ENVIRONMENTAL NARATIVES AND REPRESENTATIONS: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The growing global concerns about the environment have to do with sustainability issues. Where the activities of the individual, community, national or international, being it economic, social, political, or cultural, do not post any damage to the environment that will call for compromise for future generations to look for their means of survival in terms of the quality and quantity of the environment. However, environmental degradation, pollution, and climate change challenges persist locally and globally. Hence, green media content may increase the audience's ecological consciousness. Indeed, several authors have highlighted the central role of both print and audio-visual media in bringing environmental issues to public and political attention. This paper aims to compile the insights of various environmental narratives and representations that showcase human-environment relationships over time. As a desk study, the keywords were also the search words for the appropriate literature. It takes theoretical and philosophical roots from ecocritism. The study reveals that these environmental narratives and representation strategies will go a long way to facilitate public connections, enhance ecological sensibility, and facilitate behavioural change.

Keywords: environmental narrative and representations, ecological consciousness, human-environment relationships, sustainability, green media, ecocriticism

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INTRODUCTON

The environmental narrative is considered a story approach to studying the environment as opposed to the scientific study of the environment as both a mode of knowing and process of knowledge construction (Frank, 2017). Over time, the relationship between nature and humans has been transmitted orally or documented as an environmental narrative. Ecosystem health researchers characterise environmental narrative as oral environmental histories and other anecdotal sources of knowledge and perceptions that are bounded by the narrator's experiences, observations, and attachment to place (Robertson et al. 2001). Environmental narratives, defined by von Mossner (2017) as any type of narrative, in any media that foregrounds ecological issues and human-nature relationships, often but not always with the openly stated intention of bringing about social change. Environmental narrative refers to the stories, discourses, and frameworks used to understand and communicate the human-environment relationship. These narratives influence how people perceive, interact with, and respond to environmental issues. They can be found in literature, media, scientific discourse, and public policy. The emergence of environmental narratives can only be traced back to the development and spread of stories, frameworks, and ideologies that focus on environmental issues, concerns, and values. Over time, these narratives have evolved as a response to environmental crises, scientific discoveries, and shifting cultural values. For instance, in pre-industrial societies, for example, many indigenous cultures and early civilisations had deep connections to nature, with spiritual or utilitarian views on the environment. The Industrial Revolution (18th – 19th centuries) emphasised the progress narrative on economic growth and human domination over nature, which led to the experience of environmental degradation. Environmentalism (20th century), that is, the mid-1900s, stressed risks and hazards associated with pesticide in farming, as highlighted by works of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring (1962), which spurred a new environmental narrative focusing on the need for protection, conservation, and balance. The narratives can be presented in scientific, cultural, political, and policy styles and in media (Audio-visual and print).

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The key themes in environmental narratives include conservationists, that is, the preservation of natural landscapes and wildlife. This narrative stresses protecting nature from human exploitation (John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt) (Duke, 2016). Environmental Justice (late 20th century) connects environmental issues with social justice, highlighting how marginalised communities are impacted by pollution and climate change. It calls for a more equitable approach to environmental protection (Boone & Buckley, 2017). Anthropocentric focus is on human well-being; they believe that protecting the environment is essential for human survival and prosperity (clean air, water, and climate stability) (Kopnina, 2018). Ecocentric moves beyond human-centred; they believe that the intrinsic value of nature exists independently of its usefulness to humans. It calls for a more holistic action to address environmental challenges, including the rights of ecosystems and non-human species (Eckersley, 2023). Climate change scientists, to control global warming, highlighted it as urgent to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition to a sustainable biocircular economy with a low-carbon emission (Bonner & Biglan, 2021). The sustainability (late 20th and early 21st Centuries) narrative emerged as a central environmental narrative which emphasises a well-balanced economic growth and development with ecological protection and social equity, aiming for the long-term viability of ecosystems, societies, and economies (D'Amato, 2021). Ecofeminism highlighted the link between the pertain of women and the resource exploitation, suggesting that both are rooted in patriarchal systems of domination (Öztürk, 2020). Posthumanism and deep ecology approaches challenge anthropocentric thinking and promote the idea that human beings are part of an extensive ecological system, advocating for the rights and value of non-human life (Fetherston, 2020).

In environmental representations, the environment is given a voice and image of different kinds based on the representatives (Boström & Uggla, 2016). In this case, the environment is ventriloquised. This is because the environment cannot represent, speak, or plead for itself. Representation calls for actors and tools as logistics for acting for or standing for the environment (Boström & Uggla, 2016). In the media, for instance, since the Earth Summit,

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environmental representation has taken several forms, such as the environment being represented as nature, rural, and, more often, urban (Castrechini et al., 2014).

PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Ecocriticism considers the linkages between the literature and the environment using green approaches, and in philosophy, it rejects social constructivism, which holds that knowledge is socially constructed (Barry, 2020). It stresses the relationships between human and non-human interactions in the environment, criticism of human misuse and dominance of the environment, conservation and preservation of the biotic environment and environmental justice in society (Mishra, 2016). It also examines the interplay between culture and humans, resulting in the global ecological crisis (Marland, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

The study explores various environmental narratives and representations literature to compile all the information needed for this work. This review begins by defining environmental narrative and representation, explores theoretical frameworks, and examines the role of audio-visual media, literature and fiction representation, and environmental discourse. It concludes by looking at cultural and climate change narratives. It answers the questions: how do environmental narratives and representations influence public perception, and how do environmental representations shape environmental policy or action? Compiling various environmental narratives and representation strategies into one working document like this is critical to easing the integration challenges in terms of narrative and representation and policy formulation. Google Scholar and Google were the main search engines using the keywords of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Influences of environmental narratives and representations on public perception

The theoretical frameworks behind environmental narratives help to provide a structured way

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to understand how environmental issues are communicated, interpreted, and acted upon. These frameworks are drawn from various disciplines, such as ecology, sociology, political science, literature, and cultural studies. Below are a few key theoretical frameworks that inform environmental narratives. The conservationist narrative seeks to avoid ecological damage, degradation or harm. It focuses on environmental protection, efficient management of natural resources and judicious use of the environment. It aims to protect the environment for people. By so doing, it merges with advocacy narratives to gain support for action. It is necessitated by the progressive increases in human numbers worldwide, the affluent lifestyles and changes in consumption for the unprecedented demand for the production of materials. Hence, the never-ending exploitation of natural resources as materials for production and the attendant depletion of the environment. The resultant global environmental challenges of climate change, land degradation, pollution and dwindling resources have fuelled the conservationist narratives. Environmental justice (late 20th century) narratives fight environmental law and advocacy. It seeks justice for the affected communities to participate in environmental decision-making. Hence, it is against elite and professional roles in environmental decision-making that cater to the accumulation of the elite. It is linked to the distributive power of environmental policy, which environmental justice sees as skewed in favour of the rich (Dayna, 2014). Again, environmental justice stresses the narrow base of the environmental discourse based on resources (wood and water) to the neglect of aesthetics, settlements and their interactions. The focus is ecological injustice resulting from industrialisation. Hence, the formation of social movement and the use of narratives. Anthropocentric focus is on human wellbeing; hence, the availability of clean air, clean water, and climate stability are crucial for human survival and prosperity. Therefore, protecting the environment is necessary (Adam & Melanie. 2014). As such, it can be contended that environmental issues are a product of human conceptualisation. Even though environmental issues concern nature, they are still focused on the way in which humans perceive them (Frederick, 1994). This justifies using an anthropological approach to combat environmental issues because of humans' nature. Anthropocentrism, that is, valuable if useful for human purposes; otherwise, other living

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things have no value in themselves (Samways, 2023). Ecocriticism/ecocentric states that nature and its usefulness are distinct and separated from each other. It emphasises the inherent value in lifeforms irrespective of the human experience (Washington et al., 2018). It recognises that the Earth consists of biotic and abiotic elements which interact to provide sustenance and that living and non-living things possess intrinsic value (Gray, 2018). Curry (2011) considered nature-as-value in which human and non-human species, together with the physical environment, constitute an integral value. According to the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987a), humans "must not endanger the natural systems that support life on Earth: the atmosphere, the waters, the soils, and living beings." Washington et al. (2018) stressed ecojustice as justice for nature and distributive justice across nature. Sustainability (late 20th and early 21st Centuries) narrative encompasses circular economy, green economy, bioeconomy, and sharing economy aimed at terminating biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, pollution, waste menace and improving quality of life ((D'Amato, 2021)). It emphasises humans operating within the ecological boundaries of the Earth (Veland et al., 2018). Posthumanism holds realist and non-realist (speculative) narratives about the interactions between human and non-human species. It argues that humans are an integral part of the ecosystem. Hence, human interactions in the ecosystem must be reviewed (Caracciolo, 2022). Deep ecology adds that these approaches challenge anthropocentric thinking and promote the idea that human beings are part of a large ecological system, advocating for the rights and value of non-human life. It emphasises ecological inter connectedness and calls for a profound shift in how humans interact with the natural world. Social Constructionism posits that environment narratives are socially constructed through social interactions between humans, non-human species and non-living physical environments, processes, media, culture, and language. Environmental narratives are seen as constructed through collective human beliefs and practices. They emphasise how environmental issues are framed in discourse and how these frames shape public opinions and policy. For example, the narratives about climate change, pollution, or sustainability are all constructed through social and cultural issues. In conclusion, environmental narratives are a crucial weapon in shaping the public understanding,

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reaction, and ways of addressing environmental challenges. The power of environmental narrative can be seen in Seuss's book The Lorax, 1971 and Rachel Carsons's Silent Spring.

Influence of environmental representations on environmental policy or action

Environmental representation refers to the various ways in which the natural environment, ecosystems, and human interactions with nature are depicted or conceptualised in various forms and presented.

Audio-visual media representation and environmental discourse

This refers to stories communicated through film, television, and digital platforms, often focusing on environmental crises like deforestation, pollution, or biodiversity loss. For example, documentaries like An Inconvenient Truth or Our Planet frame environmental issues to stimulate emotional and intellectual responses. The role of media representation in shaping public understanding and discourse around environmental issues is crucial. The way and manner in which topics concerning environmental issues are presented in the media impact public perception of the environment and policy decisions. Below are some of the ways media representation plays along with environmental discourse. Framing environmental issues refers to how media stories are constructed and framed about environmental issues (e.g., climate change, deforestation, pollution), giving some aspects prominence. In contrast, others are downplayed depending on the stands of the media. Advocacy activism refers to the role of NGOs, activists, and movements pushing for change per the ways the public relates to the environment, which are usually well represented in the media space. For example, "Fridays for future" movement utilises a narrative of urgency and youth activism to advocate for climate action. Corporate responsibility and greenwashing companies use environmental narratives to improve their public image, sometimes presenting themselves as more eco-friendly than they are. For example, using phrases like "carbon neutral" or "eco-friendly" in advertisements, sometimes without real substantive change. Visuals include media showcasing documentary visuals, and films make environmental issues more tangible to the audience and have a

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significant impact in raising environmental awareness. Examples include films like An Inconvenient Truth and Before the Flood.

Challenges of Audio- Visual Representations

Environmental issues, particularly climate change, may require scientific data, economics, politics, and social behaviour. Simplified representation may fail to capture the full scope of the problem and the requirement for solutions or interventions. Conflict of interest arises as media coverage is often confronted with economic and political interests. Particularly in fossil fuels and industrial sectors, that drive environmental degradation may influence the media to downplay the severity of its environmental consequences, hence misleading the public. Due to cultural and political differences, different regions and communities may have conflicting narratives about what constitutes environmental harm and how to address it. Lack of scientific knowledge means that environmental issues that can only be addressed by scientific methods or solutions need media personnel with knowledge in the scientific field. Anything other than this may lead to misinterpretation or misrepresentation. Access to information results from the fact that accessing places where environmental issues exist is sometimes difficult or life-threatening. This may lead to limited access to credible environmental information, hence leading to the spread of misinformation. For example, getting access to illegal mining sites in Ghana is, at times, life-threatening. An example of audio-visual media representation is climate change in the coverage of Hurricane Katrina (2005) in the United States. Here, the media's focus was on the immediate damage and human impact, the narrative of responsibility and government failure, linking Hurricane to climate change, sensationalism and dramatic imagery, and last but not least, the media bias and framing were seen in their presentation with varying interpretations of the disaster.

The role of literature and fiction in environmental representation (print media)

Literature and fiction play a pivotal role in shaping and communicating environmental issues. They provide a powerful platform for exploring complex ecological issues, human relationships with nature, and the potential consequences of environmental degradation. Through

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storytelling, writers can evoke emotional responses and foster a deep connection to the natural world, which may inspire individuals and communities to take action. In raising awareness, fiction highlights pressing environmental concerns in a way that is more accessible and engaging than scientific reports.

Cultural Narratives

This reflects how cultures understand their relationship with nature. These narratives are rooted in history, religion, myth, and tradition, for example, indigenous narratives around sustainable land use or the sacredness of certain ecosystems, indigenous stories and cultural myths that express harmony or conflict with nature (e. g. Native traditional stories, Aboriginal Dreamtime tales), and often contain moral lessons or warnings about environmental stewardship. Cultural Narratives and environmental justice are birds of a fellow as cultural narratives shape how communities perceive the environment, its importance, and the injustice associated with environmental degradation. Environmental justice refers to the fair treatment of all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, or income, in the environmental decision-making process. It also emphasizes the right to a healthy environment and the need to address disparities in distributing environmental harms. Below are how some cultural narratives influence and are influenced by environmental justice. Indigenous cultures often have long-standing relationships with the land and ecosystems, shaping their views on stewardship, sustainability, and interconnectedness with nature. These cultural narratives contrast with more exploitative approaches to land use, common in colonial and industrial models. Many indigenous groups frame environmental issues as a fight to protect sacred lands, cultural practices, and community well-being. Indigenous peoples often have a deep connection to the land and possess traditional knowledge of sustainable environmental practices. Their rights to land and natural resources are frequently overlooked in environmental policies, leading to further marginalization and the loss of crucial environmental stewardship practices. The Flint Water Crisis and Environmental Justice in the United States is an example. In 2014, Flint, Michian city in the United State switched its water source from Lake Huron (Via Detroit's water system) to the Flint River to save cost. Shortly after, residents began experiencing strange issues

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with the water, such as unpleasant odour, taste, and colour. Reporting this to city officials, they reassured residents that the water was safe for usage. However, when a test was conducted subsequently, it revealed that the water was contaminated with high levels of lead and toxins. Hence, environmental justice issues raised were racial and economic disparities, government negligence, health and social impact, and environmental justice advocacy. Finally, legal action was taken against the Michigan government's Rich Snyder, and he had to declare a state of emergency in 2016. The residents of Flint were provided with bottled water and filters until the lead pipes were replaced. Several officials who were part of the decision-making process were charged with various criminal offences, and the state compensated the residents with an amount of $626 million US dollars for damages caused. Cultural narratives are integral to the ways communities understand and respond to environmental justice issues. They shape how people connect with the environment, identify injustices, and advocate for solutions.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explained narrative and representation in the environmental context. The narrative juxtaposes science to indicate a vehicle to convey environmental information to an audience. It may be fiction or non-fiction. However, scientific communication makes narratives appear as anti-science. Hence, environmental information without scientific basis is carried as an environmental narrative, a received wisdom or an orthodoxy. Whereas this notion is evident in scientific communication, sometimes science uses environmental narrative to disseminate its findings. The denigrated vehicle becomes worthy of carrying scientific information to the audience in storyline, role play, drama, and concert. The environmental narrative began with a concentration on environmental topics but has grown to express environmental crisis, a vehicle to communicate environmental problems and challenges. It has been used since the 18th and 19th centuries, during the Industrial Revolution, and through the 20th century, and it is still relevant in the 21st century. The key issues are conservation, environmental justice, anthropocentrism, ecocentrism, sustainability, ecofeminism, posthumanism and deep ecology. Embedded in the environmental narrative is a representation of the environment. It is often an

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environment in crisis: forest fires, floods, drought, waste menace, pollution and degradation. The form and style depend on the actor (representative) and available tools. Hence, it is important to conserve all forms of life and not individual species together with their habitats. Fair distribution of environmental benefits, participation in environmental decision-making and whose environment should be taken away for public use are addressed by environmental justice. The treatment of humans, non-human species, and the non-living physical environment pitches anthropocentrism with ecocentrism while creating a maze of sustainability, ecofeminism, posthumanism, and deep ecology. Environmental narratives and representations generate public networks and ecological sensibility at this intersection and foster behavioural change.

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