
**An Ecofeminism Depiction of women and Nature in Joseph
Conrad's *Heart of Darkness***

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Abstract

Ecofeminism is not a recent phenomenon. It was born simultaneously with the species. Women and environment are inextricably linked in many ways; they both give birth, nurture, and make silent sacrifices to preserve life. The concept hold that women and nature are interwoven identities, and that women should feel liberated. According to Francose d' Eaubonne, Ecofeminism , men and women have traditionally dominated land fertilisation. Toxic Masculinity is responsible for population expansion, pollution, and other negative environmental impacts. Scholars like Karen J. Warren, Susan Griffin, Maria Mies and Greta Gaard share Eaubonne thoughts on the relationship between nature and women. The novel *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad can be analysed via the lens of ecofeminism to investigate the intersections between colonialism, gender, and environment. Ecofemisim, which blends ecological concerns with a feminist perspective, can help readers grasp the new representation of colonial exploration and its effects on both environment and women. The eventual goal will be to demonstrate that women's freedom and environmental liberation are inextricably linked, and that one cannot attain complete emancipation without first liberating the other of this article.

Keywords: Joseph Conrad, Ecofeminism, Colonialism, *Heart of Darkness*, Women's Freedom

Introduction

Joseph Conrad is renowned British writers in the English language. He was born Jozef Teodar Konrad Korzeniowski on December 3, 1857. He was a polish-british writer renowned for his narrative style and deep psychological insights. Political instability and personal sorrow dominated Conrad's early life. His parents, members of the Polish nobility, were deported to northern Russia for their nationalist activities. Both of his parents died when Conrad was young, leaving him orphaned by the age of Eleven.

Heart of Darkness, one of his best known works, explores the darkness of European colonialism in Africa as well as the existence of evil inside humans. The novella's profound topics and creative narrative structure have solidified its status as a masterpiece of English literature. Despite English being his third language after polish and French, Conrad rose to become one of the finest novelist's in English literature. His writing style is distinguished by dense prose, detailed details, and a somewhat pessimistic view on human nature.

The novella powerfully illustrates the negative influence of European colonialism on the African ecosystem. The constant extraction of natural resources and change of the landscape for economic benefit reflect a patriarchal and capitalist mindset that views nature as a resource to be dominated and exploited. This is consistent with ecofeminist views of now patriarchal systems frequently exploit both women and nature. Women in *Heart of Darkness* are frequently depicted in ways that reflect their perceived relationship to nature. The African lady, associated with the wilderness and untamed qualities of the country, contrasts with European women, who are shown as more detached from nature and protected from the harsh realities of colonial exploitation. This duality emphasizes the ecofeminist belief that patriarchal systems idealise and control women in the same way that they do nature. This theory tries to present relationship between women and natural areas.

On the other hand we can see that Karen J. Waren also showed glimpse of Ecofeminism in her notable work "Ecofeminist Philosophy: A western perspective on what it is and why it matters." She revealed

“Ecofeminism is a perspective that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women” Karen J. Warren (pg.43). So Karen J. Warren showed the ecological concerns and she showed interconnected oppressions, dualistic thinking, the binary oppositions between man/woman, culture/nature, and rational/emotional.

Another Ecofeminist stated about ecofeminism, Shiva observes that the forest in India is a symbol of life and fertility. She is known as Aranyani, or the Goddess of the Forest, and goes by several titles in different locations. The forest has always been the epitome of serenity and community environment, revered and safeguarded as sacred groves. This represents the community’s deep ecological understanding colonial power was created through the devastation of India’s natural resources, such as forests. The colonial practice of commercial forestry and scientific forest management, which included designating forest area as reserved and protected, marked the beginning of the displacement of traditional indigenous knowledge and women’s subsistence economies. The preceding practice resulted in the destruction of forests and the local people’s rights to their produce.

Shiva observes that associating women only with nature is not a revolutionary idea, but rather the basis of subjugation and exploitation of women and environment. She considers Beauvoir’s formulation to be typical of western feminist philosophy, which embraces the duality and conflict of the male and female, further portraying the woman as weak and thus oppressed. Indeed Beauvoir believes that masculinising women is the solution to the women problem. Liberation will occur in a world in which women are free to adopt male values. For Shiva, such a simulation is problematic, especially since the categories of male and feminine are socially constructed. Shiva says about nature as inseparable complements of one another in nature, in woman, in man”. Shiva(P. 40)

On the other way colonial exploitation of nature we can see in “*Heart of Darkness*” the work vividly portrays European colonialism’s detrimental impact on the African ecosystem. The constant extraction of

natural resources and change of the landscape for economic benefit reflect a patriarchal and capitalist mindset that regards nature as a resource to be dominated and exploited. This is consistent with critiques of patriarchal civilization's frequent exploitation of both women and nature.

The representation of women and nature in "*Heart of Darkness*" as they symbolises darkness. Both are portrayed in ways that reflected their felt affinity to nature. The African lady, associated with the wilderness and untamed qualities of the country, contrasts with European women, who are shown as more detached from nature and protected from the harsh realities of colonial exploitation. This dualism emphasises the idea that patriarchal civilizations idealise and control women in the same way that they do nature.

Darkness in the story might be viewed as a metaphor for both the unknown aspects of nature and the repressed, marginalised feminine. The voyage in the "*Heart of Darkness*" represents a confrontation with the primal, often dreaded qualities of nature and the feminine that colonial regimes strive to subjugate and dominate.

Marlow who is the protagonist, ambivalence towards colonialism, as well as his complicated reactions to the African environment and its inhabitants, demonstrate a deeper understanding of the interdependence of human and environment exploitation. His observations generally criticize the consequences of colonialism on both the land and its inhabitants, coinciding with ecofeminist perspectives on the interconnectedness of social and environmental justice.

As we know that this novel is male-centered. There are only three female characters in described in this novel. The novel's portrayal of women mirrors the patriarchal and colonist ideals of the time Marlow's aunt assisted him in securing his employment by promoting a naive and romantic view of European colonisations as a noble mission to civilise the African continent. Her perspectives are utopian and disconnected from the hard realities Marlow sees.

Another female character Kurtz's fiancée, referred to as "the intended", represents the European woman idealised and kept in the dark

about the actual nature of empire. She is portrayed as a symbol of purity and innocence, unaware of Kurtz's horrific activities in Africa. His idealization of Kurtz contrasts dramatically with the horror he represents.

Kurtz's African mistress is a powerful and mysterious figure, she represents the wild and primordial aspects of Africa, in contrasts to European women's depictions. Although she does not speak, her character is presented as mysterious and intense.

Marlow who is the protagonist during his journey into the Congo. He presents situation of women: They were men enough to face the darkness. And perhaps he was cheered by the assurance. Besides, if they were all to perish out there in the wilderness, then so much the better for everybody". So "*Heart of Darkness*" not only criticises colonialism, but also exposes larger patterns of domination and exploitation that affect both the natural world and women.

Nature is portrayed as a tremendous, all-encompassing force in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, having a significant impact on the plot and characters. The representation of nature disrupted several critical functions.

The jungle is portrayed as dark, dense and impenetrable, providing a sense of mystery and danger. These hazardous surroundings represent the unknown and unpredictable parts of both natural and human nature. The river, shaking its way through the forest represents the trip into the heart of darkness both literally and spiritually.

Nature in the story frequently reflects the inner darkness of the individuals, particularly Kurtz and Marlow. The wild and uncontrolled jungle symbolises the moral and existential anarchy that exists with the human psyche. As Marlow advances further into the jungle, he encounters not only the natural environment, but also the darkness within himself and others.

The Congo river is a key symbol in the story, representing the voyage into the unknown and subconscious. It is both a physical and figurative journey into the heart of human nature. The river's gradual, meandering path parallels and unfolds the novel's deeper implications.

So nature in this novella serves as a multidimensional symbol that defines the plot and theme. It is portrayed as a forceful, impersonal force that unveils the darkness of both the environment and the human spirit. In this representation, Conrad delves into the complexity of civilization, the duality of human nature, and the existential dilemmas that individuals face in the face of overpowering and indifferent natural world.

A renowned ecofeminist Bina Agrawal reveals her idea about feminist environmentalism she says the relationship between women and the environment can be seen via the dynamics of gender, class, and race, as well as the organization of production, reproduction and distribution. In terms of being a theory for action.

“Such a perspective would call for struggles over both resources and meanings”. Agrawal(P. 324)

So this approach includes concepts such as the appropriation of resources by dominant groups in society via control over property and power. The ways in which this control is exercised, both ideologically and institutionally, are indicative of privilege and should be investigated further. In terms of feminist ideology, Agarwal discusses gender and the actual division of labour, particularly in the relationship between people and nature in terms of exploitation and appropriation by a few.

Ecofemism, a movement combining ecological and feminist issues, critique the intertwined exploitation of environment and the subjugation of women. Applying this perspective to the “*Heart of Darkness*” illustrates how both women and environment are depicted inside a framework of patriarchal and colonial domination.

In the novella, nature is portrayed as an over-whelming, almost malevolent force. The African environment is shown as dark, mysterious and untamed, signifying both the unknown and the fearful. This picture corresponds with conventional ideas that cast nature as feminine untamed,

irrational, male power. The jungle is depicted in language that conjure both beauty and terror, highlighting its inscrutability and power over the European characters that strive to penetrate it.

The way that colonist and patriarchal ideas oppress women and the natural world in “*Heart of Darkness*” is a reflection of the two fold exploitation that ecofeminist theory holds. Both are portrayed as objects that the European male protagonists should subjugate and control. The African bash, symbolising the natural world, and the mistress, representing indigenous womanhood, are portrayed as a mysteries to be conquered, symbolising the broader imperialist ambition to subjugate both land and people.

Furthermore, the striking contrast between the mistress of Africa and the European women highlights the intersectional character of oppression- that is, the ways in which race, gender and empire connect. In contrast to the African mistress’s representation of a feared and exorcised otherness, the desired idealised innocence and ignorance illustrating how colonial narratives construct and exploit these differences. In the novella “*Heart of Darkness*” depiction of women and the natural world is a reflection of ingrained patriarchal and colonial beliefs. The story highlights the way in which women and the natural environment are exploited together, especially in the context of European imperialism, using an ecofeministic perspective. This portrayal emphasises how understanding and confronting the legacy of such repressive regimes requires tackling both feminist and ecological issues.

The African woman, who is frequently associated with the natural world, stands for the convergence of environmental, gendered, and racial oppression. Her quiet, yet impactful, presence in the story serves as a sobering reminder of the exploitation that colonial authority entailed for both women and the environment.

The exploitation of indigenous people and the oppression of women are paralleled by the degradation of the environment. The patriarchal abuse of nature and female bodies is mirrored in the unrelenting quest to harvest resources from the democratic republic of the congo.

The protagonist of novel Marlow stated about women. It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contently with ever since the day of creation would.

“Start up and knock the whole thing cover.”

These lines are expressing the isolation of women in this era. In Conclusion, this novel may be analysed from an Ecofeminist perspective to see how it both reflects and challenges the ways that women and the natural world are oppressed together. Conrad's depiction of both highlights the inconsistencies and intricacies of colonial ideology and provides a fertile ground for ecofeminist investigation.

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