Multispecies Justice and Human Inequalities: Risks in Theorizing Anti-Anthropocentric Politics

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Abstract Human status categories have ceased to be the ontological prerogative of humans alone, and this paradigm shift carries broad ethical implications. In this essay, we investigate the concept of multispecies justice (MSJ), as it seeks to overcome the humanistic-liberal construct of justice, without sliding back into an anthropomorphisation of the nonhuman. We engage with the political limits of MSJ, as it fails to grasp a critical-genetic discourse on the historical materiality of inequalities. We advance the urgency for a more politically engaged posthumanism, as it runs the risk of becoming completely detached from current social struggles.

Keywords Posthuman. Multispecies justice. Climate justice. New materialism. Social struggles.

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1 Introduction

More than two decades have passed since what many consider the foundational act of Climate Justice movements. In 2000, the first climate justice summit took place at the Hague, organized by the Rising Tide network as a radical alternative to the Cop 6 – the sixth session of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change conference. In the following years, the Bali Principles of Climate Justice were written (2002), the Burban Group for Climate Justice was founded (2004), and the Climate Justice Now! global coalition was formed (2007) (Tschakert et al. 2020). Today, climate movements that advocate climate justice as one of their core principles are well known and widespread, such as Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, or Last Generation.

Meanwhile, posthuman research has been facing the climate crisis by challenging human-nonhuman, nature-culture, and person-environment separateness. The wide and multidisciplinary arena of posthumanism has been proving how people and things (may these be plants, animals, rocks, computers, microbes, or else) intersect, reverse, and co-implicate each other. In general, two different ways in which this division has been challenged may be identified. On the one hand, there is a growing number of inquiries that bring to light the hybrid nature of both the subject and his social systems. For example, the philosophical reflections on technologies, biotechnologies, and social robotics (e.g. Hayles 1999; Gunkel 2012; Haraway 2022), as well as the ontological turn in anthropology (e.g. Viveiros de Castro 2014; de la Cadena 2015; Kohn 2021) are interesting examples of the study of the more-than-human social assemblages that challenge *anthropos*' uniqueness and independence. On the other hand, instead of deconstructing human exceptionalism, some theoretical movements are experimenting with ways to make other-than-humans' faculties emerge. For example, anthropological multispecies ethnographies (e.g. Kirksey, Helmreich 2010; Tsing 2014) or new materialism theories (e.g. Bennett 2010; Coole, Frost 2010; Gamble et al. 2019) advance a redefinition of agency, thought, speech, emotions, sociality, which cease to be an exclusively human and intentional prerogative.

One of the most recent spaces of interaction of climate justice discourse and posthuman theories is the emerging field of Multispecies Justice (MSJ), which aims at exploring the implications of the dehumanization of traditionally human characters by considering its ethical and political consequences (Celermajer et al. 2020 and 2021; Tschakert 2020; Tschakert et al. 2020; Fitz-Henry 2021; Thaler 2021; Verlie 2021). In this essay, we engage with the concept of MSJ and scan the horizon of possibilities opened by the radical change of the subject of justice this scholarship advances. In fact, investigating the

moral obligations to nonhumans, MSJ attempts to overcome the dominant humanistic-liberal notion of justice through the recognition of a relational subject of right. Aware of the risk of falling back into anthropocentrism, we join MSJ in suggesting switching the question from the ontological level of entities to a relational one; this change helps to avoid the ontological move of anthropomorphizing the nonhuman as a way out of the anthropocentric paradigm, a move that, in fact, reconfirms it. Nevertheless, we are critical of some ethical-political aspects of MSJ, that we articulate in two directions. First, new materialist theories on which MSJ is rooted develop the notion of multispecies relationality in a not historically enough manner. This lack recreates the pattern of a different metaphysics, failing to address the materiality of inequalities from a critical and genetic point of view. Second, the MSJ's theoretical perspective seems to be hardly operable in the current concrete institutional world. It reveals a detachment from reality that risks falling into a sterile idealization. Despite revealing an awareness of the (mainly white) privileged position of academic discourse, MSJ deficits a practical grasp on human injustice. Debates around MSJ, and posthumanism in general, run the risk of becoming an abstract environmental concern, permanently disengaged from historical and current human intra-species inequalities and social struggles.

In order to grasp the dangers inherent in theorizing an anti-anthropocentric politic, the article starts with a brief overview of the limits of justice and climate justice thought. From these weaknesses the idea of MSJ has been articulated, of which we outline the focal points and theoretical basis. In the subsequent section, we highlight the theoretical and political shortcomings of this construct, as it has been developed so far. Finally, we share the perplexities about the feasibility of realizing this type of justice, concluding with a broader (self) reflection on the possibility of posthumanist academic work's engagement with social struggles.

2 Multispecies Justice As Ethical Alternative

2.1 Critics to (Climate) Justice

The concept of Climate Justice has been discussed, expanded, and deepened both in academia and policy arenas. Yet climate change remains one of the most urgent issues humanity must face, and climate injustice continues to be one of the preconditions of local and global power relations. The normative frame of climate justice does not seem to be suitable to address today's socio-environmental crisis. According to Tschakert and colleagues, this is for two reasons:

> [F]irst, as a framing for the problem, climate justice is insufficient to overcome the persistent silencing of voices belonging to multiple "others"; and second, it often does not question – and thus implicitly condones – human exceptionalism and the violence it enacts, historically and in this era called the Anthropocene. (Tschakert et al. 2020, 2)

One of the limits of climate justice theory is its anthropocentric basis. This doesn't only neglect a wide range of other-than-human entities, but it also fails to embrace posthumanist critiques. We explore the recent studies on Multispecies Justice, a growing body of research trying to overcome climate justice's anthropocentrism and liberal-humanist basis. Starting from the critics it moves to the traditional idea of justice, we will then engage with the new subject of justice it advances and investigate the risks involved in this theory.

Multispecies justice rejects the longstanding misconceptions on which climate justice theory is based. Despite its vocation for inclusiveness, most climate justice is rooted in Western theory of justice, which is historically founded on a liberal-humanist ontology (Grear 2015). As Verlie brilliantly summarizes:

> The *liberalism* is a belief that the world is primarily composed of rational individuals: discrete entities that can enter into relatively shallow relationships ('connections') with the rest of the world (Barad 2007), but that always do – or should be entitled to – retain their own integrity, sovereignty and independence [...] The *humanism* is the belief that humans are the only subjects in the world. Humans are considered the only beings able to exert agency, intentionality, or choice and the only ones deserving of moral, ethical, political or legal consideration. (Verlie 2021, 3)

This leads to a liberal individualistic and anthropocentric notion of justice. In other words, justice – climate justice included – is based on at least two false assumptions. On one side, there's the liberal idea of humans as singular, independent, insulatable individuals. When applied to climate justice, the ontology of body separation produces clearly distinct parties, and this usually takes the shape of a conflict between a polluter and a victim. On the other hand, climate justice is based on humanism, which has been tinged with an anthropocentric character for centuries. It can be resumed in three interrelated ideas: a) humans are distinct from other species and inorganic natural and technological world; b) human mind, consciousness, reason, agency are special qualities that render them unique compared to other Earth entities; c) humans are the most valuable species and thus merit greater moral consideration (Celermajer et al. 2021; Thaler 2021). The exceptionalism of this kind of *anthropos* renders our species worthy of

a different moral regime compared to the ethical consideration dedicated to nonhumans. The universalized and homogenized category of human has been excluding – and often still does – all the subjectivities that do not correspond to the quintessential white, privileged, able-bodied, heterosexual man. Feminism and ecofeminism have illuminated how the Western ontology that organizes the world through the lens of rigid oppositions is the foundational source of inegalitarian hierarchies and structural violences (e.g. Plumwood 2002). Motivated by gender, queer, postcolonial, Black, and Indigenous studies, the promoters of MSJ complicate the ethics on which justice practice is based, as avoiding confronting intersectional power inequalities, and blurring specific positionalities in the economic, socio-political, gender, and cultural structures, has lead to a kind of difference-blind unfair justice. In this regard, an equivalence between intra-humans power differences and human-nonhuman inequalities can be traced.

To summarize, MSJ research aims at overcoming liberal individualist and anthropocentric notions of justice, mainly through a radical change of the subject of justice, overcoming "the individual and exceptional human being" in order to reach the range of "living and non-living entities, and their interactions and processes" (Tschakert et al. 2020, 5). As we are going to elaborate in the next paragraph, MSJ does not only seek to include a wider number of entities in the arena of justice, but to challenge the traditional individual person as the only possible subject of justice.

2.2 A Multispecies Subject of Justice

The 2019-20 Australian bushfire season has earned the harrowing title of Black Summer. The wildfires destroyed more than 10 million hectares of land and killed or displaced an estimated three billion animal lives (WWF-Australia 2020). Experiencing this ecological, human-driven catastrophe, has led many researchers to reflect on multispecies violence and rights. At Sydney University, the Multispecies Justice project,[1] led by David Schlosberg and Danielle Celermajer, has become one of the main promoters of research devoted to

> rethink what it means to be in ethical relationships with beings other than humans and what justice requires, in ways that mark these deaths as absolute wrongs that obligate us to act, and not simply as unfortunate tragedies that leave us bereft. (Celermajer et al. 2020, 475)

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[1] https://www.sydney.edu.au/sydney-environment-institute/our-research/environmental-justices/concepts-of-practice-and-multispecies-justice.html.

As regards the politically involved scholarship underlying MSJ, Celermajer and colleagues (2021) dispose of four intersecting arenas in which MSJ finds its roots. These include animal rights theories; environmental justice and political ecology; posthumanism, in particular the Actor-Network-Theory (Latour 2005; Law 1992), multispecies ethnography, and new materialism; Indigenous philosophy and decolonizing justice theories, with their critique of posthumanism (e.g. Hoogeven 2016). One of the main common aspects of these branches of knowledge is precisely the deconstruction of human superiority, the de-humanization of traditionally human characters, and the experimentation with other-than-human faculties. MSJ engages with the ethical consequences of this paradigmatic shift, enquiring who or what is worthy to be included in the moral arena.

We think it's important to emphasize that a multispecies approach to justice doesn't simply mean including nonhumans in the same human justice structure. It's not as easy as transporting the historically rooted ethic-political organization to nonhumans, as it would imply anthropomorphising them once again. We believe that dismantling human exceptionalism doesn't lead to the conclusion that we are all the same. Failing to recognize that other-than-human species have different (in)organic life experiences, different bodily mechanisms, and different intra- and inter- species organizations would just be extremely naive. This is actually a kind of moral anthropomorphisation that is not so uncommon in the case of invasive species for example, when the nonhuman "invader" is blamed and convicted of the ecosystem imbalance. Indeed, without an accurate analysis of historical and contingent power dynamics, we are left with a quite ingenious interpretation. It's by focusing on complex environmental relations, ecosystem unbalancing, and damaging that one can trace a path for processes of accountability. It's common practice to omit the more-than-human hierarchies of power that have historically led to specific kinds of economic and environmental vulnerabilities. This fails both in making different responsibilities emerge, and in connecting power positions to culpability. What is needed instead, is an account for other beings, in respect of their specific and immeasurably different life experience, capacity, embodied abilities, ways of existing, functioning, and interacting.

One of the tasks of MSJ is precisely accounting for nonhuman diversity through a change in the justice system, because of a change of justice subjects. No subject is an independent individual. Every entity is the material product of always-in-flux interactions and processes. What is "to be" always has to be-with. According to Tschakert, MSJ aspiration is

> to acknowledge the many Others with whom our respective lives are intertwined, tangibly, knowingly, or otherwise, confront the inseparability of our shared vulnerabilities and suffering in today's

interrelated crises, […] how do we, in practice, instigate and nourish such engagements with these Others? (Tschakert 2020, 3)

Western climate justice scholarship and movements often keep on obliterating the universal connectedness, the entangled (Barad 2007) dimension of existence, the multispecies assemblages (Tsing 2015) in which we live, the geosocial character of life (Palsson, Swanson 2016), the becoming-with (Haraway 2008) of every sort of variation. Theoretically, MSJ commits to embracing this assumption, replacing the liberal-humanistic paradigm with a relational materialistic one. The ideas of relationality and material agency contrast the assumption of fixed, determined, and autonomous beings, in favor of "shifting, distributed, interdependent and heterogeneous" subjectivities, as they are always "composed, decomposed and recomposed through ever-changing more-than-human relations" (Verlie 2021, 4).

Once the fiction of individuality is revealed, the only possible move for rethinking the subject of justice is toward the array of "companion species" relationships (Haraway 2008) that render each other capable of existing. Therefore, there cannot be a just outcome for one if there is no justice for all. Relying again on Celermajer's work:

> Multispecies justice redesigns justice away from the fiction of individualist primacy, toward an ecological reality where humans actually exist: in a larger set of material relationships. Here, human and nonhuman animals, species, microbiomes, ecosystems, oceans, and rivers – and the relations among and across them – are all subjects of justice. Consequently, multispecies *in*justice comprises all the human interruptions of the functioning of this broad array of relations. (Celermajer et al. 2021, 127)

The subject of justice advanced by MSJ decenters the singularities in order to focus on relationalities, cross-scalar interconnections, and lively networks of more-than-organic socialites. The kind of morality that guides the aspired configuration of the justice system is an "environmental ethic based on ecocentrism, deep ecology, and animal rights/liberation" (Thaler 2021, 3). MSJ scholarship adopts the care ethic promoted by ecofeminism, which rejects the hierarchical oppositions that render the (nonhuman) other distant, unknown, and inferior. Fisher and Tronto define care as an "activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (Fisher, Tronto 1991, 40).

Especially in the climate change era, there's no care without multispecies and more-than-organic care. Caring for humans means establishing a kind of relationship with the nonhuman network that allows communities interagentive living. Talking about Indigenous Marind groups of Indonesian West Papua, Sophi Chao defines multispecies

care as "the *relations* that shape the affective and moral textures" of more-than-human shared lives and deaths (2021).[2]

In order to render MSJ operative, Tschakert et al. (2020) delineate four orientation points aimed at changing the justice approach. These are: a) intersectionality, which recognizes different inequalities of race, class, gender, age, ability, species and their interweaving in structural processes of oppression; b) inclusiveness, which assumes an entangled and flat ontology and consequently the interdependence of all entities; c) response-ability in a more-than-human world (Haraway 2016), which means learning how to nurture supportive relations with our companion species in everyday practices of production, consumption, and reproduction; d) cosmopolitics (Stengers 2005, 2010; Latour 2005; Sheikh 2019), which is a type of politic that points to comprehend "diverse experiences, emotions, practices, and perspectives, and embraces both deliberation and disruption" (Tschakert et al. 2020, 7), finally overcoming technocratic useless solutions. In the next paragraph we are going to focus in particular on the second point, moving some critiques to the ontological grounding of some new materialist theories.

3 Politics of Entanglement

As seen so far, MSJ has developed in opposition to both the anthropocentric paradigms of justice and the theories of climate justice. The last ones are ultimately based on a logic of extending human properties to nonhumans, failing in their aspired deconstruction of the anthropocentric paradigm. In fact, instead of attacking the heart of the problem (which is the idea of an individuated and identifiable subject, considered exceptional with respect to what is considered nonhuman or not properly human) they only widen its scope. By stigmatizing both positions, MSJ aims to directly challenge the classificatory (therefore exclusionary) attitude of anthropocentric theories of justice.

Articulating around the theoretical legacy of posthuman and new materialist theories (Barad 2007, Bennett 2010) with a particular reference to the theory of "entanglement" (Barad 2007) and "flat ontology" (Latour 2005; Bryant 2011), MSJ advances a new subject of justice: instead of an ontology of being, it replaces an ontology of relations. Thus, the main characteristic of multispecies justice's approach lies in positing relationality as the subject of an ethical-political

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2 We hope the extreme simplification of the immense ecofeminist work we are offering here can be forgiven. We invite the reader to take the few references as mere hints, which we have no opportunity to elaborate on in this context. For a brilliant in-depth analysis of multispecies care we strongly advise "Multispecies Care in the Sixth Extinction" (Münster et al. 2021).

perspective that aspires to reshape ethical-political paradigms to be inclusive of the nonhuman.

Although we believe that the effort to deconstruct the liberal subject of justice is crucial, we nonetheless feel that this attempt made by the MSJ is not sufficient. This is due to the theoretical legacy on which it is articulated, namely that of new materialism. From an ethical-political point of view, we notice that concepts like matter, relationship and distributed political agency are problematically left without a socio-historical definition. Indeed, we believe that this can lead on the one hand to a concealment of certain power dynamics and oppression, and on the other hand to a political indistinction of the role – and thus the liability – of the actors. For reasons of space, we will limit ourselves to critical remarks on a few points common to all orientations of new materialism.

Common to new materialist theories, although internally differentiated, is that of redefining the relationship between the human and the nonhuman by proposing a vision of matter that is no longer inert and passive but active and "vibrant" (Bennett 2010), such that the relationships between humans and nonhumans are "entangled" (Barad 2007). Although we consider it important to proceed in a deconstructive sense with respect to the anthropocentric conceptual tradition that relegates matter to a passive and inert object, we nevertheless believe that the theoretical move adopted by new materialism risks replacing one metaphysics with another: from the metaphysics of anthropocentrism to the metaphysics of entanglement.

This is due to the ahistorical dimension of the concepts of relationship and matter developed by the new materialism, which doesn't allow us to see and thematize how the different connections between humans and nonhumans developed historically and materially, from a dialectic between material and social elements.

Resting on an ahistorical materialism, MSJ risks reintroducing an idealistic view of material relations. Rather than pursuing a critical-genetic inquiry into the socio-historical ways in which such relations of domination are established, it reiterates an ontological question. The premise of such a movement is that from the delineation of a new entangled ontology, an inclusive paradigm of justice, as relational and intersectional, directly follows (Tschakert et al 2020). But, as critics, especially feminists (Butler 2004), have been pointing out for decades, ordering social belonging from an ontological question is precisely the prerogative of anthropocentric thinking. In fact, anthropocentrism takes the move from a metaphysical thought that *a priori* and ahistorically posits its own postulates to explain (and order) the real, concealing power relations determined behind categories deemed immutable.

In order to ground ethical-political thinking on an ontological question, we believe an analysis of the historical-material assumptions from which the hierarchical dichotomies that one wants to

overcome originate is essential. What we want to argue is that the MSJ's attempt is not enough. Even if criticizing anthropocentric ontology is inevitable in order to criticize anthropocentric ethics, we believe that one must avoid reducing ethics and politics to ontology. In fact, there is a risk of falling into a naturalistic fallacy, which is deriving ought-to-be from being. In other words, it is not enough to replace one ontology with another. We, therefore, think that the attempt to imagine a relational subject must be accompanied by a materialism that is able to elaborate a socio-historical analysis of the relations between the human and the nonhuman in order to explain how and why certain axes of power and subordination of one to the other exist. We believe it's crucial to re-emphasize the historical-social dimension of materialism in order to prevent the phenomenon known as "fetishism", initially outlined by Marx and revisited in the field of animal studies in more recent times (Shukin 2009; Maurizi 2021).

To exemplify, let us take Marx's analysis in volume III of *Capital* in relation to the so-called "Trinitarian formula". Classical economists identify "capital and profit, land and land rent, labor and wages" (Marx 1974, 927). They naturalize what are specific historical relations of production, thus concealing the social relations of exploitation. Marx argues that in the capitalist mode of production, "land operates as an agent of production" (929), but this does not depend on the land's own characteristics. Indeed, Marx argues that this is precisely the fetishistic mystification enacted by bourgeois economics, which is exchanging the historically determined form of an object for its essential properties. It is only in the specific context of a particular social relationship that land becomes land rent. Therefore, it is only by adopting a historical materialist perspective that one can illuminate, for instance, how bourgeois thought associates land with land rent, or, drawing inspiration from Shukin's analyses: "the specific cultural logics and material logistics that have produced animals as forms of capital" (Shukin 2009). Back to Marx's specific example, that land is in an entangled relationship to the social system is a point on which both classical economics, Marx and the proponents of MSJ would agree. What differentiates a thought that merely reflects a static reality from a critical and political thought is that it accounts for the *type* of relationship that is brought about: in this case, the identification of land as a means of production.

The shortcomings of new materialism are also reflected in another problem, namely the redefinition of agency. In fact, one of the key points on which the MSJ is articulated is the reformulation of agency starting from a flat ontology, which rearticulates the problem of agency by dehumanizing and distributing it among a series of social actors. Instead of being the essential category characterizing the identified human endowed with consciousness and intentionality, agency

is redefined as a property of the relationship between different actors: human, nonhuman, and technological (Bennett 2010).

We consider this thematization of agency politically problematic. Although the revival of the theme of agency as opposed to its dissolution typical of post-structuralism is to be welcomed, we believe that an indistinct distribution of agency among actors produces impolitical outcomes. Indeed, in the ethical-political sphere, it is crucial to have a conceptual demarcation axis that can distribute not only agency but also liability for actions.[3] This is all the more evident in the way the ecological crisis is addressed. As noted by Coole (2013), it is undoubtedly useful to establish that climate change is the result of a relationship involving human and nonhuman actors, but from an ethical-political point of view it risks disabling the attribution of greater or lesser liability.

Let us take the case of the Northeast blackout of 2003 in the USA, which caused countless damages, analyzed by Bennett (2010). Bennett's interpretation is that, given the multitude of actors with agency (both human and nonhuman), it is impossible to attribute responsibility for the event to anyone specifically, a position incidentally shared by the FirstEnergy Corporation itself, which was called to account for the problem. We believe that this type of analysis is exactly the political risk run by a theory that is based on such a materialistic view: ahistorical and metaphysical, unable to attribute blame and accountability on a political level.

The risk is establishing a totally contemplative rather than political attitude. It's crucial to understand how and why there is an agential asymmetry of actors, and instead of working out the summation of oppressions using an intersectional logic (Tschakert 2020), to try to imagine the constitution of a political subject capable of acting in the socio-historical real.

4 Anti-Anthropocentric Practicalities

Once the main theoretical limits and potential of MSJ have been delineated, our argument moves to the practical dangers that this shift brings with itself. In this section, we will briefly expose the material risks MSJ's scholarship is aware of and advance a broader self-reflection about posthuman academic work. Our aim is to focus on the

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3   The literature exploring agency and non-human agency is extensive, and a comprehensive analysis of it exceeds the scope and objectives of this article. Within the confines of this article, our focus lies particularly on the theories advanced by Bennett (2010) and Barad (2007), characterized by a pronounced normative nature. A different case is Latour's Actor-Network Theory (2005) developed as a 'sociology of associations', avoiding both anthropomorphizing perspectives and normative postures (Volontè 2017).

applicability of this idea of justice, and our core argument is that stronger ties need to be tightened between an academia that is not enough politically engaged, and the (not only environmentalist) social movements that fight for the recognition of the "less-than-human" or "not-fully-human" people (Butler 2004; Marhia 2013). What we want to claim is that by keeping the discussion on ontological and theoretical levels, even the most activist scholarship fails in building a counter-hegemonic coalition. Even if extremely fascinating, we believe that demonstrating nonhuman subjectivity is an end in itself if it doesn't serve the further objective of intersecting common struggles.

4.1 MSJ's Operational Limits

Speaking of MSJ involves prefigurative work that entails imagining how to concretely apply a multispecies approach in real legal institutions. We will give a glimpse of the complex and interrelated issues this operalisation brings to light (for deeper scrutiny see Celermajer et al. 2021).

First, the Western global and local justice system is based on persons entitled to rights. Extending this framework to nonhumans means recognising their personhood, which holds the risk of falling back into anthropocentrism, thus failing to engage with a relational subject of justice.[4] The rights' logic opens up further doubts. In fact, extending it to nonhumans implies that these entities ought to "participate in decisions about the institutions that will regulate their lives and relations" (Celermajer et al. 2021, 130). This would happen thanks to human mediation and representation. This brings us to the second problem: how can human institutions include nonhuman entities? If we accept ecosystems' ability to communicate, should we include them directly into political decision-making? What kind of nonhuman language is embeddable? What is the role of humans in facilitating this process? One of the answers that posthuman scholars are discussing is recasting humans as "diplomats" (Latour 2004).

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[4] Extending human rights to non-humans without considering political consequences may lead to extreme outcomes. For example, in the USA corporations enjoy legal personality, and this has allowed them to appropriate the international language of human rights to challenge certain democratic decisions made by states. A concrete case of this mechanism happened in 2003, when the multinational TechMed opposed the government of a state in the Mexican federation after the latter decided to terminate the energy supply contract that had been signed by the previous government. In order to support the use of the proportionality test in determining whether the Environmental Protection Agency's decision not to renew the permit involved expropriation, the court (ICSID) relied entirely on four different decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (`https://www.iisd.org/itn/en/2018/10/18/tecmed-v-mexico/`; Castillo 2012). The paradoxicality of this decision is evident: an artificial entity, such as a corporation, can now use human rights against democratic decisions.

There would be no need to ground a common language, but only to represent different interests.

As Eduardo Kohn states, the goal might be:

> to arrive at a conceptual framework through which different actors, be they shamans, biologists, or lawyers, can understand their respective worlds in new ways, thanks to a set of emergent concepts that arise from each of these worlds, but cannot be reduced to any of them. (Kohn 2021, 33; transl. by the Authors)

The third risk arises from the fact that different interests involve conflict. Who and how to decide what set of relations has a more valuable existence? This apparently unsolvable dilemma materializes, for example, in the tensions between animal rights activists and "hunting" Indigenous communities (Kopnina 2017). It is not uncommon to be confronted with different narratives about the same conflict concerning animal rights. Different narratives involve different power relations in structuring whose voice is not only more worthy of being heard, but also is more capable of being louder. Environmental NGOs often picture endangered species as entities that must be safeguarded indiscriminately, regardless of the specific ecosystem and political network in which they live. Wales, koalas, seals, elephants: they all fall into the same set of animals whose lives need special protection. On the other side, there are Indigenous peoples who have been actually living and relating with real animals, inhabiting a concrete environment and grounding both a local economy and a cultural identity through their relation with it. If MSJ aims at judging relationships, it is the type of interspecies bond that needs to be taken under scrutiny. Given that biodiversity loss and the "sixth mass extinction" is an effect of climate change driven by the Western capitalist economy, does the death of a polar bear caused by North Pole melting have the same moral weight as the death of a sea turtle caused by local hunting? How many (Indigenous, Black, Brown, "not-fully") human lives are worth preserving a (inexistent) untouched virgin nature? Is multispecies justice a problem of Western white privileged men and women?

4.2 Detachment From Human Inequalities

Moving our argument further, we think that power dynamics need to be kept at the core of research self-criticism also as a purely human issue. MSJ's scholarship must be careful of the risk of recreating intra-species violent hierarchies. Discrimination, ostracism, dehumanization of non-Western, non-white, non-affluent, non-adapted, and non-resilient individuals may be re-enacted if MSJ doesn't face historical and ongoing colonial, capital and patriarchal global order.

Here we think it's particularly important to join the call for decolonizing Western posthumanism, as several inadvertent neocolonial tendencies can be found. In fact, multispecies approaches run the risk of appropriating Indigenous philosophy. A growing number of Indigenous scholars are blaming posthumanist inclination for expropriating Indigenous concepts in a "cherry-picking" way (Todd 2016). Despite the insistence on ontological multiplicity, in fact, the danger is relying on a:

> ethnographically reductionist work that does not recognise the significant diversity of beings, kinds of relationship, and forms of obligation that characterize human/other-than-human relations in diverse Indigenous worlds. (Fitz-Henry 2021, 6)

MSJ, and posthuman research in general, are advancing theories that may exclude instances of Indigenous knowledge that has been recognizing nonhuman agency for centuries. There's not only a problem of cultural appropriation, but also of disconnection of the spiritual and sometimes personal, kinship, totemic relationship with the nonhuman environment. This caesura reinforces precisely the kind of dualism that MSJ ideally rejects, solidifying a division between the "West and the rest", the material and the spiritual, the scientific and the irrational. In the words of Tanasescu:

> the political implications of Indigenous ways of life are vastly more radical than those of rights of nature. In identifying Indigenous philosophies with rights of nature too closely, we run the risk of diminishing the radical potential of alternative political arrangements. (2020, 25)

The assimilation of indigenous ontologies to processes born within Western culture disarm their transformative potential. Equally, the current process of translation of multi-species ways of life into a language comprehensible to the West, risks subsuming and domesticating a potentially subversive radicality.

This concern leads us straight to our point of problematizing the insufficient political engagement of academic research. Celermajer and colleagues themselves are aware of the fact that the pressing issue of MSJ can sound extremely detached from both governments' discussions and the "bread-and-butter issues" of not privileged people (Celermajer et al. 2021, 133). Multispecies justice and its relational materialist ontology sound paradoxically dissociated from the materiality of the real world. It does seem elitist to claim nonhuman justice without facing our own intra-species discrimination and basic justice needs. As Fitz-Henry put it:

> What work still needs to be done to ensure that potential allies
> and other critical interlocutors who are *not* radical environmen-
> talists are not alienated, distracted, or otherwise put off by what
> can sometimes appear to be the pursuit (and the conceit) of priv-
> ileged, overwhelmingly white scholars? (2021, 3)

Is there a way to focus on cows, corals, or mineral agency without avoid-
ing considering the humans whose possibility of self-determination is
still suppressed, denied, and ostracized? Said otherwise, how can we
-white Western scholars- avoid being caged in an ivory tower and inad-
vertently helping to raise its walls? How can MSJ become an ally for so-
cio-political struggles? And more widely, is it possible to overcome the
separation between academia and social movements? In today's uni-
versity system, is there space for militant research? There is an insuffi-
cient range of politically and legally aligned posthuman studies, not in-
volved enough in concrete political debates and demands. There is not
enough posthuman research that actually tries to understand what sup-
porting first needs human struggles or social movements may entail.[5]

Therefore, we advance the need to reflect critically on our own po-
sitionality, as it's quite clear that even just accepting the role of "re-
searcher" is a political choice. It implies playing the game of the in-
tersectional power structure that keeps the University going, with
its moral pros and cons. Introducing the brilliant Italian edition of
Undercommons (Harney, Moten 2021), the Technoculture Research
Unit working group writes:

> The point is that the surplus value of what we produce at the univer-
> sity – but also elsewhere to the extent that it is social life itself that
> is valued – is very often taken away by us from the minority commu-
> nities of which we are part, where transformative critical thought is
> still produced, which we translate (clean, discipline, transport) in-
> to our academic work. […] a form of professionalization is demand-
> ed of us that is not only the injunction to translate by expropriating
> the commons of our community, thus to administer the world, but to
> also administer everything outside the world, including ourselves.
> (Technoculture Research Unit 2021, 23; transl. by the Authors)

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[5] One area of study that diverges from this pattern is, for example, the rich research
trend of Critical Animal Study (Tylor, Twine 2014; Nocella et al. 2014; Nocella et al.
2017), which unfortunately we cannot afford to explore in detail here. One of the main
concepts on which CAS is based is the idea of total liberation, which embraces a truly
intersectional perspective towards oppression across class, racial, gender, species, and
national boundaries, against global capitalism and domination of all kinds. Its ecoveg-
feminist roots reveal the deep anti-academic soul of this field. As Best writes, the aim
is to avoid "scholasticism, jargon-laden language, apolitical pretense, and theory-for-
theory's sake style and mentality", as CAS is aware of "historically constructed ideol-
ogies and systems of power and domination" (Best 2007, 3).

We clearly do not claim that the only option is the rejection of academic work *per se*, but we are calling for a higher level of self-criticism in an erudite world that, for systemic reasons, consists mostly of privileged people. We think it is vitally important to contrast this kind of extractivist and disciplining academic attitude. Sticking to the case of MSJ, despite its critical self-awareness, it often fails to be inclusive and intersectional by, for example, neglecting and ignoring racist structural violence. Referring to the nonhuman and material turn, Mirzoeff writes:

> This discursive move is not intentionally racist, except insofar as it is a mark of a certain privilege to be able to overlook race. My anxiety with the material, nonhuman, and universalist turns in academic discourse is, then, how quickly we seem to forget all the work that has been done to establish how and why so many people have been designated as nonhuman and bought and sold as material objects. (2018, 7-9)

We detect the urgency to think more fully about processes of dehumanization, racialization, discrimination, and oppression of humans, before extending this process to nonhumans.[6] Moving to the conclusion, we want to stress the need for a deeper understanding of how to relate, as academics, to human "inter-generational rage and loss" (Fitz-Henry 2021, 12) in order to convey different kinds of agencies around the same common anti-hierarchical soul.

5 Conclusion

In this essay, we engaged with the emergent notion of Multispecies Justice in order to survey the potentials and limits of theorizing a relational and more-than-human justice. Our discussion started with the presentation of the MSJ concept, which is rooted in an anti-anthropocentric critique of Climate Justice and in an anti-liberal-humanistic critique of the justice system in general. After an overview of the characteristics of MSJ's innovative subject of justice, we moved to a closer analytical evaluation. Firstly, we delineated an ethico-political critique to the ahistoricity of the flat and entangled ontology on which MSJ is embedded. Then, we presented the material and

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6   Of course, there are great exceptions to this tendency. Just to cite one, Katherin Yusoff's work connects the idea of Blackness, the eradication of indigenous peoples and the ontological wake of geology. In *A Billion Black Anthropocene or None*, she analyzes how "biopolitics [is] achieved through geologic means", as imposing inhuman ahistoricity and inorganicity is both a biopolitical "division of matter" and a regime of "ordering matter", which divides policy from agency (Yusoff 2018, 78).

practical risks of MSJ's operability, concluding with a broader reflection on the need for a more socially engaged academia. We believe in the possibility of letting academic counter-hegemonic tendencies flow out in the real social conflicts, through the interstices left uncovered by biopolitical (interiorised) control.

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