



Colonial Narrative and Woman-Nature Dynamics in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: An Ecofeminist Critique

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the novella *Heart of Darkness* written by Joseph Conrad, exploring the dynamics of woman-nature intersections. The portrayal of women is characterized by a lack of agency to speak, which is aligned with the inert objectification of nature. The implication behind such (mis)representation of women and the environment by colonial narrative is to show the masculine imperial discourse as the powerful one. Together, two colonizing ideologies operate in order to domesticate both women and nature. This paper claims that ecofeminist reading of the novel challenges such domestication, exposing the nuances through the frame narrative technique and covert resistance exhibited by nature and women. The shared resemblance between woman-nature dynamics further stresses the interrelation of freedom for both. The study implies that freedom of women and the environment is interlinked. The study is qualitative and employs the textual analysis as a research tool to draw a conclusion. This paper uncovers the parallels between the treatment of gender and nature by oppressive Western colonial model, which exercises masculine dominance to locate the dynamics of women-nature intersections.

Keywords: Colonial narrative, women-nature dynamics, ecofeminism, objectification

Introduction

Joseph Conrad is one of the most acclaimed British writers in the English language. His *Heart of Darkness* is a renowned novella in which the unnamed narrator begins the story describing the scene on board the ship, including the setting and the characters. He then introduces Marlow, the chief narrator and protagonist. Marlow's tale of his journey up the Congo River in search of the elusive ivory trader, Kurtz, is full of imperial, colonial, and androcentric quest. The journey itself is an implementation of Western colonialism in Africa. Conrad portrays African colonialism from the Eurocentric and colonizer perspective. Congo is a space in the novella where imperialism and patriarchy collide to sustain the evil of colonialism and masculine ideology which ecofeminism suggests to subvert to maintain an ecological and gender balance.

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Ecofeminist scholars bring the issue of dichotomy to the fore, and discuss the uneven relation between man and woman on the one hand, and humans and nature on the other hand. The dichotomy in the novella is found both structurally and thematically. Structurally, the novella has two stories: the outer story about calm London/sea as suggested by the frame narrator, and the inner story of Africa as an uncivilized continent told by Charlie Marlow as the chief narrator. Thematically, the representation of Europeans and nature as well as men and women is diametrically constructed in horizontal axis, keeping the Europeans at the top and nature-woman at the bottom. In this paper, the dichotomies are analyzed from the ecofeminist perspective to explore the gendered link between nature and women.

This study tries to find a link between the gendered nature and naturalized woman by using the ecofeminist principles as the theoretical parameters to reach a conclusion that such domestication by the colonial practices leads to social and ecological injustices. The study has further found that the way women have been represented as savage and mysterious like nature by the colonial narrative is the point where ecofeminism tries to dislocate the dichotomy of colonial supremacy. This has been done at two levels: bringing the frame narrative into discussion, and critiquing the projection of woman and nature as inert things. This study is relevant in the sense that the mother-nature subordination is seen through the frame narration employed in the text.

Literature Review

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has received a good review since its publication. Much of the reviews that surround this novella give critical remarks on the African people as having no agency, barbarous creatures, and false image of Africa. African natives are projected as victims, and they are dehumanized. Brook Thomas has analyzed this novella using the new historicist perspective. He interrogates the way order has been maintained in Congo by the Europeans like Kurtz. Thomas stresses on the need to redefine the boundaries and systems that prevail there in terms of race, gender, and nation. His reading unravels hazy truths. In this regard, he asserts, "If Conrad's narrative is one of the most effective expressions of the encounter between self and 'Other,' between the European and non-European, our task is not to affirm the truth of his narrative but to interrogate it" (246). The quote explicitly tells the readers not to ascertain the truth of Conrad's story. His attempt to interrogate the false dichotomy between Self and Other foregrounds the idea that the Europeans, as represented by Kurtz and Marlow, embody savagery within themselves. Thomas further writes, "The horror of the story is not that the Africans are a deviant form of humanity, but that the monster is also within the Europeans who consider themselves superior" (247). The quote destabilizes the constructed truth that the Africans belong to a deviant form of humanity. Along with the Africans, the representation of women as a single, barbaric, and deterministic category is highlighted by Thomas. In the same way, Johanana M. Smith critiques this text as a manly narrated adventure tale, and an exploration made by men.

Smith's critical reading of the novella raises the issues of sex and gender. In this light, he argues, "A story about manly adventure narrated and written by men, *Heart of Darkness* might seem an unpropitious subject for feminist criticism" (169). He means to say that the novella is an unpropitious subject for feminist criticism as the issue of gender is weak due to intertwining ideologies of masculinity and colonialism inherent in the narrative. He explains that the story is about manly adventures. It silences women who accept their determined and designed roles without being aware of a vicious cycle of servitude. Marlow's evaluation of his aunt and the Intended (Kurtz's European mistress) boost the idea that women for Marlow are not humans in a true sense. Smith mentions,

"Marlow attempts to escape this feminine predicament by his representations of his aunt and the Intended" (176). Marlow's intention behind the projection of his aunt as "a wife of high personage in the administration" (Conrad 15) ignores the fact that women can do their jobs on their own strength. His falsity to the Intended – "the last word he pronounced was – your name" (Conrad 123) proves that he is not only a liar, but also a male chauvinist. Smith again explicates, "Marlow's construction of these women dramatizes the point of his story, its manful effort to shore up an ideology of imperialism with an ideology of separate spheres" (177). Smith claims that Marlow's construction of these women supports masculine ideology intertwined with imperialism. The imperial goal of Conrad's representation of Kurtz as 'remarkable and prodigy' is reflected in his attempt to acquire ivory. Jeffrey Myers reflects upon Kurtz's mastery over the African people and wilderness.

In the same way, Myers establishes three layers of interpretation to showcase the colonial masculine project of Europeans. First, Myers writes, "The severed elephant tusk-ivory-as an emblem for the commodification of the African landscape as well as the self's attempted mastery over nature" (100). Myers posits his view that the severed elephant tusk-ivory represents the commodification of the African landscape. Secondly, he shares the idea that the anthropocentric practices treat wilderness as an uncivilized and inert thing. He further mentions, "Third is the effect the narrative's structure (as a tale told on the Thames about the Congo) has on Victorian notions of progress along with what is implied about evolution and ecology in these rivers' figurative confluence" (100). The Victorian period was a peak time for colonialism and imperialism. The story told in Thames River by the frame narrator in the beginning of the novella indicates how a European mission succeeded to embrace the notion of progress at the cost of barbarism practiced upon the Africans. The river, one of the ingredients of ecology, bears an eyewitness for this historical development. Thus, Myers further argues, "Not only does ivory function as a symbol for the commodification of African ecology, it also functions as an emblem of European attempts at mastery over nature, both European culture in general and individual European identity-Kurtz's identity-in particular" (101). The ivory extraction reminds a theme of European identity as superior in general, and Kurtz as remarkable universal genius in particular.

From the reviews discussed above, it is identified that the novella covers a story of dark Congo along with the native people. Brook Thomas's attempt to unravel hidden mysteries and discontinuities in the novella suggests that the text is to be read against the masculine and imperial ideologies. He mentions that the history of Africans narrated from the perspectives of Europeans contains lacuna as he fulfils it reading the novella with the New Historicist perspectives. Johanana M. Smith critiquing of the text as a manly constructed document gives a focus on the women's subjugation and dependency by/on men. Women are treated as appendages of male body. In the same way, Jeffrey Myers's reflection upon Kurtz's mastery over the African wilderness and people points out that the African land is controlled by the Europeans. It is a resource for them to fulfill their economic and imperial desire. These three critics' readings of the novella explain that the imperial project led by Kurtz depends on the suppression of Africans. Their readings further critique the manly adventures in the African locale, silencing of women's voice and misusing of the natural resources for an economic gain. Based on these remarks and theoretical underpinnings of ecofeminism, I locate the shared predicament of women and nature in the imperial practice of males to interrogate the brutality on nature and women. For Kurtz, the agent of European company sent to

Congo, the Africans are brutes, and ask for their extermination. This study purposes to examine the women-nature dynamics in Conrad's narrative amidst the subjugation on them based on value dualism, and oppressive frameworks of colonialism. This study will be an asset to the existing scholarship of literature because the trio-subjugation of nature, natives, and women with the ecofeminist lenses giving an account to frame narration is a new and unexplored issue.

Methodology

Since the study attempts to find a link between the gendered nature and naturalized woman by using the ecofeminist principles, it has applied ecofeminism as a theory to see the shared predicament of nature and women in the novella *Heart of Darkness*. A close examination of the text has been done in the light of ecofeminism to reach a conclusion. Therefore, in this study, textual analysis has been employed as a research tool. Apart from the primary text, the secondary sources like journal articles, critical books, and web pages have also been used as supports for discussion the issues raised in the study.

Women-Nature Dynamics and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: Critical Analysis *Frame Narration and Ambiguous Colonialism*

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* consists of the frame narration, a story within a story. This can be interchangeably called a combination of inner and outer stories. Thus, it has two narrators: a frame narrator and a chief narrator. The frame narrator begins the story, and the chief narrator comes to pick up the narrative flow of the first narrator. The frame narrator is unnamed; and the chief narrator is Charlie Marlow. The chief narrator makes a necessary intervention in the narrative flow of the frame narrator. This critical observation of the chief narrator helps him to have a better understanding of the nature and human world. The interruption is highlighted by Terence Bowers N.: "The experience of ecological alienation occurs early in *Heart of Darkness*, when Marlow interrupts the frame narrator, causing both a jarring disjunction in historical perspective and a radically altered view of the scene before the Nellie's passengers" (75). These two narrators have two different views on nature and colonial projects. Marlow's ambivalent stand between the colonial subjects and colonial project as well as the view of frame narrative in contrast to Marlow's perspective brings dialogic possibilities, which enables the diverse opinions emerge. The inner and outer frames of the story represent two voices. In this regard, Birgit Maier-Katkin and Daniel Maier-Katkin mention, "In the outer frame, in sharp contrast to the inner story, Marlow is located entirely within the commodious and efficient boundaries of Western civilization" (585). Marlow experiences both: darkness of Africa and darkness of Europeans. This implies that when the Europeans call the African people brutes, it reveals the brutality of colonization. In the novella, Kurtz's famous remark in the document, 'exterminate all the brutes' reminds the colonial masculine brutality imposed upon the innocent natives.

The harmonious relation within nature and its similar affinity to humanity as observed by the frame narrator is disrupted when the narration enters into the inner story. The frame narrator in the *Crusing Yawl* mentions, "In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint" (7). Here, sea and sky are in harmony forming a unity. Nature has been depicted as a calm subject. This tranquil situation seen by the frame narrator from the calm Thames River is distracted when the chief narrator mentions, "In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent" (24). The act of firing into the continent or land has its connection to

the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water. The earth, sea, sky, and water contain gaps due to firing and looting of resources unlike the initial observation of the narrator.

The frame narrator is one of the five men on the deck of *Nellie*—a small ship: the lawyer, the accountant, the director, the unnamed narrator, and the chief narrator (Marlow). The four friends listen to the frame narrator. He mentions, "Between us there was, as I have already said somewhere, the bond of sea" (8). The bond of sea among them made the colonialism flourish; they were the representation of colonial agents at the peak time of the Victorian colonial period. He assigns the feminine qualities to the natural components reflected in the lines, "the water shone pacifically . . . the sky was benign . . . venerable stream" (8-9). These qualities associated with nature assert two themes: the frame narrator's reinforcement colonial project that treats nature as a dead object until the project gives life to it and nature's association with feminine qualities.

Nature and women, hence, stand to serve men according to the masculine colonial ideology. The frame narrator is assertive in the colonial rationality and white supremacy. Regarding this, the critic Charlie Wesley sheds light on the implication of frame narrator who takes pride in being a European settler. He asserts, "The narrator's description reveals the sense of community among men who share common experiences. Therefore, the text is the first and foremost a dialogue directed specifically at an audience that is receptive to the codes and assumptions of the colonial project writ large" (24). The colonial project and white supremacy as suggested by the outer narrative is seen in the line, "The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths and the germs of empires" (Conrad 10). The dream of men as germs of empire has been practiced in the novella. The frame narrator plays a part in regulating and monitoring the colonialist institutions.

However, the chief narrator is ambiguous about the position of London as a tranquil and civilized space. He stands in the ambiguous position regarding the boundary between the European settlers and colonized Africans. This is the reason why Marlow begins his narrative with critical a distance with the frame narrator. He mentions, "And this also . . . has been one of the dark places of the earth" (10). Marlow, despite being sent to bring Kurtz back to the company, offers a critical opinion about London and civilization as he mentioned London as one of the dark places of the earth. Here, Marlow, speaking for the first time in the novella, interrogates the frame narrator to critique the civilization of the colonialism. This functions as a part of dialogic possibilities.

Marlow's dual stands on the colonial project reveal two things: dark side of colonialism and his passion for the exploration of land. Marlow narrates, "Now, when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps . . . and lose myself in all the glories of exploration" (14). In his journey to African Congo, though he offers his critical remarks on frame narrator's assertive voice, Marlow also dehumanizes Blacks, devalues women, and feminizes nature. Thus, his role in the novella helps to blur the false dichotomy between men and women, nature and culture, and the Europeans and natives based on value dualism.

Nature and Woman as Brutes and Disembodied Objects

The novella consists of relatively three female characters: Marlow's aunt, Kurtz's African mistress, and Kurtz's Intended. Marlow and Kurtz, the two distinct Europeans who have come to African Congo to extract resources, still hold different perspectives about the entire project of colonialism. Yet, they play a vital role in subjugating women and nature. They are referred to as brutes. For Amitav Ghosh, their "past was not worth studying because it had no trajectory and no meaning" (188). They

were perceived as savage and cannibals. In regard to the brutishness of the brutes of Conrad's novella, Ghosh further states:

In Conrad's novella, the sentence 'Exterminate all the brutes' comes from the ailing Mr. Kurtz, who is the object of the narrator's search. The words are not uttered aloud by Kurtz; the narrator's Marlow, finds them scrawled across the final pages of a high-minded report that Kurtz has written for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. Marlow is mesmerized by that sentence, it blazes at him. (184).

This opinion explains the harms of colonizing mission done in the name of barbarism of natives. Kurtz is Marlow's search object; Marlow is mesmerized to see the written record 'exterminate all the brutes'. These records have been documented in the report that Kurtz has written for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. By all the brutes, he means the native people, women, and nature. They cannot speak; they are muted. Ghosh again explains, "Over time, as the meaning of brute broadened, the concept became increasingly assimilated into nature" (187). Thus, for Ghosh, nature shares similar predicament with what Kurtz calls brutes. Both nature and native people have voices, but they do not make any meaning for the colonial people. For Ghosh, the native people and women as the normal people: ". . . that they have tongues, voices, and languages, brutes are effectively mute, like nature, itself" (189). The brutes are unheard like nature. This brutishness is encompassed to nature, native people, and women.

Marlow's initial observation of woman is seen when his aunt helps him finding a job. His expression of women's inferiority is immediately realized in the beginning part of the novella when he reflects upon how he achieved the job. The narrator mentions, "Then—would you believe it?—I tried the women. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work—to get a job. Heavens! Well, you see, the notion drove me. I had an aunt, a dear enthusiastic soul" (15). According to the opinion, Marlow's aunt, a dear enthusiastic soul, helped him find a job. The use of first person pronoun "I" twice, and the subsequent name "Charlie Marlow" that follows, asserts his domineering masculine identity which 'set the women to work'. His aunt's power is immediately transferred to his uncle who was in a very high position. She was just a mediator for the job. Ecofeminism objects such domestication of women upon which development in modern sense takes place.

Marlow mentions his aunt as a 'wife of a very high personage'. Marlow remarks, "I know the wife of a very high personage in the Administration, and also a man who has lots of influence with,' etc. She was determined to make no end of fuss to get me appointed skipper of a river steamboat, if such was my fancy" (15). Marlow's devaluation of aunt as the wife of high personage lacks her agency to work independently. It suggests that the woman as somebody lacking reason can be a mediator, not the agent to make changes. Marlow has a guilty feeling in asking a rhetorical question like "would you believe it? — I set a woman to work – to get a job." Women are misjudged and undervalued. Their contribution is neither accepted at personal level nor at social level. The undervaluation of women continues along with the progression of narrative. Kurtz's African mistress is called a ghost, calling it "a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman" (97). As an African mistress, she is just a plaything for Kurtz and is similar to wilderness. Women's identification with wilderness is a product of both sexist and anthropocentric ideology which function through the reductionist and monolithic approach. In this regard, Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva mentions:

The reductionist mind superimposes the roles and forms of power of western male-oriented concepts on women, all non-western peoples and even on nature, rendering all three 'deficient', and in need of 'development'. Diversity, and unity

and harmony in diversity, become epistemologically unattainable in the context of maldevelopment, which then becomes synonymous with women's underdevelopment (increasing sexist domination), and nature's depletion (deepening ecological crises). Commodities have grown, but nature has shrunk. (5)

Bandana Shiva's worry about degradation of women and nature's situation is due to the reductionist mind, which superimposes the roles and forms of power of Western male-oriented concepts on nature and women. This renders nature and women deficient and passive. She argues that it is wrong that they need to be developed according to masculine ideology.

Marlow's observation of Kurtz's African mistress shows a false image of both Africa and woman. He talks about her as he mentions, "She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly" (97). She walked wearing cloths marked with stripes and having a decorative border of hanging threads. Her walking could crush the ground and Marlow extends this as barbaric walking to barbarous ornaments, "with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments" (97). Marlow describes her head, hair, elbow, cheek, and innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck. He calls them "bizarre things" and "gifts of witch-men" (97). He could not understand her as he is alien to the Africa and its culture. He projects an image of elephant and nature into her: "She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress" (98). Her value is calculated in terms of elephant tusks. She was perceived as savage and superb. He further describes her as wild-eyed and magnificent. Marlow has already observed the mysterious and wild nature in the beginning part of novel while he was talking about the dense forest. He mentions, "All that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles" (12). The jungle, in his perspective, looks like a savage and wild creature. His perception of nature and Kurtz's perception of women are similar. According to Marlow, nature and woman are savage, wild, and mysterious. In the same way, David Galef talks about African mistress: "Endowed with all the darksome splendor Conrad can conjure up, she is both regal and mysterious" (129). According to Galef, Kurtz's African mistress is endowed with a dark image and wilderness; she is both a regal and mysterious. For Galef, her ornaments made on tusks and her sense of pride being a mistress of Kurtz confirm her solemnity. The image of women as mysterious and wild is the product of colonial project for ecofeminism. However, this establishes a connection between nature and women because nature is also projected as wild and mysterious in the colonial narrative.

Ecofeminism as a movement makes an attempt to link the ecological concern with the gender issues. Silvia Schultersmandl asserts that ecofeminism ". . . synthesizes the feminist movement and the ecological movement, arguing that the domination of sexual, ethnic, and social minorities and the domination of nonhuman nature are interrelated" (173). According to Schultersmandl, the combined form of feminism and ecology – ecofeminism is an expression of political activism and resistance to capitalism and colonialism. Kurtz's remarks on the African natives as "Exterminate all the brutes" (81) projects his own brutality upon the African natives whom he calls brutes. Ecofeminism suggests to eliminate the brutality of colonial masculine traditions. Kurtz's evaluation of natives as brutes shows his negative attitudes to them.

Marlow's depiction of Kurtz's African mistress shows his prejudices to women. He explains her as "A wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman (97). She is both wild and beautiful as the way nature is. Her identity is defined in terms of men's perspective, which ecofeminism critiques. The same bias and arrogance of colonial agents is reflected

in the remarks of the Accountant, who opines, "I've been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work" (30). He was teaching the native woman how to launder his clothes and station. He speaks as if it was a natural job to teach woman about laundering the station. Kurtz's remarks also justified that the colonial agents treat woman, nature, and natives as their personal property. Kurtz speaks and Marlow listens: "My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—" everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed stars in their places. Everything belonged to him— but that was a trifle" (78). The expressions like 'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—' justify that he is a male chauvinist, colonial agent, and ecological perpetrator. Marlow seldom acknowledges the humanity of natives and strength of women. Regarding his observation about women, Marlow narrates, "Its queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there has 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" (21). According to Marlow, women are out of touch with truth. They are not subjects to share the knowledge. They live in their fancy world without questioning. In contrast to them, as Marlow suggests, men live in happiness and satisfaction. Here, agency and action of women are not acknowledged in their physicality. Marlow's observation of women suggests that they live out of truth. Ironically, Marlow does not have clear ideas about women and wilderness. The African mistress represents a jungle herself. She is a reflection of nature. However, the strength and beauty of nature and woman are discarded due to the Western discourse of false dichotomy based on hierarchy. From such discourse of profit, the value of nature and women is measured in terms of how it generates profits.

Ecofeminism objects this tendency of under-evaluation of native, women, and resources. This is suggested in the book to talk about wilderness and mysterious features of both nature and woman. The narrator explains, "Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him—all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men" (12). In the novella, women are often referred to as wild and mysterious. Ecofeminism protests these ideas and asserts, "The centric structure provides a form of rationality, a framework for beliefs, which naturalizes and justifies a certain sort of self-centeredness, self-imposition and dispossession, which is what Eurocentric and ethnocentric colonization frameworks as well as androcentric frameworks involve" (Plumwood 118). The ethnocentric colonization trends to conquer nature; the indigenous people are the results of centric structures of masculine colonial project.

The colonial project is visible in Marlow's voice as it argues, "The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there— there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were—No, they were not inhuman" (58). He describes the earth as dead and a conquered monster. Along with the earth, the Africans were interpreted as inhuman by Marlow. Here, Marlow judges the colonial practice with a favor. He further narrates his trip to the Congo here: "At last we opened a reach. A rocky cliff appeared, mounds of turned-up earth by the shore, houses on a hill, others with iron roofs, amongst a waste of excavations, or hanging to the declivity. A continuous noise of the rapids above hovered over this scene of inhabited devastation" (25). The opinion mentions about the destructiveness due to railway construction. The earth is devastated. The waste of excavations and continuous noise show the harms on nature. The colonial project conquered the earth, and looted its resource 'ivory' from the indigenous people who

were different to the Europeans settlers in terms of complexion. Thus, they were brutes, barbaric, and irrational creatures for the colonial project, which is questioned by ecofeminism.

Thus, the representation of women and nature as brute and inert objects in the colonial narrative are interrogated by ecofeminism. The women-nature intersection is a justification of the shared strength both of them. The derogatory term, 'brutes,' assigned to nature, women, and native is the result of oppressive mindsets practiced by colonial legacy represented by Kurtz. They are brutes because of the brutality of the colonizers.

Woman-Nature Resistance to Colonial Narrative

The minor female characters mentioned in the novella are Marlow's aunt, Kurtz's African mistress, Kurtz's Intended, and two women knitting wool in the company. These characters speak at minimum level. Marlow's aunt and Kurtz's Intended speak a few words, and they were the Europeans. The rest of the female characters never speak. From this, it is obvious that they are denied of agency; they do not dare to speak. What Kurtz's aunt spoke to Marlow helped him find a job in the company. It was essential for him due to his desire and passions for world map. Though she helped him find a job, he disregards her value by mentioning her as 'wife of high personage in administration'. In the same way, Marlow's conversation to Kurtz's Intended contains gaps, which misrepresents. He deliberately speaks lies to her when he begins to tell her about the death of Kurtz as his remarks on her is like this, "The last word he pronounced was your name" (123). Kurtz did not pronounce her name when he was dying. The innocence and honesty of Intended are reflected in her thrice repeated sentences, "I loved him—I loved him—I loved him" (123). The Intended's expression of true love as seen to Kurtz in the phrase "I love him" and Kurtz's remark of 'my intended' show the ironic gap between the dominant masculine ideology to dominate women, and feminine ideology of the consent to be ruled. Here, women are not represented, but they are repressed. In the similar manner, nature has also been falsely represented as Chinua Achebe mentions about it as a false image of Africa.

Nature and indigenous groups, to some extent, has resisted the colonial legacy which suppressed them in manifold forms. Such resistance is implied in the text. The victory of colonial project began to rot as the dynamics of nature consisted of power at deep level, which even the colonialism could not defeat. For example, the things of railway project that the Europeans brought in Congo looked dead and started decaying. The narrator mentions, "The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal. I came upon more pieces of decaying machinery, a stack of rusty rails" (26). The railway track looked dead. The decaying railway track is a gradual victory of nature to colonial legacy. The machines started decaying, but nature's power, though it suffered bombing and excavations, remained stored within.

Before Marlow went to Congo, he heard about the death of earlier captain by native. The narrator shares, "One of their captains had been killed in a scuffle with the natives" (16). The narrated story of the native's attack on steamer *Fresleven* indicates the resistance by natives which was not given agency to speak in narrative. As narrated by Marlow, *Fresleven* was the gentlest, quietest creature, and a practical man. He killed 'old nigger' and big crowd watched him killing the nigger. It was only the chief's son who protested and attacked the steamer. The narrator says, "I was told the chief's son—in desperation at hearing the old chap yell, made a tentative jab with a spear at the white man" (16). *Fresleven*'s body after his death left unburied and his body slowly merged into the African soil. Marlow narrates, "Afterwards nobody seemed to trouble much about *Fresleven*'s remains, till I got out and stepped into his shoes. I couldn't let it rest,

though; but when an opportunity offered at last to meet my predecessor, the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his bones" (16). The bones are still there and they were covered by grass growing in ribs. The bones are gradually transferred into the soil.

Ecofeminism argues that such transformation of body into soil is the projection of nature's power. Since women and nature share similarity, it also confirms women's power. Therefore, women and nature are not the inert objects, rather they are active agents. This supports the conflicting remarks within colonialism that opens avenues for the possibility of resistance by women and natives. Ecofeminism problematizes that women and African people are brutes. It further asserts that they are presented as the violent and savage creatures just to fulfil the masculine goals colored by colonialism. The motive behind women and nature's representation as a wild and mysterious thing is the result of the darker side of colonial project. The colonial mind-sets reject the power and strength of women and nature. Nature's role is under-evaluated like women. This omission is a questionable issue for ecofeminism. Rita Bode discusses about the omission of women's role in the novella which is due to the fear of the narrator. She mentions:

Women's omission suggests that he fears these women. The narrative discrepancy between his easy dismissal of them and his unacknowledged fear, between his concept of women and the impression created by the novella's women suggests an independent context for them; but it is the intense textual connections that truly empower the women, for these create a kind of sub-text in *Heart of Darkness*—perhaps even a story within a story (one over which Marlow has no control)—that ripples suggestively throughout the narrative. (21)

Here, Bode asserts that Marlow is afraid of women because of discrepancy between the dismissal of women, and his unacknowledged fear. His constant reference to darkness, wilderness, and mysterious nature of women prove that he is afraid of women. The masculine discourse puts women on the side of nature to dominate both.

The brutality of Kurtz upon natives is an extreme form of injustice. Marlow hears, "Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks" (94). These heads were cut down by Kurtz and put together as a fence. The narrator remarks, "Those heads drying on the stakes under Mr. Kurtz's windows" (94). This brutality continues in the dark continent of Africa not because the natives were brutes but because the colonial agents like Kurtz and Marlow were brutal. The social injustice is linked with natural injustice as nature has been ravaged in the name of development like the rail way track. Ecofeminism asserts the view that Kurtz's remark 'exterminate all the brutes' is racial and gendered. Thus, it is not the brutes, but brutality of Kurtz is to be exterminated.

Conclusion

The novella *Heart of Darkness* projects the female characters as submissive people whose purpose of life as colonial ideology perceives, is to serve men with the capitalist mind-set. Nature is understood as dead until humanity gives life to it as this idea supports colonialism. Nature and women are depicted as enslaved to the male world in Conrad's narrative. Though the European women like Marlow's aunt and Kurtz Intended enjoy the basic right of speaking, their freedom is limited within the man's world. The close reading of the novella unravels a shared connection between nature and woman. It further shows the ambivalence of colonial discourse shown in Marlow's description of nature and women. This is supported by the narrative technique of frame narration. The assertive voice of colonial implication by the frame narrator is questioned by Marlow as the chief narrator. Thus, the Africans as projected in the narrative are not

brutes as Kurtz remarks on them. The ecofeminist critique on 'brutes and brutality' has unfolded that the brutality on the natives by Kurtz is more brutal and violent. Thus, this study suggests that it is necessary to exterminate the brutality of colonial injustices not the native people understood as brutes. Though women are represented as the disembodied bodies like nature itself, African mistress's shared similarity with the entire continent of Africa, with all its vices and virtues, shows nature and women are inherently powerful. These women-nature dynamics celebrate the interrelation with other different life forms.

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