



Great Britain
Journals Press

Print ISSN: 2515-5784
Online ISSN: 2515-5792
DOI: 10.17406/LJRHSS

London Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

Volume 26 | Issue 6 | Compilation 1.0

COMPILED IN UNITED KINGDOM

MULTILINGUAL

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Tree Poems and
Contemporary
Ecopoetry Goals

Global
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Legal Challenges
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Children's
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IN THIS ISSUE

London Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

General Catalogue

Volume 26 Issue 6 2026

EDITION

Digital Journal

Released digital issue assembled for the public journal archive.

REGISTER

LJRHSS / 26.6

LJRHSS - Section

Humanities and social science register for archival, interpretive, and interdisciplinary scholarship.

PUBLISHER

Great Britain Journals Press
United States

ISSUE RECORD

LJRHSS Volume 26 Issue 6

CIRCULATION BASIS

This compiled issue file is distributed for archive, cataloguing, review, and citation continuity. Individual article records retain their own article-level rights and metadata.

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RESEARCH FINGERPRINT

IDENTIFIER

LJRHSS-227018

PEER REVIEW

Double Blind

SIMILARITY CHECK

Perplexity AI and iThenticate

ACCESS

Open Access

LANGUAGE

English

PRINT ISSN

2515-5784

ONLINE ISSN

2515-5792

EDITION

ABBREVIATION

LJRHSS

VOLUME

26

ISSUE

6

YEAR

2026

KEY DATES

RECEIVED

2026-04-13

ACCEPTED

2026-04-17

ONLINE PUBLISHED

2026-06-11

PUBLISHED

2026-08-05

CATALOGING

CROSSMARK DOI

10.34257/LJRHSS227018UK

LCC CLASS

PN1010-1551, GE140

DDC CLASS

809.1936

ANZSRC FOR CLASS

200502

ACCESS
ONLINE

Article Record

Contemporary Tree Poems and the Goals of Ecopoetry

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the ecological aesthetics and ethics of contemporary poetry about trees and forests, arguing that developments in forest science and plant biology have transformed how we conceptualize the relationship between nature and culture. Drawing on recent research into mycorrhizal networks (“the wood wide web”) and systems thinking, the study traces a shift from anthropocentric views toward a “networked kinship consciousness” that emphasizes multispecies interdependency. Through close readings of works by poets such as Robert Hass, Dan Bellm, Tim Seibles, August Kleinzahler, Jane Hirshfield, Alice Oswald, Forrest Gander, Jimmy Santiago Baca, and Linda Hogan, the paper illustrates how ecopoetry models a non-anthropocentric ethic of kinship. It concludes by comparing these poetic strategies with the regenerative narrative visions of tree habitats in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and Hayao Miyazaki’s *Princess Mononoke*, advocating for “wildcrafting” and regenerative practices as essential cultural work in the era of the Anthropocene

Index Terms: ecopoetry • forest science • mycelial networks • contemporary poetry • nature-culture symbiosis • Anthropocene • kinship studies • tree poems

FUNDING

No external funding was declared for this work.

CONFLICTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AI USAGE

No generative AI was used for analysis or results.

HOW TO CITE

Schmidt (2026). Contemporary Tree Poems and the Goals of Ecopoetry. *London Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 26(6), 1-13. DOI: 10.34257/LJRHSS227018UK

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Abstract

This essay explores the ecological aesthetics and ethics of contemporary poetry about trees and forests, arguing that developments in forest science and plant biology have transformed how we conceptualize the relationship between nature and culture. Drawing on recent research into mycorrhizal networks (“the wood wide web”) and systems thinking, the study traces a shift from anthropocentric views toward a “networked kinship consciousness” that emphasizes multispecies interdependency. Through close readings of works by poets such as Robert Hass, Dan Bellm, Tim Seibles, August Kleinzahler, Jane Hirshfield, Alice Oswald, Forrest Gander, Jimmy Santiago Baca, and Linda Hogan, the paper illustrates how ecopoetry models a non-anthropocentric ethic of kinship. It concludes by comparing these poetic strategies with the regenerative narrative visions of tree habitats in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and Hayao Miyazaki’s *Princess Mononoke*, advocating for “wildcrafting” and regenerative practices as essential cultural work in the era of the Anthropocene

Keywords: *ecopoetry, forest science, mycelial networks, contemporary poetry, nature-culture symbiosis, Anthropocene, kinship studies, tree poems*

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1 Introduction

“

“The things she catches Doug-firs doing, over the course of these years, fill her with joy. When the lateral roots of two Douglas-firs run into each other underground, they fuse. Through those self-grafted knots, the two trees join their vascular systems together and become one. Networked together underground by countless thousands of miles of living fungal threads, her trees feed and heal each other, keep their young and sick alive, pool their resources and metabolites into community chests.... It will take years for the picture to emerge. There will be findings, unbelievable truths confirmed by a spreading worldwide web of researchers in Canada, Europe, Asia, all happily swapping data through faster and better channels. Her trees are far more social than even Patricia [Westerford] suspected. There are no individuals. There aren’t even separate species. Everything in the forest is the forest. Competition is not separable from endless flavors of cooperation.”

—Richard Powers, *The Overstory*^a

^aRichard Powers, *The Overstory*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2018, p. 142.

In 2005, Robert Hass published his poem “The Problem of Describing Trees” reminding us of the limits of language in describing what trees do and why. He also wryly suggested that it is “good for poetry sometimes to disenchant us,” even as in the three lines that conclude the poem, Hass insisted on enchantment: he chants a song celebrating our stubborn human ability to image rooted trees *dancing*.¹

¹Hass’s “The Problem of Describing Trees” is from *Time and Materials. Poems 1997-2005*. New York: Ecco (Harper Collins), 2007. See also: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/06/27/the-problem-of-describing-trees>. Accessed April 12, 2026.

Since Hass’s poem appeared, more knowledge has emerged from plant biologists about how even a huge grove of aspen trees is actually a single organism/community—and one that can (slowly) migrate. Hass focuses on the paradox that it’s hard for poems to describe life in motion, either for trees or for other beings, including people, either in a small scale (such as making vivid a particular moment) or over a long time span. But in the two decades that have passed since Hass’ poem was published, forest science has made the “problem of describing trees” even more profound. (And Hass would be delighted with such developments. He keeps up with both science and with poetry).

Two elements regarding aspen have emerged from recent research: that a forest of aspen is often a single widely distributed root mass, and that such a root system can migrate if it has to.² Such features essential to the species’ resilience are invisible to human beings unless we know how to look and understand more deeply. Our cliché of distinguishing the forest from its trees is an attempt to undertake systems thinking, that is, how to understand how a whole has features and powers that cannot be understood by focusing on its individual parts. But the forest/tree cliché is an oversimplification of how scientists over the last few decades have come to understand how forests work as ecosystems. Our knowledge of forests composed of many trees, not just aspen, has also exponentially been transformed in recent decades. Not only do trees of the same species share resources via their underground networks, but a “forest” is comprised of networks linking many different *kingdoms*—plants, animals, microbes, and fungi—and a vast number of different species. Overlapping networks of communication and nutrient exchange extend both above and below ground, visible and invisible to the human eye. As shown by *The Overstory* excerpt above, whose fictional Patricia Westford

²See Zach St. George, *The Journeys of Trees: A Story About Forests, People, and the Future*. New York: Norton, 2020. Two other recommended books: Wohlleben, Peter, and S Simard. *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World*. Translated by Jane Billingham, David Suzuki Institute, 2016; and Farmer, Jared. *Elderflora: A Modern History of Ancient Trees*. mBasic Books, Hachette Book Group, 2023.

was modeled on actual forest scientists, including Suzanne Simard, the wood wide web may also become a way of understanding highly functional, diverse, and adaptive networks of human communities, including those built by scientists.

Further, a forest's work of building and decomposing goes on continuously, as Alison Deming reminds us in her poem celebrating fungi's role in forests, "This Ground Made of Trees": "a million lives work/ at metabolizing/ what came before them." The decomposer networks in a forest are often invisible (unless you know how to look), but they are just as important as the photosynthesis process in leaves that generates the fuel that helps plants build things. Poets have long been fascinated with mushrooms, though in earlier centuries they were often seen as monstrous—as in Dickinson's poem #1350 comparing a mushrooms to an "Elf" or Judas Iscariot.³ But interest by poets in fungi has mushroomed in the last decades too, as evidence emerges that forests couldn't exist without mycelial networks. There's even an anthology *Decomposition*, collecting fungi-inspired poems (2010).⁴ Deming's line above describes mushrooms' role in an ecosystem, but Pattiann Rogers' "Geocentric" enacts in language what mushrooms do. Her funky, fervent catalogue ode doesn't just celebrate forest recycling; she revels in recycling lingo too, remixing a wide range of words connoting hell, decay, sex, poison, and rebirth, their negatives now all made positive:

“malodorous rut
and scarp, all sulfur fissures
and fetid hillside seepages, old
old, dependable, engendering
forever the stench and stretch
and warm seethe of inevitable
putrefaction, nobody
loves you as I do. (72)

In what ways may *poems* inspired by forests and new developments in forestry science also model how to value interdependency and both an aesthetic and an *ethic* shaped when interdependence is valued? Can tree poems give not just models but dramatic enactments of networks at work? The hypothesis tested in this essay is that, yes, tree poems not only map for us multiple new ways of thinking about both forests and trees, but they give us an ethic and aesthetic that are essential to the cultural work that ecopoetry does amidst the poisons of the Anthropocene. Forests and their fungal networks break down and recycle poisons as well as dead matter, making it possible to build anew. Perhaps some poems do similar work with our languages and our consciousness?

What's emerging globally over the last few decades is a field of inquiry that might be called Gaia kinship studies, an interdisciplinary field that has broad implications for studying culture, including literature and literary history, inspired in part by current developments in forestry and the study of other ecosystem dynamics. For instance, consider this question posed by *Practice*, one collection in the multi-volume essay anthology *Kinship: Belonging in a World of Relations* published by the Center for Humans and Nature in 2021: "From the perspective of kinship as a recognition of nonhuman personhood, of kincentric ethics, and of kinship as a verb involving active and ongoing participation, how are we to live?" Exploring answers to those questions guides the entire *Kinship*

anthology project. Similarly, the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals in 2025 released its *Status of the Tribes and Climate Change Report*, documenting both the challenges faced and how traditional ecological knowledge and practices (TEK) are increasingly being used to manage ecosystems, treating the land and water and the species residing there as kin deserving our care, not solely as a resource to be used. The next section of this essay briefly assesses these developments, for they point to a way beyond passive despair that nothing can now be done to stave off climate disaster.⁵

The bulk of this essay surveys representative contemporary poets on seeing trees as well as forests, including the ways in which single trees in a healthy forest become their own micro-communities. What emerges is both an array of diverse solutions to "the problem of describing trees" and methods for mapping the network of relations among species that make up a forest. Bellm uses the study of one of the largest and oldest life-forms on the planet—a huge "forest" of aspen trees that is actually a single biological entity—to meditate on conflicting ways to understand what Baudelaire called the "forest" of "correspondences" that are poetic literary tradition.⁶ He's intentionally honoring Hass' poem but also revising/recycling it. Seibles is fascinated by the relentless will in plants to survive and reproduce, versus the many ways in which humans try to kill them; this tension generates the poet's own meditations on survivance. Kleinzahler finds nature embedded in the midst of an industrial highway network. Hirshfield gives us a set of sly Zen paradoxes to shake her readers' assumptions about what the use value of trees might be to us. Several poems from Oswald's collection *Woods etc.* explore kinship relations with other beings, including an owl and a leaf as well as an ancient forest. Gander and Holten build a poem of a map of interspecies relations within a redwood forest from its overstory to its roots. Finally, capping this essay's middle section, poems by Native poets Baca and Hogan use trees and other beings to transform their understanding (rather like Oswald and Seibles) of human potential. Baca ends his poem with a celebration reconnecting himself to a kinship network of both mortal and immortal beings. Daringly, Hogan crafts her poem's speaker to be more-than-human; its "voice" morphs from being a single tree to that of species—and then concludes by offering us humans the wisdom of the life-force beyond all the beings in Creation. Although inspired by tree rings, Hogan rings changes on ways to apprehend the universe as a forest of kinship relations. Poetry's job for Hogan, as for the other poets studied here, is to wrench us readers away from our ingrained narcissism, our anthropocentrism. They find in trees' and forests' branching kinship networks the perfect analogy for nudging self-centered readers to think differently.

I conclude with a consideration of J. R. R. Tolkien, focusing on Gandriel's gifts to Samwise Gamgee in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. I then compare Tolkien's epic's ending with that of Hiya Miyazaki's eco-parable film *Princess Mononoke*. Ending with these two great storytellers in media other than poetry allows me to re-frame how to understand the causes of ecocide and the ways forward suggested by the poems and prose considered in the body of this essay. For both Tolkien and Miyazaki unforgettably remind us that tree habitats model

⁵Van Horn, Gavin, et al., eds. *Kinship: Belonging in a World of Relations*. Center for Humans and Nature, 2021.

Status of Tribes and Climate Change Working Group. (2025). *Status of Tribes and Climate Change*, Vol. 2 (B. M. Panek, Ed.). Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals, Northern Arizona University. <http://nau.edu/staccereport>.

For two accounts detailing instances where tribes have (often after long legal battles) won back their rights to manage ecosystems in portions of their traditional homelands, see Solnit and O'Reilly. Rebecca Solnit, *The Beginning Comes After the End*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2026).

Katie O'Reilly, "The Reciprocity Way. Indigenous knowledge and climate science combine to chart a path forward. *Sierra* 111.1 (Spring 2026): 6-7.

⁶Baudelaire, "Correspondences." For a good translation, I recommend Daisy Fried, *The Year the City Emptied / After Baudelaire*. Chicago: Flood Editions, 2022. 48.

³Emily Dickinson, "The Mushroom is the Elf of Plants": <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56458/the-mushroom-is-the-elf-of-plants-1350>.

⁴Deming's poem is in *Decomposition: An Anthology of Fungi-Inspired Poems*, edited by Renée Roehl and Kelly Chadwick. Sand Pointe, Idaho: Lost Roads Press, 2010, pp. 110-11. So is Rogers' "Geocentric," 72.

both an *aesthetic and an ethic of networked kinship consciousness* that is non-anthropocentric, involves multispecies interrelationships, and draws no strict line separating “nature” and “culture.”

For context, it's worth asking what contemporary prose writers and activists are doing with the theme of trees' branching networks and the responsibilities we humans face. There is no room to do even a brief survey of relevant recent writings on how humans for eons have linked expansions of human consciousness to trees and their miraculous powers. But I provide here a core sample beyond the Richard Powers *Overstory* quotation used as an epigraph above. It will be evocative, not exhaustive. Remember that the root of evocative is *to give voice*.

Listen to the novelist and historian Amitav Ghosh, from *The Nutmeg's Curse*, 2021:

“[I]t has long been accepted, by many millions of people, that a trans-species encounter, at a specific historical juncture, was essential to the Enlightenment of one particular human, Prince Siddhartha Gautama. ... What does this tell us? It tells us, first of all, that certain kinds of trans-species associations cannot be understood by the methods of science. ...Second, it tells us that an awareness of trans-species encounters of this sort have always existed among humans. [Here Ghosh mentions a story associated with St. Francis.] ... When and how did a small group of humans come to believe that other beings, including a majority of their own species, were incapable of articulation and agency? How were they able to establish the idea that nonhumans are mute and without minds, as the dominant wisdom of the time? An essential step toward the silencing of nonhuman voices was to imagine that only humans are capable of telling stories. (“Brute” 60-61)

Next, the novelist Tommy Orange, recounting things he was never told when he grew up in Oakland, California, not even when he went on school “field trips” to nearby redwood trees:

“[T]he trees I was visiting were second- and third-generation Oakland trees, merely hundreds of years old, just as I wasn't taught that the redwood forests I grew up taking field trips to were home to the thousands-of-years-old Saklan Miwok people. ...These second- and third-generation trees are part of what is called a fairy ring. A fairy ring is the name for a group of redwoods that grows in an almost perfect circle around an old-growth redwood stump cut down by loggers. This is a survival technique that precludes the need for seeding the soil, new trees growing from the preexisting root system. ... The act of survival in any living thing is its center, no matter where it is pushed or pulled, no matter in how many years aged in lines of skin, wrinkles or folds, in rings you don't see until they are irrevocably severed. (“Trees of Mystery,” 40-41)^a

^aTommy Orange, “Trees of Mystery,” *Orion Magazine*, Autumn 2021. <https://orionmagazine.org/article/trees-of-mystery/>.

Suzanne Simard is now a world-renowned forest scientist and author of the memoir *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of*

the Forest (2021). Her newest book is *When the Forest Breathes: Renewal and Resilience in the Natural World* (2026). Simard is an expert on old growth forest known to the lay public interested in such things, not just scientists and climate activists. My first quotation from her is from the first paragraph in a scientific “letter” in which she was the lead author, “Net transfer of carbon between ectomycorrhizal tree species in the field,” published with five other co-authors in the journal *Nature* in 1997:

“Plants within communities can be interconnected and exchange resources through a common hyphal network, and form guilds based on their shared mycorrhizal associates. Consequently, the theory that plant community dynamics operate mainly within the constraints of resource supply should be reformulated to consider mutualism between plants and their mycorrhizal fungi, as well as microbially mediated resource sharing.

And here's an excerpt from an interview with Simard published in a popular magazine, 2021:

“[P]eople are saying, “Oh, we're going to clear-cut these forests and plant a trillion trees, and that will increase our carbon sequestration capacity.” In the meantime, we're cutting down these forests which are already storing way more carbon than these little plantations are going to be sequestering. And it's going to take those plantations decades and decades to catch up to what they were as old forests. So reforestation is a good idea, but only if we keep our old forests intact — keep the boreal intact, keep the Amazon intact, keep our rainforests intact. Because if we lose those, there is no amount of tree planting that is going to save us.”^a

^aThe first quotation is from p. 579 in Simard et al, “Net transfer of carbon between ectomycorrhizal tree species in the field,” *Nature* 388 (7 August 1997): 579-82. Accessed 1 July 2021. For the second quotation, see Robert Moor, “Suzanne Simard Changed How the World Sees Trees,” *New York Magazine* 6 May 2021. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/suzanne-simard-interview.html>. Accessed 26 September 2021. Simard, Suzanne. *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2021. See also Wohlleben, Peter, et al. *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World*. David Suzuki Institute, 2016. Simard contributed to this collection.

The poet Craig Santos Perez, native Chamorro from Guahan (Guam), uses the banyan tree to signify both the connectedness of the Chamorro diaspora and how he hopes his book *Unincorporated Territory* (2008) will connect to a reader. Perez notes that his text is

“composed of excerpts from seven different serial poems (totaling around 100 pages) that weave into each other. I based this design on the form of the trunkon nunu, or banyan tree, which grows on Guam. From the tree's branches, new root systems (known as “aerial prop roots”) reach toward the ground, forming new trunks over time. I imagine each excerpted poem in this book as an “aerial root” grounded into the page and onto the reader's hand. In turn, I imagine each book-length excerpt as one possible trunk composed of braided, aerial roots. To connect the entirety of the project, many of the poems that appear in this first book will continue in subsequent collections.

In the Chamorro belief system it's said that taotaomonas (the spirits of my ancestors) protect the trunkon nunu and live in the spaces that the roots create. This project hopes to create de-territorialized spaces for their spirits and my voice to dwell.^a

^aNational Book Critics Circle. "Conversations: Small Press Spotlight: Craig Santos Perez." September 13, 2008. <https://www.bookcritics.org/2008/09/13/small-press-spotlight-craig-santos-perez/>

It's good that contemporary ecological writing, both scientific and popular, stresses how understanding trees and forests leads to a deeper understanding of how healthy ecosystems sustain biodiversity. Simultaneously, however, we must also recognize that the principles of sustainability discovered recently by ecological scientists have long been exemplified by the practices of Indigenous nations. Native nations are *leaders* in using concepts of kinship and responsibility obligations to craft sustainable environmental solutions. They also have long modeled how to see trees and other living beings as kin, and as embodying ancestors to whom we need to listen. Many people who think of themselves as "modern" need to learn more from Native ways that are not just ancient, but also provide a sure path to a more sustainable future. That's why I cited above the *Status of the Tribes and Climate Change Report* from 2025. It's especially crucial to know these initiatives that are under threat in the midst of U.S. governmental decisions about environmental regulations that are basically demanding that over five decades or more of progress be erased.

Yes, we need to plant trees, geo-capture existent atmospheric carbon, and restore ecosystem health. Britain is a leader in the restorative agriculture movement, which not only has redefined what healthy soil is and how to maintain it, but is exploring how to raise both plant and animal food for people while cutting ties to fossil-fuel fertilizer and other practices associated with the industrial food system developed in the previous century.⁷ We may probably before the twenty-first century is finished have to seed the atmosphere in ways that will reduce the greenhouse effect. And we'll need to redesign economics (including energy systems) to create jobs while supporting such efforts. But if humans in general ignore what Native nations are experimenting with now, we may as a species be done in by our racism, not just our ignorance or our fossil fuel fetish. All those addictions are actually intertwined.⁸

Some "green" or "sustainable" practices by governments and corporations in fact do harm to Native peoples, from ignoring their voices and experience when policies are decided, to actively displacing them in the name of preserving "wilderness." "Greenwashing" is indeed

⁷One good recent survey is by the British Ecological Society (2025). *Regenerative Agriculture in the UK: An Ecological Perspective*. London, UK. <https://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/our-policy-work/>.

⁸What may be the most ancient, sustainably managed forest on Earth? (At least one for which we have records documenting the practices that kept the forest healthy even while it was being logged). A strong case can be made that it is the Menominee Forest in upper Wisconsin, which has been under the care of the Menominee since 1854. Displaced from many of their ancestral lands by the U.S. government and settler colonialism, the Menominee bargained to be able to retain this large aboriginal forest. They also decided not to clear it for agriculture; they farmed other land on their remaining territory. The tribe's name for themselves is "The Forest Keepers." Their stewardship of the forest meant—with only a few exceptions—harvesting only sick or dead trees, or naturally fallen ones. Pine and maple was sold to create everything from museum displays to basketball courts for the Olympics, and the high quality of the trees quickly drew top prices. So the forest wasn't protected from the market, but it was culled in a way that benefited both the tribe and the forest itself. After over 150 years and over two hundred million cubic feet of lumber pulled from the forest, it has more healthy trees than it did back in 1854. The Menominee understood the concept of a "mother tree" in a forest before Suzanne Simard and Western science did.

See Cara Buckley, "The Giving Forest." *The New York Times*, April 22, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/22/climate/menominee-forest-sustainable-earth-day.html>, accessed April 24, 2023. As the article stresses, the forest and the tribe face many challenges at present, including the lack of young people will to take on the difficult and dangerous work of logging.

a poison.⁹ Ecocriticism and ecological policies can't be sustainable if they don't acknowledge and try to rectify the damage that colonialism and capitalism have done and continue to do to ecosystems in the name of power and profit. But no green ecology can exist if it also doesn't learn from Native models of ecosystem management that benefit humans as well as ecosystems. There's also a global non-profit organization, The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), founded to give governments, companies, and forest managers guidance on proven sustainable practices for managing forests and timber harvesting; organizing against deforestation; and other practices. They also have established a reliable certification system for sustainable forest products. The FSC believes it's ethical to set up a market-based approach to promoting local and transnational sustainable forest policies.¹⁰

Perhaps the above examples may each act as an Archimedean fulcrum, helping us to leverage change. Their shared message is clear: we need science, policy papers, action plans, and both old and new poems and stories to learn from old forests and other biodiverse ecosystems as we shape our own and the planet's survival strategies. There is much interest in the Environmental Humanities in how best to re-forge the desire for multi-species connections in human consciousness and behavior. To list just some other influential examples beyond Simard and Kimmerer: Donna Haraway's *When Species Meet* (2008); Timothy Morton's *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (2016); Katie Holten's *The Language of Trees: A Rewilding of Literature and Landscape* (2023); and McIntyre-Mills, Janet J., and Yvonne Corcoran-Nantes' *From Polarisation to Multispecies Relationships: Re-Generation of the Commons in the Era of Mass Extinctions* (2021).¹¹

True, some of our favorite human stories must be shelved or revised because they have a toxic misunderstanding of interdependency as a threat, or as something to be denigrated due to delusions about our human exceptionalism. But it's just as true that our species has created many other stories stressing inter-species affiliation, including some poems about trees. They bear truths their readers/hearers must viscerally experience. They *may* help their readers learn or re-learn what the Menominee, Maori, and Chamorro peoples know: trans-species encounters can be transformative for two-legged creatures, for the rest of the animal kingdom, and for plants and fungi too. Forests are laboratories as well as sacred spaces, and a lot more can be harvested or garnered from them than just boards made from that abundant biopolymer, tree cellulose. Forests are even good for *shinrin yoku*, forest bathing—a practice of using all the senses while being calm, quiet, observant, and meditative within the woods. It became popular in Japan in the 1980s and is now being adopted in many other countries. So too are urban micro-forests filled with paths and benches.¹²

⁹For one discussion of greenwashing and Indigenous protest, see Jenni Monet on global Indigenous leaders' presentations at the annual UN forum on Indigenous issues. "Green Colonialism": Indigenous world leaders warn over West's climate strategy." *The Guardian*, April 23, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/23/un-indigenous-peoples-forum-climate-strategy-warning>, accessed April 24, 2023.

¹⁰See the FSC website, <http://fsc.org>, and also this summary of their activities and ethics on Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_Stewardship_Council. Accessed August 4, 2024.

¹¹Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Morton, Timothy. *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. Columbia University Press, 2017.

Holten, Katie. *The Language of Trees: A Rewilding of Literature and Landscape*. Portland, OR: Tin House, 2024.

Yvonne Corcoran-Nantes' *From Polarisation to Multispecies Relationships: Re-Generation of the Commons in the Era of Mass Extinctions*. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2021.

¹²On forest bathing, see this LiveScience article dating from 2022: <https://www.livescience.com/forest-bathing>, accessed April 24, 2023.

Now to poetry. My tree-poems readings focus (mostly) on contemporary poems by living writers. They explore varieties of trans-species encounters, plus new forms of humility and ecstasy (out of the body encounters) that arise from those encounters. We need to sit under some deep-time trees again and let them cultivate us. *And* under the canopy spread by stories about trees. These poems let us do both.

Approximately a half decade after Robert Hass's poem "The Problem of Describing Trees" was published, another poem featuring aspens sprung up—as if from the same root system, but one that had migrated, we might say. This new poem was by a young poet, Dan Bellm. It's equally fascinated with the aspen and literary root systems, and its knowledge about aspens, plus its tone and rhetoric, clearly reflect tree scientists' understanding of aspen colonies and forest ecosystems after Hass' poem appeared. Bellm's "Aspens" is one of the standout poems in Fisher-Wirth's and Street's influential *The Eco-poetry Anthology* (2013). It differs from Hass' in two important ways: 1) it contains a much deeper analysis of literary precedent and how they are both relevant and outdated; and 2) its understanding about aspens has been transformed by advances in tree science.

For clarity's sake, I'll discuss the poem's interest in biological root systems first, then its figuration of literary roots. But it's worth noting at the outset that the poem has a lot of fun intertwining the two—thus supporting the thesis of my project here, that new understandings of nature provide impetus for new moves for poems to try out.

Bellm's poem recounts experiences that he and others had hiking in the Sierra Nevadas with a naturalist guide, trips that were part of a writer's retreat. What he learned transformed how he understood trees, and therefore also how he thought of how a forest could be used as an analogy for other kinds of beautiful but also strong and sustainable connection-networks. The experience was Bellm's own version of enlightenment under a tree's canopy, though that perhaps makes "Aspens" sound too grandiose; the poem's humor and irony make it anything but that. However, "Aspens" chronicles a very serious change in Bellm: unexpectedly, learning about aspens alters how Bellm understands literary tradition itself.

We could call this change a *radical* one, for it's inspired by aspen root networks, and the word *radical* is, literally, grounded in the Latin *radic-* and *radix*.

“

So the naturalist led us poets
up a creekbed to show us a tiny portion of our own world:
a fragile meetingpoint of volcanic rock & granite
that over a hundred thousand years urged forth a way
for water to wash down and make this canyon to the valley:
told us that the grove of quaking aspens we stopped beside
ought to call into question our definition of a tree:
...

... the system of roots beneath us
was vaster than we could think, a million years old or so,
and apparently so capable of continuing sending up clones each
season
that it can wait for the arrival of the next ice age to this valley
if it takes another million years... (168)

The poet finds these vast geologic and biological timescales rather dizzying, but the trees help ground him. To cite a famous line from William Carlos Williams' "Spring and All," rooted down, he begins to awaken. I should add that this moment of the poem is not all high

seriousness, as it would be in Wordsworth's *Prelude*. Bellm makes fun of the poets and their notetaking, including his own. They're more comfortable in highly cultivated spaces such as arboretums, not this wild landscape. Satire is important for "Aspens" because it attacks how lyric poetry can feed humans' egocentrism; the entire goal of "Aspens" is to critique anthropomorphism, not reproduce it.

Which brings me to the topic of how "Aspens" uses aspen networks to reconceive poetic tradition. This is tricky to discuss because Bellm learns that, strictly speaking, an aspen grove is a single cloned organism. The ecosystem of lyric poetic tradition is anything but a series of clones. To resolve such a conundrum, Bellm twice embeds in his poem generous quotations from Keats' letters, both of which show Keats' efforts to craft a *choral* lyric voice that transcends (or at least checks) the self-centeredness of the conventional lyric's obsession with the first-person singular. Much as he admired Wordsworth, Keats' concept of the choral lyric was a pointed rebuke to Wordsworth's monologues and what Keats called his "Egotistical Sublime."

Bellm quotes Keats arguing that a poem is a "many-chambered" house, but then he drops that comparison to choose a *forest* analogy instead. Here's what Bellm does with the italicized incorporated material:

“

if you're lucky,
you'll be a writer. Send down your taproot then, into the
many-chambered whatever it is, the comfort and fright of it,
that we're all connected. *And thus by every germ of Spirit
sucking the Sap from mould ethereal every human might become great,
and Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furze and Briars
with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become
a grand democracy of Forest Trees.* These plant "communities"—
manzanita, huckleberry, snow-something, oh I didn't write those down
either I was so tired, the words are not the point—they're migrating
over geological time—they send messages to each other
across the great spongy rootmass about changes in temp. and
rainfall, outbreaks of blight, accumulated experience we'd call
gossip or history, the sports and weather, film at 11—they slowly
move, and so others move with them, what's the choice—the point
is the interwoven indistinguishableness that all life feeds
and is fed by, not the individual life. *Ecopoetry Anthology* 169-70

13

Despite the intentionally comic modern touches ("film at 11"), Bellm here aligns himself with Keats to critique poetry's romance with the idea that genius is autonomous and exceptional. Both instead hope for a career inspired by arguing with a diversity of others. Is Bellm idealistic here? Certainly. But no more so than—in fact, proudly in the tradition of—Keats' ideal of "a grand democracy of Forest Trees." Of course, Keats' dream of community was one thing; his reception by the arbiters of poetry during his lifetime was something else.

Bellm's "Aspens" is thus a vibrant hybrid: it's an ecopoem influenced by new science combined with an often comic narration of the human ego and its struggles. Against such a false "community," the aspens and their resilience stand as both a model and a reproach. Despite that, Bellm stubbornly deploys his new understanding of a Sierra ecosystem to reimagine the possibilities for a literary community—just as Keats did. His lyric's varied voices and moods braid together, making the poem choral or even antiphonal, part skeptical and satiric but frequently turning swiftly to seriousness and wonder. Its four pages of long-lined text aren't a stolid text block but a dramatization of thought and mood in motion.

¹³Keats quotation from Keats' letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, Feb. 19, 1818. *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats*. Ed. Richard Monckton Milnes. New York: George P. Putnam, 1848. Transcription of this letter is also available online: <https://www.spectacle.org/0613/keats.html>. Bellm's poem "Aspens" is in Fisher-Wirth, Ann W., and Laura Gray Street, eds. *The Eco-poetry Anthology*. Trinity University Press, 2013.

The entwined voices of “Aspens” demonstrate how contemporary ecopoetry revives itself by re-exploring its roots in Romanticism, while also intertwining those ancient continuities with a new understanding of the limitations of Romanticism, especially its myth of singular poetic genius. That critique of Romantic egoism was induced by the new realities pressing on the poetic imagination by the debacle of the Anthropocene, especially its knowledge of the damage that human arrogance has done. Contemporary ecopoetry aspires to the condition of what Keats called a “grand democracy.” Ecopoetry’s dreams and its praxis too strive to create a kinship network—Bellm’s “spongy rootmass”—linking human and more-than-human beings, both in our imaginative creations and in our lives.

Tim Seibles’ more recent “Fearless” is also a poem about restless yearnings—or rather, the poet figuring his own via the unstoppable growing he finds in nature. “Fearless” grows from the good soil of Williams’, Roethke’s, Oliver’s, and Hayden’s work, as well as others’. It’s also not too hard to think of “Fearless” as Seibles’ response to the call put out by Langston Hughes in his poem “Earth Song”: “I’ve been waiting long/ For an earth song.”

Seibles is an expert at the meandering, quirky, often comic monologue delighting in digressions, sudden tone shifts, arcana, but also soaring flights. Jazz is certainly an influence here, as the title of one collection, *Buffalo Head Solos* (2004), reveals. But so is the stand-up comic monologue, not to mention the high drama of Spoken Word performance. The poems take great risks but are also frisky, questioning, and heroically persistent. They inspire us to go into dangerous emotional territory because somehow, riding his voice’s verve, we will have the courage to match the challenges that come. Seibles won the Roethke prize for *Fast Animal* (2012), and there’s a big bullish buffalo toughness in his work—counterbalanced by immense tenderness—that is not unlike Roethke’s, both the man and his poetry.

“Fearless” is a refreshing ecopoem indeed. It’s devastatingly funny about human stupidity—the many ways we weed and prune and try to stop greenery from growing. There’s a sardonic Whitmanian catalog of gadgets and obsessions in the poem—shears and “kill-mowers,” chemical warfare and the endless plucking and pulling of “weeds,” all to enforce ideals of neatness and symmetry that have been instilled in our heads by *Better Homes and Gardens* and a thousand other poisonous scripts for what “beauty” should look like. (Needless to say, for a Black poet the idea of the “beautiful” is also a topic freighted with the history of prejudice).

To counter narrow notions of beauty or fecundity, the poem’s often crooning and comic voice teaches us to appreciate nature’s infinite persistence. Its speaker is a connoisseur of chaos, but without being so effete as Wallace Stevens was. The speaker could also be a father speaking to a young child; the poem is dedicated to “Moombi.” The poet is a coxer and an encourager, awed by the persistence of all growing things

“
The shoots rising in spite of every plot
against them. Every chemical stupidity,
every burned field, every better
home & garden finally overrun
by the green will, the green greenness
of green things growing greener.
The mad Earth publishing
her many million murmuring

unsaid.

The poem’s fertile syntax sometimes shoots right across the poem’s structural divisions, treating stanza breaks like a trellis, not a boundary to respect. Between each stanza is a tiny period, almost as if the poet has planted a seed. Seibles points out wonders and says, Look. And also encourages us to touch and smell. Alliteration and insistent rhythms celebrate nature’s ongoingness, what Whitman called the “the procreant urge of the world,” but slipping into Black English too just for the fun of it:

“
Good to see the green world
undiscouraged, the green fire
bounding back every spring, and beyond
the tyranny of thumbs, the weeds
and other co-conspiring green genes
ganging up, breaking in,
despite small shears and kill-mowers,
ground gougers, seed-eaters.
Here they come, sudden as graffiti
.
not there and then *there* —
naked, unhumble, unrequitedly green —
growing as if they would be trees
on any unmanned patch of earth

In this kingdom of green, the kings of green are trees. The poet shows us that even small growing things have a tree-like grandeur about them if we just adjust our sense of scale and look at them up close. He traces the slow time of moss, “the shyest green citizen,” slowing inching up an oak trunk. And he ends the poem by slowing down its momentum and quieting its orchestration to pause and take in majesty:

“
The trees – who
are they? Their stillness, that
long silence, the never
running away.

It turns out that these soaring towers of green don’t listen to our ideas of order. Like the rest of the green world, they give us other things we need: stillness, courage, resoluteness and rootedness. They also, as Whitman said poets must, remind us of “many long dumb voices,” what is made mute because in our self-centeredness we have refused to hear it. Seibles’ “Fearless” is a chant that will seduce us for a moment into forgetting the foreboding Anthropocene, even as it mocks our obsessive-compulsive activities that have caused our current troubles.

Six other recent poets in whose work trees figure significantly—August Kleinzahler, Alice Oswald, Jane Hirshfield, Forrest Gander (collaborating with Katie Holten), Jimmy Santiago Baca, and Linda Hogan—develop further this branching network meditation on tree poems. Each goes in its own individual directions, as poets will. Yet all share a trunk, so to speak, a nutrient-rich set of shared assumptions about how humans may be transformed by trees. I’m not talking about warming ourselves by firewood, using trees for lumber, or enjoying their cool shade and plentiful oxygen. I mean a different kind of value that can’t be defined by normal economic or biological standards of

measurement—and indeed can't really be defined as a "use-value" for humans at all.

Key themes upcoming are these: the comic sublime of decentering humans; of how to experience nature's cycles interwoven within fossil-fuel infrastructure; how to wildcraft a "we" that includes more-than-human beings; and how contemporary ecopoetry, like Bellm's, uses ecological science's new discoveries to craft a new poetics.

The New Jersey Turnpike system proudly sports the Joyce Kilmer Rest Stop, named after a famous native son who wrote the much-loved sentimental postcard-poem "I think that I shall never see/ a poem as lovely as a tree." It's not likely Kleinzahler will get a rest stop named for him. But consider the virtues of his "Watching Dogwood Blossoms Fall in a Parking Lot Off Route 46" (1994), set in New Jersey in a different corner of its highway system:

“
Dogwood blossoms drift down at evening
as semis pound past Phoenix Seafood
and the Savarin plant, west to the Turnpike,
Paterson or hills beyond.
The adulterated, pearly light and bleak perfume
of benzene and exhaust
make this solitary tree and the last of its bloom
as stirring just now after another day
at the hospital with Mother and the ashen old ladies
lost to TV reruns flickering overhead
as that shower of peach blossoms Tu Fu watched
fall on the river bank
from the shadows of the Jade Pavilion,
while ghosts and the music
of yellow orioles found out the seam of him
and slowly cut along it.

"[I]f I stepped out of my body I would break/ Into blossom" (James Wright) this is not. Kleinzahler's is an "adulterated" sublime, surrounded by the motley music of America's hopes in decay as most of us are fixated on screens, not tree blossoms. The hospital prompts the devastating final trope, in which the poet feels his body being split open by beauty as if by a surgeon's scalpel. Or could it be that what is so wounding is the brute contrast between a dying world and nature's beauty calmly persisting? For even in the midst of North Jersey air, water, and sound pollution, orioles still arrive to feed off of the nectar and rain collected in tree blossoms, not minding that it's provided by a solitary dogwood tree surrounded by asphalt. Perhaps this briefly lasting dogwood beauty is a balm for pain and exhaustion, not its cause?

Kleinzahler's song doesn't resolve such questions, nor should it. It just sets them in circulation. It also changes our TV channel from reruns to a different kind of deep time, via its allusion to a famous poem written by Tu Fu well over one thousand years ago, in 761 CE. Usually translated as "Alone, Looking at Blossoms by the River," the poem can easily be found on the internet translated abominably, with lines like "The sorrow of riverside blossoms inexplicable" and "Among spring's vociferous glories, I too have my place." Far better is David Young's dignified understatement, which well captures how Tu Fu's melancholia and loneliness are heightened by memories of youth and nature's bounty: "you flowers, have pity/ on a white-haired man." "I don't walk, I stagger," he says, and then covers up his shame at old age's frailty with a boast: "spring knocks me out// two things I can still manage/

wine and poetry." Tu Fu, like Kleinzahler, notices orioles marauding tree blossoms, but by its end, surrounded by so much cascading life, the poet pleads for time to slow down: "I'll age more quickly/ when they're gone"; "little buds don't rush it/ open slowly!"¹⁴

If Kleinzahler's roadside dogwood reminds him of death's shears cutting the thread of life, "ghosts and the music" of Tu Fu's poem open up a life-line, a way to touch deep-time's presence even amid entropy. Kleinzahler's tree poem is a branching network sending out its tracers even while enmeshed within the U.S. highway system and its fossil-fuel residues. It offers seasonal cycles interwoven with cacophony and a life's arc's ending.

Alice Oswald followed up her magnificent book-length choral poem *Dart* (2002), in which she gives voices to a riverine ecosystem's many inhabitants, with the intentionally un-epic lyrics of *Woods etc.* (2004). I'll look briefly at the different human/nature networks she sketches in four representative poems: "Owl," the title poem, "Leaf," and "Wood Not Yet Out" (on pages 6-9, respectively). The anti-Romantic poem with "etc." in its title enacts human decentering via a series of startling tropes that imagine even a human's listening to the woods as a "wound" that causes a forest's rustling to cease. This is an ironic reversal of the poetics of Baudelaire's "Correspondences" or any Wordsworth poem. Oswald tries to chart the sun's path either toward or away from winter solstice negatively, by the Osiris- or Orpheus-like trope of a voice singing even as the body of the poet is dismembered: "hoping it [the sun] would rise/ suddenly from scattered parts of my body/ into the upturned apses of my eyes." "Owl" moves in the opposite direction. Hearing an owl call while the poet is in her lighted room transports her into dark woods. The moment also displaces human ways of knowing: "seeing my eyes seen,/ hearing my listening heard." "[A]n owl's elsewhere swelled and questioned," inspiring both "fear" and a stunning vision "straight through to God/ founded and fixed the wood," the poet suddenly transported back to the Creation and Genesis.

Oswald's "Leaf" and "Wood Not Yet Out" unveil similarly daring vistas of nature's powers that both rely on and confound Romantic tropes. The former plays with space, the genesis of a leaf; the latter with deep time, how to feel the future in the present. Reading "Leaf" (my favorite of this quartet), we journey inside a bud to see at microscopic scale a leaf in formation. Wood that may appear "dead" is full of life if you know how to look. Oswald's tone is hushed and attentive, reminding me a little of W. S. Merwin's signature voice, or Keats' "silence and slow time":

“
the leaf that now lies being made
in its shell of scale, the hush of things
unseen inside, the heartbeat of dead wood.
the slow through-flow that feeds
a form curled under, hour by hour
the thick reissuing starlike shapes
of cells and pores and water-rods (8)

"Leaf" reverses anthropocentrism, treating the emerging photosynthesizing leaves as having "hands" and (pace Simard or Kimmerer)

¹⁴David Young, translator, Tu Fu's "Seven for the Flowers by the River," in *Du Fu: A Life in Poetry*. New York: Knopf, 2008. 137-39. Young treats the different stanzas as separate, numbered poems in a sequence, where each poem has 4 2-line stanzas. The poem is often known in English as a poem of seven quatrains called "Alone, Looking for Blossoms Along the River." August Kleinzahler, *Before Dawn on Bluff Road. Selected New Jersey Poems*. Rpt. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017. 49. [As indicated in the text, the poem dates from 1994.]

intelligence. The final two lines of “Leaf” imagine her poem’s voice as a “provisional” and “inexplicable” compound of human and more-than-human, an “I/ in mid-air, meeting the wind and dancing.” Agency is not centered in a human’s will; it comes from elsewhere, the poet’s ability to become and celebrate a *leaf* as a poet (a maker) too.

“Wood Not Yet Out” (set in late winter before leaves have fully emerged) also vivifies Spring’s immanence, and it too speaks ironically of a human intruding into a forest ecosystem: “the rain, thinking I’ve gone, crackles the air/ and calls by name the leaves that aren’t yet there.” Marks of the human are there and not-there simultaneously. Those last two lines are a pentameter couplet, yet they describe an agency transcending the human. It’s a profoundly Romantic moment about discovering “correspondences” or Wordsworthian tropes for infinite creative powers, while also marking the constant emergence of the more-than-human if we know how to listen or look for it.¹⁵

For Friedrich Schiller, Romantic nature poems reflected our alienation from and damage to nature via either elegy or satire. The poetic genre of the idyll, in contrast, exemplified no symptoms of a division between self and environment. Even the idea that we should build a home (*eco*, from *oikos*, home) in a poem suggests alienation and labor, a non-Edenic condition. Oswald’s strategy is not incompatible with Schiller’s poetics of feeling and re-connection (what he called “sentimental” poetry, with no negative connotation attached). Yet her project does not have the goal of making humans feel “at home.” She wants her poetics to draw us out of our rooms and out of our normative ways of seeing, hearing, and knowing, until we reach moments of “seeing my eyes seen,/ hearing my listening heard.” Or perhaps it’s better to say that her project is to make us find a new home-away-from-home, in unpredictable discoveries of intelligences beyond our ken—“the slow through-flow” of other life energies. Like John Clare, perhaps the British Romantic Oswald is most deeply rooted in (though her upbringing was entirely different from his), she too uses her poetics to treat the tragicomic subject of how alienation from nature is an historically situated, socially constructed condition that may be outed by poems and challenged. That’s certainly one of the goals of the epic *Dart* (about both riverine and human social networks) and the lyric collection *Woods etc.* with its sly, sardonic title.¹⁶

Jane Hirshfield’s “Branch,” from *Ledger* (2020), offers a different way to think about trees, branching networks, and space-time. It’s composed very much like a set of Zen riddles or paradoxes, each set deliberately before us on the white field of the page. The poem doesn’t have a “setting” or take place in a recognizably locatable landscape. But that is its austere strength. Or perhaps we should say that its world is that of meditative mind, immersed not in time’s flow so much as out of it, looking down curiously on its stream-like motion. Compare Lyn Hejinian, from *My Life*: “It is hard to turn away from moving water.”

“Branch” (49) is composed of five stanzas, all but the last a sentence that states a paradox on which we may meditate. The first one focuses on a round timepiece, not a branching network, but teaches us how to proceed through the poem:

¹⁵For a good reading of *Woods etc.*, see Stephens, J. “A world of sound and rhythm translating Alice Oswald’s *Woods etc.*” *The Translator* 28.3 (2022): 295–307. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2021.2018260>. Stephens focus on some translations of Oswald as well as the original poems. Her thesis: “Alice Oswald, who read Classics at Oxford, draws on the structures of orality found in epic poetry with an emphasis on sounds and rhythm to transcribe a powerful experiencing of the natural world.”

¹⁶For superb discussions of Schiller and Clare, see Jonathan Bate’s *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), particularly his chapters “A Voice for Ariel” and “Nests, Shells, Landmarks.” Bate’s book was published just before Oswald made a name for herself as an essential contemporary English poet.

“

A clock does not have hands, a face,
tell anything rightly or wrongly, least of all time.

This statement outs the hidden tropes that infect “normal” language we use to describe our interactions with everyday objects or concepts. Such language, used without a second thought, encourages us to anthropomorphize the world, making it ours. This is not just true for English. In Spanish, revealingly perhaps, clocks “walk” rather than “run.” The poem also implicitly asks us to imagine what kinds of time exist apart from clock-time. That question will motivate all the stanzas that follow.

The second and third stanzas spotlight the pathetic fallacy, our tendency to believe that nature reflects our own emotions or needs back at us, so that an empty branch “longs” for an absent bird, or that a bird’s quick movement can be “read” as a punctuation mark that safely “holds separate the world’s Yes from the world’s No.” Translated, that perhaps means nature’s beauty affirms our desires rather than negates them? If so, Hirshfield’s poem firmly negates that theorem.

The next stanza then swerves to a new query and a paradoxical response.

“

Is there anywhere on earth one branch that has never
been perched on?
That is not what branches exist for. Yet the birds come.

How a tree uses its branches is one thing, birds another. The poem’s Zen terseness economically gives us a theorem that can apply to many other examples: Be skeptical of how expectations or norms blind us. See a tree branch (or any noun) with a focus on its *many* uses, and thus its different ways of being in the world. These are not to be synthesized, but rather to be kept separate. This poem enacts Zen reasoning, tricking us out of lazy thinking or connecting. But it’s also in the tradition of skeptical nature poetry by Frost or Dickinson. If humans are to use trees and their branching networks to learn to model new forms of human selfhood as interconnected rather than autonomous, Hirshfield hints, we also need to corral our tendency to value only what we believe is useful to us. Like most of the poems in *Ledger*, this one wryly seeks to knock us off of our perch believing that the universe revolves around us.

Can a poem map a redwood forest ecosystem in western North America for us, by giving us a core sample of some of the many creatures living within its web? “Forest” by Forrest Gander and Katie Holten, in Holten’s marvelous new anthology *The Language of Trees: A Rewilding of Literature and Landscape* (2023), does just that.¹⁷ Two hundred and more feet in the air, a Steller’s jay, a nesting murrelet, and a vole go about their business in the branches near the top of the towering tree, while down below, in the forest’s understory, the poem reveals to us intertwined plant lives of whipplevine and sorrel and several kinds of fern, plus a squirrel that lives in the “fire caves” (protected spaces within the redwood’s trunk bark) that also contains slugs and rooting mushrooms.

Interwoven with this mapping of ceaseless activity—even a slug’s tails freshly glisten as we gaze at them—is a credo for understanding how any world outside of us is also a part of *our* story too. “*This is not*

¹⁷Katie Holten, ed. *The Language of Trees: A Rewilding of Literature and Landscape*. Portland, OR: Tin House, 2023. “Forest” is on pp. 120–22.

description,” a voice asserts, with the caesura indicating the power of a change of perspective; it is

“
 an un- acknowledged chapter of our
 own memoir—rich with chumbling volcanics,
 andesite mostly, and dacite, and rotting redwood needles that
 lightly tremble with nematodes and some /
 spider-like arthropod who can name?”

The human story receives a Copernican-like decentering here, so that we must learn to see ourselves as a transient in this ecosystem, not its center, much less its master exercising Genesis-like rights of “dominion.” We may truly know and remember ourselves anew via this ecosystem only by recognizing our “entanglement,” “all instances interpenetrating.”

“Forest” also uses the fascinating word “underwritten” to describe the new human/forest bond the poem offers. The word has a primarily legal meaning today, connected to insurance contract guaranteeing payment for damage or loss, or a financial institution pledging to buy back unsold shares when new securities are issued. In the poem’s hands, though, pledges, debts, losses, and even the concept of “securities” undergo a radical redefinition, from an economy of scarcity and danger to one of abundance. Its mapping of ecosystem interdependencies *underwrites* (gives us a script for) surviving and thriving.

It’s at this precise moment of human humbling—yet also of discovering wonder and even hope—that the poem journeys into the forest’s underground. In the quotation above, we encounter the geological and biological processes that create the nutrients and base that nourish everything above, with a brief reference too to the third kingdom—fungi—beyond the plant and animal networks. Vast hidden mycelial webs nourish this world and are part of its systems of nutrient exchange, decomposition, and composition. The archaic Britishism “chumbling,” to nibble or chew, indicates how the whole system feeds on itself, renewing itself. And the poem even rethinks the slash marks (vergules) that are conventionally used to mark line-breaks in quoted poetry. Now they mark not slashes or breaks but the opposite: lines in a network connecting individual items to a larger whole.

As this essay nears its end, I turn for guidance to the lead poem in Jimmy Santiago Baca’s *Winter Poems Along the Rio Grande* (2004), for it defines the methods and presents key themes for the rest of his book’s 39-poem sequence. I’ll honor next two tree poems of Linda Hogan’s, “Lost in the Milky Way” (2016) and “The Age of Tree Rings” (2022). These poets center Indigenous ways of understanding (Chicano and Chickasaw) the messages trees give us—if only we would listen. Both also ground self-and-ecosystemic connections in the ability to sense the operation of time on more-than-human scales, what I’ve called the lyric poem’s ability to evoke “deep time” as well as dramatic action occurring in a single, vividly rendered present.

Baca made a name for himself as a novelist and a nonfiction-writer as well as a poet. He’s also an educator and an activist, particularly when it comes to projects opening poetry’s powers to young people and adults, including the incarcerated. His commitment to poetry’s transformative powers comes from his own hard experience: he was illiterate until age 21 and did not learn to read until he was incarcerated in a maximum-security prison for five years, much of it confined to solitary. During that time, Baca was taught to read, and reading alone for hours on end changed the direction of his life. Poetry and other sources

also opened up to Baca perspectives on Native American history and cultures, and their influence on his poetry became more prominent as his poetry matured. Native spiritual practices and cosmogonies—along with those espoused by the poet and Catholic monk Thomas Merton—are especially evident in *Winter Poems Along the Rio Grande*. So too is his daily running for exercise, which Baca thinks of as another form of spiritual practice, flexing and cleansing mind and body at the same time.

The volume’s opening poem, simply entitled “1,” shows why all the above elements are lifesaving for the poet. He runs and breathes, he says, to “shatter self-centeredness.” A reader, at first glance, has a right to be skeptical of whether the poem’s methods can achieve such a goal. The first-person pronoun *I* is used eighteen times in just the first poem, and many times thereafter. The poet’s own actions and thoughts dominate throughout, and we’re definitely in the familiar realm of Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau and other Transcendentalists who sought to access the sublime by passing *through* the ego and its sense-perceptions into something beyond both.

Laughter helps. So too does humility. Baca recounts his surprise “discovering/ the laughter that rises in my mistakes.” That phrasing is fascinating. Laughter doesn’t come from others and doesn’t involve humiliation. Rather, it releases liberation; it rises from *within* him when he’s able to laugh at himself. Similarly, Baca will use self-centeredness to undo itself, so that the “self” finds a different center, or rather a different energy-source, *outside* of where humans tend to locate it. Early on, the poem announces that goal first comically, then seriously. After having to leap off of his “bosque path” (*bosque* means *forest*) to avoid a speeding cyclist in an expensive Lycra kit, Baca realizes that disruption of his running routine has opened up a new “path” for him. He looks around “for signs to connect me/ to the navel of the universe” and finds one right away—in a tree-trunk knot. That knot’s not just a knot, but a navel—the sign every form has of its umbilical link to another world. Then he spots another sign, in a spider’s web, and yet another, via herons flying north and, through that migration, indicating winter has begun to wane.

Baca’s poem turns a birder’s factual observation into a spiritual practice—not just through prayer and a message the heron gives him, but also through the poet’s own sudden insight into how his *body* has become like the bird’s. His legs’ tendons (a runner is very conscious about how well their legs are working) and the run itself become an offering to the Creator who made both bird and human. The writing of the poem affirms that gift:

“
 Create your own Spring season
 the herons tell me migrating north in the sky—
 I stop to watch them,
 asking my Creator for insight
 into their hearts, *let me be a blue heron*, I whisper,
 and for an instant
 each fine tendril of my feathered tendons
 is a shrine-offering to the light. (1)

This moment in the poem transforms the speaker’s sense of self, body, and mind. He is “re-feathered” (perhaps suggesting he was once a bird and has rediscovered somatic memory of that earlier incarnation?). He has also now joined a “community” of many beings. He thinks like a plant and a tree too, attuned to “the up-suck energy in the roots/ the dirt-food, water-food, air-food.” All of which “shatters” his earlier, stupidly myopic androcentric self-centeredness. Baca is channeling Gary Snyder a little here, enfolded with Thomas Merton, Whitman, and a host of other sages and predecessors. Perhaps also Quetzalcoatl, the feathered

serpent in Aztec legends who made the world and the boundary between earth and sky. Quetzalcoatl is also the patron for learning and all arts and crafts.

In this vision, even the seemingly empty spaces between branches have meaning, (perhaps like the empty spaces to be interpreted in Kabbalistic study?).¹⁸ Baca's "self" is experienced as both fluid and infinitely interconnected to the lives of other beings, and such an insight is described as if silences or empty spaces are like vowels in a word or a sentence—as important to making meaning as the harder consonants:

“
a blue space where there is nothing but the sound of silence
harmonizing its beautiful vowels into my soul,
pouring it in my veins,
forcing me over the top of myself
over the brim of my body
into the air. (2)

Appropriately, Baca's poem ends with a prayer of thanksgiving to the gods of the Four Directions in which a tree roots Baca in a specific place and time while also honoring his sense of infinitely deep connections. The "great Bear" reference translates a Native name for the "Big Dipper" constellation, which points the way to the North star:

“
I stop before a thick-trunked short-leaning close-to-the-ground tree
to pray, a place I've made my shrine,
and exhausted from the five mile run
I bow to the east, asking the Light to guide me and illuminate my path,
I turn south asking the Darkness to befriend me and teach me vigilance,
I turn west to my ancestors, thank them for carrying messages to the Creator,
then north, where I pray to the great Bear for healing and moral strength. (2-3)

The use of commas in this passage, as in Whitman's plenteous lists, creates a sense of a single flowing performance, not four separate prayers. Baca's poem is an example of the heightened consciousness of connection and healing that eco-philosopher Thomas Berry called the "Ecozoic" era for Earth's surviving species, including humankind—an era that Berry prayed would follow the disasters of the Anthropocene. Like Baca, Berry stressed that true ecological understanding had to include cosmological and spiritual energies. Berry also asserted that a spiritual conversion, not solely technology, will have to intervene if humanity is to make a successful swerve away from Anthropocene ecocide to a different way of living on this planet.¹⁹

¹⁸For instance, this passage by Robert Gamer from the Sefaria website, on written and hidden letters and meanings in the Torah: the space between black letters "refers to ideas that we bring into the text when we interact with it. This is called d'rash-interpretations, applications, and teachings that flow from the Torah. The d'rash are the messages we read between the lines." See also this page from the Kaballah Centre website, particularly the discussion of the letters *Yud* and *Vav*—letters in the Hebrew alphabet that are also used in various names for the Creator and so carry the Creator's energy. Baca may not have had Midrash in mind, but his poem certainly focuses on the contrast between literal appearances and hidden meanings, and the spiritual practice of devoting careful attention to both. In some writings, the letter *Vav* has a break or crack in it, whereas it should be written "whole," like this: װ. Here is the website's interpretation of the meaning of that break: "if our true intent is to create peace and harmony – with the entire universe, with the people in our life, our friends and enemies – then, in our mind we can take something broken and mend it. The crack in the letter *Vav* symbolizes the opportunity to heal that which is fragmented or damaged."

All this to me seems unintentionally relevant to Baca's own separate histories of brokenness and spiritual healing, including that exemplified by poem #1 in *Winter Poems Along the Rio Grande*. Here are the URLs for the two websites mentioned above: <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/239905.12>. <https://www.kabbalah.com/en/articles/secrets-of-healing-revealed/>. Accessed August 25, 2022.

¹⁹See, for instance, Berry, Thomas. *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. Columbia University Press, 2009.

Baca's prayer of thanks near the poem's end joyously reconnects the speaker to his ancestors and the whole universe. But this event occurs because of the agency of the humblest tree in the entire poem. It's "short-leaning" and "close-to-the-ground" (2), clearly a being that's had to fight to survive.

In science, dendrochronology is the art of telling time through interpreting tree rings.²⁰ Linda Hogan's "Lost in the Milky Way" (2016)²¹ and "The Age of Tree Rings" (2022) use trees as a resource that can teach stubborn humans how to survive and heal a planetary apocalypse that we ourselves have set in motion. These poems define trees' use-value for us in startlingly non-materialist ways: their tree rings and branching networks are read as a spirit guide for our species' migrating soul. The older one speaks from a human perspective, filled with Native stories about the journey from this world to the afterlife. The Milky Way—the most vivid reminder we can see of what we now know is our planet's membership in a huge rotating galaxy—reminds us of prior souls and worlds:

“
Some of us are like trees that grow with a spiral grain
as if prepared for the path of the spirit's journey
to the world of all souls.

The journey alluded to here, through the tentative invocation of "as if," does not just involve a soul's travels after death. It's also a journey we might undertake while living. How might our story be likened to the rings of a tree? Hogan imagines those not as concentric circles but as a *spiral*, taking us (if we open our minds to this possibility) to a deep-time epiphany—a revelation of how humans are connected to the infinite number of beings that came before us. The Milky Way—a spiral on a much grander scale—reveals that connection. If we know how to read it, we won't just get lost; we'll find ourselves anew.

"Lost in the Milky Way" also retells tales of creation, to give us a map for the future "like a great web of finery// some spider pulled from herself to help you recall your true following." This is a reference to Spider Woman, a creator figure and trickster featured in many Native stories.²² An Old Woman also appears in the poem, who may be one of Spider Woman's many guises. She will aid us in recognizing our scars, and all those things wounded by our egotism, will, and blindness. She will help us leave those negative energies behind, after which the souls of the human dead will be freed to ascend to the heavens and an unknown future where being "lost" becomes another form of finding.

Hogan's more recent "Tree Rings" imagines a different future—not one elsewhere in the Milky Way or beyond, but here on Earth. Here Hogan's work harmonizes with Baca's, for her poem hints at what Thomas Berry has predicted with be the "Ecozoic" era of the Earth, after the collapse of fossil fuel growth-at-any-cost capitalism and the Anthropocene. Defining that era, Berry imagined that human activities would contribute harmoniously to the rhythms of ecological equipoise

²⁰Sarah Kaplan, Bonnie Jo Mount, Emily Wright, and Frank Hulley-Jones, "Written in the Wood." The Washington Post, December 20, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/interactive/2023/global-heat-record-arizona-trees-rings/?hpid=hp-top-table-main_p001_f005, accessed December 20, 2023. For a fine anthology mixing many different kinds of genres of writing about trees, I recommend Katie Holten's *The Language of Trees: A Rewilding of Literature and Landscape*. Portland, Oregon: Tin House, 2023.

²¹Linda Hogan, "Lost in the Milky Way," *Poetry Magazine*, March 2016. Available online: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/88744/lost-in-the-milky-way>, accessed June 2026.

²²For example, Susan Hazen-Hammond, *Spider Woman's Web: Traditional Native American Tales About Women's Power*. New York: Perigee Book, 1999. And Paula Gunn Allen, *Spider Woman's Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing by Native American Women*. Ballantine Books. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1990.

and what he called “rejoining the Earth community.”²³ About the future, Hogan too makes the gracious assumption that some humans will adapt and survive. Her persona as a tree gives us some advice about how to make that premise more likely. We must invent new/old forms of sociality and ways of conceiving kinship relations to the rest of the living world, what Donna Haraway in *Staying With the Trouble* calls sympoiesis, “making with,” and the importance of “speculative fabulation.” That shift begins with different stories about both our central strengths as a species and how our fates are intertwined with that of other beings, whom we must re-learn to view as kin. We need to listen to beings who already value multi-species networks and thrive within them.

Hogan’s poem speaks in the voice of a soul that has been reincarnated many times, sometimes as human, other times as other beings. It’s currently a tree and has some advice for us, using the rhetorical trick of a “reverse apostrophe,” or prosopopoeia. Unlike in a conventional ode, when the poet addresses the subject of the ode (think of Keats’ odes to a nightingale or a Grecian ode), in this exchange it’s the poet who must listen. The androcentric structure of a conventional ode is undone. Further, in Hogan’s poem about a soul’s many reincarnations, that being’s experience of many selves gives it a rather wry perspective on humans’ tendency towards narcissism and naivete.

“

The last time I visited earth I wore a skin of human flesh, vulnerable skin covering that body on its way to letting go, bones broken like the left-behind umbrella in a branch storm, all having been such fragile holy ones.

As a human, there was little left to hold solid, but this tree I have become is strong and bending, ring inside ring telling the truth of years of rain, times of drought, those of tribal burns.

As a human I could not help my failures, my lacking, my broken heart. But aren’t we all some part of a star torn loose from dark space?

Hogan’s “tree” has other news for us too. It reminds us that originally, during *Homo sapiens*’ emergence when we possessed the powers of fire, language, our sociability, and a certain prowess in making spear-points. But in general, we were a humbler species then, very aware of our precarity in the world. Our art showed it:

“

There was a time humans knew they were small and drew stick figures of themselves in ancient caves where animals were full and muscular beauty running powerful as the gods....”

If we can again make ourselves “small,” the poem prophesies, a better future awaits us. Hogan writes of that possible future using the *present* tense, as if it’s already coming into being. But of course the poet (and, hopefully, her readers) will understand that the poem is offering us an if/then hypothesis: *if* we change our behavior, then this future may come to pass. In the poem’s concluding words, humans “begin to see the shining life around them, open minds to what had not yet been thought./ ... /It is the time animals, birds, and trees awaited,/ even this tree I am that is not forever, simply one more moment in a living circle of mortal history.”²⁴

Decades ago, the poet Lyn Hejinian said that poetry’s usefulness is that it crafts the language for and the consciousness of openness and inquiry. Her words remain relevant. The best poetry searches for

immanence and seeks the conditions that encourage its unpredictable emergence:

“

[T]he emphasis in poetry is on the moving rather than on the places—poetry follows pathways of thinking and it is that that creates patterns of coherence. It is at points of linkage—in contexts of encounter, at what André Breton called *points sublimes*—that one discovers the reality of *being in time, of taking one’s chance, of becoming another*[.] (*The Language of Inquiry* 3)^a

^aLyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

2 Conclusion:

“

[The sequoias in the Giant Forest in California] are the largest unlogged sequoia grove in the parks and one of the few groves where controlled burns have been held regularly since the 1980s. The resulting landscape—cathedral-like trees with almost no undergrowth—is *what all sequoia groves would have looked like before Native Americans, who had conducted prescribed burns, were forcibly removed from their lands in the late 1800s.*^a

^aMette Lampcov and Heather Smith, “Survivors: A Year in the Life of a Burning Forest.” *Sierra Magazine* 107.2 (Summer 2022): 20–29. My italics.

Meditating on how to restore regenerative ecosystems that coexist with human thriving is precisely what the endings to Tolkien’s epic and Miyazaki’s *Princess Mononoke* explore. Before the War of the Ring and Sauron’s defeat, Tolkien’s Galadriel gives Samwise Gamgee a set of gifts in Book II, chapter 8 of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. She says that—if he survives the coming war—they will aid him trying to rebuild the Shire. The gifts are held inside a box of plain grey wood with a rune on the top, a G for the gift-giver—but also, Galadriel says, “it may stand for garden in your tongue” (486). Inside the gift-box is earth from near the Golden Wood of Lothlórien, plus a seed of the *mallorn* tree. First, Sam and a gang of Hobbit helpers create a “large sheltered garden” as well as storage-spaces lined with brick (*Return of the King*, “Grey Havens,” 373). After Sam worries that Galadriel would not want him solely to cultivate a single garden for himself, both Frodo and Merry encourage him to “use the gift to help your work and better it” (374). Working on his own, Sam repopulates the entire Shire with young trees, placing just a single grain of Lothlórien soil under each (following Frodo’s advice). He and others also plant vines and orchards, and corn and barley. The single *mallorn* seed Sam buries in the Shire’s communal area, the Party Field, where a huge tree had once been the focus and shelter for group celebrations. “Spring surpassed [Sam’s] wildest hopes. His trees began to sprout and grow, as if time was in a hurry and wished to make one year do for twenty” (375). To honor Sam’s work, his last name is changed to Gardner, and the new *mallorn* tree’s health both signifies and *creates* the rejuvenation of the social world. The leaves, wood, and bark of the *mallorn* have special uses, including providing construction materials that, when properly harvested, cause no harm to the tree. In sum, Sam regenerates the burnt world described in “The Scouring of the Shire” by creating a *commons* for all Hobbits to use—shared wealth cultivated by wildcrafting, that is, regenerative practices in which it’s impossible to draw a bright line between nature and culture.

²³Thomas Berry, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim. *Selected Writings on the Earth Community*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014. See especially chapters 3 and 8.

²⁴Linda Hogan, “The Age of Tree Rings.” *Orion Magazine*. Special Issue: Forty Origin Stories for the Anthropocene. Summer 2022. 13.

Another fascinating example of wildcrafting in Tolkien involves the “Mirror of Galadriel” chapter in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. When the trunk of a *mallorn* divides into a crown of many branches, the Galadhrim, the elven of Lothlórien, build a *telain* (a sort of platform) on top of the tree, plus buildings integrated into the spaces within the branches. An entire elven city thrives in the crown of a forest, so that separating what is “cultured” and what is “nature” is absurd. The antithesis of this elven *telain* is the Barad-dûr, Saruman’s Dark Tower, described as a “vast fortress, armoury, prison, furnace of great power” surrounded by wasteland (*The Two Towers*, “The Road to Isengard,” 204). It collapses once the One Ring is destroyed.

Thus, it would be a mistake to read Tolkien’s ending of the Ring saga as a rejection of advanced technological society in favor of pre-industrial pastoralism. True, Tolkien’s parable shows the dangers of cultural narratives justifying “dominion” over other beings. Sauron’s drive to enslave all living creatures, including Hobbits, is one with his treatment of all of nature as his to plunder. Ultimately, it’s a death wish. In contrast, elven communities within the *mallorn* trees, with guard towers on the tree-tops—or Sam’s mix of gardens, orchards, buildings, a central communal space and Party Tree, and woods—exemplify the possibilities of a sustainable nature-culture synthesis and symbiosis. Tolkien’s hope created in the midst of the threat of Nazism proved a particularly inspiring dream for the world that emerged after the debacle of World War II.

Tolkien’s Ents represent another instance of how he understood “nature” to be cultivated. But it’s neither a garden nor an orchard like those that Sam and the other Hobbits recreate at the end of the war. It is wild, yet also Ent-made. We might call it *wildcrafted*. In Tolkien’s world, trees and the beings that honor them are both transformed by their interactions: the Shepherds of the Trees evolve to resemble the particular trees that they guard, and the trees grow in new places because of the Ents’ help. How thrilled Tolkien would be with recent scientific discoveries by Suzanne Simard and many others involving messages, nutrients and other things exchanged not just within one tree species network, but with many other beings above and below ground in a healthy forest.²⁵

From one point of view, the Ents’ existence violates the strict boundary between the animal and plant kingdoms central to the science of Tolkien’s era. So too does Tom Bombadil, who is both plant-like and Hobbit-like. But that was Tolkien’s point: he wanted his “fantasy” fiction to imagine beings transgressing the basic classifications of life used by early twentieth-century science. His vision also violated the unstated scientific rule of that era, which was never to assume that non-human species had “language” or intelligence. Tolkien’s trees-with-language Ents have their own history of Entmoot councils, where the talk goes on forever due to the Ents’ long-winded language. Yet the palaver isn’t endless (the pun is irresistible); decisions are eventually reached through consensus. What Gandalf calls the new postwar age for Ents, Hobbits, and other beings models Tolkien’s hope that more-than-human entities may come to possess legal rights within a world system of governance that encompasses *many* kinds of beings.²⁶

²⁵For the Ents and Entwives, see *The Two Towers*, III-IV (“Treebeard”) and *Return of the King*, V.6 (“Many Partings”), pp. 317-21. As emphasized in “Treebeard,” Entwives favor not deep woods but fields and streams nearby, and gardens; in short, “order, and plenty, and peace” (*Towers* 99). It’s yet another instance of Tolkien imagining communities that *balance* domesticated gardens with wildcrafting biospheres that serve the inhabitants but have their wildness and otherness protected; they are not just treated as “resources” to use. At the *Rings*’ end, the Entwives have still not yet reunited with the Ents (*Towers* 100; *Return* 321). The race will be offspring-less until they do.

²⁶For more on Ents, see also Tolkien’s hilarious notes on their wild language (*Return*, Appendix F, Ents section [510]); plus Robert Foster’s *The Complete Guide to Middle-Earth*, the Ents entry. New York: Ballantine, 1978. My thanks to a colleague and Tolkien expert, Craig Williamson, for help with this section; any errors that remain are unfortunately of my own planting.

The ending of Hayao Miyazaki’s and Studio Ghibli’s anime movie *Princess Mononoke* (1997) gives us another example of a possible healing synthesis—one that pointedly has not been fully realized at the end of the story, only just begun to be imagined. Miyazaki’s ending, like Tolkien’s, can easily be misread as advocating for nature, not civilization, or perhaps for ancient rural rather than modern industrial culture. After all, trees in an ancient forest, including the Japanese version of the cedar, centuries-old *Cryptomeria japonica*, are cut down to be made into charcoal for an ironworks controlled by an aristocrat, Lady Eboshi. The cedar forest that inspired the movie is on the island of Yakushima. “The oldest cedar there, 83 feet tall and nearly 54 feet in circumference, is believed to be more than 2,600 years old, making it one of the oldest trees on earth” (Mishan). Miyazaki has said the movie depicts “the forest that has existed within the hearts of Japanese from ancient times.” The story is set in motion by a hunter’s iron ball lodged inside a wild boar, causing it to seek revenge. The movie also suggests that, with the rise to dominance of modernity, any appreciation of the woods as sacred, populated by spirits, will inevitably erode. Ursula Heise asserts “the nature and intentions of the *Shishigami*, the elusive spirit of the forest who appears in a deer-like shape by day and in a gelatinous humanoid shape by night, are not understood by either animals or humans,” with the implication that industrial civilization has changed both human and non-human worlds.²⁷

However, recent readings of the film’s conclusion by Melanie Chan, Nathalie op de Beeck, Tracey Daniels-Lerberg, and Matthew Lerberg argue that *Princess Mononoke* offers a possible yet precarious vision of interdependence. Lady Eboshi concludes that “the wolves and the crazy little wolf girl helped save us all . . . we’re going to start all over again. This time we will build a better town.” As Daniels-Lerberg and Lerberg note, “Although ‘start again’ indicates a potential repetition, . . . Lady Eboshi’s surprise that her adversaries saved her[,] alongside her statement about ‘a better town’[,] implies a potential change in her approach.” Further,

“

if Lady Eboshi eventually strays, returning to her adversarial view of nature, Ashitaka [the movie’s main human hero] remains behind to remind all who will listen that the great forest spirit is ‘life itself, he’s not dead . . . he’s here right now trying to tell us something, that it’s time for both of us [Ashitaka and San] to live.’ What Ashitaka gleans from the return of the green mountainside and abatement of violence reflects Nathalie op de Beeck’s statement that “in Miyazaki’s *animé*, as in the actual world, nature is not distant but coexists within civilization (and vice versa). Humans and wild animals have no choice but to share their territory; the boundaries overlap and bleed into one another. Nature and civilization are interdependent.”²⁸

²⁷Ursula Heise, “Plasmatic Nature: Environmentalism and Animated Film,” *Public Culture* (2014) 26.2, 309. Both the Miyazaki quotation and facts about the island of Yakushima that inspired his movie are from Ligaya Mishan, “Hayao Miyazaki Prepares to Cast One Last Spell,” *The New York Times Style Magazine*, Nov. 23, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/23/t-magazine/hayao-miyazaki-studio-ghibli.html>, accessed Nov. 26, 2021.

²⁸Nathalie op de Beeck, “Anima and Animé: Environmental Perspectives and New Frontiers in *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away*,” in Mark I. West, ed., *The Japanification of Children’s Popular Culture: From Godzilla to Miyazaki* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009), p. 267. See also Melanie Chan, “Environmentalism and the Animated Landscape in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) and *Princess Mononoke* (1997),” in Chris Pallant, ed., *Animated Landscapes: History, Form and Function* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 99; and Daniels-Lerberg, Tracey, and Matthew Lerberg, “To ‘See with Eyes Unclouded by Hate’: *Princess Mononoke* and the Quest for Environmental Balance,” in Denison, Rayna, ed., *Princess Mononoke: Understanding Studio Ghibli’s Monster Princess*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2018, pp. 57-73 (specifically 70-71). Print.

They conclude by citing Donna Haraway. The new ecocriticism seeks out speculative visions in the visual arts and literature—including most of the poems discussed in this essay—that reject primitivism/modernity and rural/urban binary choices. Instead, these works imagine either/or struggles for dominance replaced by a future kinship network among many kinds of beings, sometimes combative, sometimes in harmony:

“

As Haraway argues they are ‘together in situated histories, situated naturecultures, in which all the actors become who they are in the dance of relating, not from scratch, not ex nihilo, but full of the patterns of their sometimes-joined, sometimes-separate heritages both before and lateral to this encounter...’ ”
(*Haraway Reader*, 25; Daniels-Lerberg and Lerberg, 71)

It’s no accident that in over 4,000 years, from *Gilgamesh* read on earthen and lapis lazuli tablets or paper (or heard sung aloud) to Miyazaki films streamed via digital tablets, works of art have gazed on deforestation and then reasserted the importance of understanding that human beings’ fate is entwined with the fate of ecosystems, including forests, that we lust to consume. These storytellers see restoring our wonder at enmeshed mutuality as precarious, precious, and always in need of repair. Reforestation, not genetically altered trees growing in plantations for harvest. Some of the new “wild” can be cultivated: it’s *wildcrafted* by humans working in conjunction with nature. There are cacao tree farming practices (to produce chocolate) that exemplify contemporary regenerative agricultural principles. The trees are not grown as plantation-style monoculture, but are mixed with other trees in a forest—banana trees, native shade trees, timber trees. The cacao trees are healthy and produce abundant harvests; the soil is much more fertile, rich with microorganisms—not to mention drought resistant. A biodiverse forest agro-ecosystem is more resilient against stresses—as well as also absorbing carbon efficiently. It also can provide stable income for the farmers who tend it, and less need for fertilizer.²⁹

We need science to help us understand how forests have transformed our planet and can help heal it now. We also need poets to aid us to think like a forest and to trace its correspondences.

The quotation from Donna Haraway is from her “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” essay in Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *The Haraway Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004. 25.

²⁹On cacao, see the *To-ak Journal* website. <https://toakchocolate.com/blogs/news/what-is-regenerative-cacao>. Accessed June 23, 2022. On regenerative agriculture more broadly considered, see footnotes 7 - 11 above.

RESEARCH FINGERPRINT

IDENTIFIER

LJRHSS-227143

PEER REVIEW

Double Blind

SIMILARITY CHECK

Perplexity AI and iThenticate

ACCESS

Open Access

LANGUAGE

English

PRINT ISSN

2515-5784

ONLINE ISSN

2515-5792

EDITION

ABBREVIATION

LJRHSS

VOLUME

26

ISSUE

6

YEAR

2026

KEY DATES

RECEIVED

2026-04-15

ACCEPTED

2026-04-28

ONLINE PUBLISHED

2026-06-08

PUBLISHED

2026-08-05

CATALOGING

CROSSMARK DOI

10.34257/LJRHSS227143UK

LCC CLASS

K3240

DDC CLASS

341.48

ANZSRC CLASS

480302

UDC CLASS

341.231.14

ACCESS
ONLINE

Article Record

Deglobalization, Multilateralism, and the Limits of Global Human Rights Governance: The Brazilian Case

CORRESPONDENCE → +



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ABSTRACT

This article examines the crisis of multilateralism and its implications for the effectiveness of international human rights regimes in the context of contemporary processes of deglobalization. It argues that this crisis should not be understood merely as a conjunctural weakening of multilateral institutions or as a problem of state non-compliance, but as a revealing moment that exposes the structural limits of a model of global governance grounded in liberal juridification and the universalisation of normative standards. The central research question addresses the extent to which the crisis of multilateralism undermines the effectiveness of international human rights regimes, taking into account not only their institutional design but also their political and democratic foundations. The article advances the hypothesis that the current crisis operates less as a cause of...

Full abstract continues on the metadata continuation sheet.

Index Terms: Multilateralism • Human rights • Global governance • Deglobalization • Brazil

FUNDING

No external funding was declared for this work.

CONFLICTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AI USAGE

No generative AI was used for analysis or results.

HOW TO CITE

Alves (2026). Deglobalization, Multilateralism, and the Limits of Global Human Rights Governance: The Brazilian Case. London Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 26(6), 14-21. DOI: 10.34257/LJRHSS227143UK

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FULL ABSTRACT

This article examines the crisis of multilateralism and its implications for the effectiveness of international human rights regimes in the context of contemporary processes of deglobalization. It argues that this crisis should not be understood merely as a conjunctural weakening of multilateral institutions or as a problem of state non-compliance, but as a revealing moment that exposes the structural limits of a model of global governance grounded in liberal juridification and the universalisation of normative standards. The central research question addresses the extent to which the crisis of multilateralism undermines the effectiveness of international human rights regimes, taking into account not only their institutional design but also their political and democratic foundations. The article advances the hypothesis that the current crisis operates less as a cause of ineffectiveness and more as a condition that reveals the fragility of global constitutionalism, whose normative authority depends on political conditions it cannot itself guarantee. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative and theoretically informed critical approach, based on an interdisciplinary review of the literature in international law and global governance, combined with an in-depth analysis of the Brazilian case. Brazil is examined not as an exceptional or deviant case, but as a paradigmatic instance that illustrates the structural tensions underlying global human rights governance. The findings indicate that, despite a high level of formal adherence to international human rights treaties, Brazil exhibits selective, fragmented, and politically contingent patterns of implementation. This dynamic highlights the centrality of domestic mediation in shaping normative effectiveness and demonstrates the limitations of approaches that equate effectiveness with formal compliance or institutional sophistication. The article concludes that the persistence of international human rights norms coexists with a form of effectiveness that is structurally conditioned by political factors and increasingly subject to contestation. In a post-liberal context marked by deglobalization, the effectiveness of human rights regimes cannot be secured through juridification alone, but depends on political legitimacy that remains unevenly distributed within the international system.

ARCHIVAL RECORD

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Deglobalization, Multilateralism, and the Limits of Global Human Rights Governance: The Brazilian Case

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Abstract

This article examines the crisis of multilateralism and its implications for the effectiveness of international human rights regimes in the context of contemporary processes of deglobalization. It argues that this crisis should not be understood merely as a conjunctural weakening of multilateral institutions or as a problem of state non-compliance, but as a revealing moment that exposes the structural limits of a model of global governance grounded in liberal juridification and the universalisation of normative standards. The central research question addresses the extent to which the crisis of multilateralism undermines the effectiveness of international human rights regimes, taking into account not only their institutional design but also their political and democratic foundations. The article advances the hypothesis that the current crisis operates less as a cause of ineffectiveness and more as a condition that reveals the fragility of global constitutionalism, whose normative authority depends on political conditions it cannot itself guarantee. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative and theoretically informed critical approach, based on an interdisciplinary review of the literature in international law and global governance, combined with an in-depth analysis of the Brazilian case. Brazil is examined not as an exceptional or deviant case, but as a paradigmatic instance that illustrates the structural tensions underlying global human rights governance. The findings indicate that, despite a high level of formal adherence to international human rights treaties, Brazil exhibits selective, fragmented, and politically contingent patterns of implementation. This dynamic highlights the centrality of domestic mediation in shaping normative effectiveness and demonstrates the limitations of approaches that equate effectiveness with formal compliance or institutional sophistication. The article concludes that the persistence of international human rights norms coexists with a form of effectiveness that is structurally conditioned by political factors and increasingly subject to contestation. In a post-liberal context marked by deglobalization, the effectiveness of human rights regimes cannot be secured through juridification alone, but depends on political legitimacy that remains unevenly distributed within the international system.

Keywords: *Multilateralism, Human rights, Global governance, Deglobalization, Brazil*

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1 Introduction

Global governance of human rights has historically been constructed within the framework of multilateralism, an institutional model that, in the post-Second World War period, sought to stabilise the international order through interstate cooperation, the centrality of international organisations, and the progressive juridification of global political relations (Amaral Júnior, 2016). Within this context, international human rights regimes have assumed a central role, being conceived simultaneously as instruments for limiting state power and as normative foundations for the legitimacy of the contemporary international order.

In recent decades, however, this arrangement has been increasingly challenged by structural transformations that call into question its underlying premises. The crisis of multilateralism—manifested in the contestation of international institutional authority, normative fragmentation, and the growing selectivity in compliance with international obligations—coincides with broader processes of deglobalization, characterised by the reconfiguration of economic interdependencies, the reassertion

of state sovereignty (Alves, 2024), and the securitisation of economic, technological, and migratory flows (Milani; Alves, forthcoming).

This scenario has direct implications for international human rights regimes. State resistance to decisions of international organisations, the weakening of monitoring mechanisms, and the intensification of sovereigntist discourses raise fundamental questions regarding the effectiveness of these regimes in an international environment marked by the erosion of the liberal consensus that historically underpinned them (Held, 2016). Nevertheless, explanations that attribute this crisis solely to state non-compliance or institutional deficits remain insufficient to capture the depth of the problem.

It is precisely at this point that the incorporation of specific national contexts becomes analytically decisive. The Brazilian case is particularly relevant, given that the country has historically played an active role in the international institutionalisation of human rights, adhering to treaties, participating in multilateral regimes, and recognising the authority of international monitoring mechanisms. At the same time, however, it exhibits selective and asymmetric patterns of internalisa-

tion and compliance, revealing tensions between formal normative commitment and practical effectiveness at the domestic level.

Against this backdrop, this article proposes to shift the analytical focus from a purely institutional dimension to the structural foundations of global human rights governance, articulating this reflection through the Brazilian case. The central research question examines the extent to which the crisis of multilateralism undermines the effectiveness of international human rights regimes, taking into account not only its conjunctural manifestations but also the political and democratic limits of the model of global constitutionalisation within which these regimes are embedded.

The article advances the hypothesis that the contemporary crisis of multilateralism affects the effectiveness of international human rights regimes not merely by weakening institutional mechanisms of cooperation, but by exposing the structural limits of a model of global governance grounded in the attempt to juridically stabilise an international order marked by profound political and democratic asymmetries (Keohane; Nye, 1977). In this context, the Brazilian experience does not constitute an exception or deviation, but rather a paradigmatic example of this dynamic, revealing the coexistence of high levels of normative adherence and selective, contingent effectiveness. This selective pattern of compliance is not a unique national pathology; rather, it reflects a broader trend among middle powers and other BRICS nations, which increasingly navigate the tensions between formal international commitments and domestic sovereignty during the post-liberal transition.

It is thus argued that the crisis of multilateralism operates less as a cause and more as a revealing element of the fragility of a form of global constitutionalism that sought to replace real political conflicts with abstract normative consensus, without the corresponding construction of global democratic foundations. In the Brazilian case, this fragility is manifested in the dependence of the effectiveness of international human rights regimes on unstable domestic mediations, shaped by internal political dynamics and fluctuating degrees of openness to international normativity.

Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative, theoretically informed critical approach, based on an interdisciplinary literature review within the fields of international law and global governance, combined with an analysis of the Brazilian case as empirical evidence of ongoing transformations. The theoretical framework draws upon critical global constitutionalism in order to interpret the crisis of liberal multilateralism as a structural phenomenon intensified by processes of deglobalization.

The article is structured as follows: first, it examines the crisis of multilateralism in the context of deglobalization; second, it develops the theoretical framework of global constitutionalism from a post-liberal perspective; third, it analyses the effectiveness of international human rights regimes in light of the Brazilian case; and finally, it presents concluding remarks addressing the theoretical implications of these findings for the understanding of contemporary global governance.

2 Crisis of multilateralism

2.1 Multilateralism: foundations and institutional rationality

Multilateralism may be defined as the coordinated articulation of national policies among three or more states, developed either through ad hoc arrangements or within formally established institutional frameworks. In this sense, it constitutes a form of interstate collective action—whether institutionalised or not—grounded in a set of rules, norms, and procedures, both formal and informal, that orient actors' behaviour, con-

strain their discretion, and structure expectations regarding reciprocal conduct in international relations (Keohane, 1990, p. 731-733).

Beyond this procedural definition, multilateralism should be understood not merely as interaction among multiple states, but as a specific institutional form for organising international relations. Its distinctive feature lies in the structuring of interstate interactions according to generalised principles of conduct, applied uniformly to participants, as opposed to case-by-case or particularistic arrangements. From this perspective, multilateralism entails the internalisation of abstract norms, the predictability of interactions, and the emergence of diffuse reciprocity, whereby the benefits of cooperation extend beyond immediate exchanges and unfold over time, sustaining shared expectations of compliance and normative stability within the international system. Accordingly, multilateralism is associated with the resolution of coordination problems among three or more states, operating through a logic that stands in contrast to bilateralism (Ruggie, 1992, p. 565-571).

Within the broader framework of the liberal international order, multilateralism has been conceptualised as a mechanism through which power, particularly hegemonic power, is both constrained and legitimised institutionally. Multilateral institutions function as structures of restraint and predictability by binding states, including the most powerful, to shared rules, structured decision-making procedures, and long-term commitments. In this sense, multilateralism does not merely facilitate cooperation, but plays a central role in stabilising international order by reducing uncertainty, fostering trust among actors, and transforming asymmetries of power into institutionalised relationships grounded in common rules and normative expectations (Ikenberry, 2001).

As an organising principle of international relations, multilateralism rests upon three core properties: generalised conduct, indivisibility, and diffuse reciprocity. Generalised conduct refers to the formulation of abstract normative principles that guide state behaviour across a wide range of situations, independently of particular interests or specific strategic contingencies. Indivisibility, in turn, relates to the notion of a political collectivity, insofar as the benefits and obligations arising from multilateral cooperation are socially constructed as shared, thereby constituting a common basis for belonging and collective action. Finally, diffuse reciprocity concerns the expectation among actors that multilateral arrangements generate equivalent benefits in the aggregate and over time, even if not immediately or symmetrically distributed. It is precisely this logic of diffuse reciprocity that enables multilateralism to mitigate coordination problems among states and to sustain relatively stable patterns of international cooperation (Caporaso, 1993, p. 53).

Multilateralism consolidated itself, particularly in the post-Second World War period, as the primary institutional arrangement of the international order, structured around interstate cooperation, the centrality of international organisations, and the production of legal norms aimed at stabilising relations among states. Moreover, it incorporates the notion of plurality in the resolution of international disputes, insofar as it presupposes the reciprocal consideration of demands between core and peripheral states, thereby enabling the incorporation, albeit asymmetrically, of diverse interests into international decision-making processes. From this perspective, multilateralism underpins the creation of a significant portion of post-war international institutions (Amaral Júnior, 2020), relying on general principles of conduct, expectations of reciprocity, and the institutionalisation of common rules capable of limiting unilateral exercises of state power (Ruggie, 1992).

In contemporary contexts, multilateralism extends beyond mere interstate coordination, incorporating key dimensions of political interaction, the institutionalisation of deliberative arenas, and the reduction of transaction costs, thereby enhancing transparency and predictability

in international relations. Furthermore, such arrangements tend to promote pluralism in perspectives and identities, while conferring legitimacy upon the processes through which norms and values deemed fundamental to international society are formulated, consolidated, and diffused. In this regard, the emphasis on participation and reciprocity transcends a purely instrumental understanding of cooperation, instead orienting itself towards the gradual, albeit uneven and contested, democratisation of interstate relations (Lima; Albuquerque, 2020, p. 7).

Within the field of human rights, this model found one of its most ambitious expressions. The international codification of fundamental rights, the creation of global and regional protection systems, and the expansion of monitoring mechanisms reflect the liberal expectation that international law could discipline political power and promote universal normative standards. Such expectations, however, have always been embedded in a specific historical context, shaped by the political, economic, and normative hegemony of Western liberal democracies.

2.2 Deglobalization and the crisis of multilateralism: delegitimation, fragmentation, and contestation

From the early twenty-first century onwards, diagnoses of a crisis of multilateralism have become increasingly prominent. This crisis manifests itself in multiple and interconnected forms: the retrenchment of state commitment to multilateral institutions, decision-making deadlocks within international organisations, the proliferation of parallel and competing forums, and the growing contestation of the normative authority of established international regimes.

Such developments should not be interpreted merely as functional deficiencies or episodic disruptions, but rather as expressions of a broader transformation in the political foundations of global governance. The crisis of multilateralism reflects an intensification of contestation directed at global authority itself, driven both by state actors and by domestic social forces (Zürn, 2018). In this context, the legitimacy of multilateral institutions is no longer questioned solely on the basis of inefficiency, but increasingly in relation to their claims to authority within a system marked by structural power asymmetries and limited democratic accountability.

At the legal level, this crisis is reflected in the fragmentation of international law (Held, 2016; Alves, 2024), the selective compliance with international obligations, and the strategic instrumentalisation of legal norms by states and other actors (Alves, 2024). The proliferation of specialised regimes and the coexistence of competing normative rationalities undermine the notion of a coherent and hierarchically structured international legal order (Koskeniemi, 2011). Rather than a unified normative system, international law increasingly operates as a fragmented and contested field, in which authority is negotiated rather than presumed.

The crisis of multilateralism is significantly intensified by contemporary processes of deglobalization. These processes should not be understood as a simple reversal of global interconnectedness, but as its selective, asymmetric, and politically driven reconfiguration. In contrast to linear narratives of progressive globalisation, deglobalization is characterised by the reorganisation of global value chains, the resurgence of national industrial policies, strategic protectionism, and the increasing securitisation of economic, technological, and migratory flows (Milani; Alves, forthcoming). More fundamentally, it entails the re-nationalisation and re-territorialisation of political authority, with sovereignty being reasserted as a central organising principle of state action (Alves, 2024).

This transformation directly disrupts the underlying logic of multilateralism. Institutions designed to operate within a context of deepening economic interdependence encounter growing constraints as states pri-

oritise unilateral strategies or restrict cooperation to narrower regional or strategic arrangements (Alves, 2024, p. 154). At the normative level, deglobalization weakens incentives for legal cooperation and for the internalisation of international obligations through two distinct pathways: a material pathway and a discursive pathway. Materially, the reconfiguration of global value chains and the rise of protectionist industrial policies reduce the economic and geopolitical costs of non-compliance, as states become less dependent on integrated multilateral regimes for economic survival. Discursively, deglobalization shifts domestic political dynamics toward sovereigntist reassertion, populist movements, and national security priorities, which delegitimise external oversight as an infringement on national self-determination.

In the field of human rights, these dynamics produce particularly ambivalent effects. On the one hand, the discursive pathway reinforces sovereigntist narratives that challenge the legitimacy of international monitoring and accountability mechanisms (Alves, 2024, p. 190–196). On the other hand, the material pathway fosters selective patterns of normative engagement, whereby states formally adhere to international regimes to maintain symbolic standing while constraining their practical implementation or strategically mobilising legal norms in accordance with contingent political interests, especially in areas such as migration protection (Milani; Alves, forthcoming).

This scenario exposes a fundamental fragility of the liberal multilateral order: its dependence on the convergence between global economic rationality and a shared normative consensus. As Koskeniemi (1990) has long argued, international law operates within a structural tension between normativity and power. Deglobalization disrupts the conditions under which this tension could be stabilised, revealing that the effectiveness of international human rights regimes is not grounded in normativity alone, but in historically contingent political alignments (Alves, 2024).

Accordingly, the current crisis should not be reduced to a problem of compliance or institutional design. Rather, it signals a deeper crisis of normative authority, intensified by deglobalization (Alves, 2024). The erosion of consensus surrounding liberal values transforms international law from a framework of coordination into a terrain of explicit contestation, in which norms are no longer broadly internalised but are instead selectively appropriated, resisted, or reinterpreted.

In this sense, deglobalization does not merely exacerbate the crisis of multilateralism; it renders visible the structural limits of a model of global constitutionalism that presupposed the continuity of economic integration and normative convergence. Once these underlying conditions are destabilised, the universalist aspirations of international human rights regimes are exposed as politically contingent rather than structurally secured.

Within the specific domain of human rights, the crisis of liberal multilateralism acquires particularly acute contours. The increasing resistance of states to the decisions of international courts, the weakening of monitoring mechanisms, and the proliferation of sovereigntist rhetoric underscore the fragility of the normative authority of these regimes. However, as David Held (2008) argues, the central issue lies not merely in state resistance, but in the structural mismatch between the scope of global decision-making and the absence of corresponding democratic accountability.

From this perspective, the crisis of multilateralism undermines global human rights governance by exposing its dependence on a liberal political consensus that no longer holds uniformly across the international system. To avoid analytical circularity, we must distinguish between conjunctural weakening and structural exposure. A conjunctural weakening refers to temporary compliance deficits or institutional deadlocks that assume the system's foundational legitimacy

and normative authority remain intact. In contrast, a structural exposure reveals how the effectiveness of human rights regimes is intrinsically limited by the very architecture of global constitutionalism, specifically, its dependency on historically contingent power relations and its lack of autonomous democratic foundations. The contemporary crisis operates not as the primary cause of ineffectiveness, but as a structural exposure that brings these pre-existing limits to light.

3 Multilateralism and the legal construction of global human rights governance

Multilateralism consolidated itself, particularly in the post-Second World War period, as the primary institutional framework of global governance. Grounded in interstate cooperation, the centrality of international organisations, and the universalisation of certain normative values, this model found in human rights and democracy its principal vectors (Amaral Júnior, 2016). The international codification of human rights came to fulfil a dual function: on the one hand, the legal limitation of state power; on the other, the moral legitimisation of the liberal international order (Piovesan, 2013).

Legal scholarship has frequently interpreted this process through the lens of normative progress, according to which the expansion of treaties, monitoring mechanisms, and regional protection systems would indicate a continuous strengthening of the effectiveness of human rights (Ramos, 2018). Such interpretations, however, tend to rest on an implicit assumption: that international normativity is capable of producing effects independently of the political conditions that sustain it.

It is precisely this assumption that the present article seeks to challenge. By examining the extent to which the crisis of multilateralism undermines the effectiveness of international human rights regimes, the analysis departs from the premise that these regimes do not operate within an institutional vacuum. Rather, they are intrinsically linked to the legitimacy of the broader model of global governance within which they are embedded.

3.1 Global constitutionalism: normative promises and structural assumptions

Global constitutionalism emerges as one of the principal theoretical frameworks for interpreting the normative expansion of contemporary international law. Its development is closely associated with processes of globalisation, which have significantly transformed the locus of political authority, displacing decision-making beyond the confines of the nation-state and into transnational and international arenas (Dunoff; Trachtman, 2009, p. 7).

From this perspective, scholars have identified an ongoing process of constitutionalisation of the international order, characterised by the emergence of hierarchically superior norms, the centrality of human rights, and the progressive legal limitation of sovereignty (Dunoff; Trachtman, 2009; Alves, 2024, p. 22). In broad terms, this process entails a dual movement: the constitutionalisation of international law and the internationalisation of constitutional law (Ranieri, 2019, p. 174).

Importantly, this model does not presuppose the existence of a world state, but rather a plurality of interconnected legal orders structured around shared constitutional principles (Walker, 2002). Within the field of human rights, this framework enables the interpretation of international treaties as quasi-constitutional instruments, endowed with universalist aspirations and a normative vocation to constrain political power.

However, this model rests upon specific structural assumptions that are often left unexamined: the existence of a minimal normative consensus around liberal values; the acceptance of the authority of multilateral institutions; and the belief in the capacity of law to stabilise

global political conflicts. The crisis of multilateralism places these assumptions under strain, revealing their contingent and historically situated character.

3.2 Critical global constitutionalism and the politicisation of human rights effectiveness

Critical approaches to global constitutionalism challenge the notion of international law as a neutral or autonomous normative order (Koskeniemi, 1990). Rather than eliminating political conflict, the juridification of international relations rearticulates such conflict in legal language, often obscuring the underlying power structures that shape both norm production and interpretation.

From this perspective, the effectiveness of international human rights regimes cannot be adequately assessed solely in terms of formal adherence to treaties or the institutional sophistication of monitoring mechanisms. Instead, it must be understood as fundamentally dependent on the political legitimacy of the system that produces and applies these norms. When such legitimacy is eroded, the structural limits of international law become visible.

Constitutionalisation, whether at the domestic or international level, cannot be dissociated from the material and political conditions that sustain it (Fernandes, 2025). Applied to the global sphere, this insight allows the crisis of liberal multilateralism to be interpreted not as a contingent disruption, but as the manifestation of a structural democratic deficit within global governance.

3.3 Post-liberal constitutionalism and the erosion of international normative consensus

Post-liberal approaches to global constitutionalism begin from the recognition that the post-Cold War international order was deeply shaped by liberal Western hegemony. The universalisation of human rights was, to a significant extent, grounded in the assumption that certain values, such as liberal democracy, market economy, and legal individualism, possessed universal validity (Zürn, 2018).

The contemporary crisis of multilateralism, intensified by processes of deglobalization (Alves, 2024, p. 140-150), the rise of non-liberal powers, and the growing contestation of international institutional authority, exposes the fragility of this normative consensus. As Casella (2012) observes, international law increasingly operates within a context of contestation in which normative authority can no longer be taken for granted. This erosion has direct implications for the effectiveness of international human rights regimes. The issue is no longer limited to sporadic non-compliance, but extends to a more profound questioning of the legitimacy of the norms and institutions that constitute the system itself.

In this regard, Paulo Borba Casella's (2008) critique of international society is particularly instructive. Rejecting the notion of international society as a normatively cohesive or harmonious space, Casella conceptualises it instead as a field structurally marked by power asymmetries, material inequalities, and historically constituted hierarchies. These factors condition both the production and the application of international law.

From this perspective, the institutionalisation of norms does not eliminate relations of domination, but frequently obscures them, reinforcing patterns of selective decision-making and political exclusion. Consequently, international society cannot be understood as organised around a consensual rationality, but rather as a configuration of unstable compromises shaped by the interests of dominant states. This dynamic undermines the universalist aspirations of international law and places increasing strain on the legitimacy of its regimes, particularly in contexts marked by deglobalization and the reconfiguration of global governance.

3.4 Global democratic deficit and the structural limits of normative effectiveness

A central axis of critical global constitutionalism lies in the identification of a structural democratic deficit within global governance. Despite their normative density, international human rights regimes lack robust mechanisms of political participation and democratic deliberation at the global level (Koskenniemi, 2011).

Brazilian scholars such as Piovesan (2013) acknowledge the importance of international protection systems, while also highlighting the challenges of their effectiveness in contexts characterised by state resistance and institutional fragility, as well as democratic erosion intensified by processes of deglobalization (Alves, 2024). These challenges are not merely conjunctural, but structural, deriving from the historical formation of global constitutionalism itself. In this sense, the crisis of multilateralism operates as a revealing moment. By weakening the political foundations that sustain the system, it renders visible the limits of a model that sought to replace real political conflicts with abstract normative consensus. From the perspective advanced in this article, the crisis of liberal multilateralism should not be interpreted as an external factor that contingently undermines the effectiveness of international human rights regimes. Rather, international law has always operated within a structural tension between normativity and power, with its effectiveness conditioned by historically situated political equilibria (Koskenniemi, 1990; 2011).

Accordingly, the current crisis functions less as a cause and more as a revealing element of the structural limits of liberal global constitutionalism. The universalist aspirations of human rights, supported by a sophisticated legal architecture, have long obscured the fact that their authority depended upon a specific liberal political consensus and a particular configuration of power within the international system. As this consensus erodes, the contingent and politically conditioned nature of international normativity becomes increasingly apparent.

Just as processes of constitutionalisation within domestic contexts cannot be understood as neutral instruments of rationalising power, but rather as expressions of political conflict and struggles for hegemony (Fernandes, 2025), global human rights Governance, and liberal global constitutionalism more broadly, has remained functional only insofar as it has been capable of translating political hegemony into legal legitimacy.

When this translation weakens, the effectiveness of international human rights regimes is not simply diminished; it is selectively reconfigured. Norms continue to exist, and decisions continue to be issued, but their capacity to generate concrete effects becomes uneven, fragmented, and politically contested. The crisis, therefore, does not dismantle global constitutionalism, but exposes it as an incomplete project structurally dependent on political conditions beyond its control.

The incorporation of David Held's (2008) reflections on global governance reinforces this conclusion. Held argues that global governance mechanisms lack a democratic foundation commensurate with the scope of the decisions they produce, generating a disjunction between normative authority and political accountability. While his proposal for cosmopolitan democracy remains anchored in liberal values, his critique of the democratic deficit provides important insights into why human rights regimes face increasing resistance and limitations in effectiveness.

This critique is further expanded by recent decolonial and Global South perspectives on international law, which challenge the very foundations of global constitutionalism. As Antony Anghie (2023) argues from a Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) perspective, the universalist claims of international law and global governance often obscure enduring colonial continuities, material asymmetries, and epistemic hierarchies. From this viewpoint, the global democratic

deficit is not an accidental administrative failure that can be resolved through institutional reforms; rather, it is a structural feature of an international legal order designed to translate Western political and economic hegemony into legal legitimacy. Engaging with these decolonial critiques bridges the gap between general theoretical challenges and the specificities of the Brazilian case, where the domestic mediation of human rights reflects these broader historical and structural hierarchies.

In contrast to normativist approaches, this article does not assume that the solution to the current crisis lies in the mere expansion or reform of institutional arrangements. Instead, it argues that the crisis of multilateralism reveals a structural limit inherent to the very project of global constitutionalisation: the attempt to juridically stabilise an international order that remains deeply unequal and politically fragmented. The growing ineffectiveness of international human rights regimes should thus be understood as a symptom of a mismatch between global legal normativity and effective political legitimacy, particularly within a post-liberal context marked by deglobalization.

4 Effectiveness of international human rights regimes and the crisis of multilateralism in Brazil

The analysis of the effectiveness of international human rights regimes constitutes a critical point of entry for understanding the contemporary crisis of multilateralism, particularly when examined through specific national contexts. In the Brazilian case, this issue acquires particularly revealing contours, insofar as the country has historically positioned itself as an engaged actor in the international institutionalisation of human rights (Amaral Júnior, 2016), while simultaneously exhibiting selective and asymmetrical patterns of internalisation and compliance with these norms.

Within the fields of international law and international relations, effectiveness must be understood as a multidimensional concept. In the Brazilian case, this multidimensionality becomes evident when one observes, at the formal level, the high rate of ratification of human rights treaties and their incorporation into the domestic legal order, including, in some cases, a differentiated normative status with constitutional force. This represents a robust dimension of legal-formal effectiveness, positioning Brazil as a state formally committed to the international human rights protection order.

However, this formal dimension does not translate uniformly into practical effectiveness. At the institutional level, although Brazil actively participates in international and regional protection systems, such as the Inter-American human rights system, its relationship with international supervisory mechanisms is marked by ambivalence, characterised by moments of cooperation as well as episodes of resistance or partial compliance with international decisions (Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2010). Cases involving structural human rights violations, frequently recognised by international bodies, reveal persistent difficulties in implementing reparatory measures and institutional reforms at the domestic level.

Academic debates often adopt a restrictive conception of effectiveness, associating it with the capacity of international regimes to produce immediate compliance by states. Such an understanding, however, proves insufficient when confronted with the Brazilian experience, in which formal adherence to human rights treaties coexists with structural difficulties in domestic implementation (Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2010).

In order to more precisely understand the dynamics of such effectiveness, it becomes necessary to introduce a temporal distinction capable of identifying structural transformations in the functioning of global governance. In this regard, a differentiation is proposed between the periods preceding and following the events of September 11, 2001.

Rather than a complete historical rupture, this geopolitical milestone is understood as an acceleration and intensification of pre-existing tensions within global constitutionalism. Indeed, structural failures in the human rights regime were already manifest in earlier periods, such as the persistence of Cold War era exemptions and the selective humanitarian intervention crises of the 1990s. Nevertheless, the post-2001 era marks a decisive turning point in the relationship between politics, security, sovereignty, and international law.

In the period prior to 2001, the consolidation of international human rights regimes was closely associated with the expansion of liberal multilateralism and the relative stability of the normative consensus that sustained it. This context favoured the expansion of state adherence to treaties, the strengthening of monitoring mechanisms, and the increasing internalisation of international norms at the domestic level. In the Brazilian case, this period corresponds to the intensification of the incorporation of human rights norms, the opening to the Inter-American system, and the construction of a discourse aligned with international standards of protection.

From 2001 onwards, however, this scenario undergoes a significant inflection. As argued by David Held (2016), the wars that followed the September 11 attacks, marked by unilateral interventions, the flexibilisation of international legal norms, and the erosion of multilateral standards, contributed to the fragmentation of the international order and to the weakening of the authority of international law. This process not only undermined the legitimacy of multilateral institutions, but also reconfigured state incentives regarding compliance with international obligations.

In this new context, characterised by the increasing securitisation of international relations, the revalorisation of state sovereignty, and the emergence of selective patterns of normative engagement, the effectiveness of international human rights regimes assumes distinct contours (Alves, 2024). In the Brazilian case, this transformation does not take the form of a formal abandonment of international commitments, but rather a reconfiguration of their implementation, marked by greater political contingency, selectivity, and fragmentation.

The introduction of this temporal framework makes it possible to observe that the effectiveness of international human rights regimes, in the Brazilian case, is not evenly distributed over time, but assumes distinct patterns according to transformations in the international order.

In the period prior to 2001, although marked by structural limitations, the behaviour of the Brazilian state in relation to international human rights regimes displayed a greater degree of convergence with the expectations of liberal multilateralism. This period was characterised by the expansion of treaty adherence, the progressive opening to international supervisory bodies, and the construction of an external posture oriented towards legitimisation through international law. Normative internalisation, while not devoid of tensions, tended to occur within an environment of greater alignment between formal commitments and political willingness to implement them (Alves, 2024).

From 2001 onwards, however, a qualitative shift in this pattern can be observed. The reconfiguration of the international order, marked by the centrality of security, the flexibilisation of international legal parameters, and the increasing instrumentalisation of law by major powers, as analysed by David Held (2016), indirectly but significantly altered the incentives guiding state behaviour. In the Brazilian case, this transformation is not expressed in a rupture with the international human rights system, but rather in the adoption of more selective, contingent, and politically conditioned strategies of compliance.

This shift becomes particularly visible when examining patterns of implementation of decisions issued by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. In the cases of *Ximenes Lopes*, *Gomes Lund et al.* (known

as “*Guerrilha do Araguaia*”), and *Favela Nova Brasília*, an important shift can be observed in the manner in which the Brazilian state responds to international determinations.

In the *Ximenes Lopes* case (2006), one can still identify a pattern of greater institutional openness towards compliance with international decisions, particularly with regard to individual reparatory measures and the recognition of responsibility. Although not complete, the level of compliance reflects a context in which engagement with the Inter-American system operated on relatively cooperative grounds, with a lower degree of explicit contestation (Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2006).

By contrast, in the cases of *Gomes Lund et al.* (2010) and *Favela Nova Brasília* (2017), both involving structural violations and politically sensitive issues such as memory, truth, state accountability, and police violence, the pattern of state behaviour reveals more pronounced inflections. In these cases, the measures ordered by the Court extend beyond individual reparations and require profound institutional transformations, including structural investigations, the revision of state practices, and the confrontation of historical legacies of violence (Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2010; 2017).

It is precisely at this point that the shift in compliance patterns becomes evident. While obligations of a more punctual nature tend to be partially implemented, structural measures face significant resistance, prolonged delays, and, in some cases, indirect forms of non-compliance. This behaviour reveals an increasing selectivity in the internalisation of international norms, driven not only by institutional limitations, but also by political calculations related to the sensitivity of the issues involved.

This shift cannot be understood solely as an expression of domestic difficulties. At a deeper level, it reflects a reconfiguration of the parameters of legitimacy and authority of international law in the post-2001 context. The flexibilisation of norms by central powers, the prioritisation of security agendas, and the fragmentation of the international legal order contribute to the erosion of generalised expectations of compliance, opening space for more pragmatic and selective state strategies at the domestic level (Alves, 2024).

In the Brazilian case, this translates into the coexistence of a high level of formal adherence to international human rights regimes with a practical effectiveness marked by fragmentation, contingency, and dependence on internal political factors. The implementation of international decisions ceases to be guided predominantly by a logic of normative conformity and increasingly reflects a dynamic of political negotiation, in which different state organs, levels of government, and institutional interests dispute the scope and content of compliance, beyond the democratic deficits that such behaviour reveals.

Thus, the distinction between the periods before and after 2001 makes it possible to demonstrate that the effectiveness of international human rights regimes not only varies in intensity, but undergoes a qualitative transformation. What is observed is not merely a reduction in compliance, but the emergence of a distinct pattern characterised by selectivity, fragmentation, and the growing erosion of previously universalised human rights standards (Alves, 2024).

This transformation reinforces the central hypothesis of this article. The so-called “ineffectiveness” of international human rights regimes cannot be reduced to a compliance deficit or isolated institutional failures, but must be understood as a structural manifestation of the limits of a model of global governance whose normative authority depends on political conditions that, in a deglobalised context, have become progressively less receptive to human rights (Alves, 2024).

This pattern demonstrates that, although Brazil maintains a high level of formal adherence to the Inter-American system, the effectiveness of international decisions depends on domestic political and institu-

tional mediations, reinforcing the hypothesis that the effectiveness of international human rights regimes is structurally conditioned and cannot be ensured exclusively through global juridification.

This tension becomes even more evident when analysing the political and social effectiveness of international regimes in the Brazilian context. On the one hand, such regimes play a relevant role by providing normative and discursive repertoires mobilised by domestic actors, such as the judiciary, the public prosecutor's office, and civil society organisations, contributing to processes of judicialisation, the visibility of violations, and political pressure for institutional change. On the other hand, the effectiveness of these dynamics remains deeply conditioned by domestic political configurations, state capacity, and the priority given to the human rights agenda across different governmental contexts.

The Brazilian experience thus reveals that international human rights regimes operate predominantly through indirect mechanisms, whose effectiveness depends on domestic mediation. While this observation is compatible with liberal-institutionalist approaches (Simmons, 2009), it also exposes their limitations. The literature tends to assume the existence of favourable domestic conditions, such as institutional stability, governmental commitment, and political openness, which, in the Brazilian case, prove unstable and subject to cycles of democratic erosion, institutional contestation, and shifting state priorities (Alves, 2024).

In this sense, the crisis of multilateralism, intensified by processes of deglobalization, directly affects the incentives for the internalisation and implementation of international norms in Brazil, particularly in the field of human rights. The growing revalorisation of state sovereignty, combined with political discourses that question the legitimacy of international institutions, contributes to the adoption of selective strategies of normative engagement (Alves, 2024). Although Brazil formally maintains its commitments to international human rights regimes, it increasingly operates in a pragmatic and instrumental manner, prioritising obligations compatible with contingent political and economic interests, despite the international commitments to which it is a signatory.

This pattern reveals a central characteristic of the contemporary effectiveness of international human rights regimes: its selective, fragmented, and contingent nature. In the Brazilian case, international norms continue to play relevant symbolic and argumentative roles, but their capacity to produce concrete effects is uneven and dependent on domestic political factors. Effectiveness is thus displaced from the international sphere to domestic arenas, in which human rights are continuously renegotiated, reinterpreted, and, at times, hollowed out.

The Brazilian experience demonstrates that the so-called "ineffectiveness" of international human rights regimes cannot be understood as a mere compliance deficit or as an isolated institutional failure. Rather, it constitutes a structural manifestation of the limits of a model of global governance grounded in liberal juridification and the universalisation of normative standards. By depending on contingent domestic mediations, international regimes reveal their inability to autonomously sustain a universalist project of rights protection within an international system marked by power asymmetries and processes of deglobalization.

Thus, far from representing an exception, the Brazilian case operates as a paradigmatic example of the tensions that permeate global human rights governance. By exposing the coexistence between formal normative adherence and limited practical effectiveness, Brazil reveals the structural limits of global constitutionalism and underscores the need for analytical approaches that inseparably articulate law, power, and political context in the understanding of the effectiveness of international human rights regimes.

5 Conclusion

The analysis developed throughout this article has demonstrated that the crisis of multilateralism cannot be adequately understood as a merely conjunctural phenomenon of institutional weakening, nor as a simple consequence of increased state non-compliance with international human rights norms. Rather, it has been argued that this crisis operates as a revealing moment, exposing the structural limits of a model of global governance that sought to juridically constitutionalise the international order without adequately addressing its underlying political, democratic, and social asymmetries, particularly within a context increasingly shaped by processes of deglobalization.

The incorporation of the Brazilian case proved essential to deepening this diagnosis. Far from constituting a peripheral exception, Brazil emerges as a paradigmatic case through which the central tensions of global human rights governance can be observed. The coexistence of high levels of formal normative commitment, evidenced by extensive treaty ratification and the incorporation of international norms into the domestic legal order, and selective, contingent patterns of implementation demonstrates that the effectiveness of international regimes cannot be assessed solely in normative or institutional terms.

This analytical shift allows for a more precise formulation of the article's central claim. The so-called "ineffectiveness" of international human rights regimes should not be interpreted as a contingent failure or a mere compliance deficit, but rather as a structural manifestation of the limits inherent in a model of global governance grounded in liberal juridification and the universalisation of normative standards. In this sense, the crisis of multilateralism does not constitute the primary cause of the fragility of these regimes, but rather the historical moment in which their internal contradictions become more visible and politically salient.

The analysis further reinforces the critique of liberal global constitutionalism by demonstrating that its promise of juridical stabilisation of the international order depends upon political conditions that it is itself unable to secure. The absence of democratic foundations at the global level, commensurate with the scope of the decisions produced (Held, 2008), combined with the persistence of structural asymmetries within the international system, undermines both the legitimacy and the effectiveness of human rights regimes. In the Brazilian case, this limitation becomes evident in the dependence of normative effectiveness on domestic political contexts, revealing the fragility of a global normative order that lacks autonomous mechanisms of democratic grounding.

From this perspective, the contribution of this article lies in demonstrating that the analysis of the effectiveness of international human rights regimes requires an approach that integrates, in an inseparable manner, normative, political, and contextual dimensions. By mobilising the Brazilian case as a revealing analytical lens, the study shows that the crisis of multilateralism exposes not only institutional weaknesses, but also the structural limits of the broader project of global constitutionalisation.

Ultimately, it may be concluded that the formal persistence of international human rights regimes coexists with a form of effectiveness that is selective, fragmented, and politically conditioned. Understanding this configuration requires moving beyond abstract normativist perspectives towards analyses grounded in the interaction between global governance and domestic political contexts. In a post-liberal scenario marked by deglobalization, human rights remain a relevant normative horizon; however, their effectiveness increasingly depends on situated political dynamics, thereby posing new theoretical and empirical challenges for the study of contemporary global governance.

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PRINT ISSN

2515-5784

ONLINE ISSN

2515-5792

EDITION

ABBREVIATION

LJRHSS

VOLUME

26

ISSUE

6

YEAR

2026

KEY DATES

RECEIVED

2026-04-11

ACCEPTED

2026-04-23

ONLINE PUBLISHED

2026-06-08

PUBLISHED

2026-08-05

CATALOGING

CROSSMARK DOI

10.34257/LJRHSS226984UK

LCC CLASS

KNQ1520

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344.0326

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ABSTRACT

In the era of artificial intelligence deeply empowering urban elderly care services, the smart elderly care model faces multiple legal dilemmas. This study analyzes the current situation of urban old-age care services in the era of artificial intelligence, covering the intelligent coverage of the whole scene of old-age care services, the 'home-community-institution' integrated old-age care service model, and the large-scale development of the old-age care service industry promoted by multi-sector collaboration. At the same time, it elaborates on the difficulties faced by urban smart old-age care, such as the lack of special legislation for urban smart old-age care, the increase of security risks of excessive data collection, the ambiguity of the division of powers and responsibilities of multiple subjects, and the ethical risks caused by the lack of humanistic care. Furthermore, it proposes to construct a three-in-one governance framework of "special legislation ^ + technical standards ^ + ethical review": to formulate "smart pension service regulations" to clarify the boundaries of rights and responsibilities; establish a data classification and classification protection system to strengthen data security; establish a detailed system of joint and several liability of multiple subjects to regulate the behavior of all parties; improve the ethical risk review mechanism of smart pension and pay attention to humanistic care. Through the rule of law, we will balance the innovation of artificial intelligence technology and the protection of rights and interests, and promote the high-quality development of urban smart pension services.

Index Terms: artificial intelligence • city • pension services • legal dilemmas • countermeasures

FUNDING

No external funding was declared for this work.

CONFLICTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AI USAGE

No generative AI was used for analysis or results.

HOW TO CITE

Peng (2026). Research on the Legal Dilemma and Countermeasures of Urban Pension Service in the Era of Artificial Intelligence. London Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 26(6), 22-28. DOI: 10.34257/LJRHSS226984UK

METADATA CONTINUATION

AUTHOR CONTACT QR LEDGER

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ARCHIVAL RECORD

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Abstract

In the era of artificial intelligence deeply empowering urban elderly care services, the smart elderly care model faces multiple legal dilemmas. This study analyzes the current situation of urban old-age care services in the era of artificial intelligence, covering the intelligent coverage of the whole scene of old-age care services, the 'home-community-institution' integrated old-age care service model, and the large-scale development of the old-age care service industry promoted by multi-sector collaboration. At the same time, it elaborates on the difficulties faced by urban smart old-age care, such as the lack of special legislation for urban smart old-age care, the increase of security risks of excessive data collection, the ambiguity of the division of powers and responsibilities of multiple subjects, and the ethical risks caused by the lack of humanistic care. Furthermore, it proposes to construct a three-in-one governance framework of "special legislation ^ + technical standards ^ + ethical review": to formulate "smart pension service regulations" to clarify the boundaries of rights and responsibilities; establish a data classification and classification protection system to strengthen data security; establish a detailed system of joint and several liability of multiple subjects to regulate the behavior of all parties; improve the ethical risk review mechanism of smart pension and pay attention to humanistic care. Through the rule of law, we will balance the innovation of artificial intelligence technology and the protection of rights and interests, and promote the high-quality development of urban smart pension services.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, city, pension services, legal dilemmas, countermeasures

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1 The Status Quo of Urban Elderly Care Services in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

At present, artificial intelligence technology has been deeply integrated into all aspects of social life. The process of urban aging is continuing to accelerate, and the '14th Five-Year Plan' period has entered a 'moderately aging' society. According to the seventh national census data, the elderly population aged 60 and above in China has reached 297 million, accounting for 21.1 % of the total population. It is expected to exceed 400 million by 2035 and enter the stage of severe aging (see Fig. 1). According to the World Health Organization, it is estimated that the number of people over 60 years old will reach 2.1 billion in 2050, including 426 million people over 80 years old. The traditional old-age care model has been unable to adapt to the needs of smart old-age care in the new era due to the shortage of human resources, low service efficiency, and difficulty in meeting individual needs. With the advent of the 'digital intelligence era', artificial intelligence technology has profoundly impacted and reshaped the field of urban elderly care services with its powerful data processing capabilities, intelligent decision-making systems, and all-weather service characteristics, effectively improving the utilization efficiency and service quality of elderly care services. However, in the process of empowering intelligent elderly care services, there is an imbalance between artificial intelligence technology and legal regulation, which leads to multiple legal dilemmas in intelligent elderly care services. How to use the rule of law to balance the innovation

of artificial intelligence technology and the protection of rights and interests, and build a safe, credible and sustainable intelligent pension ecology has become an urgent proposition to be solved.

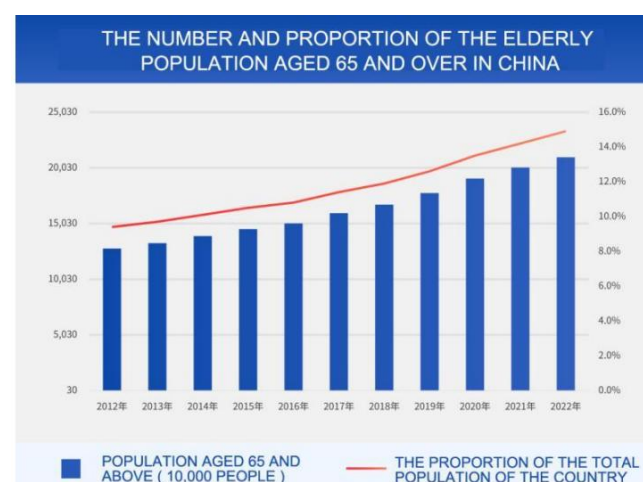


Figure 1. The number and proportion of people over 65 years old in China.

Source: China's Ministry of Civil Affairs' 2022 National Development Communiqué on Aging.

1.1 Promote Full-Scene Intelligent Coverage of Elderly Care Services

First, the deep integration of artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, big data and other technologies promotes the transformation of pension services from 'passive response' to 'active prevention'. Taking Shanghai intelligent nursing home as an example, the real-time acquisition and risk warning of vital signs and activity trajectories of the elderly are realized by deploying intelligent mattresses, millimeter wave radar fall monitoring, one-click call and other equipment. At the same time, it integrates a variety of professional intelligent terminals, covering functions such as home fire, water, electricity, and fall prevention monitoring. It also supports emergency contact assistance calls and other assistance responses, and is committed to providing 24-hour, 24-hour, multi-level, and personalized safety monitoring and care services for the elderly. Artificial intelligence is embedded in pension services, and multi-scene intelligent equipment enhances the autonomy of elderly care. To a certain extent, it can reduce the dependence on labor, play a role in partially replacing children in terms of function and emotion, effectively alleviate the care pressure of children, realize the technical replenishment of daily care for the elderly, and make the family support function continue[1]. Second, in the field of health management, AI algorithm builds a health risk model based on historical data, which can warn potential problems such as cardiovascular disease and cognitive impairment in advance. For example, in Nanning Guanglv Community Leling Center, AI facial diagnosis and treatment instrument is used to scan the face, hand, mouth and tongue of the elderly, and a report including physical identification, health risk assessment and personalized health advice can be generated in 5 minutes. Combined with the concept of 'preventive treatment of disease' in traditional Chinese medicine, the health management threshold is moved forward, so that nursing staff can understand the physical condition of the elderly more comprehensively and adjust the nursing plan in time. Third, the application of exoskeleton robots, intelligent medicine boxes and other equipment has significantly reduced the labor cost of caring for the elderly. Fourth, artificial intelligence technology creates a happy and relaxed living and entertainment environment for the elderly with the help of smart home, smart health bracelet and other equipment, and at the same time helps the elderly to improve their cognitive training and language training. Artificial intelligence technology can establish an emotional connection between the elderly and the machine for the elderly through voice interaction, chatting, storytelling and other functions. In the field of elderly care services, artificial intelligence fully demonstrates its important potential in enriching service content, improving service quality and efficiency, optimizing service experience, and empowering service personnel[2].

1.2 To Achieve "Home-Community-Institution Integration of Pension Services"

First, urban old-age care services are breaking through the boundaries of traditional institutions and building a quarter-hour old-age care model of 'walkable, functional integration, and intelligent response'. Panlong District of Kunming City combines its own resource advantages to create a good-neighborly living room based on the first floor of the comprehensive building of No.1 TV Factory attached to No.46 People's Lane. This space subverts the administrative office scene, transforms the old building of the TV factory into a composite space integrating meals, health care and entertainment, forming a 'bowl of soup distance' pension service circle, so that the elderly can enjoy a happy life at home. At the same time, it integrates online consultation, meal appointment, emergency call and other functions to form a 'fingertip ecosystem' for elderly care services, covering high-frequency needs such as medical

registration, hydropower and coal payment. This model not only solves the problem of the separation of traditional old-age service space, but also realizes the quality service of "good old-age care" at the urban community level. Secondly, the embedded pension institutions in urban communities integrate civil affairs, medical and social security data to realize the digitization of the whole process of 'portrait of the elderly-service matching-quality supervision'. Guangzhou coordinates the construction of community old-age care service institutions with comprehensive functions such as full-time care, day care, on-site service, and downward guidance, expands the functions of full-time care, day care, meals, housekeeping + old-age care, family old-age care beds, medical care, and auxiliary equipment leasing, increases the supply of embedded, comprehensive, multi-functional, and inclusive high-quality old-age care services in the central urban area, improves the full-coverage, multi-level, multi-support, and multi-agent social old-age care service system, and builds a "big city big old-age care" model with Guangzhou characteristics and is at the forefront of the country. In addition, Seoul, South Korea uses the Internet of Things (IoT) technology to provide real-time security monitoring and emergency intervention for elderly people living alone and at high risk. Through the deployment of a variety of sensors, real-time monitoring of activities and environmental data of elderly people living alone and at high risk. When the pension service system identifies an abnormality, it will automatically alarm, and the staff will intervene after verifying the situation, which effectively reduces the accidental risk of the elderly living alone and

improves their quality of life (see Fig.2).



Figure 2. Intelligent technology empowers urban elderly care services.

1.3 Construction of Multi-Sectoral Coordination of the Pension Service Industry Scale

First, the continuous optimization of urban policies provides an institutional guarantee for smart elderly care services. At the national level, the smart pension is placed at the core of the strategy of actively responding to the aging population, and a three-level policy system of 'national strategy + local pilot + industry standard' is constructed. For example, the Ministry of Civil Affairs and other eight departments jointly issued 'Several Measures on Cultivating the Main Body of Pension Service to Promote the Development of Silver-haired Economy', clearly put forward to encourage the development of pension service robot industry, and support the pilot trial of intelligent equipment development enterprises embedded in pension institutions. Beijing, Shanghai and other places guide the participation of social capital through financial subsidies. The utilization rate of smart elderly care community equipment in the Yangtze River Delta and the Pearl River Delta has broken through key indicators, forming a coordinated development model of 'central coordination + local innovation'. Secondly, the ecological environment of urban smart pension industry is accelerating to upgrade in the

direction of 'scene integration'. In 2021, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and the National Health Commission jointly issued the "Smart Health Pension Industry Development Action Plan (2021-2025)". The state incorporates smart old-age care into the '15th Five-Year Plan' and clarifies support directions such as technology research and development, scene application, and data security. Driven by this, the scientific and technological support capacity of the smart health pension industry has been significantly enhanced, and the supply capacity of products and services has been significantly improved. The industrial ecology has been continuously optimized and improved, the 'digital divide' of the elderly has gradually narrowed, and the people's happiness, sense of gain and sense of security in health and old-age care have been steadily improved. Third, the city's comprehensive smart health care platform has mushroomed. All localities actively promote the construction of a comprehensive information system platform for regional smart health care services, rely on regional old-age service centers, promote the informatization of old-age subsidies, old-age services, and industry supervision, and realize the dynamic management of elderly information (see Fig. 3). For example, Zhishen Technology Qicaixi Digital Healthcare Platform integrates health monitoring, safety protection, medical resources and other functions with its innovative technical architecture and full-scene service model, forming an integrated chain of 'R & D-production-service'. At the same time, cross-industry collaboration is increasingly close. Insurance companies develop health management insurance products, cultural and tourism enterprises deploy intelligent navigation facilities, and financial institutions provide aging credit support to jointly promote the high-quality development of smart pension services.



Figure 3. Doctors guide the elderly to carry out physical examination.

2 The Legal Dilemma of Urban Elderly Care Service in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

In the context of the deep penetration of artificial intelligence technology into the field of old-age care services, urban smart old-age care services are facing multiple legal dilemmas, and their core contradictions focus on the imbalance between technical empowerment and legal regulation.

2.1 Lack of Special Legislation on Urban Smart Pension

The current "Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly", "Network Security Law" and "Personal Information Protection Law" have made principled provisions on privacy protection, data security and other aspects, but for the smart pension scenario, there is a lack of specific and operational implementation rules. First, the field of urban smart pension presents a typical pattern of 'hot policy and cold law'. At the national level, there is no special 'smart pension service law' or relevant administrative regulations, which makes the legal system in the field of smart pension fragmented. For example, the "Law on the

Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly" is based on the logic of the industrial era. It is difficult to fully cover the new right object of intelligent pension services, and it cannot provide accurate and effective legal guidance for intelligent pension services. Secondly, the operability of the existing legal provisions in the field of pension is not strong. Most of the laws on old-age care remain at the level of principle and lack the necessary implementation rules. The urban intelligent old-age care machine has strong concealment and uncontrollability, and cannot control the whole process of its operation, which makes it difficult to investigate the facts when the infringement occurs. This situation has further caused the dilemma of difficult to follow the law and there is a lack of clear standards in practice to guide specific operations. Third, the lack of regulatory standards for urban pension services. The lack of clear and unified standards for the quality of old-age care services has led to uneven quality of service in the market, and the basic rights of the elderly are difficult to be effectively guaranteed. At the same time, there is a lack of effective coordination and cooperation mechanism between different government departments, which further hinders the effective development and implementation of pension service supervision.

2.2 Increased Risk of Over-Collected Data Security

Smart elderly care services rely on a large number of highly sensitive data such as biometrics and behavioral trajectories, but the data security protection mechanism is still not perfect. First, in the smart old-age care service, there is a large-scale, indiscriminate collection of various information data such as the biological characteristics, family conditions, and health status of the elderly. The current privacy protection laws are mostly general provisions, and there is a lack of specific and targeted arrangements for privacy protection in smart pension scenarios. When the elderly receive smart old-age care services, their rights and interests such as the right to know and the right to consent for data collection and use are difficult to be effectively guaranteed. The current law does not clearly stipulate how to ensure that the elderly truly understand and independently make informed consent, which makes the protection of privacy rights and interests of the elderly in the smart pension service ineffective. Second, the abuse of pension service data and illegal transactions. In the process of data collection, preservation and application, due to technical defects or management negligence, security risks may be hidden, resulting in illegal acquisition or abuse of data[3]. Although the "Network Security Law" and the "Personal Information Protection Law of the People's Republic of China" have made relevant provisions on data security, these provisions fail to fully consider the special scenarios of smart old-age care and the weak position of the elderly. Specifically, the lack of specific operating standards and security technical requirements for the collection, storage, processing and transmission of smart pension data makes the data lack effective norms and constraints in the use process, and data abuse and illegal transactions occur from time to time. Third, the defense capability of data security technology is weak. The smart pension platform has a serious shortage of investment in data security technology defense, and does not pay enough attention to basic security measures such as encryption, access control and intrusion detection. As an important carrier of intelligent old-age care services, Internet of things equipment has become an easy target to be attacked because of its limited security performance, and system vulnerabilities are widespread. The personal information and privacy of the elderly are exposed to extremely high risks, and they are vulnerable to identity theft, property damage and physical injury. Fourth, the attribution of data security supervision responsibility is ambiguous. In the urban intelligent old-age care service, there is a phenomenon of replacing the law with urban policies, which leads to unclear responsibilities among the old-age care

service institutions. The data security supervision has a vacuum zone, and each department shirks responsibility from each other, resulting in the situation of "responsibility shuffling." The lack of clear legal standards and accountability mechanisms makes it difficult to hold data security accountable and allows criminals to go unpunished.

2.3 The Division of Rights and Responsibilities of Multiple Subjects is Vague

Smart pension services involve platform operators, equipment manufacturers, service providers, medical institutions and other parties. However, at present, relevant laws and policies and regulations have not yet formed a unified standard, and the definition of the rights and obligations of each subject is not clear enough, which makes it difficult to clarify the division of responsibilities.

First, the boundary between government supervision and market operation is not clear enough. The government is supposed to be the rule-maker and supervisor, but in practice, it often becomes the direct provider of services in pension institutions, leading to confusion of roles. For example, the government has built a smart pension platform, but subsequent operations are outsourced to market players. When there is a service problem, it is easy for the parties to shift responsibilities to each other. Second, there is a disconnection between intelligent technology and pension services. The technology development company has built a pension service infrastructure, but it does not assume the responsibility of actually caring for the elderly. When the intelligent mattress fails to detect the fall of the elderly, it is difficult to judge whether it is a hardware failure or a software vulnerability. At the same time, if the nursing staff does not respond in time, the main body of responsibility is difficult to lock, resulting in difficulty in accountability. There is still a lack of clear explanation in the law on the regulation of problems in the after-sales and use of software and hardware of artificial intelligence products [4]. Third, the boundary between medical institutions and pension services is blurred. Smart old-age care often involves services such as chronic disease management and telemedicine. However, the responsibility boundary between the smart old-age care platform and the remote doctor is blurred, making the division of responsibilities more complicated. Intelligent products have independent decision-making power, and it is difficult to clarify which behaviors are in the normal performance of their duties [5]. Fourth, the lack of unified laws and regulations and service standard system. In the smart elderly care service, there is no uniform industry standard for data processing, privacy protection, security management, and service quality. Different service providers follow different standards, resulting in uneven service quality. This not only makes it difficult to achieve unity and standardization in the protection of the legitimate rights and interests of the elderly, but also easily leads to disputes and legal risks in the service process. Moreover, smart old-age care involves many legal fields such as civil law, network security, data protection, and consumer rights protection. There are intersections and conflicts in the scope of application between laws, resulting in uncertainty in the process of law application.

2.4 Lack of Humanistic Care Leads to Ethical Risks

The 'instrumental rationality' of artificial intelligence may squeeze the 'value rationality', leading to the neglect of the emotional needs of the elderly in the intelligent pension service. First, human-computer interaction inadvertently blurs the boundary of human subjectivity. In the smart old-age care service, intelligent algorithms have gradually replaced human companionship, and preset service responses have also replaced real empathy. Due to the decline in the judgment of the elderly, when they encounter privacy infringement, they are easy to fall into the trap of self-certification, and their legitimate rights and interests are difficult to be effectively guaranteed. Lonely old man

can only talk to the machine, and the machine so-called 'care', but a string of temperature-free digital code. This 'digital divide' is not only reflected in the accessibility of intelligent technology, but also in the fracture of emotional connection and understanding. Second, the excessive application of intelligent algorithms erodes family warmth and shakes people's traditional concept of filial piety to the elderly. Filial piety and respect for the elderly are the traditional virtues of the Chinese nation. Pension institutions use remote monitoring to replace the care and companionship of family children. This is not only a matter of convenience, but also involves the transfer of moral responsibility. By projecting a large number of emotions onto the machine and paying too much attention to the feedback they give, you may suffer from pathological emotional attachment [6]. Third, in the face of the powerful dominance of intelligent algorithms, the elderly often lack the right to choose. In the intelligent pension service institutions, the elderly are closely monitored by predictive algorithms. Intelligent algorithms not only determine their living needs, but also limit their many choices, and even predetermine their healthy future, so that the elderly lose the space to control their lives independently. Fourth, the reserve training of intelligent pension service personnel is weak. At present, the training programs of pension service related courses in most colleges and universities are still based on the cultivation of traditional nursing skills, and lack of courses closely related to home care in smart communities, such as intelligent equipment operation and maintenance management and big data analysis, resulting in the disconnection between talent training and industry demand, which further aggravates the dilemma of talent shortage [7].

3 Legal Countermeasures for Urban Pension Services in the Era of Artificial Intelligence

Under the background of comprehensively governing the country according to law, in order to protect the rights and interests of the elderly according to law, standardize the supply of smart pension services, and promote the steady development of the smart pension industry, we must adhere to the rule of law thinking, practice the rule of law, and form a multi-governance pattern under technological empowerment [8]

3.1 Filling the Legislative Gap in the Special Field of Urban Smart Pension

Accelerate the formulation and promotion of unified standards and norms for smart elderly care services, covering the use of smart devices, data security management, privacy protection, service content and quality, etc., to achieve standardization and standardization of smart elderly care services [9]. First, formulate special legislation on urban smart pension. Accelerate the introduction of the "Urban Smart Pension Service Regulations," clarify the rights and obligations of service providers, platform operators, equipment manufacturers and other entities, and reasonably define the boundaries of data collection, storage and use. In terms of the division of legal responsibilities, detailed provisions should be adopted to ensure that the responsibilities of all parties are clear, avoid mutual prevarication, and effectively protect the legitimate rights and interests of the elderly. For example, it is clearly stipulated that health monitoring equipment can only collect physiological indicators directly related to services, and it is prohibited to collect irrelevant data such as consumption habits and social relationships. The second is to refine the existing personal privacy protection laws. In the "Personal Information Protection Law," a special chapter on smart old-age care is added to clarify the "special protection status" of the elderly in data authorization. Service agencies are required to adopt mechanisms such as layered notification and dynamic withdrawal of authorization to avoid the "passive tick"

consent of the elderly. The government needs to vigorously prevent illegal access to information for the elderly, severely punish the sale of personal privacy information, and curb the illegal information industry from the source[10]. The third is to strengthen the legislation of urban smart pension technology standards. Through the revision of the "Network Security Law," the smart pension platform is required to adopt technical means such as data encryption and hierarchical authorization management, and establish a data security emergency response mechanism. Add technical requirements and data security management measures for smart pension platforms and equipment to ensure that information security protection is implemented. In addition, the national standardization management agency should take the lead in formulating and issuing relevant industry standards to ensure the consistency and operability of the implementation of smart old-age care services in urban areas. Fourth, strengthen the international docking of smart pension laws and regulations. In the face of the common challenges of global aging, through the introduction and absorption of foreign advanced wisdom pension legal experience, combined with the actual situation of China's urban pension, to build a smart pension legal system with Chinese characteristics, to enhance the adaptability and effectiveness of the law to this emerging industry.

3.2 Build a Full-Chain Smart Pension Data Security Mechanism

To speed up the construction of a unified national pension service information platform, formulate data sharing standards, open up data interfaces for civil affairs, health care, medical insurance and other departments, and expand the coverage of "one network office" services for pension services [11]. First, clear data classification and classification management. According to the 'Data Security Law', the pension data are scientifically classified. Pension data can be divided into different categories, such as core data of genetic information, important data of health records, general data of service evaluation, etc., and different intensity protection measures can be implemented respectively. Relevant organizations formulate and promote industry standards and norms for data security of smart elderly care, guide smart elderly care institutions to consciously abide by data security laws and regulations, and ensure that they meet industry standards in data security technology, management and responsibility implementation. The second is to enforce the compliance requirements of intelligent pension equipment. Strictly stipulate that smart elderly care equipment must pass national certification. For example, smart bracelets need to have data desensitization function to ensure the security of user data during transmission and use; the emotional companion robot needs to have a built-in algorithm ethics review module to ensure that its decision-making and behavior conform to ethical and moral norms. The civil affairs system of Zhejiang Province has carried out active practice in this regard. By building a "Zhejiang Liyang" intelligent pension service platform, all access devices are required to pass the ISO 27001 information security management system certification. Taking digitization as a breakthrough, the province has effectively solved the problems of insufficient development of pension services and unsmooth docking of supply and demand, and effectively improved the level of wisdom of pension services in the province. The third is to clarify the responsibilities and obligations of each subject in data security protection. The law should clearly require smart elderly care service providers and platform operators to adopt advanced technical means to ensure data security, such as data encryption, hierarchical authorization management, multi-factor identity authentication and other technologies to ensure data confidentiality, integrity and availability. At the same time, clear legal liability and punishment measures should be set up for data security accidents, and strict civil compensation,

administrative punishment and criminal responsibility investigation mechanism should be stipulated for data leakage or abuse caused by failure to fulfill data security obligations. Giving the elderly the right not to accept the automatic decision-making of the algorithm means that the elderly have the right to reject the various autonomous decision-making behaviors made by the artificial intelligence pension machine based on the algorithm model[12]. Fourth, establish an inter-departmental pension supervision mechanism. Led by the civil affairs department, the joint network information, public security, market supervision and other departments set up a joint working group on intelligent pension data security, which is responsible for the regular evaluation and review of the qualification, service level, technical security and data protection of service providers. For those who do not meet the standards, corresponding punishment measures should be stipulated, such as administrative fines, suspension of business, revocation of licenses, etc., to ensure the overall quality and safety of smart old-age care services. Fifth, improve the personal information protection regulations and promote the aging transformation. Relevant departments should promulgate the "Interim Provisions on the Protection and Management of Personal Information of Mobile Internet Applications" as soon as possible, strengthen the construction of technical means, and strengthen the protection of personal information of the elderly. At the same time, we will continue to implement the aging transformation of Internet applications to help the elderly enjoy intelligent services more quickly and safely.

3.3 Establish a Detailed System of Joint and Several Liability of Multiple Subjects

Smart pension services involve multiple subjects and multiple scenarios. Smart pension products are special. Only by accurately defining the rights and responsibilities of all parties and building an appropriate responsibility identification and disposal system can disputes be effectively resolved [13]. One is to clarify the responsibility boundary of multiple subjects. In the special legislation, the scope of responsibility of each participant should be clearly defined. Equipment manufacturers are responsible for hardware quality, platform operators are responsible for data security vulnerabilities, and service agencies are responsible for service quality issues. For example, due to the design defects of intelligent medicine boxes, manufacturers need to bear the main responsibility; due to the failure of the service personnel to remind the elderly in time, the institution shall bear the supplementary responsibility. In view of the complex situation of multi-party infringement in smart elderly care services, a clear principle of responsibility distribution and imputation is established to ensure that the subject of responsibility can be accurately determined when a dispute occurs. The second is to introduce a third-party evaluation mechanism for smart elderly care services. Before the smart pension service is launched, it must be evaluated by the safety and compliance of third-party institutions. At present, Chinese enterprises have made continuous breakthroughs in technological innovation, product application and market promotion in the field of smart old-age care, and have launched toilet robots, exoskeleton robots, feeding robots, cooking robots and other products. For all elderly care robots, they should be required to meet international standards (IEC 63310 'Performance guidelines for active assisted living robots used in interconnected home environments'), and those who do not pass must not be put into use. Through the third-party evaluation mechanism, the quality and safety of smart old-age care services can be guaranteed from the source and potential risks can be reduced. The third is to improve the smart pension insurance system. Encourage insurance companies to develop exclusive liability insurance for smart old-age care, and include risks that may cause losses to the elderly,

such as data leakage, algorithm discrimination, and equipment failure. Appropriately increasing the data leakage compensation limit of the insured institutions, such as increasing the compensation limit to 5 million yuan, is conducive to effectively dispersing the operational risks of the intelligent pension service institutions and enhancing their ability to cope with risks.

3.4 Strengthen the Ethical Risk Review Mechanism of Smart Old-Age Care

In order to standardize the intelligent old-age care service mode of human-machine integration, we should uphold the people-oriented development concept and clarify the limits and boundaries of the integration of intelligent technology into healthy old-age care. The first is to establish an intelligent algorithm ethics review committee. It is clearly required that the intelligent pension platform be established by a review committee composed of experts in law, ethics and technology to evaluate the transparency, fairness and interpretability of the pension algorithm. The algorithm involving intelligent pension health assessment needs to disclose its decision-making logic and accept public supervision. The elderly have the right to ask a specific subject to explain the automatic decision-making process of the algorithm. When receiving intelligent pension machine services, they can ask the service provider to provide a readable explanation report [14]. The second is to strengthen the standard of humanistic care for smart elderly care. When formulating technical standards, it can be made clear that smart elderly care equipment needs to have 'emotional interaction function'. For example, smart bracelets need to support voice chat, automatic contact with family members in case of an emergency call, etc. At the same time, the 'Smart Aging Equipment Design Guide' was issued, requiring that the font of all equipment operation interfaces should not be less than 18, and the button spacing should not be less than 2 centimeters. In addition, it is necessary to give full play to the positive role of artificial intelligence in the emotional services of the elderly and play a leading demonstration effect. Holographic images and anthropomorphic models can be used to help solve the problems of loneliness and family companionship of the elderly. The third is to carry out digital technology literacy education for the elderly. Through a variety of ways such as community universities and online courses, the cognitive ability of the elderly to smart devices is improved. Taking the "Yinfa AI Classroom" project in Xuhui District of Shanghai as an example, the instructor combined with the on-site demonstration, focused on the analysis of the current high incidence of AI fraud typical techniques and prevention points, and was committed to improving the cognitive level and safety awareness of elderly friends on emerging technologies of artificial intelligence. Help the elderly in urban communities to understand AI dynamics and enjoy the convenience of science and technology. Fourth, strengthen the construction of talent team of smart pension industry. Support colleges and universities to independently set up and dynamically optimize the professional layout according to relevant education policies, and focus on cultivating multi-level and compound talents needed for the smart pension industry[15]. At the same time, we will set up multi-level professional and technical posts, improve the incentive and incentive system, attract professional and technical personnel in the fields of medical and health care, artificial intelligence and other fields to transfer to the smart pension industry, and comprehensively improve the quality of urban smart pension services.

3 Conclusion

In the process of artificial intelligence reshaping the pattern of urban pension services, legal regulation must act as a 'ballast stone' for technological goodness. At present, there are legal dilemmas such as

loopholes in data security, unclear division of responsibilities, and uncontrolled ethical risks. In essence, there is a deep conflict between technical rationality and legal value and humanistic care. To solve these problems, the key is to build a closed-loop system of "preventive legislation-dynamic supervision-inclusive relief." Through special legislation, the boundary of rights and responsibilities is clarified, technical standards are used to enforce compliance, and ethical review is used to balance efficiency and fairness. Finally, a smart pension legal ecology covering the whole life cycle is formed. Only in this way can we effectively protect the dignity and rights of the elderly and promote the sustainable development of 'technology-enabled pension' in the wave of urban aging and artificial intelligence digitization.

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RESEARCH FINGERPRINT

IDENTIFIER

LJRHS-227228

PEER REVIEW

Double Blind

SIMILARITY CHECK

Perplexity AI and iThenticate

ACCESS

Open Access

LANGUAGE

Portuguese

PRINT ISSN

2515-5784

ONLINE ISSN

2515-5792

EDITION

ABBREVIATION

LJRHS

VOLUME

26

ISSUE

6

YEAR

2026

KEY DATES

RECEIVED

2026-04-20

ACCEPTED

2026-04-30

ONLINE PUBLISHED

2026-06-11

PUBLISHED

2026-08-05

CATALOGING

CROSSMARK DOI

10.34257/LJRHS227228UK

LCC CLASS

PQ9500-9698, LB1575

DDC CLASS

869.1

ANZSRC FOR CLASS

3903

UDC CLASS

821.134.3(81)-1

ACCESS
ONLINE

Article Record

A Poesias de Roseana Murray Como Ferramenta no Redescobrimento da Educação

Roseana Murray's Poetry as a Tool for Rediscovering Education

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ABSTRACT

Like an unboxed poet, this article was born in 2012, prepared for the Portuguese Language VI course when I was still a student. However, it gained new contexts after the pandemic. The idea of building it arose from classroom discussions regarding textual genres, among which I chose "children's" poetry to be my object of reflection. The objective was to show the beauty of the children's poetry by the author Roseana Murray, highlighting my interest in inviting adults to include themselves in this world, of which they were once a part. There is also an emphasis on memory, mentioned here as an ally in the dialogue with these adults. Furthermore, it shows how poetry is important in the rediscovery of education after the pandemic period.

Index Terms: Children's poetry • Roseana Murray • Memory • Education

FUNDING

No external funding was declared for this work.

CONFLICTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AI USAGE

No generative AI was used for analysis or results.

HOW TO CITE

Carvalho (2026). A Poesias de Roseana Murray Como Ferramenta no Redescobrimento da Educação. London Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 26(6), 29-33. DOI: 10.34257/LJRHS227228UK

METADATA CONTINUATION

AUTHOR CONTACT QR LEDGER

Edivânia Santos de
Carvalho¹*



ARCHIVAL RECORD

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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QUALIFICATIONS / ROLES

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Abstract

Como um poeta desgavetado, esse artigo nasceu em 2012, elaborado para a disciplina de Língua Portuguesa VI, quando eu ainda era estudante. Mas, ganhou novos contextos após a pandemia. A ideia de construí-lo surgiu a partir das discussões em sala a respeito dos gêneros textuais, dentre os quais escolhi a poesia “infantil” para ser meu objeto de reflexão. O objetivo foi mostrar a beleza das poesias infantis da autora Roseana Murray, destacando o meu interesse em convocar os adultos a se incluírem nesse mundo, de que um dia eles fizeram parte. Há também um destaque para a memória, mencionada aqui como uma aliada no diálogo com esses adultos. Além de mostrar como a poesia é importante no redescobrir da educação após o período pandêmico.

Keywords: *Poesia infantil, Roseana Murray, Memória, Educação*

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1 Introdução

A poesia dita infantil, por estar voltada para temáticas comuns nessa fase, percorreu um caminho muito difícil até chegar aos moldes que conhecemos na atualidade, já que, até meados da década de 60, este gênero servia como arma nas mãos de quem escrevia como forma de disciplinar as crianças, ensinando-as a exaltar a pátria, respeitar o país, as leis cívicas e seus pais. Hoje, a criança tem certa liberdade em criar, pensar e viver seu mundo imaginário, mas através de poemas escritos por adultos. Este mundo infantil é escriturado, fazendo parte do imaginário adulto. Este é um dos aspectos sobre os quais é necessário refletirmos, pois quem escreve para adultos deve ter muitos cuidados e perspicácia na forma de passar informações, ao construir suas ideias, intercalar os assuntos, entre outros aspectos que, se prestarmos bem atenção, não se deve comparar à sutileza daqueles que escrevem para crianças.

Portanto, o objetivo deste trabalho foi, então, fazer uma breve abordagem sobre a trajetória, digamos assim, da poesia infantil no Brasil, desde as décadas de 50 e 60, em que a poesia infantil era produzida como meio de disciplinar as crianças, até passar por escritores que se dedicavam em transcrever as belezas e sensações presentes na essência infantil, essência esta muitas vezes esquecida pelos adultos após deixarem de ser crianças.

Este artigo está dividido em cinco breves partes. Na primeira, apresento a poesia infantil como um dos diversos gêneros textuais existentes citando grandes nomes, a exemplo de Bakhtin (2000) e Marcuschi (2002). Na segunda, trato da evolução dela ao longo do tempo e para quem está destinada. A terceira parte consta da minha posição a respeito do papel que a memória exerce na reativação/ressignificação do que chamo de essência infantil no adulto. Em quarto, trago exemplo de

uma experiência que tive ao aplicar uma oficina da qual o público alvo não eram crianças, e sim, adultos compartilhando a leitura de poemas infantis de Roseana Murray e suas memórias de quando estes eram criança. E, por fim, trago um capítulo inteiro dedicado ao papel que a poesia exerce no processo de redescobrir a educação após o período da pandemia, já que, ela assume um papel de destaque no que diz respeito ao aluno redescobrir o caminho da escrita.

Dessa maneira, não devemos esquecer que essas crianças e adolescentes da realidade pós-pandêmica, serão adultos muito em breve. Sendo assim, devemos resgatar ou quem sabe, ressignificar a essência literária presente nos estudantes da atualidade, caso contrário, a geração futura se tornará em adultos rasos e até mesmo insensíveis ao que segundo Saint-Exupéry (2008, p. 80), “o essencial é invisível aos olhos, só se vê com o coração”.

2 Poesia Infantil: Um Gênero Sublime

Dentre os inúmeros gêneros textuais existentes em nosso meio de comunicação, a poesia mais especificamente a infantil, possui uma atração diferenciada. Na minha singela opinião, suas formas, conteúdos, e principalmente; a interação: autor-texto-leitor, são sublimes. Para compreender um pouco sobre a produção do gênero poesia, é necessário saber que ela é um recorte, ou melhor, um fragmento da imensa diversidade de gênero. Segundo Bakhtin: “Qualquer enunciado considerado isoladamente é, claro, individual, mas cada esfera de utilização da língua elabora seus tipos relativamente estáveis de enunciados, sendo isso que denominamos gêneros do discurso.” (BAKHTIN, 2000, p. 279). Dessa forma, a poesia faz parte da esfera escrita dos gêneros literários, que se vista isolada, assim como os outros gêneros, alguns citados a seguir, possui características próprias.

O que Bakhtin afirma é que cada gênero, seja ele uma carta, diário, romance, bilhete, nesse caso, a poesia, soma tipos relativamente estáveis de características que os individualiza, tornando-os membros sedimentados de um “corpo”. No entanto, essa relativa estabilidade dá autonomia a cada enunciado, fazendo com que cada um desses elementos citados acima, seja considerado por Bakhtin gênero do discurso, porém, prefiro chamar de gêneros textuais, assim como Luiz Antônio Marcuschi.

A noção de texto e discurso é bastante questionada, e muitos estudiosos têm o cuidado de não confundi-los. Para Marcuschi: “Texto é uma entidade concreta realizada materialmente e corporificada em algum gênero textual. Discurso é aquilo que um texto produz ao se manifestar em alguma instância discursiva. Assim, o discurso se realiza nos textos” (MARCUSCHI, 2002, p. 24).

Portanto, os poemas são textos corporificados no gênero poesia, e recebem voz ao serem recitados, discutidos e degustados pelos seus leitores. Como havia dito logo no início do artigo, a interação autor-texto-leitor é que faz esse e outros gêneros ganharem vida. Por trás da simples leitura de um poema, há inúmeras informações que o consolidam, algumas delas são: a interação do autor; os elementos, forma, conteúdo, público que deseja atingir; o texto em si, com toda sua carga de significados e a postura assumida pelo leitor em dar sentido ao que lê.

As autoras Ingedore Villaça Koch e Vanda Maria Elias, no livro “Ler e compreender: os sentidos do texto”, trabalham com diversas questões que envolvem não só os gêneros, mas também a posição do autor; o criador de textos, questões estas que se encaixam em determinados gêneros e a visão do leitor, de como este recebe e interage com as informações presentes no gênero alvo de sua escolha e simpatia.

Cada gênero tem um modo de composição (estruturação, esquematização) que lhes são próprios: a poesia estrutura-se em estrofes e versos, com ou sem rimas. No que diz respeito ao ponto de vista do conteúdo temático, na poesia predomina a expressão dos sentimentos do sujeito, sujeito esse que fala de si, dando vazão à emoção, constituindo-se, preponderantemente, na primeira pessoa. Quanto ao estilo, há a expressão máxima do trabalho do autor nas escolhas realizadas para a constituição do dizer (KOCH; ELIAS, 2006, p. 109-110), a exemplo da seleção lexical, da preferência por estruturas sintáticas específicas.

3 Poesia Infantil: Quais Alvos a Serem Atingidos?

Em se tratando da poesia infantil, sua evolução é nítida quando comparada a sua intenção social, carga de valores, maneira de dizer, anseio de desenvolver um senso crítico-criador nas crianças, nesse caso o público alvo, levando em consideração a linha cronológica; da década de 60 até a contemporaneidade. Porém, o objetivo aqui é mais desafiador, pois o desejo central não é direcionar a poesia infantil para os seus principais leitores, e sim, direcioná-la a um público que, devido à distância temporal existente entre a criança e o adulto, muitas vezes, este, vai perdendo, junto ao tempo, as emoções, sensações, lembranças e vivências da fase mais importante de suas vidas, a infância. Logo, mesmo que a poesia infantil tenha como destino as crianças, pretendo remetê-la aos adultos, mostrando-lhes a importância de relembrares esse mundo mágico e fantástico que é o mundo infantil.

Em seu artigo Poesia e infância, incluído no site da autora Roseana Murray, Sônia Maria dos Santos Menezes descreve o caminho percorrido pela poesia infantil no Brasil, desde meados da década de 60 até se encontrar no ápice do imaginário de grandes poetas contemporâneos, a exemplo de Mário Quintana (o poeta das ternurinhas), Manuel de Barros (o poeta das três infâncias) e a fantástica Roseana Murray, importante influenciadora desse trabalho.

Nos anos 60, a poesia infantil brasileira trazia na bagagem o peso do conservadorismo, o foco era usar a literatura como instrumento de disciplinar as crianças da época, mostrando a exaltação da pátria e os valores morais. O olhar para o mundo criativo da criança, seus anseios, as vivências e o cotidiano ainda não estavam vigentes nas produções desse período. Foi com as criações da poetisa Cecília Meireles que a poesia infantil começou a trilhar o caminho dos enigmas, magia, mistérios, em que se encaixa a figura da escritora Roseana Murray, autora de diversos livros para crianças.

O poeta que escreve para o público infantil tem consigo um papel difícil, mas, de ricos momentos, é preciso ter vivido o que é transcrito nas linhas, mesmo que as lembranças tenham sido vivificadas apenas no imaginário. Sônia Maria dos Santos Menezes traz em seu texto uma intensa citação de Bachelard presente em seu livro *A poética do devaneio*, no qual diz que: “É preciso embelezar para restituir. A imagem do poeta devolve uma auréola às nossas lembranças. Estamos longe de uma memória exata, que poderia guardar a lembrança pura emoldurando-a. [...] A infância vê o Mundo ilustrado, o Mundo com suas cores primeiras, suas cores verdadeiras” (BACHELARD, 1988, p. 110-111).

Em suma, o poeta é um maestro que endereça suas sintonias poéticas aos sublimes momentos de recordação, o adulto, assim como as crianças, deve e merece escavar de suas lembranças, as vivências. Independente da pouca idade, as crianças possuem recortes em sua memória, quanto ao adulto, nunca é tarde para viver a primeira, segunda ou terceira infância, como diria Manuel de Barros.

4 Memória: Ajudando o Adulto a Resgatar a Essência Infantil de sua Alma

Acredito que a melhor forma de se auto-examinar é fazendo um mergulho nas vivências do passado. Graças às nossas memórias, fazemos isso a todo momento, na maioria das vezes, sem dar-nos conta. Muitas coisas podem ser retomadas se houver essa imersão nas lembranças e recordações. Porém, é necessário que se faça uma breve abordagem a respeito do sentido da memória, esta já tão questionada por diversos estudiosos de distintas áreas.

No livro *Papel da Memória*, o tema em enfoque, explícito no título, traz a discussão da memória vista por diferentes aspectos, que são: lembranças ou reminiscência, memória social ou coletiva, memória institucional, memória mitológica, memória registrada e memória do historiador. Essas ideias estão reunidas em um conjunto de quatro textos. A leitura destes possibilita compreender uma ruptura à frágil figura da memória construída por nós até então. Entre os exemplos de memória elencados acima, escolhi trabalhar com a memória reminescente e/ou lembranças, já que esta desencadeia recortes de um todo, e jamais vem à tona se não houver interesse de um indivíduo em recuperar ou mesmo relembrares algum fato.

Sabemos agora que a memória pode e deve ser percebida por inúmeros ângulos, cabendo a nós encaixar cada um em nossos arquivos da compreensão, dessa maneira passaremos a ver a memória não mais com concepções ingênuas de lembrança imaterial não palpável, e sim, como forte arma da mídia; que utiliza de figuras emblemáticas para implantar uma imagem coletiva, ou figuras mitológicas; que retratam símbolos de grandeza, poder e herança histórica, a exemplo de Homero.

Discutir memória requer também falar de discurso, de linguagem, elementos inseparáveis, guardados na memória registrada, mas que sempre se apresentam em momentos de debates, conversas e discussões, sem necessariamente haver a obrigação da linearidade das recordações, da maneira exata que alguma situação ocorreu, pois, os textos orais e escritos são como matéria externa, já as imagens construídas por cada um de nós são matérias particulares, internas, protegidas

por cada indivíduo. Jean Davallon defende em seu artigo “A imagem, uma arte de memória?”, que:

“

A imagem é antes de tudo um dispositivo que pertence a uma estratégia de comunicação: dispositivo que tem a capacidade, por exemplo, de regular o tempo e as modalidades de recepção da imagem em seu conjuntos ou a emergência da significação. E é um dispositivo, lembremo-nos, que por natureza é durável no tempo. (DAVALLON, 1999, p. 30 in ACHARD; DURAND; PECHEUX, 1999).

Em suma a memória pode ser descrita como um arquivo particular que é arrumado de maneira própria por cada pessoa. Estas organizam as lembranças, acontecimentos de sua vida através de imagens, sensações, acontecimentos e discursos diálogos que codificou durante sua trajetória. Para Michel Pêcheux, a memória assume o papel de um “gatilho”, que, quando disparado, absorve o acontecimento e prolonga as lembranças em uma série de recordações antigas, regularizando as novas informações em novos arquivos interligados, dessa forma, muitas vezes quando um assunto é discutido, o indivíduo dispara o gatilho da memória, produzindo sempre imagens recentes, além de relacionar com as antigas. Podemos analisar como Pêcheux descreve esse processo de absorção por parte da memória aos acontecimentos, na seguinte citação:

“

A memória tende a absorver o acontecimento, como uma série matemática prolonga-se conjecturando o termo seguinte em vista do começo da série, mas o acontecimento discursivo, provocando interrupções, pode desmanchar essa “regularização” e produzir retrospectivamente uma série sob a primeira, desmascarar o aparecimento de uma nova série que não estava construída enquanto tal e que assim o produto do acontecimento; o acontecimento, no caso, desloca e desregula os implícitos associados ao sistema de regularização anterior. (PÊCHEUX, 1999, p. 52 in ACHARD; DAVALLON; DURAND; PÊCHEUX, 1999).

A memória é analisada acima como uma sequência matemática, de modo que, a cada vivência, o indivíduo cria de forma natural uma espécie de série produzida pela sua capacidade inerente de armazenamento de informação. Sendo assim, sempre que estamos expostos a alguma situação que já vivemos, ou a alguma experiência, são ativadas e liberadas aquelas recordações que fazem parte dessa sequência que havíamos criado.

Após repensarmos sobre a ideia do papel da memória, título do artigo de Pêcheux, devemos considerar que ela não é algo concreto, muito menos findável, nem mesmo puramente individual, ainda que o processo de arrumação de acontecimentos seja trabalhado singularmente. Contudo, volto a afirmar que as memórias são o caminho mais fácil ou, em outros casos, difícil, para se alcançar a essência esquecida e até camuflada do ser humano. Com o tempo, nós acabamos por fazer o processo inverso de quando éramos crianças. Pois, quando crianças, a tendência é quebrarmos o casulo e vivermos as novas descobertas. No entanto, ao tornarmos adultos, criamos uma cápsula protetora e rígida, chegando muitas vezes a nem sequer sentirmos prazer ao recordar da infância. O adulto deve buscar se conhecer, reconhecendo a criança que há dentro de si, valorizando aqueles sonhos tão satisfatórios que aqueciam a sua alma.

Portanto, defendo a importância das poesias infantis como auxílio à memória, juntas, ambas exercem um poder sublime e por que não, fantástico, como ajuda a essa retomada da essência infantil do adulto, proposto nesse artigo. E para mexer com esse imaginário, nada como trazer uma amostra de poemas encantadores da escritora Roseana Murray.

Abro agora um parêntese para descrever uma experiência que tive ao aplicar uma oficina, cujo tema é o próprio título deste artigo, na qual mediei por algumas horas momentos de profundas emoções. Tudo o que a poesia e as boas lembranças de infância são capazes de fazer e envolver um adulto.

A oficina “O fantástico mundo infantil nas poesias de Roseana Murray” foi realizada na minha turma de aula, no curso de Letras da UEFS, na qual estiveram presentes 12 pessoas, contando comigo e a professora Carla Luzia Carneiro Borges. Posso dizer que escolhi realizá-la com a minha turma, pois assim pude conhecer um pouco mais dos meus colegas a partir de experiências que estes viveram e descreveram de quando eram crianças.

Como foi a minha primeira oficina, eu tinha algumas expectativas, mas confiei no poder que a poesia tem de falar por si só. Porém, devo relatar que este momento me marcou muito por três motivos. O primeiro foi exatamente ao ouvir as histórias que foram contadas, a forma com que cada um descrevia e se empenhava em trazer à tona recortes de suas lembranças e recordações para serem compartilhadas; a segunda foi perceber como todas as poesias infantis, lidas por cada um, tocaram no íntimo de cada infância; a terceira e a mais emocionante ficou por conta das poesias, alguns gatilhos da saudade foram disparados e emocionou algumas pessoas.

Um dos meus interesses com essa oficina foi alcançado, e ao ouvir a fala de duas pessoas tive essa confirmação. Todo adulto que teve oportunidade de ter tido uma infância cheia de aventuras, descobertas, imaginação, segredos, mistério, magia, quando se permite falar sobre esses momentos, compartilhar suas sensações e molecagens, pode dar-se conta de que tudo aquilo guardado ou, na maioria das vezes, apagado por ele mesmo ao longo do tempo, precisa ser lembrado, pois é saudável dividir essas lembranças, é como um antídoto para as coisas ruins que assistimos na atualidade, como forma de valorizar o que tivemos quando criança, sabendo que hoje em dia muitas delas não têm sequer o direito de serem crianças.

Devo registrar também que foi um bom desafio para mim, que ainda não possui a prática de estar à frente de um trabalho com pessoas jovens e adultas, pois a experiência que tenho é com crianças, nas quais estou a cada dia descobrindo o que me encanta. O mundo infantil é maravilhoso, ou melhor, fantástico. É sempre desafiador entrar nesse universo. E ver os adultos de minha turma se envolvendo, deixando as emoções os embalarem, vê-los saborearem as poesias escolhidas, deixando cair algumas resistências, falando como eram, o que faziam, o que pensavam, já valeu muito a pena ter pensado na oficina.

Infelizmente, devido ao tempo curto, não deu para ter o momento de criação ou relato dos recortes da infância como havia planejado. Nós só fizemos a leitura dos 11 poemas, inclusive a professora também leu um. Cada pessoa falou de sua interpretação acerca do poema lido, e da relação dele com algum fato de quando era criança. Teve os momentos de relatos das lembranças e o que mais me chamou a atenção foi que todos se identificaram com os poemas de Roseana Murray que trazem os personagens do circo: o trapezista, *A bailarina* e o mágico, títulos de poemas presentes no seu livro *o circo*, além do poema *A casa*, sobre o qual um dos participantes testemunhou: “toda criança sempre quis ter uma casa na árvore”, outra já falou de sua saudade de uma antiga casa que viveu até os seus seis anos, e da dor que sentiu quando teve que se mudar para outro bairro.

Com a leitura dos poemas: *Dentro de uma árvore* e *Amigo* alguns se manifestaram. Alguns disseram que durante a infância é comum que a criança tenha em seu imaginário a representação de determinada árvore, relacionando ao primeiro poema, como também é comum toda criança ter um melhor amigo, mesmo que este seja imaginário. A leitura de *Horizonte* e *Comida de sereia* tocou no lado mais sensível dos participantes, pois estes poemas são puramente mágicos, é típico daqueles poemas em que o autor mergulhou de cabeça no mundo inventivo da criança. No entanto, foi na leitura do poema *Memória* que a emoção encontrou seu espaço. Ele ficou por último e parece até que se deixou ler ao fim para criar uma atmosfera bonita de uma “lembrança homenagem”. Uma das participantes chorou ao contar que, logo no início do poema quando fala:

“

Há pouco tempo atrás, aqui havia uma Padaria. Pronto não há mais. Há pouco Tempo atrás aqui havia uma casa, cheia de cantos, recantos, corredores impregnados de infância e encanto. Pronto não há mais. [...]

lembrou-se da padaria de seu avô, descrevendo a alegria que sentia toda vez em que viajava para sua cidade, Riachão do Jacuípe, onde brincava, sentia o cheiro dos pães e vivia intensamente, das maneiras mais simples, a importância, o valor e o prazer de ser criança.

Antes de concluir a oficina, fiz a leitura de duas criações minhas, frutos de duas experiências da minha infância, a que agradeço por ter sido muito rica. Os poemas são: *O planeta dos doces* e *Dia de chuva* (CARVALHO, 2021). Como havia dito acima, se houvesse tempo, todos os participantes socializariam as suas produções. A minha leitura serviu como possível influência para boas lembranças passadas para o papel. Por fim, ouvi as sugestões de alguns participantes para melhorar a minha oficina, para caso eu tenha interesse em aplicá-la em outras ocasiões. Todas elas foram muito válidas, pois o desejo de melhorar minhas práticas me trouxeram até aqui, no ano de 2026, alguns anos de pandemia, onde nós, educadores, tivemos um papel fundamental no processo educacional e intuitivo de muitos alunos.

5 Redescobrimo o Caminho da Educação com o Poder da Poesia

No período pós-pandemia a educação ganhou trilhos novos. Foi necessário que todos os envolvidos no processo educacional; gestores, professores, alunos, coordenadores se reencontrassem dentro de uma nova dinâmica de ensino-aprendizagem. Sendo assim, por unanimidade, após uma anamnese, os docentes diagnosticaram uma lentidão e bloqueios criativos quando solicitado dos alunos, que estes desenvolvessem atividades que precisassem argumentar e escrever.

Por isso, a educação necessitou de ser ressignificada e com ela, foi necessário ver e viver os desafios com o olhar dos poetas. Logo, por ela ser um mistério a se redescobrir, semelhante ao arco-íris quando surge após uma chuva. Os saberes que permeiam a educação, principalmente após um momento de crise, assim como foi o cenário pós-pandemia, requer dos seres humanos envolvidos; a esperança de voltar a se conectar ao ensinar, aprender, conhecer e reconhecer.

“

Daí surge a esperança de destacar um problema vital por excelência, que subordinaria os demais problemas vitais. Mas este problema vital é constituído pelo conjunto de problemas vitais, ou seja, a intersolidariedade complexa de problemas,

antagonismos, crises, processos descontrolados. O problema planetário é um todo que se nutre de ingredientes múltiplos, conflitivos, nascidos de crises; ele os engloba, ultrapassa-os e nutre-os de volta. (MORIN, p. 64)

O tecer da educação é feito diariamente pelos indivíduos envolvidos no processo, sejam eles: alunos, educadores, coordenadores, diretores e os demais membros do corpo escolar. Portanto, esse tecer independe de país, logo, de idioma ou território em que se estabelece. Porque a educação transcende fronteiras e desafia os docentes na busca por redescobri-la. Após a pandemia os professores tiveram que duelar com adversários ainda mais perigoso; a falta de motivação, o desânimo, as ansiedades e inquietações dos alunos. Ademais, a arte de ensinar está em constante desconstrução, por isso, inúmeras vezes é mister que os mestres das salas de aulas ressignifiquem suas armas de ensino, para não se frustrarem.

Porém, o currículo escolar ainda deve ser prioridade, aprender conteúdos relacionados a; linguagem, produção textual, gêneros textuais, as ciências humanas e da natureza, os cálculos, continuam sendo importantes para o processo intelectual dos discentes. No entanto, as dificuldades não pararam por aí, já que, a Internet, por ser um concorrente mais veloz, no que tange às informações instantâneas, tem inquietado ainda mais os professores, estes, que buscam continuamente ressignificar sua prática docente, pois cobrar de si próprio(a) é quase um pré-requisito do ser-professor.

Analogamente, a educação na atualidade é como uma estação de trem, mas que no cenário atual ganhou novos trilhos, sem contar que, as paradas de estações (os currículos escolares) estão também com novas roupagens, esses trilhos muitas vezes são as infinitas situações e decisões que o corpo docente e o administrativo das instituições de ensino têm que tomar para que o trem, este sendo o processo de educar, não estagne, mas que siga sempre em frente. Porém, o que não deve ser jamais esquecido, é que recuar um pouco, desacelerar e quando possível, olhar para trás, também é válido. Logo, esse ato de “olhar para trás” é compreendido como os momentos em que os professores analisam suas práticas de ensino consultando os trilhos velhos; o passado, para se certificar que a ressignificação está sendo eficaz.

É necessário redescobrir a escrita, trilhar o caminho de escrever sempre foi e sempre será um desafio constante no processo de desenvolvimento do ser humano, já que a arte de escrever é um mistério a se redescobrir. E, apesar de outras habilidades serem contempladas no universo educacional, escrever sempre será uma arma poderosa para a evolução profissional e pessoal do indivíduo. A palavra tem poder de alinhar as emoções de qualquer indivíduo e aliada a ela está a esperança:

“

Se é verdade que o gênero humano, cuja dialógica cérebro/mente não está encerrada, possui em si mesmo recursos criativos inesgotáveis, pode-se então vislumbrar para o terceiro milênio a possibilidade de nova criação cujos germes e embriões foram trazidos pelo século XX: a cidadania terrestre. E a educação, que é ao mesmo tempo transmissão do antigo e abertura da mente para receber o novo, encontra-se no cerne dessa nova missão.

Mas, o desfrutar do percurso de criação é algo que deve ser estimulado e cuidadosamente preparado, dentro do cenário educacional. O ser humano, seja ele adulto, como foi instigado no início desse artigo, ou

as crianças e adolescentes, público este que está diretamente associado à escola, deve voltar a escrever, ler e interpretar as sutilezas do mundo, e para isso, a poesia é essencial.

Sendo assim, validar o que os professores têm feito dentro da sala de aula, no que diz respeito à intensificação de projetos voltados para a produção literária, pós-pandemia, é louvável. No entanto, o ato de escrever é um fenômeno que merece ser continuamente descoberto.

A magia das palavras não pode ser perdida, ainda que haja os percalços e impedimento em sala de aula, escrever deve ser sempre prioridade dentro dos ambientes de educação começando desde os anos iniciais até chegar na universidade. Por isso que cabe à escola influenciar a produção discursiva e criativa dos alunos, intensificar as respostas discursivas e explorar atividades literárias. Cair no conformismo de que “os alunos não escrevem bem, não querem escrever” não é um argumento sustentável. Escrever transcende o obrigatório, o escolar, vai além dos muros da escola. É a liberdade fora da sala de aula.

Os saberes da educação do futuro passarão por estações e paradas que desembarcaram passageiros que se limitam ao que é apenas curricular. Ao desembarcar uma turma, o professor pode sondar as preferências e habilidades. Ainda que uns sejam mais habilidosos que outros na escrita, expressar-se por meio dela é uma arte que deve ser valorizada. Sendo assim, a poesia torna-se aliada a esse paralelo existente entre ensinar e ressignificar a educação.

Semelhante a uma estação de trem, em que se precisa fazer parada para que o fluxo natural da viagem siga em frente. Todo o público envolvido na “estação educacional” foi obrigado a dar uma parada no período da pandemia do Covid-19. Dessa forma, a educação precisou ser redescoberta. No seu livro “Educação: um tesouro a descobrir”, Jacques Delors dialogava com a importância de descobrir a educação, assim como aborda na obra, a luta, a dinâmica social, a importância de compreender o mundo e o outro, entre outros assuntos, isso, em um panorama distante do que foi o Covid-19. No entanto, após toda movimentação, tensão e mobilização do período pandêmico, veio a inquietação de se manter os estudos e práticas pedagógicas em movimento.

Mas, é fundamental voltar-se a aflorar a subjetividade, a poesia está intrinsecamente ligada ao que há de mais instintivo no indivíduo, seja ele criança ou adulto. Cabe a ela a autoridade poética de articular no íntimo intocável do ser humano a criatividade, as memórias afetivas, as associações emocionais e as habilidades que muitas das vezes são desconhecidas pelo próprio indivíduo. Como o intuito da escola é não apenas ensinar conteúdo, como também mostrar o caminho do se conhecer, a poesia pode ser uma arma poderosa para essa descoberta, já que a humanidade descansa no terreno fértil do que germina as particularidades, usar os textos poéticos como gatilho para a ludicidade torna-se um excelente trunfo a favor do aprender.

6 Considerações Finais

Embora eu creia que ainda haja resistência por parte de muitos adultos no que tange a recordarem questões da infância, ou até mesmo em ler poemas, sejam eles infantis, ou simplesmente: poemas, não apenas para apreciação, mas também para desfrutar da liberdade de imaginar presente no mundo infantil, posso dizer que a poesia é um dos gêneros que não mexe apenas com aprendizagem, ensino, compartilhamento, ela vai mais a fundo, chegando a tocar no íntimo do ser humano.

Graças a escritores como Vinícius de Moraes, Cecília Meireles, esta, citada aqui, e muitos outros, além da escritora contemporânea Roseana Murray, autora dos poemas que foram objetos de análise e estudo para a construção desse artigo, as crianças ganharam voz através dos poemas produzidos por estes. Sem deixar de falar do empenho com que esses

maestros e conhecedores do imaginário infantil dão movimento a este mundo fantástico. O que nos resta é desejar que cada vez mais pessoas se sintam realizadas em explorar e transcrever as aventuras vividas pelas crianças e que mais e mais adultos sejam tocados pelas inúmeras poesias infantis, ou não, presentes nos livros.

Além do mais, o ambiente educacional deve ser o propulsor no que se refere ao redescobrir a educação criativa/encantadora, pois, a poesia, juntamente com a vontade de criar, pode resgatar o encantamento perdido nos estudantes, já que ela impulsiona a mudança, a evolução do knowledge e a superação de lacunas educacionais. Não podemos perder de vista esses seres em formação, porque eles se tornaram adultos, logo ali; na próxima estação. E, não devemos deixá-los sair dos muros da escola sem o toque sutil dos poetas. Logo, a poesia, é uma ferramenta crucial contra o desinteresse da leitura de mundo, ela contribui para adoçar o imediatismo da lógica. Portanto, ler, escrever, sonhar, conquistar, são ações que desaguam no tesouro que é a educação.

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RESEARCH FINGERPRINT

IDENTIFIER

LJRHSS-227170

PEER REVIEW

Double Blind

SIMILARITY CHECK

Perplexity AI and iThenticate

ACCESS

Open Access

LANGUAGE

English

PRINT ISSN

2515-5784

ONLINE ISSN

2515-5792

EDITION

ABBREVIATION

LJRHSS

VOLUME

26

ISSUE

6

YEAR

2026

KEY DATES

RECEIVED

2026-04-16

ACCEPTED

2026-04-30

ONLINE PUBLISHED

2026-06-17

PUBLISHED

2026-08-05

CATALOGING

CROSSMARK DOI

10.34257/LJRHSS227170UK

LCC CLASS

G71.5, DK508.848

DDC CLASS

947.7086

ANZSRC CLASS

4406

UDC CLASS

911.3:32



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Geopolitical Conflicts and Regional Transformation: A Spatial Analysis of the Russia–Ukraine War

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Russia–Ukraine war through a geopolitical and spatial lens to understand its impact on conflict intensity, infrastructure damage, population displacement, and regional economic transformation. Using a spatial analysis approach based on secondary data, the research identifies significant temporal fluctuations in conflict intensity, with peak escalation observed in mid-2022 followed by intermittent variations over time. The spatial distribution of infrastructure damage reveals a highly uneven pattern, with eastern regions of Ukraine such as Donetsk and Luhansk experiencing the most severe destruction, while central and western regions remain comparatively less affected. The study further highlights large-scale population displacement, both internal and cross-border, with migration flows directed toward safer regions and neighboring countries along identifiable corridors influenced by security and accessibility factors. In addition, the findings indicate substantial economic restructuring, where conflict-affected regions experience industrial decline while relatively stable regions witness adaptive economic activity. Overall, the results demonstrate that the Russia–Ukraine war has led to profound spatial and regional transformation, reshaping demographic, economic, and geopolitical structures. The study emphasizes that integrating spatial analysis with geopolitical interpretation provides deeper insight into modern conflicts and their broader regional consequences.

Index Terms: 1.Geopolitics • 2.Spatial Analysis • 3.Russia–Ukraine War • 4.Displacement • 5.Regional Transformation • 6. Infrastructure Damage

FUNDING

No external funding was declared for this work.

CONFLICTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AI USAGE

No generative AI was used for analysis or results.

HOW TO CITE

Haider et al. (2026). Geopolitical Conflicts and Regional Transformation: A Spatial Analysis of the Russia–Ukraine War. London Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 26(6), 34–39. DOI: 10.34257/LJRHSS227170UK

METADATA CONTINUATION

AUTHOR CONTACT QR LEDGER

Dr. Hina Haider*	
Dr. Tarab Naim	

ARCHIVAL RECORD

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Geopolitical Conflicts and Regional Transformation: A Spatial Analysis of the Russia–Ukraine War

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Abstract

This study examines the Russia–Ukraine war through a geopolitical and spatial lens to understand its impact on conflict intensity, infrastructure damage, population displacement, and regional economic transformation. Using a spatial analysis approach based on secondary data, the research identifies significant temporal fluctuations in conflict intensity, with peak escalation observed in mid-2022 followed by intermittent variations over time. The spatial distribution of infrastructure damage reveals a highly uneven pattern, with eastern regions of Ukraine such as Donetsk and Luhansk experiencing the most severe destruction, while central and western regions remain comparatively less affected. The study further highlights large-scale population displacement, both internal and cross-border, with migration flows directed toward safer regions and neighboring countries along identifiable corridors influenced by security and accessibility factors. In addition, the findings indicate substantial economic restructuring, where conflict-affected regions experience industrial decline while relatively stable regions witness adaptive economic activity. Overall, the results demonstrate that the Russia–Ukraine war has led to profound spatial and regional transformation, reshaping demographic, economic, and geopolitical structures. The study emphasizes that integrating spatial analysis with geopolitical interpretation provides deeper insight into modern conflicts and their broader regional consequences.

Keywords: 1.Geopolitics, 2.Spatial Analysis, 3.Russia–Ukraine War, 4.Displacement, 5.Regional Transformation, 6. Infrastructure Damage

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1 Introduction

Geopolitical conflicts have become a defining feature of the contemporary world, significantly influencing regional and global dynamics. These conflicts not only reshape political boundaries but also have profound impacts on geographical patterns, including land use, environmental conditions, population distribution, and economic systems. In recent decades, the increasing frequency and intensity of armed conflicts have raised concerns about their long-term implications for regional stability and sustainable development.

The relationship between conflict and geography is complex and multidimensional. Conflicts often lead to the destruction of infrastructure, degradation of natural resources, and disruption of socio-economic systems. Agricultural lands may be abandoned or destroyed, ecosystems may be damaged, and essential services such as transportation and communication networks may collapse. As a result, both physical and human geography undergo significant transformations, altering the spatial organization of regions. One of the most critical consequences of geopolitical conflicts is population displacement. Large-scale migration, both internal and cross-border, leads to significant changes in population distribution and settlement patterns. Displaced populations often concentrate in urban centers or border regions, creating pressure on resources, housing, and public services. This not only affects the host regions but also contributes to broader regional imbalances and socio-

provide a holistic understanding of how geopolitical conflicts reshape regional geography and influence long-term development processes.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in geography and provide insights for policymakers and planners dealing with conflict-affected regions. Understanding the spatial dimensions of conflict is essential for developing effective strategies for recovery, resilience, and sustainable development.

Research Questions:

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How has the conflict altered territorial control and spatial boundaries in Ukraine?
2. What are the spatial patterns of destruction and infrastructure damage during the war?
3. How has the war influenced population displacement and migration patterns within and beyond Ukraine?
4. In what ways has the conflict transformed regional economic and urban landscapes?
5. How do geopolitical strategies of Russia and Ukraine reflect spatial priorities and regional power shifts?

6. What are the long-term implications of the conflict on regional stability and spatial reorganization in Eastern Europe?

2 Literature review

Geopolitical conflicts have long been recognized as significant drivers of regional transformation, influencing both physical and human geography. In recent years, scholars and international organizations have increasingly focused on understanding the multidimensional impacts of armed conflicts, particularly in terms of environmental degradation, land use change, population displacement, and economic disruption. The Russia–Ukraine conflict has emerged as a critical case study in this context due to its large-scale and far-reaching consequences.

According to the United Nations (2022), armed conflicts have a direct and indirect impact on natural resources and environmental systems. The destruction of infrastructure, deforestation, soil degradation, and contamination of water resources are commonly observed in conflict-affected regions. Similarly, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2022) highlights that conflicts significantly disrupt agricultural systems, leading to reduced crop productivity, abandonment of farmland, and increased food insecurity. These environmental and land-use changes not only affect immediate livelihoods but also have long-term implications for sustainability and regional ecological balance. The economic consequences of geopolitical conflicts have also been extensively studied. The World Bank (2023) reports that the Russia–Ukraine war has resulted in severe economic contraction, with substantial losses in agricultural output, industrial production, and trade activities. The disruption of supply chains, destruction of infrastructure, and decline in investment have further intensified economic instability. In addition, global economic interdependence has amplified the impact of the conflict beyond the immediate region, affecting food prices, energy supply, and international trade networks. Population displacement is another critical dimension of geopolitical conflicts. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2023) identifies the Russia–Ukraine conflict as one of the largest displacement crises in recent history, with millions of people forced to migrate both internally and across international borders. Such large-scale displacement leads to significant changes in population distribution, urbanization patterns, and regional demographics. Displaced populations often face challenges related to housing, employment, and access to basic services, thereby placing additional pressure on host regions. Scholars have also examined the spatial patterns associated with conflict-induced migration. Kumar (2023) emphasizes that displacement tends to concentrate populations in border regions and urban centers, leading to uneven spatial distribution and increased socio-economic pressure in specific areas. This phenomenon highlights the importance of spatial analysis in understanding migration dynamics and settlement patterns during conflicts. Furthermore, Smith (2024) argues that conflicts have long-term environmental consequences, including land degradation and loss of biodiversity, which further influence regional geography.

In addition to environmental and socio-economic impacts, conflicts also reshape regional infrastructure and connectivity. The destruction of transportation networks, communication systems, and public services disrupts regional integration and development. These changes affect not only the immediate conflict zones but also neighboring regions that depend on interconnected systems for economic and social activities.

Despite the growing body of literature, most existing studies tend to focus on individual aspects of conflict, such as economic losses, environmental damage, or migration patterns, without integrating these dimensions into a comprehensive geographical framework. There is a lack of interdisciplinary research that combines physical geography

(land, environment) and human geography (population, economy) to provide a holistic understanding of spatial transformations caused by conflict. Moreover, limited attention has been given to the application of spatial analysis techniques in examining conflict-related changes. The use of thematic mapping, trend analysis, and comparative spatial methods can provide deeper insights into how conflicts reshape geographical patterns over time and space. Such approaches are essential for identifying regional variations and understanding the broader implications of geopolitical conflicts.

Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by adopting an integrated geographical approach to analyze the impacts of the Russia–Ukraine conflict. By focusing on land use changes, environmental conditions, population displacement, and economic disruption, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how geopolitical conflicts transform regional geography. This approach not only contributes to academic research but also has practical implications for policy-making, planning, and sustainable development in conflict-affected regions.

2.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the spatial and temporal changes in land use and environmental conditions resulting from the Russia–Ukraine conflict.
2. To analyze patterns of population displacement and their impact on regional settlement structures.
3. To assess the effects of the conflict on economic activities, infrastructure, and regional development.
4. To understand the overall transformation of regional geography under the influence of geopolitical conflict.

2.2 Hypotheses

Main Hypothesis (H1) The Russia–Ukraine war has significantly reshaped regional spatial structures, resulting in measurable geopolitical and socio-economic transformations.

H2 (Spatial–Territorial Change) The conflict has led to significant spatial reconfiguration of territorial control and boundaries.

H3 (Destruction & Infrastructure Pattern) The spatial distribution of infrastructure damage is uneven and concentrated in strategically important regions.

H4 (Population Displacement) Conflict-induced displacement follows distinct spatial patterns toward safer and neighboring regions.

H5 (Economic Transformation) The war has caused spatial redistribution of economic activities and regional economic disruption.

3 Methodology

This study adopts a comprehensive descriptive and analytical research design to examine the geographical impacts of the Russia–Ukraine conflict. The research is primarily based on secondary data collected from credible international organizations, including the United Nations, World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and UNHCR, along with peer-reviewed journal articles.

A mixed-method approach is used, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative analysis focuses on geopolitical interpretation and socio-economic implications, while quantitative methods are used to examine trends in conflict intensity, population displacement, and economic disruption.

A spatial analysis framework is applied to understand regional variations. The study uses thematic interpretation, regional comparison, and spatial distribution analysis to examine how conflict impacts differ across regions and time.

Population displacement is analyzed using trend analysis and spatial concentration patterns, particularly movement toward urban centers and border regions. Economic impacts are assessed through sector-wise analysis of agriculture, industry, and services, supported by graphical representations.

The study also adopts a comparative approach to evaluate pre-conflict and conflict-period changes in land use, environment, and economic activity. Data from multiple sources are cross-verified to ensure reliability, although limitations related to secondary data and rapidly changing conflict conditions are acknowledged.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques to examine the spatial and geopolitical impacts of the Russia–Ukraine war.

- **Qualitative approach:** Geopolitical interpretation, policy analysis.
- **Quantitative approach:** Spatial data analysis (maps, patterns, distribution).

3.2 Study Area

The study focuses on conflict-affected regions of Ukraine, particularly:

- Eastern Ukraine
- Southern Ukraine
- Major urban centers

3.3 Data Sources

The study is primarily based on secondary data collected from credible international organizations and datasets. These include satellite imagery, conflict databases, and reports from global institutions.

Key data sources include satellite imagery from NASA and UNOSAT, conflict event data from ACLED, reports from the United Nations, World Bank, and other international organizations, as well as government publications and news-based geospatial datasets.

3.4 Data Collection Techniques

- Collection of geospatial conflict data (locations of attacks, destruction)
- Population displacement statistics
- Economic indicators (infrastructure loss, industry disruption)

3.5 Analytical Tools & Techniques

The study employs spatial and statistical analytical techniques to examine the geographical patterns of the Russia–Ukraine conflict.

3.5.1 Spatial Analysis. Geographic Information System (GIS)-based mapping techniques, including ArcGIS and QGIS, are used to analyze the spatial distribution of conflict events. Hotspot analysis is applied to identify regions with high conflict intensity, while overlay analysis is used to examine the relationship between conflict zones, population distribution, and economic activities.

3.5.2 Statistical Analysis. Trend analysis and comparative regional analysis are used to assess temporal changes and regional variations in conflict intensity, population displacement, and economic disruption.

3.6 Study Variables

- Independent Variable
- Geopolitical conflict (Russia–Ukraine war)
- Dependent Variables
- Territorial changes
- Infrastructure destruction
- Population displacement
- Economic disruption

3.7 Data Analysis Process

1. Data collection from secondary sources
2. Spatial mapping of conflict zones
3. Identification of high-intensity regions
4. Analysis of displacement and economic disruption
5. Integration of spatial and geopolitical findings

3.8 Limitations

The study is subject to certain limitations, including reliance on secondary data sources, potential inaccuracies in data from conflict-affected regions, and the rapidly evolving nature of the conflict.

4 Results

4.1 Temporal Pattern of Conflict Intensity

The analysis of conflict events over time reveals a dynamic and fluctuating pattern. Conflict intensity increased sharply during the early phase of the war, reaching a peak in mid-2022, followed by periodic fluctuations. These changes reflect military offensives, counteroffensives, and strategic pauses.

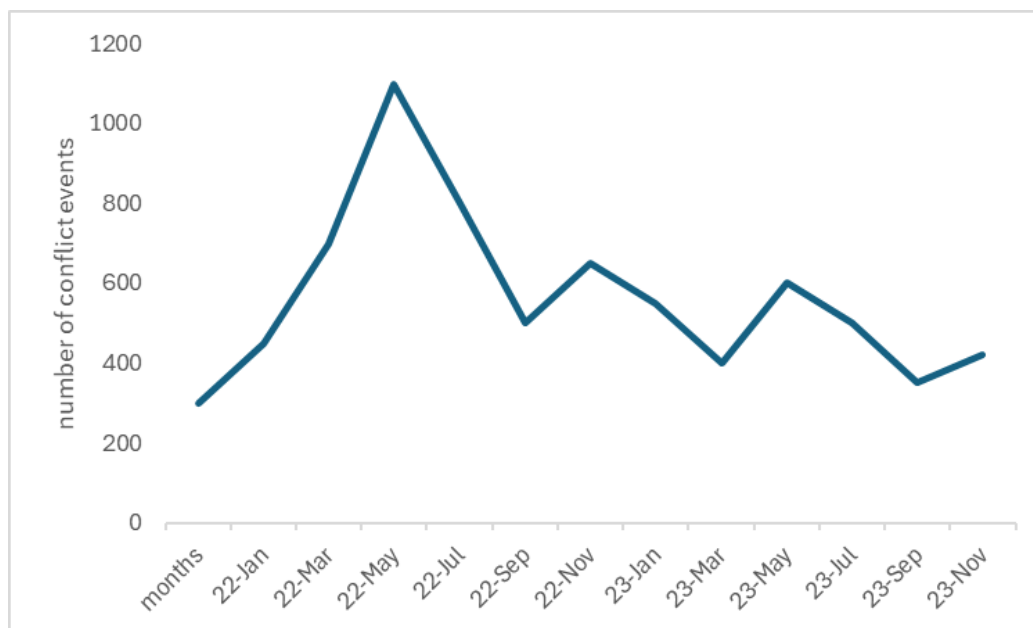


Figure 1. Temporal Trend of Conflict Intensity in Ukraine (2022–2024)

Source: Author's compilation based on ACLED data

4.2 Spatial Distribution of Infrastructure Damage

The spatial analysis indicates an uneven distribution of infrastructure damage. Eastern and southeastern regions have experienced the highest

destruction, while central and western regions remain relatively less affected. This reflects the concentration of military operations in strategic zones.

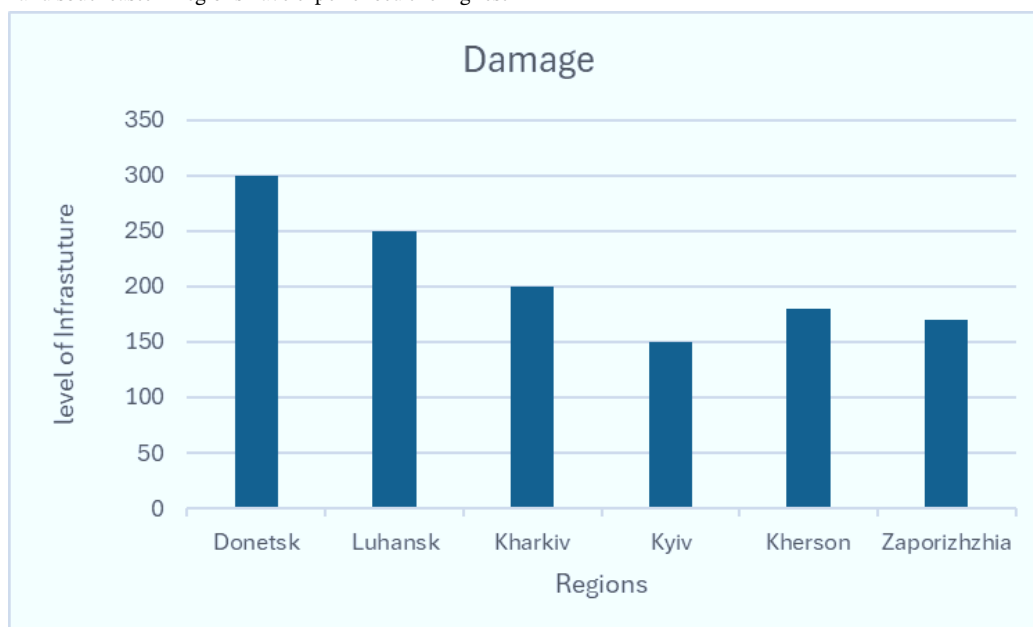


Figure 2. Regional Distribution of Infrastructure Damage in Ukraine

Source: Conflict data reports.

4.3 Population Displacement Patterns

The conflict has resulted in large-scale displacement, both internal and cross-border. Populations have moved from high-conflict areas toward safer regions and neighboring countries, following identifiable migration routes influenced by safety and accessibility.

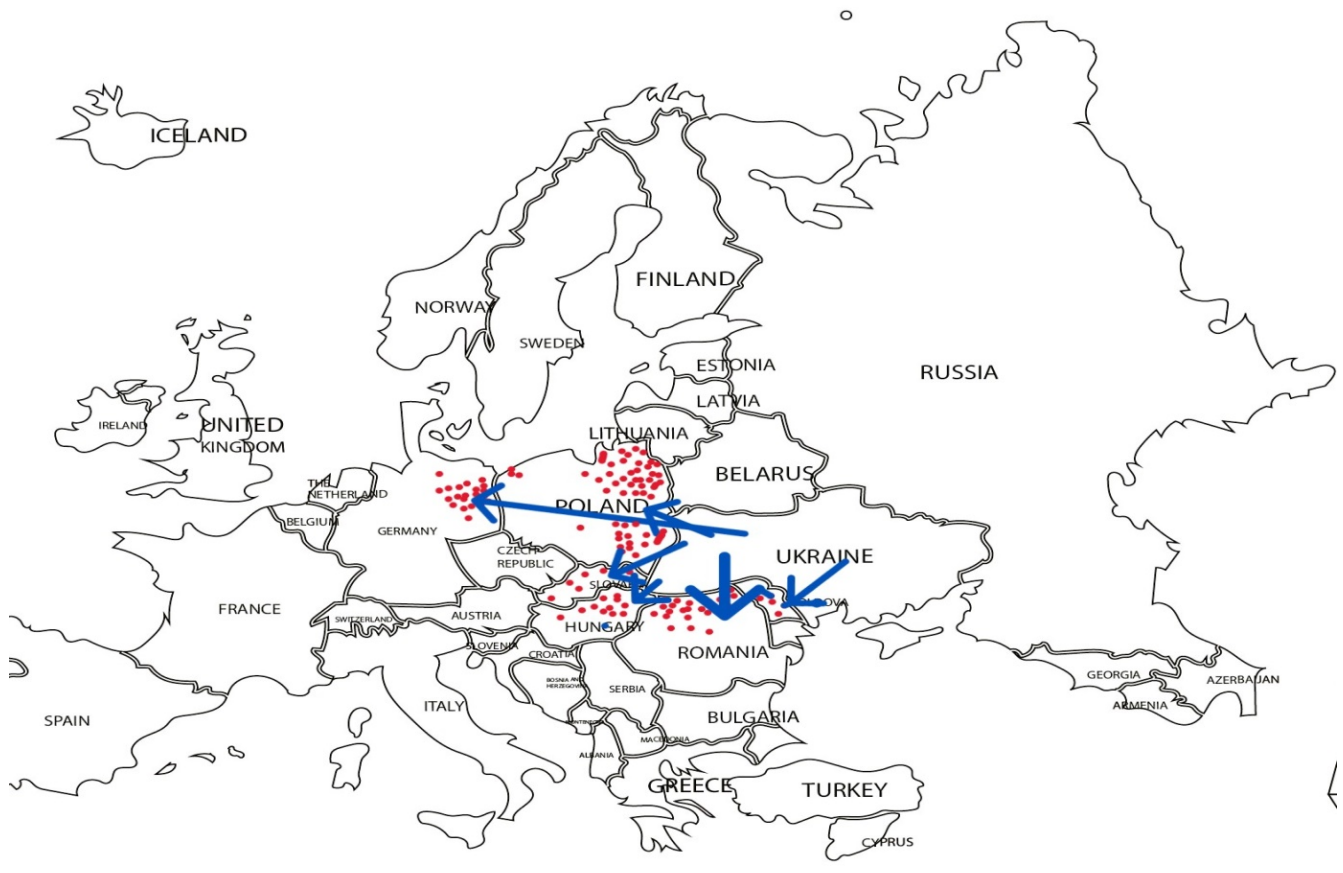


Figure 3. Spatial Pattern of Population Displacement from Ukraine

Source: UNHCR

4.4 Economic and Regional Transformation

The findings show significant economic disruption. Conflict-affected regions have experienced decline in industrial and agricultural productivity, while relatively stable regions have absorbed some economic activities, indicating regional restructuring.

5 Analysis

The analysis of the Russia–Ukraine conflict reveals significant transformations across physical and human geographical dimensions. The findings are presented under three major components: land use and environmental changes, population displacement patterns, and economic impacts.

Land Use and Environmental Changes

The study indicates substantial changes in land use patterns due to the ongoing conflict. Agricultural lands in affected regions have experienced considerable damage as a result of military activities, leading to reduced cultivation and abandonment of farmland. Soil degradation and contamination have further decreased land productivity, while destruction of vegetation has contributed to ecological imbalance. Environmental conditions have also deteriorated due to pollution, infrastructure damage, and disruption of natural systems. Comparative analysis of pre-conflict and conflict-period data suggests a clear decline in land quality and environmental sustainability.

Population Displacement Patterns One of the most prominent outcomes of the conflict is large-scale population displacement. The

results show a sharp increase in both internal displacement and cross-border migration since the beginning of the conflict. Millions of people have been forced to leave their homes, resulting in significant changes in population distribution. The trend analysis (Figure ??) demonstrates a continuous rise in displacement during the initial phase of the conflict, followed by fluctuations depending on the intensity of military activities. Spatial patterns indicate that displaced populations are primarily concentrated in urban centers and border regions, where access to resources and safety is relatively higher. This uneven distribution has led to increased pressure on infrastructure, housing, and public services in host areas. The displacement has also altered settlement structures, contributing to rapid and unplanned urbanization in certain regions.

Economic Impact The conflict has had a profound impact on economic activities across multiple sectors. The results reveal a significant decline in agricultural production due to land damage and restricted access to farming areas. Industrial activities have also been disrupted as a result of infrastructure destruction and reduced workforce availability. In addition, the service sector has experienced setbacks due to instability and reduced consumer demand. The sector-wise analysis (Figure ??) highlights that agriculture and industry are the most affected sectors, while services have shown relatively moderate decline. Trade disruptions and supply chain interruptions have further intensified economic challenges, affecting both regional and global markets. The overall economic decline reflects reduced productivity, loss of employment, and decreased investment in the affected regions.

Integrated Geographical Impact The findings demonstrate that the impacts of the conflict are interconnected and multidimensional. Environmental degradation, population displacement, and economic disruption are closely linked and reinforce each other. For example, land degradation reduces agricultural productivity, which in turn affects livelihoods and contributes to migration. Similarly, population displacement places pressure on economic systems and infrastructure in receiving areas. Overall, the results highlight that geopolitical conflict leads to significant spatial and structural changes in regional geography. The combined effects on land, population, and economy illustrate the complex nature of conflict-induced transformations and emphasize the importance of an integrated geographical approach in analyzing such phenomena.

6 Discussion

The findings strongly indicate that the Russia–Ukraine war has significantly reshaped regional spatial structures. The temporal fluctuations in conflict intensity reflect the dynamic nature of military strategies and operations. The uneven spatial distribution of infrastructure damage confirms that warfare is geographically selective, targeting strategically important regions. This aligns with geopolitical priorities and military objectives. Population displacement patterns highlight the spatial consequences of conflict, where migration follows predictable routes based on safety and accessibility. This has resulted in demographic shifts and increased pressure on host regions. Economic disruptions further demonstrate the interconnected nature of regional systems. The decline in conflict zones and growth in relatively stable areas indicate a spatial redistribution of economic activities. Overall, the integration of spatial analysis with geopolitical interpretation provides a deeper understanding of how conflicts transform regional geography, affecting territorial control, population distribution, and economic structure.

7 Conclusion

The present study highlights the significant geographical transformations resulting from geopolitical conflicts, with specific reference to the Russia–Ukraine war. The analysis demonstrates that conflicts are not limited to political and military dimensions but have far-reaching impacts on physical landscapes, human settlements, and economic systems. By adopting a spatial and analytical approach, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how conflict reshapes regional geography. One of the key findings of the study is the substantial alteration in land use and environmental conditions. The destruction of agricultural land, degradation of soil quality, and damage to natural ecosystems have created long-term environmental challenges. These changes not only affect current land productivity but also pose serious risks to future sustainability and ecological balance in the region. Population displacement has emerged as another critical dimension, significantly altering population distribution and settlement patterns. This has led to increased pressure on urban centers and border regions, resulting in challenges related to housing, employment, and access to basic services. The spatial concentration of displaced populations further highlights the uneven geographical impact of conflict.

The study also reveals the severe economic disruptions caused by the conflict. Key sectors such as agriculture, industry, and services have experienced considerable decline due to infrastructure damage, reduced production, and disrupted trade networks. These economic challenges not only affect the immediate conflict region but also have broader implications for regional and global economic stability. An important contribution of this study is its integrated approach, which combines physical and human geographical perspectives. By linking

environmental degradation, population displacement, and economic instability, the research demonstrates the interconnected nature of conflict-induced changes. This holistic understanding is essential for developing effective strategies to address the complex challenges arising from geopolitical conflicts.

The study further emphasizes the importance of spatial analysis in examining conflict-related transformations. Understanding regional variations and spatial patterns can help policymakers identify valuable areas and design targeted interventions for recovery and development. In this context, geographical research plays a crucial role in informing planning and policy decisions in conflict-affected regions. However, the study is limited by its reliance on secondary data, which may vary in accuracy and availability. Future research can incorporate primary data and advanced geospatial techniques to provide more precise and localized analysis. Additionally, comparative studies across different conflict regions may offer deeper insights into the broader patterns and impacts of geopolitical conflicts. In conclusion, the Russia–Ukraine conflict serves as a significant example of how geopolitical tensions can reshape regional geography across multiple dimensions. The findings of this study underline the need for an integrated and spatially informed approach to understanding conflicts. Such an approach is essential not only for academic research but also for developing sustainable solutions aimed at recovery, resilience, and long-term regional development.

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