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COMPARING INVASIVE NETWORKS: CULTURAL AND POLITICAL BIOGRAPHIES OF INVASIVE SPECIES*

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ABSTRACT. Under what cultural and political conditions do certain species become successful invaders? What impact does species invasion have on human culture and politics? The work assembled in this special issue of the *Geographical Review* suggests complex interspecies interactions that complicate any answer to these questions. It demonstrates the need to advance a more integrative human/environment approach to species invasion than has hitherto been seen. Reviewing the concepts demonstrated in these articles and applying them to case histories of Mimosaceae (a family that includes genera such as *Acacia*, *Prosopis*, and *Mimosa*) invasion, two general principles become clear. The status and identification of any species as an invader, weed, or exotic are conditioned by cultural and political circumstances. Furthermore, because the human “preparation of landscape” is a prerequisite for most cases of invasion, and because species invasions impact local culture and politics in ways that often feed back into the environmental system, specific power-laden networks of human and non-human actors tend to create the momentum for invasion. It is therefore possible to argue a more general cultural and political account of contemporary species expansion: It is not species but sociobiological networks that are invasive. *Keywords:* *invasive species*, *Mimosa tenuiflora*, *Prosopis juliflora*, *sociobiological networks*.

Invasive species seem to be everywhere these days. Although plant species invasion—the secondary distribution of plants in areas where they are not native (Pyšek 1995, 71)—has long been considered an important, albeit complex, problem in conservation science (Elton 1958), it is now more prevalent than ever. Invaders are increasingly evident around the world as the growing mobility of people and trade goods accelerates a longstanding process of contact and introduction.

Much is known about the character of these invasions. Most contemporary scientific investigations of invasion are inquiries into the inherent characteristics

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