Mapping Gendered Ecologies: Engaging with and beyond Ecowomanism and Ecofeminism is a timely collection of essays. It is, of course, timely in the sense that we find ourselves in a moment characterised by climate devastation and myriad crises related to the natural world. This volume brings attention to such issues through a variety of ecowomanist and ecofeminist approaches. But it is also timely in another sense.

There is growing dissatisfaction with the academy, evident in declining enrolments at colleges and universities and in the precarious status of the humanities within higher education. At least one reason for this dissatisfaction involves a perception that what goes on in the classroom has little traction with the problems of the real world and little bearing on meaningful solutions to those problems. This volume presents a strikingly different picture.

Through a diverse collection of contributions that represent a wide range of geographic locations, ethnic and indigenous perspectives, academic backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, genders, sexual identities and spiritualities, editors K. Melchor Quick Hall and Gwyn Kirk have offered readers a handbook, of sorts. It is a handbook of stories and conversations that can serve as a guide for scholars and practitioners who experience tension between their professional and activist identities or in terms of their scholarship and their spirituality. This collection will speak to those who feel torn between what they are expected to teach in the classroom and their feminist and environmental commitments and to those who don’t see themselves represented in the European capitalist patriarchal academy, among others.

In terms of academic books, Mapping Gendered Ecologies is unconventional. Within its pages, readers will find theory, practice, pedagogy, prayer and poetry. The essays weave back and forth between scholarly language and slang, moving unapologetically between academic tone and jargon and the vernacular. There is no linear organisation to the collection and no overarching argument. Some of the essays have a clear thesis and others take the form of narrative storytelling or transcribed conversations. But together, these essays map the current landscape of ecowomanism and ecofeminism well beyond what has been published previously in academic contexts. Those wondering if these approaches have faded in popularity since they experienced their moment of academic prominence toward the end of the twentieth century – or if either withstood the criticisms levied against them – may be surprised to see how vibrant they remain in both scholarship and practice. A novel contribution to recent literature on ecofeminism and ecowomanism, this volume deserves attention and is an exemplar of creative inclusive decolonial scholarship.
Among the significant accomplishments of the collection is its genuine engagement with underrepresented voices, perspectives, and legacies, each chapter contributing to this aim in explicit and implicit ways. In the introductory chapter, ‘Maps, Gardens, and Quilts’, Hall and Kirk describe their project as ‘composting academic frameworks’. The garden metaphor is apt, and you can see the project of composting at work throughout the collection.

At a farming skill share workshop about soil health, Hall explains, she began to make connections between her efforts of enriching the literal soil and the colonial roots of the academy: ‘We must break down, or deconstruct, academic frameworks so that they might serve as fodder for a richer, more nourishing, rooted mapping of the world’ (p. 6). It is with that vision that the book project came together, with intention and in a spirit of resistance. ‘To address ecological crises, research must be of interest and value to activists and policymakers, rather than abstract academic feminism, which is often co-opted by patriarchal notions of scholarship’ (p. 7). The essays that follow the introduction accomplish that objective.

In the spirit of resisting abstract academic feminism, four of the chapters explicitly address challenges and opportunities of teaching gender and environment-focused courses. In ‘Ecofeminism as Intersectional Pedagogy and Practice’, Tatyana Bahkmeteyeva considers the prominent critiques of ecofeminism that have tended to deter students from it – accusations of essentialism and exclusivity, in particular – and promotes a robustly intersectional pedagogy that directly links ecofeminism to an environmental justice framework. Doing so exposes ‘the connection between capitalist exploitation, the degradation of nature, and the subordination and domination of women and people of color’ (p. 109), making its relevance to students clear and attractive. Furthermore, these connections open space to attend to students’ and community well-being too, avoiding the sort of apathy, complacency or despair that often accompanies the study of our dire environmental context. ‘Intimate Pedagogy, Melancholic Things’ by Linh U. Hua complicates commonplace environmentalist rhetoric that assumes a nostalgia for times gone by. Hua describes how much of this rhetoric assumes a ‘universal affinity for the natural environment’ – an assumption alienating for many from disenfranchised populations, those whose histories are characterised by loss, displacement, and lack of ownership. Drawing on postcolonial and critical pedagogies such as hooks, Freire, and others, Hua makes the case that responsible pedagogy will involve critical self-reflection and autobiography – an intimate pedagogy that gives students’ own histories and experiences a place of primacy in the curriculum. These two chapters, along with Christina Holmes’s essay, ‘Theorizing Ecofeminist Intersectionalities and Their Implications for Feminist Teachers’, and a co-edited chapter by Yvonne A. Braun, editors Hall and Kirk, and Holmes, ‘Teaching and Learning Gendered Ecologies Across the Curriculum’, demonstrate the growth and development of ecofeminist and ecowomanist
The academy, of course, is scarcely the only place to critically examine the status and strength of ecofeminism and ecowomanism. This volume draws attention to spaces where these approaches are flourishing – in visionary communities of solidarity and resistance. Many of the chapters detail practices, habits and movements that actively embody ecofeminism and ecowomanism – sometimes consciously articulated by practitioners and other times not. Gardening and farming appear as themes in several chapters, including two that are based on conversations between Hall and activist-organisers. In one of these essays, Hall engages with Judith Atamba, a Kenyan farmer who teaches collaborative permaculture practices in her community in ways that honour tribal customs and faith practices while making space for an ‘alternative gendered reality’ (p. 58). Envisioning a different future and working to bring it about in her home community, Atamba writes: ‘We [women] are the ones who change our own world. Let the men join us’ (p. 58). Another conversation Hall includes is with Stephanie Morningstar, Co-Director of the Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust (NFCLT), a New England and Upstate New York-based alliance of Black, Indigenous and Asian farmers and land stewards. Morningstar and colleagues at NFCLT are building an Indigenous consultation process for farmers with goals of relationships, reciprocity, and reparations. This work is motivated and informed by emergent strategy research and is boldly visionary. Theirs is a decolonial strategy that reveals how our deep and entrenched connection to our colonial histories are ‘being able to be loosened a tiny bit and undone’ (p. 100). Other examples of promising strategies highlighted in the volume include rematriation processes, community gardens, grassroots organisations of women focused on military violence, and zero-growth economic movements, among others. Together, they indeed map a dynamic and vital landscape of practice.

*Mapping Gendered Ecologies* is innovative and, importantly, it is inviting. It invites the reader to become a participant, not merely an observer, of ecofeminist and ecowomanist practices. The practices into which the contributors invite the reader are transnational and intersectional and, as such, the book serves as an open invitation in ways that these traditions have not always been received. Within the collection are essays ideal for teaching in the classroom, essays to share with fellow activists and strategists, and essays that revitalise earlier ideas within these fields. It is not terribly common in the world of academic publishing to find a scholarly book that is a balm, but *Mapping Gendered Ecologies* is just that. Highlighting the stories of people on the ground, doing the work, and calling others into shared effort, visions of sustainable futures begin to feel within reach.

TESS VARNER
*Concordia College, Minnesota*