Relations
BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

12.1
June 2024

Decolonial Animal Ethics and Indigenous Philosophies

Edited by Francesco Allegri

Studies and Research Contributions

Comments, Debates, Reports and Interviews

Profitization

Ignoring the Ones Who Came First

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.7358/rela-2024-01-dama

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ABSTRACT

This essay critiques the Western colonial ideology of exploiting natural resources for profit and its detrimental impact on ecosystems and Indigenous communities. It advocates for recognizing the rights of non-human entities, exemplified by the Magpie River in Quebec, which was granted legal personhood. I contrast the Western profit-driven worldview with Indigenous ontologies, which emphasize the intrinsic value of nature and its interconnectedness with human and other-than-human entities. The paper explores how Indigenous perspectives challenge the commodification of land and water, advocating for a more harmonious and sustainable coexistence. I draw on the concept of "Pluriverse Worlding", which recognizes multiple ways of understanding the world and rejects the Western "One-World World" mentality that imposes anthropocentric dominance. By adopting Indigenous ontologies, the paper argues, we can protect ecosystems and counter the profit-driven mindset. The paper also critiques the Western legal system's failure to adequately protect the environment, emphasizing the need to incorporate Indigenous worldviews into environmental protection laws. This shift requires embracing Indigenous knowledge systems, fostering dialogue between Indigenous and Western perspectives. Through legal, philosophical, and practical strategies, the paper emphasizes the importance of safeguarding ecosystems and other-than-human entities for the benefit of the planet and humanity.

Keywords: anthropocentric dominance; decolonization; environmental justice; indigenous ontologies; legal personhood; Magpie River; other-than-human entities; pluriverse worlding; profitization; western colonialism.

Western colonial ideology has become universalized in its exploitation of the globe as a method for generating profit. I aim to demonstrate how other-than-human entities, like the Magpie River in Quebec, have rights that are distinct from those of a human subject. The movement of water as a basis to consider differing socio-political relations will illustrate why these entities have intrinsic value apart from human profit. I will examine

the philosophical and practical strategies that can be implemented to protect other-than-human entities. This will include Indigenous ontologies that are linked to post-humanist discourse such as the abolishment of the colonization worldview of anthropocentric dominance.

Indeed, I aim to illustrate how further installments of other-than-human rights ought to be implemented to protect the ecosystems and preserve the balance of our planet. To reinforce this assertion, I will exemplify the repercussions of ignoring environmental warnings using the science fiction narrative of *Princess Mononoke*. Utilizing the Indigenous ontology of Pluriverse Worlding, I will demonstrate how embracing these modes of thinking can transcend the commodification of other-than-human entities for profit.

I want to note that this does not mean the removal of all systems since we, like all animals, have a right to clean drinking water and land. Instead, I will show how mass corruption and global gigantism affect our communities when we view the world as a means to an end. I will investigate the inherent value of other-than-human entities – value that is not merely recognized but actively safeguarded – promoting a sustainable coexistence that goes beyond the limited objective of human profit.

Additionally, it is essential to clarify that I do not presume to speak on behalf of any Indigenous communities, nor do I intend to patronize or overshadow Indigenous voices. Rather, my aim is to use this essay as a platform to challenge the prevailing Western colonial ideologies that have long dictated our worldview. I seek to demonstrate through Indigenous narratives how we can shift away from these perspectives and embrace alternative ways of understanding the world around us.

I aim to adopt the formatting of Indigenous writing as a deliberate choice for this essay. Instead of adhering to traditional paragraphs and formatting, I intend to express my thoughts in a manner that reflects the fluidity and spontaneity of Indigenous writing methods akin to the style found in works like *The Cacophiliacs*. Indeed, I will illustrate my thinking as it comes to me rather than separate each paragraph as dictated by Western modes of writing. Through this format, I hope to honor Indigenous ways of knowing and challenge dominant narratives that prioritize Western modes of communication. Afterward, I will ensure that I have included evidence to juxtapose this perspective. This is crucial to avoid merely presenting a stream of consciousness and instead provide substance to my arguments.

I have chosen to adopt this approach to highlight the stark contrast between Westernized profit-driven ideologies and the interconnectedness

emphasized by Indigenous ontologies. By creating my version of Westernized profit-driven ideologies I will illustrate the direct harm it inflicts on ecosystems and Indigenous communities. Through this narrative, I aim to underscore the direct harm inflicted on ecosystems and Indigenous communities by prioritizing profit over environmental and cultural preservation.

Consequently, I define *profitization* as the means of viewing objects, things, or land to obtain a benefit of some kind regardless of the harm it may cause. Consider the example of damming a river to construct a new community center upstream. While this action may result in the loss of wildlife, habitats and access to clean drinking water, the potential financial gains from the community center project are prioritized. In this scenario, the degradation of the river and its ecosystem is justified as acceptable collateral damage in pursuit of profit. This serves as an illustration of the settler colonial mindset, where profit is prioritized over environmental and social well-being.

In the work "Disabling Bodies of/and Land: Reframing Disability Justice in Conversation with Indigenous Theory and Activism", the authors illustrate how settler colonial programs contribute significantly to the socioeconomic conditions that result in disability. This emphasizes the direct harm inflicted by profitization on both the land and its inhabitants, regardless of the consequences.

This work highlights how the prioritization of capital accumulation, as manifested in settler colonial practices such as land theft, has been largely overlooked within mainstream disability studies scholarship.

It emphasizes the inseparable connection between these practices and the disablement of Indigenous ontology, bodies, and communities (Jaffee *et al*. 2018, 1408). We not only harm the land, but we also extract from the bodies that safeguard it.

This reinforces the argument that other-than-human entities are exploited to serve the profit-driven settler colonial mindset. This is because "the framing of settler coloniality as 'disabling land' is intended to foreground that the settler colonial structure is inherently counter to disability justice; disablement of peoples goes hand in hand with settler land theft and degradation" (Jaffee *et al*. 2018, 1423). The article elucidates how "settlers do to the land what they do to the peoples of the land" (*ibid*., 1416). As settlers continue to exploit the land and its resources through profitization, they perpetuate a cycle of harm that disproportionately affects Indigenous communities and reinforces systems of oppression.

Profit-driven ideology has often served as the driving force behind Western colonization objectives. Due to this, land, and bodies of water, have been systematically destroyed for financial benefit. "Disabling Bodies of/and Land" illustrates how settler coloniality systematically ignores land theft as a means to displace Indigenous protectors. This continued cycle of injustice has disproportionately impacted Indigenous groups and raised environmental concerns. More specifically, this style of colonialism "targets the natural-resource-rich territories or rural and remote wastelands of Indigenous peoples worldwide" (Mascarenhas 2007). This manifestation of colonial takeover exemplifies the dominance exerted by Western ideology over Indigenous lands. This perspective seeks to exploit the land's resources while disregarding Indigenous voices that highlight the destructive impact of settler colonial practices on the environment.

These practices can be seen in various examples of Western profitization such as expansions of pipelines through Indigenous lands, the abuse of clean drinking water, and expansion for the sole purpose of economic gain. The disabling of land, whether through environmental degradation or appropriation, has served as a cornerstone of settler colonialism and a crucial driver of capitalist expansion. This is perpetuated by profit-driven ideologies that have seized control of Indigenous lands.

Furthermore, there exists a significant gap in our understanding of Indigenous ontologies. Despite the depth of Indigenous knowledge systems, they have often been marginalized or dismissed within mainstream discourse. This knowledge gap perpetuates the dominance of Western colonial perspectives and inhibits meaningful engagement with alternative ways of knowing and being. Addressing this gap requires a concerted effort to amplify Indigenous voices, recognize the validity of Indigenous ontologies, in broader conversations about decolonization and environmental stewardship.

Indeed, First Nations "struggle for the recognition of cultural identity and Indigenous knowledge within a culture of hyper-capitalism" (Mascarenhas 2007). This perspective illustrates how the Western ideas of profitization view other-than-human entities merely as a means to an end, disregarding their inherent value and the interconnectedness between land and Indigenous cultures.

This can be seen in the example of Lake Tahoe and Lovewell Pond. The "increased sediment and pollution – as a result of development – fuel the growth of algae, which absorb light and increase the water's tem-

perature [...] Lovewell pond – was visible to one hundred and two feet; in 2006, the lake's visibility was reduced to sixty-seven feet" (Royte 202).

The harm inflicted upon these bodies of water stemmed from development pursued for profit. This Western colonial ideology persistently disregards the sacredness of the natural world, opting instead to exploit and consume it rather than prioritize its preservation.

Why? For the sake of profitization.

Further, neglecting the relationship between Indigenous communities and the movement of water, in particular, not only harms the environment but also perpetuates the marginalization and oppression of Indigenous peoples. The case of Lake Tahoe and Lovewell Pond exemplifies how Westernized views prioritize the profitization of land, stripping away cultural identities and focusing solely on profitability. This disregard for land and water reflects a mindset that values it solely for its potential for human profit, rather than recognizing its intrinsic worth as a vital entity.

Instead, we ought to reconnect our views of nature, and in this case, the movement of water, back to Indigenous ontologies. Settler colonialism has ingrained in us the belief that we must exploit and harm the world to fulfill our desires, rather than appreciating and respecting the abundance it offers. In contrast, Indigenous modes of thinking empower us to safeguard the land, recognizing water as the lifeblood of the world within Indigenous ontology. The Oneida First Nation illustrates the connection between Native culture and water, emphasizing its intrinsic importance.

> We give thanks to the water because it gives life to everything. The actual word in Iroquois language in Onieda is 'ohnekanus.' [...] It is a spiritual thing. It is not just H2O. It is not just the chemical composition of it. There is more to it than that because it makes our plants grow, it sustains our life, it sustains the animals we use and the plants, and the fish. So, I think it is a totally different outlook [from non-Natives]. (Mascarenhas 2007)

Here, the Indigenous perspective on water underscores the critical importance of safeguarding this fundamental aspect of our planet. Indigenous ontologies highlight how, in our pursuit of profit, we have systematically dismantled crucial elements of the world. By polluting waterways for economic gain, we consistently prioritize human interests over the well-being of the planet. This sustains anthropocentric dominance and neglects our responsibility to steward the Earth.

When used in reference to environmental ethics, anthropocentric dominance refers to the viewpoint that human values come first and that other living things are merely tools for achieving human goals (Kopnina 2018). This demonstrates how the perception that humans hold greater significance than other beings amplify the greed associated with profit-seeking endeavors, instead of prioritizing the protection of the land that has supported us. Ultimately, we ought to use Indigenous ontologies to abolish anthropocentric dominance to further the installments of other-than-human rights as a means to protect the ecosystems.

Initiating this transformation involves altering our perception away from Western colonial profit-driven ideologies. We ought to rewrite the narrative from its inception, drawing upon Indigenous stories to forge a more meaningful connection to land and water. This can be seen in the story of "Educating in the Seventh Fire: Debwewin, Mino-bimaadiziwin, and Ecological Justice":

> "I am sending a strange new creature to live among you", [the Creator] told the Animal People. "He is to be called Man and he is to be your brother. But unlike you he will have no fur on his body, will walk on two legs and will not be able to speak with you. Because of this he will need your help in order to survive and become who I am creating him to be. You will need to be more than brothers and sisters, you will need to be his teachers. [...] But to help him I am going to send him out into the world with one very special gift. I am going to give him the gift of the knowledge of Truth and Justice. But like his identity it must be a search, because if he finds this knowledge too easily he will take it for granted. So I am going to hide it and I need your help to find a good hiding-place. [...] Where should I hide this gift?". "Put it inside them", said the Mole. "Put it inside them because then only the wisest and purest of heart will have the courage to look there". And that is where the Creator placed the gift of the knowledge of Truth and Justice. (Kruse 2019, 587)

This illustrates the significance of viewing the world as our teacher rather than a mere tool for profitable gain. Indigenous ontology emphasizes the notion that we should learn from the land and seek knowledge of truth and justice through it. By embarking on an inward journey and engaging in introspection, we can uncover the gift bestowed upon us by the Creator. This exemplifies the importance of shifting our perspective and embracing Indigenous ontologies to cultivate a deeper understanding and connection with the world beyond profitization.

However, westernized colonialism has inflicted a different perspective. It does not encourage us to embark on an inward journey; instead,

it prompts us to focus outwardly on exploiting the world for profit. This mindset has rendered the narrative within "The Seventh Fire" obsolete. However, as a community, we must transcend this greed and turn inward, reflecting on our inner journey. By embracing Indigenous ontology, we can begin to use the world in alignment with its intended purpose.

- Brothers
- Sisters
- Teachers

"The Seventh Fire" illustrates that we possess the inherent knowledge of truth and justice. It is imperative that we harness this gift from Indigenous ontologies and put it into action. By adopting both philosophical and practical approaches aimed at the preservation of other-than-human entities, we will fulfill our role as stewards of the Earth, utilizing our gifts in accordance with the Creator's intentions. This emphasizes the importance of embracing Indigenous modes of thinking to guide our actions and foster a more harmonious relationship with the world around us.

More specifically, the conversation regarding land protection and other-than-human entities is constantly overlooked when considering an Indigenous point of view. This is especially noticeable in the case of the Magpie River. The Magpie River's recognition marks the start of a global campaign to acknowledge rivers and ecosystems as organisms with intrinsic value and the right to exist, rather than just resources for human exploitation (CPAWS.SNAP 2022). In 2009-2013, prior to the river gaining personhood, Hydro-Québec targeted the river for a hydroelectric "complex" that would churn out some 850 MWh, enough electricity to power roughly 290,000 homes (Nerberg 2022). This project would see the natural flowing river dammed which would cause significant harm to wildlife and Indigenous communities for the sake of profit.

- Dammed
- For the sake of profit
- Profit

Innu activist, poet and educator Rita Mestokosho speaks the story of Mutehekau Shipu (spelled in different dialects of Innu-aimun), also known as the Magpie River.

> I've heard this chant before, especially in the time since humans with pale faces and neckties started coming to these forests with plans to divert me and other rivers. They said it was for progress. But for me, my progression was

> slowed down the moment they led me into that concrete box with sluices. Who is she pleading with, this sister? Then I hear it. She's singing a healing chant – for me, the river – for all of us, for the planet. (Nerberg 2022)

- Brothers
- Sisters
- Teachers

She continues and states:

> we've always known the river is alive. Our ancestors have always said that. The river is like the blood that runs in our veins. If the river is sick, we will also be sick. That's why we need to protect her. (Nerberg 2022)

This illustrates an alternative view from the profit-driven mindset of the West. Here, Indigenous communities aim to save ecosystems not only for their own sake but also because they recognize their inherent worth beyond human avarice.

- Water is our lifeblood

Further, freshwater ecosystems are quickly becoming some of the most endangered on the planet, resulting in animal populations shrinking at a rate twice as fast as those in the sea or on land (Benner 2024). This illustrates the need to protect these ecosystems beyond the purpose of profitization. In February 2021, the residents of Ekuanitshit and the regional municipality made history by jointly declaring legal personhood and rights for the Magpie River (*ibid*.). This groundbreaking resolution, the first of its kind in Canada, was established to protect the river and its surrounding ecosystems, ensuring their preservation and well-being (*ibid*.). This announcement officially introduced Mutehekau Shipu to the world as an other-than-human entity with declared personhood beyond that of the Indigenous community.

- Solidifying that its existence was not merely for profit
- Profit

The use of Indigenous ontologies to protect other-than-human entities illustrates the importance of recognizing the destruction of these spaces on par with harm to human bodies. Removing Western views that prioritize profiting off our land is essential for decolonization. Envisioning and constructing a future for Indigenous peoples on their own terms, as advocated by Indigenous scholars like Rita Mestokosho, is crucial.

Abusing these spaces for profit not only harms the planet but also our kin and mentors. Indigenous ontologies convey the message we should recognize the interconnectedness of all beings.

Thus, it is imperative that we eliminate anthropocentric dominance in order to actively protect our ecosystems and advance the use of Indigenous ontologies. This will promote a sustainable coexistence that goes beyond the limited objective of human profit. Abolishing anthropocentric dominance using Indigenous ontology involves recognizing and embracing the interconnectedness of all beings.

This can be done through Cultural Revitalization. The revitalization of Indigenous knowledge systems is essential for challenging anthropocentric dominance. This can be done through traditional practices which assert the Indigenous community's ontological perspectives and challenge dominant paradigms. By claiming Indigenous stories such as those presented in "The Seventh Fire", we will be able to remove the colonial bias of using ecosystems for profit. The story presented by Rita Mestokosho also serves as a mode of cultural revitalization. By enabling Indigenous communities to reclaim their stories we can begin to take essential steps towards the decolonization of the land for profit.

Indeed, promoting Indigenous education and dialogue is crucial to challenging anthropocentric Worldviews over land. By fostering an understanding and respect for Indigenous ways of teaching, westernized colonial societies can work towards a more equitable and sustainable future for all beings including other-than-human entities.

As seen in the "Disabling Bodies of/and Land", survivance ought to be implemented to further Indigenous ontologies to protect the environment. Survivance, as depicted in the article, is an active resistance that goes beyond simply "surviving" settler state violence, to actively thriving within a system that works to continuously eliminate and restrict Indigenous survival (Jaffee *et al.* 2008, 1410). By extending human rights to an other-than-human entity we have ensured the survival of the body of water known as the Magpie River. The survivance of this River not only declares the intrinsic value apart from human profit but it also pushes for the abolishment of anthropocentric dominance. This is because, despite efforts to consistently eradicate and restrict Indigenous survival, the river has managed to continue prospering within the colonial system.

Additionally, legal, and political advocacy is a crucial aspect of Indigenous rights to land self-determination and cultural sovereignty. The case of the Magpie River possessing human rights as an other-than-human entity, illustrates the challenge to colonial ideas that only humans can

hold rights. By adopting their modes of thinking, we work towards eradicating anthropocentric dominance.

- Here, we no longer view the body as a mere tool for profit

The recognition of the Magpie River possessing human rights challenges Westernized laws and embraces Indigenous ontology, which acknowledges the world as a living being. This allows other-than-human entities to have a voice. By adopting Indigenous modes of thinking, we reject colonial mindsets and enhance efforts to safeguard other-than-humans.

Indeed, the process of self-determination for other-than-human entities has been strengthened in other Indigenous communities, such as those in Peruvian Amazonia. This community has enabled the social relationship between other-than-human entities which allows them to exercise their current rights and international law (Surrallés 2017). More specifically, this community possesses or has possessed a form of state that constitutes the expression of an equally legitimate sovereignty with exclusive jurisdiction over a circumscribed area (*ibid*.). This notion of "spirituality" seen in Peruvian Amazonia ought to be implemented into the Westernized legal systems to decolonize the land for profit. This is because it will allow us to look beyond the profitization of land and revitalize the Indigenous ontology that protects these entities.

The crucial role played by animal-person spiritual beings in demarcating protected areas for conserving natural resources highlights the inadequacy of current protection measures in safeguarding these entities from privatization (Surrallés 2017). Therefore, adopting legal systems akin to those observed in the Peruvian example becomes imperative to protect other-than-human entities. The incorporation of such legal frameworks not only ensures the preservation of biodiversity but also acknowledges the intrinsic value of other-than-human entities in maintaining ecological balance and cultural integrity.

Although Indigenous ontologies have begun to take the first steps towards incorporating other-than-human entities into legal systems, many challenges persist when attempting to ensure these entities are given proper representation. It is not always possible for humans and other-than-human beings to communicate, especially in the case where each entity has its subjectivity. This makes it difficult to move away from Western viewpoints that are motivated by profitization.

Indeed, progress towards granting rights to other-than-human entities can be hindered by the complexities of determining which entities are deserving of these rights. This challenge lies in assessing the inherent

worth and agency of various other-than-humans within ecosystems, considering factors such as ecological significance, and capacity for suffering. As a result, achieving consensus on the allocation of rights to other-than-human entities requires ongoing dialogue within the Indigenous communities and legal systems.

Future challenges may arise as we navigate how to communicate with these entities, potentially deterring individuals from recognizing their rights. Since we lack a concrete understanding of what is truly best for these entities, some may dismiss Indigenous ontologies and argue that other-than-human entities are not deserving of rights. Instead, they may revert to Westernized colonial mindsets, presuming anthropocentric dominance over these beings. By ignoring the possibility of granting rights, it dehumanizes these entities, making it easier to exploit them for profit.

However, despite the challenges we face in communicating with other-than-human entities, they possess the ability to convey their messages to us through diverse means. For instance, in the Studio Ghibli film Princess Mononoke, the challenges of communicating with other-than-human entities emphasize their significance and worth independent of human exploitation.

The film commences by following Ashitaka, a young boy who is attacked by an animal in the forest and seeks aid from its deity. Unbeknownst to him the animal only attacked him due to the plague caused by a Millwork company that he will later come across. This narrative echoes modern Westernized colonial perspectives, where the protagonist becomes ensnared by greed, illustrating how corruption can adversely affect other-than-human entities.

Rather than seeking to destroy the forest, Ashitaka endeavors to forge alliances with its inhabitants. Along his quest, he encounters a mill company encroaching upon the forest's borders, driven by a relentless pursuit of profit through deforestation and exploitation of the forest Spirit's power. It is later revealed that the company was spewing chemicals into the water causing the animal attack that led Ashitaka to the company.

The film vividly portrays the direct consequences of disregarding other-than-human entities, despite Ashitaka's numerous warnings. The company's relentless pursuit to locate and kill the forest spirit for its powers leads to the degradation of the forest and prompts a violent response from the animals within the forest. This pursuit underscores society's tendency to overlook the voices and intrinsic value of the natural world in favor of profit-seeking endeavors. This film illustrates that even

though we may encounter challenges in communicating with other-than-human entities, they always find a way to convey their needs when seeking assistance.

Further, embracing the Indigenous ontology of Pluriverse Worlding enables us to transcend the perception of other-than-human entities as mere commodities for profit, fostering a deeper understanding and respect for their intrinsic value. This mode of thinking highlights that despite the challenges we face in communicating with these entities, we retain the capacity to acknowledge their value within our system. The idea of pluriversality denotes humanity's capacity to construct diverse worlds and imagine alternative models for coexisting on the planet. The Pluriverse, coined as "a world where many worlds fit", emerges as a decolonial vision pioneered by the Zapatista movement, countering the presumed universality of the Western modern world (Leitão 2023, 20).

The Indigenous ontology of Pluriverse Worlding can be further exemplified through the Fish analogy provided by Leitão. An example is individual worlds using the water between fish in the ocean. This is akin to how the fish worldviews can be invisible to us as the water is to the underwater entities. Although the water surrounds these entities they are completely immersed in these narratives and take the space for granted. However, this example sees each worldview as a distinct pond where the waters have particular features that surround certain types of fish (Leitão 2023, 21).

Since we as humans inhabit the physical world, we do not directly experience physical reality because our experience is always mediated by an interpretation (Leitão, 2023, 21). Therefore, the ontology of Pluriverse Worlding emphasizes the recognition and validation of diverse worldviews, acknowledging the inherent plurality of existence and challenging the dominance of colonial ontologies.

Indeed, this differentiated from the Western conception of the world as they perceive it as a "One-World World" (OWW) which rests on the assumption of Western dominance (Leitão 2023, 21). Here, the West claims the authority to define what constitutes "the world", while relegating other worldviews to subservience. This colonial notion of a "One-World World" perpetuates anthropocentric dominance, enforcing a hierarchical worldview that prioritizes Western values and perspectives above all others.

Ultimately, by embracing Pluriverse Worlding, we can decolonize Western anthropocentric dominance and transcend the perception of other-than-human entities as mere instruments for profit.

- Profit

The utilization of Indigenous ontologies offers a profound perspective on the interconnectedness of all beings and the imperative to protect other-than-human entities. Recognizing the destruction of natural spaces as equivalent to harm inflicted upon human bodies, the importance of dismantling Western views that prioritize profit over land preservation becomes evident. Embracing Indigenous visions for the future illustrates the necessity of envisioning and building a future for Indigenous peoples on their own terms. Rather than perpetuating anthropocentric dominance, we can impose Indigenous ontology to protect these entities.

Ultimately, I used the illustration of the Magpie River to portray the importance of allowing other-than-human entities the rights of humans. This illustrated the philosophical and practical strategies that could be implemented to protect these entities. Additionally, I included Indigenous ontologies that are linked to discourse that abolishes anthropocentric dominance under the colonization worldview. I illustrated problems that could occur when granting other-than-human entities rights such as issues communicating with these entities. Yet, using the narrative of Princess Mononoke demonstrated how these entities have the ability to communicate with us and transcend beyond the Western colonization worldview. Thereby illustrating why indigenous ontologies ought to be implemented to protect other-than-human entities.

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How to cite this paper: D'Ambrosio, Alyssa Maria. 2024. "Profitization: Ignoring the Ones Who Came First". *Relations. Beyond Anthropocentrism* 12 (1): 69-82. https://doi.org/10.7358/rela-2024-01-dama