

Introduction to the Special Issue

Transformative Water Relations: Indigenous Interventions in Global Political Economies

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Abstract

This Special Issue of *Global Environmental Politics*, on water governance, focuses on the disruptive and transformative potential of Indigenous politics for revealing the multiplicity of political economies and enhancing the theory and practice of global environmental politics. In this issue, we unsettle the assumptions of dominant colonial systems of production and exchange (often the starting point for global environmental politics scholars), using water to bring to light the conflicting approaches of settler colonial and Indigenous political economies. With a focus on the settler colonial states of the Global North—specifically, Canada and the United States—the contributing authors interrogate the ways in which different forms of water *relations* are positioned at the center of conflicting understandings of land, law, and development trajectories. Through analyses of varying forms of water infrastructure, water law, and waterways, and with careful attention to spatial and temporal distances in production and trade systems, the articles curated here examine conflicting legal forms and traditions, upstream and downstream relations, and opportunities for and limits to resistance by affected communities. In a dominant global political economy with increasing distance between sites of extraction, production, consumption, and discard—and even further removed from the financing that underpins these commodity chains—our Special Issue suggests that the acknowledgment and visibility of multiple forms of water relations contribute to reshaping both economies and environmental outcomes.

“Water is life.” This slogan is heard at protests and gatherings around the world, in art and in song, to resist the disruption of water resources, whether through their contamination, their consumption or rerouting for energy infrastructure, or their removal from common access through privatization. The phrase is central to movements that oppose industrial development projects and exclusionary enclosures. It also requires listeners to think through water as more than a commodity in a capitalist system. While water is implicated within extraction and

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production processes across sectors, from energy to agriculture and beyond, it is as—if not more—deeply embedded in social practices and spiritual traditions across cultures and regions. In North America, “Water is life”—or “Mni wiconi” in the Lakota language—became a rallying cry during the highly publicized resistance at Standing Rock, North Dakota, mounted by the Oceti Sakowin (and their allies) against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline over a ten-month period in 2016. The phrase marks the deep ontological roots of Indigenous peoples’ critiques of environmental injustices relating to land and water. “For the Oceti Sakowin,” writes Lakota historian Nick Estes (2019, 21), “Mni Wiconi, or ‘water is life,’ relates to Wotakuye, or ‘being a good relative.’”

Moving beyond consideration of water as a right or responsibility, and past questions of institutional arrangements for water management (topics that already have deep engagement by global environmental politics scholars in this journal, e.g., Fischhendler 2008; Fischhendler et al. 2011; Gerlak 2004, 2016; Gupta and Van der Zaag 2009; Katz 2011; Lindemann 2008), this Special Issue shifts to focus on water *relations*—the interactions between and across humans and water systems. Seen in this normative light, Indigenous peoples’ “resistance to the trespass of settlers, pipelines and dams is part of being a good relative to the water, land and animals, not to mention the human world” (Estes 2019, 21). We suggest that the multiplicity of values that surround water enables us to explore the ways in which different ontologies shape the social, legal, political, and economic structures that govern collective life and how these worldviews facilitate or constrain negotiations across these systems. In particular, the articles examine the core question of how water relations shape and are shaped by political economies, interrogating the intersection (or collision) of capitalist and Indigenous economic forms. These structures and processes are mediated by waterways, shaped by water access and use, enabled through water consumption and diversion, and enriched through connection and engagement.

The collection expands the field of global environmental politics (GEP) by turning to the insights offered by Indigenous political economic scholarship and practice on the opportunities—but also tensions—that emerge in efforts to challenge colonial economic and development practices. The field of political economy, as advanced through GEP, considers the role of power in patterns of investment, production, and exchange and the effects these patterns have in shaping environmental sustainability and well-being. GEP scholars consider the implications for the environment and people of changing geopolitical relationships, international financial markets and their volatility, and spillover and shadow effects of trade systems. The global political economy, as demonstrated through research in GEP, can be characterized as socially embedded (Conca et al. 2001), globally interconnected and highly unequal (Boyce 2002; Craig 2004; Havice 2012), post-Fordist in structure with multiple layers of fragmentation and integration (Conca 2001; Görg and Brand 2006), increasingly

elongated with growing distance between nodes in commodity chains (Princen 1997, 2002), dependent on rapid exchange, shaped by processes of financialization (Clapp 2014), and prone to casting shadows of environmental and social damage on places far from sites of consumption (Dauvergne 2010; Swanson 2015). Although these analyses are informed by critical theory perspectives and often motivated by justice concerns for vulnerable ecosystems and communities, these studies tend to center their attention on dominant structures of global exchange. To disrupt these models, and the damaging social and environmental consequences that arise from such systems, it is not enough to make visible the networks that sustain these economies or uncover their distant and hidden costs; more scholars need to highlight alternative models of political thought and economy that might offer a different set of perspectives on a multiplicity of paths forward. GEP scholars turn to many ideas to think through alternate futures and transformative potential—these include critiques of capitalist logics (Princen 2003 on the need for sufficiency and restraint), the potential for multilevel governance and the challenges this poses to understanding jurisdiction and territory (Conca 2012, on the rise of the region; Jordan et al. 2012, on the possibilities and limits of multilevel governance in the EU for climate policy), and challenges to understanding states that complicate mainstream conceptions of sovereignty (Hunold and Dryzek 2002, through green political theory; Dalby 2004, on empires and historical contingency). Although often unacknowledged by Western academic work (Todd 2016), scholars and practitioners of Indigenous politics have been writing about and revealing such systems for decades, documenting long-standing knowledge of alternative structures of exchange and production that are premised on different ontologies of land, environment, development, and sovereignty (e.g., Alfred 2005; Coulthard 2014; Daigle 2016; Larsen and Johnson 2017, Simpson 2011, 2017; Watts 2013).

These forms of production and exchange persist—and even thrive—alongside and despite the power of dominant economic models. As Dhillon (2018, 1) writes in her introduction to a special issue of *Environment and Society*, on Indigenous resurgence and environmental justice, “Indigenous peoples are mapping the contours of alternative modes of social, political, and economic organization that speak to the past, present, and the future.” Paying attention to such theory and action serves us well in both the critical and constructive aims of scholarship on GEP.

The articles collected in this Special Issue thus turn to Indigenous political scholarship, which the field of GEP has so far failed to engage in depth, to consider the transformative possibilities that are offered by considering a diversity of political economies and practices. We see this relative lack of engagement with Indigenous politics as curious, if not troubling, on at least two fronts: first, as demonstrated in the articles, there are clear intersections between GEP and Indigenous politics that produce valuable insights into the political economy of water governance in settler colonial contexts, and second, this failure of engagement ignores emerging national and international research norms with respect to the inclusion of Indigenous peoples and perspectives when carrying out

work and research on issues of immediate concern to them and the ecosystems for which they are responsible.¹

Here we summarize two key contributions that emerge from the insights of our colleagues in this collection. First, we identify ontological divides in understanding the nature of the environment itself and thus in the economies that flow from human exchanges with the natural world and each other. Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betsamosake Simpson (2016) refer to the ontological foundation of Indigenous critiques of settler political economies as “grounded normativity”: the ethical frameworks provided by Indigenous place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge relating to the sustainable governance of people, lands, and water. Conflicts over water and the life and energy contained therein and alongside—whether rivers or fisheries, hydropower or shorelines—reflect not only different value judgments about ecosystems and resources and money but also a deeper disconnect over what water is, what it represents, and the place of humans within the wider world. Second, turning to political economy, the collection reveals challenges to dominant political and economic systems that emerge from diverse Indigenous nations and politics. These challenges require a rethinking of how institutions are structured, who participates in market exchanges, and what rights are embedded in treaties and state law. The acknowledgment of different premises for understanding exchange and ownership opens up space for a more fundamental transformation of social and environmental relationships. Indigenous governance systems in the Global North have persisted over centuries, despite active destruction and dismantling efforts by colonial governments. Beyond surviving, though, Indigenous nations are both asserting and reclaiming their social and political practices within their communities and are also strategically altering settler colonial states themselves. Indigenous approaches to reclaiming sovereignty from settler states are reshaping the economic and legal foundations, along with the domestic and international exchange relationships, of nation-states.

With attention to historical relationships of colonialism and the ongoing contestation of governance systems within and across nations, the Special Issue articles collected here address both the limits to and the opportunities for change. Through critical political economy lenses, particularly as understood in Indigenous politics and thought, these articles offer theoretically and empirically novel contributions to GEP.

Ontological Divides and Bridges

Water flows through and across aquatic and terrestrial systems, within and through bodies, through frozen, liquid, and gaseous forms. It creates habitat, sustains life, and occupies transitional and liminal zones at multiple edges.

1. For examples of international and national research standards and guidelines, see the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and chapter 9 of the Government of Canada’s Tri-Council Policy Statement on conducting ethical research with human subjects.

The commodification of nature and the prioritization of extractive industries lie at the heart of settler state economies. Water, in this worldview, provides transportation of labor and goods, enables extraction and energy production, and holds value either as a tradable commodity or as a free input for other wealth-generation activities. In contrast, Indigenous conceptions of water, while emanating from diverse nations, position water as part of a living planet, often as something sacred (Bradford et al. 2016). Unlike the English language, which divides the environment and people, many Indigenous languages capture the interconnections of these systems and beings, including through intimate local knowledge expressed through place-names and identity and gender relations with place (Kimmerer 2017; Schreyer et al. 2014; Tuhiwai Smith 1994). By mediating social relations and positionality, water underpins legal structures and practices, playing a role in the potential for autonomy and sovereignty, the location of communities, the nature of travel and exchange, the development of property law, and the negotiation of treaties. Divergent understandings of water thus shape the social organization of economies and exchange in vastly different ways, with varying political, ethical, legal, and emotional consequences.

Water is, of course, global, transboundary, and mobile: it flows across the planet through interconnected hydrological processes; moves across, along, and under state borders; and, through complex chains of production, transportation, and consumption, ends up in embedded or virtual forms in commodities around the globe. At the same time, water is intensely local. Global or even regional averages—of precipitation, streamflow, or availability—often mean little to agricultural communities waiting for rain, riparian communities in flood conditions, or urban centers relying on overexploited aquifers. These dual characteristics of water inform the scholarly approaches of our Special Issue authors: through specific place-based case studies—in Navajo and Hopi territory and the US state of Arizona (Curley), Michi Saagiig territory and Canada's province of Ontario (Whetung), and Lummi Nation territory and the US state of Washington (Norman), for instance—our authors attend to the politics of scale and material specificity as they work to shape political outcomes (as advised by Liboiron 2016, although in a different context in her work on the agency of plastics). These situated and layered water relations offer more than contingent and idiosyncratic insights into specific places—the work of regional political studies; crucially, by engaging with the specific histories, power dynamics, waterways, and economies of these case sites, the authors reveal the ways in which colonial assumptions about generalizability collide with different Indigenous nations' relationships in place, how views of waterways and landscapes “from above” (to borrow from Scott 1998) enable colonial governing authorities to ignore and obscure pre-existing diplomatic and legal relationships, and how international market pressures and globally circulating assumptions about economic growth and development shape the governing practices that disrupt and reorient people and places in a range of watersheds around the world.

Bookending the collection of research articles are two papers that center on ontological questions and use narrative approaches to develop their theoretical insights (Whetung, Behn and Bakker). The three intervening articles (Diver et al., Curley, Norman) examine efforts by different Indigenous nations to reassert sovereignty and negotiate governance arrangements, whether by engaging with settler colonial state regulation and legislation or by offering alternatives to state processes. Whetung as well as Behn and Bakker draw on stories—from Michi Saagiig (an Anishinaabe nation) and Dunne-Za (a Dene nation) traditions, respectively—to offer insights into other ways of understanding relationships with water, place, and others. While drawing on Western practices of theory building and application, our authors simultaneously enact a mode of theory that accords with what Simpson (2014, 7) describes within Anishinaabe intellectual traditions:

Theory also works a little differently within Nishnaabeg thought. “Theory” is generated and regenerated continually through embodied practice and within each family, community and generation of people. “Theory” isn’t just an intellectual pursuit—it is woven within kinetics, spiritual presence and emotion, it is contextual and relational.

The collection starts with Whetung, who launches us directly into the ontological questions at stake in this collective work. By turning to contemporary and historical changes to Michi Saagiig territory and governance in what is now claimed as part of Ontario, Canada, she introduces an “internationalism” that challenges mainstream international relations scholarship. In detailing the many human and other-than-human nations recognized and respected by Anishinaabeg treaties, Whetung thereby unsettles Western understandings of territory, diplomacy, and legal orders. Her work documents the gendered dynamics of colonial political economies and the erasure of existing systems of governance through physical changes on the landscape, tracking the conversion of free-flowing rivers into canals along the Trent Severn Waterway in service of colonial commerce. Whetung illustrates the clash between Western/Eurocolonial and Anishinaabeg modes of understanding states and legal systems, drawing out the relational dimensions of Anishinaabeg law. To do this, she illuminates the principles of “shoreline law,” using a theoretical grounding developed from a combination of Western legal scholarship, feminist political theory, and Anishinaabeg teachings from Michi Saagiig elders and knowledge holders. Through this work, she provides a careful analysis of the ways in which certain forms of political economy not only dominate but also subsume or make impossible other forms of economies and relations. Yet Whetung also reveals the ongoing practices of Michi Saagiig people in upholding and reclaiming their land and laws through practices of resistance, including occupation of territory and declaration of rights through paddling, hunting, fishing, and cultivating wild rice.

We end the research article section with Behn and Bakker’s account of hydropower development on the Saaghii Naachii/Peace River by the government of British Columbia (BC) in Canada, in which the authors bring together two divergent methodological approaches. At the outset, they draw on political

ecology and political economy critiques of the centrality of extractive industries to colonial power, making visible the dispossession that enables the expansion of the BC and Canadian economies. This first analytic section will look familiar to scholars of GEP, with a critical assessment of the historical trajectory of hydropower in BC and its role in entrenching specific political interests. Behn and Bakker describe the strategic deployment and bounding of impact assessments as a form of “manufactured ignorance,” involving the “exclusion of specific questions, data, analytical methods, and ways of knowing.” While one solution is to expand the scope of assessments to consider cumulative impacts, Behn and Bakker propose that such a response modifies outcomes but maintains a colonial logic. As an alternative, they turn to Dunne-Za storytelling to develop an ontologically distinct approach to addressing conflicts over land, water, and energy. Stories offer far more than diversions from serious scholarship: as Simpson (2011, 33) articulates from an Anishinaabe perspective,

[S]torytelling is at its core decolonizing, because it is a process of remembering, visioning and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both *Nishnaabeg* and *peoples*. Storytelling then becomes a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism, where we can create models and mirrors where none existed, and where we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice.

Stories are vessels for teachings: they reveal connections and hold histories (Battiste 2013, 179), demonstrate legal principles (Borrows 2016), remind listeners of diplomatic practices and social responsibilities, establish consequences to action and behavior, and envision possible futures (Simpson 2011, 2017). Behn and Bakker reveal colonial efforts to “render technical” the process of hydropower development and land use change, aiming to override Indigenous traditions that “render sacred” the relationships and connections on and with the land and water. Through storytelling, they unsettle assumptions about place, law, and resistance, revealing the relational and social economies that persist alongside and in spite of colonial incursions—and the possibilities these hold for collective futures.

Strategic Reshaping of Settler States and Practices

Alongside the invitation to GEP scholars to consider ontological and methodological challenges, the Special Issue articles present a series of analyses that reveal how the lines between participation in and resistance to colonial systems can be blurred. Indigenous governments and communities can strategically wield the tools of the state to acknowledge and defend their lands, practices, and values. The use of colonial systems to defend Indigenous rights offers one path toward greater autonomy and can alter the practices of the state itself, reshaping governance in multiple ways. Still, these processes have limits, and there are dangers to such integration (Coulthard 2007, 2014).

Even as they assess the possibilities for altering state practices through engagement, our authors draw on the deep and expanding literature on the politics of recognition, much of which cautions against Indigenous participation in colonial state systems. Although participation can offer Indigenous peoples some additional power within the state, it can undermine broader and longer-term transformation of governing relationships by acknowledging the authority of the colonial state, thus limiting possibilities for reclaiming autonomy and self-determination (Coulthard 2014; Daigle 2016). By engaging with specific cases—for example, water quality standards across the United States, water rights and legal precedent in Arizona, water contamination from upstream agriculture in coastal Washington—the authors of this Special Issue provide in-depth empirical evidence for the tensions they identify in these “colonial entanglements,” a concept from Dennison (2012) used by both Curley and Diver et al. to examine the dynamics of Indigenous peoples’ participation within the structures of settler states.

The interventions in this issue explore the possibilities for—but also limits of—the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge, authority, and values into settler state governance practices. Diver et al. examine the adoption of state-like powers by tribal governments in the United States, where provisions under the Clean Water Act allow their “treatment as a state” in terms of conferring on them the authority to set local water quality standards. Conducting an analysis across the tribes in the United States that have engaged with TAS provisions, with a focus on environmental contaminants, they document the inclusion of cultural and ceremonial concerns in tribes’ water quality standards. Still, these entanglements lead to a form of water management that, although it expands the limits otherwise imposed by the state, still adheres to colonial perspectives on water resources, especially given structural constraints to tribal authority posed by US property rights regimes.

Curley further complicates the story of colonial entanglements addressed by Diver et al. with his examination of Hopi and Navajo leaders’ assertion of their water rights through appeals to phrasing from a twentieth-century US Supreme Court case. Curley takes us to the Little Colorado River, where he tracks opposition to water settlements by Hopi and Navajo (Diné) citizens, demonstrating how these communities used existing US water laws and court decisions to contest state-mediated water allocations. Rather than acquiescing to state control, Curley argues that Hopi and Navajo claims revealed the contradictions embedded in the actions of the state, undermining the legitimacy of colonial water law and increasing the governance space for upholding alternative water relations. These conflicts reveal the possibilities for disrupting colonial assumptions and power systems through engagement with the state, revealing that appeals to state structures need not always fall into the problematic politics of recognition.

Offering a bridge between the challenges of colonial entanglements and alternative relational approaches, Norman turns to ways in which Indigenous communities can circumvent unresponsive government processes. With a focus on the US West Coast, she documents efforts by the Lummi Nation (Coast Salish people), with concerns about water quality for shellfish harvesting, to work

directly with upstream farmers to reconnect rights to responsibilities for water in the Salish Sea. To convince those upstream communities to participate in negotiations, Lummi leaders first invoked legal action against farmers for contaminating shellfish beds. However, the nation quickly shifted its focus away from colonial litigious practices to relationship-building efforts that better reflect the nation's values. The relational focus of this work, both social relationships across Lummi and settler communities and place-based relationships between communities and water, highlights the transformative potential of rejecting settler state practices of negotiation and regulation. Norman's work asks us to further consider the ontological assumptions underpinning governance practices and possible futures, considering relational alternatives to mitigating and repairing the damage wrought by industrial activities on social economies.

We end the Special Issue with a policy-oriented intervention. In their Forum piece, Arsenault et al. point to the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from full and meaningful participation in environmental impact assessments for development projects in Canada, highlighting the "substantive inequities" that persist in the process. Acknowledging the historical roots—and contemporary re-entrenchment—of Indigenous peoples' mistrust in these government processes, the Forum authors turn to the ways in which more serious engagement with traditional knowledge by Western scientists could transform impact assessment and decision-making. By considering pathways for enhancing Indigenous voices within planning and development, the Forum offers a pragmatic route forward for amending existing colonial governance practices.

Readers might consider whether the Forum authors' proposal for Indigenous participation in state-led processes of environmental assessment (Arsenault et al.) creates openings for more radical transformation of the state, as considered by Diver et al. regarding the use of TAS provisions and in line with Curley's account of the power of Indigenous interpretation and deployment of treaties, sovereignty, and water. Still, such integration into colonial processes might further entrench the politics of recognition, and perhaps Norman's account of Lummi relational approaches would be more instructive for changing negotiations over landscapes and development. Taken together, these articles demonstrate how the industrial and extractive logics of settler states have disrupted and obscured the pre-existing economies of Indigenous peoples, yet they also reveal how Indigenous practices, legal systems, and water relations are reshaping settler states—with varying consequences for the independence and sovereignty of Indigenous nations.

Spaces of Engagement: Indigenous Political Thought and Global Environmental Politics

To date, notable silences remain in the space between GEP and Indigenous politics, especially Indigenous political thought in contemporary settler colonial states (the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia). Some articles in this journal have addressed Indigenous peoples and movements, for instance,

with respect to environmental justice at national and international levels (e.g., Kauffman and Martin 2014; Marion Suiseeya 2014; Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010) and in relation to knowledge systems and worldviews (e.g., Eisenstadt and Jones West 2017; Long Martello 2001), as well as by disrupting state-led accounts of transboundary agreements to center Indigenous histories and narratives (e.g., Cohen and Norman 2018). Still, there has been little sustained work on Indigenous politics contributions to GEP studies of governance, sovereignty, and political economy.

Yet the themes of GEP are familiar to scholars of Indigenous politics, and the articles in this Special Issue highlight these intersections, joining existing conversations within the journal. They follow directly from work on environmental justice. Newell (2005, 72) describes an intersection between global institutions and structures of power and “the consequences of organized inequality and the strategies adopted by marginalized groups to contest their fate as victims of environmental injustice.” These active strategies of resistance are seen in Curley’s account of Navajo and Hopi citizens’ appeal to rights encoded in US federal laws and confirmed by a Supreme Court ruling and in Diver et al.’s description of Native American tribes that have assumed authority under the Clean Water Act to regulate water quality and limit toxins. Such efforts recall social movement strategies and civil society organizational capacities beyond nongovernmental organizations (Ford 2003), with the tensions identified by Hochstetler (2002), where external pressure on states coordinated by groups within the state leads to ongoing domestic negotiation.

GEP themes of multiscale and regional governance also shine through in this collection of papers. Norman’s discussion of downstream Indigenous and upstream farmer partnerships to reduce agricultural pollution in the Salish Sea region echoes Conca’s (2012, 127) claims about the possibilities enabled by regional governance, where he argues that regions “offer hope for political progress where global efforts have stalled” and “superior conditions of scale for common property resource management.” In line with GEP research, but with less optimism about potential environmental and social justice outcomes, Behn and Bakker’s mapping of BC’s regional economy and global climate goals uncovers similar tensions to other regions with multilevel governance and multi-issue decision-making. Their account of the Site C dam project underscores that multiple layers of political jurisdiction and conflicting incentives across issue areas can lead to counterproductive commitments.

Alongside social movements and multilevel governance, the political economy analyses in this Special Issue point to the hidden inequalities and damage caused by industrial systems of production and consumption—a topic of ongoing attention in GEP (e.g., Conca et al. 2001; Dauvergne 2010). Curley, for instance, highlights the demand for water for agricultural production and urban expansion that continues to shape water law and allocation in the western United States, despite the high costs to Indigenous communities. Interrogating the foundations of colonial property and ownership structures, Whetung documents the erasure of Indigenous systems of governance and pre-existing treaty

relationships by colonial authorities focused on resource access and extraction. Scholars of local–global linkages also consider scale in their work, both in governance and impacts. In the field of GEP, Aksoy (2014, 29) considers the “plurality challenge,” writing of patterns that lead to the destruction of the resilience of human–environment systems, especially through “ignoring interactions between and within scales, mismatches between human and ecological systems, and not acknowledging the plurality of ways in which actors comprehend and value scales.” Aksoy takes on a different set of mismatches than does Whetung, but both highlight the damage that results from not acknowledging relationships between human and other-than-human beings (e.g., a plurality of relations, a plurality of nationhoods) and mismatches between colonial and other systems (e.g., Anishinaabe legal systems).

GEP scholars, many of whom engage in critical geography and sociology, are acutely aware of the need for more attention to the relational elements of humans and place. Adger et al. (2011, 2), for instance, make an argument that “the symbolic and psychological aspects of settlements, places, and risks to them” are often missing from climate policy and science and hold the position that the social interpretation of place is central to community and individual identities and provides meaning to material conditions. In this Special Issue, Whetung takes such positions even further: she not only considers the material and symbolic values that are undervalued in land use decisions and economic development plans but also identifies the social, legal, political, and economic systems that are overwritten and destroyed by those decisions and trajectories. As with Adger et al. (2011)—and asking readers to follow these ideas even further into other forms of governance and kinship—Whetung considers what is ignored by colonial powerholders and how these dominant worldviews and consequent actions supplant existing relations, legal orders, and political economies.

Indigenous nations are reshaping land and resource politics across the Global South and North, with significant implications for global political economies. By influencing energy and resource extraction, fisheries and food production, and water governance and access, Indigenous approaches to reclaiming sovereignty from settler states are challenging the economic foundations of nation-states and their domestic and international exchange relationships. Within the settler states of the Global North—where reparations and restitution for Indigenous nations remain nominal—these changes are being forced through strategic legal channels, creative negotiation tactics, powerful resistance efforts, and layered local and transnational campaigns. Through modern treaty relations, Indigenous nations are revising authority over lands and waters, embedding self-governance, co-governance, and other models of layered decision-making into state practice. Some of these shifts echo the rewriting of property relations in post-colonial countries of the Global South, including complex arrangements of customary and statutory land rights in many African countries (Lund and Boone 2013), while others reflect the specific constitutional arrangements of settler states and the contemporary contexts of urban populations, land development, international and trade relations, and other state-specific dynamics.

An Agenda for GEP: Indigenous Political Economies and Transformative Possibilities

Around the world, Indigenous scholars and activists are at the front lines of environmental research mobilization—putting ideas and bodies on the line for the sake of people and the planet. From a scholarly perspective, centering Indigenous politics in studies of these political economic conflicts has largely been left to journals of development, critical geography, and Indigenous studies (e.g., *Third World Quarterly*, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *Geoforum*, *Antipode*). Yet these movements are embedded in and responding to political economies that are premised on particular constellations of ecological systems and resources—economies of extraction, sacrifice zones in production, shadow effects of consumption. Furthermore, Indigenous politics offers radically different possibilities for future political economic organization, providing examples of social economies that have persisted alongside and despite the dominance of transactional economies (Kuokkanen 2011), operating on different premises than a contemporary capitalist economy.

Indigenous resource governance strategies are reshaping global and local political economies. In the settler states of the Global North, these changes hold deep implications for environmental and social justice, particularly by unsettling the locus of authority for decision-making, questioning the logic of resource extraction and capital accumulation, and recognizing relational dynamics in human–environment interactions, with obligations of reciprocity and respect. The articles in this issue consider the relationships of power that have developed over several centuries of colonization and the changing nature of those relations as a result of Indigenous resurgence and movement building at multiple scales. By documenting and detailing the interplay between multilevel economic pressures and industrial-sector incentives, the Special Issue articles place current territorial, extractive, and riparian disputes in historical and economic perspective.

The work makes visible the complex and often obscure chains that link upstream and downstream practices, local and distant producers and consumers, and historical and future landscapes. In light of the intersection of contested resource extraction with global ecological change, and the consequent urgency of economic transformation for ecological integrity and social justice, this is a striking moment for *GEP* to engage with scholarship and thought on alternative political economies and Indigenous resistance and resurgence.

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