

Entry

# Plural Nature(s): An Overview of Their Sociocultural Construction

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**Definition:** The social construction of nature aims to emphasise that the concept of nature has multiple meanings that vary in different socio-cultural contexts. This underlines the multiple ways in which both structures and individuals understand, explain, and engage with nature and the environment. Consequently, nature and cultures/societies are not separate entities, but are intertwined in complex and interdependent relationships. Therefore, nature is the result of human perceptions and social practices. The way we interact with, perceive, interpret, and value nature is influenced by a given society's history and sociocultural factors. This intimate relationship is closely linked to power-knowledge and influence relations. Those with more power can impose a particular vision of, and relationship with, nature, resulting in inequalities and potentially harmful relations that can explain the environmental degradation that the contemporary world faces globally, despite its expression in particular contexts, thus configuring plural natures.

**Keywords:** social constructionism; plurality; nature



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## 1. Introduction

The modern divide between culture and nature is made within a “social classification logic” that naturalises social hierarchies based on unequal power relations [1], which has served to establish identities, places, and worlds that are strategically meant to be opposites and rivals [2]. Within this modern discourse, Western environmental law (post the French Revolution) has been based on an anthropocentric representation of nature as a commodity, that is, non-human beings (plants, forests, oceans, rivers, mountains, minerals, water, soil, and animals, among many others) are seen as objects to be used, and even destroyed, to satisfy the individual needs and desires of their owners [3,4]. Recently, there has been a growing emphasis in environmental philosophy and ethics on safeguarding nature and the environment, forming the foundation of the prevalent Western and Euro-American environmental legal framework [5]. Both national and international human rights laws acknowledge individuals’ entitlement to access natural resources, green spaces, and a clean, healthy environment [6]. However, the translation of the human right to nature into environmental laws, while directed at conserving biodiversity and ecosystem services, maintains the prevailing anthropocentric viewpoint. This approach continues to separate humans from non-humans by prioritizing the protection of nature based on human interests and wellbeing [7]: essentially safeguarding nature solely for human benefit. In essence, this perspective perceives nature primarily as a source of “natural resources” meant for human advantage, illustrating a perspective rooted in economic values [8]. The key point remains: it is not possible to survive without nature, and humans need the resources provided for this purpose. But this does not justify the abusive and extractive logic that has guided humanity’s relationship with nature.

As our scientific understanding progresses, there is a growing acknowledgement of how complex and ever changing ecosystems are, shaped significantly by environmental factors and appreciated for their inherent value [9]. Consequently, these terms—ecosystems, environment, and nature—are often used interchangeably, blurring their distinctions in both everyday language and scholarly discussions [10]. However, the notion of “ecosystem services” poses a challenge by suggesting a Western-centric, human-centered view, framing nature and the environment as providers of essential “services” for human use [11]. Addressing this issue, the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) proposed a different language in 2013, offering an alternative framework to recognize and categorize ecosystem services [12]. Specifically, IPBES introduced the concept of “Nature’s Contributions to People” [13], aiming for a more inclusive and respectful approach toward diverse representations of nature. This perspective does not portray nature as serving humans, but instead suggests a holistic viewpoint, less centered on utility and more attentive to nature’s agency and intrinsic worth. There is, therefore, a possibility of achieving this coexistence and interdependence, which should be harmonious, based on the references, principles, and virtues associated with the relationship between non-humans and humans.

Nature/environment and society/culture are not separate entities, but are instead intertwined in complex relationships. Nature and the environment consist of social and cultural practices that are created and signified by individual and collective actions in specific contexts [14]. As such, notions of nature and the environment are not equal. Nature, often perceived as the physical world, transcends mere natural elements. This concept is contextually dependent and subject to varied interpretations influenced by socio-cultural contexts [15]. Different societies construct their understanding of ‘nature’ based on their cultural backgrounds and historical legacies [16], since human interaction with nature is deeply entwined with societal perceptions, cultural norms, and historical narratives [15]. Thus, societies construct and define what constitutes ‘nature’, and this construction is influenced by societal values and beliefs. While ‘environment’ encompasses natural and human-made elements, representing the broader context within which nature exists [15,16], encapsulating the physical, social, and cultural milieu influenced by human actions. The relationship established between society and the environment is marked by power dynamics, where dominant groups shape perceptions and interactions with the environment, which often leads to inequalities and exploitative practices within environmental contexts. Considering culture as the shared beliefs, customs, values, traditions, language, arts, and social behaviours of a particular group or society, which, therefore, shape individuals’ perceptions, behaviours, and interactions within a community, through a dynamic process over time, we can see that nature and environment concepts are deeply ingrained in, and are influenced by, societal practices and norms [17]. These perceptions influence societal practices, environmental policies, and conservation efforts [18]. Biodiversity, encompassing the variety of life forms on Earth, is intrinsically linked to cultural perspectives and human–environment interactions, since cultural constructions influence biodiversity conservation practices and shape attitudes toward preserving ecological diversity [19].

Those concepts lose their Western meaning in a context where the separation between humans and non-humans is irrelevant, for example [20]. Acknowledging the deep interdependence between nature and society highlights the importance of understanding the plurality of perceptions and representations of nature and environment in contrast to the hegemonic socio-ecological narrative [21–23]. The need for this understanding is in line with the current debate on the contemporary environmental, climate, and ecological crisis. Four prominent challenges, therefore, need to be addressed:

1. Recognise the agency and interdependence of both humans and non-humans to gain a deeper insight into social practices, as highlighted by Latour [24]. There are many possible ways to address this challenge, such as: (a) promoting interdisciplinary research that integrates ecological and social sciences for a holistic understanding of interactions between humans and nature; (b) conducting ethnographic research that involves

- studying and documenting the relationships between humans and non-humans in specific social contexts, as well as promoting participatory research, where all may express their visions. This can provide insights into the roles of non-human entities in shaping practices and cultural norms; (c) learning from indigenous cultures and their traditional knowledge, which acknowledges the agency and interdependence of humans and non-humans; (d) exploring environmental ethics that consider the intrinsic value of non-human entities in order to develop more ethical decision making in social practices that affect the environment; (e) advocating for, and implementing, sustainable practices that take into account the needs and agency of non-human elements, including, for example, sustainable agriculture, wildlife conservation, and responsible resource management; (f) creating public awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of recognizing the agency and interdependence of both humans and non-humans, using, for example, multimedia, art, education, storytelling, among others, to convey these concepts; (g) advocating for policies and governance structures that integrate the interests of non-human entities and prioritize their wellbeing alongside human interests, recognizing by law their rights in order to guarantee that they are truly protected, acknowledging ecosystems as active participants, and fostering sustainable practices and conservation efforts;
2. Recognise different forms of social engagement within communities and their connection to the socio-cultural world and nature. This requires the adoption of grassroots policies to combat the impacts of climate change, as proposed by Alves et al. [25]. It is necessary to support grassroots movements and community-led initiatives to combat climate change impacts, but also to encourage participatory approaches in policy making to harness community knowledge and values;
  3. Formulate and implement policies that effectively take into account the unique socio-cultural characteristics and needs of local communities, as well as the localised consequences of socio-ecological crises, as proposed by Alves et al. [26]. This implies crafting policies reflecting local socio-cultural nuances and their implications on environmental initiatives and engaging local communities in policy design and implementation for context-specific and effective strategies;
  4. Include diverse forms of knowledge, language, and actors in deliberative and participatory contexts. This includes traditional, scientific, ecological, local, artistic, popular, and lay knowledge. It also means recognising the knowledge that emerges from the struggles of social movements for human dignity. Accepting this challenge means recognising and valuing alternative ways of being and, consequently, the epistemological diversity of the world, as opposed to dominant ways of knowing [27–30]. This challenge indicates the establishment of deliberative contexts valuing traditional, scientific, and local knowledge for informed decision making through affirming various knowledge sources and alternative ways of knowing in environmental discussions, as well as the need to articulate them.

Addressing these challenges lays the groundwork for long-term environmental resilience and societal wellbeing. Considering this background, this entry aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural construction of nature and its implications for contemporary environmental challenges. By tracing the historical development of the concept and highlighting its relevance to contemporary socio-environmental issues, it emphasizes the complex historical, cultural, and philosophical underpinnings of the relationship between humans and nature. It also encourages a critical analysis of the prevailing dichotomy between nature and society, emphasizing its impact on social structures and the environment. The main aim is, thus, to advocate for a transformative change in societal and cultural attitudes and approaches to environmental conservation.

The structure of this entry is as follows: after the introduction, the historical development of the concept of the socio-cultural construction of nature is traced, starting from ancient Greek philosophy and progressing through various intellectual movements. It then considers the implications of the historical division between nature and society, empha-

sis of the Western capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal dimensions that have perpetuated this division. After that, a discussion is provided that explores how this division has contributed to the exploitation of nature and the socio-environmental crisis currently facing society and emphasizes the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness of humans and non-humans in addressing these challenges. The paper concludes with a summary of the key points discussed in the text, highlighting the need to acknowledge the influence of culture, society, and history on our understanding of nature to promote transformative change by moving beyond the limitations of the nature–culture divide to a more interconnected perspective.

## 2. A Brief Chronology of the Concept

The concept of the “sociocultural construction of nature” has a long and complex history [31]. Its roots can be found during Pre-Imperial China and the subsequent Warring States Period (c. 5000 BCE—221 BCE), which marked the initial formulation and elaboration of ideas concerning the relationship between humans and nature—both as an integral part of the natural world—in Chinese thought, before the flourishing of Ancient Greek philosophical thought. In fact, Taoism describes the relationship between nature and humans as “Heaven and earth were born at the same time I was, and the ten-thousand things are one with me” [32], which can be considered as the vision of “Unity of Man and Nature”. One vivid illustration exists in traditional Chinese Taoism, where the concept of Tien (Heaven and Earth) encapsulates both human and non-human elements, symbolizing the ultimate governing force of the universe [33]. The philosophical ideas related to the unity of man and nature were developed by philosophers like Confucius, who emphasised ethical conduct, moral values, and a balanced relationship between humans and the environment, and Mencius, who highlighted the innate goodness of humans and their role as caretakers of the natural world.

Later, in ancient Greek philosophy, the concept evolved through various intellectual movements to its current form. This concept posits that our understanding and perception of nature are not objective truths but are deeply influenced by cultural, social, and historical contexts. The seeds of this concept can be traced back to ancient Greece, where Heraclitus and Parmenides devoted attention to reflecting on the nature of reality and existence, arguing that everything is mutable, and in constant flux, with change being an inherent characteristic of nature, while Parmenides presented a contrasting view that emphasized the stability and unity of reality [34].

With modernity, the influence and importance of non-human entities have been marginalized, as has the rich diversity of non-hegemonic cultures. Nevertheless, these aspects persist and endure. Non-human entities are relegated to the realm of the natural world, becoming objects subject to domination by human agents. However, the inherent agency of the natural world remains undiminished and continues to assert itself. Within this dialectical relationship, we are already witnessing the repercussions of nature’s agency through environmental catastrophes—indeed, nature’s forces and ecological dynamics have played a significant role in shaping human history, challenging the anthropocentric view of history [35]. As stated by Porto-Gonçalves [36], this dilemma highlights the paradox of modern humanism: its insistence on promoting an anthropocentric perspective, in which humanity reigns supreme, often leads it to overlook the alternative definition of ‘subject’—one that can either act or be subjected to external forces. Nature has been understood as a condition of opposition to the organization of social life, says Latour [37], reporting, symbolically and practically, to non-human elements in nature/culture collectives that vary according to their relative positions.

Moving beyond philosophical ideologies, the Judeo-Christian tradition has significantly influenced Western perceptions regarding humanity’s dominion over nature and ethical responsibilities. The Genesis narrative, with its portrayal of humans as stewards granted dominion over the earth and its creatures, has provided a theological framework that has influenced attitudes toward the environment [38].

During the Enlightenment era, philosophers such as René Descartes promoted a mechanistic view of nature, conceiving it as a machine governed by predictable laws. This was a perspective rooted in a philosophical dualism that posited a clear separation between the mind (thinking, rational) and the body (physical, material), perceiving nature and society/culture as antagonistic poles [22]. Colonization introduced the ideals of the Enlightenment, which flowed mainly from Europe to the Global South. These ideas propagated the notion of human supremacy over other life forms and ultimately asserted the dominance of Europe over diverse worldviews, not only extending control over territories but also suppressing alternative voices, agencies, knowledge, and authority with profound and often brutal force [39]. The Romantic movement of the 18th and 19th centuries, however, challenged this mechanistic view. Romantic writers, such as William Wordsworth [40], celebrated the sublime and mysterious aspects of nature, emphasizing the emotional and subjective dimensions of human–nature interactions. However, naturalism, which also emerged in the 19th century, tends to prioritize the study of natural phenomena, often overlooking the cultural and social dimensions of human interactions with the environment, and exhibits an anthropocentric bias by focusing primarily on human experiences and perspectives [41].

The visions that have sought to explain and understand the relationship between nature and society have not always succeeded in overcoming this divide between the world of nature and the world of societies and cultures. The history of civilizations and the history of ideas bear witness to this. In the mid-19th century, Karl Marx [42] emphasised, with the concept of “metabolic rift”, how capitalist societies have a disruptive relationship with nature, arguing that its production processes alienate humans from nature.

It was not until the mid-20th century that cultural anthropology shifted the understanding of nature from a fixed and homogenous perspective to an exploration of how different cultures construct and relate to nature. In this context, environmental ethicists such as Aldo Leopold played an important role in emphasizing the influence of culture in shaping attitudes toward nature. Leopold’s remarkable work, the ‘Land Ethic’ [10], has had a profound influence on this discussion. This ethical framework argues for the need for a new ethic that encompasses human relationships not only with the earth but also with the animals and plants that inhabit it. Importantly, it challenges the anthropocentric perspective and advocates a more holistic approach to our connection with the natural world. Later, Rachel Carson, in her well-known book “Silent Spring” [43], emphasised that all elements of our environment are deeply intertwined and illustrated this relationship with the “butterfly effect”, showing that one action can have far-reaching effects and that our choices have ripple effects, affecting nations, generations, and species. In the same book, she also emphasised the societal structures influencing environmental degradation, giving the example of the chemical industry. In the 1970s, the rise of environmental sociology as a subfield led to an examination of how societal structures and institutions impact the environment and vice versa. For example, Allan Schnaiberg’s “The Environment: From Surplus to Scarcity” [44] offered insights into the societal drivers of environmental problems.

A paradigm shift occurred with the rise of social constructionism in the late 20th century, triggered by the work of sociologists and anthropologists such as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann who developed theories that applied the principles of social construction to the concept of nature, emphasising how society constructs and maintains shared meanings [45]. In the 1990s, Neil Evernden’s “The Social Creation of Nature” [46] proposed that nature is largely a cultural construct, created through societal discourses and practices and, at the same time, Bruno Latour in “We Have Never Been Modern” [15] argued against the strict separation of nature and society, emphasizing the hybridity of our socio-natural world. In the “Cyborg Manifesto” [47], Donna Haraway started interrogating the boundaries between humans, technology, and nature, underlining the constructed nature of these categories. Latour’s actor–network theory (ANT) and the hybridization of nature contributed to a rethinking of nature–society relations. ANT [24] challenged the traditional boundaries between human and non-human entities in the construction of

nature, with the author arguing that nature is not an independent, objective reality but, rather, a network of interconnected actors, both human and non-human, with agency and influence [15], thus challenging established dichotomies. Descola's contribution stemmed from his extensive ethnographic research in indigenous societies. He challenged Western ideas about the natural world, arguing that different cultures have different ontologies, or ways of understanding and categorising reality, including nature. In his book "Beyond Nature and Culture" [48], the author identified four ontological frameworks: animism, totemism, analogism, and naturalism, each of which offers a unique perspective on the relationship between humans and the environment. Descola's work emphasizes the need to recognise the plurality of ontologies and to acknowledge that the socio-cultural construction of nature varies across societies [49].

In the 21st century, the concept continued to be discussed, with more emphasis on the intersection of indigenous knowledge, postcolonial critiques, and environmental justice. One of the mandatory examples is Arturo Escobar's work, namely "Territories of Difference" [50], where he discussed the social construction of nature in the context of globalization, biotechnology, and indigenous rights. At the same time, environmental humanities and interdisciplinary approaches have provided valuable insights from the arts, humanities, and social sciences to explore the complex interactions between culture, society, and the environment, engaging with literature, art, philosophy, and history to deepen our understanding of the socio-cultural construction of nature, particularly the work of Haraway [51,52], who introduced the notion of 'natureculture' to emphasize the fundamental connection between nature and culture. This perspective points to their interdependence, illustrating how the physical and symbolic realms, human bodies, language, narratives, and realities are intricately interconnected. More recently, a current of thought called "Posthumanism" has proposed a reassessment of the nature–culture relationship that has developed in recent decades [53], deconstructing human-centric views by decentering the human in discussions about nature. Scholars in this field explore the agency and subjectivity of non-human entities, including animals, ecosystems, and technologies, emphasizing the entanglement of humans and non-humans in the construction of nature [54]. Despite the theological foundation that has historically been interpreted to assert human superiority over the natural world, often justifying exploitation, contemporary interpretations, including reflections by Pope Francis in "Laudato Si'", challenge this anthropocentric paradigm by emphasizing stewardship and interconnectedness with the environment [55]. Moreover, Pope Francis articulates a vision of holistic environmentalism rooted in ecospirituality. This concept highlights the intertwining of spiritual values with ecological awareness and ethical responsibility. Within the framework of eco-spirituality, the encyclical emphasizes the sacredness of the Earth and the moral imperative for humans to act as responsible stewards of creation. It calls for a reawakening of spiritual consciousness, fostering a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of all living beings and the environment.

The concept of the socio-cultural construction of nature continues to evolve and influence various academic disciplines and fields of practice, highlighting the profound influence of culture, society, and history on our understanding of the natural world and emphasising the need for interdisciplinary approaches to address contemporary environmental challenges.

### **3. Overcoming the Roots of the Ontological Separation between Nature and Society as a Possible Approach to Addressing the Socio-Ecological Crisis**

The historical division between the mind (associated with thought and reason) and the body (associated with the physical and material), rooted in Descartes' philosophical dualism, still perceives nature and society/culture as opposing forces [22]. This division has led to the modern Western concept of nature as an external entity separate from humanity, with the latter exercising control over the former [15]. This profound dualism is firmly rooted in Western capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal dimensions, as well as in Judeo-Christian values based on anthropocentric environmental concerns [21,56,57].

Simultaneously, this overarching division encompasses various other divisions and power dynamics that shape societies and perpetuate their inequalities.

Structural inequalities are at the heart of the ontological division between nature, society, and culture. Even if humans are positioned on the side of culture, not all individuals are classified within this realm, with women being a notable example. Ecofeminism claims that Western society exploits and dominates women, nature, and the environment [58]. This reflects the same colonial mindset that portrayed nature as an object to be exploited and labelled colonized people as “intuitive”, “savage”, “emotional”, and “instinctive” [2,59–61]. The primary rationale behind this approach was to “rescue” the non-European world from a supposed state of primitive nature and to bring it into a state of Civilization [62]. As Cronon [63] points out in his essay, this idealized view of wilderness has led to problematic outcomes, including the marginalization of indigenous communities, a narrow focus on the conservation of specific “wild” areas, and a growing disconnection between humans and the wider natural world. Addressing the construction of nature as heritage and the evolution of conservation practices unveils a critical facet often overlooked in the discourse. The inception of the first protected area, Yellowstone National Park, signifies a foundational milestone in the conservation movement, marking the dawn of preserving natural landscapes for future generations. Alongside this, the advocacy for wilderness preservation further underscores the significance of safeguarding untouched terrains, reflecting the global sentiment around preserving pristine natural environments. Moreover, the emergence of global governance mechanisms, exemplified by pivotal international conventions like the 1971 Ramsar Convention, has reshaped the approach to nature conservation on a global scale. These conventions, along with mechanisms such as REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) [64], demonstrate concerted efforts toward mitigating environmental degradation and biodiversity loss on an international platform. However, the issue at hand transcends the mere commodification of nature. Sanctuarization, while aiming to protect and conserve, has often led to unintended consequences, such as land grabbing and the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) [65]. This dual facet of conservation—both as a noble pursuit and a catalyst for socio-environmental injustice—highlights the complex and, at times, paradoxical nature of conservation efforts. The unintended consequences, including the displacement and exclusion of IPLCs from their ancestral lands due to conservation practices, call for a nuanced and comprehensive approach to navigating the intricate intersection of conservation, social justice, and environmental sustainability [66].

Nature holds a myriad of values that extend beyond its instrumental utility or intrinsic worth (Table 1). These values encompass heritage, relational aspects, and a spectrum of cultural and customary significance.

**Table 1.** Understanding the diverse values of nature in human perspectives.

Nature Values	Description
Instrumental	Nature’s utility in serving human needs or purposes, often in economic, material, or functional terms [67].
Intrinsic	The inherent worth and value of nature, independent of human use or benefit, emphasizes nature’s value in its own right [68].
Heritage	Reflects the historical, cultural, and spiritual significance attached to specific landscapes, species, or ecosystems [69].
Relational	Nature is perceived as intertwined with human society in relational terms, emphasizing reciprocity, interconnectedness, and human–nature unity [70].
Customary and cultural	Diverse meanings and values are attributed to nature within different cultures, traditions, and customary practices, influencing environmental stewardship [71].

Intrinsic values emphasize the inherent worth of nature itself, separate from human use, while instrumental values highlight its practical utility for human needs. Meanwhile,

heritage values connect nature to historical, cultural, and spiritual significance, relational values underline the interconnections between humans and nature, and customary/cultural values showcase the rich tapestry of meanings and practices that various cultures assign to the environment. These diverse values highlight how nature is not just a resource or a physical entity, but embodies layered meanings, relationships, and significance across different societal and cultural lenses.

Nevertheless, the concept of nature and its modern origins suggest a narrow, human-centered confinement, with humans on one side and everything non-human on the other. This has led to the modern Western appropriation of nature as a commodity, with external, less-developed, impoverished, and industrialised societies bearing the brunt of discrimination and exclusion. By denying the agency of non-humans, the anthropocentric power inscribed in the chosen social structures imposes possibilities that exclude others and make them unviable. The exploitation of nature has led to the socio-ecological crisis we are facing, triggered by the need to satisfy human desires and neglecting the impact on other species and ecosystems. However, new forms of ecological imperialism prevail, being widely discussed by Vandana Shiva in her pivotal work "Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge" [72]. The contemporary extension of the North's continuous exploitation of the South's biological resources, with land, forests, oceans, and the atmosphere already subject to colonization, erosion, and pollution, are unveiled, and the author contends that Northern capital is currently targeting fresh frontiers for exploitation: the interior spaces of bodies of women, plants, and animals. Here, the "multispecies" concept proposed by Anna Tsing [73] is useful in emphasising that human interactions fundamentally involve relationships between species. Consequently, Tsing's concept challenges the notion of human practices as isolated and self-contained, which has perpetuated our control over other species and their categorisation as mere components of nature. The author, therefore, proposes the adoption of the term "multispecies" to describe environments in which different entities coexist simultaneously, interdependent and mutually influential. By acknowledging this artificial division between humans and non-humans, the latter understood as nature, and by revealing the interconnected pathways within a single living organism, thereby restoring the concept of totality, interdependence, and connections, recognizing the Jason W. Moore work [23] "Web of Life", it is possible to promote a profound shift in perspective and approach toward a socio-ecological transformative change.

To address this crisis, it is crucial to recognise that nature and its elements are not just biological entities, but are shaped and understood through cultural, historical, and societal lenses. In this sense, the coexistence of different societies' perceptions of, and interactions with, their environment, based on distinct socio-cultural narratives, can influence how societies address environmental challenges and either facilitate or impede transformative change. Thus, transformative change cannot be achieved without a recognition of the complex web that connects humans, non-humans, and their environment. To promote genuine socio-ecological transformation, we must begin by acknowledging the diverse ways in which societies understand "nature" and weave these understandings into our strategies for change. Each territory expresses contextual biophysical and socio-cultural configurations, and it is based on these characteristics that appropriate policies can be designed. Only then can our solutions resonate with the diverse configurations of human-environment relationships across the globe. Descola [74] has reflected on the need to re-imagine future worlds by proposing a transformation inspired by anthropological insights, territorial conflicts, and indigenous movements, toward a hybrid society. In this envisioned society, state structures and autonomous territories harmonise within a variety of social and organizational models, lifestyles, and practices of living together. Such a shift in perspective and recognition of the interdependence of all living beings can serve as the basis for more sustainable and equitable socio-ecological practices that promote harmonious coexistence within a broader ecological framework.

#### 4. Final Remarks

The relationship between culture and nature has evolved over centuries and is deeply rooted in human history, philosophy, and social paradigms. The historical division between nature and society/culture, rooted in philosophical dualism and driven by modernity, has led to the perception of nature as an external entity to be dominated and exploited by humanity, neglecting the agency of non-humans. This division is deeply rooted in Western thought and has contributed to the socio-ecological crisis we face today. This ontological separation, deeply ingrained in the Western capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal systems, has perpetuated social inequalities, marginalizing not only non-human entities but also certain human groups, particularly women and indigenous communities. This exploitation of both nature and marginalized groups has led to an unsustainable and exploitative relationship, one that has culminated in the current socio-ecological crisis.

To address this crisis and move toward a more sustainable future, it is imperative to recognize the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings, both human and non-human. This recognition calls for a shift in perspective that acknowledges the agency and intrinsic value of nature, challenging the conventional notion of humans as the dominant force. Moreover, understanding nature and the environment as socially and culturally constructed entities necessitates a departure from the Western-centric view, acknowledging the diverse ontological frameworks that different cultures and societies possess. Incorporating these diverse perspectives into policy making and environmental management can foster a more inclusive and holistic approach that respects the plurality of human–environment relationships globally. In terms of policy integration and advocacy, there is a pressing need to prioritize policies that integrate diverse cultural perspectives and local knowledge systems, combined with collaborative research and cross-cultural dialogue, which are instrumental in addressing complex socio-environmental challenges and embracing cultural diversity and promoting sustainability.

In conclusion, the need for a transformative change in societal attitudes and practices has become evident, particularly considering the alternative framework proposed by the IPBES in “Nature’s Contributions to People”, aiming for a more inclusive and respectful approach toward diverse representations of nature, moving away from the utilitarian view. This perspective suggests a more holistic viewpoint, emphasizing nature’s agency and intrinsic worth rather than just serving human needs. Embracing this interconnected perspective, which transcends the nature–culture divide, is crucial for paving the way toward sustainable and equitable coexistence with the natural world. By integrating the principles of respect, reciprocity, and understanding, societies can establish a foundation for addressing contemporary environmental challenges and fostering a more harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Rejecting the notion of human superiority over nature, the shift toward respecting nature implies moving away from a paternalistic concept of protection and encouraging a more balanced and mutually beneficial coexistence.

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