



# DECOLONIZING NATURE

BRAIDING SCIENTIFIC AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

WORKSHOP:


DISCUSSING ESSENTIAL STEPS TOWARDS DECOLONIZING NATURE

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Decolonizing Nature Challenge aims to investigate how scientific data can be combined with indigenous knowledge so as to bring about environmentally ethical change, whilst living through a period of precarity.

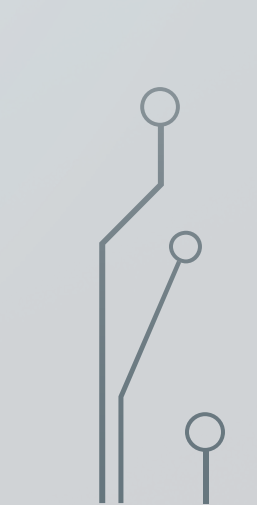

Scientific knowledge. Indigenous knowledge.

How can we combine these knowledge systems create inclusive and ethical approaches to coexisting with the natural world?



When nature is looked at as the collective phenomena of the physical world, as opposed to humans or human creations, we realise that nature has been shaped by colonialism. Colonialism affected the way in which nature is treated and studied.

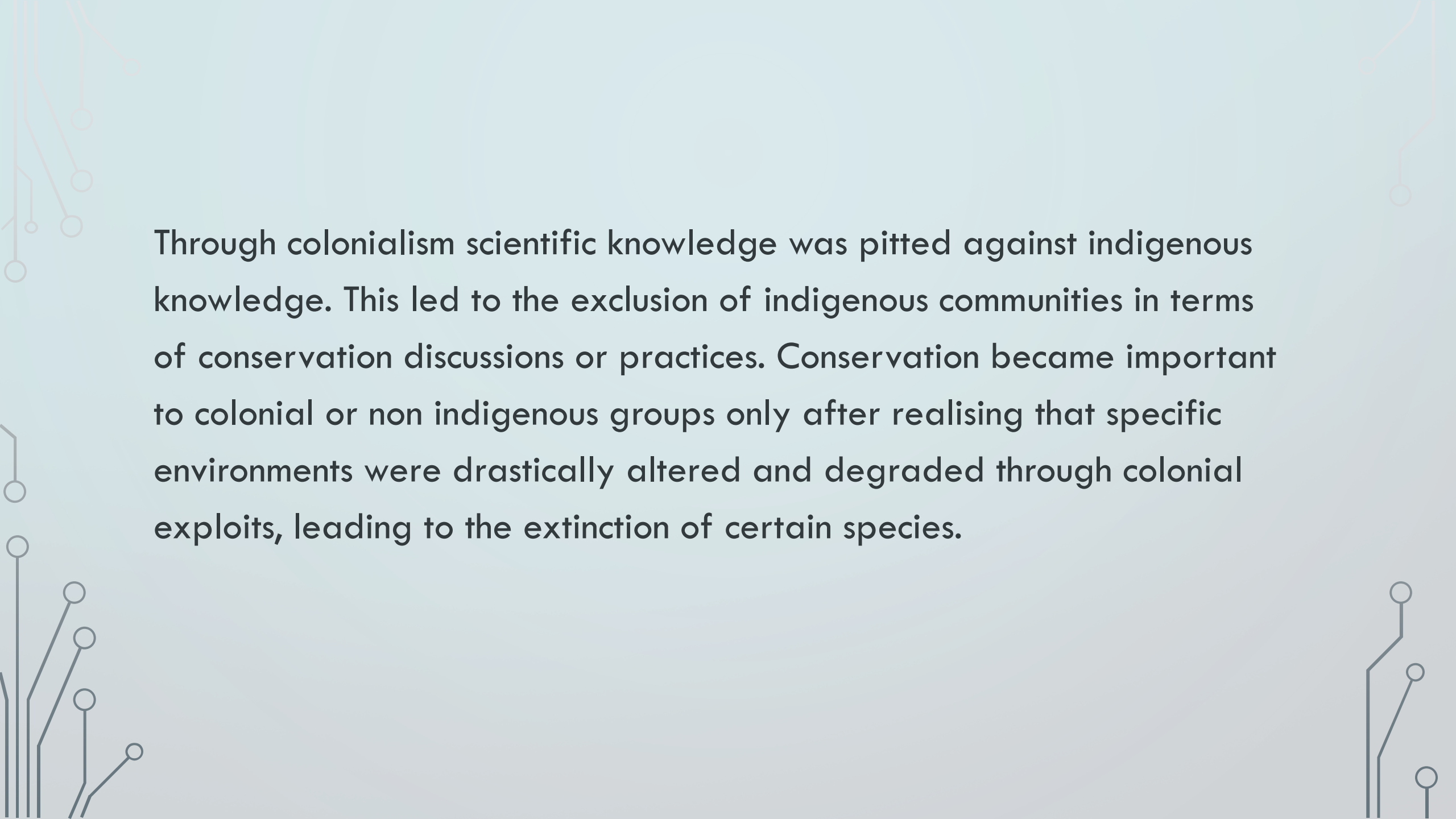
The exclusion of indigenous knowledge systems in studying and conserving nature for centuries, led to a loss of traditional practices and a disconnection between indigenous communities and their past. These communities have utilised and cared for their environment for centuries, placing less pressure on natural systems, until colonialism took centre stage in exploiting these communities and the environments they lived within.



## WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

We live in a time defined by precarity and environmental change. The looming threat of mass extinction, alongside a long colonialist history of violence and exclusion, has led to increased resistance toward environmental degradation.

Decolonization, and specifically decolonizing nature is a complex and politically charged concept. It is therefore important to approach it with care and openness.

The image features a light blue background with decorative circuit-like lines in the corners. The lines are composed of thin, light blue lines that branch out and end in small circles, resembling a network or a stylized circuit board. The lines are positioned in the top-left, top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right corners, framing the central text.

Through colonialism scientific knowledge was pitted against indigenous knowledge. This led to the exclusion of indigenous communities in terms of conservation discussions or practices. Conservation became important to colonial or non indigenous groups only after realising that specific environments were drastically altered and degraded through colonial exploits, leading to the extinction of certain species.


# ESSENTIAL STEPS

All steps are based on personal opinions. We believe that there is not one true blueprint to decolonize nature. Participants bring their own opinions and contribute to what it means to decolonize nature. The suggested steps that follow are interlinked and interdependent. The manner in which we suggest these steps is based on a flow of interlinking thoughts.


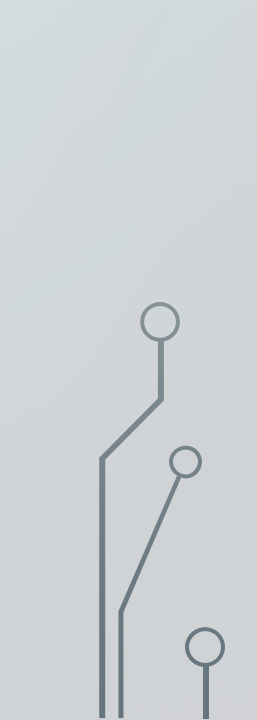
Issues must be faced head-on to bring about stimulating discussions. These discussions aim to lead to an all-inclusive story or debate in terms of protecting, respecting and studying nature.

# 1. WE MUST LEARN FROM INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES

- We must explore alternative ways of being in the world through indigenous knowledge and methodologies.
- We must investigate what practices specific communities use in order to conserve and coexist with the natural world.
- We must become sensitive to general academic tendencies of non-acknowledgment and exclusion of indigenous knowledge.
- A shift must occur in viewing western science as a more legitimate approach to making decisions about conservation. These decisions must be more inclusive.
- Local communities must be equally involved in conservation projects and interventions. These communities must be empowered through being involved at the beginning of a project, co-operating to make ethical and inclusive decisions.



## 2. WE AS HUMANS MUST RETHINK HOW WE CONNECT WITH ALL FORMS OF LIFE/MATTER THROUGH OUR BODIES, HISTORIES, LANDSCAPES, SOCIETIES, AND POLITICS

- We must transcend human-centred ideologies, and no longer place ourselves at the centre of the universe.
  - We should not see nature as an endless resource at our disposal.
  - Indigenous knowledge and practice can bring about this change in attitude and behaviour.
- 
- 



### 3. WE MUST CONSIDER AND ACKNOWLEDGE THE ANTHROPOCENE

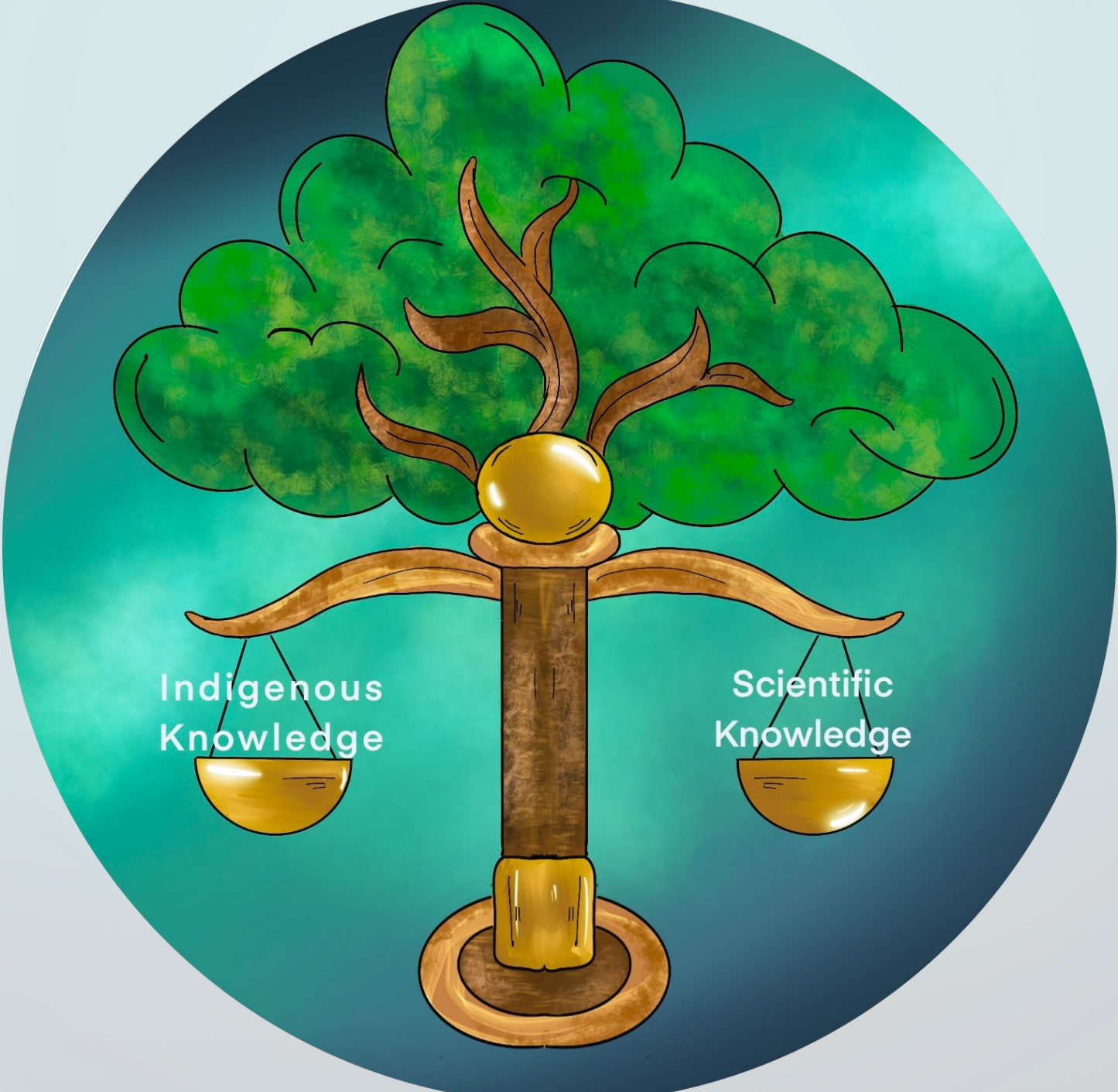
- The Anthropocene is a geological period in which human activity has created severe environmental change. Acknowledging the Anthropocene is acknowledging our part and influence on the natural world.
- All forms of life require the ability to develop spaces in which living arrangements are possible. Through these arrangements water, air and earth are transformed. Without liveable spaces, species would not be able to continue to survive. However, in the case of humans, living arrangements are tied to the concept of development, growth and progress.
- We must reflect on myths of progress and the devastation caused by capitalism. Although the prefix in Anthropocene means human, it can be argued that the cause of this geological epoch is not due to our human biology, but rather stems from capitalism. In pursuit of growth and progress, capitalism has been successful in destroying landscapes and ecological systems, turning humans and nonhumans from beings into resources. Although the idea of progress seems out-dated, embedded expectations linger on and influence our outlook and influence on the world.

## 4. WE SHOULD QUESTION CATEGORISATION

- In the past colonialism and science divided and categorized. This categorization led to exclusion. It is important to approach nature as an interdependent system, not separate materialities functioning in isolation.
- Traditions of colonialisms relates to the classification of ecosystems, societies, classes and races: divide and conquer.
- Through this classification certain ideas about value was attached to different people and forms of life.
- We need to celebrate diversity, diversity brings strength: diversity of races, cultures, languages, genders, sexes, knowledge systems, ecosystems and biodiversity.

## 5. WE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THE VITALITY OF NONHUMAN BODIES AND ALLOW THIS REALISATION TO ALTER OUR DAILY INTERACTIONS WITH MATTER.

- Celebrating diversity is celebrating all forms of life. We should therefore consider nonhumans when physically interacting with the world. Acknowledging the agency and vitality of matter should cultivate a more attentive attitude towards nonhumans, different forms of life, and seemingly passive forms of matter.
- Thinking in systems of interaction rather than in categories is a helpful alternative to aid in the pursuit of decolonizing nature. This line of thought is reflected in assemblage theory.
- Assemblage, a concept within a new materialism, suggests that matter holds the capacity to form collaborative networks and gain power through these networks, becoming a larger force of diverse materialities. What the assemblage could become, or what effects it could produce is not always clear, for example climate change. This should make us more careful in our use of matter and interaction with the natural world. The concept of assemblages is a helpful alternative to progress. Assemblages enable ecologists to circumvent perceptions of an ecological community as fixed. Assemblages allow us to rather focus on the phenomena that occurs between species, resulting in a multispecies interaction, rather than only seeing a collection of different, independent species, unaltered by one another.



Indigenous  
Knowledge

Scientific  
Knowledge