

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

“We are Frog in Amber”
an ecofeminist reading of *The Poisonwood Bible*
and *Solar Storms*

Auteur : Riche Fanny

Promoteur(s) : Professor Ben De Bruyn

Année académique 2019-2020

ROGE2M1: Master (60) en langues et lettres modernes, orientation générale

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1	INTRODUCTION	5
1.1	Field and Purpose of the study	5
1.2	Methodology	9
2	<u>POSTCOLONIALISM, ECOFEMINISM AND THE MASTER MODEL</u>	11
2.1	Postcolonialism	11
2.2	Ecofeminism	12
2.3	A focus on the Master model	19
2.4	The novels	26
3	<u>THE SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED BOND BETWEEN WOMEN AND NATURE</u>	28
3.1	Women's connection to nature in literature	28
3.2	Conclusion	33
4	<u>THE MASTER IDENTITY</u>	35
4.1	The Master identity in <i>Solar Storms</i>	35
4.2	The Master identity in <i>The Poisonwood Bible</i>	38
4.3	"The rhetoric and institution of Christianity": an instrument of domination	40
5	<u>FEMALE CHARACTERS AND NATURE AS ACTIVE SUBJECTS IN <i>SOLAR STORMS</i> AND <i>THE POISONWOOD BIBLE</i></u>	43
5.1	<i>The Poisonwood Bible</i> : Coyote and Subverting Language	43
5.2	Native Americans and nature: a colonial construction?	57
5.3	<i>Solar Storms</i> : "There was no separation between us"	60
5.4	<i>Solar Storms</i> and <i>The Poisonwood Bible</i> : Agency and Creation	78
6	CONCLUSION: A FIGHT FOR EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY	82
7	BIBLIOGRAPHY	85

1 Introduction

1.1 Field and Purpose of the Study

Gender issues and the environmental crisis are two of the most ubiquitous topics in modern societies. Today, women are still being paid less than men for doing the same job. In fact, in the US, women working full-time make 82 percent of the amount that men make. Furthermore, there is a significant difference between the pay of a white woman and the pay of an indigenous or black woman¹. When it comes to the environmental crisis, I do not believe that this topic needs to be introduced. Nonetheless, here are some crucial facts. Every minute, the planet loses a stretch of forest equivalent to forty football fields.² According to WWF, “the rapid loss of species we are seeing today is estimated by experts to be between 1,000 and 10,000 times higher than the *natural extinction rate*.”³ This suggests that between 200 and 100,000 species are going extinct each year.⁴ At first, these elements do not appear to be related, but a certain school of thought analyses the connection between those crises. This school of thought is ecofeminism. It is a diverse and heterogeneous philosophy which contains several critical scholarly discourse. Ecofeminism combines two philosophies: feminism and environmentalism. It can be defined as “a philosophy that draws a connection between the domination of sexual, ethnic and social minorities, and the domination of nonhuman nature.”⁵ This means that ecofeminism analyses how the dominant culture dominates nature, and human beings who are considered as closer to nature. Therefore, ecofeminism investigates major forms of domination, which makes this philosophy essential for analysing our societies, both past and present.

Unfortunately, the field of ecofeminism has been marginalized, criticised and put under suspicion for a number of years. As stated by Greta Gaard, the renown ecocritic who has been influential within gender studies: “Formulated in the 1980s and gaining prominence in the early 1990s, by the end of that decade ecofeminism was critiqued as essentialist and effectively

¹ AAUW. “The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap.” *AAUW*. Accessed May 14, 2020. Available from internet <https://www.aauw.org/resources/research/simple-truth/>

²Soto, Michelle. “The planet loses 40 soccer fields worth of forests every minute”. *The Tico Times*. Accessed April 24, 2020. Available from internet <https://ticotimes.net/2019/03/24/the-planet-loses-40-soccer-fields-worth-of-forests-every-minute-2>

³ WWF. “How many species are we losing?”. *WWF*. Accessed April 24, 2020. Available from internet https://wwf.panda.org/our_work/biodiversity/biodiversity/

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Schultermandl, Silvia. “Fighting for the Mother/Land: An Ecofeminist Reading of Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*.” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 17, no. 3 (2005): p.68

discarded.”⁶ However, in view of the different crises, whether social or environmental, it must surely be time to bring back an approach studying “the intersections of feminist research and the various movements for social justice and environmental health.”⁷

In this paper, I analyse how forms of domination generate a relationship between women and nature in two novels: *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998) written by Barbara Kingsolver and *Solar Storms* (1995) written by Linda Hogan. These books were published two decades ago but they continue to be relevant today. These novels highlight that environmental and social issues which were apparent then, are still manifest today.

These two authors were chosen in light of the fact that they are female authors and that they are often depicted as environmental writers. As described by Alison E. Lawhorne, these authors “go beyond providing universal truths about humanity; they broaden their readers’ perspectives to include all of the natural world—humans, plants, animals, land, and water—in a bond necessary for all life’s survival.”⁸ However, the main factor which influenced my choice is that Linda Hogan is a Native American woman while Barbara Kingsolver is a non-indigenous writer. Considering this distinction is essential to analyse how authors and characters coming from different backgrounds perceive forms of domination. Hence, a thorough comparison of their work, of their descriptions of the natural world, and of the relationship between their protagonists and nature provide a solid foundation to carry out an ecofeminist analysis. However, the number of articles analysing the importance of ecofeminism in their writings is limited. These analyses often focus on the opposition between matriarchy and patriarchy, and in some cases they argue for a return to matriarchy. Even though this is an important aspect of the novels, it is not the sole message of these narratives. In fact, *Solar Storms* and *The Poisonwood Bible* go beyond the dichotomy between patriarchy and matriarchy: they argue for the deconstruction of dualisms. Therefore, studying those two novels permits to analyse forms of domination, but also to analyse the deconstruction of an oppressive model.

Furthermore, the two novels analysed are postcolonial narratives. They are set in the 1960s-1970s. In *The Poisonwood Bible*, the characters live in colonised Congo but witness the independence of the country as well as the aftermaths of this independence. *Solar Storms* does not take place during the colonisation of North America, but it reveals the repercussions of this

⁶ Gaard, Greta. "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism." *Feminist Formations* 23, no. 2 (2011): p.26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.28.

⁸ Lawhorne, Alison E. “‘Everything We Need Is Here’: Restoring Environmental Bonds Through Activism in *Solar Storms* by Linda Hogan, *Potiki* by Patricia Grace, and *Prodigal Summer* by Barbara Kingsolver”. 2012: p.1.

violent process. In fact, the novel unveils the living conditions in the Native American reservations that were created by the settlers in order to relocate Amerindian communities. It is clear that some forms of oppression and domination addressed by ecofeminism are commonly encountered in postcolonial narratives. Hence, the analysis of postcolonial novels should be a predominant field of study for ecofeminism. However, female narrators remain a minority in postcolonial narratives. As a matter of fact, postcolonial and historical writing tend to be written by male authors, and narrated by male protagonists.⁹ This is explained in Austenfeld's article.¹⁰ A striking example is the novella *Heart of Darkness*¹¹ written by Joseph Conrad. As a result, investigating *The Poisonwood Bible* and *Solar Storms* represents an alternative to male-centred postcolonial narratives.

Solar Storms highlights the appropriation as well as the exploitation of the land which was given to Amerindian tribes by the American government. The reader follows an Amerindian community, and more precisely Amerindian women who take action against developers planning to build a dam on tribal lands, near the Canadian border. Then, Kingsolver's novel depicts five female protagonists who are oppressed by Nathan Price, a virulent Baptist preacher who is also a terrible husband and father. These five female characters are Nathan's wife and their four daughters: Orleanna, Rachel, Leah, Adah and Ruth May. These protagonists also act as the narrators of the story, and the novel alternates between these five voices. Nonetheless, these five female narrators can also be considered as the colonisers because they leave America for the Belgian Congo with the aim of "enlightening" the Congolese population. Even though the novel does explore some historical events and some African characters in more detail, its primary focus remains the "Price girls". Consequently, these novels were singled out because they portray female narrators who are dominated, yet a distinction should be made between the narrative voices of each novel. The main characters and the narrator in Hogan's novel are the "colonised". In Kingsolver's novel, despite the fact that they are subject to their own form of oppression, the narrators are the "colonisers". Hence, comparing the characters' connection to their respective environments as well as their relationship with their oppressor(s) seems essential. In addition to this, taking into account the perception of both the "coloniser" and the "colonised" brings diversity to ecofeminism because

⁹ Austenfeld, Anne Marie. "The Revelatory Narrative Circle in Barbara Kingsolver's "The Poisonwood Bible"." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 36, no. 2 (2006): p.294.

¹⁰ Austenfeld, Anne Marie. "The Revelatory Narrative Circle in Barbara Kingsolver's "The Poisonwood Bible"." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 36, no. 2 (2006): pp.293-305.

¹¹ Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. London: Penguin Classics, 2007.

this field has sometimes been criticised for being dominated by white, middle class academics, activists and writers.¹²

Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate that *The Poisonwood Bible*, a novel written by Barbara Kingsolver, and Linda Hogan's novel *Solar Storms* expose domination and exploitation in postcolonial societies. Moreover, my contention is that these novels display a connection between inferior others, and more particularly women, and the land. Nonetheless, the narratives deny an immanent and essentialist bond between women and the environment, namely by complicating the common association of women and nature with reproduction and a lack of reason. As an alternative, both narratives generate a bond between female characters and the environment that cannot be assumed to exist already but that has to be built, and which is based on knowledge. In addition, the novels portray this connection as based on agency and on a rejection of domination. This domination stems from the Master model, a concept first introduced by Val Plumwood, the model is "the identity that is at the core of Western culture and that has initiated, perpetuated, and benefitted from Western culture's alienation from and domination of nature."¹³ This model conceptualises the world in dualisms which are exclusive and oppositional rather than inclusive and complementary. The research hypothesis is that these novels portray female characters and nature as active protagonists—in lieu of passive entities—who refuse this dominant Master model and its damaging effects. Instead, they advocate a non-hierarchical society and respect for both humans and nonhumans.

The present paper is organized as follows. At first, the study defines essential theoretical notions which will be used in the subsequent analysis and introduces the two novels that will be my primary case studies. Afterwards, the first chapter addresses the bond between feminised others and nature in literature. The purpose of the first section is to illustrate that the pejorative association between nature and women is a social construction generated by the Master model. The aim is to demonstrate that the historical and social association between feminised others and nature can be depicted in a constructive manner, one which does not perceive this connection as negative. In the second chapter, I demonstrate how *The Poisonwood Bible* and *Solar Storms* represent the Master identity through characters or group of characters. The third chapter exposes how the female characters of the aforementioned narratives and their environment move from a passive state and from passive roles to an active state and to active

¹² Longenecker, Marlene. "Women, Ecology, and the Environment: An Introduction." *NWSA Journal* 9, no. 3 (1997): p.3.

¹³ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.116.

roles. Finally, the last sections outline the conclusion of the research paper as well as the bibliography.

1.2 Methodology

The approach that I decided to use is ecocriticism, as my aim was to investigate how the ecological crisis is depicted in literature. However, my wish was to analyse the ecological crisis as represented by female writers, and as experienced by female characters. Thus, I chose to work on ecofeminism in light of the fact that it associates feminism and environmentalism. Furthermore, this research paper can also be linked to social sciences, and more precisely to the theory of intersectionality. This theory analyses the way “in which different types of discrimination (=unfair treatment because of a person’s sex, race, etc.) are linked to and affect each other.”¹⁴ This approach also relates to ecofeminism in light of the fact that both field analyse complex and intersectional forms of domination. This paper is primarily based on the research projects carried out by Val Plumwood and Greta Gaard. In order to study ecofeminist representation in the narratives, I decided to focus on two main theoretical concepts developed by Val Plumwood: the Master model and *terra nullius*. This second concept defines nature and “inferior” others as resources which can be exploited.¹⁵ While reading the novels, it was essential to search the narratives for metaphors which would generate a bond between feminised others and their environment in order to illustrate their similar status as “inferior” others. Moreover, it was necessary to analyse the narratives to determine if the characters, and nature, were perceived as *terra nullius*. In addition to this, it was necessary to examine the personification of nature in both novels in order to assert the active state of nature. This invalidates the idea that human beings are entirely separate from nature. It also makes the exploitation of nature and its perception as *terra nullius* unjustifiable. Furthermore, to test my hypothesis and to deconstruct the notion of feminised others as *terra nullius*, two strategies were applied. Firstly, it was imperative to look for representations of the Master model, but more importantly for representations which dismantles such a hierarchic structure. For example, the deconstruction of the typical associations between women, emotions, reproduction and all of the inferior “values” would enfeeble the Master model. Secondly, it was crucial to analyse how the female protagonists and nature are depicted as active beings. Lastly, I analysed the

¹⁴ Cambridge dictionary. “intersectionality” *Cambridge dictionary*. Accessed May 4th, 2020. Available from internet <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/intersectionality>

¹⁵ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.4.

implications of these depictions and how the authors advocate a new society in which the dualist and hierarchic structure is abolished. To study the non-hierarchic structure favoured by the novels, I focused on the trickster figure of the Coyote. This concept defines nature as an agent which is invariably and constantly changing. It is based on the idea that nature is an agent of its own construction. This concept was defined by Dona Haraway and was developed by Catriona Sandilands.

2 Postcolonialism, Ecofeminism and the Master model

2.1 Postcolonialism

In order to understand postcolonialism, it is fundamental to understand at first what colonialism is. Colonialism can be defined as the forced occupation of a place and society for resources/capitalist purposes and/or settlement.¹⁶ Firstly, as it is explained by Lea Ypi, the verb “to colonise” was used by the Romans to describe the settling of Roman citizens in new conquered –hostile- territories. These Romans were given land by the occupying authorities. However, these citizens retained their rights of original citizenship.¹⁷ This definition of colonialism can be used to describe colonial practices in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Settler colonialism was not entirely peaceful and in a number of cases the indigenous population was slaughtered.¹⁸ Secondly, another form of colonialism, which can be referred to as extractive colonialism, exploited the colonised land for natural resources. In such cases, settlement was not the primary focus.¹⁹ This form of colonialism extracted resources for capitalist purposes, the aim was to extract natural resources and sell these around the world. Lastly, during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the primary aim of colonialism primary was “civilisation”. The objective was to convert the population to Christianity and to educate “Barbarian peoples”.²⁰ It is clear that Christianity and the idea of “civilisation” had played a part in colonialism before the nineteenth and twentieth century. However, the idea of enlightenment and civilisation reached a peak during those two centuries.

Postcolonialism does not simply deal with what comes after colonialism and it is not a historical period. Nonetheless, this term can be confusing as it could be wrongly understood as referring to a historical period. Thus, in order to avoid this confusion, it is common to use the term “postcolonial theory” (or “postcolonial study”) instead of “postcolonialism”. Postcolonial theory is a branch of the humanities which contains a number of critical scholarly discourses. As a consequence, researchers fail to agree on a shared definition that would suit all of the different approaches encompassed by the term “postcolonialism”. However, it is clear that the field focuses on:

¹⁶ Comics and the postcolonial, 2020, given by professor Véronique Bragard

¹⁷ Ypi, Lea. "What's Wrong with Colonialism." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 41, no. 2 (2013): p.160.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.161.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

the complex cultural and national identities of colonized and decolonized societies (through permutations of gender, race, religion, and culture), the ways in which the power of the colonizer dominates the knowledge and representation of the colonized, and the dynamics of decolonization as the formerly colonized work to reconfigure their self-understandings and cultural identities.²¹

The main themes addressed by postcolonialism appear to be the consequences and the impact of colonialism on society and culture. Postcolonial theory shows that consequences of colonialism are still present, and that forms of colonialism are still apparent in our societies. As a consequence, postcolonial literature is a tool of great value to expose these forms of colonialism, and their consequences.

2.2 Ecofeminism

This term appeared for the first time in 1974 in *Le féminisme ou la mort*²², a book written by Françoise d'Eaubonne. Despite the fact that d'Eaubonne invented the term, she was not the only precursor of this philosophy. Gaard mentions other foundational texts and pioneers of ecofeminism which have had a considerable impact on the field. For example, Gaard introduces Susan Griffin's *Women and Nature* (1978). This text explores how the subordination of women, animals and nature by a violent and militarized male dominant elite was legitimized by the construction of their identity as feminine, separate and inferior.²³ Greta Gaard also alludes to Caroline Merchant's *The death of nature* (1980) which provides historical evidence to support the claim that women and nature have been dominated through the use of science and capitalism.

In her article, Gandon states that the term "ecofeminism" is not a mere contraction of two terms, respectively "feminism" and "ecology". It also combines two distinct philosophies: the concepts of Simone de Beauvoir on feminism and those promoted by Serge Moscovici on ecology and nature.²⁴ In other words, ecofeminism introduces philosophies and sciences concerned with ecology and environmentalism in light of a feminist approach.²⁵ Thus, it

²¹Styers, Randall. "Postcolonial Theory and the Study of Christian History." *Church History* 78, no. 4 (2009): pp.851-852.

²²D'Eaubonne, Françoise. *Le féminisme ou la mort*. Horay, 1974: pp.228.

²³Gaard, Greta. "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism." *Feminist Formations* 23, no. 2 (2011): p.28.

²⁴Gandon, Anne-Line « L'écoféminisme: une pensée féministe de la nature et de la société ». *Recherches féministes* 22, n° 1 (2009): p.5.

²⁵Longenecker, Marlene. "Women, Ecology, and the Environment: An Introduction." *NWSA Journal* 9, no. 3 (1997): p.1.

combines feminist research, social justice and environmental health.²⁶ To summarize, ecofeminism is the unification of two different philosophies that are concerned with the oppression of women as well as the exploitation of nature and the consequences of these practices on our society.

Later on, ecofeminism gave rise to a number of feminist activist movements in the 1980s. These movements were particularly developed in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America. They were characterized by their connection to ecology. As a matter of fact, those activist movements criticised militarism, unsustainable energy production, nuclear weaponry and colonialism.²⁷ In her article, Gaard illustrates these movements with a number of examples. She mentions “women for life on Earth” which was a peace-camp established in Great Britain to protest against nuclear weapon testing. As for movements across the USA, Gaard acknowledges women’s Pentagon actions as well as “women and life on earth”. Both movements denied the oppression of “those constructed as feminine.”²⁸ Moreover, ecofeminism was also used by a number of philosophers. Gandon cites Val Plumwood, Ariel Salleh, Karren Warren and Vandana Shiva. These philosophers have used the term ecofeminism as defined by Gandon.²⁹ Longenecker states that ecofeminism relies on the fact that both nature and culture are considered as feminine, and this gendered view is what enables masculine domination, authority and control, in a society ruled by patriarchal practices. In short, because women and nature are feminine they are subordinated to masculinity. Consequently, men have an instrumental relationship with women and nature.³⁰ Explicitly, both the environment and women are considered as instruments for men; they serve men’s purposes.

In addition to this, ecofeminism investigates how forms of oppressions related to gender, sexual orientation, class, and race, are all also linked to nature as well.³¹ Gaard asserts that the liberation of women cannot happen without the liberation of nature and vice versa. The reason

²⁶Gaard, Greta. "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism." *Feminist Formations* 23, no. 2 (2011): p.28.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.28-30.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.29.

²⁹ These philosophers have used this term to highlight the connection between women and nature as well as the exploitation, oppression of both women and nature by a male-dominant society. This is the primary concept of ecofeminism.

³⁰ In this case, the term instrumental should not be confused with Parson’s view on gender roles. In Parson’s model, women have expressive roles while men have instrumental roles. In this case, women and nature are instruments, they are meant to serve men’s purposes.

³¹ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.115.

behind this statement is that Western ideology constructed women and nature as connected to each other.

Gaard emphasizes that these forms of oppression stem from Western culture's ideologies. These ideologies, as explained by Gaard, are based on normative dualisms: values are classified and put into a hierarchy. Warren describes the notion of "value dualisms" as "ways of conceptually organizing the world in binary, disjunctive terms, wherein each side of the dualism is 'seen as exclusive [...] and oppositional [...] and where higher value or superiority is attributed to one disjunct [...] than the other'."³² The meaning of this quote is that values are binary and in a constant state of opposition. For example, the dualism "civilized/primitive", "master/slave" or "reason/emotion". These form dichotomous pairings in which the values that are considered as superior can be defined as forms of reason while the inferior disjuncts can be defined as forms of nature. In the examples mentioned above, reason would have a greater value than emotion. This model is called the "Master model", and the sum of all the greater values is called the "Master identity", defined as "the identity that is at the core of western culture's alienation and domination of nature."³³ In other words, this dualist structure is inherent to the different forms of oppression and domination. This is due to the fact that the Master model and the association of inferior others with nature construct patterns of domination. As a matter of fact, human beings or entities that are considered as closer to nature are linked to the "inferior" values. Those "inferior" beings are defined as feminised others. Hence, the bond with the environment is used as a justification for the domination and the oppression of those considered as inferior. For example, Gaard explains that women are commonly associated with emotions rather than reason, with the body instead of the spirit/mind, and with reproduction as opposed to production. These associations make women inferior to the Master identity. Gaard asserts that "the critical point to remember is that each of the oppressed identity groups, each characteristic of the other, is seen as 'closer to nature' in the dualisms and ideology of Western culture."³⁴

In this model, the inferior others are defined as "*terra nullius*", "a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings, and hence available to be annexed for the purposes of those supposedly identified with reason or intellect, and to be conceived and moulded in relation to

³² Warren, 1987, p6 in Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): pp.115-116.

³³ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): pp.115-116.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.119.

these purposes.”³⁵ This structure based on dualism is entirely rejected by ecofeminism. Instead, as stated by Gaard, ecofeminism “acknowledges both women and men as equal parts of culture and nature.”³⁶ Therefore, this philosophy rejects hierarchical structures, as these systems are threats for all that ecofeminism stands for.

However, it is important to highlight that ecofeminism is a broad subject which comprises different branches. As a consequence, there are many different ways to carry out ecofeminist research. There are three major approaches: cultural or spiritual ecofeminism, economical or political ecofeminism and lastly, queer ecofeminism.

Gandon focuses on the first approach, namely cultural or spiritual ecofeminism. This approach reclaims the connection to nature “as a source of power and celebration, a sign of women’s greater sensitivity to and capacity to care for nature.”³⁷ The nature of the bond varies depending on the theory, it can be considered as a biological bond in light of the reproductive abilities of women, linking them to nature’s ability to give life. The bond can also be metaphorical, based on the idea of “Mother Earth”, but it is an “equally powerful source of what they see as their moral call to stewardship and protection of the environment.”³⁸ Lastly, the bond can also be considered as an opportunity to empower both women and nature. This form of ecofeminism focuses on religion and spirituality, but more precisely it aims to rethink them. Two different paths can be explored in order to rethink spirituality. The first one lies in the criticism of existing religions and of their portrayal of women and nature. For example, Gandon mentions Christianity and the Bible, in which human beings are not solely described as external to nature, but also as superior to it. Human beings are depicted as controlling nature, as illustrated in Genesis 1, where God invites humans to have dominion over nature and all living beings.³⁹ Secondly, Gandon states that another path embraced by some ecofeminists is to work on polytheist religions or animist religions: “Une certaine forme d’écoféminisme spirituel renoue avec des croyances du type polythéiste ou animiste.”⁴⁰ In this approach, women

³⁵ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.4.

³⁶ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.118.

³⁷ Longenecker, Marlene. "Women, Ecology, and the Environment: An Introduction." *NWSA Journal* 9, no. 3 (1997): p.2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” Genesis 1:28- King James Bible: <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Genesis-1-28/> Accessed May 10, 2020.

⁴⁰ Gandon, Anne-Line « L’écoféminisme: une pensée féministe de la nature et de la société ». *Recherches féministes* 22, n° 1 (2009): pp.15-16.

and men do not worship a God; they worship nature itself. In both, the aim is to analyse and criticise our modern beliefs, and to promote religions and spirituality in which there are no hierarchies and oppressions, whether between men and women or between humans and nature.⁴¹

Approaches like cultural ecofeminism and spiritual ecofeminism are still highly criticised for being essentialist. By implying that all women are intrinsically linked to nature, such an approach suggests that all women are the same, and that there is an essential “woman” identity. As a consequence, the whole field of ecofeminism was put under suspicion, as Gaard states in her article:

Focusing on the celebration of goddess spirituality and the critique of patriarchy advanced in cultural ecofeminism, poststructuralist and other third-wave feminisms portrayed all ecofeminisms as an exclusively essentialist equation of women with nature, discrediting ecofeminism’s diversity of arguments and standpoints to such an extent that, by 2010, it was nearly impossible to find a single essay, much less a section, devoted to issues of feminism and ecology (and certainly not ecofeminism), species, or nature in most introductory anthologies used in women’s studies, gender studies, or queer studies.⁴²

However, completely rejecting the historical conception of women’s identity, as well as the connection drawn between women and nature, would not be a constructive approach. In Alaimo’s words:

Ecofeminism’s conception of ordinary ‘female’ activities and experiences as the basis of planet saving could attract women who feel left behind by what they perceive as a feminist movement that is only concerned with women achieving ‘successful careers’. The potential for ecofeminism to attract women who define themselves in traditional roles could benefit both the environmental and feminist movements.⁴³

In addition to this, Alaimo writes that the glorification of nature, which appears to her as an ecofeminist strategy, would encourage both a more respectful and less exploitive approach towards nature.⁴⁴ However, Alaimo insists that this glorification of nature can lead to a mysticism which would reinforce the schism between human beings and nature instead of

My translation: [One form of spiritual ecofeminism reconnects with animist or polytheist beliefs.]

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Gaard, Greta. "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism." *Feminist Formations* 23, no. 2 (2011): p.31.

⁴³ Alaimo, Stacy. "Cyborg and Ecofeminist Interventions: Challenges for an Environmental Feminism." *Feminist Studies* 20, no. 1 (1994): p.143.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

deconstructing it.⁴⁵ Consequently, this approach has positive aspects because it can attract women who find themselves in more “traditional” roles, and it can encourage a more sustainable approach to nature. However, this approach also has negative aspects because the glorification of nature can considerably deepen the chasm between human and nature.

The second approach, consistently called political or economical ecofeminism, rejects an immanent connection between women and nature because this bond is considered essentialist and dangerous. The reason for the rejection of this bond, according to Longenecker, is that the claim of an immanent and intrinsic connection with the environment will solely recreate patterns of domination which ecofeminism tries to resist and deny.⁴⁶ Moreover, this connection between women and nature is questioned due to its tendency towards biological determinism.⁴⁷ As a matter of fact, several ecofeminists feel that emphasizing this connection would threaten to restore patriarchal structures.⁴⁸ The supporters of this approach argue that the best way to protect nature is to “deconstruct the nature-culture (and gender) dualism itself as a false dichotomy.”⁴⁹ In other words, the conception of human beings as exterior to nature has to be deconstructed. In addition, economical or political ecofeminism argues that “in bringing together ecology and feminism, ecofeminists see women and nature as subjects to the destructive socio-economic and technological systems of modern male-dominated society”⁵⁰, as outlined by Mellor (1997, 178). Gandon describes this argument by quoting Salleh: “l’écoféminisme permet de dire que les femmes et l’environnement subissent les mêmes forces d’oppression et d’exploitation devant le capitalisme financier et la mondialisation.”⁵¹ As a result, this means that capitalism, industrialization and globalization are tools of domination used on both women and nature. Gandon states that women and nature are external to the economy because the system exploits them. In the case of women, it is highly common to see

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Longenecker, Marlene. "Women, Ecology, and the Environment: An Introduction." *NWSA Journal* 9, no. 3 (1997): p.2.

⁴⁷ Sandilands, Catriona. "Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer: Ecofeminism and (More) Questions of Identity." *NWSA Journal* 9, no. 3 (1997): p.25.

⁴⁸ Longenecker, Marlene. "Women, Ecology, and the Environment: An Introduction." *NWSA Journal* 9, no. 3 (1997): p.4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁵⁰ Mellor, 1997: p.178. in Longenecker, Marlene. "Women, Ecology, and the Environment: An Introduction." *NWSA Journal* 9, no. 3 (1997): p.13.

⁵¹ Salleh in Gandon, Anne-Line « L’écoféminisme: une pensée féministe de la nature et de la société ». *Recherches féministes* 22, n° 1 (2009): p.14.

my translation: [ecofeminism allows to express the fact that women and the environment undergo similar forms of oppressions and exploitation by financial capitalism and globalization.]

female workers being underpaid or not paid at all. As a consequence, these ecofeminist researchers criticise capitalism and our modern society as expressed by Gandon:

Il s'agit de critiquer l'idéologie capitaliste qui nous fait croire que nous sommes toutes et tous des égaux devant la nature, que nous sommes toutes et tous libres de l'exploiter pour nous enrichir comme Robinson Crusoé sur son île, alors qu'il faut tenir compte des biais de sexe, de classe et de race.⁵²

Apart from cultural ecofeminism and political (or economical) ecofeminism, there is a third position, queer ecofeminism. As mentioned above, ecofeminism defines our society as ruled by a Master identity, and has having a structure based on dualism. In the previous section, some examples of these oppositions were highlighted, but in one of her articles, Gaard urges us to include new dualisms. She adds four new dualisms, which are: white/non-white, financially empowered/impoverished, heterosexual/queer and lastly, reason/the erotic. The reason for this addition is that queer people are also victim of the dualist structure prevailing in Western societies. This oppression is demonstrated by the fact that queer people are usually criticised as being "against nature" which implies that nature is valued. However, it is not the case, as nature and queers are both devalued, in reality. Thus, the "nature" that queers are asked to conform to is simply the "dominant paradigm of heterosexuality", as explained by Gaard. What is qualified as "natural" is indubitably linked to procreation and procreativity, this claim has been used to "manipulate women back into compulsory motherhood and so-called women sphere."⁵³ As a result, both queer and female individuals are relegated to the sidelines by the idea that sexuality has to have a reproductive purpose and that motherhood is the true nature and purpose of women. Reproduction and motherhood are not perceived as a choice or as a project, they are seen as an obligation and as a process which is undergone or even endured. It is necessary to rethink the concepts of sexuality, reproduction and motherhood. Thus, reproduction and motherhood needs to be conceived as a project which is undertaken in order to escape the dualist structure. In addition to this, linking sexuality with reproduction reinforces the claim that what is constructed or depicted as natural is heterosexuality. The major consequence of promoting

⁵² Gandon, Anne-Line « L'écoféminisme: une pensée féministe de la nature et de la société ». *Recherches féministes* 22, n° 1 (2009): p.15.

My translation: [it's about criticising the capitalist ideology which makes us believe that we are all equal in front of nature, that we are all free to exploit it in order to get rich like Robinson Crusoe on his island. When in fact, we have to take into account sexual, social and racial biases.]

⁵³ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.120.

one type of sexuality over the other types is that by naturalizing one type or one form of sexuality, the Master identity attempts to take control of sexuality, as outlined by Gaard.⁵⁴

Furthermore, Gaard emphasizes that the term “natural” has been commonly used to justify social norms, not just heterosexuality. In addition to this, queer ecofeminism can be used to study colonialism and the role of religious missionaries in colonial practices. For example, by analysing how non-white populations were described as unnatural due to their skin colour, but also because of their sexual behaviours.

It is clear that researchers are not obligated to position themselves in favour of one of the different stances. Despite the fact that these approaches are extremely different, most ecofeminists argue that human beings are separate from nature in some ways, but not entirely separate, which is illustrated in the following extract: “to assume that humans can ever be wholly ‘other’ to nature is to ignore ecological reality.”⁵⁵ In addition to that, most ecofeminists claim that even if there is no particular connection between women and nature, “the gendered nature of labor, knowledge, and social practices does give women a ‘closer’ view of environmental problems and solutions.”⁵⁶ In other words, women are not intrinsically linked to nature, but in light of their status in society, and due to the gendered distribution of labour, women have a different perception of environmental issues. This will be important to analyse how the characters in the novels relate to their environment, and how they describe it. In addition, another trait which characterises ecofeminism is its critique of patriarchal structures, and patriarchal discourses, which are characterised by dualist mode of thinking. The following section defines this particular dualist model.

2.3 A Focus on the Master Model

This dualist structure stems from the human/nature antinomy as well as from the reason/nature conflict. Reason has been defined as (mostly male) human beings’ prerogative, and as a tool to overcome nature. It generated two concepts: progress and development. This had two major consequences. First, the overcoming of nature has been perceived as the path towards progress and development. Second, in light of the fact that reason was seen as the tool to overcome nature, those supposedly possessing reason conceived themselves as superior to

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.122.

⁵⁵ Longenecker, Marlene. "Women, Ecology, and the Environment: An Introduction." *NWSA Journal* 9, no. 3 (1997): p.3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

nature. In other words, the possession of reason bestows superiority over nature. This is expressed by Plumwood in the following extract:

The concept of reason provides the unifying and defining contrast for the concept of nature, much as the concept of husband does for that of wife, as master for slave. Reason in the western tradition has been constructed as the privileged domain of the master, who has conceived nature as a wife or subordinate other encompassing and representing the sphere of materiality, subsistence and the feminine which the master has split off and constructed as beneath him.⁵⁷

Thus, the human/nature opposition originates from the possession of reason. The result was a conception according to which human beings are conceived as separate from nature.⁵⁸ Hence, the concept of reason associated with the notions of progress and development led to a number of dualisms. As a consequence, those who possess reason are superior to nature but are also superior to those who do not possess it. Reason has allowed human beings to conceive entities which are perceived as closer to nature, as subordinate. Those entities are inferior and thus associated to femininity. Thus, they are named “inferior others” or “feminised others”. They include women, racial minorities, elderly people, children or LGBTQ communities/individuals, to mention a few examples. Gaard summarizes this theory in the following excerpt:

Western culture’s oppression of nature can be traced back to the construction of the dominant human male as a self fundamentally defined by its property of reason, and the construction of reason as definitionally opposed to nature and all that is associated with nature, including women, the body, emotions and reproductions (Plumwood, 1993). Feminists have also argued that women’s oppression in Western culture is characterized by our association with emotion, the body, and reproduction.⁵⁹

Thus, the possession of reason is the characteristic which defines the superior self and, in consequence, it is used as a justification for the domination and subordination of the feminised others and nature. This context and these notions gave birth to a dualistic model – the Master model – which is based on dualisms and key oppositions. Val Plumwood and Greta Gaard offer the following key oppositions present in the dualist structure:

⁵⁷ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.118.

Table 1. The key oppositions in the dualist structure.

Master identity	Feminised Others
Culture	Nature
Male	Female
Reason	Nature
Mind	Body (nature)
Master	Slave
Reason	Matter (physicality)
Rationality	Animality (nature)
Reason	Emotion (nature)
Mind, spirit	Nature
Freedom	Necessity (nature)
Universal	Particular
Human	Nature (nonhuman)
Civilised	Primitive (nature)
Production	Reproduction (nature)
Public	Private
Subject	Object
Self	Other
White	Non-white
Financially empowered	Impoverished
Heterosexual	Queer
Reason	The erotic

Plumwood adds that these key oppositions “reflect the major forms of oppression in Western culture. In particular the dualisms of male/female, mental/manual (mind, body), civilised/primitive, human/nature correspond directly to and naturalise gender, class, race and nature oppressions.”⁶⁰ The model in Table 1 conceptualises the world in dualisms that are exclusive and oppositional rather than inclusive and complementary.⁶¹ In this schema, the values on the left side can be defined as forms of reason, while the values on the right side can be defined as forms of nature.⁶² The values representing forms of reason are perceived as being superior, and characteristic of masculinity. Those who possess the master’s “qualities” or forms of reason can be defined as subjects who exemplify to the Master identity. In short, the Master identity is the sum of all the values that can be associated with Reason.

In contrast, the values which are depicted as forms of nature are perceived as inferior and are commonly associated with femininity. Consequently, all the entities which are

⁶⁰ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.43.

⁶¹ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.116.

⁶² Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.44.

comprised under the “others” category share the characteristics of being feminised, animalised and naturalised.⁶³ For example, as exposed in table 1, non-white populations can be seen as closer to primitiveness and to nature rather than to culture, civilisation and reason. Thus, the non-white population can be perceived as inferior to the Master identity. Therefore, the justification for the domination and the exploitation of both feminised others and nature is based on such pernicious dualisms.

The justification for this subordination is partly built on a dichotomy between that which is active and that which is passive. The feminised others, analogously to nature, are defined as “*terra nullius*”. In other words, because nature and feminised others are conceived as inferior and as passive entities which fundamentally lack reason, the Master identity is free to exploit them for its own purposes. Thus, nature is only the background for the Master identity’s activities and values. It is a passive entity which can be used for productive purposes. As Plumwood describes it: “It [the Master identity] assumes that nature is a nullity, without value or direction on its own account, and that these things are added in by human labour.”⁶⁴ It is clear that a relationship can be established between the concepts of *terra nullius* and extractive colonialism. In both cases, the land is exploited for natural resources and those considered as inferior can be used for the benefits of the masters.

It is now clear that the Master identity asserts its superiority, and that it construes the feminised others as inferior to it and closer to nature through the medium of dualisms. However, it is imperative to take a closer look at the strategies used to establish these dualisms and the Master’s superiority. Dualisms can be defined as follows

Dualism is a relation of separation and domination inscribed and naturalised in culture and characterized by radical exclusion, distancing and opposition between orders constructed as systematically higher and lower, as inferior and superior, as ruler and ruled, which treats the division as part of the natures of beings construed not merely as different but as belonging to radically different orders or kinds, and hence as not open to change.⁶⁵

This definition is not sufficient. In fact, dualisms are generated through a number of processes. The aim of these processes is to construct the other as entirely different, as the exact opposite of the Master identity. Plumwood explains that there are five features which are characteristic of dualisms. These features are employed by the Master identity to establish its

⁶³ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.117.

⁶⁴ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.111.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.47-48.

superiority and define the feminised others as exterior and separate. The following overview describes these main features as they were defined by Plumwood.

1. Backgrounding or denial. This process originates from the fact that the Master model denies that it is dependent on the underside. The Master identity uses and benefits from the feminised other but refuses to admit its dependence on them. According to Plumwood, this process can take many different forms. She mentions a number of them such as making the other inessential and denying his or her contribution, or “treating the other as the background to the master’s foreground.”⁶⁶ In other words, this process is based on the Master model, taking advantage of the underside while simultaneously denying its reliance on the feminised others.⁶⁷

2. Radical exclusion or hyperseparation. Gaard defines this procedure in the following terms: “radical exclusion, in which the master magnifies the differences between self and other and minimizes the shared qualities.”⁶⁸ In order to construct the other as inferior and not solely different, it is necessary to accentuate the qualities possessed by the Master identity which are absent (or described as absent) in the inferior others. This chasm between superior and inferior, between master and slave, is used to legitimise the disparate and contrasting destinies.⁶⁹ For example, hyperseparation could be used to justify that women should stay at home because they are closer to their emotions; they are more nurturing. Plumwood illustrates hyperseparation through the medium of the male/female dualism. She asserts that “men are defined as active, intellectual, egoistic, competitive and dominant, while women are defined as possessing the complementary qualities, as passive, intuitive, altruistic, nurturant and submissive”.⁷⁰ Through this example, it is clear that the values possessed by the male are the antithesis of the values of the females. Thus, it exposes how women are conceived as entirely different from men.

3. Incorporation or relational definition. As mentioned above, radical exclusion (or hyperseparation) constructs the underside not only as different, but also as inferior. Incorporation is the process through which the Master identity’s values or characteristics are perceived as standard while the underside, or feminised others, are

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.48.

⁶⁷ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.117.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*

⁶⁹ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.49.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p50

defined in relation to the Master identity. In consequence, “because the other is defined and perceived in relation to the master, he or she is not encountered fully as an independent other.”⁷¹ In other words, the other, or underside, is systematically described in negative terms or in contrast to the Master identity, due to their lack of the “standard” values.

4. Instrumentalism or objectification. This process can be linked to the *terra nullius* notion, as it is based on the conception of the feminised other as having no purpose or aim of its own. Therefore, the feminised other can be exploited, used as a resource for the Master identity. The underside is considered as an instrument for the master’s purposes.

5. Homogenisation or stereotyping. “In homogenisation, differences among the inferiorised group are disregarded.”⁷² The feminised or “inferior” others are seen as homogenous.

Lastly, it must be noted that Plumwood privileges the concept of Master model in lieu of patriarchy or a patriarchal model. The reason for this is that patriarchy, and the dichotomy between human/nature, and nature/culture, is not universal but rather representative of Western culture.⁷³ This is expressed in the following extract: “Accounts of a generalised ‘patriarchy’ as the villain behind the ecological crisis implicitly assume that western culture is human culture.”⁷⁴ Or as stated by Linda Hogan: “Don’t you think that *civilization* is a confusing word? It seems that it always implies Western civilization and certain kinds of behavior and ways of being in the world that are in conflict with the environment.”⁷⁵ The term “Master model” specifies that the dualist structure prevails in Western societies while patriarchy suggests universality. Hence, the use of the term “Master model” is privileged by Plumwood because it highlights that such a dualist structure is not universal, or typical of human culture, but rather that it is representative of Western societies, and Western culture. The Master model, and Master identity, are essential to understand how some characters in literature are constructed. This model is also crucial to understand how some characters are perceived by the reader, by other characters, and how they perceive themselves.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.52.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.53.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Murray, John A. “Of Panthers and people”. *Terrain*. Accessed May 6, 2020. Available from internet <https://www.terrain.org/1999/interviews/linda-hogan/>

In the context of my paper, I agree with political and economical ecofeminists that there is no biological nor immanent connection between women and nature. Nonetheless, I claim that feminised others have a link with nature. My conclusion is based on the following argument: the definition of “woman” and “nature” as well as the bond between them are socially and culturally constructed by the Master model. These definitions are anchored in Western ideology. Hence, women and nature are linked by the fact that they are considered as “inferior” others. Furthermore, feminised others and nature are connected because they are both dominated by the dualistic structure. In light of the fact that they are both dominated and exploited by the Master model, it is logical to study the processes of domination over both the categories of “women” and “nature” as an ensemble rather than separately. In addition to this, I argue, similarly to Plumwood and Gaard, that our society is based on a dualist structure, i.e. the Master model. This model is unsustainable, and this hierarchic construction should be dismantled. The reason for this is that a binary model reduces women, racial minorities and nature to passive entities that do not evolve. Moreover, such a model construes immutable identities that do not comprise internal multiplicities. To dismantle the Master model, it is necessary to rethink both feminised others and nature. The construction of both feminised others and nature as active entities, possessing intellect and their own consciousness, nullifies the justification of the exploitation of nature. This is affirmed by Sandilands in the following excerpt:

If nature is understood as an active and unpredictable character (or series of characters)- as an *agent* cocreating the world with other, human agents- it is difficult not only to justify its exploitation as passive and inert ‘resource’ for human activity but also the dualistic terms through which humanity has progressively come to understand itself as ‘separate’ from nature.⁷⁶

As a consequence, in this paper, I argue that in *Solar Storms* and in *The Poisonwood Bible*, “inferior” others and nature move away from their passive state and enter an active state. Moreover, by conceptualising feminised others and nature as allies and active agents in what Alaimo describes as a “mutual struggle”⁷⁷, the novel destabilize the Master model and deconstructs the model on which it is grounded.⁷⁸

These novels create a new model which is non-hierarchical and non-binary. My hypothesis is that this new model is similar to Coyote. In her article, Catriona Sandilands, in a

⁷⁶ Sandilands, Catriona. "Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer: Ecofeminism and (More) Questions of Identity." *NWSA Journal* 9, no. 3 (1997): p.32.

⁷⁷ Alaimo, Stacy. "Cyborg and Ecofeminist Interventions: Challenges for an Environmental Feminism." *Feminist Studies* 20, no. 1 (1994): p.133.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.149.

similar fashion to the famous feminist scholar Donna Haraway, claims that nature is “an active, unpredictable (and ungendered) trickster—coyote—whose agency allows it to defy the totalization of human representation.”⁷⁹ Sandilands adopts Haraway’s construction of nature as Coyote. The Coyote figure as a trickster originates in Native American stories.⁸⁰ This character is presented as a shape-shifter, it is able to “embody aspects of other beings while remaining ‘itself’.”⁸¹ As a consequence, trickster figures and stories featuring such entities portray a world and a society in which it is virtually impossible to conceive definite and immutable identities. This is explained by Phelan as follows: “They suggest a world in which caution and care are called for, in which we cannot assume that we know who is who or what is what.”⁸² Therefore, the notion of nature as Coyote, active and changing, makes it difficult to justify the exploitation of nature and its resources, as it can no longer be defined as a dormant and passive character.⁸³ Nature is not just a resource with purely instrumental value, it is a living web of creatures with lives and intrinsic values of their own. Similarly, if human beings are perceived and constructed as unpredictable and in perpetual evolution, it becomes increasingly difficult to “classify” them in stable and monolithic categories.⁸⁴ As a consequence, through their depictions of nature and feminised others as agents, the narratives undermine the domination of the Master identity and participate in creating a new model.

2.4 The Novels

Solar Storms, first published in 1995, is set in the United States in the early 1970s. The story follows Angela Jensen—a native American young woman who was in foster care since she was a child—as she goes back to her community. When she first arrives at Adam’s Ribs, she finds a very poor and mainly elderly community. Angela, who is nicknamed Angel, first lives with Agnes and Dora-Rouge, her great-great grandmother, until she leaves the mainland to live on a small island with Bush, the woman who saved her from her abusive mother. Through her relatives’ narratives and stories, Angel rediscovers a world of rituals,

⁷⁹ Haraway, Donna quoted in Sandilands, Catriona. "Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer: Ecofeminism and (More) Questions of Identity." *NWSA Journal* 9, no. 3 (1997): p.31.

⁸⁰ Phelan, Shane. "Coyote Politics: Trickster Tales and Feminist Futures." *Hypatia* 11, no. 3 (1996): p.113.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.131.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Sandilands, Catriona. "Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer: Ecofeminism and (More) Questions of Identity." *NWSA Journal* 9, no. 3 (1997): p.32.

⁸⁴ Sandilands, Catriona. "Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer: Ecofeminism and (More) Questions of Identity." *NWSA Journal* 9, no. 3 (1997): pp.18-40.

dreams, songs and reconnects with nature. When this all-female family learns that a developer plans to erect a dam on tribal lands, the characters embark on a journey to protect their environment. This will lead Angel to meet her abusive mother. The rediscovery of her family and her past enables her to understand herself and the land she came from.

The Poisonwood Bible is a novel written by Barbara Kingsolver in 1998. The novel follows Nathan Price, an evangelical Baptist who leaves for Congo with the intent to preach the word of God. The character embarks on a journey with his wife, Orleanna, and their four daughters: Rachel, Leah, Adah and Ruth May. This American family enters Congo with a number of preconceived ideas, beliefs carried by Nathan Price, an uncompromising and fierce man. Nonetheless, when they arrive in Kilanga, they realise that Africa, and life there, are far different from what they originally thought. As a consequence, the Price girls are obligated to question their education, their religion, gender roles and white supremacy. Forced to think for themselves and to adapt, the girls will start considering Africa and its inhabitants under a new light, but most importantly they will question and reshape their own identities.

3 The Socially Constructed Bond between Women and Nature

The following sections aim to demonstrate that the socially constructed parallels between the feminised others and nature have been used to devaluate the aforementioned entities, and that these parallels have been integrated into Western culture. These socially constructed associations are used to affirm the superiority of the Master identity, and in parallel to affirm the inferiority of feminised others. However, as illustrated in this chapter, these constructions can be reversed and used in constructive way to criticise the Master model. In order to achieve this, I analyse literature, and more precisely the representation of women and nature in literature. I compare male and female authors' depictions of the connection between nature and women in Bildungsromans⁸⁵ from the first half of the nineteenth century. Secondly, an analysis of how female authors describe this bond is carried out. We observe two main alternatives: first, female authors embrace and claim the connection between women and nature. Second, female authors depict the bond between women and nature as a connection that has to be built by women themselves.

3.1 Women's connection to nature in literature

In the first place, this paper intends to demonstrate that literature exhibits signs of a connection between women and the natural world. In this context, nature comprises earth, trees, plants and animals. The attachment of women to nature is noticeable in novels written by female authors as well as in some written by male authors. Yet, female and male authors do not describe this relationship in similar manners. As reported by Annis Pratt, male authors of Bildungsroman (from the first half of the nineteenth century) appear to criticise and to condemn the importance of nature for their female characters. For example, Pratt writes that the male character finds the female protagonist's naturism "distasteful"⁸⁶, and that "the male author seems to be looking at

⁸⁵ Bildungsroman is a term which describes a literary genre (or a novel) which focuses on the moral/intellectual development of its protagonist. It can be linked to a "coming of age" theme. In the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, it is defined as "a novel about the moral and psychological growth of the main character". Merriam-Webster. "Bildungsroman". *Merriam-Webster.com*. Accessed May 19, 2020. Available from internet: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bildungsroman>

⁸⁶ Pratt, Annis. "Women and Nature in Modern Fiction." *Contemporary Literature* 13, no. 4 (1972): p.482.

a female phenomenon and disapproving of it.”⁸⁷ In opposition to this, female Bildungsroman authors do not display similar judgments and disapproval towards their protagonists’ attachment and devotion to the natural world. The criticism and disapproval exhibited by male authors confirm that the construction of women as closer to nature rather than culture, as favouring emotion over reason, has been used to categorise them as irrational. Consequently, this has been used to justify their inferiority and domination.

In parallel to the opposition between male and female writers, an opposition between female and male protagonists is apparent. According to Simone de Beauvoir, girls and boys experience the “quest for self” in distinctive manners: “the adolescent girl will devote a special love to nature: still more than the adolescent boy, she worships it.”⁸⁸ De Beauvoir continues by saying that when the adolescent girl takes possession of nature, she takes possession of herself. In her article, Pratt uses a novel written by Jewett as an example for the connection between women and nature. Annis Pratt states that the young heroine is free in nature and that she does not wish for a “vehicle out of her green world.”⁸⁹ However, it is essential to notice that the boy in Jewett’s novel is seen by the female protagonist as separate from nature. Pratt then explains that the girl will choose the wild world over the boy. This is due to the fact that nature represents freedom while the boy and the love he carries stand for “canine servitude”⁹⁰.

Through female authors’ descriptions of the relationship between women and nature, it appears that there is an acceptance of the socially constructed notion of women and nature as being connected. Nonetheless, an awareness of the dualist structure which constructs both women and nature as inferior also seems to exist. This is revealed by the servitude that arises as a consequence of the boy’s love. In addition to this, Pratt’s analysis of one of May Sinclair’s novels reveals that a number of characters prefer nature over people: “there are heroines enough in the female genre who perceive love and men as phases in their quests for self-determination and less important to them than the ‘reality’ of nature.”⁹¹ The insistence on “the female genre” reveals that this is typical of female Bildungsroman authors during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This illustrates two main characteristics: first, female authors have occasionally embraced the association between the feminine and nature which, in the case of these twentieth century novels, reflects an essentialist approach of the bond between the natural

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. New York: Knopf, 1953: p.362.

⁸⁹ Pratt, Annis. "Women and Nature in Modern Fiction." *Contemporary Literature* 13, no. 4 (1972): p.479.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.483.

world and women. Secondly, the reaction exhibited by these authors regarding the Master model appears to devalue the male rational approach which is expressed by the rejection of the male characters, and the refusal of the female/male relationship. This is supported by Gaard in her article as a probable reaction to the association between women and nature: "Some have rejected these associations and attempted to align themselves with the public male sphere of rationality (liberal feminists). Others have reversed the valuation and embraced these associations while devaluing the male rational culture (cultural feminists)."⁹² It seems that the female protagonist rejects the male protagonist and conceives them as being entirely separate from nature.

The different behaviours which are displayed by female characters and by male characters towards nature depict a separation between nature and male characters. The latter are constructed as exterior to the natural world. This argument is supported by Pratt in the following excerpt: "the heroine of the female genre being more likely to view herself as coextensive with the green world and the hero of the male genre to view his heroine and the green world as coextensive parts of each other but rightfully subordinate to him."⁹³ This actively illustrates how the Master model has become part of Western ideology and culture. The male protagonist views women and nature as close to each other but subordinated to him, and the male author depicts the connection between women and nature in negative terms. As stated by numerous ecofeminists, the connection to nature is often devalued and criticised. Hence, the supposed possession of reason by the male character allows him to build a representation of women and nature as inferior to him. Hence, the construction of women and nature as inferior beings stems from the Master identity.

Secondly, some novels reject this immanent link between women and nature. More recent narratives do not display a cultural feminist perception. In fact, these novels tend to privilege a different approach in which the bond between feminised others and nature is not depicted as essentialist. In some cases, the connection of women with the natural world has to be built or rediscovered. For example, in *Solar Storms*, Angela needs to reconnect with her family, with her ancestral land, in order to learn how to love, understand and respect nature. Therefore, it is clear that the character always had the possibility to have a connection to nature, but despite what is described in other novels, this bond has to be developed. This idea is promoted by

⁹² Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.118.

⁹³ Pratt, Annis. "Women and Nature in Modern Fiction." *Contemporary Literature* 13, no. 4 (1972): p.484.

Heather Houser in an article in which she discusses Kingsolver's novel *Flight Behavior*⁹⁴ and Pancake's novel *Strange as this weather has been*⁹⁵. In both narratives, the female protagonists do not display a strong relationship to their land or an idealistic bond with nature. As a matter of fact, the bond with nature is born out of dissatisfaction with their own personal lives, and their lack of professional lives. The characters are trapped in their domestic lives, which causes dissatisfaction. The fact that the characters are despondent about their domestic lives confronts the Master model because the dualist structure typically associates women and the private sphere. In lieu of having this utopian connection with this perfect green world, the female characters in these novels are aware of the damage and the threat hovering over the natural world. Therefore, they want to protect it, or at least adopt a more sustainable approach to the environment. This idea of sustainability is supported by Houser: "Instead of production leading to loss, as under extraction, loss generates shared space and experiential knowledge that serve environmentalist goals."⁹⁶ Hence, it is clear that these novels explore a different type of bond which is characterized by an environmental and sustainable initiative. This represents a strong relationship with their environment, but one which is not intrinsic. This relationship is based on knowledge, on a willingness to understand the environment, and on an active participation in the preservation of nature.

Houser uses Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*⁹⁷ to illustrate this more realistic connection between women and nature. The protagonist of the analysed novel is a 28-year-old woman who is discontent with her family life: she is not happy with her husband, and motherhood is not satisfying her. Dellarobia, the protagonist, is on her way to meet her lover when she stumbles upon a colony of monarch butterflies. The butterflies should not be there; they should have migrated to Mexico. Hence, the butterflies symbolize global climate change. What sparks her interest for the natural world is this peculiar and worrying discovery. As a consequence, she will join a team of scientists, more precisely of lepidopterists. Prior to that, Dellarobia wouldn't "know nature if it bit her."⁹⁸ The author of the article interprets this previous quotation as an effect of motherhood. Houser argues that the protagonist does not know nature in light of the

⁹⁴ Kingsolver, Barbara. *Flight Behavior: a Novel*. New York: Harper, 2012.

⁹⁵ Pancake, Ann. *Strange as This Weather Has Been: a Novel*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2007.

⁹⁶ Houser, Heather. "Knowledge Work and the Commons in Barbara Kingsolver's and Ann Pancake's Appalachia" *MFS Modern fiction studies*, 63, no.1 (2017): p.96.

⁹⁷ Kingsolver, Barbara. *Flight Behavior: a Novel*. New York: Harper, 2012.

⁹⁸ Houser, Heather. "Knowledge Work and the Commons in Barbara Kingsolver's and Ann Pancake's Appalachia" *MFS Modern fiction studies*, 63, no.1 (2017): p.96.

fact that “motherhood has confined her to her home and limited her sight to the view from her kitchen window. The novel reverses a powerful, pervasive trope that equates maternity with care for and closeness to the earth.”⁹⁹ This challenges and criticises the Master model, and a conception of the bond between feminised others and nature that would be essentialist. This criticism of the Master model is achieved by refusing the association between women and reproduction, as illustrated in several ways. Firstly, Dellarobia’s connection to the land is not immanent or intrinsic to the character, it is triggered by the butterflies. Moreover, this connection does not originate from maternal instincts. This goes against the “mother Earth” concept which can be found in other novels. On the contrary, Dellarobia’s attachment to the land extricates her from motherhood and from her marriage. This distancing from her personal situation is illustrated by Houser in the following extract: “the butterfly encounter that revises her labor position and reverses environmental estrangement occurs because she seeks escape from wifedom and motherhood.”¹⁰⁰ This excerpt highlights another criticism of the Master model: the protagonist, by searching an escape from her personal life, challenges the association of women with emotion. Houser presents a protagonist who privileges her activist form of labour over her status of mother and wife. Thus, this protagonist can no longer be considered as *terra nullius*. This means that the character goes from being passive —an “annexed” propriety— to being an active participant in the fight against global warming and unsustainability.

To sum up everything that has been stated, the connection of women with nature is a recurrent topic in many novels. This reveals that the Master model is a social and cultural construction which has been assimilated into Western ideology and into common social consciousness. Moreover, the association between feminised others and nature has been portrayed in various ways. These different descriptions have revealed that this bond can be used for several purposes. As a matter of fact, the depictions of the bond by male authors and male characters are highly unfavourable, since the bond is also a justification for the subordination of both nature and women. In opposition to this, female authors and protagonists do not exhibit similar criticism towards the aforementioned relationship. However, it is essential to notice that female authors and female narrators can also depict this bond in diverse manners. On the one hand, this relationship is often described as inherent to women, and they are described as having a deep understanding of nature. They see the natural world as a place where they have the

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.102.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

opportunity to be free. Consequently, women are described or see themselves as “coextensive” with the natural world. This is representative of an essentialist vision of both women and nature, but also of the bond that unites them. In this cultural feminist approach, the rational values and primacy of reason are entirely rejected. This rejection is suggested by the refusal of a relationship with the male protagonist. On the other hand, this connection can be depicted in a different way. In some cases, the female protagonists have to build the connection with their environment, which is neither immanent nor idealised. These protagonists realise that the land is exploited and damaged. In light of that fact, they grow aware of the environment and their behaviour seems to evolve. They become active participants in their communities, and “defenders” of the land. This indicates that the female protagonists are no longer *terra nullius*, which makes their domination and exploitation by the Master identity unjustifiable. Moreover, the denial of a link between motherhood and care for the earth challenges the Master model. This is achieved by dismantling the construction of women as being solely wives and mothers, and indicates that the bond with the land which has to be built enables the protagonists to escape gender roles, and to find their identity as well as emancipation. Therefore, this particular model “rejects the structure of dualism and acknowledges both women and men as equal parts of culture and nature.”¹⁰¹ As a consequence, the association between the environment and feminised others no longer has this unfavourable connotation. Instead, the connection is based on awareness and, in a way, on reason. This suggests that feminised others reclaim reason, a value which is seen as the prerogative of the Master identity. Thus, it criticises the Master model’s depiction of both feminised others and nature.

3.2 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the connection between women and nature is a recurrent topic in literature. Women’s attachment to nature is noticeable in novels written by female authors as well as novels written by male authors. However, the bond between female characters and their environment is depicted differently depending on the sex of both the author and the narrator. As reported by Annis Pratt, male authors, especially authors of Bildungsromans, seem to criticise and condemn the importance of nature for their female characters. In opposition to this, female authors do not exhibit such negative criticism towards the relationship between their characters and the natural world. These elements suggest that the link between the “other” and nature has been assimilated into Western society. Moreover, they

¹⁰¹ Gaard, Greta. “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism.” *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.118.

establish the fact that there are two distinct methods used to characterise this relationship. The first one tends to idealise the relationship by providing a utopic description of it. It can be characterised as essentialist. The second method is more recent, more modern, and provides a more realistic description of the relationship. This second approach uses the association between women and nature to criticise the Master identity. In both of these approaches, the association between women and the environment is construed as positive and constructive. Such construction questions the Master model and its values. Furthermore, it confronts the conception of a bond between feminised others and nature as a justification for their domination and exploitation. In other words, this first chapter has illustrated that the dualist structure known as the Master model depreciates feminised others in order to conceive them as inferior. This is achieved through unfavourable associations between feminised others and nature. In literature, the bond with the natural world is used by male authors to characterise women as emotional and irrational creatures.

In the following chapters, I analyse how the Master identity perceives and constructs feminised others as inferior. In addition to this, we will see that *Solar Storms* and *The Poisonwood Bible* adopt the second approach: they depict characters who do not have an immanent connection to their environment. In Hogan's novel, the main protagonist has to rediscover her family and her past to connect with the land. In Kingsolver's novel, the narrators do not have a connection with the land due to the fact that they do not know their new environment, i.e. Congo.

4 The Master Identity

In the previous chapter, I have demonstrated that the Master model is central in Western societies and that it is engraved in common consciousness and ideologies. This model depicts feminised others as inferior in order to justify their domination and their exploitation. This second chapter reveals the presence of the Master model and the Master identity in *The Poisonwood Bible* and in *Solar Storms*. In both novels, it is clear that there is a representation of the Master model and of the Master identity. More precisely, there is a character or group of characters which represents or embodies the Master identity. In Kingsolver's novel, the Master identity takes the form of Nathan Price, one of the male characters, who symbolises colonialism. In Hogan's novel, the Master identity is represented by the company building the dam. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how the Master identity is constructed in the two analysed novels. Moreover, this chapter is dedicated to the analyses of the tools used by some of the characters to affirm the master's superiority. The ways in which the narratives undermine the Master model will be analysed in a following chapter.

4.1 The Master identity in *Solar Storms*

In Linda Hogan's novel, the Master identity is symbolised by the building company: BEEVCO. The latter has plans to build a hydroelectric dam on tribal grounds. In order to achieve their construction plans, the company has to change the course of rivers, to deforest and to disturb animal life. This has several consequences. First, it threatens the reservations in light of the fact that changing the course of rivers will result in floods. Secondly, the destruction of forests and rivers reduces habitat for animal life which weakens the tribes' food supplies and commerce.

Firstly, in terms of contrasting pairs, the dam building company represents reason over nature, as expressed in the following quote: "I thought about the land. These men would do anything to take it, change it, and make it fit their wants and dreams."¹⁰² The developers are using reason and its correlates (i.e. progress and development) to shape the land as it pleases them. The progress represented by electricity, along with the installation of such progress, has an environmental cost. These patterns can be linked to other key values of the Master identity,

¹⁰² Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner paperback fiction, 1995: p.282.

which are rationality and culture, due to the fact that they perceive this dam as an improvement for human life. Moreover, it is seen as a company trying to make profit. The term “profit” also generates connection between the dam company and the Master identity. This is due to the fact that BEEVCO represents capitalism, and as a consequence the “financially empowered” characteristic which defines the Master identity. Furthermore, the BEEVCO corporation can be associated with the “production” side of the Master model and the public sphere. The reason for this is that the enterprise is building structures which will *produce* electricity and profit. The public aspect is demonstrated in the following extract: “but his words made clear that if the corporation and government had their ways, the Indian people had no say on this matter, no power to reverse what had already been decided by men with other ways, men in other rooms and houses of law, men with other skins.”¹⁰³ This portrays the public domain in light of the fact that the company has ties with the government and the law, which represents the ultimate control of the public realm. It should also be noted that this excerpt highlights racial inequality. In this case, white people have power over Native Americans and over tribal land. Despite the fact that the land belongs to Amerindian tribes, the (mostly) white government has the power to take the land away and to relocate communities whenever it wants to. Lastly, a parallel can be drawn between the BEEVCO corporation and an all-powerful figure through the notion of creation: “Above all, they were certain they would win in this game of creation”.¹⁰⁴ The developers believe that they can shape the land, change it, *generate* and *create* an environment which will fit their needs. This highlights the dichotomy between human/nature as well as the overcoming of nature through the medium of reason. In addition to this, it also creates an analogy between the Master identity and a god-like figure which is able to create, to shape the world by means of its sheer will.

Secondly, the representation of the Master identity by a capitalist company is also illustrated through the medium of the five features of dualisms, which are backgrounding, radical exclusion, incorporation, instrumentalism, and homogenisation. The BEEVCO corporation defines the main protagonists by means of these characteristics. In order to demonstrate this, I use the part of the novel in which a meeting between the company spokespersons and the tribes takes place. Backgrounding is described by Plumwood as “denying the reality of the other [...] through mechanisms of focus and attention.”¹⁰⁵ Plumwood adds that “one way to do this is to insist on a strong hierarchy of the activities, so that the denied

¹⁰³ Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner paperback fiction, 1995: p.280.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.282.

¹⁰⁵ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.48.

areas are not ‘worth’ noticing.”¹⁰⁶ The denial of the Native Americans’ existence is expressed by Angel during the meeting, when she declares that “To the builders of dams we were dark outsiders whose lives had no relevance to them. They ignored our existence until we resisted their dams, or interrupted their economy, or spoiled their sport.”¹⁰⁷ This extract exhibits backgrounding clearly, as the existence of the protagonist’s community is entirely denied. Additionally, this excerpt bespeaks radical exclusion. Radical exclusion, or hyperseparation, is employed to construct the Master identity and the feminised others as radically different. In Gaard’s words, “the master magnifies the differences between self and other and minimizes the shared qualities.”¹⁰⁸ In this particular case, the fact that the Amerindian characters are described as “outsiders” indicates radical exclusion. In fact, by qualifying them as outsiders, the Master identity and Western society reject the indigenous people from the sphere of reason and from all the qualities that are attributed to the Master identity. In addition to this, by relegating Native Americans to the periphery of society, the Master identity places itself at the centre.

When it comes to incorporation, the main protagonist’s community is described in terms of negativity. This means that they are identified by their lack of the master’s value. When Tulik shows tenderness towards Aurora, who attributes Tulik emotions in lieu of reason, the reaction of the company’s spokespersons is immediate. This is expressed in the following example: “I could see right away that this lost him [Tulik] points in the white men’s book. Tenderness was not quality of strength to them. It was unmanly, an act they considered soft and unworthy”.¹⁰⁹ The description of the community as deficient in superior values is also conveyed through this quotation: “He, like others, believed we were ignorant”.¹¹⁰ In this case, the protagonist’s people are defined by their lack of reason and culture. Moreover, the deficiency and the absence of the Master identity’s traits can be portrayed literally, as seen in the following passage: “to the man who were new here, we were people who had no history, who lived surrounded by what they saw as nothingness. Their history had been emptied of us, and along with us, of truth.”¹¹¹ The community is surrounded by nothingness and emptiness. Thus, this quotation emphasises the concrete emptiness which is employed to characterise the inferior others.

Lastly, the construction company displays instrumentalism. This process is based on the conception of feminised others as having no purpose or aim of their own. Thus, the master is

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner paperback fiction, 1995: p.283.

¹⁰⁸ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.117.

¹⁰⁹ Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner paperback fiction, 1995: p.281.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.280.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

free to exploit the feminised others which are then used as instruments for the Master identity's purposes. The relationship between superior and inferior is described by the Master identity as beneficial for both sides. However, this does not appear to be true as stated by Plumwood:

Although the relationship is usually presented as being in the interests of the dominated as well as the dominator, it is apparent that those on the lower side of the dualisms are obliged to put aside their own interests for those of the master or centre, that they are conceived of as his instruments, as means to his ends. They are made part of a network of purposes which are defined in terms of or harnessed to the master's purposes and needs.¹¹²

In Hogan's novel, instrumentalism is exhibited by the impossibility for indigenous communities to refuse the construction plans of the BEEVCO corporation and the actions that are taken without their consent. This is expressed in this extract: "you have already built a road across the spawning grounds of the withefish. They'll die from that road. You did it without our permission."¹¹³ Furthermore, the spokesperson tries to convince the Amerindian community that building the dam is beneficial to them because it will allow them to gain access to electricity. Thus, because the symbol of the Master identity (i.e. the company) perceives the protagonists and their people as "naturally" inferior, and because feminised others are perceived as *terra nullius*, the company entitles itself to impose its own agenda on them.

4.2 The Master identity in *The Poisonwood Bible*

In *The Poisonwood Bible*, it is clear that Nathan Price embodies the Master identity. This is suggested by the numerous connections that can be drawn between this specific character and the different forms of reason, which are described in the Master model. Moreover, Nathan Price displays the five dualist features that have already been mentioned.

Firstly, Nathan Price can be associated with different forms of reason. The character is white, heterosexual and promotes reason over the erotic. As a matter of fact, Nathan reprimands Orleanna for what he considers to be an overly sexual behaviour. This is stated by Ognibene "when they have sex, he blames her for her 'wantonness'."¹¹⁴ Hence, Nathan considers that sex should just be a mean of reproduction, which highlights the rule of reason over the erotic. Moreover, this male protagonist represents the public sphere, the universal, as well as the mind or spirit. The reason for these associations is his status of preacher. Due to his position as a preacher, he is in the public realm because he preaches the word of God to a whole community.

¹¹² Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.53.

¹¹³ Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner paperback fiction, 1995: p.281.

¹¹⁴ Ognibene, Elaine R. "The Missionary Position: Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*." *College Literature* 30, no. 3 (2003): p.23.

Nathan Price can also be related to the public sphere because his status makes him an example to his community. In fact, his role as a preacher is to spread the gospel, and Christianity, which associates him with the universal. In addition to this, his position connects him to the mind, the spirit, for the sole reason that he is a man of God, and promoting spirituality is Nathan's main purpose. Lastly, Price is always referred to as "Father" (with a capital letter) which generates a resemblance with a god-like figure, with an all-powerful being symbolising authority. This also enables to draw a parallel with the Master identity in light of the fact that both "own both the world and the word."¹¹⁵ As a matter of fact, Nathan is "superior" due to his knowledge of the Word of God, which confers him authority.

Secondly, analogously to *Solar Storms*, the five features of dualism are noticeable in Kingsolver's narrative. Backgrounding is the first feature, in which "the master relies on the services of the other and simultaneously denies his dependency."¹¹⁶ It is revealed through the preacher's conception of the Congolese people. As a matter of fact, Nathan perceives them as being in the background of his purpose. The black community is part of a bigger plan, which is Nathan's will to bring the Word of God, to convert people to Christianity, and to save souls. When it comes to radical exclusion, this process appears in both the physical and the mental sphere. This is indicated in the following quotations: "Back home in Georgia they have their own school so they won't be a-strutting into Rachel's and Leah and Adah's school (...) The man in church said they're different from us and needs ought to keep to their own"¹¹⁷ and "Their day for the zoo is Thursday. That's in the Bible."¹¹⁸ In these excerpts, it clearly appears that the black community is physically excluded, because they cannot be in the same location as the white community. Furthermore, they are also mentally and spiritually rejected, as they are qualified as different. Thus, this illustrates hyperseparation, which aims "to maximize separation between the dualised spheres and to prevent their being seen as continuous or contiguous".¹¹⁹ In this case, the differences are maximised, and they are so important that there is need for a physical separation. When it comes to instrumentalism, it is depicted by the characterisation of the Congolese as sinners and the description of Africa as a dark place in which light has yet to fall. This is revealed in the following extract: "My work is to bring

¹¹⁵ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.190.

¹¹⁶ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.117.

¹¹⁷ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.23.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.24.

¹¹⁹ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.49.

salvation into the darkness.”¹²⁰ Through this description, the Congolese people and Africa are constructed as instruments, as tools that serve Nathan’s goal of salvation.

Furthermore, Nathan construes women as entirely different, and more importantly as inferior to him, which also demonstrates radical exclusion. This is illustrated in the following extract: “this was not dangerous, for he rarely struck us at the table, but it was designed to show us all as dull-witted, bovine females.”¹²¹ In this extract, the female characters are compared to animals, and more precisely to an animal from the cattle group (or a cow). This highlights that Nathan construes them as inferior: the female characters are not human beings; they are only animals. Radical exclusion is also revealed in the following extract: “He was merely trying, that sigh suggested, to drag us all toward enlightenment through the marrow of our own poor female bones.”¹²² In addition to this, this extract also portrays backgrounding and instrumentalism. The reason behind this is that the main female characters are both a background and an instrument to Nathan’s purpose, because the male character can spread the Word of God and enlighten the “ignorant” starting with his wife and daughters. In terms of homogenisation, which “supports both instrumentalism, incorporation and radical exclusion”¹²³, this particular process is visible in *The Poisonwood Bible* in light of the fact that Nathan Price homogenises and construes the black community, and the female characters, as ignorant and sinners, who are oblivious to the Word of God. In contrast, Price has the knowledge and the ability to understand and spread the Lord’s words. Therefore, the male protagonist makes a distinction between himself and the Others. As expressed by Plumwood, “To the master, all the rest are just that: ‘the rest’, the Others, the background to his achievements and the resources for his needs.”¹²⁴ The Others are part of Price’s sacred mission, they are the instrument needed to accomplish and bring salvation. However, there remains an irreconcilable difference between him and the others. He is superior, they are inferior. He is the master and they are the Others. He is the shepherd and they remain the sheep.

4.3 “The rhetoric and institution of Christianity”¹²⁵: an Instrument of Domination

One may think that the use of the rhetoric of Christianity to impose authority is the prerogative of Nathan Price. However, it is not. This section aims to demonstrate that

¹²⁰ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.147.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.90.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.93.

¹²³ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.54.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.122.

Christianity, both as an institution and as a particular language, has been used by the Master identity to justify domination and exploitation of the feminised others and nature. This is asserted by Gaard when she writes that “the rhetoric and institution of Christianity, coupled with the imperialist drives for militarist nation-states, have been used for nearly two thousand years to portray heterosexuality, sexism, racism, classism, and the oppression of the natural world as divinely ordained.”¹²⁶ The notions of domination and hierarchy are described as natural because they are supposedly established by God. This is expressed in the following passage from the Bible: “and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”¹²⁷ This passage justifies humans’ dominion over nature. Hence, the Master’s language is most probably linked to the rhetoric of Christianity. This is due to the fact that Christianity and the Bible generate a holy order that cannot be questioned because it is decided by God. For the purpose of demonstrating that the rhetoric of Christianity is the language of the Master identity, I analyse the Master identity and its speech in *The Poisonwood Bible* and in *Solar Storms*.

In *The Poisonwood Bible*, the exclusion of African Americans is justified through the medium of the Bible, as seen in this extract: “Their day for the zoo is Thursday. That’s in the Bible.”¹²⁸ In this extract, Ruth May believes that racial segregation is dictated by God. In this case, the rhetoric of Christianity is wrongly used to promote and authorise radical exclusion. In addition to this, the exploitation, and even enslavement of Africans is also permitted by the Bible: “God says the Africans are the tribes of Ham”¹²⁹, “Noah cursed all Ham’s children to be slaves for ever and ever.”¹³⁰ There is a clear use of biblical language to demonstrate that black people are inferior, and to legitimise their exploitation. Thus, this legitimises the master/slave dichotomy as well as colonialism. Gaard states that “both the monarchs and the explorers felt the need to justify their colonialist desires for more land, more wealth, and more slaves”¹³¹ and Christianity offered legitimacy for the dominion of feminised others.

The question of colonialism, and more importantly of the language of Christian colonialism is present in the two narratives. As a matter of fact, in both novels, the natives,

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ King James Bible. “Genesis”. *Kingjamesbibleonline.org*. Accessed May 10, 2020. Available from internet. <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Genesis-1-28/>

¹²⁸ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.24.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.23.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.126.

whether Amerindian or African, are described as dark and uncivilised “heathens”. In opposition to this, the coloniser, or the Master identity, is described as a saviour bringing light and knowledge. In *Solar Storms*, the dam company is literally planning on bringing light to the community because they want to install electricity. The thematic of the conqueror bringing civilisation to an inferior society is clearly visible in the following extract: “the man called us remnants of the past and said he wanted to bring us into the twentieth century”.¹³² This is highly representative of Christian colonialism as expressed by Gaard: “In the rhetoric of Christian colonialism, the Europeans filled the role of benevolent culture ‘civilizing’ savage nature – and this ‘civilizing’ involved taking the natives’ homelands, eliminating their cultural and spiritual practices, and raping and enslaving their people.”¹³³ In Hogan’s novel, the firm presents itself as a “civilising” entity which will bring modernity to the tribes. However, it is destroying the environment and stealing the tribal lands as well as its resources. Similarly, in Kingsolver’s novel, Nathan Price perceives himself as the saviour of Africa. The male character embodies the Christian coloniser, as he conceives Africans as ignorant, dark and sinful savages who need to be civilised and enlightened. In addition to this, Western society’s role to implant godly virtues and culture in those uncivilised places is revealed in Nathan Price’s locution: “The Belgians and American business brought civilization to the Congo! American aid will be the Congo’s salvation. You’ll see!”¹³⁴ The Master identity uses biblical language for several purposes: first, to naturalise and justify his dominion over nature and feminised others. Second, it uses it to construct these patterns of domination as beneficial and salutary to all.

¹³²Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner paperback fiction, 1995: p.280.

¹³³ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.127.

¹³⁴ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.148.

5 Female Characters and Nature as Active Subjects in *Solar Storms* and *The Poisonwood Bible*

The following sections explore how *Solar Storms* and *The Poisonwood Bible* invalidate the Master model as well as its implications and consequences. Furthermore, this chapter aims to demonstrate that the narratives construe nature and feminised others as active subjects and agents. In *The Poisonwood Bible*, a parallel is drawn between the Belgian Congo and the female protagonists. However, the Price girls emancipate themselves from Nathan Price by means of the narrative structure, of language and of a “political” alliance with the land. In *Solar Storms*, this active state is expressed by the connection between the women and nature. The numerous metaphors linking them to the environment conceive nature as a living and active entity. This is supported by the personification of nature found throughout the narrative. In addition to this, the female characters in the novel become agents through their environmental activism, and a new conception of motherhood and care.

5.1 *The Poisonwood Bible: Coyote and Subverting Language*

The following paragraphs provide a short summary of Kingsolver’s novel in order to put the analysis in context.

The Poisonwood Bible is a novel written by Barbara Kingsolver in 1998. It is often considered as a rewriting of *Heart of Darkness*¹³⁵. It narrates the story of Nathan Price and his family. In 1959, Nathan Price, a virulent Baptist preacher, brings his entire family to Congo. He aims to save the uncivilised people of Africa and their souls by converting them to Christianity, which is the reason why Price leaves Georgia for the Belgian Congo with his wife and his four daughters: Orleanna, Rachel, Leah, Adah and Ruth May. The Price girls and their mother are the narrators of this journey into the Belgian Congo. *The Poisonwood Bible* alternates between several female narrators: Orleanna and her daughters. Each one of the narrators offers a different focus or perspective on the story. First, Orleanna adopts a retrospective vision of the events, and she focuses on what is expected of a wife and mother. This is stated by Austenfeld: “she sees through the eyes of wife and mother.”¹³⁶ Second, Rachel,

¹³⁵ Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. London: Penguin Classics, 2007.

¹³⁶ Austenfeld, Anne Marie. "The Revelatory Narrative Circle in Barbara Kingsolver's "The Poisonwood Bible"." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 36, no. 2 (2006): p.295.

the eldest daughter, sees the world with the mind of a terribly materialistic teenager, but she “renders human relationships, material details, conversations, and emotions with great accuracy”¹³⁷, according to Anne Marie Austenfeld. I would also add that she is probably the most pessimistic narrator in the novel in my opinion. Third, Leah has an extremely strong sense of morality and is the most politically active narrator. Then, Adah, Leah’s twin, is highly intelligent and her narration offers a sardonic critique of the world and society. Last, the narration of Ruth May, the youngest daughter, is described as distant: she has “all-observing eyes”¹³⁸, her voice can be qualified as “straightforward and positive.”¹³⁹

The American family arrives in Kilanga, a small village, and soon realises that they are not prepared at all for this adventure. There is no running water, no shops, no cars. They are no longer in America, and what seemed simple now demands considerable efforts or is impossible in Kilanga. For example, cooking one meal takes the whole day. The first sign of their unpreparedness is Nathan’s failed attempt to grow a demonstration garden. After a few weeks of reshaping and replanting the garden, Nathan finally realises that there are no pollinators. Therefore, the family has to rely on the local market and local food supplies to eat.

Nathan remains focused on saving every soul in the village without taking into account the religious, spiritual and environmental backgrounds of Africa. The preacher’s main plan is to baptise the villagers in the nearby river, even though it is infested by crocodiles. However, the female narrators slowly understand this new culture and are affected by it. Months go by and the situation is getting increasingly dangerous because the Congolese people want their independence. As a result, there are nationalist riots and Belgium begins to lose control over the country¹⁴⁰. Thus, the mission league orders the evacuation of the Price family. However, Nathan refuses to leave because he has not accomplished his purpose yet. The family stays in Africa but does not have access to the resources of the league. Hence, the girls are forced to find new ways to get food on the table. In the meantime, Orleanna, the mother, is desperate and she resents Nathan for his decision. She lies in bed for weeks, and when she leaves her bedroom, she has a unique goal: getting her daughters out of Africa. From here on, the events go from bad to worse. Ruth May, the youngest, contracts malaria and has difficulties to recover. The people of Kilanga are starving due to the drought, tensions arise in the village and Leah mocks

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.296.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Comics and the postcolonial, given by professor Véronique Bragard, 2020.

one of the men. The relationship between the girls and Nathan degrades and finally, Ruth May is bitten by a green mamba snake and dies.

The rest of the novel narrates the different paths of these female characters after the events in the village. Orleanna refuses to lose another daughter, so she takes her daughters away and leave Nathan and Kilanga behind. However, Orleanna never truly recovers from the loss of her daughter and from the time she spent in Africa. Leah is too ill to leave Congo so she stays with Anatole, a Congolese school teacher. Later on, Leah marries him and they dedicate their lives to fighting for Congo's independence. Rachel marries three men in a row before opening a luxury hotel in Africa. Adah is the only daughter who returns to America with Orleanna. Once they are back home, Adah goes to university and becomes an epidemiologist. As for Nathan Price, he stays in Congo to save souls but he loses his mind. In the end, the girls learn that their father was burnt alive by villagers. As the novel ends, the three remaining daughters and Orleanna all go back to Congo in order to find Ruth May's burial site. Once in Congo, they are told that Kilanga never existed. The last section of the book is narrated by Ruth May who encourages the characters to move forward.

The section of this dissertation dedicated to *The Poisonwood Bible* first reveals how the narrators are perceived by those who uphold the Master model. To achieve this, I focus on Orleanna and on her description of her relationship with her husband. Secondly, I demonstrate that the narrators, along with nature, liberate themselves from the Master's domination. The narrators question this authority figure through the narrative structure in itself, through their active state and their use of language. To illustrate this, I analyse Adah's point of view and her subversive use of language. I focus on this character because she is very critical of her father, and of biblical language. Regarding the environment, the land appears to be an ambivalent entity which intertwines reproduction and destruction. Lastly, I show that the novel advocates a model which differs from the Master model and which is non-hierarchical.

5.1.1 Women and Congo: "A territory is only possessed for a moment in time"¹⁴¹

The Poisonwood Bible starts with a passage from Genesis 1:28 "And God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."¹⁴² This quote is crucial to apprehend how the main protagonists are perceived by Nathan

¹⁴¹ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.457.

¹⁴² King James Bible. "Genesis". *Kingjamesbibleonline.org*. Accessed May 10, 2020. Available from internet. <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Genesis-1-28/>

Price. They are seen as inferior and faulted by the male character. The female characters are entirely aware that they are considered as inferior beings and as entities that can be possessed and exploited. In the case of Orleanna, she draws a comparison between herself—and any woman who is subdued—and a colonised land. This parallel already appears in the first pages of the novel and is visible throughout the majority of the narrative. Thus, the aim of this section is to demonstrate that the metaphor linking Congo and Orleanna reflects that the Master model constructs them both as *terra nullius*.

Firstly, Orleanna draws a parallel between her marriage and colonisation. The beginning of Orleanna and Nathan's relationship is already characterised by oppression. As a matter of fact, the protagonist notes that she was not supposed to give an answer to Nathan's marriage proposal: "I hardly had time to think about my own answer—why, it was taken to be a foregone conclusion. And even if anyone had been waiting for my opinion, I wouldn't have known how to form one."¹⁴³ Once they are married, Nathan Price shows an abusive attitude towards Orleanna and mistreats her when she does not abide by his rules. As a consequence, she feels herself disappearing and changing. Thus, she is not Orleanna anymore. In fact, like a landscape or territory that is being invaded and occupied, the text here suggests, in line with the *terra nullius* principle, that she is solely a conquest. This is expressed in the upcoming excerpt: "And where was I, the girl or woman called Orleanna, as we travelled those roads and crossed the lines again and again? Swallowed by Nathan's mission, body and soul. Occupied as if by a foreign power."¹⁴⁴ This is reinforced by the following extract: "Nathan was in full possession of the country once known as Orleanna Wharton."¹⁴⁵ Hence, her marriage to Nathan Price is a symbol of the oppression and exploitation she endures. The protagonist is clearly a simple possession abused by her husband. She even describes herself as a land conquered by Nathan Price.

Their relationship is one of dominion and submission as revealed by following excerpt: "Until that moment I'd thought I could have it both ways: to be one of them and my husband's wife. What conceit! I was his instrument, his animal. Nothing more."¹⁴⁶ The superior/inferior nature of their relationship is also expressed in the following extract: "Maybe I'll even confess the truth, that I rode in with the horsemen and beheld the apocalypse, but still I'll insist I was

¹⁴³ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.236.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.241.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.244.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.107.

only a captive witness. What is the conqueror's wife, if not a conquest herself?"¹⁴⁷ This excerpt demonstrates that Orleanna is dominated by the Master identity because she is a conquest and an instrument used by her husband to fulfil his purposes. However, it also shows that Orleanna can be perceived as part of an oppressive force. Orleanna is defending herself: she does realise that she played a part in colonialism and in an oppressive system, but she argues that she too was dominated and did not have a choice. These elements actively illustrate that the Master identity is in a superior position and dominates the narrator as expressed in this extract: "I was an inferior force."¹⁴⁸ These extracts and the portrayed marital relationship clearly illustrate the Master model. Orleanna, who represents feminised others, displays a considerable amount of what are considered to be inferior values. In fact, Orleanna is portrayed as "object" in opposition to "subject", which is demonstrated by the fact that her family was not expecting her to give an answer to Price's wedding proposal. It appears that she is an object in her own marriage. Orleanna is also described in terms of animality (as opposed to rationality), as can be seen in one of the aforementioned extracts. In this particular example, the terms "instrument" and "animal" can be linked to the notion of slave (as opposed to the master).

Secondly, Orleanna's depiction of her marriage indicates a parallel between women and Africa. The narrator compares Africa to the female characters in light of the fact that they are both dominated and exploited by men. To illustrate this aforementioned connection, a bridal metaphor is used to define Africa and Congo. An element demonstrating this comparison is illustrated in the following extract: "In the end, my lot [women] was cast with the Congo. Poor Congo, barefoot bride of men who took her jewels and promised the Kingdom."¹⁴⁹ Moreover, the bride metaphor appears a second time: "He and all the profiteers who've since walked out on Africa as a husband quits a wife, leaving her with her naked body curled around the emptied-out mine of her womb."¹⁵⁰ Thus, it is clear that, in *The Poisonwood Bible*, a parallel can be drawn between Congo (or Africa) and women. The similarity stems from the exploitation and domination that they undergo. This exploitation is suggested through the locutions "took her jewels" and "emptied-out mine of her womb". Moreover, such representation can be linked to the notion of *terra nullius*, and reveals the Master model's conception of the underside. These elements indicate that women and nature are considered as mere instruments by those who

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.232.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.244.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.11.

uphold the Master model: they have no aim of their own, and thus can be used for the master's purpose.

To sum up, in *The Poisonwood Bible*, the bond between masculine and feminine is defined through oppression and domination. This indicates the primacy of the Master model and of a superior/inferior dialectic. In the novel, women and the land are linked by their similar mistreatment: they are considered as *terra nullius*, they have no purpose of their own, except to serve the master and his interests. The feminised others are plainly conquered and colonised. However, I will discuss the subtle forms of resistance which are found in the novel.

The Master model establishes a society in which the beings perceived as closer to nature are subordinates. Due to their "inferiority", these beings can be exploited in ways that seem justified to those who accept the Master model unquestioningly. However, in *The Poisonwood Bible*, the feminised others liberate themselves from Nathan Price and from the Master model's dominion. This is achieved through the character's agency, the narrative structure, the subversion of language, and the use of an alternative language.

Firstly, the female protagonists in Kingsolver's novel evolve into agents. After the death of Ruth May, Orleanna has no choice but to leave if she wants to protect her daughters. She expresses the urge to keep moving, as revealed in the following extract: "And it happened finally by grace of hell and brimstone that I had to keep moving. I moved, and he stood still."¹⁵¹ Orleanna takes her three remaining daughters away from Kilanga and Nathan. They leave on foot and walk until they find the next village, from where Orleanna will organise their return to America. At the same time, Nathan remains true to his purpose of salvation. Despite the death of his youngest child, which was caused by one of the villagers, Nathan refuses to leave Kilanga. He persists in trying to convert every soul in Congo with the same strategies. The novel suggests a reversal and a deconstruction of the Master model's values. As a matter of fact, the superior side, the master's side, which is defined as active, becomes passive while the inferior side becomes active. The female character, Orleanna, is no longer *terra nullius*, because her only goal is to become active. In addition to this, the description of Nathan as being passive enables the criticism of the Master model. In fact, it shows that the Master model and the Master identity have not evolved, that they remained the same and are thus outdated. This is illustrated in the following extracts:

But his kind will always lose in the end. I know this, and now I know why. Whether it's wife or nation they occupy, their mistake is the same: they stand still, and their stakes moves underneath

¹⁵¹ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.457.

them. (...) Chains rattle, rivers roll, animals startle and bolt, forests inspire and expand, babies stretch open-mouthed from the womb, new seedlings arch their necks and creep forward into the light. Even a language won't stand still. A territory is only possessed for a moment in time.¹⁵²

Even before the flagpole begins to peel and splinter, the ground underneath arches and slides forward into its own new destiny. It may bear the marks of boots on its back, but those marks become the possessions of the land.¹⁵³

These excerpts support the construction of feminised others and nature as active and unpredictable entities. The depiction of the land, communities and feminised others as a whole, which is constantly changing and evolving, questions the master's domination. The Master identity does not evolve, does not change, because it is based on dualisms. However, by describing nature and feminised others as constantly evolving, the novel dismantles clear identities. In other words, if women and nature are perpetually changing, then it becomes increasingly hard to conceive stable identities. For example, if the identity "woman" constantly shifts from reproduction to production, from body to spirit, from culture to nature, and vice-versa, it becomes impossible to define "woman".

Secondly, the emancipation of the female characters is conveyed through the medium of the very structure of the novel. As a matter of fact, the novel offers "a feminist alternative, first to historical writing, which tends to be male-centered [...] second, to male-written and narrated European fiction about Africa."¹⁵⁴ This is achieved by means of the choice of narrator. Kingsolver's novel has five distinct female narrators and each one of them offers a different focus or perspective on the events of the story: Orleanna, Rachel, Leah, Adah and Ruth May. In the novel, Nathan Price, who represents the Master identity, dominates and silences the female characters. The male protagonist is the one who speaks with God and in the name of God: "My father, of course, was bringing the Word of God —Which fortunately weighs nothing at all."¹⁵⁵ The monopolisation of speech is also represented by his church sermons. To illustrate that, it is necessary to investigate the arrival of the Price family in Kilanga. The villagers have organised a feast for Price and his family, they are dancing and chanting. Nevertheless, Price silences everyone and monopolises language. This is revealed in the following extracts: "Then

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Austenfeld, Anne Marie. "The Revelatory Narrative Circle in Barbara Kingsolver's "The Poisonwood Bible"." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 36, no. 2 (2006): p.294.

¹⁵⁵ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.22.

he began to speak. It was not so much a speech as a rising storm”¹⁵⁶, “he shouted in his rising singsong preaching voice”¹⁵⁷, “no one sang or cheered anymore. Whether or not they understood the meaning of ‘loud clamor,’ they didn’t dare be making one now. They did not even breathe, or so it seemed.”¹⁵⁸

Moreover, through the medium of his church sermons, Nathan imposes moral behaviours and virtues. In fact, Nathan is the only one who possesses the Word of God, which grants him a moral superiority and a superiority in church, as he is the only one who is allowed to talk. In addition to this, Nathan will start to add Kikongo words (the indigenous language) into his sermons, which highlights that Price appropriates a language and a culture which are not his. This shows that the male character reduces everyone to silence and tries to monopolise language. Furthermore, Nathan deprives the main female protagonists of language in the private sphere: “Our Father speaks for all of us, as far as I can see”¹⁵⁹, and later Nathan says: “Orleanna, shut up!”¹⁶⁰ Thus, the main female characters are silenced by Nathan Price. However, the women are the narrators of the story. Thus, as argued by Demory, “Nathan Price’s authority is subverted because he does not ever get to tell his own story. The novel is narrated not by a publicly sanctioned male voice, but by five women, Orleanna Price and her four daughters.”¹⁶¹ In addition to that, the fact that *The Poisonwood Bible* exhibits female-only narrator — who are ordinarily silenced—questions the social and political context in which they live and which restrains them.¹⁶² In other words, by giving them a voice as narrators of the story, Nathan Price, the embodiment of the Master model, is dethroned.

Third, the most significant subversion of the Master model and Master identity regards language. For the purpose of exemplifying this subversion of the Master model’s language, I analyse how Adah and Orleanna use language to transcend the Master identity and its language. In *The Poisonwood Bible*, the Master identity, embodied by Nathan, mainly expresses itself through the use of biblical language. The subversion of the dominant language is a recurrent aspect in the novel and is demonstrated via the reversal of the master’s ideology and language. Explicitly, the female protagonists sometimes reverse and debase the biblical language used by

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.31.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.33.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.38.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.164.

¹⁶¹ Demory, Pamela H. "Into the Heart of Light: Barbara Kingsolver Rereads "Heart of Darkness"." *Conradiana* 34, no. 3 (2002): p.187.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

Nathan Price. Reversing the biblical language is literally achieved by Adah as in the following excerpt: “From that day I stopped parroting the words of *Oh, God! God’s love!* And began to cant in my own backward tongue: *Evol’s dog! Dog ho!*”¹⁶³ This example displays a clear inversion and a parody of the biblical language. This process deprives language of meaning. It is a tool to resist the instrumentalisation of language by the Master model.

Another strategy adopted by Orleanna, which is used to deprive the master’s language of meaning, is to use his language in an inappropriate context or manner. For example, “I attempted briefly to consecrate myself in the public library.”¹⁶⁴ To understand the significance of this extract, it is essential to examine the meaning of the word “consecrate”.¹⁶⁵ This verb is used for religious ceremonies or in the context of religious institutions. Thus, Orleanna trying to consecrate herself in a public or “pagan” environment suppresses the word’s sacred original meaning.

Lastly, Nathan Price’s language is ridiculed and mocked by the female narrators. As a consequence, the male character is devalued and his credibility declines. During one of his sermons, the preacher tells the biblical story of Susanna. According to the Old Testament, this woman was falsely accused of adultery. As a punishment, she was sentenced to be stoned to death without even giving her a chance to defend herself from the accusation. Fortunately, the truth was revealed and Susanna was saved. However, Adah questions and mocks this parable. This is portrayed in the following excerpt: “We were not supposed to wonder what kind of husband was this Joakim, who would kill his own lovely wife rather than listen to her side of the story.”¹⁶⁶ This shows that the narrators are questioning the values promoted by the master’s speech and that they devalue its message. This is emphasised in the following passage: “My father, of course, was bringing the Word of God—which fortunately weighs nothing at all.”¹⁶⁷ This implies that, for Adah, the word of God has no meaning, it has no substance.

¹⁶³ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.211.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.7.

¹⁶⁵ Oxford learners dictionaries. “Consecrate”. *Oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com*. Accessed April 9, 2020 Available from internet: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/consecrate?q=consecrate>

1. **consecrate something** to state officially in a religious ceremony that something is holy and can be used for religious purposes; 2. **consecrate something** (in Christian belief) to make bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ; 3. **consecrate somebody (as) (something)** to state officially in a religious ceremony that somebody is now a priest, etc.

¹⁶⁶ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.87.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.22.

Furthermore, the master is also devalued and ridiculed, as demonstrated in this passage: “*Bangala* means something precious and dear. But the way he [Nathan] pronounces it, it means the poisonwood tree. Praise the Lord, hallelujah, my friends! for Jesus will make you itch like nobody’s business.”¹⁶⁸ In the beginning, Nathan had a translator for his sermons, in order to make sure that the inhabitants of the village would understand the message and the stories of the Bible. However, after a fight with his translator (Anatole), Nathan refuses his help because he does not trust him anymore. In addition to this, Nathan Price is afraid that his words are not being translated properly. Thus, he takes it upon himself to incorporate Kikongo words in his sermons, but as shown in the previous extract, Nathan is incapable to understand the slight variations in the language and consequently devalues his own message. As Demory puts it: “Price is completely unaware of his mistake, so while he believes he is a master of the language — the very Word of God — the text reveals him to be a fool, preaching what his daughter takes to calling behind his back ‘the gospel of poisonwood’.”¹⁶⁹ As a consequence, the authority of Nathan Price, who represents the Master identity, is undoubtedly enfeebled.

Fourth, Adah is going to subvert the master ideology and her father’s language through the use of an alternative language: science. By refusing to use the language that was imposed on her, Adah escapes the master’s domination. Instead, she supplants it with a different one, as can be seen in the following extract: “In organic chemistry, invertebrate zoology, and the inspired symmetry of Mendelian genetics, I have found a religion that serves. I recite the Periodic Table of Elements like a prayer; I take my examinations as Holy Communion, and the pass of the first semester was a sacrament.”¹⁷⁰ Through the medium of an alternative language, a language which differs from the dominant one, she extracts herself from the Master model altogether. In other words, if Adah does not use the language which was imposed on her and which is used to dominate others, she does not subscribe to the Master model or to any form of domination.

Despite the fact that the five protagonists are oppressed by Nathan Price, they are white privileged women. In a way, even if they are being dominated by Price and the Master model, they are also participants in a colonial system that dominates others. Furthermore, the novel focuses on privileged white protagonists and pays little attention to the Congolese characters, who do not really have a voice of their own. In fact, the Congolese characters, the political

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.331.

¹⁶⁹ Demory, Pamela H. "Into the Heart of Light: Barbara Kingsolver Rereads "Heart of Darkness"." *Conradiana* 34, no. 3 (2002): p.187.

¹⁷⁰ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.486.

events as well as Congolese culture are constantly described through the eyes of American protagonists. It must also be noted that, in the beginning of the novel, the protagonists are prejudiced against the villagers. In addition to this, Orleana and Leah are primarily described as wives and mothers which places them in more traditional roles. However, the novel gives a voice to several women who are all different and who have different visions and mindsets. Therefore, it shows that women are not a homogenous group. It should also be noted that the protagonists' criticism of the Master model indicates a broader criticism of colonialism and of any form of domination.

5.1.2 Nature in *The Poisonwood Bible*: Unpredictability

The construction of nature as an agent leads to a reconsideration of the opposition between human and nature. It also makes the exploitation of the land unjustifiable, because it is no longer an inert and passive resource. In Barbara Kingsolver's novel, nature is described as an active and living entity. Moreover, nature is presented as unpredictable. Thus, the domination of such an entity is impossible and preposterous.

In Kingsolver's novel, there is no unique bond between the land and feminised others except for the fact that they are both dominated and exploited by the Master model. In other words, the narrative concatenates "women and nature as agents in a mutual struggle"¹⁷¹ and describes them as "political allies".¹⁷² In fact, human beings are subject to nature. In other words, they are bound to follow the rules of nature. This is expressed in the following extract: "In Congo, it seems the land owns the people."¹⁷³ In *The Poisonwood Bible*, human beings are subjects to nature and its endless cycle of life.

In order to demonstrate the construction of nature as an active agent, I analyse the "demonstration" garden in the novel. Nathan Price wants to grow a "demonstration" garden or "miracle" garden in order to grow food for his family. However, his main goal is to show to the villagers how to cultivate the soil, to give them food and to convert them to Christianity. Of course, Nathan is sure that if he gives food to the villagers and ensures them that it is the work of God, they will all convert to Christianity. Thus, since the garden is a recurrent theme, it is important to analyse the making of this demonstration garden.

¹⁷¹ Alaimo, Stacy. "Cyborg and Ecofeminist Interventions: Challenges for an Environmental Feminism." *Feminist Studies* 20, no. 1 (1994): p.133.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p.150.

¹⁷³ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.340.

It is clear that Nathan Price tries to subdue the land and to shape it according to his will. This is revealed by the vocabulary used by the author. Violence is expressed in the following extracts: “all in favour of subduing the untamed wilderness for a garden”¹⁷⁴, “he bent over and began to rip out long handfuls of grass with quick, energetic jerks as though tearing out the hair of the world”¹⁷⁵ and “He took back the hoe and proceeded to hack out a small, square dominion over the jungle.”¹⁷⁶ Nonetheless, it appears that nature has a mind of its own. As a matter of fact, Mama Tabata, the Price family’s helper, warns Nathan and Leah that the poisonwood tree “bites”¹⁷⁷. Nathan does not listen to Mama Tabata and touches the Poisonwood tree. As a result, Nathan is “bitten”: “My father woke up the next morning with a horrible rash on his hands and arms, presumably wounded by the plant that bites.”¹⁷⁸ The tree retaliates and is personified, which humanises nature. The character of Nathan Price wants to use the environment for his own purpose: to convert the Congolese people to Christianity. As a consequence, Price imposes the Western view and agricultural method to Congo. However, this is unachievable due to the fact that Congolese nature is unpredictable and that it keeps evolving and changing. Nathan attempts to put fences around his garden in order to possess a part of the natural world. However, Leah states that nature seems to endlessly take back the land: “we constantly had to break and hack off branches to win back our ground.”¹⁷⁹ This is also expressed in the following excerpt: “the jungle that will surely take back everything once we are gone.”¹⁸⁰ Nature appears to be constantly active and evolving, despite the intervention of men. It must be noted that through this constant evolution, nature undoes these interventions. Nature is an agent of her own construction.

Furthermore, the construction of Congolese nature as an active and unpredictable agent facilitates the resistance against the Master model. For Orleanna, it is precisely this unpredictability which makes colonisation impossible. This is expressed in the following extracts: “The Congo river, being of a different temperament, drowned most of its conquerors outright. In Congo, a slashed jungle quickly becomes a field of flowers, and scars become the ornaments of a particular face”¹⁸¹, and “Africa swallowed the conqueror’s music and sang a

¹⁷⁴ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.43.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.45.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.47.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.49.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.94.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.100.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.458.

new song of her own.”¹⁸² In these extracts, it appears that nothing is ever what it seems, because Congolese nature changes and evolves constantly. What was once the conquerors’ song became Africa’s song.

Then, nature is non-binary. This feature is demonstrated by means of the deconstruction of one of the most common associations: the connection between the environment and reproduction. This prevalent association between nature and reproduction is disputed with the representation of nature as ambivalent: nature is composed of both life and death. This is illustrated by the following extract:

The trees are columns of slick, brindled bark like muscular animals overgrown beyond all reason. Every space is filled with life: delicate, poisonous frogs war-painted like skeletons, clutched in copulation, secreting their precious eggs onto dripping leaves. Vines strangling their own kin in the everlasting wrestle for sunlight. The breathing of monkeys. A glide of snake belly on branch. A single-file army of ants biting a mammoth tree into uniform grains and hauling it down to the dark for their ravenous queen. And, in reply, a choir of seedlings arching their necks out of rotted tree stumps, sucking life out of death. The forest eats itself and lives forever.¹⁸³

It is clear that this passage is filled with antitheses and oxymora which intertwine life and death, reproduction and destruction. For example, poisonous, deadly creatures give life by way of reproduction. Vines are “strangling”, killing each other to receive sun, which can be associated with life, and “sucking life out of death” explicitly linking these two antonymic concepts. A dynamic and ambivalent conception of nature is similar to the idea of nature as a trickster-like project, a project that is described by Sandilands in terms of Coyote. This is due to the fact that, as asserted by Phelan, trickster figures and characters are recurrently depicted as “uniquely complex, ambivalent creatures”.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, the intertwining notions of reproduction and destruction, but more specifically of life and death, are characteristic of the trickster Coyote. In fact, the singularity of tricksters lies in their ability to die and then come back to life. Thus, Coyote is an endless cycle of life and death, which also bespeaks its timelessness. In the novel, timelessness is demonstrated by the recurring sentence “The forest eats itself and lives forever.”¹⁸⁵ This sentence underlines the system of life and death by the fact that it is stated on the first page of the novel by Orleanna, but it also appears in the epilogue, which is narrated by what seems to be Ruth May’s spirit or ghost. Thus, this demonstrates that the Congolese jungle,

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.5.

¹⁸⁴ Phelan, Shane. "Coyote Politics: Trickster Tales and Feminist Futures." *Hypatia* 11, no. 3 (1996): p.134.

¹⁸⁵ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.5.

similarly to nature, is seen as an unpredictable trickster. This challenges the Master model and, more broadly anthropocentrism.

5.1.3 Favouring a New Model

The Poisonwood Bible exhorts a deconstruction of the Western dualistic structure. The novel suggests a new model which is non-hierarchical and not based on dualisms. In order to illustrate this, it is fundamental to analyse the character of Ruth May and her perception of the world. After Nathan refuses to leave Congo, Ruth May is terribly ill due to malaria and her friend Nelson explains to her that she has to think of a safe place so that when death comes, her spirit will go to that sanctuary. The child protagonist eventually heals and forgets to think about her safe place. Nevertheless, during the ant invasion and the resultant disarray, Ruth May manages to imagine her safe place. This refuge is described in the following extract:

I know what it is: it's a green mamba snake away up in the tree. You don't have to be afraid of them anymore because you are one. They lie so still on the tree branch; they are the same everything as the tree. You could be right next to one and not even know. It's so quiet there. That's just exactly what I want to go and be, when I have to disappear. Your eyes will be little and round but you are so far up there you can look down and see the whole world, Mama and everybody. The tribes of Ham, Shem, and Japheth all together. Finally you are the highest one of all.¹⁸⁶

In this excerpt, it is clear that what is portrayed is a dimension in which the dichotomy between human and nature is deconstructed and in which humans are no longer separate from nature. On the contrary, they are a part of nature. This inclusion is revealed by Ruth May's desire to be the snake and to be part of the tree. More importantly, it is revealed by the fact that she sees through the snake's eyes. However, in this excerpt, Ruth May has not entered this new model because she still subscribes to the Master model, which is demonstrated by her use of biblical language. Another possibility is that she uses this language in a critical way with the aim to pass on a message of equality. In other words, the character of Ruth May could be using the master's language (the dominant language) to promote a deconstruction of dualisms. In the epilogue, what the reader surmises to be Ruth May says that: "I am all that is here"¹⁸⁷ and that "I am *muntu* Africa, *muntu* one child and a million all lost on the same day."¹⁸⁸ These quotes demonstrate that this conscience encompasses human beings and nature; it represents a whole,

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.366.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.641

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

a totality. The narrator symbolises the union of human and nonhuman entities. Furthermore, the use of a language differing from the master's language highlights a willingness to move away from the dualist structure. These Kikongo words are thus used in a positive and inclusive manner, with the aim to advocate a new model.

Furthermore, the depiction of nature as ambivalent, as timeless and as an eternal cycle of life and death suggests a new perception of nature. In fact, it depicts nature as Coyote: an agent which is constantly changing and reinventing itself. This trickster entity is characterised by its ambivalence and its shape-shifting ability. Coyote can be anything and everything, it is constantly transforming. Thus, this ambivalent world, a world in which things are in constant movement and metamorphosis, a world in which life and death intertwine, a world in which "I am all that is here"¹⁸⁹, can certainly not be a hierarchic and dualistic world.

Lastly, the following passage suggests the dissolution of the Master model : "The tribes of Ham, Shem, and Japheth all together."¹⁹⁰ The reason for this occurrence is that this vision promotes the end of the distinction between ethnicities and the end of the dualistic vision of the world. The epilogue of the novel also expresses similar themes. In fact, it advocates the inclusion of human beings inside the natural sphere and the transcendence of the Master model. This aspect is visible in this passage "you send us to the kingdom of somewhere else, where we move untouched through the forest and no trees fall to the ax and everything is as it could never be."¹⁹¹ This extract affirms the possibility of a different conception of society, but it also indicates that if the Master model is not challenged, this new non-hierarchical model "could never be".

5.2 Native Americans and Nature: a Colonial Construction?

Before analysing *Solar Storms* and the relationship between the characters and the environment, it is imperative to address the "ecological Indian" myth. The reason for this is that the relationship between Native Americans and nature has often been idealised. In fact, Amerindians are sometimes perceived as being intrinsically conservationists. However, this conception has been called into question, and disputed, by a number of academics. The following section intends to illustrate how some researchers refuse the concept of the

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.366.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.641.

“ecological Indian”, which argues that Native Americans are “inherently environmentalist”.¹⁹² These anthropologists describe the “ecological Indian” as a myth or as a harmful construction.

In one of his article¹⁹³, Raymond Hames explains that the reason behind this construction is that it was believed that there was higher biodiversity in places inhabited by Native Americans. The author asserts that “high biodiversity is associated with the presence of native peoples, whereas low biodiversity is associated with non-natives.”¹⁹⁴ According to the article, some researchers have stated that the ecological awareness and conservation of the land was rare and happened under very specific circumstances. Instead, a new perception of Native Americans and their environment was established, and this theory supported “the idea that deliberate conservation by native people was a myth.”¹⁹⁵ Moreover, some argue that Indigenous tribes pollute less due to the fact that they have “low population density” and “limited technology”.¹⁹⁶ This suggests that Native Americans are not conservationists by choice, but simply by contingency. Hence, it means that Native Americans did not try to conserve or maintain the land and its ecosystems on purpose. However, the article does mention that Native Americans knew and understood their environment: “They understood complex environmental interactions.”¹⁹⁷ This is supported by Raymond Hames when he asserts that Native American people do have “an extensive and deep understanding of their local ecosystems”.¹⁹⁸ Similarly, Sarah Jaquette Ray argues that “Native communities do have a vested interest in addressing environmental issues, but not because of an essential ‘closeness to the land’ that mainstream environmentalism ascribes them.”¹⁹⁹ As mentioned in the article, the tribes understood the land, yet they damaged it. For example, Hames mentions that they hunted some animal species almost to extinction. Hence, Native American beliefs, their ways of life, as well as their connection to the land should not be idealised nor demonised. The complexity of the relationship between Native Americans and their environment should be taken into account.

¹⁹²Seymour, Nicole. *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018: p.152.

¹⁹³ Hames, Raymond. "The Ecologically Noble Savage Debate." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 36 (2007) : pp.177-90.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.179.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.180.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.181.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.184.

¹⁹⁹Jaquette Ray, Sarah in Seymour, Nicole. *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018: p.153.

Hence, saying that Amerindians were “naturally” conservationists is as incorrect as saying that they had a fundamentally unsustainable way of life.

The question that arises is the following: why is the myth of the ecological Indian so prevalent in Western society, if researchers have shown that it is a pure construction? This “myth” is a cultural idea that generates “racialized environmental affect”. Nicole Seymour states that racialized environmental affect consists of “the emotions and dispositions expected of certain racial groups in terms of their relationship to environment.”²⁰⁰ For example, society expects Native Americans to have a better understanding of nature and a deep connection with the land. These racial stereotypes are constructed by society and are born out of an “imperialist-colonial construction that engages in harmful purity policies and puts indigenous people in unfair performative binds.”²⁰¹ Therefore, this suggests that the myth of the “ecological Indian” is a colonial construction which imposes a certain behaviour on indigenous populations. In this case, Native Americans are forced to demonstrate a connection with the environment and they are expected to respect the land and all living beings. If they do not, their identities will be questioned. Hence, this perpetuates the colonial perception of Native Americans as well as the social hierarchy that arises from such a colonial construction.

This myth constructs the Amerindian society as the opposite of progress. This is expressed by Michael Hatt in one of his articles. According to Hatt, displaying Native Americans as “ecological savages” had a single purpose, which was to show that: “l’indien était un genre d’anachronisme au milieu des Etats-Unis progressistes et modernes.”²⁰² Consequently, this portrays the dominant culture and the Master identity as the embodiment of progress, development and reason. Moreover, the construction of Native identity as the antithesis of progress suggests that Native Americans are archaic, primitive savages. This is supported by Hatt: “les indiens sont régulièrement représentés comme des sauvages, et dans les discours, de l’ethnographie à la bande dessinée, ils se définissent d’abord et avant tout par la violence. On pouvait s’y attendre: somme toute, il s’agit de justifier la conquête de l’Ouest et l’extermination.”²⁰³ In light of the fact that Amerindians are seen as primitive savages and the

²⁰⁰ Seymour, Nicole. *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018: p.151.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² Hatt, Michael. “Le Peau-Rouge comme Signe de l’Identité Blanche”. *Diogène; Paris* 0, no.177(1997): p.97.

My translation:[The Indian was a sort of anachronism in the middle of the progressists and modern United states]

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp.98-99.

antithesis of progress, the dominant culture can construe itself in opposition to the Native identity. As a consequence, the Master identity perceives itself as superior, which justifies the subordination and oppression of this racial minority. By perpetuating the colonial vision of Native Americans and by trapping this racial minority in behaviours that are considered as archaic and “savage”, the dominant culture supports a society based on dualism. As a result, the dominant culture maintains the dichotomy between coloniser and colonised, master and slave, dominant and inferior. In Hatt’s words, “ces visions apparemment positives se rapportent moins à la question de l’identité indienne qu’elles ne sont un moyen utiles de consolider l’identité blanche.”²⁰⁴ Thus, the myth of the “ecological Indian” enables the Master identity to construe Native Americans, and more broadly racial minorities, as primitive and inferior. It consolidates the Master identity as well as the Master model. In addition to this, it is clear that the Master model, patterns of domination, and colonial ideology are inscribed in modern Western societies.

In Linda Hogan’s novel, the colonial construction used to oppress Native Americans is mentioned to criticise and delegitimise the Master model. As Christa Grewe-Volpp argues, Linda Hogan “uses the Ecological Indian critically, even subversively, to undermine dichotomous thinking, to work towards a symbiosis of Euroamerican and American Indian ways of life.”²⁰⁵ In other words, in *Solar Storms*, racial stereotypes are employed to advocate a new model which differs from the Master model.

5.3 *Solar Storms*: “There was no separation between us”²⁰⁶

The next paragraphs provide a short summary of Hogan’s novel in order to put the analysis in context.

The novel, first published in 1995, is set in North America in the early 1970s. The story depicts how Angela Jensen – a native American young woman who was in foster care since she

My translation: [The Indians are regularly represented as savages, and in the different discourses, from ethnography to graphic novels, they are primarily defined by violence. As expected: the aim is the justification of the conquest of the Wild West and the extermination of Native Americans.]

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.100.

My translation: [these supposedly positive conceptions are less about Indian identity than they are a tool to consolidate white identity]

²⁰⁵ Grewe-Volpp, Christa. “The Ecological Indian vs. the Spiritually Corrupt White Man: The Function of Ethnocentric Notions in Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms*”. *Amerikastudien/ American Studies* 47, n°2 (2002): p.271.

²⁰⁶ Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner paperback fiction, 1995: p.78.

was a child— goes back to her community. Angel was taken by child services when she was a baby because her mother, Hannah, was abusive and violent with her. As a teenager, Angela writes a letter to Agnes, who she believes to be her great grandmother. Agnes tells her to come at once, and Angela returns to her roots, back to the land of her tribe. Angela first lives with Agnes and Dora-Rouge, her great-great grandmother, until she leaves the mainland to live with Bush, the woman who saved her from her mother, on a small island.

However, the arrival of two young Amerindians who announce the construction of a dam on tribal land will force the protagonists to take action. Angel, Bush, Agnes and Dora-Rouge embark on a journey to the land of their ancestors, who are called the fat-eaters. This journey in a canoe is incredibly exhausting and dangerous. During the trip, Agnes dies of a fever, which deeply hurts the characters. Once they arrive on the construction site, Angela and her female ancestors start a long fight to preserve the environment. They protest against the creation of dams on tribal lands because it would have disastrous consequences. The government and developers put their construction plans into action, causing the protests to grow increasingly violent.

During their time on the land of the fat-eaters, Angel meets her mother Hannah, but the latter leaves before they can communicate. Later on, Angel learns that Hannah is dying, and she goes to see her on her death bed. While Angel is watching over her mother during her last moments of life, the main protagonist is finally able to forgive Hannah and move on. At the same time, Angel discovers that she has a baby sister, who she names Aurora, and she decides to take care of her.

At the end of the novel, the characters go back to their community, which has been flooded due to the construction of the dam. Dora-Rouge stays with the fat-eaters in order to die on the land of her ancestors. In the end, Angel looks back at her life and at the events that have taken place. Despite the destruction of nature and the loss of some of her relatives, she keeps hoping that one day, the rest of the world will see that every human being is a part of nature as much as nature is a part of them.

This section dedicated to *Solar Storms* aims to demonstrate that the novel depicts feminised others in an equal partnership with their environment. This differs from the previous case study as, in *The Poisonwood Bible*, women and nature are simply political allies, while in Hogan's novel, it appears that the characters use the land to define themselves. The first aspect addressed is how Native American men relate to their environment. The purpose is to demonstrate that women are not the only ones who are connected to the land, but also that they are not the only ones to be dominated by the dualistic system. The second part of this section

analyses how the protagonists of the novel are tied to nature by means of animal and natural metaphors. This second part also reveals that the relationships between the main characters are set in the natural world. Furthermore, I investigate how nature is personified and humanised. The goal is to show how the dichotomy between human beings and nature is deconstructed. The third part explains that the female characters and nature have agency and are active protagonists.

5.3.1 Feminised Others: Native American Communities

The main protagonists in *Solar Storms* are women, and the novel mainly focuses on their connection to their environment. Nonetheless, it is imperative to note that, in *Solar Storms*, male characters have an essential part to play. Linda Hogan's novel does not solely portray female characters and their oppression. In fact, the narrative portrays a racial minority as a whole, which can be defined as feminised others. The community can be described as feminised in light of the fact that it is considered as primitive, non-white, and impoverished. In the Master model, these features correspond to forms of nature and are considered as inferior to forms of reason. This suggests that men too can be defined as feminised and as *terra nullius* if they are part of a socially disadvantaged community. As a consequence, one should not omit to study how Native American males relate to their environment. As a matter of fact, *Solar Storms* portrays male characters who have a similar relationship to the land as the female protagonists. More importantly, the novel describes men who fight for their land and their beliefs with a strength equalling that of the main characters.

An appropriate example to highlight this concept would be the male character named "Husk", who is Agnes' partner. Similar to the female protagonists, a parallel is drawn between Husk and the environment, and more specifically between Husk and water. As a matter of fact, he is the one who explains and shows to Angel that water is alive. This belief, which is expressed by the offering he makes to the lake, is visible in the following extract: "To keep the Hungry Mouth content while we passed it, Husk took a bag of tobacco from his pocket and fed it to the water, then he added cornmeal and bread."²⁰⁷ Furthermore, Husk appears to be linked to nature in some way: "On land, he wasn't much over five feet five, but in water Husk became large. It was his place, the swaying water."²⁰⁸ Husk appears to be stronger when he is associated with water. This attests the association of what is considered to be "inferior" others with nature.

²⁰⁷ Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner paperback fiction, 1995: p.63

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.62.

Moreover, a male protagonist, Tulik, fights for the land. This male character used to know Dora-Rouge's family, and once the female protagonists arrive to the land of the fat-eaters, they stay in Tulik's house. This male figure will help Angel discover her talent with plants by showing her where to find them, how to treat them, and what songs should be sung for each plant. This demonstrates that Native American men also have an extensive knowledge of the land and of nature. Furthermore, this particular character is influential in his community and plays an important part in the resistance against the construction of a dam on the land of his ancestors. They are disadvantaged subjects of a state that fails to respect their rights. In this case, the male protagonists are not presented as incarnations of the Master model, they are perceived as inferior others and *terra nullius*. In fact, the entire community is disregarded by the Master identity. Thus, even though the main protagonists are women, the novel also displays a minority as a whole, which is composed of both men and women. These male characters reject the Master model by virtue of their conception of nature and their own agency in the community. In addition, they reject the Master model by generating an alternative conception of masculinity as they embrace characteristics which are typically associated with women.

Hence, *Solar Storms* brings racial diversity, but also gender diversity to ecofeminism. In other words, even though women are dominated by the Master model, there are other communities (or individuals) who suffer domination and ecofeminism should take them into account.

5.3.2 Women and the Environment in *Solar Storms*:

In *Solar Storms*, the main female characters are all described by means of animal metaphors. These analogies occur remarkably early in the novel and are apparent in a number of scenes. In these scenes, it is clear that each female protagonist is associated with a specific animal, as well as one of the four elements (i.e. water, air, fire and earth). These metaphors are representative of the attitude, the personality and, in some cases, of the physical appearances of the women. The use of these metaphors and the construction of the female characters as part of nature participate in deconstructing the dichotomy between human beings and nature. Moreover, by undermining this dichotomy, the narrative abolishes dualisms. As a result, the entire structure of the Master model is questioned.

5.3.2.1 *Bush: Water personified*

Firstly, Angel describes Bush extensively, the woman who took her away from her mother when she was a child, and employs a large amount of natural metaphors. There is a recurrent comparison between Bush and water. This metaphor is present at different levels. The first level concerns Bush's appearance. When Angela first sees Bush, she describes her as rising out of the place where land and water meet: "Bush stood barefoot in that dark, newly exposed clay, as if she'd just been created by one of the gods who made us out of earth, as if she'd risen up like first woman."²⁰⁹ This tends to indicate her connection to the land and particularly to water. In fact, by depicting Bush as emerging out of the land, the author deconstructs the dichotomy between human beings and the environment, and the notion of humans as separate from the land.

The second level is her attitude. This is demonstrated later in the novel, when the characters are anxious because it has not rained for a long time, which causes the level of the lake to be extremely low. The narrator describes the attitude of Bush as being similar to water. As a matter of fact, this depiction could express that Bush is compared to water in light of the fact that she touches her plants and talks to them to ask them to grow despite the draught. This is demonstrated in the following extract: "she touched her plants as coaxing them to rise."²¹⁰ In addition, an animal metaphor is also used to describe the character. She is compared to an otter when she is in water: "like a dark-headed otter."²¹¹ This actively illustrates that, like the otter, she feels at home in water. Furthermore, it represents her connection with the animal world.

More importantly, Bush is depicted as being water, she is water. This is expressed on several occasions throughout the novel. For example, in the following extract: "the world of water had claimed her the way it did with people, the way it would one day claim me".²¹² However, the most explicit evidence of this personification of water is the metaphor which is used to describe Bush is expressed in the following example. Angela is watching Bush swim, and she says that "she was water. Agnes once told me there were rumors how the men she'd slept with believed they swam across her."²¹³ This recurrent metaphor (or conceit) demonstrates the connection between the character and the land. Bush is part of the land and it is visible in her physical appearance, her attitude, her entire being, so much so that she embodies an element

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.67.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.75.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.182.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p.67.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p.182.

of the land: she is the land. This is demonstrated by the following extract: “She was a woman of heart. She and the world were all of a piece.”²¹⁴ The conception of the natural world and the character as being one entity, as parts of each other, helps to refute the opposition between human and nature. The character is compared nature, the character is like water. There is no possibility to establish an opposition or a distinction between them.

5.3.2.2 *Dora-Rouge: the Bridge towards the Spiritual World*

Secondly, the main character meets Dora-Rouge, her great-great grandmother. The author’s portrayal of the old woman differs strongly from her depiction of Agnes or Bush. Thus, this actively illustrates that each female character has a unique personality. Moreover, they each have a particular animalistic or earthly alter-ego. The character of Dora-Rouge is regularly associated with a range of animals and natural elements, which are the fox, the owl and the roots. She is characterised as the elder and is believed to be highly intelligent and cunning. In light of these personality traits, she is sometimes described as foxlike. However, one of the most important aspects of Dora-Rouge’s character is that she has access to otherworldly knowledge. For this reason, the protagonist is often compared to a bird, and more specifically to an owl. The reasons behind this metaphor are numerous. First, the owl is a symbol of wisdom, knowledge and, in a number of cultures, it is believed to guard the world of the dead. Therefore, it has a strong connection to spirits.²¹⁵ These symbolisms fit the protagonist perfectly. The reason why Dora-Rouge is able to communicate with the spiritual world is given in the following extract: “She had already begun to step over the boundaries of this world into the next. It was an intelligent world, she said, the next one. It was full of the makings of life, and it was where she conversed with her gone husband, Luther.”²¹⁶ Second, she has physical traits which can be defined as “birdlike”. This is depicted in the following extracts : “Dora-Rouge propped up, was birdlike sitting there”²¹⁷ and “Dora-Rouge had an owl beak of a nose like mine. The same eyebrows, white and longer, though hers turned up a little at the edges, winglike.”²¹⁸

The second metaphor characterising Dora-Rouge is the tree, and more precisely the roots. This metaphor is used to describe her physically, for instance when talking about her skin. It could also be linked to the character’s deep knowledge of plants and their medicinal purposes.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.120.

²¹⁵ Dowd, Mary. “Cherokee beliefs about owls”. *Theclassroom.com*. Accessed April 8, 2020. Available from internet: <https://www.theclassroom.com/cherokee-beliefs-owls-5634.html>

²¹⁶ Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner paperback fiction, 1995: p.31.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

However, this metaphor is mostly used to describe her spiritual impact on the other members of the family. The metaphors involving plants show that Dora-Rouge has the role of matriarch: it is clear that this character holds the family together, and thereupon Dora-Rouge is the roots of this family. Accordingly, she is portrayed and called a “matriarch” recurrently, and each member of this “clan” takes care of her. In other words, she is what keeps the family together. This is illustrated in the following excerpt: “Dora-Rouge, I think now, was a root and we were like a tree family, aspens or birch, connected to one another underground, the older trees feeding the young, sending off shoots, growing.”²¹⁹ For example, before the characters leave the village to go North, they are disagreeing on whether or not they should participate in the protests. The trip to the land of the fat-eaters is very long and dangerous. In order to avoid the blockages set up by the developers, the characters have to leave by canoe. However, since rivers are being redirected, it is highly possible that some passages will be entirely flooded or dry. If the water way is impracticable, the characters would have to carry the canoe on land before returning to the rivers. If Dora-Rouge was to come with them, they would have to carry her due to her old age. In view of these perilous circumstances, Agnes refuses to go and forbids her mother to embark upon this hazardous expedition. This generates tensions between the main characters. Nonetheless, Dora-Rouge insists that she wants to be a part of this trip, which alleviates the tensions. This can be explained by the fact that Agnes, Bush and Angel will unite and converge around the matriarch in order to protect her and take care of her.

5.3.2.3 Agnes: the Bear-like Woman

Agnes is the first relative that Angel encounters, and she also happens to be Angel’s great-grandmother. When Angel crosses the path of Agnes for the first time, she immediately associates her with a bear because of her bear fur coat. From here on, Agnes is constantly assimilated to the animal. This is revealed in the following extract: “She wore a blue-gray fur coat, worn in places, sloppy, and unbuttoned. It made her look like a hungry animal just stepped out of a cave of winter.”²²⁰ In addition to this, Agnes takes care of her bear coat as if it was still alive, as if it was part of her tribe: “she absentmindedly ran her fingers through the blue-gray fur, touching it in the ancient, animal act of grooming that women’s hands remember from long ago.”²²¹ This highlights how women are in touch with these ancient ways. As a matter of fact, Agnes remembers the ancestral ways. It is important to notice that the character of Agnes has

²¹⁹ Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner paperback fiction, 1995: p.48.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.23.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p.30.

memories of actions, traditions and instincts that have been forgotten by the rest of the world for a long time. This notion of reminiscence is emphasised in the upcoming example. Angela is watching Agnes dancing and singing in her fur coat. Dora-Rouge, Agnes' mother, questions her in regard to the song she is singing because it is a "lost" song, a song that people have forgotten over time, and that even Dora-Rouge, who is elderly, does not have the ability to sing. Agnes reveals that it is her bear coat which taught her the song. This is expressed in this quote: "I heard it inside this coat."²²²

Furthermore, Agnes possessed an affinity with the bear which gave her its fur for the coat. Agnes was taking care of a captive glacier bear. Unlike the men who hold it captive, Agnes was not afraid of the bear and "the bear liked this. It knew her in a way."²²³ Here, it is clear that there is a connection between the young Agnes and the old bear, because they are not scared of each other. With the intention to put the animal out of its misery, Agnes killed him. The following scene conveys the profound bond between the character and the animal: "Its eyes were grateful. I saw that. She stroked the big animal. I saw it with my own eyes. That bear put a paw on Agnes and stroked her in return. It touched her. It comforted her."²²⁴ Hence, Agnes' relationship to the bear and the animal metaphors used to define her confirm her strong connection to the natural world. Furthermore, the bear's ability to communicate with Agnes reveals a humanisation of living entities. In fact, it grants several human traits to the bear, and it personifies the animal. Firstly, it grants it a form of language, which is seen as the prerogative of humans. Secondly, the bear has the ability to understand the situation, which shows some kind of consciousness and reason. These attributes are typically associated with the Master identity. Thus, by granting reason and consciousness to the bear, the author attributes characteristics of the "superior" side to the inferior others. This element dismantles the superior/inferior opposition. In consequence, the entire foundation of the Master model is once again questioned.

In the Master model, the human/nature opposition is one of the main dualisms. Thus, by linking a human being to a nonhuman entity, it generates a humanisation of the nonhuman. As a matter of fact, the act of transferring nature towards the human side has two consequences. First, it deconstructs the human/nature dualism. These metaphors assist in the dissolution of the schism between human beings and nature. Second, this move puts nature on the superior side

²²² *Ibid.*, p.44.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p.46.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.47.

which makes the dichotomy between inferior and superior irrelevant. Therefore, these analogies support the nullification of the principles on which the Master model is based.

5.3.2.4 *An Instinctive Relationship*

The second element which underlines the dismantling of the dichotomy between human and nature is the manner in which the main character, Angel, describes her relationship with some of her relatives. On several occasions, the protagonist uses natural metaphors to characterise her connection to her family. Furthermore, the narrator utilizes these metaphors to depict the bond between her relatives and the land. These metaphors are noticeable throughout the entire novel but they already appear in its first pages, especially when Angel is aboard the ferry to meet her family for the first time. While Angel crosses the river, she notices a woman in a canoe who, as she will learn later, is from her family. Angel states that between the two of them “there had once been a bond, something like the ancient pact land had made with water, or the agreement humans once made with animals.”²²⁵ However, when she was taken away by social services from this woman, Bush, by social services, the bond that they had created was severed. It is clear that she describes this broken family connection with natural characteristics. The reason for this is that she argues that, analogously to the link between humans and animals, the bond between Bush and her is broken. Here, a parallel is drawn between the protagonists’ relationship and the relationship between humans and the land. This describes the dualism that was generated by the Master model, in which humans are constructed as independent from nature. However, this does not mean that the bond is permanently broken. In fact, the novel asserts that this severed connection can be repaired. This is expressed by the parallel that can be drawn between Angel’s bond to Bush, and the link between human beings and nature. In light of the fact that Angel’s relationship with Bush becomes considerable and meaningful, it is suggested that it is highly probable that human beings and their environment can, once again, become one.

Another natural metaphor used to express the connection that lies between these female characters is illustrated in the following excerpt: “But I was like Agnes had said: Water going back to itself. I was water falling into a lake and these women were that lake.”²²⁶ The female protagonists in *Solar Storms* describe their relationship in terms of nature. They are part of the natural world and they see themselves as coextensive with nature and all forms of life. As a

²²⁵Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner paperback fiction, 1995: p.22.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.55.

consequence, their relationship is embedded in the natural world. This notion is supported by this excerpt: “we would breathe together the way wolves do with their kith and kin.”²²⁷ The characters portray themselves as a part of the earth, they belong to nature. As a matter of fact, these women perceive that everything is part of the land. This notion is evident in the following extracts: “With the window open, I lived inside water. There was no separation between us. I knew in a moment what water was”²²⁸, and “I understood I was part of the same equation as birds and rain.”²²⁹ These quotations demonstrate the fact that the protagonists conceive living and non-living beings as a whole. Everything, every living and non-living being, is a part of nature and a part of the world. This is reinforced by the idea that there is no border between human beings and animals or between nature and the human world, as highlighted in this extract: “the division between humans and animals was a false one. There were times, even recent times, when they both spoke the same language, when Dora-Rouge’s song was taken into account.”²³⁰ Moreover, the land is also a part of the characters, it is living inside Angel, as expressed in the following extract:

I began to feel that if we had no separate words for inside and out and there were no boundaries between them, no walls, no skin, you would see me. What would meet your eyes would not be the mask of what had happen to me, not the evidence of violence, not even how I closed the doors to the rooms of anger and fear. Some days you would see fire; other days, water. Or earth. You would see how I am like the night sky with its stars that fall through time and space and arrive here as wolves and fish and people, all of us fed by them.²³¹

This excerpt establishes that the distinction between the world and humans has been generated by humans themselves and through language. Hence, it is entirely artificial. Words have created a distinction; the master’s language has separated humans from the rest of the natural world. Analogously to *The Poisonwood Bible*, it seems that the Master model is linked to a problematic use of language. In fact, in both novels, it appears that language is used to support the Master model, dualisms, and a hierarchic structure. In addition to that, humans and animals are portrayed as equals, which can be seen in this sentence: “You would see how I am like the night sky with its stars that fall through time and space and arrive here as wolves and fish and people, all of us fed by them.”²³² The protagonists refuse a hierarchy between humans, nonhumans and

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.45.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.78.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.79.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.81.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p.54.

²³² *Ibid.*

nature. Consequently, the narrator refutes a dualistic model in which one is the master and one is the slave.

Hence, the female characters in *Solar Storms* define themselves as a part of the world, and a part of nature. They are part of the land, of the animals, of the elements, but more importantly, they are made of these components: they are the land. In other words, the characters are coextensive with the land. As it is asserted by the narrator herself: “We were shaped out of this land by the hands of gods. Or maybe it was that we embodied the land.”²³³ The use of natural metaphors to depict the relationship between the different characters enables the novel to insert human beings, society, and human interactions inside nature. Additionally, setting the narrator and her relatives inside nature, and as part of nature, supports the rejection of a chasm between nature and human beings. The narrator insists on the artificial origin of this schism. It has been produced artificially by the Master identity, it is thus irrelevant and should be forgotten.

5.3.2.5 *Personification of the Natural World*

This last section aims to demonstrate how nature is personified and granted human characteristics which are usually associated with the Master model. In *Solar Storms*, the natural is described as being able to communicate and as a spirit or a deity.

The characters, both male and female, consider the land as a being with a life and a mind of its own. Hogan’s *Solar Storms* expresses this notion through the personification of nature. For instance, water is depicted as being alive, which is expressed in the following extract: “the lake was alive. I was sure of it.”²³⁴ Water is also described as having a mind of its own, this characteristic is revealed in the following extract: “these two rivers had probably never liked each other in the first place, I thought.”²³⁵ The idea of water as a living entity is expressed by Dora-Rouge when she says that “the rivers are angry. Both of them.”²³⁶ Lastly, the characters maintain that the lake, the rivers, and everything that belongs to water, has a voice which is noticeable on several occasions: “As I crossed the lake and heard its voice, I thought of Husk’s words, that the world was alive”²³⁷, “I could hear it, the tribe of water speaking”²³⁸ as well as

²³³ *Ibid.*, p.228.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.73.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.195.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.192.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.129.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.118.

“where water’s voice said things only the oldest of people understood.”²³⁹ Moreover, air and wind are personified too, which is observable in the following excerpt: “Trees, freed up, were being moved by the wind. They creaked as the wind spoke through them, telling winter to hurry away, singing back the sun, the green new shoots of living things.”²⁴⁰ The fact that the elements have a voice and their ability to use a form of language opposes the idea that language is the prerogative of human beings.

In addition to these aspects, it is fundamental to mention how Bush talks to the fire when Angel is severely burnt. The character of Bush is able to ease the pain by communicating with the heat. This is illustrated in the following quote: “she spoke to the burn, spoke with it.”²⁴¹ This characteristic implies that, similarly to the other natural elements, fire has a life and a mind of its own on the grounds that it can be reasoned with. In addition, when the characters cannot cross the river to keep traveling north, Dora-Rouge will make a deal with water. Angel and her relatives have to canoe down a river but the rivers are too agitated. Dora-Rouge says that the river is angry but that she will try to talk with water. This is described in the following extract:

It would have been a lie if any of us said we weren’t afraid, and it would have been a lie, too, if we’d said we believed completely in Dora-Rouge as she sat on the bank of the river and spoke.

We could only see her lips move. We heard nothing she said. But after a while she nodded at us.

‘It will let us go,’ she said loudly, and that was the final word.²⁴²

After Agnes’ death, Dora-Rouge blames herself and the deal she made with water: “This is all my fault [...] I’m the one who made the deal with water.”²⁴³ It appears that this notion of language is crucial and contributes to the construction of nature as an active subject.

Moreover, nature loses its status of inferior entity in light of its spiritual connotation. In *Solar Storms*, the land is a god, or at least a spirit. As expressed by one of the characters: “‘I love the ground,’ she said. ‘It’s my God.’”²⁴⁴ To explore and analyse the deification of the natural world, two examples will be used: water and Wolverine. First, water is depicted as a spirit, and even as a god. This is shown through Angel’s first crossing of the lake. During this first trip, Husk explains to her that there is the Hungry mouth of Water, which is a place on the lake that never freezes. The legend says that if you go close enough, you can still see everything

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.73.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.134.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.263.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p.193.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.215.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.312.

that was swallowed: it never moves, and it never changes. It is described as a dangerous entity waiting for its next prey, but it is above all a spirit or a deity:

Halfway between Adam's Rib and Fur island was the Hungry mouth of Water. It was a circle in the lake where winter ice never froze. Young people, with their new and shiny beliefs, called this the Warm Spot, and thought it was a geological oddity, a spring perhaps, or bad currents. But the older ones, whose gods still lived on earth, called it the Hungry Mouth of Water, because if water wasn't a spirit, if water wasn't a god that ruled their lives, nothing was.²⁴⁵

Water is an entity with a form of power and an ability to rule and change people's lives. Second, Wolverine is described as an entity which cannot be seen. It is an invisible trickster, and no one truly knows what or who Wolverine is. However, Wolverine is also called Mondi, which is a deity or a powerful entity. The narrator explains that Mondi or Wolverine is the one who created the world and the Earth. This is revealed in the following excerpt: "Because it was Mondi, Wolverine, who'd made the world and the sun and moon."²⁴⁶ Thus, the natural world is personified, but it also appears to be an entity which possesses some form of agency.

In conclusion, the personification of the environment expresses that the female characters of the novel are able to communicate with the land, with nature and with all that is part of it. This is achieved through the medium of the humanization of the land. These metaphors attribute human traits to nature—whether it is living or non-living. Furthermore, by bestowing emotions, feelings, to the natural world, the Master model is reversed. This is illustrated by a reversal of the key oppositions: the environment goes from animality to rationality, from nature to human. However, the most significant transfers are from object to subject, and from other to self. Nature is no longer an inferior entity because it is shown to have the same values as the Master identity. As a consequence, the dichotomies between human and nature, between superior and inferior, are undermined. Thus, nature is no longer separate from human beings, no longer inferior, and no longer passive. Hence, the land cannot be described as *terra nullius* and it cannot justifiably be exploited and dominated.

5.3.3 Feminised Others as Active Entities

In this section, I demonstrate that the female protagonists in *Solar Storms* are active subjects and agents. The characters go against the Master model by redefining motherhood and by participating in environmental activism.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.62.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.321-322.

In the Master model, women are associated with body, emotions, matter and reproduction. Plumwood asserts that reproduction is not perceived as a project or a choice. As a matter of fact, it is conceived as being linked to the field of nature, and as a process which is undergone instead of undertaken.²⁴⁷ In addition to this, Gaard notes that motherhood has been described as the ultimate purpose of women:

The equation of 'natural' with 'procreative' should be familiar to all feminists, for it is just this claim that has been used in a variety of attempts to manipulate women back into compulsory motherhood and so-called women's sphere. From a historical perspective, the equation of woman's 'true nature' with motherhood has been used to oppress women, just as the equation of sexuality with procreation has been used to oppress both women and queers.²⁴⁸

For Plumwood, this conception is particularly representative of the Culture/Nature dualism. In consequence, it participates in the Master model and in the oppression of women. In order to escape the dualist structure which prevails in Western society, it is necessary to rethink reproduction as well as motherhood. Plumwood argues that it is essential to redefine reproduction as "powerful, creative and involving skill, care and knowledge with the reproductive woman as subject."²⁴⁹ In other words, reproduction has to be a project which is undertaken instead of endured. This enables women to become active agents. Analogously to Schultermandl²⁵⁰ –an American literature professor– I assert that, in *Solar Storms*, there is an alternative conception of motherhood and maternal care. This undermines the masculine perception of motherhood as well as the Master model more generally.

In her article, Schultermndl argues that the main protagonist, Angel, who was mistreated by her mother and then taken by social services, has the ability to: "sympathize with her mother's fate rather than judge her along patriarchal norms of good or bad motherhood."²⁵¹ This ability is linked to her family's history. The author of the article states that Loretta, Angel's grandmother, is the embodiment of the masculine's exploitation of the land, of Angel's community and of her people. The damage done to Loretta's psyche would originate from witnessing the dissolution and the extinction of her people. Additionally, it would also stem from how she was beaten and raped by the Euro-American settlers. Schultermndl writes that

²⁴⁷ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.38.

²⁴⁸ Gaard, Greta. "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism." *Hypatia* 12, no. 1 (1997): p.120.

²⁴⁹ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.39.

²⁵⁰ Schultermndl, Silvia. "Fighting for the Mother/Land: An Ecofeminist Reading of Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 17, no. 3 (2005): pp.67-84.

²⁵¹ Schultermndl, Silvia. "Fighting for the Mother/Land: An Ecofeminist Reading of Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 17, no. 3 (2005): p.73.

the way Loretta was treated is similar to how the land was treated.²⁵² Through the story of her grandmother, Angel is able to understand that her own mother, Hannah, was abandoned and most probably abused as well. As a result, “Angel learns to understand the significance of her mother’s own behaviour beyond patriarchal laws that advocate maternal guilt and bad motherhood.”²⁵³ In other words, Angel is able to understand her mother’s behaviour, which originates in the abuse that she underwent. This causes Angel to accept that her mother was repeating the same pattern as her grandmother. According to the article, the story of her grandmother, along with her own mother’s damaged psyche, have consequences on Angel. As a matter of fact, her family’s history makes the main protagonist realise that these behaviours are consequences of the patriarchal domination of nature, of women and of racial minorities. For Schultermandl, Angel’s completion of her reinsertion into her community is dependent on her ability to forgive her birthmother.

The author adds that the community described in *Solar Storms* promotes lateral structures instead of hierarchical ones. In fact, for Schultermandl, the relationship between Angel and her abusive mother is representative of such lateral structures.²⁵⁴ In addition to this, Schultermandl uses these lateral structures to define the relationship between the female protagonists and nonhuman nature. Thus, according to the author of the article, Linda Hogan’s novel “treats matrilineage as gynocratic principle of cultural resistance against Western domination of Native American tribes and lands.”²⁵⁵ Therefore, this actively illustrates that matrilineage, the connection between these women, as well as the relationship between Angel and her mother, counters Western domination and “patriarchal hierarchies.”²⁵⁶ In other words, due to the fact that Angel is able to have compassion for her mother and to forgive her, she refutes a normative conception of motherhood, of maternal care, and of womanhood.

Angel’s capacity to forgive her mother counters what Schutlermandl qualifies as “patriarchal hierarchies”. As I mentioned earlier, however, I prefer to use the term “Master model” or “dualistic model”. The reason for this occurrence is that “Master model” is not universal but rather representative of Western culture.²⁵⁷ Instead, the term “patriarchy” suggests universality. This is explained by Plumwood in the following extract: “Accounts of a generalised ‘patriarchy’ as the villain behind the ecological crisis implicitly assume that western

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.74.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.76.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.11.

culture is human culture.”²⁵⁸ What I argue is that, in *Solar Storms*, the conception of motherhood and the conception of maternal care go against the Master model and its principles.

Firstly, the construction of Hannah as an abusive mother who is unable to care for her children undermines the association between women and emotions. The narrative rejects the definition of reproduction and motherhood as being “natural”. This is achieved by describing Hannah as incapable of caring for her child and by the fact that the characters do not judge her for this. As a matter of fact, it dismantles the notion of reproduction as being “the field of nature”, “the work of instinct, lacking skill, care and value.”²⁵⁹ Therefore, the character of Hannah questions the Master model –and the dualistic structure on which it is based– in light of the fact that women and reproduction can no longer be linked to the primitive, to emotions, and to nature. Secondly, after Hannah’s death, Angel decides to take care of her baby sister similarly to how Bush, Agnes and Dora-Rouge decided to educate her, to care for her and, in some way, to adopt her. This decision demonstrates that maternal care is a choice rather than an imposition. Thus, women are subjects, agents of care in opposition to objects of reproduction. Moreover, the association of maternal care with the body, reproduction, and animality is counteracted. If attending to a human being is a choice, then it can be linked to emotions, but also to a form of rationality, and to intellect. As a result, it becomes a deliberate and enlightened choice.

The second aspect which reveals the agency of the protagonists is their “environmental activism”, as well as their determination to denounce the injustice that they are suffering from. To start with, it is clear that actively participating in the protection of the environment –which can be defined as environmental activism– is the opposite of a passive being. It is also the antinomy of the theoretical notion of *terra nullius*. As a reminder, *terra nullius* can be defined as “a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings, and hence available to be annexed for the purposes of those supposedly identified with reason or intellect, and to be conceived and moulded in relation to these purposes.”²⁶⁰ One of the consequences of the women’s participation in the protests in Hogan’s novel is that they have their own purposes. Their main aim is to protect the tribal lands, and more importantly the tribes themselves. The reason behind their activism is that the construction of the hydroelectric dam will result in the flooding of their villages. Moreover, it will also result in the destruction of nature, in the disappearance of numerous animals and in the delocalisation of the tribe.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.38.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.4.

In addition to this, the female characters expose the company's harmful activities. The main protagonist, Angel, does an interview with a radio program called "Indian time", and during that interview she reveals the way her people are being threatened and mistreated by the logging industry:

I felt bad doing it, not laying low like I'd promised Tulik, but I was foolish; I still believed in justice, so I told Mike Seela all about the bulldozers and lights and how I'd been arrested and the truck impounded and even that it would cost \$128 to get it out of tow. I wanted everyone to know.²⁶¹

A parallel can be drawn between the actions of Angel and those of Bush. Indeed, Bush is also determined to make public the threats posed by the logging company to the tribal lands. Bush's work is published in a number of newspapers in Canada and the United States, and her main theme is the abuse suffered by Native Americans. Angel's radio interview and Bush's articles undermine the Master model. As a result of their environmental activism, and their publication of the crimes against the tribes, the female protagonists enter political life. Thus, the women in *Solar Storms* participate in the public sphere, and they become active subjects and "protectors" of the land. Hence, they are no longer objects of abuse and mistreatment. Lastly, the depiction of the protagonists and their undertaking or opposed to the process of incorporation (or relational definition), a process which participates in the dualistic structure prevailing in Western society (see section 3.3). As a matter of fact, by rediscovering the stories of inferior others and by giving them a voice, the novel allows them to redefine their own identity. It affirms an identity which is separate from the Master identity and it asserts resistance.²⁶²

5.3.4 A New Model: Wolverine and Creation

As in the previous case study, *Solar Storms* rejects and deconstructs the Master model. Moreover, the critique of the old model is combined with a tentative definition of a new, alternative model. The Master model is supplanted by a model based on Wolverine and creation.

In Hogan's novel, a new model is formed around the symbol of Wolverine. It appears that no one exactly knows what or who Wolverine is. In addition to this, Wolverine only appears as a shadow and cannot be seen. Hence, Wolverine, is a trickster, like Coyote, because it generates

²⁶¹Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner paperback fiction, 1995: p.292.

²⁶² Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1997: p.60.

a world in which nothing is what it seems. This is illustrated in the following extract: “Luce said there were witches who turned themselves into Wolverines”²⁶³, and in this excerpt:

Yes, it is true there are witches who turn themselves into wolverines to do their work, just like the old people always said. Like Wolverine, they make themselves invisible. They can pass right by you and you’ll only feel a chill or catch the smell of them. Old Wolverine is just a mask. There’s a man or woman underneath the mask, wearing it, you see. That person can walk on all fours, and has learned to be sly. They move so soft, like a whisper, and all you see is a shadow.²⁶⁴

Wolverine is able to take the appearance of other beings while remaining, at the core, Wolverine. As said by Phelan, this portrays a world in which there is no definite identity, because we do not know who is who and what is what.²⁶⁵ In other words, Wolverine appears to be a master of metamorphosis. In this particular case, the characters cannot determine whether Wolverine is human or nonhuman. As a consequence, the dichotomy between human and nonhuman is indistinct.

Furthermore, Angel imitates and becomes Wolverine. She decides to starve the workers and the soldiers who protect the construction side, and in order to do so, she pretends to be Wolverine. She thinks the way Wolverine thinks and she becomes Wolverine. Her goal is to make the workers believe that Wolverine destroyed their supplies. This is demonstrated in the following extracts: “I slipped out of bed, pretending to be Wolverine, thinking inside myself the way a wolverine might think”²⁶⁶, and “I knew Wolverine and his destruction perfectly well. Without words, I, like Wolverine, would tell the men to leave our world. Without words, I, like Wolverine, would speak, would destroy their food so they would grow hungry, so they would have to leave.”²⁶⁷ These extracts reveal that there are no clear and absolute identities. As a matter of fact, human beings and nature cannot be classified into hermetic categories; entities can travel through the categories, as can be seen through the figure of Wolverine and through Angel’s shape-shifting. Thus, this indicates a conception of the world that is very different from the Master model. *Solar Storms* constructs a non-dualistic model in which human and nature are entwined to such an extent that the distinction between them becomes indiscernible. This is illustrated in the following passage: “If you listen at the walls of one human being, even if that one is yourself, you will hear the

²⁶³ Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner paperback fiction, 1995: p.321.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ Phelan, Shane. "Coyote Politics: Trickster Tales and Feminist Futures." *Hypatia* 11, no. 3 (1996): p.131.

²⁶⁶ Hogan, Linda. *Solar Storms*. New York: Scribner paperback fiction, 1995: p.322.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

drumming. Older creatures are remembered in the blood. Inside ourselves we are not yet upright walkers. We are tree. We are frog in amber. Maybe earth is just now starting to form.”²⁶⁸ Human beings are inset into the natural world, but the land is also imbedded in them. Through the medium of *Wolverine*, the novel favours and highlights the possibility to create a new model, to create a new society and new ways to relate to the world.

5.4 *Solar Storms* and *The Poisonwood Bible*: Agency and Creation

Ecofeminism studies how “inferior” others and nature are oppressed by a dualist structure. In addition, ecofeminism argues for a deconstruction of this model (i.e. the Master model). Thus, an ecofeminist reading of the novels allows to explore how the narratives describe this oppressive structure and how they emancipate themselves from this system. In *The Poisonwood Bible* and in *Solar Storms*, nature is designated as an active entity, an agent. Consequently, both novels help to nullify the concept of *terra nullius*. This depiction of the environment as an active subject, instead of a passive object, leads to a nullification of the justification of the exploitation of nature. However, it must also be noted that the construction of nature, and of feminised others, differ in the two narratives.

In *Solar Storms*, the metaphors bridging the gap between the female protagonists and the environment create a connection with the land, blurring the frontier between human and nature. Similarly, the personification of nature participates in dismantling the schism between human beings and nature. The land is humanised through these processes which attribute human characteristics to nature. Consequently, the dichotomy between inferior and superior appears to be irrelevant. Therefore, due to the fact that nature is construed as an active entity, the land cannot be described as *terra nullius* anymore. Thus, in Hogan’s novel, the exploitation and domination of nature is shown to be based on a problematic model of the human and nonhuman world. This is due to the fact that nature is not a passive entity and is not separate from human beings. Regarding the association between women and nature, it is clear that the female characters have a particular relationship with the land. In fact, they have the ability to communicate with the environment, and are involved in what can be described as an egalitarian partnership with nature. According to the characters, the separation between human beings and nature is a false one. This schism was created by language (or a wrong use of language), and is thus artificial.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.351.

Regarding the construction of feminised others as active agents and subjects, in Linda Hogan's novel, the female characters are active subjects, in virtue of their environmental activism, and of their protests to protect the tribal land. Moreover, the fact that they make their actions public supports their status of subjects. The female protagonists are connected to nature, which is defined as an agent and, as a consequence, both women and nature become subjects. Furthermore, the novel deconstructs the traditional association between women and reproduction (and motherhood). This is achieved by portraying Angel's mother as a woman unable to provide care for her children, and by displaying alternative forms of maternal care. In *Solar Storms*, maternal care is depicted as a choice and it is not systematically linked to reproduction. However, an important aspect of Hogan's novel is that the main protagonists are representative of the entire class of feminised others. As a matter of fact, they are Native American women so they are female, they come from a racial minority, and they originate from an impoverished community. Hence, they represent a large spectrum of the feminised others because race and ethnicity are more important in this novel.

In *The Poisonwood Bible*, nature is conceived as an active, unpredictable agent. This is achieved by means of the personification of the land, and more precisely of Congolese nature. In addition to this, in Kingsolver's novel, nature's common association with reproduction – rather than production – is denied. This is achieved through the novel's conception of the land as ambivalent. As a matter of fact, nature seems to alternate between life and death, it is simultaneously creation and destruction. As a consequence, the narrative conveys a conception of nature which is similar to the Amerindian concept of Coyote. This trickster entity is characterised by its ambivalence, as it is believed to be a shape-shifter. Therefore, it actively illustrates that Coyote can be anything and everything, it is constantly transforming. Moreover, by describing nature as a combination of life and death, of creation and destruction, the novel links the environment to the trickster figure. The reason for this is that Coyote is defined by the fact that it is in an endless cycle of life and death, which also suggests its timelessness. Hence, Congolese nature – and more broadly nature as a whole – is construed as an active, unpredictable and ambivalent agent: Coyote. Moreover, in the novel, the female protagonists' sole connection to nature originates from the fact that they are exploited and dominated by a similar structure, i.e. the Master model. Thus, women and nature are "allies" due to the fact that they attempt to resist the same structure.

In *The Poisonwood bible*, the female protagonists emancipate themselves through the medium of the narrative structure itself. In fact, the main characters are constantly silenced by the authority figure, which is symbolised by Nathan. Nonetheless, in light of the fact that they

are the narrators of the story, they are granted a voice. Therefore, the Master identity does not have the opportunity to tell its own story. Thus, the female narrators and protagonists become subjects, agents of the narrative. Through their description of the Master model, they question the entire structure prevailing in Western society. In addition to this, the authority of the Master identity is mitigated by the subversion of the Master model's language. The characters reverse the master's ideology and language. This is achieved through the inappropriate use of biblical terminology, with the use of "consecrate" expressions in the public, non-religious sphere, for example. Moreover, the Master identity and its language are derided and criticised. These strategies are used to demonstrate the inconsistencies in the structure promoted by the Master model and its language. Lastly, one of the characters liberates herself from the master's language through the use of an alternative language: science. It must also be noted that, in Kingsolver's novel, the protagonists are white, privileged women who remain in roles which can be considered as essentially traditional. Nevertheless, the novel depicts the multitude of identities that the category "women" encompasses by means of the use of distinctive narrators.

Hence, it appears that, in both novels, feminised others and nature free themselves from the master's domination and exploitation. In both narratives, the female protagonists reject their status of inferior beings. They refuse to be considered as objects which are meant to be possessed and exploited by Western men (missionaries, colonists, and characters associated with other forms of oppression) who flaunt themselves and parade their alleged superiority. Analogously, the natural world is not inanimate, it is not meant to be controlled and altered by human beings. As a matter of fact, it has agency and it keeps evolving despite the intervention of human beings. Thus, nature –Coyote– unchains itself from an anthropocentric vision of the world; it liberates itself from anthropocentrism. The natural world is not subordinated to human beings, it is an agent and an entity in itself. Furthermore, the connection between feminised others and nature cannot be employed to subdue them and to characterise them as inferior beings. This is due to the fact that feminised others and nature, two agents and two subjects, are allies and partners in a fight against the unwarranted domination of the Master identity. Thus, this association is a tool in the struggle for a society in which equality and sustainability prevail.

Lastly, *Solar Storms* and *The Poisonwood Bible* conceive a model differing from the Master model. In fact, they propose a new system which is non-hierarchical and non-binary. This model is based on Coyote or Wolverine. The main feature of the Coyote or Wolverine system is that it intertwines the dualisms. In Hogan's novel, it becomes virtually impossible to discern the true identity of Wolverine; it is as much human as it is animal. Angel even transforms into Wolverine for a certain time. In Kingsolver's novel, Ruth May's essence defines

herself as a part of everything that is here, she is “the forest’s conscience.”²⁶⁹ Thus, human and nature are shown to be indistinguishable. Coyote/Wolverine interlace reproduction and destruction, life and death. In *The Poisonwood Bible*, “the forest eats itself and lives forever”²⁷⁰ and in *Solar Storms*, Wolverine is both Mondri the creator of the world and the one who starves humans. This model generates a world which does not have defined boundaries and in which there are no immutable identities. Moreover, this new model promotes a more sustainable world in which every entity is considered as a subject and an agent. It should be noticed that this model is promoted by the characters, and it is adopted by them, but it is not adopted by the rest of the world. However, the characters have hope that, one day, this new system will be implemented.

As a result, it is clear that an ecofeminist approach allows us to analyse forms of domination, how modern forms of oppression are connected to each other, and how these forms of oppression reinforce each other. An ecofeminist position also allows to analyse how forms of oppression can be dismantled. An ecofeminist reading of *Solar Storms* and *The Poisonwood Bible*, has made clear that nature, men from racial minorities, and women (white or non-white) are all dominated by a similar structure. Moreover, these novels promote a new model, and explore ways in which society can move away from such a pernicious model.

²⁶⁹ Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004: p.642.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.5.

6 Conclusion: A Fight for Equality and Sustainability

The aim of this research project was to demonstrate that our society is based on a dualist model, the Master model, which means that one part of the key oppositions, and one gender, are considered as having a more considerable value. This system is integrated in Western ideology, and some traces of it are visible in the workspace, in literature: the exploitation of the environment as well as gender inequalities are two examples of it. The dualistic model constructs a Master identity which is believed to possess reason, a trait that is considered to be superior to nature. As a result, individuals or communities judged as closer to nature, or “feminised”, are inferior to the Master identity due to their lack of reason. This deficiency serves as a justification for their oppression and, in a number of cases, exploitation. In other words, others are inferior, ignorant and lack reason, so it is considered to be “natural” (in this model) that they are subordinated to those who have knowledge and reason. Furthermore, this dualistic model constructs feminised others as passive entities who do not have their own purposes or meanings. Due to this absence of purpose, the inferior others are used to fulfil the Master identity’s aspirations. Thus, it is clear that it is a hierarchical construction. The research hypothesis was that *Solar Storms* and *The Poisonwood Bible* portray female characters and nature as active protagonists—in lieu of passive entities—who refuse this dominant Master model and its damaging effects. Instead, they advocate a non-hierarchical society and respect for both humans and nonhumans. The study illustrates how *Solar Storms*, written by Linda Hogan, and *The Poisonwood Bible*, a novel by Barbara Kingsolver, denounce the Master model and deconstruct the conception of the feminised others and nature as naturally inferior. These novels extract women, nature and feminised others from their passive states, which makes the justification of their oppression null and void. In addition, the narratives attempt to create a new and non-hierarchical model.

The analysis has revealed that the connection between women and nature is a constant topic in literature. The association of women with the environment is visible in narratives written by female and male authors. However, as reported by Pratt, some male authors seem to criticise the importance of nature for their female characters. Through this analysis of male authors’ description of women in connection to nature, I have demonstrated that such depictions have been used to construe women as irrational. This notion of irrationality supports the concept of women as inferior beings, and thus it can be used to justify their domination. However, female authors seem to embrace the association between women and nature. I have been able to establish the fact that two approaches can characterise this relationship: the first one can be

depicted as essentialist, describing the bond as immanent. The second acknowledges the association between women and nature but uses it to criticise the Master model. This second approach challenges the essentialist vision of the connection between women and nature. In fact, this stance conceptualises the bond as a tool to emancipate women and nature from their status of objects. This recurrent topic in literature suggests that the relationship between feminised others and nature is engraved in Western society's ideology. Moreover, I have also established that the existence of a connection between nature and racial minorities, and more precisely Amerindians, is part of the colonial process. Similar to male authors' depictions of women as irrational, Native Americans are described as closer to nature in order to establish their inferiority. In fact, the bond between Amerindians and the land is employed to conceptualize them as the antithesis of Western society. Thus, using this bond to construe Amerindians as primitive savages consolidates the perception of Western society as enlightened, civilized and superior. However, as with the stereotypical link between women and nature, there are positive and negative ways of describing that connection. A prime example is Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*.

In *Solar Storms* and in *The Poisonwood Bible*, it is clear that the connection between feminised others and nature is used to liberate these two subjects from a hierarchic and binary system. When it comes to the natural world, the personification of nature and the metaphors linking it to the protagonists personify nature. In both narratives, the environment is described as being an active and living entity. Additionally, the novels set the protagonists and storyline in the heart of nature. They put human beings and human relationships inside nature rather than outside it. As a consequence, the separation, the dichotomy between human beings and nature is deconstructed. Furthermore, because it is portrayed as an active entity, the natural world cannot be perceived as an object. The fact that nature is alive, evolving, and constructing itself, identifies the environment as "an active, unpredictable (and ungendered) trickster –coyote– whose agency allows it to defy the totalization of human representation."²⁷¹ Hence, if nature is not an object deficient in purpose and in meaning, the hierarchy between human beings and nature is groundless, and its unsustainable exploitation must be prohibited.

Regarding feminised others, by deconstructing the common associations between them and emotions, reproduction, body, and primitiveness, the novels contradict the Master model. In fact, attributing forms of reason to the inferior others suppresses the dualisms between master

²⁷¹ Haraway, Donna quoted in Sandilands, Catriona. "Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer: Ecofeminism and (More) Questions of Identity." *NWSA Journal* 9, no. 3 (1997): p.31.

and slave, between inferior and superior. Thus, due to the fact that they have qualities that are analogous to those of the master, feminised others cannot, and should not be perceived as inferiors. Moreover, the protagonists are depicted as having a specific purpose: protecting tribal lands, saving their daughters, studying rare diseases or liberating Africa. These examples attest the active state and the agency of the characters. This agency is also shown by the fact that they are the narrators of the story. Therefore, they have a voice and they subvert the Master identity's authority and its monopoly on language. In addition, through the narrators' thorough descriptions of the Master model and of Western hegemony, the narratives decry colonial practices and the dualistic model, which are omnipresent in our past and present. As a result, these numerous processes make the oppression of the Master model unjustifiable. The novels challenge a dualistic and pyramidal structure, and promote a non-hierarchical system based on equality and sustainability. In conclusion, I assert that these narratives invite the reader to reconsider the socially, sexually and ecologically unsustainable beliefs of certain parts of society.

Finally, it should be noted that this study was based on one single novel from each of the aforementioned writers. In other words, the study is based on a limited corpus. In order to further investigate the ecofeminist stance of Linda Hogan's and Barbara Kingsolver's work, and more broadly the ecofeminist stance in modern literature, a wider corpus would be of great use. Moreover, a study of the representation of the Master model in the work of African American writers, of LGBTQ authors and of authors from other minorities authors would enable a more thorough and exhaustive representation of ecofeminism in literature. This form of analysis would uncover new narratives with unknown protagonists, new subjects and new agents fighting with the same goal since time immemorial: equality and respect for diversity.

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