role of nonhuman materials in public life."[18] In *Wild Geese*, subjective inanimacy is expressed through acts that

deny agency to the nonhuman environment, embedding it within systems of domination and control. Early in the novel, this is exemplified through Lind's encounter with Amelia's relation to the land and her family:

> There must be some reason for Amelia's endurance. Was it a hope of compensation of some kind? The children? No, there was not enough affection among them – after the precious flame had been sucked into the very earth upon which and by which they lived – to make the sacrifice worthwhile.[19]

10 Lind's reflection on Amelia's endurance emphasizes the relational nature of her existence, particularly how it is defined by sacrifice. While her children may have been a source of meaning, this potential is negated as they are described in terms that align them with the environment – "the precious flame" suggests both vitality and its extinguishment by the land. This alignment places the children in an ecological, almost mystical, framework that mirrors the loss of agency attributed to Amelia herself. However, the key distinction lies in how sacrifice operates for Amelia: her identity is structured by expectations of loss and subordination, both in her role as a mother and as a wife. Her hope that the children might "sacrifice all their youth for her [to live]"[20] reveals her desperation, as their sacrifice would counterbalance her own erasure. By contrast, the description of her children in environmental terms underscores their potential vitality, tethering them to cycles of life and renewal that Amelia is denied. Ostenso's use of inanimate and natural metaphors for both the children and Amelia illustrates the broader project of subjective inanimacy – justifying not only familial exploitation but also colonial and patriarchal control over land and life alike.

11 This is subjective inanimacy – the perceived unrelatedness of what is "unalive" which creates the very meaning of the lived experiences around us. Metaphorically demonstrated in the nonhuman throughout the text, an inciteful conversation between Mark Jordan to Lind also exposes the roots of subjective inanimacy. As Mark tells Lind about his travels around the Prairies and to the north, he diverts into reveries about the environment he encountered:

> The austerity of nature reduces the outward expression in life, simply, I think, because there is not such an abundance of natural objects for the spirit to react to. We are, after all, only the mirror of our environment. Life here at Oeland, even, may seem a negation but it's only a reflection from so few exterior natural objects that it has the semblance of negation. These people are thrown inward upon themselves, their passions stored up, they are intensified figures of life with no outward expression – no releasing gesture. [21]

12 In other words, "matter and meaning are not separate" [22] and believing something to be true does not make it so. [23] Phenomena exist only as part of the world's ongoing intra-activity, its dynamic and contingent differentiation into specific relationalities. This is on display in Mark's words, although he speaks less from a position of the settlers' subjectivity, and rather perceives his agency (and that of those around him) as limited associating with the land.

The Possibility of a Non-Oppositional *Wild Geese*

13 Deborah Keahey's analysis of *Wild Geese* construes "place" as mere geography, thus enabling a view of Caleb Gare as someone obsessed with "knowing [his] place" [24] only in his awareness of his surroundings, not of his relation to them. Through subjective inanimacy, place can be extended to include geology and conceptions of land. Caleb can be interpreted in two ways in this regard: as someone who controls inert land, and as one who is (without realizing it) formed from that same land, believing himself an active life-bringing antithesis. In the former case, Caleb is close to being one of the sacrificed, as his "very lifeforce is given over to the crops; he surrenders his power to them, and his energies are employed to support the growth and reproduction of the fields' plant populations." [25] In fact, his bodily and economic investment is societal; he is not working for any environment, but sacrificing himself, others, and eco-geological spaces for what could be considered an agricultural (and ideological) apparatus of the Canadian Prairies. This is described in passages that designate Caleb as "absorbed with the process of growth on the land he owned,

lending to it his own spirit like physical nourishment." [26] In actuality, what does not put the settler in a sacrificed position is his ownership over the land.

14 Caleb's farming is a transformative experience that enables "a transcendent power in this blue field of flax that lifted a man above the petty artifices of birth, life, and death. It was more exacting, even than an invisible God. It demanded not only the good in him but the evil and the indifference." [27] Such a passage perpetuates John Locke's Indigenous-killing and ecocidal notion that whoever *cultivates* the land owns it, [28] and René Descartes's view of the spirituality of material such as the land. [29] Caleb's farming practices can be analyzed through Donald Hall's theorization of the "muscular Christian body," which frames white masculinity as grounded in physical labor and moral superiority, often expressed through dominance over nature. This ideal ties the male body social, national, and religious hierarchies, where autonomy and strength are central. Caleb embodies this ideal in his relationship with the land, asserting control over it as a means of affirming his identity. Yet, Caleb's autonomy is paradoxical – his dominance over the land binds him to its relentless demands, undermining the very independence he seeks to maintain. The farmer is not simply a "male body [that] appears as a metaphor for social, national, and religious bodies," [30] it is an active rejection of the ties that a body has to physical elements, wherein the land becomes the very thing that allows transcendence from itself. Rather than living through intra-actions, where "it is the action between (and not in-between) that matters," [31] Caleb views his labor as a form of transcendence, equating his mastery over the land with a spiritual escape from the physical and moral constraints of life. Yet, this vision of transcendence relies on a rigid separation between himself and the land, an interaction where the land is reduced to an inanimate object of use. From this perspective, Caleb's attempt to transcend the land through dominance and control is fundamentally flawed. Rather than acknowledging the interdependence between himself and the land, Caleb rejects intra-action, situating himself as superior to it. My reading highlights the consequences of this rejection: Caleb's eventual death at the hands of the land reflects the failure of his asymmetrical worldview, where attributing inanimate qualities to the environment ultimately severs the mutuality required to sustain life.

15 While demonstrating a form of intra-action, Caleb still exists and operates in a manner that encourages inanimacy. This is evident in one description of Caleb:

> His tremendous shoulders and massive head, which loomed forward from the rest of his body like a rough projection of rock from the edge of a cliff, gave him a towering appearance. When attention was directed to the lower half of his body, he seemed visibly to dwindle. He had harsh gray hair [...], a weedy, tobacco-stained mustache, and [...] black brows that straggled together across the bridge of a heavy, bony nose. [32]

16 Ostenso establishes the land as something that cannot exist separately from the male farmer. In this perspective, the land must be counterbalanced and tamed by settlers – most clearly evidenced in Caleb's description as a man-nature farmer and by the revenge nature takes on him at the novel's climax. As his grasp on those he deems inanimate (his family, the farm, the people who live in his community) slips, so too does his grasp on the land, leading to his gruesome death being caused by the marsh "tugging at his feet [...] the strength of the earth was irresistible [and] drew him deeper." [33] Caleb's profound misunderstanding of the "radical asymmetries in the relationship of human beings to the earth and cosmos" [34] establishes how the land will be understood in relation to whether someone is deemed to belong on it according to the text and the characters within it. In his attempt to master *Terra Nullius* (or *Indigena Nullius*), Caleb sows the seeds for his own destruction, as he becomes one with that which he exploited.

Wild Geese and the Indigenous Palimpsest

17 This final section fully addresses how the Indigenous characters of *Wild Geese* are represented and framed in a way that mirrors and reinforces the theoretical concepts I develop throughout this article. Malcolm is a Cree-Scots character who, despite his mixed heritage, maintains a traditional Indigenous lifestyle that keeps him separate from white Canadian society, and his retreat into the wilderness suggests that he leaves the area to make way for homesteading. By

pushing half of her Indigenous characters past the margins of the text, Ostenso perpetuates a colonial logic of Indigenous erasure to legitimize settler claims to the land. However, the text sets the stage for resistance, as contemporary Indigenous critics might interpret Malcolm's connection to the wilderness as a symbolic assertion of sovereignty and resilience. This dual reading highlights the tension between Ostenso's literary project and the possibilities for Indigenous resurgence.

18 Such dynamics of emerging political identities can be seen through the other Indigenous character in *Wild Geese*: the mostly silent John Tobacco, a Cree mail carrier. Ostenso problematizes his existence through his implied complicity in the settler presence. This is evident when Lind and Mark "went to old John Tobacco and got an outfit of doeskin and feathers for Mark, and a costume for Lind ornate with beads and feathers"[35] for the harvest dance. John enables the couple's plan to dress up in attire that has been reduced to a costume for those who wish to impersonate a "dying" culture. Indicative of John's support for the perpetuation of a romanticized image of Indigenous culture, the scene has a sense of loss as it signifies the marginalized Cree man giving away the clothing of his past to a couple who represent the future of "civilization." Furthermore, the above "complicity" intersects with the muddled notions of inanimacy and subjectivity I raise. By enabling Lind and Mark's appropriation of Indigenous clothing, John Tobacco becomes a vehicle for settler narratives that portray Indigenous cultures as static and consumable. Tobacco is both present and marginalized, his agency constrained within the colonial framework that renders his culture as an artifact rather than a living entity. His role evokes the paradox of inanimacy, where Indigenous people are recognized (as culture-bearers) and erased (as active agents). Thus, Tobacco's actions highlight the tension between forced participation in settler projects and the imposed inanimacy that silences resistance and reconfigures subjectivity into a colonial construct.

19 This raises concerns about the power dynamics between settlers and Indigenous peoples, and how the former appropriate aspects of the latter's culture to validate their own presence. Transferring clothing from the Indigenous proprietors to settlers mirrors the dispossession of land. This act also suggests a form of approval from Tobacco, as his

actions tacitly endorse the settler duo and their continued presence in the region. Through "[the] lovers' symbolic indigenization under the approving eye of John Tobacco," [36] the couple claims the land, as their inculturation represents a declaration of their natural belonging to the territory. By virtue of their new "Indigenous"-like status, the couple transcends the classification of settler in the same power-driven sense as Caleb is regarded as a settler-invader. Furthermore, in line with Stephanie Nohelani Teves' essay "Indigeneity and Performance" (2021), the costumes emancipate Lind and Mark from the conventions of the community, [37] and Tobacco's blessing affords the couple the opportunity to live in amity upon Indigenous land.

20 Turning to a more focused examination of how *Wild Geese* contributes to dispossession in both planetary and literary contexts, I want to approach this through Patrick Wolfe's idea that "the primary motive for [Indigenous] elimination […] [is] access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element." [38] While this may appear contradictory to the arguments thus far presented, which assert that the land is assimilated into the settler rather than obliterated, a passage from *Wild Geese* illustrates how this dynamic functions:

> While he was raptly considering the tender field of flax – now in blue flower – [his wife] Amelia did not exist to him. […] Caleb would stand for long moments outside the fence beside the flax. Then he would turn quickly to see that no one was looking. He would creep between the wires and run his hand across the flowering, gentle tops of the growth. A stealthy caress – more intimate than any he had ever given. [39]

21 Caleb's sole focus on his flax crop as the means to demonstrate his success reveals his unrelenting obsession with power and greed. His daily inspection of the fields covertly manifests his desire, but his preoccupation highlights his fixation with the physical manifestation of his achievements as a farmer, and not any sentimental attachment to the crop or the land itself.

22 Caleb's interaction with the flax field underscores the tension between his desire for possession and an unacknowledged longing for bodily pleasure. This duality reflects the muscular Christian ethos

discussed earlier, wherein physical labor and mastery over the land are moralized as virtuous acts that reinforce settler identity. Caleb's "stealthy caress" of the flax blurs the boundary between possession and pleasure, revealing an intimate connection to the land that is both deeply personal and entirely self-serving. His fixation on the crop as a marker of his success reduces it to a symbol of his dominance, yet the physical act of running his hand over the flowering tops exposes a sensual, almost reverential engagement. This reflects the broader settler-colonial dynamic wherein the land is simultaneously revered for its generative capacities and subjugated to human control.

23 The violence pervading the novel is inflicted upon those characters linked to the land. This hostility is directed towards Caleb himself, as he becomes increasingly isolated from his family, and towards his daughter Judith, who has an intimate connection with the land and understands "how knowing the bare earth was, as if it might have a heart and a mind hidden here in the woods."[40] Judith's complicity lies in the way she sexualizes the landscape and "makes love" to/on it, reinforcing another way she takes possession of the land while being taken by it. This dynamic reflects colonial constructions of land as a female, eroticized body ready to be claimed. As Indigenous feminist scholars like Leanne Betasamosake Simpson have noted,[41] such depictions perpetuate the settler project by framing land as an object of sexual conquest and erasing its inherent agency and relationality. I would argue that Judith's position is part of a larger reinforcement of bodily aggression that the novel further perpetuates against Indigenous peoples, who are rendered invisible in this notion of the land as something that has been conquered through its appropriation by the settlers. This is particularly evident in the portrayal of Malcolm, a minor character who is identified as "Scotch, with Cree blood two generations back, and had been Caleb Gare's hired man."[42] While the Scottish ancestry of Malcolm is highlighted as more genetically significant than his Cree heritage, his role as a helper on a settler farm underscores the novel's larger theme of erasing the Indigenous presence from the land.

24 The novel even reproduces the relation to the flax field Caleb demonstrates, but with Malcolm as the central figure:

> His eyes roved admiringly over the rich flax, and around northward to the acres of luxuriant tame hay and rye grass. Caleb Gare was a prosperous man. A mean man, he knew, but his children would live after him – his children would be established in comfort for the rest of their lives on this land – and he, Malcolm, was a wanderer, hearing ever a call in the wind, a summons to far lakes and lonely forests. [43]

25 The reader is thus a witness to the construction of inanimacy directed at the most prominent Native character, a framing that reflects settler narratives seeking to render Indigenous figures as passive relics of a vanishing past. Yet, this inanimacy operates not as a neutral depiction but as a colonial mechanism to undermine the subversive potential of nomadic movement, which inherently destabilizes settler claims to the land. Malcolm's rights to the land are revoked because of his connection to it. Similar to the mistreatment Caleb inflicts on the nature-loving Judith, he applies a comparable logic to Malcolm, who is doubly impacted as he is feminized by being described in similar terms as Judith. The novel's logic mandates that Natives be linked to the land of which they are being dispossessed, as they "are typically represented as unsettled, nomadic, rootless, etc., in settler-colonial discourse." [44] Malcolm is explicitly depicted as a paradox. He is a man who desires and embodies the very things that Caleb possesses. Yet, he cannot possibly have them because his embodiment of those qualities renders him perpetually excluded from the structures of ownership and power that Caleb represents. In a final act of dispossession, Caleb demonstrates how little Malcolm can own for himself by reducing him to the one thing that the farmer can fully control: the land.

Conclusion

26 Martha Ostenso fails to acknowledge Indigenous people and their political orders. However, her depiction suggests an awareness of a form of sovereignty embedded in their lands. This tension reflects the limits of her narrative's engagement with Indigenous presence and agency. Moving to Manitoba, she had written that "*Wild Geese*, lay there, waiting to be put into words". [45] This may be generously interpreted as Ostenso attributing agency to the land, suggesting it exists as something exterior to human action. However, the notion

that the land is merely waiting to be lived on undermines such a reading, as it culturally discounts the land's inherent agency and relational vitality. This gave the novel the status of "writing that engaged with the power […] of the Canadian landscape […] [making it] central to the national literature."[46] That centrality invokes "grander narratives that overshadow how the novel's hyper-local social arrangements [such as Indigenous-land relations, for example] exceed the settlers' schemes."[47] At best, it is a renewed contact with a sacred land otherwise represented as fallen, while insisting that behind such a reality, is a realm of larger (i.e. colonial) forces.

27 This essay traced *Wild Geese*'s perpetuation of subjective inanimacy, reducing both the land and Indigenous figures to passive objects within a settler-colonial framework. However, the analysis offered here highlights the potential for a decolonizing counter-reading, one that challenges these constructed silences and foregrounds the agency of the land and its Indigenous custodians. By reading the sexualized landscape as a decolonizing subject, a different narrative emerges – one where the land's vitality resists its reduction to inert matter. The sensuality of the Prairies, often depicted as an object of settler possession, can instead be interpreted as an assertion of its own dynamic power, refusing to conform to the extractive and patriarchal desires imposed upon it. Similarly, Indigenous characters such as Malcolm and John, though marginalized in the text, embody movements and actions that resist settler constructions of inanimacy. This counter-reading invites an interrogation of *Wild Geese* as a site of colonial tension, where even the textual reinforcement of dispossession reveals traces of the resistance it seeks to erase. By recognizing the sexualized landscape and marginalized Indigenous figures as active participants in these narratives, we begin to reframe subjective inanimacy not as an endpoint but as a contested space where decolonizing possibilities emerge. In this way, *Wild Geese* can be situated within a broader effort to critique and dismantle the colonial frameworks that underpin its literary and eco-geological representations.

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ABSTRACTS

English
This paper challenges the misconceptions *Wild Geese* perpetuates about settler relations to the land as being oppositional. Instead, *Wild Geese* participates in Canada's ecocidal project by constructing "subjective inanimacy" in its settler characters and the land, conflating Indigenous presence with the inanimate. I argue that Ostenso presents matter as self-generative in its quest for meaning. This analysis explores how colonial possession is narrated, as characters and storylines embody the matter they desire, illustrating how narrative creation shapes environmental conceptions, driving ecocide and dispossession.

Français
Cet article remet en question les idées fausses que *Wild Geese* perpétue sur les relations coloniales avec la terre comme étant oppositionnelles. *Wild Geese* participe plutôt au projet écocidal canadien en construisant une « inanimité subjective » chez ses personnages colonisateurs et dans la terre, confondant la présence autochtone avec l'inanimé. Je soutiens qu'Ostenso présente la matière comme autogénératrice dans sa quête de sens. Cette analyse explore la manière dont la possession coloniale est racontée, à mesure que les personnages et les intrigues incarnent la matière qu'ils désirent, illustrant comment la création narrative façonne les conceptions environnementales, conduisant à l'écocide et à la dépossession.

Español
Este artículo desafía las ideas erróneas que *Wild Geese* perpetúa sobre las relaciones coloniales con la tierra como una oposición. En cambio, *Wild Geese* participa del proyecto ecocida de Canadá al construir una "inanimidad subjetiva" en sus personajes colonizadores y la tierra, confundiendo la presencia indígena con lo inanimado. Sostengo que Ostenso presenta la materia como autogenerativa en su búsqueda de significado. Este análisis explora cómo se narra la posesión colonial, a medida que los personajes y las historias encarnan la materia que desean, ilustrando cómo la creación narrativa da forma a las concepciones ambientales, impulsando el ecocidio y el despojo.

INDEX

Mots-clés
inanimité subjective, autochtonie, néo-matérialisme, littérature canadienne, éco-géologies

Keywords
subjective inanimacy, indigenous, new materialism, Canadian literature, eco-geologies

Palabras claves
inanimidad subjetiva, indígena, nuevo materialismo, literatura canadiense, eco-geologías

AUTHOR

Patrick Aura
Université de Montréal (Québec, Canada)

A Postcolonial study of *Aranyak*: *Of the Forest* (1939) by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay: An Ecocidal Fiction of Colonial India's Indigenous Lands

*Une étude postcoloniale d'*Aranyak: Of the Forest *(1939) écrit par Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay. Une fiction écocidaire des terres indigènes de l'Inde coloniale*

Un estudio postcolonial de Aranyak: Of the Forest *(1939) escrito par Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay – Una ficción ecocidiaria de las tierras indígenas de la India colonial*

Mallika Bala and Madhumita Roy

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OUTLINE

Introduction
Ecocide and Deforestation of the Indigenous Lands in *Aranyak*
Conflicting Views on Environmentalism
Anthropocenic and Capitalocenic Impacts on the Forest
A Critique of Wilderness Narratives
Conclusion

TEXT

Introduction

1 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's novel *Aranyak* (1939) is one of the earliest eco-conscious fictions of India. It was originally written in Bengali and later translated in English by Rimli Bhattacharya in 2017 as *Aranyak: Of the Forest*. Environmental consciousness was scarcely seen in novels during Bandyopadhyay's time. *Aranyak* was written during the time of the British colonial period, yet it demonstrates an awareness of ecological issues prior to the rise of environmentalism as a widespread social and political force. For

environmental welfare to take effect or even to be generated in the first place, a climate of transformed environmental values and perception is required. To that end, the power of stories, images, and artistic performances, as well as the resources of aesthetics, ethics, and cultural aspects are crucial. As the ecological crisis increases, emotional responses soar with it.

2 *Aranyak* is an Indian novel that represents one response Indigenous people had towards colonial India's deforestation process. It is also an Indian wilderness narrative, influenced by western texts such as Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854),[1] while being seeped with local Indian specific concerns. The novel depicts a mosaic of human lives composed of Indigenous peoples, nomads, vagabonds, poets, and moneylenders who are all interconnected with the wilderness. It powerfully demonstrates how the forest's destruction threatened the survival of these diverse groups. I argue that this narrative of ecocide predominantly portrays the Global North's deep environmentalism, although an undercurrent of Global South's utility-based environmentalism can be discerned. This article explores the ecocide of Indigenous lands through alternative perspectives on environmentalism that critique traditional wilderness narratives and analyze the interconnectedness of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene.

Ecocide and Deforestation of the Indigenous Lands in *Aranyak*

3 In *Aranyak*, the narrator Satyacharan comes to the Indigenous jungle area because he needs a job to survive and his only available option is to take up a job as a tax collector in a jungle[2] owned by his friend's father, a large forest estate set on Santal and Gond peoples' land in British Colonial India. He hates the desolate wilderness at first, calling it an uncivilized land inhabited by "barbarian"[3] people, while gradually getting addicted to the beauty of the jungles as he ends up overseeing its destruction. *Aranyak* can be read as a tale of confession and remorse. The novel indeed begins with the narrator's confession of the crimes he committed against the forest.

4 The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) does not define the term "Indigenous." [4] However, *Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Human Rights System*, Fact Sheet No. 9 Rev. 2, defines Indigeneity with terms such as self-identification, historical continuity with pre-invasion/pre-colonial societies, distinct cultures and social organizations, as well as vulnerability. [5] Neither the British government of colonial days nor the present-day Indian government have officially recognized any specific section of their population as "Indigenous." For administrative purposes, the Indian government utilizes the term "Scheduled Tribe" to designate certain communities for constitutional privileges, protection, and benefits, acknowledging their historical disadvantage and social upheavals. Article 342 of the Indian Constitution empowers the President to specify that a community is a Scheduled Tribe, while Parliament retains the authority to include or exclude communities from this list. [6] In common understanding, Scheduled Tribes are often equated with Indigenous groups in India. A formal definition of "tribe" or "Indigenous" remains elusive. Furthermore, as caste identity frequently overlaps with tribal identity, making clear distinctions between them can be challenging. "Indigenous people" and "tribe" are often used interchangeably in this article, highlighting the fluidity of these two social categories.

5 *Aranyak* foregrounds the complex socio-cultural landscape of rural colonial India through its representation of diverse marginalized communities, including established Indigenous groups and lower caste populations. Specifically, the narrative incorporates the Santal [7] and Gond, [8] recognized as Adivasi communities for their distinct cultural traditions and historical relationships to the land. Furthermore, the novel also mentions lower caste groups, such as the Gangota (specializing in farming and animal husbandry [9]), Ahir, [10] Dosadh, [11] and Kalaor, [12] whose social position is often characterized by economic precarity and historical oppression. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge the frequent fluidity between Indigenous identity and caste affiliation in the Indian context. The inclusion of these diverse groups allows the novel to explore themes of land rights, social hierarchy, and the persistent legacies of historical marginalization.

6 *Aranyak* delves deeply into the intricate relationship between Indigenous communities and their land. The novel portrays the forest as more than just a geographical space as it is deeply intertwined with Indigenous cultural identity, spiritual beliefs, and social structures. The novel highlights how deforestation disrupts their intricate balance with the environment, forcing them to adapt to unfamiliar and often exploitative economic models such as farming and working as migrant laborers. Deforestation depletes traditional resources, compelling Indigenous communities to migrate to survive through low-wage agricultural labor in upper caste communities' corn, mustard, and wheat fields.

7 In *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (2004), Alfred Crosby explains how European settlers introduced and/or curated animals and plants in the colonies for their own profit. Colonizers also brought fatal diseases with them. European settlers and their plants, animals, and diseases destroyed the original flora and fauna of their colonies. [13] Although this theory can be applied to describe the ecocides as well as human hecatombs which occurred in North and South America as well as Oceania, in dense tropical and subtropical lands of India, changing the entire ecosystem was not an easy task for British colonial masters, which led them to adopt a different strategy. Colonial presence drastically changed the land usage system of India. Instead of changing the entire ecosystem, the British colonial system changed the economy, land, and forest usage, as well as food production by coercing and/or seducing their subjects to drive them into farming cash crops such as indigo, opium, and jute. By the middle of the 17th century, Britain emerged as the world leader of deforestation. After destroying their own forests in the UK, British colonizers focused on their colonies' forests for the supply of timber, coal, and other resources for business, on top of making railways and ships. [14] The most obvious outcome of colonialism was its global control over resources. Although the colonial presence is not the explicit focus of the novel under study, multiple references to the British Raj are scattered throughout *Aranyak*. The major example is the revenue system of the forest land as well as the narrator's education and feeling of moral superiority stemming from his British colonial education. Indeed, he belongs to the colonial elite class

created by the British through the imposition of the English education system.[15]

8 In *Aranyak*, acre after acre of forest are cut off to tame, control, and transform woodland into settler areas and agricultural lands by order of a *zamindar*[16] (land holder), who, in exchange, receives regular taxes from settlers. British colonial rulers are not seen as the profit-making party here but ultimately, the taxes and revenue of the land filter towards them as they officially own this land. The narrator oversees the deforestation of the forestlands which partially belong to the Indigenous population. The Indigenous community is recognizable by its political autonomy, isolation, and self-reliant economy. Yet, hardly any Indian Indigenous group falls in this category, as isolation is a myth. The forest land is the richest store of resources thereby, which explains why colonial agents were attracted to this land to exploit more and more resources for business.

9 Alfred Crosby's idea of ecological imperialism could also be applied as a framework through which to read the actions of the narrator Satyacharan and his friend Jugalprasad. Jugalprasad is an eccentric man who has one purpose in his life – beautifying the jungles and mountains.[17] Both men bring flower saplings from cities and outside to make the forest look beautiful in their own terms. As Jugalprasad said:

> I had seen a wonderful English creeper in a saheb's garden in Purnea: it had lovely red flowers. This seed is of that creeper… the forests here don't have these species of flowers and creepers. I'm planting them now; in another two years they will come up and start flowering. How nice it will look.[18]

10 "Saheb," in this context, refers to a British person. Both men's attempt at beautifying the forest can be perceived as a great aesthetic move when seen through the colonial gaze, but this enterprise heavily contributes to eliminating local species. Beautifying the jungle according to colonially inspired aesthetic tastes disregarding the local ecosystem, destroys and replaces it with different species, exemplifying imperial ecocide. The narrator also orders seeds and plants from a British Indian company named "Sutton Seed Company" to later spread them in the jungle:

> That year, I had English wildflowers ordered from the Sutton Seeds Company in Calcutta and the wild jui creeper brought from the Duars range and had them planted in great numbers in the forest around Sarawati kundi [...] I picked out the colourful and attractive ones. Amongst these, the white beam, red campion and the stichwort showed exceptional progress; the foxgloves and the wood anemones did not do too badly either; but despite our best efforts, the dog-roses and the honeysuckle could not be saved.[19]

11 This passage also illustrates a kind of ecological invasion on local ecology. The creepers and plants, that the male characters introduce in the wild, very soon invade the locality. When cataloguing plants and animals living in the wilderness, the narrator uses either Bengali names instead of local Indigenous words to adhere to the culturally dominant language or invents a name for them altogether. He does not use the local names of most species, erasing the plants' original names in the process.

Conflicting Views on Environmentalism

12 Environmentalism is fundamentally different whether applied in the Global North or in the Global South, as these two approaches do not address the issues of nature, environment, and preservation in the same way. In *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South* (1997), Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez Alier argue that the Global North grew conscious about the wilderness of nature in post-industrial era and tried to preserve it for the ultimate luxury of the upper-middle-class consumers.[20] Environmentalism in the Global North is interested in the preservation of nature and the wild. The Wilderness Movement, focusing on the preservation of pristine untouched nature, began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, primarily in the United States. Inspired by the Romantic and Transcendentalist work of William Wordsworth, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold amidst others, this movement was a reaction to growing concerns over rapid industrialization and urbanization that were threatening vast tracts of natural land.

13 Environmental movements in the Global South, particularly in a country like India, emerged as a direct response to the negative ecological consequences resulting from development initiatives after India became independent from the British Raj in 1947. Large-scale industrialization, deforestation, and the displacement of people often led to visible ecological damage, pollution, soil erosion, and the destruction of forests. These tangible consequences of development directly affected the livelihoods and well-being of local communities, prompting them to mobilize and demand environmental justice. [21] In 1973, the Chipko movement in the Himalayan forests, for example, emerged as a response to the destruction of forests for timber extraction. Local women embraced trees to prevent their felling, highlighting the interconnectedness between the environmental protection of their land and the survival of their communities. Similarly, in 1985, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (i.e. Save the Narmada River Movement) arose following the construction of a large dam that threatened to displace hundreds of thousands of people and cause significant environmental damage. Environmental movements in India – and the Global South more broadly – are often rooted in the lived experiences of people who are directly affected by environmental degradation. Their struggles are not merely about preserving nature for its aesthetic, ecological, or intrinsic value, but about ensuring the survival and well-being of their communities.

14 Bandyopadhyay's novel is set in pre-independent India. Yet, I argue that early consciousness regarding ecocidal consequences is perceptible in the novel. The forest land is used by the Indigenous people and lower caste (mostly Gangota caste and various tribes) for grazing cattle and cultivating lac insects. [22] These agricultural practices were the primary sources of survival for most people then, to which hunting and gathering could be added. For the sake of their own survival, the tribal and lower caste people were motivated to preserve the forest. [23] The motive behind their environmental protection is not planetary consciousness or deep ecology, but their own survival. This kind of environmentalism is called "empty belly environmentalism" by Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier. According to them, the environmentalism of Third World countries is driven by the marginalized people whose livelihood depends on forests and other natural resources. Indeed, if large-scale

environmental degradation happens, their livelihood will get affected and they will be the first group impacted. As they mention:

> The environmentalisms of the poor, we argue, originate in social conflicts over access to and control over natural resources: conflicts between peasants and industry over forest produce, for example, or between rural and urban populations over water and energy. Many social conflicts often have an ecological content, with the poor trying to retain under their control the natural resources threatened by state takeover or by the advance of the generalized market system.[24]

15 As he belongs to a privileged background, the narrator of the novel *Aranyak* very often shares thoughts which evoke the "deep ecological" theories and western concepts of environmentalism. What motivates him to save the forest is the forest's intrinsic value and its aesthetics. Subsequently, after the forest is lost, the narrator does not recount the fate of these people who lived and were dependent on the forest's resources for survival. By comparison, Indigenous and caste communities suffer much more severely than the narrator as he only regrets the loss of beauty.

16 Conceiving and experiencing "nature" from a different angle due to his class prejudices, the narrator describes nature as a beautiful fairyland, unaffected by survival issues. Satyacharan follows the common rhetoric of retreat from the civilized world and city life, falling in love with nature's beauty:

> I began to feel that I would not be able to return to the hurly-burly of Calcutta forsaking the vast tracts of forestland, the fresh fragrance of the sun-scorched earth and the freedom and the liberation they represent [...] her beauty unveiled: evenings came wearing a crown of bloody clouds; the searing afternoon in the guise of a mad Bhairavi; or draped in moonlight and wearing the cool and pure fragrance of wild flowers, in the depths of night came the beautiful muse of music, wearing around her neck a garland of stars; and, on moonless nights appeared the immense form of Kali, wielding the flaming blade that was Orion, the radiance extending into space.[25]

17 In this passage, the narrator employs Romantic ideals by emphasizing the sublime aspects and his renewed connection with nature. The

awe-inspiring descriptions of celestial phenomena (i.e. “crown of bloody clouds,” “flaming blade that was Orion”) evoke the sublime, a concept central to Romanticism that emphasizes the overwhelming power and beauty of nature, often experienced as a transcendent and even spiritual encounter. Satyacharan finds solace and inspiration in the natural world, suggesting a deeper connection to the universe and a rejection of the artificiality of urban life.

18 The use of different literary devices, such as pathos, personification, and mythical imagery, further contributes to the Romantic aesthetic. By imbuing natural elements with human characteristics (i.e. “evenings came wearing a crown,” “the searing afternoon in the guise of a mad Bhairavi”), the passage animates the natural world, suggesting a deeper, more profound relationship between humans and their environment. The invocation of Hindu deities like Bhairavi [26] and Kali [27] adds a layer of mysticism and connects the experience of nature to the spiritual realm – a key aspect of Romantic thought too.

19 Where the narrator is seen romanticizing nature, the actual inhabitants of the land find it cruel due to continuous severe drought, scarcity of food, cholera, and other epidemic diseases, attacks from wild animals, such as tigers, wild boars, wild buffaloes, etc. The locals constantly struggle:

> No simple language would be equal to portraying the face of this fearful natural calamity [...] all the water in the jungle ran dry – ponds, ditches, canals or any fair-sized body of water. There was no water to be had even if you dug a well; if some little water did manage to seep through the sand into the well, it took over an hour for water enough to fill a small bucket to collect inside the well. [28]

20 Benefiting from his privileged administrative role, the narrator readily adapts to life in the wild. By contrast, the local populace, particularly the most impoverished, face continuous struggles arising from a combination of factors, including the exploitation of their land and resources by moneylenders and the upper caste, as well as the challenges posed by adverse natural conditions.

21 The relation Indigenous people have with the forest land fashions their distinct eco-consciousness. Agriculture in settled land is not

their preferred means of livelihood as it is forbidden in their culture. Their means off livelihood is hunting-gathering but hunting is never used as a means of entertainment. They take pride in hunting with spears but hunting with guns is seen as derogatory and offensive. When the narrator asks an Indigenous person about their farming habits, the clan member replies:

> "That sort of thing is forbidden to our race," Dobru Panna replied with some pride. "The greatest honour lies in hunting, and of that, there was a time when hunting with spears was considered the most prestigious. Hunting with bows and arrows does not appease the gods, it is not something a brave does."[29]

22 No major organized environmentalist movement resulted in conservation of the wilderness in India. India was a British colony during the novel's timeline. The administrator and the owners were bound to generate more taxes and revenue from the land. It was obvious that the colonial masters would not want to save the jungle for aesthetic purposes or ecological biodiversity when the forestland could generate so much income. Contrary to local cultural customs, the forestland was turned into agricultural farmlands to produce cash crops that generated revenue.

Anthropocenic and Capitalocenic Impacts on the Forest

23 The anthropocentric worldview, prioritizing human needs above all else, has driven our planet to the brink of ecological collapse. Our survival now hinges on shifting towards a post-anthropocentric perspective that recognizes the interconnectedness of all lives. Ecological concerns are not new phenomena. From the ancient *Epic of Gilgamesh* dating back to the Sumerian Civilization to the 20th-century novel *Aranyak*, a recurring pattern can be highlighted: civilizations built on foundations of violence, unchecked consumption, pollution, deforestation, and disregard for the natural world, ultimately sow the seeds of their own destruction.

24 When the Deep Environmentalist movement emerged as a reaction to anthropocentrism, it called for a radical reevaluation of the

relationship between human beings, non-human beings, and the environment. The term "Deep Ecology" was coined by Arne Naess in his 1973 article "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary." [30] Deep Ecology staunchly rejects the idea of human centeredness and calls for the preservation and protection of every species. This ideology claims to preserve the richness and diversity of life in all forms, regardless of human needs. Deep Ecology also has limits, though, as it can sometimes downplay the interconnectedness of environmental issues with social and economic inequalities, potentially neglecting the environmental burdens disproportionately borne by marginalized communities.

25 To critique the concept of anthropocentrism, Donna Haraway in her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2022) develops the concept of the Capitalocene, even though this term was first coined by Andreas Malm in 2009 in a seminar at Lund University, [31] Sweden. The current environmental crisis is not a result of inherent human flaws, but rather a consequence of the capitalist system's relentless pursuit of profit. For her, the concept of the Capitalocene emphasizes capitalism as the primary driver of ecological destruction, and highlights how this system, through its exploitation of both humans and nature, has led to widespread environmental degradation. The concepts of the "Anthropocene" and the "Capitalocene" highlight the human impact on climate change, fostering a sense of despair and determinism. Donna Haraway proposes the idea of the "Chthulucene" instead, a framework that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and their environments. The Indigenous cultures depicted in *Aranyak*, especially the clan of Old King Dobru Panna, can be seen as inherently Chthuluceneic due to their deep-rooted understanding of interconnectedness. They often recognize symbiotic relationships within ecosystems, placing humans as part of a larger web of life, not above it.

26 In *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), Timothy Morton argues that the traditional concept of nature as something separate from humanity hinders effective environmental action. [32] He proposes a new framework, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living beings within a complex mesh. Morton also contends that the idea of pristine wilderness is a myth, and that acknowledging our integral

role within the natural world is crucial. From the very beginning of the novel, Satyacharan's sense of environmental preservation is motivated by a fetishized attachment for one particular landscape. His idealized vision therefore prevents the forest's environmental well-being. [33] As an outsider, he is the only character to find nature mysterious, dark, exotic, and beautiful. The natives of the forestland, the Indigenous people, and the lower caste people are not amazed by the forest as they coexist with nature without fetishizing it. In the text, people from tribal backgrounds do not wonder at the sight of pristine nature as it is part of their everyday life. However, they do wonder at the thought of city life. Cars especially fascinate them: "I went to Bhagalpur once – quite a city, that. I've seen the wind-run cars there: such strange things they are… No horses, nothing, and they move along the road by themselves." [34] This quote from *Aranyak* challenges the assumption that sublime nature universally evokes awe. It suggests that perceptions are shaped by unique experiences and environments. This challenges the romanticized notion of Indigenous peoples as inherently connected to nature, highlighting instead the diversity of human experiences and values within different cultural contexts.

A Critique of Wilderness Narratives

27 The wilderness is often referred to as "virgin land." It is often imagined as uninhibited by humans and secluded. This concept constructs nature as uncontaminated by civilization, adding a sacramental value to it, and promising a renewed relation between humans and nature. In his landmark article "The Trouble With Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" (1996), William Cronon contests the sublimity of the wilderness and argues that the sublimity of wilderness is a recent invention. [35] The idea of a pristine wilderness was created to serve the needs of a western urban privileged and consumerist society who have the leisure and resources to take a break from their work and escape to the countryside to enjoy its beauty. It also shows the commodification of nature as leisure. The wilderness is not a natural state then, but a man-made construct resulting from an urban/rural dichotomy. In

Aranyak, urban privileged people come to the wild for leisure. They are not seen experiencing the wilderness though, as they keep their same urban habits of polluting the spaces they live in. They leave tin cans of condensed milk and jam as well as garbage behind them. They also come to the forest to hunt for their own entertainment, angering the narrator in the process. [36]

28 William Cronon argues that the characterization of the American wilderness as "desolate" in many historical accounts and narratives are inaccurate as these accounts ignore the significant presence of Indigenous peoples, themselves imagined as "Red Indians" by western settlers. Very often, the narrator of *Aranyak* also refers to the forest land as a desolate and lonely space, [37] when, in reality, the land is filled with Indigenous people. By calling the land "*Terra Nullius*," he negates their presence in the jungle. However, it is important to acknowledge that Indigenous peoples were practicing forms of land stewardship for thousands of years before the formalized Wilderness Movement began.

29 Diverse types of forestlands are recognized in Indian literature and cultures, recognizing forests' varying degrees of density, their proximity to human habitation, and association with cultural significance. [38] These degrees are *āraṇya*, *vana*, and *upavana*. *Āraṇya* is the deepest form of forests, where human presence is minimal and only sages dwell there for acquiring spiritual wisdom. *Vana* denotes a less dense forest type, often described as a grove of trees. This term is often associated with exile (*vanavāsa*) or as a place of retreat from societal obligations. *Upavana* is the transitional zone between the wild and the domesticated *gramyā* (village). [39]

30 The title of Bandyopadhyay's novel therefore derives from ancient India's main collection of Hindu religious texts named *Vedas* composed between 1500 and 500 BCE. *Vedas* comprise four parts (*Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *and Atharva Veda*) and each part is itself divided into four sections (*Samhita*, *Brahmana*, *Aranyaka*, *and Upanishad*). The section of *Vedas* that were created in *aranya* (dense forests) are called "*aranyaka*" which means "of the forest." According to Arthur Berriedale Keith, "*Aranyak*" was thus named because the discussions contained in these works were to be studied in the forest by ascetics and sages living in forests, or were intended

to be studied in the "*vanaprastha*" phase of life [40] when people retire from domestic life to the forest to gain spiritual wisdom. The novel *Aranyak* draws its name from the "*Aranyakas*," ancient Indian texts often studied in the seclusion of forests. This title reflects the author's profound reverence for the forest (*aranya*), which is viewed as sacred. In the prologue, the narrator starts his story in these terms: "I have heard that to confess a crime in one's own words lightens somewhat the burden of the crime. Therefore, this story." [41] The novel *Aranyak* thus explores how the ecological destruction of the forest is deeply entangled with the guilt associated with harming the sacred space, as the protagonist repeatedly confesses his remorse at having participated in the destruction of the forest from the very first chapter of the novel.

Conclusion

31 To conclude, this article on Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak*, highlighting a form of ecocide on Indigenous lands, challenges conventional wilderness narratives and illuminates the crucial link between the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene. By examining the novel through the lens of alternative environmental perspectives, this article brings up a more nuanced understanding of the complex forces driving environmental destruction in the specific context of colonial India. *Aranyak*, written in the 1930s, offers a poignant portrayal of the devastating impact of deforestation on the lives of Indigenous communities, nomadic groups, and other marginalized populations deeply connected to the natural world. Moving beyond idealized and often romanticized visions of untouched wilderness, this analysis focuses on how *Aranyak* portrays the lived experiences of those directly affected by environmental degradation. The novel reveals the interconnectedness between human lives and the forest ecosystem, demonstrating how the destruction of the forest disrupts not only ecological balance but also social structures, cultural practices, and economic livelihoods. This article argues that *Aranyak* provides a valuable historical perspective on the intertwined histories of colonialism, capitalism, and environmental destruction. By analyzing the novel through the frameworks of both Global North's deep environmentalism and the more utilitarian environmental perspectives often associated with the

Global South, this article studies the multiplicity of values and motivations that shape human interactions with nature. *Aranyak* demonstrates how the colonial drive for resource extraction, fueled by capitalist expansion, led to the exploitation of Indigenous lands and the disruption of traditional ways of life. Ultimately, this analysis underscores the need for a more critical and inclusive approach to environmentalism, one that recognizes the historical and ongoing injustices embedded within ecological crises, and centers the voices and perspectives of those most affected.

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1 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, Boston, Boston Ticknor and Fields, 1854, pp. 148 and 339.

2 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak: Of the Forest*, transl. Rimli Bhattacharya, Calcutta, Seagull Books, 2017, p. 8.

3 Ibid., p. 9.

4 United Nations, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, New York, United Nations, 2008.

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6 Government of India, *The Constitution of India*, New Delhi, Government of India Press, 1949.

7 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, pp. 60 and 148.

8 Ibid., pp. 165 and 242.

9 Ibid., pp. 23 and 120.

10 Ibid., pp. 79 and 92.

11 Ibid., p. 41.

12 Ibid., p. 50.

13 Alfred Worcester Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. xviii.

14 Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, Oxford and Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 117-121.

15 Aziz Rahman et al., "The British Art of Colonialism in India: Subjugation and Division," *Peace and Conflict Studies*, vol. 25, No. 1, 2018, pp. 7-12.

16 The Zamindari system was the administrative-social formation through which the superior landholders extracted agricultural revenues for the Mughal and English East India Company states in 18th century Bengal. See John R. McLane, *Land and Local Kingship in Eighteenth-Century Bengal*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 8.

17 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, p. 108.

18 Ibid., p. 108.

19 Ibid., p. 108: *Jui* is a Bengali name given to a white flower of the Jasmine species. The bionomical name of *Jui* is "*Jasminum auriculatum*" in Latin. *Kundi* refers to a small lake or a water body.

20 Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South*. London and New York, Earthscan Publication, 1997, p. 18.

21 Ibid., p. 20.

22 *Kerriidae* is a family of scale insect, commonly known as "lac insect." These insects secrete a waxy resin that is harvested and converted to be used in various dyes, wood finishing varnishes, and polishes.

23 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, p. 212.

24 Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism*, p. xxi.

25 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, pp. 20-21.

26 David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986, p. 163. Bhairavi is a Hindu warrior Goddess who has a reddish complexion. She often wears a garland of severed heads, holds a rosary and a book in two of her four hands, and makes the signs of fearlessness while conferring boons with her other two hands. Her breasts are smeared with blood.

27 David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, p. 116. The goddess Kali is almost always described as having a terrible, frightening appearance. She is always black or dark. Her body is usually naked, and displays long, disheveled hair. She is usually shown on the battlefield where she is a furious combatant who gets drunk on the hot blood of her victims, or in a cremation ground where she sits on a corpse surrounded by jackals and goblins.

28 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, p. 32.

29 Ibid., p. 152.

30 Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary," *Inquiry. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 16, 1973, pp. 95-100.

31 Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 184.

32 Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 125.

33 Ibid., p. 1.

34 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, p. 24.

35 William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History*, vol. 1, No. 1, 1996, pp. 7-28.

36 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, pp. 184-185.

37 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, pp. 63, 65, and 114.

38 Meera Baindur, *Nature in Indian Philosophy and Cultural Traditions*, New Delhi, Springer, 2015, p. 110.

39 Ibid., p. 111

40 Arthur Berriedale Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University Press, 1925, pp. 489-490.

41 Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay, *Aranyak*, p. 4.

ABSTRACTS

English

The article intends to present a postcolonial ecocritical study of Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's novel *Aranyak: Of the Forest* (1939). This novel is one of the earliest fictions to portray the deforestation occurring on the Indigenous lands of the Santal in India during the British colonial period. This article also tries to study the conception, representation, and understanding of nature in different strata of the colonial Indian society. *Aranyak* is concerned with nature being violated by exploitative practices, as well as processes of ecocides and deforestation in Indigenous forest lands. The perception of nature and the ideological views on how to preserve forests are drastically different among the characters who show differing views on environmentalism. In western culture, religion, and philosophy, humans are usually considered the center of the universe, but in the Indigenous Indian context, humans, in this shared world, are not at the center of the universe but part of the planetary consciousness. The different approaches to environmentalism developed by various characters in the ecofiction will be studied in detail. The article will also focus on the concepts and representations of wilderness, deforestation, colonial influence, and capitalism. The current climate crisis proves the non-functionality of anthropocentrism. Therefore, there is a need for an alternative, all-encompassing worldview of nature where humans are not a be-all and end-all but a part of a greater planetary consciousness.

Français

L'article présente une étude écocritique postcoloniale du roman *Aranyak: Of the Forest* (1939) de Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay. Ce roman est l'une des premières fictions à décrire la déforestation organisée sur les terres indigènes des Santal en Inde pendant la période coloniale britannique. Cet article tente également d'étudier la conception, la représentation et la compréhension de la nature dans différentes couches de la société indienne coloniale. Aranyak s'intéresse à la nature violée par des pratiques d'exploitation, ainsi qu'aux processus d'écocide et de déforestation dans les terres forestières indigènes. La perception de la nature et les points de vue idéologiques sur la manière de préserver les forêts sont radicalement différents selon les personnages qui affichent des points de vue divergents sur l'environnementalisme. Dans la culture, la religion et la philosophie occidentales, les humains sont généralement considérés comme le centre de l'univers, mais dans le contexte indigène indien, les humains, dans ce monde partagé, ne sont pas au centre de l'univers, mais font partie de la conscience planétaire. Les différentes approches de l'environnementalisme développées par différents personnages de l'écofiction seront étudiées en

détail. L'article se concentrera également sur les concepts et les représentations de la nature sauvage, de la déforestation, de l'influence coloniale et du capitalisme. La crise climatique actuelle prouve la non-fonctionnalité de l'anthropocentrisme. Il est donc nécessaire d'adopter une vision alternative et globale de la nature, dans laquelle les humains ne sont pas un tout et une fin en soi, mais une partie d'une plus grande conscience planétaire.

Español

El artículo presenta un estudio ecocrítico postcolonial de la novela *Aranyak: Of the Forest* (1939) de Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay. Esta novela es una de las primeras ficciones que describen la deforestación organizada en las tierras indígenas de los Santal en la India durante el período colonial británico. El artículo intenta también estudiar la concepción, representación y comprensión de la naturaleza en diversas capas de la sociedad colonial india. Aranyak se interesa por la naturaleza violada por prácticas de explotación, así como por los procedimientos de ecocidio y de deforestación en los bosques indígenas. La percepción de la naturaleza y los puntos de vista ideológicos sobre la manera de preservar los bosques son radicalmente diferentes según los personajes que adoptan puntos de vista divergentes acerca de la ecología. En la cultura, la religión y la filosofía occidentales, los humanos son generalmente considerados como el centro del universo, pero en el contexto indígena indio, los humanos, en este mundo compartido, no están en el centro del universo, sino que son parte de la consciencia planetaria. Los diferentes acercamientos del medio ambientalismo desarrollados por diversos personajes de la ecoficción son estudiados en detalle. El artículo se concentra también en los conceptos y las representaciones de la naturaleza salvaje, de la deforestación, de la influencia colonial y del capitalismo. La crisis climática actual prueba la no-funcionalidad del antropocentrismo. Por consiguiente, es necesario adoptar una visión alternativa y global de la naturaleza, en la que los humanos no son una totalidad y un fin de por sí, sino una parte de una mayor consciencia planetaria.

INDEX

Mots-clés

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AUTHORS

Mallika Bala
Humanities and Social Sciences Department, IIEST Shibpur (India)

Madhumita Roy
Humanities and Social Sciences Department, IIEST Shibpur (India)

“This coal is gobbling us up”: Narrating Slow Violence Through Somatic Landscapes in the Fiction of Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar

« Ce charbon nous engloutira tout entier. » Narrer la violence lente à travers des paysages somatiques dans la fiction d’Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar
«Este carbón nos tragará a todos»: Narrar la violencia lenta a través de paisajes somáticos en la ficción de Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar

Atreyee Chakraborty

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OUTLINE

Introduction
“Humanizing” the Adivasi and Somatic Landscapes
Residue of Development
Gender-Based Violence, Subaltern Studies, and Extractive Capitalism
Displacement of a Devalued Culture
Conclusion

TEXT

Introduction

1 The Chotanagpur plateau, situated in the east of the Indian peninsula, lies between the fertile Indo-Gangetic plain in the north and east and the Mahanadi River in the south with the Damodar River Valley, the largest repository for coal in India, running across its center. Besides being the largest producer of coal in the country, the plateau harbors some of the richest iron-ore belts in the world, the largest deposits of copper and uranium in India, and mammoth reserves of mica, limestone, bauxite, and manganese. However, the mineral wealth of Chotanagpur is in stark contrast to the material poverty of its Indigenous people called the Adivasi (literally “original inhabitants”), constituting 85 to 90% of the total population of the region, who

suffer from the large-scale exploitation of natural resources, gargantuan mining projects, and commercial deforestation.[1] Yet, the ecocide of Chotanagpur and the consequent displacement and dispossession of the Adivasi have systematically been ignored by mainstream Indian media. In *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1994), Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky's propaganda model identifies the economic role of large corporate advertisers on television who "will rarely sponsor programs that engage in serious criticisms of corporate activities, such as the problem of environmental degradation."[2] Thus, as multi-million-dollar mining projects ravage the ecosystems that support millions of Indigenous people, this slow-burn tragedy hardly ever translates to a breaking news story.

2 Rob Nixon coined the term "slow violence" for such attritional calamities "that occu[r] gradually and out of sight."[3] They are "neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales."[4] Nixon argues that the relative amnesia for slow violence stems from the nature of its casualties which become "light-weight, disposable casualties."[5] The marginalization of the environmentally dispossessed does not limit itself to mass media. Scholars like Amitayu Chakraborty, Debasree De, Rashmi Varma, Prathama Banerjee, and Anshul Avijit, among others, question the misrepresentation of the Adivasi in Indian cinema and Indian English literature, largely produced by urban intellectuals.[6] Understanding the representational challenges of narrating violence that remains unseen, Nixon highlights the role of the writer-activist who may, through their writing, offer us "a different kind of witnessing: of sights unseen."[7] Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2013) and his collection of short stories *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2017) offer such a defamiliarized perspective on post-colonial India's development, where readers witness the slow violence, inflicted over generations, on the land and the centuries-old inhabitants of Chotanagpur. This paper critically analyzes the narrative strategies that Hansda employs in his fiction to represent the Adivasi's imperceptible environmental vulnerability.

“Humanizing” the Adivasi and Somatic Landscapes

3 Born in the Santhal [8] community, [9] the largest Indigenous tribe of Jharkhand (i.e. the Indian state where the bulk of the Chotanagpur plateau is situated), Hansda [10] had an English-medium education and grew up to be a medical officer. He has become a “highly motivated translator” of the environmental struggles of his community from which he has recently emerged but with which he remains bonded through memory. [11] His fictional works expose institutionalized silences that enshroud the Adivasi in oblivion. Indeed, his short story, “The Adivasi Will Not Dance,” begins with the state police using brute force to muffle the cries of the Santhal narrator, Mangal Murmu: “They pinned me to the ground. They did not let me speak, they did not let me protest, they did not even let me raise my head.” [12] Speaking in the context of the United States, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky found US mass media’s definitions of worth meeting the expectations of a propaganda model where “worthy victims” may elicit a propaganda outburst by the mass media while victims deemed “unworthy” will not generate sustained coverage. [13] Such differential treatment of tragedy transcends the United States to become characteristic of the propaganda model of Indian mass media. The Indian bourgeoisie never hear of the oppressed as the media tirelessly promotes the dominant discourse of neoliberal development.

4 In the short story “The Adivasi Will Not Dance,” as the whole Santhal population of Godda gets forcefully displaced to make way for a thermal power plant, Mangal Murmu narrates that “the papers carried glowing reports, along with pictures, of the roads which were being repaired or rebuilt in Ranchi and Dumka.” [14] In this context of a collusively manufactured unseeing, Nixon demonstrates how imaginative writing “can help make the unapparent appear, making it accessible and tangible by humanizing drawn-out threats inaccessible to the immediate senses.” [15] Indigenous communities have been dehumanized in popular imagination into being “the global residuum” [16] of neoliberal urban development. In India, the dehumanization of the Adivasi is rooted in a postcolonial reinforcing

of colonial stereotypes of Indigenous primitivism. Dominant literary, anthropological, sociological, and political discourses have constructed the Adivasi as an exotic Other. Abin Chakraborty draws attention to the literature produced by urban intellectuals where the Adivasi largely operate as "objects of urban elite male lust."[17] Debasree De identifies Bhanmati, one of the female characters in Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak*, as emblematic of the mainstream literary representation of "a tribal woman replete with an unbound sexuality and passion."[18] Against such dehumanizing discourses, Hansda's fiction releases the Adivasi's trauma as an affective force that urges the readers into an ethical confrontation with the Other.

5 In his analysis of Hansda's first novel, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, Amitayu Chakraborty argues that, running counter to stereotypes of pre-modern egalitarianism, Hansda sheds light on the rigid and discriminatory clan hierarchy and the oppression of women in the Santhal community of fictional Kadamdihi. Debunking myths of forest people deliberately practicing a lifestyle of isolation, Hansda places his Santhal characters amidst continuous interaction with other communities like the low-caste Hindus or Dalits, namely the Kunkals and Kamars.[19] Hansda's art of characterization in his collection of short stories *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* liberates Indigenous people from monolithic molds. Santhal men like Mangal Murmu in the title story are not mute dancers but protestors with agency. Mangal argues before the President of India: "We will sing and dance before you but you tell us, do we have a reason to be happy?"[20] The Santhal sex-worker Sona in the story "Merely a Whore" defies a culture of sexual objectification with the question: "Why don't you kiss me on the lips?"[21] Panmuni Soren has dietary concerns when she shifts with her husband to the West Indian state of Gujarat where the majority follows a vegetarian diet: "'What are we going to eat there?' she wondered aloud. 'They don't eat *jill-haku*[22] in Gujarat, do they?'"[23] In Hansda's fiction, the Adivasi become recognized as humans, embodied with the fears and desires that characterize the residents of high-rise buildings in urban India.

6 Hansda brings the plight of the environmentally dispossessed into focus through a narrative strategy that this paper identifies as "somatic landscapes." Somatic landscapes give figurative shape to the

formless threat of ecocides as the body of the Adivasi transmutes into a geographical space on which Hansda maps the ecological degradation of Chotanagpur. The inextricability of body and space is not simply poetic and allegorical in his fiction but visceral, rooted in Adivasi myth and tradition. Mathew Areeparampil elaborates on this intimate bond between the Indigenous body and land:

> The Indigenous people have a special relationship with their land. To them land is not simply a factor of production as it is for other people, but a source of spirituality as well. […] [F]or the Indigenous people land and blood are homologous. Their society, culture, religion, identity and their very existence are intimately linked to the land they hold. To separate the Indigenous people from their land is tantamount to tearing them apart from their life-giving source. [24]

7 It is important to note that *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* opens with a picture of Rupi "squatting in the middle of a rice paddy, shin-deep in slush," [25] birthing her eldest son. Her body appears as an ineradicable topographical feature. As Indigenous body-maps in Hansda's fiction narrate stories of ecological trauma, an affective encounter with these somatic scars urges readers to witness the geographies of slow violence.

Residue of Development

8 In "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," Mangal Murmu describes the inauguration ceremony of a thermal power plant as characterized by a complacent denial of the plight of thousands of Indigenous people displaced by its construction:

> All very happy with the progress, the development. The Santhal Pargana would now fly to the moon. The Santhal Pargana would now turn into *Dilli* [26] and Bombay. The businessman was grinning widely. Patriotic songs in Hindi were playing from loudspeakers placed at all corners of the field. "*Bharat mahaan*" [27] someone was shouting from the stage, trying to rouse the audience, his voice amplified by numerous loudspeakers. [28]

9 The relation between the construction of a power plant and the patriotic chant of "*Bharat Mahaan*" reminds me of Nixon's theory

which associates ambitious, haphazard development in the global South with postcolonial rivalry, "whatever our old colonial masters can do, we can do as well."[29] Coal mining was a crucial enterprise for bolstering nationalist pride. The postcolonial Indian state has equated coal with "national development, energy security and hence strategic sovereignty."[30] However, this infrastructural development that grows on the backs and the lands of Indigenous people categorically ousts them from its benefits. Hansda defamiliarizes the chant of national progress from the perspective of the subaltern as the narrator demands: "What *mahaan*? I wondered. Which great nation displaces thousands of its people from their homes and livelihoods to produce electricity for cities and factories?"[31] Arundhati Roy also questions the injustice of making the poorest communities pay for infrastructural benefits they never enjoy: "The ethnic 'otherness' of their victims takes some of the pressure off the Nation Builders. It's like having an expense account. Someone else pays the bills. People from another country. Another world. India's poorest people are subsidising the lifestyles of her richest."[32] In Hansda's fiction, the Adivasi pay a somatic price as the ecosystem that sustains them undergoes a slow death. While the diseased bodies of Indigenous people mirror the toxic landscape, the sexually exploited bodies of Indigenous women reflect the ravaged plateau, exploited for its mineral riches. The dispensable body of the Adivasi, turned lifeless under speeding trucks, resembles the delicate biodiversity of Chotanagpur, doomed to be crushed under the speeding wheels of progress.

10 In "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," Mangal Murmu represents the choking residue of national development as he complains: "What do we Santhals get in return? Tatters to wear. Barely enough food. Such diseases that we can't breathe properly, we cough blood and forever remain bare bones."[33] The impoverished Adivasi use their "nails, fingers, hands, and whatever tools [they] can manage"[34] to steal and sell coal. The physiological deterioration of the Adivasi and the topographical degradation of the plateau become indistinguishable in Mangal's description of the coal that, on the one hand, is irreversibly damaging the landscape and, on the other hand, is "gobbling us up bit by bit."[35] The blackened earth mirrors the somatic landscape of the Santhal community:

> There is blackness – deep, indelible – all along the *Koyla* [36] Road. The trees and shrubs in our village bear black leaves. Our ochre earth has become black. The stones, the rocks, the sand, all black. The tiles on the roofs of our huts have lost their fire-burnt red. The vines and flowers and peacocks we Santhals draw on the outer walls of our houses are black. Our children – dark-skinned as they are – are forever covered with fine black dust. [37]

11 The tears of the crying Santhal children flow like the coal-ridden Damodar River "cutting across a drought-stricken land." [38] In *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, Rupi, once the strongest woman of the Kadamdihi village, sinks into an inexplicable illness like "a bar of soap" [39] in the industrial town of Nitra under the charms of Gurubari's witchcraft. Rupi's illness becomes an extended metaphor for the once flourishing land and cultures of the Adivasi, now corroded under heavy industrialization. Like Gurubari who sucks Rupi's life out like the poisonous *alakjari* vine, leaving her to lie ailing in a cot in the backyard, Satyen K. Bordoloi argues that the city-settlers give the Indigenous people an illness that reduces their life to incomprehensible ruin, relegating them to the backyard of human consciousness. [40] Much like urban India that basks in the glow of uneven development, Gurubari, the witch flourishes as Rupi wastes away. [41]

Gender-Based Violence, Subaltern Studies, and Extractive Capitalism

12 Adivasi women as the gendered subaltern pay a grimmer somatic price for urban development. The association "Women Against Sexual Violence and State Repression" (WSS) reports that the systematic sexual violence against Adivasi women aims to batter the Indigenous people "into submission to corporate-led industrialization." [42] In the story "Merely a Whore," Hansda juxtaposes the sexual exploitation of Adivasi women with the exploitation of the mineral riches of Chotanagpur. The transition of Lakkhipur to a coal-mining town parallels the transformation of the colony of displaced outcasts into a

red-light district: “Mud houses fell, concrete ones mushroomed. Roads, police outposts, a railway station, a bus depot, shops, market, a slum and the busiest red-light area in the whole of the mining zone.”[43] While men “shirtless, sweaty, black with coal-dust”[44] dig like automatons for coal underground, “women, too, eat out of their sweat and labor. Only, it is mixed with the semen and the sweat of men.”[45] The story climaxes when the protagonist sex worker of the story, Sona, asks her regular *diku*[46] client, Nirmal, to kiss her on the lips during sexual intercourse. Nirmal, enraged at the impunity of the sex worker, rapes her to show Sona her place. He says: “Kiss? I don’t kiss a *rendi*[47] on the lips.”[48] Nirmal represents the material greed of extractive capitalism, a symbol for the corporate industrialists who exploit Chotanagpur for its mineral riches but never invest in its sustainable development.

13 Similarly, as the twenty-year-old Talamai in the story “November is the Month of Migrations” submits to the lust of a policeman on the Koyla Road, the latter says: “you Santhal women are made for this only,”[49] referring to a violent and phallocentric sexual encounter, devoid of the formalities of consent, passion, or care. Hansda’s narratorial strategy of somatic landscapes transmutes the girl’s raped body into the ravaged landscape that fails to articulate protest: “She just lies – passive, unthinking, unblinking – as cold as the paved ground she can feel through the thin fabric of the *gamcha*[50], as still as an inert earthen bowl into which a dark cloud empties itself.”[51] Hansda further highlights the dispensability of Adivasi life pulverized under coal-carrying trucks. Mangal Murmu narrates:

> They are so rough, these truck-drivers, they can run down any vehicle that comes in their way. They can’t help it, it’s their job. The more rounds they make, the more money they earn. And what if they kill? The coal company can’t afford to have its business slowed down by a few deaths.[52]

14 Like the disappearing species of animals, birds, and plants of Chotanagpur, a capitalist state disposes of the Adivasi as a non-lucrative impediment on the road to profit.

Displacement of a Devalued Culture

15 Nixon argues that the massive displacement of millions of Indigenous people in the Global South goes largely unquestioned because, although they may be generationally attached to the land, the land does not legally belong to them. [53] In "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," the tenacity of Mangal Murmu's memory struggles against state-sponsored promotion of oblivion: "This tola is now called the Jolha [54] tola of Matiajore. Once Matiajore used to be an exclusively Santhal village. Today, it has a Santhal tola and a Jolha tola, with the latter being the bigger." [55] While the state disregards the Adivasi's right to reside on their own land, Hansda points to an inimitable bond in *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* where the psychological trauma of displacement from rural Kadamdihi to the coal-mining town of Nitra finds its somatic reflection in Rupi's inexplicable illness. While Rupi often failed to cook a meal out of exhaustion in Nitra, in Kadamdihi; "Rupi was a part of everything – planting during the months of Ashadh and Saan, harvesting in the month of Aghan and threshing during Posh." [56] In the coal town, Rupi is subject to what Rob Nixon calls "a temporal violence," surviving in "a truncated, severed present, torn by involuntary displacement from the numinous fabric that had woven extended meaning from time-in-place." [57]

16 Nitya Rao cites the loss of cultivable land due to their submergence by dam projects as a major indirect pressure causing the displacement of the Adivasi. [58] In the story "November is the Month of Migrations," Hansda portrays Santhal clans making "long, snaking processions as they abandon their lands and farms to take the train to Namal, the Bardhaman district of West Bengal and the paddy fields there." [59] As Talamai submits to the lust of a police officer on Koyla Road, giving up her sense of dignity for "a fifty-rupee note and two bread pakoras," [60] her body stands for the land that the Adivasi are forced to give up and migrate from in order to quench their hunger. While families like those of Talamai's manage to escape, millions remain subject to "displacement without moving": "a loss that leaves families stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable." [61] Such a stationary displaced population

crowds the coal town in "The Adivasi Will Not Dance." Meanwhile, the President of India, dissociated from ground reality, exercises the freedom of movement to arrive in a helicopter to inaugurate a thermal power plant in Godda. [62]

17 The widespread displacement and dispossession of Indigenous people receive social sanction through a majoritarian understanding that systematically devalues Adivasi cultures. Jason Moore critiques the Cartesian dualism of Man versus Nature that fuels the Anthropocene argument and argues in favor of the term "Capitalocene" to describe the climate change crisis:

> For the story of Humanity and Nature conceals a dirty secret of modern world history. That secret is how capitalism was built on excluding most "humans" from Humanity – Indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, nearly all women, and even many white-skinned men (Slavs, Jews, the Irish). From the perspective of imperial administrators, merchants, planters, and *conquistadores*, these humans were not Human at all. They were regarded as part of Nature, along with trees and soils and rivers – and treated accordingly. [63]

18 In "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," Mangal argues that, although the Adivasi are proselytized from their animist Sarna faith to Hinduism to boost vote banks during election cycles, the "pure people, the clean people" [64] never really include them in the rigid caste hierarchy of Orthodox Hinduism. Similarly, in *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*, lower-caste Hindus of Kadamdihi like Kamars and Kunkals practice untouchability against the Santhals who "ate cow and pig meat, drank *haandi* and *paura* [65] and practised polygamy." [66] Hansda attempts a metaphorical depiction of the cultural patronization of the Adivasi by the city-settlers in the relationship between Rupi and Gurubari, as Rupi is manipulated to relinquish control of her entire household to Gurubari: "No one questioned Rupi's abilities as a mother or in the fields. It was only Gurubari who always demonstrated that she knew more than her." [67]

19 Pointing to a dichotomy between official and vernacular landscapes, Nixon argues that "a vernacular landscape is shaped by the historically textured maps that communities have devised over

generations, maps replete with names and routes, maps alive to significant ecological and surface geological features." [68] On the other hand, an official landscape, oblivious to such earlier maps, "writes the land in a bureaucratic, externalizing, and extraction-driven manner that is often pitilessly instrumental." [69] Rooted in an animist interpretation of nature, Santhal villages are often named after the trees and the animals that populate the areas. For instance, the village of Kadamdihi was named after the *kadam* trees that grew there while the village of Horoghutu derived its name from the *horo* (tortoises) that used to frequent its ponds. These places lose their etymological significance as the *kadam* trees get wiped out of Kadamdihi and the tortoises stop visiting the ponds of Horoghutu. Similarly, the Adivasi lose their cultural identity as generationally woven webs of cultural intimacy with the land get severed with the erasure of the original verdure of Chotanagpur. Mangal's self-introduction in "The Adivasi Will Not Dance" reveals him grappling for a stable sense of identity as new corporate meanings get encrypted into his vernacular landscape:

> My name is Mangal Murmu. I am a musician. No, wait… I am a farmer. Or… Was a farmer. Was a farmer is right. Because I don't farm anymore. In my village of Matiajore, in Amrapara block of the Pakur district, not many Santhals farm anymore. Only a few of us still have farmland; most of it has been acquired by a mining company. [70]

20 As the Santhal family of Sorens in "They Eat Meat" move to an Orthodox Hindu community in the Indian state of Gujarat, they gave up eating meat and eggs, "they conformed to the norms – they went to *mandirs*, [71] celebrated Hindu festivals, fasted on certain days, lit *dhoop-batti* [72] in their house – and were accepted." [73] As the Santhals migrate from their ancestral lands, they lose their cultural identity and are assimilated into mainstream society much like the land that becomes unrecognizable after a heavy industrial makeover.

21 The marginalization of Adivasi cultures runs parallel to their exoticization through a tokenistic inclusion of Adivasi dance, important to neoliberal India's image as a democratic, multicultural nation. Mangal Murmu highlights the irony of such selective inclusion: "For every benefit, in job, in education, in whatever, the *Diku* are quick to call Jharkhand their own – let the Adivasi go to hell.

But when it comes to displaying Jharkhandi culture, the onus of singing and dancing is upon the Adivasi alone." [74] Mangal highlights the Adivasi's dehumanization as they dance like museum exhibits of "primitives" stuck in time: "We are like toys – someone presses our 'ON' button, or turns a key in our backsides, and we Santhals start beating rhythms on our *tamak* and *tumdak*, or start blowing on our *tiriyo* [75] while someone snatches away our very dancing grounds." [76] Making the Adivasi dance is as much a violent subjection of the Indigenous body to the whims of the neoliberal nation state as is its subjection to sexual and physical violence. Like the police officer who uses Talamai's body or like Nirmal who uses Sona's body to satisfy their lust, the urban elite use the dancing body of the Adivasi to satisfy their neocolonial and consumerist urge for an escape from the hustle and bustle of corporate India to reconnect with a fantasized wilderness. Of course, in such a superficial encounter with the Adivasi, the urban elite remain disinterested in the plight of the dancers.

Conclusion

22 Amitayu Chakraborty observes that Hansda's works are "more than a postcolonial allegory of victimhood of an oppressed ethnic group in India" [77] as the fight and endurance of the Adivasi become indicative of "a subaltern resistance." [78] While Hansda's fiction is a memoir of the slow violence inflicted on Santhals, it is also a testament to what Nixon calls "the environmentalism of the poor." [79] Embedded in social, cultural, political, and economic struggles, the poor can never be single-issue activists, [80] forced by their material realities to have an intersectional approach to environmental justice. In the texts chosen for study, the Adivasi's struggle to reclaim the autonomy of their land and renew their original relationship with nature is interwoven with the struggle to reclaim their bodily autonomy. While both Rupi and Mangal's bodies become the site of their subjugation, it is also the site of their resistance. As Rupi constantly struggles to return to the workforce despite her ailing health, it is important to consider the link between her struggle to regain somatic control and her urge for a renewed connection to the fields she grew up working in. [81] Similarly, Mangal's corporeal reclamation in his refusal to dance remains tied to the struggle to

reclaim the ancestral land of his clan: “Unless we are given back our homes and land, we will not sing and dance. We Adivasis will not dance.” [82]

23 Hansda’s choice of a global language like English for his fiction ensures that the story of the plight of the Santhals reaches a global audience. As his stories transcend Chotanagpur to attain transnational visibility, the slow violence inflicted on the plateau and its Indigenous people ceases to be a problem of the Global South, demanding global corporate accountability for the ecocide. Mathew Areeparampil observes that as the deposits of minerals in the developed countries get gradually depleted, mining multinationals turn their eyes to India which has huge reserves of cheap labor and a vast potential for mineral exploitation. As the same companies are involved in the violation of Indigenous people’s rights in several countries in the global South, including Papua New Guinea, and other countries in South America and South-East Asia, [83] they become involved in “global crimes of environmental racism (that treat certain communities as more expendable than others).” [84] Resonating with the struggles of Indigenous people across the world, Mangal Murmu’s speech puts a stake at universality:

> For they too suffer, the same as I. They would have stood by me and, together, our voices would have rung out loud. They would have travelled out of our Santhal Pargana, out of our Jharkhand, all the way to Dilli and all of Bharat-disom; [85] the world itself would have come to know of our suffering. Then, perhaps, something would have been done for us. [86]

24 These words become an expression of solidarity for the victims of slow violence in different parts of the globe, encouraging a pan-international alliance of the dispossessed that would stand strong and someday emerge victorious against the mighty bulldozers of the global corporate.

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1 Mathew Areeparampil, “Displacement Due to Mining in Jharkhand,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 31, No. 24, 1996, p. 1524.

2 Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, London, Vintage, 1994, p. 17.

3 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and The Environmentalism of the Poor*, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University Press, 2011, p. 2.

4 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 2.

5 Ibid., p. 13.

6 See Amitayu Chakraborty, “Problematising ‘Indigeneity’ Through Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar’s *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey*,” *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol. 11, No. 3, 2019, pp. 1-15; Debasree De, *A History of Adivasi Women in Post-Independence Eastern India: The Margins of the Marginals*, New Delhi, SAGE Publishing India, 2018; Anshul Avijit, “From ‘Savages’ to ‘Saviours’: Genealogy of Santhal Portrayal in Colonial Modernity,” in Leïla Choukroune and Parul Bhandari (eds.), *Exploring Indian Modernities: Ideas and Practices*, Singapore, Springer, 2018, pp. 303-334; Prathama Banerjee, “Culture/Politics: The Irresolute Double-Bind of the Indian Adivasi,” *Indian Historical Review*, vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 99-126; Rashmi Varma, “Representing the Adivasi: Limits

and Possibilities of Postcolonial Theory," in Alf Gunwald Nielsen and Srila Roy (eds.), *New Subaltern Politics: Reconceptualising Hegemony and Resistance in Contemporary India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 103-125.

7 Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 15.

8 This added note is from the guest editor: in this article, "Santhal" is spelled with an h to abide by Hansda's spelling of this word.

9 The Santhals are one of the largest ethnic groups of Eastern India, largely inhabiting the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Orissa. The Santhal community is one of the various Adivasi or Indigenous communities of the Indian subcontinent. In 1950, the Adivasi communities were listed in the Indian Constitution with an aim to bring about their social and economic development. In this catalogue, all the Adivasi groups came to be officially recognized as "Scheduled Tribes." The Santhals are one of the Scheduled Tribes in the Constitution of India.

10 Hansda is a surname associated with a clan within the Santhal community, one of the largest Indigenous communities of India. In his novel *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (New Delhi, Aleph Book Company, 2013, p. 13), Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar elaborates on the origin of his surname: "Hansdas, for instance, are said to have hatched from the eggs of the mythical swans, Hans and Hansli." In response to an interview question that inquired how Hansda came to be the author's first name despite it being a family name, the author replies: "My father wanted me to have an impressive name, so he gave me a long name with my surname placed at the beginning" (see Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar and Michelle D'costa, "Interview 9 – Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar," 25 March 2017). Adhering to the tradition of addressing authors by their last names in research articles, I refer to the author as "Hansda" in this article.

11 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 27.

12 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, New Delhi, Speaking Tiger Books LLP, 2017, p. 169.

13 Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing*, pp. 37-38.

14 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 184.

15 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 15.

16 Mike Davis, *Planet of the Slums*, New York, Verso, 2006, p. 72.

17 Abin Chakraborty, "Examining Subalterneity in Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's 'The Adivasi Will Not Dance'," *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 12, No. 1, 2017, p. 3.

18 Debasree De, *History*, p. 240.

19 Amitayu Chakraborty, "Problematising 'Indigeneity'," p. 8.

20 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 187.

21 Ibid., p. 165.

22 *Jill-Haku* is a colloquial Santhali expression for "non-vegetarian food." Brahmins, who are at the top of the caste hierarchy in Orthodox Hinduism consider non-vegetarian food to be ritually impure.

23 Ibid., p. 2.

24 Mathew Areeparampil, "Displacement," p. 1526.

25 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Mysterious Ailment*, p. 1.

26 *Dilli* (দিল্লি/दिल्ली) is the vernacular Bengali and Hindi pronunciation of New Delhi, the capital of India.

27 My own translation from Hindi *Bharat mahaan*: "India is great!" (भारत महान).

28 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 185.

29 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 166.

30 Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt et al., "Land Acquisition and Dispossession: Private Coal Companies in Jharkhand," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 47, No. 6, 2012, p. 40.

31 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 185.

32 Arundhati Roy, "The Greater Common Good," *Frontline*, vol. 16, No. 11, 1999, p. 6.

33 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 17.

34 Ibid., p. 174.

35 Ibid., p. 174.

36 *Koyla* is a Bengali word for "coal" (কয়লা).

37 Ibid., pp. 174-175.

38 Ibid., p. 175.

39 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Mysterious Ailment*, p. 151.

40 Amitayu Chakraborty, "Problematising 'Indigeneity'," p. 6.

41 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Mysterious Ailment*, p. 6.

42 Jo Woodman (ed.), *Brutalized for Resistance: The Assault on Indigenous Women in Modi's India*, Berlin, Survival International, 2022, p. 12.

43 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 147.

44 Ibid., p. 144.

45 Ibid., p. 144.

46 *Diku* is a colloquial Santhali expression for "outsider."

47 Abusive Hindi colloquialism for "whore."

48 Ibid., p. 166.

49 Ibid., p. 41.

50 *Gamcha* is a Bengali word for "towel" (গামছা).

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., pp. 173-174.

53 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 164.

54 *Jolha* is a colloquial Santhali word for "Muslims." The term originally referred to the Muslim weavers of the Chotanagpur region.

55 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, pp. 175-176.

56 Id., *Mysterious Ailment*, p. 108.

57 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 162.

58 Nitya Rao, "Displacement From Land: Case of Santhal Parganas," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 40, No. 41, p. 4440.

59 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 39.

60 Ibid., p. 42.

61 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 19.

62 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 186.

63 Jason W. Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, Michigan, Kairos PM, 2016, p. 79.

64 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 173.

65 *Haandi* and *Paura* are rice-based fermented beverages brewed in central India in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar as

well as parts of north-east India such as West Bengal and Assam. Consumption of alcohol is considered ritually impure among the upper castes in Orthodox Hinduism.

66 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Mysterious Ailment*, p. 14.

67 Ibid., p. 109.

68 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 17.

69 Ibid., p. 17.

70 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, pp. 170-171.

71 *Mandir* is a Hindi word for "temple" (मंदिर).

72 *Dhoop-batti* is a Hindi word for "incense sticks" (धूप-बत्ती) used in the ritualistic worship of Hindu gods.

73 Ibid., p. 15.

74 Ibid., p. 179.

75 *Tamak* and *Tumdak* are percussion instruments while *Tiriyo* is a wind instrument used in Santhal music and dance.

76 Ibid., p. 170.

77 Amitayu Chakraborty, "Problematising 'Indigeneity'," p. 7.

78 Ibid.

79 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 4.

80 Ibid.

81 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Mysterious Ailment*, p. 151.

82 Id., *Adivasi*, p. 187.

83 Mathew Areeparampil, "Displacement Due to Mining in Jharkhand," pp. 1527-1528.

84 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 59.

85 *Bharat-disom* refers to India in the Santhali language.

86 Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar, *Adivasi*, p. 169.

ABSTRACTS

English

The most mineral-rich zone of India, the Chotanagpur plateau has been the center of a scramble for coal, iron ore, bauxite, and manganese since the country's independence in 1947. Thousands of Indigenous people or "Adivasi" have been displaced by mining operations in the region. In his theorization of "slow violence," Rob Nixon highlights the challenges of representing ecocides that are made invisible under capitalism. The role of the writer-activist, he says, is instrumental to bringing these ecocides into imaginative focus. This paper uses Nixon's theoretical framework to focus on Indian Indigenous author Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's narrative strategy of "somatic landscapes" in his dramatization of slow violence in Chotanagpur.

Giving figurative shape to the imperceptible threat of ecocide, Hansda turns the Indigenous body into his theater of violence. In the short story collection, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2017), and the novel, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2013), the Adivasi body becomes the site on which Hansda inscribes the ecological destruction of Chotanagpur. But Hansda also thinks of the Adivasi body as a site of political/personal resistance that involves the reclamation of their relationship with the land. Attempts to reestablish this connection are closely related to their struggle for somatic dignity and autonomy. Hansda's narrative of slow violence transcends Chotanagpur to lay bare transnational networks of structural violence and the global politics of (in)visibility that dispose of delicate ecosystems and Indigenous lives to make way for neoliberal development.

Français

Le plateau de Chotanagpur est la zone la plus riche en minéraux de l'Inde. Il a été l'objet d'une ruée vers le charbon, le minerai de fer, la bauxite et le manganèse depuis l'indépendance de ce pays en 1947. Des milliers d'Indigènes, aussi appelés « Adivasi », ont été déplacés par les opérations minières organisées dans cette région. Lorsqu'il théorise la « violence lente », Rob Nixon souligne les défis rencontrés pour représenter les écocides qui sont rendus invisibles par le capitalisme. Le rôle des auteurs-activistes, affirme-t-il, est instrumental pour mettre en avant ces écocides dans l'imaginaire. Cet article utilise le cadre théorique de Nixon pour se focaliser sur la stratégie narrative des « paysages somatiques » développée par l'auteur autochtone indien Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar dans sa dramatisation de la violence lente au Chotanagpur.

En donnant une forme figurative à la menace imperceptible des écocides, Hansda transforme le corps autochtone en théâtre de violence. Dans le recueil de nouvelles, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2017), comme dans le roman, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2013), le corps des Adivasi devient le lieu sur lequel Hansda inscrit la destruction écologique du Chotanagpur. Mais Hansda pense aussi que le corps des Adivasi est le lieu d'une résistance politique et personnelle qui implique la réclamation de leur relation particulière à la terre. Les tentatives pour ré-établir ce lien sont

fortement reliées à leur lutte pour une autonomie et une dignité somatique. La narration de la violence lente par Hansda transcende le Chotanagpur pour mettre à nu les réseaux transnationaux de la violence structurelle ainsi que la politique internationale de l'(in)visibilité qui dispose d'écosystèmes délicats et des vies autochtones pour laisser place au développement néo-libéral.

Español
La meseta de Chotanagpur es la zona más rica en minerales en India. Desde la independencia del país en 1947, ha sido objeto de una estampida hacia el carbón, el mineral de hierro, la bauxita y el magnesio. Miles de indígenas de la región, también llamados Adivasi, fueron desplazados por unas operaciones mineras organizadas en esta región. Al teorizar sobre la "violencia lenta", Rob Nixon subraya los desafíos con los que se topa para representar los ecocidas que el capitalismo invisibiliza. El papel de los autores-activistas, afirma, es instrumental para mostrar estos ecocidas en el imaginario. Este artículo utiliza el marco teórico de Nixon para focalizarse en la estrategia narrativa de los «paisajes somáticos» desarrollada por el autor autóctono indio Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar en su dramatización de la violencia lenta en Chotanagpur.
Al dar una forma figurativa a la amenaza imperceptible de los ecocidas, Hansda transforma el cuerpo autóctono en teatro de violencia. En el conjunto de novelas, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* (2017), como en la novela, *The Mysterious Ailment of Rupi Baskey* (2013), el cuerpo de los Adivasi se convierte en el lugar sobre el cual Hansda inscribe la destrucción ecológica del Chotanagpur. Pero Hansda piensa también que el cuerpo de los Adivasi es el lugar de una resistencia política y personal que implica la reclamación de su relación con la tierra. Las tentativas para restablecer este lazo están fuertemente relacionadas a su lucha por una autonomía y una dignidad somática. La narración de la violencia lenta por Hansda transciende el Chotanagpur para poner a la vista de todas las redes transnacionales de la violencia estructural así como la política internacional de la (in)visibilidad de que dispone de ecosistemas frágiles y vidas autóctonas para dejar sitio al desarrollo neo-liberal.

INDEX

Mots-clés
Adivasi, Santhal, violence lente, Hansda, écocide, Chotanagpur, secteur minier

Keywords
Adivasi, Santhal, slow violence, Hansda, ecocide, Chotanagpur, mining

Palabras claves
Adivasi, Santhal, violencia lenta, Hansda, ecocida, Chotanagpur, sector minero

AUTHOR

Atreyee Chakraborty
Université Paul-Valéry, Montpellier

A Transpacific Approach to Environmental Dis-Asters in Aotearoa New Zealand Ecopoetry

Une approche transpacifique des dés-astres environnementaux dans l'écopoésie d'Aotearoa Nouvelle-Zélande
Una aproximación transpacífica de los des-astres medioambientales en la ecopoesía de Aoteroa Nueva Zelandia

Marine Berthiot

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OUTLINE

Introduction
Alterity and Reciprocity
Charting Systemic Abuse on Nature and Cultures in the Pacific
Tending to Climate Wounds with *Talanoa*
Conclusion

TEXT

Introduction

1 The growing presence of Pacific ecopoetry and environmental activism on the political stage worldwide is revelatory of the urgency and impact so-called natural dis-asters have on the inhabitants of this region and shows the powers of poetry in a fight that is often presumed to be scientific only. Ecopoetry matters in a time of dis-aster, a term that Maurice Blanchot defined as a particular time in history when the trajectory of a star (ASTER) is DIS-rupted, plunging humanity in darkness: "le désastre signifie être séparé de l'étoile."[1] Seen through this lens, ecopoetry testifies against climate dis-asters which islanders experience first-hand with many of them forced to migrate to survive sea-level rise. Pacific ecopoetry also engages with,

voices, and challenges fears that grow amidst “apocalyptic” climate catastrophes. Perhaps does it also comfort trauma-readers and encourages them to act.

2 This article is woven on a dialogue between Pacific and western ecocritical texts to examine the intertwinement between the environmental trauma, poetry, and climate science. In her groundbreaking book, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou) argues that “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism.” [2] The history of science shows that research has often used Pacific peoples as objects of study, disregarding the value of their languages, cultures, and knowledge, thus contributing to the implementation of colonial ideologies. As a French scholar, I am *tauiwi* (a foreigner) in Aotearoa New Zealand and the views that I formulate on the literature produced in these isles come from the periphery. Western theories, when applied, will thus be adapted to the specific settler colonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

3 A settler colony since the implementation of the English version of the Treaty of Waitangi (6 February 1840), Aotearoa New Zealand is both part of the North and part of the Fourth World. Damon Salesa (Sāmoan New Zealander) notes how paradoxical this situation is as Aotearoa New Zealand continues to be constructed as a western nation when it is deeply embedded in Pacific history and geography: “New Zealand is a nation that exists on Pacific islands but does not, and perhaps cannot, see itself as a Pacific Island nation or its people as Pacific Islanders.” [3] The Pacific zone is particularly impacted by climate changes. [4] Wildfires, droughts, floods, landslides, sea-level rise, earthquakes, tsunami, cyclones, typhoons and so on, are on the rise, threatening ecosystems, social structures, and the very citizenship of some islanders, as in Tuvalu. Environmental trauma has not spared Aotearoa New Zealand either, and the situation is not new as, in the 1990s, the government was already listing endangered species in both fauna and flora. [5] Despite national efforts of conservation to preserve endemic species such as kiwi, kākāpō, takahē, and kauri to name but a few, the situation is still fragile and continuously threatened by human activity. [6]

4 In her doctoral thesis, *Imagining Ecologies: Traditions of Ecopoetry in Aotearoa New Zealand* (2019), Janet Elizabeth Newman (Pākehā) notes that "[i]t is in this environment of ecological colonial violence that New Zealand ecopoetry in English has its genesis," [7] namely deforestation, the gradual extinction of native birds, and the introduction of non-native species upsetting the whole ecosystem. The corpus of ecopoetry is growing fast in Aotearoa New Zealand and in the Pacific to raise awareness on human-made ecological dis-asters. This article especially focuses on two poems: "Unity" by Selina Tusitala Marsh (Samoan, Tuvaluan, English, Scottish, and French New Zealander), composed for the 2016 Commonwealth Summit in Westminster Abbey, and "Poem for the Commonwealth, 2018" by Karlo Mila (Tongan, Palagi, and Sāmoan New Zealander). Using a transpacific approach, this article analyzes the way ecopoetry testifies to climate dis-asters in Aotearoa New Zealand. After studying how alterity and reciprocity are constructed, systemic abuse on nature and cultures from the Pacific will be charted, to eventually observe how environmental wounds can be tended with *talanoa*.

Alterity and Reciprocity

5 In their introduction to *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies* (2016), Joni Adamson and Salma Monani note that Indigenous authors challenge Eurocentric readings of their land and customs with "cosmovisions – conceptions of entangled human relations with more-than-human worlds." [8] For them, these cosmovisions emphasize values like reciprocity and kinship. As Māori and Pasifika cosmologies construct the land as sacred, any hierarchical and vertical reading of nature is disavowed, offering instead a metonymic approach to describe the relationship humans have with nature. In "Unity," Selina Tusitala Marsh weaves her poem on the *vā* – a concept which, in Sāmoan philosophy, designates the relational space existing between people, animals, trees, rocks, and the sea – and the *vā* of her poem builds a path for the international community to repair the damage done to the earth. In "Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body" (1996), Albert Wendt (Sāmoan New Zealander) defined the *vā* as "the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and

things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things." [9] Wendt then adds a short list of Sāmoan words born out of the *vā*, including "vasa = ocean (va – space; sa – forbidden/sacred)." [10]

6 In the *vā* of Marsh's poem, differences are accepted and acknowledged despite the upheavals that they generate. The chorus of the poem, "*There's a 'U' and an 'I' in unity / costs the earth and yet it's free*," [11] inscribes the poet's ironic view on colonization, globalization, and the Capitalocene. Letters have become humans, "U" (you) and "I," symbolizing the gap between Marsh as a Pasifika poet voicing the concerns of people from the Pacific in the face of climate change and her audience composed of international leaders, including the late Queen Elizabeth II as Head of the Commonwealth. Belonging to the same alphabet, thus to the same humanity, Pacific inhabitants – though long discarded as "noble savages," "warriors," as well as "exotic" and "erotic" beings there to decorate idyllic landscapes occupied by white settlers and tourists looking for leisure and fantasy – cannot be envisaged as isolated, excluded, and marginalized in their fight against climate change anymore as the environmental disorders Pacific Islanders have been experiencing are now shared with the member nations composing the Commonwealth, since climate balance is destabilized everywhere in the Capitalocene.

7 In "We Should Be Talking About the Capitalocene" (2023), Wendy Arons considers that the term "Capitalocene," coined by Andreas Mann, has often been connected to an expansive use of fossil fuels related to the Industrial Revolution. Yet, she argues that the colonial impact must also be accounted for, especially in its exploitation of Indigenous peoples, their lands, and natural resources. [12] The exploitation of Indigenous workforce was justified in the colonial discourse by the enforcement of racial and gender hierarchies which demeaned non-white and non-male humans and denied their humanity as well as their ability to think and feel. Selina Tusitala March uses the *vā* as a methodology that challenges and subverts this colonial inheritance affecting "the Unity-that-is-All." [13]

8 She emphasizes the bonds existing between humans and non-humans in a series of comparisons: "the salt in the sea, like the salt in our blood like the dust of our bones, our final return to mud," [14]

finding connections between humans and oceans otherwise denied by western classifications. With this comparison, she stresses how humans' survival depends on oceans' good health and how saving the environment serves human interests. This line rephrases the biblical words: "Ye are the salt of the earth"[15] – a parable that Jesus is said to have delivered to his disciples to impress on them how to lead people to the kingdom of heaven. In Marsh's variation of Christ's parable, a dying ocean means the Apocalypse, as humans are fomenting their own genocide when they destroy the planet they live on. The lines, "what *you* do, affects me / what *we* do, affects the sea,"[16] weave the North with the South, the colonial metropolis with its distant territories. Power imbalance resulting from colonization and epitomized in settler colonial societies thus needs to be redressed for the climate crisis to be solved.

9 In "Poem for the Commonwealth, 2018," Karlo Mila represents a world in which people from the Pacific communicate with natural elements, as in stories of old. She personifies the ocean in her poem, yet the lady ocean's message to humanity is now one of exasperation: "she would say, ENOUGH!"[17] as she finds herself stuck amidst plastic waste – the result of fossil fuel industry and overconsumption. Plastic pollution in the Pacific Ocean is the last straw for Karlo Mila as it invades islands, stifling marine ecology, damaging coral reefs, and poisoning schools of fish, transforming land into an open-air garbage dump.[18] The poet further signifies the climate urgency experienced in her region with the metaphor of the canary in the coal mine, whose sacrifice enables humans to find a way out before being asphyxiated underground.[19] With this image associating Pacific Islanders with tiny, caged, sacrificial birds, Mila contests the colonial and capitalist ideology underlying political apathy with regards to environmental actions. Indeed, Linda Tuhiwai Smith recalls how Pasifika were long denied their humanity because Hegelian theories claimed that people who had no writing system had no History.[20]

10 To contest fake scientific assumptions underlying and justifying the colonial enterprise, Mila refers to the genealogy of mankind from a Tongan viewpoint, as *whakapapa* (genealogy, family history) is interwoven with the *vā* (spacetime). The concept of *vā* which can be found throughout the Pacific also has its own usage in Tonga. Karlo Mila and Maui Hudson (Te Whakatohea, Nga Ruahine, and Te

Mahurehure) argue that, "As va is a culturally located concept, it necessitates that this va is guided by principles of balance, reciprocity and respect – although all is possible in the va."[21] Imagined as a "negotiated space,"[22] the *vā* is inseparable from *whakapapa* as time and space are conceived in their togetherness, not as separate entities: "My people have always known / that we are all relatives, / common ancestors, / the same stardust / in all of our bones, / the rocks, the trees, the leaves."[23] In Tongan history, humans' kinship with stars, plants, and minerals is asserted.

11 Tongan science is confirmed nowadays by contemporary western science. As Titaua Porcher-Wiart (Māʻohi, French) notes in "Imagining the Body in Pacific Francophone Literature" (2015), in Pacific cultures, "the body, in the collective imagination, is akin to a particle of the cosmos [...] [which] appears as curiously akin to the very recent discoveries of modern cosmology."[24] Kinship is one of the founding principles of Pacific cultures. Refusing the western dichotomy between nature and culture propagated by Enlightenment philosophers, Pacific inhabitants offer ethical approaches to the climate crisis, highlighting bonds between humans, non-humans, and more-than-humans despite their differences. In her poem, Karlo Mila thus challenges the narrative of "progress" professed during colonization, presenting instead Indigenous epistemologies as safeguarding humanity from global warming's apocalyptic damage which risks dis-ASTER-ing humans and non-humans from their interplanetary origins and more-than-human particles.

Charting Systemic Abuse on Nature and Cultures in the Pacific

12 In the "Introduction to *Refiguring Disaster Temporalities*" (2023), Chris Prentice (Pākehā) argues that "environmental disasters [...] are inseparable from history and politics."[25] Sea-level rise in the Pacific results from global warming, itself the result of human activities polluting the atmosphere.[26] Marsh's poem stitches the slow violence endured by Pacific Islanders, at having had their cultures, customs, epistemologies, and languages repressed and sometimes suppressed

by missionaries and colonists, with the gradual drowning of Pacific lands due to the Capitalocene. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Rob Nixon explains that slow violence is "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all." [27] The temporal perspective he takes is a useful tool to observe chronic situations such as "domestic violence[,] posttraumatic stress and, in particular, environmental calamities." [28] In this context, Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence seems an appropriate framework to analyze Marsh's poetic construction, as she associates the fight against climate change with a fight for Indigenous peoples' right to dignity: "My grandad's from Tuvalu and to be specific it's plop bang in the middle of the South Pacific […] / my ancestors were guided by sky and sea trails and way before Columbus even hoisted his sails!" [29] In this passage, irony is used to measure the gap existing between Europeans' (lack of) knowledge regarding the Pacific and Pacific Islanders' modes of knowing the world.

13 In *An Indigenous Ocean: Pacific Essays* (2023), Damon Salesa argues that, although one third of our planet is labeled under the name "Pacific Ocean," most world atlases and histories "marginalis[e], minimis[e] or occlud[e] Oceania to the point of actually having to fundamentally misrepresent the Earth." [30] Salesa explains how (mental) images representing the Pacific as a big blue stain – as though uninhabited and relegated to the background – have scientifically and historically been fashioned by two-dimensional maps drawing the world in a Eurocentric way. The imaginary fracture that these maps create on this region – as though an "East Pole" and a "West Pole" existed each on one side of the earth in the Pacific [31] – seems to separate this part of the world from more important centers of power. It also erases lands deemed too tiny to be represented, and therefore erases peoples, cultures, languages, and knowledge from the map, constructing the Pacific as a blue desert, as a *Mare Nullius*. To oppose this western rewriting of Pacific history, Marsh recalls in her poem how, for the last 40,000 years, navigational skills and sky reading have enabled the different waves of migration and settlement across the Moana. [32] The poet disclaims the myth of "discovery" (neo-)colonists perpetuate to this day – a decolonial

theme also explored by Karlo Mila [33] – and highlights instead the engineering prowess of her ancestors.

14 When Marsh weaves her poem with symmetrical patterns – with place-naming recalling how London exists both in the UK and in Kiribati [34] – to offer empathy in lieu of colonial history, Karlo Mila portrays the British capital as "epicentre of epitaph, / epitome of empire [35]" – not as the navel of the world, but as a memory site for the dead of its former empire. Mila's text asserts its trauma-telling objective, treading in the footsteps of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions set up in Australia under the name "Truth-Telling" (1991 ongoing) and in Aotearoa New Zealand (2018-2024): "Truth be told, / it is the fear of future / that we most have in common." [36] Environmental trauma is inseparable from the colonial past. Mila preserves the "us" versus "them" dialectics, opposing Indigenous/colonized people to the leaders of the Commonwealth. Her poem is overtly political and addresses controversial issues like the content of history books, massacres, historical trauma, cultural assimilation, language loss, plastic pollution, sinking islands, and the fossil fuel industry.

15 Mila constructs her ethos as a spokesperson voicing Pacific Islanders' climate realities: "I come to sing of sinking islands / in the South Pacific, / on the blue continent / where I come from." [37] Talking not of sinking ship but of sinking land and nations drowning, the poet calls the Pacific Ocean a continent per se, though made of seawater. The metaphor of "the blue continent" can be read as a metonymy of earth, itself often nicknamed "the blue planet." From this perspective, Pacific Islanders become the epitome of humanity, the focus point of history, as they inhabit the widest territory in a 3D representation of the earth.

16 Subtly echoing the well-established definition Epeli Hauʻofa (Tongan and Fijian) crafted of this region as "a sea of islands" (1993), [38] Karlo Mila's "blue continent" encompasses a vast expanse of interconnected, multicultural, and multilingual lands, deeply embedded in a common history of migration waves and commercial exchanges. She praises "the uncommon wealth / of multi-world-views" [39] present in her region and in the Commonwealth, to escape from monocultural, homogenous, and hegemonic narratives. Mila

sings the heterogeneity and polyphony of her home-sea-land which Damon Salesa describes in these terms: “[t]he Indigenous Ocean itself is a vast compendium of [...] stories, a compendium that reflects that it is drawn from the Ocean of (More Than) a Thousand Languages.” [40] Her poem is a wake-up call for northern nations to hear Pacific Islanders and their own epistemologies: “let us harness our collective wisdoms: / diverse, different and divergent.” [41] Ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and bio-diversities are presented as viable alternatives to a certain “helicopter” climate change discourse [42] formulated by scientists from the West and which could run the risk of uniformizing the response humans can take in front of environmental disasters, using climate change science as one more colonizing and greenwashing rhetorical device.

Tending to Climate Wounds with *Talanoa*

17 Pacific Islanders are situated at the intersection of interpersonal, historical, cultural, intergenerational, and environmental traumas. In “Poem for the Commonwealth, 2018,” Karlo Mila testifies to the institutional abuse Indigenous children endured at school: “Almost completely silenced, / schooled out of us, / in lost languages / that were beaten / out of the mouths of children.” [43] Residential schools in Canada, boarding schools forced upon the Stolen Generations in Australia, and institutionalization in Aotearoa New Zealand were all condemned by Truth and Reconciliation Commissions for having verbally, emotionally, physically, and often sexually abused Indigenous children taken away from their families and meaning-making social structures, with a view to acculturate them, censor their languages and knowledge, forcefully assimilate them, and steal their ancestral lands. Targeting isolated children via schooling and a systemic separation from their parents, families, and land have enabled settler states to weaken Indigenous social, cultural, and political structures. [44] Yet, many Indigenous peoples have managed to preserve their customs, languages, arts, epistemologies, scientific knowledge and techniques despite numerous acts outlawing them.

18 Mila writes a eulogy of Indigeneity when she writes that, over the centuries, they have devised “intergenerational meditations / on

what it means to be alive, / what it means to survive / in a certain set of conditions, / specific parameters of earth and sea and sky."[45] Already living in a "post-Native Apocalypse world" as Grace Dillon (Anishinaabe) would argue,[46] Indigenous people are ready to live in a dystopic climate narrative. Mila expresses her faith in Pacific Islanders who, because they have survived so many upheavals following colonization, have the strength to face environmental traumas. Her poem thus unexpectedly ends on a hopeful note as she plans to rebuild a better and safer world where environmental injustice would have been solved, and equality would be the norm: "It may be the end of the world as we know it / but let us not fear / the remaking of another one."[47] The Apocalypse has already occurred in Mila's poem and Indigenous epistemologies are its revelation, especially *whakapapa*, kinship, solidarity and *aroha* ("affection, sympathy, charity, compassion, love, empathy"[48]) which have the power to heal communities, natural resources, ancestors, and the land which they inhabit.

19 From this perspective, Earth itself becomes "a dream house / a great place to raise a family,"[49] which includes the past, present, and future, human beings, their ancestors, animals, plants, minerals, stars, and deities. Recovery from ecological dis-asters takes the symbolic shape of a *fale*, a traditional communal Tongan house in Mila's poem. This image of an ecological *fale* echoes the "*fonofale* model" devised by Fuimaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann (Sāmoan New Zealander) in 1984. Representing health as a *fonofale* enables patients to symbolically situate their family as the foundation stone of their wellbeing, their culture as the roof over their head, and the four pillars holding the house as their (1) physical, (2) mental, and (3) spiritual health, as well as (4) their gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social status, etc.[50] The *fonofale* is also envisioned as being surrounded by a cocoon composed of the environment, time passing and history, as well as the context, which shows how porous and fluid the boundaries are between the *fale*/house of health/one's body and the external world, including "natural" dis-asters.

20 Accounting for the impact of climatic events on one's health, the *fonofale* model seems particularly relevant to analyze Karlo Mila's protest poem. The optimism she shows at the end of her poem is not the kind of happy ending readers expect to find in a YA climate

fiction. It stems from another source, cultural awareness, which acknowledges that one's wellbeing as humans also depends on our conditions of life, climate catastrophes, social injustices, and historical legacy. As such, environmental traumas affecting the Pacific region can be tackled by its inhabitants and the international community, with collective stories offering support to witnesses while enticing the community to act and reconstruct meaning amidst chaos.

21 The fact that Mila first published her text on "adda," the Commonwealth Foundation's literary website whose aim is to connect writers and readers, is significant in this context. The poet invested the digital space to deliver her poem/speech to reach a vaster amount of readers across the world and have direct reactions from her audience. Timote Vaioleti (Tongan) explains the Tongan etymology of *talanoa*: *tala* ("to inform, tell, relate and command, as well as to ask or apply" [51]) and *noa* ("of any kind, ordinary, nothing in particular, purely imaginary or void" [52]). Mila indeed invests the 21st-century version of a storytelling practice known throughout the Pacific as *e-talanoa*. Lorna M. Probasco (Tongan American) suggests that "E-*talanoa*s are not a replacement for in-person *talanoa*s, but rather, by adapting and utilizing digital platforms to share and engage in *talanoa*, a world of learning for non-Pacific Islanders and Pacific Islanders alike is opened, particularly for those in the diaspora." [53] By publishing her poem on the Commonwealth literary website which receives comments from readers, Mila thus adapted *talanoa* to new technologies, engaging in an electronic version of "open, solution-oriented conversation" [54] to entice the web community – notwithstanding their ethnicity and culture – to be the builders of the ecological *fale*/civilization.

22 Marsh's "Unity" (2016), "Postcolonial Talk Back" (2018), [55] and *Mophead Tu* (2021) [56] all together could also be interpreted as instances and variations of *talanoa*. David and Kayt Robinson depict this rhetorical artform as "a traditional Pacific Island deliberation process that goes round in circles; it does not follow a straight line, aiming towards a final decision like many western processes. It involves a lot of repetition." [57] The fact that Marsh keeps coming back to the composition of "Unity" under various formats – a poem, a press article, and a graphic novel – shows that this story continuously

shape-shifts to adapt to its audience. Indeed, *talanoa* is often used to solve conflicts, allowing space/*vā* for every viewpoint to be expressed, and accepting differences. [58] When delivering "Unity" at Westminster Abbey, Marsh invited her spectators, mostly composed of politicians, to participate in an open discussion on environmental dis-asters, leading to further talks on means of actions and ways to protect the population and the land from sea-level rise and human-made pollution.

23 Her poem also interrogates the limits of politics in the fight against global warming and her perception of time in which the future occurs before the past can be confusing in a western, linear reading of time passing: "What we leave behind, matters to those who go before we face the future with our backs, sailing from shore to shore." [59] From a Pacific standpoint, her reference to migration waves (i.e. "sailing") and to (is-)lands distanced from one another (i.e. "shore to shore") contribute to representing life as a journey, a sea voyage, instead of "from womb to tomb." Paola Della Valle also notes that "[t]he principle of walking backwards into the future is a basic axiom in Polynesian thinking, as expressed in the Māori proverb *Ka mua, ka muri*: 'looking back in order to move forward'." [60] This transpacific insight envisioning time as circular and vast ocean space as interconnected challenges western notions of progress and of an apocalyptic ending, as it entices humans to act and change course in front of environmental trauma.

24 *Talanoa* therefore empowers Marsh with decolonizing people's mindsets, whether children and young adults with her graphic novel, adults with the press article, and every age group with her poem, with a view to preserving islands from being submerged. Her response to colonial thinking is poetic, metaliterary, and non-fictional, weaving her counter-story into different formats to voice her concerns for her people and their lands while being heard from various standpoints and platforms – at home, at schools, in political committees, and on the internet, as her poem, performance, and article are freely accessible online – opening the conversation on "post"-colonialism and its consequences for Indigenous people in a time of "natural" dis-asters to a wider audience.

Conclusion

25 Climate change poetry from Aotearoa New Zealand, based on transpacific viewpoints emphasizing kinship with non-humans and more-than-humans, could be described as the cultural production of *tangata o te moana nui a Kiwa*. Karlo Mila and Selina Tusitala Marsh use ecopoetry as a political stage to convey several forms of environmental trauma that could be left unsaid and unheard otherwise. In this article, I could create a conversation between western ecocriticism as represented by dis-aster studies influenced by Maurice Blanchot's philosophy, Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence, and Wendy Arons's understanding of the Capitalocene; and Pacific epistemologies which are useful tools to redress power imbalance and resolve conflicts resulting from colonization. The *vā*, *whakapapa*, *talanoa*, *aroha*, the "*fonofale* health model," and "the sea of islands" are Indigenous methodologies from the Pacific which can prove valuable to understand the apocalyptic impact of climate change on Pacific lands, peoples, and customs, talk about it, and act accordingly to preserve biodiversity and cultural differences.

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ABSTRACTS

English

Though formulated from the margins as its author is *tauiwi* (a foreigner) in Aotearoa New Zealand, this article examines how Indigenous epistemologies based on the concept of reciprocity, such as the *vā* (the space between), *talanoa* (conversation), and *aroha* (kindness, empathy, love), challenge unequal human/non-human relationships set up by settlers in Oceania. It especially focuses on two poems from Aotearoa New Zealand

which evaluate the colonial legacy on Indigenous cultures and endemic ecosystems in the Pacific: “Unity” by Selina Tusitala Marsh (Sāmoan, Tuvaluan, English, Scottish, and French New Zealander) and “Poem for the Commonwealth, 2018” by Karlo Mila (Tongan, Palagi, and Samoan New Zealander). These poems give shape to a spacetime which is respectful of Pacific epistemologies enabling poets to testify to alarming human/colonial-made environmental issues, such as sea level rise, marine pollution, and the extinction of endangered species. Positioning themselves as witnesses, actors, and guardians of stories, the poets of the corpus participate in the decolonization of the land, the English language, and Pacific literatures.

Français

Bien que formulé depuis la marge puisque son autrice est *tauiwi* (une étrangère) en Aotearoa Nouvelle-Zélande, cet article examine comment des épistémologies autochtones fondées sur le concept de la réciprocité, tels le *vā* (l’espace entre, l’entre-deux), *talanoa* (conversation), *kaitiakitanga* (la protection des ressources naturelles), et *aroha* (gentillesse, empathie, amour), défient les relations inégales entre humains et non-humains installées par les pionniers en Océanie. Il se concentre essentiellement sur deux poèmes d’Aotearoa Nouvelle-Zélande qui évaluent l’héritage colonial sur les cultures autochtones ainsi que sur les écosystèmes endémiques dans le Pacifique : « Unity » de Selina Tusitala Marsh (Néo-Zélandaise d’origine samoenne, tuvaluenne, anglaise, écossaise et française) et « Poem for the Commonwealth, 2018 » de Karlo Mila (Néo-Zélandaise originaire de Tonga, européenne, et samoane). Ces poèmes donnent forme à un espace-temps respectueux des épistémologies du Pacifique qui permettent aux poètes de témoigner de problèmes environnementaux résultant de l’activité humaine et de l’ère coloniale, tels que la montée des eaux, la pollution maritime, et l’extinction des espèces en voie de disparition. Se positionnant comme témoins, acteurs, et gardiens d’histoires, les poètes de ce corpus participent à la décolonisation de la terre, de la langue anglaise, et des littératures du Pacifique.

Español

Aunque formulado desde el margen ya que su autora es *tauiwi* (una extranjera) en Aotearoa Nueva Zelanda, este artículo examina cómo epistemologías autóctonas fundadas en el concepto de la reciprocidad tales como el *vā* (el espacio entre, el entre dos), *talanoa* (conversación), *kaitiakitanga* (la protección de los recursos naturales), y *aroha* (amabilidad, empatía, amor), desafían las relaciones desiguales entre humanos y no-humanos instalados por los pioneros/colonizadores en Oceanía. Se concentra esencialmente sobre dos poemas de Aotearoa Nueva Zelanda que evalúan la herencia colonial sobre las culturas autóctonas, así como sobre los ecosistemas endémicos en el Pacífico: «Unity» de Selina Tusitala Marsh (neozelandesa de origen samoana, tuvaluana, inglesa, escocesa et francesa) y «Poem for the Commonwealth, 2018» de Karlo Mila (neozelandesa

originaria de Tonga, europea, et samoana). Estos poemas dan forma a un espacio-tiempos respetuoso de las epistemologías del Pacifico que permiten a los poetas testimoniar de problemas medioambientales provocados por la actividad humana y la era colonial, tales como el crecimiento de las aguas, la contaminación marítima, y la extinción de las especies en vía de desaparición. Se posicionan como testigos, actores, y guardianes de historias, los poetas de este corpus participan de la descolonización de la tierra, de la lengua inglesa, y de las literaturas del Pacífico.

INDEX

Mots-clés
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AUTHOR

Marine Berthiot
Researcher affiliated with LCE (Lettres et civilisations étrangères), F-69007 Lyon, France; MSCA Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Galway (Ireland)

Where Will the Bellbird Sing, if Not on the Harakeke? Kaitiakitanga (Guardianship, Custodianship, and Protection) in Te Ao Māori

Où chantera le korimako, si ce n'est sur la pousse de harakeke ? Kaitiakitanga (tutelle, sauvegarde, et protection) dans le monde māori
¿Dónde cantará el korimako, si no es en el brote de harakeke? Kaitiakitanga (tutor, salvaguardia, y protección) en el mundo maorí

Lisa Renard and Awhina Tamarapa

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OUTLINE

Introduction
Whanaungatanga (kinship, relationship) and *taonga tuku iho*
Kaitiakitanga and Responsibilities
Mana and Respect: The Importance of Cultural Care
Conclusion. Where will the *korimako* sing, if not on the *harakeke*?

AUTHOR'S NOTES

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In this article, originally written in New Zealand English, we have chosen not to italicize Māori names. Ideally, we would have preferred not to italicize any Māori words, but we had to work within the author's guidelines, based on American English. To learn more about decolonizing academic writing, see Alice Te Punga Somerville, *Always Italicise: How to Write While Colonised*, Auckland, Auckland University Press, 2022.

TEXT

Introduction

1 Home of the Māori people – who are Tangata Whenua (Indigenous people of the land) – Aotearoa New Zealand is located in the southernmost part of Te-Moana-nui-a-Kiwa (the Pacific Ocean). Over time, its people have traveled from and maintained strong ties with other Pacific nations, including the Cook Islands, Society Islands, Tahiti, Austral Islands, Marquesas Islands, Tuamotu Archipelago, Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Niue, Hawai'i and others. [1]

2 Within Māori ontology, the entities that make up the world – ancestors, humans, mountains, plants, birds, ancestral treasures, etc. – are associated with each other in a relational and genealogical sense. They all share the same origin and are part of a genealogical continuity that links them to the primordial ancestors who gave birth to the world: Papatūānuku, the Earth Mother, and Ranginui, the Sky Father. [2]

3 In ceremonial contexts, this continuity is invoked by mentioning the names of key ancestors through an elaborate art of oratory channeling *taonga tuku iho* [3] (revered cultural practices, cultural treasures, Māori ancestral treasures, i.e. treasured ancestral belongings) as uplifter, aid, and support. [4]

4 The *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship, custodianship), i.e. the care, protection and nurturing of *taonga tuku iho* such as *whatu* (weaving) or *raranga* (basketry), are therefore the subject of diligent care, knowledge, values, skills, and know-how that can be entrusted to specialists in *tikanga* (Māori custom) [5]. Among these specialists, *kaitiaki* (ancestral treasure guardians), *tohunga* (ritual experts), and museum professionals have a unique importance and responsibility to build *whanaungatanga* (relationships and kinship) between *taonga*, the land, and the people. [6]

5 It was these specialists who enabled the two authors of this article to establish their first exchanges in 2012. At the time, Awhina Tamarapa

had been working at Te Papa Tongarewa National Museum of New Zealand, for more than a decade, as *kaitiaki* (caregiver, guardian) for *taonga* Māori (ancestral treasures, belongings), as well as concept developer and collection manager. Lisa Renard, then pursuing her PhD, hoped to do an internship under Awhina's guidance at Te Papa. Our connection was made possible through *kaitiaki* and artists who had previously worked with Lisa in Europe and trusted her to be the right person to learn from Awhina. From the very beginning, our bond was deeply rooted in *whanaungatanga* (relationship and kinship). In 2013, we spent three months working on the Ngāti Toa Rangatira exhibition at Te Papa in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand, building an enduring friendship. Ten years later, Awhina now holds a PhD of Philosophy in Museum Studies and Lisa a PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology. Together, we have shared countless adventures (fig. 1), laughs, *kōrero* (discussion, stories) and a deep admiration for *whatu* (Māori finger weaving), *raranga* (Māori plaiting and basketry), and the people who practice these art forms.

Figure 1. Lisa and Awhina's hands above *harakeke*, Kapiti, December 2024

Awhina Tamarapa

6 This article considers the ancestral ties that bind the Māori, Tangata Whenua (Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand) to an emblematic plant, named *harakeke* [7] in Te Reo Māori (the Māori language). Through the presentation of key concepts from the Māori world, such as *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship, custodianship and protection) of *taonga* (Māori ancestral treasures) and *whanaungatanga* (Māori kinship ties and the art of relationships), we address the need for greater understanding, consideration and respect for Indigenous knowledge systems and practices, particularly within the museum world. Behind this lies not only our gratitude to the *harakeke* and its many *kaitiaki* (guardians) – humans, birds, insects, plants, *taonga*, winds, rivers, and rain – both here in New Zealand, Aotearoa and overseas – but also the importance of the ancestral connections between Tangata Whenua and *harakeke*. We

also recognize the interconnected relationships that are fostered and sustained across generations, time, and places in alignment with the following Hūtia *waiata* (song), which is also a *whakataukī* (significant saying): [8]

> Hūtia te rito, Hūtia te rito o te harakeke
> Kei hea te kōmako e kō?
> Kī mai ki ahau, he aha te mea nui?
> He aha te mea nui o te ao?
> Māku e kī atu, He tangata! He tangata! He tangata, hī! [9]

Figure 2. *Korimako* Tiritiri Matangi island, November 2024

Lisa Renard

Whanaungatanga (kinship, relationship) and *taonga tuku iho*

7 For generations, Tangata Whenua have nurtured deep connections with the *whenua* (land) and the *taiao* (natural world). [10] Among the striking features of the *whenua* of Aotearoa are the beautiful,

towering flax bushes, including the iconic *harakeke* (New Zealand flax) species unique to the land of the long white cloud. This uniqueness is reflected across Aotearoa's natural world, which is shaped by its native fauna and flora. In addition to its famous birds, such as the *kea*, kiwi, and *kererū*, many other species of animals and plants are endemic to Aotearoa.[11] This includes the *harakeke* (*Phormium tenax*, New Zealand Flax) (fig. 1) and the *korimako* (*Anthornis melanura*, Bellbird) (fig. 2), both of which are celebrated in the Hūtia *waiata* presented in the introduction. This song reflects not only the importance of *he tangata* (the people), but also underlines the fundamental connection between *he tangata* and other beings dwelling in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world).[12] Without the contribution of the *korimako*, *tūī*, and many other birds and insects, the pollen can hardly travel, and the *harakeke* cannot spread and grow (fig. 3). Without the skilled yet gentle hands of the weavers, the *pā harakeke* (the weaver's garden) cannot flourish. Ultimately, without the *harakeke* and the *manu* (the birds), the weavers would not be able to practice their arts.[13] All are mutually dependent on one another and are *whanaunga* (related and fostering relationships) to one another.

Figure 3. Jim and Cathy Schuster's *Pā Harakeke*, Rotoiti, December 2024

8 The trajectories of *harakeke*, *korimako*, and humans are not only intertwined in everyday life, but also historically, as this connection dates back to time immemorial. In the Māori worldview, all beings – *harakeke*, *korimako*, humans, and many others – are interconnected through *whakapapa* (art of genealogy) and are mutually dependent on one another in various ways. They are *whanaunga* to one another. In other words, they are related, intertwined, and interdependent. In the case of *harakeke*, *korimako*, and humans, they share multiple common ancestors: Papatūānuku, the Earth Mother, and Ranginui, the Sky Father, and one of their sons Tane nui-a-rangi. He created the first woman, the birds, and the forest, among which the *korimako* and the *harakeke* emerged. The *pūrākau* (origin stories) tell that the *harakeke* species [14] came into the world of light through the union of Pākoti (also known as Pākoki) and Tane nui-a-rangi. [15] He also is at the origin of the creation of Hine-te-iwaiwa, the spiritual deity of weaving, childbirth and the cycles of the moon. [16]

9 Additionally, the emergence of the art of weaving in Te Ao Māori is closely linked to another *pūrākau*: the story of Niwareka and Mataora. [17] Niwareka was a spirit-being from Rarohenga (the underworld) who married a mortal named Mataora. After Mataora disrespected his wife, she fled back to her people in Rarohenga. Mataora chased her and was laughed at when he arrived in Rarohenga, as his *moko* (Māori tattooing) was painted on his face and body, rather than chiseled into the skin. Uetapu, Niwareka's father, a master carver and *tā moko* (Māori tattoo) practitioner, challenged Mataora to endure the process of having a *tā moko* chiseled into his skin. After meeting this challenge, Mataora was forgiven for his actions and was bestowed the knowledge of *tā moko* by his father-in-law. Niwareka and Mataora then returned to the upper world together. As a skilled weaver, Niwareka brought back the art of weaving and the first woven garments; Te Rangi-haupapa, a type of cloak called a *pāroha* (fastened at the throat) and a patterned, plaited belt named Te Ruruku o Te Rangi. "The patterns of both garments were the original designs to guide all students in the art of weaving." [18] Within Māori weaving co-exist a wide range of ancestral fiber technologies that include *whatu* (finger weft twining), *tāniko* (colored horizontal threads used in the *whatu* technique),

whiri (braiding), *raranga* (plaiting), *whāriki* (mat weaving) *tukutuku* (lattice weaving), and *tuitui* (stitching).[19]

10 Passed down to the livings through many generations within *te whare pora* (the school of weaving), Māori weaving (fig. 4) is a *taonga tuku iho*: a revered cultural practice and treasured ancestral belonging. As such, when practiced, shared, and transmitted, it calls upon the *mana* (the influence, authority, prestige), the *tapu* (sanctity), the *wairua* (the ancestral presence, the spirit), the *mauri* (life principle), and many other ancestral qualities of multiple ancestors, connecting the weavers simultaneously to their ancestors, the *whenua* and the *taiao*.[20]

Figure 4. Māori weaving, Kawerau, October 2013

Lisa Renard

Kaitiakitanga and Responsibilities

11 Customarily, the disciplines of weaving have been deeply influenced by access to resources, time, skill, and purpose. As a consequence, a

weaver always bears the responsibilities associated with *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship, custodianship), which entails caring for and nurturing the land so that the *harakeke* and other essential weaving resources can flourish and remain accessible. It also involves mentoring apprentices to ensure *mātauranga* (Māori knowledge) thrives and is passed down through generations. [21]

12 As apprentices – Lisa to Tina Wirihana, Awhina to Nanny Kath, and many others – we were primarily instructed the techniques related to *harakeke* and the associated practices for tending to a *pā harakeke* (weaver garden). Central to this *mātauranga* was the metaphor of the bush as a family, consisting of grandparents, parents, children, and grandchildren. The outermost leaves represent the grandparents, who envelope and protect the parents, while the parents shield the youngest leaves – the children and grandchildren – located at the center of the fan known as *te rito* (central shoot or baby). These three central leaves must never be cut, as they are vital to the bush growth and regeneration. Yellowed and dried leaves, often referred to as "great-grandparents," are unsuitable for weaving, whereas the leaves referred to as the "parents" are ideal for this purpose. [22] Pruning, trimming, and caring for a *harakeke* bush requires few tools: a cutter or thick-bladed knife. Cuts must be precise, clean, and made at the base of the bush to ensure the plants can continue to develop and provide resources for weavers year after year. Because the leaves grow in a fan-like pattern, it is essential to keep the outermost fan well maintained to access the inner layers while clearing pathways between bushes to prevent injury. Improperly cut leaves, which remain too long, can pose significant risks, including injuries to legs, forearms, face, and eyes. [23]

13 One of the key contemporary concerns regarding Māori weaving is the accessibility and sustainable use of *harakeke*. For many decades, weavers and activists have fought – and continue to fight – to protect native species not only from invasive species but also from resource misuse, decline of traditional practices, the pollution of land and waterways, and loss of ancestral lands. [24]

14 Among the various significant initiatives undertaken over the years, the establishment of multiple community *pā harakeke* in Te Wai Pounamu (South Island) and Te Ika a Māui (North Island) has been

particularly vital (fig. 5). The establishment of art schools and *wānanga* offering classes in Māori weaving has also been of considerable importance.[25] Furthermore, the Māori cultural rights claim against the Crown, called the WAI 262,[26] has played a crucial role in the protection of *taonga tuku iho*, including the art of Māori weaving, and other issued such as intellectual property and copyright laws. Issued by six different *iwi* tribal representatives, in 1991, this claim challenged the New Zealand Government to address the authority and rights of Māori over the control of *taonga* – cultural knowledge, heritage, and custodianship of the natural environment. This claim set a precedent in that it was the first to focus on contemporary laws and policies affecting Māori cultural rights. The recommendations of the Waitangi Tribunal released in 2011, have still not been addressed by New Zealand governments.[27]

Figure 5. Orokonui Ecosanctuary near Dunedin, September 2023

Lisa Renard

Mana and Respect: The Importance of Cultural Care

15 To this day, one of the primary challenges faced by Māori weavers is the lack of recognition and understanding of *mātauranga* (Māori knowledge) as *kaitiaki* (caregiver, guardian). This lack of acknowledgment undermines the depth of traditional knowledge systems and practices, often marginalizing the cultural, spiritual, and environmental understandings integral to weaving (fig. 6). These practices are upheld by the *mana* (authority) of *tohunga whatu raranga* (expert weavers), whose expertise is invaluable. [28]

Figure 6. *Harakeke* at Te Rerenga Wairua, August 2023

Lisa Renard

16 Yet, whether in Aotearoa New Zealand or overseas, the weavers often do not receive the respect and trust they deserve. Particularly within institutions such as museums where they are frequently called upon

to provide culturally appropriate practices and *mātauranga* to care, restore, display, or research *taonga tuku iho* (revered cultural practices and treasured ancestral belongings). However, they are seldom acknowledged in the long term. Their names are often forgotten, their contributions go unrecognized, and, more often than not, they are inadequately compensated for their *mahi* (work). In the past, within museum contexts, both of us have witnessed expert weavers being both respected and admired for their skills, but we have also seen weavers being treated with disregard and subjected to external direction on their tasks, despite being the true experts.

17 On another level, when developing collaborative practices with Indigenous communities regarding plant-based material culture, museums often lack cultural care. The teams underestimate the time required to build trust and develop a common language. Activities are typically planned according to rigid schedules, leaving little room for breaks, reflection, experimentation, joint discoveries, and most crucially, the reassessment of the initial project. Just as museums sometimes fail to allocate sufficient attention to the initiation of a project, and to properly welcoming their collaborators into the museum world, the final stages and conclusions of collaborative projects are regularly rushed. This often leads to outcomes that are misaligned with the *tikanga* (Māori custom) and fundamental protocols of Indigenous communities. [29]

18 The dismissal or misrepresentation of *mātauranga* and weavers not only threatens the preservation of Māori weaving but also disregards the role of Indigenous expertise in resource management, cultural sustainability and the care of *taonga tuku iho*. Besides, it undermines the strength of interconnected relationships between Tangata Whenua (the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand) and their environment, which as we have seen in this article are fostered and sustained across generations, time, and places. We argue that to shift museums towards decolonizing practice, the *mana* of Indigenous knowledge systems, practices, and experts must be restored. Moreover, cultural restoration is a form of liberation not only in a museum context but also beyond, benefiting Māori communities, other Indigenous communities, and museum professionals alike. [30]

Conclusion. Where will the *korimako* sing, if not on the *harakeke*?

19 The *harakeke* (New Zealand flax) and the *korimako* (bellbird) are endemic to Aotearoa New Zealand and have been intertwined for generations. They both hold significant relationships with the entities that make up Te Ao Māori (the Māori world): rain, waterways, wind, other birds, insects, plants, humans, *taonga* (treasured ancestral belongings), and more.

20 Within this interconnected world, the *harakeke* and *korimako* are related to other plants, birds, as well as humans and *taonga*, not only through a genealogical continuity and shared common ancestors, but also by inhabiting the same environment and facing similar challenges. Their past, present, and future are therefore intertwined and interdependent. Humans, in particular, hold a responsibility toward the world around them and can act as *kaitiaki* (custodians, guardians) when called upon.

21 This is exemplified by Māori weavers, who act as *kaitiaki* (custodians) and for whom the *harakeke* and *korimako* are particularly significant. Māori weavers hold the *mauri* (life force) of weaving, which means they not only care and nurture the land to ensure *harakeke* and other essential weaving resources can thrive and remain accessible but also advocate for sustainable practices. They work to share and transmit the *mātauranga* (Māori knowledge) associated with plants and birds, both within Aotearoa and internationally, in various contexts and especially in the museum world.

22 We hope this article has provided insight into Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) on two fundamental concepts demonstrated through the practice of Māori weaving; *kaitiakitanga* (custodianship) and *whanaungatanga* (kinship, relationships). The proverb “Hutia te rito o te harakeke” describes the interdependencies of the natural world. It also expresses the importance of family, and the obligation of humanity to nurture all life.

23 We demonstrate that it is possible to learn and understand intercultural respect through in-depth immersion and a willingness to be led by Indigenous principles, values, and practices. Museums, in particular, have an obligation to release control of cultural heritage that belongs to marginalized peoples in order to build new relationships based on trust and respect – so that all of us may sing.

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ABSTRACTS

English

This article considers the ancestral ties that bind the Māori, Tangata Whenua (the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand), to an emblematic plant, named *harakeke* in Te Reo Māori (the Māori language), also known as New Zealand Flax or *Phormium tenax*. Through the presentation of key concepts from the Māori world, such as *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship, custodianship, and protection) of *taonga* (Māori ancestral

treasures) and *whanaungatanga* (Māori kinship ties and the art of relationships), we address the need for greater understanding, consideration and respect for Indigenous knowledge systems and practices, particularly within the museum world. Behind this lies not only our gratitude to the *harakeke* and its many *kaitiaki* (guardians) – humans, birds, insects, plants, *taonga*, winds, rivers, and rain – both here in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas – but also the importance of the ancestral connections between Tangata Whenua (the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand) and *harakeke*. We also recognize the interconnected relationships that are fostered and sustained across generations, time, and places in alignment with the Hūtia *waiata* (song) at the heart of our article's title. "Where will the Bellbird Sing? Kei hea te kōmako e kō?" is also an homage to the work of Dame Anne Salmond and refers to one of her Discussion Paper dated June 2022. Titled "*Where Will the Bellbird Sing? Te Tiriti o Waitangi and 'Race'*," this work aligns with our collective engagement with Toitū Te Tiriti. It calls on the New Zealand government to honor Te Tiriti o Waitangi and ensure its endurance for future generations, in order to protect and nurture the many entities that make up Te Ao Māori (the Māori world), such as birds, plants, mountains, and rivers.

Français

Cet article s'intéresse aux liens ancestraux qui unissent les Māori, Tangata Whenua (peuple autochtone de Nouvelle-Zélande Aotearoa), à une plante emblématique, le *harakeke*, aussi connue sous le nom de lin de Nouvelle-Zélande ou *Phormium tenax*. À travers la présentation de concepts clés du monde māori, tels que la *kaitiakitanga* (sauvegarde, tutelle, et protection) des *taonga* (trésors ancestraux māori) et la *whanaungatanga* (l'art relationnel et les liens de parenté māori), nous interrogeons la nécessité d'une meilleure compréhension, associée à une réelle considération des systèmes de savoirs et de pratiques autochtones, en particulier dans le monde muséal. En toile de fond, s'exprime non seulement notre gratitude à l'égard du *harakeke* et de ses nombreux *kaitiaki* (gardien·nes) – humain·es, oiseaux, insectes, plantes, *taonga*, vents, rivières, et pluie – tant ici, en Nouvelle-Zélande Aotearoa, qu'à l'étranger, mais aussi l'importance des relations qui lient les différentes entités qui composent Te Ao Māori (le monde māori). Nourries et entretenues de génération en génération, dans le temps et dans l'espace, par de multiples *kaitiaki* (gardien·nes), ces relations sont, du point de vue māori, essentielles pour le bien-être de toutes et de tous, comme l'illustre le *waiata* (chant) intitulé « Hūtia » à l'origine du titre de notre article. « Où chantera le korimako ? Kei hea te kōmako e kō? » renvoie aussi aux travaux de Dame Anne Salmond et à l'une de ses conférences, intitulée : « Where Will the Bellbird Sing? Te Tiriti o Waitangi and 'Race' ». Cet hommage s'aligne avec notre engagement collectif pour la défense de Te Tiriti o Waitangi et enjoint le gouvernement néo-zélandais à honorer et à garantir sa pérennité pour les générations futures, afin de protéger et de faire prospérer les nombreuses entités qui

composent Te Ao Māori, telles que les oiseaux, les plantes, les montagnes, et les rivières.

Español
Este artículo se interesa por los lazos ancestrales qui unen a los maoríes, Tangata Whenua (pueblo autóctono de Aotearoa Nueva Zelanda), a una planta emblemática, el *harakeke*, también conocida como lino de Nueva Zelanda o *Phormium tenax*. A través de la presentación de conceptos claves del mundo maorí, tales como la *kaitiakitanga* (salvaguardia, tutela y protección) de los *taonga* (tesoros ancestrales maoríes) y el *whanaungatanga* (el arte relacional y los lazos de parentela maorí), interrogamos la necesidad de una mejor comprensión, asociada a una consideración real de los sistemas de saber y de las prácticas autóctonas, en particular en el mundo museístico. En definitiva, expresamos no sólo nuestra gratitud hacia el *harakeke* y sus numerosos *kaitiaki* (guardianes /-nas – humanos /-nas, pájaros, insectos, plantas, *taonga*, vientos, ríos y lluvia –tanto aquí, en Aotearoa-Nueva Zelanda, como en el extranjero, pero también la importancia de las relaciones que enlazan las diferentes entidades que componen Te Ao Māori (el mundo maorí). Nutridas y mantenidas generación tras generación, en el tiempo y el espacio, por múltiples *kaitiaki* (guardianes /-nas), estas relaciones son, desde el punto de vista maorí, esenciales para el bienestar de todas y todos, como lo ilustra el *waiata* (canto) titulado « Hūtia » que origina el título de nuestro artículo. «¿Dónde cantará el korimako, si no es en el brote de harakeke? Kei hea te kōmako e kō?» se interconecta también con las obras de Dame Anne Salmond y una de sus conferencias, titulada: «Where Will the Bellbird Sing? Te Tiriti o Waitangi and 'Race'». Este homenaje se integra a nuestro compromiso colectivo a favor de la defensa de Te Tiriti o Waitangi e insta al Gobierno neozelandés honorar y garantizar su perennidad para las generaciones futuras y hacer prosperar las numerosas entidades que componen Te Ao Māori, tales como los pájaros, las plantas, las montañas y los ríos.

INDEX

Mots-clés
Aotearoa Nouvelle-Zélande, expertise autochtone, environnement, tissage, musées

Keywords
Aotearoa New Zealand, Indigenous expertise, natural environment, weaving, museums

Palabras claves
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AUTHORS

Lisa Renard
Researcher Affiliated with the laboratoire interdisciplinaire en études culturelles (LinCS) CNRS-Université de Strasbourg, France, and Adjunct Research Associate at the Stout Research Centre, Museum and Heritage Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand

Awhina Tamarapa
Postdoctoral fellow at the Stout Research Centre, Museum and Heritage Studies, Victoria, University of Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand