

الطبيعة والمرأة والثقافة في أعمال جوي هارجو المختارة من 1982 إلى 2022

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Nature, Women and Culture in Joy Harjo's Selected Works Extending from 1982 to 2022

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المخلص

تعرضت الطبيعة والنساء والأقليات العرقية للقمع في المجتمعات الغربية لفترة طويلة جداً من قبل أصحاب النفوذ. وتقول النسويات البيئيات مثل كارين وارن (1997، ص 3-5) أن هناك رابطاً بين جميع المقموعين. ويعد الأمريكيون الأصليون من بين الأقليات التي واجهت اضطهاداً مدمراً. ومن أشهر كتّابهم جوي هارجو (1951-)، التي توضح أن وصول المستعمرين البيض إلى أراضيهم أدى إلى طرد شعبها، ووضع حداً للتعايش الذي بنوه مع العناصر الطبيعية ومعاناة نسائهم. تنظر هذه الدراسة في مقالات هارجو ومقابلاتها وتحلل بعض القصائد من أعمالها الحائزة على جوائز مثل *كان لديها بعض الخيول* (1983)، *كيف أصبحنا بشراً: قصائد جديدة ومختارة* 1975-2002 (2004)، *الشاعر المحارب: مذكرات* (2021)، *التقاط الضوء* (2022)، و*شروق شمس أمريكي* (2019) لتوضيح كيف أدى

الاستعمار إلى نضال نساء الأمريكيين الأصليين، وتدمير الطبيعة وتغيير الثقافة التي كانت موجودة في الأرض لقرون.

Abstract

Nature, women and racial minorities were oppressed in the western societies for a very long period of time by those who were powerful. Ecofeminists as Karen Warren (1997, pp. 3-5) say, there is a connection between all the oppressed ones. Native Americans are among the minorities faced a destructive persecution. One of their famous writers is Joy Harjo (1951-), who explains that the arrival of the white colonizers to their land led to the expulsion of her people, putting an end to the harmony they had built with the natural elements and suffering of their women. This study looks at Harjo's columns, interviews and analyzes some poems from her award – winning works such as *She Had Some Horses* (1983), *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems 1975-2002* (2004), *Poet Warrior: A Memoir* (2021), *Catching the Light* (2022), and *An American Sunrise* (2019) to show how colonization led to the struggle of the Native American women, the destruction of nature and changing the culture that has been in the land for centuries.

Shared Problems of Women and Nature

Modern age brought many changes to society, especially to women. They came out of the strict traditional role that kept them at home to take care of children, wait for the men of their families to return home and only be an audience to activities and events happened all around the world.

Léonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland (1983, p. 5) claim, in the second half of the 20th century, women in some countries of the world played an important role in different movements, like the ones arranged asking for a better healthcare to women, putting an end to wars, saving the environment and protecting the rights of animals. All these led to the emergence of ecofeminism.

The term ecofeminism was first used in 1974 by Francoise d'Eauborne to show the bad treatment done to women and nature. The writer's message was highlighting the oppression and urging everyone to have a role to put an end to it (Vakoch, 2023, p. xxv). Then, attempts were unified and took an organized form. On the 21st March 1980, there was a conference in Massachusetts in the United States under the title 'Women and Life on Earth: A Conference on Eco-Feminism in the Eighties' in which around 600 women participated. The conference was the first ecofeminist one in the world in which a great focus was on women and the environment (Caldecott and Leland, 1983, p. 6). At the same time, works came out



supporting the effort, including *Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak out for Life on Earth* in 1983, which is regarded to be the first collection of essays about ecofeminism (Gaard, 1993, p. 3).

Assumptions of Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism has some basic assumptions. First, it examines the relationship between women oppression and the exploitation of nature. According to Karen Warren (2000), ecofeminism combines views from feminism, ecology, and environmental studies to analyse how women and nature face similar patterns of domination. This framework identifies what Warren calls "the logic of domination" - a system where one group is given authority to subordinate another, and this status being shown as justified. Ecofeminists believe their attempt is not confined to discuss the matter only, but they also lay down strategies and suggest answers to end the domination too.

Another assumption is supporting holistic connection. Greta Gaard (p. 5) argues, there is a connection between women, animals and nature as the pollution of the environment has had a great impact on animals and women. A large number of chemicals are tested first on animals to decide whether they are suitable to be used or not, successful or not, toxic or not. At the same time, some applied strategies have had a great impact upon women in the Third World countries in which women are breadwinners. Consequently, ecofeminists believe the aim should be protecting and saving all the oppressed ones.

Another assumption is identifying and finally removing the dualism created in the society. Charles Bressler (2011. p. 236) argues that opposites are made and a large number of people fall into them, like men/ women, white/ people of colour and culture/ nature. Sam Mickey (2018, p. xx) says, two of the early and big dualities have been human/ nature and man/ woman. people dominated and mistreated nature, and men oppressed woman. Ecofeminists believe these dualities persist in societies around the world, but should be eradicated.

Women, Nature and Culture in Native American Society

Native Americans loved the Earth and cared for all its beings. In *Native American Stories (Myths and Legends)*, Michael Caduto and Joseph Bruchac (1991, p. IX) show how the Okanagans, the natives lived in the area that is now the borderline between the United States and Canada, used the word Mother to refer to the Earth and Father to refer to the Sun. They also regarded animals as their siblings. Nearly all the natives had the view that their environment should be protected and no harm should be done to other beings.



Like other societies of that time, the Native American community was primitive. Men and women had different roles and the contribution of women was essential for the survival. According to Robert Lowie (1980, pp. 60-61), based on his visits in the early years of the 20th century, women mostly did housework, like bringing water, preparing food and producing clothes, while men mainly hunted and protected the society. Lowie says, "socially, the women enjoyed a good deal of freedom... A wife had definite property rights...I repeatedly noted that no husband ever attempted to influence, let alone coerce, a wife in the disposal of her own belongings".

Native Americans were persecuted by the whites for more than a century, but in the past four decades their situation has become better. Some of their women writers dedicated part of their work to show the true culture of their people and the impact of colonization on them, like Joy Harjo.

Nature, Woman and Culture in Joy Harjo's Work

Joy Harjo (1951-) was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma with Cherokee, Muscogee Creek, French and Irish ancestry. She is deeply connected to her ancestor's culture. Her mother's stories comforted her and gave her a sense of cultural pride, as she grew up (Mary Snodgrass, 2006, pp. 251-252). On her father's side, many ancestors were tribal chiefs, the most famous one was Monahwee, leader of part of the American tribe known as Red Sticks. Monahwee and his people fought American forces under the leadership of Andrew Jackson in the early years of the 19th century (McClinton-Temple and Velie, 2007, p. 157). In *Soul Talk, Song Language* (Joy Harjo and Tanya Winder, 2011, pp. 38- 39), Harjo reveals her enthusiasm to show details about Monahwee in the form of a "full-length feature film".

As far as the issue of culture is concerned, Joy Harjo deals mainly with colonization and its destructive impact on the native Americans. In the November 2009 issue of Msvkoke Media, Harjo mentions her experience while visiting Mystic, a town in Connecticut with a nice view, but a terrible past. She argues the colonizers killed over 600 natives in a violent way in 1637 there, most of whom were women and children. The whites blocked the entrances of the then-village and burned it all. That massacre was only an example of what the colonizers did to the natives who once "were %100 of the population", but "now roughly ½ of %1 of the total census of this country" (B- P. 5).

Joy Harjo believes the Earth has been very kind to humans. In "Prepare" from *Poet Warrior: A Memoir* (2021), Harjo says, breathing has been the first "gift" given to people by the Earth. The breath activated the physical being, because it "opened your body, these lungs, this heart"



(line 2) and consequently people connected to the natural world and the natives are aware of this. Also, plants, as vital components of the natural world, hold deep significance for the Natives. In *The poet Warrior: A Memoir* (pp. 276, 285), Harjo retells how once she was offered coca leaves to remove hunger and tiredness. Tobacco is also used by natives for different purposes, as “it has powers, ways to help humans”.

As far as the position of women is concerned, Harjo states that her people have had a high esteem of them. In *Catching the Light* (2022, p. 45), Harjo introduces the Earth as “a mother” and says, “Understanding this will be essential to our survival. To understand this relationship means that we have respect for life, for the mother principle, for women who stand alongside men, not beneath them”. In *Soul Talk, Song Language* (2011, p. 19), Harjo reminds the reader that “the overall deity”, known as the Great spirit, the creator of the Universe in the Native American culture, is neither male nor female. That is why, the Great Spirit does not give privilege to any of the gender.

The same themes are found in her poems too. An example is “From the Salt Lake City Airport-82” from *Sinister Wisdom: A Gathering of Spirit* (1983) in which Harjo shows some of the main differences between the views of the Native Americans and the whites. The poet maintains the tradition of her people by dealing with the Wasatch Mountain in the western part of the United States as a person, when she says:

The Wasatch Mountains plead
to be remembered.
In the East.
They watched wagon trails
wear down men, allowed them
to cross their bellies
thinking these white skins
could learn to love this land (13- 20)

Jim Duriga (2005, pp. 29-30) states, these lines and the personification of “ghost moons” (line 4) as they “watch” the travelers and then “wait”, is an indication to the belief of the Natives that all elements in the universe possess life and consciousness. At the same time, the reader notices how the directions “East” (line 15) and “West” (line 26) are capitalized. This reflects the cultural significance of cardinal directions in Native American spirituality, where the compass points played vital roles in prayer practices, spiritual beliefs, and daily life.

But the whites are presented in a very different way. They are interested in building walls and creating separation, contrary to what the



Natives did. Duriga (p. 29) argues, the people who went to Salt Lake City in the state of Utah were the Mormons. They wanted to practice their faith freely there. The line "they build a city of separation" (line 29) can be understood in different ways. First, it represents their physical distance from other people and their disconnection from their own cultural roots. By building the city, they also separated themselves from the natural world, unlike the Native Americans who believed everything is connected and so humans should not be separated from nature and the other living beings.

The difference is not only between the perception of Natives and the whites, but their culture too. According to Robert Winzeler (2012, p. 70), the Natives held a profound reverence to the Earth and believed some of the main components of in the universe have a sense of consciousness and everything in the cosmos is interconnected. This is seen in the poem as the poet talks about "ghost moons", "the Wasatch Mountains", "the red hills", "the sun" and "the earth". All of them are personified and treated as people. However, the whites are presented differently. They entered the area, but only payed attention to themselves and "looked only West" (line 26). The difference in culture appears when it comes to naming children too. The whites "grew children/ and named them names of men" (lines 31- 32), while the Natives used names related to "the land" (line 34).

Colonization and oppressing women on the part of the whites follow. The poet says, the red hills should never be forgotten, as they surround the city and witnessed what happened to the indigenous people in the area close by. Then, it shows how women were treated in the white people's society. They were kept at home as prisoners, visible only through the windows, surrounded by children. The women were even obliged to express words and expressions of the men, as the poet says:

They speak men's words, not their own
Except those languages they've
Learned to speak in secret
And in dreams, if they've
Not forgotten. (lines 60-64)

View of the Natives follow, which is contrary to the one of the white colonizers. The Earth, as a female figure, has been described as having the ability to work beyond the human control. The lake west of the city has been defined as "the womb" of the city's discomfort where that patriarchal view is in control. It is also shown to be the "mother" of the city (lines 81-82). That is two main feminine symbols have been used which represent the view of the Natives.



"The Woman Hanging from the Thirteenth Floor Window" from the poetry collection *She Had Some Horses* (1983) is another anthologized poem of Joy Harjo. The poem talks about the tragic life of a woman in Chicago who wants to kill herself, because she thinks it would put an end to her suffering and finally "she will be set free" (line 7).

The line "The woman hanging from the Thirteenth Floor" has been repeated seven times. Joy Harjo (1985, p. 39) mentions she has chosen this repetition as a technique and the aim is communicating with the reader directly so that the idea would "enter into the listener like a song or a chant".

The main message is showing the horrible life of women in general. Harjo (1985, p 40) says, "perhaps many women are this woman". Some of the lines resonate this idea too. In the second stanza, the poet, in describing the situation of the woman, says, she "is all the women of the apartment/ building who stand watching her, watching themselves" (lines 14-15). The same idea appears in the third stanza too, when the poet in describing the woman says, "She sees/ other building just like hers" (lines 16-17). As far as the identity is concerned, Joy Harjo (1985, p. 40) reveals the woman is an Indian who has left Wisconsin to Chicago, because she did not have any job in her hometown. But the reader can get this idea too without being aware of the revelation of the poet. That is through many words and expressions that have been used. For example, using "east Chicago" (lines 4) in the state of Indiana where many Native Americans live, and mentioning "wild rice" (line 16) which is a very important food in the indigenous people culture, especially by tribes like Odawa, Ojibwe and Potawatomi. This expression better indicates the identity of the woman when "farther north" (line 17) is considered, because a large number of the Native Americans lived and planted rice there. Two other expressions are used which also support the claim. First, when Harjo says, the woman is "on the Indian side of town" (line 29). Second, the poet mentions, "She thinks of the color of her skin" (line 52).

This woman is an archetype of the Native Americans whose people were evicted from their place. Joy Harjo (1985, p. 40) says, the "audience" are "women, mostly Indian women, those who survived and those who weren't strong enough" to survive. This point relates the case of the women with a theme that is often a major point in Harjo's work, that is colonization and its impact on the Native Americans, especially Native American women. In *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature* (2006, p. 251-252), Mary Snodgrass says, one of the basic themes often raised in the work of Harjo is "the cultural rape perpetrated by racist European conquerors" against the indigenous people and the impact of that



treatment that led to their expulsion and their settling “in the white world”.

Since the woman is a Native American and now lives in a place far from her ancestral land, the poet mingles both past and the present. As far as the past is concerned, it talks about life of the native in her place and among her people. The poet describes her life in this way:

When she was young she ate wild rice on scraped down
Plates in warm wood rooms. It was in the farther
North and she was baby then. They rocked her. (lines 16-18)

The other one is present. She is far from home, tired, alone, sad to a point that prefers to die rather than continue the life she has found herself in. The poet gives a snapshot of the life of the woman in some lines and says:

She thinks of the 4 a.m. loneliness that have folded
her up like death, discordant, without logical and
beautiful conclusion. Her teeth break off at the edges.
She would speak. (lines 56- 59)

Nature in some of the works of Joy Harjo is sometimes portrayed as a victim of human being, often accompanied by another victim, that is woman. An example is “The Everlasting” from the collection *How we Became Human: New and Selected Poems 1975- 2002* (2004). “The Everlasting” has been written down for Ingrid Washinawatok, an activist from Wisconsin advocating for the rights of the indigenous people. She was killed in 1999 while on a mission to Colombia to help the U’wa people protect their life and culture. During that time, Occidental Petroleum, an American company was drilling in the area where the indigenous people live. The natives were against the drilling, but rulers of the area, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc), had a good relation with the company. The force kidnapped the activist and after one week her corpse was found.

After mentioning the killing of Washinawatok in the first stanza, the second stanza retells what the soldiers did. They continued their life as usual, ate dinner around fire, piled up “pig bones” and called their family members. According to Sarah Giragosian (2019, p. 40), these lines make clear how women, plants (trees cut down to be burned) and animals are mistreated by the men and it happens only in the patriarchal societies. Also, the idea that soldiers call “their mothers” and “their daughters”





from the same place where they killed Washinawatok shows their lack of morality and inhumanity.

Towards the end of the poem, Harjo mentions that Washinawatok's body is integrated to the living cycle, as she says "The wound in the earth where they took her/ is being tended by rain/ and flowers" (lines 73- 76). But her death is the beginning of degrading the land and nature, as well as changing the culture too, as the poet says:

Oil companies will soon dig crude there,
With their machinery, their money,
And instant cities of missionaries and soldiers
will beget a countryside
of children of missionaries and soldiers. (77- 81)

Nearly two centuries after the forced relocation of the Native Americans to what is now called Oklahoma, Joy Harjo goes to her native land and expresses her experience there in *An American sunrise* (2019). In "Don't look back", Harjo does not only talk about the expulsion of her ancestors, but explains what they miss too, as she says:

We loved our trees and waters
And the creatures and earths and skies
In that beloved place.
Those beings were our companions
Even as they fed us, cared for us. (lines 5- 10)

Conclusion

This paper highlights the core concepts of ecofeminism as a common movement in the post- modern era, by referring to its theories and writings of some of the ecofeminists. It explains the impacts of colonization of the Native American land through the lens of ecofeminism.

Since the subject is about ecofeminism, works of a woman descendent of a well- known Native American tribe has been chosen to be discussed, Joy Harjo (1953-). The prose writings, interviews and poems selected to be discussed in this paper all show colonization led to the removal of her people in their land. As a result, a long- standing culture was rooted out, part of which was having a good harmony between the people and nature. The works explain how the eviction of the Indians led to the suffering of their women, as they were obliged to work in communities that were patriarchal and majority- whites at the same time, so they faced double oppression.



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