

BOOK REVIEWS

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Narratives of Environmental Challenges in Brazil and India. Losing Nature

Bora, Zélia M. and Murali Sivaramakrishnan, eds.

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N*arratives of Environmental Challenges in Brazil and India, Losing Nature*, edited by Zélia M. Bora and Murali Sivaramakrishnan is a special volume which explores narratives reflecting environmental transformations. The changes that our society is undergoing call for new theories to approach and understand literature. Ecocriticism as a theory “explores the ways in which we imagine and portray the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production” (Garrard 2004, i). Focusing on Nature, the volume offers us a renewed vision of classical masterpieces and opens a new spectrum for contemporary narratives. Different cultures around the world have myths of creation based on Nature, which shows how the natural element is central to our culture. Thus, Nature could be considered as an important issue in our collective imaginary.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, but especially from the year 2000 onwards, there has been an increase in the number of projects and publications on Ecocriticism and Nature, helping to raise awareness of the relevance of Nature in the current world. Bora and Sivaramakrishnan’s edited collection includes contributions of scholars from a variety of countries, revealing the global scope of its content. Divided into three different sections –Contested Spaces: Resisting the Loss of Water and Forests; Speaking Nature: The Cultural Dimensions of Water and Land; The Voice of the Subaltern: Losing Nature-, each of them focuses on a certain aspect of Nature. Forests and water, which could be considered as a common thread in the work of the contributors, are the two recurrent natural elements dealt with in the different chapters, proving their relevance in the creation and development of life.

Murali Sivaramakrishnan opens the volume with a preface in which he provides a general picture of how this theory is being portrayed by different experts. As has been stated previously when referring to Nature as a key element in our contemporary world, he emphasizes how “the natural environment has always played a significant role in the discourse of national identities in Brazil and India” (2019, xiii), bringing together two countries which do not seem to share too much. However, as post-colonial contexts, Brazil and India suffered changes at different levels imposed by their having to fit the cultural, social and political structures of the colonizing power. He highlights, in particular, the change in the way in which human beings relate to Nature as the provider of all the necessary elements to sustain life, thus emphasizing the importance of respecting her.

Global destruction as inspiration

It is at the very beginning of the introduction when Zélia M. Bora explains how “the basic idea that inspired the present book was the premise that environmental inequality and the destruction of nature is a global phenomenon” (2019, 1), linked to a second objective: “to emphasize environmental problems through global connections” (2019, 1). Bora is very critical of the corruption linked to “the role of the state and the exacerbated pursuing of its own interest at the expense of the good of the national community” (2019, 20). She also explains that race needs to be taken into consideration when talking about the destruction of Nature as the result of national and global economic interests, “since the exploitation of the forest resources put at risk the lives of the native population” (2019, 12). One of the ideas closing the introduction is that it should never be forgotten that the “environmental integrity in the Global South must mean both advancing the integrity of human and nonhumans and making them mutually sustaining” (2019, 17). Moreover, in “The Amazonas Rainforest Revisited: A Critical Reading of the Novels by Dalcídio Jurandir”, she gives some hints on the literature of the Amazon by analyzing *Chove nos Campos de Cachoeira* (1941) and *Marajo* (1947), where the rainforest is represented as a virgin land, “a space untouched by civilization in the Eurocentric sense of the term” (2019, 76).

In “The Loss of Nature, Human and Nonhuman Relationships in Tamil Nadu”, V. Arivudai Nambi relates the transformation of the Javadi Hills both physically and in terms of its inhabitants. As a population practicing subsistence agriculture, they had to overcome several natural changes such as “the first major impact on the forests [...] during the early colonial period [which] was laying of the southern railway line passing through the district” (2019, 24). The area was highly exploited until the Madras Forest Act of 1882 preserved several zones of the Javadi Hills, although their wildlife, as well as the extraction of sandal and bamboo, was excluded from protection. More recently, in the 1950s, road ex-

pansion had an impact on the marketable products, the expansion of education and also the seasonal migration of tribal farmers, which led to new developments and helped transform the area.

Reinhart Philip’s “Human Intervention and the Depleting Well Springs of Nature. A Case Study of Orange Poika”, focuses on water, “as it is central to achieve poverty reduction, inclusive growth, food security and public health, sanitation, dignified life and harmony of the ecosystem” (2019, 37). Throughout this chapter, the author emphasizes how humankind depends on water, a finite resource, and deals with the crisis that this dependence entails exemplified in Kerala, a state with difficulties to find fresh water except during the Monsoon season. Lake Orange is portrayed as an example of the destruction of an ecosystem in the name of progress and commodities. As Reinhart highlights, “the irony is, all this happens when human beings are well aware of the importance of water and its varied uses and in situations where scarcity threatens its demand” (2019, 47).

Siddharth Singh Monteiro Bora’s “Green Risk. Analyzing the Societal Harms in the Illegal Wood Trade of the Amazonian Rainforest (Peru/Brazil)” reinforces the idea that our planet is being put at risk as an ecosystem in the name of development, with the deforestation of the Amazonian area as an example. The text makes the readers aware of the need of Green Criminology, as this discipline “seeks socio/ecological, as well as environmental justice” (2019, 53). By reading this chapter, we realize how humans use and abuse Nature nowadays while in the past there was “an existence that respected nonhuman lives” (2019, 57). Later in the volume, specifically in chapter 10, Heloisa Helena Siqueira Correia portrays “The Literary Manifestos of Vicente Cecim” as a plea for the protection of the Amazonian rainforest, since “the manifestos denounce the systematic action of destruction and violence in the region” (2019, 147) and they “stand for testimonies related to forgetfulness and silence related to the Amazonian region” (2019, 148).

Rajan Gurukkal’s “Sabarimala. A Review of Development Threats to a Rare Forest Ecosystem” gives an account of how a hill temple changes the environment surrounding it so that a greater number of pilgrims can visit Sabarimala by “developing a good pilgrim base camp with [several] facilities” (2019, 64). The transformation is negatively impacting the ecosystem with serious landscape modifications such as deforestation, biodiversity depletion and environmental degradation (2019, 63). Gurukkal tries to raise awareness using as an example “how techno-economic and cultural impact makes often fundamental and irreversible changes in the natural landscape ecosystem” (2019, 69), in an attempt to stop processes of destruction of natural spots to build human facilities.

In Nibedita Bandyopadhyay’s contribution, we are told, once again, that the most vulnerable part of the population “struggles for equal distributions of the natural resources and an overall healthy environment” (2019, 87), as it is shown in *The Drought: Mahesh* (2006) written by

Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and *Water* (1997), by Mahasweta Devi. Both texts denounce how water is reserved for the upper castes and how a big amount of the population is deprived of this basic natural resource.

Carmen Escobedo de Tapia presents the most elaborate chapter in terms of ecocritical theory, as her text includes a brief explanation of relevant concepts applied to the analysis of Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). Concepts such as wilderness, dwelling or bioregionalism (2019, 102) are part of Escobedo's article, which portrays Nature in two different ways: firstly, as one of the elements most damaged by human action and secondly, as one of the basic building blocks in literature, this is, setting (2019, 101). Moreover, the article explains how Nature can be considered a character in a literary work, which can completely change the interpretation of any kind of text as it implies that human characters can be affected or even controlled by her.

In Roy's contribution, we can read about the "relationship between human beings, their religion and Nature" (2019, 111) through an analysis of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004). Through the description of the Sundarbans, Ghosh denounces the current global ecological crisis, which has developed parallel to the religious one (2019, 112). This is not new; in his book *Walden* (1854), Henry David Thoreau already "argued that Nature has an intrinsic value and provides the source for spiritual truth" (2019, 113-14). Through these pages, Roy portrays the relevance of preserving Nature and living in harmony to create a balance between the human and non-human elements of the ecosystem. Besides, *Walden* can also be understood as "a study in comparison between the environmental perspectives of the West and the East" (2019, 119).

Frank Izaguirre presents the Neotropical Colombian rainforest as an environment of "outstanding biological diversity" even though it is usually portrayed "either as a storehouse for endless wonderment [...] or as a hostile wilderness" (2019, 125). Through the analysis of *The Vortex* (1924), by José Eustasio Rivera, a natural element such as ants becomes extremely relevant when they submerge rubber workers into chaos, functioning "as a kind of purifying force" (2019, 133). The text portrays how ants are working as an element to reestablish balance where human intervention aims to destroy nature.

Lígia Karina Martins de Andrade's takes into consideration indigenous perspectives, since during the European colonialism "all forms of local knowledge were eradicated or censored" (2019, 151). Her contribution "Myths of the Amazon River and the Theater A RA QI RI" shows us a theatre "based on criticism of the colonality of knowledge and power relations through the rewriting of history and its power of visibility and transformation" (2019, 155).

The last contributor of the volume, Rekha Pande, shows how ecofeminism, which "develops as a new attitude to women and Nature that is based on accepting the intrinsic value of both" (2019, 159), emerged in India due to women's need to survive. It is through "the close connection between women and the environment and between women's rights and environmental protection" (2019, 173) that we become conscious of the "vital role in environmental management and development" (2019, 157) that women have had in history and how some attributes of Nature, such as the responsibility for subsistence and survival, have also been connected to women.

The abuse humaning

Although *Narratives of Environmental Challenges in Brazil and India. Losing Nature* lacks a general conclusion, it is quite easy for the reader to understand its message: through history, Nature has suffered under the abuse of humanity and now she is trying to tell us that "human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (Glottfelty and Fromm 1996, xviii). After reading its pages, we become aware of the need to preserve Nature in contrast with our current lifestyle, which is clearly destroying her. This volume could be understood as a plea to provide nature a key role in our globalized and stressful world. It is mainly during this last decade, maybe due to how we have become aware of the climate change and its long-term effects, when we have realized about the importance of this issue. This book is fundamental nowadays, since it reminds us of our responsibility to respect Nature in general and forests and water in particular. It is our duty to control progress and take care of all the natural spots that we still have available, because "one goes to 'Nature' to recover one's true nature" (Clark 2011, 31).



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