Dr. David McDermott Hughes  
Professor of Anthropology  
President, Rutgers AAUP-AFT  
Rutgers University  

The Eden Problem:  
Utopia and Unemployment on New Energy Landscapes  

What is the place of work in the clean energy future incipient in some parts of the world? In a breezy Spanish village, along the Straits of Gibraltar, this question lurks unspoken behind all the arguments for and against wind power. Standing more than 100 meters tall, steel turbines flank settlement on all sides. Residents hate the noise, the shadows, and the newly technological landscape. But, more than anything else, neighbors hate windmills for what they don’t provide: jobs. How can it be, day laborers despair, that something so large can need so little maintenance and repair? More positively, as the manager of the wind farm boasts, his turbines function smoothly and efficiently as “robots,” controlled, in fact, from a room in Mexico City. Unemployment and utopia, then, go hand in hand. And they always have. This paper updates Spanish-derived manifestos on nature and labor to try to reconcile them for an Anthropocene, sustainable future.

Professor David McDermott Hughes has taught at Rutgers University since 2000 - first in the Department of Human Ecology and then the Department of Anthropology. He earned his PhD in Anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley, having conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Ensuing from that training his first two books concerned race, natural resources, and land reform in Southern Africa (From Enslavement to Environmentalism, 2006 and Whiteness in Zimbabwe, 2010). Politics drove him out of Zimbabwe and to the petro-state of Trinidad and Tobago. Hughes is now publishing a monograph on the oil industry and responsibility for climate change (Energy without Conscience, 2017). He has also begun fieldwork in Spain on labor, aesthetics, clean energy, and utopian thought. At Rutgers, Hughes has directed the Center for African Studies and the undergraduate program in the Department of Anthropology. Currently, he serves as president of the Rutgers AAUP-AFT faculty union.