

Reconstructing Ecofeminism and Its Elements in *The Cleft* by Doris Lessing

Aydinoğlu, E.
Department of Foreign Languages
Cappadocia University, Turkey

Abstract. This present study analyzes some fundamental social and environmental troubles through the novel by clarifying what ecofeminism is and how it is constructed in the novel in a detailed way. The introduction part gives a piece of brief information about the writer's life, the short explanation of ecofeminism and the goal of the study. The rise of ecofeminism paves the way for the details of the effects and results of ecofeminism and it also explains how it has evolved in time. Components of ecofeminism observed in the novel are presented in the next section. In the conclusion part, the research draws to a close by referring to the novel through the ecofeminist doctrine. Thanks to this study, the significance of ecofeminism depicted through the novel underlines the necessity of the concerns related to ecofeminism in different ways.

Key words: environment, women, nature, lessing, ecofeminism

Introduction

Doris Lessing, whose works such as novels and short stories are based on people incorporating social and political advancement, is a British author. By describing her life with ups and downs, Lessing nurtures herself by reading Dickens, Scott, Dostoyevsky. With the effect of the harsh life, she tries to produce the works related to the deficiencies of the period that she observes and experiences with the aim of criticizing the era by writing. Her works generally set sight on the period's subjects and matters from the perspective of race and gender by taking the position and the role of women in society into account.

The sections in the "Children of Violence" (1952-69) are highly overcome with the denial of her stable family role and her closeness to communism. Most importantly, thanks to another novel publication, *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Lessing has achieved in presenting her fondness for the feminist movement. With the experiences in her life, Lessing has produced a masterpiece named *The Cleft* which can be analyzed in terms of feminism in its elements, symbols, and subtle details by portraying the women in different conditions.

The word "ecofeminism" comes from "eco" closely related to nature and ecology, and feminism that involves in the women's portrayal in nature by blending natural events and elements with women's roles. By using the pedestal items in feminism, socialist ecofeminism aims to bring the awareness of the association between women and nature into the discussion with regard to how nature and women are handled by a male-dominated society. Based on the idea that women and nature present similar characteristics in the sense of the vitalism of controlling, according to socialist ecofeminism the role of women are created socially and women's body has a major role in the suppression of women in society. However, the biology does not mean wholly. The responsibility and role of women, political issues and its material position create the relationship between women and nature.

This study aims to examine what ecofeminism is, what kinds of elements of ecofeminism can be observed in *The Cleft* by Doris Lessing in concern with nature and environment by combining feministic approaches and thoughts. I aim at explaining the reasons why and how we can behold the ecofeminist impacts on the work in the two parts. Part One focuses on the biography of the author and some concepts which had an effect on her thought. Part Two concentrates on the beginnings of ecofeminism and its impacts and marks on the work of art.

The Rise of Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism, associated with the production in environmental movement and feminism of modern age, examines the relationship between abuse of women and sovereignty of nature. This movement forces us not only to consider the problems of the sphere and environmental conjunctures but also to help us connect the association between women and nature in terms of feminist ideas by basing the ideas on nature. The theory benefits from intersectionality which is connected with a social category such as racism, sex, class in order to define the torture of the nature and supremacy of women. The ecofeminists bring forward the idea that the need for control of nature by human beings is similar to men's demand to take advantage of women, elites' demand to suppress the needy. According to the ecofeminist approach, it is an association that has an attitude related to the idea that everything living has a value and different qualities making them again valuable. Its aim is to portray what a real-world can be with the harmony between men and women, human and non-human, planet.

Becoming a phenomenon in the 1970s and 1980s, the period paves the way for establishing a close connection between corrosion of nature and subversion of women in the patriarchal society. Ongoing oppression by men still had an impact on women at that time. While men enjoyed life to the utmost after gaining daily needs, suppressed women still had the work that had to finish in the background. The position of women in society was a clear place that was unshakable and static, that's why the authors of the period generally tried to touch upon such issues and problems faced. Despite this unbeatable and persistent manner in society, some writers, like Doris Lessing, tried to examine the place of women in the community. With the effects of the Third Wave of Feminism, ecofeminism has demonstrated huge progress in reference to women's rights by combining it with the environment. Feminism raises the claim that women's subjection is the outcome of the unfair and modifiable practice of masculine sovereignty and dominance.

Third Wave of Feminism can be regarded as one of the main factors that affected it in terms of intellectual ways. Although it had some similar characteristics of the first wave and second wave of feminism, it differentiates itself with regards to its main idea that third-wave feminists preferred to become a canon rather than become a shadow of its past. Under the effects of the postmodernist mind in the academic world, with the denial of weak, suppressed, obedient characteristics of women, third-wave feminists reconstructed the position and dedication? of women as powerful, determined, self-controlled. These kinds of advancements in third-wave feminism do the groundwork for the improvement of ecofeminism. Forgotten elements like nature and associations like the connection between environment and women become the main subject for the new critical forms of feminism.

Ecofeminist Elements in the Work

Doris Lessing, who is apt at depicting women in the patriarchal society with regards to their social existence, position, and their responsibilities at home and outside of the house, wants to characterize the psychological war between their mind and heart; occupation and maternity; self-alienation in terms of their career life. She has not only succeeded in gaining fame and popularity, independence, and international identification among readers, critics but also gained a valuable seat in English Literature.

In the novel, *The Cleft*, there are two narration lines; the first one is to reconstruct the history of human creation and demonstrate the community called the Cleft who lives onshore. The second part mentions the senator's life part in the book which consolidates the position of women in terms of a different community. In the first story, the Clefts believe that they are formed by the waves of the sea. Doris Lessing says "It is a clean cut down through the rock and under it is a deep hole" (10). Here, Doris Lessing tries to describe the environment that they live in. From my perspective, she likens the shape of the place they live to women's vulva

with the clear and detailed descriptions of the rock. Beginning with a resemblance of the vulva, Lessing achieves to portray the rock as a symbol in order to exemplify women's sexuality. Moreover, she gives inspiration to us about Clefts, embryonic women inhabiting the onshore area, immune from submission, reason, and disunity of men. They breathe in harmony by falling pregnant by the tides of the moon. The women characterized by natural beauty are drawn closer to nature with the characteristics of it such as purity, reproductivity, breeding. They can be pregnant without men thanks to nature. This makes women and nature come together.

The life of The Clefts living in a peaceful environment in accordance with their pure desires is suddenly interrupted with the emergence of a baby boy whom they call a monster. They throw the deformed babies, twins to the place which they call Killing Rock. With the arising reaction to these monsters, on the other hand, monsters make a sensation for some women in the Clefts but most of them are afraid of the monsters. Lessing says "I believe the birth of the Monsters was the first bad or even disturbing thing to have happened to them" (32). In other words, she tries to picture the appearance of men as a devastating event in their lives. With the great descriptions of the oppositeness of the Clefts and Monsters, she explains the reason why some of the Clefts are curious about the monsters. Whereas the monsters living in a valley inhabit shelters, the clefts live in modest, quiet nature. The part that the clefts visit the monster's living space is disappointing. They always try to get the nature under control by abusing and vandalizing it. The idea of killing animals refused by the Clefts is an accepted and normal thing for the monsters, because hunting and eating them is a daily routine for them. Moreover, whenever they harm nature, nature responds to them by its power such as a hurricane, a strong breeze. That is the main idea of ecofeminism which is "nature is a 'living organism'" (Lakshmi, 2017, p. 4). As it was clarified in the article by Lakshmi, nature comprises of the things breathing and continues to survive with the deformer objects which generally are a human being.

Another thing that I would like to emphasize is the eagles which are the main motif in the novel. In today's world, the eagle stands for different meanings in different cultures such as power, agility, etc. In this novel, the eagles are depicted as the main figure playing an active role in terms of non-verbal communication and invisible interaction. In the novel, Lessing expresses her ideas about eagles with clear representations:

We are the Eagles, the Eagle, the Children of the Eagle. The Eagles bore us on their wings, they bear us on their breath, they are the wings of the wind, the Great Eagle watches us, he knows us, he is our Father, he hates our enemies, he fights for us against the Clefts (Lessing, 2007, p. 27).

With the definitions of the eagles, Lessing makes the meaning of it with the emphasis of power, masculine words like father, wind. On the one hand, she creates the eagle as strong, determining the destiny of the human. On the other hand, we can conclude that men would not have been? kept alive if the eagles had not been in this ancient society. While this quotation consolidates the importance of the eagles in accordance with the survival of monsters, it also craftily criticizes the deficiencies of the monsters in terms of their existence in society.

Man's incompetence to bear a child is also a key reason for them in order to alter the history of a human being. In this novel, Lessing says "males are always put first in our practice. They are first in our society, despite the influence of certain great ladies of the noble Houses" (Lessing, 27). She indicates the fact that monsters know that they are the first ones and also give precedence to men over women in that society. In the background of reality, men actually might be afraid of women's fruitfulness of childbearing and they might want to control and force women into submission by giving some rules, duties, and responsibilities at home and in society. If we look from the viewpoint of some women in the Clefts like Maire and Astre, their limitless imagination and curiosity of the monster's life pave the way for the destruction of the Clefts and emergence of new-born monsters. On the other hand, if we take into account the

feminist ways, Maire and Astre's situations can be regarded as the appearance of their individualities, because before the monsters, they do not have specific names. They are categorized their duties and responsibilities in the society. Although Maire died as a result of being brutally raped by the lecherous monsters, she is the first woman in the novel who achieves gaining an identity with her name rather than her position in society. No matter how they try to exhibit the rebellion for the Clefts, they fail in maintaining strong, confident decision that they have made:

The girls looked inside the shelters and found a filthy mess of bones, fruit rinds, discarded weed bandages. They tore branches from the trees and used them as brooms. This was in itself remarkable since there were no trees near the Cleft's shore. The rubbish was swept into a big pile and added to it were the bones and bits of flesh from the place where fish was brought to the eagles. This pile was swept to the river's edge, then into the cleansing flow (Lessing, 2007, p. 74-75).

The quotation above is a great definition of women in the society in which they prefer instead of the Clefts. For these lines, the roles and responsibilities of women in the monsters' society are depicted like women's roles in today's world. By abandoning the harmony which is ornamented with the beauty of nature in the Clefts, they prefer to stay with monsters by taking over domestic roles and responsibilities. The roles and the duties separated between the monsters and the clefts construct the society which focuses on subjugating women and overpowering nature. For example, in the novel, monsters are responsible for guns, knives, cutlery whereas women are liable for making combs, ornaments, necklaces. This division subjects to ecofeminism in terms of their physical appearances and their addiction to role shaped by the patriarchal society. Again, we witness the harsh reality that men not only corrupt women by imprisoning women at home with domestic duties, but also ruin nature by cutting, killing, consuming the nature without replacing it. The entertainment, fighting each other makes men aggressive and with their extravagant nature, they tend to devastate and have fun. According to some ecofeminists, men's aggression and offensiveness are regarded as equal to men's rape of women's bodies. In *The Cleft*, both nature and women are depicted as victims of men's weak points in their inner world. Men's weakness both in women and in nature is transparently demonstrated in every part of the novel.

Nature is always depicted as feminine in our history. Some characteristics of women are made to go with nature's qualities such as simplicity, purity, virginity, solitude, courtesy, etc. As a result of it, we can conclude that nature is the epitome of these characteristics. In addition to this, women are accepted to be closer to nature. For example, the ocean, the earth are perceived as the mother of nature. When we want to express the beauty of a woman, we generally use the flower or some delicate plants with the aim of referring to her. In compliance with ecofeminists, both women and nature have been controlled, managed by men for many years and they have lacked many rights such as self-expression, freedom of choice of their responsibilities instead of being assigned roles. In this novel, monsters allocate some responsibilities related to home or basic and simple issues that can be handled in an easy way for the purpose of controlling and subverting the order in society. In the light of ecofeminism, men take women into account in terms of their advantages on men's lives, where letting them grow socially and financially outside.

Conclusion

The Cleft, masterpiece published in 2007, is a novel that presents us an imaginary recreation of a human being by basing the story upon the results and relationship between women and nature influenced by men. Ecofeminism is a theory, evolvement that preserves nature and women in accordance with the close connection between women and nature in terms of their oppressions by cruel men. In this novel, Lessing not only succeeds in telling the

recreation of human being both in reality with the part of Roman Senator and an imaginary place, the Cleft, but also proves herself in touching upon the social concern, women position, men's patriarch by familiarizing between women and nature. With the reason why women and men have different characteristics in their nature, women have always connected with nature in the sense of their delicate constructions. Women's power to give a birth engendered envy in men in terms of the womb. For this reason, men drew women in the other position by attributing her some roles like motherhood, domestic issues, unreasonableness in the society.

The ecofeminist novel, *The Cleft*, speaks for the commission of some features to women attached by men in the community. In the clefts, monsters ruin both nature and women. They try to cut the trees and control nature whatever they want. Like women, trees in nature or other natural objects are regarded as seducer for monsters. That's why they blow up nature advocating and safeguarding them like a mother. Amir Hossain assumes that "she wants to show us the psychological problems and conflicts of mankind and womankind around the world" (Hossain, 2018, p. 28). In the light of this sentence, Lessing proves to achieve in linking the psychological troubles with quarrels of men and women by showing us two stories which consolidate the position of women as weak in the society. The psychological background of women is always associated with nature. That's why we all the time witness the social and psychic problems that women have in the community.

All in all, the novel sheds new light on feminism in terms of the relationship between women and nature by making mention of the gender roles in society. It examines how nature and women are suppressed, subjugated, controlled by men. Lessing's portrayal of the roles of men and women in society plays a key role in ecofeminist criticism.

References

- Eren, Z. (2016). The Patriarchal Implications in *The Cleft* by Doris Lessing. *Sefad*, 36, 415-434.
- Hossain, Md. A. (2018). Doris Lessing's Fiction as Feminist Projections. *International Journal of English and Cultural Studies*, 1(1), 23-29.
- Lakshmi, A. (2017). An Eco Feminist Reading of Doris Lessing's *The Cleft*. *DJ Journal of English Language and Literature*, 2(2), 1-7.