

ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE

The concept of *environmental violence* (EV) explains the harm that humanity is inflicting upon itself through our pollution emissions. This book argues that EV is present, active, and expanding at alarming rates in the contemporary human niche and in the Earth system. It explains how EV is produced and facilitated by the same inequalities that it creates and reinforces, and suggests that the causes can be attributed to a relatively small portion of the human population and to a fairly circumscribed set of behaviors. While the causes of EV are complex, the author makes this complexity manageable to ensure interventions are more readily discernible. The EV model developed is both a theoretical concept and an analytical tool, substantiated with rigorous social and environmental scientific evidence, and designed with the intention to help disrupt the cycle of violence with effective policies and real change.

RICHARD A. MARCANTONIO is a Teaching Assistant Professor in the Department of Management and Organization at the Mendoza College of Business and a Fellow at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. A scholar-practitioner of environmental management and peace-building, he has conducted environmental and social science research on five continents and with varied communities, partnering with governmental, private, and nongovernmental organizations to pursue positive human and environmental outcomes. He is coauthor of *Environmental Management: Concepts and Practical Skills* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-17079-6 — Environmental Violence
Richard A. Marcantonio
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE

In the Earth System and the Human Niche

RICHARD A. MARCANTONIO

University of Notre Dame



Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-17079-6 — Environmental Violence
Richard A. Marcantonio
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009170796
DOI: 10.1017/9781009170802

© Richard A. Marcantonio 2022

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-009-17079-6 Hardback

Additional resources for this publication at www.cambridge.org/marcantonio.

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| <i>Preface</i> | <i>page vii</i> |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | x |
| 1 Approaching Environmental Violence | 1 |
| 1.1 Introduction | 1 |
| 1.2 Theoretical Frameworks and Underpinnings of Environmental Violence | 15 |
| 1.3 A Brief Example: Fossil Fuels | 21 |
| 1.4 Overview of the Rest of the Book | 23 |
| 2 Environmental Violence Defined | 25 |
| 2.1 Introduction | 25 |
| 2.2 Defining Environmental Violence | 26 |
| 2.3 Common Concepts of Violence | 28 |
| 2.4 Environmental Violence: A Concept and a Hazard | 31 |
| 2.5 Existing Concepts of Violence That Are Connected to the Environment | 42 |
| 2.6 Differentiating the Ecologically Interconnected Concepts of Violence | 46 |
| 2.7 The Contribution of Environmental Violence in Sum | 49 |
| 3 Environmental Violence across the Earth System and the Human Niche | 51 |
| 3.1 Introduction | 51 |
| 3.2 Sources of Environmental Violence | 52 |
| 3.3 Environmental Violence in Air, Land, and Water | 53 |
| 3.4 Environmental Violence in Time | 59 |

| | | |
|----|---|-----|
| vi | <i>Contents</i> | |
| | 3.5 Locations, Intersections, Politics, and Measurements of Environmental Violence | 63 |
| | 3.6 Summary | 69 |
| 4 | The Flow of Environmental Violence on the Pampana River, Sierra Leone | 70 |
| | 4.1 Introduction | 70 |
| | 4.2 Tracking Environmental Violence: Data Collection and Analysis | 79 |
| | 4.3 The Environmental Violence Model Applied | 87 |
| | 4.4 Concluding Thoughts | 118 |
| 5 | Paradise in Peril: Environmental Violence in Everyday Island Life | 122 |
| | 5.1 Introduction | 122 |
| | 5.2 Insider Perspectives on EV-Exacerbated Extreme Weather Events | 124 |
| | 5.3 Paradises Imperiled | 132 |
| | 5.4 The Environmental Violence Model Applied | 136 |
| | 5.5 Concluding Thoughts | 153 |
| 6 | Reflections, Findings, and Future Applications of the Environmental Violence Framework | 155 |
| | 6.1 Introduction | 155 |
| | 6.2 Applying the Framework: Reflecting on and Continuing the Work | 156 |
| | 6.3 Junctures of Environmental Violence: Findings from the Environmental Violence Framework | 165 |
| 7 | Ethics, Policy, and Trajectories for Environmental Violence | 171 |
| | 7.1 Introduction | 171 |
| | 7.2 Environmental Ethics | 174 |
| | 7.3 Potential Policy Pathways Forward: Approaches, Preferences, and Interventions for Reducing Environmental Violence | 185 |
| | 7.4 Environmental Violence and the Human Niche | 191 |
| | <i>Notes</i> | 195 |
| | <i>References</i> | 203 |
| | <i>Index</i> | 247 |

Preface

In writing this book, I've reflected a lot on the fact that I left my former work as a Marine officer to get away from violence. While I am proud of my military service (and maybe not for the reasons folks might assume), it posed several moral hazards that I could not navigate in a way I was satisfied with. So, I left that path and started seeking a new one that would be less fraught.

I had studied human and physical geography and had always been (and continue to be) an avid outdoors person, so I put environmental work at the center of my pursuits. My assumption was that it would be less morally and ethically messy. I figured working toward a clean and healthy environment and a synergistic human–environment relationship was something I could pursue for the good of everyone. It wasn't long before several revelations undid my logic and showed me that I was entering a similarly precarious world, and, as it turns out, one with a much higher body count.

First, I began to learn about all the harmful and potentially harmful substances that we humans produce: their sources, their products and byproducts, and their tie-in to so much of everyday life, both in their role in human processes and their effect on human activities, from being breathed in to rendering land unusable. I learned that, if I were to become a professional environmental manager, I would literally be permitting the intentional emission of a range of toxic pollutants that, even within established “safe limits,” still have tangible and measurable effects on human health. And I learned that established safe limits are often more a judgment of ethics and acceptable harm than human physiology alone.

Second, I learned about the unequal distribution of risk and why certain areas are deemed expendable or not worth remediating if already contaminated. For example, I learned that there are hundreds of thousands of contaminated sites in the United States alone, distributed throughout the country, and that an unequal number of these sites are in poor and/or minority communities. I learned that, globally, the people and countries least responsible for contributing to this risk are also those most exposed and vulnerable to it.

Finally, I learned about the extent of effects on humans, through pollution and also other forms of ecosystem modification, in the Earth system and throughout the human niche in local to global contexts. Our fingerprint is ubiquitous in the Earth system. And while humans are living longer lives and most are arguably living more stable lives than most of our evolutionary history, we are now exceeding thresholds that threaten our existence, or at least to substantially reduce the flourishing of many if not most – especially for the poorest and most vulnerable.

The violence I experienced in my military career was clearer and more straightforward, both in action and in moral hazard. I shot at people and people shot at me. This direct violence has clear, visible consequences that flow from perpetrator to victim. And while technology has created some level of indirectness in warfare (e.g., armed unmanned aerial vehicles), still the understanding that lethal action is being taken has not been removed. But with environmental hazards, many of which we produce through simple everyday life practices, the perpetrators and victims are rarely ever connected. It is unlikely you will ever see exactly which bodies are penetrated and harmed by the particles of pollution you emit into an ecosystem. But it isn't just the lack of a perpetrator–victim link that renders this form of violence invisible. Rather, our normalization of its production both permits most people to be unaware of it and prevents them from viewing their actions as potentially violent. In particular, the normalization of lifestyles involving heavy consumption of power, fuels, and products made of new materials disguises the violence that derives from the processes needed to meet such consumption.

Rather than breaking with the participation in violence that characterized my former career, I found myself instead confronted with a new form of it – one that I was an active participant in (and still am) and that is arguably the single largest challenge to humanity in our history. Recognizing what I call EV as violent is not primarily a step toward leveling punishments or assigning liability. But it is important for people to have a true understanding of the nature and impacts of their own actions in order for them to make decisions. Just as I was acutely aware of the violence in which I participated as a Marine, leading me to eventually change course, people must be made aware of the violence in which they participate when they buy fast fashion, turn on their vehicles, over-buy industrialized foods, fly regularly, leave their lights or other electronics on when not in active use, heat or cool a space not in use, own multiple homes or homes sized well in excess of need, ritually pursue input-intensive lawns and landscapes, and myriad other everyday activities. With a clear understanding of the implications, we are all better able to change course. Recognizing the human impacts of our actions then is an important step of realism that serves as an invitation for generative, healing action that unites us and asks us to love each other better. Importantly, EV is a disturbing reality, but it is not one without hope.

While we humans are the only species that has risen to become a primary driver of geologic change and create an epoch that bears our mark, the Anthropocene, we are also the only species that can be conscious of this, and thoroughly recognize, measure, and track our impacts. And, most critically, we have an immense capacity for creativity, cooperation, and care.

I conclude with two assertions about human nature that, I think, are the seeds of how we can turn the tides on EV. First, when we live with others in mind, we are not neglecting ourselves, but are simultaneously living as our best selves. And, second, living in balance with the Earth system does not neglect the needs of the human species, but is key to maximizing all human flourishing. The lifestyles of high consumption and intense material dependence that drive EV are not good for the victims, but they are also not healthy for the perpetrators. The changes required to end EV will increase, not decrease, human flourishing.

Acknowledgments

I may have written this book, but it is a product of the labor, support, and guidance of numerous people, institutions, communities, mentors, and family members. Listed in no particular order, I owe a debt of gratitude and thanks to all of the following, and many others, who contributed along the journey.

For their generous support and collective effort in making this project possible, I am indebted to the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, the GLOBES Program for Environment and Society, the Kellogg Institute for International Peace Studies, the Richard and Peggy Notebaert Fellowship, the Century for Environmental Science and Technology (especially Jon Loftus and Mike Brueseke), and the Environmental Change Initiative at the University of Notre Dame and the Pat Tillman Foundation. Thank you for your trust and confidence in my ability to complete this project.

For their partnership and co-production of the many aspects of this work, I am grateful to the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone and Team Rubicon. I hope that our work together helped the lives of the people you serve and continues to do so. Special thanks are owed to TJ Porter, Corey Eide, and Papanie Bai Sesay for their dedication and support for our shared mission. I look forward to continuing to serve and build together.

I am immensely indebted to the literally hundreds of community members in Sierra Leone and in Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Abaco, who entrusted me with their time, effort, and stories. This book is in service of them and all who share in their experience of having their daily lives severely impaired by anthropogenically driven environmental change. I hope I have met your expectation and that this work in some way contributes to the lessening of your struggle.

Throughout the research and writing process I had numerous mentors, guides, and supporters. Thank you to Larry Sullivan, John Paul Lederach, Gary Lamberti, Cat Bolten, Donna Glowacki, Pat Regan, Sean Field, and Marc Lame. For all that you each individually provided, thank you. Thank you to Agustín Fuentes for

Acknowledgments

xi

empowering me to think with complexity, broadly yet grounded. And thank you to my editor, Mariangela Sullivan, who took what I said and made it into what I meant with a touch of improvement. To Matt Lloyd and Sarah Lambert, thank you for making the process of bringing this to publication a pleasure.

Most importantly, thank you to my family: Lesley, Simon, and Eugene. None of this was possible without you, and everything is for you.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-17079-6 — Environmental Violence
Richard A. Marcantonio
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)
