

## FOR RE-NEWED STRATEGIES TO SAVE OUR PLANET

*Por estratégias re-novadas  
para salvar o nosso planeta*

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### ABSTRACT

Unprecedented catastrophes resulting from climatic changes are common. I am Mauritian and my island is in direct line with the Antarctic Circle which stands only 3210 miles away, that is about 5 hours flight time calculated at about 506 mph. Every day we see signs of global warming. It is imperative that human beings must change their behaviour. In this paper I propose the adoption of positive attitudes on a wide spectrum ranging from spirituality to deep respect towards nature, accompanied with activism in order to deal with the human-induced climatic crisis. Amitav Ghosh in *The Great Derangement* (2016) puts forward the idea that writers can look ahead in matters related to public life and he concludes, saying that hope resides in the involvement of religious groups in the politics concerning climate change, for “they transcend nation states” and they involve intergenerational responsibilities. Ghosh also takes Pope Francis as an example. I believe we must care actively for our environment and collaborate with it; we need to react with alacrity to the urgency of the problem. My objective in using

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literature to address the issue of climate change has been reinforced by Ghosh's points. I foreground *Stories from a Shona Chilhood* (1989) by Charles Murgoshi, *The Secret River* (2005) by Kate Grenville and *Born Again on the Mountain* (2014) by Arunima Sinha. These literary texts are respectively from African, British and Indian writers and will allow a global perspective. The methodology I use to analyse these novels and discuss the issue of environment and literature from the point of ecocriticism, is recommended by Simon C Estok (2008). According to him ecocriticism must diminish its openness and ambivalence and should have a core issue. I also use points made by Daniel G. Anderson and David Harvey about homogeneity of space as this can foster respect towards nature (2014). My point in recommending positive attitudes starting with spirituality and riding up to deep respect, as strategies is motivated by the fact that spirituality is all- inclusive and encompasses universal values.

**Keywords:** Strategies; spirituality; action

## RESUMO

Catástrofes sem precedentes decorrentes das mudanças climáticas são comuns. Sou da das Ilhas Maurício. Minha ilha está em linha direta com o círculo antártico, 3210 milhas, aproximadamente cinco horas de voo calculado em 506 metros/h. Todos os dias presenciamos os sinais das mudanças climáticas. É imperativo que todos os seres humanos mudem seus hábitos. Na presente discussão proponho amplas atitudes positivas relacionadas à espiritualidade e profundo respeito à natureza acompanhada de uma forma de ativismo para lidar como a crise causada pelo ser humano. Amitav Ghosh em *The Great Derangement* (2016) sugere que os escritores precisam olhar adiante e conclui dizendo que a esperança reside no envolvimento dos grupos religiosos e na política ligada à mudança climática, pois elas “transcendem os estados nacionais” e envolvem responsabilidades inter-geracionais. Ghosh também segue o exemplo do Papa Francisco como exemplo. Acredito que devemos tomar conta de nosso meio-ambiente e colaborar com ele. Temos que agir rapidamente e urgentemente em relação a esse problema. Meu objetivo é usar a literatura para discutir as mudanças climáticas, reforçadas pela perspectiva de Ghosh nas seguintes obras: *Stories from a Shona Chilhood* (1989) de Charles Murgoshi, *The Secret River* (2005) de Kate Grenville e *Born Again on the Mountain* (2014) de Arunima Sinha.

Esses textos são respectivamente de um escritor africano, britânico e indiano. Os textos permitem uma perspectiva global sobre o problema. A metodologia que uso para analisar a questão é através da ecocrítica, de acordo com Simon C Estok (2008). De acordo com ele, a ecocrítica deve reduzir sua abertura e ambivalência e deve ter um papel central. Eu uso também o conceito de Daniel G. Anderson e David Harvey sobre homogeneidade do espaço que poderá subsidiar o respeito à natureza (2014). Minha sugestão positiva começa pela espiritualidade que deverá levar ao respeito profundo como estratégia que motiva que inclui todos os seres e abrange os valores universais.

**Palavras-chave:** Estratégias; espiritualidade; ação

*“Ideas emerge when a part of the real or imagined world is studied for its own sake”.*

Edward O Wilson (2016)

There are some worrying features of climatic change in Mauritius: unprecedented rise in temperature, flash floods and unexpected heavy down pours, so crops are ruined, fruits and vegetables have become scarce and expensive. Hence, we are having an adverse effect on our balance of payment and queues in hospitals are becoming longer. These facts have created an urgency.

Amitav Ghosh (2016) in his book *The Great Derangement* has been specific regarding the responsibility of fiction writers on the issues of climatic change and environmental disasters. He says:

When future generations look back upon the Great Derangement they will certainly blame the leaders and politicians of this time for their failure to address the climate crisis. But they may well hold artists and writers equally culpable – for the imagining of possibilities is not, after all, the job of politicians and bureaucrats. (GHOSH, 2016)

Writers of narratives, long and short, poets and dramatists have to build up such works that deal with ecological matters. Theorists and academic writers also have their role; through their interpretations and critical analysis they can influence policy makers and individuals to take such measures that can save our Planet. Politicians are always on the lookout for new ideas to influence their electors and to earn votes. So, to save our planet writers in the field of literature and literary critics

should take their responsibility and trigger saving measures through their readers.

In this paper, I draw on Simon C. Estok's points (2008). According to him, ecocriticism has been too open and ambivalent in its poststructuralist approach and has failed in its activist promises. He proposes that the ecophobia by which "nature becomes the hateful object in need of our control" and to be exploited for the benefit of human beings must be dropped for a biophilia, an impulse that resides within human beings and by which they interact closely with other forms of life in nature. He adds that ecocriticism needs a structural approach with minimum ambivalence and ambiguity. For Estok ecocriticism must be: (a) practical (b) dependent on ethical principles, (c) active against ecophobia - exploiting nature for the benefit of humanity, and (d) confluent, taking along racial, class, caste and gender issues (ESTOK, 2008, p. 12-23). I firmly believe that ecophilia can lead us to re-newed strategies to save our planet.

To the views of Estok I add those of Ken Hiltner (2015). He demarcates the stages that ecocriticism has followed so far. For him the first wave romanticised Nature and included writers such as William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) who focused on their local areas; the second wave highlighted on the environmental disasters all over the planet, acted as an alarm clock and included writers such as Rachael Carson. A third wave is information now by turning itself into Environmental Justice (HILTNER, 2015).

Taking up the point of Environmental Justice, I draw on the points made by Gustave Daniel Anderson (2014). In his article, *Space is the Place*, he makes the difference between local coherence which takes place when one develops a special liking to a place; when several such moments happen, one may talk of global coherence. Anderson says: "The homogeneity of space is a necessary premise for a mandate for global care - it is an object of responsibility" and he adds that one should insist "on both global and local coherence simultaneously in a relationship of mutual understanding." (ANDERSON, 2014).

It must be noted that Anderson (2014), early in his article, mentions that, as a Buddhist of the Tendai tradition, he adopts a type of devotional walking called Kaihogyo, in which one keeps walking without taking rest but what is observed, and the attention paid is considered sacred. I emphasize on this spiritual strategy. I am taking spirituality, in its broadest sense, that is our attitude to the invisible power. Spirituality stands in contrast to the material; it takes us towards

the sublime and connects us all. When we observe spirituality, we feel we are all subjected to certain laws of life, while we live on our planet. I use the term “re-newed” for spirituality has existed ever since human beings have sensed that we are subjected to laws of life.

At this point I would like to add Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s stand regarding her point about *Planetarity*. In her essay *Planetarity*, she explains that flying “over the land between Bagdad, Beirut, Haifa, and Tripoli into Turkey and Romania” she noticed that “the land looks the same – hilly sand” (SPIVAK, 2013). She suggests that we should stop looking at the world as made up of different countries but rather as one planet. Hence, I emphasize on her idea of planetarity.

## ANALYSIS OF TEXTS AND FOCUS ON INSTANCES OF SPIRITUALITY

My stand is that people in their private life can give a depth, a seriousness and an urgency to the movement of saving our planet by reaching for the sublime and for spirituality. The sublime is what human beings need in their struggle to give a sense to life here or to our passage on earth. According to Longinus, the Greek literary critic of the 1<sup>st</sup> century (CE) the sublime is necessary:

For grandeur produces ecstasy rather than persuasion in the hearer; and the combination of wonder and astonishment always proves superior to the merely persuasive and pleasant. This is because persuasion is on the whole something we can control, whereas amazement and wonder exert invincible power and force and get the better of every hearer. (LONGINUS, 1972, p. 462)

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the Indian poet and artist in his *Gitanjal* says: “When grace is lost from life, come with a burst of song.” (TAGORE, 1949).

Anna Chitando, Professor of language and literature, believes that an emphasis on spirituality is productive for it transmits an insightful truth that we are accountable for our actions or our neglect. For her spirituality can foster the appropriate attitude of respect towards nature. She asserts that “spirituality does not exclude practical approaches to life.” (CHITANDO, 2017)

I take up the writing of Charles Mungoshi (b. 1947), a Zimbabwean writer. In his *Stories from a Shona Childhood* (MUNGOSHI, 1989) he has a

story about a Kakore, that is a slave who becomes a tree. The boy leans against a Musasa tree which is green amid a dry land and he calls upon the cloud to provide water. Soon thunder is heard and there is a heavy rainfall. The Musasa tree is regarded as sacred. Other communities in Zimbabwe take the Mubacha or the Muchakata tree as sacred. The muchakata is not only a source of nutritious fruit but also an assembly point for Shona rituals. One is not allowed to tamper with this tree. It is the same with the Basil plant in India. Among many Hindu families this plant is worshipped every morning; in some temples it is dressed, decorated and venerated with water, flowers and prayers. She is believed to be the provider of good health and to be a purifier. In fact, this plant is medicinal too as its leaves are crushed and added to honey and used as a home medicine for a cough.

Anna Chitando believes that Children's literature can equip children and adults to adopt practices that promote environment sustainability and alleviate the impact of climate change. So, if people on continents are anxious, one can easily imagine the situation on small islands. I go further into practical approaches and spirituality. In *Born Again on the Mountain* (2014), Arunima Sinha tells us about the attack on her on a moving train. As a result, she found herself "bleeding heavily on a railway track with no one to help" (SINHA, 2014). But a "little over a year" later, she was on top of the Everest (SINHA, 2014, p. 206). With one artificial leg she had decided to climb the Everest and she did it on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2013. Early in the novel when she was at the base she had felt as if "a great ice-army was trying to prevent human beings from moving any further" (SINHA, 2014, p. 167). On having a full view of the Everest peak, she records that it was "a thrilling view" (SINHA, 2014); all her companions "were glued to the sight" (SINHA, 2014). She offered a silent prayer to the mountain, saying: "*Hum aayenauraaapkadarshan karpaayen*" (SINHA, 2014); meaning "we have come here and have been able to be in your auspicious presence". In the word "darshan" there is more than just "see you", there is awe, respect and a feeling of spirituality. Addressing the mountain as "aap" which corresponds to the singular "vous" in French and the "usted" in Spanish is a clear sign of humility and great respect towards the mountain. Once on the top she and her Sherpa prayed before a Tibetan flag of the Lamas (SINHA, 2014, p. 192).

However, what is most interesting is the account we have about the disposal of waste on the mountain. Sinha (2014) refers to an "Eco Everest Flag" and she describes how, while climbing, one is required

to put all waste material in a pouch, labelled with one's name and to bury it in the snow. On their return, climbers are expected to dig their pouches out take them downhill. Sinha (2014, p. 169) adds that she has learnt that "even a waste incinerator has been installed up there". Thus, *Born Again on the Mountain* reveals that spirituality and practical steps to protect our Planet can go hand in hand.

Thirdly, I take up Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2013). This is principally a postcolonial novel. It traces a boatman's journey from being a convict. He had stolen four planks of Brazil wood. He was shipped to Australia. There he became a convict-settler and an owner of "three hundred acres of good river front land" (GRENVILLE, 2013). He was "Mr. Thornhill of Thornhill's Point now" (GRENVILLE, 2013, p. 360). I chose this text because as the text starts in 1806 we witness the economic expansion of the European Empires on a micro level and along we see the exploitation of nature for one's economic prosperity. After a nine-month voyage the Thornhill family lands in Sydney. Immediately they start business in order to survive. I pick up two instances where the first nation Australians are deprived of their food.

Blackwood is a convict-settler, who had reached Sydney earlier and had bought land and set up in a very limited way. He reminds Thornhill and the other English men settling down, that when the relationship with the first Australians comes up: "Ain't nothing in this world just for the taking" and he adds "Matter of give a little, take a little" and in fact he repeats it as a motto (GRENVILLE, 2013, p. 108-110).

It is Blackwood who explains to Thornhill that when he was weeding off a plot to plant corn he was destroying the first nation Australians' plantations of yam. Grenville (2013), on another occasion highlights the anger of the natives when they see Smacher, another convict-settler, burning mounds of oysters to make lime. The narrator says: "A blackened oyster rolled out and lay steaming on the dirt. He pointed at it, gesturing insistently, and then down to the rocks where the ebbing tide was exposing the white scars where the burning oysters had once grown. He was shouting, an angry man" (GRENVILLE, 2013, p.241). On observing the behaviour of the convict-settlers we see the way nature has been exploited by human beings without considering what they must give in return or that they must take only a little. D.H Lawrence (1885-1930) in his poem *The Mosquito Knows* says: "he only takes his bellyful / he doesn't put my blood in the bank" (LAWRENCE, 1969, p. 200).

To conclude I emphasize that writers' work is not completed until their writings are read. Discussing their works, focusing on the change that the writers wish to foster can bring human beings to refrain from over exploitation of nature. Hence, we highlight the link between literature and environment as a major one to save the planet. The idea of being thankful for what nature gives us, of using a little as well as the idea of paying back, in terms of taking care of her, can inspire; however, it must not be thought that spirituality is purely abstract. Once it inspires concrete actions, it enters into the domain of the practical. When we look at the ways different religious groups look at nature we realize that we are all united in spirituality and can protect our home.

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