

Viral Clouds: Avian Influenza, Biosecurity, and Environmental Flourishing in Indonesia

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Philosophy is not simply a tribunal of reason; it is also a battleground of infections and sicknesses.

—Keith Ansell Pearson, 1997

At the turn of the twenty-first century, a new strain of type A influenza virus appeared in Asia. H5N1, an avian influenza, jumped the species barrier from poultry to humans when an outbreak struck Hong Kong, killing first a three-year-old boy and then more than a dozen others. As a fellow of the Rachel Carson Center, I am working on a book manuscript tentatively titled *Viral Clouds: Avian Influenza, Biosecurity, and Environmental Flourishing in Indonesia*, a work which addresses a “natural” disaster in the making, a potential pandemic of H5N1 influenza, a virus that emerged, though in a way little recognized, from the conditions of intensive industrial poultry production. *Viral Clouds* aims to broaden concepts of the global environment and human security away from a narrow concept of species biodiversity and toward a concept of environment broad enough to include both human pathogens and animal agriculture. It does this in order to pose the critical questions, *Can we successfully live in the global environment along side of the environmental objects we create*, and, *What would it take to create objects we can live with?* This work falls under two topics at the core of the Center’s research objectives in the environmental humanities: “natural disasters and cultures of risk,” and “environmental knowledge and knowledge societies.”