An SfAA Oral History Interview with Barbara Rose Johnston

The Intersections of Environment, Health, and Human Rights

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Barbara Rose Johnston is an anthropologist who has worked for many years on issues of environmental social justice. She has conducted major research in the areas of human rights, health, and the environment, nuclear militarism, water and energy issues, consequential damage assessment and the process of reparations, global climate change, biodiversity, and development theory and praxis. Her work has had wide-ranging impacts on public policy and she has served as expert advisor to several UN Special Rapporteurs and to the UN Expert Panel on water and cultural diversity. She is one of anthropology's foremost public intellectuals, moving comfortably between academic social and natural science, anthropological application and praxis, and social justice advocacy. This work has been recognized in anthropology with numerous awards, including the Michael Kearney Memorial Lecture (2016), the American Anthropological Association's (AAA) Anthropology in Public Policy Award (2015), the Lourdes Arizpe Award (2007), and the Solon T. Kimball Award (2002).

Barbara Rose Johnston graduated from the University of California, Berkeley with a B.A. in Anthropology and earned a M.A. in environmental science from San Jose State University and a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She is a Senior Research Fellow with the Center for Political Ecology and adjunct Professor in Anthropology at Michigan State University. She is the author of nine books including *Consequential Damages of Nuclear War: The Rongelap Report* (co-authored with Holly Barker) which won the 2011 New Millennium Book Award, and of numerous book chapters, journal articles, and public and technical reports. She is also a frequent contributor to online publications, such as *Counterpunch*, *Truthout.org*, and *Anthropology News*.

This featured interview was condensed and edited from two separate interviews conducted by Barbara Rylko-Bauer for the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) Oral History Collection. Added material is presented in brackets. The first interview occurred in Denver, Colorado on November 21, 2015 during the annual AAA meeting; the second one took place in Vancouver, British Columbia on April 2, 2016, during the annual SfAA meeting. Both interviews are available in their entirety in the

SfAA Oral History Collection archived at the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky Libraries.

Barbara Rylko-Bauer: It's wonderful to have this opportunity to interview you. I thought we could start by having you describe how and why you decided to pursue a career in anthropology, a career that I would characterize as integrating theory with advocacy and practice.

Barbara Rose Johnston: Okay, good question. I did not start out with the intent to be an anthropologist, though I was certainly influenced by a number of concerns growing up, with social justice being paramount. In the "tribe" that I grew up in, one of eleven children, we were the folks who always were out there at all the marches and so forth. Every summer growing up we went to our friends' cabin on the Russian River where they did an outdoor movie—*Island of the Blue Dolphins* (1964). It is this incredibly poignant story of a Native California woman who is left behind as her whole tribe is taken to a mission where they die of disease. That had an indelible impact upon me. I also grew up reading fairy tales and religious books about saints' lives and all that sort of thing. So, that narrative and notion of suffering and justice is a facet of just who I am.

I took a test in high school that predicted I'd be an urban planner. I did planning initially in my graduate program. I did an undergraduate degree in anthropology, because you could take anything and get into a master's program in planning. I decided that since I was paying my own way through school, I would never take a class that I did like. I liked reading and writing and so anthropology and native California was my area of study.

Rylko-Bauer: Now, where did you go to school?

Johnston: Initially, in high school I did community college classes and after high school I went to San Jose State for two years and transferred to UC-Berkeley. I graduated after three years of college, because I was working and paying my way through school. One quarter I took 29 units, but it was reading and writing. I had the most amazing year. It was the last year of Robert Heizer's life, he was dying of throat cancer. He was an archeologist; native California and the Great Plains was part of his body of work. [This expertise led him to support tribal land claims and serve as] expert witness in 1950s era lawsuits over whether or not California tribes had the right to get the treaties that were never signed by Congress when gold was discovered in the 1800s. I learned so much that year about the [impacts of doing

anthropology, especially the] ethical obligations to act if you have privileged information. You can't just sit on the sidelines. Robert Heizer's stories had a big impact on me.

Rylko-Bauer: I can see, yes.

Johnston: I worked for my honor's thesis with him and Albert Elsasser, doing an annotated bibliography of all the Native California manuscripts in the Kroeber archives. The Harrington collection of papers had just been returned to the Kroeber Library. They gave me a key to the locked shelves and I spent the whole year in the library. It was wonderful and I loved it. I pulled together this annotated bibliography that Heizer and Elsasser used in preparing one of his last books [*The Natural World of the California Indian*]. When I was done with this big, thick manuscript showing where California plants were used for medical purposes—medical ethnobotany, Heizer said, okay, you wrote the book, you might as well publish it. I thought, I'm twenty years old, I'm too young to do this. He really infused in me that notion, me and the other five students in the honor's class. I would say that was perhaps one of the biggest things. That period had another big impact for me because it was one intense year to graduate. At Berkeley, the one class that I did the worst in was also the one class that I learned the most, and that was Laura Nader's class. That had a big impact on my life and career as well—the lifetime relationship that developed over the years, because of that brief time that I spent there.

And then I got a job at Santa Clara County Planning Department where I was brought in through a federal program that paid for 18 months, for internships basically. At the end, I was offered a permanent position, but eventually decided not to take it. I was involved in documenting the cultural resources of the county and coming up with a long-term plan that protected these cultural resources. Reviewing the research on relationships regarding where and how Indians had lived, I came up with a predictive model, [map, and proposed changes to] the county environmental impact assessment code. If your home or property was in this shaded area, then you needed to have an archeologist come and do a Phase I survey [to assess presence or absence of cultural resources]. This county code became [the model for changes statewide. That was when I was 21.

Rylko-Bauer: It sounds like from the very beginning you have had this ability of figuring out how you can translate knowledge and research skills into a form that has policy impact. That's remarkable.

Johnston: I think that Heizer was really key in giving me the confidence to know that it didn't matter that I was 21, with my hair in braids and wearing overalls to work, and telling these developers who were millionaires that no, you can't build there. To have that kind of power was something that came naturally I guess, in part because of the teachers, and in part because of the family that I grew up in—that we have rights. Those were the times when Wonder Woman was on TV and feminists were taking to the streets and farm workers were protesting. Cesar Chavez started the early years of the farm workers union in our church, that's the context of the times.

Rylko-Bauer: Your PhD was from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, right?

Johnston: Right. I started with a semester or two of graduate work in planning at San Jose State and it was stupid. [I was working as a planner and] they were teaching me how to write an office memo. The environmental law class was good and I got a lot out of it. In the environmental impact fieldwork course, I got to go out and do surveys. And then I decided to go visit my brother in the Virgin Islands when my 18 months was up, to think about the job offer from the Santa Clara County Planning Department. I had never been a kid. I had never been to a bar, never done anything in that regard. I had just been a *student*. So, I began living on a houseboat. I had hooked up with a new friend who was doing archeology and I volunteered on excavating a midden there. It just got me wondering. I had never been further east than the Nevada state line. I had never been anywhere like the Caribbean. I expected that it would be tropical, it would have rainforests, but instead I encountered a mountainous island that looked like Baja California.

One of the key questions I had was, why? What was the difference between my expectation and reality? I decided to study on my own with my unemployment checks when I turned down the Santa Clara County job. I studied tropical ecology and this question of how did the landscape change over time—the difference between my expectations and reality. Doing archeology as a volunteer meant asking paleoclimatology questions—what kind of plant and animal life was here. What did this look like thousands of years ago, because we had analysis of some of the shells. The site itself I think was about 3,000 years old, but it gave us that kind of timeline and information.

And then I went back home for a family wedding and encountered Les Rowntree, a geographer at San Jose State, a friend of mine that I had gotten to know when I worked for Santa Clara County. He said, as long as you're studying this stuff, you might as well get a master's for it. I'll sponsor you and you do independent studies—

because there was no master's at that time in environmental studies. I wrote my thesis for the Virgin Islands research and then spent the second semester back in California taking ecology everything—plant ecology, biological ecology, labs, fieldwork, human ecology.

Rylko-Bauer: So, you weren't taking anthropology courses, right?

Johnston: No. I got a master's in interdisciplinary studies (that now, at San Jose State, is an environmental studies master's) that focused on the cultural construction of drought and how an island changed over this long historical period. It got me reviewing all the history of the place, the relationships between land use and slavery, its relationship in geopolitical terms and so forth. That little kernel then was expanded into my dissertation.

I went to the University of Massachusetts-Amherst because they had a Caribbean program. I had a year of classes at U-Mass, and then, because they had accepted my master's, I went back to the Caribbean. I did another semester at U-Mass the second year, and then I was in the Caribbean the rest of the time to finish my research and write my dissertation. So, I did not have a whole lot of schooling other than my undergraduate degree which was intense, and a full year of intense courses in anthropology and also political economy and paleoclimatology. So, yeah, I did not feel like an anthropologist for many years. I feel like I fit in now, though I certainly didn't when I first started.

Rylko-Bauer: Listening to the path that you took, I can see the very early influences in what you did and how you've run with it and developed it over time in the work you've done. Who were some other people, both early on and throughout your career, that have had an impact on you?

Johnston: The people that have influenced me the most are the people that I've worked so closely with in all of these collaborative endeavors over time. I was so fortunate to go to U-Mass, not knowing that this was a really independent unique graduate program with a lot of student determination. We had a student representative on the governing council for the department who had power, a vote. They could vote on whom to offer the job interview; they could vote on whom to offer the job to. But more than that, your construction of what is my PhD was very student-controlled. You defined your statements of field and what your readings were.
Part of that was because of Sylvia Forman. Sylvia was one of Laura Nader's students at UC-Berkeley. When she got hired, UMass-Amherst was a startup department. Most of

the faculty were new PhDs or just finishing their dissertations. This was in that revolutionary era. And so, you have to come up with a guiding framework—what is our department, how do we operate? Sylvia was a natural. She was part of the Berkeley political movement. She knew how to craft this, but she also wrote up and really reacted to what she disliked about her graduate program training and made it student-empowered. So that was interesting.

Sylvia and I got to know each other because of working in the Caribbean; then Grenada was invaded. Johnnetta Cole was another faculty member there. Sylvia and Johnnetta were very involved in the U.S.-Grenada Friendship Society and I got involved when I came on campus. We were involved in protests and political action around it. I got to know my faculty members not in the classroom reading their works as much as colleagues around the table talking political strategy for outreach and engagement or advocacy. I got to appreciate Sylvia over the years, because I came in 1981 and finished in 1987. Laura Nader was a very big force in her eyes, so I got to know her through Sylvia. And then through political actions and this determination to get out in the world. Sylvia was the one who was really good at pushing me out. She was also the first person who ever mentioned applied anthropology to me.
Sylvia was very good at empowering other people to do. She didn't have a lot of patience for women coming back to grad school and just studying and not sure of what they want to do—and not doing something. Sylvia did not put great emphasis in publishing her work. She was a political actor and she did a lot of her advocacy within anthropology in trying to find ways to make this matter more. She and Carole Hill were a seminal inspiration, with a number of other people, in founding the Association for Feminist Anthropology. But she was also, with Johnnetta Cole, a really big behind-the-scenes person to help make the Association for Black Anthropology happen. So that notion of how do you create communities and collectives to allow political action and transformative change to occur was fine-tuned by working with Sylvia on that.

Rylko-Bauer: You got a lot of practical experience and some real models that you then were able to later apply, but also to make your own, yes?

Johnston: Yes, I was so fortunate to do this, to get that experience in a context where we were all equal at the table. There was no power differential between professor and student, so to speak. Instead we were just shared actors trying to achieve a common political, or social, or justice aim. You asked me also, though, about other inspirational sources?

Rylko-Bauer: Yes.

Johnston: Again, because you defined your own statements of field at U-Mass, I chose ethnicity and ethnic conflict. And to do that I did a whole survey of both sociology and anthropology. And I contacted a lot of key folks to say what is the difference between sociology and anthropology. Truly, in that realm there really wasn't much difference at all. My school had Marx Bible classes, we used to call them—all the archeologists and everybody got Marx, right? And Fredrik Barth in terms of ethnicity and anthropology; but Paulo Freire, that was the one that really gave me a sense of praxis, the connections between people and the underlying reasons why we do what we do; how to do it in a way with dignity, with empowerment, and what kinds of strategies. Paulo Freire was a very big influence in those early formative years in my work.

Rylko-Bauer: That's really interesting, I can see the connection. I see your work as crosscutting environmental issues, health, social justice, and human rights. And I'm sure that you could add a number of others to that list. Is there a particular way that you like to describe this? When you're trying to tell somebody, for example, what it is that you do?

Johnston: What I tell people is that what I do is what I'm doing. I do environment, health, and human rights at this point in my life—those intersections, the linkages. I find it difficult to find a catch term phrase for "what do you call this?"

Rylko-Bauer: The labels.

Johnston: The labels. In large part because they get defined, redefined, morphed and tweaked. They have different meanings for different people, but also because it tends to be an insider language. I would rather communicate more clearly. "I do this, this and this." So, sometimes in earlier years it was environmental quality and social justice, you know, but I've had different terms over the years.

Rylko-Bauer: I was going to ask you what led you to go into this constellation, but clearly you were doing it from your master's thesis.

Johnston: I was doing it from day one. I grew up in the "Valley of Heart's Delight" [Santa Clara Valley]. Now it's known as Silicon Valley. I saw in my lifetime, this beautiful orchard and landscape and valley with little tiny towns and cities—thirteen of them. Now, you have one big blanket of cement and absolutely polluted aquifers.

And so, that question of how and why was this process of change occurring, and at what cost, was always asked. And then the other facet that got me was the recognition in my schoolbooks that California natives were always described as Digger Indians who died off. They were peaceful, and so-called "less primitive, a developed tribe," but because they had no warfare, they were considered, you know, the village idiots, so to speak. And I had no idea that every summer when we went to the Russian River and I watched this sad movie about this dying off of the Indians, that the people picking the grapes across the river at Korbel Champagne vineyard were Pomo Indians. The Indians, hello! In fact, there were more Indians in California, you know, when I was a kid growing up because of the relocation acts. But in terms of native California, it was alive and it was certainly there and it was invisible.

Rylko-Bauer: Yes, invisible is such a critical word.

Johnston: The point being I guess, that I didn't come to anthropology, and I don't do stuff in anthropology—it's just who I am. Life shapes you.

Rylko-Bauer: You know, that word invisible, I think that your life work has been making things visible that others would rather remain invisible.

Johnston: When I think about what I do, I think of myself as [looking at life through the lens of] a kaleidoscope and then when you shift the lens, the vision of the world looks different. Sometimes an idea or a facet or conversation causes the kaleidoscope lens to shift. Sometimes in terms of the nature of the work that you're doing, it's giving voice. And initially, at a superficial level, that's kind of what I was doing back in 1990 or so, shifting the idea of what we can study and what we can learn. And then we could, we white anthropologists—or what have you—give voice. We would assert it in places for those people who didn't have power, and so we were playing a culture broker role or an advocacy role, a facilitator role, but we were also, of course, doing it through our own lens.

Rylko-Bauer: Right.

Johnston: For me, the ideal outcome in life is that if you start off working in that kind of context, to be able to evolve in your relationships and in your understanding and productivity to the point that you're just a full-time facilitator, rather than a documentarian. That the people you are working with are fully determinant actors and your role is congratulations or commiseration or how can I help. But you are no longer the top of the power chain.

Rylko-Bauer: More specifically about your body of work, in 1998 at the SfAA meetings in San Juan, you stated that you didn't see yourself as an activist. What do you mean by that and do you think differently seventeen years later?

Johnston: Activist as a label often gets used in our disciple as a way of marginalizing—that there are those who do real anthropology that is theoretical and sound and informed, and is not tainted by the various ways that political actions might preempt, you know, or skew an analysis. I came into the field as a science background and that science master's is really key. Science is about evidence. And evidence can be used in political ways or not, but it's about evidence. So, I see myself, first and foremost, as somebody who is deeply concerned with the evidentiary basis that informs whatever it is you're looking at. So no, I don't see myself as an activist. At times I will do activism, but I primarily do research on issues and topics that matter—research with a purpose. And at times some of that research is explicitly action-oriented, but I'm largely a book scholar, an archivist, researcher, writer. People tend to describe me as "doing the trenches or out there on the picket lines." No. Other people do that, I may facilitate it.

Rylko-Bauer: Yes, as you said, as a facilitator to give the people, who are in the trenches because it's their issue, more power and more resources to be more effective.

Johnston: Right, and even when it is my issue. So, when Fukushima happened, the nuclear issues in our backyard—my neighbors organized and asked me, because 'you work on nuclear issues.' But my role, as I see it, and I really try to make clear boundaries on it, is to educate and facilitate and support, but to empower them to do the activism and to give advice. I need to have my own little cocoon where I'm not working 24/7. Maybe that's the end result of that.

Rylko-Bauer: But this is a great and doable model. We talk in anthropology about relevance and engagement and outreach. I think that people are really confused about what all that means and how can we effectively interject whatever resources we have into that.

Johnston: I have to say that when you get involved and engaged with a group or community of people, or with an issue, and because of your research and work become a unique player in your command of knowledge—you have an immense ethical responsibility. I've had in my own life a couple of areas where I've developed

this unique body of knowledge and information and insight. That means that you're always on call. The ethical relationship is always there.
So, I will do activist-oriented things and advocacy on behalf of an issue, but I will do it only because of that unique role. So, I do a lot of work in collaboration with civil society actors and affected communities and various people in the public and governance, and in academia. I'll be facilitating or providing information or giving suggestions on strategy or digging up key evidence in documents. But again, it's that sense of, you have to do it, because you have this command of the knowledge base. If other people can do it, I'll say go for it, you know. Or I turn folks on to that. I give away more work, than I . . . give away jobs, give away money [laughs], just because you can only do so much in life.

Rylko-Bauer: Well, you've worked on a lot of different projects, but I know that there are several that I think one could label as landmark projects in your career. The AAA award that you just received, Anthropology in Public Policy Award, was for those landmark projects that you did, each of which helped indigenous peoples, who have been affected by environmental and military projects of different sorts, to gain both acknowledgement of their suffering and some form of restitution for that. Am I right in the way I characterized that?

Johnston: Sort of. The award itself is for the body of recent work and demonstrative impact in public policy in the last five years. Also, in that regard it shows some of the skewed nature in how they set up this award, because you don't get public policy done as an individual. And yet, you're giving all of the attention to the individual, who may be a key actor and an important facet, but it's because of a large collective collaborative that public policy happens. And, when people think of public policy, they think of government or a law or whatever. That's only a little facet of it. A lot of the area that I focus in is how do you get governance that addresses needs. Governance in the true sense of the word, where you have an institutional and political apparatus that is designed to meet and serve the needs of the people.
So, when people don't have access to the rule of law, when they have horrific situations and conditions that are outside the realm of [official concern]—how to get remedy outside of the rule of law is the area I specialize in. So, it was kind of interesting for me to try and characterize my body of work in the last five years, because it's all based on 30 years of cumulative work.
And yet, the recent achievements have finally occurred, which says a lot about anthropology and our idealistic or shallow notions that when you want to do effective work, you can just have a project, get some funding, go out and do some work. And

then you have some product. And then you move on to the next thing. That's what a lot of people do, but it's not the same for what I do.

Rylko-Bauer: Just to have it on record, a lot of people are familiar with the work that you do, but for this interview, it would be good for you to summarize.

Johnston: OK, four main projects that create this arc. The first being a global study, trying to secure social science contributions, case-specific studies in support of a United Nations (UN) initiative, the first special rapporteur on human rights and the environment. I had seen the call in an environmental magazine, so I contacted the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, which was the main nonprofit assisting the rapporteur and said I was interested in this, because I had been teaching environmental studies and there is no social-cultural content in there. When they're talking about people it's only a population issue. I wanted to write a textbook about the environment and human and cultural context in a much more sophisticated way for environmental studies.

We had this long meeting and they told me that actually they didn't have any cultural contributions, only responses, studies, and cases—that look at how human rights and the environment intersect and of abuse—from individual journalists who are whistleblowers or from lawyers. But they've never really thought about groups and group rights.

So, I organized a committee and I proposed it to the AAA and to the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA). This was in 1990. At the AAA November meetings, Carole Hill and Jane Buikstra, who were then presidents, approved it—a joint committee of the AAA and the SfAA on human rights and the environment. And the plan was to globally contact both anthropology and others, because the SfAA is interdisciplinary—so geographers, political scientists and lawyers—to get the broader array, to collect those kinds of case studies around the world that demonstrate the most egregious examples of ulcerating abuse, that give you the reasons why the groups have rights, that cultures are being abused as well as the environment. And look at the processes and the driving forces that are making this happen. We had about 150 people in the end submitting case studies.
Jane Buikstra also put me on the AAA environmental task force. They had already been meeting for a year and they welcomed me. This would have been Skip (Roy) Rappaport and Shirley Fiske—I'm blanking on others, but actually it was a wonderful group of people. My task was to focus on human rights and the environment and to mediate with the SfAA and we'd have these two sorts of rounds. At the end of the

meeting we had a new AAA president who did not support this initiative. So, she disenfranchised the former decision. All of the paperwork wasn't properly prepared and it was easy for her to do. I still did environment and human rights for the environmental task force, but there was no AAA sponsorship of this SfAA initiative. And I would say that almost all of our contributions for this study came from AAA members, some who were also SfAA members. It was a major endeavor of three years of work where we pulled together different reports and submitted them to the United Nations. We also prepared a grant and I got Nathan Cummings Foundation money to the SfAA— the first time they'd ever used their nonprofit status to get a grant.

Rylko-Bauer: So, the SfAA was involved in this work, but not in collaboration with the AAA?

Johnston: Right, the collaboration was dismantled in the AAA right after it was approved. I went to the [AAA conference and SfAA board] meetings during November, and the SfAA executive board approved this initiative as well. They set up a human rights and environment committee that operated from 1990-1997, that I chaired and developed and organized. I was basically the lead and at every SfAA and AAA meeting we would meet and pull together cases. That was a huge and profound thing. Some of the most egregious cases that we came across, one was the case of Rongelap, an atoll in the Marshall Islands that was heavily exposed from nuclear weapons, but also where the people were used in human radiation experimentation. Another was the case of a dam development in Latin America and the horrific human rights abuses accompanying a World Bank financed dam. So that project had a huge impact.

One outcome was the book called *Who Pays the Price: The Sociocultural Context of Environmental Crisis* that I edited and was the principal author of, published by Island Press. I didn't want an academic press, because I wanted to get into the science realm. Island Press was the main environmental science publisher and was nonprofit. The book was published and had a broad distribution. It was used in a gazillion law courses and it influenced a lot of things. It also went to some of the communities and places and because of the book, I started getting contacted to do more work. That's where my other projects evolved.

Rylko-Bauer: So, just to back up, the SfAA was involved in that project and its subsequent impact, right?

Johnston: I organized and chaired the project and I reported to the SfAA board twice a year. And we had this immense amount of work and activity. With that Nathan Cummings grant we had $5000 that I was able to use to produce these reports and distribute a booklet that went to 450 environmental and human rights organizations around the world. There was no intersect at that time between the two areas and fields.

Rylko-Bauer: Oh, really.

Johnston: Environmentalists only saw environmental problems; human rights saw human rights problems. There was no intersect, so we made that happen by sending this to the foundations and the advocacy groups around the world—for free.
Greg Button was a AAA fellow at the time and also on this committee and contributed a case study on the maquiladoras and the proposed adverse impact of NAFTA on the border. He was Senator Wellstone's congressional fellow. And Wellstone was pitching an environmental justice act. So, Greg helped to influence the writing of that act in large part out of this, but also, he got that booklet put into all of the incoming Congress packets. So, Barbara Boxer saw that booklet, which had four of the most egregious studies, including the Marshall Islands case.
And then in 1993, Eileen Welsome published a series of articles on human radiation experimentation based on interviewing subjects or the families of people who had been in classified research used in the U.S. When that hit the fan, a broad public protest occurred and President Clinton set up the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experimentation (ACHRE). And Boxer sent the SfAA booklet to Hazel O'Leary, who was Secretary of Energy, and said, put the Marshall Islands on the mandate.

Other people were advocating as well, because the initial construction of the advisory committee's mandate was only the 48 states. And because of advocacy like this and others, the ACHRE looked at other territories like Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the Marshall Islands and the history there of human radiation experimentation.
Really, when I think of my life, I think of life as, you know, a body of water, a pond. But the first big stone, in my adult life, that was tossed into that pond created all of these ripples. And then the more that you track where these ripples go, that is the interconnectivity between that which took me to the Marshall Islands and an invitation to advise the Nuclear Claims Tribunal on indigenous peoples, their rights, and their customary relationships with land, as they were trying to figure out how do we compensate for the environmental harm associated with land.

That invitation in 1999 led to a relationship I'm still involved in, and massive questions that keep coming up in different areas of research. I think, if you're a researcher, what a privilege to be asked to come assist, to answer questions to a judicial panel, of how do you appropriately compensate for the loss of land, for the environmental harm, when the people are still there, if they are removed from their ability to safely use land. How do you compensate that, when the property or administrative courts are all based on the Western notion of property? How do you get an indigenous notion of value into this conversation and appropriately compensate for these immense issues that money can never, ever solve?

Rylko-Bauer: Why don't you mention a few of the issues that resulted from this—

Johnston: So nuclear weapons testing. The most polluted place in terms of U.S. atomic and nuclear bombs on the planet is called the Pacific Proving Grounds—we tested our dirtiest nuclear weapons in the Marshall Islands. In 1954, the biggest detonation the U.S. did–and the second largest, I think, after Russia—carpeted the whole 22-populated atolls, but especially the Northern Chain, with extremely dangerous fallout. The people of Rongelap, who were a hundred and so miles downwind, were the largest number of people to be exposed to the highest level of radiation and still live. These were classified tests. People were left on their island for three days or so before they were evacuated from Rongelap Atoll. One of the adjacent atolls is Rongerik and weathermen [who were working there] for the military were evacuated a day and a half after the test. So, the people were left to their own devices, though the military knew that there were very, very off-the-charts high levels of radiation in the area.

They were eventually evacuated, brought to Kwajalein where they were immediately enrolled—I think on day seven after the Bravo test, which was on March 1, 1954—in a classified project to study the effects of high-level radiation. And the scientists were looking at acute effects from acute exposure. They studied them, and they also went to and evacuated Utirik, which was another atoll, not as close but still within range. There the people got very serious doses, though not as much as Rongelap. The military collected that population and brought them back. They studied the people from Utirik for 30 days or so, and then they returned to their atoll. Nuclear weapons tests continued all the way through the end of 1958. So, people were living. . .

Rylko-Bauer: They were getting repeated exposure?

Johnston: People of Utirik, it turns out, got repeated, repeated, repeated, repeated exposures that the U.S. never really addressed or paid much attention to, in large part because they had their population-studying concern. And they thought at the time that only high levels of radiation were a problem; that at low levels human will adjust and adapt to the ecosystem. I learned this from responding to the Nuclear Claims Tribunal's request. When the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments finished its work, due to civil society lawsuits, President Clinton issuing an order to make all of this public, via a Web-based open access to all of the formerly classified documents on a word-searchable engine.

Rylko-Bauer: A treasure trove.

Johnston: Oh, my God! So, I got asked to answer those questions for the Tribunal when I had access to word-searchable downloadable documents to really pull together the history. And then also to pull together a study. I'll just sum up to say that the nuclear work in the Marshall Islands was meant initially to document and advise the Nuclear Claims Tribunal on how to address indigenous land value issues. I brought out a team — myself, Holly Barker and Stuart Kirsch, because he had been working in Papua New Guinea on a land claims expert witness. Where we would try and hammer out what's a methodology to really handle this. We had a lot of debate. After that trip, Holly and I continued our work together.

Rylko-Bauer: Can you summarize some of the key findings and then fast forward to what happened as a result?

Johnston: One of the more important things that came out of this—in part because of those debates and discussions with Stuart Kirsch and Holly Barker, and in part because I had been working with this large group of people on human rights and the environment and I had a phenomenal number of contacts and connections to assist—was the development of a methodology. How do you document the consequential damages of these things?

A methodology that also took into account other sources of law concerning natural and other economic regimes, of how do you value natural resources. So, having access to people like Bonnie McCay and Shirley Fiske, for example. Shirley Fiske told me to look at the Exxon Valdez spill and all of the expert witness testimony. But then you also have to get a hold of the Army Corps of Engineers reports, because they really wanted to figure out how to get the money back from the corporation, right? And then, how do you value a salmon or a seal. Then Bonnie McCay, similarly—how

do you look at law and the broader history of law and then customary law. And friends of mine who had worked in Australia, asking how do you look at issues like marine resources, the notion that land is not just land.

Western law is based on land, yet indigenous life, and especially in the Pacific Islands, it's based on a much broader array. Because how can you own land? Let alone when your life is as a seafaring people, Pacific Islands people. So those were really significant for me, because I developed a consequential damage assessment approach that first looked at a traditional way of life and did it in a participatory process, working with elders in all of these different areas–mapping, documenting, and fleshing out the ways in which people lived.

And then how do you, from an evidentiary sense, get at how people have changed over time. What were factors in terms of the nature of the harm? Again, it was beautiful to have access to health physicists and the wide array of people that had been previously working on the UN human rights and environment study. How do you pull that together in a way that allows standing in a judicial process that is based initially on a U.S. template of western property law? In the Marshall Islands their constitution includes customary rights as parallel and equal to the constitutional rights that reflect this largely U.S.-authored constitution; and they also explicitly recognize international law. So customary law and international law are recognized as equivalent standings of power and authority. Australia, and to some modest degree Canada, became a very important source [for legal precedents].

I had worked on the human rights and environment project initially with the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, which is now Earth Justice, with environment and human rights lawyers. That was extremely helpful. I met people more broadly in the community of that hybrid between anthropology and the law. So, coming up with a methodology and then figuring out how to present it in a way, in a court context, led me to my next projects.

Years later, I was asked to assist and advise the World Commission on Dams and prepare a reparation and right to remedy brief, because I had done that in the Marshall Islands. This was a brief on how to compensate those who were adversely affected by dams. And I turned it around. Having gone through the UN documents and seeing these new draft guidelines on reparation and right to remedy, I argued that we can't just look at the economic losses that people incurred from being forcibly displaced or suffering from massacre or what have you.

We need to look more broadly at what has been lost here. What does meaningful remedy look like? In the Marshall Islands, we did a participatory process from day one that was based on this historical arc of the past and the period of concern. I did that for the World Commission on Dams.

Rylko-Bauer: To return to the Rongelap case, how has that ended? What was done with that material?

Johnston: So, for the Rongelap case . . . we did two different studies for the Office of the Public Advocate, who was Bill Graham. They ended up not using the land valuation study. But in the third phase regarding consequential damages, I was brought in to do additional research and pull together the case for Rongelap claim for consequential damages, with Holly Barker in 2001. We presented it in three days of a court claim hearing on Halloween and the Day of the Dead—very appropriate. At this point, decades and decades had passed. This was right after 9/11.
On 9/11, I was studying anthrax delivery mechanism systems in the Marshall Islands and the nationwide exposure to staphylococcal enterotoxin B, which is an anthrax-simulating agent that produces in the aged, in the young, and in infirmed populations, a pneumonia that is often fatal. That's what I was doing on 9/11 and then we had the anthrax scare.

Then I went to the Marshall Islands and we realized that there were people there who had died as a result of [biochemical weapons testing], and so that ended up being an element in our story. The point is that we had these hearings and they were phenomenal. The judge said, I wish you had done this approach when we started the Tribunal so many years ago, because all these years we've been going through these other claims for Bikini and for Enewetak and we haven't addressed community damages, cultural damages, and the loss of a sustainable way of life, all of these other issues.

And the idea that the Tribunal can do more than just [decide on remedy that is defined by] dollars and it's legal. To be able to link dollars with the rationale that supports the notion of remedy was really a revelation. So, it was a profound hearing. During those three days, we had the judges with tears literally running down their faces. Holly Barker and I were given authority to directly ask questions and interrogate, because of the indigenous status of the people, and that was a norm and precedent set in Australia. And basically, we were in charge of the case. It was just amazing. We left feeling like, we won! In fact, one of the key survivors of Rongelap

who was evicted in '54 and had spent his whole life doing this, he said to me, now I can die, because I know that change, remedy will happen.

In reality it wasn't until 2007 that the Tribunal issued their judgment on this. Other politics were involved, including negotiations with the U.S. on whether they could restore the full funding for the Tribunal; or if not restore, then to fully fund the Tribunal to allow it to pay out its awards. It was $150 million to start with. By the time they finished in the four atolls, they realized that nationwide exposure had occurred, but only four atolls went through a claims process and I think it was upwards of $4 billion that was awarded and only a $150 million fund—so nothing really happened.

Rylko-Bauer: So today?

Johnston: So today, judgments are on record and they have never been implemented. The Nuclear Claims Tribunal was closed. They ran out of funding. I managed to get the former National Archivist, Trudy Peterson, involved to try and save the NCT archives from going to the garbage dump and at least create the archive of files and medical records and so forth.

The Marshallese went through the U.S. courts, but they don't have standing. They used to be territorial residents but now they have a Compact of Free Association. They went all the way up to the Supreme Court, which denied the case for lack of standing. So, they have no court and they have no reparation with this mechanism, but they have the body of evidence that we pulled together for that case.

Holly Barker and I later turned our expert witness report into a book, once the award was announced in 2007 [*The Consequential Damages of Nuclear War, The Rongelap Report*, 2008]. And then they had a tool that they can use politically—a book that they could go to whenever they met with other nations of the world. So today, their standing is really very different, because I'm not involved directly in their advocacy, they are; and the tool, that Holly and I helped to create, is being utilized.

At the UN level, one of the things that we managed to do in 2012, I helped bring, for the first time, representatives from the Marshall Islands to tell their story to the Human Rights Council and present this egregious failure to provide meaningful remedy and get the world's community to tell the United States that they have an obligation here. In that endeavor, the only protesting voice, of course, was the United States, which believes that they've met all of their obligations.

And it's a still-evolving story. The Marshalese of Rongelap were the ones that started it; the reasons why we have a nuclear nonproliferation treaty in the first place, was because of the 1954 exposures and Rongelap community petitions to the UN. It was a UN trusteeship previously and [when they came under U.S. control they were largely] invisible and voiceless. And now they're back on the map in a big way. They're suing the nine nuclear nations of the world. I mean, it's just amazing. One of the lessons out of this is that remedy in this context involves the coming of age and self-determination and capabilities of a nation to advocate on its own behalf. But also, the ways that people like you and I might be able to assist and facilitate.

Rylko-Bauer: Let's shift to the next case, perhaps summarizing it a little bit more succinctly.

Johnston: So, I mentioned the World Commission on Dams (WCD) which was a global critical look at what large dams, in general, have done in terms of meeting expectations in providing clean, green energy, renewable energy. It was a panel that included Ted (Thayer) Scudder as the social science representative. This was a joint International Union for Conservation and Nature (IUCN) and a World Bank funded initiative, but a global independent investigation. In the last year of their three-year term, they realized that they had never thought about the adverse impacts in a really rigorous way, or what happens with mitigation, or whether these impact assessment processes work and do they have accountability mechanisms that are working.
I was brought in at the last minute on a recommendation based on my work in the Marshall Islands, to write a brief for the commissioners. So I did that in 2000, not just reviewing all the sources of law, all the accountability mechanisms that exist at the UN and these international institutions, or in the constitutional law of all the nations of the world, but also to look at three exemplary cases of dams, the social impacts, and what happened to those people. They called them the legacy issues—the Kariba Dam built in 1952 in Africa that Ted Scudder is still working on, a dam in Pakistan, and the Chixoy Dam in Guatemala. I had all of the case presentations that were submitted by advocacy groups and by the affected communities from these consultations to review. And I pulled together a report [in support of the WCD's final report].

The people from the Chixoy Dam thought, when they gave their testimony to the WCD, that they would get some measure of assistance or international attention, and that didn't happen. So, three years later they asked civil society partners to assist them in doing a study to document their history, their damages and injuries, and to do it in a way that was written in World Bank language. They contacted International Rivers, who had been a partner with them, and with the reparation and right to

remedy brief. So, they asked me to come in and take a look at it. I don't speak Spanish very well at all, but I was asked explicitly because I don't work in Guatemala. Because you need a neutral party and outside actor, to have some credibility here, since the political factions are so extreme and the history is so intense.

The Chixoy Dam Reparations study came out in 2005. [In 2004, the affected communities] managed to get a reparation negotiations agreement by taking over the dam, [since much of the developed land] was actually still owned by the affected communities. That initial agreement was never implemented. The agreement was to sit down and negotiate fully the reparation plan that I had in our five-volume study. So, we did this study, again using the Marshallese model. And we hired a realtor, basically the person that finds out whether or not your title has been legally secured. He went to the Central American cadastral, he reviewed the records in Guatemala. He reviewed the community records. He found that of the whole area of the dam and the reservoir, the construction hydroelectric works and downstream, only two parcels had been legally secured by the INDE (National Electrification Institute), the electrical institute which is a government facet that received all the funds to build this dam. The money came from the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, Venezuela, and other places but only two parcels had been legally secured. All of the rest of the land was still owned largely by the indigenous mining communities. Some of those communities own land upstream and in the area that extends into the reservoir. And they are still to this day paying taxes on submerged lands, and so that was an interesting and very significant finding.
Once you are done with the research, how do you get the implemented change happening? That took from 2005 up to 2015. In those ten years a very long story emerges, but the outcome is that just in October of 2015, the massacre survivors who were displaced from their homes at gunpoint, slash and burn of all of their property and 456 or so people from the Rio Negro village alone killed—those people received an apology from the President of Guatemala in November of 2014. Now that President is in jail, but the new President (then Vice-president) gave them another apology and a check for initial compensation. And the Guatemalan Congress has made a law, in large part because of political action and international actors that assisted, to make sure that when administrations come and go out there is still an obligation to include this budget allocation each year.

I have to say that one of the other reasons why this case was so significant is that when Guatemala was going through its most intense civil war period of state-sponsored violence, and so many people were dying—it was erased. It was reported in the news, but generally at the international level, and the notion was that human

rights abuses are occurring because there's a war going on. After the war, these people did not just disappear. They weren't just refugees and went someplace else. These massacres happened.

[The recognition that genocide had occurred] happened largely because of Clyde Snow, an anthropologist who worked with and helped train archeologists and anthropologists in Guatemala. They exhumed these massacre sites and documented them. And that forensic work led to the peace accords. The first site that was exhumed was the Rio Negro site in this dam, and so that is a really significant part. In the peace accords, the truth commission was set up and issued its report in 1999 saying that genocide had occurred. I began work shortly after. The exemplary case of genocide was this Rio Negro story of the village that is now underwater because of the Chixoy Dam. And that was hugely significant because it showed relationships between internationally financed development and the ways in which violence at times results. But also, because when you look at the financial trail of money, it was that dam that financed the genocide.

Rylko-Bauer: It's interesting to hear of the different anthropologists that have been involved, and archeologists.

Johnston: In the Chixoy Dam study we had over a thousand people directly or indirectly involved in contributing information that I was able to tap into for one reason or another.

Rylko-Bauer: This is a great example of what you said at the very beginning, that impact and advocacy doesn't happen because one person does something. That it takes a huge collaborative team of people. I want to shift to one last topic. You also did work with the EPA, so, if you could talk a bit about that project?

Johnston: The *Who Pays the Price* book, when it came out, I sent it to Al Gore and Kathleen McGinty, the head of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. Al Gore sent it to the EPA. And starting in 1996, up until the end of their term, when you walked into the EPA's office building there it was in the entry, on a pedestal. Some of those ideas were used when Gore was given the task of reorganizing and reinventing government. He created or supported the initiative in EPA to create an office of sustainable ecosystems in communities. They contacted the SfAA, because on the cover of *Who Pays the Price,* the Society for Applied Anthropology is underneath my name. They said they would like to create a cooperative agreement to work with SfAA to help communities develop their own means and capabilities to

recognize and address in appropriate meaningful ways their environmental problems.

Jay Schensul, SfAA president, gets the call out of the blue in 1996. And she's "wow, this is amazing! This is great! We could do this!" She contacted me and together Jay and I wrote a cooperative agreement in negotiation with the government counterpart, Theresa Trainor, a master's degree anthropologist, that allowed us to have full autonomy, full control. We would only work at the invitation of communities. And the communities would tell EPA that we have these problems and issues, and EPA would say, we have these resources. And then they would set the community up in negotiation with the SfAA to discuss what exactly they needed.

Rylko-Bauer: Would it make sense to give an example?

Johnston: I worked as the director of the project, and set up an advisory board with Shirley Fiske, Bonnie McCay, Ed Liebow, and Miguel Vasquez. The advisory board worked for the whole five years of this cooperative agreement between the EPA and the SfAA, and I apologize if I've forgotten any names. We had to define who are we and what are we doing. So, we had this day-long meeting where we negotiated and described and figured it all out.

Our first fellow, Eric Jones, was taking notes, where we decided to call it *environmental anthropology*. We created the term and then we defined what environmental anthropology means. And we described how it would be employed and deployed in this project; that we would be doing environmental social science, because this is an applied anthropology organization that is writ-large, interdisciplinary. Among other things, we would be working with communities, but we would also be doing internships and fellowships—first a fellowship that you could get with a master's degree, and then we had technical assistance at a higher level with PhD folks who were doing very specific projects. We worked in 27 states over the four years that I was director of the project, and I think that I had 54 interns and fellows working.

The projects ranged from getting environmental social science in the Everglades restoration plan, doing lead hazards outreach in Philadelphia, looking at pesticides and sustainability in agricultural workers in Washington, to finding an anthropologist to work in a sensitive and collaborative way with the Zuni nation to do a repatriation of a sacred wetlands. It was remarkable. And it was also a whole lot of work and we were quite, quite effective.

By the end of the four years, EPA needed to decide if they wanted to negotiate an expansion the following year. We had a cap of $250,000 a year that we could do in projects. They wanted to expand, but they wanted us to be more professional. I was working and doing everything myself in terms of doing the reports and the reporting; the SfAA managed and sent out checks.

At any rate, they wanted us to put out more professional products similar to the Ecological Society of America and get into the computer age—some glossy publications, booklets, that sort of thing. So, I pitched it to the executive board at the SfAA, that we have a space instead of being a cyber organization. The SfAA would serve as an umbrella and this would be a nonprofit project [similar to the nonprofit operations of the Ecological Society of America] that has its own staff, that the SfAA would pay 50% of the staff initially to get it up and running, and that we would go through the grants, etc. The board said no. It's really too bad, because at that time we also got requests from CDC and from forestry to do the same kinds of cooperative agreements. So, there was this sense of 'we'd like to help communities solve their problems' recognition of the role of anthropologists and this organization, but the SfAA was not prepared to do it.

But it's interesting to see, in terms of 'ripples in the pond,' the many fellows that I worked with and where they've gone. I know one who, for example, is the head of the California water board right now, and others who hold all kinds of different positions–professors as well as public citizens doing the kinds of work that they do. And then there are the communities and the changes in relationships that occurred. But more significant, writ large, was environmental anthropology and the notion that you could be an "environmental anthropologist." Now people know what that means around the world.

RYLKO-BAUER: Can you talk about some of the other "ripples in the pond," as you put it?

JOHNSTON: So, what was important about the focus and set of concerns of the SfAA Committee on Human Rights and the Environment was that all the anthropologists on this committee were members also of the AAA. Every year we met at the AAAs and the SfAAs and we helped shape the meeting programs as a result. And there were derivative products. So, *Who Pays the Price?* was a formal report for the SfAA. And then our committee's work focused on how do we get this message out in various venues? And how do we advocate that particular question of *Who Pays the Price?* and the point that it's not just individuals, it's not just peoples of color, that

it's also cultural and social communities who are vulnerable? That led to a new way of framing and thinking for a whole lot of people.

As we continued to meet and work on advocacy, we asked the next questions, such as what are communities doing about their circumstances and situation and how can we best interact with them? That was the impetus for the second book, *Life and Death Matters: Human Rights and Environment at the End of the Millennium*. Every contribution in that 1998 volume came from members of the initial *Who Pays the Price?* study to look explicitly at that question. And to take a longer-term perspective, not just summation of a case, but to look at the interaction between the issues, the communities, their efforts to try and secure justice.

John Donahue, one of our members, suggested that we organize a session at the 1995 SfAA meetings in Albuquerque that focused on relationships between water and culture and power. That was really the subtext of our thinking, you know, human environmental relationships. It was clear from the double session that we had so much interest and such a wealth of material. Again, the people involved were from all over the world asking these questions, and they were members of our committee.

RYLKO-BAUER: Do you remember who those people were?

JOHNSTON: Well, they're in the book that came out of that—*Water, Culture and Power*—Anne Ferguson, Bill Derman, and a whole host of people. It was the first environmental social science book to come out on water with Island Press, an environmental science publisher. And it went very large in terms of national, international, and trans-disciplinary attention. So, the "ripples in the pond" were these clear connections between the local and the global. These were place-based issues that were also part of broader assaults and impacts on peoples and on the hydrosphere, writ large.

When you understand that, then you look at tension and conflict in different areas, it allows the kaleidoscope lens to shift a bit and you see things differently. In this case, a few years later, the UN had a water initiative that Mary Elmendorf, another really wonderful applied anthropologist, helped get going. Her work in the UN on water not only got the gender perspective ingrained within the UN system, but also this concern for water as a human right.

Our book is still being used and cited at the UN level. I also responded to a UNESCO call asking for guidance or a desire to participate in this potential expert panel being

formed on water and culture. And I sent them our book, which ended up being an important keystone in the expert panel's framing. I was the US representative on this expert panel, from 2008 to 2011.

One of the end products of that period of work on water, cultural diversity, and environmental change was the first environmental textbook geared explicitly to those in social sciences, in civil engineering, in hydrology. The thought being that if you want to do transformative change strategically you want to get these young folks, who are right now in school, going back to their home countries or communities with a broader perspective. And ideally, we wanted it taught at the UN hydrology schools and so forth—to really think about water as part of the hydrosphere, not just water in a place-based way. I wrote the proposal and the initial concept, and eventually was the editor-in-chief.

It had cases from forty-five countries and maybe seventy-nine contributions, with five major themes with case studies and personal or first-person voices and cultural narrative asides. Full color. Fully illustrated. The kind of textbook that, you know, Biology 101 has. A hardback big thing. And Springer Netherlands agreed to publish it with UNESCO. I negotiated the contract with them and ensured that a modest royalty would go to UNESCO, and that after one year's time Springer could sell the hardcover and put out an e-book. But we would have the rights [to distribute the e-book]. We would get a pdf file of the book, and UNESCO and the project partners, including the Center for Political Ecology, which I'd been working through, would have rights to distribute it for free online.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, what's the timeframe of this?

JOHNSTON: That came out finally in late 2011 [publication date is 2012]. A year later we were able to put it on the Web and make it a free textbook. And it's just growing every single day. And it's being taught now in Thailand, in India, in China, you know, all over the world. So, its initial core framing—the issues, strategies, and connectivity from the local to global and these intersecting concerns—started with that first *Who Pays the Price?* question. And looking at culture, power, and the global systems . . .

RYLKO-BAUER: What's the title of the book?

JOHNSTON: *Water, Cultural Diversity, and Global Environmental Change: Emerging Trends, Sustainable Futures?*

RYLKO-BAUER: To be honest with you, this sounds like much more than just ripples in the pond; more like waves that build, and it's exciting.

JOHNSTON: Maybe that's the wrong word. But it's like you throw something out there and then there can be these ripples, and other people interact with it and that's part of it. The idea that, through the passage of time, something can be an inspiration and a collective of like-minded people getting together, trying . . . And the SfAA especially allowed for that when we could have these meetings that were truly transdisciplinary and everybody felt at home. It was also a comfortable place for people who are sociologists, geographers, wildlife ecologists, and so forth.

RYLKO-BAUER: And you need that interdisciplinarity, you can't do it without that.

JOHNSTON: No. You don't have the broader perspective.

RYLKO-BAUER: Right. We were talking before the interview started about other things that resulted from the time that you spent on the SfAA Human Rights and the Environment Committee and you mentioned some work that you did with Ted Downing . . .

JOHNSTON: Oh yeah. [As noted earlier with regard to human rights and the environment, we would] meet twice a year at SfAA and AAA meetings with the same groups of people that included substantive sessions that allowed for a very fast process and organic expansion. Ted Downing and I had known each other from SfAA for a number of years. He approached me at one of those meetings to explain that he was involved in a case where his own professional rights were being abused and especially his ethical responsibility to do no harm to the people he was working with. And he asked for my advice given that I had worked in both the SfAA and the AAA on human rights issues.

His situation was a really complicated one. He was asked to be an expert adviser to the International Financial Corporation (IFC), a part of the World Bank, on their accountability mechanism, to do an audit. He and Jay Hair, head of National Wildlife Federation. Jay Hair was supposed to do an audit of were there any environmental violations of a large dam development in Chile and Downing was asked to audit for violations on the social side. This was the Pangue Dam on the Biobio River, which displaced indigenous people in the heart of the Pehuen territory.
Downing went down and did a participatory and collaborative approach telling the communities, this is what I'm doing, totally transparent, any report I present back

would go to you. That was written in his contract, he had appended this ethical dimension to it. The IFC balked at it, but agreed and signed off. And so that was his mandate. He did his research. He found ten million or so dollars [had been siphoned off] in corruption from just the initial deforestation. Profit from any timber harvesting should have gone to the people who owned the land. Instead all of the timber in surrounding areas around the dams were harvested once the roads were put in and the money just disappeared.

He tracked the paper trail to show this corruption. Money went into the social organization and it went out again in illegal ways. The IFC had had a very exciting idea [to offset social impacts, that had some problems in its implementation. The plan was to create a means by which money was put in a nonprofit community-controlled fund to do the kinds of development and things that the indigenous people need so they can have control by transferring this natural capital into capital that allowed for social development. That was the plan. And what Downing was supposed to do was ask—did it work?

And [in answering this question] he demonstrated mass violations and huge problems that resulted from a flawed impact assessment and prediction of what the problems might be. As well as problems associated with the implementation of how to mitigate the known potential impacts. He also demonstrated people evicted and displaced without any compensation at all.

So, he came up with a report that was not only a summation of what he saw going on, but also supported by evidence, especially finding the paper trails. He submitted it to the IFC and then was going to submit it to the communities. He was told, you can't submit it to the communities. This is a public-private partnership that the IFC was involved in. Not even the Chilean government was allowed to have a copy of the report that Downing did. And so Downing was in a real conundrum—I have this obligation to get it out, I can't get it out and they say that they have these other contractual obligations that supersede my agreement. And in the interest of their obligation to the builder they said, if you make it public we will sue and garner your wages for your lifetime, etc. So, he took the issue to me and I said, why don't you go to both organizations? The SfAA and talk to the President, John Young. And he and a few other folks might have some ideas on how to ask for a meeting with the president of the World Bank and talk these things through. Go top down. Do a president-to-president meeting.

And then do the same thing in the AAA and present it officially to the Human Rights Committee. Jim Peacock, a strong supporter of human rights, by that point was a past AAA President appointed to the Human Rights Committee, [which could investigate human rights issues and complaints from its members]. The AAA had Terry Turner and me investigate more deeply. And the action in the SfAA was that John Young and—apologies if this is wrong but I believe Ed Liebow and Rob Winthrop went with him on this meeting to sit down with the World Bank President and go over the issues and concerns and especially the ethical codes and relationships in the social impacts and the serious nature of it all.

The report that Terry Turner and I did, which the AAA President signed off on, was published on the Web and was immediately a public document. It was the first time that a professional anthropology organization released a public document that said that these human rights and environmental issues had been violated by the World Bank. And we'd gotten in our investigations all kinds of supportive material and documents from environmental civil society. We contacted groups in Chile and some who'd been to the UN to protest over this. So, it had a big impact. And one of the most important ones was that because it was accessible on the Web, we got a note from environmental activists in Chile asking if they could have permission to translate and publish it in Spanish, yes! —[laughs]—which they did. And that report still has currency especially in Latin American circles as being a foundational document, because scientists and a scientific organization did this investigation. And it had a huge social and political result in rethinking what the responsibilities and obligations [of development financiers] are really. Not just letter of law. But really, these are rules that have profound consequential damages if you do not attend to them.

RYLKO-BAUER: Right.

JOHNSTON: And those damages are bigger messes you have to pay down the line.

RYLKO-BAUER: What happened with the SfAA side of that?

JOHNSTON: Well, they learned that, you know, Presidents can do that sort of thing. They went to the World Bank; they had a sit-down meeting. It was the first time we had this sort of president-to-president thing. It hasn't happened since then, but what it did was create the notion that the organization can take different kinds of roles beyond just simply being a social club that furthers the intellectual interests of its members.

RYLKO-BAUER: That it can advocate.

JOHNSTON: That it can advocate. And that advocacy is strongest is when it's obviously based on scientific methods that are evidentiary and clearly demonstrably valid. It's not just, oh, I have an issue. It certainly created greater interest in being what I think of as a labor organization that effectively represents anthropological workers. And that our code of ethics and our human rights statements are key foundational documents that give a mandate and a guidance for these organizations to act on our behalf. And, occasionally they have in different ways. Both those two organizations—it would be wonderful if they would professionalize further—[laughs]—but that comes down to members, member interests, and the management of the business offices.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, I'm going to shift a little, because, I know that you've been associated with the Center for Political Ecology that's located in Santa Cruz for a long time. Can you describe the Center and how it fits with the work that you've done? Because that's been a very strong part of your identity. And is it interdisciplinary?

JOHNSTON: Oh yeah. It used to be the Center for Ecological Socialism. It was created by Jim O'Connor, a Marxist economist, sociologist, when he came to UC-Santa Cruz. He wanted to put out this journal called *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*. He had this idea of the new Marx—green got red, red got green, we have to do some fusion here. The journal had these different pods of people—in the San Francisco Bay Area, Toronto, the New York area, Spain, in eight places around the world. Interdisciplinary, to develop the material, review contributions, collectively discuss these. And I was the only anthropologist involved in this editorial collective at that time. Barbara Laurence was the secretary-treasurer of the organization, but really ran the journal. So, I was a Center for Ecological Socialism fellow initially and that allowed me access to the library, and if you get grant money you can run it through the nonprofit. But more importantly, for me it was an identity which became much stronger when they decided to change the name to Center for Political Ecology, because in '81 I did a political ecology dissertation and the first course I ever designed was a political ecology course.

RYLKO-BAUER: So, it felt really comfortable for you?

JOHNSTON: It was my identity. **S**o, I decided it was a matter of political affiliation. There were many years I was full-time employed doing this or that, and had multiple affiliations. But I always used the Center for every single publication as my primary

affiliation because I wanted to broadcast the name, political ecology, and get people thinking about it. It was my intellectual home; I have to say and that's how it still is. It's a 501(c)(3) and in the last probably decade or so it increasingly became, especially when I started working in Guatemala, a really wonderful mechanism and means to do collaborative work. Because it's an environmental advocacy group. It's not . . . you know, it's not Greenpeace.

RYLKO-BAUER: Yeah.

JOHNSTON: I'm not doing protests, I'm not marching in the trenches, I am not an activist, and this is not an activist organization. Its funding and approach are to produce the kinds of educational materials that change thinking and change the world. So, at any rate, when I was down in Guatemala what it meant was that I could work collaboratively and in partnership with environmental activist groups, civil society, professional organizations, and the UN, but the Center was where the scientific study was being conducted. So, we had our collaborations and clear lines of power and authority and roles very marked out. And that has proven to be a very powerful model. So, it's taking that sort of participatory collaborative—the anthropologist and the community writ large—and scaling it up. The Center for Political Ecology is a cyber-based operation and a Web site. As many entities are evolving to. And our members are all over the world and we do action research.

RYLKO-BAUER: If I recall correctly, the five-volume final product of the Chixoy Dam research and analysis—which we talked about earlier—all of that got posted on that Web site.

JOHNSTON: What was important in that situation was how do you create rights-protective space? One of the things I was keenly worried about was that we were doing truth commission style research in a participatory way—we weren't doing it secretly; we were letting everybody know. And we asked everybody to participate: The World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the UN special rapporteur to support and assist, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, and the affected communities. So, everybody knew what was going on.
And then we launched the report in a public way. We had a press conference that was attended by many of the key journalists in TV, radio, news, et cetera. It was all over Latin America by the end of the day. We were on TV—it was kind of cool—[laughs]. That was in 2005.

Only six years previously, a similar sort of process took place in Guatemala that was looking writ large at a truth commission on the relationship between massacres and who did it. But the night before they launched that report in 1999, the main material author of the report was killed. And so, we were really fearful. You know, we'd had death threats and things like that in the course of doing the study, our ethnographers that were on the ground. I wasn't in the country and so I was more insulated. This was an investigation looking at, among other things, whether or not there was corruption and violation in the ways in which funds were used—how much money was used to build the dam, what was the rest of the money used for, was any of the dam equipment like helicopters used to disappear people, yes, that sort of thing. So, it was a very volatile time.

Having the Center for Political Ecology involvement was part of our rights protection strategy, to say we were going to publish everything simultaneously in English and Spanish, immediately in multiple places on the Web. We built a Web site and got it functioning specifically so that we had a place to publish it. And at the same time, we got the American Association for the Advancement of Science to be involved and to put it on their Guatemala Page where they had the original truth and reconciliation report. So that, even if we were killed, it was still out there. So, when I think of what is the Center for Political Ecology, it has evolved and has different sorts of meanings, and that was a very important one.

RYLKO-BAUER: A final question —you've done a lot of work as an adviser, expert panel member, expert witness for many groups on many different issues. You've done this while working in the area of environmental equity and action towards social justice and finding ways of sustaining human rights. So, I'm wondering, what advice would you give young scholars, young people.

JOHNSTON: When I think through from who I was to who I am and the sort of the path that I've taken, you know what I learned along the way was that what really resonates with yourself is a good touchstone: the ways you interact in life and how it influences and affects who you are and what resonates is important. But being true to your heart and true to the relationships and the people in your life matters hands down every time over money. And so, I'm a socialist rather than a materialist [laughs]. If the goal in life is to die with a smile on your face, the question is how did that smile get there? And for me, that smile got there knowing that I made a difference. I've done things in the world that helped and my presence has created ripples in the pond and I have used my talents to the best that I can and that's what you take with you when you die.

I think that we were raised in a time and in a culture where we have a seductive materialist realm around us. It's difficult to balance, uh, the economic . . . For me family is first. And as you get on through life you realize there's many definitions of family [laughs].

RYLKO-BAUER: It's true.

JOHNSTON: And when you continue to put those matters and issues first, it's the ethical relationships that really ring true.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, to apply that kind of vision to concrete social problems, what pragmatic tools do you think that young scholars need? How do you actually end up being able to transform it into concrete action? And especially tools within anthropology.

JOHNSTON: Right. What I strongly advise everybody is if you're interested in, for example, environment and human rights or medicine and human rights, it's great to be in an interdisciplinary field like anthropology which is basically all of everything. On the other hand, that becomes such a generalist perspective, that it has little meaning in the practical workforce.
A dual degree path, secondary credentials, you know, like anthropologist-lawyer, or an NGO certificate with your degree. If you want to be effective, you need to have power in the various settings that is acknowledged and honored. So, when I go to teach in the environmental studies department, the fact that I have an environmental science master's degree means I can teach the science classes. When I went to the UN and worked in that transdisciplinary panel, the fact that I had science and social science credentials meant everything. But when I went to Japan the fact that I was a sensei, because I have an honorary adjunct professorship at Michigan State University, that meant I was heard in a different way.
So, having those multiple affiliations and credentials is for me the adaptive mechanism that allowed me to do what I wanted to do in these different settings. And then also you have to know that you have morphed and changed into a peculiar animal as an anthropologist. When I go to the advocacy realms and interact with my colleagues there, they see me as the academic**,** so I can only write certain sorts of things because I'm always analyzing. And then when I go to my academic realms, they pigeonhole me as the activist. Both groups have their tendency to pigeonhole you. So, recognizing that, learning to listen, and then learning to adapt. Be flexible in both realms. That's a lifelong lesson.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, Barbara, this has been a real pleasure. And I really appreciate that you took the time and shared these different things that you've done with me and everybody who's going to listen or read the interview in the future. So, thank you very much.

JOHNSTON: I want to add a caveat. Chaos happens. And you don't always have the outcome you hoped for. One of the greatest measures of success, and this is what is success in our discipline, and especially doing the kind of work I've done, is to wake up and realize one day well, it's okay. Because I'm working with and for these people or this issue and I've created these tools that have greater currency than just the time, the moment, and the battle in which we potentially could have changed things. That actually, we're different people at the end of the day. And the tools that I made have strength and resilience that continue to get reused by all kinds of countless people who I have no contact with, have no idea what's going on. And in the end, you have a much more powerful transformative change. It's not individual or time-specific-directed. The best indicator I've learned in life of being successful is working yourself out of a job.

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