

The Multiple Spaces of the Colonized: A Feminist Perspective to Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*  
الفضاءات المتعددة للمستعمر: وجهة نظر نسوية لجوزيف كونراد رواية اللورد جيم

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**Abstract**

This study is a thorough investigation of the prospects of feminine life as depicted in Joseph Conrad's novel *Lord Jim*. It deploys a postcolonial approach to examine the concepts of racism, otherness, and gender. Drawing on the contributions of the prominent postcolonial theorists, the study aims to highlight the social role of women in the community during the colonial era. Colonial control in many corners of the world has enhanced marginalized women in society and imposed on them the domestic role that has prevented their social participation. Conrad's literature reflects an era in modern English literature that follows women's social and psychological suffering due to being under the control of the colonizer. Conrad's *Lord Jim* delivers the opposite notion of a white hero to sacrifice for the sake of the colonized; Jim's beloved, Jewel, reflects the darker impact of colonialism. She represents a hybrid character with two halves; an Eastern colonized half that acts parallel to a Western colonizer one.

**المخلص**

هذه الدراسة هي تحقيق شامل لأفاق الحياة الأنثوية كما تم تصويرها في رواية اللورد جيم لجوزيف كونراد. ينشر نهج ما بعد الاستعمار لفحص مفاهيم العنصرية والآخر والجنس. بالاعتماد على مساهمات منظري ما بعد الاستعمار البارزين ، تهدف الدراسة إلى إبراز الدور الاجتماعي للمرأة في المجتمع خلال الحقبة الاستعمارية. لقد عززت السيطرة الاستعمارية في كثير من أنحاء العالم من دور المرأة المهمشة في المجتمع وفرضت عليها الدور المنزلي الذي حال دون مشاركتها الاجتماعية. يعكس أدب كونراد حقبة في الأدب الإنجليزي الحديث التي تتبع المعاناة الاجتماعية والنفسية للمرأة بسبب كونها تحت سيطرة المستعمر. يقدم اللورد جيم لكونراد المفهوم المعاكس للبطل الأبيض للتضحية من أجل المستعمر ؛ تعكس جويل ، محبوبة جيم ، التأثير المظلم للاستعمار. هي تمثل شخصية هجينة بنصفين ؛ نصف شرقي مستعمر يعمل بالتساوي مع المستعمر الغربي

**Keywords:** postcolonialism, Conrad, Jewel, otherness, suppression

الكلمات المفتاحية: مابعد الاستعمار ، كونراد ، جويل ، الآخر ، القمع

### Introduction

Colonialism is one of the vital terms that have been widely discussed in the realm of colonial studies and the responses against them that the postcolonial era offers in the literary contributions conducted by many writers. Colonialism is defined as the control of a particular country over other people and their regions, imposing on them its own governing rules and structure. Ronald Horvath (1972), in his *A Definition of Colonialism*, clarifies that Colonialism as a phenomenon indicates both aspects of social and individual control. He states, “a form of the control by individuals or groups over the territory and/or behaviour of other domination individuals or groups.” The concept of dominance falls into two types: ‘intergroup’ and ‘intragroup’; the intergroup refers to the aspects of domination in a society that is culturally heterogeneous, and intragroup explicitly indicate the prospects of control within the same groups found in a society that is culturally homogenous. The basics for these categories are the factors of homogeneity and heterogeneity (Horvath, 1972, p.46).

Politicians and historians commonly use the term “postcolonialism” to describe the period following World War II as independence. According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (2002), every culture has been impacted by imperialism from the time of colonization until the present. This is due to the persistent concerns that have pervaded the historical process sparked by European colonial assault (p.2). Consequently, all cultural production that interacts in some way or another with the continuing effects of colonial rule is considered post-colonial. Colonized communities engage in this process for an extended time through many stages and means of interaction with the colonizing power, both during and after the real-time direct colonial authority (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2002, p.195).

Many prominent critics helped in developing the postcolonial theory. The most prominent ones are Edward Said, Franz Fanon, and Gayatri Chokrarclly Spivak, who are famous for their significant contributions the postcolonial theories and analysis. They exert great efforts to make up free voices from the colonial writer and the writers who belong to the colonizers. Their writings and ideas influence postcolonial analysis and perspectives (Innes, 2007, p.5).

Regarded as one of the most famous postcolonial theorists, Edward Said has recommended the keystone for postcolonial theory. He has been considered one of the greatest critics and cultural theorists. His works focus on the dominance that Europe has over other regions. His book, *Orientalism* (1978), is considered the most influential book and the basis for postcolonial theory; it has had a continuing impact on critics and writers. Said shows how Western scholars and writers looked at the East or the Orient.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is well known for the introducing of the concept “subaltern”, which describes those who are lower in rank, particularly for the officers who are under the rank of captain. The term was first used by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, in his *Prison Notebooks*; to describe classes that are subordinated by another social class that represents the political and economic control (Morton, 2003, p.48). In addition, this term is manifested by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1998) as denoting the inferior rank of the people under the ruling class. The term implicates the marginalized and oppressed people in the colonial and postcolonial periods (p.215).

Women were fully dominated by men in the colonial period. The domination was a result of the satisfaction of men's ego. The state of the male ego held large part of women domination and sufferings at that time. In return, women at the colonial period figured their place and roles as they started to create a prominence in their domestic environment. They were restricted to the home chores. They are locked by their only and solo habitat, that is to say, home. This orientation has resulted in their submissiveness to their superior and accommodation in the domestic place. Women were viewed as being weak creatures that have to be protected by either fathers, brothers or husbands. This meekness was part of nature as they are often described as being fragile and breakable. However, exceptions have been brought up as some women endeavoured hard to come out of the assigned and figured roles and habitat and pursued their independence. These exceptional cases included women who fought domestic routines and did their best to work outside their drawn lines. By their attempts for independence and avoiding being domestic robots, they made a historical mark in women's struggles and history. However, the evil and oppressive of the colonial period were hard and severe, yet, women appeared strong and committed to the management of their lives (Sangeetha, 2018, p.958).

Postcolonial feminist critique has certain characteristics that make up its definition(s). It first seeks to expose the dual colonization that Third World women experience, especially the dominant power in patriarchal and colonial institutions that results in Third World women losing their voices and having their identities twisted; It also questions traditional western feminism, which is based on ideology and imperialism, and secondly, it calls into question Western feminism, which is based on those ideologies (Ma, 2021, p.19).

Whenever the two postmodern theoretical models of postcolonialism and feminist thinking are united, postcolonial feminism emerged as a distinct critical method in literary and cultural criticism. As a concept of postcolonial conditions, postcolonialism attempts to analyze economic progress, cultural influence, political structures, and colonialism's lingering impacts in different ways. While colonies have gained sovereignty and independence, the long-term effects of colonialism have not faded, and colonialism continues in many locations (Ma, 2021, p.19).

The gendered discrimination and women's marginalization were the main reasons behind the emergence of postcolonial feminism. The historical implication of colonialism is regarded as a period of exploitation, oppression, and seclusion of the non-white and non-Western. The usurped countries have been highly influenced by the racial and exploitation of colonialism. Therefore, post-colonial feminism has come to shed light on colonial oppression, especially the issues of racism, class discrimination, and ethnic segregation, with specified looks for women in postcolonial communities (Mishra, 2013, p.131).

#### **Fluidity in the Female Space: Jewel's Depiction in *Lord Jim***

*Lord Jim* (1900) is one of the greatest contributions conducted by Conrad and depicts the colonial era and feminist abuse. Pramod Nayar (2009) deals with the novel from various scopes to investigate the prospects of women's life. He states, "Feminism is both a political stance and a theory that focuses on gender as a subject of analysis when reading cultural practices and as a

platform to demand equality, rights and justice” (Nayar, 2009, p.117). Focusing on women’s traditional subordinate and domestic roles, feminism concludes that women will inevitably be socialized to fill them. These stereotypes of men and women are not innate but rather the product of society; they are not even predetermined but rather imposed by males. Feminism contends that women are portrayed negatively because they are subjected to oppressors and lack the economic and political power to challenge their status in society, which leads to them being portrayed negatively with blindness, weakness, dependence, innocence, and sexual object. However, postcolonialism and feminist considerations of the literary text make them proper for a thorough analysis in light of postcolonialism. In feminist view, the colonial endeavor is strictly a male preserve where women enter into colonial discourse as figures for the exotic territory or as “a ‘dark continent’ to penetrate and to pacify” (Cixous, 1976, p.877).

Padmini Mongia argues in her *Narrative Strategy and Imperialism in Conrad’s Lord Jim*, that the story of Jim as told by Marlow is more profound than how Marlow interprets it. For Mongia, the story is not a tale of sea men’s affairs but about how the colonizer and the colonized interact (1992, p.173). According to Mongia, Marlow concentrates on the interconnection found between both the character and its assigned duty. The incident on the Patna provokes an investigation of the contrast between an individual’s heroic idea of himself and his abilities. In such a milieu, imperialism creates enough material conditions for Marlow to engage the state of man’s soul in the novel. In this sense, “the colonial situation in the text remains a backdrop for the narrative’s interest in the modernist condition of fragmentation and isolation” (1992, p.173). Marlow’s narrative presence in the novel, as seen in this chapter, raises questions about how negatively or positively the female figures are rendered by Conrad’s narrative.

Most critics agree that the Patusan section of *Lord Jim* tumbles from the realm of virile, complex subtlety to reified romance. This view is encapsulated in Fredric Jameson’s formulation: [T]he wish-fulfilling romance . . . marked as a degraded narrative precisely by its claim to have “resolved” the contradiction and generated the impossible hero, who, remaining problematical in the Patna section of the book . . . now solicits that lowering of our reality principle necessary to accredit this final burst of legend. (1981, p.255-656)

Like Patusan, Jewel, the female heroine, has been awaiting her Jim. Only through Jim’s presence in the text can the narrative lens focus on Jewel, and only through Marlow’s imagination and speculation can Jewel’s backstory have any significance or representation. As Mongia holds, Conrad invests in Jim not just the heroic stuff of adventure and romance—virile agency that finds its fulfillment in masculine action—but also the features of the colonized, helpless ‘feminine.’ Jim is as much the figure in white—virginal, helpless, in need of rescue by the master story-teller Marlow . . . who orders the chaos of Patusan. (1993, p.1)

As a feminized space of enclosure, Patusan has been interpreted as womb-like. Similarly, as Gabrielle McClintock argues in *Imperial Leather* (1995), imperial progress’s narrative was consistently coded in gendered terms, mainly when it came to conquering and owning new lands in which “The myth of the virgin land is also the myth of the empty land, involving both a gender and a racial dispossession” (p.30). “Women are the earth that is to be discovered, entered,

named, inseminated, and, above all, owned. Symbolically reduced, in male eyes, to the space on which male contests are waged" (p.31). As in Jim's relationship with Jewel, Jim is presented as Lord, and Jewel is figured as property belonging to him. Through the sexual conquest of Jewel, Jim increases his legitimacy as ruler of this Eastern space.

It is widely acknowledged that identity crisis as one of the postcolonial topics requires a lot of recognition of the others. However, otherness defines a specific category of people to be seen within a designed scope that the colonizer creates to proclaim his superiority. Thus, such consideration involves drawing on the aspects of similarity and difference as well. Powell and Menendian (2016) argue that, "a set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities" (p.17).

In the novel, the ideology of otherization is clear from the beginning of Marlow's narration. It depends on strict territorial, racial, and gender distinctions of what Fredric Jameson calls "ideologies of Otherness" (1981, p.227). Like Kurtz's women, in the *Heart of Darkness*, in *Lord Jim* women have not a proper name and are put as inferior other. Jewel's real name is not told in the novel. Jim calls her "Jewel," but enigmatically, Marlow never uses this name and calls her "the girl." The daughter of two generations of native women who married white men, Jewel is racially mixed. Marlow states, "what I remember best about her is the even, olive pallor of her complexion and the intense blue-black gleams of her hair" (Conrad, 2005, p.230). Jewel's identity is thus projected upon her through interpretation since she fluctuates between these two scopes of the male's necessity and the narrating style.

In *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, Nina Auerbach observes that the infantilization of women, a technique that Marlow engages in here with Jewel, is structured as a form of gender discrimination. She attaches this as a "central Victorian symbol of woman's social incompetence and mysterious powers" (1982, p.140). Jewel's movements, soft words, and young looks contribute to Marlow's impression that she is a little, flimsy bird. Ultimately, he will refer back to these images while discussing Jewel's assumed "invincible ignorance" (Conrad, 2005, p.257), portraying her as "a small bird beating about the cruel wires of a cage" (Conrad, 2005, p.257). Marlow fails to soothe Jewel's concerns about being left alone by the false hero and to "soothe her frail soul" (Conrad, 2005, p.257). He will substitute for his inadequacy by symbolically seizing control of her.

Conrad's narrative provides an excellent opportunity to analyze how standard conceptions of gendered closure may shift when intertwined with racism and colonialism. The project to rehabilitate Conrad concerning women is an ongoing dynamic in Conrad's texts, as Andrew Michael Roberts notes:

Jewel, the partly Malay and partly European woman who becomes Jim's lover in Patusan, is almost the only woman to appear in the book. This omission of a woman whose life is carefully placed by Conrad within an obscure history of colonial displacement

presumably reflected the summarizer's sense that she is marginal to the action of the story. (2000, p.54)

As in the majority of colonialism narratives, the white male always departs, and the non-white female is well aware of this fact. When Marlow attempts to persuade Jewel that Jim intends not to leave her, she responds, "They always leave us" (Conrad, 2005, p.252). As a result, Jewel's mistrust of any engagement with a white man was well-founded, as interracial relationships hurt her mother and maternal grandmother. Therefore, when she prompts Jim to leave before he has firmly established himself in Patusan, she is not only attempting to save his life but also to spare herself from a doomed, heartbreaking relationship with a white man. Marlow states that Jim's "danger that was foremost in her thoughts—even if she wanted to save herself too—perhaps unconsciously" (Conrad, 2005, p.254).

Conrad makes juxtaposition between a colonial setting and the lives of native women to demonstrate the dual role of imperialism and patriarchy in the style of living adopted by these women. After hearing Jewel's tale, Marlow realizes he knows nothing of her world. He fears understanding her point of view because it would shatter his fragile sense of manly ethical obligation. Jewel's story of her final moments with Jim had such an emotional impact on Marlow: "I have not the heart to set down here such glimpses as she had given me of the hour or more she passed in there wrestling with him for the possession of her happiness" (Conrad, 2005, p.335). Jewel's speech further shows both her intelligence and her ability to communicate her ideas about Jim's character in her statement regarding his choice to leave her "He could see my face, hear my voice, hear my grief! When I used to sit at his feet, with my cheek against his knee and his hand on my head, the curse of cruelty and madness was already within him, waiting for the day" (Conrad, 2005, p.284).

Jewel is sure that Jim will go back to the white world at some point. Her plight mirrors those of other local women in Conrad's works, like Nina Almayer in the novel *Almayer's Folly* and Aissa in the novel *An Outcast of the Islands*. The Conradian heroes in these stories, like Jim, display their deception of "an easy option of removal to a less stringent world, by association with a woman belonging to the world or party they have newly chosen" (Land, 1984, p.86). However, Jewel may obviously know what Benita Parry sees as Jim's demand, independent of Malays' consent, but "confirmation of his redemption . . . from his peers back home" (1983, p.90).

Whereas Jim emerges to ignore the men's advice, Jewel seems to gain insight from the experience of the women she is close with. She is worried that Jim will leave Patusan because of Marlow. Marlow's touch of her feelings of insecurity is a "craving" and cannot absorb why Jewel "should have made for herself a shelter of inexpugnable peace out of that honest affection" (Conrad, 2005, p.255). Jewel's collective experience of white men's departure has made her cautious of their fidelity.

This may echo Frantz Fanon's premise that trauma's effects of internalized oppression are transmitted via socialization from one generation to the next. In Fanon's words, "the young [black] subjectively adopts a white man's attitude" and "a way of thinking and seeing that is white" (2008, p.114). Fanon avows that "A normal [black] child . . . will become abnormal at the slightest contact with the white world" (2008, p.111). This case appeared in the Patusan's women. In such understanding, the trauma of leaving, as Meera Atkinson states, "is transmitted



effectively across generations and between subjects, families, and societies at large" (2017, p.3).

Jewel understands that Jim's loyalty will prove no stronger than theirs: Other men had sworn the same thing. . . . "My father did." She paused the time to draw an inaudible breath. "Her father too. . . ." These were the things she knew! At once I said, "Ah! but he is not like that. . . ." after a time the strange still whisper wandering dreamily in the air stole into my ears. "Why is he different? Is he better? Is he. . . ." (Conrad, 2005, p.256)

Marlow sees Jewel as a replica of her mother. Jewel recognizes the horrible similarity in her life, as for all native women before her. She says, distrusting Jim's pledge to remain with her, "Other men had sworn the same thing. . . . "My father did." "Her father too. . . ." (Conrad, 2005, p.256) Each woman has a white lover, and each lover abandons the woman.

Although she is mainly depicted negatively, Jewel is still a fearless woman of action Conrad creates who exhibits "extraordinary martial ardour" (Conrad, 2005, p.295). In her seminal book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that the gendered body is performative and lacks ontological status if acts, gestures, and enactments are manufactured and performative. Butler avers that "If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (1999, p.174).

Therefore, in Butler's view, gender can be neither actual nor apparent, created nor inherited, and is, therefore, neither true nor untrue. As she sees it, gender can be made profoundly unbelievable as well. By introducing a female character who performs her individuality, Jewel seems to echo Butler's concept of performativity: "gender reality is created through sustained social performances" (Butler, 1999, p.180). Thus, her life, rather than the male characters, allow her to have her role in society. In the case of Jewel, it is her actions and deeds that lead her to prove herself.

At the end of the novel, however, the intrusion of "a living woman" clearly disturbs the integrity of the specular relation between homeland and colonial territory upon which the figuration of woman as territory depends. Such considerations only partly account for accepting the woman instead of "the girl." In dealing with the ending of *Lord Jim*, Jameson writes, [The] "undecidability" of the ending . . . offers a virtual textbook illustration of an "imaginary resolution of a real contradiction," it being understood that an imaginary resolution is no resolution at all. All of Conrad's artfulness is in this concluding section mustered for a kind of prestidigitation designed to prevent the embarrassing question from being posed in the first place. (1981, p.256)

Since the subject here is the colonial other as a woman, her emergence articulates the conjunction of race and gender in the colonial space. To understand Conrad's living woman way may need to call Spivak's opinion of woman's configuration. For Spivak,

[T]he figure of the woman, moving from clan to clan, and family to family as daughter/sister and wife/mother, syntaxes patriarchal continuity even as she is herself drained of proper identity . . . The continuity of community or history . . . is produced on . . . the dissimulation of her discontinuity, on the repeated emphasis of her meaning as instrument. (2006, p.320)

What is living about this woman has nothing to do with the productive and mysterious life of the wilderness in the *Heart of Darkness*. The living woman does not counter the hollow, specular figure of colonial opportunity with any nostalgic hope of redemption based on anterior plenitude; on the contrary, she challenges it with a racial and social order wholly contingent on discontinuity and, indeed, on the proliferation of difference. However, while *Heart of Darkness* ends by fixing the woman into a figure for the ideals of the colonial metropolis, *Lord Jim* ends by opposing “a living woman” to a symbolic woman, who in this text repeatedly appears in the familiar colonial shape of the veiled bridge standing for the East as the place of heroic opportunity.

The relation between woman and territory is concealed in or contained by the ideological figure of a woman as territory. Tellingly, Patusan itself, as a geographical space, is consistently presented in feminine terms. In this way, Jim is subject to the same interpretation system as Jewel. For Mongia, Jim’s connection to Jewel and femininity as a construct positions him in a similar role to the one that Jewel occupies: a feminized object subject to masculine intervention and control. The novel “conflates geography, the feminine, and the colonial in a manner that makes of Jim the helpless female to Marlow’s energetic, masculine, rescuing ability” (1993, p.13).

Ian Watt strongly claims that Jim sees in Jewel a redeemer that through her effort her people are going to get rid of the tyranny of Sherif Ali (Cited in Diana, 2004, p.84). Rather, Darras suggests that Jim is not different from other heroes created by Conrad since he seeks confirming his identity within a liberating scope.

Patusan is a religious tomb, a kind of purgatory where the moral rehabilitation of the hero takes place after his initial confession. Consequently, it is an enchanted place, a mythical enclosure which the chivalric commercial order preserves secretly in order to mend and amend its models. (1982, p.27)

Eventually, Jim is depicted on two levels of being a trapper of the place and a prisoner of it at the same time. After dominating Jewel’s life, he turns to be the dominator of that space, attracting her in unfulfilled fake promises of being his future wife. In this line, Zohreh Sullivan suggests that the various landscapes depicted by Conrad indicate a lot of conflicts “correspond symbolically to repressed conflicts with the feminine matrix in general” (1981, p.59-60).

### Conclusion

In the story of *Lord Jim*, the setting is Asia; most of the characters are Asian, while the central characters are Europeans. The tragic state of Jim and Jewel’s relationship is just one of several imperialist motifs in the text. This relationship allows Conrad to demonstrate the catastrophic possibilities of the unbridled romantic imagination and illustrates the destructiveness and ultimate futility of the colonialist’s imperial ideal, a manifestation of the European romantic imagination. By departure concepts, Conrad indicates the end of the interest that pushes the colonizer to flee away. In the same line, Jim’s promise of staying with Jewel is a fake tale that



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reflects the reality that colonizers must leave at that point in life. Obviously, they have no belonging to the land to keep them here.

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