

Neither here nor there - Where can COVID-19 pandemic lead,  
since near / far is nowhere? /

*Nem cá, nem lá – Para onde a pandemia da COVID-19 pode  
levar, já que perto/longe é nenhum lugar?*

Alice Maria Corrêa Medina\*

Universidade de Brasília – D.F. – Brasil. Doutorado/Pós-doutorado em Educação (PPGE).

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9647-7951>

**Received** in: 22 aug. 2021. **Approved** in: 20 sep. 2021.

**How to cite this article:**

MEDINA, Alice Maria Corrêa. Neither here nor there - Where can COVID-19 pandemic lead, since near / far is nowhere? *Revista Letras Raras*. Campina Grande, v. 10, n. 4, p. 32-41, dec. 2021. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8404650>

**ABSTRACT**

The article addresses the crisis, related to the COVID-19 pandemic, pointing to it as a result of the convergence of several other crises, including the social, environmental, political and economic. The text discusses the need for human re-appropriation of different ways of life, indicating as a pressing need the production of other forms of knowledge and understanding, according to Leff (2004), aiming at the dissemination, above all, of the valorization of other forms of life in the planet. In proposing this type of "dialogical table", for the production of environmental meanings in the context of the relationships between human beings and nature, it guides towards the observation of aspects inherent to the constitution of the human being, such as emotions and spiritualities that operate as promoters and inducers of thoughts and behaviors in the production of realities and daily life. The article suggests based on the studies of Medina (2021) and Lavorato (2020), the creation of a talk table for the "listening" of beings, whose seats should be guaranteed, in the name of the maintenance of all forms of life in the Planet. It concludes by pointing out the human as a mediator and weaver of the network of production, provider and sponsor emphasizing the value of the knowledge of nature such as the protein threads produced by spiders, the social organization of ants and the flower of the mandacaru in hinterland indicating the arrival of rain in the sertão.

**KEYWORDS:** Humanity; Nature; Crisis.

**RESUMO**

O artigo aborda a crise relacionada à pandemia da COVID-19, apontando-a como resultante da convergência de várias outras crises, entre as quais a social, ambiental, política e econômica. O texto discute sobre a necessidade de uma reapropriação humana sobre os diferentes modos de vida, indicando como uma necessidade premente a produção de outras formas de conhecimento e compreensão, de acordo com Leff (2004), visando à disseminação, sobretudo, da valorização das formas de vida no planeta. Na proposição desse tipo de "mesa dialógica", para a produção de sentidos ambientais no contexto das relações entre o ser humano e a natureza, orienta para a observação de aspectos inerentes à constituição do ser humano como, por exemplo, as emoções e as espiritualidades, que operam como promotores e indutores de pensamentos e comportamentos na produção das realidades e dos cotidianos. O artigo, baseado nos estudos de Medina (2021) e de Lavorato (2020), sugere a criação de uma mesa de conversação para a "escuta" dos seres, cujos assentos devem ser garantidos, em nome da

\*

 [licinhamedina@gmail.com](mailto:licinhamedina@gmail.com)

*manutenção de todas as formas de vida e do próprio planeta. Conclui-se apontando o humano como mediador e tecelão da rede de produção, sustentação e manutenção da vida, ressaltando-se o valor dos saberes da natureza, como os fios de proteína produzidos pelas aranhas, a organização social das formigas e a flor do mandacaru na seca indicando a chegada da chuva ao sertão.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Humanidade; Natureza; Crise.

## 1 Introduction

The health and environmental issues which humanity has been going through converge from the social, environmental, political and economic crises with the last two being prevalent. Under the environmental scope, one of the possible causes of the crisis might be the illusion of a gap between humans and nature because of social inequality and rampant consumerism.

This sensitive relation between men and nature is one of the issues and challenges, which humans must face. Guimarães (1995) states that “[...] the human being, completely outcast from the whole, does not perceive the balance of nature’s relations. They act in complete disharmony with the environment, thus generating environmental imbalances”. (GUIMARÃES, 1995, p. 12).

The human experience during the life-threatening sanitary crisis somehow affects other forms of life when you take into account the changes of human behavior on our planet.

Periodic investigations on how the civilizatory process is learnt makes some analysts, such as Settele et al. (2020), believe that the Covid 19 pandemic is simply a symptom of mankind’s main structural issues. Due to this fact, a debate on the illusory separation between humankind from their nature threatens the different life forms on Earth, once you consider the occupation and appropriation based on the reckless exploitation of natural resources.

Ecocriticism is a theory which studies the relation between literature and environment (GARRARD, 2006) and which may contribute to teach us how humans and environment relate, amplifying the knowledge of human movement in nature.

Undoubtedly, it is fundamental to promote thoughts and actions based on an environmental policy for life, nevertheless if politics is orientated by the social agents’ thoughts and actions, how is it possible to promote behaviour and minds that produce an environmental policy towards life in all of its dimensions? In order to change the behavioural processes, it is necessary to change the relations effectively that produce personal and collective meanings in relation to nature.

## 2 Where is humanity?

To promote a social repossession of nature, such as Leff (2004) indicates as an action that urges for a reconstruction of the relation between society and nature, a vital repossession of humans in relation to themselves and nature is beforehand necessary. It requires rebuilding, understanding, creating and spreading new ways to maintain life before and beyond each being. In this relational context to produce meaning, and as collective creators of social, environmental, economic and political contexts, other human aspects have to be taken into consideration, such as emotions and spirituality which promote and induce behaviours and thoughts as active elements of subjectivity and complexity.

Although it is currently possible to notice the pros and cons of globalization, it is possible to clearly perceive the results and impacts of an autophagic system, which allows one to forecast a future which is apprehensive when the environmental issues are taken into consideration. Both the socioeconomic inequality of the populations and the life-threatening consequences of the Covid 19 pandemics cannot be taken for granted by the eyes of the XXI century. They are the reflection of the social and political distortions favored by the access to the same globalized information and communication network.

On the impact of globalization on nature, Leff (2010) claims that:

The globalization process keeps on re-signifying and recoding nature as goods in economic terms. Thus, the productive process regards it as fragmented, objectified and denaturalized from its ecological complexity; at the same time, it is deemed only as discreet resources, instead of environmental processes, which the sustainability of both life and planet depend on, and which was not manufactured. (LEFF, 2010, p. 110-111).

The exploitation of nature has resulted in grievous consequences to the planet, thus Maschio (2005) suggests that the first step for a change in the relational structure between humans and the environment should be:

Human beings, in their recent journey of existence on Earth, have thought of themselves as superior to other species, and due to the anthropocentric view, imagine themselves to govern other beings [...]. That is why men believe to be the masters and lords of life, determining the well-being and happiness of all other living beings on the planet. Is this superiority true? Is there any reason for it? One must consider that humanity has achieved more ability than animals to deal with natural obstacles. They have developed techniques to dominate fire, minimize intense heat and cold, invented agriculture to mitigate the lack of food, and dominated, to a certain extent, water areas with dams

and canals. Is this ingenuity and major skill to transform their environment, if they must be deemed as positive, enough to undoubtedly evidence the superiority of humans? If this is the case, is it ethical, moral, fair and licit to subdue other living species to their will?

Human's diktats, interests and goals have conquered and used the environment. This allows us to infer that if humanity had grounded their development of knowledge based on a respect logic and interactive appropriation towards other living beings, the history of their relation with nature might have been another.

Considering the production of knowledge based on the interaction among different species during the current pandemic situation, World media disseminated, at the end of 2019, the hypothesis that a bat that had directly contaminated an intermediate host or a human being after some kind of mutation originated the new coronavirus. Considering Wuhan's market in China as the original contamination area, it is a fact that animal husbandry as well as the trade and traffic of wild animals may lead into future epidemics and pandemics.

According to Castro, Lopes e Brondizio (2020), the previous manifestations on the need for transformation processes facing the global problems and issues did not promote the necessary changes. Nevertheless, lockdown policies during the coronavirus pandemics crisis produced a decrease in the human impact in nature. According to Arora, Bhaukhandi and Mirsha, the interruption in commercial and social activities, as well as the limitation in the circulation of people has improved the quality of air and rivers, a reduction in noise pollution and a greater tranquillity to wildlife. It is noticeable that, somehow, the sanitary crisis has been positive to the preservation of natural resources, which by its turn may stimulate worldwide movements and consequent strategies aiming at the reduction of impacts and damage to the environment.

A comparative study on the positive and negative alerts related to the environment during the pandemics was organized by Barroso et al. (2020) and published in the *Revista Agraria Academica (Academic Agrarian Magazine)*. The purpose of the article was to undertake a systematic comparative review on the impacts of the pandemics in the environment. The results show several positive aspects in relation to human action in nature, as well as negative ones when considering the indiscriminate use of certain resources.

The study organized by Barroso et al. (2020) is presented below in order to contextualize the current moment in which humans have suffered the direct and indirect impacts of the

pandemics and to support the debate on social isolation. Chart 1 indicates the positive and negative results of social isolation in the environment.

**Table 1:** Information of the selected articles in this review (BARROSO et al., 2020, p. 58-59).

Positive aspects	Negative aspects	References
–	Negative quality of the air (temperature and speed of winds)	XU et al., 2020
–	Increase in the production and consumption of disposable face masks	FADARE and OKOFFO, 2020
Decrease in NO <sub>2</sub> emissions	–	MUHAMMAD, LONG and SALMAN, 2020
Decrease in pollution and in the emission of pollutant gases	Plastic consumption	PEREIRA, SILVA and SOLÉ, 2020
Decrease in the emissions of greenhouse gases	Plastic consumption (PPE) and medical waste	SILVA et al., 2020a
Decrease in the pollution by aerosol sprays	–	ROMAN-GONZALEZ and VARGAS-CUENTAS, 2020
Decrease in pollution	–	JU, OH and CHOI, 2020
Decrease in water and terrestrial pollution	–	MANDAL and PAL, 2020
Decrease in climate impacts.	–	GARDNER et al., 2019
Sustainability increase	–	VENTURA et al., 2020
Decrease in pollutants	–	SILVA et al., 2020b
Decrease in pollution	–	LUCENA, HOLANDA and BONFIM, 2020
	Increase in emergent diseases and economic problems	SILVA et al., 2020c

---

Decrease in gas emissions	–	VIANNA, 2020
Decrease in polluting gases	–	SOUZA, 2020
Decrease in environmental impacts	–	CARMO et al., 2020
Decrease in environmental pollutants	–	MELO, MELO and GUEDES, 2020
Decrease in water pollution	–	VIEIRA, 2020
Decrease in pollutants and impacts	–	MONZONI and CARVALHO, 2020

---

Source: Barroso et al. (2020).

According to this study, it is possible to notice a decrease in some of the variables which produce damage to the environment and consequently to life on the planet during the pandemics. An example is the decrease in the levels of pollution, pollutant gas emissions, and water and terrestrial pollution. At the same time, it also exposes an increase in the consumption of plastics, hospital waste and economic problems.

Chart 1 gathers extremely relevant themes to humanity and endorses the possibility to change behaviours, even though it is necessary to point out that transformation is the consequence of human beliefs, values and attitudes. To a certain extent, one must consider these changes as a possible response to the impositive determination of social isolation, without actually representing a real environmental awareness, and consequently lacking the social reflections, which can effectively change behaviours.

The transformation process involves the production of meanings. It is related to the values and the spread of environmental behaviours both individually and collectively. Despite being the result of impositions related to the need to control the epidemics in the world, this debate is still appropriate, since the moment favours the discussion and thought aiming at solutions to the environmental problems and the data obtained on the impacts of human distancing from nature as a consequence of the sanitary policies.

In relation to the social isolation during the confinement period, Latour (2020) considers it a suitable moment to individual and collective reflections,

That is why it is essential to use this confinement period, imposed by the pandemics, to separate, firstly as an individual and then collectively, what we are attached to from what we are willing to free ourselves from. Which chains are we willing to rebuild and which ones will we quit? (LATOIR,2020,P. 1).

The economic system is in crisis. Although its dynamics and structural logic is operated by the market, its gears and operations are based on the effort of people, thus being susceptible to their contamination and other diseases, thus impacting their welfare and economy. Despite being no doubt that social distancing, by reducing the actions and the character of the exploitation and contamination of the planet, has resulted in positive scenarios, it is important to highlight that these are temporary since the pandemics is a health issue, which will be solved by new vaccines and researches. When it is over and contamination is not a threat, humans are expected to return to their previous behaviour. Once you consider that social isolation generated expectations that have been hampered by this period, it is also possible to imagine a more aggressive social return to the environment, especially in relation to air pollution and soil degradation. This means that green and coastal areas may suffer this occupation even more.

As a means of promoting debates and actions, the present crisis reveals dichotomic scenarios when considering a new orientation in the decision-making process of the civilizatory diaspora in favor of human survival during the pandemics. In order to explain this subject, it is possible to verify a not so recent movement towards nature and the recent possibility of humans trying to distance themselves from wildlife. Whatever movement this is, the matter is that this might indicate that the previous misguided gap between men and nature has brought doubtful and insecure scenarios.

Due to this urgent demand, new researches and studies on the different means of contamination, processes, symptoms and consequences of Covid 19 in humans and animals have been developed aiming at stretching the boundaries of knowledge about the disease as a way to control and eliminate it in the population. At the same time, there is a lack of a consistent and broad knowledge about nature. An example is the study by Moratelli e Calisher (2015) on zoonotic bats, which are bats diseased by viruses which replicate in animal reservoirs and hosts, which contaminate humans. Its conclusion is that there is no scientific evidence to support this hypothesis in relation to the new coronavirus. There is also a demand for differentiated investments to sponsor the search of new ways to learn and guide the relation between humans and nature.

The ever-growing challenges are many and varied. They evidence an urgent change in meanings, e.i, a movement from nature to humankind, which produces an idea of humans integrated and incorporated to nature. Civilization moves towards a crucial change in behaviour so as to create new values, attitudes and environmental behaviors, in which a horizontal relation between both is present, at the expense of the idea of human domination. Pereira et al.(2020) states that “[...] if humanity wishes to achieve their goal of a more sustainable and prosperous future, rooted in a prosperous nature, it is fundamental to widen up to more plural perspectives between mankind and nature.[...]” (2020, p.2).

The arising decisions, in this nebulous future scenario, draw parallel lines between preserving lives and the restraints to non-essential trade and services which result in inevitable economic deceleration. At the same time, an increase in the rate of emotional issues caused by social isolation is noticeable, which aggravates the sanitary crisis scenario.

Social agents produce and idealize reality and idealize and support it. Thus, affecting and transforming humans is an essential strategy to the construction of a new life logic in the world. Undoubtedly, this is the greatest challenge, once human ‘formats’ are diverse social, cultural, political and economic products. This is where humans may converge to meet themselves, in order to build a lifestyle resulting from several colectives, as a species and among species in this world.

Concerning the movements and production of knowledge about human nature, Medina (2021) states:

We understand culture, politics, technology and economy, although we do not know where we gather in our natural intersection. A place where it is possible to recognize our similarity side by side and affect each other by converging ambiguous codes which both expand and limit us as beings.(MEDINA, 2021,p. 4).

From an environmental scenario that pointed at the destruction of life on the planet, the appearance of a virus, somehow, hampered these dynamics and threats and coercively imposed human isolation. This situation restructured natural scenarios and obliged humanity to converge in a collective diaspora towards survival.

## **Final Considerations**



Lavorato (2020) focuses on the crucial social responsibility for the future of the planet, in which individuals must respond for their actions and behaviours, at the same time it cautions against consumerism. The author's work emphasizes the need for social environmental awareness and an increase in the human perception of the importance of the natural environment.

In this article, human behaviour is related to values, beliefs and attitudes, so the genesis of an awareness of the environmental responsibilities will only be effective and active if produced by individual and collective environmental values. Humanity cannot ignore the environmental, social and economic crisis due to the lack of previously available natural resources. An example of that is starvation and the inequitable distribution of food on the planet. Environmental responsibility is possible if anchored in a collective production of social and environmental values that nourish movements of respect and attention towards the different forms of life on the planet.

After all that has been said, it seems that the most promising direction is a relationship that can be represented by a round table at which the beings are invited to share their experience and knowledge, legitimized by their right to live. As mediators, humans will weave the production, sustainability and maintenance net for the different forms of life with the protein threads of spiders, the social organization of ants and the flower of the mandacaru cactus when announcing the beginning of the rainy season in the hinterland.

This might be the most crucial moment to overcome the coronavirus and other future viruses. It will favour a new relational paradigm which prioritizes life, equalizing humans to the other forms of life on Earth.

Beyond the production of food, technologies, goods and services, a final generator question, or thought inductor, must be considered: what kind of production does humanity need to maintain, preserve and protect life?

## References

ARORA, S.; BHAIKHANDI, K. D.; MISHRA, P. K. Coronavirus lockdown helped the environment to bounce back. *Science of the Total Environment.*, [s. l.], n. 742, p. 140573, 2020.

BARROSO, R. de F. et al. Um estudo comparativo de alertas positivos e negativos do meio ambiente em tempos de pandemia. *Revista Agrária Acadêmica*, [s. l.], v. 3, n. 6, nov./dez. 2020.

Available at:  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347735958\\_Um\\_estudo\\_comparativo\\_de\\_alertas\\_positivos\\_e\\_negativos\\_do\\_meio\\_ambiente\\_em\\_tempos\\_de\\_pandemia](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347735958_Um_estudo_comparativo_de_alertas_positivos_e_negativos_do_meio_ambiente_em_tempos_de_pandemia). Accessed on: June 22nd, 2021.

CASTRO, F. de; LOPES, G. R.; BRONDIZIO, E. S. The Brazilian Amazon in times of COVID-19: from crisis to transformation? *Ambiente e Sociedade*, São Paulo, v. 23, 2020.

GARRARD, G. *Ecocrítica*. Translation by Vera Ribeiro. Brasília: Editora da UnB, 2006.

GUIMARÃES, M. *A dimensão ambiental na educação*. Campinas: Papyrus, 1995.

LATOURE, B. Imaginando gestos que barrem o retorno ao consumismo e à produção insustentável pré-pandemia. Translation by Débora Danowski. *Clima Info*, April 3rd, 2020. Available at: <https://climainfo.org.br/2020/04/02/barrar-producao-insustentavel-e-onsumismo/>. Accessed on: June 22nd 2020.

LAVORATO, M. L. de A. A importância da consciência ambiental para o Brasil e para o mundo. *Ambiente Brasil*, 2020. Available at: [https://ambientes.ambientebrasil.com.br/gestao/artigos/a\\_importancia\\_da\\_consciencia\\_ambiental\\_para\\_o\\_brasil\\_e\\_para\\_o\\_mundo.html](https://ambientes.ambientebrasil.com.br/gestao/artigos/a_importancia_da_consciencia_ambiental_para_o_brasil_e_para_o_mundo.html). Accessed on: June 22nd, 2021.

LEFF, E. *Racionalidad ambiental. La reapropiación social de la naturaleza*. México: Siglo XXI Editores, 2004.

LEFF, E. A água como bem comum ou bem privado. In: LEFF, E. *Discursos sustentáveis*. São Paulo: Cortez, 2010, p. 109-118.

MASCHIO, J. J. Os animais, direitos deles e ética para com eles. *Jus Navigandi*, ago. 2005.: Available at: <https://jus.com.br/artigos/7142/os-animais>. Accessed on: March 18 2021.

MEDINA, A. M. C. Relational paradigm of life new meanings and values for life when viruses threaten. *Revista da Fundarte*, Montenegro, ano 21, n. 44, p. 1-10, jan./mar. 2021. Available at: [http://seer.fundarte.rs.gov.br/index.php/RevistadaFundarte/article/viewFile/862/pdf\\_164](http://seer.fundarte.rs.gov.br/index.php/RevistadaFundarte/article/viewFile/862/pdf_164). Accessed on: July 28th 2021.

MORATELLI, R.; CALISHER, C. H. Bats and zoonotic viruses: Can we confidently link bats with emerging deadly viruses? *Memórias do Instituto Oswaldo Cruz*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 110, n. 1, p. 1-22, 2015.

PEREIRA, L. M. et al. Developing multiscale and integrative nature-people scenarios using the Nature Futures Framework. *People and Nature*, London, v. 2, n. 4, p. 1172-1195, 2020.: Available at :<https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10146>. Accessed on: June 22nd 2021.

SETTELE, J. et al. COVID-19 stimulus measures must save lives, protect livelihoods, and safeguard nature to reduce the risk of future pandemics. *Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)*, Bonn, Germany, 2020. Available at: <https://ipbes.net/covid19stimulus>. Accessed on: March 10th, 2021.