

# Rhetoric of Equating Nature and Native in Henry Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*

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## Abstract

*The article has selected Henry Rider Haggard's adventure fiction, King Solomon's Mines, for its eco-feminist critical scrutiny. In so doing, it usurps the working definition of the term "ecofeminism" as a tool of inquiry. Then it demonstrates how the rhetoric of empire constructs and mirrors the African continent in general and people and animals in particular. The article primarily exposes the sinister colonial rhetoric of equating nature—land and animals—with women, thus site for exploration and exploitation opens up. The rhetoric becomes an instrument in defining and understanding them for achieving its political ends which leads to unbridled exploitation of both. The analysis further understands the discursive technique of equating nature and natives to establish the European legitimacy for exploitation of native people and nature.*

**Keywords:** *Ecofeminism, feminizing, trespassing, hunting, adventure, survey*

## Introduction

Henry Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* equates empire's treatment of women and nature as object of exploitation. In the name of lost brother, Sir Henry Curtis, hires Quatermain, an expert of African values, and assigns to explore the whereabouts of entire, unexplored Africa. His brother was vanished while running after the long-lost diamond mines of King Solomon in a part of Africa that is still untouched by the emperors. The research looks into the novel from the perspective of ecofeminism which understands empire as an expression of masculinity and a form of atrocity.

British readers were primarily introduced to the African landscape through Henry Rider Haggard's writing in the same way as India was introduced to them through Rudyard Kipling's. Although Haggard occupies a minor place in the history of literature, the propagation of imperial ideas was actively articulated in his Writing. Written in 1885, *King Solomon's Mines* relates a story of British adventurers, including Allan Quatermain, Henry Curtis, and Captain John Good. This story is about the British colonizer's journey to inner Africa in search of an adventurer (George Neville) who was said to be missing and the diamond mines. The adventurers' desire was to become the richest men in the world.

They have to overcome many obstacles on the way to their destination. With the help of the natives, they are able to travel through the forest, desert, and mountains. Before they grab the treasures, they have to face Twala, the king, and

Gagool, an old woman "with supernatural power." With the principle of "divide-and- rule." they are able to defeat Twala and enthrone Umbopa (disguised Ignosi) who supports them on the way to the destination. They also find Neville along with the treasures.

The paper takes ecofeminism as a theoretical perspective to look into colonial rhetoric. In 1974, French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne published the word *ecoféminisme* for the first time to refer to the movement by women necessary to save the planet (Gaard 2). Ecofeminism, as Tzeporah holds, combines ecological principles and feminist theory contending that the oppression of women and the domination of Nature in are interconnected and mutually reinforcing (260). In addition Eco-feminists, Tzeporah adds, argue that "human beings are only one constituent of a much larger community: community that includes all life and living systems. The question of whether women are closer to Nature than men is inherently flawed, as both gender and Nature are social constructions" (260). Ecofeminism, as stated by Gaard, "calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature" (1). Ecofeminism emerged as a movement inspired by various political and social movements.

One of the striking features of the rhetoric of empire is that it classifies the native people into hierarchies: the primitive tribes, and Europeanized Africans (Spurr 68). In *King Solomon's Mines* also this hierarchy is perceived between Ignosi and Twala and between Foulata and Gagool. The former shares seen as more civilized, noble and friendly to the British while the latter shares despotic and barbaric. This aspect of native people becomes the point of justifying their intervention for civilizing mission. In this connection, the French administrator Albert Sarraut contends:

Without us, without our intervention... these indigenous population would still be abandoned to misery and abjection; epidemics, massive endemic diseases, and famine would continue to decimate them; infant mortality would still wipe half their offspring; petty kings and corrupt chiefs would still sacrifice them to vicious caprice; their minds would still be degraded by the practice of base superstition and barbarous custom; and they would perish from misery in the midst of unexploited Wealth. (qtd. in Spurr 7)

This type of rhetoric is repeatedly written by other Victorian writers in order to justify their right to colonize new territories as the *white man's burden* (emphasize mine) The debasement of the African native reaches its peak when Quatermain remarks Twala, the native king, as the most entirely repulsive countenance we had ever beheld. *The Tips* were as thick as a Negro's, the nose was flat, it had but one gleaming eye and its whole expression was cruel and sensual to a degree" (96).

The white man's strategy is to "feminize the nature", i.e. the mountains, and its phenomena. Jose da Silvestra, an earlier traveller to Africa, anthropomorphizes the mountains as having female breasts with nipples:

I, José da Silvestra, who am now dying of hunger in the little cave here no snow is on the north side of the nipple of the southernmost of the two mountains I have named Sheba's Breasts [...] Let him who comes follow the map, and climb the snow of Sheba's left breast till he reaches the nipple, on the north side of which is the great road Solomon made. from whence three days' journey to the King's Palace. Let him kill Gagool. Pray for my soul. Farewell. José da Silvestra. (Haggard 20)

Women are, thus, perceived as inert materials, as a natural resource, to be owned, harnessed, harvested and climbed and mined (Tzeporah 266). Women in this perspective are projected as soil, earth as one's mother, ever nurturing and caring. Expressing her dissension to this view, Tzeporah contends that the association of women and femininity with Nature in environmental discourse perpetuates patriarchal traditions and domination. It can therefore be seen that uncritical engendering of Nature re-creates the dominant ideology of oppression and sustains hegemonic traditions (267). The use of the terms "virgin" and "penetrate" in relation, she further adds, to "the wilderness areas perpetuate the notion of ownership and conquest - once you have penetrated her she is yours" (266).

As stated earlier, the Victorian colonial male mindset is clearly reinforced by the following lines (in Quatermain's words) in which the African continent itself is treated as having feminine qualities:

These mountains placed thus, like the pillars or a gigantic gateway, are shaped after the fashion of a woman's breasts, and at times the mists and shadows beneath them take the form a recumbent woman, veiled mysteriously in sleep. Their bases swell gently from the plain, looking at that distance perfectly round and smooth; and upon the top of each is a vast hillock covered with snow, exactly corresponding to the nipple on the female breast. (86)

In this novel, not just the land /mountains are feminized, but the plants as well are feminized as the "fern" is termed as maidenhair. Of the two female characters, Foulata was owned by the British travellers as their "female servant" (209). Quatermain justifies their rightful ownership of Foulata thus: "Somehow, with the assistance of the beautiful Foulata, who, since we had been the means of saving her life, had constituted herself our handmaiden, and especially Good's" (211). The Victorian male mindset, which even did not allow women to vote, is reflected in this novel when Quatermain holds: "Women are women, all the world over, whatever their colour (83). Haggard seems to be fond of referring women

synecdochically as "a petticoat" (34) to reduce their value. His attitude to women is reflected when he declares that this novel was "ostensibly written for boys." Haggard's misogyny culminates at the point when the narrator says: "women bring trouble as surely as the night follows the day" (199).

The British Victorian travellers move all over the world with their optical instruments so that they can make surveillance in panoptic scale. In *King*, the narrator (Quatermain) surveys the female body bit-by-bit and describing "women . . . exceedingly handsome." The focus is on the physical beauty: "They are tall and graceful, and their figures are wonderfully fine. The hair, though short, is rather curly than woolly, the features are frequently aquiline" (88). The description attracts the gaze of the European towards the women as an object to utilize and consume. He further explains:

and the lips are not unpleasantly thick, as is the case among most African races. But what struck us most was their exceedingly quiet and dignified air. They were as well-bred in their way as the *habituées* of a fashionable drawing room, and in this respect they differ from Zulu women and their cousins the Masai who inhabit the district beyond Zanzibar. Their curiosity had brought them out to see us, but they allowed no rude expressions of astonishment or savage criticism to pass their lips as we trudged wearily in front of them. (88)

In colonial rhetoric /discourse such as above the body of the primitive, as Spurr holds, as much the object of examination, commentary and valorisation and killing as the landscape of the primitive (22). The narrator of the novel appears as a gentleman who tries to justify his act of killing the natives as legitimate by referring to the Christian Deity:

At any rate, I was born a gentleman, though I have been nothing but a poor travelling trader and hunter all my life. Whether I have remained so I know not, you must judge of that. Heaven knows I've tried. I have killed many men in my time, yet I have never slain wantonly or stained my hand in innocent blood, but only in self-defence. The Almighty gave us our lives, and I suppose He meant us to defend them, at least I have always acted on that, and I hope it will not be brought up against me when my clock strikes. (36)

His reference to European deity places him in a privilege position of decision making about life and property. He stands as a symbol of masculine weapon: guns are used to kill and subdue native people and animals. Quatermain describes the quality of the guns:

Three heavy breech-loading double-eight elephant guns, weighing about

fifteen pounds each, to carry a charge of eleven drachms of black powder. Two of these were by a well-known London firm, most excellent makers, but I do not know by whom mine, which is not so highly finished, was made. I have used it on several trips, and shot a good many elephants with it, and it has always proved a most superior weapon, thoroughly to be relied on. (59)

The guns are associated with the masculine power of sexuality. In this regard, Kheel holds that "bullets are called balls, firing is referred to as discharge, and hitting a body with a bullet is called penetration" (qtd. in Kermmerer 18). In Western patriarchal culture, she further contends "without the pursuit of orgasm, sex typically is thought to have no meaning or narrative structure; without the intent to kill, the hunt, we are told, has none as well" (Kheelqtd. in Kermmerer 18).

Talking about animals' suffering, Carol Adams notes that 'animals are made absent through language that renames dead bodies before consumers participate in eating them (Adams qtd. in Berman 264). Pain, suffering and death are absent from the scene and what are left are the tusks and ornaments but not the real animal. The suffering of animals is ignored in these lines uttered by Quatermain:

We had killed nine elephants, and it took us two days to cut out the tusks, and having brought them into camp, to bury them carefully in the sand under a large tree, which made a conspicuous mark for miles round. It was a wonderfully fine lot of ivory. I never saw a better, averaging as it did between forty and fifty pounds a tusk. The tusks of the great bull that killed poor Khiva scaled one hundred and seventy pounds the pair, so nearly as we could judge. (72)

Ecofeminists focus on interconnections between domination and oppression of women and the domination/oppression of nature, noting that the "hatred of women and the hatred of nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing" (King 458). Ecofeminists are aware that "the perpetrators of violence throughout the world are, by and large, men, and the victims of this violence are primarily women and the natural world" (Kheel 110). Ecofeminist analysis is generally much more expansive than environmentalism and feminism: "Conceptual interconnections are at the heart of ecofeminist philosophy (Warren qtd. in Kemmerer 24). While the science of ecology "aims to harmonize nature, human and nonhuman," ecofeminism draws on ecological, Socialist, and feminist thought, incorporating a handful of social justice movements, such as feminism, peace activism, labor, women's health care, antinuclear, environmental, and animal liberation (Gaard 1).

For these colonizers, Africa becomes as woman to cruise into. In other words, the approach to feminize the continent. Quatermain sums up the approach as

something that “rose [into] two enormous mountains . . . to be seen in Africa [that are] shaped in the fashion of a woman's breasts” (86). This erotic equating shows deep rooted psyche of the European to consume the natives.

For the narrator, Africa is not just a woman but a dark and mysterious place. Quite similar to Africa itself, Gagool, the demonized character in the novel, is the embodiment of the land. She depicted as a harmful, mysterious witch finding Woman. Many negative associations are tied with her. Haggard's novel was reproduced into many versions of films. In 1937, a black- and-white movie was produced with some modifications. In 1985, a new version of the adopted film was produced with more modifications. In both of the movies, the theme of adventure and domination along with interconnectedness is retained.

Quatermain is presented as a “gentleman” that is reflected through his guns, murdering of wild animals, and of human beings, aggression, revenge, trespassing, cruelty, treachery, appropriation, exploitation of women, animals and men. The wilderness and innocence of Africa is represented, through the image of Gagool, as ugliness, witchery, mystery, brutality, beastliness. Quite similar to the image of an African Woman (Gagool), depicted in the derogatory portrayal of Gagool is made thus by Quatermain:

As they drew near we saw that these were women, most of them aged for their white hair, ornamented with small bladders taken from fish, streamed out behind them. Their faces were painted in stripes of white and yellow; down their backs hung snake-skins, and round their waists rattled circlets of human bones, while each held a small forked wand in her shrivelled hand... one of them, pointing with her wand towards the crouching figure of Gagool, cried out. (147).

The African natives are demonized as cruel and ugly creatures. Just as Twala is described as a one-eyed man, Gagool is described as a witch-like old woman with mysterious ornaments. Quatermain's narration not just feminizes the land (the neuter gender), but neuterizes the feminine gender. Metaphorically, Africa is presented in the form of female character. By the use of the pronoun “it” to refer to a woman, Quatermain animalizes seen through the observation of Gagool. He has seen “monkey-like figures creeping from the shadow of the hut” (124). These crept in all four but when it reached the place where the king sat it rose upon its feet, and throwing the furry covering from its face, they “revealed a most extraordinary and weird countenance” (124). The description of their physical features shows the gaze upon body. The sense of fear and ugliness is further enhanced in these words:

There was no nose to speak of. . . a sun-dried corpse had it not been for a pair of large black eyes, still full of fire and intelligence, which gleamed and played under the snow-white eyebrows, and the projecting parchment-

coloured skull, like jewels in a charnel-house. As for the head itself, it was perfectly bare, and yellow in hue, while its wrinkled scalp moved and contracted like the hood of a cobra. The figure to which this fearful countenance belonged, a countenance so fearful indeed that it caused a shiver of fear to pass through us as we gazed on it, stood still for a moment. (125)

The equation of Africa-Gagool is reflected when the narrator feminizes mountains as "Witches. Haggard's novel is known for negating women as well as the landscape. There is whole chapter (Chapter 16, "The Place of Death") devoted to describe how a place can witchlike, mysterious and evil. The word "witch" is used to refer either to Gagool or to the mountain. In this connection, Steibel remarks that "as Europe is to Africa, so is man to woman in Haggard's novel". "It appears, she further notes, that unconsciously Haggard projects a good deal of his latent desire and that of his age, which was one of determined public prudery onto his feminized African landscapes" (112).

Apparently, Quatermain and his party seem to visit Africa in order to find out the lost man (George Neville), in fact, their real purpose was to trespass into inner Africa in order to plunder the treasury of diamond mines, and elephant tusks. Still another purpose was to interfere with the internal affairs of the native and rule them by dividing them. They manipulate their knowledge of weapons in order to exploit the natives by converting "science into "magic and to make an extensive surveillance of Africa in order to colonize it. The Victorian world view is reflected in the hierarchy created by the novel in which money /God is at the top of the pyramid since the entire journey is planned for achieving "diamonds out of Africa. The position of God is also equally prominent as the naming system in the novel is based on the Biblical references and also the narrator justifies his /their actions by citing the Holy books as the authority in this scheme, the second position next to God /money is that of human beings (male and Christian) as these are the agents of whatever is happening in the story. The third position is occupied by women and nature that are useful for those actors (elephants, Foulata and Ignosi). The last and marginalized position is reserved for the natives, land, animals, and plants that are harmful or mysterious (Three Witches, Gagool, desert land plants that are harmful or mysterious (There Witches, Gagool, desert land, ice). The position /rank of women is demoted by equating them with nature (mountains, plants, rivers) so that both of them can be penetrated, cruised into, dominated, and finally, consumed.

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