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Red Wolf Multispecies Justice Publication 2023

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Red Wolf.

The **red wolf** once inhabited the eastern and southern parts of the U.S., but now it has become the most endangered species in the world, with only 15-17 individuals left. Due to decades of human activity, including gunshots and vehicle collisions, the population has dropped significantly. This Multispecies Justice Publication is named after one of the most endangered species in the U.S. to raise awareness, protect, and recover all our vulnerable species.

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Editor's Note

Our understanding of multispecies justice is still solidifying. In spring 2023, a group of Utah State University undergraduate and graduate students attended a course by Dr. Kirsten Vinyeta on Multispecies Justice and Indigenous Approaches to the Environment. Throughout this course, we studied the works of scholars and writers from a variety of social locations and identities who challenge Western theoretical frameworks in social science.

This publication celebrates our intellectual struggle with this emerging field and opens a forum for conversations about justice for humans and additional species. This issue features various writings, reflections, and photos from students taking the Multispecies Justice and Indigenous Approaches to the Environment course. Children of students and faculty also contributed artwork with multispecies elements. We would like to thank all contributors for making this publication possible. We thank Dr. Jessica Schad for her wise guidance. Our special thanks to the Community and Natural Resources Institute (CANRI) for funding the publication of this booklet.

Zubair Barkat and Kirsten Vinyeta

I love nature by Eskar





College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Community & Natural Resources Institute
UtahStateUniversity.

The Community and Natural Resources Institute, or [CANRI](#), produces and promotes interdisciplinary and applied social science and humanities research focused on challenges at the intersection of people and the environment in the Intermountain West.

Undrowned and Multi-Species Justice

Elizabeth Bennett

Multi-species justice (MSJ) is notoriously difficult to define as a field and term. This could be due, in part, to multi-species justice not being a goal that can be achieved or a place to reach. Rather, it is a continual process of changing and adapting. In *Undrowned*, Gumbs (2020) illustrates how we can work towards multi-species justice and why it is imperative that we do so. *Undrowned* (Gumbs 2020) stands out not just as an example of MSJ but also as a meaningful shift in how we write about the environment and think about the relationship between humans and more than humans. It can be difficult to grasp how to work towards multi-species justice without projecting our own views and thoughts onto more than human species. However, Gumbs does a beautiful job of writing about the connection between human and more than human

species, as well as the tumultuous history that humans and more than humans often have. Multi-species justice encourages us to push back against the norms of academia, including how we write about more than human species and how we relate to our research. As Gumb describes, scientific writing often uses an “objective”, detached voice to write about research findings. Despite the passion that many scientists feel for their work, passion is removed from academic writing and replaced with objective and detached language. The love for our research is removed in pursuit of science. We tease apart predictor and outcome variables without acknowledging the connections that exist in our research topics. Gumbs suggests that scientists bring the love and passion back to our writing and embrace the connections, what Gumbs calls “entanglement”. The

following paragraph describes entanglement. “Surely there must be some way to improve the system that already exists. I don’t think so. Where are the people who argue that commercial fishing is necessary for human life when the same economic system pollutes that exact food supply and raises carbto levels that are killing fish off already? None of these things can be separated from each other. We are all entangled. And the fact that entanglement is a slow death doesn’t make it any better; it in fact makes it more gruesome. If we don’t do it, if we don’t end capitalism this week, it is because we are entangled, a reality that will continue to wound us after the vaquita and the North Atlantic right whale disappear off the face of the Earth. So, you don’t have to save the whales, but at least look at the ropes. Acknowledge what has already been severed, the costs of

this system as usual. At least take a moment to imagine how you would move if we weren’t all caught up in this. Could we do that?”

Entanglement aligns well with MSJ because it points out that we cannot simply have justice for humans. When we recognize how entangled everything is we can see that justice for humans alone is not adequate. Even if we have justice for humans there will continue to be harm to more than humans, which will in turn harm humans because everything is entangled. In a time when things can feel helpless, Gumbs' encouragement to think about our own entanglements can help us all consider how we can find hope in the future and think about our own role in that, with MSJ.

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No garbage by Finley Schad

Don't just think about us, think about animals too. People go to grocery stores. Animals have to hunt. Think about turtles. They hunt for jellyfish. People sometimes throw trash in the ocean. Plastic bags look like jellyfish and turtles eat jellyfish. We need to help the ocean. There is a lot of stuff we can fix. There is a lot of waste in the ocean and there is a giant island of garbage as big as Alaska. We need to help the ocean.



Name: Finley ulck schad age: 7. ~~date~~ date: May first / 2003.

Families Gather in Protest of Families Torn Apart

Alex Baldwin

Part I: Families Gather in Protest, A Reverse Chronology

April 8, 2023:

After angrily shouting at us, a man in a golf cart called the police on my parents, partner, fellow protesters, and me. It was a beautiful day, so sunny that the mountains wavered over the highway in rural Wellsville, Utah, and the snow burnt our nostrils and chins. We were standing on public land outside the entrance to the American West Heritage Center, which was selling tickets for guests to look at captive-bred bear cubs in a barn. These babies came from Yellowstone Bear World, an Idaho bear breeder that annually takes weeks-old newborns from their mothers and forces them to endure a barrage of public events, including multi-day cub-holding photo ops, hour-long group encounters, and months of bottle-feeding interactions. My father held a sign that read “Yellowstone Bear World Tears Families Apart.” My

domestic partner and her sister’s signs both read, “Baby Animals Belong with Their Mothers.” A young couple with a baby girl dressed in a bear onesie arrived, and the new mother rocked her infant and said, “I don’t think anybody should have the power to break the mother-baby bond.” As more families joined the protest, we decided to split up into two groups on both sides of the venue’s entrance. This was when Golf Cart Man sprang out from behind the wheel, shouting his demands that we stay together and that he was calling the cops because he didn’t want us lawfully breaking up into two groups on public land. A grandmother soothed and eventually left with her young granddaughter, who became too frightened at the idea of the police showing up. No officers materialized.

April 9, 2022:

Covering the second annual protest at the American West Heritage Center organized by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and the Utah Animal Rights Coalition (UARC), the Herald Journal chose the headline, “Bear cub crusade: Protesters return to Baby Animal Days.” The article’s featured image was a mother at the protest holding her smiling little boy as he hugged a teddy bear bigger than he was. Behind them and the other protesters, readers could see the Bear River Mountains,

where native black bear cubs likely were hopping over the past winter’s deadfall to keep up with their mothers. As it should be, these curious bears would learn from and develop alongside their mothers for the next two years.

April 8, 2021:

While the annual protest will grow exponentially, this first year’s gathering carries a humbling, meaningful nostalgia for me: half the people who held PETA and UARC signs on the side of the highway were my family.



Part II: Families Torn Apart, A Backwards History

By April 8, 2023:

In the year since our 2022 protest, Bear World was cited for violating captive wildlife regulations by Idaho Fish and Game, cited for violating the federal Animal Welfare Act by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and fined for violating worker safety laws by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Bear World reacted to getting caught breaking Idaho code by having its lawyers write a bill that virtually exempted itself from state oversight going forward. Governor Little signed the bill into law in March. That same month, this bear breeder shipped off eight two-months-old black bear cubs to Gregg Woody, an exotic animal wholesaler in Illinois with a documented history of sending bears to slaughter. (Since 2012, Bear World has sent 96 known black bears to Woody.) Bear World then

shipped off two more cubs to a Hollywood bear wrangler in Bend, Oregon, whose recent credits include making a bear in chains participate in a stunt for the latest Jackass movie.

By April 9, 2022:

The Herald Journal article covering our 2022 protest would later include that Bear World “said the bears born at its facility will remain there for life, and that the animals in its care are considering family.” However, Bear World had already sold and shipped three cubs to Gregg Woody by the end of March 2022, and it would go on to sell another cub to Woody a few weeks after making this statement. Prematurely separating babies from their mothers threatens the infants’ long-term development. Robbed of the chance to nurse naturally from their mothers, cubs from Bear World have been recorded trying to nurse on staff’s chins, arms, and on other bears’ ears. And numerous

bears have been documented exhibiting signs of psychological distress by pacing and tossing their heads.

By April 8, 2021:

For more than two decades, Bear World has sent bears off to fill the cages of Hollywood wranglers and America's most notorious captive wildlife facilities, including Oswald's Bear Ranch, Kirshner's Wildlife Foundation, and the G.W. Zoo made infamous in the Tiger King docu-series. Bear World has become the country's largest known bear supplier, fueling the cruel cub-petting industry spring after spring. In March 2021, the facility sent five baby bears to Gregg Woody. At the beginning of April, it shipped a lone cub across the continent to a New Hampshire tourist trap called Clark's Bears that forces bears to perform in circus-like shows. There, traveling families pay to surround and laugh at bears who do things with scooters, basketballs, and a swing.

These shows last 30 minutes; captive bears can live for more than 30 years. And they'll continue to pace the fence lines along the roadsides of our family trips until we stop buying tickets.



With love, from Nigeria by Oluwaseyifunmi Adejugbe

Photo Credit: Sadie Braddock





Indigenous Attachment to Land and Nature.

Mufti Nadimul Quamar Ahmed

Indigenous peoples tend to live near their natural surroundings, and how they perceive and interact with the natural world has a significant bearing on the degree to which they are connected to their natural surroundings. Enrique Salmon (2000) talks about how Rara´muri perceives their natural environment and values it within which they live in his article titled “Kincentric Ecology: Indigenous Perceptions Of The Human–Nature Relationship”. This reminds me of how other indigenous people in various parts of the world value the land and nature they depend on to maintain their livelihoods. Bangladesh is home to several indigenous tribes, and these tribes maintain a solid attachment to their homeland. People from indigenous communities in Bangladesh strongly believe that remaining in their land, even if they might have a better life elsewhere, is more vital to their well-being. Enrique Salmon (2000) also mentioned Iwi´gara, which

means their interconnectedness with the land and nature. These indigenous people participate in various ceremonies and rituals to maintain the health of their natural environment. They think they can only maintain a healthy life if they maintain a healthy environment. This reminds me of another quote from an older indigenous person living in Bangladesh during my own data collection for a research project on indigenous communities living in a protected area of Bangladesh. The principal occupation of Khasia (an indigenous community living in Bangladesh) is betel vine production, which depends on timely rainfall. However, in that region, precipitation either arrives ahead of schedule or lingers longer than they anticipate. So, when I asked why you will not change your occupation as many other people are already doing so to maintain their livelihoods? He replied, “I do not cultivate anything else as any other

crops require cutting down trees. For example, if we want to cultivate lemons then we have to cut down trees since lemons cannot be cultivated in the shadow of other trees” (Ahmed and Haq, 2019). So this reflects how these people strongly value nature and the environment within which they live. Overall, Enrique Salmon’s (2000) article as mentioned earlier, is fascinating where he used the term “Kincentric ecology’ and explains it further to elucidate nature and human relationships. This is one of the more original ways of perceiving and appreciating nature. When we truly respect our environment, we will undoubtedly take more environmentally friendly measures to protect it. Celermajer et al. (2021) discuss the development of multispecies justice, its theoretical foundations, and some of the underlying issues in theory and politics in their article “Multispecies justice: theories, challenges, and a research agenda

for environmental politics”. They began with the Australian bushfire, which harms the ecosystem and the interactions between nonhuman entities. Still, they consider it an injustice rather than a climate disaster or tragedy. MSJ, according to them, rejects the core ideas of human exceptionalism; humans are separate from other non-humans; they are unique and more important. As the intellectual and political backgrounds of MSJ, the authors concentrated on some movements and issues like; animal rights, environmental justice activism, and scholarship. Posthumanist scholarship rejected the earlier convention of human exceptionalism. The authors also focus on the communication of non-humans and emphasise a diverse range of communication practices like; arts, storytelling, emotions, etc. To explain the relationship between humans and non-humans, the authors said, “respect not just the individual but everything;

disrespect to any part is disrespect to everything....”(p.129). Finally, to realise MSJ, the authors urge the necessity to develop coalitions beyond scholarly multidisciplinary, as well as organizations already committed to the rights of animals and the environment.

Norgaard and Fenelon (2021) argued in their book chapter “Towards an Indigenous Environmental Sociology” about the way indigenous peoples and their understandings are often not considered in the dominant discourse of environmental sociology. Indigenous people have distinct ways of viewing and treating nature, and the authors call for an ‘indigenous environmental sociology’. The authors recognise that Indigenous peoples have access to viable alternatives in the form of technologies, epistemologies, social structures, moral codes, and ecologies themselves, all urgently required to

address environmental crises in the present day. In this article, the authors also emphasized Indigenous “traditional ecological knowledge (like; the Karuk tribe) and how this knowledge is related to their emotional and mental well-being and cultural identity, which is nowadays valued by Western science practitioners, academic institutions, and various agencies (p.481). The authors suggest it should be up to the indigenous groups to determine their environmental practices, resource distribution plans, and food and resource regulations.

As indigenous people follow a distinct culture and have close ties with their nature and land; therefore, any top-down policies and plans must incorporate them in the decision-making process to work for them. In Bangladesh, when the government tried to declare some areas as protected (where some tribes historically live), these

inhabitants did not agree with this initially. But, when environmental activities and government officials talk with them, convince them that this decision to declare some protected area protects them and their surrounding natural resources, and local people will be supervisors or forest managers. These tribes are convinced of the decision after that. So, if we want to do justice to the indigenous people, we must incorporate them into the decision-planning and decision-execution process. Without hearing local voices, any plans or policies will not seem successful and meaningful if local people/indigenous people do not consider them part of these policies and plans and will not cooperate.

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Whale by Maisie Schad

Nature Art by Sarah Barnes

Photo Credit: Zubair Barkat



Throughout my academic journey I have learned just how complex environmental issues are in our society, especially when it comes down to how the causes, consequences and solutions to these issues are perceived and framed by differing worldviews, such as the dominant western worldview and an earth-centered indigenous worldview. After engaging with the materials from Dr. Kirsten Vinyeta's Multispecies Justice and Indigenous Approaches to the Environment course, it can be argued that the fate of ecological collapse brought on by biodiversity loss and climate change could be remedied through inwards reflection on the taken for granted ideologies that shape the ways we understand and interact with the more-than-human world.

The reoccurring theme throughout this course explored the nature-society divide which observes how society has become detached from

the natural world around us. Embedded in ongoing settler-colonial logics and the human exceptionalism view that believes humans are hierarchically above, separate and exempt from the natural laws of nature, these underlying assumptions are what make our dominant western worldview. This way of thinking disregards the intertwined realities of our interdependence on nature for our own survival. If we as a society are to repair this divide, values are in need of changing. If we only value nature as an object that solely exists as a resource to be taken for human use, we neglect any notion of justice for nature which consequentially brings both unintended and intended consequences to ourselves and our ecosystems.

In contrast to the nature-society divide, the concept of multispecies justice (MSJ) urges us to rethink our dominant ideologies held towards

Opposing the Nature-Society Divide: Reflections on a Multispecies Justice Framework

Sadie Braddock

nature. Instead of viewing nature merely as an object to commodify, we should view nature – or for a better term, non-human species (animals, plants, mountains, rivers, lake bodies, etc.) – as subjects or entities with their own legal standing and rights to flourish. A MSJ lens is grounded in the recognition that the complexity of life entails an interconnected relationships between all species who are interdependent upon each other and hold unique purposes and responsibilities. With this in mind, justice for one species cannot be fully achieved until there is justice for all species.

This holistic understanding is central to the epistemologies in Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Indigenous cultures embody a value system of relationality where they recognize non-human species as sacred kin whom they share a responsibility with. The Earth provides an abundance of life-

sustaining gifts, and it is the role of humans to act as stewards to return the favor of these gifts through a reciprocal relationship based on love and respect. Learning from indigenous perspectives can offer an alternative framework for inspiring our society to rethink the ways we approach the non-human species we share this Earth with.

Unfortunately, this social system is embedded in ongoing settler-colonialism that erases indigenous knowledge and power. The current power dynamics in place favor the unsustainable and unrealistic values and notions of justice set forth by the dominant worldview. It is critical to identify who has the power to frame the notion of what justice is and who gets to benefit from it.

It is not hard to understand how this narrow illusion of disconnect laid out by the nature-society divide of the dominant narrative has come to operate; a majority of society isolates themselves every day from

the 'outside' world by working within climate-controlled buildings and traveling mostly in motorized chunks of metal. This physical divide has made us lose sight of our innate bond with nature and our responsibility to be proper stewards. We are so detached that children have an easier time naming and identifying brands and logos than they do local flora and fauna. I long for ways to reignite our sense of wonder with nature to repair this relationship.

In my perspective, we need a culture shift that adopts indigenous relationality frameworks and concepts of multispecies justice to reimagine what it means to be human while ethically sharing this world with other species who are interconnected with us. Further, we need to address the power dynamics in place engrained with

persisting settler-colonial frameworks that disempower the voices and wisdom of indigenous peoples whose ideologies and land management practices exemplify that a harmonious, just and sustainable reciprocal nature-society relationship is achievable. Of course, it is important to note how this is certainly not a silver-bullet solution; we need a diversity of all types of collaborative approaches to address our complex issues on both individual (worldviews) and structural (power-dynamics) levels. It is my hope that one day this can be realized.

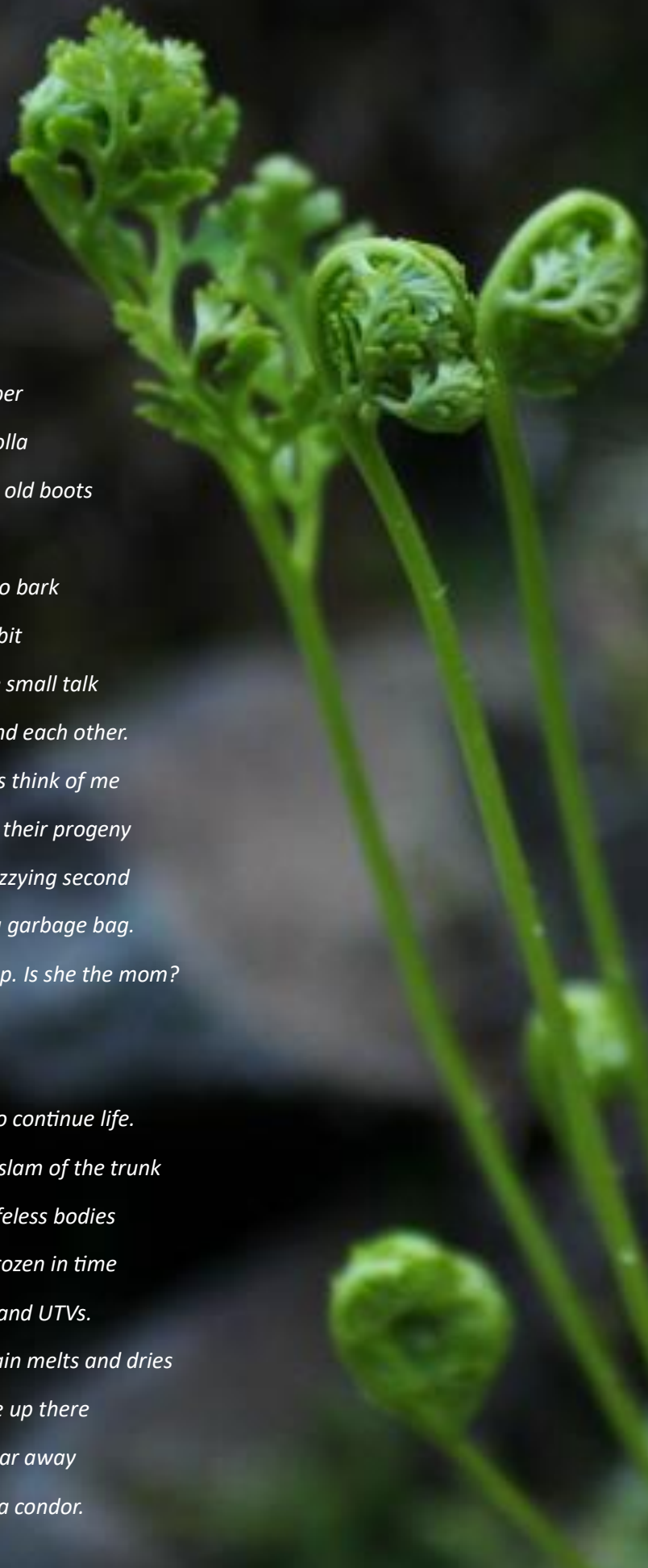
Nature by Azra and Melih Soyer





Grim Reaper by Anne-Laure Blanche

I am a second-year master's student in the Wildland Resources department at USU. My thesis focuses on the foraging habitats and competitive impacts of California condors. To collect data on foraging behavior, I place game cameras on carcasses. Natural mortalities are few and far between, so I collect and freeze carcasses from spring lambing operations to use throughout the summer, when the sheep are let out to graze and condors use my field site. As a vegan who grew up in a city, I have learned a lot working with wildlife and livestock, living in rural areas, and interacting with shepherds and ranchers. However, sometimes there is still a lot to process, so I put it into a poem.



*I am a strange grim reaper
Pulling up in a rusty Corolla
Dark jeans, jacket, dusty old boots
And bright red hair
The sheepdogs rush up to bark
And the sheep scatter a bit
The ranchers and I make small talk
We pretend to understand each other.
I wonder what the moms think of me
As I reach for the legs of their progeny
Lift it into the air for a dizzying second
And then deliver it into a garbage bag.
I look to the closest sheep. Is she the mom?
Does she care
In my head I explain,
I'm trying to use death to continue life.
A fumble, crinkle, and a slam of the trunk
I drive away with little lifeless bodies
They stay on my mind, frozen in time
Tucked behind gas cans and UTVs.
The snow on the mountain melts and dries
The sheep will be let free up there
The lambs too, they'll soar away
In the crop of a California condor.*

Contextualizing Multispecies Justice on the Streets of Megacity Dhaka: Selected Quotes from Relational Autoethnography

Zubair Barkat and Amol K

“My name is Amol K (pseudonym, here “K” represents Amol’s idea of Kinship. In his indigenous culture, everything around us is a relative and we share the life with everything). I was born in the Chittagong Hill region to an indigenous family. Having been displaced by Bengali settlers, I now work as a dog catcher in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. When I moved to an unfamiliar city, I lived through the same traumatic experiences as stray dogs. My life is a continuous struggle, just like the lives of innocent street dogs in these megacities. I’m only trying to help animals using my limited capacities. This is the idea of justice I learned from my indigenous culture. I understand that the on-ground reality is much more complex here in Dhaka. There are a lot of

residents who struggle to have access to food, healthcare, education, and even water to survive. Here, I do not have the dignity of a human being, and the same is true for the local working class. Rich people are the only full humans, according to the social hierarchy. The rest of us are somewhat half human or animals. This system places stray dogs at the bottom of the social hierarchy because they have no utility. Thank you for documenting our stories. I refer to both my stories and street dogs’ stories. You know, I was previously interviewed by researchers. They asked me questions like my monthly income, working hours, how much money I send back home etc. They never inquired about how I felt when I was forcefully displaced from my native

land. They never ask about my emotional sufferings when abandoned the captured dogs in garbage dumping area. I am happy that we are telling our stories together. If I interpret multispecies justice correctly, understanding the specific context is critical to implementing them."

In this article, Amol K (pseudonym) and I (Zubair) present stories about relocating stray animals by an indigenous dog catcher in the global south to contextualize multispecies justice. The key research question for this study is "How a displaced indigenous dog catcher in the third world constructs multispecies justice centered on his lived experience on the streets of the megacity Dhaka?" Relational autoethnography is an effective research method to answer the above question. It allows me to focus on and evocatively tell Amol's narratives in shared storytelling and

meaningful conversations. The approach and order of this article builds on Ellis (2013) 's seminal work where she introduces collaborative witnessing of survival during the holocaust as an exemplar of relational autoethnography. Ellis (2013, p. 376) describes this approach as fitting with what she and others [see (Chang, 2008) (Ellis, 2004) (Ellis, et al., 2010)] have claimed about autoethnography: it is about and for others as well as about and for the researcher. Using relational autoethnography as a method of study, I shared authority with respondents. Amol led the narrative in this study, and we constructed his experiences together. During one of our conversations, Amol said, Zubair, it's not just my or your story, or the struggle of thousands of city dwellers; it's also the story of hundreds of street dogs who have

been cruelly relocated or killed. Can we also include them as co-writers?

Sorgo theke poton (The fall from heaven)

“We lost everything in the Bengali settler attack. Our house, money, my father's rocking chair, and my mother's wedding sari (a traditional dress). My father crafted that bamboo rocking chair. Our crops were looted. Previously we had three different pieces of land. Our land was designated as a reserve forest area following the Chittagong hill tracts peace accord. In our indigenous culture, there are no formal land records. This continued for a long time. Later, with the police's assistance, Bengali settlers took over another piece of land. The last piece of land has now been grabbed.”

Hello from Hell: A Day in a Life

“I stay in the cleaner's colony quarters. My uncle works for the City Corporation as a cleaner. It is a two-room apartment. Uncle and aunt stay in one room, and their children live in another. In this house, there is no living or dining room. Our apartment has only one bathroom and a small kitchen. I feel like sleeping in a coffin at night. The situation is so claustrophobic that breathing is difficult.” “The dog started screaming when I held its throat with grasper from inside the net. Like a human cry. Similar to the screams and cries I heard when Bengali settlers burned indigenous people to death. As the Grasper's hook sticks in the dog's neck, I pull the dog out of the net. The dogs resemble hanging prisoners. Screams and threatens to bite us.”

“Oh, people here are different than us (indigenous people). They don't like animals in front of their homes or in the streets where they walk.”

The problem with street dogs is that they invade residential communities and share community spaces. In Dhaka, there are very few parks. It is a popular and only place for residents to walk and children to play. Due to the presence of street dogs, they are no longer able to do so. Also, in populated cities like Dhaka, there are extremely few other public spaces."

Justice to street dogs is a luxury I can't afford.

"I noticed two packs of hungry stray dogs aggressively fighting over garbage food. Everyone screamed and shouted. Others threw rocks and stones at the dogs. A dog appeared from behind and bit the child's leg. In fear, the child collapsed to the ground. Everyone rushed to the child. Children who were injured were immediately taken to the hospital. Meanwhile, the school's security guards arrived

with a stick and stones. Human-animal conflict extends from forests to busy city streets."

Sespata: Asa nirashar dolchal (The last page: stories of hope and struggle)

"I am just an ordinary dog catcher who has no power at all. I don't understand the state, society, or individuals in this city, and I don't follow their rules. I am not educated like the people living here in the city. However, as an Indigenous person, I understand that violence against innocent animals cannot continue indefinitely. To me, it seems the state doesn't have any other business except relocating native communities and innocent animals. I was evicted from my indigenous homeland by Bengali settlers with the help of the state. We brutally removed dogs from city neighborhoods."



Toward a Mormon Multispecies Kindred

Sarah Ann Woodbury

Scholars across disciplines have noted negative relationships between The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint (LDS or Latter-day Saint; also referred to as “the Church” or “Mormonism”) identity and environmental attitudes and practices, from historians (Worster, 1992; Reisner, 1993; Foltz, 2000) to sociologists (Hunter and Toney, 2005; Olson-Hazboun et al, 2017; Brehm and Eisenhauer, 2006) to ecologists (Peterson and Liu, 2008). Even in Jason M. Brown’s work identifying a “vitalistic tradition” in the faith, he notes that “contemporary Mormonism has largely remained silent on environmental problems and excluded the earth from our sphere of core moral concerns” (2011). However, this becomes somewhat mysterious when one considers that the Church is relatively unique among Christian religions in its animistic doctrines and canonized

environmental stewardship ethic (Handley, 2016). While many of these beliefs have gone dormant in dominant LDS teachings and practices, there is a growing effort among Church members to re-identify with earth-related teachings (Brown, 2011). Multiple authors have noted that understanding of LDS perceptions of the environment is limited, calling it an under-researched area (Olson-Hazboun, 2017; Handley, 2001). Deepening an understanding of these perceptions and their religious roots becomes particularly important considering the significant impact of religious identity on environmental attitudes (Brehm and Eisenhauer, 2006), the Church’s influence on the politics and ecologies of the Intermountain West, and what I have observed to be a lack of successful engagement with LDS values in conservation efforts in the Mormon Culture

Region. In this essay, I briefly engage the following questions:

- 1) Where can we begin to locate interspecies ethics and perceptions—or, more broadly, animistic knowledge—in the belief structures of Mormons in the region?
- 2) How might a multispecies justice lens support a meaningful return to deep stewardship during a time of widespread ecological suffering?

The interdisciplinary soil of this essay style is comprised largely from work by Chao et al., who seek a “multioptic vision” in pursuing multispecies justice understandings (2022).

Multispecies Worlds in Mormon Doctrine

Doctrines of animism, more-than-human agency, and Earth ethics exist across the LDS canon and history, including the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, teachings by

latter-day prophets (understood as the modern mouthpiece of a responsive, active God), and folk histories. Centrally, most Christian religions understand creation to be *ex nihilo* (from nothing), meaning that God created all things in a vacuum (Brown, 2011). LDS understanding of creation, however, is *formare ex materia*, meaning that God created the world by organizing pre-existing, intelligent, enspirited matter, which existed in a state of chaos before it was organized (Blair, 2021). In this view, the creation of all things occurred first spiritually, then physically. LDS prophet Brigham Young “explained that even natural landforms have a spirit: ‘The spirit constitutes the life of everything we see. Is there life in these rocks, and mountains? There is. Then there is a spirit peculiarly adapted to those rocks and mountains’” (Galli, 2011). Similarly, LDS Apostle Orson Pratt said in 1853

that “every vegetable, whether great or small, has a living intelligent spirit capable of feeling, knowing, and rejoicing in its sphere” (Galli, 2011). This material spirituality extends beyond mountains and vegetables to the Earth itself. One poignant illustration is contained in the vision of Enoch in the LDS Book of Moses: And it came to pass that Enoch looked upon the earth; and he heard a voice from the bowels thereof, saying: Wo, wo is me, the mother of men; I am pained, I am weary... When will my Creator sanctify me, that I may rest, and righteousness for a season abide upon my face?

And when Enoch heard the Earth mourn, he wept, and cried unto the Lord... (Moses 7:48-49)

These doctrines and teachings align the very beginning of life in Mormonism with an animistic viewpoint, or an understanding of

all on the Earth as endowed with spirit or intelligence.

While the idea of subduing the earth is certainly present in Mormon doctrine, teachings also hold unique stewardship and use instructions to members. The Word of Wisdom, a set of health-based commandments delivered by Joseph Smith, instructs believers that “Yea, flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I, the Lord, have ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving; nevertheless they are to be used sparingly; And it is pleasing unto me that they should not be used, only in times of winter, or of cold, or famine” (Doctrine and Covenants 89:12-13). While this commandment is not nearly as culturally emphasized as others in the Word of Wisdom (e.g., to avoid coffee and alcohol) and is thus not strictly observed, it can still be at least potentially understood as part of an **interspecies ethic** (Welling,

2011). The Joseph Smith translation of Genesis 9:11 communicates the gravity of this interspecies understanding, as well as a directive to deeply consider enspirited life and the ways in which it is used: “And surely, blood shall not be shed, only for meat, to save your lives; and the blood of every beast will I require at your hands.” This suggests that during divine judgement, individuals will have to answer for their treatment of—or decision to take life from—every creature.

A More-than-Human Atonement

Moving even deeper into this animistic worldview, in LDS doctrine, the Atonement of Christ is seen to extend not only to humans, but also to more-than-humans (Galli, 2011). The idea that an immortal god paid the price for the resurrection of all life forms is, to my knowledge, unique in Christianity. This teaching is perhaps

the strongest example of interspecies entanglement and multispecies justice in the Church. It is a beautifully splintered understanding of Donna Haraway’s multispecies “worldings,” which considers vast entanglements between species, from which new worlds emerge (2018). She says, “There can be no environmental justice or ecological reworlding without multispecies environmental justice and that means nurturing and inventing enduring multispecies—human and nonhuman—kindreds” (2018).

A Mormon Multispecies Kindred Mormonism has a unique history of animacy in its doctrines and beliefs; however, these are not necessarily visible in the modern attitudes, practices, and structures of the Church and its members. On a larger scale, widespread ecological collapse calls for ontologies that unhook from dominant and

dominating approaches and can be *other* to face climate disruption and socio-ecological declines. Currently, many species—which are seen in Mormonism as the handiwork of God—are going extinct. Causing an extinction, in my view, is the greatest offense to a Creator imaginable; conversely, engaging in projects of multispecies justice brings the greatest joy.

Unruly entanglement through the Atonement, creation, matter, and ultimate salvation presents a strong case for Mormon multispecies kindred. In pursuit of this deeply entangled kindred, we might consider the power of a polyphonic approach, listening deeply to the voices of science, doctrine, story, ecology, the more-than-human, and practice at once to 1) examine the ways Mormons interact with landscapes, and 2) re-weave our practices into existing doctrines and philosophies of care for the Earth as

an animate being and our eternal home.

Mormons have experience being different, and sharing our animistic Christian threads may be of service to other religions moving toward deeper engagement with environmental ethics, help bridge barriers between LDS communities and other groups, and engage us in the responsibilities we have for socio-ecological repair in the Intermountain West. Though these teachings are not strongly emphasized in modern LDS culture, they hold potential for those seeking to re-discover a spiritual practice that is glittering with life and embedded in a world of many threads and songs.

*Academically, the term *animism* is often used related to Indigenous knowledges. By using this and related terms, I do not mean to suggest that Mormon views are analogous with Indigenous ones or

participate in problematic uses of the term that have permeated Indigenous studies. Rather, I mean only to describe a perception that sees all things as enspirited, animated, or in other words, “at least potentially alive” (D. Abram, personal communication, August 2022).

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Multispecies Justice

Kirsten Vinyeta

“Multispecies justice” was first coined by Donna Haraway in her 2008 book “When Species Meet,” and while all sorts of multispecies studies have since emerged and gained traction, the concept of multispecies justice is still gaining shape. I became intrigued by multispecies justice as a framework that might be able to explicitly connect and simultaneously address human and more-than-human oppression, to demonstrate how social structures such as capitalism, settler colonialism, and patriarchy (to name a few) implicate more-than-human species and generate distinct ecologies. As a former landscape architect focused on ecological restoration now turned environmental sociologist, I often fantasize about a more thorough integration of sociological theory and ecology. My work as a settler collaborating with Indigenous communities and scholars in the

Pacific Northwest has made vividly clear the ways in which settler colonialism simultaneously impacts and exploits Indigenous peoples *and* the species and ecosystems with which Indigenous peoples hold reciprocal responsibilities (Whyte 2018). Once you dismantle the Western nature/culture binary and recognize that people are a part of nature, it becomes evident that “communities” involve more than just humans but a constellation of species and places. Impacts upon a human community will affect the species and ecosystems with which that community interacts, and vice versa. Injustice, therefore, is always inflicted somewhere in space and time replete with webs of ecological relations, including myriad species, landscapes, and ecological processes. Theorizing and implementing multispecies justice frameworks seems especially pressing as we face climate change-

induced ecological tipping points with wildly unequal responsibilities and burdens. Without developing frameworks capable of conceptualizing justice beyond the human, we risk species extinctions, ecosystem collapse, and severe and unequal impacts to the integrity, wellbeing, and full expression of human cultures across the globe.

For much of its history, my home discipline of sociology largely failed to recognize the vital role of other species in profoundly shaping, and being shaped by, human social systems. The rise of animal sociology and of environmental sociological scholarship that actively theorizes the social role of more-than-human species has begun to reverse the human exceptionalism that once permeated the discipline. For example, Pellow (2016) advances a Critical Environmental Justice (CEJ) Studies framework that

“recognizes that social inequality and oppression in all forms intersect and that members of the more-than-human world are subjects of oppression and agents of social change” (p.225). York and co-authors describe dialectical relationships between humans and non-human species, in which other animals shape our lives and societies at the same time as we shape theirs (York and Mancus 2013, York and Longo 2017). Ergas and York (2021) give plants their long overdue attention within the discipline, calling for the emergence of a sociological plant studies. Norgaard and Fenelon (2021) make the case for an Indigenous Environmental Sociology informed by Indigenous epistemologies and lifeways—in which other animals, plants, and even fire and water are often understood as agentic beings with whom Indigenous peoples hold reciprocal relationships. These

various scholars and their work recognize that human social systems are intimately tied and interdependent with ecologies near and far.

For many of us in the United States—especially settlers, urban dwellers, and folks whose food and other life necessities are extracted and produced by invisible “others”—our interdependence with local and global ecosystems is often out of sight and out of mind. Even species living among us are often taken for granted. I like to encourage students to reflect on their dis/connection with local environments by asking them to list ten species they saw on the way to class. While a small number of students are able to list a few species, most are able to only name generic categories like “bird” or “tree,” and seldom is there someone who can list ten species.

Furthermore, when discussing the importance of other species and ecosystems in the classroom, some students presume that Indigenous communities, farmers, and others interacting closely with the land have a stronger reliance on other species and ecosystems, not recognizing that every single person, regardless of cultural affiliation or occupation, relies on a vast network of plants, animals, fungi, microbes, and minerals to sustain daily life. No one is exempt from ecological relations and interdependency, as much as some of us try (or are forced to) to separate ourselves from production and caretaking processes and—in that separation—may sometimes feel immune to ecological collapse. It is ultimately a false and selfish sense of security with profound and long-lasting effects that disproportionately impact certain species, ecosystems, and human

communities who hold irreplaceable, culturally-significant relationships with specific species and ecosystems.

When I was hired as an assistant professor at USU, I was asked what graduate courses I might be interested in teaching. As a graduate student, I had taught a course titled “Species in Conflict” to undergraduates, in which we explored how more-than-human species shape and are shaped by human social conflict. When my USU colleagues proposed that I adapt the course for a graduate audience, I was beyond excited—this topic is fringe and I didn’t think they would welcome (let alone propose!) the idea. I had been recently exposed to multispecies justice concepts and literature, and I decided that a multispecies justice focus would be appropriate and interesting to explore with a

graduate-level class. So in Spring 2023, I taught my first graduate-level course: “Multispecies Justice and Indigenous Approaches to the Environment.” While I am a settler and not entirely at ease teaching a course with the word *Indigenous* in it, I wanted to honor the fact that many of the readings and concepts we would cover in the class were written by Indigenous authors and reflective of Indigenous epistemologies that often get erased in Western academic spaces. While I couldn’t teach the material from the positionality of an Indigenous person, I could at least expose my students to vital writings, concepts, and perspectives emerging from Indigenous scholars, activists, and communities that deeply inform emerging Western conceptualizations of multispecies studies. So it was that I found myself in a room with a diverse group of wonderful, inquisitive,

thoughtful students all of us on a journey to better understand, critique, celebrate, and be transformed by the various conceptualizations of human and more-than-human relations and multispecies justice emerging from Indigenous and Western thinkers.

Teaching the course was not a walk in the park for a variety of reasons. For one, I still felt like a graduate student myself, and trying to project an aura of authority felt not only fraudulent, but absurd. The students quickly gave me a run for my money, poking holes at the various unknowns that remain unanswered as it pertains to the applicability of multispecies justice frameworks. In one of our early course texts edited by Chao, Bolender, and Kirksey (2022) titled *"The Promise of Multispecies Justice,"* a concrete definition of multispecies justice is never really

provided. The authors explain that they prefer to leave the definition malleable and open to interpretation to account for distinct justice frameworks and place- and context-based conditions. Multispecies justice, they explain, may be differently defined depending on whether the justice lens one employs is based on distributive, restorative, transformative, procedural or myriad other typologies of justice. This lack of concrete definition and therefore nebulous applicability really tormented some students, especially students in the natural sciences whose academic tradition tends to leave less up for interpretation. For the social scientists in the room, and for students hailing from the Global South, the frustrations sometimes stemmed from concerns that multispecies justice was a bourgeois concept out of touch with many

peoples' realities, and that focusing on other species' welfare ran the risk of obscuring the political immediacy of human suffering, poverty, and global inequality.

Furthermore, all of us, at some point or another, pondered the complexities of determining what justice means for a flea, versus a lion, versus a gazelle, versus a mushroom, versus people with various lifeways. As Kirksey and Chao (2022) state:

“In ecological communities filled with predators and prey, hosts and parasites—worlds where hostility and hostages are embedded at the very heart of hospitality—alliances can be fleeting as interests align, only to unravel again...According to Isabelle Stengers, peace does not

exist within ecological communities. Instead of longing for peace, she argues for the necessity of ongoing battles in sustaining conditions for life on earth.” (p.10)

Doing our part in sustaining the conditions that support the lives of our biotic community members, though, is no small feat, since making such determinations risks what the authors refer to as *ventriloquism*. First coined by Arjun Appadurai, ventriloquism was an ongoing topic throughout the course, and refers to speaking about, or on behalf of, more-than-human species through our inevitably imperfect and anthropomorphic lens. In class, we debated best approaches to mitigate this shortfall, even if we all agreed it was impossible to entirely eradicate. My personal opinion is

that an imperfect presumption of the needs and lifeways of a given species or more-than-human individual is better than no consideration at all. At least it gives you a starting point which you can later refine as you learn more and revise your understanding. Multispecies justice, like justice broadly, is seldom perfect in its application. Yet in the absence of more effective frameworks, justice is a powerful and broadly legible approach through which to address disproportionate harms and chip away at oppressive structures.

The above critiques and discussions were all indispensable to moving the conversation forward and gaining a better understanding of the work that remains to be done in the field. Overall, I believe that most of us left the course with an expanded vision of our scholarship, activism, and place in the world, a

place replete with more-than-human beings with whom we share our lives, and in some cases, our destiny. By engaging with multispecies writings by Indigenous, Black, Marxist, feminist, and queer studies scholars, we were able to compare and contrast how human experiences of oppression and pursuits of liberation are intertwined with more-than-human lives. Most importantly, we were able to digest these readings and ideas together, learning from one another's perspectives given our various positionalities, multispecies relations, and life experiences. What became clear as I read students' weekly reading journals and final papers is that they were grappling deeply with the course material, sometimes in deeply personal and cathartic ways, and that our readings and conversations were inspiring them to widen their professional and personal scope.

Perhaps my crowning achievement was in giving students the space (in a Western academic setting) to consider other species as beings with agency, with culture even, that play indispensable roles in human lives. For social scientists, it was a compelling expansion of our human-centric frameworks and an invitation to not only discuss the environment generically, but zoom into concrete ecologies and multispecies arrangements. For natural scientists, it was an invitation to breach the daunting walls of scientific objectivity to 1) consider how ecology shapes and is shaped by injustice, and 2) allow themselves to express connection with, even love for, the species and ecosystems they spend their lives studying.

Contrary to how it probably should have been done, I provided some semblance of a multispecies justice

framework at the end of the course. By now, students were probably exhausted, burnt out, and irritated by the delay, but I needed a semester's worth of synthesis, conversation, and reflection to offer students my own nascent interpretation of what the application of multispecies justice necessitates. The framework below is bare bones and elementary, but it points to what might be essential steps based on our constellation of readings:

The Seed of a Multispecies Justice Framework

- 1) Notice**— pay attention to who is in your biotic community

- 2) Get to know**— commit to lifelong learning about the lifeways and needs of the living beings and

communities in your midst. Ethically learn from willing teachers who may know more than you about certain lifeways. This will always be imperfect, and that is ok.

biocentrism, your family/community/Tribe's Indigenous worldview, or other similar frameworks that set parameters for just multispecies relations.

3) Understand injustices shaping your biotic community— what groups of people and/or species have been dispossessed? Who has benefitted from this dispossession? This may change over time. Knowing once doesn't mean knowing forever.

5) Develop a process for putting your framework into practice— this could look like a systematic decision-making template that outlines specific parameters that aid in complex decision-making, the development of a decision-making council or interdisciplinary team, etc.

4) Adopt a justice-oriented framework— this could be context-dependent or a lifelong framework you adopt, ie. distributive justice, restorative justice, political non-ranking

6) Implement your process via policy-development, teaching, caretaking, activism, management, etc.—using your process, make material, on-the-ground change.

- 7) **Reflect and revise**— take time to observe and reflect on the changes brought on by your implementation. Notice how it is—or is not— impacting your biotic community in ways you hoped for. Revise your framework/process as needed to better achieve your lens of multispecies justice.

The practical applicability of such a framework is uncertain. Justice is a fleeting and imperfect pursuit in most realms. Yet I firmly believe that there is an urgent need to explore approaches that integrate human and more-than-human wellbeing and liberation. Many Indigenous epistemologies are replete with multispecies value systems. For Indigenous readers,

this may be old news. But the Western, Euro-centric systems that drive socio-ecological relations on a mass (and often globalized) scale largely lack frameworks that account for more-than-human life as more than just a generic resource. It is my hope that the wonderful folks who partook in the course will take what we collectively learned and spark conversations within their departments, families, friendships, and broader communities. As this compilation begins to demonstrate, these are passionate, creative, critical thinkers whose perspectives complicated, contextualized, and brought to life the course material. I too plan to continue expanding my understanding of how to effectively fight for multispecies justice alongside students, colleagues, and various communities. I don't see social justice and multispecies justice as competing interests—like

many scholars whose works we read in our course, I see them as inextricably linked. I invite you to peruse the multispecies reading list in this compilation to learn more.

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Multispecies Justice Reading Primer

For those interested in learning more, here is a brief compilation of readings that center multispecies relations and justice:

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Multispecies Relations Books for Adults AND Kids!

Jacob, M. (2020). *Huckleberries and coyotes: lessons from our more than human relations*. Anahuy Mentoring LLC, Whitefish, MT

Jacob, M. (2021). *Fox doesn't wear a watch: Lessons from Mother Nature's classroom*. Anahuy Mentoring LLC, Whitefish, MT



Thank You.

If you have any questions / comments, please reach out to us.

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