Dijana Gaćeša
Queen's University
Kingston (Canada)

ECO-SAVAGES ARE CONQUERING THE WORLD
(The Creation of Ecological Sensibility through the Construction of the "Other")

Summary

Contemporary environmentalist discourses employ the notions of "ecological wisdom", "true sustainability" and "religious naturalism" in order to promote ecological awareness. The exotic and non-Western "other", historically subjugated through the means of colonial power, romantic literature and early anthropological theories, gains popularity in these discourses. This paper analyzes how the Other is used as a tool of articulating and a means of propagating models of sustainable living. It questions whether the allegedly profound Western concern for distant and exotic peoples comes as a new popular rhetoric of conquering the "savage". In the conclusion, the paper suggests that the Other can be perceived not just as a building block of Western identity, or a means of exercising the power of the West, but as an equal participant in human interaction.

Key Words: Nature, Environment, Sustainability, The Other, (Eco)Savage, Myth of Ecological Wisdom, Responsibility

Introduction

The notion of the "lost connection with nature" has recently emerged as one of the alleged obstacles for a modern Westerner's "pursuit of happiness". This alienation from nature, supposedly related to the alienation of modern people from themselves, is also often considered to be a major cause of so-called global ecological crisis. Consequently, the imperative of ecological awareness appears today as a cornerstone for a

---

dijana979@yahoo.com

sustainable present and a viable future. Various authoritative discourses, from academic to popular ones, propagate ecological sensibility through concepts of "nature", "environment" and "wilderness" and discuss a human being as an *integral part* of each of them. The "other", especially the "exotic other", is often used as a tool of articulating and a means of propagating models of sustainable living: other's cultures are described as ecologically aware and their lifestyle as sustainable.

This paper intends to analyze how the distant, non-Western "other", historically subjugated through the means of colonial power, romantic literature and early anthropological theories, gains popularity in the modern discourse of environmentalism. Immersed in the imperative of political correctness and simultaneously driven by consumerist mass-mentality, the "other" is seen today as a source of "ancient ecological wisdom" and thus as the most wanted panacea for the troublesome ecological crisis; accordingly, the "other" becomes the Westerners' bellowed "eco-savage".

The paper will argue that the old Russo's concept of Noble Savage, the supposedly overcome background rhetoric of imperialism, cloaks itself in contemporary authoritative discourses of environmentalism and sustainable living. In order to demonstrate how the profound Western concern for distant and exotic peoples turns to be a new popular rhetoric of conquering the Other, the paper will elaborate on three related problems. Firstly, it will briefly present the notion of "nature" as a social construct tightly related to the concepts of biodiversity, sustainability and religious naturalism. Secondly, it will discuss the major philosophical discourses of "otherness" from the historical perspective, emphasizing the most important principles in perceiving and constructing the "other". Finally, through the analysis of the myth of "ecological wisdom", the paper will examine how the process of "constructing nature" correlates with the process of "constructing people". In the conclusion, it will suggested how the "other" can be perceived not just as a building block of Western identity, or a means of exercising the power of the West/North, but as an equal participant in human communication and interaction.

Constructing Nature

From "nature" to "the environment"

Every environmentalist discourse is more or less embedded in the lamenting the past and the supposed pre-conscious state of human's union with nature. Sometimes that nostalgia is expressed in a rather sensationalist way. Certain connotations to Huxley's dystopian vision and to the ideas of "lost home", "divine abandonment" and "the Frightening New World" contribute the high dramaticism that permeates this "death of nature" idea.[1]

---

[1] For example, as the environmentalists David L. Barnhill and Roger S. Gottlieb warn, "Nature has ended […] nature as we have known it has gone. In its place is 'the environ-

However, what is usually left out of the environmentalists' gloomy visions is some more precise definition of what is assumed under "nature"; moreover, it is mostly overseen that "nature", just as "environment" or "culture", is also a social construct.

Phil Macnaghten and John Urry (1998) suggest that there is no such thing as one single "nature"; there are only "natures", various concepts that alter according to the specific cultural and historical context. Contemporary Western culture conceptualizes nature in three particular ways: (1) nature as a field of scientific inquiry and human management; (2) nature as a threatened realm; and (3) nature as a sacred realm filled with great moral and spiritual powers (22). All of these concepts reflect dualism between nature and civilization, each resolving human/nature contradiction in a particular way. Critically assessing destructive human effects on nature, the second and the third concepts are mostly present in environmentalist campaigns. The second concept perceives nature as a "pure and healthy body being constantly threatened by human-made pollution" and emphasizes the public concern over endangered species. The third concept takes nature to be "a sacred realm filled with great moral and spiritual power, a place to be enjoyed and worshiped by all humans" (22-23). Nature is represented as an infinite resource for moral, physical, and spiritual healing. Rooted in different ethical grounds, both concepts propose the preservation of nature, from endangered natural species to endangered "natural humans".

In the 1970s and 80s, "the environment" rises around the world as a social and cultural phenomenon (Luhrmann 1993: 18). As a new moral discourse and the quest for a viable future, environmentalism manifests itself in different ways: sometimes it grows into ecological determinism, that is the view that cultural phenomena exist to serve the needs of ecological adaptation (4); sometimes it ascribes a spiritual dimension to green principles of global ecological awareness and becomes "a religion-based movement for social change" (23).

Master narratives and strategies for managing ecological crisis:
Concepts of biodiversity, sustainability and religious naturalism

In his article "Whose Knowledge, Whose nature? Biodiversity, Conservation, and the Political Ecology of Social Movements", Arturo Escobar notes that all the political strategies related to the concept of environmentalism and ecological crisis introduce the same simple line of thinking: "If you want to save the planet, this is what you must do, and here are the knowledge and resources to do it" (Escobar 55). What is pe-

---

ment', […] everything has changed - and we cannot go home again; this [is] Frightening New World that humanity – and not God – has created" (Barnhill and Gottlieb 4)

culiar, though, is that "the knowledge and resources" are actually often entrenched in "the myth of primitive environmental wisdom" and romantically perceived historical and cultural heritage of Third World populations.

On a different level, political ecology constitutes master narratives of ecological living through the concepts of biodiversity and sustainability.Biodiversity is a discourse of recent origin that creates a powerful interface between nature and culture (Escobar 75). Focusing on global resource management, national sovereignty, biodemocracy and cultural autonomy, biodiversity discourse has resulted in an "increasingly vast institutional apparatus that systematically organizes the production of forms of knowledge and types of power"; these forms are mutually linked through concrete strategies and programs offered by NGOs, universities and research institutes in the first and third worlds (57). After its birth in the late 1980s, the concept of biodiversity soon becomes politicized and appropriated by a profoundly unscientific narrative. Foale and Macintyre (2005) note that the roots of the idea of "biodiversity as a moral good" stream from the Western, dualist image of nature as "untouched, pristine and separate from (destructive) culture, and in need of protection from it" (2). The campaigns propagating the preservation of biodiversity are significantly endorsed with new consumerist strategies, like popular-scientific media that advertise "ecotourism": in order to popularize tourists' engagement, they mystify the natives' relationship to Nature by interpreting their understanding of natural environment.

The two supposedly core scientific ideas that underpin the ideology of biodiversity, the "interconnectedness of species" and "inherent value of species", are further expanded through the concept of sustainability (Foale and Macintyre 3). Escobar emphasizes that sustainability is not only an ecological, economic, and technological issue; it involves the principles of compensation, equity, autonomy, self-determination, and the affirmation of identity (1998: 73). Above all, sustainability is taken to be a moral claim that strongly opposes principles like instrumentalism and anthropocentrism. A hierarchical view that the human is in the highest position within nature is replaced by the principle of biocentric egalitarianism, a tendency to value all things in nature equally. Human beings are not seen as categorically different from their surroundings (because of their intelligence, technology, science, political life, language, or the soul), but as an integral part of nature.

However, in order to comprehend the interconnectedness of natural species and to acknowledge "the intrinsic value" of nature, it is necessary for human beings to undergo a radical shift in their consciousness. This is the idea that directed a number of environmentalists and deep ecologists (e.g. Barnhill and Gottlieb 2001, Goodenough 1998, Rue 2005) to a new philosophy of nature (so-called ecosophy) that emphasizes the role of the

religion in promoting ecologically sustainable living. As Goodenough notes, religious naturalism, the "new religion" for the "new, self/nature-aware people", demands a context-sensitive approach and a deep spiritual commitment in protecting nature. The major principle of *religious naturalism* is the *sacredness of nature*: nature is to be experienced through an intuitive and sensuous communion with the earth and the feeling of humility towards wilderness (Barnhill and Gottlieb 2001:6). The level of personal emotional involvement in this kind of environmental mission differs: while Ursula Goodenough (1998) calls for the celebration of nature with "awe and joy" and the reverence of "the whole enterprise of planetary existence [and] sacredness of life" (170), Loyal Rue (2005) explores the question of general ecological responsibility. Arguing against Western dualistic thinking that separates nature and god, nature and human, nature and culture, he promotes religious naturalism as a new *Nature-centred meta-myth* that should be soundly rooted in an "integrated vision of evolutionary cosmology and eco-centric morality". Through the "naturalization of God" and the "divinization of Nature" he sees a new way of carrying on life on Earth and managing the ecological crises (363). Finally, it is important to notice that religious naturalism often looks for already existing models of sustainable living: special attention that has been recently directed towards Eastern Asian and indigenous religious traditions reflects how the "others", especially the "exotic others" can be perceived and constructed in a contemporary context of environmentalism and sustainability.

Constructing people: Discourses of Otherness

"Otherness" is a concept that has received much attention in recent years. Originating in the field of philosophy, the notion of "otherness" is now widely used by a variety of other disciplines including psychology, anthropology, sociology, marketing; what it usually refers to is the tension between two groups of people.

According to an analytical psychologist, Renos Papadopoulos, the "ontological state of otherness" appears as a product of the state of separation between Being and its wider context. "There can be no self without the other and no other without a self," asserts Papadopoulos; logically, philosophically and psychologically, the self is a constituent element of the definition of the other (2002: 166). However, the relationship between the 'self' and his/her 'other' ranges within the broad scheme of possibilities regarding the following condition: does the Self encounter the Other in a conscious or an unconscious way? Both options can lead to either positive or negative effects, while the consequences can also be equally real (169).

So, who is the Other and why do we need it? Logically, the Other is not the Self, i.e., a *stranger*. The figure of *stranger* permeates the entire European history: from the ancient *foreigner* (*xenos*), through the Greek *barbarian*, to the European exotic, overseas *savage* (Kearney 2003: 3). In terms of philosophy, the self/other paradigm runs from Plato to Hegel and modern philosophy, discussing the notions of absolute and relative "otherness". As Kearney notes, Plato's *xenos* is an "absolute *heteron*", a category "beyond being", the Other so fundamentally different from Us that it becomes unrecognizable and unspeakable. On the other hand, in Hegel's master-slave dialectic the Other is never an absolute alien; it is defined as other-than-me, as the Other that manifests itself as Our alter ego (16). Eventually, the concept of "radical alterity" and "the rejection of relative otherness in favor of absolute otherness" regained popularity with Emmanuel Levinas.[2] For Levinas, the Other is *not knowable* and cannot be made into an object of the self, as it occurs in traditional metaphysics. Explaining Levinas, Peperzak says that Levinas's Other "cannot be captured or grasped and is therefore, in strictest sense of the word, incomprehensible" (Peperzak 1993: 21). What significantly differs from Plato's concept of the "absolute otherness" is Levinas's inclusive and humanistic approach to the absolute Other: for him, the Other is "invisible", it is "enigma", but the Other is also our "relationship with the future and infinity" (Lollini 2002: 25). For that reason "[the Other] makes [us] responsible for him/her, and this responsibility *has no limits*" (Peperzak 1993: 22).

One of the major features of the concept of otherness is its tendency to emphasize characteristics and the circumstances which highlight strangeness and differences rather than commonness and similarities between compared objects. In his study "The Other Other: When the Exotic Other Subjugates the Familiar Other" Papadopoulos (2002) examines the levels of "otherness" by contrasting two kinds of others: a distant or *exotic other* with whom one feels very different, and a *familiar other,* who is closer to one or even part of one (175). In order to demonstrate a common understanding of these categories, he presents Jung's comparison of the West (i.e. North America and Western Europe) with the distant Others of the Middle and Far East, of Africa and native North America. Although personally being aware that "our psychology is Eurocentric", Jung actually projects all idealizations onto the exotic and distant other (of the non-Christian, Oriental, African, and other 'primitive' realms) whilst he ignores or scorns the familiar other (e.g. Eastern Christianity) (177). On the other hand, as Kearney notes, it was not always a case that the distant other was transformed into a Westerner's *fetish-god*; sometimes it was

---

[2] Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) is the Lithuanian born French philosopher who was one of the main modern thinkers who concentrated on man's relation to the Other. For more information see Peperzak, 1993.

transformed into a *monster,* or even into the both of them at the same time (Kearney 2003: 5). In any case, the feelings of a *mysterium fascinans et tremendum* towards the distant other contributed to the stubborn refusal of the West to recognize the stranger as a "singular other who responds, in turn, to the singular otherness in each of us" (5). For a long time, says Kearney, we have refused to "acknowledge ourselves-as-others" (5).

The general interpretation of the Other has recently changed and has become more sensitive to the subtle mechanisms of power relations. Post-modernist critique offers two general strategies for challenging the totalizing thought of modernity and its traditional subject-object distinction: the concept of "difference" and the concept of "otherness" (Ryan 2002: 15). These concepts address two major metanarratives of modernity related to the ideology of progress. The first one, the "master and slave" narrative, sees progress as "liberation of the oppressed", as their "lifting up", gaining equality and becoming included in the rest of civilization; here the principal goal is the progress of humanity as a whole through the *liberation of the slave* (18). The second narrative, the narrative of "civilized and savage", reflects the dark side of progress: it is not liberation of the slave any more but rather his "domestication"; here only the part of humanity, the "civilization", progresses by either *assimilation or destruction of the savage* (18-19).

The "postmodernism of difference" is a possible critique of the master/slave narrative. The modernist totalitarian "model of plurality" recognizes the abundance of objects but it doesn't acknowledge and accept their differences as such. The postmodern concept of difference defeats totality here not by seeing the object as defined *within* the dominant subject but as a part of "open-ended nexus of differential relations" between the subject *and* the object (16). In the context of the master/slave narrative, to liberate the slavish is not possible if it assumes including "slave/slavish" in a more expansive order. That kind of "liberation/freedom" would be just another kind of enslavement, asserts Ryan (20). On the other hand, the "postmodernism of otherness" is the potential critique of the civilized/savage story. After seemingly including the Other in the dominant discourse, the modernist totalitarian "model of alterity" entrenches it in various hierarchies still making it a discredited and disvalued object. The postmodernism of otherness perceives the "Other" not as an intruder of the "purity" of totality, but as something that can never be fully comprehended and reached; it is just to be accepted as such. It is impossible for "the civilized" to neither exclude "the savage" from its discourse by killing nor include it by domestication/assimilation (20). The fact that the Other is both "always there and always beyond our reach" is simply to be accepted and recognized. What we can only do, according to Ryan, is to open ourselves to others, not in order to "liberate" us or them, but to achieve peace. [3]

---

[3] Ryan draws an illustrative parallel to death: perceiving the Other is like perceiving death – we don't look for liberation from death but just the way to accept it (Ryan 20).

Power and violence play different but significant roles in both aforementioned narratives of modernity: violence serves the need for power, power serves the need for violence, and the postmodernist approach offers some new insights into that issue (Ryan 19). The next section will present one of the contemporary concepts of subtle subjugation of the distant Other; it will also analyze some further possibilities of challenging the new discourse of "otherness".

"Natural people": The myth of ecological wisdom

Towards the notion of the "eco-savage"

As briefly documented with Jung's perspective on the "exotic others", Western perception of the "other" has been generally characterized by the twin tradition of thought that simultaneously idolize and savage native populations. Upon the "discovery" of new worlds, the European recognition of the "primitives" was reluctant and gradual. The early anthropological theories marked by white-European-Christ-centric views started dubiously considering the humanity of "primitives": for example, if we accept that they are *not less humans* than we are, can we accept their *religiosity*? Furthermore, if we allow that they *are* religious, can we say they are also *scientific*? Regrettably, even Levi-Strauss' *The Savage Mind*, a capital work from the 1960s that strongly argued for a different and specific kind of logic of "primitive" thought, didn't manage to remove academic doubts regarding the natives' cultural inferiority. As Vassos Argyrou notes, despite the development of the idea of human rights and freedoms, the old colonial and racial discourse that considers human as "man" (i.e. "man" as the only relevant Subject of Nature, "man" as "the measure of all things", "man" as "European man"), basically left all the people in the world who don't think of themselves as "men" out of concepts of "humanity", "civilization" and "culture" (2005: 61-62).

However, although still entrenched in apparent ethnocentrism, this discourse started changing in the second half of the 20th century. The religious and/or scientific character of "primitive thought" was acknowledged with the explanation that natives do posses the ability to make a distinction between the natural, supernatural and rational but that this distinction is not a literal but a metaphorical one (Argyrou 64-65).[4] Eventually, the new image of natives has been created in the imagination of modern environmentalists. The notion of a "noble savage" has been taken out of dusty historical accounts and imbued with a new sentimental value:

---

[4] Numerous influential anthropological theories argued in a favor of this idea. For example, Claude Levi-Strauss asserted that it is the method of the "savage mind" to resolve contradictions of life, while for Clifford Geertz it is the way for the primitive to maintain a "meaningful cosmos".

we should be "grateful to the savage" for the heritage of "ecological wisdom" they left to us.

The myth of "ecological wisdom" is derived from another myth, the one of "the pristine goodness of primitive life". Both of them present "primitives" as ecologically wise human beings who live in harmony with nature: their social structure is described as the "proper natural order of original human society", their environment as "the primordial mother earth", and their relationship to nature as the "spirituality of green politics" (Ellen 1986). This vision of "Ecotopia" seems rather alluring to a modern Westerner. He is convinced that "life nearer to nature is more virtuous and 'real' than in the superficial urban environment that man creates for himself" (Street in Ellen) and that there must be that *they* know something that *we* don't, or that we have lost. Small-scale societies, especially those of native Americans and distant exotic islanders, are usual taken to be the epitomes of precious ecological knowledge. Certain religious groups, like Zen Buddhists and Taoists, are also perceived as "spiritual responses against pollution, erosion, deforestation and environmental wreckage" (Ellen 8). In general, the myth of ecological wisdom strongly emphasizes the opposition between nature and culture, exclusively assigning humanity to one side or another. As Ellen concisely analyzes, the roots of this myth are to be found in the Judeo-Christian tradition and the stories of Eden/the Flood (when both times a perfect and harmonious creation is destroyed by "human evil"), in the Marxist concept of "primitive communism", in popular anthropologies like Carlos Castaneda's one and, recently, in the enthusiasm of revolutionary ecologists (8).

From "sound environment" to "beautiful wilderness":
Artistic and consumerist representations of "natural people"

The concept of ecologically aware savage responds to two important requirements of the modern Western world, the ethical and the aesthetic one. According to Foale and Macintyre, various strategies have been developed with intention to meet people's needs and protect nature while proposing sustainable living and preservation of intact ecosystems, strong local traditions, and robust economies. What is rather interesting is that these strategies do not just assert that an "innocent, untouched world" and a "primordial Nature" are to be protected but also to be aesthetically consumed. This interpretation is maintained by the new trend of ecologically sensible thinking that values the "environment" as "wilderness" (2005:6-8).

In their article "Green Fantasies: Photographic representations of biodiversity and ecotourism in the Western Pacific", Foale and Macintyre analyze the use of nature photography as a powerful means of perception, presentation and protection of environment/wilderness. The common photographic illustration of the people of the Pacific as entirely entrenched in their idealized relationship with an idealized "Nature" pro-

duces twin results. On the one hand, nature photography supports modern environmentalism campaigns in their endeavor to "serve political ends and reinforce an ideology of moral engagement with 'Nature'". On the other hand, by transforming the "natural world" of Pacific islands and reefs into the "virtual reality" it produces a partial and "romantically-inflected vision of the Pacific" that substitutes criteria of authentic representation for the aesthetic ones (2005:2-6). The most illustrative example of these principles is photograph of "charismatic megafauna". The mode of animals' representation is meant to evoke the Westerner's feelings of protection, care and sympathy for the animals, which should further result in a specific campaign of political activism and financial generosity. Both aesthetic and ethic appeals are obtained through the anthropomorphic dimension of animal photograph: Animal protagonists usually have large and "soulful" eyes, they appear vulnerable in some way, and/or they can be seen in "comical" or touching situations (13).

Representations of indigenous people greatly correlate with those of animals. *National Geographic* magazine is probably one of mediums that support this idea in most illustrious way. Through the critical analysis of *National Geographic*, Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins (1993) note that the people of the third and the fourth worlds are portrayed as exotic, idealized, naturalized and sexualized (89). The "exotic other" is usually shown as semi-naked or dressed in colorful, beautiful and sexually alluring clothes of traditional attire. The exoticism of the attractive non-Westerner is best expressed through his role of a "ritual performer, embedded in tradition and living in a sacred" (90).[5] Ritual appears as a crucial element of indigenous religions. The dramatic and vibrant pictures of ritual are usually followed by the text including clichés like "millenniums-old religious patterns" or oversimplified, even incorrect explanations (e.g. Tibetan Buddhism is combination of animism and the teachings of Buddha) (91).

Situated in the pictures of "cornucopic Eden" and unspoiled landscape and surrounded by friendly human-like animals, *National Geographic's* non-Westerner is presented as a part of a beautiful landscape; he is seen as an "unchanging natural human without history", a "noble savage" who is a "natural custodian of the Environment". The romanticized idea of "happy and classless people" who are "outside of history but evolving into it" traditionally involves the total absence of violence, victimization, or illness.[6] Clearly opposed to the category of "the West", populations of "the rest" of the world tendentiously become aesthetic ob-

---

[5] *National Geographic* narrowly defines ritual as "sacred and formally organized group behavior" (Lutz and Collins 90).
[6] Western military is presented as a regular, not unpleasant part of everyday life of the third world, while non-Westerners are usually presented as non-aggressive, friendly and smiling (Lutz and Collins 99)

jects to appreciate and admire; at the same time, the principles of inter-connectedness and responsibility are downplayed (95).

Lutz and Collins suggest that the view of "exotic others" as presented by *National Geographic* can be evaluated in different ways: (1) as an ideal model of living that emphasizes devotion to the sacred/supernatural and living with the past; (2) as an innocent, kind and/or naïve presentation; (3) as a special kind of neocolonial discourse which ultimately degrades its subjects; or (4) as humanistic/liberal advertising of the developing world (117). By emphasizing that the roots of the magazine lie in the concepts of mass culture and national-cultural legitimacy, the authors obviously personally support the third thesis. In order to articulate a national vision and national identity, *National Geographic* takes images of Africa, Asia and Latin America out of their context and arranges them in a way that addresses contemporary Western preoccupations. By juxtaposing "the West" and "the rest" and comparing them in the terms of progress, cultural evolution, success and failure, but, at the same time avoiding any critical or controversial material, the magazine creates illusions of a stable and complete "humanity" (23-27). The nature photography plays crucial role in this supposed agenda of artistic construction of the new world order.[7] Entrenched in the discourse of environmentalism, the artistic idealization of the non-Westerner concurs with the artistic idealization of nature – both present the spiritual domain in which the ills of (Western) civilization can be cured and even more – commodified.

The critique of the myth of ecological wisdom

Artistic and consumerist representations of "natural people" are deeply rooted in the concept of (lost) "ecological wisdom". According to numerous scholars from different fields of study (Ellen 1986, Argyrou 2005, Sillitoe 1993, Driessen 2003, Foale and Macintyre 2005), the myth of ecological wisdom is based on various unexamined assumptions, misconceptions and contradictions. There are several major points that need to be addressed to in order to elaborate on why "the primitive" *appears* to be so successful in managing sustainable living and why *in reality* that is actually not a case.

The first and unavoidable generalization is related to the very notion of "the primitive": how do we define "primitives" and what kind of society do we have in mind when we speak of "the primitive"? In his article "What Black Elk Left Unsaid: On the Illusory images of Green Primitivism" Roy Ellen observes that referring to type of societies which are "functionally generalized while structurally decentralized" and which "do not modify

---

[7] As Lyman asserts, "Photographs are not viewed as metaphors of experience, but rather as sections of reality itself […] When photographs depict Indians as 'savages', Indians were confirmed as savages" (Lyman in Lutz and Collins 28)

their environment in any radical way", does not help defining this vague category (10). Instead of deconstructing and/or completely abandoning the controversial category of the "primitive", contemporary mass-culture media help propagating it. Their approach marked by reductionism and generalizations can be well illustrated through the representation of Native American cultures: indigenous peoples of North America are usually epitomized through the Dionysian tribes of the north-west Pacific coast, whose cultures are furthermore reduced to the bunch of vibrant totem poles and perplexing but alluring institution of potlatch (10).

Ellen further criticizes the common prejudice regarding native peoples living in total harmony with nature: sometimes, he asserts, they themselves are victims of nature, but they are also possible perpetrators of natural disasters. We shouldn't take for granted the popular environmentalist suggestion that forest destruction or hunting to extinction are phenomena restricted to the 20th century. On the contrary, he reminds, ideologies and cosmologies that stress environmental harmony often diverge from what actually happens in practice (10). Lubbock's critique of the romantic concept of "natural man" or "noble savage" clearly complements the Ellen's one: "The true savage is neither free nor noble; imperfectly protected from the weather, he suffers from the cold by night and the heat of sun by day; ignorant of agriculture, living by the chase, and improvident in success, hunger always stares him in the face, and often drives him to dreadful alternative of cannibalism or death" (Lubbock in Argyrou 11). It is certainly true that "primitive" societies are small-scale societies with very little impact on the environment. However, their supposed sustainable living is not a result of some kind of conscious decision or careful population/environment policy: high infant mortality, diseases and poor nutritional status are prime causes of their "well-balanced" and "nature-friendly" life. Even more, native populations usually lack the sole idea of environmental concern.[8]

One more vastly present misconception is that nature/ culture opposition does not exist in primitive cultures. However, human attempt to control nature is not a recent phenomenon; it can be found in any kind of sacred and mythic knowledge, no matter how ancient or unique it is. Patterns of human interaction with nature and the use of natural resources are inseparable from cosmologies, theogonies and various rituals related to everyday life. The more plausible explanation of this original naturalism, as Foale and Macintyre suggest, is to be found within theories of local

---

[8] Talking about Papua New Guinea's Wola people, Sillitoe emphasizes that they are unable to foresee environmental, specifically soil agricultural potential. They exploit environment to its maximum: "It is their agricultural technology, coupled with a modest population density, rather than their cultural ideology, that protects the Wola environment in the long term" (Sillitoe 172)

self-sufficiency based on technological development and professional specialization: human effects on nature were simply not of a scale that jeopardized biodiversity; however, due to internal and external forces, human impact on nature started increasing and imagined distinction between nature and human (culture) became more evident (2005:15-16).

The myth of ecological wisdom is deeply entrenched in the dualism of "the modern" and the "the primitive". However, in terms of practical engagement of the later in the former, the environmentalist vision of the primitive is not clearly articulated: what is to be *done* with these "isolated people with superb survival strategies for meeting the challenge of an extreme environment"? The double vision of "eco-savage" (who is taken to be a desirable model for a sustainable life of modern society, but at the same time destined, for its own good, for the isolation in its "exotic" world, out from the rest of the "modern" world) is widely criticized. While anthropology mainly argue against the vision of isolation and exclusive ascription of humans to either modern or primitive world, the real controversial critique comes from the field of political ecology. Responding to the idea of Western environmental activists that the Africa's poor "should not be allowed to make the same mistakes the developed world did" Paul Driessen (2003) accuses radical environmentalism for "romanticizing poverty" (42). While living without electricity and running water, and suffering from diseases caused by severe indoor air pollution (produced by burning renewable biomass fuel), "what the developing world really needs is not sustainable development but 'sustained development' and an end to the 'sustainable poverty'", asserts Driessen (39).

Finally, it is significant to note that this ardent environmentalist concern for native people doesn't appear until mid 1980s; even one decade earlier there was no mention of "ecological native wisdom" in reports on environmental issues. But ones positioned in the discourse of "ecological way of living" and "environmental ethics", the reputation of "noble savage" soon becomes all the rage. Analyzing "the logic of environmentalism" through lenses of anthropology, ecology and postcoloniality, Vassos Argyrou questions some highly prized environmentalist principles also acknowledged by United Nations Environment Programme and the World Wide Fund for Nature: Has so-called "planetary interdependence" ever existed? Can we talk about the isolation of natives as supposedly contributing to the preservation of their "ecological awareness and adaptation"? Are we really facing an "ecological crisis"? (67-68). All these discourses assume that there is a kind of "knowledge, experience and skills of native populations" that should be used as "critical tools in any effort to deal with the ecological crises". However, left without a viable explanation what these tools *are* and how they can be practically *applied* to environmental problems, Argyrou concludes that radical environmentalism unfortunately operates in a space "between science and shamanism" (70).

Conclusion: From Orientalism to eco-imperialism and – further?

Not long ago, the Orientalist discourse created the exotic Other with a multiple purpose: The construction of the "Orient" and the "Orientalist Other" has functioned as a catalyst for the Dionysian aspects of the Western culture: through this imagined "inversion of the West", the West tried to subordinate its own "shadow side" (King 1999:3). Further, qualities that have been conceived as *poetic, mystical, irrational, uncivilized* and *feminine* were constructed in the West and projected back onto distant Others taking part in the reinvention of their own culture and tradition. Finally, the Orientalist discourse revealed itself as a "way of controlling, manipulating and managing the Orient" and a legitimate means of the colonial aggression and political supremacy of the Western world (6, 82).

The West/East division, ardently criticized by Edward Said et al, soon has been replaced by the division between the North and the South, or between the First and the Third world. The perception of the Other apparently didn't change a lot, it just became more subtle and sophisticated. In the similar way a prominent anthropologist R. Radcliff-Brown once made a theoretical breakthrough by realizing that totem animals were not just "good to eat", but they are also "good to think with", the distant native populations turned to be very "good to think with" about questions of individual and collective identity and all the other ontological issues that were focus of European thought (Argyrou 2005:71). Today, with all alleged respect and inclusiveness for their cultures, it is obvious that discourses on so-called primitives still more speak about US than about THEM. In that way, asserts Argyrou, the concept of the exotic Other as a proponent of ecological wisdom may be seen as the "new Western ethnographic allegory": "native populations are once again used as key building blocks in the latest Western construct – the environmentalist vision of the world" (72).

The new vision of the world assumes the new encounter of "civilizations", developing South with developed North, which occurs within the context of the supposed environmental crisis. As Argyroy notes, both the North (i.e. the West), superior in material sense but ethically and spiritually impoverished, and the South (i.e. the East), superior in spiritual aspects but poverty-stricken, don't hesitate to use the "environmental crisis" in order to obtain what they are lacking. It would be a sweeping oversimplification to assert that only the North/the West bears the responsibility for the state of environmental emergency: "Both poverty, with its pressing needs, and wealth, with its compulsive habits, lead to unsustainable practices and lifestyles which deplete natural resources" (Argyrou 2005:173), and both cultural scarcity and cultural wisdom lead to the mutual allurement between the First and the Third worlds. "With environmentalism", concludes Argyrou, "we are back to the same vicious circle of identity and power, back to a redefinition of […] the order of the world and the world order" (160).

However, it would be also a dangerous to assume that both sides in this context have the same opportunity to master the power-identity exchange. Western philosophy, historically on the side of "freedom" and the "monopoly of the Same", either through the discourse of liberation or domestication of the Other, has to find a way to defend the Other from itself. The narcissism of Western thought, essentially responsible for - what Papadopoulos calls - the "state of other-less-ness", has to be replaced with genuine responsibility for the Other (Papadopoulos 2002:179), eventually ending up in the seemingly paradoxical attitude: "I am responsible for the other, although the Other is not responsible for me" (Ponzio; Petrilli, Ponzio 2005:22). Only with the *narrative understanding* of what is that that separates Us from Others (Kearney 2003:20), and by cautiously comprehending the sole act of *Othering* (Papadopoulos 166), we can possibly open the chance for suspending the chronically oppressive discourse of otherness. What we need is to "acknowledge strangers in ourselves and ourselves in strangers" (Kearney 20), no matter of whose culture, whose nature, and whose power.

Bibliography

Argyrou, Vassos. 2005. *The Logic of Environmentalism: Anthropology, Ecology and Postcoloniality*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Barnhill, David L. and Gottlieb, Roger S. (eds.).2001. *Deep Ecology and World Religions*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Drees, Willem B. 1998. "Should Religious Naturalists promote a Naturalistic Religion," *Zygon*. Vol 33, 4: 617-633.Driessen, Paul. 2003. *Eco-imperialism*. Bellevue, Wash: Free Enterprise Press.

Ellen, Roy F. 1986. "What Black Elk Left Unsaid: On the Illusory images of Green Primitivism," *Anthropology Today* Vol.2, 6: 8-12.

Escobar, Arturo. 1998. "Whose Knowledge, Whose nature? Biodiversity, Conservation, and the Political Ecology of Social Movements," *Journal of Political Ecology* Vol.5: 53-83.

Foale, Simon and Macintyre, Martha. 2005. "Green Fantasies: Photographic representations of biodiversity and ecotourism in the Western Pacific," *Journal of Political Ecology* Vol.12: 1-22.

Goodenough, Ursula 1998. *The Sacred Depths of Nature*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Kearney, Richard. 2003. *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters (Interpreting Otherness)*. London and Ney York: Routledge and Taylor & Francis Group.

King, Richard. 1999. Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'. London, New York: Routledge.

Lollini, Massimo 2002. "Alterity and Transcendence: Notes on Ethics, Literature, and Testimony," in *Who, Exactly, is the Other?: Western and Transcultural Perspectives*. Steven Shankman and Massimo Lollini (eds.). Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon Books and Oregon Humanities Centre.

Luhrmann, Tanya M. 1993. "The Resurgence of Romanticism: Contemporary Neopaganism, feminist spirituality and the Divinity of Nature," in *Environmentalism: The View from Anthropology*. Kay Milton (ed.). London and New York: Routledge.

556

Lutz, Catherine A. and Collins, Jane L. 1993. *Reading National Geographic*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press.

Macnaghten, Phil, and John, Urry. 1998. *Contested Natures*. London: Sage.

Milton, Kay 1993. "Environmentalism and Anthropology," in *Environmentalism: The View from Anthropology*. Kay Milton (ed.). London and New York: Routledge.

Sillitoe, Paul 1993. "Local Awareness of the Soil Environment in the Papua New Guinea Highlands," in *Environmentalism: The View from Anthropology*. Kay Milton (ed.). London and New York: Routledge.

Papadopoulos, Renos. K. 2002. "The Other Other: When the Exotic Other Subjugates the Familiar Other," *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 47:163–188.

Peperzak, Adriaan. 1993. To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press.

Ponzio Augusto, Petrilli, Susan and Ponzio, Julia. 2005. *Reasoning with Emmanuel Levinas*. New York, Ottawa, Toronto: Legas.

Rue, Loyal. 2005. *Religion is not About God*. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press.

Ryan, Cheyney. 2002. "The Two Faces of Postmodernism, or the Difference Between Difference and Otherness," in *Who, Exactly, Is the Other?: Western and Transcultural Perspectives*. Steven Shankman and Massimo Lollini (eds.). Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon Books and the Oregon Humanities Center.

Дијана Гаћеша, Кингстон (Канада)

ЕКО-ДИВЉАЦИ ОСВАЈАЈУ СВЕТ
(Стварање еколошког сензибилитета кроз конструкцију "Другог")

Резиме

Савремени дискурси о очувању човекове средине користе концепте "еколошке мудрости", "истинске одрживости" и "религијског натурализма" у циљу промовисања еколошке свести. Егзотичан, не-западни "други", традиционално потчињаван путем система колонијалне власти, романтичне литературе и раних антрополошких теорија, постаје атрактиван за ове дискурсе. Рад се бави анализом употребе Другога као инструмента формулисања и средства пропагирања модела еколошки одрживог живљења. Питање које поставља је да ли је привидно дубок западњачки обзир за далеке и егзотичне заједнице само нова и популарна реторика потчињавања "дивљих". У закључку, рад предлаже да Други може бити доживљен не само као саставни елеменат западног идентитета, или као средство наметања моћи запада, вец као поједнако вредан учесник у међуљудским односима.

Кључне речи: Природа, човекова средина, одржив развој, Други, (еко)дивљак, мит о еколошкој мудрости, одговорности