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## INVOLVING ANTHROPOLOGY

# Nobody Likes Dichotomies (But Sometimes You Need Them)

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### ABSTRACT

Environmental anthropologists attempt to accommodate social justice while seeking to reconcile more-than-human relations and responsibilities towards their habitats. This article acknowledges areas of tension between local livelihoods and international conservation efforts, between indigenous peoples and wildlife, between traditional lifeways and development, and finally between different types of ethical assumptions that underlie anthropological advocacy. A number of dichotomies that are inherent in these tensions are discussed. With regard to the ecocentric/anthropocentric dichotomy, I argue that while human and environmental interests are sometimes intertwined, ecocentrism is necessary if non-humans are to be protected outside of utilitarian interests. With regard to the 'neoliberal conservation/local communities' dichotomy, I argue that blaming conservation for the violation of social justice depoliticises the issue of ecological injustice. Through a critical discussion of these dichotomies, this article examines the role of environmental anthropology in addressing today's pressing environmental issues, particularly the loss of biodiversity, with respect to the 'conservation' of communities and that of protected areas.


### KEYWORDS

Anthropocentrism;  
conservation; ecological  
justice; environmental  
anthropology;  
neo-colonialism

## Introduction

Environmental justice usually refers to social justice or peoples' 'rights to nature', and to their unequal exposure to environmental risks and benefits (Gleeson and Low 1999). Sometimes, environmental justice includes ecological justice or 'rights of nature', which refers to the justice between species (Kopnina 2014a). The advocates of the 'rights to nature' approach support different groups' entitlements to the benefits derived from natural resources and ecosystem services (e.g. Chapin 2004; Corry 2011; Holmes 2013; Nonini 2013; Fletcher, Dressler, and Büscher 2015).

Environmental anthropologists, political ecologists and human ecologists have focused their research and considerations on the social and economic rights of disadvantaged communities, on the unfair distribution of the benefits of conservation, or on the grievances caused by the establishment of protected areas (e.g. Holmes 2013; Büscher 2014; Fletcher, Dressler, and Büscher 2015; Duffy et al. 2016). Conservation is criticised for displacing local communities (e.g. Chapin 2004), and privileging environmental non-governmental

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organisations (ENGOs) or other parties with financial resources (e.g. West and Brockington 2012; Minter et al. 2014). Anthropologists have highlighted the social inconsistencies associated with conservation alliances, arguing that they entrench economic inequality and require global consumption practices (such as in the domains of tourism or trophy hunting) to generate conservation revenue (e.g. West and Brockington 2012; Sullivan 2014).

In the context of neoliberal management, nature and conservation are often considered to be a social construction and to reflect ‘nature as capitalist imaginary’ (Fletcher, Dressler, and Büscher 2015) by neo-colonial, elitist, western ‘environmentalists’ who have ‘produced nature’ (Castree 1995) or even ‘fictitious conservation’ (Büscher 2014). Some have argued that the intellectual and political dichotomisation of the ‘wild’ and ‘domesticated’, or the ecocentric and the anthropocentric, is artificial and unhelpful (for instance, Ingold and Pálsson 2013). In a tellingly titled article, *Against Wilderness*, Fletcher (2009, 178–179) reflects:

So what we need is to eliminate the distinction between the wild and tame entirely, to realize that the “wild” is a human idea, that it has never truly existed as an objective reality, and that, in the final analysis, it has caused us more harm than good.

Thus, he concludes, ‘... we find ourselves confronted with a counterintuitive truth: As long as we need wilderness we will never be free’ (2009, 178–179).

In opposition to this view stands the argument that wilderness is *not* socially contingent and that the recognition of nature is a cross-cultural phenomenon (Dunlap and York 2008). In Leopold’s (1949, 188) formulation, wilderness is ‘the raw material out of which man has hammered the artifact called civilization’. Leopold’s vision is that wilderness, interconnected with diversity, complexity, and subtlety, has been an inspiration and impetus for the multitude of human cultures that exist across the globe. This vision has profound implications for the cultural possibility of preserving nature before ‘the only wilderness that remains is one that is colonized, domesticated, and manufactured in the neoliberal image’ (Derby, Piersol, and Blenkinsop 2015, 384). Supporters of the ‘rights of nature’ perspective (e.g. Cafaro and Primack 2014; Kopnina 2012a, 2014a, 2016a, 2016b) point out that the refusal to acknowledge the objectivity of wilderness is a denial ‘that we are residents on a planet where there is nature that transcends humans, and that various organisms pursue their own lives independently of our culture’ (Rolston 1997, 40). Supporters of conservation point out the multiple instances of non-human displacement and ecocide, or killing of millions of non-humans for meat or other uses, or destruction of or loss of ecosystem (Higgins 2010), and call for the recognition of ecological justice (e.g. Strang 2016). This is also the point of view this paper will discuss, and defend; it will do so by addressing the underlying anthropocentric bias and the question of ‘neo-colonialism’.

The following sections will address the tensions between human and indigenous rights on the one hand, and ecological justice on the other. It will begin by discussing the dichotomous perspectives of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, and follow by exploring the related dichotomy between what is seen as neo-colonial, neoliberal conservation on the one hand, and marginalised local communities on the other. Following Strang (2016), I will argue that justice needs to be considered more broadly as something that depends not only on upholding the simultaneous common good of the human, but also of the non-human.

## Anthropocentrism/Ecocentrism Dichotomy

Anthropologists have often argued that the anthropocentrism versus ecocentrism (or biocentrism) dichotomy entrenches the problematic culture-nature dualism (e.g. Ingold and Pálsson 2013; Sullivan 2014). It is argued that political ecology cannot be properly conceptualised unless the Nature and Culture dichotomy is dissolved (for instance, Brockington 2002). It is also assumed that human and nature interests largely coincide, and that the so-called pragmatic anthropocentric approach leads to positive environmental outcomes (e.g. Norton and Hargrove 1986). The Nature/Culture dichotomy is seen as an obstacle to finding the common ground, since the two ‘camps’ (that prioritise one over the other) tend to be rigid, exclusive, and confrontational (Flores and Clark 2001).

Yet, empirically, ecological and human interests do not always converge. According to Katz and Hargrove (1999), anthropocentric motivations for environmental protection can *sometimes* be beneficial to nature. This is, however, *only* the case in the context of human-connected environments – in the case of the availability of (clean) water, air, and soil, for example – but *not* in the context of species extinction. Indeed, at present, many species go extinct as human welfare is not contingent on their survival. Therefore, moral ecocentrism is *necessary* if the interests of non-humans and their habitats are to be protected outside of utilitarian interests (Rolston 1997; Crist 2012).

In deconstructing the dichotomy between humans and non-humans, we might be simultaneously erasing the issue of human chauvinism and speciesism. For example, if we were to reject the dichotomy between slaves and slave owners (because they are all humans, after all), we might also be de-politicising the necessity to critically address the institution of slavery itself. Similarly, if we reject the distinction between the categories of men and women (again because they are all humans, after all), feminists might lose the reason to support the gender discrimination argument.

Nobody likes dichotomies such as that between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, or humans and nature. Yet, practically and ethically speaking, they may be necessary, particularly where blatant discriminations against non-humans continue. Such discriminations are evident with respect to animal treatment in the meat industry, in medical experimentation, or in the incidence of roadkill (Thorne 1998; Crist 2012; Desmond 2013). Invoking peoples’ understanding of their moral relationships with nature-beyond-the-human in non-anthropocentric terms is a necessary measure (Sullivan 2014).

## NGO and Local Communities Dichotomy

Another relevant dichotomy that needs to be questioned is that between the capitalist, colonial, neoliberal ‘imperial enterprise’ and the marginalised, discriminated, traditional cultures, or poor people. Critics have pointed out that conservation has colonial origins and restricts or prohibits local practices under the auspices of protecting wilderness (for instance, Brockington 2002; Chapin 2004; Carrier and West 2009; Baviskar 2013). It has been argued that national parks, pioneered in the United States, denied indigenous peoples’ rights, evicted them from their homelands, and provoked social conflict (Keller and Turek 1999; Cultural Survival 2015).

von Hellermann (2007) and von Hellermann and Usuanlele (2009) have argued that narratives of environmental crisis served to justify colonial and post-colonial conservation

intervention. These ‘dominant discourses about wildlife, poaching, and the extinction crisis’ (Holmes 2013, 74) resulted in a ‘politics of *hysteria* in conservation’ by Western environmentalists (Büscher 2015). West and Brockington (2012, 2) further state:

Environmentalism went south, so to speak, and inserted itself into the power struggles over environmental governance in the recently decolonized nations. While there, it got snugly in bed with its old enemy, corporate capitalism.

Colonialism, corruption, and capitalism are often linked together by those that claim that environmentalists are ‘waging war to save biodiversity’ (e.g. Duffy 2014). According to Duffy and St. John (2013, ii), ‘poaching in Sub Saharan Africa was produced via the historical legacy of colonialism’. Likewise, Holmes (2013, 75) gives the following interpretation of the case of wildlife spearing in Amboseli:

here resistance was effective because it targeted highly visible flagship species, such as lion and elephant, where attacks on wildlife could relatively easily lead to a noticeable decrease on their numbers, the preservation of which were a key conservation goal. Attacking high value, high profile wildlife was a high impact form of resistance which carried few risks or costs, giving local people a trump card which could cause conservation to fail. Yet such powerful low risk options are rarely available, and the literature suggests that while such weapons of the weak can have some impact in limiting or delaying certain protected area policies, they are generally unable to seriously challenge the existence of protected areas or their ability to protect biodiversity.

These ‘weapons of the weak’ (killing wildlife to express community discontent with conservation policies) are rarely condemned by supporters of exclusive social justice. In a similar way, illegal deforestation and other environmentally damaging practices are excused when local people profit from it. For instance, von Hellermann (2007) states that the Taungya cocoa and plantain farms in the state of Edo, which transport thousands of tons of plantain to Lagos every week, are indeed ‘illegal’ because they are largely unknown to senior forest officers. Yet, these activities provide a vital source of livelihood for the many farmers and traders involved. Thus, according to Von Hellerman’s interpretation, this ‘illegality’ needs to be questioned. Those that condemn anti-poaching efforts imply that the victims of these efforts are the poor local communities (Büscher and Ramutsindela 2016).

### **The Issue of Political Correctness**

As Goodall (2015) has written, the struggle over poaching is not between conservation elites and poor communities, but between heavily armed poachers using equipment ranging from helicopters to advanced weaponry and operating as part of international criminal cartels, and those that try to protect the most vulnerable animal communities. For example, the traditional snaring of African rhinos for bush meat has largely been replaced by targeted shooting using assault weapons and high-powered rifles in order to obtain the horns (Bennett 2015, 191). Most violence that occurs in conservation areas in the name of conservation is in no way directed towards the local people, but towards the criminal poaching gangs.<sup>1</sup>

While I am aware of contexts in which indigenous claims have emerged, and very much support indigenous rights, additional ethical questions need to be addressed. What gives one group of people the right to hunt? For example, why do the Inuit people have an

exclusive right to seal hunting? If these same indigenous peoples (or poor farmers, or discriminated minorities) become rich and move away from their homelands, do they also lose their exclusive right to their traditional practices? What are the moral basis for eliminating numerous members of wildlife in order to safeguard human rights? In other words, what justifies – on philosophical, ethical, or practical grounds – exclusive social justice?

With population growth, ‘traditional’ and commercial activities have merged and hunting weapons have improved. The exclusive right given to Australian Aborigines to hunt wallabies, or to the Inuit people to hunt seals, seems to predominantly reflect political correctness motivated by post-colonial guilt. The preoccupation with the heritage of colonialism influences even multispecies ethnography:

The orangutan herself was subjected to constraints of space rooted in colonial and postcolonial histories of making territories. And those constraints were, for her, gendered insofar that her sex affected her relationship to space. For instance, whenever managers thought she should get pregnant, she would be forced into captivity with a male orangutan for the purpose of procreation. (Salazar Parreñas 2015)

The deliberate abuse, and even massacre, of wild apes (Eckersley 2007) and their enslavement can indeed be compared to colonial practices. In fact, the inverse relationship between human interests and the well-being of ecosystems bears remarkable resemblance to instances of colonial, racial, and gender inequalities (Shoreman-Ouimet and Kopnina 2015b). However, in the quote above it seems that colonialism and gender preoccupations overshadow the perception of a simple fact: the orangutan was caged and forced to mate.

Some of the ‘colonial’ practices or ideologies stemming from the European Enlightenment such as the drive for equality and individual rights are largely supported by anthropologists. Most anthropologists even implicitly support selected colonial prohibitions such as tribal wars, infanticide as a traditional means of birth control, or other ‘savage rituals’ condemned by the UN Resolution on Human Rights. Such attitudes stand in sharp contrast with those adopted towards other traditional practices that did not place human life above that of non-humans.

For example, early anthropological descriptions of rituals connected to the violation of tree taboos are discussed in *The Golden Bough* by Sir James Frazer (1854–1941). Frazer ([1922] 2012) described severe punishments for violating the trees in ancient Germany (e.g. ‘The culprit’s navel was to be cut out and nailed to the part of the tree which he had peeled, and he was to be driven round and round the tree till all his guts were wound about its trunk’ (2012, 98)), as well as in Africa (for instance, the Ewespeaking peoples used to honour some of the silk-cotton trees by occasionally sacrificing humans, which were fastened to the trunk or laid against the foot of the tree (2012, 99)). It is unlikely that anthropologists would celebrate such traditional rituals today.

It is therefore ironic that while many anthropologists today defend traditional culture, they would probably cringe at practices such as human sacrifice that have once placed human life on the par with non-human lives. No such cringing occurs in cases of ‘traditional’ animal hunting. A very Western language of human rights and economic entitlements is evoked. While Martin, Akol, and Gross-Camp (2015) speak of ‘intolerable social impacts of conservation’ and call conservationists to consider distributive justice in the case of vulnerable communities, distributive justice among non-humans (and their entitlement to a fair share of resources) is simply not discussed. As noted by Strang (2016),

environmental justice defined in social terms, while articulating ideas about citizenship and enfranchisement, is entangled with economic development. The ‘rights to nature’ approach tends to assume that local communities have a right to profit from nature, while the ‘rights of nature’ approach questions the very economic rationale of exploiting the environment. We therefore need to draw a line between a legitimate criticism of neo-colonial practices, and the negation of ecological justice for the sake of economic development under the guise of pursuing social justice.

### Demographic and Life-Style Changes

While so-called traditional ways of living are often linked to relatively sustainable subsistence practices, this sustainability was only possible because of low population densities and pre-industrial methods of production. In contrast, modern lifeways are characterised by a high-population density as well as the conversion of traditional practices and ideologies into the global market mentality (Sponsel 2013). With the introduction of Western medicine, most populations have expanded many-fold. For example, between 1991 and 2006, the Indigenous population of Australia has increased by 2.6% per year on average (ABS 2015), while the population of wallabies has drastically declined (Strang 2016).

A growing human population tends to exacerbate the problem of resource scarcity (Bateson 1972; Smail 2003). While in the past, small population densities and simpler technologies of production did indeed allow for ‘sustainable communities’ to effectively manage their resources, this situation has drastically changed (Sponsel 2013). Demographic pressure leads to an increased demand for land, as well as increased instances of wildlife killing to protect harvests (Sinclair 2015). As Bateson (1972, 497) has observed, the very first requirement for ecological stability is a balance between the rates of birth and death. For better or for worse, humanity has tampered with the death rate, especially by controlling the major epidemic diseases and the death of infants. Today, there is a growing proportional difference between the number of humans (over seven billion) and the number of non-humans, especially the apex predators left in the wild. While apex predators are normally controlled by environmental constraints, this is no longer the case for humans. It seems that

the bigger the population, the faster it grows; the more technology we have, the faster the rate of new invention; and the more we believe in our ‘power’ over an enemy environment, the more ‘power’ we seem to have and the more spiteful the environment seems to be. (Bateson 1972, 494)

### Anthropocentric Bias

An anthropocentric bias extends to poaching and to dislocation, since critics of conservation do not discuss non-human displacements or indeed colonisation in a broader sense. The defining characteristic of ‘colonisation’ in general, along with the increase of social inequalities, is the ever-greater instrumentalism in human engagements with non-human inhabitants (Strang 2016). This entails the self-proclaimed right to undermine another species’ very existence and the evolutionary unfolding in the noble quest for social justice (Kopnina 2012a, 2012b, 2014a; Cafaro and Primack 2014), in effect condoning ‘nonhuman genocide’ (Crist 2012, 140). Accusations that conservationists are ‘out of

control' to save the near-extinct species (Büscher 2015) testifies to a robust anthropocentric bias, and a refusal to acknowledge the legal repercussions of ecocide (Higgins 2010).

The perpetuation of social inequality and the increasing extinctions of non-human species fundamentally alter the ethics of anthropological practice. These ethics are subject to value judgements – of what or who is accorded rights, and in what proportion. Caplan (2003) has argued that extreme cultural relativity (in which it is possible, for example, to ignore major abuses of human rights) is an abdication of moral responsibility. By the same token, presenting even the concern over loss of biodiversity as a social construction of sentimental elites, or by profit-seeking neo-colonial regimes, abdicates moral responsibility to non-humans.

The proponents of social justice keep perpetuating the dichotomies between the indigenous communities and the Western elites (e.g. Chapin 2004), or between poor rural peasants and neoliberal conservationists (e.g. Holmes 2013). However, historically, protected areas were rarely created to benefit particular groups of people (such as tourists), because most national parks have been established *for* the people, everywhere in the world, and not just in post-colonial nations (e.g. Doak et al. 2015). In fact, national parks can be seen as *protecting* cultural identity against severe changes to the local environment, such as logging. As Brosius (1999, 39) has noted in the case of Penan in Malaysia, 'logging not only undermines the basis of Penan subsistence but, by transforming sites with biographical, social, and historical significance, also destroys those things that are iconic of their existence as a society'. Conservation does not threaten people's liberty, as Fletcher (2009) would have it – rather it enables one to live in a world of natural richness. In the words of Wakild (2015, 44):

... history in many cases shows that people were not kicked out; national parks were designed with them in mind. Yet, the ways parks and peoples merged did not stop the rapaciousness of development around them. The lack of historical introspection, context, or nuance in denunciations like Chapin's beg a re-evaluation of the broader conservation landscape.

The critics of the national park model forget that the point of the *American Wilderness Act* (1964) was the protection of wilderness *for the people* (Shoreman-Ouimet and Kopnina 2015b). While the critics talk of exclusion, the parks were in fact created in order to be accessible to the public, and in most cases allowing people to either profit from or enjoy nature as a national and widely shared good (Doak et al. 2015). Local communities are often direct beneficiaries of biodiversity conservation, which also alleviates poverty and provides nutrition for the most vulnerable communities (e.g. Goodall 2015). Thus, while in some cases, dichotomies between the 'guilty' and the 'victimised' are necessary, in other cases they obscure realities. To quote Crist (2015, 93):

The literature challenging traditional conservation strategies as locking people out, and as locking away sources of human livelihood, rarely tackles either the broader distribution of poverty or its root social causes; rather, strictly protected areas are scapegoated, and wild nature, once again, is targeted to take the fall for the purported betterment of people, while domination and exploitation of nature remain unchallenged. The prevailing mindset of humanity's entitlement to avail itself of the natural world without limitation is easily, if tacitly, invoked by arguments that demand that wilderness (the last safe zone for species, processes, ecologies, nonhuman individuals, climatic disruption, and indigenous ways) offer up its 'natural resources'—in the name of justice.



Allowing *all* people to profit from nature is not realistic in the long term. Due to population pressures and increasing scarcity of land, supposedly ‘traditional’ practices, such as slash and burn agriculture or swidden farming (Henley 2011), are occurring in so many localities, and without restrictions, that the ‘sustainability’ of even ‘traditional’ farming on this scale becomes highly questionable.

## Dichotomies and Divisions

The issue today is that while some social scientists highlight the importance of combining social and ecological interests in their work and suggest alternative models, many seem implicitly opposed to conservation altogether. The reconciliation will not be easy. As Kashwan (2015, 3) explains, the ‘rather simplistic tradeoffs between social justice and environmental conservation does not necessarily lead to the proverbial win–win solutions at the intersection of social justice and environmental conservation’.

The polemical extremes of social and ecological justice stances emphasise the importance of a middle road of cooperation that acknowledges human as well as non-human rights (Shoreman-Quimet and Kopnina 2015a). Environmental anthropology, with its emphasis on self-reflexivity, cultural relativism and political ecology, can play an important role in suggesting solutions to the environmental issues if, and only if, the anthropocentric bias is removed.

I do acknowledge the complexity of interactions within conservation and appreciate the fact that many social scientists have highlighted the detrimental ecological outcomes of social injustices in conservation contexts. Yet, I cannot condone strategically employed dichotomies of the ‘guilty’ elites and the ‘oppressed’ communities. While not all people can be held accountable for environmental destruction (*e.g.* Sponsel 2013), neither can all ‘conservationists’, ENGOs, or ‘environmentalists’ be conflated with the capitalist, neo-colonial enterprise. Yet, while economic development remains a powerful and complex constellation of public and private agencies including multilateral and bilateral donors and a vast array of NGOs ranging from small grassroots concerns to large transnational organisations (Lewis 2005), the same is true of conservation.

There is a widely shared assumption that poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation are often caused or exacerbated by industrial development (for instance, see Adams *et al.* 2004; Duffy and St. John 2013; Duffy *et al.* 2016). Despite the optimism of ecological modernisation and post-material-values theories, wealthier societies continue to be the drivers of unsustainable production and consumption (*e.g.* Kopnina 2014b). However, a fair distribution of natural resources does not diminish environmental degradation. In dividing the economic ‘pie’ between people, debates about fair division still ignore the question as to *what* is in the ‘pie’. Whether the ‘pie’ feeds the lucky few or the ‘bottom billion’, the environment is still, metaphorically speaking, stuffed in the crust.

It does not help that some academics are turning against conservation in the name of the oppressed. The dichotomy between vulnerable communities and profit-seeking conservationists obscures what conservation really stands for. By focusing on conservationist violence against poachers and the ‘militarisation’ of conservation, a sense of proportion is lost. When one talks of ‘war to save biodiversity’ (Duffy 2014), no proportional ‘body count’ is done. If it had been done it would clearly appear that the main victims are non-humans.

## Efficacy of Conservation

The ‘fortress conservation’ model (Brockington 2002) is not just about the rights of people, human poverty, and social injustice, or about a manipulation by the elites. Ecological data show that strict protection can be efficient. There is strong evidence that strict protection with limited access for eco-tourism can be crucial to the survival of many species (e.g. Bekoff 2013; Cafaro and Primack 2014; Wuerthner, Crist, and Butler 2014; Doak et al. 2015; Wakild 2015). The creation of large, strictly protected areas, with wildlife corridors as well as rewilding programs, can minimise human–wildlife conflicts and the damage to crops (for instance, Butler 2015; Doak et al. 2015). More generally, ‘wilderness preservation was meant as a gesture of planetary modesty and a badly needed exercise of restraint on the part of a species notorious for its excess’ (Nash 2012, 304).

At a time when efforts to conserve biodiversity correspond with green grabbing by large corporations and food insecurity, one needs to be concerned about vulnerable communities. During a horrendous period of colonial history, many indigenous populations have shrunk due to massacres and diseases. But this is not the whole picture. I agree with Strang (2016) that as anthropologists, we should campaign for justice for people, but we should also recognise the short-sightedness as well as the moral deficiency of prioritising this care at the expense of non-humans. Ultimately, we cannot have justice for people *before* justice for the environment, because separating these will lead to neither. We need to consider justice more broadly, as something that depends on simultaneously upholding the common good of the human and the non-human.

It is one thing to claim that militarisation by conservationists in order to counter wild-crime will not achieve their goals to conserve, yet it is a very different thing to assert that such militarisation efforts are *per se* immoral, unjust, and anti-human. If the distinction between poachers, ‘traditional’ hunting practices, and retaliatory killing of animals by local communities is blurred, the mass slaughter is likely to continue.

## Reflection: Common Interests

The overall thrust of the social justice argument is that the moral duty is exclusively to vulnerable people. Yet, ironically, the social justice, human rights, and equality that enlightened (and politically correct) academics embrace, although outwardly noble and admirable, are not a cross-cultural phenomenon. In fact, an anthropocentrism, or rather industrocentrism (industrialist ideology), which is not sufficiently cognisant of non-human species, is in itself a product of Western heritage (Kidner 2014). Exploitation of nature is nothing more than a product of our industrial ideology. This industrocentrism equally affects ecosystems and cultural systems and is a clear signal that human symbolic abilities have been parasitised by a system which is hostile to, and ultimately replaces, the natural order from which it emerged (Kidner 2014). While environmentalists are far from a uniform, at its core conservation fights the same ‘enemy’: industrocentrism and injustice. Recognising this, supporters of both social and of ecological justice object to the commodification of nature, either because it promotes social injustice (Sullivan 2014) or because it demotes non-human species to commodities (Crist 2012).

As Holmes (2013) notes, despite the claims that community consent and cooperation is essential for the success of conservation, local support is not always essential for

conservation. Perhaps it is time to start asking whether indigenous peoples are allies of conservation, what sort of nature they protect, and under what conditions they protect it (Nadasdy 2005). What deserves more attention are the cases of defence of environment is instigated by native communities themselves. There is plenty of evidence that grassroots resistance movements are not an elitist enterprise and that protection of nature is a cross-cultural phenomenon (e.g. Dunlap and York 2008; Milfont and Schultz 2016). While the list of Western conservationists and environmentalists continues to lengthen, there is an even longer list of indigenous environmental activists (Kopnina 2015; Shoreman-Ouimet and Kopnina 2015b). Besides the internationally recognised activists, such as the Noble prize-winner and the founder of the Green Belt Movement, Wangari Muta Maathai, there are many less-known non-Western activists. Costa Rican Jairo Mora Sandoval (Fendt 2015) and Cambodian Chut Wutty (Global Witness 2013) have both sacrificed their lives defending nature. These are examples of local conservation organisations or individual activists that, while motivated by different value sets, can be generally regarded as oppositional to an industrocentric way of relating to nature (Kidner 2014). What seems more constructive than the bashing of international ENGOs is to direct criticism to industrocentrism, which denies prospects for nurturing alternative values and practices (Lewis 2005; Martin, McGuire, and Sullivan 2013; Sullivan 2014). Some progress in already made, as many anthropologists are already at pains to work with and support conservation activities and organisations, instructing conservation practitioners who can learn from local idioms for understanding people's surroundings (West and Brockington 2006). Indeed, understanding the meaning-production within different sociocultural groups, based on history, language, and social practices (Strathern 1980, in West and Brockington 2006), can be very helpful in providing alternative models for thinking about nature and sustainability.

I would like to expand the notion of justice by highlighting the need to consider animal rights and ecological justice (Rolston 1997; Crist 2012). While the scope of this article does not allow for a review of the animal rights literature, a reasonable hypothesis can be made that all living beings do not want to die and want to avoid pain. Supporters of social justice fail to recognise the victimhood of non-humans who will never be able to speak in their own defence, even when threatened by extinction (Crist and Kopnina 2014). While non-humans cannot convey their point of view, this is not a sufficient reason for excluding them from moral consideration (e.g. Eckersley 2007).

In the vacuum created in the 'after nature' (Escobar 1999) space, nobody can hear an animal scream or a tree fall. To oppose this tendency, we need to resist settling for a colonised environment as an easy substitute for the wild(er)ness (Derby, Piersol, and Blenkinsop 2015). Instead, a re-conception of combined social and ecological rights could serve to expose the 'common enemy': rapacious and self-serving industrial capitalism. Butler (2015, xxiv) notes, the 'conservation movement arose as a counterrevolutionary force in response to the land degradation and wildlife holocaust associated with the expansion of industrial civilization, a wave that extirpated indigenous cultures as well as native species'. Indeed, the conservationist's

foremost tool – protected areas – rejects a colonialist, imperialist attitude toward the living Earth. The designation of protected areas is an expression of humility about the limits of

human knowledge and a gesture of respect toward our fellow creatures, allowing them to flourish in their homes without fear of persecution. (Butler 2015, xxiv).

Many environmentalists' greatest concern is with the downtrodden, specifically downtrodden non-humans. In the words of Milton (1995, 12):

Environmentalists also speak for other categories whose needs might otherwise go unrepresented. In particular, they speak for non-human species, for 'nature' ... 'mother earth' or some other personification of the biosphere, and for future generations of human beings. Environmental disputes often take the form of a struggle to establish the needs of these categories. With no voice (and no votes) of their own, non-human species and future generations are at the mercy of interests whose advocates compete for the right to define their needs ...

As Milton (1995, 2) has noted, an environmentalist critique of anthropology emerges to question some of the discipline's central principles, just as the feminist critique did in the past, 'yet for the present, this possibility remains largely undeveloped'. I would like to open up this possibility. By highlighting the blatant anti-conservation rhetoric, I tried to demonstrate that the truly significant dichotomy is that between those who care and do not care about the lives and suffering of non-humans. To overcome this division, the ecological outcomes of conservation, beyond the question of social utility, need to be considered.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed dichotomies between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, between local livelihoods and international conservation efforts, between indigenous people and wildlife, between traditional lifeways and development, and finally between different types of ethical assumptions that underlie anthropological advocacy. While some of the critique directed at top-down conservation is well-taken, in particular in the context of social inequalities and economic vulnerabilities, it must also be noted that conservation critics view conservation only in relation to local communities and dismiss ecological justice. As far as both the rights *to* nature and the rights *of* nature are concerned, the dichotomy between elitist capitalist conservation and indigenous, poor communities is false. This dichotomisation lacks the long-term perspective on the state of the planet, characterised by increased human population and industrialisation, and affecting both the flourishing of local environments and the people. Considering that dichotomies serve as potentially powerful rhetoric devices, the lack of concern for the outcomes of conservation is worrying. The accusation that conservation violates social justice testifies to a robust anthropocentric bias, a refusal to acknowledge mutual interconnectedness of human and environmental interests as well as the legal repercussions of ecocide.

It was argued here that it is indeed important to recognise that the issue of conservation cannot be seen as purely ecological because it always involves people. It is the people who bring their different assumptions about nature and culture to the environmental table, and it is social relations and structural inequalities between people that often influence the outcomes of conservation. But it is equally important to emphasise that while non-humans are unable to bring anything to this negotiating table, we cannot exclude them from considerations of justice simply because they cannot speak our language. We therefore need

more robust theories of human–environmental relationships. We need models that recognise the mutually constitutive processes that compose people and environments (Strang 2016). We need to enable a bioethical position that encompasses the needs of other species and gives *simultaneous* consideration to justice for humans and non-humans.

## Note

1. At the time of writing this article, February 2016, a British conservationist Roger Gower was shot dead by the poachers in Tanzania’s Katavi National Park (Tremblay 2016).

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