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Inter-species Justice and the Right to Thrive

Biodiversity in Crisis in Aotearoa New Zealand

MAKERE STEWART-HARAWIRA

10.1 Introduction

In 2024, global temperatures reached more than 1.4°C above pre-industrial temperatures for the first time (Copernicus Climate Change Service 2025). This was marked by increasingly urgent-voiced reports and statistics underscoring the extreme danger facing humanity and indeed the entirety of the biosphere (see for instance Ripple et al. 2022; Rockström et al. 2023). The frighteningly rapid pace of change, the identification of an extensive list of interrelated climate feedback loops (Ripple et al. 2023b), the warning that we are on the verge of five critical and inter-connected tipping points (Livina 2023; Ripple et al. 2023a), that six of the earth's nine critical boundaries had already been passed (Wang-Erlandsson et al. 2022), and most likely, the seventh – ocean acidification (Caesar et al. 2024) – the continuing failure of the United Nations Conferences of Parties on Climate Change to secure drastic reductions in carbon and methane emissions and the refusal of the fossil fuel industry to end fossil fuel expansion and use underscored the cascading dangers of species extinction and the urgency of resolving the impasse on climate action. Food production and agriculture alone *are* responsible for 8–10 per cent of global emissions (UNEP 2024) and have caused 70 per cent of biodiversity loss on land and 50 per cent in fresh water (WWF 2022). With over a million plant and animal species threatened with extinction (WWF 2022), the intertwined global catastrophes of climate change and the extinction of species as manifested in the alarming loss of global biodiversity (World Economic Forum 2021) threaten the well-being of all interrelated aspects of life on Planet Earth (Mahon et al. 2024).

Despite making up only 6.7 per cent of the land surface area of the globe, islands are outstanding for hosting 20 per cent of the world's biota. This extraordinary proportion of the world's biodiversity on islands is, however, surpassed by the rate of endangered and extinct species due to the vulnerability of

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islands, particularly marine islands, to anthropogenic disturbances (Fernández-Palacios et al. 2021). Fernández-Palacios et al. report that 50 per cent of the threatened species and 75 per cent of the known extinctions since the European expansion around the globe are occurring on islands. Marine islands, which are surrounded by ocean, include land-bridge islands as well as continental fragments such as Aotearoa New Zealand. Oceanic islands are reported as some of the most severely impacted on the planet. Although fresh water makes up less than 0.3 per cent of the global available surface water, fresh waters support around 50 per cent of the total fish species (Reid et al. 2019). The gravest decline in biodiversity is occurring in freshwater habitats which support around 50 per cent of the total fish species are reported as experiencing two to three times the rate of biodiversity loss of terrestrial and marine habitat (Birnie-Gauvin et al. 2023).

Against this background, increasingly urgent calls for environmental justice and transformed systems of governance elicit an ever-widening range of responses. Many of the responses to climatic crisis raise critical issues of justice and equity in particular for those occupying regions and areas threatened by rising oceans and vulnerable to extremes in weather conditions and diverse populations in the Global South (Sultana 2023). Multispecies justice scholars argue that normative frameworks of climate justice are no longer adequate to address the climate crisis. Multispecies justice rejects the three core ideas of human exceptionalism, namely that humans are physically separable from other species and non-human nature, that they are uniquely separable from all other species because they possess consciousness and agency, and that they are therefore more important than other species (Celermajer et al. 2022). Using a relational lens, multispecies justice approaches recognize the myriad of networks and relationships to which individuals and societies are bound in everyday interactions. This includes recognition of the multiplicity of different types of being, in their own terms and their involvement in thick relational webs. As Celermajer et al. (2022) point out, recognizing this thick interrelationship between humans and other beings, other species, means that justice for one equals justice for all. Nonetheless because humans have the capacity to impact these relations, and an ability to have a conception of justice that might reshape human institutions and actions, humans also have a unique ability to conceive and practice multispecies justice. This approach recognizes that practicing different ways of co-existing between the human and non-human is essential in order to generate new forms of being and acting in this world (Tschakert et al. 2021). Calls for an expansion of the notion of justice to more-than-human species have many alignments with Indigenous onto-cosmologies. In seeking deeper understandings of the meaning of relationality, multi-species justice scholars frequently turn toward the ontologies of being that underpin Indigenous peoples' ethics and values in enacting their first

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responsibilities under their own traditional laws; to care for and protect the multiplicity of the more-than-human beings with whom they coexist.

Indigenous communities on whose traditional lands over 80 per cent of the world's biodiversity have been protected for thousands of years, and whose ways of life, livelihoods, cultural identity, and physical and spiritual well-being are inseparable from the well-being of the more-than-human species in their lands and territories have been some of the most powerful voices against the devastating impacts of market capitalism (Celermajer et al. 2023). Today they are in the forefront of calls for action on climate justice. For the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand where the case study that is central to this chapter is located, the relationship between all human and non-human or more-than-human beings is delineated in the onto-cosmologies of Maori genealogies in intricate detail (Rewi & Hikuroa 2023). Encompassing the tangible and intangible, the organic and inorganic, the seen and the unseen, throughout and beyond the universe (Durie 2001: 88), these deeply entwined co-creative relationships have defined and articulated Maori relational values and ethics, their spirituality, and their cultural practices for over a thousand years (Salmond et al. 2023). In contrast to planetary justice approaches, these relationships are place-based, communal, and also deeply personal. Mountains, rivers, and many landmarks are recognized as ancestors to which the traditional human occupants have inalienable obligations. Predicated on these genealogical and cosmological relationships, Maori have an abiding responsibility of *kaitiakitanga* (loosely interpreted as guardianship) to the more-than-human species with whom they co-exist in place. Protocols and practices that care for the environmental have deep cultural and spiritual meaning and are recognized as such in traditional sayings, songs, and chants. Underpinning these protocols is recognition of the sacred nature of the mauri, the life force that binds everything together. Rivers have particular importance and are conceptualized as the lifeblood of the land. The well-being of the river which is encapsulated by its mauri is intertwined with the well-being of its people, thus its protection is of the highest importance (Stewart-Harawira 2020). This deeply ethical relationality and interconnectedness that for aeons underpinned Maori traditional cultural practices for caring for and managing their environment is today the foundation of Maori environmental governance (Redvers et al. 2023; Salmond et al. 2023).

The failure of the international governance system of nation-states and corporate-government partnerships to address the global scale of the destruction is self-evident. Transformative forms of governance have been high on the agenda of the UN Conferences on Climate Change since 2014 and the UN Sustainable Development goals since 2015. The evolving planetary boundaries framework is one such response (Cf. Rockström et al. 2009), yet as Blythe et al. emphasize (2018), there are a number of latent risks with transformative government proposals that are often overlooked in

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the articulations of such aspirational goals, not least of which is the political processes and shifts in power that are involved. A recent report calling for a new paradigm for planetary governance positions environmental and climate justice in its goals and invokes a proposed new legal architecture of earth law as one arm of planetary governance (Rockström et al. 2023). A critical examination of the role of law in maintaining a safe operating space within the planetary boundaries (Rockström et al. 2024) concludes that, while

> [l]aw cannot [therefore] be a panacea for addressing the complex task of governing the Earth system and the regulatory challenges emerging from the planetary boundaries, it will have a critically important role to play in this existential endeavour. (Kotzé & French 2021)

While the role of law is widely promoted as an effective tool in addressing the failure of calls for justice to address inequity, it too is hampered by the principle of state sovereignty which overrides issues of justice at the global and national levels. As dramatically demonstrated in the November 2023 national election in New Zealand, this is particularly the case within nation-states whose national governance strategies and policies can be reversed almost on a whim.

Situated at the intersection of Indigenous onto-epistemologies, multispecies justice, and proposed planetary justice frameworks of transformative governance, this chapter focuses on the critical issue of the right of more-than-human species to thrive in the context of increasingly catastrophic effects of anthropogenic climate change. The vehicle for this exploration is a consideration of the challenges to transformative governance and the implications that accrue to indigenous biodiversity. The context is the catastrophic climatic events that occurred in the South Pacific Island nation of Aotearoa New Zealand in early 2023 with devastating consequences and the well-intentioned, but contradictory, responses of a liberal humanist government with a transformative agenda. Of particular note is the recognition of Maori knowledge, ethics, and values in very recent environmental policy documents and responses to crisis after decades of its absence. Attention is drawn to the power of political upheavals in climate obstructionism and some inherent dangers in evoking transformative governance as a response to the crisis of extinction. In the final analysis, it is argued that nothing less than deep systemic transformation underpinned by an ontology of being that is committed to the ethics of deep interrelationship, the importance of place, and protection of the ability of all species to thrive will provide a pathway for maximizing the protection, regeneration, and survival of species into the future.

10.2 Extinction in the Pacific

The small island nation in the South Pacific and one of the last countries to be settled, Aotearoa New Zealand, as it is known today, has some of the world's most

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unique biodiversity due to 70 million years of Gondwana's isolation from other continents. Elaborated in an address on the Gondwana inheritance shared by Southern hemisphere lands (Logan 2001), New Zealand's biodiversity evolved in the absence of many species and families of plants and animals dominant elsewhere in the world due to its isolation and unique environmental history over 80 million years. As Logan enumerates, these absences include large land mammals, large reptiles, and snakes. Its unique biodiversity includes the distinctive kakapo, the only flightless parrot in the world, primitive frogs that lay eggs that hatch into adult frogs, and large insects such as the Stephens Island giant weta that fill niches occupied by rodents elsewhere. Unique features of the landscape include the braided river systems of the South Island, the kauri forests of the North Island, and the geothermal ecosystems of the central North Island. Yet today Aotearoa New Zealand has the greatest loss of indigenous biodiversity in the world (Joy & McLean 2019). Heavily forested prior to colonization,[1] by the 1860s Andrew Rutherford of a prominent Canterbury squatter family, was able to revel in the replacement of the forested cover of the Canterbury Plains with 'nothing but grass and wind' (Holm 1992), a comment revealing of the extent of destruction of the indigenous forest biome caused by settler burning in the pursuit of prosperity. As Park (1995) wrote, 'When the colonists' fires cleared at the end of the nineteenth century, New Zealand had become a different place. Maori had lost their most precious life support system' (Park 1995). Legitimated in their eyes by both biblical and Lockean ideologies of ownership and the subjugation of nature, colonists unhesitatingly took the opportunity to clear the land for building and development. In the early 1900s, as Salmond and Caddie report (Salmond & Caddie 2026), the Royal Commission on Forestry stated that 'No forestland, except if it be required for the special purposes of a climatic or scenic reserve and which is suitable for farmland, shall be permitted to remain under forest if it can be occupied and resided upon'. In hilly, highly erodible terrains such as in Tairawhiti (the East Coast of the North Island), debates about indigenous forests which prevented erosion versus exotics for which there was a ready market drove changing policies. Ultimately fast-growing exotic *Pinus radiata* plantations, which offered local communities a steady income from forestry and an unfulfilled promise of permanent plantations to address erosion, supplanted indigenous forests. The impact of this on the highly erodible terrains in Tairawhiti was particularly pronounced on the catchment areas of the five major rivers in the region (Fuller et al. 2023).

At the beginning of the first National Forest Survey 1945, on a total land area of 26.6 million hectares, only 25 per cent of indigenous forest remained and that

[1] Richardson et al. note that forests were 'the land biome with the strongest functional coupling to the climate system during the Holocene period' (2007).

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mostly in areas difficult to farm (Masters et al. 1957 as cited in Marden et al. 2018; cf. Cunningham 1953: 40). Almost 80 years on from the NZ Forest Service survey, 62 per cent of New Zealand's ecosystems classified as rare are listed as threatened (Stats NZ 2023). Ninety per cent of New Zealand country's wetlands have been destroyed with the remaining 10 per cent under extreme threat from polluted waterways in farming areas, polluted urban environments, over-abstraction from waterways, industrial fishing practices, introduced species, and the effects of climate change (Department of Conservation 2020; see also Ministry for the Environment New Zealand 2019). In consequence, New Zealand has the highest proportion of threatened indigenous species in the world. Regarded as national treasures, as well as being an important food source for Maori, New Zealand's endemic species hold cultural significance (De Lange as cited in Hancock 2022).

Over the past 50 years, freshwater biodiversity is reported as vanishing at a particularly fast rate (Elston et al. 2015). While much of this is due to invasive species, equally serious is the effects of large-scale habitat destruction through deforestation, wetland drainage, and ecosystem degradation (Ministry for the Environment New Zealand 2020). In 2013, almost 33 per cent of assessed native freshwater plants (182 of 559 species) were threatened or at risk in 2013. Of these, almost 20 per cent were in the highest risk category: nationally critical (Ministry for the Environment New Zealand 2023a). Ten years on, in 2023, around one-third of New Zealand's unique indigenous marine, land, and freshwater species were listed as threatened.[2] Seventy-four per cent of assessed freshwater species were ranked as 'threatened' and a further 17 per cent as 'At Risk'. Nearly a quarter of the freshwater species were described as 'Data Deficient', meaning that there was insufficient data to make a proper assessment (Department of Conservation 2020). A machine learning analysis published in 2022 found that more than half of species whose endangered status cannot be assessed due to a lack of data are predicted to face the risk of extinction (Borgelt 2022). Many of New Zealand's rare native bird species also depend on freshwater environments. Eighty-two per cent of these were classified as threatened or at risk of becoming threatened in 2023. Eleven are already extinct (Ministry for the Environment New Zealand 2023a). Sediment levels which have a direct impact on river quality and freshwater biodiversity have been found to be significantly higher in areas of pastoral land and exotic forestry, compared to indigenous forest cover (Spicer 2021, as cited in Salmond & Caddie (2026)). In recent years New Zealand's market-oriented approach to emissions reduction has seen the exotic, fast-growing *Pinus radiata* become the forestry product of choice for carbon emissions trading. For some

[2] This accounts only for species which have been assessed. Some species are unassessed because there is no data available.

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Tairawhiti communities, this has represented significant investment with overseas partners (Fuller et al. 2023). For the five major rivers on the East Coast, the two largest of which comprise 'steep, highly dissected terrains that are subject to recurrent hillslope failures' and one of which, the Waiapu, is reported to be the highest sediment yielding river in Aotearoa New Zealand, the impact has been particularly pronounced (Jones et al. 2023). Owing to the lobbying power of New Zealand's key export industries, forestry, and dairy products, however, to date efforts to reduce the effects of agriculture and over-abstraction on waterways as well as land have spectacularly failed. This failure is acerbated by policies underpinned by utilitarian approaches which measure and divide ecosystems according to their economic worth.

10.3 Forests, Rivers, and Floods: Tensions in Paradise

In March 2023, following two months of unprecedented rain and flooding that accompanied Cyclone Hale in January and sparked by superheated atmospheric storms, Cyclone Gabrielle gathered strength and velocity as it headed towards Aotearoa New Zealand (Jones et al. 2023). It hit the north-east of the country leaving in its wake the loss of 11 lives (adding to the 4 lives lost 2 weeks earlier in an unprecedented flooding event further north), 6,500 people still missing one week later, and the destruction of homes, roads, and bridges leaving some townships cut off without power, water, food, or any way out for up to 2 weeks (Kerr et al. 2023). A government-commissioned panel called under urgency to 'investigate the situation in Tairawhiti/Gisborne and Wairoa' as a result of weather events which flooded woody debris and sedimentation into land, waterways, and infrastructure, concluded that 'Sedimentation from more than a thousand untreated gullies, trees, logs and slash off hills that should never be plantation planted or clear felled, waterways choked with debris flows, riverbeds aggraded, coastlines suffocated and dangerous, roads and bridges unfit, unpassable, and many broken' (Ministry for the Environment New Zealand 2023b: 6).

Recommendations from the eight-week investigation, which included consultation with local Maori communities, the forestry industry, and scientists, focused attention on the well-known erosion susceptibility of the land and advocated for immediate restrictions on large-scale clear felling of plantation forests (of exotic pines), restrictions on plantation forests, and returns of some areas to permanent – preferably native forest – 'which would have the advantage of biodiversity co-benefits' (Ministry for the Environment New Zealand 2023b: 19) as well as strengthening biodiversity through a system of mosaic planting. Many of these recommendations had been previously made in 1988 following the devastation of Cyclone Bola (Campbell 2023). Regarding waterways, the panel noted that

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legislating for the health of the two rivers to be a mandatory legal requirement would 'considerably speed up the health and wellbeing of the two rivers' (Ministry for the Environment New Zealand 2023b: 13).[3] Some of the critiques levelled at the report exposed tensions and contradictions within local Maori communities. Other critiques focused on the potential loss to a highly lucrative timber export industry, particularly from partnerships with overseas investors whose pine plantations represented a multibillion-dollar industry based on carbon credit trading, harvesting, and export (cf. Te Taumata 2022). Behind these tensions and anxieties was a colonial history of commodification and extraction which had seen indigenous forests replaced with more market-lucrative exotics for export and a ready employment market for local communities.[4] A report on the health impacts of Cyclone Gabrielle is unequivocal in its statement that prevention of this disastrous flooding 'means systemic decolonisation and restoration of Indigenous relationships with the land and waterways' (Jones et al. 2023: 8).

In July 2023, the New Zealand National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity was published as part of a bundle of policy documents aimed towards fulfilling Aotearoa New Zealand's climate commitments under the 2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement. Using language which prioritizes Maori ethics and values regarding guardianship of the environment, the document acknowledges 'the web of interconnectedness between indigenous species, ecosystems, the wider environment, and the community, at both a physical and metaphysical level' and recognizes 'that the health and wellbeing of people and communities are dependent on the health and wellbeing of indigenous biodiversity and that in return people have a responsibility to care for and nurture it' (Ministry for the Environment New Zealand 2023a: 1.5.2). Yet the emphasis on the role of Maori knowledge and values was not matched in the proposals. Directed towards local body roles and responsibilities for 'identifying, protecting and maintaining indigenous biodiversity under the Resource Management Act (1991)', the policy extended provisions relating to promoting restoration and increasing indigenous vegetation cover to include natural inland wetland areas and included partitioning the land for forestry based on catchments rather than their original habitat and natural groupings known to Maori (Thomas et al. 2024). From a *matauranga Maori* or Maori knowledge perspective, these proposals flew in the face of place-based knowledge and relationships. Species do not exist in isolation. They exist within ecosystems of mutual interdependence such that the loss or destruction of one species causes

[3] An earlier version of the report recommended that legislation to protect the rights of the two rivers be pursued.
[4] For a detailed account, see Salmond, A., & Caddie, M. (2026). The root of the matter: forests and colonial histories in Aotearoa New Zealand. In *People, Place and Nature in Indigenous-Settler Relations: Recentring the More-than-Human World* (pp. 85-103). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

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the diminishment, and, ultimately, the loss of those whose ability to thrive is dependent on it for sustenance (Thomas et al. 2024). Similarly, the spiritual, physical, and emotional health of Maori communities is inextricably tied to the health of those species with whom they co-exist.

10.4 The Challenge of Transformative Governance and the Return of the Extreme Right

Within the first 100 days of the newly elected extreme Right coalition government elected in November 2023, the liberal humanist policies of a six-year Labour government which sought to reduce carbon emissions, improve freshwater governance, install wide-ranging policies to address biodiversity loss, and prioritize well-being were overturned. Without public consultation and with merely a ministerial stroke of a pen, the New Zealand Government abandoned an agreement to significantly widen a deep ocean marine sanctuary in the Pacific, reopened coal and oil mining throughout New Zealand including on the only habitat of a rare protected fauna, ceased implementation of new Significant Natural Areas legislation introduced by the previous government (Sowmund-Lund 2023), introduced Fast-track Approvals legislation offering a fast-track consenting process for certain listed, and referred projects that will have 'significant regional or national benefits'. The stated objective of the Fast-track Bill is to 'reduce consenting costs and timeframes to enable the efficient implementation of large-scale projects' (Garvan & Hulme-Moir 2024). The Bill allows for projects to be approved by three ministers with unprecedented powers to 'authorise harm to wildlife in return for compensation', a single Minister after rapid examination by a Fast-track Expert Advisory Group supported by officials from the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, and a great deal more. In his submission opposing the Fast-track legislation, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment stated that the proposed Fast-track Approvals legislation will 'achieve sub-optimal outcomes through poor decision-making, poor allocation of resources, a lack of legislative durability, and increased litigation risk' (Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment 2024). As he noted, 'Ministers subject to political lobbying are empowered to allocate public resources with potentially harmful environmental and health consequences.' Former Prime Minister and Queen's Counsel Sir Geoffrey Palmer was unequivocal about the harmful consequences, stating,

> [t]he overturning of the guiding principles of the existing Resource Management Act and the shift from an economy of wellbeing to an economy prioritizing mining and development has removed all considerations of ecosystem health and species survival. (Palmer 2024)

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Aotearoa New Zealand is a signatory to the Convention on Biodiversity (since 1993) and the Kumming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022). The implications of the proposed removal of environmental protection legislation would mean an extremely poor prognosis for the last remaining 10 per cent of New Zealand's wetlands, 20 per cent of and dunes, 27 per cent of rare ecosystems, and 20 per cent of indigenous species would be extremely poor. Like marine life in the South Pacific Ocean and indeed biodiversity globally, without deep systemic intervention, the biodiversity on this island nation in the South Pacific is facing even further extinction. The consequences of such massive disruption to ecosystems can only exacerbate the effects of climate change and accelerate the already devastating loss of biodiversity.

At the time of first writing this conclusion, news headlines in New Zealand reported that the Fast Track bill was crumbling under the weight of thousands of submissions opposing such action (Edwards 2024). As Salmond et al. (2023) noted, in the country that was one of the first to recognize a mountain as an ancestor with legal personhood, resistance, and transformation was happening from the ground. Awareness of the catastrophic impact of industrial development and climate change had seen the principles of kaitiakitanga rise to the fore. Yet critical as this movement was, and is, it was insufficient to stop the juggernaut of market capitalism and financial power. Rising awareness and New Zealand's role as a signatory to international conventions seeking to protect biodiversity notwithstanding, the determined efforts of a government elected by the power of the financial-industrial lobby saw the Fast Track Approvals Act passed into law in December 2024 (New Zealand Government 2024). Under this Act the impacts of industrial development on rare and/or endangered species are no longer to be considered nor, of course, are impacts on Maori values or communities. The removal of Maori rights, language, and the principles of kaitiakitanga from all legislative considerations under the Coalition Government is not coincidental.

10.5 Governing for the Survival of Species

Among the proposals for transformative governance for planetary well-being and multispecies justice is a new planetary commons framework proposed by a large consortium that includes the Potsdam Institute, the Stockholm Resilience Centre, and many others. Calling for a new paradigm for governance that 'foregrounds planetary stewardship and secures critical planetary life-support systems in a safe and just way' (Rockström et al. 2024), the proposed planetary commons approach for earth system governance recognizes that the 'transgression of boundaries and undermining of biophysical symptoms already have multispecies justice implications for past and present generations' (Rockström et al. 2024: 3). As this

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preliminary document emphasizes, to achieve the goal of 'collectively securing critical biophysical Earth system functions that regulate livability on Earth for everyone, irrespective of where these functions are located' would require a shift from governing of resource use of natural resources to universal rules of planetary stewardship. Alongside this major challenge to the 'outdated traditions of an old European political order', including state sovereignty and self-determination, vested corporate interests, inequities of global power, and the complexities of demarcation (Rockström et al. 2024: 6), is a proposed new legal paradigm of earth system law and a new planetary ethic that would rest on sets of principles such as differentiated degrowth and sufficiency, interconnectivity, and a new planetary ethic (Rockström et al. 2024: 8). The particular engagement of indigenous peoples with their 'knowledges, practices, and contributions to ensure stable living conditions across the planet' is included in this framework for planetary well-being, as is the relationship between 'territorial custodians of a planetary commons and the broader spectrum of planetary beneficiaries', yet it is unclear to what degree the importance of place-based species and knowledge that is central to Indigenous onto-epistemologies is fully understood. As the authors acknowledge, 'the spectre of climate and environmental colonialism' is ever present (Rockström et al. 2024: 7). So also, as the document demonstrates, is the centring of the human. Critiques of the planetary model point out that there are other ways of conceiving of planetary ethical commitments that require a radical shift in our conceptualizations of humans and more-than-human, of communities, and of the planet. One example is Latour's model of using the concept of planetary to break apart the concept of a 'whole', 'singular planet' that can be looked down upon from on high. Others point to multispecies justice lifeways as a route to achieving planetary, multispecies justice (Kurki 2024). The ethics and values of Indigenous peoples who have for thousands of years recognized the animated, agential nature of the world, including human and nonhuman, and whose first law of governance is the protection of biodiversity represent the foundation of such a model. One thing is unequivocal, while the exceptional human remains at the centre, the transformative paradigm for protecting biodiversity that is sought in the framework for planetary stewardship will repeat the mistakes that have led to this extinction.

Aotearoa New Zealand is not alone in its demonstration of the fragility of governance and law as mechanisms for protecting the well-being of species, human and more-than-human, and the distribution and protection of justice from the proclivities of power and ambition. The achievement of deep systemic change will require transformation from the bottom up. It begins with the ethics and values of right relations and the first law of traditional Indigenous governance. Traditional Maori ethics and values of right relations recognized that status accrued not from ownership and power over but from uplifting and protection of the rights of others,

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that our first and foremost responsibility is to the protection of the life force, well-being, and right to thrive of all our relations, human and more-than-human (Williams 2013). 'Kaitiakitanga', stated Chaz Doherty, 'is an action, not a title' (Te Ao with Moana 2020).

Without an underpinning onto-epistemology of the sacredness of the lifeforce which binds all existence and the decentring of the human, the achievement of deep systemic transformation may be long in the making.

Granting legal personhood to geological bodies such as rivers and mountains is one representation of the broadening of concepts of justice to the more-than-human, to multi-species justice. However critical limitations and challenges exist, some of which are reflected in the planetary boundaries framework. The onto-cosmologies of Indigenous peoples, such as, for example, those traditionally held by Maori in Aotearoa New Zealand, by First Peoples in Australia and in the Americas, in the high mountains of Bhutan and elsewhere, hold the sacred nature of all being and of ethical relationality itself, as the essence of existence. Such an ontology decentres property rights and economic priorities and re-centres the well-being of life itself. These are the ethics and values that must be embedded in and enframe legal and civil legislation and boundaries not only for planetary wellbeing, but for the well-being of all aspects of existence now and into the future, and in such a way that they cannot be overturned. Never have they been more urgently needed.

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