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The Routledge Handbook of Environmental History

Edited by Emily O'Gorman, William San Martín,
Mark Carey and Sandra Swart

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

The Routledge Handbook of Environmental History presents a cutting-edge overview of the dynamic and ever-expanding field of environmental history. It addresses recent transformations in the field and responses to shifting scholarly, political, and environmental landscapes.

The *Handbook* fully and critically engages with recent exciting changes, contextualises them within longer-term shifts in the field, and charts potential new directions for study. It focuses on five key areas:

- Theories and concepts related to changing considerations of social justice, including postcolonial, antiracist, and feminist approaches, and the field's growing emphasis on multiple human voices and agencies.
- The roles of non-humans and the more-than-human in the telling of environmental histories, from animals and plants to insects as vectors of disease and the influences of water and ice, the changing theoretical approaches and the influence of concepts in related areas such as animal and discard studies.
- How changes in theories and concepts are shaping methods in environmental history and shifting approaches to traditional sources like archives and oral histories as well as experiments by practitioners with new methods and sources.
- Responses to a range of current complex problems, such as climate change, and how environmental historians can best help mitigate and resolve these problems.
- Diverse ways in which environmental historians disseminate their research within and beyond academia, including new modes of research dissemination, teaching, and engagements with stakeholders and the policy arena.

This is an important resource for environmental historians, researchers, and students in the related fields of political ecology, environmental studies, natural resources management, and environmental planning.

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*Edited by Emily O’Gorman, William San Martín,
Mark Carey and Sandra Swart*



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CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xxi</i>
Introduction: Framing Environmental History Today and for the Future <i>Emily O’Gorman, Mark Carey, William San Martín, and Sandra Swart</i>	1
PART I	
New Methods, Innovative Approaches	15
1 Ethics, Justice, and Environmental Histories <i>Heather Goodall, Madhuri Mondal, and Meera Anna Oommen</i>	17
2 Oral and Environmental History: Time, Place, Decolonisation, and the More-Than-Human World <i>Katie Holmes and Aet Annist</i>	36
3 Sounding Environments <i>Hedley Twidle and Aragorn Eloff</i>	49
4 Geographic Information Systems, Remote Sensing, and Spatial Data Infrastructure <i>Marina Miraglia and Kairo da Silva Santos</i>	66

PART II	
Non-Human Agencies	77
5 The Tangled Bank <i>Harriet Ritvo and Rebecca Woods</i>	79
6 Multispecies Cultures and Environmental Change: The Animal (Agency) Turn <i>Diogo de Carvalho Cabral and Heta Lähdesmäki</i>	91
7 Animal and Vector-Borne Diseases, Zoonoses, and One Health <i>Lyle Fearnley and Melissa Salm</i>	106
8 The Non-Human in Agriculture: Technologies of Agriculture and Non-Human Aspects of Farming <i>Veronika Settele and Claiton Marcio da Silva</i>	124
9 (Inter)national and (Trans)regional Agents: The Coastal Sand Dunes of Mozambique <i>Joana Gaspar de Freitas, Inês Macamo Raimundo, Ignacio García Pereda, and Dissanayake Mudiyanseelage Ruwan Sampath</i>	142
10 Actor-Networks, Conservation Treaties, and International Environmental History: Re-assembling Conventions <i>Raf De Bont and Simone Schleper</i>	156
11 Hazards and Disasters: Locusts, Earthquakes, Volcanoes, Floods, Droughts <i>Katrin Kleemann and Admire Mseba</i>	171
PART III	
Engaging with the Planetary and the Anthropocene	185
12 Planetary Boundaries, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene <i>Ruth A. Morgan and Cristián Simonetti</i>	187
13 Extinction in Environmental History: Historicising Problems of Classification and Intentionality <i>Dolly Jørgensen and Miles Powell</i>	204
14 Temporality and Environmental History in the Anthropocene: Timing Climates, Modelling Futures <i>Emil Flatø and Erik Isberg</i>	217

15	Fossil Fuels from Extraction to Emissions <i>Antoine Acker, Elizabeth Chatterjee, Lukas Becker, Matthew Shutzer, and Nathalia Capellini</i>	229
PART IV		
Power, Flows, and Knowledges		245
16	Global Histories of Environment and Labour in Asia and Africa <i>Mattin Biglari and Olisa Godson Muojama</i>	247
17	Toxicity, Racial Capitalism, and Colonial Mining: Lessons from Cyanide and Gold Mining in Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia) <i>Elijah Doro and Marco Armiero</i>	261
18	Local Fishermen Knowledge and Scientific Expertise in Eastern Europe and West Africa: Assessing the Unseen <i>Stefan Dorondel, Veronica Mitroi-Tisseyre, and Youssoupha Tall</i>	274
19	Historical Memory and Technocratic Failures in Environmental Impact Assessments <i>Javiera Barandiarán and Ricardo Oyarzún</i>	289
20	Cities, Food, Water, and Environmental History in China, the USA, and India: Making Bubbles <i>Shen Hou and David Biggs</i>	304
21	Urban Environmental Governance: Historical and Political Ecological Perspectives from South Asia <i>Jenia Mukherjee and René Véron</i>	319
PART V		
Practices and Actions for Current Socio-Ecological Crises		335
22	Pedagogy for the Depressed: Empowerment and Hope in the Face of the Apocalypse <i>Michelle K. Berry and Emily Wakild</i>	337
23	Activist Environmental History: On War Machines and Guerrilla Strategies <i>Regina Horta Duarte, Bruna Luiza Costa Pessoa, and Lucas Erichsen</i>	352

Contents

24	Communicating Environmental History: Reaching Diverse Audiences through Online Forums <i>Jonatan Palmblad and Jessica M. DeWitt</i>	368
25	Environmental History in Museums: Past Practice and Future Opportunities <i>Luke Keogh, Liisi Jääts, Nina Möllers, and Libby Robin</i>	385
26	Environmental Historians, Policy, and Governance <i>Alessandro Antonello and Margaret Cook</i>	399
27	Future Directions in Environmental History <i>Cintia Velázquez-Marroni, Jessica Urwin, Nicolo Paolo Ludovice, Bryan Umaru Kauma, Sangay Tamang, and Jayson Maurice Porter</i>	413
	<i>Index</i>	429

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

1.1	Case studies from India and Australia: Ethics, justice, and environmental history. Map by Sharon Harrup.	18
3.1	Sonic mapping of a site under the N2 highway, Cape Town Foreshore, tracing loudness and softness shaped by the architectural environment. Drawing by Meghan Ho-Tong.	55
3.2	Still from Janet Solomon (director) (2018a). <i>Becoming Visible</i> (film). Vanishing Present Productions. https://www.becomingvisible.africa/the-movie/	58
4.1	The synthesis of integration between environmental history and GIS Science. Authors' own elaboration, 2022.	70
4.2	Victor Martin de Moussy. 1873. "Paraquariae Provinciae". Image no. 0464003. David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.	71
5.1	TaurOs grazing in Croatia in lieu of unavailable aurochs. Photo credit: Harriet Ritvo.	83
5.2	A young raccoon in Toronto, 2022. Photo credit: Peter Friedman.	86
9.1	(a) Mozambique in the African continent. (b) The provinces of Mozambique, the lighthouses (the triangles) mentioned in the text, and the localisation of the Limpopo River mouth, including Xai-Xai area (the square).	147
10.1	A CITES identification manual, showing pictures of the most smuggled species.	158
10.2	A northern gannet with transmitter. Up to today, larger, popular birds such as gannets and godwits are fitted with transmitters more often.	164
11.1	The Laki Fissure as seen from Mount Laki in Iceland, 2016. Photograph by Katrin Kleemann.	179
12.1	Planetary boundaries. From Rockström et al. (2009).	188
12.2	Location of candidate Global boundary Stratotype Section and Point (GSSP) sites under investigation, 2020.	189

Illustrations

- 13.1 The last giant softshell turtle from Hoàn Kiếm Lake on display in the Ngoc Son Temple, Hanoi, Vietnam. Photograph by Dolly Jørgensen, 2019. 207
- 15.1 Graffiti near Belmont Plateau, Philadelphia, 6 December 2021. Photograph by Melissa Hornor. 239
- 16.1 Safety training of Iranian oil workers, late 1940s. ARC 100033, BP Archive, Warwick, UK. © BP plc. 253
- 16.2 Gas flare in Nembe Creek, Nigeria, 1993. Photographer: Sara Leigh Davis. 256
- 17.1 Feet and hand of an African patient with a 23-year gold mining history suffering from lung cancer and hyperkeratosis (1956). Osburn (1957: 219, 220). 269
- 18.1 Evolution of fishing quotas and fishing catches in DDBR. 279
- 18.2 Fisherman preparing to board his pirogue on the Typha-lined lake. Picture credit: Tall, 2021. 283
- 19.1 Polluted beach at Quintero-Puchuncaví, with industrial facilities in the background. 291
- 20.1 Urbanisation over the past 500 years, 1500–2016. One World in Data. 307
- 21.1 The HUPE framework. Mukherjee (2022: 36). 328
- 22.1 A Painted Lady butterfly (*Vanessa cardui*) visits a wildflower in Coronado National Forest on Mount Lemmon outside Tucson, Arizona. Painted Ladies have been observed to fly 100 miles in one day. Photo Courtesy of Michelle K. Berry. 341
- 22.2 Checklist and fence for beaver containment facility, Lucky Peak Wilderness Management Area, Idaho. Photo courtesy of Emily Wakild. 345
- 23.1 Poster for the launch and debate of the documentary on CIEM in the context of negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC. Universidad de Los Andes, 2017. 357
- 24.1 Trees branch out both above and below soil and constitute an apt metaphor for outreach and communication. But to grow and thrive, they depend on healthy relations to other trees, species, and soil, and this adds an important dimension of interdependence and mutual aid to the metaphor. The communication of ecological insights, then, can sometimes benefit from an ecological mode of thinking. Illustration from George L. Clarke's *Elements of Ecology* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1954), p. 422, public domain. 372
- 25.1 On the Land exhibition at the National Wool Museum, Geelong, Australia. Courtesy National Wool Museum, Geelong. 389
- 25.2 Inimene ja keskkond [People and the Environment] exhibition at the Estonian National Museum. Images by Arp Karm and Berta Jänes. Courtesy Estonian National Museum. 394
- 27.1 Opening of the *Museu das Resistências* at the João Januário Magalhães Municipal School, 1 December 2022. Photographer: Nayhara J. A. Pereira T. Vieira. Courtesy of Walter Francisco Figueiredo Lowände/Museus das Resistências Project. 418
- 27.2 Project Cocoon Hungary: Following the Removals. 27 July 2019. Photographer: Eric Etheridge. Courtesy of the artist Kate Browne. 423

Illustrations

Tables

19.1	Number of impact studies submitted since 1997 by major companies in Q-P.	295
19.2	Comparison of the maximum permissible limits ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) of different air contaminants.	297

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INTRODUCTION

Framing environmental history today and for the future

*Emily O’Gorman, Mark Carey, William San Martín, and
Sandra Swart*

Environmental history is both an established and continuously innovative field, shaped and reshaped within global networks of researchers, teachers, and practitioners. It emerged as a self-defined and conscious field in the United States in response to the environmental movement of the 1970s. Nevertheless, broader intellectual and socio-political trajectories from more diverse origins and spatial and temporal scales have also influenced its methods, approaches, and guiding questions. These trajectories include, among others, the earlier work of scholars in the French *Annales* school in the 1930s concerned with the *longue durée* of interlinked human and geographical history, and contemporaneous questions of land ownership in former settler colonies within history, historical geography, and other disciplines (see McNeill 2003; Griffiths 2003; O’Gorman and Morgan 2021; Sutter 2013; Winiwarter et al. 2004). Transnational trajectories, such as the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, the struggle over decolonisation, conservation, and self-determination to manage natural resources in the post-colonial world, movements opposing development projects during the Cold War, and the rise of sustainable development in the 1980s have also informed the global rise of environmental history beyond the specific scales and scopes of the field in the United States.

Globally, environmental history emerged as a distinct field in the discipline of history; however, it did so in close dialogue with the natural sciences and geography. Environmental history continues these connections while also integrating closely with other fields such as animal studies, political ecology, ecocriticism, anthropology, environmental studies, ethics, and science and technology studies (STS) (Sutter 2013; O’Gorman and Morgan 2021). The field’s blurring of human and non-human worlds, of nature and culture, as well as its analysis of various agencies and species interactions has much to offer other environmental researchers working broadly in coupled natural-human systems, sustainability sciences, and climate adaptation that are more recently seeking the kind of depth and nuance inherent to environmental history scholarship.

Today, the field of environmental history encompasses a wide range of issues around the globe, from planetary questions of climate change and entangled social and ecological impacts of colonisation, to questions of ethical and sustainable management of natural

resources and non-human historical agencies. In all of these areas, environmental historians examine not just how various people and societies have influenced the non-human world across time and space, but also how environments – from pastures and farms to glaciers and whale pods – are products of a long and dynamic interplay between human and non-human forces. This interchange of forces means that ideas, discourse, and politics are as important to our studies as the material effects of climate, toxins, and species population changes. Environmental historians are thus equipped with a valuable interdisciplinary set of skills to examine some of the most pressing socio-ecological issues of our time, such as climate change, species extinction, sustainable development, and the governance of environmental commons.

This *Handbook* seeks to provide novel and important contributions to environmental history while stimulating and inspiring new types of scholarship in the history of human-environment dynamics. As a handbook, rather than, say, an edited volume of essays, it seeks to be more widely accessible and comprehensive in coverage and approaches, although no volume could ever be fully comprehensive. It is intentionally organised thematically – rather than geographically or regionally – in order to bring the histories of different regions into conversation with each other and, more importantly, to underscore new approaches and trends in the field rather than specific places and time periods. That said, the work in this *Handbook* is grounded in time and space, with many of the chapters highlighting specific issues or places. Our goal is thus to broaden the approaches and make them accessible to scholars working in all subfields, places, and time periods while providing concrete examples. To be more wide-ranging and globally accessible in terms of topics and approaches, this *Handbook* is also global in nature. Firstly, it features approximately 72 authors from 27 countries. It also covers a wide array of world regions and countries, with the objective that authors working in distinct places find it easy to use, relatable, and relevant to their own work. Additionally, the *Handbook* works to advance new and innovative methodological approaches, such as through new sources and evidentiary bases, through co-authorship, or through different approaches such as oral history, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and more ethics-based approaches.

This introductory chapter frames and explains the suite of essays in this *Handbook*. Really, it is intended as a kind of prolegomenon as it offers an overview and contextualisation that both introduces and interprets that which follows. Overall, the *Handbook* strives both to capture some of the most groundbreaking, interesting, and stimulating recent trends in the field and to open new paths forward for environmental history research globally. The chapters exemplify environmental history’s disciplinary responses to shifting scholarly, political, socio-economic, and environmental landscapes. Indeed, over the last decade, the field has changed significantly as it has responded to new opportunities, such as those presented by engagements with new academic fields like the environmental humanities, as well as global challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, health and socio-economic inequalities, and the growth of nationalisms. This expansion offers a wonderful – and crucial – time to take stock of where the field is now and, much more importantly, chart some new directions that showcase where the field can go. We explore what exactly environmental history brings to related fields, to other disciplines, to current policymaking, and to the fundamental and urgent need to address environmental injustices and inequalities. As environmental historians know very well, the framing of these societal and environmental problems often lacks context and historical understandings, which shape not just what these “wicked problems” have come to be, but also what can be done about them and who gets to decide. As such,

the audience for this *Handbook* is well-established environmental historians as well as undergraduates and graduate students trying to make their way into environmental research and practitioners beyond academia. Of course, as scholars in the environmental humanities, political ecology, environmental studies, natural resources management, environmental planning, and other cognate fields wrestle with similar topics, the volume strives to reach them as well, engaging in the important ways environmental historians contribute to these pressing issues.

A cross-cutting concern among many *Handbook* authors is with past and ongoing legacies of imperialism and colonisation over the last 400 years. Chapters largely focus on the period since 1600. Yet they engage with multiple temporalities, including a consideration of Deep Time and the longer timescales implicated in the Anthropocene. Key concerns that cut across the volume are the current planetary crises of biodiversity and habitat loss coupled to the collapse of ecosystems, the loss or liminalisation of local environmental knowledge, accelerating pollution and toxicity, and climate change. A core theme with which several authors engage is novel ways of grappling with “agency”. This volume explicitly aims to push (and push at) the boundaries of the field. It engages with emerging approaches as well as suggesting future pathways that build on, dialogue with, and depart from more traditional practices in environmental history.

The *Handbook* also purposefully engages with intellectual inquiries and research outside of the academic circles in the north Atlantic and the Global North. In short, it seeks not just global coverage and international topics, but more global intellectual inquiries—with questions, approaches, and academic contexts that expand beyond and sometimes differ from those posed in North America and Western Europe. It encourages conversations about global (in)justices and power disparities that integrate underrepresented agents (e.g., Indigenous peoples and knowledges, sexual and gender minorities, and grassroots movements, among others), non-humans (e.g., animals, plants, technologies, and landscape elements), future generations (intergenerational justice), and mobile entities (e.g., chemical forms, knowledge and cultural systems, waste, and governance architectures) into a broader understanding of socio-ecological change across scales. We also actively sought to feature a range of authors coming from diverse backgrounds, institutional affiliations, positions, and places, such as authors from the Global South and Global North as well as both early career and senior scholars.

Another innovative feature of this volume stands out immediately even with just a quick glance at the Table of Contents: every chapter and every piece of the *Handbook* is co-authored and co-edited. The *Handbook* was built through collaboration and partnership, through sharing and helping, through countless conversations and compromises that we believe improve the scholarship and its contributions. Sole authorship remains the norm in environmental history (and, indeed, in history more generally) but there is a great deal to be gained from co-authorship and collaboration, especially in a volume such as this that benefits from including a range of perspectives and geographical diversity. A recent call for greater collaboration in our field further explains that:

collaboration is especially important in Environmental History because answering complex questions about past environmental conditions, biophysical changes in the environment, and human-environment relations requires eclectic theories and methods that no one scholar can ever hope to master.

(Alagona, Carey, and Howkins 2023)

Co-authorship offers many benefits. It can expand geographical and temporal coverage while also building international relationships, networks, and communities. Some author teams help increase demographic diversity (gender, race, age, region, career stage, type of institution, and so on) when they choose co-authors from different backgrounds or contexts. In some cases, co-authorship creates mentoring opportunities when early-career scholars collaborate with more experienced researchers. Given that each author brings their own networks to an author team, the research partnership can also help scholars reach new and larger audiences for their work, particularly when they collaborate with researchers outside their discipline. In this way, co-authorship can stimulate methodological innovation within and beyond environmental history. Finally, collaborative writing enriches learning and deepens analysis by requiring co-authors to decide how to write, organise, represent, compare, and share material. We believe something more profound happens when researchers co-author a chapter rather than just sharing a draft for comment. This was the case for co-editing this *Handbook*: we all learned from each other, and thus improved the volume, by working together, despite the challenges of collaborating across time zones in Australia, South Africa, and, in the United States, Massachusetts and Oregon.

We have thus actively encouraged co-authorship of chapters by scholars at different career stages and from different parts of the world, with attention to diversity of gender, professional affiliation, and cultural background. We believe addressing co-authorship with an intentional focus on diversity and inclusion can help address the unequal nature of academic labour and the disparities impacting early career scholars and practitioners, especially in low-income and post-colonial nations and in institutions affected by severe budgetary cuts after the Covid-19 pandemic. We also do so as we understand that the lack of diversity and global representation in the production of environmental knowledge creates epistemological gaps that compromise our understanding of complex socio-ecological issues (San Martín 2021). We moved from the premise that women, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) scholars and those from the Global South are under-cited (Ahmed 2017; Collyer 2018). So we took scholarly identity seriously to move toward a more just and less insular academic practice (Dworkin, Zurn, and Bassett 2020). We consciously tried to subvert existing inequities in global knowledge economies by developing new networks of citation through new collaborations.

Chapter authors have responded with enthusiasm, forming productive co-authorship teams that in many cases did not exist previously. The afterword of the volume – “Future directions” – has been written by a team of early-career environmental historians who have distilled where they see, and where they would *hope* to see, the field heading. This radical approach is a response to calls to increase diversity in academic institutions and research, to address issues of representation in environmental scholarship and activism, and to provide concrete platforms that overcome traditional structures and practices (Ferdinand 2021; García Peña 2022; Liboiron 2016; McKittrick 2021; Soto Laveaga 2020). Co-authorship provides one avenue to help address these issues because it inherently expands the ideas, scopes, and methods in a scholarly piece. Yet, as noted earlier, among environmental historians, this kind of collaboration is still relatively rare – although we believe it will be part of the future of the field. This volume, with its co-authored chapters, thus tries to take one small step toward implementing and practising these goals. Most collaborations in the *Handbook* are historians teaming with historians. But we hope this co-authorship model and its benefits will inspire historians to build teams beyond our field, to do more joint scholarship with biologists and ecologists, geologists and hydrologists, political scientists and philosophers,

which many of the *Handbook's* editors and authors already do. In short, we believe the co-authorship format helps deliver new content, diversify the discipline, and inspire new methodological approaches to environmental history.

The *Handbook* is structured in five parts, each of which centres on a key concern within environmental history: (1) new methods and innovative approaches; (2) non-human agencies; (3) engaging with the planetary and the Anthropocene; (4) power, flows, and knowledges; and (5) practices and actions for current socio-ecological crises. The remainder of this chapter outlines each of these themes within the field and introduces the chapters that address them.

New methods, innovative approaches

Environmental historians have always engaged with and combined a variety of different methods in their approaches to particular questions and topics. This has ranged from research of documentary archives to donning a pair of good boots for site visits (Worster 1989: 289), doing ethnographic fieldwork, and engaging with ecological or natural science studies, to understand aspects of the changing relationships among people, animals, plants, and geophysical forces. Analysis has long encompassed both qualitative and quantitative approaches, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the field. However, qualitative approaches have tended to predominate, perhaps due to the ongoing influence of the humanities. For similar reasons, research of documentary archives and text-based sources arguably has been the most common method used by environmental historians since the emergence of the field in the 1970s, as it has predominated in other sub-disciplines within the discipline of history. However, the questions, methodologies, and approaches environmental historians bring to researching and examining archives have changed over time, contoured by shifting global and local concerns, as well as by intellectual and technological breakthroughs within the field. A cross-cutting theme in the chapters throughout this *Handbook* is the importance of the researchers' positionality in examining archives. This reflects enduring and recent considerations within the field and more widely about the way a researcher's background (including cultural, gender, socio-economic, and so on) and/or emerging scholarly stances influence how they examine archives and other documentary sources. The chapters often foreground questions of asymmetrical power relationships and diverse agencies in their examination of archives and documents. For example, Chapter 10 examines how international agreements might be analysed in terms of non-human agencies, while Chapter 17 shows that archives related to the toxins produced by gold mining in Zimbabwe contain powerful evidence of race and class oppression.

Part I of the *Handbook* focuses on inventive approaches and new methods in the field beyond archival research and more traditional academic practices. Chapter 1 provides an overarching discussion of the role and importance of positionality, ethics, and justice in approaches to environmental history. It specifically considers the role of positionality in differing perspectives on justice, pondering on whose voices are amplified and muted in environmental histories, and how analyses of environmental justice have been shaped by competing views within and among different groups. These points are illustrated through three case studies, two from India and one from Australia.

Environmental history has all too frequently lacked critical reflection on the methodologies of oral history, or the challenges of working with memory as a historical source, as Williams and Riley (2020) have noted. The tendency has been to weave interview material

into an environmental analysis without critical reflection on the nature of the source, the significance of memory or, indeed, the methodologies used to collect such material. Combining approaches in environmental history, environmental humanities, and anthropology, Chapter 2 shows the potential uses of oral history as an explicit, reflexive methodology that helps decolonise research methodologies with Indigenous and marginalised communities, and that re-centres a more-than-human world.

Other sources beyond archives and oral histories also offer environmental historians rich material through which to examine the past. Chapter 3 examines emerging approaches to sound in environmental history research and analysis. It considers how we can think with sound in academic worlds dominated by the visual and reclaim soundscapes that no longer exist. It argues that examining the work of acoustic ecologists, experimental sound art, and the possibilities opened up by recording technology, audio software, and the digital, *sounding* environments – as both adjective and verb – can provide novel approaches to studying sound and silence, blurring the conventional categories of biophony and anthropophony in a context of crises and environmental inequalities.

Environmental historians have also turned to methods like GIS to serve as critical tools for examining the changing relationships between society and the environment graphically and spatially over time. Chapter 4 departs from the general assumption that GIS is only a tool to represent or examine spatial data. The authors instead demonstrate that GIS can provide a more complex analysis that integrates a spatial dimension along with other areas more broadly used by historians, such as social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions. This is demonstrated through two case studies: urban river basins in Brazil and toponymy in the Guarani Jesuit Missions.

Non-human agencies

Environmental historians are increasingly engaging with questions of non-human agency. These engagements have emerged in dialogue with work in animal history and studies (Aderinto 2022; Ritvo 2022; Tortorici and Few 2013), and more recently in interdisciplinary more-than-human and multispecies studies (O’Gorman and Gaynor 2020). In general terms, a concern with non-human agency aims to decentre purely human perspectives and instead centre particular non-humans or sets of more-than-human relationships in order to emphasise a more distributed historical agency (Doro and Swart 2022). These sorts of approaches have developed in response to mounting critiques of dominant ideas of human separation from and superiority over “nature” that have significantly contributed to past and current socio-ecological crises (Horsthemke 2015; Plumwood 2002) and have erased other ways of multi-species coexistence. Importantly, these perspectives emphasise diversity of both humans and non-humans, the connections between the real and represented species, the nuances of change in complex multi-species assemblages and asymmetrical power relationships in their analyses.

Part II provides a set of perspectives on emerging considerations of non-human agency within environmental history. An underlying theme environmental historians grapple with is the scales at which we can examine changing and enduring non-human agencies, from particular places and specific periods, to landscapes as a concept that emphasise more-than-human relationality, and all the way up to the scale of global migrations of some species. Environmental historians can use the lens of domestication, as Chapter 5 does, to understand and analyse many of the different and shifting human-animal relationships that

have emerged over time. The authors consider a series of relationships, such as the extermination and then re-introduction of wolves into Yellowstone National Park in the United States, or recent attempts to resurrect mammoths using biotechnology.

Environmental historians have been changing and expanding the ways in which they approach and present animal agency. Chapter 6 focuses on a discernible “animal (agency) turn” within the field that has increasingly centred animals. In particular, the chapter shows three emerging research areas that exemplify this growing tendency within the field to engage with both animal cultures and the influence of animals on more-than-human cultural systems and assemblages: animal resignification of human-influenced environments, the roles of wild predators and their symbolism, and human-animal co-production of waterscapes.

How zoonotic diseases shaped history and how historians have captured the shifting bodies of knowledge about such diseases is another key area of research on non-human agency, explored in Chapter 7. It explains how the Covid-19 pandemic ignited fresh debate (from Twitter conspiracy theories to academic arguments) over the genesis and spread of diseases in a globalised world. These are obviously contested but increasingly popular processes and debates. The chapter shows how a term such as “One Health” makes a powerful argument about how human plans to alter the environment to avoid or eradicate disease have themselves led to the (re-)emergence of devastating diseases. In so doing, environmental historians can show the links between understandings of disease, environmental actions, and risks of future outbreaks.

Chapter 8 examines non-human agency and enrolments in agriculture from the perspective of environmental history. Focusing on the period since the nineteenth century, it argues that animals, plants, and soils involved in agricultural projects supported the global mobilisation of technologies. This is demonstrated through an analysis of efforts to increase production and modernise agriculture in particular places. This chapter exposes the uneven power relationships that have shaped the multiple scales of human and non-human relationships over time.

Landscape mobility and changes have shaped human and non-human histories in profound ways. Chapter 9 considers sand dunes as historical actors. Focusing on Mozambique in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it examines the role of sand dunes in shaping international and transnational human movements across time and space. Taking a transdisciplinary approach, it shows how a focus on these sand dunes can reveal new connections between local and international events and trends.

Chapter 10 argues that Actor-Network Theory (ANT) can be a critical tool for the study of international treaties specifically and more-than-human agency broadly. Treaties, conventions, and agreements involve not just mobilising humans and their institutions but also non-human organisms and technologies. The chapter grounds its analysis in two major transnational treaties for wildlife protection: the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds Agreement (AEWA).

Events and disasters have shaped histories in sometimes dramatic ways. Chapter 11 explores a range of catastrophes – from earthquakes and volcanoes to extreme weather and insect plagues – while also examining a range of temporalities, from Deep History to the present. The chapter contends strongly that environmental history is useful in understanding disasters by explaining both failed and successful responses, and suggesting the general and contextually idiosyncratic factors that contour the outcomes.

Engaging with the planetary and the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene – a new framing of our current geological age, conceptualising from *anthropo*, for “human,” and *cene*, for “new”, as the epoch during which human activity has become the prevailing influence on climate and the environment – has become an important, yet controversial, concept in the humanities as well as the sciences. It usefully captures the unparalleled global scale of change. Yet since it was first coined as a term in 2000 (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000; Zottola and de Majo 2022), it has been contested because it implies a sweeping generalisation of all “humanity’s” complicity in this, which masks how geographically, politically, generationally, and culturally situated such causes and impacts have always been. Nevertheless, in this very debate, it also prompts a useful interrogation of the politics, ethics, and economics of global change, as well as a range of explanations for historical causes and hence for future solutions. Environmental historians and others have debated and utilised this concept in relation to past socio-ecological transformations, including the role and experiences of Indigenous people (Bashford 2013; Whyte 2018), and developed alternative propositions such as the “noösphere” (Vernadsky, cited in Rispoli 2022), “chthulucene” (Haraway 2015), “plantationocene” (Moore et al. 2019), “pyrocene” (Pyne 2021), “capitalocene” (Moore 2016), and “wastecene” (Armiero 2021). Indeed, environmental historians have become some of the leading humanities researchers and thought-leaders in this area (Warde, Robin, and Sörlin 2017).

Arguments over the concept of the Anthropocene (and many other-cenes) expose deep inter- and even intra-disciplinary fissures between the natural and social sciences/humanities. In fact, many chapters in this volume continue a trend among scholars in environmental history, history of science, and in the interdisciplinary environmental humanities and social sciences of critiquing Earth system science and the grip it has had on our understanding of planetary configurations of space, time, and people. These homogenous and sweeping depictions of global processes erase social difference, power imbalances, colonialism, and the uneven effects of natural resource extraction, among many other social and environmental problems. Environmental historians challenge these simplistic framings of the Anthropocene, global climate change, and many other planetary depictions that have gripped the public and policymakers. Challenges to Earth system science have long shown how modelling global processes or depicting places from satellites – the supposed “view from nowhere” – erases societal variation and the uneven effects of climate change (e.g., Borie et al. 2021; Hulme 2010; Shapin 1998). Environmental historians also expose how climate records, such as from ice cores, also vastly oversimplify and homogenize global time as well as space, including Earth time, human time, and future time – temporalities born in scientific studies that have also had far-reaching public effects on (mis)understandings of history (Antonello and Carey 2017).

Yet the debates about the Anthropocene and discussions about scientific representations of Earth’s processes and timescales also promise potential for fresh and unusual collaborations across disciplines. After all, and as John McNeill has explained, the evidence for understanding climatic changes and other planetary shifts is no longer coming just from government documents and other archival sources (texts) that historians are accustomed to using. Instead, the data come from ocean and ice cores, tree rings, marine corals, and speleothems. Environmental history is “undergoing a renaissance,” suggests McNeill, as the natural sciences create a “volcano-like eruption of new historical data” that are inspiring an ever-increasing number of cross-disciplinary collaborations (McNeill 2016: 19, 20). At the

same time, and relatedly, growing concern over the deterioration of a variety of interlinked planetary processes – from biodiversity to climate systems – has brought environmental historians into a more acute awareness of past and ongoing global issues and wicked problems such as species extinction.

Part III centres on some of the key considerations environmental historians are grappling with in engaging with the planetary and the Anthropocene. Conceptualisations of the Anthropocene, global climate change, and other planetary framings have in many ways erased humanity and ethics. Chapter 12 examines how such configurations of the planetary have drawn heavily from Earth system science. The authors show how this effort to provide a view from nowhere essentially helps perpetuate a trajectory of modern science that proclaims to capture some objective reality. The chapter argues for “provincialising the Anthropocene” through a “view from somewhere”. Moreover, they draw on the work of First Nations and Global South scholars to humanise the Anthropocene, to ground the global in time and place, and to challenge single and simplistic narratives that are so often embedded in framings of climate change and the Anthropocene.

Chapter 13 explores how environmental historians have engaged with extinction to try to help understand not only how, when, and why extinction happens, but to go further and grapple with multifaceted issues like the difficulties of actually classifying a being as “extinct” and the complexities of extinction versus extermination. Taking a historical lens to this category shows that extinction is not a teleological binary of “dead or alive”, but rather a deeply contested process that is historically contextualised.

Examining the emergence and changes in post-war Earth system science and climatology is important for understanding these contemporary debates. Chapter 14 argues that the emergence of climate knowledge during this period was also crucial to understanding and managing time. Climate archives, such as ice- and deep-sea cores and computer models, served as time-making technologies to document and predict human-induced changes. This chapter demonstrates that looking at notions of time and practices of time-making in environmental sciences can better inform the planetary turn in environmental history and the humanities.

The reliance of many people and economies on fossil fuels continues to be an ongoing issue in addressing climate change. Chapter 15 examines how path-dependency on fossil fuels emerged. It traces this through the dynamic of extraction and emission, focusing on perspectives from the Global South. Importantly, this approach highlights the planetary and interconnected nature of this issue and centrality of empire making and coloniality in its history.

Power, flows, and knowledges

Environmental historians have always been concerned with the changing ways that diverse social groups have known and experienced environments. Increasingly, these are being brought into dialogue with questions of justice and power, and with human and non-human movements across time and space. Historians interested in the environment have been concerned with environmental justice and environmental racism, some stemming from outrage after hazardous pollutants and toxic waste were abandoned near African American communities in the 1980s, making it starkly clear how environmental issues connect with socio-political injustice. A separate seam of research developed from concerns by historians over how marginalised people suffer from coercive extraction, being forced from their land,

forced into exploitative labour regimes, and compelled to live with mining’s toxic by-products. Another seam of research has focused specifically on those removed from their land under duress (and thus severed from both culture and livelihoods) – because of colonisation, for commercial agriculture and resource extraction (Guha and Martínez-Alier 1998), or because of “fortress conservation” in game reserves and so-called “pristine” wilderness areas, which dispossessed Indigenous peoples in creating national parks like Yellowstone and Kruger National Park (Dlamini 2020; Wakild 2013). There is also increasing concern among those investigating environmental justice over how environmental burdens and the effects of anthropogenic climate change have been increasingly carried by the Global South.

Part IV on power, flows, and knowledges tackles these and related issues over time and space. The chapters ask who controls the flows of water, food, energy, and goods – and with what consequences for diverse social groups, particularly in the Global South. Focusing on places like Latin America, Africa, and Asia, they examine local places where people experience these injustices and global processes, from mines and oil wells to urban infrastructure and riverbanks. While environmental histories of colonialism and capitalism have long concentrated on resource extraction and the harsh, often deadly, impacts on workers and neighbouring populations, the chapters in Part IV incorporate new approaches, themes, and topics as well. Many focus on systems of scientific knowledge, unmasking the globalising efforts that not only deny the geography of science in practice. Moreover, they also reveal the ways in which scientific framings and processes, such as through Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) or the Anthropocene, remove humanity, erase the local, and feed state and corporate power. To rectify that framing, these chapters turn to micro-histories or place-based analyses. They scrutinise “expert power”, whether to enact quotas on fishing or to approve a mine through EIAs. While focusing on the local, they also trace a variety of flows and intertwined linkages that run from the global to the local (and vice versa), from the North to the South, from hinterlands into cities, from labour to corporate profits. While exposing environmental narratives and storylines that empower some at the expense of others, the chapters in Part IV also analyse material environments, showing also the physical flows, as with energy, toxins like cyanide, water in cities, and fish into families and local economies. Grappling with all these issues leads many chapters to address directly, or have implications for, issues of care, trust, and ethics, thereby making this section important for the ways in which environmental historians engage with environmental justice.

Chapter 16 examines relationships between environment, labour, and energy, particularly in Asia and Africa, with broader implications for anyone investigating histories of colonialism and capitalism. The authors challenge universalist claims or assumptions that scholars can make about concepts (such as justice, labour, environment) and processes (such as labour exploitation). Instead, through their close historiographical analysis of labour and environment in Asia and Africa as well as their case study focusing on Nigeria, the authors make a case for putting the study of labour and environment into distinct temporal and spatial contexts, rather than importing notions from existing literatures produced in North America or Europe.

Questions of power, flows, and knowledges further draw attention to questions of chemical use in production techniques and historical environmental injustices. Chapter 17 examines the history of gold mining in Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia) in terms of its effects on subaltern bodies. It specifically examines the impacts of colonial mining company’s use of cyanide in their processes from 1900, which significantly affected the health of workers. Environmental history is an important means for analysing these sorts of past and ongoing

environmental injustices, and this chapter draws the field into closer dialogue with multidisciplinary research and concepts. It also shows just how crucial it is to centre not only investigations of power, contamination, and the human body, but also the intersectionality of race, capitalism, colonialism, and labour.

Chapter 18 is a bold call for environmental history to stop the Manichean division of “ways of knowing” between “science” and vernacular or local empirical knowledge. It uses the case study of artisanal fishing techniques in two very different ecological and socio-political settings, the Danube Delta in Eastern Europe and Lake Guiers in West Africa. By putting these two case studies in conversation with each other, the authors illustrate the struggle between state-sponsored models and the tacit, vernacular, or traditional ways of “knowing and being” of the fishers. Notwithstanding enduring conflict between local and scientific approaches, both groups understand the ecological assemblages – especially the fish – in ways that are neither entirely different nor disconnected.

Changing environmental management processes have further been implicated in concerns over power, flows, and knowledges. Chapter 19 analyses the rise and fall of EIAs since the 1960s, with a case study examining Chile that has broader implications for understanding the international expansion and failure of these assessments. Importantly, the chapter does not simply condemn EIAs for being neoliberal tools pushing destructive, science-led, technocratic, and anti-democratic policies—though the chapter does show these results over time. Yet the authors argue that with care, trust, and legitimacy built into EIA processes, the assessments could, in fact, become tools that recognise the needs of social groups and multiple life forms.

The shifting metabolic flows and far-reaching impacts of cities have further been a key consideration of environmental historians. Chapter 20 provides an overview of how environmental historians have engaged with cities. It develops the concept of “bubbles” as a means for understanding and examining the far-flung environmental and economic flows between cities and the places on which they depend. This analysis is grounded in examples from India, China, and the United States.

Chapter 21 examines South Asian urban environmental governance, offering methodological and topical innovations by linking urban environmental history with political ecology. The chapter contends that researchers can uncover new historical processes and narratives of urban environmental governance when they combine historical archival research with political ethnography. The result is what they call Historical Urban Political Ecology. This approach helps deeply illuminate the place of religion, caste, class, ethnicity, institutions, and bodies in the colonial and postcolonial projects governing urban environments in South Asia, with larger implications for broader debates about power relationships between the North and South.

Practices and actions for current socio-ecological crises

The many, and mounting, current socio-ecological crises – from climate change to water scarcity – have led environmental historians to reconsider how they undertake their existing practices to better address these. Already in a field that grapples with questions of environmental change, many environmental historians have further reoriented their academic research and writing to engage with these issues more directly. But environmental historians have also rethought other aspects of their practices or developed new avenues for actions to address urgent issues, some embracing the approach of “applied history” to help understand

present-day environmental conditions by investigating historical patterns and analogues (Guldi and Armitage 2014). This kind of engaged history writing is inspired by a current crisis and then tries to understand it by using the past as a source of explanation to offer deeper understanding. This helps us suggest probable further consequences and encourages imaginative solutions – and even propose possible policy interventions.

Part V focuses on some of the key ways that environmental historians are reorienting their practices and actions for pressing times. It explores how we are moving *beyond* conventional research and more traditional forms of scholarly writing such as journal articles and books published by academic presses. Chapter 22 grapples with university teaching, arguing for the importance of inspiring students to be hopeful and imaginative rather than only despairing. Teachers can thereby empower students to experiment with new ways of engaging with history and the world. More specifically, the chapter focuses on the possibilities that stem from centring multispecies approaches, imaginative learning, and process-driven pedagogies.

Environmental historians have also engaged in various forms of activism within and beyond their academic work. Exploring this theme, Chapter 23 focuses on several new ways to engage with current crises, including social media, blogs, and filmmaking. However, opportunities for activism by academics are shaped by inequities, access to skills and technologies, and opportunities to work across disciplines and in teams. Activism in the field is also difficult to define and, in many instances, almost impossible to fully separate from scholarly practices, and therefore to identify as such. There may be possibilities for activism, however, if environmental historians remain open to them.

Relatedly, environmental historians have sought to reach audiences beyond the academy. Chapter 24 focuses on the imperative for environmental historians to communicate their research to diverse audiences. It grapples with the promises and limitations of online platforms as a means for doing so, giving practical recommendations and guidance. Environmental history’s long-standing engagement with online listservs and other online communication platforms means it is well placed in this regard now and in the future.

Environmental history has also been important in other spheres and organisations that are seeking to address contemporary crises. Chapter 25 focuses on how museums and galleries are using environmental history to engage with the past and promote dialogue amongst audiences about current and future challenges. It grounds its analysis in examples from Australia, Estonia, and Germany, arguing that environmental history offers museums and galleries an important channel for engaging with the Anthropocene.

Finally, Chapter 26 centres on the relationships between environmental history and policy. Examining how environmental historians have engaged with policy in the past and more recently, it offers useful examples, frameworks, and concepts that can assist these efforts into the future. While engaging with policymaking can be difficult and time-consuming, if approached with patience and determination, it can make important differences.

Future directions in environmental history

Six early career scholars and practitioners met for two months across time zones to assess the past and present of environmental history and reimagine its future paths at a time of ecological crises, job market constraints, and long-lasting neocolonial research practices. As a result of an open call, this co-authorship team brought together researchers with global expertise from Australia, South Asia, Latin America, southern Africa, and Southeast Asia.

Their work goes beyond academia and profoundly engages with local organisations, Indigenous communities, educational institutions, museums, and public scholarship. Building on their areas of expertise, shared views, and differing visions, this afterword calls to accept the coloniality of environmental history knowledge and research practices and unveil the role of Western epistemologies in the field. The authors do so not only to provide a thoughtful diagnosis of the challenges of the environmental history field and the profession but also to provide a series of paths to heal and reconcile the work we do with more-than-human worlds, the communities with whom we work, and historical trajectories that cannot be reducible to the harms of colonialism, hetero-patriarchy, and the colonial archive. The afterword is a grounded call to action and a hopeful plea to amplify the everyday small and affirming relations that can help us build a better future for the environmental history field and the communities we care about within and beyond academia.

As co-editors and scholars, we believe that during this critical moment of global crisis, our generation has the urgent job of negotiating new ways to be in the world. We need an understanding of how we got here, if not to reverse, then at least to navigate and ameliorate perhaps the most extreme challenges humanity has ever confronted. The viability of our future depends on an understanding and a reckoning with our past, building towards a more ethical and more sustainable world than the one we live in now.

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PART I

New Methods, Innovative Approaches



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1

ETHICS, JUSTICE, AND ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORIES

Heather Goodall, Madhuri Mondal, and Meera Anna Oommen

Introduction: Rethinking environmental histories

The histories we write are always entangled with the present. What troubles us now pushes us as historians to ask the questions we do of the past. We want to know not only how we came to be where we are today, but how we might make futures with greater justice. This motivation – to turn to the past for insights into the present – points to the central role of our work as historians, which is to trace and analyse change. We are pushed to recognise that what we see today may have little resemblance to what has been present or has taken place in the past.

To better understand change among humans, historians have turned increasingly to archaeology, literature, and cultural studies. The conventional view has been that *ethics* is our obligation to interpret whatever type of evidence we use as carefully, honestly, and completely as possible, creating historical accounts which are drawn directly from these sources (Denial with Harvie 2010; Tapper 2010; Nash 2000). Yet change has occurred as much in the “natural” world as in the world of humans, demanding that historians draw more actively on the work of ecologists and geographers. If we hope to learn from the past in order to create more just futures, it is necessary to recognise what has been obscured, in both the human and non-human worlds (Macintyre 2004; Caruthers 1995, 2014; Cederlof and Sivaramakrishnan 2014; Shahabuddin and Rangarajan 2007). This means asking what might have been excised from the dominant historical narrative altogether. At whose cost, human and non-human, has change taken place? Whose voices have been ignored in accounting for changes and their impacts? To what extent have attempts to build ethical relationships with nature led to exclusionary processes erasing both humans and non-humans (Sivaramakrishnan 2015)?

This chapter has been written by analysts and activists from both the Global South and the Global North. The dialogue, including its tensions, which takes place in and between our case studies, may open up wider perspectives on the questions surrounding both ethics and justice in our environmental histories, an issue which we discuss further as we conclude.

The term “environment” itself emerged only recently, as Warde, Robin, and Sörlin (2018) have shown, and has only in the last few years been understood to encompass the “more-than-human”

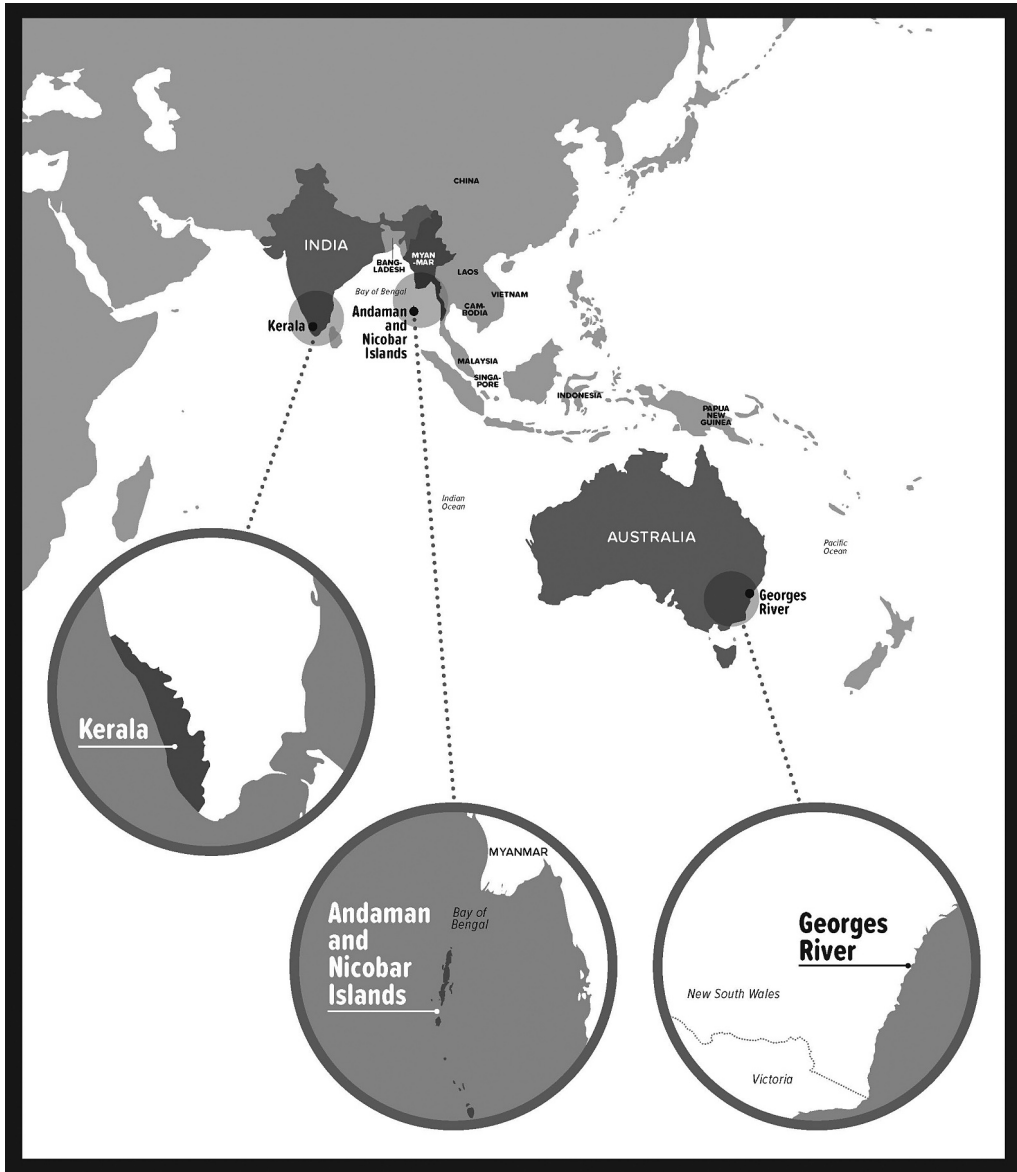


Figure 1.1 Case studies from India and Australia: ethics, justice, and environmental history. Map by Sharon Harrup.

world, which, including humans, interacts with the geological, hydrological, and climatic conditions (O’Gorman and Gaynor 2020). When the United States’ version of environmental history emerged, during the 1960s and 1970s, it did so in close association with the conservation movement, which had assumed that “pristine wilderness” existed, untouched by humans, ignoring the many generations of Indigenous people who had interacted with the land (White 1985, 2001; McNeill, 2003). It was feared that rapid development would damage such remaining

“wilderness” places. This was a “nature” that was fragile and could suffer damage, rather than the robust, deterministic “nature” of earlier histories (e.g., Turner, 1893). Such “environmentalism” would later be termed “post-materialist”: only societies and economies which had reached a high living standard, it was argued, could afford to “care” about the “natural” world. Poverty was seen to cause damage to “nature” and – as Brundtland, on behalf of the UN, argued in *Our Common Future* (1987) – the solution must be the eradication of poverty through “sustainable development”. The hope was that that development could take place to increase productivity and income but at the same time be managed to avoid damage to the environment of the planet.

Cronon (1995) had challenged the concept of a “pristine wilderness” – demanding recognition that humans have changed environments across the planet, including those which recent settlers claimed to have been the first to see. Yet there has still been little recognition of the movements among working and colonised people who had called for recognition that environments could be harmed – but also be harmful – long before the conservation movement in North America. Few of these movements had been analysed by academic historians before the publication of the Global Northern histories which badged themselves as “environmental”. Yet the people suffering the impact of these environmental pressures and changes had long been directly expressing their concerns and arguing their analysis of environmental vulnerabilities. Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier collaborated in *Varieties of Environmentalism* (1997) to argue for the long existence of the “environmentalism of the poor”. They accused Global North historians of ignoring these subaltern interests in the environment when they wrote their early environmental histories. Guha and Martinez-Alier argued instead that the affluence which had nurtured the conservation movement’s goal of protecting imaginary “wilderness” had been built on the exploitation of the land and resources of colonised and working people in rural and urban environments. They drew on examples from their own work in India and Peru respectively, as well as the emerging theoretical approaches of Wallerstein (1980) and others in world systems theory to argue that attention to environmental change and damage was widespread among those who suffered the impacts of colonialism and international trade.

The historical work documenting the environmentalism of the poor has emerged long after those movements themselves had commenced, being published only in more recent decades (Shahabuddin and Rangarajan 2007). Rather than being identified as “Environmental History”, however, these analyses of the histories of the environmentalism of the poor have often been classified as “Environmental Justice” (e.g., Hood Washington 2004; Lakshmi and Sharma 2017; Steyn 2006), “Industrial relations” (e.g., Burgmann and Burgmann 1998) or “Indigenous Studies” (e.g., Goodall and Cadzow 2009; White 1991). Nevertheless, these publications have identified the histories of changing environments at the same time as documenting the complex human interactions taking place in relation to those changes with living species and the lands and waters of those environments. Each of them has identified justice as a central concern (see also Chapter 16, this volume).

In our case studies, we build on these four genres: environmental history, environmental justice, industrial relations, and Indigenous studies – before and beyond formal colonialism, drawing on the insights not only of anthropologists, archaeologists, and political scientists, but also those of geographers and ecologists. We aim to suggest how environmental history might take greater account of the voices, both human, e.g., settler and Indigenous, as well as non-human, which have been ignored or erased in the dominant historical narratives of each of these areas. Our first study is set in the Andaman group of islands, in the eastern Bay of Bengal, situated between the Indian mainland and the coast of Myanmar. Once a penal

colony under British colonial rule, the islands were made a Union Territory of the Republic of India in 1956. The current situation in the islands exemplify dilemmas surrounding mainstream development and environmental protection, as well as the challenges in balancing settler livelihoods with the preservation of Indigenous cultures, such as those of the Jarawa. Our second case study is focused on a mountain landscape in the Western Ghats of Kerala on the Indian mainland, with its complex and changing interactions of both Indigenous peoples and settlers with forest wildlife, including conflict with charismatic conservation icons like elephants and tigers who pose a danger to people and to livelihoods. Our third case study takes us to a highly conflicted and culturally diverse area of suburban Sydney in south-eastern Australia – the estuary of the Georges River. Here too, both people (settler and Indigenous) and wildlife have interacted in complex ways over decades, sometimes reaching mutual accommodations and at other times intensifying conflict. In all three sites, questions can be raised about the definition of “settlers”, often simplistically portrayed as homogeneous and in binary opposition to Indigenous colonised peoples, who themselves are diverse and have varying interactions with other human communities and the natural world. Similarly, all three sites can be characterised by varied entanglements with its wildlife and other natural elements – be it questions about the indigeneity of species, conflict with people, or their role as conservation icons.

Although engaging primarily with human perspectives, each case study suggests that a broader vision can be brought to environmental histories to produce more inclusive histories by recognising change and seeking of more voices, including those of non-humans, in our understanding of the dynamics of change and the impact on human-environment relations. We continue to see human social, economic, and cultural processes – and the tensions and conflicts between different groups of humans (e.g., Indigenous people and settlers) – as powerful drivers of change. We have found that materialist, feminist, and intersectional theoretical work has been important in identifying these tensions and conflicts. (Cuomo 2015; Haraway 1988; Jørgensen et al. 2013) And yet, as we hope these case studies also show, we see environmental changes as interactions. Human engagements with and responses to the behaviours, forms, and changes of more-than-human ecologies shape the wider ongoing processes of historical change.

Case study 1: Andaman Islands, India

The Jarawa, one of the last remaining Indigenous communities of the Andaman Islands (located in the Bay of Bengal between mainland India and Myanmar), had coexisted with about ten Great Andamanese communities for at least several thousand years on these islands (Saini 2018), drawing on complex hunting and resource use patterns. During the pre-colonial period, different Indigenous groups used different territories within the islands based on availability of resources, including wild pig, honey, monitor lizard, the larvae of certain insects, turtles, fish, crabs, and molluscs, and a range of tubers and fruits. For most Andamanese, the availability of these resources, harvesting, and consumption had been season-specific and governed by strict taboos, myths, and rules (Pandya 1993), including various resource and habitat taboos such as age restrictions on eating pork, honey, or the fat of turtles and seasonal limits on hunting. The existence of such informal systems and cultural engagements among small bands are closely tied to the avoidance of overexploitation and the sustainability of terrestrial and marine resources over the long term (Oommen 2022).

British colonisation and control (between 1792 and 1947) ushered in an era of change and was spurred initially by commercial maritime interests, and then, after the First War of Independence (the “Mutiny”) by the establishment of a penal colony for political prisoners. As in other colonial scenarios, the British saw the islands as “empty space”, assuming that the Andamanese did not have a concept of land ownership (Pandya 2013). Administrators and ethnographers disparaged their foraging lifestyles for their lack of agriculture, mobility, and austere living arrangements. The hostility of the islanders (apparently in response to widespread regional slave-taking previously) simply confirmed to the colonisers their “brutish savagery” (Colebrooke 1799; Mouat 1867).

After the uprising of 1857, the British established a penal colony in the islands and transported several thousand convicts. Many initial arrivals succumbed to disease, and their deaths were blamed on the “miasmas” from the swamps around South Andaman, leading to the clearing of the wetlands (Shanks and Bradley 2010). The “Cellular Jail”, an enormous panopticon prison constructed in the later 1800s following Jeremy Bentham’s design ideals, was used into the 1930s, by which time it had housed more than 80,000 convicts, including criminals, political prisoners, and nationalist agitators (Anderson et al. 2016). Over this time, many Andamanese were confined and subjected to training for “civilisation” and to ethnographic and scientific study. The creation of “Andaman Homes” and greater contact with outsiders led to the outbreak of many communicable and sexually transmitted diseases, significantly depleting the Great Andamanese communities. (Pandya 2013).

From the late 1920s, the colonial administration began to seek suitable migrants to establish a free colony through agricultural expansion and commercial extraction of timber, especially Andaman *padauk* (*Pterocarpus dalbergioides*). Exploitation without adequate attention to regeneration and poor forestry practices resulted in vegetational shifts (Krishnakumar 2009). To alleviate the labour shortfall, the colonial administration brought in the Karen people, from Moulmein and surrounding areas in Burma. As the settlements expanded, the Jarawa frequently attacked convicts and laborers. Retaliative punitive expeditions were undertaken to control Jarawa attacks. This created a dangerous and hostile boundary between tribal forest and settlements. Containment and civilisation of the Jarawa was seen as the key solution for the maintenance of the settlement and to meet the needs for surveillance and observation for scientific studies.

During the first years of World War II, additional timber was extracted to meet wartime needs, while colonists’ introduction of exotic timber species was also a threat. Several species of plants, snails, insects, fishes, birds, amphibians, and mammals were also introduced, with the most harmful, invasive ones including spotted deer (*Axis axis*), Indian bullfrog (*Hoplobatrachus tigerinus*), and feral dogs and cats. Elephants brought in for timber hauling became feral on some islands.

The Andamans came under Japanese control between 1942 and 1945, with Indigenous communities severely affected. The Japanese had treated them brutally because they accused the islanders of spying for the British, because of their mobility in moving frequently between Port Blair and the surrounding forests.

The colonial era saw the decimation of the Great Andamanese communities. A handful of individuals now remain confined on Strait Island (near Middle Andaman). The Sentinelese, a small population of islanders on North Sentinel Island, remain, largely hostile to contact. Several hundred Jarawa continue to inhabit the western and central areas of Great Andaman. After Indian independence (1947), the dual idea of “preserving” and “mainstreaming” the Jarawa, drawn directly from British colonial policy, became the foundation of succeeding tribal

policies. The government saw the Andaman tribal communities as part of India's cultural diversity, to be taken care of within the political structures of the new Republic. Nevertheless, as in other postcolonial situations, the Indian government has been as keen as the British Raj to use the land and natural resources of the islands.

In 1948, the government examined "the prospect of colonization and settlement" of the Andamans, observing that "there are large possibilities for settlement by those who take to cultivation or fishery as their principal occupation" (Sengupta 2017: 7). The significant Partition refugee exodus from East Bengal, combined with urgent labour needs, led to a new era of settlement between 1949 and 1956. Each refugee family was given five acres of hilly land for the plantation of cash crops, five acres of flat land for paddy cultivation, and one acre as homestead land. Settlers from Jharkhand, Telugu, Tamil, and Bengali communities were also brought in at various points from the Indian mainland.

As settlements grew, international organisations questioned the Indian state and expressed concern for Indigenous communities, arguing that the Indigenous "food-gatherers" were being increasingly surrounded by immigrant "food-growers". In 1956, the government responded by establishing the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Protection of Aboriginal Regulation (ANPATR), creating "Tribal Reserves" and directing the Islands' administration to exercise power in a "non-interfering" and "non-imposing" manner. The Jarawa Tribal Reserve was established in 1956, covering part of the western coast of the South and Middle Andaman (Chandi 2010). The autonomous Tribal Welfare Department for the islands was also established to befriend the Indigenous people in order ultimately to "develop" and transform them. After the enactment of the Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA) in 1972, national parks and sanctuaries were created in 1977 to conserve the wildlife of the islands. Ironically, the WLPA brought the spotted deer under protection all over India and failed to recognise its negative impact on the island forests. Even after creation of the tribal reserves and conservation laws, the future for the Jarawa remained insecure because of the rapidly growing settlements. By 1960–5, the settler population of the islands had reached 200,000 whereas the Indigenous population decreased to less than 500 (Pandya 2013).

To connect the expanding settlements in the north and the south, the 343-km-long Andaman Trunk Road (ATR) was built in 1978, passing through the Jarawa Reserve, fuelling further conflict between the Jarawa and the settlers. The road catalysed the creation of additional encroachment routes, providing easy access to outsiders for hunting and exploitation of the community. Forestry operations increased, while commercial species were also planted. Together, these factors constrained Jarawa hunting grounds and availability of food. The emerging tourism industry greatly increased vehicular traffic along the ATR, with some tour operators promoting an insidious form of "Jarawa tourism", where tourists stared at the passing Jarawa, handed food items, and photographed them. Close contact with the outsiders led to further epidemic outbreaks like measles.

Recognising detrimental impacts on the Jarawa, a group of organisations and activists appealed to the Supreme Court of India to close the ATR. Although the court ordered its complete closure in 2002, the road remains open because of appeals from tour operators and other settler groups without alternative transport. In 2013, when the court intervened again, the island administration promised to protect the Jarawa with an effective welfare policy, a buffer zone, and eventually to "mainstream" the community within island society (Pandya 2013). Contrarily, there have been continuing reports of poaching within the Jarawa Reserve for both terrestrial and marine wildlife and also sexual offences by settlers on Jarawa.

The continuing pressure on the Jarawa Reserve eroded its capacity to provide a secure livelihood. One young Jarawa man, Enmei, interviewed while in Port Blair Hospital, explained that:

resource density has reduced in the Jarawa areas ... the Jarawa now have to work more to gather their food, for instance, spend four hours instead of two on hunting a pig.
(*Shekhar 2003*)

Over the last few years, Jarawa attacks have reduced and some Jarawa have approached the road to demand food and gifts. Further forms of transaction have arisen, including the exchange of venison and crabs from the reserve in return for tobacco and metal implements. Chandi (2010) notes that Jarawa do not always encourage hunting by visitors, but they contribute to the catch if provided drinks, gifts, and food. At no stage has the Forest Department called on the Jarawa to share their knowledge to enhance forest conservation and sustainability. Overall, protection strategies have had limited effectiveness and threaten to endanger both the Jarawa and their forests. Furthermore, their strategic transactions with tourists and settlers indicate pressure from the State and the tourism industry which demands “museumisation” – an insistence on the performance of unchanged and exotic customs. As Krishnakumar (2009) states, although the British Raj and the independent Indian state were both “primarily driven to exploit the islands to accrue capital, the former attempted this through the commodification of forests, while the latter framed its enterprise in terms of ‘development’ policies”.

Case study 2: Western Ghats, India

Our second case study explores the dynamic of conservation and development in a forest-fringe landscape in the Ranni Forest Division, in the southern Indian state of Kerala. Located between two well-known protected areas, Periyar and Agasthyamalai, this landscape is characteristic of the Western Ghats mountains and is home to many species of conservation significance, including large mammals like elephants and large carnivores, as well as highly endemic herpetofauna. The region has a long history of human use and occupation, and now constitutes the current location of the forest fringe. This case study attempts a brief audit of social and environmental justice both from the perspective of human communities and their non-human counterparts who occupy the porous boundary between forest and field.

Examining human occupation here reveals a history that is at odds with the narrative of pristineness attributed to the region’s forests by many contemporary conservationists. Ancient literary sources and coinage point to the presence of foragers, who secured a variety of forest products (ivory, cinnamon, cardamom, pepper, timber, etc.) for trade as part of the vibrant Indo-Roman exchange from the 3rd century BC onwards (Gurukkal 2010). At the same time, this landscape encompassed many hill-millet chiefdoms whose agriculture attracted crop-raiding elephants and pigs. Ancient literary texts (primarily, romantic Sangam-period bardic poetry) allude not only to conflict, but also peoples’ acceptance of the sentience of species such as elephants and their coexistence (Oommen 2019). The poetics of the *kurinji* landscape (i.e., the mountains dominated by *Strobilanthes sp.*) reflects the fundamental semiotics of ancient Dravidian cultures to their ecotypes and the simultaneous threads of culture and subsistence binding people and nature (Gurukkal 2010). Complex

interactions bringing together the sacred and the emotive with pragmatic day-to-day subsistence use and sustainability has been a long-standing feature of various Indian landscapes including the Western Ghats. Multifaceted relationships with large iconic species, encompassing both conflict as well as acceptance, tolerance, and reverence, is also reflective of long-term coexistence (Oommen 2021).

From the 16th century onwards, the arrival of European colonial powers in southern India escalated the demand for timber and spices. Eventually, this induced scarcity and catalysed the plantation of species such as pepper and cardamom that were once exclusively wild-sourced. By the mid-1800s, coffee, cinchona, and tea had been planted under British colonial impetus. Colonial records show that by the early 1900s, rubber too was established. Timber extraction and plantations transformed landscapes and entailed habitat loss for large, free-ranging vertebrates such as elephants. They also resulted in loss of land and livelihoods for many of the region's diverse forest-dwellers, generically referred to as "hillmen". Some of these communities traditionally practiced slash-and-burn ("shifting"/swidden) agriculture by girdling large trees and firing the land (Bourdillon 1893). Others, like the Hill Pandaram, were mobile foragers. British forestry officials, valuing timber, interfered in shifting agriculture because they considered it wasteful. Plantation agriculture edged out hill tribes from their traditional hunting and harvesting spaces, disrupting long-held traditions of movement and ritual. In 1909, under the "Hillmen Rules" (Rules for the Treatment and Management of Hillmen), such communities were made "wards" of the state and urged to settle down and cultivate. Restrictions were also imposed on the *viruppu* cultivators (agriculturalists from the plains who moved in seasonally to grow crops) for whom the forests served as a safety net during famines.

The steep slopes and marginal soils of the Ranni landscape prevented extensive plantation agriculture, but hydroelectric power and irrigation requirements in the plains led to the establishment of numerous dams within the forest catchments in the colonial period and after (e.g., the Sabarigiri network of dams). Protected areas too were a parallel development that began in the colonial period with the establishment of the Nelliampathy Reserve in the mid-1930s, followed by the Periyar Tiger Reserve in 1950. Game preservation for hunting by Europeans was one reason for restricting Indigenous hunting and increasing protection. Elephants too became a protected species due to their economic and cultural importance. Ivory extraction, elephant capture (for countryside operations) and elephant labour (in timber hauling) were significant revenue earners for the government and some hill communities who traditionally specialised in their capture and management. Sportsmen's memoirs state that occasionally, laws were relaxed for sport hunting and for eliminating rogues and habitual crop-raiders. Elephants therefore enjoyed a paradoxical positioning, characterised by both protection and destruction.

In the early 1940s, two large-scale crises – the Bengal Famine and the Japanese occupation of Burma – resulted in widespread severe food shortages. The forests of the *ghats* were thrown open as short-term safety nets to impoverished migrants to cultivate food. The Ranni forests were promoted as Food Production Areas by the Travancore government under the national Grow More Food campaign (which continued post-independence), attracting migrants from the nearby plains. These migrant families faced the uphill task of settling in an unfamiliar landscape with dark, impenetrable forests. Their attempts to grow rice were foiled by frequent raids from crop-raiding elephants. Settlers were forced to take refuge in *madoms* or platforms built on forest trees. The odd *madom* still survives in this landscape as a testament to the past. Settler memories as recorded in oral histories recall that their trauma of

famine and displacement was compounded by their daily struggles with crop-raiding wildlife and an unsympathetic forest bureaucracy which treated them as unwanted elements who were usurping valuable forest land. Unable to cope, many families returned to the plains, but others remained. While some plots were eventually regularised, others are still considered as encroachments, and uncertainty over land tenure continues to this day.

Prior to India's independence in 1947, the Forest Department (FD) secured revenues from timber and other forest operations, including elephant capture and sale. After independence, reflecting a nationwide shift, influenced by Western conservation organisations and home-grown elite conservationists, its primary objective became the expansion of Protected Areas (PA) and the conservation of wildlife (Ranjitsinh 2017; Shanker et al. 2018). At first, animal depredations were primarily restricted to raids by elephants; however, as rice became unviable because of low prices and loss of topsoil, newer food crops such as tapioca came under attack from other species, especially wild pigs. Settler sharing of space over longer periods of time with elephants had resulted in a less hostile form of coexistence, as both elephants and people learnt from each other to avoid confrontations. Damage by elephants was, in any case, catastrophic, making it easier to quantify and receive compensation. Nightly raids by pigs, however, were a persistent, insurmountable challenge. With more stringent conservation legislation (e.g., the Indian Wildlife [Protection] Act, 1972), blanket protection was offered to wildlife and punishments meted out for "poaching".

Such "punitive" conservation engendered a view that wild animals that "transgressed" PA boundaries into private lands were now regarded as government property. New forms of resistance against conservation began to take shape, along with retaliation against the conserved species themselves. This form of social mobilisation embodied a moral economy of violence against protected wildlife and the state by local communities who perceive such conservation impositions as unjust. In another example, native tree preservation legislation that was implemented in the region meant that settler spaces faced bans against tree felling, whereas the landholdings in the plains were exempt from restrictions. Settlers began to view environmental protection as a burden borne only by them, whereas plains communities remained exempt yet enjoyed the benefits of settler struggles. These arguments foreground the question of distributive justice.

Migrant influx was viewed by both the government and settlers themselves as the colonisation of an empty forest. Neither group anticipated a need to treat these as peopled forests. The government allowed land acquisition without safeguarding communities such as the Hill Pandaram, who were primarily forest-dwelling and mobile. In some cases settlers actively deceived forest cultivators such as the Mala Araya to part with their land. A common tactic was to supply alcohol and tobacco (and goods such as rice, dry fish, iron implements, etc.) to increase their dependency and then induce them to sign away land for nominal returns. Interviews in the Ranni landscape reveal that contrary to the dominant narrative, not all interactions were antagonistic; in fact, many were mutually beneficial and cooperative. The Kurava and the Hill Pandaram routinely prevented settlers from starving during the initial years as they willingly supplied foods such as *Dioscorea* roots and wild honey, and provided guidance on living in the forest. But overall, this was an unequal relationship that eventually resulted in the large-scale diversion of the land in favour of the settlers and of the forests in favour of the FD.

The increasing FD control of land has become more pronounced over time because conservation resulted in steadily increasing restrictions on local tribes. In recent years, especially after the Forest Rights Act, 2006 (which aimed to set right historical injustices that