Call for Proposals:
Unsettling Transpacific Ecologies

Association for Asian American Studies 38th Conference
April 8-11, 2021 (Seattle, WA)
Due Date for Proposals: October 2, 2020

This year’s conference theme encourages place-based inquiry, beginning with the settler colonial conditions under which our Association for Asian American Studies convenes in Seattle, Washington, on the ancestral lands of the Duwamish, Suquamish, Snoqualmie, Puyallup, Muckleshoot, Tulalip, and other Coast Salish peoples. The Pacific Northwest is storied land and has become a gathering place for not only many Asian Americans but also a diverse group of Pacific Islanders, including Native Hawaiians, Samoans, Chamorros, and growing numbers of Marshallese, Tongans, and Fijians.

We seek to “unsettle” the provenance of Asian American and Pacific Islander groupings, honoring the distinct routes and sometimes overlapping contexts of Asian American and Pacific Islander migrations to these shores. Unsettling the term “transpacific” in Asian American studies demands rethinking a majoritarian geopolitical outlook that replicates a fly-over model, problematically reductive of “the Pacific” to strategic military bases or isolated island living laboratories. Similarly, we want to bring decolonial analysis to the term “ecologies,” not only to acknowledge the historical interactions between the Age of Ecology and the Atomic Age, but also to thread together environmental, racial, and disability justice by considering the ways ecological vulnerability, “slow violence,” and “slow death” disproportionately affect the politically and financially disenfranchised.

By “unsettling transpacific ecologies,” we look to forms of solidarity that arise out of the histories of displacement, exploitation, and dispossession that form the substrate of racial capitalism and settler colonialism. What shifts when Asian American studies centers the Pacific? Instead of a politics that moves towards recognition and rights under the settler state, centering the Pacific allows us to access alternate social configurations and political solidarities that foreground Indigeneity. We look to other possible affiliations and alliances to trace the shape and limits of Asian American studies and Asian American subjectivity by continuing to question the U.S. state-centrism of “Asian America.” What might a politics grounded in deeper relation to the land, to the ocean, or to the more-than-human entail? How can we imagine ecological systems that account for connections and conflicts across national lines, gendered difference, sexual economies, and contradictory ontologies? To what extent might we understand our current climate crisis as fallout from extractive capitalism’s reliance on Native dispossession that disrupts human-nonhuman relations through water expropriation, the patenting of genetically modified seed, and the military targeting of ecosystems, for example. We write this CFP even as the COVID-19 pandemic reveals the inequities of this “unsustainable empire,” which is failing the poor, the homeless, the elderly, the undocumented, the incarcerated, people with
disabilities, gender non-conforming and queer folks, Indigenous, migrants, refugees, and racially subjugated communities, and the most precarious workers first.

So it is under these conditions that we call for papers, workshops, roundtables, and collaborative thinking that help us build and imagine more just and sustainable ways of being in relation with one another as well as with the planet. The term ecology might invoke environmental concerns, but it might also point to work that engages other interconnected systems across scales. We call for submissions that approach transpacific ecologies, either specifically or more broadly construed, from a range of disciplines, including but not limited to: Geography, History, Anthropology, Gender Studies, and Environmental Studies. The conference theme is meant to inspire contributors to connect fields or concepts across familiar divides.

We welcome proposals for panels, roundtables, individual papers, posters, films, and workshops that address but need not be limited to the following topics below:

- Disability and environmental health
- Queer diasporas and the settler state
- Pacific militarism and nuclear imperialism
- Pacific Islander sovereignty
- Critical ocean studies and “sea epistemologies”
- Racialized histories of environmental harm
- Digital placemaking and the settler state
- Trans studies and the transpacific
- Asian Americanist approaches to the more-than-human
- Affective regimes of settler nation-states
- Histories of Asian colonial occupation of Pacific Islands
- Property, possession, and other settler logics of ownership
- Surveillance and securitization and the study of ecosystems
- Carceral ecologies, dispossession through incarceration
- Decolonial approaches to “research” and methodology
- Performing transpacific solidarity and dissent
- Transpacific food sources, supply chains, and infrastructure
- Queer-feminist healing practices and decolonial joy
- Solidarity and environmental justice movements
- Archival ecologies
- Liberalism and environmental law
- Poetics, ecopoetics
- Biopolitics, environmental racism, and racial capitalism
- Islands, continents, and epistemological geographies
- Transpacific temporality, memory, and storytelling
*Please note that in 2021 AAAS will be offering the option to link up to three panels, roundtables, films, and workshops. Linked sessions present multiple approaches to a single theme or topic, thus allowing presenters and audience members to have extended discussions in a particular area.

Remember: You MUST be a current and active AAAS member of the calendar year in which you are submitting your proposal (so your membership must be active for the calendar year of 2020 in order to submit a proposal for 2021).

Please note that new memberships purchased in the late fall default to the next calendar year, as they do not officially start until January. You will not be able to submit proposals for the 2020 conference (as membership must be current for the calendar year in which you submit) unless you specifically request that your new membership starts for the year of 2019. **New memberships have a 3-5 day turnaround; please do not renew or request a new membership right before the proposal submission deadline as you will not receive your membership information in time.**

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