This book has long- and medium-term histories that have accumulated multiple layers of intellectual, institutional, and personal indebtedness that we can only acknowledge here briefly. Among the long histories is certainly the collaboration of Kaika and Keil on matters urban and nature that goes back to the 1990s. Most of our close co-conspirators and comrades from the early period of UPE are in this book and we are grateful to them for allowing us to share a path in critical solidarity over those years and decades in creating one of the most rewarding, inspiring, and productive projects of our careers. It is the now time-honoured collective project of attempting to understand the urbanisation of nature that we acknowledge here as the seedbed for this particular contribution we have put between these covers.

Among the more short-term histories that need mentioning here is the opportunity that arose at the end of the Major Collaborative Research Initiative on Global Suburbanisms, sponsored by Canada’s SSHRC, and housed at York University, to look specifically at the intersection of global suburbanisation – or as we would also call it, extended urbanisation – and urban political ecologies. Global Suburbanisms funded the research for a paper, with the lead authors Yannis Tzaninis and Tait Mandler: Tzaninis, Y., Mandler, T., Kaika, M., and Keil, R. (2021). Moving urban political ecology beyond the ‘urbanization of nature’, Progress in Human Geography, 45(2): 229–52. This paper also provided the basis for the Introduction, and eventually also the Epilogue of this current book.

The paper initially provided the impetus for the Sub/urban Political Ecology Workshop, also funded and co-organised to great extent by Global Suburbanisms, and co-organised and hosted by the University of Amsterdam in February 2019. We would like to specifically thank Cara Chellew and Lucy Lynch at York and Yannis Tzaninis in Amsterdam for their tireless efforts to make the event a huge success. In addition to most authors in this book, Jochen Monstadt, Sara Macdonald, Samir Harb, Marco Armiero, Cara Chellew, Lucy Lynch, Justus Uitermark, Joris Tieleman, Debra Solomon, and Mendel Giezen provided valuable input during the workshop.
It deserves mentioning that the editors met again a year later in Amsterdam, in February 2020, to forge the detailed conceptual framework for this book. It was the last collegial in-person meeting any of us attended before the world shut down due to the pandemic. We are grateful to our authors to have stuck with us during quarantine and lockdowns, grinding uncertainties as our attention shifted to an economy of care, that has preoccupied our urban world since, and to have provided us with the exceptional papers that we have assembled here. The pandemic is written into the pages of this book explicitly and implicitly. The project’s original framing around the climate emergency – fuelled by the editors’ recent first-hand experiences of the devastating fires in Australia and Greece – had provided the back-drop. In this context, we are particularly grateful to Mike Davis for setting the tone for this volume with his prefatory essay on the political ecology of California’s megafires.

In keeping with this theme, on 5 May 2022 Leto Bengtsson, the son of one of the editors, produced a captivating hand drawing. When asked what it depicted, Leto said it was Australia: its sun, its sky, and the smoke under the sky. Then when asked what the yellow-red colours and stick figures depicted he said it is Australian people dying in the wildfires. Leto called this grim, sobering picture ‘The Fire Land’.

Leto Cornelis Bengtsson gave permission to use his beautiful artwork for the book cover. Thomas Dark, Laura Swift, and Victoria Chow worked hard to deliver a well edited manuscript. Judy Dunlop produced the meticulous index.

As we were finalising this volume, the sad news of Mike Davis’s death reached us. Mike had been ill for a while and we had been in touch with him with encouragement as he was ultimately going into palliative care. We kept him abreast of the progress of the manuscript and sent him an early sketch for the cover that used Leto Tzaninis’s painting. A children’s book author late in life himself, he noted ‘Love it!’ and his wife Alessandra Moctezuma said it was ‘a beautiful cover’.

With Mike, we are losing an early proponent and profound defender of the urbanisation of nature debate that drives the discussion in this book. Nobody amongst us who has participated in that debate took it as far as Mike did over thirty years of critical interventions on the topic. He wrote about the water of the LA River, the political ecology of slums, the fragility of the desert environments, even the glacial pace that underlies our existence, and importantly the political pathology of infectious disease. And much more.

We were honoured and delighted that Mike gave us access to the text that now stands as the Prologue of this book. It is a tremendous statement of both the challenges and political opportunities that await. In the end,
he wrote about fire, and he left us with this Prologue as a strong signal at the outset of the volume before us. We will honour his demand and cry to continue the struggle even in the darkest times. In the end, the collective project towards a better socio-natural future will have the upper hand. We will miss him.

Amsterdam and Toronto, October 2022