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Echoes of the Anthropocene: Reimagining Legal Consciousness in the Face of Ecological Crisis

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Abstract

The concept of the "Anthropocene," referring to the interconnection between human activity and what was once considered the natural environment, has emerged as a direct response to the radical changes in climate and ecosystems that have transformed the planet's ecology and potentially contributed to the pandemic crisis. Human agency, long regulated through legal instruments, now takes centre stage in the management and stewardship of the planet. Law, as both a reservoir of emotionally significant social symbols and a powerful regulatory tool, plays a crucial role in this context. Therefore, understanding the evolution of environmental legal frameworks is essential. This understanding encompasses the relationship between law, society, the environment, and the role of the citizen, encapsulated in the concept of "legal consciousness". Moreover, law operates through conceptual categories and frameworks that construct, communicate, and interpret social and cultural relationships. Given that the Anthropocene is not only an ecological condition but also a state of consciousness, environmental awareness must align with legal consciousness. This moment offers an opportunity to reshape legal culture. Several questions arise: How have legal frameworks been reflected in the words, actions, and interpretations of ordinary citizens? Is it necessary to rewrite legal terminology or redefine legal values and frameworks to depict the interconnection between nature and human activity? What role, if any, does the educational system and media play in shaping this consciousness? This paper employs a theoretical and

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interpretative methodology, drawing on legal theory, environmental history, and analysis of legal consciousness, to examine the role of law in shaping human responses to the environmental crises of the Anthropocene. Furthermore, what are the most effective ways to communicate contemporary legal principles, such as the rights of nature? Should these rules be developed through open and participatory processes? Finally, what lessons can be drawn from environmental history to inform future legal frameworks and values? These questions guide the exploration of how legal systems must evolve in response to the challenges of the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Legal consciousness, Nature, law, Environmental awareness

Introduction

The exponential expansion of capitalism and the rapidly increasing consumption of primary resources and energy have led to a correspondingly severe global environmental crisis. The contemporary model of sustainable growth cannot adequately address the chain-reaction consequences within the international environment in which the economy currently operates. The Earth, as a global ecosystem, is directly affected, along with the institutional infrastructures and cultural perceptions that underpin these systems. In a rapidly changing world shaped by constant interactions, understanding the mechanisms driving these transformations is essential for analysing the functioning of Law and the legal culture within any society. It is crucial to outline the interaction between the values embedded in legal regulations and those held by the citizens they target, as well as how societies perceive the environment and the politics of its conservation.

To achieve this, the terms “legal consciousness” and “legal culture” must be decoded. Law regulates Technoscience—a sociological activity that amplifies environmental risk. The transition from the “natural catastrophes’ age” to an era of man-made catastrophes is closely tied to the explosion of Technoscience and the resulting endangerments. The management of these dangers, stemming from Technoscience, is intertwined with the allocation of social trust between Technoscience and Law, as they are mutually legalized through shared references. Consequently, the boundaries between the natural and the cultural have become blurred, displaced by advancements in technology and science.

This is an era where “the ruin has become our collective home” (Tsing, 2015, p. 10). Precarity–the pervasive sense of constant uncertainty and the failure of modern capitalism’s promise of progress–is ever present, accompanied by the reality of unregulated risk infiltrating daily life. Human rights to a safe and healthy environment increasingly appear to be an empty

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shell, while the duty to preserve ecosystems in the state they were delivered is repeatedly breached.

The preservation and protection of the environment, both as a regulatory and ethical issue, are more relevant than ever. Social theory and emerging paradigms in legal thought such as environmental rights, attempt to democratize environmental risk management and mobilize citizens to participate in solutions.

Thus, research investigates whether a radical shift—such as recognizing rights in nature—can and should be made to address the inadequacies of the current status quo and mitigate the planet's environmental risk and dangers. The cultural narrative, originating from the articulation of scientific hypothesis that heralds the Anthropocene era, challenges the anthropocentric perspective of human-nature relations. It has led almost to the emergence of a new planetary legal consciousness. The example of New Zealand, where the Whanganui River was recognized as a legal entity with rights and obligations under the influence of the Maori tribe's history, traditions, and legal claims, is examined.

Approaching the Term "Legal Consciousness"

The approach to and conceptual definition of the terms "legal culture" and "legal consciousness" is complex and, at times, challenging (Nelken, 1997, p. 1-2). Lawrence Friedman describes "legal culture" as an "abstract" and indefinite term, admitting it is "a difficult concept to understand" and noting significant challenges in defining it (Cotterrel, 1997, p. 13-32). Does this term ultimately emphasize the living "mosaic" of society?

Friedman argues that the legal culture of a society can be indirectly reflected through questions posed to citizens about their views on legal rules, the delivery of justice, or by observing their daily lives (Friedman, 1997, p. 33-40). The notions of "thought" and "understanding" are particularly important (Friedman, 1969, p. 29-44), as they pertain to what people in a given society think about Law and justice. Legal culture is considered a set of values and attitudes integrated into everyday practices (Blankerbourg, 1997, p. 64-65), forming a subcategory of culture.

Moreover, legal consciousness is interpreted as "the ways in which people understand and make use of laws" (Sally, 1990, p. 5) and the means by which individuals "participate in the process of creating the concept of legality" (Ewick & Silbey, 1998, p. 35). Legal consciousness encompasses perceptions of legislation, judicial functioning, law enforcement, and other "concepts, sources of power, and cultural practices often recognized as legal" (Ewick & Silbey, 1998, p. 35).

The approach to legal culture is thus vital for societal transformation. To comprehend and potentially reshape the legal culture of any society, it must

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be studied using methodological tools such as theoretical analysis, comparative methods, and empirical research. (Silbey, 2001. p. 474-477). Therefore, understanding how ordinary citizens perceive Law is key to understanding and transforming legal culture and consciousness (Cotterrel, 2009, p. 376).

Benda Beckmann (2019, p. 269) argues that only through research into how legal rules are integrated into broader social structures and everyday life can their role in society be fully understood. Research in this field has been described as an investigation into "the forms of participation and interpretation through which active subjects build, maintain, reproduce, or correct the current (disputed or hegemonic) conceptual structures regarding justice and Laws" (Friedmann,1997, p. 38).

The investigation centres on people's views of Law and justice (e.g., sources of law, legislation, vague legal concepts, legal arguments), the role of experts in legal processes, effective methods of dispute resolution, or approaches to discouraging injustice. This includes examining how citizens' perceptions of legal schemas can ultimately influence the creation of legal rules and the delivery of justice. How does the consolidation of a legal rule work from the bottom up? How do legal rules and justice function within different contexts, and how are they understood and perceived within social settings? (Nelken, 2004, p. 84).

In any case, the culture of a society, of which legal culture is a part, cannot be separated from the status of "the human", as it has primarily addressed human relations thus far (Nelken, 2004, p. 29). UNESCO's World Declaration on Cultural Diversity emphasises that culture must be viewed as a set of distinct spiritual, material, mental, and emotional characteristics of a society or social group, encompassing art, lifestyles, ways of co-existence, value systems, traditions, and beliefs (Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Co-operation, 1966).

This system consists of a *continuum* and succession of practices that both reproduce and transform it. Together, the system and its practices form a concrete entity co-constructed by ordinary citizens. These citizens enrich the legal framework by creating understandable and reasonable new legal schemes and claims through the semantic redefinition of ideas such as work, property, and community consent.

Legal culture ultimately incorporate a variety of images, assemblies, and narratives about justice and the environment, as well as interpretive schemes and sources that not only semantically reflect thought and action but also enable individuals to construct a self-sustaining, holistic view of the legal and moral world. This includes law, justice, their associated claims and protection, and the obligations imposed by law (Saguy & Stuart, 2008, p. 619).

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Individuals participate in the construction of legitimacy by expressing their own conceptions of Law and justice (legal consciousness). Social forces are mobilised by groups and individuals who act as agents of change. It is widely acknowledged that international cooperation, particularly in critical areas like the environment, can only develop on the basis of shared values, including democracy as a principle of governance, respect for human rights, and environmental stewardship.

This co-operation necessitates, to some extent, the harmonization of legal cultures and legislation and requires prior mapping of the legal culture of each society. As Friedman observes, "For each individual society, we have little valuable data on its legal culture, because we never bothered to collect them" (Friedman, 1997, p. 38).

In exploring the role of the environment within this intricate "mosaic" of "legal civilization", this study seeks to illustrate the concept of "legal culture" and the current evolution of legal rules. Examining legal culture reveals tensions, disputes, and negotiations. New rules of law and legal frameworks continuously emerge to address evolving needs, particularly in the field of environmental protection and technological advancements, which appear inevitable. The resulting legal landscape is a product of social evolution (Friedman, 2011, p. 40).

Methodology

The methodology employed in this research is primarily based on theoretical and critical analysis of existing legal concepts, frameworks, and their intersections with the Anthropocene. Historical analysis and legal case studies complement this approach. A multidisciplinary perspective integrates insights from legal theory, environmental philosophy, and anthropology to critically examine how legal consciousness and legal culture respond to the environmental challenges posed by the Anthropocene. Rather than relying on empirical data, the study engages with scholarly literature and case studies to assess conceptual gaps and opportunities within current legal systems concerning environmental protection and the recognition of ecological rights. One of the primary methods utilised is comparative legal analysis**,** particularly in exploring how different legal systems, both Western and indigenous, conceptualize nature and environmental protection. For instance, the research examines the legal recognition of the Whanganui River in New Zealand as a living entity with rights, contrasting this with the more anthropocentric legal frameworks typical of Western jurisdictions. This comparative approach highlights how indigenous worldviews, which often regard humans as integral components of an interconnected ecological system, offer a more holistic framework for environmental law. By juxtaposing these perspectives, the

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research demonstrates the limitations of traditional legal systems in addressing the ecological crises of the Anthropocene.

Additionally, conceptual analysis is employed to deconstruct key terms such as "legal consciousness" and "legal culture" within the Anthropocene context. The analysis traces the evolution of these concepts and examines how they may need to adapt to account for the unprecedented environmental transformations currently unfolding. The study critically evaluates the inadequacy of existing legal frameworks in addressing issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological degradation. Overall, the methodology aims to foster dialogue between legal theory and environmental ethics, proposing pathways for legal reform that align more closely with ecological imperatives. By integrating insights from multiple disciplines and legal traditions, the research seeks to contribute to the development of innovative legal frameworks capable of addressing the environmental challenges of the Anthropocene.

The Concept of Anthropocene

The term “Anthropocene” extends beyond its geological roots, representing a continuation of the ecological movement’s development and consolidation. In recent years, debates surrounding geological time and Earth’s history have gained renewed relevance. While geologists still refer to the current epoch as the Holocene, the term “Anthropocene” has gained significant traction, symbolising humanity’s profound influence on the planet. It is rooted in the idea that “the universe is a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects,” where existence itself thrives on the interconnectedness of all beings within the universe (Swimmes & Berry, 1994, p. 243)

This term connects humanity with geological time, highlighting the era’s defining feature: the transformative impact of human activities on Earth's atmosphere, primarily due to fossil fuel combustion. As Chakrabarty (2009, p. 197-222) asserts, “modern liberties” have largely been predicated on the overexploitation of these resources. Human actions now cause irreversible changes, depleting geological resources formed over millions of years and reshaping Earth’s atmosphere.

In his essay History of Climate: Four Arguments (2009), Dipesh Chakrabarty explores the Anthropocene’s significance, arguing that human-induced climate change marks a paradigm shift in history and perception. Acknowledging that human activities reshape Earth’s atmospheric and geological systems highlights humanity as a geophysical force with lasting planetary influence, akin to cyanobacteria, which generated oxygen billions of years ago, or meteorites, which precipitated the extinction of dinosaurs.

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Chakrabarty also contends that this new era disrupts humanity's continuity of collective experience. Historical frameworks, which previously allowed humans to predict the future based on past experiences, are rendered ineffective by the Anthropocene's unprecedented challenges.

The question of when the Anthropocene began remains contested. While some associate it with modernity's apex, tracing its origin to the 17th century (Edgeworth et al., 2015, p. 33-58), others identify it as a culmination of human/nature dichotomies introduced during the scientific revolution. This distinction posits nature as a passive entity governed by natural laws, while humans, defined by intentionality and agency, emerged as the dominant force capable of exploiting non-human nature for economic gain.

Humans are considered the only living beings on the planet with the capacity for intentional action, desires, and will. The human/nature distinction was consolidated with the emergence, a century later, of *Homo economicus*. Humans, being the only beings capable of intentional action, are also the only ones who can use non-human nature as a set of resources to achieve goals. Therefore, the human/nature distinction is, above all, about politics and power. It defines a division of powers between human and non-human entities, which is intertwined with the consolidation of a system of social and economic organization. Through colonialism, this system imposed its logic on the entire planet.

Technology and machines are perhaps the only field in which human and non-human entities can collaborate in the age of modernity. *Homo economicus*, however, is confronted with another reality. The objects and tools constructed through division and delimitation no longer guarantee the continuation of human existence.

The advent of the Anthropocene era does not only signify an anthropogenic acceleration of geological evolution but, above all, the realization that human time continues to be part of the geological. Human time is intertwined with geological time, which itself is accelerating. This acceleration poses a threat to the survival of the human species, even if its effects appear to impact other natural species or ecosystems. The implications of "environmental humanities" and climate change research for the discipline of history are irreversible.

The climate crisis is the most significant indicator of the Anthropocene era, but there are other biophysical subsystems and processes identified as threatened planetary "boundaries" or thresholds (Steffen et al., 2015). One of these thresholds is defined by rapidly changing biodiversity and the extinction of certain species. " These planetary boundaries/thresholds characterize the time of the sixth extinction" (Barnosky et al., 2011, p. 470), a period marked by a rapid decrease in the biodiversity of species on the planet. This is

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significant considering that during Earth's entire geological history, there have been only five distinct instances of mass extinction.

The role of biodiversity, particularly species's function and the integrity of ecosystems, is fundamental. Ecosystems are dynamic systems that require natural variability to maintain flexibility. Both seasonal and biennial variability in energy flow and nutrients are essential to support the reproduction and conservation of species, as well as their existence within communities (Grime & Pierce, 2012 p.185-197). Indicators of biodiversity loss in the Anthropocene era are alarming. There is a significant reduction in species richness and changes in species abundance, which, in turn, affect ecosystems.

The legal culture of a society and the analysis of its legal regulations help compare and understand how, in the Western world, a culture of political participation develops and dominates in environmental issues. Simultaneously, indigenous people in other parts of the world, through collective participation, reshape and recreate the concept of environmental law. Examining how environmental law is produced and applied in different cultures reveals a direct correlation with the values of human subjects, the application of adopted dispute resolution systems, economic choices, public participation, and more. This demonstrates how social, political, and technological transformations have influenced expectations from legal systems and rules.

The approach to the environment and its meaning within the value systems of modern generations has gradually evolved over the last fifty years (Inglehart, 1977), transitioning into a post-materialistic value era (Schlosberg & Craven, 2019).

Through this perspective, the environment is perceived as: a rare commodity valued within the framework of the dominant development model; a catastrophic risk threatening humanity, which necessitates urgent action to mitigate its negative consequences; and a moral value cultivated philosophically and socially, advocated by the ecological movement. This movement evolves continuously between human communities and nature, reconstructing daily interactions with the environment, as well as dominant legal schemas (Sclosberg & Coles, 2005).

A Case Study: The Paradigm of the Whanganui River

Traces of the legal capacity of entities other than humans, such as animals, can be found in legal history (Papachristou, 2006). These traces are evident in the European area, the Mediterranean world, and indigenous cultures, where the distinctions between human and animal are more fluid and less rigid compared to European systems (Nash, 1989).

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In ancient Greece (Hansman, 1976, p. 23-25) and Roman times (Hughes, 1980, p. 47-50), forests were revered as sacred groves and protected by both popular mythology and law (Meiggs, 1982 p. 49-53). Specific trees, such as the oak associated with Zeus, held religious significance. To preserve these, some Greek communities enacted local ordinances with severe penalties. Greek culture also introduced Orphic and Pythagorean philosophies, which posited that all living creatures, including plants, possessed souls that reincarnated within a cyclical universe—an early notion of biological interconnectedness (Aberth, 2013).

The recognition of nature's rights gained strong advocacy from Cristopher Stone and Aldo Leopold. Leopold argued that environmental ethics place self-imposed restrictions on human freedom, acknowledging the interdependence of all community members. Berry's ideas further inspired Wildlife Law and Land Rights, emphasising that the interconnectedness of all things warrants legal and moral recognition across nature (Berry, 2006, p. 149-150).

New Zealand exemplifies how indigenous perceptions of human and nature interdependence can influence legal systems. Among the Māori, property concepts differ significantly from Western notions. Māori emphasise collective rights and stewardship over individual ownership, reflecting a cultural framework where ecosystems are integral to their identity and culture (Patterson, 2001, p. 195).

The emphasis on the collective dimension of their existence reflects their cultural rights and the nature of their relationship with the land, which lies at the heart of their culture. Specifically, indigenous people neither recognize nor understand models of individual ownership of land and its natural resources. The concept of private property appears entirely foreign to their culture and daily life. Instead, they operate under customary, collective systems of management and occupation. This stands in stark contrast to the atomistic, Western model.

This fundamental distinction has historically rendered the modern framework of individual human rights, as expressed in international text, inadequate for effectively protecting indigenous land rights and cultural heritage. Indigenous rights and ways of life are deeply rooted in their connection to the land, which forms the foundation of their cultural identity. The emphasis on collective stewardship emerges from their oral history, philosophy, lifestyle, and worldview. These are further reflected in their tangible and intangible cultural heritage, where individual elements (such as works of art, dances, stories, myths, innovations, and other cultural objects) are not privately owned but are communal assets.

Indigenous communities, as cohesive entities, manage natural resources collectively. They delegate stewardship responsibilities to certain

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members, ensuring these resources are preserved and passed down unchanged to future generations. A significant distinction between indigenous societies and Western paradigms lies not only in their communal organization but also in their profound respect for the Earth and all living beings, which they regard as sacred, rather than objects for exploitation and consumption. In New Zealand, "The River" was formally recognised as a multi-faceted legal subject with rights and obligations, honouring its historical and cultural significance as well as longstanding environmental claims. Members of the Māori tribe had long contested British Commonwealth management of the Whanganui River (New Zealand National Party, 2019, accessed: 19 Feb. 2019). Central to this dispute was the interpretation of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi—New Zealand's founding document—which delineated English hegemony while ostensibly protecting Māori landownership. Many Māori argued that the Crown had violated its treaty obligations and brought their grievances to the Waitangi Tribunal.

To fully understand the recognition of the Whanganui River's rights, it is essential to consider the cultural background of the Māori people and their connection to the river. This bond is rooted in traditions and cosmological myths that define their identity (Levi-Strauss, 1986).

Since the rise of scientific thought in the 17th century, mythology has often been dismissed as superstition. However, there is growing recognition of the role of myth in human history. According to Māori creation myths, all elements of nature share kinship through their genealogical ties to Father Uranus (*Rangi*) and Mother Earth (*Papatuanuku*). Moreover, they view their world as a legacy to be safeguarded for future generations (Mead, 2016).

In Māori tradition, every living or inanimate object possesses a spirit, a soul, and a life of its own (Patterson, 1992, p. 13). Thus, distinction between animate and inanimate entities are less pronounced than in European culture. The Māori regard the Whanganui River as a living organism. (The Whanganui River report, Waitangi Tribunal, 1999, accessed: 19 Feb. 2019). They believe that respecting the river's spirit is vital for maintaining environmental harmony and their own physical and mental health. This interconnectedness shapes their behaviour and attitudes toward the Earth. (Patterson, 1992).

Māori cultural practices include a deep knowledge of fisheries management, which has been passed down through generations. Their sustainable use of river resources reflects their responsibility to conserve fish populations and preserve traditional (Acheson, 1981, p. 275-316). The river is integral to their rituals and prayers, embodying both spiritual and physical well-being.

The legal proceedings before the Alternative Dispute Resolution Commission demonstrated the importance of cultural context. Māori tribe members presented their case using traditional rituals and their native

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language, often interpreted alongside European dialects (Storey, 1979, p. 898). This intercultural approach substantiated claims on both sides. The Māori argued that Western legal systems disregarded the river's spiritual and cultural significance and failed to recognize the validity of oral traditions and customary law. Their evidence highlighted how Western processes marginalized indigenous perspectives.

In 2014, after years of advocacy, the New Zealand government and the Māori, signed a treaty recognising the Whanganui River as a legal entity with rights and obligations. This agreement, formalised into law in 2017 (Te Awa Tupua), acknowledged the river as an indivisible and living whole, from its source to the sea, encompassing its natural and metaphysical properties (Finlayson, 2016). This recognition marked a significant step in reconciling cultural differences and acknowledging indigenous legal traditions.

The resolution of this cultural conflict required a deep understanding of Māori values and a willingness to integrate alternative legal frameworks. The judge in this case examined broader cultural environment, identifying elements compatible with Western legal systems while respecting the uniqueness of Māori traditions. This process highlighted the dynamic interaction between national and transnational legal traditions in an interconnected world.

Part of the Māori legal culture was the continual struggle to maintain the rights of access to and use of water resources, fisheries, the right to progress, and, ultimately, the right to their identity. The different approach to the river is directly related to the way each group views itself, its origins, and its creation. While Māori history connects the birth of the river with the healing of the rift created by the anger and rage of God, for Europeans, it was initially just a geographical feature. The creation story of the river, which for the Māori is about equality among all elements of nature and the primary role of the children of God, in Western culture was linked to scientific terminology, such as the displacement of tectonic plates, volcanic eruption, and so on. However, this "European" notion gradually changed.

Māori legal culture continues to advocate for the rights of nature, emphasising the equality of people and the environment, encapsulated in the expression: "*Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au*" —"I am the river, and the river is me" (Rudge, 1993, p. 28). The success of indigenous communities in living in harmony with nature offers valuable lessons for future environmental and legal frameworks. Recognizing alternative knowledge as equivalent to scientific evidence is essential for advancing cultural rights and sustainable development.

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Results and Discussion

The exploration of human agency in the Anthropocene reveals a significant shift in how humans perceive themselves as species within a fragile ecosystem, wherein all factors—human and non-human alike—possess the ability to enact intentional action. This recognition underscores the necessity of reevaluating hegemonic human practices and their role in environmental degradation. The shift from the perception of globality to planetary awareness has been one of the defining characteristics of the Anthropocene, necessitating a more interdisciplinary approach that intertwines geological, socio-economic, and cultural histories to better understand the interconnected forces shaping the world. This, in turn, invites a reconfiguration of knowledge, where both human and non-human agents are seen as equally capable actors within the environment.

In terms of legal frameworks, the study highlights that while the concept of "ecological integrity" has long been embedded within international legal documents such as the Rio Convention (1972) and the RAMSAR Convention on Biodiversity, these principles have rarely been implemented effectively. A key finding from this analysis is the disconnection between legal texts and their enforcement, particularly in the context of ecological preservation. The study raises a crucial question: Are citizens and legal systems adequately aware of and equipped to enforce these principles? This gap in legal consciousness becomes a focal point for understanding how environmental degradation has continued despite the presence of legal mechanisms intended to prevent it.

Further, the case study of the Māori in New Zealand offers a compelling example of how alternative environmental legal frameworks, grounded in indigenous knowledge, can contribute to a more holistic and ethical approach to ecological governance. This non-Western perspective elevates the spiritual and cultural needs of the community to universal rights, encompassing both basic survival and higher cultural values. The findings suggest that embracing such alternative forms of environmentalism, rooted in post-humanist theory and collaborative ethics, can foster a deeper respect for the environment. The results underscore the importance of moving beyond economic considerations toward a more ethically driven, planetary consciousness that recognizes the interdependence of all beings and systems.

Human beings are reconfiguring and reinventing themselves as species, becoming aware of the fragile nature of existence in the context of the heterogeneous assemblies formed with hegemonic practices, but where all factors, and not only humans, have the ability for intentional action (Chakrabarty, 2009). In this time of multi-faceted crises (Barnes; Dove, 2015), no division between human and non-human should be accepted (Mitchell, 2011).

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The concept of the Anthropocene has provided a powerful tool to discuss the role of humans in a changing world (Crutzen, 2002, p. 415). One of the main features of this era is the transition from the perception of globality to planetary perception. There is also a need for an interdisciplinary combination of geological and socio-economic history that focuses both on planetary or Earth factors, and on cultural changes that have jointly shaped humanity over hundreds of thousands of years. A post-anthropocentric configuration of knowledge that grants the Earth the same status and abilities, and agency, as the human subjects in it (Braidotti, 2020, p. 160).

The approach to the environment and its meaning in the value system of modern generations over the last fifty years is gradually changing (Inglehart, 1977). Additionally, the pertinent question is: How can the integrity of ecosystems be preserved in this post-materialistic value era (Sclosberg & Craven, 2019, p.161-175)?

The legal culture of a society is a key concept in its protection. While the legal term "ecological integrity" has been prominent and found in many legal texts for decades, it has never been effectively implemented or enforced. One of the main legal documents (Adede, 1995, p.35) that includes this principle is the Rio Convention (Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 1972), particularly Article 7, which states that States "must safeguard, protect and restore […] the integrity of ecosystems". This principle also appears in other legal documents (e.g., World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). This concept is reflected in the RAMSAR (The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat) Convention on Biodiversity, which mentions the "conservation of ecological character" of ecosystems as well as the "wise use" of wetlands, ensuring that they continue to exist and function in a way that supports the overall efficiency and functionality of the biosphere. The term "ecological integrity" should be evaluated and understood locally, regionally, and globally, through a holistic logic and approach. However, this has not occurred (Bosselman & Kim, 2015, p. 194).

Understanding the Anthropocene era requires the automatic recognition of the urgent need to transform the world and the limits of human action (Castree, 2014, p. 233-260). The new position of human beings dissolves the separate categories of nature and society. Bruno Latour argues that just as the adjectives "natural" and "social" denote representations of communities that are neither natural nor social, the terms "local" and "global" offer perspectives on existing networks that are, by nature, neither local nor global, but are more or less extensive and connected (Latour, 2000).

On the other hand, one can retreat to posthuman theory, which also challenges "the traditional equation of subjectivity with rational consciousness resisting the reduction of objectivity and linearity" (Braidotti, 2020, p. 169).

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To be post-human does not mean to be dehumanized or indifferent to humans; it rather implies a new way of combining ethical values with the wellbeing of an enlarged sense of community, which includes multiple networks of territorial or environmental interconnections. Post-human theory is about joint projects and activities based on positive grounds of collaboration.

Under the long legal conflict, Māori traditional and practical knowledge of the river was recognised alongside scientific tools and evidence in the context of alternative dispute resolution. Additionally, the inclusive consultation of all interested parties and stakeholders reinforced the legalization of the relative process. They propose an alternative, a robust type of environmentalism, based on non-Western values: the cultivation of alternative forms of ecological legal entities.

What matters is the reassertion of the need for new planetary values in the sense of interconnections among humans and the ecosystem of the river. The needs, spiritual or otherwise, of the Māori became universal rights of nature, encompassing both basic necessities such as food, shelter, and health, and higher cultural needs such as identity, knowledge, and dignity. This is a tangible paradigm of a new ecological post-humanism that calls for self-reflection from the subjects that once occupied the human-centric nexus. A holistic, ethical approach to environmental protection is favoured over an economic one. The conception of the Anthropocene goes one step further. The ecological sciences have proposed a new basis for the ethical community: respect for the environment, as a matter of ethics and not economics.

Even if living in a post-Anthropocene era, the *Chthulucene* era (derived from the ancient Greek words "*chthon*" or "*chthonic*", meaning entities or beings living in the Earth, and "*kainos*" meaning new or present), represents a time and place of uncertainty, but also of promise: a time where the only thing to do is to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response to a damaged Earth. Perhaps, legal consciousness is the only way that could help reconstruct the ability to "exist within the constant crisis" (Haraway, 2017, p. 3).

This era of the ongoing *Chthulucene* is symbiotic as it consists of "collectively producing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries". Information and control are distributed among the components of these evolving systems, which are capable of change (Haraway, 2016, p. 33). After all, neither biology nor philosophy supports the notion of independent organisms in the environment. What matters is what ideas are used to think of other ideas (Haraway, 2016, p. 35).

Afterword-Suggestions

In a game of chance, it is worth noting that the common root of the economy and ecology is the word "eco", which in ancient Greek means

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"home". The "home of the *chthonian*" creatures of the *Chthulucene* era is the Earth. A "*kainos*" (new) home and a new "science" must be built. On one hand, a vibrant community and its content, and on the other, a science that studies how the community manages time, labour, and material resources.

This leads to the assumption that not only do humans depend on nature, nor that nature is central to humans, but above all, that there is a *continuum* between humans and the planet, between human and non-human beings of the planet (Coole, Frost, 2010, p. 127), which directly and simultaneously creates a new collectivity.

The displacement of anthropocentrism leads to a reconstruction of the relationship between humans and other living entities. Critical theory can help face this challenge by building upon the multiple imaginary and affective ties that have consolidated human–animal, or even human-nature interactions.

The post–anthropocentric shift towards a planetary, geo-centred perspective can guide this effort, representing a conceptual revolution. After all, one way to change the world is by changing the way people think and experience the world around them. The concepts of respect for the integrity of ecosystems, ecological citizenship, and planetary consciousness are paramount in this endeavour. Reaching an environmental consciousness may require combining the radically new with some origins from the past. Individuals learn how to become responsible residents of a place by respecting that place and its other entities, rather than transforming it to serve their own needs.

This kind of "planetary ship" presupposes covering the basic needs, both material and psychological, of each individual, from sources available locally. The concept of the "planetary ship" is a form of moral commitment and responsibility, as well as a commitment to future generations and other species and entities, regardless of where they live. After all, a sustainable society can only be built by ecologically conscious citizens, which presupposes legal consciousness.

If the Anthropocene means the end of Modernity, the *Chthulucene* era symbolizes the continual struggle of all living entities for survival. For such an ecological revolution to succeed, the current capitalist model of the biosphere, with its ultimate immorality, must be transcended. It must be replaced by a world of ecological and cultural diversity – a world of total and responsible freedom, rooted in ethical and legal values compatible with nature.

The material reality of this time helps develop new ideas, attitudes, and cultures. As argued by Duncan (Dunkan, 2019, p. 2), to understand how policies and laws have shaped and influenced the environment, it is necessary to reflect on and rewrite the codes and concepts they use, highlighting the interrelationships between nature and the artificial world of politics. It is also necessary to critique the conventional thinking related to political values,

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economic growth, environmental inequalities, and justice. This challenge was raised during the Anthropocene.: "The Anthropocene changes the way we perceive the connection between the human species and the rest of the planet" (Bennet, 2010, p. 117).

Every being can be an actor capable of creating a relationship with the environment. Human entities, until now, have ultimately created the direction of life. Changing how humans experience the world – a change in legal consciousness – is critical. In doing so, an exchange of arguments may not suffice; instincts and passion may be needed. Poetry, art, spiritual rituals, the narration and retelling of myths and tales, as well as the creation of stories, contribute to this change. Cultural change can also affect understanding and decision making. Access to and understanding of information management are important, so it can be transformed into environmental knowledge.

Each entity, from the beginning, shares a certain position within the Western economic model, which may change if specific economic interests change. Furthermore each human body is a singularity with a certain footprint but is dynamically intertwined with other bodies, human and non-human actors. As argued, "We extend into our environments and yet, paradoxically, are required to live this extension as interiority" (Blackman, 2012, p. 151). If humans were viewed as another collective entity, as an in-between connected to a variety of possible sources and forces, as an environmentally bound and territorially based subject (Legrand, 1997), which incorporates and constantly transforms its natural, social, human, and technological environment, the urgent need for change would become evident.

This era, one of tremendous dilemmas and changes, calls for more complex schemes to understand the multi-layered form of inter-dependence in which all beings are living. The awareness and consciousness of the instability and lack in coherence in the narratives composing social structures and relations are the first steps towards changing them. Legal consciousness relates directly to how knowledge is produced by networks of human and non-human actors and how that knowledge is transformed into legal rules. Maintaining the Earth's equilibrium is the final goal. Legal consciousness must be reintroduced into legal practices by demonstrating various ways in which legal schemas can be created and implemented.

As Latour (2011), Le Guin, and others argue, this era calls for a new narrative, to create another story, and to think again from the beginning by reconstructing the narrative, not with humans at the centre, but with Earth itself as the focal point. Legislation must change. History must give away to geo-stories, Gaia stories, and symphonic stories (Haraway, 2016, p. 49).

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