

THE COMMON LOT OF NATURAL, PATRIARCHAL, AND COLONIAL EXPLOITATION***Amel Zaouga**

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Abstract

This article seeks to develop a critical discussion of how the blending of an ecocritical vision and a feminist outlook, in some instances of postcolonial Anglophone Caribbean fiction, namely Jean Rhys' works, display significant aspects of continuity related to Canadian literature, namely Margaret Atwood's works. It is to show that both literary canons, though originating from different historical, cultural, and ideological backgrounds, meet in their perception of natural and patriarchal manipulation as bound up with colonial exploitation. This article also sets out to reach a working definition of the major theoretical framework, using ecocriticism as an umbrella term, and ecofeminism and postcolonial ecofeminism as its derivational and interdisciplinary approaches with the practice of dualism being a common threat. Notably, the exploration of the relationship between feminism and ecological feminism contributes to the development of green theories and environmentalism. The ongoing systems of oppression have left their imprint in Western culture to form several dualistic relationships. The logic of dualism explains the interconnection between the different forms of oppression and forges links between the downgraded categories.

Keywords: Ecocritical, Feminist, Postcolonial, Interdisciplinary, Dualistic.

INTRODUCTION

Warren advocates that within a society built on "a logic of domination," there could be no remedy for an ecological crisis (*Ecological* 29). In other words, a revision of social relations is needed to allow a revision of the relation of man towards nature. A key element can be to "unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this society" (Ruether 204). Literature can be the medium through which the relationship between the human condition and nature can be revised. It interprets the way human being can have a stand against environmental damage. Modern humanities agree that language is a conduit for the transition towards a more ecologically balanced society. A deviation from the norms of the Western male narrative can be seen as a prerequisite to eradicate narrative domination that extends to the domination of women, domination of nature, racism, classism; etc. Plumwood introduces a list of binary oppositions in which she presents nature/ culture at its heart. Though people, in this dualism, belong to the realm of culture, the rational human being is conceived as exclusively male. Women, through their association with emotion and connection to childbirth, are treated as 'other,' as closer to nature. Building on this dualistic thought, male manipulation of both women and nature is justified in Western rationalism, embodied in Plato and Descartes. Plumwood underlines the way philosopher René Descartes, for example, advanced arguments to erase any corporeal presence in the domain of reason:

[He came to] reinterpret the notion of "thinking" in such a way that those mental activities which involve the body, such as sense perception, and which appear to bridge the mind/body and human/animal division, become instead, via their reinterpretation in terms of 'consciousness', purely mental operations. (*Feminism* 115)

Descartes gave additional emphasis to the gap between mind/body and human/nonhuman beings, denying the latter both reason and feeling. He perceived nonhuman beings as not just different but inferior. The different forms of oppression, distinguishing between dualized categories, share the same "model of master ... [that] is based upon alienated differentiation and denied dependency" (Garrard 25). This model implies hierarchy not difference and creates "hyperseparation" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 47). Plumwood, therefore, criticizes this reason/nature dualism and confers upon it a gendered perspective. Eventhough 'reason' has been used to justify men's oppression of women, animals, and nature, Plumwood does not stand against it but rather against the philosophies that set it in opposition to other categories. She assumes that it is high time for rationalist androcentric¹ narrative to leave room for "multicentric pluralism" (Kostkowska 1). Plumwood wants to show that difference can be constructive "without the neurotic obsessiveness of the mainstream philosophical tradition ... [and] its idealization by androcentric philosophy" (Garrard 26). She stresses the idea that "we need to understand and affirm both otherness and community in the earth" (*Feminism* 137). Hence, the key solution is "diversity" as Ynestra King argues: "A healthy, balanced ecosystem, including human and nonhuman inhabitants, must maintain diversity" ("The Ecology" 20). This spotlighting on both biological and cultural diversity comes to respond to the indeterminacy around the monolithic condition of human life. Ecofeminism is the outcry of women and nature. The meeting up of ecological and feminist issues, within this new social and political theory, questions old hierarchical paradigms and imposes more egalitarian models. With the second wave of feminism and the consolidation of the green movement, ecofeminism succeeds to mature into a strong approach centering around the idea that there is an important connection between the subordination of women and the degradation of the natural world.

¹ Androcentrism is a system of beliefs and practices that favors men over women (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (glossary)).

Plumwood points out that “the concept of oppression as a network of multiple, interlocking forms of domination raises a number of new methodological dilemmas and requires a number of adjustments for liberation movements” (Qt in Merchant, *Ecology* 230). He views that the solution is to think about each form of oppression as encompassing all other forms in such a way that each movement can be beneficial for many other movements. For example, the gender strife for equality can incorporate an advocacy of environmental justice and animal rights and vice versa. However, the success of such interweaving between militant movements can be reached only if “a degree of distinctness and differentiation” is acknowledged in spite of the cooperative insight they bear (231). In other words, the continuity that can exist between militant movements should not reduce women, nature, and animals into one category. The identity of each category needs to be preserved and though different, they can still forge a strong bond against the forces of exclusion.

Ecofeminists embrace spirituality as a source of empowerment in their struggle for re-inscribing women within the male-exclusionary cosmos. This movement gives rise to what is known as ‘spiritual ecofeminism.’ The latter combines “a celebration of women’s biological role (mothering, nurturing) with a celebration of women’s bodies and sexuality” (Mellor, “The Politics” 3). Spiritual ecofeminists, therefore, try to break the old degrading perceptions of women’s bodily experience involving menstrual blood and childbirth as a degrading condition.

Ecofeminists aim to expropriate the value-laden assumptions in-built in the patriarchal discourse. In other words, femininity needs to be studied in a way that incorporates the feminine and the masculine to tackle the issue of gender in a substantial manner. For example, tracing back the patriarchal discourse about gender roles to feminine biology naturalizes male superiority and foregrounds women as mere reproducers of humanity. It is important then to rethink the relationship between women and nature. The idea that women are closer to nature is the same starting point for the patriarchal construction of gender but the results can be reversive. Two possible results can come from the understanding of the relationship between women and nature. The first result is female subordination while the second result is an open liberation that favors both women and nature. Ecological feminism discards the idea that human beings and mainly men stand outside nature. Merchant has emphasized reciprocity and complicity while favoring an ethical imbrication of human and non-human categories (*Earthcare* 56).

Ecofeminists, such as Warren and Plumwood confer upon ecofeminism a social and philosophical dimension “that countermands the irrationalism and essentialism of radical ecofeminism” (Garrard 27). They want to avoid the confusion posed by affinity ecofeminists and explain the connection of women to nature by a common experience of exploitation under capitalist, patriarchal or social misuse of power. King, also, sees that western industrial civilization thrived at the expense of nature. Because women are closer to nature in this anti-nature culture, King believes that this provides women with the privilege to rise against the impoverishment of nature. Women, accordingly, incarnate all other forms of domination. Therefore, the challenge “extends beyond sex to social domination of sex, race, class, and nature [which] are mutually reinforcing” (King, “Feminism” 120).

King advocates a positive connection of women and nature that can promote “a non-destructive connectedness between humanity (man) and the natural world” (Mellor 8). The personal rage of the woman is expressive of the grievance of many subordinate categories. Such rage can “celebrat[e] diversity and oppos[e] all forms of domination and violence” (119-120). This idea invites a community of categories that are entrapped with inferiority to defeat victimization. An invitation that comes at a “moment where women recognize [themselves] as agents of history- -yes even unique agents- - and knowingly bridge the classic dualism between spirit and matter, art and politics, reason and intuition. This is the potentiality of a rational re-enchantment. This is the project of ecofeminism” (King, “Feminism” 120-121). Breaking this dualism is, using Merchant’s words, “revolutionizing economic structures in a direction [that] equalize[s] female and male work options and reform a capitalist system that creates profits at the expense of nature and working people” (*The Death* 42). According to her, socialist ecofeminists explain environmental problems by “the rise of capitalist patriarchy and the ideology that the Earth and nature can be exploited for human progress through technology” (“Feminism” 294).

Moreover, ecofeminism has laid its seeds in the South. The Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva, for example, has been a strong advocate of the movement. She has tried to pose “the foundations for the recovery of the feminine principle in nature and society and through it the recovery of the earth as sustainer and provider” (*Staying* 224). Her beliefs drive her to organize several campaigns against ‘maldevelopment’ that is ecologically destructive. This disordered development is mainly resulting from a loss of diversity that she defines as ‘monoculture’.

Shiva sums up maldevelopment in her perception that “the paradox and crisis of development arises from the mistaken identification of culturally perceived poverty with real material poverty, and the mistaken identification of the growth of commodity production as better satisfaction of needs” (13). What one can infer from Shiva’s statement is that cultural impoverishment can even be more dangerous for mankind than material poverty and that although people indulge in consuming more commodities, they are unhappy. It is because the process of production is male-dominated and ecologically devaluing. It is “a development bereft of the feminine, the conservation, the ecological principle” (4). What is rather needed is a kind of development that acknowledges cooperation between men and women, nature and culture, tradition and modernity. Only then “[can] nature maintain the production of renewable resources” (9) and can the technologies developed show a better understanding of traditional peoples’ needs and knowledge. Shiva argues, in this respect, that “[r]ural women, peasants, tribals who live in, and derive sustenance from nature, have a systematic and deep knowledge of nature’s processes of reproducing wealth” (219). This idea intends to recuperate this wealth of knowledge which has been the price of the Western ‘monoculture of the mind’. An important aspect of ecofeminism is the belief that human existence depends on the natural world. This belief breeds what is known as ecocentrism. Robyn Eckersley defines the latter as “an ecologically informed philosophy of internal relatedness, according to which all organisms are not simply interrelated with their environment but also constituted by those very environmental interrelationships” (*Environmentalism* 49). To put it differently, human beings

cannot stand outside their environment as they affect and are affected by a web of relationships that shape and are shaped by their existence. To sum it up, although ecofeminists may differ in their approach to the connection of women and nature, they meet in their critique of the patriarchal systematization of Western society. They share the view that the pattern of hierarchical divisions threatens to a large extent the natural world as well as the feminine world. The binary oppositions that set culture against nature, mind against body, scientific knowledge against traditional and indigenous knowledge, reason against feeling are the main ground for social divisions and mainly for the supremacy of men over women.

Building on the above analysis, my focus will be put on the many threads that tie Atwood's and Rhys's fiction to gender, identity, and ecology. Both writers share an ecological awareness that is visible in their transgression of old perceptions of the world as a monolithic entity. In revisiting the wilderness, revising the cultural representation of animals, and celebrating communion with nature, they aim at wording an environment that recognizes and protects all human and nonhuman beings; especially, fragile entities.

The Wilderness: from a "Masculine Sublime"² to a Feminine Realm of Enunciation

The reexploration of wilderness as an inevitable part of nature espouses a more inclusive approach to the human condition in general. For deep ecologists, ecological problems result from the monolithic character attributed to everything in the world. Only then a belief in plurality can solve them. In this respect, Edward Burke, an Irish political theorist, tried to revolutionize the aesthetic of the 'sublime' and 'the beautiful.' He points out that unlike the beautiful which causes mere feelings of pleasure, "the passion caused by the great and sublime in nature ... is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of Horror" (*A Philosophical* 53). Schama conceives that Burke's ideas countermand the philosophy of the 'Enlightenment' as he establishes himself as 'the priest of obscurity'.

According to Schama, Burke's sublime was grounded on "shadow and darkness and dread and trembling, in cave and chams, at the edge of the precipice, in the shroud of cloud, in the fissures of the earth" (450). To put it differently, while the beautiful is related to what is small and delicate, the sublime is found in what is great and powerful. The background of this claim has urged feminist critics to blame this gendered distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. Day, for example, questions the idea that "the sublime moment is peculiarly male" (188). She sees that gender is an exclusionary category that works against both nature and women. Garrard, in his book *Ecocriticism*, tackles the issue of men's mastery over nature. He perceives that in positioning the Earth as a "nurturing mother," natural philosophers reduced it to a "soulless mechanism" and an assemblage of parts "regulated by a set of rules and laws that men could know about them and then decode natural functioning" (61-62). In the same line of thought, Descartes and Bacon introduced a new philosophy in which "knowing the force and action of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that surround [human individuals]," gives them the right to become 'masters

and possessors of nature' (Descartes, "A Discourse" 49). Both ecocritics and ecofeminists attack this view. Plumwood, for example, highlights the parallelism between the rise of mainly masculine reason and natural decay. She advocates that as soon as the human mind is seen as the sole assessor of the value of all the other categories on Earth, nature automatically loses its 'intrinsic' worth. The significance of nature becomes limited to the role that reason assigns to it. She also argues that "it is no coincidence that this view of nature took hold most strongly with the rise of capitalism, which needed to turn nature into a market commodity and resource without significant moral or social constraint on availability" (*Feminism* 111). Harrison, as well, comments on the effect of reason on nature by pointing out that the growing importance of scientific principles eradicated the traditional value and symbolism of the forest:

There can be no question of the forest as a consecrated place of oracular disclosures; as a place of strange or monstrous or enchanting epiphanies ... as a natural sanctuary where wild animals may dwell in security far from the havoc of humanity going about the business of looking after its 'interests.' There can be only the claims of human mastery and possession of nature-the reduction of forest to utility. (121)

Snyder, acting against this reductive view, promotes a "new cultural ethic of the wild" (*The Gary Snyder* 21). His vision revolves around four key claims:

1) the necessity of a commitment to the potentialities and limitations of place; 2) the belief in the wild and its processes as the best teacher of humanity; 3) the identification of the wild with the sacred; and 4) the use of the wild as a guide for a diverse, inclusive, participatory democracy. (21)

Therefore, he tries to break the dualistic relationship between the wilderness and civilization by domesticating the 'wild'. For instance, in his "Song of the Taste", he brings 'the wild' closer to everyday life incorporating the habit of eating:

Eating the living germs of grasses
Eating the ova of large birds
The fleshy sweetness packed
Around the sperm of swaying trees

Snyder advocates that the wilderness epitomizes the free and spontaneous self-construction of nature. The individual, through embracing it, is satisfying his thirst for freedom long lost under the handcuffs of civilization. It is about acknowledging that "the wild requires that we learn the terrain, nod to all plants and animals and birds, ford the streams and cross the ridges, and tell a good story when we get home" (182). Therefore, the first step towards ecological healing is to recognize that wilderness is an irreducible part of nature and that it has an 'intrinsic' worth that lies in its openness and freedom and goes beyond the limitations of usefulness for man or progress.

Dualism: its ends and limitations

The feminist attack of defining women in relation to nature did not loom from anything. Women were traditionally excluded from humanity on the grounds that they are guided by emotion. This argument aims to foster their image as mere sexual and reproductive objects. Even when they try to conquer the different fields of life, they are always put in the background, as Plumwood asserts, "women are 'the environment' - they

²This expression is taken From page 64 of Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism*.

provide the environment and conditions against which male 'achievement' takes place, but what they do is not itself accounted as achievement" (*Feminism* 22). Taking as a background women's closeness to the realm of nature, many theorists collude in denigrating them to a low status. Swift, for example, argues that he "cannot conceive of [women] to be human creatures, but a sort of species hardly a degree about a monkey" (Qt in Morgan 191). Aquinas, in the same vein, assumes that "a necessary object, woman, [...] is needed to preserve the species or to provide food and drink" (Qt in Morgan 183). These examples and others that cannot see women outside the sphere of the domestic make women's identification with nature seem like a blemish for a woman yearning for a better status in the world of discovery and creativity.

Hence, Ecofeminists try to bespeak the positive part in women's alliance with nature. Instead of being a tool of oppression of women and an instrument of consolidation of patriarchy, this alliance could make a turning point in the low status of both women and nature. Consequently, ecofeminists dive into the problem of how to confirm women's connectedness to nature without excluding them from the fabric of culture and reason. Their route to resolution is to deconstruct the dualistic and hierarchical relationship between culture and nature in such a way that stresses both men's and women's belonging to both categories. In this sense, returning women their human essence and moving them to the foreground denies "the backgrounding and the instrumentalization of nature" (21). Then, it becomes possible to think of women as human beings enjoying a direct and fluid relationship with nature and empowering it. What is therefore worth deducing is that dualism labels the periphery the same as it does for the center. In this regard, Albert Memmi asserts, "colonization creates the colonized just as it ... creates the colonizer" (91). It is, in fact, about the naturalization of strong hierarchies in a manner that leaves no room neither for the reversal of the dualistic terms nor the prospective equality between them. Plumwood, in her *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, defines four major forces of dualism:

1. **Backgrounding (denial) (48):** It incorporates the perspective that the other is neither essential nor worth of attention in the ruling class's existence. The other cannot exceed the frames of the background to the master's foreground. Although it is the slave who glorifies the status of the master, the latter denies dependence on his/her services.
2. **Radical exclusion or hyper separation (49):** Plumwood thinks that a mere separation or distinctness between two terms can be seen as a dichotomy but the tense exclusionary quality of dualism is apparent in the master's intention "to emphasize and to maximize the number and importance of differences and to eliminate or treat as inessential shared qualities, and hence to achieve maximum separation" (49). This radical exclusion is intensified by a maximum of ideological, historical, and biological barriers that block all sorts of 'contact' between the ruling class and the ruled subjects. While privileging one group and intimidating the other, this separation is rendered unbridgeable. In dualistic thought, common and relating characteristics are blurred and disallowed. The fact that the colonizer cannot form his/her identity beyond hierarchies and structure himself/ herself but against an inferior other is

a shared feature with masculinity. "Thus the slave's being is part of a lower order in which other linked inferiors also have their being the slave is body, the slave is animal, the male slave is feminized" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 50).

3. **"Incorporation of relational definition" (52):** It is about defining the dualised other in terms of "lack" and "negativity" (52). It is also about holding the view that the master has the controlling qualities that put the slave under one-sided dependence and give the illusion that they are capable of filling in the lack attributed to the opposed category. Within this tightened opposition, "the other is recognized only to the extent that it is assimilated to the self, or incorporated into the self and its systems of desires and needs: only as colonized by the self. The master consciousness cannot tolerate unassimilated otherness" (52).
4. **"Instrumentalism" and "Homogenization or Stereotyping" (53):** The extreme rejection of all forms of otherness is conducted via one of or all of the three above-mentioned strategies. Instrumentalism builds on reducing the dualized others to mere instruments or facilitators dedicated for the master's serving his interests and occupying the whole position of the center. The dominated, in this case, has to sacrifice his/her interests to guarantee the full pledge of the dominator. However, 'homogenization' or 'stereotyping' not only deprives the inferiorized categories of their subjectivity but also denies differences among them. Naturally, since dualistic thought radically rejects all forms of otherness and difference between the two sides of dualism, it puts all others in a block. They have all to fit in the same homogeneous category and be surrounded by various stereotypes. This strategy has a double effect; it hinders them from approaching the center and collecting the fragments of their culture. Likewise, their identity is either eclipsed or contaminated by the upper side of dualism.

Undeniably, dualism creates an "exaggerated separation" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 59). It sets all forms of difference as boundaries between self and other. Hence, an effective remedy could be "a merger strategy" (59). The latter involves recognizing the fruitful aspect of difference; one that does not naturally lead to hierarchy nor does it hamper coexistence between the two poles of dualism. By eliminating overthinking about distinctions, the relationship between masculine and feminine, colonizer and colonized, human beings and nature could find their escape road from dualism. One feature that better exemplifies this idea is the masculine domination of nature stifled by rationality from which women are also denied. This denial is due to the perception of women as passively immersing in nature without affecting it. From an opposite vantage point, Simone de Beauvoir believes in the ability of women to conquer the exclusionary model of humanity and thus bring about the changes necessary to the image of nature and women themselves. Once the forces of dualism are put under hold, overstepping its boundaries becomes possible. Dualism is the outcome of the naturalization of the process of domination caused by the denial of dependency on and difference from a weakened other. The latter is seen as appropriated into the culture of the superior categories (generally speaking, that of the master) in the different systems of oppression, incorporating race, gender, and colonization. Consequently, this "dualised relationship"

results in “dualised identity” (Plumwood, *Feminism* 42). In the same line, Plumwood asserts that dualism should not be treated “as a simple hierarchy” (61). For example, the logic of colonization looms up from that of dualism. They both meet in repressing identities. Plumwood confirms that the colonized has never freed himself from the ‘dualised identity’ attributed to him or her. S/he rather internalizes the image that the colonizer has drawn of him and blindly adopts what the colonizer includes and despises what he excludes. Once trapped by notions of race, class and gender, the colonized becomes involved in stitching the fragments of a postcolonial identity that goes beyond subordination. For example, the problem may worsen when colonization is aggravated by gender. In this case, identifying women with nature without analyzing the dualistic background of this identification may make a trap for a postcolonial female identity. A key axis of a healthy environment, in which such an identity may blossom, necessitates a revision of the relationship between human beings and nature. Since colonization influences identity-formation, a reconsideration of the relationship between the colonizer and colonized is also recommended.

The dominant logic of reason in Western culture is built on the lack of acknowledgment and denial of the other as part of one’s existence. The accumulation of a series of denials that incorporates not only women and nature but also the colonized, the slave, the poor... This accumulation leads to energizing the dynamic of power relations and deepening the connectedness of the subordinated categories. Women, then, are close to both nature and the colonized and their fate is interchangeable in the postcolonial context. The colonial period in the West was governed by the civilized/ savage (primitive) dichotomy, which is a branch of reason/ nature and subject/ object dualisms. The first terms of this list of dualisms, where power is an umbrella term, are often attributed to men and from which women are almost excluded. Nancy Hartsock defines reason/ nature dualism as “a way of looking at the world characteristic of the dominant, white, male Eurocentric ruling class, a way of dividing up the world that puts an omnipotent subject at the centre and constructs marginal Others as sets of negative qualities” (161). From the same vantage point, Plumwood asserts that humanity, rationality, and masculinity appear as interconnected concepts in the logic of dualism and form strong counterparts to nature, body and the feminine. (*Feminism* 45). Aristotle’s account of this chain of dualisms further illustrates the fact that almost all dualistic relationships spring from reason/nature dualism. He states that:

It is clear that the rule of the soul over body, and of the mind and the rational element over the passionate, is natural and expedient; whereas the equality of the two or the rule of the inferior is always hurtful. [...] Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle of necessity extends to all mankind. Where then there is such a difference as that between soul and body, or between men and animals..., the lower sort are by nature slaves, and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the master. (Qt in Barnes 1990). The above passage shows that dualism resides in equating difference with otherness. To face this issue, Plumwood distinguishes between dichotomy and dualism; while the former means that “distinctions are made between two kinds of things”, the latter implies “the way the distinctions have been treated” (47). Dualism leads to downgrading the dualized others and the different cultural and social aspects related to

them. As a result, in the face of the powerful domination of the superior categories within this form of dualism, the downgraded groups are systematically supposed to accept their marginalization and adhere to the culture and the values of the dominant groups. Accordingly, Plumwood emphasizes the fact that dichotomy and difference can rather be crucial elements to abandon dualism if and only if ‘distinctions’ are being reconsidered. She proposes three major solutions to heal environmental and gender wounds: to acknowledge “reconsideration of the model of feminine connectedness with nature and masculine distance from and domination of it and to problematize the concept of the human” (24). In this sense, the concept of humanity needs to be revolutionized since it is built on the exclusion of the feminine and the natural. Such denial naturalizes the oppression of both women and nature. The argument that what is human is always regarded as superior and opposed to what is non-human advocates dualistic thought and unbalanced relationships. In relation to ‘problematizing’ the old standard of humanity, Plumwood calls for criticizing “the overvaluation of reason and its use as a tool for the exclusion and oppression of the contrasting classes of the non-human” (24). To put it differently, the fact that the attributes associated with humanity are almost identical to those of masculinity puts the feminine identity at stake since what is non-masculine is accordingly non-human.

Feminist readings of the dominant model of rationality and humanity have incorporated theories of race, class, and gender domination. These theories have generated a new angle of vision from which the oppression of nature can be observed. Dualism, its practice of negation as well as the feeling of estrangement it implies, bear much resemblance with the concept of modernity. Indeed, the concept of reason forms the common counterpart for the concept of nature, same for femininity and slavery. Ecofeminist thinkers are aware of the malicious effect of the dominant concept of reason on nature and femininity. However, they believe that the solution is not to abandon all forms of reason and science but to revise these forms in a way that destabilizes their hierarchical and oppositional bases. Plumwood advances in the study of dualism by reexamining the Western rationalist tradition and the exclusions existing in the Platonic account of reason. She advocates that:

Once nature is conceived as capable of agency and intentionality, and human identity is reconceived in less polarized and disembodied ways, the great gulf which Cartesian thought established between conscious, mindful human sphere and the mindless, clockwork natural one disappears. (*Feminism* 5)

Accordingly, reason/nature dualism influences human beings’ relationship with nature and is influenced by a dualistic conception of self/ other, personal/ collective and male/ female: “overcoming the dualistic dynamic requires recognition of both continuity and difference; this means acknowledging the other as neither alien to and discontinuous from the self nor assimilated to or an extension of the self” (6). In order to draw on the interdisciplinarity of ecofeminism, one may note that feminist intersections with ecocriticism are bound up by postcolonialism. In 2004, Grey Garrard goes further from Glotfelty’s and Harold’s definition of ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (*The Ecocriticism* xviii). He defines it as “the study of the relationship of the human and non-human,

throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself” (*Ecocriticism* 2). This redefinition raises key questions of the way constructing and defining human beings as opposite and superior to nature resonates with colonialist and racist attitudes given that binaries of colonizer / colonized, white/ black, and even man/ woman are not only culturally enabled, but also naturalized. A deconstructive approach to those enabled binaries gives rise to what is known as ‘postcolonial ecofeminism’. The latter is to see the history of colonization from ecological and feminist lenses. While Western ideology casts nature as inferior to culture, colonial and patriarchal conceptions of nature have associated some groups of people as being like or even identical to nature and thus less than human. Both environmentalist and postcolonial critics have been “alert to the dilemmas involved in conserving endangered ecosystems and animals when the livelihoods of local (subaltern) peoples are simultaneously put at risk” (Huggan and Tiffin 185).

Therefore, postcolonial female writers inscribe within their texts a sense of national belonging to the place that revives within the characters a particular sensitivity to the natural world. The setting, with ecocriticism, is no longer a framework where actions occur. It becomes a category in the same line with race, class, and gender. Both Margaret Atwood’s and Jean Rhys’s novels share the portrayal of a female crossing “a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work”³. They use the ecological dwelling as a literary trope that gives an air of immediacy to their female protagonists’ immersion in the landscape. Their dwelling, driven by nostalgia for childhood landscape and/ or responsibility towards the environment, widens the literary possibilities of the books. The latter can raise a moral and spiritual commitment towards nature. They can also stir a cultural and political consciousness.

The blending of ecofeminism with postcolonialism makes postcolonial ecofeminism. It is to recognize “the ‘double bind’ of being female and being colonized”(Campbell, “Whatis” 11). It studies the way the violence of colonialism is being represented and reconceptualized by ecofeminism. In other words, postcolonial ecofeminism brings into light the fact that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are complicit with notions of class, race and colonialism. The editors of *Caribbean Literature and the Environment* examine the literature of the Caribbean from an ecocritical perspective. The book explores the relationship between nature and culture and show the way Caribbean texts tackle the environmental impact of colonial and plantation economies. This collection also focuses on the ability of literature to posit a sense of place in the Caribbean. Undoubtedly, Caribbean literature is aware of the historical ills inflicted on the Caribbean. Rhys’ fiction, for example, can be a conduit to an affirmation of the indigenous cultural values upon which a gathering of the Caribbean geographical, ideological and linguistic fragments becomes binding. Caribbean people’s attachment to the land is the first step towards healing. The introduction of the colonized’s view of the land is thus important to face colonial hegemony that blemished its image.

Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn is that the female protagonists, in both Atwood’s and Rhys’ writings, realize that many instances of female, colonial and racial oppression are interconnected with the environment. If the natural system is contaminated by colonial signs, the sacredness of human dignity and the female body is endangered. The rupture with the hegemonic master narrative is an important thread that ties Atwood’s and Rhys’s ecological insights. They experiment with language to allow the emergence of pluralistic forms that espouse ecological feminism. Their texts unfold from different narrative points of view with temporal nonlinearity and spatial movement being their landmark.

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