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EDITORIAL OPEN ACCESS

Decolonising Hope and Decolonial Action: Role of Humanities in the Time of Climate Crisis

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Abstract

Hope is reactionary, as it emanates from courage. It is not a passive acceptance of what is foisted on us by a dominant power; rather, it is manifested in the spirit of struggle. However, the ontological construction of hope, in academic research, has been predicated on a Western intellectual tradition from an egoistic self. This is why it cannot address the global concern of the climate crisis from a holistic position. To elucidate this proposition, this essay engages with two works that may be representative of the Euro-American intellectual tradition: Jonathan Lear's *Radical Hope*, and Anna Antonova's *A Discipline of Hope: Environmental Humanities in a Time of Crisis*. In both these works, hope has been presented as emancipatory, yet conditional and contradictory; and hence a closer look betrays the underlying power structures and hegemonic features that euphemise domination as hope. The climate crisis, which has resulted from Western hegemony and global capitalism, cannot be resolved by the same hegemonic worldviews and structures. On the contrary, the resolution for the crisis should be sought through remedial decolonial action, by acknowledging and identifying the historical injustices, by coming out of the narcissistic position, and by deliberating across the table.

Keywords: Hope; Decolonial Action; Ecopedagogy; Environmental Humanities; Epistemic Recovery

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> This is true; as from the flaming fire issue forth, by thousands, sparks of the same form, so from the immortal proceed, good youth, diverse *jivas* and they find their way back into it. (Mundaka Upanishad, 2.1.1) (Sastri, 1905).

Introduction

In his *Pedagogy of Hope*, Paulo Freire invokes a scene: "[t]he people cry out against all the crass evidence of public corruption. The public squares are filled once more. There is a hope, however timid, on the street corners, a hope in each and every one of us" (Freire, 2014, p. 2). Hope, in this sense, is reactionary and entrenched in action in the face of adversity. The absence of hope leads to fatalism, which is devoid of action, and deprives one of the strength to carry on the "fierce struggle that will re-create the world" (Freire, 2014, p. 2). Therefore, hope emanates from courage, and it cannot be passive acceptance of what is foisted on us by a dominant power. Freire's idea of critical hope was developed in connection with the role of education that would help children to grow up in a nonauthoritarian environment, which in future could be instrumental in shaping social institutions. Freire acknowledges that pacts and treaties can be part of the struggle too (Freire, 2014, p. 33), but that should lead to liberation and freedom in the real sense. Jonathan Lear, in his *Radical Hope*, provides a contrasting idea of hope. He asserts, with relation to the Crow community, that "[r]adical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it" (Lear, 2006, p. 103). Lear's idea of "future goodness" appears to be radical in the event of a complete collapse faced by a native American tribe. When the cultural, political, economic, and geographical autonomy of a community is subjected to colonial violence, what can hope mean for that community? And how shall that hope lead to a future that would ensure freedom and not enslavement to colonial or neo-colonial powers? Lear does not address these concerns because that would become counterintuitive to the conformist argument he is trying to push in the American context. However, if we scrutinise the dominance of the United States of America as a global power, and the wars it has waged since the time it colonised the continent, it becomes quite evident that many of the nations across the globe, especially Vietnam and Afghanistan, would find the idea of radical hope unconvincing. Recent domineering acts by the US include the kidnapping of the Venezuelan President (Ahmed, 2026), the war with Iran (Kori, 2026), vying for Greenland (Hossain, 2026), sanctions on nations importing oil from Russia (Gupta and Soni 2026)— all pointing to one undeniable fact: that the world has been taken over by a consumerist-capitalist lobby under the logic of neo-liberal democracy and neo-liberal economy. But many critics argue, and so does Guilio Boccaletti in his *The Environmental Republic*, that dominance and power are required to secure trade routes and attain global peace and security, and the US is morally right in doing so, despite what it has done in the Marshall Islands (see Pincus, 2021), Laos (see Khamvongsa and Russell 2009), and elsewhere (Sakellaropoulos and Sotiris, 2008). The global capitalists, through their mouthpiece (Yunus, 1998), also tend to argue that a technology-driven society can solve many of the problems like poverty, hunger, and global warming (Krausmann et al., 2018), although the unhindered growth industry based on fossil fuels (Huesemann, 2006) and the great acceleration (Steffen et al., 2015) may have been primarily responsible for creating a planetary crisis in the first place (Steffen et al., 2007). Therefore, in this conflict-ridden world, threatened by climate change and mass extinction, radical hope, as a critical formulation in the West, appears to be a fascinating and welcome approach for some naïve speculation.

Although hope is not bad, I argue that the ontological construction of hope, in academic research, has been predicated on a Western intellectual tradition from an egoistic self. This is why it cannot address the global concern of the climate crisis from a holistic position. To

elucidate this proposition, this essay engages with two works that may be representative of the Euro-American intellectual tradition: Jonathan Lear's *Radical Hope*, and Anna Antonova's *A Discipline of Hope: Environmental Humanities in a Time of Crisis*. In both these works, hope has been presented as emancipatory, yet conditional and contradictory; and hence a closer look betrays the underlying power structures and hegemonic features that euphemise domination as hope. The climate crisis, which has resulted from Western hegemony and global capitalism, cannot be resolved by the same hegemonic worldviews and structures. On the contrary, the resolution for the crisis should be sought through remedial decolonial action, by acknowledging and identifying the historical injustices, by coming out of the narcissistic position, and by deliberating across the table. Two interconnected research questions that would guide us in debunking the hegemonic idea of hope are: why the Western concept of hope is inadequate in addressing climate justice; and how it is connected to social justice? The objective of this essay is to add conceptual clarity and a future direction to the understanding of hope as a critical field and its application in the humanities with specific reference to climate justice. Since there is an urgent need for reification of ideas, ideologies, and consciousness from the level of abstraction to that of action, mere contemplation will not yield any change, and it is in this context that the idea of decolonial action has been introduced. By decolonial action, I do not mean reinstating some idea from a hoary pre-colonial past and imposing it. My argument is simple. Colonialism had two underlying features: ideological and material, each growing through symbiosis. Its objective was to secure wealth, to extract resources, and to rule over others, for which several institutions and structures had been set up. These oppressive institutions and structures were forcefully foisted on the colonised people. Therefore, decolonial action should dismantle the oppressive structures, institutions, and ideologies, and help in epistemic recovery, meaning recovering those elements which can restore humankind's humility. However, I am not dealing with humility in this essay but addressing what decolonial hope could mean for us. This essay shall first show the internal contradictions with relation to what has been argued as "future goodness," vis-à-vis hope in Western intellectual tradition. By analysing the idea of hope and goodness, which appears in some influential texts, including Jonathan Lear's *Radical Hope*, this section will show that these ideas are the product of Western intellectual tradition, and therefore, cannot be universal. Secondly, once the problematic aspect associated with hope has been identified, the essay shall show why the Western approach to resolving the climate crisis will further lead us to more crises. In this section, I specifically analyse Anna Antonova's *A Discipline of Hope* and Guilio Boccaletti's *The Environmental Republic*, which deal with the idea of hope and freedom. Further, I see courage, hope, goodness, and freedom as interrelated ideas because all action emerges from the convictions rooted in these concepts. I argue that although these two texts deal with the issues of environment and climate change, their approaches and the proposed models are exclusionary and narcissistic, respectively. Therefore, this essay conclusively states that it is not through a Western framework of hope, but through decolonial action that the climate crisis should be addressed.

On Decolonising Hope

Lear offers a moral dimension to Plenty Coup's decision to ally with the United States in *Radical Hope*. The Absarokee, or as the French called them Le Corbeau, meaning Crow, had a way of life in which "[f]ighting battles, defending one's territory, preparing to go to war" (Lear, 2006, p. 11) and planting a coup-stick defined courage and bravery. In their constant war with the "Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Blackfeet" (23), guns, blankets, and ammunition became indispensable by the 1850s. Later they allied with the "white man, in particular the US government, in what became a common battle against the Sioux" (24). However, this did not stop the US government from "repeatedly revising treatise[s] at will and from encroaching

on Crow lands" (136) and by the 1880s they had been forced to live in shrunken reserves. Then how can this act be considered courageous? Lear develops a rationale by referring to Aristotle to argue that courage is not fearlessness of death, but to aim for what is fine, and to "exercise good judgement" (111), and in this context, Plenty Coups' decision might have saved him and his tribesmen from "malnutrition, starvation, disease, defeat, and confinement" (123). Therefore, "radical hope might be not only compatible with courage: in times of radical change, it might function as a necessary constituent" (123). The problem in such a reading of what constitutes courage and radical hope is twofold: first, who (rhetorically) has the power and authority to define their meanings in a colonised world? And second, how can their meanings contradict the framework within which it has been conceived? In the Western framework, as Friedrich Nietzsche has argued, good has evolved from master-morality, having its origin in aristocracy and in noble persons (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 17). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche explains:

> … when it is the rulers who decide the concept of good, it is the exalted, proud disposition which is regarded as the distinguishing feature …. The Noble type of man separates from himself the beings in whom the opposite of this exalted, proud disposition displays itself; he despises them (Nietzsche, 2018, p. 192).

Therefore, the Crow warrior-life which was considered courageous earlier had to be abandoned and readjusted into taking a decision to become an ally of the oppressor. If this acceptance of subjugation and subservience is deemed as a new form of courage, then has the criteria of nobility itself undergone a change under colonial rule? This is so because Nietzsche traces the formation of Good in a noble Being, and later its application to the action of other beings. So, what happens to that Ideal Being, and is that Being abandoned to reconfigure a new meaning of Good? Is accepting colonial dominance to survive a new form of excellence considered radical hope? Plenty Coups' capacity to adapt, listen, learn, and negotiate, although not chosen of free will, becomes an alternative expression of courage according to Lear, but then this contradicts Nietzsche's argument. The implication is that the colonial matrix of power has overtaken the world of the native Americans. This form of transformation from which the so-called radical hope emerges cannot be considered ethically autonomous. Therefore, when Lear provides a new understanding of hope and courage, he is vindicating subjugation without being critical of how the American tribes were systematically deprived of their autonomy, or how different Indigenous peoples in Australia, Indonesia, Africa, and other parts of the globe have been massacred and marginalised by the European colonisers.

Hubert L. Dreyfus, while discussing Lear's book, argues that in the event of a complete collapse, the nostalgic view of the past is no longer intelligible. He rhetorically states that neither is there any agency for cultural renewal, nor any illustration of hope provided by Plenty Coups:

> But how could one take up traditional values that have become unintelligible except by a self-deluded form of nostalgia. Indeed, to Lear's credit, we see no examples in his book of Plenty Coups taking up traditional practices and reinterpreting them (Dreyfus, 2009, p. 69).

Dreyfus (2009) points out that the Crow community, by adapting to agriculture, has gone forward by going back, because prior to becoming nomadic, they were agriculturists. This is how the marginal aspects of their life, that did not define the core Crow way of life earlier, came to be central. One might argue both ways: either Coups should not have conceded defeat, or Coups did the right thing for the community's self-preservation. Lear's argument promotes the second one, though, and in a way, it also throws off the Kantian notion of the last man. But here is the catch, and the irony as pointed out by Julian Reid, which I shall refer to in a while. Dreyfus suggests by alluding to science and scientists in a Heideggerian sense that it is wise

to give up the current view, if anomaly piles up, and adopt a "revolutionary new one" (68). Dreyfus' critique of Lear makes sense, but falls short in two ways: first, he equates the collapse of scientific worldviews with cultural worldviews; and second, he does not discuss the problematic connection between hope and courage. Moreover, there is no critique of the political sway and the Eurocentric worldview that is about to forever engulf the Indigenous tribes within the Euro-American hegemony. Julian Reid's reading of Lear's *Radical Hope* is different from that of Dreyfus'. He is critical not only of Lear, but also of Dipesh Chakrabarty for their lack of engagement with Kant's racist view of what constitutes courage. Reid offers a new perspective on the dynamicity of the values attested to courage in the Anthropocene epoch, and how, through a reversal, the Indigenous world that was once threatened by colonialism can now offer a future perspective in understanding some of the responses. Therefore, although Plenty Coups' story could be read as one of resilience because it shows the "capacities for survival, for endurance, for perseverance" of the Crow community (Lear, 2006, p. 256), the story of Sitting Bull can also be equally instructive. Today, Sitting Bull, and not Plenty Coups, is the face of Indigenous resilience in the US because the Sioux tribe, to the present day, has refused to give up their territories to the expansion of US infrastructure. Reid, in another essay, has been critical of the idea of resilience as a neo-liberal extension, but we are not addressing it here (Reid, 2019). But then what is important is the site, Standing Rock, where Sitting Bull was executed by the US in 1900, because Standing Rock has become "central again to Indigenous struggles in the US, and symbolically so worldwide" (2023: p.256). This form of resistance, and not the only one that Lear argued as resilience, is instructive because it is in the indigenous way of life that the zeitgeist is manifested. But very much like Dreyfus, Reid also does not critique the colonial structures which were responsible for creating the crisis for the Indigenous communities during the nineteenth century. Lear's approach is a more sophisticated reframing of what James Farish, an acting Governor of Bombay in 1838, opined on the colonial subjects: "[t]he Natives must either be kept down by a sense of our power, or they must willingly submit from a conviction that we are more wise, more just, more humane, and more anxious to improve their condition than any other rulers they could possibly have" (Viswanathan, 1989, p. 2). Therefore, the loss of the subjective self of the Crow people, and their reconstitution through Christianity, exemplifies the Euro-American dominance of the Indigenous worlds. The absence of the critique of such colonial power endorses a universalist worldview where liberal Western economies have established their dominance over nature as well as people, whom they thought were culturally inferior. The critique or validation taking place with reference to the Indigenous communities within the framework of Western notions of hope, therefore, is inadequate because it never challenges the structures from which those notions have arisen. This calls for a decolonial approach to hope. Goutam Karmakar and Janet M. Wilson suggest the term decolonial hope "[a]s a political and ontological act," in which "hope comprises a pedagogy of transformation that enables the possibility of deconstructing existing power hierarchies and inequalities" (Karmakar and Wilson, 2026, p. 2). Karmakar and Wilson's approach remains limited to "interrogating the fallacies of human exceptionalism embodied in capitalist enterprise and understanding how coloniality not only engenders hierarchies in human power dynamics but also is instrumental in violations of planetary justice as well as the rights of non-human entities" (3). Although they use the phrase "decolonial hope", their epistemological framework is drawn from Western concepts like Bruno Latour's "earth-bound" and Dona Haraway's "multispecies storytelling." These concepts, originating in Western centres, have been shaped by capitalist institutions and modernist cultures, as could be evinced from Haraway's exposition of the relationship between humans and non-humans, especially pigeons and meres. Haraway undoubtedly challenges the idea of human exceptionalism but does not offer the possibility of a decolonial

struggle. Caroline Gatt has argued that Haraway's appropriation of Indigenous concepts, dictated by Western principles, leads to a hierarchy of knowledge production where the Western way of knowing again becomes dominant: "Haraway uses concepts derived from localized knowledge without taking into account the Indigenous histories and protocols around such knowledge and stories" (Gatt, 2023, p. 3). Donna Haraway's concept of staying with the trouble and making kin is close to the Heideggerian idea of adjusting to changes and not challenging it. Many researchers in contemporary times find this an appealing idea, including Slavoj Žižek (2024), who states that humankind's struggle is just to survive. In much the same way, Zoe Todd points out that the "ontological turn" which spins at the back of the non-Europeans is an irony because we seldom acknowledge the Indigenous communities who build and maintain those knowledge systems, and instead celebrate and worship "a European thinker for 'discovering', or newly articulating by drawing on a European intellectual heritage, what many an Indigenous thinker around the world could have told you for millennia: *the climate is a common organizing force*!" (Todd, 2016, p.8). As argued by Reid, in the worldview of Indigenous societies interspecies thinking has always been predominant: "Indigenous peoples never brought into human exceptionalism, the argument goes, and their cultures entail entirely different notions and practice of politics, which do not depend on assumptions of or projections towards human dominance" (Reid, 2023, p.252). Therefore, Indigenous knowledge and their worldview not only provide a counter-perspective to Western thought, but also provide the basis of decolonial action in postcolonial societies.

The indigenous worldview that does not believe in human dominance or exceptionalism, therefore, is to be understood in its own historical, social, and cultural context. Concepts such as *Pachamama* (Apaza Huanca, 2019) in Bolivia and *Minobimaatisiiwin* among the Anishinabeg community in Minnesota (Grim, 2001) take us to an alternate worldview where the world is not seen in terms of multi-species, but in concepts that organically remain rooted in their everyday cultural practice where the distinction between human and non-human does not remain hierarchical. In Eastern cultures as well, especially in India and most notably in Amitav Ghosh's recent work *Ghost-Eye,* we are introduced to that world. Through the concept of *jiva* (spirit that inhabits a being), Ghosh tries to show that in the cyclical view of life (Ghosh, 2026), unlike the linearity suggested by Francis Fukuyama (1989) and his predecessors, the same *jiva* can carry the consciousness from one life to another: Dinanath Dutta, one of the characters and narrators in the story, was an otter in his previous life. The connection of the spirit of the snake with the spirit of the Mango tree exemplifies how different life-forms may be connected through interdependence. In much the same way, the kinship between human and non-human forms, or transformations of Tiger spirit and other animal spirits into human forms, appears in the folktales of the tribal communities across South and Southeast Asian nations (Biswas and Roy, 2025; Manggala, 2025). These stories from pre-colonial societies familiarise us with a cosmological view that cannot be understood or explained except for referring to those contexts. For instance, Srimanta Sankardev's famous adage "কুকুৰ শৃগাল গর্দভৰো আত্মাৰাম, জানিয়া সবাকো পৰি কৰিবা প্রণাম, (God resides in the soul of a dog, a fox, and a fool / knowing this well bow down before all). Citing this famous verse from Sankardev's *Kirtan Ghosa*, Ajit Kumar Mahanta writes:

> Sankaradeva traces the origin of *jiva* to the Brahman's attribute of consciousness. The individual self is a part of God. The individual self or the embodied soul is called *jivatman,* and Brahman is called Supreme Self or Paramatman (Mahanta, 1993, p. 27).

Srimanta Sankardev was a social reformer and a proponent of the neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam at a time when society was ridden with caste hierarchies and animal sacrifices. His teachings appealed to reforming the masses in the 15th century by drawing inspiration from the Upanishads. Therefore, decolonial thought,

decolonial hope, and decolonial praxis should be rooted in drawing from the cultural context from which they originated, and not from a misplaced and distant centre of power. From here, after establishing the inadequacy of Western formulation of hope, I move on to arguing that Western intuitions' idea of hope and freedom cannot address the concerns of climate change.

Hope and Climate Crisis

If climate change is not a European or American problem alone, but a global one, then why are its ramifications and resolution sought only within the Euro-American intellectual tradition? Whether it is a narcissistic approach or a lazy one may be a matter of inquiry at another time. In this section, I look into two recent works which try to address the climate crisis from a Euro-American framework. Anna Antonova, in her *A Discipline of Hope: Environmental Humanities in a Time of Crisis*, foregrounds the importance of Environmental Humanities (EH) as a discipline of hope at a time when the world is exposed to multiple planetary crises. She begins her monograph by trying to trace the origin as well as the intellectual trajectory of EH as a multi-faceted discipline in the West. In doing so, she starts by referring to Western scholars from different disciplines who have addressed the nature-society binary in their respective works. She argues that the common idea among these scholars indicates the need to collapse the difference between environment and society. Antonova then moves on to engage with 15 other Western scholars by interviewing them and conversing with them to underpin the importance of academic institutions and their role in addressing the climate crisis. In her interview with Kate Rigby, the latter explained that the study of EH, at least in Australia, originated in religion, which helped shape an ethical responsibility, then moved into critiquing societal structures and ideas under left-liberal scholarship, and later advanced towards diagnosing and analysing different types of problems. Antonova argues that each field of study related to EH has a set of determining objectives in relation to its present and future direction, and this also shapes the institutions which are built around these objectives. Her conversation with Elizabeth DeLoughrey and Ursula Münster reveals that EH's engagement with Colonial and settler histories, Postcolonial studies, Feminist scholarship, social justice or engagement with science transformed EH into what J. Andrew Hubbell and John Charles Ryan (2021) call crossdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and/or transdisciplinary. This also helped in foregrounding the importance of multispecies thinking within EH. On the other hand, Katie Ritson, in her interview, refers to the political dimension of EH, its critique of capitalism, and relation to academia and beyond in the form of political activism. In his conversation with Antonova, Marco Armiero highlights that the attention must be shifted from human to the more-than-human and include other subjectivities in terms of gender, race, and class. He calls for a politicised approach into understanding what a common home could mean in contrast to a private or gated property, and why it is essential to address the migrant issue within the scope of Environmental justice. Taking the argument further, Lesley Green adds that voices matter, but then there must be a balanced approach because one can neither undermine the "complexities of human experiences of nature" (Antonova, 2026, p. 28) nor overlook the implications of the political economy. It is at this juncture that Antonova mentions the rise of right-wing politics and a substantial defunding of the environmental humanities. There is also an onset of anxiety within the discipline because, as Katie Ritson points out, the approach of EH shifted from problem solving in its earliest years to one of "grief, extinction [and] learning to live in an irredeemably changed environment" (30). Moreover, Green points out that EH has not been engaged in policy-making decisions, nor has Humanities been given any space at the Belém COP, or in policymaking at the European Union, as flagged by Francesca Tarocco. The reason for this marginalisation of EH is that, as Rob Gioielli argues, the discipline's core engagement has been with criticism instead of problem-solving. While EH has failed to engage in policymaking, its political engagement is

considered a threat by many who believe that the students of EH will become voters for green parties. Under these circumstances, what will be the role of EH as a discipline of hope in addressing the planetary crisis? Ursula Münster suggests that EH provides the space and connection to people, and Jamie Wang writes that storying as a method contributes to the public role of EH. It is through the power of narrative, what Marco calls "guerrilla narratives" (38), that EH can familiarise people with alternate worlds and address injustices.

The discussion in Anna Antonova's book is limited to narrative power and the possibilities of alternate worlds. First, these discussions relegate hope to a passive concept. When a discussant argues that "[b]ecause, you know, we're not going to *manage* our way out of this" (38), the approach of EH cannot be grounded in hope. Further, by referring to *Radical Hope*, the discipline's roadmap cannot be established. Second, like Lear, the framework for the discipline of hope is drawn from Western concepts. Her work is informed only by academics who have been working from Western institutions within a Western framework. Even their reference to postcolonialism or decolonial approaches is marginal and limited, because they do not actively engage with those worldviews vis-à-vis dominant Euro-American worldviews. The most problematic aspect is that while making room for multiple narratives, we often overlook the Western academic framework that creates that space, which by nature is hegemonic. For instance, if there is only one definition of modernity, how can there be multiple futures? Unless the ontology of modernity is deconstructed and reconstituted within decolonial and Indigenous frameworks, all futures will be relegated to the logic of Western modernity. Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues that epistemologies of the North are grounded in coloniality, patriarchy, and capitalism (de Sousa Santos, 2021; Santos, 2020). Thus, education grounded only upon Northern ways of knowing is inherently oppressive. Consequently, decolonising our teaching, knowledges, and epistemologies is essential for all education, including environmental teaching. Dunford Robin explains this brilliantly:

> When focussing on pluriversality as both a substantive value and a particular process of value formation, by contrast, decoloniality becomes an *imperative*, and explicitly rules out some other visions – including liberal cosmopolitan visions – of global ethics" (Dunford, 2007, p. 2).

The question is – can institutions operating under the European Union or the Western hegemony create space for a truly cosmopolitan world? Robin argues that a world order which has been shaped by global capitalism cannot create space for decolonial ethics, and therefore, like Walter Mignolo and Anabel Quijano, he too argues that modernity is entwined with its darker side, coloniality. This becomes evident in Francesca's romanticised point of view:

> Modern cities, Francesca observed, are often projects of removing humans from nature, but Venice »does not do that. In a city defined by its porousness and openness to the tides, she remarked, collaborating with local activists and organizers, as well as with musicians, culinary experts, and artists, was a natural way of approaching environmental humanities (Antonova, 2026, p. 41).

Francesca's approach is in conformity with the Western intellectual tradition and offers us a point of entry in discussing Giulio Boccaletti's *The Environmental Republic*. Boccaletti, despite being a physicist, has convincingly argued that science cannot offer a remedy to climate change anymore unless the problem is politically addressed. In this, he foregrounds the strong role to be played by voice, institution, and collective purpose. His objective is great, but like most Western scholars, his ideas are also rooted in Western understanding of nature. This is where Francesca's and Boccaletti's ideas converge and conform to the Western intellectual and critical tradition. Boccaletti has an instrumentalist view of nature, and this is in line with the Baconian creed. His reference to

the greening of the desert by China (by planting commercially useful trees), the robust plantation economy of Barbados, and sharp criticism of Aldo Leopold betray his utilitarian views of an environmental republic. Guilio Boccaletti (2026, p. 95) writes:

> What I conclude from these experiences was that the "nature" most people have in mind is not actually a property of the environment. Rather, it is relative to us, to our desires, a complex mix of aesthetics, fantasy, functionality, and human values (Guilio Boccaletti (2026, p. 95).

According to Boccaletti, what is meant by nature is "us". This conceptualisation has been shaped by the political and economic necessities of Europe and in this, as he points out, "the "landscape' – in Italian *paesaggio*, French *paysage*, Dutch *landscape*, and German *landschaft* – became an overtly political idea, an expression of agency. It was what we wanted it to be" (96). Artists like Leon Battista Alberti and Francesco Colonna shaped the idea of nature through modern architecture. They highlighted these in their paintings: modern villa with its gardens, indicating the consolidation and condensation of the aesthetic form with political life: "Europe was drained, channelized, and dammed to enable armies to walk across it. "Nature" went from aesthetic ornament to index of power. This engineered attitude towards nature flowed into an increasingly urbanised life" (97). Francesca's romanticised vision is only an extension of the European influence of power and hegemony. As evinced from Boccaletti's account, the influence of Salgari, Conrad, Melville, and Jules Verne's stories, Spinoza's philosophy, Milion, Harrington, and Cromwell's political philosophy, and the various European art forms widened the imagination and allowed one to look beyond the horizon across the sea routes, while science was weaponised to "claim territory" through colonial occupation (59). Therefore, ideas of hope coming from institutions and concepts which have been shaped through instrumental rationality, cannot fully grasp the problems of climate change. Unless EH is decolonised from its western intellectual tradition, and reconceptualised within the world that had been oppressed, the discipline cannot be envisioned on hope.

Concluding remarks: Hope as decolonial action

Antonova refers to John Barry and Paul Merchant to suggest that the disciplinary boundaries of EH should be trespassed and moved beyond the classroom. This approach, although not developed further by Antonova, has been otherwise well explored by Paulo Freire in the context of ecopedagogy. Greg William Misiaszek, in his book *Freire and Environmentalism: Ecopedagogy*, writes that Freire's ecopedagogy teaches how to end oppression and domination (that is, praxis) through critical democratic dialogue and reading (that is, critical literacy). It also helps us understand why environmentally violent acts occur (that is, ecopedagogical dialogue and literacy) (Misiaszek, 2023). Ecopedagogical goals call for "deepening" and "widening" students' and teachers' perspectives of environmental injustices and planetary unsustainability, with the objective for enacting crucial transformation (Misiaszek, 2021). Deepening implies teaching to critically understand the impacts of environmental violence locally through the eyes of those who suffer from it, while widening is teaching environmental well-being for all. For instance, if we are talking about the Marshall Islands, or other small island nations which are threatened by rising sea levels due to melting glaciers, we also need to understand how we are contributing to it. Only when we engage the students emotionally and intellectually to deal with this crisis, we can truly sensitise them about environmental (in)justice. In one of my research projects, after interviewing almost 473 literate adult participants in the age group of 50-100 years, it was found that fictional works have very little impact on adult minds, either because very few people read literature in the first place or because habits once formed become too difficult to be changed. This suggests that EH's should reconsider its approach and broaden its horizons through early intervention. Environmental Studies have been part of the school curriculum

in India since the 1990s, but it is designed from a utilitarian perspective and not as a form of value education. All books start by referring to nature as Natural resources, thereby defeating the very cause for which it was introduced. EH may exist as an autonomous and independent field of study, but the concern relating to funding, or job opportunities in the field as highlighted by Antonova, shows the imminent challenges faced by this discipline. A parallel can be drawn between EH and Philosophy in academic institutions. Philosophy as a subject has been losing its relevance in colleges and universities for a few decades now, and there are very few takers of the subject because of the lack of job opportunities. Nevertheless, the importance of philosophy cannot be denied, as it provides the foundation of every field of inquiry. Diminishing demand does not imply diminishing relevance; it is only our lack of foresight. What I intend to mean is that, apart from its relevance as a discipline, researchers with expertise in Philosophy should be absorbed in other disciplines like Economics, History, Sociology, English, and so on and so forth, and these interdisciplinary engagements would not only strengthen those departments but also replenish the study of Philosophy. In much the same way, a multidisciplinary approach should be mandated for EH in the universities, and every discipline should prepare its curriculum by centralising its concern with nature. This would not only decentralise EH, but would help create a local and global network among its practitioners and help establish a dialogue among various communities, societies, nations, and disciplines. I have introduced a course on EH at the post-graduate level within English Studies, in which students are familiarised with the history of EH, philosophical and religious approaches to nature, the idea of nature within the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), as well as Western traditions. This approach, which leads to comparative ecology, offers a space within which different worldviews can be studied. In addition, students are given assignments and tasks to collect empirical data from their own societies, which helps in a real and pragmatic approach to understanding the meaning of planetary crisis. Since the students are already equipped with theoretical approaches, they can easily identify and discuss the problems. Thus oriented, these students, after going back to their respective societies, can share their knowledge with their friends and families. It also develops reflexivity among the students and makes them capable of imagining multiple possible futures. As Freire pointed out, human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it. Human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action, so it should not be reduced to either verbalism or activism (Freire, 2000, p. 125). Decolonial hope, therefore, lies in praxis, in which action will be guided by concepts drawn from the experiences of the oppressed.

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Declaration

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Use of AI

AI tools have not been used in any form.