

Exploring Cultural Narratives in the Age of Climate Change

Tukwatsibwe Dickson

Department of Business Administration, Kampala International University, Uganda

ABSTRACT

Climate change is not just an environmental or scientific issue it is deeply embedded in cultural narratives that shape our understanding of the world. This paper examines how cultural narratives have historically framed climate change, how contemporary literature and media represent environmental crises, and how indigenous knowledge offers alternative perspectives. It explores the intersectionality of climate change with race, gender, and socioeconomic status, revealing how storytelling can drive environmental awareness and action. By analyzing diverse narratives, from ancient texts to modern films, this study highlights the power of storytelling in shaping perceptions, fostering dialogue, and inspiring societal change in the face of ecological challenges.

Keywords: Climate change narratives, cultural representation, environmental storytelling, Indigenous knowledge, intersectionality, media, and climate change.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural narratives and the stories we tell are deeply entwined with the reality we imagine and participate in shaping. These representations instruct our approaches to big-picture issues like climate change. Artists, filmmakers, poets, storytellers, musicians, and other cultural workers help mediate climate-related concepts by producing compelling work that brings a new depth, emotionality, and profound narrative to data and scientific facts. Culture is the values, beliefs, and behaviors that are learned and maintained by societies or individuals and then passed along. It is an inseparable part of what we do and think, what we value, and how we conceptualize the world. In other words, culture permeates who we are and how we think and act in countless small and large ways, including day-to-day practices. When a collective cultural shift occurs that results in an environmentally rooted or sustainable practice, societal change is rapidly possible. In a world of crises, narratives determine what characterizes an emergency and what we view instead as the norm. They constitute a vital currency for imagining the present, past, and future. History and a rich amount of scholarship are always in conversation with the contemporary moment. Thus, we will understand climate change most ably by considering its multiple situated and historical representations. Different approaches to detecting narratives in different forms of cultural expression will yield a more well-rounded telling of the output and of the state of the world itself [1, 2, 3].

Historical Perspectives on Climate Change in Cultural Narratives

Cultural narratives about the inevitability of climate change: historical and ancient civilizational perspectives. Fictional narratives themselves are shaped by the historical and geographical contexts in which they are conceived. These conversations that various societies have with their ecological systems are as old as those societies themselves, within which one encounters ideas, attitudes, dispositions, and jargon that communities use to denote their being and conduct. The presence of themes such as the beauty of the environment, its destruction and rehabilitation, and religious literature from the mid-sixteenth to the early-nineteenth century, and poems are examples of environmental diplomacy in the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [4, 5, 6]. The extraordinary variance that the texts of these societies present on environmental change makes it imperative that we endeavor to understand that stories about climate change are as ancient as human history is, and counterparts of their focal points and reticulations. In this piece, we present a detailed review of these stories, as they have been recounted through a variety of documents. It is believed that a sound understanding of the historical narratives of climate change helps us develop a nuanced understanding of the cultural orientations that undergird the attitudinal change in communities, and what practical insights that understanding may give us in the endeavor to arrive at a resolution in our environmental disputes, particularly those related to climate change [7, 8, 9].

Contemporary Representations of Climate Change in Literature and MEDIA

This paper examines vivid cultural narratives of climate change and identifies some chief priorities across contemporary representation. Exploring the range of narrative strategies such representations use, we will address three dimensions of contemporary environmental narrative that have attracted a growing body of scholarly literature: contemporary literature and visual art related to climate change; the mass media publicizing climate change, including film and documentary; and internet and social media responses to environmental crisis. Several artists and writers whose work represents climate narratives at this large scale have had significant popular and scholarly influence [10, 11, 12]. There is a growing field of contemporary literary and cultural production that is centered on representations of our environment, including writing and visual art that addresses climate change. While some of this work can be classified as explicitly activist or didactic, many texts that reference climate exhibit many of the narrative qualities we will address in the literature in this chapter. Yet it is also important to ask: What literary, narrative, and art texts do people read, look at, and resonate within a world of social and mass media, including film? A filmmaker, writer, and climate activist worked alongside a breakthrough communications group in developing a documentary film in an attempt to exploit new knowledge about how to use drama to help viewers resonate with the science of climate change. Iconic representations of climate change, such as polar bears on melting ice caps, or notable photographs, are notable for their capacity to generate resonance and so have been widely deployed by climate environmentalists and activists. In its extensive use of popular entertainment concepts, imagery, and storytelling techniques, this film reflects a wider interest in this analysis of the entertainment-education media campaign [13, 14, 15].

Indigenous Knowledge and Climate Change Narratives

Indigenous knowledge contributes a fundamentally different narrative of climate change and the environment, such as the practices of traditional ecological wisdom, which provide insightful ecological practices in local areas and are conscious, planned, and transmitted through traditional oral methods. Such knowledge also provides perceptions of indigenous communities on what ecological approaches are sustainable. These approaches are primarily focused on long-term external sustainability that is intergenerational, as well as spiritual and ethical sustainability, and maintaining environmental justice. Therefore, the narratives developed by Indigenous communities about the changing climate are a result of the actions of humans, reflecting careful management and stewardship of the environment. By utilizing this traditional wisdom, a holistic narrative of nature or the universe that accounts for more than just resource availability and more than present-centered self-interests is developed [16, 17, 18]. The importance of documenting and using this knowledge for climate change assessments, environmental problem-solving, and general ethics and responsibilities of living on Earth is essential, but the concern of colonization, oppression, and racism in inputting, documenting, and distributing such knowledge is critical and needs to be addressed. While many Western narratives are beginning to include the voices and knowledge of indigenous and minority cultures, a crucial piece of the climate change narrative has yet to be grasped by the Western world: the effect of colonialism and the resulting disappearance of much of the untold narratives. Because both dominant Western and some Indigenous narratives acknowledge that humans influence the resilience of the environment, the recognition of Indigenous knowledge enriches the complexity of reality and adds another layer that should not be omitted.

Intersectionality and Climate Change Narratives

The concept of intersectionality has come up in connection to narratives about climate change. This approach could be seen as a deepening of an already existing exploration of climate-sensitive traumas, as they are entangled with those caused by various forms of oppression and a call for a shift of perspective from privileging human voters to giving voice to marginalized beings. Narratives have also been drawn to interpret the issues with climate change from both legal and ethical perspectives. Studies have interrogated events and happenings beyond the devastation that occurs as a result of being in a different

environment from birth, hence the need to examine this from different narratives that bespoke the twilight tales of humans with diverse cultures, behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, experiences, choices, and objections [19, 20, 21]. Writing about climate change, the environmental encyclical and Black Lives Matter, calls for intersectional storytelling to expand the understanding of climate change – to use the case of Black Lives Matter, with connections of global race, moving to theology from below discussing gross connections to poverty in the age of climate crisis, and to weave narratives below and across global wealth and income inequality, and like climate failures catalyzing many intersecting disasters creating suffering upon suffering, eventually leading to global collapse, that didn't have to happen. Indeed, it cannot be overstated how essential it is to name the ways that gender, race, nationality, economic class, and so many other divisions affect the experience of the climate crisis. Discriminatory educational systems mean that those suffering the most from climate change are often overlooked in discussions on all levels – from academia to activism to government forums. Documenting the role of climate change stories might play a crucial role in the next advent of climate change literature [22, 23, 24].

CONCLUSION

Cultural narratives play a crucial role in how societies perceive and respond to climate change. From historical texts to contemporary media, these stories influence public consciousness, policy decisions, and individual behaviors. Indigenous knowledge offers sustainable alternatives, while intersectional perspectives highlight the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalized communities. By acknowledging and integrating diverse climate narratives, we can foster a more inclusive and effective approach to addressing the climate crisis. The fusion of art, literature, media, and historical perspectives with environmental science enriches our understanding and can catalyze meaningful change in the global response to climate challenges.

REFERENCES

1. Piper A. Computational narrative understanding: a big picture analysis. In Proceedings of the Big Picture Workshop 2023 Dec (pp. 28-39).
2. Motevalli S, Talib MB, Al-Shaibani GK, Chan NN, Henshaw CJ, Roda JM. Climate Adaptation and Resilience of Pro-environmental Behavior through Climate Storytelling. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*. 2024 Jun 7;30(6):1892-900. [kuey.net](#)
3. Beach R. Adopting a languaging approach for teaching about the climate crisis in English language arts. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*. 2024 Sep 23.
4. Singh C, Ramesh A, Hagenlocher M, Shekhar H, Siemons AS, Okunola OH, Werners SE. Applying recent advances in climate adaptation research to urban heat risk management. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*. 2024 Sep;15(5):e901.
5. Davidson DJ, Kecinski M. Emotional pathways to climate change responses. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*. 2022 Mar;13(2):e751. [\[HTML\]](#)
6. Borras Jr SM, Scoones I, Baviskar A, Edelman M, Peluso NL, Wolford W. Climate change and agrarian struggles: an invitation to contribute to a JPS Forum. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*. 2022 Jan 2;49(1):1-28. [tandfonline.com](#)
7. Borras SM. Politically engaged, pluralist and internationalist: Critical agrarian studies today. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*. 2023 Feb 23;50(2):449-89.
8. Ojala M. Facing anxiety in climate change education: From therapeutic practice to hopeful transgressive learning. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education (CJEE)*. 2016;21:41-56.
9. Toivonen H, Caracciolo M. Storytalk and complex constructions of nonhuman agency: an interview-based investigation. *Narrative Inquiry*. 2023 Feb 10;33(1):61-90.
10. Gillings M, Dayrell C. Climate change in the UK press: Examining discourse fluctuation over time. *Applied linguistics*. 2024 Feb 1;45(1):111-33.
11. Bernstein A, Cohen R, Duggan TJ, Carrillo-García ME, Kerslake L, Oziewicz MC, Robinson D, Skardal R, Sweeney K, Valentín-Espiet N, Vincent S. Literature as a lens for climate change: Using narratives to prepare the next generation. Rowman & Littlefield; 2022 Mar 3.
12. Gallagher K, Cardwell N, Denichaud D, Valve L. The ecology of global, collaborative ethnography: metho-pedagogical moves in research on climate change with youth in pandemic times. *Ethnography and Education*. 2022 Jul 3;17(3):259-74. [\[HTML\]](#)
13. Orr SA, Richards J, Fatorić S. Climate change and cultural heritage: A systematic literature review (2016–2020). *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice*. 2021 Oct 2;12(3-4):434-77. [tandfonline.com](#)

14. Valentine D, Hassoun A. Uncommon futures. *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 2019 Oct 21;48(1):243-60.
15. Bulfin A. Popular culture and the “new human condition”: Catastrophe narratives and climate change. *Global and Planetary Change*. 2017 Sep 1;156:140-6.
16. Schipper EL, Dubash NK, Mulugetta Y. Climate change research and the search for solutions: rethinking interdisciplinarity. *Climatic Change*. 2021 Oct;168(3):18.
17. Tengö M, Austin BJ, Danielsen F, Fernández-Llamazares Á. Creating synergies between citizen science and Indigenous and local knowledge. *BioScience*. 2021 May;71(5):503-18. oup.com
18. Raimi MO, Vivien OT, Oluwatoyin OA. Creating the healthiest nation: Climate change and environmental health impacts in Nigeria: A narrative review. Morufu Olalekan Raimi, Tonye Vivien Odubo & Adedoyin Oluwatoyin Omidiji (2021) Creating the Healthiest Nation: Climate Change and Environmental Health Impacts in Nigeria: A Narrative Review. Scholink Sustainability in Environment. ISSN. 2021 Feb 9. ssrn.com
19. Versey HS. Missing pieces in the discussion on climate change and risk: Intersectionality and compounded vulnerability. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. 2021 Mar;8(1):67-75. sagepub.com
20. Garcia A, Tschakert P. Intersectional subjectivities and climate change adaptation: An attentive analytical approach for examining power, emancipatory processes, and transformation. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 2022 Sep;47(3):651-65. wiley.com
21. Ergas C, McKinney L, Bell SE. Intersectionality and the environment. *Handbook of environmental sociology*. 2021:15-34.
22. Tevis TL, Martinez JG, Lozano YE. Disrupting white hegemony: A necessary shift toward adopting critical approaches within the teaching and learning environment. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. 2022 Apr 21;35(4):341-55. [\[HTML\]](#)
23. Brown J, Acey CS, Anthonj C, Barrington DJ, Beal CD, Capone D, Cumming O, Fedinick KP, Gibson JM, Hicks B, Kozubik M. The effects of racism, social exclusion, and discrimination on achieving universal safe water and sanitation in high-income countries. *The Lancet Global Health*. 2023 Apr 1;11(4):e606-14. thelancet.com
24. Ngcamu BS. Climate change effects on vulnerable populations in the Global South: a systematic review. *Natural Hazards*. 2023 Sep;118(2):977-91.

<p>CITE AS: Tukwatsibwe Dickson. (2025). Exploring Cultural Narratives in the Age of Climate Change. Eurasian Experiment Journal of Arts and Management 7(3):10-13</p>
