

## Review

# Multiple spatialities, temporalities, and gender identities

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This paper seeks to develop a conception of time as a category open to continuous rethinking and to consider it in the mid of multiple forces like space and gender. Guided by the postcolonial perspective on temporal difference, emphasis is put on how revisiting historical processes disrupts the linear notion of time by narrating various moments as disjunctive parts of the same story. Nonlinear narratives highlight the way the past comes back to disrupt the present. However, these narratives demonstrate that cyclical time as opposed to linear time does not only mean defeat but also may encode the repetition of possibility through attention to historical exclusion and recourse to harmony with the non-human world. The concepts of cyclicity and harmony with nature largely correspond to the ecofeminist conceptualizations of time in terms of multiplicity and acknowledgement of difference. Spatial turn is an intellectual movement that has shifted attention to the dynamic nature of space with regard to cultural change. This movement appeared in dialogue with feminist, ecological and postcolonial thoughts. Hence, this paper also shows how these thoughts share the understanding of space as multiple and heterogeneous to offer alternative spatial configurations. Focusing on theorizing space and gender, both feminist and spatial critique meet in their analysis of patriarchal spatialization, more specifically of the binary oppositions and hierarchical power structures that are laid bare through human interactions with space. This analysis highlights the ways through which the space is gendered. Hence, ecofeminists aim to initiate a multiple understanding of gender.

**Key words:** Time, space, ecofeminist conceptualizations, multiplicity, interaction

## INTRODUCTION

The enaction of timeless spaces, where the present mediates between the past and future and offers possibilities of interpretation thus regeneration of space, highlights "the interlocking formations of class, gender, and racial hierarchies" (Gregg, 1995, 131). Mardirossian explains that consciousness about the interconnection between race, class and gender helps face hegemony.

The three categories imply an exclusion of difference in a way that works against one weakens the others in the process of "reclaiming difference" (Mardirossian, 2005, 1). In *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, Vandana Shiva, who is an Indian environmentalist and author, developed a postcolonial examination within the framework of

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ecofeminism<sup>1</sup> which is a theory built on the idea that the social forces that naturalize the domination of women are the same forces that naturalize the exploitation of the natural environment. This examination is built on considering race-based and imperialist obsession with domination as engendering historical varieties of dualism (Shiva, 1989, 240). Plumwood defines the latter as “the process by which contrasting concepts are formed by domination/ subordination and are constructed as oppositional and exclusive” (Plumwood, 1993, 30). Dualism creates an “exaggerated separation” (Plumwood, 1993, 59). It sets all forms of difference as boundaries between self and other. Hence, an effective remedy could be “a merger strategy” (ibid). The latter involves recognizing the fruitful aspect of difference; one that does not naturally lead to hierarchy nor does it hamper coexistence between the two poles of dualism. By eliminating overthinking about distinctions, the relationship between masculine and feminine, colonizer and colonized, human beings and nature could find their escape road from dualism.

In the same line of thought, Anne Naess comments on the way the preservation of an important level of diversity and embeddedness in nature broadens the scope of human possibilities: “Self-realization is the realization of the potentialities of life. Organisms that differ from each other in three ways give us less diversity than organisms that differ from each other in one hundred ways [...] The greater the diversity, the greater the self-realization” (Naess, 1993, 185). This form of ‘self-realization’ permits human beings to understand their positions as part of the system not as masters above it. Such a sense of belonging advances notions of coexistence rather than domination. In this sense, there is a celebration of women’s efforts in paving the way for raising nature beyond a mere human utility. Nature is represented as a controlling force of intrinsic worth. Emphasis on ‘diversity’ as leading to ‘self-realization’ is heightened in many ecologically-charged female texts where the feminine and natural worlds juxtapose. This article develops a critical discussion of how the blending of an ecocritical vision and a feminist outlook, in some instances of postcolonial Anglophone Caribbean fiction, namely Jean Rhys’ works, display significant aspects of continuity related to Canadian literature, namely Margaret Atwood’s works. It is to show that both literary canons, though originating from different historical, cultural, and ideological backgrounds, meet in their perception of natural and patriarchal manipulation as bound up with colonial

exploitation.

The novels under study probe into history, refashion it, and link it to previously unexplored areas incorporating ecology. They bring into light important linkages between gender, colonialism, and ecology in the production of history. Their gendered representation of environmental history proposes new lenses from which historical events can be interpreted. The non-human world, incorporating nature, landscapes, and ecosystems, stems its importance from the fact that it can serve as a material and physical incarnation of history. The intersection between the characters and space in those novels may retrieve a long-buried history with memory and interpretation being major tools for doing so. As Linda Nash asserts: “what binds [ecofeminist historians] together is a strongly held belief that material environments- for all their sociality, historicity, and constructedness- always matter to history” (Nash, 2013, 133). As Shaffer and Young also noted in their influential book on environmentalism, *Rendering Nature: Animals, Bodies, Places, and Politics*, environmental history “sought to distinguish itself through an approach that foregrounded the role of the physical world as a crucial context for understanding human history” (Shaffer and Young, 2015, 6). While feminism concentrates on the study of gender, ecocriticism examines literature from a nature-based perspective and concentrates on the way the interactions between individuals and nature are portrayed through different literary devices mainly imagery. Feminist ecocriticism, however, relates the study of nature to that of gender in literary productions. Ecofeminism brings to the fore two seemingly different notions: gender and ecology. It forges the link between the dominance of men and the environmental crisis while diving into the depth of the structures of mastery, dualism and colonialism. It aims at drawing “a synthesis of environmental and social concerns” (Garrard, 2004, 3).

An Ecofeminist reading of gender aims at reexamining how binary definitions give rise to oppositional dualisms, where one side of dualism is described as the complete opposite of the other side of it, such as opposite genders. Ecofeminism also advocates that a similar oppositional dualism exists in conventional definitions of human beings’ relationship with nature. It perceives the hierarchies existing in gender relations in connection with patriarchal social structures and with nature through an anthropocentric view that considers humanity as more valuable than nature and all other living beings. Atwood’s *Surfacing* and Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* exemplify the way these social constructs can often justify masculinized advocacy of domination and violence towards women, animals, and the natural world. This advocacy is expressed through masculine cultural norms related to domesticity, hunting, and power. The female protagonists, in both books, realize that many instances of female, colonial and racial oppression are interconnected with the environment. The rupture with the hegemonic master narrative is an important thread that

<sup>1</sup> The interdisciplinarity of the field of ecofeminism permits a growing emphasis on coexistence between seemingly contradictory areas like nature and culture. This is mainly because “human history and culture cannot be easily isolated from environmental forces and circumstances” (Sutter 96). Eugene P. Odum claims in the same respect that “[t]he principles of ecological succession bear importantly on the relationships between man and nature. The framework of successional theory needs to be examined as a basis for resolving man’s present environmental crisis” (49).

ties the books' ecological insights. There is an experimentation with language to allow the emergence of pluralistic forms that espouse ecological feminism. They unfold from different narrative points of view and are marked by temporal nonlinearity and spatial movement. This article clarifies and explains the choice of literary theory and terminology that build the framework for the comparison done between Canadian and Caribbean literature. The present article is divided into three sections. Section one zooms on the multiple forms of time that might be issued through breaking free from the obsession with homogenizing the experience of time. Section two takes the notion of space beyond a mere background for events and presents multiple spatialities as major forces of liberation. Inner and outer, real and imaginary, and social and natural spaces are brought together without a prior hint of space change. Section three unearths the major differences within previously homogenized categories like women. It demonstrates that the preservation of an important level of difference may strengthen social inclusion rather than exclusion.

## RETHINKING TIME

This section seeks to draw on the cruciality of multiple temporalities in offering an example of nondualistic temporal configuration and producing interwoven historical systems. I trace this idea through a multilayered corpus of novels consisting of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and *the Edible Woman* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark*. The novels imply a rejection of one single form of time and instigate a flexible temporal readerly experience. It is important to mention that the texts under scrutiny share a committedness to the significance of temporality within discourses concerning nature. A temporal experience of space implies the meditation of the depth of time. Thus, an awareness of natural temporality leads to ecological awareness that may instigate ecological action. Clearly, the texts intend not to suppress time but to construct a different conceptualization of temporality. They push the reader to experience time differently and recognize the particularity of nonhuman time. The texts also seek to complicate rapid, linear and shallow patterns of time in favor of the cyclical, deep and slow natural time. Hence, this section also studies the difference between natural time and human time. The key concern is how the cyclicity, depth, and slowness of ecological systems go beyond the limitations of human history. Natural time is governed by the cyclical structure of repetition, regeneration, and return. There are three primary standards for understanding natural time that emerge from this common temporal imagination: deep, slow and cyclical time is used to contradict the shallow, linear and rapid progress of human history. This perception denotes an understanding of cyclical and slow time that allows the

reader to perceive the ongoing damage inflicted on natural cycles. The slow forms of environmental violence delay the visibility of the damage. In fact, linear development eradicates both the cyclical stability of the natural space and the cyclical forms of natural temporalities. It is feasible to highlight the ecological belief in the necessity of recognizing the slow and cyclical patterns of natural time that countermand the rapid and linear patterns of human time while treating environmental issues. The question of time can be raised by tracing the reader's movement through nonlinear and repetitive temporal events while journeying back and forth between profound pasts and distant futures. Hence, building on the ecofeminist belief in diversity, this section also zooms on examples of multiple time zones in certain literary texts instigating temporal fluidity thus fluidity of meaning.

Notably, the texts share counterhegemonic understandings of the notion of history that imply resistance to environmental degradation and social exploitation. These understandings are about how social histories of injustice and environmental histories of exploitation continue to influence the present ecological and social situation. Such literary texts help the reader understand present and future environmental crises with narrative access to past atrocities. The texts also draw on the variety of species and categories that have been degraded by human progress. They demonstrate that only through contrasting the shallowness and rapidity of human history with the depth and vastness of natural time can we acknowledge the worth of natural spaces like the wilderness. The critique of the ruins of civilized life and the idealization of uncivilized ways of life reevaluate practices and beliefs following the course of progress. This reevaluation calls for the protection of specific wilderness spaces from human obsession with progress. It also elucidates the damage perpetrated by progress, the forms of life it has precluded, and the natural cycles that it has destroyed. The aspect of ancientness in the wilderness is what stimulates the unique experience of it. Transforming this space implies the erasure of the particularity of natural history and its articulation. Although new ecological facts may result in new forms of imminent risk, crises never erase the past. The paradigm of exploitation and violence persists. Dipesh Chakrabarty shows the danger of a "single and secular historical time" (Chakrabarty, 2000, 18). The monolithic character of time is one feature of colonialism. It explains the colonial strategy to engage the "premodern" societies in the dominant modern time because being outside this norm reduces them into primitive and uncultured people (Chakrabarty, 2000, 17). Thus, Chakrabarty raises consciousness about "how the archaic comes into the modern [...] as something constitutive of the present" (Chakrabarty, 2000, 251).

Building on multiplicity and heterogeneity in relation to time configuration, time resists being compressed in a

confined frame upon which exclusionary ideological assumptions are imposed. Time can be observed as a category that is open to a wide range of possible interactions between past, present, and future. Michail Bakhtin's conceptualization of the chronotope is a way to prove that literary time cannot only be analyzed but also historicized. As he advocates "a literary work's artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality is defined by its chronotope" (Bakhtin, 1981, 243). In a chronotope, Bakhtin observes, "time ... thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise space becomes charged with and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (Bakhtin, 1981, 84). Time is regenerative to the extent that it influences space that is itself influenced by "the plot" and "history." In other words, the chronotope is based on the relationship between literary time and historical time. It is about the ability to represent time through narrative in which time is used to measure the "historically developing social world" (254). Paul Ricoeur is another influential theorist of narrative time. In his *Time and Narrative*, he argues that "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (Ricoeur, 1980, 3). Narrative and time are in this respect complementary in a way that time makes the narrative understood and 'meaningful' the same as the narrative does for time. The real essence of time is hence made observable when narrativized. As Hayden White observes, "history has meaning because actions produce meanings. These meanings are continuous over the generations of human time. The continuity, in turn, is felt in the human experience of time organized as future, past and present rather than as mere serial consecution" (White, 1990, 179).

In Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, for example, the narrator divides time into different temporal zones. She speaks about being in an alienating time and then "reenter[ing] [her] own time" (Atwood, 1969, 197). This idea brings to mind Kern's view about "the heterogeneity of private time and its conflict with public time" (Kern, 1983, 16). This "private time" is a psychological and imaginary time in which the present tense is dissolved into the past and future. The narrator's escape to her "private time" in order to articulate her sense of selfhood is meant to criticize the "homogenization" and standardization of "public time." Walter Benjamin argues that this "homogeneous, empty time" that marks historical progression is used to absolve the cruelty of modern history (Benjamin, 1968, 257). Kathleen Davis criticizes the "homogenized historical time" of modernity (Davis 2008, 20). She argues that this "homogenization" excludes the multiple notions of time that help shape every historical period from the 'medieval age' to the modern era. She also contends "there is no single 'medieval' conception of time" (104). Therefore, there could be no single conception of modern time either.

Furthermore, because the book is told from the first-

person point of view, there is an air of unreliability spreading throughout it. The issue is that when the narrator recalls some important events, she either denies or changes them later. She is therefore misleading the reader in order to show that one version of history can also be misleading. The reader also knows in the beginning that the narrator gave her child to her ex-husband after their divorce to find out later that she had unwillingly abort it. A conversation with Anna about marriage and children reveals the narrator's hovering between remembering and forgetting this important 'section of her life' which is the act of abortion:

She doesn't have any herself; if she did she couldn't have said that to me. I've never told her about the baby; I haven't told Joe either, there's no reason to [...] I have to behave as though it doesn't exist, because for me it can't, it was taken away from me, exported, deported. A section of my own life, sliced off from me like a Siamese twin, my own flesh cancelled. Lapse, relapse, I have to forget (Atwood, 1969, 48).

This passage takes the reader somehow closer to the truth since the narrator first admits that the birth of her child, which she has fabricated, is rather an abortion. The novel traces the collapse of the narrator's invented personal history at the moment of diving into the lake. At that moment, the narrator confirms the truth about the aborted fetus: "Whatever it is, part of myself or a separate creature, I killed it, it wasn't a child but it could have been one, I didn't allowed it" (Atwood, 1969, 144). She admits that the reality of abortion is too much for her to bear. Hence, she decides to invent a more bearable account of what happened; an account that is more socially and mentally accepted:

I couldn't accept it, that mutilation, ruin I'd made, I needed a different version. I pieced it together the best way I could, flattening it, scrapbook, collage, pasting over the wrong parts. A faked album, the memories fraudulent as passports; but a paper house was better than none and I could almost live in it, I've lived in it until now (Atwood, 1969, 145).

The above revelation demonstrates the narrator's recourse to mental reinvention because she 'couldn't accept' the fact of abortion which she identifies as 'mutilation'. She assimilates the mental retrieval of the past event (the abortion) to the process of creating a book out of a collage. The metaphor of paper pervades through the passage. The narrator refers to the designing of a 'scrapbook', a 'collage' and by extension 'a faked album' which is related to the idea of the failure to communicate. What can be deduced is that the interior monologue<sup>2</sup> is guided by a confessional tone that shows

<sup>2</sup>Following Carol Spencer, the narrative technique used in *Surfacing* is stream of consciousness technique. However, the passage can still be interpreted as an instance of interior monologue.

a degree of daring in the narrator's judgemental rethinking of a past event. The acts of rethinking, recollecting, and retrieving the past develop a critical outlook with this literary imaginative endeavour being harmonious with an evolving national policy. In fact, this is how the novel has been approached by Canadian readership. There is a stylistic play between diving and surfacing. The way the truth of the abortion surfaces when the narrator dives into the lake underscores the fusion of the literal and the figurative in which depth and surface become interchangeable as much as the physical and the ontological become continuous with each other. The narrative, in this way, makes visible an important facet of its ecological ethos. The narrator expresses her anxiety because of her incapability of laying roots in the New Canada. This feeling is coupled with the loss of a sense of identity that cannot be recovered without retrieving touch with her birthplace. The narrator's emotional void takes the narrative backward in time in order to discover what makes the present turn out as awful as it is. The work of memorialization is thus mandatory in order to bring out clues about the lost homeland that help stitch the fragments of her wounded psyche and destabilized consciousness. It is about revisiting the past through the perception of the space.

In *Surfacing*, home is considered as the last tie with tradition. Any change that might be inflicted on it is considered a breach of its meaning of security and order. The narrator's clinging to the place while fetching clues to her identity best exemplifies the way the notion of place "embodies cultural and human geography" (Ragaišien 2006, 296). As Sauer suggests, there is an interaction between "natural landscape" and "cultural landscape", where culture forms a kind of a demarcation mark between the present and the past (Sauer 1986, 28)<sup>3</sup>: "Memories associated with her native country are imagined as an all-inclusive integral system [...], the road is consistent with the archetypal symbolism of the road of life in that it represents the axis of the community and serves as a symbol of horizontal continuity" (Ragaišien, 2006, 301). Reviving the past is contingent upon recollecting memories and exploring their meanings in depth. It is about adopting a regenerative approach to time and life in general: "Time is compressed like the fist I close on my knee in the darkening bedroom, I hold inside it the clues and solutions and the power for what I must do now" (Atwood, 1969, 75). The reconciliation between paternal and maternal inheritance is important for integrating different dualized categories incorporating human beings/ nature and reason/ feeling. The narrator starts having control over the past when she establishes a meaningful return to her origins. This return is not only about her physical presence in her childhood place but

also her psychological sensation of its elements and contours. As soon as her parents are brought closer to her mind and psyche in a way that releases the pain of parental guilt, the narrator decides to "reenter [her] own time" (197). This new self, crafted out of temporal travelling and stifled by the power of imagination in the hands of nature's wonders, is ready to allow the birth not of a god but "the first true human" (Atwood, 1969, 222). She announces that since its birth, this child will be in harmony with nature; no science will interfere in its delivery and nature will be its home. In the same vein, J. Brooks Bouson claims that *Surfacing*, with inscribing the female endeavor, "challenges the privileging of masculinity as the site of power and knowledge" (Bouson, 2000, 52). In this way, the temporal environment is as important as the spatial and psychic environments. The female protagonist frees herself from the ontological spatial and temporal boundaries to embrace the metaphysical world. In the same respect, Ley advocates the notion of "time-travel" and the idea that "[a] journey in space is a journey in time" (Ley, 1993, 40). Also, Kort remarks that "Kant, in his early discussions of space, subordinates spatiality to temporality precisely because spatial relations are more physical. Time, thereby, is judged as more universal, and time, he contends, includes, with everything else, space" (Kort, 2004, 1).

## RETHINKING SPACE

The gendered perception of the space shows the way the latter is "central both to masculinist power and to feminist resistance" (Blunt and Rose, 1994, 1). This idea can be explored through the tight link between "space, power, and difference" (1). The different forms of interaction with space can promote images of man and woman as powerful or powerless. This view depends primarily on the acknowledgment of difference. The aim is to deconstruct the 'monolithic' character of the space and endow the latter with fluid meanings that celebrate the fluidity of the female body in terms of reproduction and fertility. This notion of fluidity destabilizes dualism in such a way that the subject and object positions are not supposed to be purely occupied by man and woman, respectively. Thus, the hovering between spaces and identities needs to be critically observed. Blunt and Rose claim in the same respect: "a critical study of women's colonial and postcolonial geographies should address not only the multiple and complex construction of subjectivity but also of space itself" (Blunt and Rose 1994, 20).

The ecofeminist perspective puts the stress on space as boosting gender constructions and the fact that space needs to be understood as multiple and dynamic. This idea is built on the acknowledgment of difference in relation to space as a way to destabilize dualistic thought. It is feasible to note in this respect that gender distinction is blurred for example in Margaret Atwood's and Jean Rhys's novels. In these novels, the female characters

<sup>3</sup>In Carl Sauer's presentation, entitled "Theory of the Morphology of Landscape," Mitchell draws on the idea that culture is being represented as "the primary agent" that causes changes in the landscape that form the "cultural landscape" (Sauer 1986, 28).

move randomly between domestic and untamed spaces strengthening the understanding of space as, using Theda Wrede's words, "multiple, shifting, heterogenous, situational and contested" (Wrede, 2015, 1). In the same line of thought, the blending of ecofeminism with postcolonialism makes postcolonial ecofeminism. The latter forges the link between the oppression of native women and colonized spaces. It is to recognize "the 'double bind' of being female and being colonized" (Campbell, 1949, 11). It studies the way the violence of colonialism is being represented and reconceptualized by ecofeminism. In other words, postcolonial ecofeminism brings into light the fact that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are complicit with notions of class, race and colonialism. This idea demonstrates how gender and space are linked in colonial and postcolonial societies.

Postcolonial ecofeminism aims at subverting the dominant spatial and gender discourse. In this sense, Atwood's and Rhys's texts also inscribe the female characters in different spatial contexts where they travel between personal and collective spaces and between natural and cultural ones. The characters move between the colonial land, postcolonial space, and the colonizer's spatial realm. Hence, such a reading of space in these texts helps the reading of the postcolonial experience. It examines how postcolonial spatialities have shaped the definition of the global postcolonial culture. Emphasis may be put first on the gap between the changing landscape of the homeland and its original contours. There are clear demarcation lines between rural nature, symbolized either by the wilderness or the pre-colonial land, and the urban culture, epitomized by the modern city and the postcolonial land. A second concern can be the study of the notion of space as a symbol that reflects the characters' state of mind and complex psyche, the events, and the general air spread throughout the texts. Continuities and contrasts in the texts' representation of nature and the interaction between the natural and human world can also put under scrutiny. Much attention needs to be directed to the analysis of the connection between the female protagonists' thirst for escape into nature with environmental issues. The physical settings play a major role in the plot of the novels same as the metaphysical settings do in the development of the characters. The way the land is treated, metaphorized, and allegorized increases attention to the different interactions between the human and the natural world.

What can be explored is Atwood's and Rhys's texts' involvement in the construction of female subjects and the way the space shapes the accounts they give. Space, as seen in the novels, is not simply a location that witnesses the characters' actions and holds the book's events. It is rather a character and a foreground that traces other characters' thoughts and feelings. It psychologically affects the protagonists and changes their state of mind and behavior. Through signs that

trigger flashbacks, the space stirs memories. It also opens up future possibilities thanks to the power of imagination with which it endows its beholder and dweller. Between this retrospective and introspective travelling, lies the present that seems to resemble a childbirth moment. It is this tension that can push the protagonists backward, forward, or both in a manner that keeps them in a limbo state. In the three cases, they have to accept nature's laws and therefore dismantle views on human superiority over it. An important layer of spatial criticism is the identification with the landscape as a spring for the reaffirmation of cultural identity in the postcolonial context. Female embeddedness in nature becomes a way to transcend the dilemma of self-effacement as in Atwood's works and that of displacement in Rhys's works. This cultural appropriation of the landscape dismantles the dualistic relationship between nature and culture. This process occurs through promoting nature as a participatory agent of cultural reaffirmation and culture as a conduit for the reexploration of nature. Such an idea is premised on the understanding of the postcolonial landscape as a text loaded with coded meanings.

## RETHINKING GENDER

A woman is a tree of life; the heavens know her grace. In her is found an essence that eclipses time and space. She reaches heavenward, her fingers branching toward the sun and winds her roots through rocks and dirt to bless the work she's done... to feed and anchor tender shoots by her good seed begun.

### Susan Noyes Anderson, "The Mother Tree"

The connection of women to nature has started since the epoch of ancient classical mythology. Many goddesses, such as Persephone and Mother Demeter, were strongly related to earth. This association is justified by equating the way many aspects of nature blossom out of the earth to the way humanity is born out of female wombs. The representation of nature as a woman is also due to the life cycle they both undergo and to certain common qualities they possess. Women were considered as being domestic, emotional, and beautiful. On the other hand, men were seen as adventurous, rational, and mechanical.

In her *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, Susan Griffin explores the two possible results of the identification of the woman with the earth. The first result is that this identification can foreground women as sustainers of humanity. The second is that it can turn them into victims of male subjugation. Griffin's analysis starts from Plato's division of the world into spirit and matter. Such division demonstrates how patriarchal Western ideology builds on language and science to

justify the superiority of men over both women and nature. Notably, the feminization of nature has grown mainly in patriarchal societies and has been exposed in gender-specific writings. In this context, while men have been conquering the realm of the sublime and occupying the world of danger and wonder, women have been cast as mere inspiration for them. Using Fay's words, "[w]omen have a far more difficult time claiming Romantic inspiration because, according to literary tradition, inspiration comes from the female muse to the male poet" (11). Fay also asserts that "the sublime is specifically a male achievement gained *through* women as female objects or through female Nature, and so is closed off to women writers" (Fay, 1998, 14). In the same vein, Mulvey comments on this gender distinction in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". She states that "[w]oman ... stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (Mulvey, 1998, 586).

Concerning the ancient universal discourses of women and nature, we can deduce that language and power are tools of manipulation which act against women thus nature. Women and nature form just a background and with silence and submission, they prepare for men the axiomatic floor to exploit and humiliate them. Under the male gaze, the angles from which woman and nature are viewed are the same. It is about a limiting position that reduces both categories to male utilities.

The mastery of nature under the dominant model of rationality appears to be the end of every person incapable of acknowledging the natural world as unique and scarce to the extent that his survival depends on it. This denial of dependency energizes the human greed over nature and its minimization to a disordered site upon which human beings have to confer rationality by scientific and technological means. According to Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill, human beings had a global impact on the environment mainly during the two centuries marked by the industrial revolution. This impact incorporates mainly the effect of human overconsumption of freshwaters, endangering the diversity of plant and animal life, and altering the ocean-atmosphere system. They advocate that "humans are not an outside force perturbing an otherwise natural system but rather an integral and interacting part of the Earth system itself" (Steffen et al., 2007, 615). Drawing on the effect of the industrial revolution on creating a split between nature and culture, Raymond Williams also notes that "nature was where industry was not" (Williams, 1980, 80). In response to the widening gap between nature and culture, Donna Haraway introduces the concept of "naturecultures", which she defines as a refusal of "typological thinking, binary dualisms, and both relativisms and universalisms of many flavors" for the

sake of "relational categories" embedded in "process, historicity, difference, specificity, co-habitation, co-institution, and contingency" (Haraway, 2003, 6, 7, 8). The contemporary environmental situation illuminates the cultural aspect of reason/ nature binarism and the importance of eradicating Western dualisms. The Utopian conception of the land feminist thinkers have is that it is a place where women enjoy direct contact with the natural world, free from technological barriers and modern abysses. This symbiosis leaves room for coexistence between the different species ruled by 'mutual dependency' and acknowledgment of difference. Thus, the other is perceived as neither the antithesis nor the extension of the self. Notably, the environmentalist movement has been fed by a belief in the symbiosis between humanity and nature. Many writers have emphasized the natural beauty that existed before the environmental postcolonial crisis. They used to stress the colorfulness, abundance, and spell of nature.

Ecocriticism concentrates on the relationship of individuals with nature and the way their interactions are portrayed through different literary devices like pastoral, dwelling, and imagery. Ecofeminist postcolonialism, however, centers around the affinity between postcolonial environmental devastation and the ongoing violence against female postcolonial agents. Ecofeminism then incorporates this linguistic and thematic divergence. It explains man's estrangement from nature, his oppression of women and the naturalization of neocolonialism by a generally accepted system of binarism and monoculturalism. Commenting on the way to approach environmental history, Shaffer and Young quoted Cronon's view that there exist "three distinct levels through which one might track environmental historical change". As Cronon summarized, 'First, the dynamics of natural ecosystems in time; second the political economies people erect within those natural ecosystems; and third, the cognitive lenses through which people perceive their relationships to the other two. Natural, political economy, and belief—these, in varying mixes, have been the chief fascinations of environmental historians' work'; and quickly, as Cronon comes to note, the issue became 'how to integrate the three' levels (Shaffer and Young, 2015, 6). Building on the above analysis, notions of environmental upheaval, consumer economy as well as the human place in nature need to be tackled hand in hand. For example, technological progress, bringing about a total social, cultural, and political metamorphosis, defines the structures of modern life. Modernity, which influences the natural world, unveils notions of consumerism and lack of animal rights. There is an obsession with dominance that demonstrates the way the relationship between human beings and the different entities of their surrounding ought to be brought under scrutiny. The feminist critique focuses mainly on the social construction of gender and the way differences between women and men are accentuated. Ecofeminist

critique further develops the notion of gender to show that the accentuation of differences between women themselves is also mandatory to initiate a multiple understanding of gender. Ecofeminists draw on the importance of plurality that makes reciprocity and mutualism between genders possible.

Postcolonial ecofeminism also contributes to rethinking gender. It puts forward the idea that the notion of gender cannot be severed from the socio-cultural and historical context of the creation of gender identities due to the many factors that influence this creation mainly the notion of race. For example, in *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, Vandana Shiva, who is an Indian environmentalist and author, developed a postcolonial examination within the framework of ecofeminism. This examination is built on considering race-based and imperialist obsession with domination as engendering historical varieties of dualism (Shiva, 1989, 240). In the same line of thought, studies demonstrate that ecofeminism may provide a framework that responds not only to gender hierarchies fuelled by race and colonialism but also to environmental injustice. In fact, ecofeminism, quoting Sylvia Mayer's words, "addresses environmental problems from a gender-conscious perspective and allows literary and cultural studies scholarship to draw attention to the impact that historically and culturally specific conceptualizations of nature have had on women" (Mayer, 2006, 112).

In light of the above mentioned theoretical framework and considering Judith Butler's question: "why can't the framework for sexual difference itself move beyond binarity into multiplicity?" (Butler, 1990, 197), this section highlights the way the inclusion of multiple gender identities within multiple spatial and temporal zones may strengthen non-dualistic thought and weaken gender hierarchies. By asserting that all forms of oppression are connected and that patterns of oppression need to be addressed in their totality, ecofeminism can also be analyzed as a form of literary criticism that has a close relationship with postcolonialism. This analysis is built on emphasizing language and power as direct factors influencing the notion of gender inequality. Such analysis invites people to carefully choose the way they use language in order to eradicate old hegemonic and binary patterns. Language needs to promote diversity instead of conformity, equality instead of hierarchy, and communion instead of separation. As Levin asserts: "Language and discourse shape our social and (for some) physical environments" (Levin, 2002, 176).

Importantly, the study of language requires the identification of the factors that influence it. For example, the relationship between language and reality can be seen from two opposite perspectives. The first perspective is that language is contaminated to the extent that it cannot be considered as a truthful means of representation of reality. To put it differently, the human instinct of domination targets language as an easy tool of

manipulation. The second perspective builds on the first and perceives language as able to transcend the barriers of logic to become a powerful tool of imagining new realities capable of offering better ways of understanding one's surrounding. Accordingly, language can lead either to destruction or construction depending on the angle of vision from which it is treated and used. For example, certain novels like Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and *the Edible Woman* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark*, meet in their resistance to the traditional model of femininity within the patriarchal literary canon. An Ecofeminist reading of gender in these texts aims at reexamining how binary definitions give rise to oppositional dualisms, where one side of dualism is described as the complete opposite of the other side of it, such as opposite genders. Ecofeminism also advocates that a similar oppositional dualism exists in conventional definitions of human beings' relationship with nature. It perceives the hierarchies existing in gender relations in connection with patriarchal social structures and with nature through an anthropocentric view that humanity is more valuable than nature and all other living beings. These texts also exemplify the way these social constructs can often justify masculinized advocacy of domination and violence towards the feminine and the natural world. This advocacy is expressed through masculine cultural norms related to domesticity, hunting, and power. In fact, through the protagonists' deliberate return to nature, there is an emphasis on women's affiliation with the natural world that countermands men's misuse of it. The recourse to the particular lens of gender analysis aims at exposing the links between gender, identity, and ecology to prove the way the special relationship with space endows the protagonists with the power to control time. Scaling up from a personal to collective experience, the novels bring to the fore female characters who decide to refuse victimization and mutilation by men. These characters proclaim their idiosyncratic realm, away from male-defined assumptions. In the four books, nature is the female protagonists' domain of idiosyncrasy where a whole process of identity-making is being concretized. While feminism concentrates on the study of gender, ecocriticism examines literature from a nature-based perspective. Feminist ecocriticism, however, relates the study of nature to that of gender in literary productions. Ecofeminism brings to the fore two seemingly different notions: gender and ecology. It forges the link between the dominance of men and the environmental crisis while diving into the depth of the structures of mastery, dualism and colonialism. It aims at drawing "a synthesis of environmental and social concerns" (Garrard, 2004, 3).

In this sense, carelessness about the suffering of women leads to carelessness about different forms of abuse incorporating those directed towards nature. In Warren's words, "ecological feminism is the position that there are important connections — historical, symbolic,



and theoretical—between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding which is crucial to both feminism and environmental crisis” (Warren, 1990, 235). Accordingly, ecofeminism strengthens the belief that a starting point for readjusting women’s status and by extension that of nature is the dissolution of the major forces of “instrumentalism”<sup>4</sup>. Seen that both nature and women have been marginalized, ecofeminism attempts to bring both categories closer to the reader’s mind through launching literary criticism from the double vision of ecology and feminism. Ecofeminism responds to the exclusion of women from traditional environmental history. It aims at recentring female attempts to issue a more environmentally-balanced world. This recentring starts mainly from unearthing the different gendered power relations accentuated by social and environmental changes. From this perspective, the connection of women with nature is empowering. If women go beyond their silence and speak for themselves and the other degraded categories in the non-human world, they can save nature from further denigration. As soon as this objective is met, the wide gap existing between the different polarities, such as man and woman, nature and culture, and reason and feeling, can be alleviated. Since the failure to recognize mutual relationships between these polarities can exacerbate the social and environmental crises, it is important to acknowledge that both women and men belong to both nature and culture. This acknowledgment may avoid the gendering of both realms. As Gil and Wilke point out: “The dialogue with nature should no longer mean ‘to cast a disenchanting look from outside on a moonlike desert, but rather to explore a complex and varied nature at specific points in time and place according to specifically chosen viewpoints” (Gil and Wilke, 1994, 14). They also observe nature “forces us to acknowledge its complexity, its autonomy and its temporality” (Gil and Wilke, 1994, 15).

## DISCUSSION

The above findings add to the growing body of literature on ecofeminism which is built on multiplicity as opposed to oneness and dualism. The specific contribution of this article to the criticism of Margaret Atwood’s and Jean Rhys’ fiction consists in an ecofeminist reading of two of their novels while identifying the female place within time and space. There is a plethora of critical texts on the writings of Atwood and Rhys. However, linkages of

temporalities, spatialities, and gender identities are very rare mainly with emphasis being put on their multiplicity. This idea may motivate a focalization of comparative work and cooperation between the disciplines of Canadian and Caribbean literature. This article also tackles some of the shared ways in which Canadian and Caribbean literature undertakes the shaky relationship between human beings and nature as postcolonial aftermath. Through a combination of an actual landscape, an imaginary and/or remembered one, the novels prove that the notion of home is a place that transcends the barriers of time, space, and gender. The novels share a concern for female, silenced, and ignored views on life. They succeed to develop a new approach to the environmental cause that may initiate an environmental upheaval amid the modern civilization. Resistance does not only appear in the themes raised but also in the stylistic techniques used. For example, the novels are laden with complex metaphors used to transmit to the reader hidden messages existing between the lines of apparently apolitical stories. The literary representation of nature can be seen as a crucial point upon which the process of imagination and interpretation is initiated. The resistive strategies employed, mainly paradoxicality and deviation from official norms, guide the reader towards underscoring the social and political levels of resistance to the status quo and postcolonial commands. The female protagonists feel nostalgic for a past of pre-colonialism. They are caught up in their childhood memories stirred by the surrounding which paved the way for multiple temporalities, spatialities and gender identities. With anguish, they retrospectively travel in time and space while musing the splendor of their former houses. Authenticity is lost in the postcolonial context and contamination becomes an obvious trait. Time, space, and gender form a triptych of interconnected categories when it comes to an ecofeminist reading of the studied novels while opening up the possibility of rethinking the three categories with the eradication of duality being a major common characteristic.

## CONCLUSION

The ecofeminist belief is built on the cruciality of the human reconsideration of the hostile relationship between human beings and nature. This belief comes mainly out of the close link between people who live in the present world and those who will occupy the future world. The effect of human greed over nature will not only affect the people of the present but also future generations. This fact explains the growing concern about nature on the part of many writers like Margaret Atwood and Jean Rhys. The belief that difference is the first generator of diversity and ecological awareness awakens the human attention to boosting a variety of natural resources and granting the prosperity of the non-human world. Hence, new forms of relationships may

<sup>4</sup>“Instrumentalism” is a concept emphasized by Plumwood denoting the way the other is reduced to a means to an end where no relationship is allowed. It “is a mode of use which does not respect the other’s independence or fullness of being, or acknowledge their agency. Its aim is to subsume the other maximally within the sphere of the user’s own agency. It recognizes no residue or autonomy in the instrumentalised other, and strives to deny or negate that other as a limit on the self and as a centre of resistance” (Plumwood 142).

exist such as mutualism and harmony. Relationships as such may prevent oppositional dualisms from damaging the social and environmental fabric. Hence, the acknowledgement of difference and multiplicity as opposed to homogenization and dualism explain the recourse to temporal fluidity in different literary texts. Such fluidity can be seen as a form of representation of spatial fragmentation same as it can work as enacting timeless spaces where the past, present, and future can be brought closer to each other. The present mediates between the past and future and offers possibilities of interpretation and regeneration.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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