



CALL FOR PAPERS

International Conference

Organized by the
Department of Languages
Department of English Language, Literature & Civilisation

Ecole Normale Supérieure

University of Tunis

Tunis, Tunisia

Social & Environmental (In)Justice

in Discourse & in the Literary/Artistic Imagination

November 8–10, 2023

Venue: Ecole Normale Supérieure (Tunis) and online

Official conference site: www.ens-conference-tunis.com

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The conference aims at inviting scholarly examinations of the discursive patterns—historiographic, documentary, theoretical, and artistic—within which the old theme of social (in)justice has been revisited in connection to the issue of environmental (in)equality. If—as it has often been noted—exposure to, and suffering from ecological disasters has also been victimizing the lower classes, marginal groups, and indigenous populations, how far did this multi-faceted injustice orient documentary, theoretical and creative practices towards a critical rethinking of the concept of representation, as well as a rethinking of notions such as militancy, commitment, and activism? How have the discourses of culture studies, sociology, sociolinguistics, and literary criticism been approaching those intersections between forms of social and environmental (in)justice? How has the literary and artistic imagination been reacting to the urgency of these issues in an intellectual climate that has been increasingly sceptical about the adequacy of representation and the desirability of the mimetic? How did the issues related to the ecological urgency contribute to the revival of a scholarly interest as well as artists' concern with the question (in)justice?



Theory & Cultural Studies

For centuries, *justice* has endured as a mantra with which the world's nations, communities and individuals could relentlessly vest their faith, will, knowledge, and ideological fears, desires, and values. As a result, *social justice* has generally functioned as a utopian design assimilated to the legitimacy of a human longing to empower and nurture the common good. From the Native's and Afro-American's local anti-racial strife in America through the working classes' challenging of the dominant socio-economic regimes of bourgeois power in both Europe and Asia, to the controversial "third world's" decolonial resistance to global imperialism and hegemony since the mid-20th century (Fredric Jameson, 1986), the urgent need for social justice has coalesced with the strengthening of freedom and democracy in the modern world, the reclaiming of indigenous peoples' rights, and above all, the re-envisioning of what it means to be human in a politically, technologically, and climatically precarious world.

"Recognition," Axel Honneth (1995) posits, is a *sine qua non* for any struggle for social justice. Such recognition remains, nonetheless, warranted by a "mutual," hence *intersubjective*, individuation process of "self-confidence," "self-respect," and "self-esteem." Interestingly, Honneth's justice-based recognition would not only evoke the implicit correlation (Platonic and Aristotelian) between individual (or collective) rights and duties. It would also problematize the notion of justice and its entanglement with law enforcement—a contention already challenged by Jacques Derrida in one of his Lectures entitled "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'" (2002). For Derrida, justice is critically aporetic. Not only is it "unrepresentable" and "incalculable," but it is also intricately enmeshed in the "enforceability", and by extension, "violence" of law (Derrida, 2002). In other words, the possibility of justice is impaired by its coercive character. How the notion of justice conceals the vulnerability of both its foundation and its feasibility is pertinent. On a different level, in a world where both the universal and the particular fuse or have become "glocal," to use Roland Robertson's term, the cultural re-appropriations of justice over time have so broadened up that the borderlines of each one of its relevant scopes tend to become entangled with others. In this context, the very scope of environmental injustice appears to include factors of class, ethnicity, and gender since it "is the term scholars use to describe what occurs when marginal populations suffer a disproportionately high burden of environmental harm and are excluded from environmental decisions affecting their communities. This is a social problem that primarily affects people of color, indigenous peoples, low-income populations, immigrants, and women. These communities are sites where hazardous facilities, landfills, incinerators, toxic waste sites, and contaminated water, air, land, and food are frequently the order of the day" (David N Pellow, 2018). In a post-modern world where "a civilization of excess, redundancy, waste, and waste disposal" (Zygmunt Bauman, 2008) has taken possession of our ordinary way of life, the already "precarious" condition of those communities that suffer from the environmental injustices induced by a dysfunctional anthropocentric system of unbridled interest and growth, around the world has alarmingly been endangered.

Provided that the interpretation realms of (in)-justice, be they national or international, conservative or liberal, urban or rural, and secular or religious, have been incorporated in the representational and militant discourses of culture (from historiography to journalism, and from literary production to the performative arts), how far could the discursive and narrative constructs around social (in)justice be inclusive, representational of the dispossessed and the disempowered? To what extent have those discourses and narratives been capable of promoting a rethinking of issues of class, race, and gender? How would the rise of environmental awareness impact the terms and axes of such rethinking? One way to address this is to study the scope and power of gender, class, and environment as *anthropocentric* "discursive practices," to adapt Michel Foucault's phrase from *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), which may induce a reconceptualization of the very economy of such issues. Another possibility is to critically examine justice from post-humanist, post-anthropocentric, or even trans-humanist perspectives whereby, in its social dimension, the notion takes on environmental and ecological proportions. In this vein, will the "recognition" of the rights of the dispossessed human overshadow those of the non-human?

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Indigeneity, ethnic movements, and the conception of environmental justice in historiography
- Ecological and social movements in journalistic representation
- Social activism & the politics of ecology
- Narratives of social and ecological militancy
- Race, class, and gender in the discourses on (in)justice



Theory & Literary Studies:

The turn of the twenty-first century has witnessed the end of a long-standing critical antipathy between formalisms and materialisms. It is by now evident that texts and contexts, fictions and realities, imaginings and materialities are far from being the separate spheres we used to safely navigate. With the advent of new materialism, posthumanism, and environmentalism, critical approaches abound that seek to reconcile the new intellectual orientation towards the vital energy of matter or the ethical concerns of social and political justice on the one hand and awareness of the opacity of discourse on the other. New materialist and ecocritical readings of literature have broadly sought to re-establish the link between literary texts and their socio-cultural, economic, political and ecological environments.

In this context, the ecohumanities approach to literary studies has sought to qualify a previous ecocritical concern with nature and nature writing through debunking the human-nature dualism it implies. Granting “the ecological embeddedness” of humans and the interpenetrability of human (social) and natural worlds, the new environmental criticism has done much to add ecology to questions previously neatly enclosed within the spheres of literary, social and political analysis (Val Plumwood, 2001). By adopting ecology as its central geographical concept – one that encompasses the natural and social spheres – the ecohumanities perspective brings questions of both difference and justice to the fore. Since both humans and their ecologies are heterogeneous, divided and hierarchized, then questions of social and environmental justice can no longer be separated. Starting from the idea that a defining feature of second wave ecocriticism is the interlinking of political ecology and literary geography, we invite papers that investigate social and environmental justice issues in literary and cultural texts.

In a context of a continuous oscillation between the sincere seriousness of modernism and the playful irony of postmodernism, a reevaluation of our relationship with the environment may involve exploring the potential metamodernist aesthetics (Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker 2010), placing them at an intersection of ecological justice, environmental activism, and the renegotiation of our connection with the natural world (Henriques, 2020; Franco-Torres, 2020; Lipovetsky, 2005). It must be highlighted that metamodernism and the various manifestations of justice (mainly social and environmental) converge in their shared emphasis on challenging the legitimacy of established narratives, social inequities, and power dynamics. In this regard, exploring the trajectory of how postmodernism bifurcated into distinct paths of hypermodernism and metamodernism (Borgmann, 1992) might offer a compelling avenue of inquiry. “While hypermodernism refers to pathological and dominant technoscience, metamodernism refers to an alternative path where deep ecology and technology converge in harmonious ways and people are sensitively attuned to the destructive impact mass consumption and financial capitalism have wrought” (Kirwan and Fu, 2020). Conference participants are thus encouraged to submit works by envisioning alternative and recent approaches, reassessing human-centric views on literature and laying stress instead on diverse ecological legacies and holistic perspectives that cultivate a (primarily postmillennial) awareness of sustainability and ecological mindfulness.

Topics may include but are not limited to:

- Poetic justice in narrative fiction: its convergence with/divergence from the politics and ethics of justice
- Renewed interest of Literature and/or the visual arts in social class and class distinctions
- Environmental justice movements and their impact on artistic expression
- Neo-Realism in literature & the ecocritical wave
- Satire and the militant ethos in (ecocritical) literature & the visual/cinematic arts

Linguistics

The role of language and communication in reconstructing the new lives of groups once displaced by social and environmental injustices is undeniable. To help them circumvent the situation of injustices caused by displacement, there is urgent need for policies which truly empower them with the language of the majority while preserving their linguistic human right of maintaining their respective languages and sustaining their use by their offsprings. In order to break the cycle of environmental injustice (resulting in social, economic, sociolinguistic, cultural, occupational and educational disadvantage), the way forward is to (re)construct fair, diverse and inclusive societies. The challenge for the world today



is to think out language-in-education policies which depart from the one nation, one state and one language ideology and to truly embrace diversity, multilingualism and multiculturalism.

The need to move towards alternative education systems that promote equitable learning has been well-documented. Social justice education is one alternative that still attracts the interest of many scholars. While it can be a controversial issue, social justice education “provides tools to examine the structural features of oppression and our own socialization within unjust systems” (L. A. Bell, 2023). A social justice approach to education has been used in most educational fields, including ELT and EAP. For example, social justice has been linked to the benefits that translanguaging, bilingualism, and multilingualism can bring to the English language classroom. It is argued that preventing learners from using their first languages in the English language classroom not only hinders their learning but also deprives them of their linguistic human rights (Heugh et al., 2019).

Topics may include but are not limited to:

- Social justice and academic discourse socialization
- Critical pedagogy and social justice
- Bilingualism/multilingualism in the context of social (in) justice
- Language assessment and social justice
- Learner/teacher agency related to social justice
- Social justice and intercultural education
- Class, gender and/or race related to ecological issues from a sociolinguistic perspective

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Important information on venue, dates, and registration

We will gather for our conference at the charming premises of Ecole Normale Supérieure in El Gorjani. Situated in close proximity to the bustling old town of Tunis, our venue will offer a delightful blend of academic excellence and cultural richness, fostering intellectual discourse and collaboration among Tunisian and international scholars.

Click [here](#) to register for the conference.

Abstracts of 250-300 words, followed by five key words and a bibliography of three entries, should be submitted through the online registration platform.

Short bio notes of 120 words should be submitted through the online registration platform.

- **Abstract submission deadline: [September 4, 2023](#)**
- **Notification of acceptance by the scientific committee: [September 11, 2023](#)**

Publication of the conference papers:

Selected papers submitted to the conference will undergo a rigorous peer-review process. Papers accepted through this process will have the opportunity to be included in the official conference proceedings.

Conference venue: Ecole Normale Supérieure, Tunis, Tunisia (8, Place aux Chevaux, 1089 – El Gorjani)

Form of participation: on-site or online

Online participation is available for international applicants only. While our preference is for in-person attendance, applicants facing travel constraints due to visa limitations, travel restrictions, or other personal circumstances are encouraged to participate online.

The conference language(s): primarily English, but presentations in French or Arabic may be accepted.

Registration fee:

We are currently reviewing the conference participation fees. Please note that the payment details will be provided to you in a separate communication. You are requested to complete the registration form without including any payment information at this time.

Contact address: ens.conference.tunis@gmail.com

Visit the official conference website at www.ens-conference-tunis.com

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