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Introduction. Palm Readings: More-Than-Human Tropical Histories



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The idea that tree rings help us understand past environments and places has captured the imagination of millions. Even people unfamiliar with dendrochronology, the scientific method of dating tree rings, are vaguely aware that tree rings offer historical insights. This association between trees and rings is often so strong that people imagine that all trees grow with rings. However, most tree rings are a result of a wintering period, when the vascular cambium (growth tissue) of a tree goes dormant and stops growing. Therefore, without winters, most trees do not grow rings consistently enough to serve as a proxy of climate data (Pérez-Ángel and Porter 2024). In more tropical climates, rainy seasons and droughts can leave behind tree rings, but they can occur less frequently and more invariably than a full winter freeze. In lieu of a dendrochronology of tropical trees, the authors in this Special Issue wonder: can palms – the quintessential tropical tree – offer a lens to imagine other environmental histories?

Areaceae is the only family in the palm order with over 190 genera and 2,450 known species. Fossil records indicate that the first species of *Arecales* began to emerge around eighty million years ago; by 56 million years ago, palms were abundant and widespread in the tropics. Being old and prominent parts of the vegetation in their habitats, makes palms critical species for understanding past tropical climates. They might not have winter rings, but many palm species live long lives with ages that can be determined by the length of time needed to produce a leaf and counting leaf scars (Kress 2025). Similar to tree rings caused by droughts and heavy rains, however, the rate of leaf development shifts with environmental factors and is not a constant proxy like a winter.

Yet palms remain full of surprises. Early twentieth-century botanists considered palms the ‘big game’ of the plant world, because they have long captivated scholars and writers, but researchers are still learning about palms and the environments they both reflect and generate (Bailey 1933). At the largest scale, palms connect countless tropical localities to the entire globe. At the micro scale, the aeration of palms’ breathing roots help make liveable worlds in waterlogged soils (Lloréns 2021). They are also keystone resources for pollinators. Botanists used to

think that palms were only wind-pollinated but we are now constantly surprised by the number of animals connected to palm ecologies. We now know that beetles, flies and bees can pollinate certain species and coconut palms (*Cocos nucifera*) are pollinated by both wind and insects. Bats are principal pollinators of *Calyptrogyne* in Costa Rica, African elephants disperse the seeds of wild date palms (*Phoenix reclinata*) and black bears disperse the seeds of several palms in Florida (Uhl and Dransfield 1987).

What else can we learn from reading palms and their relations to diverse places and species? What else can we learn from palms by listening to the communities who have lived with them for generations? For years, the climatic study of tree rings has ignored palms even though they grow in tropical regions experiencing the fastest rates of climate change. Recent collaborative investigations between tropical scientists and Afro-Colombian communities in the Chocó region are beginning to address this oversight. Together, community-driven research is starting to unravel the mysterious factors shaping tree ring formation in this rainy corner of the world (Giraldo et al. 2022, Pérez-Ángel and Porter 2024). In inspiration and in community, we as editors of this issue are humbled by the belief that we still have much to learn from palms so long as we listen to as many perspectives as possible, especially those rooted in the tropics, beyond the temperate gaze of dendrochronological normativity.

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Endemic to the tropics and subtropics, yet found in virtually every type of habitat from rainforests to swamps and deserts, palms are well-known and widely cultivated plant species. Whether one thinks of dates, coconuts, bananas, oil palms, sugar palms or sago palms, this diverse collective of perennial flowering plants, known within secular scientific taxonomies as the *Arecaceae* family, has sustained human subsistence, everyday material life and social, cultural and religious systems for millennia, while also contributing significantly to ecosystemic and biodiversity processes. At the same time, palm species' polyvalent functions have rendered them central to trajectories of trans-national and trans-continental trade, to colonial-driven market expansions, to racialised divisions of labour and human difference with plantation regimes, and to the global capillaries of contemporary agriculture-based

economies and supply chains. Many palm products find their way into the lives of everyday consumers today as ingredients in countless different commodities – sago pearls, coconut water, protein bars and the soaps, cosmetics and detergents that palm oil is a key component of, among others.

This special issue brings together early-career, mid-career and senior researchers from across the Global North and South, as well as practitioners including activists, artists and landscape architects, to consider palms through their global and more-than-human histories. Specifically, we ask: how do human and non-human entities (biotic and abiotic), relations and values coalesce within the bodies, careers and trajectories of palms as native species, cultivated cash crops and global commodities? What can a multi-disciplinary investigation of palm-human entanglements in the past reveal about these entanglements in the present, and for the future? How does thinking across disparate spatialities and temporalities help us uncover partial connections between palm lifeways and deathways in an age of ecological unmaking?

In addressing these and other key questions, this Special Issue contributes to multi-disciplinary perspectives on plants by drawing on our collective expertise in fields including science and technology studies, environmental history, multispecies studies, plant humanities, environmental anthropology, environmental science and biology. We bring to current conversations around plant-human futures a distinctly decolonial and practice-based approach, centring the voices of early and mid-career and senior researchers as well as practitioners from world-regions where palm species flourish. Many of our contributors are actively involved in grassroots or community-level advocacy, creative artistic practice, ecological revitalisation and knowledge preservation efforts, in support of sustainable, just and inclusive multispecies futures. The regional scope of the Special Issue contributions, which encompass the Americas, Southeast Asia and Africa, further offers a truly global perspective on more-than-human palm histories beyond Euro- and American-centric histories and their conjured peripheries.

In what follows, we identify and examine four cross-cutting themes that emerge across the contributions to this Special Issue. ‘Mobilities, Diasporas and Translocal Ecologies’ explores how palms move across places, empires, trade routes and migratory worlds, generating new ecological relations, cultural meanings and forms of belonging that

exceed fixed territorial boundaries. 'Palms as World-Makers Beyond Commodity Histories' examines palms not simply as economic resources or traded goods, but as active participants in shaping social worlds, ecological processes, sensory experiences, and more-than-human forms of life in the tropics. 'Enclosure, Extraction and Unequal Care' attends to the ways palm landscapes are transformed through regimes of accumulation, dispossession and environmental exploitation, while highlighting the gendered and uneven distribution of labour, maintenance, responsibility and care across human and more-than-human communities. 'Archives, Memory and Environmental Futures' considers how histories of palms are remembered, documented, narrated and contested across diverse archives and embodied forms of memory, and how these engagements open possibilities for imagining alternative environmental futures. We close by reflecting on plurality: in the variety of forms within the Special Issue, in the diverse positionalities represented by its contributors and in the invitation that this collection offers for future interdisciplinary and more-than-human research on palm-people relations, anchored in critical and creative comparison and dialogue, and generative of new ways of reading palms across commonality and difference.

MOBILITIES, DIASPORAS AND TRANSLOCAL ECOLOGIES

Several contributions to this Special Issue approach palms as mobile, historical actors that are continually remade through their situated encounters with people, infrastructures, environments and power (Tsing 2015, Crosby 2004, West 2012, Demuth 2019). Central to these contributions is the question of how exactly palms move, and how these movements generate new ecological and historical formations. In addressing this question, the contributions push against the notion that palms remain unchanged as they are carried across oceans, transplanted into new political economies and embedded into new cosmologies. Rather, palms enter new relations as they move that alter their biocultural meanings, material forms, environmental functions and multispecies futures (Hernandez 2022, Schiebinger 2004, Watkins 2021).

Javier Carrera's essay on the peach palm (*Bactris gasipaes*) offers perhaps the deepest historical timescale of palm mobility. Rather than treating movement as a colonial-era phenomenon, the essay

reconstructs peach palm as an Indigenous technology of circulation across the tropical Americas. Originating through domestication in the southwestern Amazon, the species spread through western Amazonia toward Central America, undergoing multiple secondary domestication events as cultivated populations interbred with local wild varieties. Movement therefore appears not as diffusion but as an ongoing process of genetic and cultural transformation. Importantly, these movements generated new ecological formations. As Indigenous communities selectively propagated and dispersed peach palm, they simultaneously reshaped forests themselves, producing anthropogenic landscapes structured through long histories of perennial cultivation. The ecological effects extended beyond humans: surplus fruits supported wild animal populations and sustained hunting systems linking cultivated and forest ecologies. In contemporary Ecuador, peach palm continues to act as a mobile ecological actor through regenerative agroforestry systems, where companion planting, microbial relations and biodiversity transform disease ecologies and restore ecological resilience.

If Carrera's essay foregrounds Indigenous domestication and landscape-making, Gbenga Adesina and Case Watkins's contribution shifts attention to diaspora and forced movement. Their photo-essay asks what happens when a palm moves alongside enslaved peoples? It shows how the African oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis* Jacq.) became part of an emergent more-than-human diaspora. This African diaspora, the authors argue, has always been ecological, composed not only of humans but also of plants, seeds, foodways, cosmologies and practices that crossed oceans together. Transported from West and Central Africa to Brazil through histories of enslavement and colonial violence, the palm became something new in Bahia. Its oils entered Afro-Brazilian cuisines, its groves reshaped coastal landscapes and its presence became embedded in language through the term *dendê*, marking things as simultaneously African and Bahian. Dense groves of *dendazeiros* naturalised across forests, roadsides, mangrove margins and domestic spaces, becoming central to Afro-Brazilian identities and practices. Through imagery of estuaries, mangroves and 'transatlantic rootings', the essay reconceives diaspora as an ecological process in which mobility itself becomes a form of dwelling and the basis for new Atlantic worlds.

Theresa Ventura's contribution offers a different model of mobility that is structured through empire, infrastructure and capitalism.

In the Philippines, coconut palms move primarily through processes of extraction and development. Ventura uses the concept of the crop-scape to show how coconuts become global through assemblages of plants, labour, finance, architecture, state power and colonial science. The Coconut Palace in Manila became a powerful symbol of this process. Constructed under the Marcos regime (1965–1986) and built materially and ideologically around coconut, the building condensed histories of development, export agriculture, international lending and nationalist aspiration. Coconut trunks became columns, shells became ornament and development research became architectural spectacle. Yet this mobility remade the palm as much as it spread it. Coconut was transformed from a locally embedded multipurpose species into an export commodity routed through multinational supply chains. Colonial agricultural institutions, penal colonies, plantation infrastructures and industrial chemistry progressively translated coconut into copra, glycerin, charcoal and eventually even military technologies like napalm. The coconut's movement from village subsistence to global commodity thus altered what the palm could become.

Throughout these contributions, palms emerge as generators of translocal ecologies, or ecological worlds constituted through movement across regions, oceans, empires, and generations. This movement rarely left palms unchanged. Peach palm becomes domesticated and ecologically generative through Indigenous mobility. African oil palm becomes diasporic and relational through Atlantic crossings. Coconut becomes infrastructural and extractive through colonial capitalism. Palms, then, make and remake global worlds. Mobility becomes the very process through which palms, people, landscapes, and futures are continually co-produced. At the same time, the contributions resist treating movement as frictionless circulation or abstract connectivity. Mobility appears as uneven, contested and historically situated, enabled through some relations while foreclosing others (Tsing 2005, Soluri 2005, Grove 1995). Palms move through cultivation, enslavement, trade, displacement and ecological adaptation, generating new forms of attachment alongside new forms of loss. In this sense, palm mobility brings us to consider how movement transforms the conditions of life itself and generates new possibilities for inhabiting and relating to more-than-human worlds.

PALMS AS WORLD-MAKERS BEYOND COMMODITY HISTORIES

A second recurring motif within this Special Issue is the attempt to move beyond reading palms as commodities or extractive resources – oil, timber, fruit or profit – and instead understanding them as world-makers, or beings that participate in creating forms of attachment, sociality, territory, memory and collective survival (Kimmerer 2014, Kohn 2013, Carney and Rosomoff 2011). Rather than reducing palms to units of value or exchange, the essays within this theme foreground the relationships, practices, temporalities and ethical commitments through which people and palms co-produce one another.

Vanessa Villegas Solórzano's contribution offers a clear example of this conceptual shift. Paralleling Carrera's essay, Villegas Solórzano present the Chonta or peach palm not as an agricultural crop but as a material and symbolic infrastructure of Afro-descendant life across the Pacific coastlands of Colombia, Ecuador and Panama. Its fruit, *chontaduro*, is food at the same time as it is memory and belonging: 'the taste of home', or an embodied connection to territory, ancestry and collective identity. Eating *chontaduro* becomes a practice through which attachments to place are renewed across time and movement. Yet food is only one way the palm makes worlds. The same tree provides the wood for the *chonta marimba*, a foundational instrument in Afro-Pacific musical traditions. Marimba music accompanies births, celebrations, mourning and everyday life, linking generations through sound and ritual. Its rhythms sustain both bodies and social worlds, producing memory and continuity. The plant exceeds its functional utility, embodying a spiritual connector and marker of territorial identity. Through Afro-descendant histories of movement and settlement in the Chocó region, palms emerge as infrastructures through which worlds of inheritance, belonging and *vivir sabroso* (a spiritual notion of wellness linked to territory and identity), endure.

A different but complementary argument appears in Cavalcanti Ribas Vieira's article, which challenges environmental narratives bent on reducing oil palm to a destructive plantation crop. Without denying the violence of agribusiness expansion in the past and present, Vieira argues that such framings obscure longer histories of relation between African communities and oil palms and flatten diverse palm worlds into a single

extractive narrative. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in the Mayombe forest region of Central Africa, the contribution develops the concepts of ephemeral and territorialised plants to show how palms become embedded in local worlds over time. The category *dííba yoómbe* refers to semi-wild palms understood as emerging with and belonging to Yoómbe communities. These palms are neither plantations nor untouched nature but exist through relationships among humans, forests, spirits and land. Palm products such as *mwuambe* sauce, palm wine and palm oil sustain kinship and everyday life. Oral stories position palms within cyclical time, where life, death and renewal unfold together. Against plantation temporality – linear and extractive – the Mayombe palm world remains relational, situated and continually renewed through localized systems of value and reciprocity.

Read together, the contributions under this theme uncover how palms actively shape how communities imagine belonging, continuity, and flourishing under conditions of movement, environmental uncertainty, and historical change. Across these palm readings, trees appear as active participants in making worlds. They nourish bodies and memories, anchor identities and territories, sustain rituals and economies, mediate relationships across generations, and create possibilities for collective futures. To think beyond commodity histories is therefore to recognise that palms enter worlds of market value at the same time as they create worlds of attachment, kinship, identity and survival (Anderson 2005, Head and Atchison 2009, Nazarea 2005, Miller 2019). Rather than emerging primarily through exchange, accumulation or productivity, value appears through practices of care, inheritance, reciprocity and coexistence. Palms are foundations and substrates of possibility for particular forms of life. They gather people together, organise temporal rhythms, transmit knowledge and sustain ethical obligations across generations. Their significance lies not only in what they produce materially but in the relations they enable and maintain.

ENCLOSURE, EXTRACTION AND UNEQUAL CARE

A third connective tissue within this Special Issue centres palms through their histories of uneven flourishing and the unequal regimes of power through which some palm ecologies are protected and invested in while

others are enclosed, exhausted, abandoned or rendered disposable. Contributions engaging with this theme demonstrate that palms become sites where value is patchily distributed across landscapes, bodies, species and communities (Tsing et al. 2019, Chao 2022, Rudge 2023, Li and Semedi 2021). They demonstrate how celebrated narratives of progress and growth tethered to commodified palms also depend upon the enclosure of Indigenous lands, the depletion of workers' time and energy and the exclusionary allocation of scientific and institutional care.

Alice Rudge's contribution situates oil palm expansion within a much longer history of frontier-making in Malaysia. She argues that oil palm inherited and intensified older colonial technologies of enclosure. Drawing on ethnographic work with Batek communities in Pahang, Rudge's contribution begins with the recurring statement: 'we have no place to run to now', capturing how once-mobile forest dwellers have become increasingly confined by shrinking forests and expanding plantations. To explain this condition, Rudge traces how Pahang was historically constructed as a frontier requiring intervention and control. Colonial land codes, forest reserves, mining concessions, agricultural estates and wildlife parks progressively territorialised land and reorganised populations. This reveals how oil palm did not create enclosure but rather emerged through earlier infrastructures of extraction and governance. During the Emergency, resettlement, chemical defoliation, movement restrictions and food controls further intensified these processes. Oil palm is thus reframed as the latest expression of long-standing and layered histories of enclosure whose flourishing depended on rendering some landscapes and communities disposable.

If Rudge foregrounds territorial enclosure, Perdana Roswally shifts attention to the gendered body as a site of naturalised and invisibilised extraction, arguing that plantation economies depend both on the dispossession of land and on the dispossession of workers' capacities to reproduce and sustain life. Her contribution opens with Maria, an Indonesian plantation worker who questions whether repeated miscarriages resulted from years of spraying agrochemicals. Maria's experience reveals a broader pattern in which women disproportionately bear toxic exposure while remaining structurally invisible within plantation labour regimes. Women are commonly employed as temporary workers responsible for spraying pesticides and fertilisers under intense heat and limited protection. Drawing on feminist political ecology, Roswally

maintains that agrochemical exposure must be understood well beyond an occupational hazard, as a political condition through which plantation productivity is sustained. Women experience bodily dispossession, where reproductive capacities, health and longevity become extractable resources. Miscarriages, toxic contamination, chronic illness and unpaid labour are the conditions of production rather than its side-effects. Extraction thus exceeds economics when it is experienced and lived as embodied, ecological, and intergenerational.

Andres Caicedo's contribution turns from extraction to differential regimes of care. Working in Tumaco on Colombia's Pacific coast, he examines how oil palm and coconut palm experience radically unequal forms of protection, repair and recognition despite facing comparable ecological crises. The ethnographic entry point is the *picudo negro* – the South American palm weevil – blamed for transmitting two diseases affecting both oil palm and coconut: bud rot and red ring, respectively. Yet, while bud rot disease threatening oil palm has generated extensive scientific research, institutional intervention and financial investment, red ring disease affecting coconut has received little support. Coconut growers describe enduring repeated epidemics without recognition or assistance. As one farmer explains: 'oil palm has godfathers; coconut doesn't have mourners'. Caicedo argues that this uneven care is racialised. Oil palm is framed as modern, productive and nationally valuable, while coconut cultivation – associated with Black peasant livelihoods – is represented as backward and scientifically deficient. Black ecological knowledge is marginalised even as growers consistently connect disease emergence to deforestation and plantation expansion. Scientific infrastructures mobilise to save oil palm while allowing coconut worlds to disappear.

These contributions tack back and forth between palm species that receive investment, protection and futures, and palm species that are enclosed, exhausted or abandoned. These unequal histories and flourishing unfold across disparate territories, bodies and species. Palm histories are therefore also histories of whose lives, landscapes and worlds are deemed worthy of sustaining or sacrificing (Chao, Bolender and Kirksey 2022, Haraway 2008, Oliveira and Hecht 2016, Reinert 2016, Porter 2021). Importantly, the contributions show that inequality and injustice are not accidental or incidental to palm economies but rather constitutive of them. Enclosure, for instance, depends on the selective allocation of mobility and belonging. Extraction relies on rendering certain bodies

expendable. Care operates based on decisions around which ecologies deserve repair and which can be left to decline. At the same time, the contributions refuse purely victimising accounts. They reveal how communities on the ground continue to contest enclosure, endure abandonment and articulate alternative forms of relation and value (Moulton and Harris 2025, Davis et al. 2019, Tammisto 2024). Palm histories thus become a lens through which to examine the political ecology of survival itself: how worlds are disrupted but also how decisions are continually made about which worlds are allowed and enabled to endure.

ARCHIVES, MEMORY AND ENVIRONMENTAL FUTURES

A final recurring motif within the Special Issue frames palms as living archives and speculative futures – as material witness through which knowledges are stor(i)ed, histories transmitted, memories sustained and pathways for environmental and social renewal imagined (Leal 2018, Montgomery 2026). Contributions engaging with this theme shift environmental history away from documenting what has been lost and toward asking how palms continue to orient collective horizons of promise and possibility. Across manuscript traditions, ecological restoration and poetic memory, palms emerge as media through which worlds persist and are continually remade.

Shruthi Kumar's contribution resists treating archives as fixed repositories, showing instead how palm leaves became dynamic materialities in preserving and renewing medical knowledge across generations in Tamil Nadu. Siddha medicine – one of South India's oldest medical traditions – circulated largely through oral transmission and was marginalised under colonial regimes that privileged Ayurveda and Sanskrit textual traditions. Palm-leaf manuscripts became one of the few means through which Siddha could document itself and assert scientific legitimacy. Crucially, the archive itself is framed by Kumar as recursive rather than permanent. Original manuscripts no longer survive, and the knowledge they contained endured thanks to repeated acts of copying onto new leaves before older manuscripts deteriorated and were ritually destroyed. Preservation therefore depended on continual renewal rather than permanence. Palm leaves themselves functioned as technologies of care, with palmyra and talipot leaves undergoing elaborate

preparation through drying, boiling, oiling, fumigation and chemical treatment to extend their lifespan. These practices reveal that archives constitute more than neutral containers of information and instead operate as living infrastructures, sustained through labour, expertise and material stewardship across generations.

Alejandro Solano, Pilar Egüez Guevara and Agustina Arcos' contribution pivots to palms as archives of ecological possibility. Working in Ecuador's Chocó Andino Biosphere Reserve, the authors describe a fifteen-year restoration project that treats palms as active agents in building regenerative futures. At Mashpi Shungo Reserve, eighteen native and exotic palm species have been integrated into agroforestry systems alongside hundreds of other plants using approaches such as successional agroforestry, analogue forestry and syntropic agriculture. Rather than excluding introduced species, restoration becomes an experimental practice of assembling resilient landscapes. The contribution focuses especially on *Bactris gasipaes* (*chontaduro*), commonly cultivated elsewhere through extractive monocultures for palm heart production. At Mashpi Shungo, the authors resisted this model by allowing palms to mature within diverse agroforestry systems, generating shade, nutrient cycling, fruit production and habitat for wildlife. Abundant fruit production redirected local fauna away from cacao crops, illustrating how palms reorganise ecological relations and reshape patterns of multispecies coexistence over time. Restoration therefore becomes a future-oriented environmental practice grounded in long histories of palm use and care.

The final contribution, Paolo Realpe Mina's poem and lullaby 'La Chucula', turns from institutional and ecological archives to intimate forms of memory. The poem centres a drink made from *chontaduro*, coconut milk and plantain, but its concern does not lie primarily with culinary instructions. Rather, the poem transforms the palm into a vehicle of inheritance and continuity through repetition, rhythm, and everyday language. Repeated lines – 'I used to drink it when I was a child', 'my uncle also had it', 'all the children had it' – situate palm within intergenerational memory and locate history within ordinary acts of preparation and consumption. The repeated substitutions of *chontaduro*, *chonta*, *chontilla* and *chapil* point to continuity through adaptation as ingredients change but the practice endures, and as memory survives through forms of improvisation and repetition. The lullaby form further

positions the palm as something carried forward through voice, collective care and everyday intimacy, turning nourishment into a practice of remembering and, thus, preserving intangible cultural heritage. Palms are reimagined in the poem as an edible archive through which childhood, kinship, neighbourhood and historical continuity remain alive and continue to nourish future generations.

Across these contributions, palms do far more than just preserve the past and record environmental histories. Palm leaves carry medical knowledge into uncertain futures. Palm restoration efforts reactivate ecological possibilities. Palm songs and recipes transmit memory through everyday practice. In the process, palms act as vegetal compasses, geared towards particular environmental futures, and with and through which communities imagine continuity, enact care and cultivate worlds yet to come (Leal 2018, Watkins 2021). Palm archives, meanwhile, are reimagined as material, ecological and embodied processes that require continual acts of renewal, interpretation, and transmission. Palm leaves must be copied and preserved. Restored landscapes must be cultivated and adapted. Songs must be sung and recipes repeatedly prepared. In each case, continuity emerges through practice rather than permanence, as environmental futures are fashioned through inherited forms of knowledge, care, and relation that remain open to transformation. Within these dynamics, palms are positioned as witnesses to historical worlds and as companions in the creation of worlds to come.

PLURALITY AS PRACTICE AND INVITATION

We close this Introduction with a word on plurality, which we approach as both analytical concern and as editorial practice. Aligning with *Plant Perspectives'* commitment to making space for scholarship that exceeds disciplinary boundaries, extends beyond the academy and enables more participatory forms of knowledge production, this collection features a combination of conventional peer-reviewed scholarly articles, non-scholarly essays, a photo-essay, poetry and book reviews. Deliberately bringing together different genres of writing, modes of inquiry and forms of knowing reflects a central proposition of the collection: that palms exceed any single method, archive, discipline, or language. To write global and more-than-human histories of palms requires

approaches attentive not only to political economy, environmental change and historical process, but also to memory, affect, embodiment, aesthetics, sensory experience and lived relation. Different forms make different things visible, and different genres create distinct possibilities for encountering palms as historical actors, ecological companions and participants in world-making.

Across this Issue, scholarly articles trace plantation expansion, labour regimes, ecological restoration, mobility, enclosure and more-than-human relations through ethnographic, historical and analytical methods. Non-scholarly essays create space for practice, reflection, synthesis and conceptual experimentation, foregrounding palms as archives, ecological actors and future-making beings. The photo-essay mobilises image, texture, and juxtaposition to explore diasporic ecologies and vegetal intimacies in ways that exceed conventional textual narration. Poetry turns to rhythm, repetition and sensory language to evoke inheritance, memory and everyday relations with palms. A book review extends these conversations by situating the collection within broader intellectual and political debates in environmental humanities and plant studies. This plurality of form matters because it unsettles hierarchies around what counts as evidence, argument, and knowledge. Rather than separating creative and scholarly practices, the Special Issue treats them as mutually generative.

Plurality also characterises the spectrum of positionalities that are represented in this Special Issue. As editors, we bring different cultural, disciplinary, geographical and professional trajectories that inform how we approach palms and the worlds they sustain. Anthropologist Sophie Chao (French/Chinese descent, living and working on unceded Gadigal Country, Australia) engages in her scholarship with questions of multispecies justice, extractivism, Indigenous worlds and more-than-human politics in the Asia-Pacific region. Environmental historian Jayson Maurice Porter (US Black American, living and working on the former plantation zones built on unceded Piscataway land, now called Washington, DC, USA) contributes to historical and environmental perspectives that are attentive to mobility, political ecology and the *longue durée* of ecological transformation in Mexico. Anthropologist and film-maker Pilar Egúez Guevara (Ecuadorian, latina, mestiza working in between Ecuador, Cuba and the United States, what once was called Abya-Yala) brings a commitment to food sovereignty, restoration

practice and environmental stewardship grounded in Ecuadorian landscapes and lived engagement with cultural heritage preservation and regenerative futures. Together, our different trajectories have shaped the Special Issue as an evolving conversation across methods, regions, careers and commitments.

These differences extend across the contributing authors. The Special Issue features scholars and practitioners working across anthropology, environmental humanities, history, geography, ecology, agronomy, plant studies, medicine, literary practice and artistic production. Contributors write from and with different regional contexts including South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, West and Central Africa and trans-oceanic worlds. Their contributions draw on archives, ethnography, restoration practice, oral traditions, poetry, visual methods, historical analysis and creative experimentation. Equally important, contributors occupy different career stages and institutional locations, from established scholars to emerging voices and practitioners working across and beyond academic settings. Such differences are not incidental to the project but constitutive of it. Bringing these positionalities together creates fertile conditions for comparison, friction, translation and unexpected resonance, foregrounding plurality as the method through which this collection thinks and seeks to stimulate thought.

Ultimately, we hope this Special Issue will be taken up as an invitation to pluralise perspectives, methods, scales and forms of engagement with palm worlds. This ethos aligns closely with *Plant Perspectives'* commitment to amplifying interdisciplinary plant studies and exploring plant–human interactions across spatial, temporal and cultural contexts. Throughout the Issue, plants remain centre stage as actors that shape movements, memories, infrastructures, ecologies, livelihoods and futures, and as analytical companions through which broader questions of life, history and coexistence might be reimagined. We hope that this collection fosters further interdisciplinary, collaborative, cross-regional and translocal research on palm lifeworlds and deathworlds – research that attends both to local specificity and global entanglement while questioning that very distinction, that reimagines more-than-human histories of palms across different yet interconnected sites, scales and subjects, and that unearths in these pasts new possibilities for multispecies futures and multispecies justice to gain ground and grow (Gumbs 2008).

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