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*Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World.* By Malcom Ferdinand, Cambridge: Polity Press. 2022. 300 pp. £17.99 Paperback/£55 Hardback. ISBN: 978-1-509-54622-0

There is no shortage of examples of the entangled violences of systemic racism and ecological destruction. Extreme climate events including wildfires, storms and floods, as well as ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and global cost of living crisis all disproportionately impact people of colour, whose voices are marginalised in efforts to address these crises. Tracing alternative historical and ecological genealogies, Malcom Ferdinand's important book, (originally published in French with Editions Seuil in 2019, and lucidly translated here by Anthony Paul Smith), examines how these social and environmental emergencies have rarely been conceptualised or challenged as intersecting, nor have they been understood as rooted in colonisation, imperialism and slavery which established destructive and exploitative ways of 'inhabiting the earth' (p. 26). Throughout his astute analysis, Ferdinand seeks to address what he terms the 'double fracture of modernity' (p.8) – one that separates colonial and environmental (hi)stories – and lays the foundations for a 'decolonial ecology' which 'articulates the confrontation of contemporary ecological issues through an emancipation from the colonial fracture *by rising up from the slave ship's hold*' (p.14).

Taking the slave ship as starting point is central to the book's political and epistemological intervention. The slave ship's hold serves as a motif for thinking 'from' the Caribbean as a 'scene of ecological thinking', critically disrupting a tendency to take the Caribbean as a theoretical testing ground for concepts formulated elsewhere (p.12). Re-framing understandings of ecology and colonialism from such a standpoint departs from the dominant genealogies of both – which foreground stewardship, exploration, protection – and instead provides a story of violence and survival, resistance and hope in the face of what Ferdinand calls 'modernity's hold' (p.3). Ferdinand's project joins others in its commitment to developing new vocabularies for understanding pasts and imagining futures. For instance, adding to wider critiques of the Anthropocene as one that positions 'man' as a politically neutral actor responsible for ecosystem destruction, Ferdinand opts for the terms Plantationocene (as proposed by Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing)<sup>1</sup> or his term Negrocene.

He relates his work to a lineage of anti-colonial thinkers, artists, writers and activists who have highlighted connections between ecological destruction, colonial domination in their demands for equality (p.15), yet whose ideas have been marginalised in mainstream anti-racist and environmental discourses. The book's

engagement with Martinique – a French overseas department in which unequal relations rooted in colonial history still persist in multiple ways – provides a particular vantage point to explore discontinuities within environmentalist and anti-colonial movements, as well as between the metropole and its (post)colonies. Whilst Ferdinand's approach engages with insights of Latin American decolonial thinkers such as Walter D. Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano and Arturo Escobar, the book's centring of the Caribbean – and in particular the experience of uprooted Black Africans taken to the Caribbean in the hold of the slave ship – departs from these currents geographically and intellectually, making links with other movements including African philosophy, post-colonial ecocriticism, and Black feminist critiques that have highlighted the intersections of racialised and gendered forms of oppression. Indeed, one of the book's key contributions is attention to these junctures and construction of bridges (another recurring motif in the text) between, for instance, 'here' and 'there', human and non-human, then and now, allowing ideas that have been silenced within dominant narratives to resurface, and new stories to emerge at these intersections.

*Decolonial Ecology* consists of 17 chapters, as well as a prologue, epilogue and compelling foreword by Angela Davis. The book is divided into four parts with a narrative arc that broadly moves from context to critique, resistance, action, and hope. The first part, entitled 'The Modern Tempest' lays the conceptual and historical foundations of Ferdinand's critique, including the argument that the 'principal action' of colonisation was an act of inhabitation, involving not only an exploitative and violent relationship to nature and non-humans – 'ecocide', but also what he terms 'othercide' (p.28) – a rejection of the possibility of sharing the Earth with those regarded as different to a self (in this case a White male self). The logic of 'colonial inhabitation', he argues, established gendered, racialised and geographical hierarchies and a Plantation system that forcibly transformed landscapes, ecosystems and maternal bonds with the Earth (p.38).

If Part 1 presents a critique of the colonial order and its associated ecocides, matricides and epistemicides, Part 2 offers a powerful critique of the global environmental movement. Titled 'Noah's Ark', Ferdinand introduces the 'politics of boarding' to argue that far from saving the Earth, environmentalist groups have, in fact, been complicit in reproducing 'the mechanisms of enslavement and domination' (p.83). This bordering/boarding politics that separate the 'chosen' from the 'excluded' under the 'guise of good intentions' (p. 83) is forcefully illustrated in three chapters examining examples of environmental

(neo)colonialism in the Caribbean, including: reforestation policies in Haiti that involved the massacre of peasants in the Parc de la Visite (Chapter 6); the decision to dedicate land previously occupied to use as a navy base on the small island of Vieques off Puerto Rico to a wildlife reserve, thus further displacing its indigenous inhabitants (Chapter 7); and the use of the toxic pesticide Chlordecone in the French Antilles (Chapter 8).

Part 3, 'Maroon Ecology' turns attention to the figure of the Maroon as one who epitomises not only a refusal of the violence of enslavement, but also ecological resistance and wisdom through alternative ways of inhabiting the Earth. Not romanticising 'marronage' and acknowledging the many forms it took (p.146), this section introduces the figure of the marooness who demonstrates a 'double resistance to slavery and male domination' (p.156). Chapter 12 re-visits the role of the White 'founding fathers' of ecology, most notably, Henry David Thoreau in whose resistance to enslavement and ecological destruction Ferdinand identifies the possibility of a 'civil marronage' as well as highlighting the role played by White women (including Thoreau's mother Cynthia and sisters Sophia and Helen) in this refusal of the Plantationocene. Ferdinand's decolonial ecology takes these examples of solidarity to envisage new ways of living together (p.175).

If the Noah's ark metaphor diagnoses the double fracture of colonial inhabitation and environmentalism, the fourth and final part proposes another maritime imaginary, a 'world-ship' (p.192), to offer an alternative politics of encounter that demands new alliances – embodied in the figure of the 'shipmate' (p.200) – as well as reparations for past injustices. Pushing back against the colonial world order and imagining ways to re-connect with the Earth, proposals include: 'interspecies alliances against the Plantationocene' (p. 226) ; a 'cosmopolitics of relation' (233) which expands Édouard Glissant's<sup>ii</sup> relational thinking to acknowledge the plurality of encounters with humans and non-humans; reparations for slavery and the transatlantic slave trade and restitution of art objects and human body parts. Whilst the notion of justice recurs throughout this section, it feels there is scope for deeper critical engagement with what these forms of justice would look like and how these intersecting racial and ecological calls for justice can be mobilised.

*Decolonial Ecology* is an outstanding book that makes several formative and urgent interventions in contemporary debates within both environmentalist and anti-racist movements. Politically, the book

contributes to a growing body of intellectual and activist work that delineates how environmental degradation is intimately connected to racism and extractive capitalism both in the past and nowadays.<sup>iii</sup> Yet the book's politics are underpinned by its poetics: Ferdinand's commitment to the role of the imagination and use of fiction, as well as his close engagement with art, literature, and music to envisage a new 'Worldly ecology'. Rather than an extra 'shelf on a bookcase already established' (p.14), Ferdinand offers new imaginaries and trajectories which embrace all forms of life and in which racial, misogynistic and ecological violence have no place.

Olivia Sheringham

Department of Geography

Birkbeck University of London

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<sup>i</sup> D. Haraway, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin.' *Environmental Humanities* 6, (2015) pp. 159-165

<sup>ii</sup> É. Glissant, *The Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing. (Michigan University Press, 1997, original French version 1990)

<sup>iii</sup> Greenpeace UK, *Confronting injustice: racism and the environmental emergency* (London, Greenpeace UK, 2022); L. Pulido, & J. de Lara, 'Reimagining the 'Justice' in *Environment Justice: Radical Ecologies, Decolonial Thought, and the Black Radical Tradition*,' *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1-2 (2018), pp. 76-98; L. Sealey-Huggins, 'The climate crisis is a racist crisis: structural racism, inequality and climate change', in A. Johnson, R. Joseph-Salisbury and B. Kamunge, eds. *The Fire Now: Anti-Racist Scholarship in Times of Explicit Racial Violence*, (London, Zed Books, 2018,) pp. 99-113; O. Táíwò, *Reconsidering Reparations: Worldmaking in the Case of Climate Crisis* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022), D. Voskoboinik, 'To fix the climate crisis, we must face up to our imperial past', *Open Democracy* (2018); J. Williams, *Climate Change Is Racist: Race, Privilege and the Struggle for Climate Justice*, (London, Icon Books, 2021).