

# Introduction: beyond anthropocentrism, changing practices and the politics of 'nature'

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## 1. Nature, culture, power

Over the past decade, a growing awareness of environmental issues has emerged in the public sphere, and environmental movements have affirmed themselves as major political actors with a truly global dimension. A growing body of literature in environmental anthropology and in ethnographic studies of environmentalism has contributed to this consciousness. But we are witnessing unprecedented world-wide environmental destruction, taking place largely under neoliberal economic conditions. Moreover, in mainstream Western thought and practices, environmentalism as a political movement has often emerged with an anthropocentric legitimation, justifying the protection of nature as necessary just for human survival, reproducing a clear-cut human/environment distinction. Research on environmental questions seems still more urgent than ever.

This Special Section of the *Journal of Political Ecology* brings together reflections on environmental conflicts, social movements, and power, by engaging with creative alternatives to mainstream anthropocentric and ethical thinking within environmentalism.<sup>2</sup> In this introductory article, we argue that much of the current writing on environmental conflicts and/or activism does not adequately acknowledge the socio-economic power relations that underlie many human/nature interactions. For instance, many approaches frame the protection of nature solely as an ethical problem or as a question of individual or societal attitudes. In what follows we aim to lay the conceptual ground for exploring the underlying political and socio-economic power over the environment through three contemporary research traditions. These traditions offer a theoretical and methodological prism through which practices and politics of 'nature' can be understood within their wider context. The **first** discusses different environmental ideologies and calls for the assignment of a more active part in analysis to the non-anthropocentric dimension. The **second** derives from environmental movement studies, and calls for a more complex analysis of the relationship between society, 'nature', and environmental activism. Finally, the **third** shifts the attention towards unconventional practices of environmental justice and activism, which are often overlooked in more traditional work. We argue that all three tendencies - regarding environmental ideologies, activism, and practices - should be integrated to offer a combined model to understand better the role that socio-economic power relations play in the practices and politics of 'nature.'

## 2. Debating environmental ideologies: going beyond anthropocentric thought

The first tendency relates to debates about environmental ideology. In particular, it concerns the relationship between the environment and human culture. In mainstream Western thought, from the Judeo-Christian tradition to Cartesian thinking, the categories of humanity and nature have always been considered distinct, and this distinction is considered a "...key foundation of modernist epistemologies" (Scoones 1999: 486). This applies to binary oppositions: human beings versus animals, and nature versus culture. At the same time, some voices have underlined the necessity of considering nature and culture as 'open' categories, rather than as opposites; "No single meaning can in fact be given to nature or culture in western thought;

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<sup>2</sup> Most of the articles were initially presented in April 2011 at the 10th International Congress of the *Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore* (SIEF) in Lisbon, Portugal. We would like to thank the contributors for expanding their articles for publication, Valeria Siniscalchi for allowing us to include her article among them, and the reviewers and JPE editor Simon Batterbury whose critical readings assisted the revision of this special section. As required by Italian academic regulations, we specify that while the article has been discussed and processed by both authors, sections 1 and 3 are mainly written by Alexander Koenler and 2 and 4 mainly by Cristina Papa.

there is no consistent dichotomy, only as a matrix of contrasts..." (Strathern 1980: 177). In mainstream western thought humans are regarded as having qualities including mind or spirit, intelligence and will; all other animate and inanimate beings are classified as objects, with substantivist connotations.

In the 1970s, several environmental ideologies and activist movements developed that opposed the anthropocentric views of Western ethical systems (Uggla 2010). For the purpose of this special issue, we distinguish three main perspectives among non-anthropocentric approaches. One of these perspectives aims to rethink the relationship between species, between humans and non-humans and to build what has been described as new 'environmental virtue ethics.'<sup>3</sup> Most prominent in terms of this approach, the American philosopher Paul Taylor, in his book *Respect for nature*, theorized a "...biocentric egalitarianism aimed to create a new environmental ethics which extends the traditional boundaries of ethics by including the non-human world" (Taylor 1986: 34). This sentiment builds upon a number of key publications.<sup>4</sup> A second non-anthropocentric perspective is James Lovelock's so-called 'Gaia theory' or the 'Gaia principle', which proposes that all organisms and their inorganic surroundings on Earth are closely integrated to form a single complex system. A third perspective is known as 'deep ecology' and was proposed by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1989). Deep ecology emphasises the intrinsic value of the environment and is conceptualized in opposition to hegemonic 'superficial' ecology, which remains caught in anthropocentric dichotomies.

Also within anthropology, an important line of debate was the critique of the nature/culture dichotomy. While the term 'nature' commonly refers to the non-human environment, the uses by anthropologists of the term 'environment' refer to an "...explicit, active concern with the relationship between human groups and their respective environments" (Little 1999: 254). One realm of thought follows the work of Bruno Latour (1993), who developed a 'symmetrical anthropology', where these divisions are no longer held to be relevant. He made a call to overcome anthropocentric thinking and to consider social reality as a single assembly of both human and non-human, all considered as 'things.'

Less radical approaches, for example so-called 'alternative evolutionary perspectives', suggest that nature and culture must be seen as interrelated. For example, environmental anthropologist Tim Ingold maintains that individuals should not be considered as distinct from the biological and environmental dynamics that constitute them (Ingold 1990). Bird-David, based on empirical data collected among South-Indian Nayakal gatherer-hunters, shows how the sharing of forest resources produces new connections between human beings with what she describes as a "cosmic economy of condivision" (Bird-David 1992). Besides the broad recognition that these perspectives gain in daily life through altered behaviors, including everyday recognition of environmental processes through vegetarianism or support for recycling, most of these analytical attempts remain unable to adequately capture the importance of power relations. In other words, symmetry between nature and culture does not mean that power relations, which exist among all living entities, are horizontal or symmetrical (Little 1999). The attempts to profoundly rethink the nature/culture dualism must take into account that a multiplicity of agents have structural power inequalities. As we will see, recognizing this means going beyond discursive approaches and shifting attention towards practices and human agency.

More recent anthropological critiques have rethought the assumption of inherent equilibrium in the ecological sphere. An increasing number of studies describe ecosystems not as closed, regulated and stable, but point to more complex dynamics, including empirical studies of catastrophic natural events, chaotic progress, and self-extinction. Scoones summarizes;

Three concepts provided important hypothesis and questions: the concept of multiple stable states – non equilibrium systems with more than one equilibrium attractor (Noy-Meir 1973); the recognition of chaotic dynamics, where nonlinear interactions have sensitivity to initial conditions and long-term predictability (May 1989; Hastings *et al.* 1993) and stochastically dominated systems that are truly non equilibrial, without simple regulatory feedback mechanisms (Chesson and Case 1986). [...] A whole new language emerged describing various elements of such systems. (Scoones 1999: 482)

<sup>3</sup> The first major analysis of this approach is Louke Van Wensveen's influential book *Dirty virtues: the emergence of ecological virtue ethics* (2000).

<sup>4</sup> Two articles published in *Science* by Leslie White (1968) and Garrett Hardin (1968) had a crucial impact. Also influential was Hardin's *Exploring new ethics for survival* (1972), as well as an earlier book by ecologist and forester Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County almanac* (1970, first published 1949) in which he explicitly claimed that the roots of the ecological crisis were philosophical. For a complete overview of the influences of scientific discourse on the emergence of environmentalism, see Cramer (1998).

In light of these critiques, discourses of sustainable development based on equilibrium thinking do not necessarily reflect objective conditions of the ecosphere, but can be seen as 'meta-narratives' that enables new political alliances, or as a contribution to an emerging political cosmology (Little 1999; Ribeiro 1992).

Marxist-inspired studies consider the environment as a relatively static entity, subject to changes resulting from capitalist penetration and the dynamics of commercialisation in a nature/culture system. Scholarship influenced by Marxist and structuralist approaches has appeared in the work of the defining personalities of political ecology, examining many cases of environmental destruction that were linked to capitalist production (Wolf 1972). A neo-Marxist revival of these approaches has defined the destruction of its own means of production (nature) as the "...second contradiction of capitalism" (O'Connor 1998: 233). In this perspective, the emergence of environmental movements as a global force have emerged as a "social barrier to capitalist accumulation" (Little 1999: 256). But where Marxist and neo-Marxist scholarship points to the linear dynamics of subordination and exploitation, attempts in the social sciences to draw on non-equilibrium thinking tends to identify differences (Robbins 2004). There are complementarities between the two approaches. For instance, Little underlines the influence that chaos and complexity theory has brought to descriptions of more "...irregular, asymmetrical power connections that unite social actors who operate at different levels of social scale and whose actions often produce unexpected results" (Little 1999: 261). Interestingly, this reflects a powerful post-Marxist shift with an understanding of power as being intertwined with multiple relational fields, discourses and knowledge all articulated in a dynamic complex relationship.

The view that "balanced, harmonious" equilibria between the social and the ecological spheres exist, has been described as an "equilibrium ecology" (Scoones 1999: 485) and can also be found in current writing on environmental themes. The ecofeminist socio-political movement is one example. Combining feminism with deep ecology, its advocates suggest that logical links exist between the subordination and exploitation of women and nature in modernist societies. This critique draws its argumentative power from the basic assumption of a harmonious nature (Diamond and Orenstein 1990; Mies and Shiva 1993), and has been criticized for its uncritical stance towards the politics of nature (Garb 1990; McGregor 2004). Thus power, domination, and political and socio-economic dynamics remain critical for an understanding of the relationship between society and ecology (Scoones 1999).

A substantial anthropological debate has developed around questions of sustainable lifestyles, development, and culture. Discourses on sustainability have received global attention in terms of common-sense thinking, in public policymaking, and in academic writing. These shifting paradigms have crucial consequences for the understanding of power relations in conflicts relating to the conservation of nature. If nature itself is dynamic, so environmental and conservation practices must be too (Papa 2004). A central point remains: the role ascribed to human agency in relation to non-human agency.

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The critiques of modernist ecological thinking have been central to the mobilization of several environmental movements, that have reframed their campaigns in non-anthropocentric ways. The best known examples relate to the 'deep ecology' movements inspired by Arne Naess (Naess, Drengson and Devall 2010; Seed 1988). These arenas of radical ecology have been analysed as counter-hegemonic discourses emerging in the West, as evident in Merchant's (1992) account of different realms in ecology. These environmental movements have gained only limited attention from policy makers, however, because they have been considered as too distant from the underlying assumptions of mainstream anthropocentric environmentalism.

In the political mainstream today, debates and policies about environmentalism often remain anthropocentric. In debates about the relation between the social and the ecological spheres, environmental philosopher Bryan Norton (1991) has proposed the need to reconcile the dualism between non-anthropocentric and anthropocentric environmentalism. As a way out of this dead end, Norton offers a more pragmatic 'weak anthropocentrism.' This is a position that maintains that all species should be protected if the human costs are not excessive. The central point for Norton is not the production of theory as an end in itself, but more pragmatically to focus on the effectiveness of environmental conservation, where environmental philosophies ultimately are tested.

In sum, these insights incite us to overcome the nature/culture divide through more differentiated insights into the relations between human and ecological environments, and to assign non-human agents a more complex role in environmental analysis. An adequate awareness of socio-economic power relations, in this context, would allow us to ascribe a more definite agency to non-human agents, contributing to the development of more complex and elaborated environmental ideologies as a basis for research.

### 3. Environmental movements: forms of mobilization and legitimizing strategies

The second tendency outlined in this introduction integrates elements deriving from social movement studies into environmental anthropology. Over the last few decades, ethnographic studies of environmental movements have become a vibrant and growing field of research, able to capture the global dimension of environmentalism. In his path-breaking critical analysis of the evolving discourse of international environmental regimes, Ford states that environment movements have;

...been accorded a space for engagement with global environmental governance through the sphere of global civil society, which has been widely portrayed as a democratizing force. However, the orthodox, liberal conceptualization eschews an analysis of power relations, both inside the sphere and between global civil society, the inter-state system and the global market. (Ford 2003: 120)

The importance of placing attention on power relations is also central for a more sophisticated understanding of the emergence of environmental mobilizations. For instance, Yaakov Garb (1996) points out that cutting away the economic and political factors has facilitated the spread of the environmental movement among the American middle class. For instance, Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* (1962), about the dangers of pesticides such as DDT to human health, is considered an initial cornerstone of American environmentalism. Garb's analysis (1996) of the language and rhetoric used by Carson shows how the book remains surprisingly uncritical of the political and economic reasons for environmental destruction. Environmentalist activism was delegated to the personal and ethical spheres. It becomes an issue of the 'irrational' behaviour of single individuals. Significantly, Garb notes that the names of companies who produce the pesticides are never mentioned in the book. Another aspect which emerges from Carson's work is that these forms of emergent environmentalism are anthropocentric in character. For instance, the national environmental protection law passed in the U.S.A. in 1969 (the *National Environmental Policy Act*, or NEPA), focuses exclusively on human ethical interests. Also the majority of the environmental laws subsequently passed in the US highlight the importance of environmental protection for the health of human beings, such as the promotion of parks or gardens in cities, and the avoidance of land use for construction or for agriculture.

Less anthropocentric approaches emerged in the 1980s. As Derek Wall (1999) has shown, most notable was the movement and environmental network *Earth First*, which proposed innovative bio-centric ethics in the U.S.A. Subsequently, the movement established in Britain, and shortly after in Northern Europe. *Earth First* has been pivotal in promoting new approaches towards the environment from a holistic perspective. It illustrates the shifting forms of mobilization of environmental movements with a non-linear development of different visions and policies. However it is hard to define what constitutes an 'environmental movement' and what does not. According to Alan Touraine (1988), the term 'social movement' is an expression that cannot be easily reduced to an observable phenomenon in the (ethnographic) field, but it is an expression that evokes historical ensembles. With the emergence of new theoretical paradigms in the 1970s, social movement studies focused more on the actual perspectives of participants, their practices and their agency in collective action. In this context, environmental movements can be considered part of the 'new social movements' according to Touraine (1988). This shifts the emphasis towards the changing of collective forms of self-understanding and the politics of identity, rather than the mere achievement of a movement's stated goals. For Touraine, under changing economic conditions, the 'central conflict' (a concept earlier taken up by Marx) was shifting away from material aspects of society towards symbolic aspects. In post-industrial society, other social cleavages became more significant, and produce new ways of belonging and new identities.

The main element from max Weber's philosophy in Touraine's work is the centrality of 'the actor' as a protagonist of social action. 'New social movements', accordingly, are those that are related to the emergence of 'new' identities. In his study of the northern European Anti-Nuclear movement Touraine tried to point out that an 'ecological way of life' and the opposition to techno-politics (as evident in the construction of centralized industrial plants including nuclear power plants) is a driving force for mobilization, more so than other material factors. The main contribution of this approach relies on highlighting complex cultural shifts in society, and how identity politics are intertwined with material and political aspects. This shift, in turn, reflects the renewed interest in non-anthropocentric philosophies in 'new' environmental movements.

For an understanding of the emergence of environmental movements in the West, another set of theories deriving from movement theories is also useful. Originally developed as an alternative approach to the 'new social movement paradigm', the so-called 'resource mobilization' paradigm has become another indispensable reference (McCarthy and Zald 1977). This paradigm considers the mobilization of movements as enabled mainly through the increased availability of material and symbolic resources to the activists. Nowadays this could mean, for instance, the availability of new communication technologies. The insights

highlight that there is no linear relationship between grievance or poverty, and collective action. Accordingly, the mobilization of environmental movements in the Western context has often been regarded as imposing a form of 'environmental colonialism' on the rest of the world (Tsing and Greenough 2003). Similar to other forms of colonialism, environmental colonialism imposes a set of values, norms and power relations on a specific local context, silencing other forms of agency (Ervin 2011).

Environmental movement studies in Europe have focused on the relationships between institutions of governance and changing organisational forms (Dalton 1994; Diani and Donati 1999). More recent ethnographies illustrate the specific repercussions of transnational knowledge and power dialectics. For example in the book *Wild Sardinia: indigeneity and the global dreamtimes of environmentalism*, Heatherington (2010) analyzes a local conflict in Sardinia over the establishment of a nature park. In this conflict sheep herders refer to themselves as 'Indians' from whom 'the land is being stolen.' For the author, this case shows the alignment with transnationally available nature politics and conceptualizations, promoted by mainstream environmentalists. In contrast, the contribution of Franco Lai to this Special Section shows specific local grass-roots practices at work, which elude and undermine the power relations of the wider context through practices of environmental agency (Lai 2013). In a broader context, anthropological work has demonstrated how the use of indigenous and traditional knowledge about nature and the environment has become increasingly visible and discussed in various local settings throughout Europe (Papa 2000; Papa 2004).

#### 4. Environmental practices

The final tradition in environmental research calls for attention to be paid towards unconventional grass-roots environmental practices that are underestimated by both conventional movement studies and in environmental anthropology. Recently, in mainstream environmental discourses and public policies, more attention has been directed to the concept of 'common goods' such as water, air (Minteer 2009). Currently, we are witnessing a progressive privatization of the common or public goods that are the basis for the existence of life under current capitalist societies. In *The tragedy of the commons*, Garrett Hardin (1968) questioned the importance of the commons in terms of power relations and ownership, and of who decides the use of public property. Hardin has subsequently been criticized by political ecologists for his oversimplification of nature/culture relations (Forsyth 2003; Huggan 2004). Nonetheless, the questions that Hardin raised are still circulating at the centre of heated debates regarding how private profit rules over social needs - a dynamic which also can be identified as one important cause of environmental disasters, as shown by Rajan (1999) for the Bhopal industrial catastrophe in India.

Turning to the scholarly analysis of these issues, the significance of unconventional environmental activism, and practices of activism in general, has long remained marginal within anthropological studies, although less so in sociology and in political science. While there are exceptions (Graeber 2004), many anthropologists conceptualize practices rather differently in their work: most analyses focus more on practices that reproduce social life, rather than on understanding those practices that are aimed at transformation or change (Escobar 1992). It follows that anthropologists need to understand social reality not through normative frameworks, but as a web of actions and practices that may appear at first glance inconsistent, ambiguous, or contradictory.

Another element is often overlooked. The conduct of individuals alone cannot explain cases of environmental degradation, or guide environmental protection efforts. For example, in the case of the nuclear disaster in Japan in 2011, the efficiency and ability to control events on the part of the Japanese population failed to avoid a disaster of epic proportions. Structural conditions, and economic and power dynamics that are out of reach of individual behaviour, gave rise to forms of real environmental colonialism that were at the expense of people in a weaker position. There is a need to pay attention to good micro-practices and unexpected outcomes of different forms of engagement with nature (Rajan and Duncan 2013). The attention to practices, in this sense, means the need to grasp the often complex dimensions and the unintended consequences of environmental mobilizations. In recent approaches to the 'anthropology of knowledge', practices have been conceptualized as elements that shape, produce, and negotiate the relationship between symbolization and reality (Marchand 2010). Everyday practices - as well as activist practices - not only react to a given reality, but also produce those 'facts' or 'objects' which may seem part of an incontestable reality. For example 'knowing' the reality of environmental problems, as well as knowing in general, is regarded 'an ongoing process' rather than as a certainty (Harris 2007). This is embedded in, and enabled, through practices, performances and agency. The attention to practices as a dimension of the production of reality assumes a particular significance in the relationship between the social and the ecological, where the latter is often imagined as objectively given and immutable. This becomes clear, for example, in relation to concept of 'nature' discussed above. Knowledge about nature is not simply held by human beings as 'processors of information' (Ingold 2008), but is realized in "nested communities of practices" (Marchand 2010) and in

embodied engagements. In short, the interactions between minds, bodies, social settings and environments are more intricate than is often assumed in everyday or public discourses.

In sum, these three research tendencies allow us to reflect on the effects, strategies and implications of environmental activism, and to examine cases where there seems to be a clash between what people do with their environments, and general ecological and ethical concerns about them. By bringing together these perspectives, it also becomes possible to highlight how citizens may generate new grass-roots practices of environmentalism that are not tied to more traditional environmental movements.

## 5. In this collection

In this Special Section, the contributors reflect on questions of political and economic power in the relationships between social and ecological life. Each author offers specific ethnographic studies in the European context, focused on Italy. All of them apply an anthropological perspective to in-depth understanding of changing practices, and the politics of 'nature' related to recent conceptual developments in multi-disciplinary political ecology, and to practices related to environmental protection and mobilization. How is local political life affecting conventional conservation policies? How is it contested? How can environmental justice activism mobilize new political forces and new practices? To what extent can new forms of environmental activism produce social change in individual lifestyles and pattern of consumption? In particular, the articles reflect on the effects, the strategies and the wider implications of environmental activism. One angle visible in these contributions reflects critically on how practitioners and activists can develop 'good practices' that overcome the binary divide between the ecological and the social spheres, going 'beyond anthropocentrism' (Seed 1988). Another addresses power relations in conflicts over the protection of nature and environmental degradation. Together, both angles can contribute to new insights into emerging environmental practices and the changing politics of nature.

The collection opens with the work of Valeria Siniscalchi (2013), who studies the ways in which the Slow Food movement seeks to elaborate new forms of economy and new places for political action. In the last ten years, Slow Food has extended its action from consumers of food to producers, becoming a significant player in the larger debates concerning the issue of food, agriculture and fishing. The ideology of a sustainable economy is applied globally to defend local production and the origin of products; and gastronomic diversity has become an element of biological and environmental diversity. The author focuses on a case study of *presidia* in Italy in order to show how Slow Food plays an active role in the production of new norms that allow a moral economy of food to be imagined and constructed.

The second contribution by Gaetano Mangiameli (2013) analyses multiple discourses around the emergence of leukemia in a Sicilian regional town and shows that this disease not only has a political dimension, but 'is a socio-political disease' in the sense that it stems from political apathy. The discourse around leukemia evokes practices that are conceivable only in a context where the local community, concerned about a leukemia cluster, reallocates power to other actors or institutions, namely the State, first of all, and, at the same time, it renounces the need to exert control over such actors. Mobilization over environmental factors that may be leading to leukemia is far from being rooted in the global environmental movement. However, the activism described in this article is moving slowly from a private dimension of individualized or collective mourning, to a public commitment to environmentalism.

In his contribution, Sandro Piermattei (2013) offers new insights on the power relations at stake in the context of conflicts over resources and environmental protection in a Central Italian national park. His insights are into the complex relationships between local inhabitants of the park, professional ecologists, and local and regional politicians. He shows how continuous strenuous political negotiations between the park authorities and the local administration illustrate growing disillusionment and hostility towards the park by local residents. In conclusion, he calls for a renewed, more democratic approach to park administration, based on a different perspective on what type of 'nature' has to be protected, and how.

Abandoned spaces within urban or semi-urban contexts deserve special attention. The concept of 'third landscape' proposed by Gilles Clément (2004) is taken up by Franco Lai in his article (Lai 2013). Lai discusses the multiple re-uses of abandoned spaces by visitors to a park situated in a Sardinian town, who enact representations of the past and re-negotiate the dynamics of identity. Large spaces in the city were once devoted to the production of salt. Now, as abandoned areas, a spontaneous, relaxed and 'slow' process of human re-appropriation has started in an area that would otherwise have remained unused or derelict. In this way, the area has been transformed into a public park. The park did not result from a top-down process but emerged organically from local efforts. It is, therefore, not at odds with the local population, as is often the case in other contexts (Brockington 2002; Sodikoff 2007).

In summary, this Special Section calls for ethnographic scholarship able to produce new insights into the contemporary challenge of creating new forms of environmental justice, and calls for reflection on how these practices are embedded in manifold fields of power, including structural, economic, and political forces in Italian contexts. At the same time, we have argued for greater attention to the non-anthropocentric world

and its considerations. We hope to stimulate further research into the practices and politics of nature, to go beyond entrenched binaries, and explore more complex interrelationships between environmental conflicts, activism, and unconventional grass-roots practices.

### **Beyond Anthropocentrism, edited by Alexander Koenlsler and Cristina Papa**

1. Alexander Koenlsler and Cristina Papa: Introduction: beyond anthropocentrism, changing practices and the politics of 'nature'.
2. Valeria Siniscalchi: Environment, new legalities and the moral economy of food in the Slow Food movement.
3. Sandro Piermattei: Local farmers vs. environmental universalism: conflicts over nature conservation in the Parco Nazionale dei Monti Sibillini, Italy.
4. Gaetano Mangiameli: From mourning to environmentalism: a Sicilian controversy over childrens' deaths, political apathy and leukemia.
5. Franco Lai: Nature and the city: the salt-works park in the urban area of Cagliari (Sardinia, Italy).

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## Abstract

In this introduction to a Special Section, we outline three recent interrelated research tendencies with regard to how to understand the practices and politics of 'nature': 1) a major attention towards non-anthropocentric environmental ideologies; 2) more complex analyses of environmental movements; and finally, 3) attention to unconventional every-day practices of environmental justice. In all three tendencies, we argue, a renewed attention to socio-economic power relations of the wider context becomes crucial for a better understanding of environmental dynamics. Ethnographically engaged studies from the European context offer examples of how it becomes possible to assess the impact of new grass-root practices, to pay attention to good micro-practices, and understand the unexpected outcomes of the engagement with nature.

**Key words:** Environmentalism, social movements, power, conflict.

## Résumé

Dans cette introduction trois tendances de la recherche en référence aux pratiques et politiques de la «nature» sont mis en évidence: 1) une plus grande attention à des idéologies non-anthropocentriques 2) une analyse plus complexe des mouvements environnementaux 3) l'attention aux pratiques quotidiennes non-conventionnelles pour la justice environnementale. Il est souligné que l'émergence d'une écologie politique qui accorde une attention croissante aux relations de pouvoir socio-économique dans un contexte large permet une meilleure compréhension de la dynamique de l'environnement dans les trois tendances de recherche. des études ethnographiquement engagé de contexte européen offre des exemples de la façon dont il est possible d'évaluer l'impact de nouvelles pratiques de études ethnographiques engagés de l'offre des exemples de contexte européen de la façon dont il est possible d'évaluer l'impact de nouvelles pratiques de base, de prêter attention aux bonnes micro-pratiques et comprendre les résultats inattendus de l'engagement avec la nature

**Mots- clés:** L'environnementalisme, les mouvements sociaux, le pouvoir, les conflits.

## Riassunto

In questa introduzione vengono evidenziate tre recenti tendenze di ricerca in riferimento alle pratiche e alle politiche della "natura": 1) una maggiore attenzione nei riguardi delle ideologie non antropocentriche 2) analisi più complesse dei movimenti ambientalisti, e infine 3) attenzione a pratiche quotidiane non convenzionali di giustizia ambientale. Viene sottolineato come per una migliore comprensione delle dinamiche ambientali diventi cruciale in tutte le tre tendenze, l'affermarsi di una ecologia politica che presti attenzione alle relazioni di potere socioeconomico in un più ampio contesto. Studi etnografici europei offrono esempi concreti come diventa possibile di comprendere l'impatto delle nuove pratiche dal basso, incentivare delle pratiche buone e analizzare le conseguenze spesso imprevedibili dei tentativi di proteggere l'ambiente.

**Parolechiave:** Ambientalismo, movimenti sociali, potere, conflitti.