



Shifting settler-colonial discourses of environmentalism: Representations of indigeneity and migration in Australian conservation



Ellen van Holstein*, Lesley Head

School of Geography, University of Melbourne, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Indigeneity
Migration
Environmentalism
Settler-colonialism
Discourse analysis

ABSTRACT

Western environmentalism and conservation are deeply entangled with histories of colonialism. This entanglement has marginalised Indigenous and migrant perspectives on the environment to protect settler norms and interests. This paper approaches those two types of othering together in the context of environmental debate, using the lens of a mainstream conservation magazine. We analyse representations of indigeneity and migration in a shifting settler-colonial discourse on the environment, throughout the 45 volumes of the Australian Conservation Foundation's magazine *Habitat* (1973–2016). The Australian Conservation Foundation was Australia's first nation-wide conservation organization. Its magazine exemplifies a settler-colonial discourse that initially aimed to conserve pristine nature but that over time has responded to increasing awareness that environmental crises have transnational causes and consequences, and require intercultural and international cooperation. We found that, while contributors to the magazine increasingly represent Australian conservation issues as connected to international processes and closely collaborate with remote Indigenous communities, they continue to assume the settler as norm and prioritise the protection of wealth and lifestyles. These goals are achieved through the conditional inclusion of *others* and through the treatment of environments as having zero-sum limits. The colonial imaginaries of 'wilderness' and carrying capacity are repurposed to frame migration as being at odds with Australian people's wealth and wellbeing. The reiteration of settler-colonial environmentalism as a dominant way of protecting the environment stands in the way of the greater pluralism of environmental relationships that will be needed for coping with environmental change.

1. Introduction

Over recent decades waves of scholarship in geography and elsewhere have critiqued western ontologies and their dominant environmental imaginaries. This research has shown how deeply western environmentalism and conservation are entwined with histories of colonialism, ignoring or erasing the presence of Indigenous peoples and their environmental practices (Cronon, 1995; Braun, 2002; Brockington and Schofield, 2010). Research has also shown that mainstream conservation movements can entrench western and colonial relationships to the environment as they are not necessarily open to the perspectives of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Davison, 2008; Kloek et al., 2013; Gould et al., 2017). Further, Head and colleagues (2018) have argued that the cultural specificity of most of the literature on environmental knowledge and behaviour as 'white, western, affluent, urban' is exposed by its encounter with ethnicity and migration history. These two different types of 'othering' (Rotz, 2017) are connected; new scholarship on settler-colonialism is highlighting how migrants and

Indigenous peoples have been othered together against settler norms (Kobayashi and De Leeuw, 2010; Bauder, 2011; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Rotz, 2017). However, none of this new work has yet explicitly examined the settler-Indigenous-migrant triangle in the context of environmental debates.

In this paper we examine that triangle in a particular empirical case. The paper brings the 'othering' of Indigenous and migrant environmentalisms into conversation with one another, using the lens of a mainstream conservation magazine. *Habitat* is the magazine of the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), Australia's first nation-wide conservation organisation. *Habitat* offers insight into the ongoing discursive practices through which relationships between settler environmentalists and differently othered people are reproduced. We analyse the content and silences throughout its 45-year history. By focusing on how both indigeneity and migration have been represented in *Habitat*, the paper tracks the relationships between these issues and how they have shifted over time. This two-way view allows us to see, in a new way, shifting conceptualisations of nativeness and belonging that

* Corresponding author at: University of Melbourne, 221 Bouverie Street, Parkville 3010, VIC, Australia.
E-mail address: ellen.van@unimelb.edu.au (E. van Holstein).

entrench settler relationships to environments as norm, against both Indigenous people who were there first, and migrants who came, or will come, later. Our aim is to identify how legacies of marginalisation form barriers to the decolonisation of settler environmentalism and to reveal opportunities for greater pluralism as environmental organisations embrace the complexity of present day socio-environmental challenges.

In a volatile and uncertain world, effective responses to environmental degradation need to draw on the most diverse environmental scholarship and practice possible. Relationships to environments are changing, as climate change pressures ecosystems and traditional livelihoods. Climate change will continue to alter people's movements and relationships to place (De Guttery et al. 2016). These circumstances ask for detailed understanding of the ways in which the environmentalisms of people 'other' than settler and European migrant descendants are marginalised through dominant discursive practices. By examining the history of these discursive practices, we can better imagine how to effect changes in the future.

We first lay the groundwork by discussing how settler colonial conservation has intersected with indigeneity and how settler colonialism has shaped approaches to migration. Our study contributes to geographical scholarship that has brought issues of indigeneity and migration together (Kobayashi and De Leeuw, 2010; Rotz, 2017; Pulido, 2017), albeit not necessarily in the context of environmentalism. We then discuss the magazine *Habitat* and its context, before outlining our methodological approach to critical discourse analysis.

2. Settlers, Indigenous peoples and migrants in environmentalism

2.1. Settler-colonialism and environmentalism

It is widely acknowledged that western environmentalism and conservation are deeply entwined with histories of colonialism (Cronon, 1995; Guha, 1999; Hutton and Connors, 1999; Braun, 2002; Cribb, 2007; Brockington and Schofield, 2010; Brown et al., 2008; Gombay, 2014). This entanglement is particularly strong in the context of settler-colonialism, in which 'settler' is premised on 'an intention to stay' with the objective 'to establish new political orders [...] rather than to exploit native labour' (Veracini, 2013: 315–313). The permanency and the material reworking implied in settler contexts translated into distinct approaches to conservation. Environmental movements in settler-colonial nations such as Canada and the United States originated in the anticipated loss of frontier experiences as previously 'wild' country was being made accessible for agricultural and industrial activities. In response, the 'Yellowstone model' of protected area management, became influential in the west throughout the twentieth century (Cronon, 1995; Stevens, 1997). This model is premised on the idea that nature is most effectively protected by excluding people and their activities from designated areas, effectively erasing the history of Indigenous peoples, denying the ways in which people's activities shaped those landscapes and excluding people from their traditional lands and livelihoods (Adams, 2005; Brockington and Igoe, 2006; Adams and Hutton, 2007; Mar, 2010; Timms, 2011; Moorcroft, 2016).

Indigenous scholar Langton (1996) was one of the first to articulate a strong critique of the wilderness idea in Australian art and conservationists' representations of landscape. Coinciding with Australian developments in native title, particularly the Mabo case of 1992 which dismantled the legal fiction of terra nullius, and the Wik decision of 1996 which protected leaseholder interests against native title, she unmasked the ongoing imagination of empty landscapes and how this facilitated a new wave of dispossession in the name of environmental protection (Langton, 1996). More recently Langton (2013) has taken issue with the tendency of environmental groups to argue against mining, when the extractive industry provides Indigenous communities with opportunities for education, employment and wealth generation. As has been argued more widely in Indigenous Studies, she highlights

that environmental campaigners generate a new layer of marginalisation when Indigenous people are exclusively and reductively understood as separate from capitalist interests and as only authentically Aboriginal when living in close relationship to traditional lands and ecosystems (Langton, 2013; also see Radcliffe, 2017). This line of reasoning has made spiritual connection and place-based knowledge prerequisites for the recognition of Indigenous identity and rights (Maddison, 2013) and it has produced expectations that Indigenous people feel impelled to care for conservation areas (Coombes, 2007; Coombes et al., 2012; Hope, 2017).

In the Australian context on which this paper focuses, moves to recognise Indigenous ownership and conservation practice have included joint management of national parks and a range of schemes to support Indigenous communities to manage their land and sea estates (Stevens, 1997; Young et al., 2001; Adams, 2005; Ross et al., 2010). On a continent where about 23 per cent of the land area is held under some form of Indigenous title (Altman, 2012), national commitments to protect biodiversity cannot be met without the participation of Indigenous communities, for example through Indigenous Protected Areas (Moorcroft and Adams, 2014). In times of retreating state services and budget cuts, especially in remote and rural areas, poorly resourced Indigenous communities are bearing disproportionate burdens for landscape management (Head and Atchison, 2015). The interests of Indigenous communities, and their engagements in various economic activities in the resource-rich landscapes of remote Australia (such as community-based conservation, carbon farming and mining), thus need to be considered as plural and as underpinned by socialised rather than essentialised ecological knowledges (Langton, 2013; Neale and Vincent, 2016).

For a deep understanding of relationships between Indigenous peoples and conservation organisations, the multiplicity and fluidity of political positions must be considered on both sides (Vincent and Neale, 2017). For example, in her critique of the environmental left's homogenised and essentialist assumptions about Indigenous people, Langton (2013) imagines environmentalists as a homogenous and coherent bloc of stakeholders. However, 'environmentalism' exists in multiple shades of green political orientations, and research literature frequently highlights positive and mutually beneficial relationships between Indigenous and environmental groups (e.g. Pickerill, 2009). This realisation has led Neale and Vincent (2016: 13) to argue that rather than painting indigeneity and environmentalism each with one brush, more attention should be paid to the 'social textures' and how events are 'founded in, and foundational of exchanges between people'. Along similar lines Rose (2014) has argued for dialogue as a way forward towards decolonial environmental discourse. She demonstrates how the complexity and pluralism of intersecting environmental, economic and cultural interests tends to be overlooked when environmentalism starts from a settler-colonial interest in nature conservation and then goes looking for its own reflection in the 'other'. In focusing here on a conservation magazine as a particular expression of a mainstream environmental organisation, we recognise the social texture made up of multiple voices and positions, and we trace how discursive changes are enacted within a multifaceted discourse.

2.2. Contemporary migration and environmentalism

The cultural partiality of western environmentalism extends to the way later migrants, many now coming from a more diverse set of source countries than the settler-colonial populations, have been viewed. Going back to Malthusian approaches to estimating the land's carrying capacity, migration has been understood as environmentally problematic due to the increases in population growth and resource use that it engenders (Klocker and Head, 2013). Environmental problems have sometimes been blamed on immigration rather than affluent lifestyles (Neumayer, 2006; Bradley, 2009). Arguments of migrants as environmentally problematic are being made in diverse western contexts,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7353379>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7353379>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)