

## Continuity and Discontinuity of Gender-Nature Relations in DH Lawrence's *The Woman Who Rode Away*

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### ABSTRACT

Oppressions of nature and gender are two things that are interrelated. Both require a struggle that leads to the liberation of nature and women called ecofeminism. The Gender-nature relations can be found in literary works as reflections of the reality that surrounds the author. Through literary works, issues related to gender and nature are raised by the author as a form of ecofeminist struggle, that all forms of damage done by humans to nature will have an impact on the preservation of nature in the future. The objective of this study was to find out the continuity and discontinuity between nature and gender as part of the ecofeminism discourse in the short story *The Woman Who Rode Away* written by DH Lawrence. The method used to collect data was observation through close reading to both the story, as the primary data source, and other texts from journals and reference books as the secondary data sources. The result shows that the narratives of ecofeminism are evident in the fiction. The story tells the position of men as the masters in nature who have the power over all things. The depiction of male characters as the figures who tend to oppress women becomes a part of discontinuity toward nature in the story. This is different from the depiction of the female character who is considered as a caretaker of nature and is able to build a continuity of harmonious relationship between human and nature. In conclusion, the story reflects unbalanced relationships between gender and nature.

**Keywords:** continuity, ecofeminism, gender, nature

### INTRODUCTION

Every human being was born with an identity that must be accepted as a result of social construction. The earliest identity attached to humans is gender identity. In society, boys are often associated with blue colors and toys that are masculine, such as robots, balls, and toy cars. Meanwhile, girls are often associated with pink colors and toys that are feminine such as Barbie dolls, toys of cooking utensils, and toys of salon equipment. Gender construction is a binary opposition between men and women involving a hierarchy (Bennet & Royle 2004). This construction of gender identity also extends to the division of the work sector. Men tend to be positioned to work in public spaces, while women are identical in domestic (household) spaces.

Gender is seen as a construct for both men and women that represents what is socially required and also accepted (Wolfreys et al. 2006). According to Udasmoro (2009), gender is a form of social system relationship. Gender is an identity formed by society, it is different from male and female sex which is a biological term to determine individual identity based on ownership of reproductive organs (Fakih 2008). Gender identity positions men as individuals who are able to work in the public space and are able to control productivity and

capital, including cultivating nature. It perpetuates the capitalist-patriarchal system which according to Shiva (2016) has a fundamental error, especially in understanding the meaning of productivity which is solely interpreted as an activity to generate profits and cultivate capital.

One of the impacts of the capitalist-patriarchal system is that women and nature occupy positions below men. The position of women is almost similar to nature as an object that can be controlled by men. Patriarchal culture prioritizes power and destroys; whereas matriarchal culture prioritizes tenderness and emotional relations so that life becomes more well cared for and maintained (Humm 1986). Femininity energy has enormous potential in preserving the environment and the entire Earth (Khotimah 2008). Patriarchal culture also considers women as part of a second-class society (Sumarsono 2014). For example, in the employment sector, the wage ratio for women is lower than for men, with a ratio of 61.07% and 77.74% (Rahayu 2015).

The relationship between gender and nature is the essence of the study of ecofeminism. According to Capra (1996), ecofeminism is not characterized as a special field of social ecology, but it addresses the basic dynamics of social domination in a patriarchal context. Tong (2010) expressed the view that there is a direct relationship between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature. Das (2020) states that women and nature are linked in morally significant ways. It is a common cultural myth that women are somehow closer to nature than men. However, being confined to the realm of nature and caretaking work teaches them about the various ways in which we are all connected to nature. Women recognize the material reliance on nature — and the power of nature. Sensitivities and empathy are created by the work that women are designed to do. As a result, women have moral knowledge, not because they are in a female body, but because of what female bodies are designed to do.

The problem of gender relations with nature can be found in literary works as a reflection of the reality that surrounds the author. Through literary works, issues related to gender and nature are raised by the author as a form of struggle in the ecofeminist movement. It is a movement that does not only promote liberation from the exploitation of women but also nature. People should believe that all the destruction done by humans to nature, including polluting the air, land, rivers, seas, and forests with dangerous and deadly materials will have an impact on the sustainability of nature in the future.

The relationship description between gender and nature is found in the short story written by DH Lawrence entitled *The Woman Who Rode Away* through the narratives that describe the continuity and discontinuity of gender-nature relationship. In this short story, the men are narrated as master figures who are able to control and oppress women and nature. The narratives of ecofeminism found in *The Woman Who Rode Away* describe the position of men as masters in nature who have power and control over any things. For example, men are positioned to work in public spaces. Meanwhile, women only occupy the domestic spaces, with limited space for movement, and barriers that are difficult for women to develop. The depiction of male characters who tend to commit acts of discontinuity or destruction of nature is also found in *The Woman Who Rode Away*. This is different from the depiction of the female character in this short story who is considered as caretaker of nature, by not doing any damage to nature and the living things in it.

The specific objective of this study is to analyze the continuity and discontinuity of the relationship between humans and nature in *The Woman*

*Who Rode Away* by DH Lawrence which contains ecofeminism narratives through depicting the relationship between gender and nature. Through this depiction, perpetuating the position of men as masters in nature who has power over women and nature is a reflection of the reality that exists now. In this case, it is the reality that has been outlined by the author in *The Woman Who Rode Away* by DH Lawrence.

Ontologically, ecofeminism actually sees the relationship between gender and nature in society. Meanwhile, epistemologically, ecofeminism looks at how gender relations with nature occur in society. The problems that can be found in literary works are reflections of people's lives. In the realm of literature, this problem is grown by the author as a form of struggle of the ecofeminist movement. One of the functions of literary works is as a space for forming negotiated discourses in the midst of dominant discourses. Literary works have become part of the movement process of social change, including liberation from the exploitation of women and nature. Therefore, is very important to describe phenomena in literary works as social reflections that can provide suggestions and solutions to problems experienced by society.

As we all know, issues related to nature and women are two important things that are currently in the spotlight. The narratives found in *The Woman Who Rode Away* criticize the capitalist-patriarchal system which has positioned nature and women as subordinates of men. Through the discourse of ecofeminism, it is hoped that the exploitation and oppression of nature and women can be stopped so that environmental sustainability and gender justice can be realized in social life.

**METHOD** Implementation of the methods in this study include: literature study, problem identification, data collection, data processing, data analysis, as well as conclusions and suggestions. At the stage of the literature study method, the researcher collected some references related to the study of ecofeminism in literature. At this stage, the researcher also determined what problems would be studied, namely those related to the continuity and discontinuity of the relationship between gender and nature as part of the ecofeminism discourse in the short story *The Woman Who Rode Away* by DH Lawrence. Meanwhile, at the problem identification stage, the researcher identified problems related to the issue of ecofeminism in literary works.

The method used to collect data was by means of observation through close reading, both literary texts which are used as research objects, it is the short story *The Woman Who Rode Away*, as a primary data source as well other texts from journals and supporting books that were in accordance with the formal object of research as a secondary data source. The data collected were in the form of descriptions related to the discourse of ecofeminism, which included the continuity and discontinuity of the relationships between gender and nature.

Data processing is done by grouping the collected data in the form of words, sentences, or paragraphs regarding the continuity and discontinuity of the relationship between gender and nature as part of the ecofeminism discourse in *The Woman Who Rode Away* by DH Lawrence. The data analysis in this research uses a qualitative descriptive method by analyzing data in the form of words, sentences, or paragraphs about the continuity and discontinuity of the relationship between gender and nature in *The Woman Who Rode Away* by DH Lawrence. Meanwhile, conclusions are written based on the results of the data analysis that has been conducted. The conclusion section also contains limitations and suggestions for the research.

**TWO TYPES OF  
RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN HUMANS  
AND NATURE**

According to Hawkins (1998) between humans and nature, there is a continuity that cannot be separated. Even though they have different forms, humans, and nature are actually formed from a continuity from ancient times to the present. To see the continuity relationship that is built by humans and nature, it can be done through positionality and interactivity. The term positionality was adopted by Hawkins (1998) from Hayles which shows the relevance of language, history, culture, discipline, tradition, gender, class, and race with other conceptual factors to the other. Meanwhile, interactivity is used to see the relationship between humans and nature that form a whole.

According to Vakoch & Mickey (2018), human-nature dualism is used historically and presently as justification for human subjects in exploiting nature as the object. On the other hand, man-woman dualism is used as a justification for doing exploitative things done by women. Even though the concept that humans and nature have been found in a form of continuity that Western science still resists this. This dualistic relationship occurs between the oppressing master (oppressor) and the oppressed. The masters subordinate 'the other'. This kind of relationship causes a discontinuity between humans and nature. Seeing the other as an object makes everything controlled according to the needs of the master. It shows that women and nature are in the same position as objects that can be dominated by men. Based on this kind of thinking, the discontinuity of the relationship between humans and nature has been formed by men. It is also affected by the human desire to form a civilization that causes the separation and destruction of nature.

Meanwhile, Simone de Beauvoir (2011) underlined that, in the logic of patriarchy, women and nature were connected as they present themselves as the 'other' by respecting the men. In the same way, Irigaray (1987) stated that women as strangers to the male universe. Therefore, it may cause the oppression conducted by men toward women. The worst thing is, the oppression that happens toward women and nature becomes something common to be found in our society.

**Discontinuity of  
Man-Nature  
Relations in *The  
Woman Who  
Rode Away***

The continuity-discontinuity issue concerns whether a particular developmental phenomenon represents a smooth progression throughout the life span (continuity) or a series of abrupt shifts (discontinuity) (Kail & Cavanaugh 2022, 6). According to ecofeminism, the perpetuation of oppression occurs because a person does not choose to be part of a society but he finds himself a part of that society so that even when they become oppressors, they will not realize it. Oppression does not solely occur because of strict regulations but because it has been formed in a structure in society (Hawkins 1998). The discontinuous relationship between man and nature, including animals, can be seen in the quote from *The Woman Who Rode Away* by DH Lawrence as follows.

So the years went by, in the adobe house strung round the sunny patio, with the silver-works overhead. Her husband was never still. When the silver went dead, he ran a ranch lower down, some twenty miles away, and raised pure-bred hogs, splendid creatures. At the same time, he hated pigs. He was a squeamish waif of an idealist, and really hated the physical side of life. He loved work, work, work, and making things. His marriage, his children, were something he was making, part of his business, but with a sentimental income this time. (Lawrence 2004)

The quote above illustrates the exploitation of nature by man. The male character (husband) is described as a miner who really loves his job. In fact, he

often moves from one place to another in search of a new mine site. All actions performed by the male character (husband) in *The Woman Who Rode Away* by DH Lawrence are described as the act of destroying nature. The male character is described as a destroyer of nature rather than a preserver of nature.

This is in contrast to the depiction of the female character (wife) in *The Woman Who Rode Away* by DH Lawrence who is described as a nature preserver, as seen in the following quote.

But when she had ridden about a mile, she left the wild road and took a small trail to the right, that led into another valley, over steep places and past great trees, and through another deserted mining-settlement. It was September, the water was running freely in the little stream that had fed the now-abandoned mine. She got down to drink, and let the horse drink too. (Lawrence 2004)

The quote above shows the continuity of the relationship that exists between the female character (wife) and nature by seeing that humans and nature can share a place in carrying out life and interacting with each other without oppression and domination. This is called community ecology. Through the quotation above, it is obtained that the female character treats her horse with great affection. The action of the female character in treating her horse well without oppression and domination is proof that women are nature preservers.

Meanwhile, the opposite thing was done by a young Indian leader who committed acts of violence against the horse he was riding. He treated his horse harshly, without compassion, as described in the quote below.

Without more ado, they set off at a good speed up the stony trail. The young Indian ran alongside her horse's head, the other two ran behind. One of them had taken a thick stick, and occasionally he struck his horse a resounding blow on the haunch, urging him forward. This made the horse jump, and threw her back in the saddle, which, tired as she was, made her angry. (Lawrence 2004)

The quote illustrates the discontinuity of the relationship between men and nature in the form of violence. Acts of violence against other beings can only be done by the master against 'the other'. This form of oppression occurs because it is already formed in a structure of society, where the master suppresses the other.

In *The Woman Who Rode Away* by DH Lawrence, the Indian man is described as a figure who builds a discontinuity of relationship with nature. The quotation below narrates that the male Indian character views the female character as a weak female white ant.

And the elder men, squatting on their haunches, looked up at her in the terrible most dawn, and there was not even derision in their eyes. Only that intense, yet remote, inhuman glitter which was terrible to her. They were inaccessible. They could not see her as a woman at all. As if she were not a woman. As if, perhaps, her whiteness took away all her womanhood, and left her as some giant, female white ant. That was all they could see in her. (Lawrence 2004)

The quote above implies that men position women on the same level as ants. This shows the inequality between men and women which reinforces the idea of dualism that women and nature including the living things in it are in the same position, namely as objects that can be oppressed and dominated by men (Plumwood 2003). This also reinforces that dualism cannot exist without 'the

other'. As a result, the perpetuation of the master's oppression toward the other will continue to occur as something that is taken for granted.

**Continuity of  
Woman-Nature  
Relations in *The  
Woman Who  
Rode Away***

The relationship between women and nature is described in the form of interactive relationships, that humans are inseparable from nature and become part of nature in order to form a unified whole (Hawkins 1998). This type of relationship builds a continuity of relationship that exists between women and nature.

She traveled on, and camped at night in a valley beside a stream, deep among the bushes. She had seen cattle and had crossed several trails. There must be a ranch not far off. She heard the strange wailing shriek of a mountain lion, and the answer of dogs. But she sat by her small camp fire in a secret hollow place and was not really afraid. She was always buoyed up by the curious, bubbling elation within her. (Lawrence 2004)

The quotation above shows that the female character is described as a figure who does not separate herself from nature and forms a harmonious unity with nature. This explains that whatever is done by humans against nature, will have an impact on human life. The female character in *The Woman Who Rode Away* is described as someone who is able to interact with nature, even in small and simple things. This can be seen from the way she treats nature well. She is able to enjoy the beauty of nature without any intention to do damage to nature.

According to ecofeminists, nature is a feminist issue. Trees, forests, and forestry are also feminist issues (Warren 1997). Women are the ones who suffer from environmental degradation. It is women who have to walk farther for fuelwood. They must carry it all back themselves. That is why all the things which relate to nature including trees and forests are part of the feminist issue.

The continuity of the relationship between women and nature is also illustrated through the form of a relationship built by the female character in accepting Indian traditions/culture.

They gave her the new clothing: a long white cotton shift, which came to her knees: then a tunic of thick blue woolen stuff, embroidered with scarlet and green flowers. It was fastened over one shoulder only, and belted with a braid sash of scarlet and black wool. (Lawrence 2004)

The quotation above narrates that the female character accepts the tradition/culture of the Indian tribe as a form of respect for nature. Nature, local culture, and women are in a straight line as parts that tend to receive oppression from the capitalist-patriarchal system. The female character takes an act of acceptance of Indian culture through her willingness to change the clothes she is wearing with traditional clothes often worn by Indian women as a symbol of respect, that Indian culture is an inseparable part of nature.

**CONCLUSION**

The narratives of relationship between gender and nature are explicitly found in the short story *The Woman Who Rode Away* by DH Lawrence. The narratives of this story show the continuity and discontinuity of the relationship between gender and nature. In this fiction, the male characters are narrated as masters who are able to dominate, exploit, and oppress women and nature. Meanwhile, the female character in short stories is described as a figure who is being able to build continuity with nature.

In *The Woman Who Rode Away*, the male characters are narrated as the destroyers of nature rather than the preservers of nature. Male characters are depicted as figures who oppress women and nature, including animals. As the

result, it creates a relationship pattern in the form of discontinuity. Meanwhile, the female character is described as a figure who is able to interact with nature, even in small and simple things. This can be seen from the way she treats nature well. The female character is also described as a figure who does not separate herself from nature and shows that she is an inseparable part of nature and as a part of the unified whole so that when humans do bad things to nature, it will have an impact on human life.

The narratives in *The Woman Who Rode Away* criticize the capitalist-patriarchal system which positions nature and women as subordinate to men. Patriarchal culture is considered to prioritize power and damage; whereas matriarchal cultures prioritize tenderness and emotional connection. Through the ecofeminism discourse found in *The Woman Who Rode Away*, it is hoped that the exploitation and oppression of nature and women can be stopped so that environmental sustainability and gender justice can be realized because the issues of ecology and women are crucial issues that need big attention from society.

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