

Rethinking the Nexus: Eco-feminist Discourse on Femininity, Nature, and the 'Other' in Morrison and Hurston's Works



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Abstract: *The patriarchal norm is seen as being threatened by powerful women (Normandin, 2020). This study pens down the ecofeminist discourse found in Morrison's and Hurston's literary works. This scrutiny examines how these significant writers confront the devaluation of the feminine, nature, and the "Other," focusing on Morrison's "Beloved" and "Song of Solomon" and Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God." Morrison deftly interweaves the challenges of African American women with the natural environment in a similar vein, Hurston emphasizes the interconnectedness of race, gender, and ecology in her writing, which is firmly anchored in African American folklore and tells a story that links women's experiences to the natural world. Amid social and ecological issues, this scrutiny invites readers to reevaluate the ties between women, nature, and society systems by highlighting the fundamental interconnection addressed in their works.*

Key Words: Environment, Feminism, Gender, Degradation, Other and Culture

Introduction

In recent decades, eco-feminism is a theoretical framework that integrates ecological and feminist concerns has become more well-known as a critical lens for analyzing how societal systems, ecology, and gender connect. To better understand and evaluate the language around eco-feminism, this essay will examine the writings of two significant African-American authors, Toni Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston. We will explore how these writers confront the devaluation of the feminine, nature, and the "Other" by closely examining their creative contributions.

The purpose of this research is to examine the selected texts from the perspective of ecofeminism, taking into account how women, the environment, and other marginalized identities are oppressed and

dominated in many cultural contexts. I have selected classic works by two highly regarded American women writers, Toni Morrison, and Zora Hurston, for this study. To expose the industrialized countries' exploitation and invasion of our ecosystem and its resources in the guise of urbanization, development, and globalization, ecofeminism is essential. In the same manner, our attitudes towards the natural world, other living things, people of different sexes, and sexual minorities may all be used to examine and analyze gender-related issues. As a movement and theory, ecofeminism discovers that the subjugation of women is connected to oppression by nature and masculine power.

The concept of ecofeminism surfaces as a potent prism through which the intricate links between the feminine, environment, and social institutions are

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analyzed in the rich tapestry of literature. The literary writings of two groundbreaking African-American authors, Toni Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston, give this investigation a unique depth and resonance. This research aims to (view) the ecofeminist discourse inherent within Morrison's "Beloved" and "Song of Solomon," as well as Hurston's groundbreaking work, "Their Eyes Were Watching God," as we set out on a path of challenging the degradation of the feminine, nature, and the "Other."

These works of literature are like canvases on which the writers have painted vivid stories that question social standards and provide a deep understanding of the interwoven conflicts that women and nature endure. Morrison skillfully weaves African-American women's stories into the very fabric of the natural environment while navigating their experiences. Hurston, who has a strong foundation in African-American folklore, simultaneously invites readers to challenge conventional hierarchies and narratives by crafting stories that examine the intersections of race, gender, and environment.

When we explore the eco-feminist aspects of these pieces, we are looking at how women are portrayed about nature as well as how they are actively resisting the degradation that is imposed by social conventions. This introduction lays the groundwork for a critical analysis of how Morrison and Hurston subvert social norms, confront preconceptions, and eventually play a major role in changing the conversation about nature, the feminine, and the "Other." Our journey delves deeper than a simple textual analysis as we examine the intricate relationship between literature, eco-feminism, and the African-American experience. We encourage readers to re(view) these narratives with a renewed sense of perspective and an appreciation for the transformative power of storytelling.

The social and scholarly movement known as ecofeminism makes important linkages between the exploitation of women and the dominance of nature. The third wave of feminism was dubbed ecofeminism when it was coined by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 (Montegna, 2022). As noted by Karen Warren², the term "ecofeminism" serves as a catch-all for a wide range of methodologies. You can be an ecofeminist who is socialist, cultural, radical, ecowomanist, etc. The contention is that, in the words

of Karen Warren, "there are crucial linkages between the control of women and the dominance of nature," even though the category of ecofeminism is a contentious issue, unites these divergent perspectives (Lorentzen and H. Eaton 2002). Ecofeminism was developed as a concept in the 1970s; there have been, arguably, major policy shifts in the fields of gender inequality and environmental sustainability (Buckingham, 2004). Thus a consideration of the achievements of and work outstanding for, ecological feminism is warranted. Since the 1970s, when the idea of ecofeminism first emerged, there have undoubtedly been significant legislative changes in the areas of gender inequity and environmental sustainability. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the successes of exceptional work for ecological feminism (Herr, 2013). In this essay, I will evaluate the shifting policy landscape to investigate how much it has structurally changed gender inequality, how societies handle the environment, and how these two processes are intertwined. The present corpus of literature centers on how ecofeminism has influenced gender inequality and environmental policy throughout the previous two decades. It examines the main points of the ecofeminist argument before focusing on the social construction interpretation of women's relationship with the environment (Herr, 2014). It will argue that substantial policy improvements in the fields of equal rights and the environment have occurred in Europe and the UK, in part because of organizations' campaigning at different levels that have been affected by ideas of ecofeminism (Buckingham, 2004). The report does, however, caution that these improvements essentially occur gradually and operate inside existing structures, which inevitably restricts their capacity to bring about change (Singh, 1996).

Research Questions

- Q.1 How do oppressive conceptual frameworks work against women and the environment as well as against Others in the comparative method of the chosen texts by Morrison and Hurston?
- Q.2 How can women, others, and the environment be freed from oppression, dominance, and exploitation according to the texts chosen?

Q.3 How do Morrison and Hurston depict the exploitation of marginalized identities in their distinct cultural and social contexts?

Research Objectives

- Exploration into the comparative potential of the chosen texts in terms of reflecting the role of value dualisms within the context of nature's oppression of women and others.
- To highlight gender biases and the role of nature that depicts its hierarchy that men are closer to culture while women are closer to nature
- Identify and critically evaluate the discourse of eco-feminism in Morrison and Hurston's works and unravel the gap in the present discourse that males are closer to nature than women.

Theoretical Framework

The emergence of ecofeminism in the 1980s was closely associated with a resurgence of earth-honoring and -caring practices among many women. This included the revival of nature-centered customs and a renewed significance of earth goddess, women-wise spirituality. According to these women, the primary objectives of what they called ecofeminism were to recover the holy and honor women's compassionate and special relationship with life forces and the earth's energies (Anjum, T. 2020). The emergence of ecofeminism brought essentialism, anti-essentialism, spirituality, earth goddesses, nature/culture identities, and materialism to the fore of the feminist discourse.

Literary works possess the ability to include theoretical perspectives and a transdisciplinary approach. Given the increasing global prominence of ecofeminism, especially in the West and America, it is not impossible for literature and this philosophy to come together. Literature on all seven continents is likely to embrace the more accommodative ecofeminist attitude. Because ecofeminism aims to be a way of life rather than a theory, literature seems to be an appropriate medium for undermining its ideals and practices (Barbara 65). After analyzing the concepts that ecofeminism provides in literature, readers would be more equipped to understand how

the ideals of the ecofeminists are applied in real-world situations.

As politically significant as the labels "socialist feminism" and "black feminism" were, the term "ecofeminism" denotes a twin political intervention—feminism into ecology and environmentalism into feminism. This is an engagement that plays a significant role in the state of the environment and is among the common interests shared by the majority of feminists who pursue environmental scholarship and activist work, whether from "ecofeminist" or not. Women are under pressure from society to act more like males, which includes utilizing resources more quickly. Men might contribute to gender equality by consuming less and leaving a smaller carbon footprint if they are encouraged to adopt feminine ideas and practices as an alternative (Bloodhart 2020).

Analysis

The second is the notion that there is a philosophical, cultural, or symbolic relationship between women and nature. There are many different methods to express these interactions. Ruether is not alone in believing that dualistic and hierarchical worldviews are fostered in Western societies and manifest in societal structure. The idea is that dualist conceptual frameworks associate women with femininity, the body, the earth, and sexuality, while men are associated with masculinity, the spirit, the intellect, and power. The dualisms of man/woman, culture/nature, mind/body, and heaven/Earth are all intertwined. This suggests that males are born with the ability to control both nature and women. This dualistic philosophy was first advanced by the Greeks and subsequently strengthened by Christianity and the scientific revolution.

The primary reason why the dual dominance of women and nature in this society appears acceptable and "natural" is because it is reinforced by many cultural networks, symbols, and inventions such as religion and philosophy. Given the linkages seen between women and the environment, the ecofeminist epistemological argument makes sense. Women have an epistemic advantage over males since they are more competent to be experts on environmental issues because they are the ones most negatively impacted by them. In other words, women are more knowledgeable about

earth systems than men are. This implies that these women have a unique opportunity to contribute to the development of fresh, sensible, and insightful ecological concepts. Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva is a supporter of this sort of knowledge.

As several UN global conferences and studies from different NGOs have shown, women are not only the first to suffer from the impacts of environmental degradation but also play a significant role in protecting nature (Puleo, 2017). Reactions to the woman-nature link are diverse. Some argue that although there is a cross-cultural and historical link, the association should be reexamined. It hasn't been good for women or the Earth. Some people feel that it merits respect and celebration. Some people think it belongs more in the past than in the present day.

Several of the earliest ecofeminist religious and theological writings examined the historical foundations of patriarchy by examining the philosophical and theological traditions of Europe and the Mediterranean. They found that patriarchal religion encouraged the dominance of women and the environment.

It is claimed in historical reconstructions by Gerda Lerner, Marija Gimbutas, Carol Christ, and others that societies centered upon goddesses and that honored women and nature existed before the systems of patriarchy and militarism that destroyed them. Women and the natural world were denigrated when Earth deities gave way to patriarchal gods. According to these reconstructions, societal standards and religious symbols are the result of the evolution of masculine dominance and hierarchy. Before the emergence of transnational, global, and third-world women, disadvantaged third-world feminists were perceived as voiceless, defenseless victims experiencing "false consciousness" (Okin 1995, p. 5). Nonetheless, according to feminist viewpoint theory, third-world, transnational, and global feminists see third-world women's "marginalized" societal environments as helping develop not enough compatibility or even an "objective" understanding of the human situation (Harding 1993, pp. 56, 62).

They possess "epistemic privilege" as a result of their marginalized status, meaning they are aware of things that more privileged groups either ignore or find repugnant. For example, "the specific perspective of poor indigenous and Third World/South women

provides the most inclusive viewing of structural power within a closely 8 interconnected capitalist system" (Mohanty 1993, page 511). Furthermore, these feminisms recognize that contrary to the popular belief that they are victims, women in third-world countries are more vigilant toward combating victimization on a range of fixed regional boundaries (Basu et al, 2010).

Toni Morrison's Eco-feminist Vision

Women and Nature Are Richly Shown in "Beloved" and "Song of Solomon"

Toni Morrison's novels, in particular, "Beloved" and "Song of Solomon," portray women and their relationship to nature richly and intricately. In "Beloved," Sethe's figure reflects the harsh reality that enslaved women had to endure, highlighting the similarities between the exploitation of the natural environment and the abuse of women. One interpretation of the title character Beloved's eerie presence is that it represents the unsolved wounds that nature and women have suffered. Morrison relates the lives of African American women to the environment in "Song of Solomon," a story she writes. The main character, Pilate, is shown as a strong, independent woman whose bond with the earth serves as a metaphor for strength and resiliency. Morrison skillfully weaves together the tales of the ladies with the tides of nature to create a story that speaks to larger ecological problems and goes beyond the experiences of the individual characters.

Challenging Stereotypes and Exploring Intrinsic Connections

Morrison presents women in situations that go against social norms, challenging established gender stereotypes. By depicting Sethe as a strong, independent woman in "Beloved," she shatters the cliché of the meek, submissive woman. Sethe challenges the idea that women are distinct from or inferior to the natural environment by making her relationship to it an essential element of who she is, rather than just a backdrop.

Morrison also uses symbolism and imagery to examine the innate relationships that exist between the natural world and the feminine. In "Beloved," nature is a real, breathing thing that is interwoven with the lives of the characters, not merely a scene. To

emphasize the cyclical cycle of life, death, and rebirth, natural components like trees and water are used as a metaphor.

Resisting Societal Norms

Morrison's characters, especially those about race and gender, aggressively oppose the dehumanization that society imposes on them. The infanticide committed by Sethe in "Beloved" is a last-ditch effort to protect her kid from the cruel system of enslavement. Even though this conduct is severe, it might be interpreted as a protest against the way society devalues motherhood and the ties that bind families under the repressive system.

Through Pilate, a character in Morrison's "Song of Solomon," who defies social norms and traditional gender roles, the author examines resistance. By rejecting consumerism and maintaining a strong connection to the earth, Pilate leads an unorthodox lifestyle that acts as a type of resistance to social conventions that aim to limit and marginalize women. Morrison offers a compelling substitute for the traditional roles that are expected of women via Pilate, promoting freedom.

The eco-feminist perspective of Toni Morrison, as portrayed in "Beloved" and "Song of Solomon," transcends the traditional accounts of women's experiences. Morrison defies stereotypes, examines the innate bonds between the feminine and nature, and presents characters who actively oppose the degradation imposed by social norms through complex storytelling and nuanced characterizations. As a result, Morrison makes a significant contribution to the larger conversation about eco-feminism in literature.

Zora Neale Hurston's Eco-feminist Narratives

Women and nature are represented in "Their Eyes Were Watching God" by Zora Neale Hurston

This moving story follows protagonist Janie Crawford on her path to emancipation and self-discovery. The book deftly intertwines the natural environment with Janie's inner development, highlighting the strong bond that exists between women and the natural world. The shifting terrain frequently reflects Janie's experiences, highlighting the cyclical and

transformational elements of both her life and the surroundings.

Hurston illustrates the significance of nature in Janie's story with rich and metaphorical imagery. For instance, the horizon starts to symbolize Janie's goals and the boundless opportunities that lay ahead. The seasons and Janie's marriages are also correlated, illustrating the relationship between women's emotional life and the cycles of the natural world.

Embracing Connection to the Environment and Navigating Society's Expectations

Hurston's characters, especially Janie, strive for individuality and self-determination while navigating societal norms and expectations. Through Janie's three marriages, the limitations placed on women by society's expectations are examined. The traditional duties that were imposed on women in the South in the early 20th century were challenged by her tenacity and will to speak out for her. Janie's relationship with the natural world turns into a wellspring of knowledge and resilience. Her interactions with the pear tree in her grandmother's backyard and other natural encounters function as catalysts for her self-discovery. As Janie gets older, she comes to value her relationship with the land more and more, seeking comfort and identity in the natural world. She can defy cultural norms that try to limit her to certain positions because of this link.

The Place of Spirituality and Tradition in Ecofeminist Conversations

Hurston incorporates rich cultural components into her ecofeminist discourse, drawing from her deep roots in African-American folklore and spirituality. Nanny, Janie's grandmother, is a representative of a generation formed by the horrors of slavery, and spirituality and folklore play a significant role in shaping her worldview. In addition to being motivated by common sense, Nanny's want for Janie to be financially secure is also shaped by a more expansive spiritual and traditional conception of survival and stability.

Spirituality, as depicted in the novel, is not divorced from the natural world but intertwined with it. The horizon, often mentioned in the context of Janie's spiritual and emotional journey, becomes a

symbol of transcendence and connection to something greater than the self. Hurston's use of folklore further reinforces the idea that the relationship between women and nature is embedded in the cultural fabric of the community, providing a sense of continuity and shared wisdom.

"Their Eyes Were Watching God," written by Zora Neale Hurston, is a brilliant examination of eco-feminist topics. Hurston explores the complex relationships that women have with the environment, how to navigate social expectations, and how spirituality and folklore are included in the eco-feminist conversation via the prism of Janie's experiences. In the framework of African American history and culture, Hurston's writings continue to serve as a tribute to the tenacity of women and their complex interaction with the natural world.

Intersectionality of Eco-feminism in Morrison and Hurston

Similarities between Ecofeminist Themes

Hurston and Morrison both include ecofeminist themes in their writing, exhibiting a sophisticated awareness of the connections between racial, gender, and ecological issues. African American women's difficulties are intricately linked to the natural environment in Morrison's writing. Vivid depictions of the exploitation and degradation of women and the environment under repressive institutions support an all-encompassing ecofeminist narrative. Hurston's stories also highlight how race and gender intertwine with the environment. Her characters, such as Janie in "Their Eyes Were Watching God," have to negotiate the intricacies of their identities in a world that seeks to categorize and limit them according to their gender and ethnicity.

Challenging the Notion of the "Other"

By providing marginalized people, especially women of color a voice and agency, both authors question the idea of the "Other." The protagonists in Morrison's writings fight against racism and slavery's dehumanizing consequences, claiming their humanity and the right to coexist with the natural world. Hurston depicts characters who fight against being cast aside in her works, which are based on the African-American experience. In "Their Eyes Were Watching God," Janie

embarks on a search for selfhood that defies social norms and rejects the idea that African American women are "Othering."

Criticism of Systems Encouraging Degradation

Morrison and Hurston highlight the intersectionality of oppression in their critique of systems that encourage the degradation of marginalized communities. The legacy of slavery is a major issue in Morrison's works, showing how institutional racism and gender inequality lead to the deterioration of women and the environment. Hurston's criticism is ingrained in the African American experience's cultural and historical background. Her characters not only negotiate harsh racial frameworks but also subvert gender conventions, upending the mechanisms that support the 'Othering' of women.

Integration of Cultural components

By including cultural components in their stories, both writers provide the ecofeminist conversation with a richer, more nuanced sense of identity and history. Morrison incorporates African-American theology and mythology into her writing to give her characters a deeper cultural depth that highlights their resiliency. Because of her training in anthropology, Hurston can integrate African American languages, folklore, and cultural customs into her writing, which helps to root her eco-feminist discourse in the real-world realities of her characters. The concept that the struggle against oppression is not just political but also closely related to cultural identity is strengthened by this combination.

Celebration of Empowerment and Resilience

Within the ecofeminist paradigm, both authors highlight the empowerment and resilience of their female characters. Notwithstanding the difficulties, figures such as Janie in Hurston's stories and Sethe in Morrison's writings emerge as potent representations of agency and resistance. The celebration of resilience extends beyond personal victories to become a shared story of empowerment that questions oppressive structures and presents many viewpoints on how marginalized groups, gender, and the environment interact.

In conclusion, Hurston and Morrison's texts illustrate the intersectionality of eco-feminism and the

complexity of the human experience. By clarifying the relationships between race, gender, and environment and challenging the notion of the "Other," these authors contribute to a better understanding of the interconnected problems faced by disadvantaged groups. By sharing their experiences, they call attention to the inequities of the systems that enable further degradation and pay tribute to the courage and tenacity of those who dare to challenge established norms and change their place in social and natural ecosystems.

Conclusion

In summary, Toni Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston's ecofeminist discourse reveals a deep examination of the complex relationships among the feminine, nature, and the "Other." Using literary masterpieces like "Beloved," "Song of Solomon," and "Their Eyes Were Watching God," both authors have deftly captured the twin battles that repressive systems face on the part of women and the natural environment. From an

ecofeminist perspective, Morrison and Hurston praise the resiliency of their female characters and question preconceptions and societal standards. Their contributions are significant because they have the power to rewrite stories about the experiences of women and the larger interconnections of race and gender in the ecological framework. These writers undermine the idea of the "Other" by criticizing structures that support the subjugation of oppressed people and providing substitute viewpoints that emphasize agency, empowerment, and the appreciation of diversity in culture. Through their subtle narrative and skillful blending of cultures, Morrison and Hurston have made a lasting impression on the literary world, challenging readers to reevaluate the connections between women, the natural world, and the forces that work to marginalize them. They provide a greater comprehension of the fundamental interconnectedness that characterizes the human experience in the face of social and ecological issues by changing these narratives.

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