

Nature, Empire, and Paradox in Environmental Education

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Abstract

As part of the 2009 North American Association of Environmental Education Research Symposium, this article addresses the cultural and theoretical frameworks that we bring to environmental education, the web of ideas and experiences that define the scope and purpose of the work in its geopolitical context. Originally delivered as a keynote address at the symposium, the paper highlights two necessarily related conversations within environmental education: the first concerns the problem of empire, including its roots in imperialism and colonialism, as well contemporary problems of globalization; the second concerns the problem of nature, including the need to develop intimate connections with the non-human on a planet that everywhere bares the mark of human alteration. Nature and empire are two poles on a continuum that shape the cultural and ecological contexts of life and learning. The author argues for the need to hold empire and nature not in opposition, but in paradox. Holding the tension of paradox complicates simplistic binaries, and can contribute to a stance that appreciates the relationships between seeming polarities in the intersectional work of social and ecological change.

Résumé

Dans le contexte du colloque intitulé « North American Association of Environmental Education Research Symposium » de 2009, le présent article aborde les cadres culturels et théoriques que l'on intègre dans l'éducation environnementale, de même que le réseau d'idées et d'expériences qui déterminent la portée et l'objet des travaux dans ce contexte géopolitique. L'article, initialement distribué au colloque à titre de discours-programme, signale deux discussions nécessairement connexes dans le contexte de l'éducation relative à l'environnement : la première concerne le problème de l'empire, y compris ses racines dans l'impérialisme et le colonialisme, ainsi que les problèmes contemporains provenant de la mondialisation; la seconde porte sur le problème de la nature, y compris le besoin de créer des liens étroits avec l'élément non humain sur une planète où rien n'échappe à l'altération par l'être humain. La nature et l'empire constituent les deux pôles d'un continuum qui façonne les contextes culturels et écologiques de la vie et de l'apprentissage. L'auteur fait valoir le besoin de disposer l'empire et la nature non pas en opposition, mais plutôt en paradoxe. La tension du paradoxe complique les points de vue simplistes et peut contribuer à une conception qui tient compte des relations entre apparences de polarité dans l'œuvre multidisciplinaire du changement social et écologique.

Keywords: environmental education, paradox, nature, empire, decolonization, reinhabitation

For starters, I want to welcome all travelers to the Columbia River watershed. Here we are. I live some 300 miles east on the Idaho border, and the Palouse River that flows full of agricultural silt and erosion through my rural town mixes here with Portland's urban confluences on its way to the Pacific Ocean. The mouth of the Columbia is an impressive roar of waves, marine life and history, commerce, and even today, shipwreck. Historian Richard White (1995) called the great Columbia River "the organic machine": upriver the once wild Columbia and its many tributaries are now a mechanized and politicized system of dammed, slack-water reservoirs. The organic machine, indeed.

The tension of paradox surrounds us, and it surrounds the field of environmental education: local-global; urban-rural; environment-culture; masculine-feminine; native-settler; public-private; land-property; commons-enclosure; human-more-than-human; inhabitant-refugee; social justice-ecojustice; schooling-learning; domination-resistance; me-you; us-them; nature-empire.

My thesis is a simple claim around a single paradox: environmental education of any stripe can deepen its theory and practice by purposefully embracing the tensions between nature and empire. Nature and empire are two poles on a continuum that shape the cultural and ecological contexts of life and learning.

In the tradition of 19th century natural history, imagine an object lesson. I hold in my hands two related objects: the flight feather of a barn owl, and a wallet full of plastic and paper money. *Inquiry: How do these objects and what they represent implicate me and shape our work?* Nature and empire, the flight feather of an owl and the wallet of a white man, generate a paradox, a paradox that we need to hold, and balance.

We need to embrace paradox because we nature-lovers and no-child-left-insiders must also face up to the eco- and genocidal politics of empire, politics we're all complicit with everyday in our cosmopolitan superprivilege. We need to embrace paradox because as heady academics and well-meaning activists, we can easily forget the gift of our own embodied and earthy existence. This feather is perfect. No matter how scientifically rigorous, politically informed, or culturally responsive, environmental education is barren if it does not include re-enchantment with the wide world of creation, encounters with the others, and gratitude for the gift of life.

Nature, empire, and paradox.

Nature. Remember, when you walked miles into the mountains until the rant of your mind receded. The sounds around you returned. Birds, insects, movement in the cover. The air, warm and cool of sun and shade. You started to blend, quiet self diminished and enlarged by a place full of others, and though walking through, you felt belonging. Until later you startled a cougar, you had thought this impossible, your shared shock while everything stopped, her ears twitching, brown eyes locked on your next move, your heart jumping on your chest, predator, prey, you watched each other's bodies trembling. Remember, how against reason you wanted to run, how you caught your breath and she suddenly returned easily to the ninebark. The day shimmered,

your relief, you had finally come back to your senses.

Encounter, enchantment, gratitude.

Empire. Like globalization, empire describes the political economy of the planet: the new imperialism, colonization, development, free trade. Empire—a system of domination and resistance, a bio-political power that is exercised, internalized, and shaped by networks of human cultures worldwide. A system of authority and control enacted by all of us, motivated by habit, addiction, desire, necessity, dreams of a better life, fantasies of endless economic growth—all increasing the throughput of natural and human capital. Empire creates and destroys under the flashing lights of a “postindustrial” age. Empire—your I-Phone, my laptop, the G-20—ecological and social impacts concealed, denied, ignored, and masked as ecological nostalgia or market opportunities. The subject of empire is the commodity; the object is the consumer. All of us are its soldiers.

Domination, critique, resistance.

Context: It’s a beautiful world, life is short, and I want to live. I want to feel the wind rushing around me. I want to walk on the land I love, every day. I want to garden with my children and watch them taste the fruits. I want friends. I want to drink starlight in the mountains and howl at the moon. I want the experience of being alive, to feel my sensuous and spiritual relation to flesh, water, rock, fire, wind, species, shooting stars. I want to keep my privileges and increase them. I want to travel to Europe with my family. I want to see my daughters in London or Paris.

Context: Planet Earth 2009, population and industrial explosions, perpetual war, mass extinctions, billions of us striving for better and more, the unthinkable suffering of others. Such beauty and possibility for wonder, connection, pleasure—and—as Barry Lopez (2001) wrote in his great essay “The Naturalist”: “To read the newspapers today, to merely answer the phone, is to know the world is in flames” (¶ 24). Earth abides; meanwhile, no one knows the full extent of the mess we’re making of habitats, species, biosphere, ecosystems, neighborhoods, cultures, selves, others, relationships. No one knows the full extent of “this entire extractive culture [of empire] that has been deforesting, defishing, dewatering, desoiling, despoiling, destroying since its beginnings” (Jensen, 2009, ¶ 10). No one knows the full scale of the problem of empire, its spiral of unintended consequences, and the degree of our own complicity: the way we are part of the problem we fail to understand, the way we fail to understand our part in it. Some say we are on the brink of industrial apocalypse. Others remember: we’ve been here about 500 years.

Anyone paying any attention can see that the mounting data describe an awesome mess of impacts, but fitting the fragments together is complicated. *How many parts per million CO₂? How many African American men in prison?*

Rare is the space in which related impacts are acknowledged along with their more complex cultural causes. But increasingly, impacts are experiential, and therefore transformative. During my first week of classes this fall, a graduate student showed us a collage of photographs she made from her travels with Philippine Exchange: a dichotomous landscape of incredible beauty, destruction from mining, factories like prisons, and desperate poverty: people barely surviving, naked children playing on mountains and rivers of waste. Slumdog without millionaire; millionaire far removed. “It humbled me,” she said, and our privileged space of learning grew quiet. *Breathe it in now*.

I believe that appropriate responses to the facts surrounding nature and empire—what we know and don’t know, what we feel and don’t feel—are anger, fear, grief, and humility. Avoiding such emotions can lead to projections that may contribute to problems we deny or arrogantly claim to understand. We might learn to be with, rather than run from, the natural sense of despair that the field of environmental education sometimes schools us to avoid. If we are the least connected to others, we are part of a great suffering. *Inquiry: Can we hold the paradox between suffering and hope, the dichotomous landscape of wretchedness and magnificence?* “The test of a first-rate intelligence,” F. Scott Fitzgerald (1936/2008) wrote, “is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless yet be determined to make them otherwise” (§ 2).

Paradox. Along with grief, anger, and a rational fear of catastrophe, there is also a sense of urgency and responsibility, an embodied and shared knowing that we must do what we can, and now. From “Hieroglyphic Stairway,” by Drew Dellinger (2006, p.47):

it’s 3:23 in the morning
and I’m awake
because my great great grandchildren
won’t let me sleep
my great great grandchildren
ask me in dreams

what did you do while the planet was plundered?
what did you do when the earth was unraveling?

surely you did something
when the seasons started failing?

as the mammals, reptiles, birds were all dying?

did you fill the streets with protest
when democracy was stolen?

what did you do
once
you
knew?

(See the poet perform the entire poem at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW63UuthwSg>)

Pause. W. S. Merwin said of poetry, “Any work of art makes one very simple demand on anyone who genuinely wants to get in touch with it. And that is to stop. You’ve got to stop what you’re doing, what you’re thinking, and what you’re expecting and just be there . . . however long it takes” (Merwin in Moyers, 1995, p. 2). Like the other time I seek out on the land, poetry engenders another cultural way of knowing. It is a dissident minority tradition within my own colonized and colonizing culture. Stopping for poetry is an antidote to the morning news, to the incessant political posturing, to the super-sure academic argument, to the voice of reason that governs research methods and reports findings with caution and restraint. Poetry revives me, helps me to recover my wilder self, my possibilities, my empathy, in a domesticating competitive culture that makes me feel *loss* and *lost*. Poetry does not argue for the truth, it burns with it. “What did you do once you knew?” (Dellinger, 2006, p.47).

Pause. At 82, W. S. Merwin has won two Pulitzer prizes for poetry including this year’s prize; he is also an environmental and peace activist. What Merwin says of poetry is a fruitful beginning for any field of inquiry shaped in part by empire: we’ve got to stop what we’re doing, what we’re thinking, and what we’re expecting. Is it possible to let down our guard and just be here, together?

To deepen a felt experience of paradox between nature and empire, I want to read two poems by Mary Oliver, another great American poet of nature. The poems I’ll read are from her recent volume, *Red Bird* (2008); the titles are “The Teachers” and “Of the Empire.” These two poems reflect a tension in environmental education: between a focus on nature and human relationship with the more-than-human world, and a focus on empire and the political structures that shape people, place, and planet. My argument, again, is simple: environmental education research must hold together the tension between nature and empire or risk its own irrelevance while empire grows and nature recedes.

Mary Oliver is one of the best nature poets ever. She has taught millions to stop and wake up to their own terrestrial embodiment. In “The Summer Day” Oliver (1992) confesses:

I don’t know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields. (p.94)

Oliver ends this poem by asking of everyone alive, “What will you do with your one wild and precious life?” (p. 94). Her poem “The Teachers” (2008, p.27) is typical of her meditations on slowing and stopping to pay attention to the others and what our relationship to others might signify.

“The Teachers”

Owl in the black morning,
mockingbird in the burning
slants of the sunny afternoon
declare so simply

to the world
everything I have tried but still
haven’t been able
to put into words,

so I do not go
far from that school
with its star-bright
or blue ceiling,

and I listen to those teachers,
and others too—
the wind in the trees
and the water waves—

for they are what lead me
from the dryness of self
where I labor
with the mind-steps of language—

lonely, as we all are
in the singular,
I listen hard
to the exuberances

of the mockingbird and the owl,
the waves and the wind.
And then, like peace after perfect speech,
such stillness.

Pause. The teachers, the others, make me more human. The more-than-human world—as David Abram, Paul Shepard, Annie Dillard, Henry Thoreau, Rachel Carson, Jay Griffiths, Derrick Jensen, and all my friends remind me—the more-than-human-world is *sacred*, biological diversity makes human life *possible*, it makes my life, your life, potentially, beautiful. The logic of empire is destroying this world, leaving behind what David Quammen (1998) called “a planet of weeds.”

Who are the teachers, what are their names, and what, if we learn to listen, might we hear the land and the water telling us? Robert Michael Pyle (2008) wrote, “[Environmental] education, no matter how topographically or culturally informed, cannot fully or even substantially succeed without reinstating the pursuit of natural history as an everyday act” (p. 156). It’s only good manners, Pyle says, to get to know our neighbors. “What we know, we may choose to care for. What we fail to recognize, we certainly won’t” (Pyle, 2001, p. 18). Nature study, from this perspective, must also include the study of what we fail to recognize, the study of what dominates our attention and stunts our ability to perceive nature. It must, in other words, include the study of empire.

Environmental education requires an expansive conceptual and experiential framework connecting local and global realities; it requires ecological attention and political edge, to make it relevant to our place and time. It also requires what Phillip Payne and Brian Wattchow (2009) call “slow pedagogy,” deep experience that helps us open and become responsive to the voices of the teachers:

Owl in the black morning,
mockingbird in the burning
slants of the sunny afternoon...

...I do not go
far from that school...

(Oliver, 2008, p.27)

How far gone are we now, here, today, from the teachers? Returning to the teachers, slowing to open to the more-than-human others, to the experience of habitat and biological diversity, to the interactions between land and people—this is the heart and soul of environmental education. What impedes our ability to perceive these teachings?

Aldo Leopold (1949/1968) said it over a half century ago: “our educational and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of land” (p. 223). Today, it is even possible to observe that some environmental education research is headed away from, rather than towards, intense consciousness of land, consciousness that can only develop through direct experience of sufficient frequency, duration, curiosity, and reverence, so that we

may learn to listen and to love. The environmental education field has become culturally responsive, politically astute, and psychologically smart—mainly in response to empire. But we still need the teachers. What they teach us is irreplaceable, and endangered, unless we stop, look, and listen for a long time.

Pause. Before sharing Oliver’s (2008) poem, “Of the Empire,” I want to make a few paradoxical claims about the field of environmental education.

First, environmental education researchers and practitioners ought to guard against the lure of professionalization and the pressures of specialization that surround all fields of inquiry. There is a danger inherent in specialization that narrows our potential community and that distances us from the teachers. In many ways I believe, as Peter Martin wrote in 1996, that “having become institutionalized, environmental education is a lost cause and should be phased out as soon as possible” (p. 51). This obviously does not mean that I don’t support environmental education; rather, I observe that the development of environmental education as a profession can dull its political edge, and can school it far away from the teachers. What is more, as Foucault (1977) showed us, professions tend to normalize behaviour, marginalize outsiders, and disqualify dissent; they can make us docile and unresponsive to nature or empire.

In a provocative lecture titled “Professionals and Amateurs,” Edward Said (1994) noted:

Specialization means losing sight of the raw effort of constructing either art or knowledge; as a result you cannot view knowledge and art as choices and decisions, commitments and alignments, but only in terms of impersonal theories or methodologies. . . . In the end as a fully specialized . . . intellectual you become tame and accepting of whatever the so-called leaders in the field will allow. Specialization also kills your sense of excitement and discovery, both of which are irreducibly present in the intellectual’s make-up. In the final analysis, giving up to specialization is, I have always felt, laziness, so you end up doing what others tell you, because that is your specialty after all. (p. 77)

Environmental education, because of its inherent interdisciplinarity and the enormous scope of the work, ought to resist specialization by definition. The real challenge is not to advance the field, but to participate in and help shape the larger movement for cultural and ecological renewal and transformation. As Paul Hawken (2007) tells it in his book *Blessed Unrest*, the larger movement is huge. It is made up of diverse networks of organizations and individuals working for peace, social justice, ecological sustainability, and Indigenous and civil rights. Each of these related ideals is threatened by the same empire. Political and conceptual power capable of resisting and shaping empire can be found in the intersectionality of the larger movement. This power is also found in the arts, the soul of all social movements.

Mary Oliver's (2008) "Of the Empire":

We will be known as the culture that feared death and adored power, that tried to vanquish insecurity for the few and cared little for the penury of the many. We will be known as a culture that taught and rewarded the amassing of things, that spoke little if at all about the quality of life for people (other people), for dogs, for rivers. All the world, in our eyes, they will say, was a commodity. And they will say that this structure was held together politically, which it was, and they will say also that our politics was no more than an apparatus to accommodate the feelings of the heart, and that the heart, in those days, was small, and hard, and full of meanness. (p.46)

Let's face it: environmental education is a pedagogical David to the Goliath of empire with its schools, bombs, patriarchy, and shopping opportunities everywhere. The way the U.S. national budget is prioritized is symptomatic: trillions for horrific wars; nothing for the environment within the Department of Education. Even if the United State's No Child Left Inside Act of 2009 eventually passes, and the environment is finally noted by the Department of Education 40 years after Earth Day, it and its budget will be subsumed under No Child Left Behind, which is the climax of neoliberal education reform aligned with the politics of empire. This is not conspiracy theory or even critical theory, but the explicit expression of educational purpose from policymakers and leaders from local, state, and federal levels. No Child Left Inside is a remarkable example of grassroots political activism in support of environmental education. *May we please open a window and listen to the teachers?* But obviously, the thrust of formal education in the industrial/capitalist state is aligned with the politics of empire.

Today in wartime, these politics constantly promote the expectation of "economic recovery," and the recovery of "consumer confidence." We might wonder what it means. Consumer confidence? Recovery back to what? The prevailing fiction of limitless growth, that logical impossibility that Edward Abby called "the ideology of the cancer cell"? Recovery back to what? An unjust colonial order? An economically exploitative and ecologically destructive culture of hyper-consumption, speculation, and debt? Today in wartime, few educators, environmental or otherwise, are questioning the profoundly *pedagogical* impact of empire: economic growth for the class economy, military adventurism for false security, and the erosion and commodification of the cultural and ecological commons. The most insidious effect of empire, however, may be that it functions to conceal from thought the very idea that any of this is problematic. These

are the politics from which no child is left behind, and to which environmental education research must attend.

Memory and Reinhabitation

A writer and lover of beauty, my grandmother suffered from Alzheimer's the last decade of her long life. She was the matriarch of a large family, a first generation immigrant who loved America, and the American flag, for the real opportunities it represented for freedom from poverty and oppression that my ancestors fled in Eastern Europe. I remember the last time I saw her before she was placed into full-time care. I took her for a short canoe ride on a lake in northern Wisconsin. She crawled into the bow seat; I paddled from the stern. I had never paddled so intentionally, every stroke deliberate and smooth. Once out on the water, she leaned over the gunwale and let her hand dip below the glassy surface. "Soft," she said, "it's so soft."

The last time I saw her before the funeral was at the nursing home in Milwaukee. The attendant who wheeled her into the common room told her, "Your grandson is here to visit with you, Liz," and then she parked the wheelchair next to me and left us alone. I was scared. Would she know me? Was it a good day or a bad day? So, I started talking about the weather, the season, what was going on. I said: "Nonny, guess what. I moved to the *country*." Instantly, as if from far away, she came back: "Smart," she said, "smart."

Then she must have remembered I was a teacher. She loved education, read all the time, left school after eighth grade. "You're teaching," she said, half statement, half question. I answered, "Yes, I'm a professor now." Unimpressed, she asked me what I was teaching, and glibly I told her, "Well, I'm trying to help tear down the system." Her eyes got real squinty then, and they widened and cleared as she looked up at me with the firm authority of elderhood, "You mean build it up!" She was insistent, and that was the end of that.

Most days my grandmother didn't know her own name, her children or grandchildren's faces, the season, the current president (she often spoke of Lincoln), or how long ago her husband had passed (it had been 30 years). But at the mere mention of tearing something down, the response from my grandmother was immediate. "Sonny," she said, "you need to build it up."

Today I honor my grandmother's wisdom. She came of age during the Depression. She stretched a meager budget for food for seven children. "Sonny," she said, "you need to build it up."

Building things up and tearing things down—this apparent dichotomy presents another opportunity to hold and balance paradox. I've described nature and empire as two poles of a paradox that reflect the expansive landscape of environmental education, the linked cultural and ecological contexts of our work. I want to offer another paradox that holds together the big aims of environmental education, and that also points to pathways for pedagogy and curriculum. The

paradox is between decolonization and reinhabitation, between tearing things down, and building things up.

I propose considering “decolonization” and “reinhabitation” as twin goals for education in a culture of empire. It should be said that these goals parallel other aims of educational research and practice; naming them is an effort to make inclusive space for those interested in environment *and* culture, nature, *and* empire. Like other synonymous terms, decolonization signals a strong critique of cultural practices and their underlying assumptions. The significance of decolonization as a theoretical category is that its usage specifically problematizes the *colonization* of people *and* land, both as historical practice and as the political progenitor of today’s empire. Of course critique alone is insufficient theory for environmental education research, and thus the pairing of decolonization with the vision of reinhabitation. It is the tension of paradox between decolonization and reinhabitation that gives both terms their conceptual range. Though for the sake of theory-building the two terms are called out as distinct, reinhabitation and decolonization are two dimensions of the same task. Renewal often requires that something is undone. In California, Van Jones expressed this clearly with his program, “Green Jobs, Not Jails.” Nature, empire, paradox.

Decolonization involves learning to recognize disruption and injury in person-place relationships, and learning to address their causes. Because colonization refers also to the colonization of the mind and body, it involves the practice of unlearning and undoing. Reinhabitation involves maintaining, restoring, and creating ways of living that are more in tune with the ecological limits of a place, practices that are less dependent on a globalized consumer culture that values profits and conveniences more than people and places. Reinhabitation means learning to live well socially and ecologically in a place, and learning to live in a way that does not harm other people and places (Gruenewald, 2003).¹ These are big aims, but there is more. Reinhabitation also implies taking a new stance toward one’s own becoming. We reinhabit the self whenever we seek our own renewal, when we stop to listen to the teachers, or when we acknowledge the heartbeat of empire in our own bodies:

they will say also that our politics was no more
than an apparatus to accommodate the feelings of
the heart, and that the heart, in those days,
was small, and hard, and full of meanness. (Oliver, 2008, p.46)

Because decolonization emphasizes human relationship to land, Indigenous perspectives on inhabitation are vital, as are the perspectives of other displaced and minoritized groups. Acknowledging Indigenous inhabitation is not only to recognize place-based relations to nature, but also to remember the long story of colonization, resistance, and the rights of sovereignty. Indigenous cultures are not the only cultures that have histories that need to be remembered; many

minority traditions tell sacred stories of land, displacement, and struggle. Even mainstream white America incubates movements for resistance and change. The voices of poets, artists, activists, and others working for peace, social justice, Indigenous and civil rights, and for environmental justice and ecological sustainability—these voices are a worldwide movement standing up to empire. Whatever success this unnamed movement will have building things up and will depend not merely on critique and vision, not merely on developing communities of congruence and resistance. Perhaps building things up will depend mainly on changes in consciousness that open the heart, reinhabitations that slow us down so that we can recognize the intersectionality of our interests, how each of us is implicated in the other.

Listen to the teachers, confront empire. I want to build now toward naming a course of action for the field. While we might celebrate No Child Left Inside and the growth of green, decolonization means that we dig deeper: that we acknowledge genocide, racism, and patriarchy, past and present; that we acknowledge the class and caste systems that our contented consumption supports; and that we face up to our militarized culture of violence, repression, and war. Decolonization and reinhabitation mean untangling the roots of empire and building something up, a process that begins with ourselves, reaches outward, and never ends. Every act is important and not without consequence; collectively all of our actions create all of our contexts. Our numbers are many.

Our numbers, in fact, and our impacts, are extreme. Chris Jordan is a photographer who creates images that communicate the otherwise ineffable scale of our culture of mass consumption (see all the following images at <http://www.chrisjordan.com>). What is indistinguishable from a distance is revealed on closer scrutiny. “Gyre” (2009) depicts 2.4 million pieces of plastic, equal to the estimated number of pounds of plastic pollution that enter the world’s oceans every hour. All of the plastic in this image was collected from the Pacific Ocean. “Shark Teeth” (2009) depicts 270,000 fossilized shark teeth, equal to the estimated number of sharks of all species killed around the world every day for their fins. Jordan’s art also magnifies the social and psychological impacts of empire: “Ben Franklin” (2007) depicts 125,000 one-hundred dollar bills (\$12.5 million), the amount our government spent every hour on the war in Iraq during 2007; “Constitution” (2008) depicts 83,000 Abu Ghraib prisoner photographs, equal to the number of people who have been arrested and held at US-run detention facilities with no trial or other due process of law, during the Bush Administration’s war on terror; “Barbie Dolls” (2008) depicts 32,000 Barbies, equal to the number of elective breast augmentation surgeries performed monthly in the US in 2006. The commodification of life under empire reeks of plastic, petroleum, patriarchy.

Paradoxically, the demand for Jordan’s work is high: people are drawn to the terrible truth of his poetry. Of all of Jordan’s (2009) work, his “E. Pluribus Unum,” or “the many become one,” best represents to me future directions for

environmental educational research. From a distance, this image reminds me of the stories of the land told in tree rings. Complexity and beauty are revealed in proximity. This large scale mandala (the indoor wall hanging measures 45 by 45 feet) depicts the names of one million organizations around the world that are devoted to peace, environmental stewardship, social justice, and the continuation of diverse and indigenous cultures. The actual number of such organizations is unknown, but Paul Hawken's (2007) "Blessed Unrest" project estimates the number at somewhere between one and two million, and growing. If the lines in this piece were straightened out, they would make an unbroken line of names, in a ten point font, twenty seven miles long.

What I'm suggesting is that if part of the work of environmental education is to decolonize and reinhabit empire, then we must better recognize the intersectionality of our interests with the interests of others, even or especially those whose ecological consciousness may be diminished by the ravages of empire. Green jobs, not jails. Environmental educators who can hold the paradox between nature and empire can expand the landscape of the field while enhancing the reach and impact of environmental education. In all intersectional social movements there are opportunities to acknowledge and resist the power of empire, to remember and reinhabit colonized land and colonized places, to remember their stories, and to listen for the wisdom of the teachers. We need an intersectional approach because our work is already braided in its resistance to and reconfiguration of empire, and moreover, to discount the struggles of others is to cut ourselves off from the principle of interrelationship; and to discount the struggle of others is to enact the logic of empire.

The intersectional movement that environmental education needs has been gathering: social ecology, environmental justice, ecofeminsim, ecojustice, ecopedagogy, ecopsychology, critical geography, Indigenous ways of knowing, place-based education, peace education, humane education, sustainability education, disability studies, transformative education, Transition Towns, Wendell Berry, Jane Goodall, the Earth Charter. The shared theme of intersectional movements is their responsiveness to both nature and empire. Their movement energy is the vanguard of educational theory and practice.

The politics of empire do not change unless they are resisted by growing social movements: locally, nationally, globally. Democrats in Washington are obviously not enough. President Obama is not enough. Even if he wanted a strong climate agreement, for example, or to remove the salmon killing dams on the Snake River, or to provide affordable universal health care, or to end war--he can't get it done, because his work is governed by the logic of empire.

History shows us that through partnership, solidarity, and persistence, social groups grow wiser and stronger in their ability to transform this logic, and to reinhabit our colonized places and lives. In the age of empire, the field of environmental education can itself become a kind of E. Pluribus Unum that invites and creates intersectional theory and action.

But—as important as it is to politicize our work and to ally the field with kindred social movements, we must remember the teachers. We need to learn how to stop, slow, and invoke their sacred presences. We need to learn how to *privilege* the teachers—other species, their languages, “owl in the black morning”—as full partners in E. Pluribus Unum. Nature, habitat, ecosystem, species, climate—this is not a political group; it is the context that makes all politics possible. There is a power greater than political power, and a strength greater than intellectual muscle. We know it as the experience of being alive, and being connected to others. The challenge is to hold this power and develop this strength as we participate in the larger struggle for peace, social justice, Indigenous and civil rights, and ecological wellbeing.

Because a culture of perpetual war undermines the growth of any environmental ethic, I want to close with a poem by Judyth Hill (2002, p.4) called “Wage Peace.”

“Wage Peace”

Wage peace with your breath.
Breathe in firemen and rubble,
breathe out whole buildings and flocks of
red wing blackbirds.

Breathe in terrorists and breathe out sleeping children
and freshly mown fields.

Breathe in confusion and breathe out maple trees.
Breathe in the fallen and breathe out lifelong friendships intact.

Wage peace with your listening: hearing sirens, pray loud.
Remember your tools: flower seeds, clothespins, clean rivers.

Make soup.
Play music, learn the words for “thank you” in three languages.
Learn to knit, and make a hat.
Think of chaos as dancing raspberries,
imagine grief as the outbreath of beauty or the gesture of fish.

Swim for the other side.
Wage peace.
Never has the world seemed so fresh and precious.
Have a cup of tea and rejoice.
Act as if armistice has already arrived.

Celebrate today.

Notes

- ¹ Participation in the money economy makes it difficult to know how one's consumption is impacting other people and places. The point is that to practice reinhabiting place, one must become more aware of how one's actions have impacts "all over the place" now and in the future—and—one must begin to act ethically on that knowledge.

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