

**ارتباط الانسان بالطبيعة في الادب الروائي للأطفال: قراءة
نسوية بيئية لرواية لورين سانت جون الزرافة البيضاء**

**The Interconnectedness of Man and Nature
in Children's Fiction: An Ecofeminist
Reading of Lauren St John's *The White
Giraffe***

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المخلص

يتفحص البحث الأفكار البيئية النسوية والتي تبدو ممكنة في رواية لورين سانت جون الزرافة البيضاء حيث لم يتم تناول النص من هذه الزاوية من قبل. يلقي البحث الضوء على المستوى التمثيلي في الرواية ممثلا في الشخصيات والطبيعة وعلاقتهم المترابطة. كما يبحث النسق الثقافي للرواية. وفقا للنظرية النسوية البيئية فقد وجد البحث العديد من النتائج ومن اهمها ان لأدب الأطفال دور مهم في نشر الوعي البيئي النسوي بين الشباب الصغار في عمر المراهقة. ان من اهم ما يخلص له البحث ان الامبريالية والنظام الابوي والرأسمالية يشكلون تحالفا شريرا يهدد ازدهار البشرية. ومع ذلك، يؤكد النص على العلاقة الوجودية بين البشر - وخاصة النساء - والطبيعة التي تضمن استمرارية وازدهار كليهما. تقترح الرواية التعاون بينهما لحل عقدة الهيمنة المعقدة.

Abstract

The paper investigates the ecofeminist notions that are potentially resident in Lauren St John's novel the *The White Giraffe*. The text has not been investigated from this perspective before. The paper sheds lights on the representative level of the text signified by the characters and nature and their interconnected relationships in the novel. The paper also investigates the cultural context of the novel. Dwelling on the notions of ecofeminism, the paper comes out that children's literature is significantly important to disseminate ecological and feminist awareness among young adults. Importantly, the novel signifies that imperialism, patriarchy, and capitalism are the ominous allies that threaten the prosperity of human beings. However, the text assures the existential connection between human beings-especially women- and nature that ensure the continuity and prosperity of both. The novel suggests the collaboration between them to undone the complex knot of domination.



1.1 Introduction:

Lauren St John's children novels are interestingly furnished with environmental concerns especially her *Animal Healer* series. St John (1966-) is an English novelist, activist, and correspondence to *The Sunday Times*. She was born in Zimbabwe in 1966 then she moved to London. She grows up in a game reserve, which becomes the setting of much of her novels. Her *Animal Healer* series that involves five novels for children is a bestseller. The first book in the series is *The White Giraffe* (2006) which wins the 2008 East Sussex Children's Book Award, and nominated for the 2010 Rebecca Caudill Award. The novel is also encompassed in the 2009-2010 District 65 Battle Of The Books, an intermediate book award for children in Illinois. However, St John writes books for adults and young adults such as *Dead Man's Cove* (2010) that wins 2011 Blue Peter Book of the Year Award and was shortlisted for Children's Book of the Year at the Galaxy National Book Awards. She also writes *One Dollar Horse* (2012) series, *The Obituary Writer* (2014), and *The Glory* (2015), *The Snow Angel*, (2017), *Kat Wolfe Investigates* (2018) (St Jones, 2022).

Lauren St John's novel *The White Giraffe* (2006) is loaded with potentially ecofeminist motifs. Tackling a literary work from an ecofeminist perspective opens a wide arena to be investigated because of the variant aspects of the theory like, gender, women's persecution, nature, racism, ableism, ageism and so on. *The White Giraffe* displays its motifs in both western and postcolonial cultures- England and South Africa. Besides, *The White Giraffe* addresses young adult readers. Tackling children's literature, however, is different from adults' literature. Over time, children's literature has played a vital role in creating collective and individual consciousness towards ideologies that society or the system wants to establish and perpetuate. And so did the eco-oriented authors as they spread their thoughts in children's literature. According to Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor in her article "Advocating Environmentalism: The Voice of Nature in Contemporary Children's Literature," children's literature has developed over time. In the past, nature was depicted as a wild and powerful creature that needed to be tamed by man, and for sure, it needed man's power to survive. It has no agency and was created for the good of the human being and at his service, which was the predominant religious and cultural viewpoint. Over time, that viewpoint has gradually developed to the point that recent eco-oriented children's literature portrays nature as an influential entity. The power of nature does not lie in the danger it poses to people; rather, it exerts its influence via an emotional appeal because it acknowledges the destructive potential of people, insists on its own right to survive, and asks the reader for aid in guaranteeing its continued existence states Wagner-Lawlor (Wagner-Lawlor, 1996, p. 143).



Historically, Anna Sewell's revolutionary novel *Black Beauty* (1877) had a significant impact on raising public awareness about animals' rights, particularly in the United States. The novel, in its effect, is compared to Harriet Beecher's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. While Beecher's is anti-slavery, Sewell's is anti-cruelty. The novelist Jane Smiley states, that *Black Beauty* altered how people saw animals. Smiley demonstrates that if you acknowledge that an animal has a point of view, it becomes very challenging to be cruel to that animal. The novel demonstrated that the earth is filled with beings who should not be regarded as commodities (Libo, 2012, p. 1). On the tongue of the mother in *Black Beauty*, Sewell says: "in a very serious voice, 'we have no right to distress any of God's creatures without a very good reason; we call them dumb animals, and so they are, for they cannot tell us how they feel, but they do not suffer less because they have no words'" (Sewell, 1999, p. 173). On a religious and humane basis, an independent entity for the horse is suggested. From an ecofeminist perspective, Sewell's novels promote ecofeminist awareness because animal rights is one of the pillars of ecofeminism.

Further evidence in support of this notion is provided by David Rudd in his book *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*. He states that in this sense, ecofeminism, which is a more critical area of ecocriticism, has a lot to contribute to the study of children's literature. The idea behind ecofeminism, which is a synthesis of feminism with ecological theory, is that the same cultural assumptions that are responsible for the domination and oppression of women are also responsible for the harm done to the environment. Therefore, the goal of ecocriticism is to establish methods that are non-sexist and intersubjective for grasping the human and natural environments, including human others, other species, and natural ecosystems. Therefore, subjectivity and environmentally responsible ways of living emerge as a result of the interactions that occur between geographical, cultural, political, and economic activities and the natural environment. (Rudd, 2010, p. 169).

Many contemporary young adult's fiction involves with ecofeminist principles that prompts plural identity, diversity, and rejects hierarchy and "conceptualizes masculinity and femininity as relational, rather than oppositional" (Ruth 30). Francesca Lia Book *The Rose and the Beast* (2000), for instance, is a collection of fairy tales rewritten to reconceptualise old thoughts that are deeply patriarchal and hierarchal. In one of the stories, Snow white refuses to be with the handsome knight who loves her and prefers to continue living with the seven malformed brothers who brought her up, and teach her to cherish nature. The story, accordingly "makes direct reference to eco-feminism in the way that it emphasizes the symbiotic interrelationship between human beings and nature, as well as



promoting harmonious gender relations via the heroine's decision to forego a romantic union in favour of a peaceful, altruistic life with the brothers" (Rudd, 2010 30).

2. Discussion

2.1. An Overview on *The White Giraffe* and Lauren St John

Lauren St John's children novels are interestingly furnished with environmental concerns especially her Animal Healer series. St John (1966-) is an English novelist, activist, and correspondence to *The Sunday Times*. She was born in Zimbabwe in 1966 then she moved to London. She grows up in a game reserve, which becomes the setting of much of her novels. Her Animal Healer series that involves five novels for children is a bestseller. The first book in the series is *The White Giraffe* (2006) that won many literary prizes.

However, this paper aims at investigating ecofeminist aspects in *The White Giraffe*. Thus, supposedly it would enhance children's education and activism as Greta Gaard claims that "ecofeminist literary criticism is grounded in activism, and committed to using literary criticism as a strategy for ecodefense" (Gaard, 2010, p. 47). What makes this text very relevant are many things, first the accelerating rates of species extinction caused by climate change and poaching. While St Lauren's heroin Martine Allen wins her battle and restores the rare white Giraffe (Jemmey) into a secured wild place, a real rare white Giraffe and her calf have been slayed by poachers in Kenya in March 2020 (Dahir & Vigdor, 2020). This recent calamity highlights the importance of children literature that tackles environmental issues.

Elaborating on the same issue, Lauren St John writes in her website what reflects her eagerness to support earth sustainability via promoting individual and societal responsibility towards environment. She says that the earth needs our aid now more than ever. More than 68% of mammalian, avian, aquatic, and reptilian species have vanished from the Earth since 1970, as reported by the Living Planet Report 2020. There are an estimated one million species in danger of extinction, and if we don't act quickly, plastic will outnumber fish in the oceans. I find encouragement in the growing number of young people concerned about environmental issues and climate change. This includes people like Greta Thunberg, Dara McAnulty, and Bella Lack. Their words and deeds are changing lives and the world every day. However, changing the world does not need you to write a best-seller or amass tens of thousands of likes on your social media accounts. Whether it's putting out fresh water for birds on a hot day or turning down a plastic toy or bag that will wind up in the seas, even the smallest acts of compassion may have a profound impact. Put into practise



the changes you'd want to see in your own life and neighbourhood (St John, 2022).

The second thing is that the author promotes diversity and equity in her novels. The author herself has written a note at the end of *The White Giraffe* to say that she has chosen South Africa specifically as the setting for the novel to eradicate the negative stereotypical portraits of Africa in the media. She explains her intentions, claiming that to have the best of both worlds—the breathtaking beauty of the Cape, with its ocean, mountains, and wineries, and the savannah of Zimbabwe—she chooses to have the narrative take place in Cape Town, South Africa, rather than in Zimbabwe. Both Grace and Tendai are amalgamations of real Africans in her life. From everything she has seen and heard in the news, one would be excused for believing that the whole continent of Africa is plagued by sickness, starvation, and violence. True, big swaths of it are affected by these things, but in between those regions are others that are stunning in their natural beauty and rich in unique and spectacular animals as well as attractive, brilliant, and kind people (*The White Giraffe*, 11, 12).

Third, the vital roles females have played in the text. All these features and more make the text potential to be investigated from an ecofeminist and post-colonial ecofeminist viewpoints.

2.2. Ecofeminist Reading of *The White Giraffe*

Drawing on the ideas of ecofeminism that patriarchy, imperialism, and capitalism dominate and annihilate both women and nature, and that there are two entwined ways to subvert these forces: the first is activism and the second is ideological, the chapter shall analyse the text of the *The White Giraffe*. The analysis shall make use of the premises of postcolonial ecofeminism and the ecofeminist deconstruction of dualisms, besides other ecofeminist premises.

Greta Gaard raises a question about the possibility of Ecopedagogy in children literature: "what in the world are we doing by reading environmental literature?" Ecopedagogy is an enterprise that insists on the collaboration between theory and activism in the real world. It is, the Ecopedagogy, which through narration can subvert narration of hegemony and authority (Gaard, 2008, p. 11). As for the novel, its major setting is a game reserve, named Sawubona that means health in the language of Zulu (Wylie 39). The sanctuary saves animals and maintains their lives thus the novel promotes activists' endeavour via characters such as Martine, and her grandparents Mrs. Thomas, and Mr. Thomas who lost his life for the cause of saving nature, Mrs. Grace and Tendai. The novel cherishes the character of the ecowarrior whose courageous deeds saves nature.



Gaard asserts that narration of 'domination' establishes norms "rooted in alienation and the myth of a separate self ", hierarchy, and duality. To disengage this complex knot of ideology, the literary text should involve collaborated elements. The first element is the narration that "would require narratives of connection, community, and interdependence among humans, animals, and the natural world." The second is narratives "of anarchy, or an absence of hierarchy and a presence of diverse human-animal-nature communities and participatory democracy. Resolving these two operations leaves no room for domination," states Greta Gaard. The chapter will explore the potential capacity of St. John's novel to subvert "logic of domination" (Gaard, 2008, p. 15).

However, explaining the major events and relation networks of the novel would facilitate understanding its motifs. The novel is about the story of a couple who were living in a game reserve in Africa. When they hear the prophecy about their new-born daughter-Martine- that she is going to be a saver of animals, they decided to spare her that burden because they knew the danger of having such a mission in Africa. They did not tell her anything about the prophecy nor about the presence of her grandmother or grandfather. They move to England where the events of the novel start after twelve years. The twelve years old child loses her parents in a fire, which engulfs their house. She miraculously was saved because of a dream that awakens her at the right moment. She finds herself under the guardian of her grandmother, Mrs. Gwyn Thomas, according to the will of her parents. She moves to live with Mrs. Thomas whom she knows nothing about her before, in South Africa in a game reserve.

The first person she meets in South Africa is Tendai who works as an assistant to her grandmother. He belongs to the Zulu tribe. Then she meets Mrs. Grace, Tendai's aunt. She is a *sangoma*¹. She welcomes Martine warmly and tells her that she is a very special child and that she has a gift: "'You have the gift, chile,'" she whispered. "Jus' like the forefathers said." "What gift?" Martine whispered back. But Grace just shook her head. "Be very careful. The gift can be a blessing or a curse. Make your decisions wisely.'" (*The White Giraffe* 28). At the beginning, the grandmother was indifferent to Martine. The sad child found her solace by feeding sick and astray animals but her grandmother prevents her from entering the game reserve. Martine discovers the presence of a rare

¹ **sangoma**, highly respected **healer** among the **Zulu** people of **South Africa** who **diagnoses**, prescribes, and often performs the rituals to heal a person physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. The sangoma may address all of these realms in the healing process, which usually involves divination, herbal **medicine**, and specific customized rituals to cure illness and restore well-being. Martin, Denise. "sangoma". Encyclopedia Britannica, 19 Aug. 2014, <https://www.britannica.com/science/sangoma>. Accessed 7 November 2021.



endangered white giraffe with whom she secretly rediscovers herself. Besides, she discovers untrodden charming places in South Africa. Meanwhile she discovers the truth of Mrs. Grace's Prophecy that she has the gift of healing animals. When the poachers try to smuggle the white giraffe Martine saves it along with many other rare animals with the assistant of her classmate Ben. Martine discovers that Alex du Preez, the white warden in the game reserve, is but a poacher, and that he is the killer of her grandfather, and the one who smuggles the white giraffe. The police arrested him at the end. Martine finds herself riding the white giraffe along the streets of Cape Town and the local tribe's legend that "the child who can ride a white giraffe will have power over all the animals," (*The White Giraffe* 18) comes true.

Martine, a traumatised orphan, spends her nights sobbing over the death of her parents, but she finds comfort in a secret friendship with a white giraffe. When the giraffe comes to Martine's aid when she is attacked by a reptile, a strong emotional connection and mutual trust are formed between them. The compassionate animal communicates with Martine not through words but by touch. The absence of human voices in the novel's animals makes the novel's portrayal of nature's speech more literal than metaphorical. Martine is able to have conversations with the white giraffe and the birds since "Nature itself" uses their voices. A touch is all it takes to convey meaning between them. Martine feels a surge of energy go through her as she touches the white giraffe, and she understands the animal's name "Jeremiah—Jemmy for short" (39) and what he suffers from that he is like her, is lonely. The situation displays the likeness in the nonverbal communication between Martine and Jemmy, from one hand and between Martine and Mrs. Grace from the other, "Martine felt a tingle of electricity run up her arm—the same tingle she'd felt when Grace had put a hand on her forehead." (*The White Giraffe* 39). This similarity reflects an ecofeminist notion that man and nature are interconnected. Moreover, the incident bestows an agency to a nonhuman nature that it has the capability to communicate with human beings.

Wagner-Lawlor affirms that giving an independent voice to Nature to communicate with children other than that of the human being is a strategy of narration followed by contemporary authors, which grants an agency to Nature. Nature becomes a character "with a consciousness of its own, with interests not necessarily coinciding with those of humans and their progress—and indeed, with interests often at odds, or imperiled, by human activity, against which it has little defence" (Wagner-Lawlor, 1996, p. 144). Martine starts to communicate with the giraffe as her friend not as a creature inferior to her. She confesses to Jemmy (the white giraffe) her



own sad story and that she is also suffering loneliness. Both of them has lost their beloved ones.

However, the voice given to Jemmy could not, however defend him against the imperialistic and capitalist forces represented by the poachers and the mayor who attempt to smuggle him to Dubai to be displayed in a zoo. What happened next is that the twelve years old Martine apprehends her responsibility towards nature and she ventures to save Jemmy at the end of the novel. According to Wagner-Lawlor, that type of representation has a political aim that is to authorize the children who are "conventionally seen as powerless and, as children's rights advocates remind us, institutionally silent. These texts attempt to show children that, unlike Nature's creatures, they can effect change, they can exert power, through their voices" (Wagner-Lawlor, 1996, p. 144). Thus, the role given to Martine subverts the image of the child as irrational, powerless, and unauthorized. Accordingly, the duality of culture\nature has been subverted because an independent voice has been given to nature, promoting as such diversity of "human-animal-nature communities" that disintegrate the knot of 'domination'. Besides, the dogmatic creed that the child has no authority or agency is also undermined.

The agency given to Martine is associated with another concept, namely mysticism or spirituality, which in itself subverts the duality of material and spiritual. The material is represented by the western material world, which is represented by Alex and the Mayor, who deny any agency to the animals and treat them as commodities, usurping them from their native land. The inhumane conditions of transporting animals in ships evoke images of the Atlantic slave trade, which transported thousands into the new world. The narrator condemns that treatment and describes those animals as intimately as if they were humans:

She was in a cramped container area lit with flickering neon tubes. Scores of crates and boxes, many draped with tarpaulins, were stacked in untidy rows in the shadows. ...There were glass cases full of writhing snakes, cages crammed with crestfallen parrots, and boxes full of whimpering monkeys. A huddle of depressed sheep cowered in a crate that was plainly too small for them. ...Her heart ached for all these creatures that had been treated with less regard than a shipment of coal or rice. As if they had no feelings or needs. As if they were immune to thirst or hunger and impervious to pain (*The White Giraffe* 172, 173).

Furthermore, the reference to the cruelty towards animals parallels the cruelty towards human even if happened in the past. The novel shows the undercurrent impact of the imperialistic colonization and the apartheid system on indigenous man, woman and nature. According to the ecofeminist philosophy "There are important interconnections among the



unjustified dominations of women, other human Others, and nonhuman nature" (Warren 43). Though the Apartheid system ends in the early 1990s in South Africa, yet its impact can be easily detected in the novel. The writer refers to the colonization era. The reference to that era is always sinister. It makes the reader feels its shadow lurking closely and that the country has not freed completely. When the school makes a picnic to the Botanical Garden, the teacher comments on special place that looks so beautiful but it records the history of the abducted Africans' efforts to run from the colonizers who enslaved them in the colonization era. Miss Volkner tells the children not to be deceived by the serenity of the place, because "it had a brutal and bloody history as an escape route of slaves in the days when the British ruled the Cape colony. "Legend has it that one slave who escaped here was eaten by a leopard, and all that was found of him was his skeleton," (*The White Giraffe* 72). Furthermore, the teacher warns the children not to intrude on this place because they may lose their way back, "Many a child has been lost up there (*The White Giraffe* 72). The novel alludes to the high levels of children's abduction in South Africa and the world in the present time (Lancaster, 2022, p. 1).

The story suggests that what has happened to Black people in the Apartheid era is still happening to Nature and man. The novel suggests a comparison between Jemmy and Tendai. Tendai shows Martine the traces of torture engraved on his chest many years ago. In the Apartheid era, a police officer stopped him because he has no identification card and when he told the police officer that he knows him very well because he used to check on him for many years every day, the racist police officer ripped Tendai's shirt who lost his temper and hit the police officer. The police tortured Tendai severely and separated him from his parents forever, likewise has happened to Jemmy -the white giraffe- whose parents have been killed while defending their calf. While Mrs. Grace, the sangoma, embraced Tendai and saved him from being prey to poverty and hatred, an elephant had embraced and fed the little white giraffe when he lost his parents:""It was Grace who taught me that the best revenge is forgiveness," Tendai said. "Sometimes the thing that hurts your enemies most is to see that you are not like them." (*The White Giraffe* 85).

The way the colonizer tortures Tendai has a symbolic significance "When he regained consciousness, he was in a prison hospital, covered in the welts of a *sjambok*, a whip made of rhinoceros hide" (*The White Giraffe* 84). The tool of torturing Tendai is rod made of rhinoceros skin, thus the colonizer slaughtered and skinned native animal "Nature" and used it to dominate native man. Thus, Tendai suffers double persecution, as he becomes victim of victims. In the present time of the narration, the blond Alex indignantly emphasized that point when he was angry that the Kudu



he shoots strangely runs away. He said to Tendai “And as for you, just for the record, you should know that it’s not the new South Africa on this game reserve” (*The White Giraffe* 95). The formerly colonized black man still suffering from the persecution of the white man in the post-Apartheid era, and while the white man can no more enslave the black man legally, he insists on dominating him and his land i.e. 'Nature':

The Zulu was sitting on the ground with his head in his hands. There were two ugly gashes on his face caused by ricocheting splinters. He lifted his head. “Please don’t say anything to your grandmother.” He didn’t want to distress her unnecessarily. “Tendai!” . “Please.” “Okay,” Martine agreed unhappily. (*The White Giraffe* 95)

Tendai's story and the racist tone of Alex make Martine aware of the presence of racism and persecution. When she sees her schoolmate Ben, who is "mixed race, with a Zulu father and an Indian mother", being attacked by other children -Five Star Gang-, she was afraid to help him. However, when she hears their racist words, she rushes to save him. The boys were pushing him to the verge of the cliff:

“You’re a loony, has anyone ever told you that? You’re a freak.” “You’re like one of those sad-looking dogs you find down at the shelter,” jeered Luke. “Say: ‘I’m a mongrel, Luke.’ What are you? Say: ‘I’m a mongrel . . .’” Martine had until then been crouching behind a boulder, too scared to intervene. But at those words, the memory of Tendai’s story came burning through her like liquid fire. With a yell of fury, she burst out of the trees. (*The White Giraffe* 138)

Moreover, Martine makes logical argument to defend Ben. She numerates Ben's exclusive physical and mental abilities, which exceeds his peers. In the first place, Martine could not understand how the colour of a human being would determine his destiny. She recognizes the good traits of Ben and Tendai and treats them accordingly. The author shows that the child has the agency to subvert the logic of domination set by Eurocentric Western philosophy by using logical thinking. Ironically, that mode of thinking is claimed to be Eurocentric:

“I’ll tell you who Ben is,” Martine heard herself saying. “He’s my friend, that’s who he is. He’s also the boy who beat you by about fifty meters in the hundred meters at the school championships, Luke. And he’s the boy whose homework you keep borrowing, Lucy, because you’re too thick to do your own. As for his parents, well, at least he’s got a father, Scott. When was the last time you saw yours?” (*The White Giraffe* 139)

The portraits of the indigenous and multi raced characters in the novel are not stereotyped, as the author has mentioned in her notes on the text. The character of Tendai is full dimensional. He is an educated man. It is not the white man who teaches him to read and write, but his mother.



The mother figure though the reader knows very little of her, but the reader can apprehend that she is educated, and civil. Persecution of the Apartheid system could not crush her son's dignity. After losing his parents, Tendai could rise again with the assistance of the Mrs. Grace, the mother figure of many lost souls in the novel. Tendai is a compassionate man who cares for others' feelings and good. He is loyal to Mr and Mrs Thomas who employ him. He embraced ethic of care that he defends animals of the game reserve wholeheartedly. One of Tendai's responsibilities in the game reserve is to find and destroy the 'bone-crushing snares', which the poachers put to catch wild animals. The victimized Tendai becomes liberator of potentially enslaved animals. Above all, the western culture could not crush his faith in the everlasting resources of his motherland, South Africa. The Zulu man teaches Martine native methods of living in the wild nature and about the medical characteristics of each herb and tree. He is described in the novel as a man who "carried nature with him, almost like an aura" (*The White Giraffe* 13).

2.3. The exchangeable healing role of women and nature in *The White Giraffe*

Besides the racial and ecological motifs, there are other motifs such as ethics of care related to the natives. The novel establishes ecofeminist ethics of indigenous methods of living away from those of the western culture. Those methods serve the sustainability of the planet and confirms the symbiotic interconnectedness between man and Nature², and between human beings themselves. Mies and Shiva explain "these fundamental needs: for food, shelter, clothing; for affection, care and love; for dignity and identity, for knowledge and freedom, leisure and joy, are common to all people, irrespective of culture, ideology, race, political and economic system and class" (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 13). On the other hand, the novel shows the humans - those who are attached to nature- as protectors and in some cases healers of Nature, a role that can be safely described as exchangeable. According to Ronnie Zoe Hawkins, "the goal of ecofeminism as the establishment of a "community ecology" that would restore the "continuity of human with nonhuman life" by deconstructing "mutually exclusive oppressed identities" that persist in patriarchal thought." (Copeland, 2004, p. 80).

Planet Earth is inhabited by millions of species—at least! Because different species² often inhabit the same spaces and share—or compete for—the same resources, they interact in a variety of ways, known collectively as symbiosis. There are four main symbiotic relationships: mutualism, commensalism, parasitism, and competition. "Symbiosis: The Art of Living Together." <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/society/>. Accessed 11 Jan. 2023.



Moreover, Elizabeth Allisson confirms the abovementioned notion in her article, "Toward a Feminist Care Ethic for Climate Change." She explains that within the cultural and theological legacies of many of the world's local and indigenous traditions, we may discover resources for building locally applicable pragmatic ethical views. Many indigenous tribes have innate awareness of the entanglements, dependencies, and linkages that Haraway urges us to consider. In contrast to the powerful's disregard to the needs of other creatures, which has led to environmental degradation and climatic change, many indigenous societies recognize the significance and value of reciprocity with interdependent others. As in feminist care ethics, warmth and gratitude are key relationship values. Moreover, care is woven into the fabric of everyday life via a multitude of tiny acts and attitudes. (Allisson, 2017, p. 155)

Clearly, throughout the novel, care ethics are represented especially by indigenous people, whose medical practices and food sharing embody much of these ethics. Moreover, the blessing of eating organic and wild food is recurrent. Its impact on Martine is emphasized. In the game reserve her grandmother states that "No fast food. We grow our own vegetables" (*The White Giraffe* 35). In the school, organic food is served in the cafeteria. The school itself is running by the solar energy. The healing and energizing impact of the wild and organic food served by Mrs Grace is obvious on the traumatized Martine: "Grace emerged from the kitchen with two huge plates containing omelettes made from fresh farm eggs and wild mushrooms, a heap of crispy bacon, and tomatoes fried with brown sugar. Martine felt as if she hadn't eaten in years and she savored every mouthful in silence" (*The White Giraffe* 27). When Martine is about to chase the poachers to have Jemmy back, Mrs Grace offers her food that make her think clearly, "The porridge was fantastic. It poured into her veins like molten lava, warming her bones and clearing her head" (*The White Giraffe* 159). Mrs. Graces' food is juxtaposed to the inedible food served on the plane that fly from England to South Africa, "The scrambled eggs were watery, the rolls had the consistency of tennis balls, and the main meal smelled like pet food" (*The White Giraffe* 20). All these motifs serve ecofeminist causes and disseminate ecofeminist attentiveness, because the organic food here has a healing power. It also shows ethics of care instinctively adhere to the mother figure, Mrs. Grace, the sangoma, whose job is to heal.

Moreover farming organic food is essential to liberation of people from the capitalist forces and colonization according to Vandana Shiva who calls the biotechnological development in agriculture "Maldevelopment". That is because the companies who produces the seeds makes them "nonrenewable". The seed cannot produce another seed from



the fruit it produces. Thus, the farmer will be bound to the company, which produces these seed. Moreover, the company produces specific fertilizers and pesticides to that specific seed. That mechanism is another form of colonization and would affect the life of the farmers in the south part of the world whose majority are women. Local farmers especially women preserve the biodiversity and grabbing that role from them would endanger the whole nation (Cohoon, 2019, p. 423). Moreover, mass production depletes the natural resources of the land and causes soil erosion.

Shiva argues that the Green Revolution's political and social planning intentionally set out to create not only seeds, but also social interactions (Shiva 1991, p. 16). When patented, nonrenewable seeds were introduced to India, sustainable indigenous farms were turned into foreign-controlled factory fields for monoculture crops, despite the fact that Indian peasant women had protected the self-reproducing nature and genetic variety of seeds for millennia. This further pushed developing countries to rely on Western corporations for innovation and on World Bank financing to fund seed distribution at the expense of their own citizens (Shiva 2009, pp. 24, 21, 22). The miracle of miraculous seeds is actually a commercial miracle that drags the Global South further into the Western agribusiness market if poor farmers are forced to constantly invest in fresh supplies of the non-renewable hybrid seeds (Shiva 1989, p. 116). Women farmers lose their traditional role as protectors of biodiversity and sustainability just as seed loses its natural fertility. On top of that, the hybrid seeds' need for poisonous pesticides and fertilisers kills out native species and dries up soils (Cohoon, 2019, p. 424).

Thus, the novel serves environmental, feminist, and, above all, liberation causes when it encourages organic farming. The ecofeminists claim that organic farming stimulates social interconnectedness, empowers the farmers, and is environmentally friendly. According to Jytte Nhanenge, in her book *Ecofeminism: Towards Integrating the Concerns of Women, Poor People, and Nature into Development*, organic farming is good for both the mind and the community, because it requires a lot of manual effort and focuses on the local community. Most organic farms are rather modest in size and operated by families. Farmers who sell their wares at nearby markets reduce the amount of energy needed to get the food from the farm to the consumer's table and keep the food's quality intact in terms of both its freshness and its nutritional worth. In conclusion, organic farming is a productive method that yields good results. Crop yields in Africa improved by between 50 and 100 percent as a result of an agroecological effort that included 730,000 farming households. In addition to this, it lowers the expenses of production while simultaneously increasing cash earnings by a factor of up to 10 (Nhanenge, 2011, p. 299).



Consequently, the game reserve becomes a project of liberation from the colonial forces that continue to strike man and nature. When imperialist forces are unable to enslave indigenous peoples through traditional means, controlling the economies of these countries is another method of enslavement. Moreover, organic food participates in healing the traumatised Martine and attaches her to Nature. Thus, the novel shows the possibilities of disintegrating the "logic of domination" actively, not theoretically.

Moreover, the holistic medicine the novel endorses via using natural components and spirituality offered primarily by women, advocates ecofeminist causes, because it subverts the western duality on which the western medicine is based: "modern drug oriented medicine derives from dualistic ideas. Whereas the holistic perspective honors the healing energy of the body and of the earth, modern western medicine is founded upon a distrust of nature and nature's power to heal" (Kheel, 1989, p. 2). Western medicine is based on the Cartesian philosophy that objectifies both of nature and of women. It considers them as resources that should be used for the good of man. Western medicine changes the nature of the herbal medicine turning it into chemical: "Plants are no longer valued in and of themselves. Rather, the most powerful properties of plants must be isolated, extracted and then synthesized into chemicals and drugs. Nature is seen as a resource which is useful only when transformed by men's rational mind" (Kheel 1989, p. 7). Moreover, western medicine starts to use toxic minerals such as mercury, lead and arsenic in drugs.

All over the novel, information about the botanical kingdom is scattered. Botanical diversity is beautifully demonstrated in the novel in various places such as Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens in Cape Town, Fragrance and Medicine Gardens, Table Mountain, "The Fragrance and Medicinal Gardens were wonder-lands of aromatic plants and healing herbs", and the wilderness. Tendai, Miss Volkner- the teacher- and Mrs Grace are the mouthpieces of the benefits of herbs and trees. It is presented as a sufficient medical substitute for western drugs: aloe, the marula tree, a "one-stop pharmacy" (*The White Giraffe* 86). The fruits of the marula tree relieve pain and provide plenty of vitamin C, among other benefits, "Its leaves were great for dressing wounds or treating insect bites, and its bark reduced inflammation. And that wasn't all. The pit of the marula fruit contained an oil that the Africans prized as nose or ear drops, or lit in its shell as a natural candle" (*The White Giraffe* 86). It appears that the relationship between the natives and nature (the tree) is not only material as they use its bounties, but also spiritual: "The Zulus even believed that if a person suffering from measles rose before dawn, went down to the tree without speaking to anyone, and bit the bark, he'd be cured" (*The White*



Giraffe 86). The tree is accordingly treated with reverence as if it has divine power or is an independent entity.

Aside from being healers, trees are portrayed as a source of beauty throughout the novel: "exotic flowers and trees" (*The White Giraffe* 1). Trees are represented as a safe shelter for animals from poachers and predators, "under an umbrella tree, his curved tusks and gray bulk almost completely camouflaged" (19). The camouflage effect signifies the interconnectedness between nature's components that they support each other. Trees are represented as peaceful sanctuaries for meditation and a safe place to get rest: "Martine knew that she wouldn't be able to keep going for much longer, so she plunged into the wilderness of yellowwood trees" (50). The word "plunged" signifies the trustfulness with which Martine rushed into nature as a child into his mother's arms. Consequently, the novel portrays nature like a mother, safe and trustworthy.

Furthermore, when the poachers hunt Jemmy, Martine uses a medicine prepared by Mrs Grace, which works perfectly along with Martine's spiritual healing powers to heal the wounds: "Grace handed the pouch full of bottles to Martine. "Thank you, Grace," she said. "I'll keep them in a special place." Grace looked pleased. "You're mos' welcome. You have your healing gift, but sometimes you will need a little extra help" (*The White Giraffe* 135). When Alex shoots the Kudu, Martine ventures and sneaks while Tendai was quarrelling with Alex. She heals the wounds of the Kudu by using her healing powers along with special techniques used by the indigenous tribes that is to use the heads of specific type of ants as stitching threads to sew the animal's wounds. Martine makes use of the education presented in the school and of her parents whom where physicians:

Martine shut him out and put her hand over the hole in the kudu's throat. Blood bubbled through the gaps in her fingers. Every second counted. She scanned the area around her, desperately searching for something that could help to seal the wound. There was nothing but pale dirt, tufts of dry grass, and a big anthill. An anthill! Martine had a sudden flashback of Miss Volkner telling the class how the Shangaan tribe had once used soldier termites, which had very large mandibles or pincers, to "stitch up" wounds. What made it so effective, Miss Volkner had told them, was that the termites' saliva worked as a natural antiseptic (*The White Giraffe* 93).

The preceding quotes emphasise the spiritual and mutually beneficial connection between humans and the natural world, and between the many parts of the natural world. The treatment, which consisted of natural materials and chants, was successful in curing Jemmy (the white giraffe). The Kudu's wounds can be stitched up by the ants' heads. In addition, Martine provides an ethical justification for killing the ants in



order to treat the patient. Her thoughts are relayed to the reader in the form of an internal monologue: "it had died for a good cause. It hadn't just been stepped on by mistake or something" (*The White Giraffe* 93).

Presenting Martine as a healer has symbolic social significance that subverts "logic of domination". That is because along centuries, the traditional role of woman as a healer has been reduced mainly because of the patriarchal system represented by the church. It gives orders to burn and execute millions of women in Europe and North America because of witchcraft and healing: "An estimated nine million people (mostly women) were executed or burned as witches between 1479 and 1735. Interestingly, one of the titles for witches was "herberia," meaning "one who gathers herbs." Often, the crime such women were accused of was literally their ability to heal" (Kheel, 1989, p. 4).

Frequently, these women were accused of committing the crime of healing. This assault by the church was simultaneously aimed against the Goddess-worshipping religion, which reflected a regard for the whole natural world, and the peasants, who lived by this tradition and passed it on. To realize why healing should be deemed a crime, one must know the Church's stance against women and the whole natural world. According to the church, the vital, curative energy of nature lay not in the earth but in a masculine, sky-dwelling deity. Even labour pains were manifestations of the will of God. "God's plan" could only be implemented by Church-approved persons (primarily educated men and the priests with whom they were required to confer) (Kheel 1989, p. 5).

However, despite the church's diminished influence, misogynist attitudes toward women healers persist in modern times. White men were only permitted to study medicine in limited capacities until the second half of the nineteenth century. The 'Enabling Act' of 1875, which theoretically permitted British colleges to give medical licenses to women, was enacted in the context of broader social changes brought about by first-wave feminism; yet, this did not prohibit institutions from deciding whether or not to accept women (Jefferson, 2015).

Nevertheless, in 1874, a group of determined and pioneering women, including Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Sophia Jex Blake, established the first medical school in Britain to allow women to graduate and practise medicine, the London School of Medicine for Women (now the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine).⁵ Sophia Jex Blake later moved back to Edinburgh where she established the Edinburgh Hospital and Dispensary for Women and Children in 1885 (Jefferson, 2015).

Significantly, in the novel, witch-hunting that has been practised many centuries ago still lurking in the mindset of the post-colonized



society. Martine is accused of being a witch when she for the first time discovers her gift. When she heals the broken wing of the Egyptian goose and set it free, Martine's schoolmates decided to kill her as they realise her ability to heal the bird:

Luke was yelling at her. "Is it black magic? *Voodoo*?" "Maybe she's an *umthakathi*," accused Xhosa. "That's the Zulu word for a wizard or witch, someone who bewitches others or casts spells on them. Be careful, she might change into a bat or a bird." Martine stuttered, "I'm not an um . . . I'm not a w-witch." "You know, in South Africa, some people say that there is only one thing to do with an *umthakathi*," Xhosa said. "They must be eliminated. Otherwise they will do evil things" (*The White Giraffe* 77).

The schoolchildren are antagonistic to Martine because of her supernatural abilities, as well as to animals and anybody who acts differently. Solar-powered and eco-friendly, their school fails to instill in its students a sense of animal care. Furthermore, they do not treat Ben with hatred due to his mixed race alone, but also due to the fact that he meditates and embraces trees, demonstrating his belief in the interdependence of humans and all forms of life: "Probably hugging a tree or something" (*The White Giraffe* 47) said one of the students mocking Ben's behaviour. Ben's actions are reminiscent of those of the Indian Chipko Movement³, which seeks to prevent forest destruction. Additionally, his methods are consistent with indigenous beliefs that give trees special status and credit them with curative abilities.

2.4. Conclusion

To sum up, *The White Giraffe*, however, demonstrates the resident power of colonization in a postcolonial country and how maintaining ecofeminist praxis can potentially subvert the hegemony of colonialist and capitalist forces, or what Greta Gaard calls the "logic of domination." Martine challenges the "logic of domination" when she, with the help of an indigenous boy, rescues the animals from poachers who are transporting them to another continent. The logic of domination is subverted again when the prophecy of indigenous forefathers' spirits is validated when people in the city see Martine riding on the back of a white giraffe. Fulfilment of the prophecy subverts the monolithic voice of the colonizer. It gives validity to another story to be heard and cherished. This young girl, once accused of practicing dark witchcraft, is now celebrated as a national heroine and

Chipko movement, also called **Chipko andolan**, nonviolent social and ecological ³ movement by rural villagers, particularly women, in India in the 1970s, aimed at protecting trees and forests slated for government-backed logging. The movement originated in the Himalayan region of Uttarakhand (then part of Uttar Pradesh) in 1973 and quickly spread throughout the Indian Himalayas. The Hindi word *chipko* means "to hug" or "to cling to" and reflects the demonstrators' primary tactic of embracing trees to impede loggers. (Petruzzello)



healer. Her acts subvert the dominance of colonization because she acts interdependently with an indigenous boy, Ben. Her acts subvert the dominance of capitalism and patriarchy because they promote holistic medicine, nature preservation, and spirituality. Animals are represented as entities with agencies and sustaining their existence guarantees the continuity of both man and nature. It can be argued that the novel refuses to take an anthropocentric attitude; in other words, it does not put humanity, males, and the western duality at the centre of the universe. The novel subverts the western dualities of culture \ nature, black \white, and man \woman. Moreover, the novel promotes the importance of ethics of care and motherhood that are shared between human beings and animals.



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