

ENTREVISTA

Raul Lejano

(Writer, Doctor, New York University)

About the interviewed

Raul Lejano is a scholar in public policy, environment, and collective action, whose foremost interests involve understanding people's deep engagements with community and environment, and in how we might design policies and institutions from a relational perspective. His work on climate justice and urban sustainability involves increasing resilience in vulnerable communities to risks from extreme weather events and environmental health risks. His research suggests strategies for reforming environmental governance around an ethic of care. Current projects include studying adapting to extreme weather in developing nations – e.g., empowerment workshops at Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, enacting a relational model of risk communication, and exploring high-definition virtual simulations for flood risk communication.

Beginning with his first book, *Frameworks for Policy Analysis: Merging Text and Context* (Routledge), he has developed approaches for integrating multiple analytical lenses in interpreting environmental situations. In his (co-authored) book, *The Power of Narrative in Environmental Networks* (MIT Press), a theory is advanced regarding the unique capacity of narrative to capture complex human motivations and human-nonhuman relationships. The theo-

ry is further developed in his recent (co-authored) book, *The Power of Narrative: Climate Skepticism and the Deconstruction of Science* (Oxford Univ. Press). His newest books are entitled *Caring, Empathy and the Commons: A Relational Theory of Collective Action* (Cambridge Univ. Press) and *Relationality: The Inner Life of Public Policy* (Cambridge Univ. Press).

His work in the area of environmental policy emphasizes how ecological knowledge and action emerge from the capacity of a person to build relationships with the other. Since people's motivations are never merely utilitarian or affective or deontological, policies cannot be so simplistically designed. As an example, cities need to be analyzed not merely in objective terms but as a web of relationships. His latest work involves the role of narrative and relationality in moving people to act on (or disregard) change. Lejano received his doctorate in Environmental Health Science in 1998 from UCLA, and held faculty appointments at MIT, UCI, and HKU before coming to NYU. As a doctoral student, he worked with Lloyd Shapley, recipient of the Nobel Prize in economics. .

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1. Why has the environmental agenda become a relevant topic in International Relations?

Raul Lejano – Because, first, some environmental issues have taken on even more global proportions --e.g., climate change and species loss, necessitating multilateral action in all continents. Secondly, because the urgency of these issues have increased --e.g., according to some accounts, extreme weather events (tropical cyclones, droughts) have become worse and more frequent than anticipated.

2. What is the world's perception regarding Brazil's role in the environmental agenda?

RL – Brazil's role in international environmental affairs is closely tied to its protection of the Amazon. First, actions to protect this ecosystem are recognized as most crucial in the global campaign for sustainability. Secondly, however, there is perception that actions regarding environment and deforestation go up and down with the changing political climate --this is true of Brazil, the U.S., everywhere.

3. How to evaluate in degree/scope/dimension the environmental issues for the great powers?

RL – There is a lot of symbolic commitment (e.g., targets for decarbonization), but one has to track actual material changes in a nation's environmental performance. By and large, the largest carbon emitters are not meeting targets to reduce the degree of climate change over the coming decades.

4. What are the biggest challenges in the short, medium and long term regarding the environmental agenda?

RL – The biggest challenges, in the short and medium term, is to overcome polarization, both within nations and across nations, that impede progress on meeting sustainability goals. Nations and the world are becoming increasingly divided. Longer-term, there is a need for change within, in the ways individuals and cities go about their everyday lifestyles. There is need for reorientation away from purely individual interests to caring for others and for nature.

P. S.:

By the way, my first book, *Frameworks for Policy Analysis*, is available in Brazil in Portuguese. If you want to mention this in your article, please do. Here is the citation: Lejano, R. (2012). **Parâmetros para análise de políticas**: a fusão de texto e contexto. Campinas: Arte Escrita.

Also, my newest book is coming out this year. It is: Lejano, R. (2023). **Caring, Empathy, and the Commons**: A Relational Theory of Collective Action, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Interviewers: José Renato Ferraz da Silveira and Cláudio Andrés Téllez Zepeda