

FROM THE GUEST EDITORS

Settler Colonialism

Jeff Gessas* and Tricia Glazebrook**

Settler colonialism has been largely underrepresented in environmental philosophy. This special issue aims to build on the efforts of others to bring settler colonialism and Indigenous sovereignty to the forefront of environmental concerns by increasing its visibility within environmental ethics.

Settler colonialism is a violence that disrupts human relations with the environment, produces injustice against Indigenous peoples, and furthers ecological devastation of the earth. In contrast to kin-based, reciprocal relationships embodied in many Indigenous land-based practices, settler colonialism reduces the natural world to inert resources that are extracted using tactics of dispossession, assimilation, and genocide. Unlike conventional colonialism in which the colonial metropole, i.e., the “parent” colonizing state, dominates from afar, settler colonialism is an ongoing project of replacement. Colonists who come to stay disrupt, occlude, oppress, and destroy antecedent relationships with the land through their homeland creation process. The articles in this issue explore the mechanisms by which this is done and begin to open avenues through which Indigenous place-based, reciprocal relationships with the land can be reconstituted or preserved toward environmental justice and possibilities for healing.

Discussion begins with Lauren Eichler and David Baumeister who trace early historical accounts of settlers in North America to show how the animalization of Indigenous peoples was weaponized as a justification for genocidal conquest of land. The authors stress how Native Americans continue to be animalized as predators and pests in ways that still dehumanize Indigenous people and trivialize as myth or demonize Indigenous land-use practices to justify European settlement. Rebekah Sinclair explores how the scientific concept of *species* reproduces the organizing grammar of settler colonialism whereby designations such as “invasive,” “native,” and “wild,” for example, are mapped onto ecosystems in ways that contradict Indigenous histories, worldviews, and axiological paradigms. Sinclair suggests that the concept of species conceals the biases of (or fails to critically examine) Western scientific metaphysics and processes of ordering. She then draws on Native American scholars and storytellers to describe a decolonizing orientation to species concepts that centers, rather than masking, Indigenous science, histories, and nature-culture relations.

* Jeff Gessas, Department of Philosophy and Religion, University of North Texas, 1155 Union Circle #311070, Denton, TX 76203-5017; email: jeffgessas@gmail.com.

** Tricia Glazebrook, School of Politics, Philosophy, and Public Affairs, Washington State University, P.O. Box 644880, Pullman, WA 99164-4880; email: trishglaze@gmail.com.

Anna Cook and Bonnie Sheehey stress that any integration of Western and Indigenous environmental philosophy must be one that challenges abstract, groundless accounts of normativity common in the philosophical discipline and avoids delocalized, universal frameworks. Drawing on Cherokee philosopher Brian Yazzie Burkhart, they investigate how land-based epistemology “localizes” environmental ethics within a place, responsive to the land and drawn from land-connected Indigenous practices. They show that this approach is more effective for responding to environmental ethics challenges while also exposing the violent power dynamics at play in settler colonialism.

Shelbi Meissner shows how the land informs theory and empowers resistance. Her article explores rainmaking among 'atáaxum champúlam/Luiseño medicine people as an embodied practice subjected to colonial violence via what she identifies as “epistemic damming,” whereby settler colonial academic and legal institutions produce contributory injustice by “parceling” out components of Indigenous cultural practices. She argues that a wholistic land-based approach to Indigenous ceremonial practices offers pathways to resist injustice.

Billie Lythberg and Dan Hikuroa write using a poetic “call and response” method, akin to the powhiri welcome ritual of encounter offered by Māori to visitors, to ask how we might know Wai-Horotiu, a river now buried under a main street in the center of the city of Auckland. They blend ancestral connections to produce the powerful image of tragedy that Wai-Horotiu and other rivers in Aotearoa-New Zealand have been subjected to as they are buried alive by indifferent colonizers who cannot see the life of the river or the life it brings to the land and its many cohabitants. They ask if seeing rivers through a whakapapa lens might teach all New Zealanders, including the political descendants of British settlers, to “listen for the voice of the river(s)” as a healing connecton between people and the governing spirit of water and land.

Together these articles show how Indigenous resistance through and with land-based practices materializes powerful repudiations of violence and offers alternative frameworks for building just relations.

We received many excellent submissions and are sorry we could not accept them all. Our aim has been to provide a balance of issues, places, and voices, and to remember history while looking to the future. We thank the authors for their rich and inspiring contributions and also those whose contribution we were unable to include.

We thank Gene Hargrove, who is editing this issue as the last before he retires. By launching this journal, he gave environmental thinkers a place to share ideas and build environmental ethics as a philosophical sub-discipline. His unrelenting commitment has brought so much to us.

Deb Haaland was recently sworn in as the first Indigenous Secretary of the Interior in the United States—a crucial role in management of U.S. ecosystems and Indigenous affairs. We look with hope to what this may bring to the future.

We dedicate this issue to indigenous environmental and land protectors whose efforts put them at great risk while benefiting us all.