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Thinking About Ecological Inter/ Dependencies: Introductory Remarks

In a world increasingly marked by life-altering, deeply unequal, and all-too-often deadly environmental changes, our edited volume *Ecological Interdependencies: Strong Asymmetrical Relations and More-Than-Human Worlds* interrogates the environmental humanities through the lens of asymmetrical dependencies. That means that we are interested in investigating the relationship between the environment and asymmetrical power dynamics, an approach that allows us to shed light on how historical and contemporary inequalities have shaped and still shape our social, political, and cultural realities as they intersect with their respective ecosystems. In the same breath, it allows us to foreground the manifold processes of exploitation, extraction, and exclusion, which have created uneven ecological landscapes, which, in turn, impact the way we live our lives. In an attempt to bridge disciplines—the only way to reckon with the immense changes wrought upon the planet by anthropogenic climate change—, our volume synthesizes diverse perspectives from the humanities and social sciences, attending to the tangled and often thorny bonds between human and more-than-human existence. By incorporating eco-relational viewpoints and recognizing the agency of non-human actors, the book aims to amplify the often-overlooked voices of the marginalized, including those beyond the human realm. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted in *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, understanding the intersections of power dynamics and human history requires acknowledging our deeply interconnected existence within a broader planetary context.[1] This edited volume's contributions offer a lens through which to rethink enduring questions of difference and dependency. These considerations are framed not as abstract or theoretical exercises, but as ones that are deeply grounded in material realities informed by histories of asymmetry, inequality, and exploitation, thus challenging us to critically reframe notions of ecological inter/dependencies beyond the universalizing narratives of the Anthropocene.[2]

1 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

2 We consciously play with the forward slash between "inter" and "dependency" throughout this introduction, and the edited volume as a whole, to draw attention to the fact that concepts of strong asymmetrical dependency (SAD), as developed by researchers at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS), always already involve interactions and interrelations and the sometimes troubled, sometimes liberatory wiggle rooms in between these interactions.

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1 Ecology as Relation

Ecology, traditionally defined as "the study of relations between organisms and environment," including "relations between individual organisms and environment" as well as "between groups and environment," takes on a richer and more expansive meaning within the humanities.[3] It extends beyond biological systems to encompass the complex interconnections between culture, society, and more-than-human realms. This more expansive scope accentuates not only the biological but also the sociocultural dynamics that model ecological understanding and practices. With this in mind, we begin our explorations by (re-)conceptualizing ecology as being inherently rooted in interrelation and dependency. In his landmark essay on "Black Ecology," African American sociologist Nathan Hare provided an early and crucial framework for understanding the intersections of ecology and dependency, positing that "the emergence of the concept of ecology in American life is potentially of momentous relevance to the ultimate liberation of black people. Yet blacks and their environmental interests have been so blatantly omitted that blacks and the ecology movement currently stand in contradiction."[4] He critiqued the newly emerging environmental movement of his time as wilfully excluding the realities of Black communities. His incisive discussion centred on racism and its enduring ecological and embodied effects on Black communities' health and access to nature, revealing a stark disparity: "The ecological ordeal of the black race does not have to wait for a nuclear attack; present conditions are deadly enough. The environmental crisis of whites (in both its physical and social aspects) already pales in comparison to that of blacks."[5] Through his work, Hare exposed how environmentalist-activists and policymakers focused primarily on maintaining quality of life for the white middle class, remaining blind to the environmental crises caused by systemic racism, oppression, and inequality. For Hare, this blindness was not incidental but deeply tied to structural violence: Blackness itself "was regarded as pollution and a threat to the health of the (white) social body. As such, Hare showed how Blacks were then pushed further and further from suburban spaces and sequestered in the inner cities, which, blighted by racial oppression and abandonment, were made into ghettos to each other."[6] For our purpose in this edited volume, it is important to foreground the ways in which Hare's prescient analysis revealed how anti-Black racism and ecological devastation could not be regarded as separate phenomena, but had to be thought of as interdependent processes. Moving beyond the biological conceptualisation of ecology reveals how relationships between

3 Julius Gould and William L. Kolb, eds., *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1964): 215; quoted in Nathan Hare, "Black Ecology," *The Black Scholar* 1, no. 6 (1970): 2.

4 Hare, "Black Ecology": 2.

5 Hare, "Black Ecology": 4.

6 Alex A. Moulton and Inge Salo, "Black Geographies and Black Ecologies as Insurgent Ecocriticism," *Environment and Society* 13, no. 1 (2022): 162.

human and more-than-human agents are irrevocably fashioned by interrelated, co-constitutive, and contingent hierarchies of power and privilege. Hare's articulation of ecology foregrounds these interrelations and dependencies, offering a critical intervention that has laid important groundwork for subsequent scholarship.[7]

In their recent special issue on *Expanding Black and Indigenous Ecologies*, Bonnie Etherington and Delali Kumavie expound on the deeply rooted entanglements between ecology, colonialism, and systemic inequities:

> Ecologies shape and are shaped by macro as well as micro units of the community, the nation-state, and the global. They are also fundamental to the ways we approach and understand historical, social, political, and economic relationships around the world. However, colonial epistemologies continue to marginalize Black and Indigenous peoples in discussions about ecologies; indeed, the neglect of Black and Indigenous peoples' disproportionate environmental dispossession and environmental racism displaces them from ecological conversations while "naturalizing" Black and Indigenous peoples as closer to the natural environment.[8]

By highlighting the ecological dimensions of racial capitalism and the enduring logics of extraction and pollution that inform our global commons, fields like Black and Indigenous ecology have emerged as both a diagnostic framework and a platform for resistance. As Roane, Femi-Cole, Nayak, and Tuck note, such an approach to ecology not only helps put pressure on entrenched histories, archives, or institutions, but also underscores the ability of Black and other marginalized communities to marshal "cultural resources and political insights to create meaningful alternatives."[9] Nathan Hare's 1970 conclusion indeed situated Black ecology as a anticolonial alternative praxis. He asserted that "the real solution to the environmental crisis is the decoloni-

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7 See the emerging fields of Critical Black Geography and Black Ecology. For discussions, go to Moulton and Salo, "Black Geographies and Black Ecologies as Insurgent Ecocriticism," as well as to Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014); Hilda Lloréns, *Making Livable Worlds: Afro-Puerto Rican Women Building Environmental Justice* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021); Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, eds., *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007); J.T. Roane, "Plotting the Black Commons," *Souls Journal* 20, no. 3 (2018): 239–66; J.T. Roane and Justin Hosbey, "Mapping Black Ecologies," *Current Research in Digital History* 2 (2019); and Celeste Winston, "Maroon Geographies," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 111, no. 7 (2021): 2185–99.

8 Bonnie Etherington and Delali Kumavie, "Expanding Black and Indigenous Ecologies," *English Language Notes* 62, no. 1 (2024): 2. For the interplay between Black and Indigenous ecologies, also see Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

9 J.T. Roane et al., "'The Seeds of a Different World Are Already Alive in the Everyday Practices of Ordinary Black and Indigenous People': An Interview with J.T. Roane," *Curriculum Inquiry* 52, no. 2 (2022): 129.

zation of the black race" and that Black people "must challenge and confront the very foundations of [. . .] society."[10]

This call to decolonization and systemic transformation continues to resonate today, as it offers us a framework for addressing the intersections of environmental and racial justice. Such explorations can serve as a foundation for understanding what we call ecological inter/dependency, demonstrating how the interplay between racialised violence and environmental degradation shapes both human and more-than-human worlds. Through this lens, we might be able to recognize how the dynamics of dependency extend beyond human communities, implicating multispecies assemblages, ecosystems, and landscapes in processes of power, oppression, and, crucially, resilience and refusal. As such, this edited volume introduces the concept of ecological inter/dependency as an interdisciplinary and widely applicable framework that captures the asymmetrical relationships between humans and more-than-human entities across different historical and geographical scapes. As our contributors show, ecological inter/dependencies emerge from deeply entrenched structures forged by power, greed, extraction, and exploitation—from antiquity to today. At the same time, they also reveal possibilities for collaboration, sustainability, and care, be it in the Amazonian rainforests or on Japan's coasts. To highlight the plethora of possibilities for expressing ecological inter/dependencies, we orient our work in this volume toward scholars like Kim D. Hester Williams and LeiLani Nishime, who have posited "nature and environment as relational sites for navigating both embodied racial identities and ecological space and place."[11] By situating ecological inter/dependency within a historically grounded, interdisciplinary, comparative, and planetary framework, this volume examines how human and non-human histories are profoundly entwined, moving beyond anthropocentric paradigms to foreground the interconnected and contested relationships that sustain life on Earth.

2 Decentring the Anthropocene: Histories and Legacies of Colonialism

Our reframing of ecological relations and dependency demands a critical interrogation of the Anthropocene, which, while quite rightly penned as the era in which humanity has become the single most influential geological force, tends to universalize the responsibility for ecological destruction. The narrative of "the Anthropos" has been critiqued for its failure to account for differentiated responsibilities and vulner-

10 Hare, "Black Ecology": 8.

11 LeiLani Nishime and Kim D. Hester Williams, "Introduction: Why Racial Ecologies?" in *Racial Ecologies*, eds. LeiLani Nishime and Kim D. Hester Williams (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018): 4.

abilities. As Janae Davis et al. have noted, "the centering of an undifferentiated humanity in much Anthropocene scholarship serves to reproduce white supremacist claims to universal knowledge."[12] Far from being neutral, the Anthropocene reflects the legacies of specific agents of power, then and now: "the forces directing the destruction of nature and the wealth produced from it are owned and controlled overwhelmingly by an unaccountable, mainly white, mainly male, elite."[13] The ecological transformations associated with this era—fossil fuel economies, the weaponization of steam power, and the establishment of extractive systems—are the direct results of decisions made by colonial and capitalist forces over centuries. Sharon R. Krause's observation that "environmental domination in this sense is a function of unchecked power on the part of states and corporations in relation to vulnerable people and their environments, together with the exploitation of such people and environments for profit and power" encapsulates this systemic imbalance.[14] Such domination is not only an outcome of these processes but also a driver of their perpetuation, reinforcing inequalities while degrading ecosystems. Alternative frameworks such as the Plantationocene and the (Racial) Capitalocene may help us understand how ecological harm disproportionately impacts those living under asymmetrical dependencies, while the architects of these systems profit from and perpetuate ecological and social crises.[15]

12 Janae Davis et al., "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, . . . Plantationocene?: A Manifesto for Ecological Justice in an Age of Global Crises," *Geography Compass* 13, no. 5 (2019): 5. For other critiques of the Eurocentric drift of much of Anthropocene scholarship, see also Heather Davis and Zoe Todd, "On the Importance of a Date, or, Decolonizing the Anthropocene," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 16, no. 4 (2017): 761–80, and, more generally, Farhana Sultana, "The Unbearable Heaviness of Climate Coloniality," *Political Geography* 99 (2022): 102638, and Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, its Overrepresentation—an Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2013): 257–337. For a recent exploration of the Anthropocene from a geoanthropological perspective, see Christoph Antweiler, *Anthropology in the Anthropocene: An Earthed Theory for Our Extended Present* (Cham: Springer, 2024).

13 Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993): 12.

14 Sharon R. Krause, "Environmental Domination," *Political Theory* 48, no. 4 (2020): 447.

15 The concept of the Plantationocene emphasizes the plantation system's influence on global environmental and social structures; it investigates the ways the plantation model became crucial for ecological exploitation, forced labour, and monoculture. And it takes plantations as the centres of ecological harm, racialized labour, colonization, and extraction practices, which damage biodiversity. See Donna Haraway et al., "Anthropologists Are Talking—About the Anthropocene," *Ethnos* 81, no. 3 (2016): 535–64; Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Davis et al., "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, . . . Plantationocene?"; and Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 17, no. 3 (2013): 1–15. The Capitalocene framework goes beyond the Anthropocene framework, which takes humans as the center of environmental impact, and argues that resource exploitation and continuous growth in capitalism are the main reasons for the ecological crises we face today. See Jason W. Moore, ed., *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016); Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, "The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative," *The Anthropocene Review* 1, no. 1 (2014): 62–69; Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam-*

The critiques inherent in these alternative approaches challenge the erasure of difference in the Anthropocene narrative. They highlight the specific historical, emplaced, and embodied actors and structures of domination that have led to today's environmental crises.

Both the plantation and the mine serve as stark examples of sites of ecological violence that intersect with the violence that was inflicted upon enslaved Black and Indigenous populations during the colonial period, violence that reaches into our presents and futures. As Hosbey, Lloréns, and Roane observe, "in the Continental Americas, especially in the early Spanish conquest, enslaved African and Indigenous peoples were forced to transform landscapes into mining extractive complexes."[16] These mines were not just sites of labour exploitation, they were integral to the imperial ambitions of the Spanish empire, with silver and gold serving as the raw materials for colonial expansion and for the consolidation of global capitalist networks. Similarly, the plantation forced enslaved Africans to clear vast tracts of land in order to establish the industrial-scale monocultural production of commodity crops such as sugar, rice, tobacco, indigo, and cotton. This transformation of land, marked by deforestation, monoculture, and terraforming, had disastrous consequences not only for the ecosystems, but also for the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and Africa, as well as the enslaved Africans forced to labour under inhumane conditions. These processes were not isolated but intertwined, as the plantation and mining industries converged into what has been termed "the mining–plantation complex" in the fifteenth century.[17] This complex marked the inception of eco- and genocidal logics that continue to shape our world today. The extraction-driven destruction of entire ecosystems through deforestation, mining, the importation of non-native species, and large-scale land transformations was directly tied to the dispossession, murder, and subjugation of Indigenous and African peoples. Kathryn Yusoff succinctly encapsulates this violence, arguing that "coloniality cuts across both flesh and earth in the economies of valuation it established [. . .]. Indigenous genocide and removal from land and enslavement are prerequisites for power becoming operationalized in premodernity."[18]

Power and the Roots of Global Warming (London: Verso, 2016). The Racial Capitalocene connects racialization and capitalism to analyse their combined impact on ecological and social crises. This concept builds on the Capitalocene framework by emphasizing the historical link between systems of racial oppression and exploitation, and the environmental and economic impacts of capitalism. See Françoise Vergès, "Racial Capitalocene," in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, eds. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (London: Verso, 2017): 72–82; and Cedric J. Robinson's work, reflected by H.L. T. Quan, ed., in *Cedric J. Robinson: On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism, and Cultures of Resistance* (London: Pluto Press, 2019).

16 Justin Hosbey, Hilda Lloréns and J.T. Roane, "Introduction: Global Black Ecologies," *Environment and Society* 13, no. 1 (2022): 3.

17 Hosbey, Lloréns and Roane, "Introduction: Global Black Ecologies": 3.

18 Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018): 32–33.

Within this framework, colonial power was established through the simultaneous destruction of both human and ecological systems, with the exploitation of bodies and environments working in concert to fuel the extractive capitalist project.

Yet, even within the oppressive structures of the plantation and mining complex, scholars have highlighted the potential for insurgency. Caribbean philosopher Sylvia Wynter's unpublished manuscript, *Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World*, for example, offers a compelling counter-narrative to the genocidal and ecocidal logics of colonialism. She identifies the garden plots cultivated by enslaved Black communities as spaces of escape, where alternative worldviews and practices emerged. These plots, described by Wynter as "the slave's area of escape from the plantation," became sites for reinventing and perpetuating an "alternative world view, alternative consciousness to that of the plantation."[19] Far from being marginal or incidental, these ecological spaces embodied resilience and renewal, offering material and symbolic resistance to the plantation economy. The significance of the plot has been explored extensively in recent scholarship across fields such as critical ecology, ethnobotany, geography, and archaeology, emerging as a site of biodiversity and alternative subsistence models.[20] As one case in point, we can take Judith Carney and Nicholas Rosomoff's work in *In the Shadow of Slavery*, which illustrates how enslaved Africans brought critical agricultural expertise, such as rice cultivation, to the Americas, sustaining colonial economies while also fostering acts of eco-rebellion.[21] These practices highlight the dual nature of dependency as both a tool of domination and a source of survival and defiance.[22] As Katherine McKittrick notes, the plot or dooryard garden "became the focus of resistance to the overriding system of the plantation economy," materializing social and ecological practices that flourished despite the de-

19 Sylvia Wynter, "Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World," Institute of the Black World Records, MG 502, Box 1. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, not dated. See also Sylvia Wynter, "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation," *Savacou* 5 (1971): 95–102.

20 See Judith A. Carney, "Subsistence in the Plantationocene: Dooryard Gardens, Agrobiodiversity, and the Subaltern Economies of Slavery," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 48, no. 5 (2021): 1075–99; as well as Camilla Hawthorne, "Black Matters Are Spatial Matters: Black Geographies for the Twenty-First Century," *Geography Compass* 13, no. 11 (2019): e12468; and J.T. Roane, "Plotting the Black Commons," *Souls* 20, no. 3 (2018): 239–66.

21 Judith Carney and Nicholas Rosomoff, *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

22 Along a similar vein, Londa Schiebinger has drawn attention to the monetization of Indigenous and African botanical knowledge, a process which illustrates how colonial authorities reorganized ecological inter/dependencies into exploitative hierarchies: these practices eradicated the relational and reciprocal aspects of local knowledge, converting it into a resource for imperial expansion. This historical commodification continues to influence global ecological interactions, highlighting the enduring imbalances in ecological dependencies. See *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

humanizing conditions of slavery.[23] These spaces illustrate how enslaved people cultivated forms of autonomy and ecological knowledge, which not only sustained them physically but also created social orders that defied the plantation's extractive and exploitative logics.

In a similar vein, marronage, the practice of enslaved individuals escaping to form autonomous communities in forests, mountains, or swamps, represents both a conceptual and a geographic space of resistance. These maroon communities not only offered refuge from the dehumanizing systems of enslavement, but also facilitated ecological renewal and restoration, designating, as Alex Moulton has shown, "an early Black 'conservation' of resources against the unremitting relations of extractive capitalism and the 'relational, immersive forms of (environmental) care exercised by Maroons' in the reproduction of more-than-human socio-ecologies."[24] By inhabiting marginal lands often overlooked or deemed unsuitable by colonial regimes, maroon communities engaged in sustainable practices that preserved biodiversity and fostered more-than-human relationships. Scholars of marronage have illuminated how these communities disrupted colonial and capitalist landscapes, forging the possibilities for living *otherwise* at the fringes of empire.[25] Both the plantation plot and maroon settlements exemplify the reparative potential of ecological inter/dependencies, countering the extractive logic of the mining-plantation complex. Through the cultivation of provision grounds and subsistence plots, enslaved individuals established alternative ecological orders that facilitated both survival and resistance, while generating new forms of relationality. These practices reveal how dependency and interdependency simultaneously upheld oppressive systems and produced counternarratives of care, renewal, and resilience.

Krause's concept of "eco-emancipation" provides a useful framework for understanding the broader implications of these practices; as she writes, "eco-emancipation

23 Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 17, no. 3 (2013): 10.

24 John Favini, "Caring for Nature: Anonymity, Conservation, and Jamaican Maroons," *Social and Economic Studies* 67, no. 1 (2018): 9; quoted in Alex A. Moulton, "Towards the Arboreal Side-Effects of Marronage: Black Geographies and Ecologies of the Jamaican Forest," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 6, no. 1 (2023): 6.

25 In addition to Moulton, see Adam Bledsoe, "Marronage as a Past and Present Geography in the Americas," *Southeastern Geographer* 57, no. 1 (2017): 30–50; Robert Connell, "Maroon Ecology: Land, Sovereignty, and Environmental Justice," *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (2020): 218–35; Kevin Dawson, "A Sea of Caribbean Islands: Maritime Maroons in the Greater Caribbean," *Slavery & Abolition* 42, no. 3 (2021): 428–48; Justin Dunnavant, "In the Wake of Maritime Marronage," *Slavery & Abolition* 42, no. 3 (2021): 466–83; Malcom Ferdinand, "Behind the Colonial Silence of Wilderness," *Environmental Humanities* 14, no. 1 (2022): 182–201; Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Celeste Winston, *How to Lose the Hounds: Maroon Geographies and a World beyond Policing* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023).

is ecological in the familiar sense that it aims to protect the environment but also in the sense that it can only come about by means of a new kind of political ecosystem understood as the constellation of interconnected human and more-than-human networks in which our relationships with other organisms unfold."[26] This resonates with work long done in Indigenous communities across the globe: Kyle Whyte's work on environmental injustice, for instance, insists that restoring Indigenous sovereignty is essential to addressing asymmetrical dependencies and fostering ecological resilience even beyond settler-colonial notions of who constitutes a human.[27] More-than-human agencies, Indigenous ways of relating to nature, insurgent Maroon communities, and alternative Black plantation plots all embody the notion of eco-emancipation, creating new-fangled political ecosystems where relationships between humans and the more-than-human world are reimagined outside the dominant logics of extraction and exploitation. While Sharon Krause suggests that "a politics of eco-emancipation involves practices of care for this ecosystem along with institutions that protect it from insufficiently checked, exploitative human power,"[28] the communities described above anticipated this vision of eco-emancipation exactly because they were forced to operate outside of formal institutions. As scholars of dependency and slavery, it is our responsibility to pay close attention to how colonialism and racial capitalism structured environmental transformations, embedding asymmetrical dependencies that persist even now. Decentring the Anthropocene demands reckoning with these histories, not only as evidence of structural violence but as sources of alternative epistemologies and ecologies that resist the totalizing narratives of environmental destruction.

26 Sharon R. Krause, *Eco-Emancipation: An Earthly Politics of Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023): 461.

27 On Indigenous perceptions of kinship and more-than-human agencies across different disciplines, see also Sophie Chao, *In the Shadow of the Palms: More-Than-Human Becomings in West Papua* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022); Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013); Enrique Salmon, "Kincentric Ecology: Indigenous Perceptions of the Human-Nature Relationship," *Ecological Applications* 10, no. 5 (2000): 1327–32; Zoe Todd, "Fish, Kin and Hope: Tending to Water Violations in amiskwaciwâskahikan and Treaty Six Territory," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 43 (2017): 102–7; and Vanessa Watts, "Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency Amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go On a European World Tour!)," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no.1 (2013): 20–34.

28 Krause, *Eco-Emancipation*: 461.

3 Contingent Un/Freedoms: Asymmetrical Dependencies in Ecological Relations

By foregrounding these histories, this volume seeks to expand our understanding of ecological inter/dependency by widening the scope of dependency studies to include environmental and ecological dimensions, building on existing frameworks while challenging their anthropocentric biases. Julia Winnebeck et al. conceptualize asymmetrical dependencies as integral to social orders, but their insights also open the door to the expansion of this analysis to ecological orders which are similarly marked by complex and unequal dependencies.[29] As Winnebeck et al. suggest, addressing these dynamics requires us "to consider not only human actors and their intended actions and meanings, but different and heterogeneous entities," inviting a more inclusive approach that integrates the more-than-human world into discussions of power, agency, and dependency.[30] Such an expansion reveals how ecological dependencies are inextricably linked to the structures of power that define social and economic systems. Central to this discussion is the paradoxical relationship between dependency and freedom within ecological contexts. Dependency is often framed in opposition to freedom, yet the freedoms enabled by capitalist and colonial expansion are deeply rooted in asymmetrical ecological dependencies. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has observed, the industrial revolution, driven as it was by the large-scale exploitation of fossil fuels, marked a shift that firmly rooted the freedom of certain groups—the ability to move, produce, and consume—onto the back of ecological exploitation and systemic inequality. Chakrabarty notes that "the mansion of modern freedoms stands on an ever-expanding base of fossil-fuel use."[31] Thus, the liberation of some has always depended on the unfreedom of others, creating a world where human agency is entangled with systems of dispossession and ecological degradation. This entanglement, however, complicates simplistic narratives of human agency. As we have shown above, the Anthropocene, with its suggestion of humanity being a unified actor responsible for environmental catastrophe, tends to obscure the deep inequalities and asymmetries that have historically defined ecological relationships. As Emmet and Lekan point out in their reflection on Chakrabarty's "Four Theses," the Anthropocene's framing risks erasing "relevant differences in human experience that are expressed in, and through, environmental knowledge and power."[32] It is not all of humanity but specific actors—those at the helm of colonial and capitalist expansion—

29 Julia Winnebeck et al., "The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency," *Journal of Global Slavery* 8, no. 1 (2023): 1–59.

30 Winnebeck et al., "The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency": 14.

31 Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*: 208.

32 Robert Emmett and Thomas Lekan, eds., "Introduction," *RCC Perspectives* 2 (2016) [= special issue: *Whose Anthropocene? Revisiting Dipesh Chakrabarty's "Four Theses"*]: 10. Referring to Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197–222.

who have exerted disproportionate influence on the planet's systems. From the Plantationocene to the Capitalocene, the asymmetrical dependencies created through slavery, extractivism, and the expropriation of Indigenous lands reveal that the narrative of human mastery over nature is not universal but deeply stratified, privileging certain groups while marginalizing and oppressing others.

Ecological inter/dependency in this context manifests as processes of contingent freedom and unfreedom. In his recent monograph on *Plantation Worlds*, geographer Maan Barua has underscored the need to "draw attention to the multiple ways in which worlds are made amid the eviscerations and ruins of what one could call a Plantationocene,"[33] pointing to the histories of dispossession and ecological exploitation that are not merely shared but also diverge across specific contexts and regions. In fact, overlapping histories of colonial exploitation operate in tandem with localized ecological transformations, showing us that planetary change cannot be understood solely through abstract, homogenized, or universalizing narratives. Or, in the words of Joseph Pugliese, ecology always "refers to the matrix of relations that binds living entities with the complex infrastructure of their environment. The key term here is relationality: a rupture of one relational link invariably produces other effects across the broad spectrum of entities that constitute a given ecology."[34] These relations reveal a need for alternate political ecologies that consider the complex, situated interactions between humans and the more-than-human, both in terms of oppression and opposition. This compels us to rethink the Anthropocene, not as a story of unified human agency but as one of deeply unequal power dynamics where dependency and freedom operate in tandem, with the freedom of some necessitating the dependency —or unfreedom—of others. This asks for a comparative and planetary approach that considers human and more-than-human interactions marked by complex asymmetrical dependencies. Such an approach does not merely critique the systems of domination that have produced our current ecological crises but also opens space for imagining alternative forms of inhabitation and coexistence. These alternative possibilities are crucial for addressing the fractures and inequities embedded in dominant ecological narratives. Recognizing this duality—where freedom is inextricable from dependency, and human agency is entangled with ecological systems of power—allows us to move beyond reductionist frameworks. It foregrounds relational and situated knowledges, particularly those of communities who have survived and resisted under systems of asymmetrical dependency: in doing so, it opens space for alternative narratives that connect human and non-human lives in ways that are equitable, sustainable, and attuned to the intertwined histories of oppression and care. These approaches remind us that while ecological dependency has been weaponized as a tool

33 Maan Barua, *Plantation Worlds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2024): 15.

34 Joseph Pugliese, *Biopolitics of the More-Than-Human: Forensic Ecologies of Violence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020): 2.

for domination, it also holds the potential for new modes of coexistence and collective liberation.

By drawing together perspectives from anthropology, archaeology, literary and film studies, history, religious studies, and political science, this volume bridges disciplinary boundaries to offer a deeper understanding of ecological inter/dependencies. Its contributions challenge hierarchical and Eurocentric approaches to the environmental humanities, emphasizing instead the situated, plural, and relational knowledges of those most affected by ecological crises. This interdisciplinary approach not only critiques the structures of domination and exploitation that define ecological dependency but also illuminates pathways for eco-solidarity.[35] Ultimately, *Ecological Interdependencies: Strong Asymmetrical Relations and More-Than-Human Worlds* calls for a profound reimagining of ecological relationships that foregrounds the interconnectedness of all life forms. By situating dependency at the centre of environmental inquiry, this volume charts a path toward more just, ethical, and sustainable futures, offering new theoretical, explorative, and practical contributions to the study of dependency and the environmental humanities. In doing so, it not only critiques enduring systems of exploitation, but also highlights the possibilities for creating alternative and equitable relationships between humans, more-than-humans, and other-than-humans and the environments they share.

4 Mapping Our Roots and Routes: Structure and Organisation

This edited volume is structured around four thematic parts, each designed to interrogate the complexities of ecological inter/dependencies across different temporal, spatial, and cultural contexts. By weaving together diverse scholarly perspectives and disciplines, the volume invites readers to rethink asymmetrical relationships between humans and the more-than-human world. The first part on *Grounded Transformations: Socio-Ecological Dependencies and Matters of Materiality* focuses on the relationships between human activities (such as mining, building, farming, and designing) and matter/materiality; our contributors share the observation that any such material-ecological interaction creates complex dependencies that both sustain and disrupt ecosystems. In Chapter 1, on "Landscape Modification as Domination: Pre-Hispanic Human-Environment Relationships in the Southern Maya Lowlands," archaeologist-anthropologist Paul Graf explores Maya landscape transformations and considers the ways in which the Maya constructed terraces and irrigation systems to facilitate sus-

35 On ecological solidarity, see Leetsch et al., "New Ways of Telling True Stories: Reflections on Ecological Solidarities across Post/Colonial Worlds," *Postcolonial Text* 19, no. 1–2 (2024): 1–11.

tainable agriculture. These transformations fostered a multitude of ecological interdependencies as they integrated human work with natural resource extraction in their production systems. These activities served an adaptive purpose, but at the cost of making people more susceptible to environmental change and reinforcing social hierarchies. Throughout his chapter, Graf demonstrates how ecological dependencies can function as instruments of both resilience and domination.

Chapter 2, co-written by the environmental anthropologists Kristina Großmann and Ajarani Mangkujati Djandam, is titled "Reconfigurations of Asymmetries in Mining in Indonesia," and examines the profound socio-ecological transformations driven by large-scale mining in Southeast Asia, focusing on Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of the island of Borneo. Through case studies on coal and gold extraction, the authors reveal how these industries disrupt traditional human-environment relationships, fostering new ecological dependencies while simultaneously sustaining or reshaping entrenched power dynamics. Central to these processes are patronage networks, which bind local elites, corporations, and communities into exploitative systems that marginalize already-vulnerable populations. Großmann and Djandam investigate the intricate interplay between power, ecology, and dependency, demonstrating how mining exacerbates inequality and curtails possibilities for social mobility and political agency.

In Chapter 3, on "Asymmetrical Dependencies and Factory Farming: Externalizing Violence," sociologist Alexander Rothenberg criticizes the ethical and environmental issues that arise from the treatment of animals as commodities for human consumption, especially in industrial farming. This system externalizes environmental costs, resulting in dependencies that exploit vulnerable communities and destroy ecosystems. This chapter employs the concept of "slow violence" (Rob Nixon) to demonstrate how industrial agriculture perpetuates itself through concealed and long-term ecological devastation. Rothenberg encourages readers to rethink the interdependence of humans and non-humans in food systems while reconsidering their own food systems and eating habits.

Chapter 4, by art historian Julia A.B. Hegewald, is on "Ecological Dependencies and Resource- and Climate-Responsive Jaina Shrines Along the Malabar Coast in South India," and it looks at how Jaina temple architecture reflects considerable ecological inter/dependencies by adapting to the distinct climatic and environmental conditions in places like the Malabar Coast and the Deccan Plateau. Temples built with locally sourced materials like stone, mud, and lumber illustrate ecological practices that are appropriate for their environment. Hegewald emphasizes the contradiction between traditional ecological practices and the growing reliance on contemporary, globalized materials such as concrete, which undermine these established adaptations. This chapter foregrounds the emergence of architectural innovation as the careful balancing of human requirements with environmental restrictions.

The second part of the edited volume, *Fluid Interdependencies: Glacial, Coastal, and Maritime Ecologies*, examines the dynamic relationships between human commu-

nities, aquatic ecosystems, and the socio-political frameworks that shape them. In Chapter 5, "'Locals Don't Care About the Natural World': The Making and Remaking of Ecological Space by Japanese Migrants on the Miyako Islands," environmental anthropologist Sarah J. Clay's fieldwork and interviews investigate the ecological connections of the Miyako Islands, where conservation efforts initiated by migrants from the mainland frequently overlook and undermine local coastal ecological traditions. These initiatives, informed by hierarchical governance frameworks, depend on stories that portray the local community as apathetic towards environmental justice, which exacerbates the existing power disparities between mainland Japan and the islands. Migrant-led projects frequently prioritize external ecological models, creating new forms of dependency that undermine locally adaptive practices and perpetuate historical inequities.

Chapter 6 by cultural anthropologist Joaquín J.A. Molina M., titled "'*Mamapacha* Is Ill': The Paradox of Offerings in the Huaytapallana Mountain," explores the complex and often paradoxical ecological relationships highlighted in the ritual offerings dedicated to sacred beings in the Huaytapallana glacier area of Peru. Pilgrimages and offerings such as Mamapacha and Apu Huaytapallana represent a mutual relationship with the earth and its spirits, showcasing profound cultural connections to the land. Nonetheless, these practices frequently lead to considerable environmental damage, as offerings and waste discarded on the mountain add to local pollution and hasten the glacier's decline. Molina critiques this tension between spiritual devotion and environmental degradation, situating it within the broader context of global anthropogenic climate change. The chapter highlights the intertwined relationships between human practices, ecological systems, and sacred landscapes, underscoring the need to reconcile ritual traditions with sustainable ecological stewardship.

In Chapter 7, "Triumph over Nature? Ecological Dependencies and Landscape Modifications in Mediterranean Port Cities," archaeologist Stefan Feuser examines how ancient Mediterranean port cities like Alexandria and Caesarea Maritima attempted to overcome ecological dependencies through extensive architectural modification. These cities depended on extensive maritime structures, including breakwaters, artificial islands, and harbours, to address the difficulties presented by unpredictable coastal conditions. However, these constructions not only changed local ecosystems but also established new dependencies, as their upkeep demanded considerable resources and technological know-how. Feuser emphasizes how leaders portrayed these initiatives as victories over nature, utilizing them as representations of strength and dominance, even as the enduring environmental and societal consequences frequently compromised their viability.

Archaeologist and anthropologist of the Americas Dita Auziņa, who writes about the "Networks of Human and Other-Than-Human Dependencies During Environmental Catastrophes: Kukra Hill, Nicaragua," in Chapter 8, focuses on ecological interdependencies on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua where oil palm plantations have drastically changed human-nonhuman relationships. The cultivation of oil palms dis-

turbs traditional land-water relationships, displacing local biodiversity and establishing a new reliance on global agro-industrial systems. Non-human components, such as deforested areas and deteriorating water sources, are crucial to this change, thus influencing local groups' survival tactics. Auziņa uses a relational approach to demonstrate how ecological dependencies are reconfigured under extractive regimes, emphasizing the critical need to address the intertwined repercussions for both human and environmental actors on Nicaragua's coast.

The third part on *Sacred Entanglements: Spirit, Rituals, and Cosmologies* casts light on the spiritual and cosmological dimensions of ecological interdependencies, thus illuminating the relationships between sacred practices, environmental guardianship, and the more-than-human world. Chapter 9 by anthropologist Taynã Tagliati, titled "Embodying Worlds: More-Than-Human Interactions Between the Xingu and the Rhine," is half academic field report, half transcribed oral narrative, and it tells us a story about ecological entanglements by way of a comparative analysis of the human-parrot relationships among the Mebengokré-Kayapó people in the Amazon and the rose-ringed parakeets in Germany. In the Amazon, the Kayapó integrate wild animals into their kinship networks, fostering reciprocal and interdependent relations that challenge anthropocentric views of ecological control. In contrast, as an imported species, the parakeets in the Rhineland adapt to urban ecologies in ways that complicate human efforts to categorize or control their presence. By juxtaposing these two cases, Tagliati is able to highlight the agency of non-human beings in shaping multispecies worlds, revealing how ecological inter/dependencies are intimately negotiated across diverse cultural and environmental contexts.

In Chapter 10, on "Asymmetrical Relations with Other-Than-Human Beings in Some Accounts of Early Travel to Tibet," scholar of Tibetan Studies and religious historian Lewis Doney explores the ecological dependencies embedded in Tibetan cosmologies, focusing on the relationships between human communities and meta-human beings such as mountain deities. Drawing on early Tibetan travel accounts, the chapter highlights how sacred landscapes were understood as active participants in shaping ecological and spiritual systems. These dependencies were mediated through rituals and offerings that sought to harmonize human and non-human interactions while also navigating asymmetrical power dynamics with these spiritual entities. By examining these practices, Doney reveals the enduring interplay between cultural and religious narratives and the dependencies that arise from ecological relationships.

Theologian and Church historian David Brandon Smith, in Chapter 11 on "More-Than-Human Creation and Ecological (Inter)Dependencies in the Early Medieval Irish and Anglo-Saxon Penitentials," looks at Anglo-Saxon and Irish penitentials from the early medieval period as writings that are crucial for foregrounding fundamental ecological relationships between humans and their surroundings. By addressing issues like cleanliness, contamination, and moral obligations, these manuals—intended to direct Christian penance—highlight the connections between people, animals, and the

natural environment. These writings' descriptions of rituals and food regulations show how spiritual beliefs influenced reliance on natural systems. Still, they also draw attention to the power disparities that existed within these connections. By concentrating on how penitentials shaped human interactions with the environment, Smith reveals a framework of ecological interdependency that placed people in a position where they were both the stewards and users of a divinely organized creation.

The final and fourth part of our volume, on *Postcolonial Pasts and Futures: Extractive Dependencies and Ecologies of Resistance*, emphasizes both the enduring impacts of colonial and postcolonial extractive practices, and the possibilities for resistance and reimagined ecological relationships—not only in politics but also in creative endeavours such as fiction and film. Chapter 12, co-written by peace and security scholars Kudakwashe Chirambwi and Maria Enow Ayuk, on "Asymmetrical Dependency and Selective Securitization of Climate Change Between AU and EU: Insights from the Sahel Region," addresses the climate change policies of the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU), arguing that historical legacies of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism still shape these relationships. Their chapter links the climate crisis with the exploitation of African labour as well as with the transatlantic slave trade, and they show how historical patterns of ecological dependency and degradation reach into our future—and thus require our attention and care in the present.

Continuing this engagement with colonial pasts and postcolonial futures, Chapter 13 by anglophone literatures scholar Aylin D. Walder on "Reimagining Human-Nature Relations Through Asymmetrical Ecological (Inter)Dependencies in N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* Series" focuses on the connections between human and non-human activities on a planet affected by environmental disaster. Father Earth, a sentient planetary force in this fictional world, lies at the heart of the plot, compelling humanity to rely on the planet's precarious conditions. Jemisin's trilogy foregrounds extractive colonial histories and calls into question the notion of human exceptionalism by illustrating how human survival is linked to relationships between living matter and non-human species. Walder prompts us to contemplate the moral and environmental ramifications of human activities, as well as to recognize the interdependence that exists between all living beings in shared ecosystems.

In Chapter 14, African literature and film scholars Mariam Salaudeen and Rotimi Fasan's work titled "Antithetical to Modernity: Alternative Environmental Sustainability Practices and Ecological Dependencies in Tunde Kelani's *Ti Oluwa ni Ile* and *Saworoide*" focuses the ecological themes in two Yoruba Nollywood films. In their ecocritical reading, they emphasize how these films call into question the environmental devastation resulting from Western modernism and colonial legacies, which have cultivated exploitative ecological dependencies in Nigeria. As Salaudeen and Fasan argue, the films critique sustainable methods grounded on Indigenous cosmologies by contrasting traditional African land reverence and resource conservation with the ecologically detrimental effects of postcolonial capitalism. Salaudeen and Fasan highlight Kelani's cinematic focus on the agency of non-human elements, including holy

lands and spiritual forces, to contest human supremacy and advocate for ecological equilibrium.

Closing the volume, Chapter 15 by English Studies scholar Alissa Kautz on "'This Minuscule Orb': The Material Agency of Opium Poppies in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*" explores the role of opium poppies as active agents in colonial ecological and economic systems, using Amitav Ghosh's novel *Sea of Poppies* as a lens to examine how the cultivation of poppies in colonial India reshaped landscapes, impoverished farmers, and enforced a dependency on monoculture cash crops. In her close readings, Kautz emphasizes the vegetal agency of the poppy from seed to crop and explores how dependency on poppy farming created interconnections between human and non-human agencies. By framing opium poppies as both agents and symbols of ecological dependency, Kautz vividly captures their impact on the social and environmental realities of colonialism.

This edited volume emerged from the interdisciplinary dialogue fostered by the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) and a dedicated working group on "Ecological Dependencies," co-founded by Zeynep Y. Gökçe and Jennifer Leetsch, that convened over the span of three years in regular meetings and during a workshop in February 2022 to address the intersections of ecology and asymmetrical dependencies. From the beginning, our shared aim was to situate ecological inter/dependencies at the centre of critical inquiry, bringing together scholars from diverse fields—including anthropology, history, art history, cultural studies, archaeology, religious studies, political science, and literary studies—to explore the profoundly entangled relationships between humans, non- and more-than-humans, and their environments. In this sense, we embrace what Brightman and Lewis term "the disciplinary melting pot of the Anthropocene"[36] by integrating diverse methodologies and perspectives that all grapple with the complexities of planetary ecological crises and their uneven social consequences.

As seen in our roadmap above, the contributions in this volume are not organized along conventional disciplinary, chronological, or geographical lines. Instead, they are structured according to the ecological relationships, species interactions, and more-than-human dynamics they illuminate. This approach allows us to trace planetary matters and movements across time and space, to move beyond linear narratives, and to foreground the surprising relationalities and interconnected dependencies that emerge across different social, political, and geographical contexts. Through this relational and cross-ecosystem framework, our volume seeks to challenge traditional academic silos and uncover new insights into how political, cultural, and social logics intersect. By placing relationalities at the forefront of our analysis, we want to highlight

36 Marc Brightman and Jerome Lewis, "Introduction: The Anthropology of Sustainability: Beyond Development and Progress," in *The Anthropology of Sustainability: Beyond Development and Progress*, eds. Marc Brightman and Jerome Lewis (New York: Palgrave, 2017): 23.

not only the oppressive dynamics that have characterized human history but also the possibilities for resilience, resistance, and renewal within ecological inter/dependencies. This approach, we hope, underscores the urgency of interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing the pressing environmental and social challenges of our time, and perhaps offers at least a glimpse of some of the pathways necessary for rethinking the relationships that sustain and shape life on Earth.

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