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Conviviality, Ecocriticism and the Anthropocene
An Approach to Postcolonial Resistance and Ecofeminism
in the Latin American Jungle Novel

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Conviviality, Ecocriticism and the Anthropocene: An Approach to Postcolonial Resistance and Ecofeminism in the Latin American Jungle Novel

Madalina Stefan

Abstract

In the context of the Anthropocene, ecocriticism is gaining an increasingly important role, foregrounding the inextricability of nature and culture, on the one hand, and the postcolonial cultural representation from the Global South on the other. Against this backdrop, the present working paper will focus on the Latin American context, suggesting that conviviality signifies a crucial contribution to the discourse about the Anthropocene and serves as an ideal theoretical framework for the research project on “Postcolonial Resistance and Ecofeminism in the Latin American Jungle novel”, which is outlined at the end of the paper.

Keywords: ecocriticism | Latin American jungle novel | ecofeminism

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1. Ecocritical Inequalities, Postcolonial Legacies and the Anthropocene

In order to speak of ecocriticism in the era of the Anthropocene, it is imperative to start by drawing attention to the inequalities that traverse it. Therefore I would like to point out the necessity to focus on postcolonial cultural representations from the Global South. This need arises from the mere fact that still today, the “scholarship that does turn to the role of the Anthropocene cultural imaginary is focused almost exclusively on the viewpoints of the global north” (DeLoughrey 2019: 2). This current situation reflects the global North-South divide as it fosters the old colonial hegemony of knowledge, attention and visibility. We are dealing with a gap produced by the discourse of a dominant North American ecocriticism, which among others, lays ground to a green orientalism that, as Larry Lohman explains, “sets up and enforces, in fine Orientalist style, a dichotomy between hungry, expectant, tradition-shackled Southern peoples and a modern, scientific, democratic North under whose progressive leadership they will gradually be freed for better things” (Lohman 1993).

Nonetheless, given that “the Anthropocene – or at least all of the anxiety produced around these realities for those in Euro-western contexts – is really the arrival of the reverberations of that seismic shockwave into the nations which introduced colonial, capitalist processes across the globe in the last half-millennium in the first place” (Davis and Todd 2017: 774), ecocriticism (and not only postcolonial ecocriticism) undoubtedly “must engage the complexity of global environmental knowledges, traditions, and histories in a way that moves far beyond the discourses of modernisation theory on the one hand, which relegates the Global South to a space of natural poverty, and the discourse of colonial exploitation on the other, which relegates the Global South to a place without agency, bereft of complicity or resistance” (DeLoughrey et al. 2019: 19). In consequence, it is clear that in order to close this gap, we need ecocritical approaches that address and empower the Global South. As will be explained in the following, this focus finds its roots in the very genesis of the Anthropocene itself.

In this sense, it is worth reminding that the Anthropocene – a term that refers to a geological epoch that is characterised by the domination of the human – was coined by the atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen, who “famously historicised the Anthropocene by tying it to the creation of the steam engine (1784), rooting anthropogenesis in a fossil fuel-based industrialism” (DeLoughrey 2019: 99). Nevertheless, as theorists such as Elizabeth DeLoughery explicate, “humanities scholars would point out that it is undergirded by the history of transatlantic empire and slavery, the radical dislocation of humans from their ancestral soil, and a violent irruption of modernity that predates the industrialisation of nineteenth-century Europe” (DeLoughrey 2019: 35).

Also Bonneuil and Fressoz, among others, stress that it was the capitalist trade networks based on colonialism that paved the way for the steam engine to have the impact it had:

The immensely profitable cotton monoculture in the Caribbean was only possible because slaves were fed by agricultural products from North America and cod from Newfoundland, while Britain could only dedicate its own soil to the production of grain, wood, and animal fodder by 'outsourcing' the cultivation of cotton fiber to its colonies (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016: 232–233).

Along the same lines, it is equally striking that one major point of criticism that the term Anthropocene has received, and that stresses its intrinsic relationship with colonialism, is precisely that of the misrepresentation of the crucial role capitalism played in the exploitation of the natural world (see Vermeulen 2020: 11). In reaction to this sometimes-neglected aspect, renowned scholars such as Andreas Malm (Malm and Hornborg 2014) and Jason Moore (Moore 2016) or Donna Haraway (Haraway 2015), have proposed alternative terms like, for example, the Capitalocene, the Plantationocene and the Eurocene. Here it is timely to briefly sketch that the Eurocene roots the environmental crisis in the European settler colonialism, while the "notion of the Capitalocene wants to highlight how global trade networks and class and colonial relations fundamentally shaped the planet" (Vermeulen 2020: 12). The Plantationocene, for its turn, "is an effort to foreground the planetary impact of transatlantic colonialism and to pinpoint its operative national and economic agents" (DeLoughrey 2019: 24).

Despite grasping different moments and their divergencies, all three terms emphasise the crucial role European colonialism plays in the context of the current geological epoch. Consequently, all three of them highlight the necessity to turn to the Global South. It goes without saying that "the violence of transatlantic empire is one recognised marker or constellation of the Anthropocene" (DeLoughrey 2019: 25).

But if the Anthropocene is rooted in colonialism and the discourse of the dominant ecocriticism silences the voices from the Global South, it is not only necessary but urgent to turn towards these perspectives and knowledges. As Lewis's and Maslin's (2015) contribution to the debate shows, special attention has to be paid to the Latin American context. To be precise, the authors argue that it is the European colonisation of the American continent that kickstarts the global trade and marks the beginning of the modern world-system. On this account, they do not only advocate that the Anthropocene finds its origins in the conquest of America, but they "foreground the violent process of empire and integrate the beginnings of capitalism, which is constitutive to transatlantic slavery and colonisation" (DeLoughrey 2019: 23). Drawing back on Kenneth Pomeranz's writing (Pomeranz 2000), the authors state that

industrialisation and extensive fossil fuel use were only made possible by the annexing of the Americas [...]. Thus, the agricultural commodities from the vast new lands of the Americas allowed Europe to transcend its ecological limits and sustain economic growth. In turn, this freed labour, allowed Europe to industrialise (Lewis and Maslin 2015: 17).

Similarly, Donna Haraway emphasises the slave plantation as a “model for [a] carbon greedy machine-based factory system” (Haraway 2015: 162, footnote no. 5), and A. W. Crosby (Crosby 1988) speaks of “ecological imperialism”. In sum: The industrialisation is considered to be the starting point of the Anthropocene. Therefore it has to be taken into account that it is rooted in the colonisation process of the Global South, especially of the noteworthy Latin American context.

But more importantly, it is at the heart of the conquest and colonisation of the Americas that we find the male, white master model (Plumwood 1993: 23) that ruled the colonial epistemologies, which, as known, led to a dramatic decline in human numbers, among others:

Regional population estimates sum to a total of 54 million people in the Americas in 1492, with recent population modeling estimates of 61 million people. Numbers rapidly declined to a minimum of about 6 million people by 1650 via exposure to diseases carried by Europeans, plus war, enslavement and famine” (Lewis and Maslin 2015: 12).

Besides the impact that the European discovery had in the so-called New World, the quote stresses how the arrival of Europeans in the Americas has been primarily formulated in terms of an encounter between humans, even though it has to be taken into consideration that a multi-species encounter would convey a more proper perspective. Yet, as Alfred W. Crosby argues, the colonisers brought bacteria and all kinds of other life forms with them, and the success of the colonisation process “depended on the ability to ‘Europeanize’ the flora and fauna of the New World in order to control and manage the unknown landscape” (Crosby 2003: 64).

But above all, from the viewpoint of the coloniser, humans as well as non-humans are viewed as equally at the disposal of the colonisation enterprise and thought of as means to it. And so is nature itself: “colonisers actively exploited the resources of the colonies, which included, in a deadly logic, people, animals, plants, the soil, and - most coveted - gold and other mineral deposits” (Bartels et al. 2019: 109).

Therefore one of the most striking ideas that the postcolonial epistemologies comprise in this context, is that of a pristine territory that awaits to be conquered and developed. This possessive territorial paradigm (that expands to all kinds of living beings on earth) expresses itself through what the author of the seminal *Imperial Eyes* (1992),

Mary Louise Pratt, baptised as the trope of “the monarch-of-all-I-survey” (Pratt 1992). Explaining the colonial gaze, she furthermore draws our attention to the fact that this appropriation lacks the heroism which it presumes.

The discovery [...] consisted in a gesture of converting local knowledge (discourses) into European national and continental knowledges associated with European forms and relations of power [...]. In the end the act of discovery itself, for which all the untold lives were scarified and miseries endured, consisted of what in European culture counts as a purely passive experience – that of seeing (Pratt 1992: 202–204).

In the same line of thought, DeLoughrey argues that we are dealing with “a construction of nature that was increasingly seen to require masculine European management” (DeLoughrey et al. 2019: 25). And it is important to recognise that this construction corresponds to the language of the civilising mission, whose “task is to reinvent America as backwards and neglected, to encode its non-capitalist landscapes and societies as manifestly in need of the rationalised exploitation the Europeans bring” (Pratt 1992: 163).

It is a “normalising, homogenising rhetoric of inequity” (Pratt 1992: 153), which is not only foundational to the colonial epistemologies and inequalities but draws on Enlightenment dualisms of nature and culture, White and Black, and male and female. In this regard, it is necessary to emphasise that the entanglement of these colonial dualisms is commanded by the nature-culture divide, which postulates nature “as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason” (Plumwood 1993: 19), that therefore corresponds to “the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilised, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness” (Plumwood 1993: 19).

And even though the renowned postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha marks the unstable character of the colonial discourse due to being based on the ambivalence of the aforementioned dualisms- which in turn leads to slippages and the possibility of a subversive postcolonial resistance (Bhabha 1984: 129), the nature-culture divide forecasts a White, male and European superiority.

The category of nature is a field of multiple exclusion and control, not only of non-humans, but of various groups of humans and aspects of human life which are cast as nature. Thus racism, colonialism and sexism have drawn their conceptual strength from casting sexual, racial and ethnic differences as closer to the animal and the body construed as a sphere of inferiority, as a lesser form of humanity lacking the full measure of rationality or culture [...]. To be defined as “nature” in this context is to be defined as passive, as non-agent, and non-subject, as the “environment” or invisible background conditions against which

the “foreground” achievements of reason or culture (provided typically by the white, western, male expert or entrepreneur) take place. It is to be defined as a *terra nullius*, a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings, and hence available to be annexed for the purposes of those supposedly identified with reason or intellect, and to be conceived and molded in relation to these purposes (Plumwood 1993: 4).

Thus, the exclusion from the “master category of reason” (Plumwood 1993: 4) paves the way for the persistent, ongoing colonial inequalities and colonial dualisms that link the domination of humans to that of nature. Famously, Dipesh Chakrabarty has also argued that the current planetary crisis of climate change “spell[s] the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history” (Chakrabarty 2009: 201). Building on Chakrabarty’s thesis, DeLoughery adds that it is “a distinction upon which postcolonial critiques of capitalism and globalisation have relied” (DeLoughery et al. 2019: 29).

As this quote already suggests, it is equally important that the rootedness and persistence of these colonial epistemologies, categories, and hierarchies lead to the contemporary situation of late capitalism, which can be thought of as a prolongation of old colonial power relations that also in the context of climate change create an immense impact in the Global South, even though this impact is in great part provoked by the consumption and lifestyle of the Global North.

In this regard, it is crucial to see that the moment nature became a commodity, the nature-culture divide automatically went hand in hand with the global North-South divide. Arturo Escobar pinpoints it when he says that:

capital is undergoing a significant change in form, and is entering an “ecological phase”. No longer is nature defined and treated as an external, exploitable domain; through a new process of capitalisation, effected primarily by a shift in representation, previously “uncapitalised” aspects of nature and society become internal to capital (Escobar 1996: 326).

This paradigmatic reconstruction does not only signify “a deepening of the encroachment of capital on nature and labour, an aggravation of the ecological crisis” (Escobar 1996: 326), but has led to theories like Martínez Alier’s “environmentalism of the poor”, within which “the most frequent form of action consists in the rejection of the inclusion of environmental resources in the generalised market system, in order to maintain or return them to the non-commercial sphere of the ‘moral economy’ (in E. P. Thompson’s and J. Scott’s sense)” (Martinez Alier 1994: 185).

Suffice to say that such legacies of colonial character and this joint history shared by colonialism and ecological disruption and exploitation “remains pertinent in the present”

(Bartels et al. 2019: 109), leading to a global climate crisis saturated by profound inequalities. And by taking up and critiquing the famous and endlessly repeated slogan “think globally, act locally”, Escobar insistently reminds us of these inequalities. This slogan, he says,

assumes not only that problems can be defined at a global level, but also that they are equally compelling for all communities. They believe that since all people are passengers of spaceship earth, all are responsible for environmental degradation. They do not always see, in short, that there are great differences and inequities in resource problems between countries, regions, communities and classes (Escobar 1996: 330).

Or, to put it in Rob Nixon’s words, we are witnessing an Anthropocentrism of “unequal human agency, unequal human impacts, and unequal human vulnerabilities” (Nixon 2014). An era of unequal multi-species agency, unequal multi-species impacts, and unequal multi-species vulnerabilities, we should add.

Interestingly enough, building on and commenting Nixon’s work, Pieter Vermeulen observes that it is crucial to understand that we are dealing with a problem of storytelling:

Nixon’s own contributions to debates over the Anthropocene have advocated a disciplined focus on the storytelling practices and the forms of activism that make up an often overlooked “environmentalism of the poor”. For Nixon, the non-spectacular, attritional deterioration to which the global poor are exposed is hard to talk about and to make visible: such “slow violence” (his coinage), a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, does not really lend itself to the spectacle-driven templates of contemporary media culture, or even to the drama-dependent formats of literary storytelling (Vermeulen 2020: 14–15).

This remark is of major interest to our purposes as it proposes a perspective that is based on a constructivist conception of nature and is intrinsically linked to the inextricability of nature and culture. It reminds of Neil Smith’s thesis of the “production of nature” (Smith 2008) and the idea that “there isn’t any more something that we can call ‘first nature’” (Manzi 2020: 6), but that humans inhabit a human-made nature, an environment that is exploited according to the ways nature is perceived, imagined and narrated by humans. In this sense, Escobar advocates that “it is necessary to reiterate the connection between the making and evolution of nature and the making and evolution of the discourses and practices through which nature is historically produced and known” (Escobar 1996: 315).

But more importantly, these thoughts are embedded in a major framework that discloses a linkage between the global climate emergency, the Anthropocene, and an

epistemological crisis, which, as the outlined positions sustain, point out an urgency of a change of perspective, knowledge and storytelling.

Furthermore, it seems to be common ground that “the Anthropocene focalises the necessity of new modes of figuring the relation between humans and the planet” (DeLoughrey 2019: 12) and that we need to come to another understanding of the human-nature relation (Latour 2017: 20), which means “to start with inventing a new language to speak of these issues” (Escobar 1996: 338). It is against this backdrop that I seek to argue that conviviality could be one major contribution to this new vocabulary.

2. Conviviality as a New Vocabulary for an Epistemological Crisis

Assuming that we are dealing with an epistemological crisis, the key question would lie in the production of knowledge and therefore in how humans think of nature and see their environment. Thus, it makes sense to direct our attention to Tim Ingold’s “Globes and Spheres: The Topology of Environmentalism” (Ingold 2011: 209–217), in which he states that “what may be called the global outlook may tell us something important about the modern conception of the environment as a world which, far from being the ambience of our dwelling, is turned in upon itself [...]” (Ingold 2011: 209). Accordingly, Ingold proposes to differentiate between the globe and the sphere, referring the first one to a vision of the world that encompasses the human, and the second to one upon which we can gaze (Harvey 1996: 37); “the quintessential world-image of colonialism” (Wenzel 2014: 20), so to say. In consequence, regarding our concerns, the distinction between sphere and globe results fundamental as far as it is a carrier of change in perspectives and views, meaning an approach of a world imagined from below. In addition, as Jennifer Wenzel points out that the distinction furthermore does

involve not only the spatial perspective of visualisation from above, but also how habitation is imagined: a globe is a thing we live upon; it’s under our feet; as opposed to living within a world-or, more precisely, a “lifeworld” that surrounds and sustains us, a mode of experience and imagining [...]. In this sense, world-imagining from below is also something like world-imagining from within (Wenzel 2014: 20).

In order to avoid the creation of binary oppositions, and inspired in the closeness of Ingold's thoughts to those of Mary Louise Pratt and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's¹ Wenzel proposes the term "planetary", which "would aim to reveal and undermine the hegemony of the global [...], to rethink what it means for the earth to have a shape like its own, and to be a home for all" (Wenzel 2014: 21). Later, she adds:

[...] planetarity is the conceptual space where the alterity of nature goes when the received, Enlightenment-era dualism that separated humans from nature is discarded and disavowed in favor of ideas of humans-in-nature, a more-than-human world, a republic of things, what Leopold called a 'biotic community' (Wenzel 2014: 21).

Inevitably, these words expose that the planetary shares an affinity with the concept of conviviality, given that both a world-imagining from within and the community-thinking is integral to it.

Nevertheless, its constitutional trait to part from the inextricability of conviviality and inequalities makes the approach of conviviality reach out far beyond the planetary. And this is the point to be spotlighted: conviviality means a shift of perspectives, a world-imagining from within, that by taking into account inequalities, differences and conflicts also signifies an ethical shift. To better understand this term, I will briefly sketch its outlines in the following. And to do so, I will take Sérgio Costa's article (Costa 2019) as a starting point, where the author traces back the origin of the term conviviality and gives an overview of the different contexts in which it has been used and developed. The article opens by stating;

Since the incorporation of the term conviviality to the humanities vocabulary by Ivan Illich (1973), a wide variety of heterogeneous contributions have applied the categories and tools developed by Illich to various fields of knowledge or have even expanded and reformed his concepts to adapt them to the study of contemporary problems (Costa 2019: 1).

Even though these different contexts are not to be overviewed, I would like to focus on two aspects, which the same article places as crucial.

Firstly it has to be said that Costa does not only trace the different approaches, but also stresses that they share the notion of the "search for ways to live together", and

1 The "new planetary consciousness" which Pratt speaks of in the context of the La Condamine expedition among others, functions "as an ideological construct" and "makes a picture of the planet appropriated and redeployed from a unified, European perspective" (Pratt 1992: 47). G. C. Spivak in turn posits a mode of habitation for "planetary subjects" in which alterity describes a relation wherein the planet is neither continuous nor discontinuous with the human: such alterity, in her words, "contains us as much as it flings us away" (Spivak 2003: 72).

that this “living together’ is understood not only as ordinary life among human beings, but also between humans and non-humans such as plants and animals, spirits and artifacts” (Costa 2019: 1).

In the tradition of I. Illich, Costa’s comprehension of conviviality also includes posthuman and non-human life forms, bringing into the debate the Anthropocene discussion. Picking up this central aspect, he introduces a form of conviviality that fosters the conception “of the human being as a species that exists in relation with other organic and non-organic life forms” (Domanska 2019: 330).

And in this sense conviviality is easily relatable to approaches such as Latour’s Gaia, Braidotti’s Zoe or Haraway’s Chthulucene. Nevertheless, within the wide range of different approaches, it is due to its accent on the relational, and the processual character of coexistence that the term is foremostly linkable to Donna Haraway’s notion of the Chthulucene, which “replaces the Greek anthropos with echoes of the Greek *khthonios*, which means ‘of the earth’” (Vermeulen 2020: 17). It is worth noting that the introduction of her book *Staying with the Trouble* (Haraway 2016), where the author develops these notions, can be read as a plead for conviviality and for learning to coexist on Planet Earth. Yet, she states explicitly that “we become-with each other or not at all” (Haraway 2016: 4). Drawing back on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s conception of existence as a constant process of identitarian negotiation as a flow of becoming, Haraway includes otherness as a key moment of the self, grasping also the non-human others, just as Deleuze’s and Guattari’s chapter “1730: Becoming- Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible...” in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 232-309) already anticipates.

Therefore, it is outstanding that the convivial approach does not only share the aspect of the relational, processual earthly coexistence but also that of living with difference (Heil 2019: 318). Far from a romanticising, abstract theory, Haraway conceives the becoming with each other as a response to the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene, which she identifies as “the main forces of the latest troubling times” (Haraway 2016: 2); and as a necessity of “learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in responsibility on a damaged earth” (Haraway 2016: 2). Here it has to be pointed out that this proposal of a responsible conviviality refers to all living life on earth, this is to say to Zoe, as R. Braidotti would put it (Braidotti 2013: 60). In consequence, it also includes entangling “with the ongoing, snaky, unheroic, tentacular, dreadful ones” (Haraway 2016: 43) and to engage with “a frightening alterity (Chthulucene)” (DeLoughrey 2019: 22).

Besides, Haraway’s theory shows another affinity with the convivial approach. As already hinted at, Haraway’s idea of earthly conviviality is tightly linked to the critique

of the Capitalocene, a perspective shared as well by Illich's theoretical program of conviviality, as by the *convivialisme* (see Costa 2019), whose critique of economic growth (Viveret 2014) "implies a global redistribution of wealth and the development of sustainable production technologies dedicated to a new form of relating to nature and other living beings" (Costa 2019: 17; Les Convivialistes 2013: 32).

The linkage between nature and capital has become increasingly clear in the context of the debate of climate change and the global economy, and Costa pinpoints it when he alleges that "by disrupting conviviality among human beings, capitalism also undermines their relationship with nature (Costa 2019: 29). In consequence, the convivial approach does not only take into account a human-non-human coexistence, but permits to grasp the relation between the coexistence of humans and nature in the context of colonialism and capitalism. This seems decisive if we recall that capital has entered an ecological phase, as Escobar formulates, and that:

virtually every model of global climate change indicates that the Global South is particularly vulnerable to the predicted increases in weather extremes, such as more prolonged droughts, more intensified but less frequent rainfall and flooding, rising sea levels, shifting migrations of flora and fauna due to temperature increases, and even earthquakes (DeLoughrey et al. 2019: 26).

Yet the entering of capital into the ecological phase has gone hand in hand with the commodification of nature and the exploitation of natural resources and, consequently, the fostering of already long-lasting colonial inequalities that accentuate the global north-south divide. This leads us directly to the second aspect Costa stresses in his article: the nexus between conviviality and inequalities.

In order to avoid reducing the concept to a "good conviviality" that would turn it into a less operable tool, Costa posits the inseparability of conviviality and inequality as a premise and defines inequality as the "distances between the positions occupied by individuals or groups in the social hierarchies in relation to at least four levels: [...] material, power, environment, episteme [...]" (Costa 2019: 14–15). The outcome is a relational, processual theoretical program that implies an ethical shift and focuses on power asymmetries. In this sense, although not only, but at least in the Latin American context, conviviality inevitably foregrounds the critique of colonial legacies, seeking to give visibility to the margins. Thus, standing for a world-imagining from below, it raises questions about empowered seeing, social hierarchies and colonial hegemonies.² In regards to the Anthropocene, this colonial legacy encompasses the colonisation of

² The article refers to Nixon's essay "Slow Violence", where he asks: "Who gets to see, and from where? When and how does such empowered seeing become normative?" (Nixon 2013: 15).

nature, paving the way for new, enriching “convivial figurations”³ that study the human “ascending to power over the rest of the Earth System” (Malm and Hornborg 2014: 1) from a postcolonial perspective that goes beyond the exploitation of natural resources. And as already elaborated, the epistemological dimension of the global climate crisis is the principle condition that demands a turn towards cultural representations from the Global South.

Against this background postcolonial literature and with it “Edward Said’s notion of ‘contrapuntal reading’ that reads the literature of empire from multiple sides of the colonial encounter and interprets literary texts in terms of broader histories of imperialism” (Wenzel 2014: 21), opens up to a whole new field of research. In this context the convivial approach permits that these “multiple sides of colonial encounter” also include the side of ecological imperialism, as well as those of the Anthropocene and animal studies. And one such convivial figuration that concentrates on the colonial encounter between humans and non-humans is my ongoing research project, which I will sketch in the following section.

3. Postcolonial Resistance and Ecofeminism in the Latin American Jungle Novel

Focusing on the representation of the convivial relations between humans and non-humans, the research project foregrounds that postcolonial studies generally have concentrated on colonial power relations between humans, leaving aside a multi-species perspective. Inevitably this omission seems all the more surprising if we think of how Homi K. Bhabha, drawing back on nature-related concepts in order to develop his concept of postcolonial mimicry (Bhabha 1984), without taking into account the non-human actors, and despite being usually considered that colonial processes have been intrinsically linked to the exploitation of natural resources. Nevertheless, with the ecological turn, an environmental consciousness arises that galvanises postcolonial ecocritical “readings against the grain”, promoting a “reading for the planet” (Wenzel 2020: 2). And in regards to the Latin American context, such kind of readings can give new insights. Yet,

by controlling representations of Latin America in their travelogues, European travel writers could recreate the region and its people in any way they desire, whether they portray Latin America as a territory in need of Europeans’ civilising

³ “Convivial figurations are, by definition, dynamic, that is, they are found in a permanent process of reconfiguration and transformation. Considered from a perspective of a long duration, the convivial figurations know both diuturnal transformations as well as moments of inflection motivated by the accumulation of smaller transformations or by ruptures (catastrophe, revolution, radical institutional change, etc.) in the relationship between inequality and conviviality” (Costa 2019: 17).

power, as a land full of exotic danger and excitement, or as a picturesque world inhabited by countless undiscovered species (Waliszewski 2011).

It is against this backdrop that the research project aims to reach out and see what kind of image the nature narratives of the Latin American jungle novel promote and how they have been used in a productive manner, this is to say, as an empowering moment of postcolonial resistance that denounces the exploitation of nature and indigenous people. In this sense, the project aims to focus on a particularly fit literary moment that is famous for its entanglement of postcoloniality and nature writing, namely the Spanish American jungle novel (*novela de la selva*), which in the present context can be understood as a “form of knowledge about conviviality” (Ette 2010: 989).

It is crucial to understand that since the discovery of America, the representation of the New World’s nature played an important role in the process of colonisation, and it has to be emphasised that the representations of the peripheries emerge from the very centres of power of the empires, pursuing to represent their others to themselves (see Pratt 1992: 17), while exhibiting the centre and the colonial process as a successful project (Donavan 2012: 42). Actually, a closer look at representations of Latin America shows that nature discourses are at the heart of the debate on Latin American identity. From Columbus’s diaries to Humboldt’s romanticising views, the imaginaries of the New World were linked to nature and the exotic. And it is maybe the Latin American Jungle novel that most outstandingly showcases this. Yet with Latin American literary modernity, a change in the representation of American nature and colonial conviviality takes place. Characterised by the search for an American identity of its own, the Latin American literature of the first half of the twentieth century marks a significant turning point, given that it becomes “a testimony of the social, political and cultural realities, bringing to light problems that have not had sufficient public attention” (Walczak 2013: 150). And one of the most outstanding literary productions in this context is the telluric novel, which develops parallels to avant-garde literature (of more urban character), and deals with social inequalities, indigenous identities, and nature. In consequence, as mentioned, the project focuses on the Latin American Telluric Novel, more concretely on the Spanish American Jungle novel (*novela de la selva*), which “turned to the rainforest and the indigenous communities” (Wylie 2011: 1), and is considered to belong to the narratives that signify one of the first prominent moments of Latin American self-representation to “construct a distinctively American literature” (Wylie 2011: 1).

We are dealing with a set of novels with strong intertextual links, that emerge in a period of thirty years, between 1924 and 1953, given that this novelistic period begins with *La vorágine* (José Eustasio Rivera, 1924) and ends with *Los pasos perdidos* (Alejo Carpentier, 1953) (Manzoni 2003: 66). It also has to be noted that since the well-known article “Novelas ejemplares” by Juan Marinello (Marinello [1936] 1963), the

novela de la selva is discussed alongside classic novels like *Doña Bárbara* (Romulo Gallegos, 1929) and *Don Segundo Sombra* (Ricardo Güiraldes, 1926), yet according to Marinello, through all these novels “Indo-Hispanic America speaks with all its voice” (Marinello in Manzoni 2003: 66) and their exemplarity resides in its American character, that takes the jungle, the plain and the pampa as points of reference (Manzoni 2003: 66). It is striking that by employing nature as one of the main distinctive features, these novels keep a postcolonial ecocritical program at the core of their conceptual design. Actually, this design derives from the research projects’s approach, which pairs ecocriticism with postcolonial theory.

In terms of conviviality, it is curical to comprehend that colonial utopian narratives emerge in an era of slavery (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011: 31) and that the Western discourse on nature has been shaped by the history of empire (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011: 10). In consequence, as already mentioned, binary oppositions of Western enlightenment, such as nature and culture, feminine and masculine or Black and White come into being in the context of colonial processes (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011: 24) highlighting at the same time that the colonial discourse is built on unstable stereotypes that give rise to ambivalences, and therefore can be subverted (Bhabha 1984). Indeed, unlike utopian European narratives that mask the exploitation of nature and colonial violence by idealising landscapes of a lost terrestrial paradise, the narratives of the *novela de la selva* subvert the colonial discourse, portraying nature as a moment of postcolonial resistance that opposes European male intervention. Thus, these narratives present their own perspective, denounce the inequality of colonial conviviality and describe the jungle as a space of power struggle and exploitation of nature and indigenous people.

Moreover, besides the focus on human and non-human nature, the project aims to cover an often overlooked perspective in what refers to postcolonial convivial inequalities. Yet, if it is true that, as already said, the postcolonial studies generally have concentrated on colonial power relations between humans and the dimension of conviviality between humans and non-humans has been omitted, the relation between gender and nature in the context of the colonisation process directly signifies a blank spot.

In this sense, the research project seeks to emphasise that colonial utopian literatures do not only create a European imaginary of an earthly paradise and impose a vision that reveals the territory as a pristine one that awaits to be explored, conquered and developed, but also as one that is characterised by a discursive construction that conceives nature as a feminine site in need of European male intervention (see DeLoughrey and Handley 2011: 25).

Hence it is outstanding that the conviviality between colonisers, indigenous people, rubber workers, farmers, slaves, traders and explorers, on the one hand side and flowers, trees, bushes, omnivorous ants, leeches, hippopotami, spirits etc., on the other, is narrated in the Spanish American Jungle Novel as marked by unequal power relations and colonial hierarchies, but foremost as traversed by gender issues. Furthermore, given the striking depiction of female characters and the gendered representation of the rainforest, the research project proposes an ecofeminist reading that highlights how the hyper-separation between culture and nature is accompanied by the separation between male and female. Since gender plays a crucial role in the novels but has not been studied in relation to colonial nature discourse so far, this approach promises especially rich insights and new perspectives in the context of Latin American ecocriticism.

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