

Latin America as a Bio-region: An Ecocritical Approach to José Martí's "Nuestra América"

Georg M. Schwarzmann
University of Lynchburg

"Nuestra América" is probably the most widely researched and analyzed essay of José Martí, with most interpretations focusing on the political and cultural vision of the text: He warned Latin Americans of an imminent invasion of the US and he tried to raise cultural pride in being Latin American. From his vantage point of living in New York from 1880 to 1895, he experienced the jingoistic tendencies that dominated the political discourse in the US at the end of the nineteenth century. Influenced by R.W. Emerson and his call for cultural independence for the U.S. from Europe, he envisioned Latin America to be equally culturally autonomous, both from the US and from Europe. "Nuestra América" represents a synthesis of these views and, as Esther Allen states, "the culmination of a lifetime's reflection on Latin America, its essential unity, and its relationship to the United States" (288).

This study will look at Martí's essay from the eco-critical perspective while integrating the essay's political content. It will also take into consideration Martí's and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's conflicting views of nature. Lawrence Buell defines an environmental text as one in which "the nonhuman environment must be presented as an active presence and player within the text" (*The Future of environmentalism*, 51), a proposition that we will prove to be applicable to "Nuestra América." In addition, Martí's depiction of the antagonism between white *criollo* societies and Latin American nature and culture resonates with environmental writer Linda Hogan's lifelong goal "to seek an understanding of the two views of the world,

one as seen by native people and the other as seen by those who are new and young on this continent" (11). In essence, Martí describes in "Nuestra América" what Peter Berg and Raymund Dasmann call a "bioregion," a term that refers both to "geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness – to a place and the ideas that have developed about how to live in that place (399). According to Berg and Dasmann, "within a bioregion the conditions that influence life are similar and these in turn have influenced human occupancy" (399). In "Nuestra América," Martí shows how Latin American nature has influenced and shaped the consciousness of its inhabitants. He depicts the "natural man" as the unique product of his surrounding natural environment and as a reflection of the formative power of Latin American nature, thus justifying the subcontinent's political and cultural independence. The references to nature and native inhabitants in "Nuestra América" offer a rich context that relates to modern ecological concepts.

Like few other Latin American authors of the nineteenth century, Martí emphasizes the role of nature and gives it prominence in his prose and poetry. He looks at nature as a benevolent force, a source of intuition and moral guidance, and as a means that makes man strong and prevents weakness and decadence. Like Nietzsche and his concept of nature, Martí was influenced by R.W. Emerson, the American philosopher of nature, whose essay "Nature" played a pivotal role in Martí's vision of the interplay between man and nature. Josefina Toledo observes that "Martí considers man as an integral part of nature" (8), and Martí himself expresses the crucial bond between man and nature with these words: "Nature inspires, heals, consoles, strengthens, and prepares man for virtue. And man is not complete, nor does he reveal his character to himself or sees the invisible, if it were not for his intimate relation with nature" (translation mine) [La naturaleza inspira, cura, consuela, fortalece y prepara para la virtud al hombre. Y el hombre no se halla completo, ni se revela a sí mismo, ni ve lo invisible, sino en su íntima relación con la naturaleza] (13:25-26). Seen from the eco-critical perspective, Martí's acknowledgement of nature's crucial role for humanity shows an eco-centric view that is unparalleled in Latin American letters of that epoch. His role for raising awareness for the non-human Latin America environment deserves the same recognition as Emerson's and Thoreau's contribution to the North American environmental movement. Martí stands out as one of the first advocates for the protection of Latin America's flora and fauna¹.

Whereas Martí's concept of nature was positive and welcoming, the Argentine Domingo Faustino thought differently. For him, nature was threatening, destructive, and violent. Sarmiento's most prominent literary statement following that school of thought was his 1845 book *Facundo*, in which he created the conflicting view of barbarity and civilization: cities and their western oriented culture stand opposed to untamed nature, which breeds barbarity. Martí didn't agree. Like no Latin American author of the nineteenth century, he esteemed and prioritized nature and held views that are similar to those of the modern ecology movement. In that sense, he was a visionary, who anticipated the ecological movement of the 20th and 21st centuries².

The description of Latin American flora constitutes the backdrop for Martí's statement of cultural independence in "Nuestra América." In the opening paragraphs, he uses the metaphor of the tree and likens Latin Americans to a "nation of fluttering leaves" (Allen 289) [el pueblo de hojas] (6:15). The trees must create a bulwark and "block the seven-league giant" (Allen 289) [el gigante de las siete leguas] (6:15), a metaphor for the powerful northern neighbor. He also mentions the plantain, the emblematic agricultural plant of Latin America, calling on his compatriots hyperbolically to use it for wine and not import European products. It

1. In an exhaustive study, Josefina Toledo has identified more than 300 different plants in Martí's collected works and names them all in *La naturaleza en José Martí*, including where they appear in Martí's texts. This amazing number shows the Cuban poet's profound knowledge of the non-human world as well as his respect and interest in the natural environment.

2. Erique Leff names nineteenth-century writers such as Eudides da Cuna or Jorge Amado as "proto-political ecologists." Among the precursors of Latin American political ecology, he counts José Martí, José Carlos Mariátegui, Frantz Fanon, and Aimé Césaire. Leff states that in Martí's affirmation expressed in "Nuestra América" that struggle was not between civilization and 'barbarism' but between false learning and nature, we find a "critical response to European epistemological-political colonization" (45). From Mariátegui's Latin American Marxism intended to fuse socialism with the culture and productive organization of indigenous peoples to the liberation pedagogy of Paulo Freire and the eco-pedagogy of Leonardo Boff there is a line of critical thinkers who have influenced this research field. (Leff 45)

might not be the best quality and probably sour ["agrio"] (6:20), as Martí admits, but it would be a Latin American creation nevertheless and not the product of a European grape. The example of the plantain represents a larger idea. Martí wants his compatriots to produce and cherish locally or regionally produced food instead of importing it from Europe or the US. He thus presages the modern *locavore* movement, which emerged from the bioregional trend. For Martí, Latin Americans need to create their own products with the means that nature provides rather than rely on European commodities or copy them. Indeed, the dichotomy of the creation and the copy becomes a *leitmotif* in "Nuestra América." Martí states that "natural statesmen are emerging from the direct study of nature; they read in order to apply what they read, not copy it" (Allen 294) [Surgen los estadistas naturales del estudio directo de la Naturaleza. Leen para aplicar, pero no para copiar] (6:21). At another place Martí claims in Emersonian terms that "there is too much imitation, and that salvation lies in creating" (Allen 294) [Entienden que se imita demasiado, y que la salvación está en crear] (6:20). For Martí, "to create is the password of this generation," [Crear es la palabra de pase de esta generación] (6:20). Martí is convinced that the inspiration and the power to create do not come from Europe or the US. They arise in Latin American nature and culture.

Martí also includes Latin American fauna in his essay. He mentions the tiger on various occasions, probably referring to the jaguar, as its name in Spanish is "tigre" (6:19,21). The jaguar is an autochthonous and enigmatic animal of Latin America, and just as cryptic is Martí's reference to that predator:

The tiger, frightened away by the flash of gunfire, creeps back in the night to find its prey. He will die with flames shooting from his eyes, his claws unsheathed, but now his step is inaudible for he comes on velvet paws. When the prey awakens, the tiger is upon him. [...] The tiger waits behind every tree, crouches in every corner. He will die, his claws unsheathed, flames shooting from his eyes. (Allen 292-293)

[El tigre, espantado del foganozo, vuelve de noche al lugar de la presa. Muere echando llamas por los ojos y con las zarpas al aire. No se le oye venir, sino que viene con zarpas de terciopelo. Cuando la presa despierta, tiene al tigre encima ... El tigre espera, detrás de cada árbol, acurrucado en cada esquina. Morirá, con las zarpas al aire, echando llamas por los ojos.] (6:19)

Martí's reference to the jaguar is ambivalent. Is it the Indio, who was overpowered and subjugated by the Spanish, but who is still alive and wants to strike back? In that case, the metaphor of the jaguar could be read as a warning to the *criollos* to respect the Indian culture and include it into their society. It would align with Martí's equally mysterious claim that "if the republic does not open its arms to all and include all in its progress, it dies. The tiger inside came in through the gap, and so will the tiger outside" (Allen 294) [Si la república no abre los brazos a todos y adelanta con todos, muere la república. El tigre de adentro se entra por la hendidura, y el tigre de afuera] (6:21) Or could the blood-thirsty jaguar also be a metaphor for the Spanish who have lost their American colonies but who are stealthily trying to reestablish their rule either directly through toppling governments or indirectly by maintaining their cultural and political influence for economic purposes, which is why Martí warns that "the colony lives on in our republic" (Allen 293) [La colonia continuó viviendo en la república] (6:19)? While Martí's reference to the jaguar leaves room for interpretation, his weaving Latin American fauna into his text corroborates the thesis of this article about the prominent role that Martí is giving nature for nation-building in post-colonial Latin America.

Jaguars are the largest of Latin America's big cats. They once roamed the continent from its southern tip up to its northern border with the U.S. They also played a prominent role in the mythology of Latin America's indigenous people, most notably for the Maya and Aztecs. These cultures feared but also venerated jaguars as manifestations of divinity. Jaguars are savage and dangerous, but also powerful, intelligent, and beautiful, and it's these attributes and the cultural significance of these creatures that make them a perfect example of the enigmatic Latin American fauna. Martí's reference to Latin Americans and the "feline caution of the species" [la cautela felina de la especie] (6:18) hint at his admiration for the jaguars³. Sarmiento also uses that predator in his narrative, but in a totally negative context. In *Facundo*, he describes how the gaucho is stalked by a jaguar and barely survives the attack⁴. For Sarmiento, the jaguar represents the untamed, savage, and violent side of Latin America, characteristics that also apply to Facundo. Sarmiento felt that Argentina, and the rest of Latin America, like Facundo, needed to be tamed and molded according to European culture and civilization. For Sarmiento, Latin American nature represented an obstacle to progress and needed to be broken like a wild pony to fit human needs, and this includes indigenous people, whose elimination was welcomed by the Argentine writer⁵.

Sarmiento's views on nature differ from Martí's, as expressed in "Nuestra América." While for Sarmiento Latin America's flora and fauna are inimical and life-threatening for humans, Martí believes that they empower the natives and the people who live on the subcontinent. Latin America's nature makes them strong and resilient. The product of this influence is the "natural man," an individual that is uniquely formed by Latin America's natural environment and that is stronger than the weak and effeminate European man⁶. According to the modern environmental context, Martí holds an eco-centric view because this concept identifies with all life or a whole ecosystem, without giving privilege to just one species, for example to humans (Clark 3). Eco-centrism affirms the intrinsic value of all natural life and rejects even the most trivial human demands over the needs of other species or integrity of space (Clark 2). In contrast, the anthropocentric view holds nature entirely in relation to humans, for instance as a resource for economic use. This view holds that human beings and their interests are solely of value and always take priority over those of the non-human (Clark 3). Sarmiento's vision of nature is anthropocentric because it subjugates nature and natives under the rule and civilizational standards of a European-oriented oligarchy and aims at the exploitation of nature for economic ends. In "Nuestra América," Martí's eco-centric view gives prominence to Latin American nature and to the indigenous people of the southern hemisphere. The Europeans have intruded into the American Eden and have spoilt it with their "European book" and with disrespect for the land and its natural laws. Martí condemns the arrogance and the ignorance of the Europeans with regard to Latin American nature and repeatedly emphasizes the need for the white ruling class to adapt to the land, and not vice versa. Seen from the modern perspective, Martí questions the "human-centeredness" of the ruling class, which in Val Plumwood words "permeates the dominant culture, fostering illusions of disembodiedness and invincibility, which are likely to be especially strong among privileged decision-makers" (238). In the context of Martí's "Nuestra América," the decision-makers are the *criollos*, who are culturally and spiritually detached from Latin America and who see the subcontinent's nature only as a source of economic benefits. Martí challenges this anthropocentric supposition and puts Latin American nature center-stage.

Scott DeVries argues that Sarmiento's *Facundo* is engaged in the "analyses and advocacies of political ecology" because Sarmiento is concerned with

3. Jorge Camacho argues that the jaguar is never a positive symbol in Martí. In *Etnografía, política y poder a finales del siglo XIX: José Martí y la cuestión indígena*, Camacho explains that for Martí, the jaguar (tiger) is an allusion to Facundo, who was called "the tiger." The metaphor of the tiger in Martí is a symbol for the beastly impulse, the criminal in "El padre suizo," and the image of the tyrant in "chac-mool." Ivan Schulman argues similarly. In *Símbolo y color en la obra de José Martí*, Schulman points out that the tiger represents "una pasión llevada a extremos violentos y excesivos" [a passion taken to violent and excessive extremes] (18) and also "voracidad" [voracity] (19).

4. Sarmiento also uses that predator in his narrative, but in a totally negative context. In *Facundo*, he describes how the gaucho is stalked by a jaguar and barely survives the attack.

5. Juan Carlos Hernandez Cuevas writes that "with strong conviction, Sarmiento justifies the Spanish colonization and the alleged racial and cultural supremacy of European origin in Argentina" ["con una actitud vehemente, Sarmiento justifica la colonización española y la supuesta supremacía racial y cultural de origen europeo en Argentina"] (2). In contrast, "the discourse of Martí's chronicles offers a mature vision, free from racial prejudices; the objective of the Cuban thinker is to offer a solution to the pressing needs of the heterogeneous peoples who live from the 'Río Bravo to the Strait of Magellan,' and at the same time avert the neocolonial influence of Latin America" ["el discurso de las crónicas martianas ofrece una visión madura, libre de prejuicios raciales; el objetivo del pensador cubano es ofrecer una solución a las apremiantes necesidades de los pueblos heterogéneos que habitan desde el río 'Bravo a Magallanes,' y a la vez evitar el influjo neocolonialista de América Latina"] (2).

6. Martí's view of the strong "natural man" and the effeminate European man might have been influenced by the discourse of "social degeneration," triggered by Charles Darwin and the

the way in which the land that previously produced barbarism should be altered in order to produce civilization (11). In that view, Latin America needed to be developed and industrialized along the models of the U.S. or Europe. Sarmiento continued the discourse of economic exploitation of Latin America that started with Columbus' letters and his descriptions of the newly-found lands and has been continuing to the 21st century⁷. DeVries states that "from the moment that Sarmiento's proposal for a political ecology of possession and industrialization of the land rang from the pages of *Facundo*, a capitalist mode of land exploitation becomes the standard model for the development of Latin America" (11).

Martí proposes a reverse logic to Sarmiento's with regard to nature and civilization. For him, European-style civilization in Latin America is not the solution but the problem, and he insists that nature and the indigenous cultures of Latin America are the key to a politically and culturally strong continent. They need to be considered and safeguarded before new ideas are implemented and foreign products are imported. In that sense, Martí proves himself ecologically conscious and a forerunner of the bioregional movement of the twentieth century. DeVries points out Martí's importance as an opposing voice to Sarmiento's call for industrial development of Latin America and as an early critic of a globalized economy in favor of regional markets:

It was as early as the appearance in 1891 of the essay "Nuestra América ("Our America"), by Cuban literary hero José Martí, that we find one of the earliest challenges to the influence of development discourse: the references to stolen lands and the value of local knowledge; the rejection of traditional forms of governance, education, and class ideology; the call for a change of intellectual spirit and an embrace of the natural man. All of these ideas challenge the central suppositions upon which the imported concept of development was founded. [...] Development theory hinges upon the notion that regions should, can, and will experience economic growth through a series of stages usually culminating in globalized trade, but when Martí describes his America—"Nuestra América"—as a region marked by the Río Bravo and the Magellan Strait, he proposes geographies that reject globalized economies in favor of localized and individuated alternatives. (12)

Martí's preference for localized markets stems from his regard for nature and agrarian societies⁸. He argued that Latin America can be economically self-sustained since it possessed all the important raw materials and agricultural products. Economic independence from U.S. And European

beginning of the industrial revolution. It refers to the city dweller who, separated from nature and hard work, becomes weak and degenerate. Towards the end of the 19th century, Darwin's theory of evolution became the basis of fears of social, cultural, and racial degeneration and decline. Martí admired Darwin and referred to him often. He dedicated an essay to him in 1882 with the title "Darwin has died" [Darwin ha muerto] (15:369). For Martí, "America is giving birth to the real man in these real times" (translation mine), [... le está naciendo a América, en estos tiempos reales, el hombre real] (6: 20). Martí criticizes the Europeanized man for his "weak arm, the arm with painted nails and bracelet, the arm of Madrid or of Paris" (translation mine) [... el brazo canijo, el brazo de uñas pintadas y pulsera, el brazo de Madrid o de París ...] (6:16). Like Nietzsche, Martí also adopts Emerson's critique of modernity and its debilitating effect on society. Emerson affirms that a "strong race and strong individual rests at last on natural forces, which are best in the savage, who, like the beast around him, is still in reception of the milk from the teats of Nature" (Porte 979). In his essay on Whitman, Martí describes the American Bard as a "natural person" [persona natural] with his "nature without restraint in original energy" (translation mine) [naturaleza sin freno en original energía] (13:132). This is why "those raised on Latin, academic, or French milk could maybe not understand that heroic grace" (translation mine), [Los criados a leche latina, académica o francesa, no podrían, acaso, entender aquella gracia heroica] (13:133).

7. Eduardo Galeano's 1971 *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* is one of the most potent condemnations of exploitation of Latin America perpetrated by Europe and the U.S. Galeano writes: "Latin America is the region of the open veins. From the moment of the discovery until today, everything has always been transformed into European capital or later, North American, and as such it has accumulated and it is accumulating in the remote centers of power: Everything: the earth, its fruits and its depths rich in minerals, the people and their ability to work and consume, the natural resources and the human resources," (translation mine) [Es América Latina, la región de las venas abiertas. Desde el descubrimiento hasta nuestros días, todo se ha transmutado siempre en capital europeo o, más tarde, norteamericano, y como tal se ha acumulado y se acumula en los lejanos centros de poder. Todo: la tierra, sus frutos y sus profundidades ricas en minerales, los hombres y su capacidad de trabajo y de consumo, los recursos naturales y los recursos humanos] (2).

8. Critics of bioregionalism have argued that it has been too focused on rural places and agrarian issues while ignoring the urban environment, where the majority of people live. Giovanna DiChiro states that "most main-stream environmental organizations and environmental studies programs in U.S. universities pay scant attention to the problems and potentials of the urban environment" (315). Jill Gatlin mentions the "Green City" projects during the 1980s and their strategies to "ecologize" urban areas, "which range from developing urban food and energy sources to reducing noise pollution to reestablishing land belts with native plants" (249). In Martí's texts, and in particular in "Nuestra América," we find a "back to the land" view and a celebration of rural places and agrarian culture.

markets would lead to cultural independence. Martí supported a sustained flow and export of agricultural products to the U.S. and Europe because the income guaranteed the livelihood of Latin Americans. And since European-educated governors in Latin America didn't understand the natural conditions of the land and thus failed to maximize the yield of the land, he proposed to heed the knowledge of the indigenous cultures, which had known the land from tilling it for hundreds or thousands of years⁹.

In "Nuestra América," Martí also refers to the ponies of the gauchos, which can't be controlled by European knowledge but by skills learned and perfected by the natives living with their horses: "A gaucho's pony cannot be stopped in midbolt by one of Alexander Hamilton's laws" (Allen 290) [Con un decreto de Hamilton no se para la pechada al potro del llanero] (6:17). Like the jaguar, the Latin American pony represents the strength and vigor of the Latin American fauna, which can't be tamed by European knowledge¹⁰.

Concluding his essay, Martí mentions the condor, one of the most emblematic and enigmatic animals of the Andes. In Martí's description, it carries the Great Cemi, a spirit worshipped by the Taino, on its back, which scatters the seeds of the new America across the continent, "from the Rio Bravo to the Straits of Magellan" (Allen 296) [del Bravo a Magllanes] (6:23). The condor connotes freedom and independence and thus is fitting for the closing remarks of the article. It alludes to the freedom and independence of the Latin American nations, from the border with the US in the north to the southern tip of Latin America. The condor represents Latin America's nature, whereas the Great Cemi on its back hints at Latin America's indigenous culture, both of which need to be recognized and integrated into the societies of the emerging new republics of Latin America¹¹.

Martí's reference to the Rio Bravo in the north and the Strait of Magellan in the south constitute landmarks that delineate Latin America's natural and cultural sphere. These borders are natural formations that run horizontally from east to west, whereas the Andes with their silver veins ("the silver in the depth of the Andes") [la plata en las raíces de los Andes] (6:15) run vertically from north to south. Thus, Martí marks the geographic contours of a bioregion or natural space with its distinct culture and inhabitants formed by Latin American nature. His oft-mentioned "natural man," that is, the Native Latin American population, originates there. By mapping the space for Latin American nature and culture, Martí is also adding a political dimension with messages both to the US and to the *criollo*-controlled governments of Latin American countries: Latin America belongs to the "natural man" and not to the intruders, who are ignoring the land and its native population. Silvia Herzog calls this vision "inquietante" ("disquieting") because "estamos ante un discurso nuevo, en el que lo natural y lo político, la naturaleza y la cultura, se fusionan en un todo indelible" ("we are looking at a new discourse, in which the natural and the political, nature and culture, fuse into one concept that can't be taken apart") (177). In effect, Martí justifies political and cultural independence of Latin America with her natural and cultural idiosyncrasies, a process that Herzog calls "la reformulación de la naturaleza como categoría política" ("the new proposition of nature as a political category") (177). In that sense, Martí's essay contains a subversive message directed at Latin American *criollo* oligarchies to beware of the "natural man" because he is part of the indigenous culture and thus entitled to the land, whereas the *criollos* are foreign and incompatible with the land and its culture.

Martí's support for indigenous people, both in North and Latin America, is at times ambiguous. While he regarded the indigenous population as

9. Martí was not the first Latin American writer who opposed Sarmiento's characterization of indigenous people in Argentina as manifestations of barbarity. Scott DeVries mentions early works of *indigenismo*, such as the historical novels *El último rei de los muisca*s (The last king of the Muisca) (1864) by Colombian Jesús S. Roza and *Entiquillo* (1882) by Dominican Manuel de Jesús Galván. The harmonious relationship between indigenous communities and nature is portrayed in Ecuadorian Juan León Mera's *Melodías indígenas* (Indigenous melodies) (1858) and *Cumandá* (1879) and in *Tabaré* (1888) by Uruguayan Juan Zorrilla de San Martín. Indigenous perspectives are expressed in the context of the *cautiva* story *Huinahual* (1888) by Chilean Alberto del Solar, and abuse and victimization are represented in Peruvian Clorinda Matto de Turner's seminal novel *Aves sin nido* (1889). All these works constitute a counterpoint to Sarmiento's dismissal of indigenous groups. Their positive representations are meant to defend the rights of the native population. (DeVries 191-192)

10. In *Símbolo y color*, Schulman explains that Martí also uses the horse as a symbol of "virility and potency" (265). This would connect to the "natural man" born in Latin America.

11. Schulman explains that the eagle in Martí's work possesses "spiritual value" [valor espiritual] (98). The condor, as a representation of Latin American fauna, probably carries the same meaning as the eagle for Martí.

"kindhearted" and condemned the conditions in the Indian reservations in the US promoting educational programs to assimilate them into the dominant white American culture, Martí also revealed a deep resentment toward them because he viewed them as indifferent, "uncultivated," "lazy," "bestial," enemies of economic progress, and, what is worse, inclined to reject the civil institutions of the government, as Jorge Camacho shows in his *Etnografía, política y poder*¹².

Still, Martí was not racist, and eliminating the native population was not an option for him, as opposed to Sarmiento. According to Camacho, Martí believed in the concept of "inferior races" that were still going through different stages of civilization (savage state, barbarian, civilized). Thus, he supported the acculturation of "savages" because he believed in the progress of humanity and he viewed the "inferiority" of races not in biological or anatomical terms, but from the cultural point of view.

It should be stressed in this context that Martí, like other modernista writers, was obsessed with the new economic system, i.e. capitalism. He depended on it and exploited it¹³.

He even edited for three years a journal called "The American economist." As much as he praises nature in "Nuestra América," he also believed that by exploiting the land, (which is in direct correlation with exploiting the Indians and peasants, and taking away their land for the agricultural industry) Latin America would come out of the shadows, out of poverty, and solve its economic problems. In his 1883 article on immigration in Argentina, for example, Martí praises the construction of railways and the economic growth and stability of the country because Indians had to cede ("los indios invasores, echados de las faldas de los andes, sus últimas guaridas") ["the invading Indians, driven from the sides of the Andes, their last hideouts"] (7:322). However, Martí expresses this view in 1883, whereas his 1891 "Nuestra América" reveals a more mature and sober vision shaped by the effects of his experience of the unbridled market economy and of the systematic dispossession of Native Americans in the U.S. This might explain why he gives Indian culture a prominent place in "Nuestra América."

Martí's critique of a globalized market and his emphasis on local knowledge reverberate in the modern ecological concept of the *bioregion*. In his 1985 book *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision*, Kirkpatrick Sale refers to the terms *dwelling* and *place* and the importance of knowing the natural environment:

The crucial and perhaps only and all-encompassing task is to understand *place*, the immediate specific place where we live. The kinds of soils and rocks under our feet; the source of waters we drink; the meaning of the different kinds of wind; the common insects, birds, mammals, plants, and trees; the particular cycles of the seasons; the times to plant and harvest and forage—these are the things that are necessary to know [...]. And the cultures of the people, of the populations native to the land and of those who have grown up with it, the human social economic arrangements shaped by and adapted to the

12. In chapter 7 of his book, Camacho explains that since the end of the 1880s, Martí saw with concern the social differences in Latin America. A very cultivated ["cultísima"] class coexisted with another one that was not interested in progress and that was primarily composed by indigenous people and by "incultos." As Martí affirms in "Nuestra América," this problem was not new. It stems from the colonies, but since the middle of the nineteenth century, the elites had decided to solve it: Annexing those territories and justifying it with the ideology of progress and racial superiority.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Martí proposes therefore to include those ethnic minorities into the new republics, educate the "uncultivated" classes, and thus avoid that they might revolt. In addition, they might start a dialogue with the higher classes about their differences through the right to vote and through active participation as citizens.

"Nuestra América" proposes a democratic pact between the wealthy classes and the traditionally dispossessed, but this pact also facilitated the imposition of the culture of the liberal elites of their time. By including the natives, the elites were able to protect their property and to contribute to what they considered progress. This is why the situation of the indigenous didn't change for such a long time. On the contrary, in all likelihood the differences became more acute and the natives had no other choice but war. (Camacho, *Etnografía*, chapt. 7)

13. *Modernista* writers kept an ambivalent attitude toward capitalism, which, as Noé Jitrik points out, was related to the influence of their social environment: "The intellectual, as *modernismo* presents him to us, wants to be different even though he is surrounded by forces that characterize a culture in decline" (translation mine), [El intelectual, como nos lo presenta el modernismo, quiere ser otro aunque está todavía rodeado de los poderes que caracterizan una cultura en declinación] (113). In *Capital Fictions*, Ericka Beckman breaks a taboo in U.S. literary circles and reveals *modernista* writers in their complicity with capitalism while ignoring social ills and injustice. She states that "*modernismo* chose to found a modern artistic discourse deeply embedded in the pleasures of import consumption" (57-58). José Enrique Rodó warns in *Ariel* of vulgarization of life in Latin America, effected by U.S. style capitalism, yet he overlooks Latin America's economic backwardness and poverty. Rubén Darío rejects capitalism and technical progress in even starker terms, for example in his poem "A Roosevelt" or in his essay "El triunfo de Calibán." Based on his contempt for U.S. capitalism, he calls his northern neighbors "bárbaros," "yankees," and "calibanes," but he does his eyes to Latin America's social problems preferring instead to create *l'art pour l'art*. José Martí stands out among *modernista* writers in his criticism of social ills, both in the U.S. and in Latin America.

geomorphic ones, in both urban and rural settings –these are the things that must be appreciated. (42)

Sale's catalogue of natural characteristics of your environment and the need to know them reflects Martí's firmness on understanding the natural conditions of a place and his concern for indigenous people. Knowing nature and accepting indigenous people are recurring themes in "Nuestra América." Martí describes how Latin American natives, the original inhabitants of the land, are shunned and silenced by the *criollos* and driven from their homes: "The Indian circled about us, mute, and went to the mountaintop to christen his children" (Allen 293) [El indio, mudo, nos daba vueltas alrededor, y se iba al monte, a la cumbre del monte, a bautizar sus hijos] (6:20) Martí suggests that native Latin American culture should have been recognized and integrated into the dominant European culture: "The wise thing would have been to pair, with charitable hearts and the audacity of our founders, the Indian headband and the judicial robe, to undam the Indian" (Allen 293) [El genio hubiera estado en hermanar, con la caridad del corazón y con el atrevimiento de los fundadores, la vincha y la toga; en desestancar al indio] (6:20). Martí personifies Latin America and describes her as a "mother" whose "sons" feel shame because she wears an Indian apron. They are not accepting the native American heritage in which their culture is rooted: "These men born in America who are ashamed of the mother that raised them because she wears an Indian apron, these delinquents who disown their sick mother and leave her alone in her sickbed" (Allen 289) [¡Estos nacidos en América, que se avergüenzan, porque llevan delantal indio, de la madre que los crió, y reniegan, ¡bribones! de la madre enferma, y la dejan sola en el lecho de las enfermedades!] (6:16) Martí deplores throughout "Nuestra América" that the *criollos* despise Native Americans and thus an integral part of their home and their own identity.

A *criollo* himself, Martí was not free from elitism toward the native population. In *Nuestra América*, he differentiates between the "cultos" (*criollos* like himself) and the "incultos" (the indigenous people) (6:17). Martí also expresses his fears of natives using violence and taking charge of the (*criollo*) government because of their "habit of attacking and resolving their doubts with their fists" ["hábito de agredir y resolver las dudas con su mano"] (6:17). Martí's faith in science and liberal societies reveals traits that supported the *criollo* nation and went against the rights and aspirations of other minorities in Latin America.

Again and again, Martí points to the need to know the natural conditions of the land in order to govern and administer it well, thus anticipating the modern concept of *dwelling* in a *bioregion*. The use of the land can only come to fruition if the people who toil it know it and live in harmony with it. Foreign knowledge is useless because it is not based in the facts and the laws of a particular place in nature. For Sale, to *dwell* means living mindfully in a place and experiencing fully the sensory richness of our immediate environment. In a similar way, Martí expresses the importance of the mindful experience of nature in his *Versos sencillos*, where the poet shows intimate knowledge of the surrounding flora because he knows the names of the plants: "I know the strange names / of the herbs and the flowers" [Yo sé los nombres extraños / de las hierbas y las flores."] In "Nuestra América," Martí writes that to govern well, "one must attend closely to the reality of the place that is governed" (Allen 290) [donde se gobierna, hay que atender para gobernar bien] (6:17). Martí continues:

In America, the good ruler does not need to know how the German and Frenchman is governed, but what elements his own country is composed of and how he can marshal them so as to reach, by means and institutions born from the country itself, the desirable state in which every man knows himself and is active,

and all men enjoy the abundance that Nature, for the good of all, has bestowed on the country they make fruitful by their labor and defend with their lives. (Allen 290)

[El buen gobernante en América no es el que sabe cómo se gobierna el alemán o el francés, sino el que sabe con qué elementos está hecho su país, y cómo puede ir guiándolos en junto, para llegar, por métodos e instituciones nacidas del país mismo, a aquel estado apetecible donde cada hombre se conoce y ejerce, y disfrutan todos de la abundancia que la Naturaleza puso para todos en el pueblo que fecundan con su trabajo y defienden con sus vidas.] (6:17).

Martí's references to the "elements" and the "institutions" that constitute a country refer to the natural conditions of Latin America and the existing indigenous culture. Throughout the text, Martí is targeting and blaming the *criollos* (those of Spanish descent, who were born in Latin America) for abandoning their "sick mother" and for turning to Europe as a model for civilization. The sons of rich *criollos* would spend an extended period of time in Europe, preferably in Paris and London, and then return to Latin America as political leaders and run the countries according to European laws and standards. They don't know the "elements" of which the country exists nor do they know the "methods" and "institutions" that arose from them. The "elements" refers to the natural conditions of the country, such as the consistency of the soil, the weather patterns, the relationship between flora and fauna, the efficient use of water, the natural resources, the knowledge of the best plants with the highest yield, etc. The people who know the country best are obviously the natives, who have inhabited the land for hundreds or thousands of years. They have developed efficient "methods" of working the land and built "institutions," such as the arts, crafts, markets, traditions, etc., in short, an established culture and civilization. Those "methods" and "institutions" are based on people's ancient knowledge of their land, which guarantees the best farming results and social peace and security due to established institutions. According to Martí, knowing the land will lead to harvests in "abundance" given by generous Nature.

Bioregionalism has generated ideas and movements that correlate around that term, such as community, local food systems, local culture, the *locavore* movement, renewable energy, "green cities," grassroots activism, habitat restoration, ecological awareness, sustainability. These expressions have become widely known thanks to the bioregional movement. Cheryl Glotfelty confirms that "in recent years, the bioregional movement has continued to inform a variety of other expressions of emergent new localisms, including community-supported agriculture, the slow-food movement, antiglobalization efforts, and postcolonial reconceptualizations of place and identity" (4). Martí's ideas expressed in "Nuestra América" bear semblance to the discourse of *bioregionalism* because they foreground natural factors as a way to envision place. Like the bioregional discourse, Martí proposes that human identity may be constituted by our residence in a larger community of natural elements, our local bioregion, rather than by national or ethnic bases of identity. For Martí, Latin American national identity is based in being born and raised in the natural environment of Latin America. It is nature that defines human identity. Martí's vision reveals traits of Naturalism and its proposition that the environment determines human identity.

Martí's "Nuestra América" makes it clear that Latin America is deeply rooted in specific natural conditions, which have shaped and defined the culture of her peoples. Nature and the concept of "living-in-place" assume prominent roles in the description of the cohabitation between the white

man and indigenous people. Martí portrays white civilization as an intrusive force into a culture that had been in harmony with nature and that respected her laws, similar to how Berg and Dasmann describe the concept of *living-in-place*: "A society which practises living-in-place keeps a balance with its region of support through links between human lives, other living things, and the processes of the planet – seasons, weather, water cycles -- as revealed by the place itself" (399).

Martí blames the white man for disrupting the harmony of American nature by destroying a *living-in-place* society. For Martí, Native Americans represent an autochthonous and integral part of American nature, which is why they need to be safeguarded, protected, and supported. He takes the same stance in his essays on North American Indians and their plight in reservations.

Martí's plan for reestablishing the knowledge of the Indians for successful farming and for elevating Indian culture is reminiscent of the bioregional concept of *reinhabitation*, which Berg and Dasmann define as "learning to live-in-place in an area that has been disrupted and injured through past exploitation." The two critics declare that "it involves becoming fully alive in and with a place" and "applying for membership in a biotic community and ceasing to be its exploiter." (399) As Berg and Dasmann view the process from the exploitation of the environment to the reestablishment of a "sustainable pattern of existence," Martí in a similar manner aims at reinstating and emphasizing indigenous traditional methods for working the land and social integration of native people, whose knowledge of American nature is vital for using the land efficiently and responsibly¹⁴. For Martí, governors with "a mishmash of arrogant, alien, and ambitious ideas" [pensamientos diversos, arrogantes, exóticos o ambiciosos] (6:18), perpetuate the exploitation of the land and its people, which started with the arrival of the Spaniards. For Berg and Dasmann, successful *reinhabitation* rests on "studies of local native inhabitants, in particular the experiences of those who have lived there before" (399), a vision that is reflected in Martí's call for the "American university," that is, for the knowledge imbedded in indigenous cultures. As Berg and Dasmann conclude, knowledge about the land gleaned from native inhabitants, helps *reinhabitants* to "determine the nature of the bioregion within which they are learning to live-in-place," and they can "apply this information toward shaping their own life patterns and establishing relationships with the land and life around them" (399). Martí would have concurred. Latin America can only be reasonably governed and inhabited if its flora and fauna are taken into consideration. For Martí, knowing the land and adopting Indian culture are the crucial elements to understanding the mystery of Latin America.

José Martí forcefully challenged Sarmiento's anthropocentric view that nature and indigenous cultures on the subcontinent needed to be subdued to enable a European- and Yankee-style civilization. The eco-centric vision permeating "Nuestra América" emphasizes the role of nature and indigenous cultures while criticizing the white *criollo* ruling class for ignoring both. However, as a *criollo* and belonging to the ruling class himself, Martí also reveals traces of elitism and a nuanced disdain for indigenous people for their resistance to economic progress. Like no other Latin American writer of the nineteenth century Martí saw the need to include nature and indigenous cultures for successful nation-building. He viewed Latin America as a natural sphere with unique conditions and indigenous cultures shaped by their natural environment. His vision that human identity is shaped by distinct natural conditions reverberates in the modern environmental discourse.

14. Other examples of *reinhabitation* in Martí's work are his two 1883 essays on deforestation in the US, in which he warned of the consequences of excessive logging for society. Martí shows that trees not only are crucial for agriculture, but they also create a healthy natural environment for human beings.

BIBLIOGRAFÍA

- Allen, Esther. *José Martí: Selected Writings*. Penguin Books, 2002.
- Beckman, Ericka. *Capital Fictions*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Berg, Peter and Raymond Dasman. "Reinhabiting California." *The Ecologist*. Vol. 7, issue 10. 1977. pp. 399-401.
- Buell Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental Criticism*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- Camacho, Jorge. *Etnografía, política y poder a finales del siglo XIX: José Martí y la cuestión indígena*. University of North Carolina Press, 2013.
- Clark, Timothy. *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*. Cambridge UP, 2011.
- DeVries, Scott M. *A History of Ecology and Environmentalism in Spanish American Literature*. Bucknell UP, 2013.
- DiChiro, Giovanna. "Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice." *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*. Ed. William Cronon. W.W. Norton & Company, 1995. pp. 298-320.
- Galeano, Eduardo. *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*. Catálogos S.R.L., 2002.
- Galván, Manuel de Jesús. *Enriquillo*. Las Américas Pub. Co., 1964.
- Gatlin, Jill. "'Los campos extraños de esta ciudad' / 'The strange fields of this city': Urban Bioregionalist Identity and Environmental Justice in Lorna Dee Cervantes's 'Freeway 280'." *The Bioregional Imagination*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty et.al. Georgia Press, 2012. pp. 245-262.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll (ed.) et al. *The Bioregional Imagination*. The University of Georgia Press, 2012.
- Hernández, Juan Cuevas. "Visiones decimonónicas de América: Martí y Sarmiento." *Espéculo*. Vol. 33. (07/01/2006).
- Hogan, Linda. *A Spiritual History of the Living World*. W.W. Norton & Company, 1995.
- Herzog, Silvia, et. al. "Naturaleza, sociedades y culturas en José Martí." *Cuadernos americanos*. Vol. 9, 3(51), 1995. pp. 92-121.
- Jitrik, Noé. *Las contradicciones del modernismo*. El Colegio de México, 1978.

Leff, Enrique. "Encountering political ecology: epistemology and emancipation." In *The International Handbook of Political Ecology* by Raymond L. Bryant (ed). Edward Elgar Publ., 2015. pp. 44-69.

Martí, José. *Obras completas*. Editorial Nacional de Cuba, 1963-73.

Matto de Turner, Clorinda. *Aves sin nido*. Las Américas, 1968.

Mera, Juan León. *Cumandá ó Un drama entre salvajes*. Espasa-Calpe, 1967.

_____. *La virgen del sol: leyenda; melodías indígenas*. Timbre Imperial, Sección Tipográfica del Crédito Catalán, 1887.

Plumwood, Val. *Environmental Culture: The ecological crisis of reason*. Routledge, 2002.

Porte, Joel, ed. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Viking Press, 1983.

Rozo, Jesús Silvestre. *El último rei de los muiscas*. Imp. de Echevarría Hnos., 1864.

Sale, Kirkpatrick. *Dwellers in the Land. The Bioregional Vision*. Sierra Club Book, 1985.

Schulman, Ivan A. *Símbolo y color en la obra de José Martí*. Editorial Gredos, 1969.

Solar, Alberto del. *Huincahual*. P. Roselli, 1888.

Toledo, Josefina. *La naturaleza en José Martí*. Editorial científico-técnica, 2007.

Zorrilla de San Martín, Juan. *Tabaré*. Editorial Kapelusz, 1965.