Othering through Gendering Discourses and Patriarchal Hegemonies in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*

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ABSTRACT

Many postcolonial studies of the relationship between the 'empire' and the 'margin' have revealed that it is characterized by persistent dominance and exploitation. Scholars like Frantz Fanon have argued that colonial encounters between the West and Africa constitute a relationship of dominance and oppression in which the oppressed is maintained as an exploited Other to the dominant Self. While the power differential in this relationship is obsessively guarded through varying forms of othering, the dominant self subtly explores new ways of upholding the structures of supremacy over the Other. Gender is one such subtle means, in the sense that the colonial Other is often ingeniously conceived as the traditional female who is a subordinate (Other) to the male. This essay examines ways in which such othering through gendering is achieved in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness *and Barbara Kingsolver's* The Poisonwood Bible.

Keywords: Gender, Othering, Post-colonialism

INTRODUCTION

In comparing the novels, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Poisonwood Bible*,[2] one cannot help but notice that, despite their convergence in adapting Africa, precisely the Congo, as the major setting for their narratives, the texts differ at the level of gender presentation. *HOD*, on the one hand, is no doubt a male-oriented text that seems to have as part of its agenda the exclusion of women from the discovery of Kurtz's horror, because it proceeds from the assumption that women are altogether too fragile, ignorant or naïve to handle the stark realities of life. *PWB*, on the other hand, is a female-oriented text that aims at giving a feminine perspective

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on masculine/imperial 'heroic' adventures into the conquest of the colonised Other, where the constitution of this Other is very much linked to the female body in the sense that both endure forms of penetration and possession by the patriarch/empire whose desire is to assert superiority over the colonised/female.

Sharing the common heritage of colonialism, both novels articulate gender difference and gender roles as a part of the organisation of imperial states and colonial territories. This subsumption of gender into the greater picture of human oppression is significant for two main reasons. First, the categorisation of gender into masculine and feminine often precedes a distinction between the treatment of and attitudes towards men and women. Secondly, gendering, like colonialism and other structures that operate on a system of binary oppositions, has at its core some level of oppression, in this case, of the 'weaker' half (the feminine). In an essay entitled "Deconstructing Equality–versus–Difference", Joan Scott (1988:37)declares that:

> [o]ppositions rest on metaphors and cross-references, and often in patriarchal discourse, sexual difference (the contrast masculine/feminine) serves to encode or establish meanings that are literally unrelated to gender or the body. In that way, the meanings of gender become tied to many kinds of cultural representations, and these in turn establish terms by which relations between women and men are organized and understood.

However, she argues further that there exists some "interdependence", some complementarity in these ostensible opposites. In support of this assertion, she draws on the views of Jacques Derrida and explains that,

> Western philosophical tradition...rests on binary oppositions: unity/diversity, identity/difference, presence/absence, and universality/specificity. The leading terms are accorded primacy; their partners are represented as weaker or derivative. Yet the first terms depend on and derive their meaning from the second to such an extent that the secondary terms can be seen as generative of the definition of the first terms (1988:37).

In my analysis of *HOD* and *PWB*, I find such binary oppositions at work at three different levels, each of which has a bearing on the others. These are the levels of masculine/feminine, white/black and the West/Africa. These oppositions contribute to formulating the concept of otherness by replicating difference through the referential terms "we/they, us/them." In my study of the texts I intend to show how such oppositeness contributes to meaning and to the creation of a particular image of Africa that seems to be constructed from the combination of the three levels of opposition that I have already identified. To this end, I agree with Scott that "if binary oppositions provide insight into the way meaning is constructed, and if they operate as Derrida suggests, then analyses of meaning cannot take binary oppositions at face value but rather must "deconstruct" them for the processes they embody" (1988:37).

This essay will, therefore, attempt to explore how power structures are established through gender related otherness, which endorses forms of oppression aimed at keeping the feminine gendered subject in a constant state of subjugation to patriarchal authority. Further to this, I will attempt to discuss some of the ways in which different gendered subjects resist gender oppression through agency (either subtly or blatantly) by undoing gender difference and transgressing gender roles.

GENDERED STEREOTYPES

Different scholars have conceived of gender in various ways in order to identify its varying forms and break the stereotypes associated with them. These forms develop from what Mary Hawkesworth (1970:649), quoting Harold Garfinkel, calls the "'natural attitude' towards gender," which

> encompasses a series of 'unquestionable' axioms about gender, including the beliefs that...gender is invariant; genitals are the essential signs of gender; the male /female dichotomy is natural; being masculine or feminine is natural and not a matter of choice; all individuals can (and must) be classified as masculine or feminine–any deviation from such a classification being either a joke or a pathology.

To challenge "the validity" of such beliefs, Hawkesworth (1970:650) argues that "[e]arly feminist scholars used gender to repudiate biological determinism by demonstrating the range of variation in cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity", whereas more recently, "others use gender to analyze the social organization of relationships between men and women...to investigate the reification of human differences...[and] to illustrate the microtechniques of power", among others. She further posits that the more different analysts try to conflate different approaches to dispel the myths about gender, the wider the contextual scope it encompasses.

Of the several ways cited by Hawkesworth (1970:649-50) in which gender has been viewed, it is the definition of gender "in terms of a binary opposition" and "as relations of power manifested in domination and subordination" that are most relevant to my discussion (Mackinnon 1987; Gordon 1988; qtd. in Hawkesworth 1970: 651). To support these ways of analysing gender in relation to my primary texts, I also adopt Joan Scott's definition of gender "as a concept of two interrelated but analytically distinct parts," as "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and [as] a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (qtd. in Hawkesworth 1970:652). With regard to *HOD* and *PWB*, the first part of this definition applies to the categorisation of characters based on their biological sexual differences (male/female; men/women). The second part relates to the way in which certain characters, irrespective of their biological sexual identities, may be gendered to play out or "signify ... relationships of power".

IN BLACK AND WHITE

Gender, in the self-evident sense of the word, that is, as biological sexual identity, is clearly spelt out in the novels. In *HOD*, there are fewer women than men. Between Marlow's aunt mentioned at the beginning of the narrative and Kurtz's Intended whose pallid aspect draws Marlow's brooding tale to a close, we encounter three other women: Kurtz's African mistress and the Fates "guarding the door of Darkness" (*HOD*, 12), bringing the total number of women characters in the novel to five. On the other hand, the male characters are represented multiply through

Marlow, his clique of attentive listeners 'secret-sharing' with him on the *Nellie*, 'the great man himself' in the 'Company's offices' (11), the French doctor who conducts some medical examination of sorts on Marlow "in the interests of science" (13), the Swede captain of the little steamboat that transports Marlow to his Company's station (17), the company's chief accountant (21), the manager (25), the company of wearisome pilgrims, the brickmaker, Kurtz's Russian disciple and Kurtz himself...the list seems endless. Thus outnumbered by the male characters, the women in the text certainly seem to be out of place in this male dominated narrative. Cast hazily as dreamlike entities removed from the reality of life, each of the female characters possesses an aspect of illusion that disqualifies her from a discovery of truth. The Fates "guarding the door of Darkness" (12) as well as the African mistress have an ominous aspect that casts them in the realm of nightmarish apparitions; the Intended is kept in a state of ignorance about the truth of Kurtz's life and death; and Marlow's aunt lives in a state of pure naiveté that distances her from the truth. Thus discarding the ominous three to the sphere of the unreal and remarking simply that they are the "most improper person[s] to be...at the other end of such an affair" (81), Conrad sums up his opinion of the fair pair in Marlow's words about his aunt:

> It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there has never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over (14).

In a thought provoking essay about the exclusion of women from Conrad's novel, Nina Pelikan Straus (1987:124) has stated that "Marlow presents a world distinctly split into male and female realms–the first harboring the possibility of 'truth' and the second dedicated to the maintenance of delusion". So pronounced is the superiority of men in the text that in a strain of comparison, the two most dominant male figures in the text, Marlow and Kurtz, seem to be all it takes to downplay the importance

of all five women. Kurtz, in life as in death, retains possession over his Intended. In his minatory personality, he surpasses the ominous aspect of the Fates and the enchanted nature of the African mistress put together. Marlow, on the other hand, is ushered into his nightmare on a wave of incertitude, slightly piqued by his aunt's naiveté regarding the reality of the colonial enterprise about which he knows better. At the end of his journey, having traversed to "the centre of the earth" (15) and back to "the sepulchral city" (88), he restively performs the finale of 'guarding' the Intended's innocence, sealing her ignorance with his lie about Kurtz's last words.

In *PWB*, a markedly feminine text, there seems to be a reversal of Straus' assertion, for though indeed the Price females (Orleanna, the mother; Rachel, the eldest; the twins, Leah and Adah; and Ruth May, the youngest) also present a world distinctly split into male and female realms, here, it is the women who harbour the possibility of 'truth' while the men (or man, Nathan in this case) are "dedicated to the maintenance of delusion" (Straus 1987:124). As though she were consciously aiming at undoing Conrad's text, Kingsolver creates a parallel text to *HOD* through which "she critiques European and American imperialist policies toward Africa [and] oppressive patriarchal attitudes toward women" (Fox 2004:406). Building her narrative around the Price family consisting of five females and a sole male, Kingsolver's novel is dominated by the females through whose personal perspectives the story unfolds. Each of the Price females recounts in her own way the domineering hegemony of the single male who rules each of their lives at the beginning of the novel. However, as they narrate their individual experiences, they become more aware of their precarious existence dependent fully on the authority and dubious conviction of the one man in their lives. With this discovery of themselves comes also their realization of the need to rule their own lives based on their own convictions. Making personal sacrifices to this end, they each forge ahead to make their own lives independent of the tyrannical male and his patricentric laws.

At the beginning of the novel, it is evident that Nathan, the husband, father, patriarch and 'god' of the Price females, stands unopposed as the superior male who dominates (even if silently), the lives of all the five females. So

delusional is he in exercising his power to rule the lives of others, to give commands and have them obeyed that, using his tyranny over his family of females as a model, he relentlessly tries to bend the will and traditions of Africa and its people to the will of the imperial and colonial power of which he is a religious representative. So overbearing is his power over the lives of the women that Adah, the lame twin, cynically refers to him as "Our Father" (32-4; 171-4; 213-4), observing that he speaks for all of them (32). Thus, even though in the novel, his voice as a narrator is conspicuously absent, his 'law' dominates and influences the narration of each of the females. In a disparagement similar to Marlow's opinion of his aunt, Nathan generally opines, by implication, that the females, whom he indubitably equates to "bad dogs and morons" (133), have "failed to grasp" (13) the seriousness of their mission as a family to Africa because, led by their mother, Orleanna, they display a materialistic "outlook" (133) on the task of leading the way "*out* from [the] place of *darkness*! ...into a *brighter land!*" (28).

Apart from these characters represented in both novels as clearly biologically male or female, there are other characters and entities in both novels that come out as gendered. They are either strongly/super masculine or stereotypically feminine. As already stated in Scott's (1988:37) definition, such gendering, imputed either consciously or unconsciously, often serves to determine relationships of power between or among these characters. This assertion is replicated by Helen Bradford (1996:355) as she states in her essay on gender and colonialism that "[t]he colonial state was a male state: in its social base, personnel, and, not least, its military preoccupations and gender discriminatory laws". Bradford (1996:356) argues that this androcentric structuring of state and society was bequeathed by representatives of the imperial states who carried with them into Africa ripples of political revolutions taking place in Europe at the time. As a result, many texts from that period (and from the present, when many of such deeply ingrained ways of thinking still persist) consist of

> [a] repertoire of gender stereotypes...structuring ways of thinking about both sexes. On the one hand, men are largely gender neutral, conceptualized not as men but as

> people, linked with categories like economics, politics or race. On the other hand, women are gendered beings, with an implicit or explicit emphasis on their sexual attributes and their familial relationships with men.

This attitude towards gender may well explain why Conrad's text, written at what may be considered the exploratory years that laid the foundation for colonialism, endows men with heroic abilities while women demonstrate a deficiency in knowledge about certain aspects of life. As Straus (1987: 125) argues, "Conrad's text itself...stimulates the notion that the psychic penury of women is a necessary condition for the heroism of men". And as I have already suggested, Kingsolver's *PWB*, in the sense that it tries to work out a reversal of gender attitudes, seems to induce the psychic penury of men as a necessary condition for the heroism of women.

To revisit Scott's definition of gender that Hawkesworth (1970: 652) applies to her analysis of gender, it is possible to examine how gender is deployed in *HOD* and *PWB* as an indication of "relations of power manifested in domination and subordination" and as "a primary way of signifying relationships of power". In *HOD*, such power relations are manifested through characters like Kurtz, Marlow and his male audience on the yawl (to whom Strauss extends the metaphor of secret-sharing). These men are depicted as definitely masculine by dint of their heroic abilities or by the transference of these abilities merely through association (as male listeners or even readers) with the heroes. Thus gaining superiority over the effeminate women, who lack the experience of adventure and, as a result, the knowledge of 'truth,' the masculine is portrayed as the dominant gender to which the feminine is subordinate, signifying in this way the dynamics of power between the two. The 'truth' itself is gendered in the sense that, presented from the perspective of the 'powerful' male, it is, in actual fact, a justification for the need to colonise and exert power over the Other.

There are the women in the novel who occupy clear feminine positions. It is worth noting that these women are not even given names. Whether they symbolise good/light or evil/darkness (as do the Intended and the African mistress, respectively), evince benefaction or presage an omen

(as with the aunt or the Fates), they bear no names. The identities of each one of them has been reduced to the feminine pronoun 'she', and once collapsed into this single unit, their individual identities are voided. They do not exist for themselves. They exist only insofar as they move Marlow's tale forward. Straus (1987:134) argues in her essay that because the Intended is without a name she is "thrice voided or erased" by Kurtz, Marlow and Conrad, none of whom ever speaks her name. If we carry this argument further and extend it to the other gendered characters in the novel, it will be evident that all five women "remain in the stereotypically convenient world of 'she'" (Straus 1987: 134) and so are all equally voided at one level. However, there is a second level of erasure from which the Intended and Marlow's aunt are spared, because they at least have voices. The African mistress and the Fates are placed at a level of erasure where they neither have names nor voices, and even their very forms are linked to the nebulous, sinister nature of the darkness through which Marlow has travelled to find Kurtz, a darkness that only deepens into "something ominous...tenebrous...with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose" (*HOD* 76). These characters are not only feminised but also to some extent dehumanised, which reflects how feminine-gendered characters also fall into a category of otherness that contests their humanity. This may or may not be a direct result of their representation but is linked, largely, to the overall dominant patriarchal attitudes that have accompanied definitions of men and women over time.

In *PWB*, there are similar constructs. There is the masculine-gendered male, Nathan Price, who, though only nominally represented, exerts authority over the females, thus asseverating his superiority. He is the epitomised representation of the dominant patriarch whose laws must be obeyed. Though his character is portrayed through the narratives of the female characters, we are still able to decipher that his attitude corresponds to "masculine ideals of self-reliance, individualism, sexual sampling, mobility and adventure" (Comer 1997:78). On the other hand, the females are feminine-gendered at the beginning of the novel, stereotypically revealing "female values such as attachment, connection, belonging, community and commitment" (Comer 1997:78). This representation is

however reversed, or at least questioned, as the females make an effort to reconstruct their selves away from gender stereotypes.

CHANGING PLACES

There is another category of feminised characters in the novel who are not biologically female. These characters are represented in the forms of the African men in the novel. First, there is the chief of the village, Tata Ndu, whose chiefly regalia includes "large black glasses frames (which bore no lenses)" (*PWB* 97). When we first meet him, he is cast as a caricature who is more concerned with the acquisition of more wives and copulation than with the affairs of his village. However, when we encounter him later in the wake of Nathan's gradual debilitating power, he is gaining power and savouring this power over the white missionary. He gradually sheds his effeminate self in exchange for an increasingly masculine attitude, through which he asserts his authority as chief of the village. He stands up to Nathan, puts Nathan's version of religion to the test of voting, a procedure defined by the West, and thus exposes the inadequacy of Western ideals imposed on African cultural or value systems.

There is indeed Nathan himself who lands in Africa, the typical male overlord, tyrant and virtual 'god' of his household. It is significant to note that there is no other male in his nest who would have stood up to him, for there cannot be two captains on one ship. When his power to dominate and repress starts to give way, he gradually becomes effeminate. We actually see a foreshadowing of his emasculation in the fact that he is denied a narrative voice to recount his own experience of Africa. Rather, we learn about his experiences and his actions from the parallel narratives of his all-female family. When Mama Tataba, the African housekeeper who worked for Nathan's predecessor and later worked for Nathan and his family, stands up to him, it is a shock to his family who have never thought that kind of action possible; and it is the prefiguring of other such revolts against him. When Anatole, an orphan who was cared for and educated by previous missionaries and who now serves as Nathan's translator, visits the Price homestead, he tells Nathan the truth about how ineffective his mission is among the village folk, stating that the chief, "Tata Ndu is happy for (Nathan) to draw the bad-luck people away, but worries (he

is) trying to lure too many of the others into following corrupt ways" (*PWB*, 129). Later, we find that even his "favourite pupil," Leah, stands up against his authority and command and goes hunting with the men even though he forbids her to do so. This seems to be the final silencing factor that completes his evolution into a feminine-gendered character. For, from this point onward, we hear less and less about him until he is completely erased from the picture except to continue hovering over and haunting his family. His haunting presence is captured in his family's individual recollections of the experiences they lived through as a result of his dragging them into the Congo with him in the first place. The final time we hear of him is in Leah's report of his mystical reclusive life as a haunt among the native people and his eventual portentous, horrific, and ghoulish death. Adah points out the irony of his death in the context of his own methods and his life: "he got [the last] The Verse" (487).

Finally, the other character who falls into this category of the feminine-gendered subject is Anatole. When he is introduced at the beginning of the novel, he is clearly masculine, demonstrating self-reliance and individualism. Orphaned at an early age, he has learnt to survive on his own and on the benevolence of the white priests who took him under their wing and trained him. Having thus acquired high literacy skills, he inadvertently becomes Nathan's assistant and translator in the church, although he still has his own opinions about Nathan. At the village gathering following the hunting expedition, he stands up for himself and for Leah when the village elders discriminate against both of them on the grounds of orphanhood and femaleness, respectively. Thus, he demonstrates clear masculine ideals in standing up for himself and for others, in fearlessly stating his opinion on any subject and in his adventurism when he actively participates in the revolution for independence in the Congo, which earns him an arrest. However, in marrying Leah, he seems to have yielded his independence, his identity and his voice to her. His subjectivity is subsumed under Leah's authoritative and privileged voice and his assertiveness is almost completely swallowed up by Leah's idealisation of him, of Africa and of her life in Africa. In the end, he seems to exist only for her, for it is through her dominating voice and point of view that we get to hear of him at all. In this gender representation of Leah and Anatole,

not only do we observe a reversal of gender roles and a subversion of gender differences, but also we detect the endorsement of racial power relations in maintaining the hegemony of white over black.

DE-/PHALLICISING GENDER

In both novels, it is possible to see the imperial West as a vague, though strong, masculine character that possesses the patriarchal phallic status penetrating into Africa upon whom it has imposed a maternal clitoric, feminine status and over whom it asserts its power and authority. In her essay on "prostitution and sexual geography," Felicity Nussbaum (1995:19) connects the colonial enterprise to prostitution and demonstrates how pornographic representation of the hypersexual female body as "the silenced ground for a nationalist and colonialist agenda" is linked to the exotic representation of the "torrid/ tropic zones" as the fertile ground for colonial exploitation and domination. She further shows how, in John Cleland's novel, *Memoirs*, the narrator depicts the possession of his prostitute's corporeal 'territory' as "one of mutual pleasure in the exploration and discovery, as the colonized is increasingly pleasured by the colonizer's intrusion" (1995:26). Discussing how in eighteenth century English society the prostitute or errant "permissive female" was likened to the "torrid zone's Other" and considered "an aberration" and an "evil" necessitating control, Nussbaum explains further that, for this society, it became exigent that sexuality be regulated in a bid to curb and domesticate (moderate) the hyper erotic tendencies of both the prostitute and the torrid Other. Among the repugnant evils of prostitutes which were to be guarded against was autoeroticism, for the prevention of which it was suggested that women be protected from themselves. To this end, one writer recommended that the woman's body be "literally swathed during the night" to hide her body from her. Thus "[d]iscouraged from exploring their own bodies, women (were expected to) await discovery by another" (Nussbaum 1995:22).

To extend Nussbaum's metaphor of linking the woman's body to colonial territory, I argue that Africa's material wealth and value were (and still are) the pleasure that the imperialist sought. Already compared to the permissive woman, Africa was considered a threat and a danger to herself

since she lacked the 'civilisation' (domesticity) to control her excessive sexuality and erotic pleasure. She is a prostitute requiring domesticity and regulation to turn her into a chaste, modest woman. Except that, unlike the clitoral Fanny Hill of Cleland's *Memoirs* who, by gaining Charles' love, is transformed from low-class, "elevated to bourgeois status and fully domesticated" (26), Africa, having more than one 'intruder' and gaining the love of none, remains a prostitute, since in the colonial encounter there was no intention of marriage on the part of the European invader. The correlation between Cleland's *Memoirs* and the colonial experience lies in the fact that for Fanny Hill, the sexual encounter is used to domesticate her, whereas for Africa, it is used to entice and then subjugate and colonise her, which is the ultimate goal of the domineering phallic empire. Given such a clitoral portraiture that is enormous enough to suck in more than one imperial phallus, Africa remains prostitute to all empires, slave to all.

In the light of this sexual metaphor, it is evident how Africa is gendered in both *HOD* and *PWB*; for abstract in nature, yet present with some level of performative force, are the Imperial West and Africa. Represented by its motley agents (missionary, civilising or mercantilist), and so subtly eclipsed by these agents (magnified by reason of humanity), the Imperial West is the most dominant male character in both novels. It is gendered masculine and displays attributes of masculinity: adventurism, conquest, sense of superiority and dominance. In *PWB* it is represented in Nathan who remains convinced that, for his mission, he has the strong and unwavering approval of God and the United States of America even while his wife and daughters turn "un-missionary" (525), disillusioned with the threefold father figure of God, American leaders and Nathan. Each of them gradually casts off the power wielded over their lives by the domineering male figure and reconstructs herself into a new, more assertive person. It is equally represented in the spy-cum-merchant, Eeben Axelroot, who, in the true nature of the empire, exploits the deception of the colonial enterprise for his personal benefit. In a more subtle way, it is also represented in the person of "Eisenhower... [t]he King of America [who] wants a tall, thin man in the Congo to be dead" (297), evidence of the power he wields over the lives of others, no matter how far away they may be from his seat of authority. It is, in fact, this controlling force of

the Imperial West, brandished by the puppeteer, Eisenhower, that sets the pace for emasculating Nathan who is defeated by Africa, starting with Mama Tataba's revolt against and disregard for him.

In *HOD*, the imperial West is represented strongly by the men and the adventurers and more metonymically by the Thames and the exploits that have been carried out on it in the past as well as by the evocation of various ships on which, and ports from which such exploits were led:

> And indeed nothing is easier for a man who has... 'followed the sea' with reverence and affection than to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames. The tidal current...in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships it had borne... men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin...ships...from the *Golden Hind*...to the *Erebus* and *Terror*...from Deptford, from Greenwich, from Erith...they had all gone out on that stream, bearing the sword and often the torch, **messengers of the might** within the land...The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, **the germs of empires**" (*HOD*, 5 emphasis added)

It is of interest to note that in Nussbaum's (1995:25, 26) analysis of sexuality and conquest she states that ships were often used as "a common trope for whores", and that Cleland's novel suggests that the whore "Fanny Hill's body is both male and female". Male, because it represents the might of the empire which penetrates, by way of exploration, into 'unexplored' lands; and female because it is itself controlled by male sailors who operate the ship, taking possession of it and directing its course. With such a suggestion, a relation can be detected between the ship as female, explored and enjoyed by the male adventurer who sails upon her, and the ship as male, penetrating into the female regions of the earth to explore and colonise. With the men and ships together thus symbolising the "might" and the "empire," it is possible to identify them as the mighty empire itself that penetrates into Africa. Marlow confirms his identification with this mighty empire when he asserts: "After all, I also was a part of the great

cause of these high and just proceedings" (*HOD*, 19). In this statement by Marlow, however, there is a hint of irony, for Marlow's entire role in "these high and just proceedings" consists mainly in revealing how ignoble the whole sordid affair is, of having to engage in 'sowing' "the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires" (5) or to rescue the insane (such as Kurtz) from the effects of such expeditions. This is evidenced in his assertion that "the conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much" (7-8).

In *PWB*, we observe a similar correlation between the masculine gendered conqueror who represents the empire and the feminine gendered conquest who in part is also Africa, colonised, plundered and abandoned but hardly domesticated. The masculine is represented in the character of Nathan who, on behalf of the West (which is his god) "rides in to vanquish the untouched tribes" (*PWB*, 9) bearing "the torch" (*HOD*, 5) of religion. But like "Dr. Livingstone...and all the profiteers" before him, he "walk[s] out on Africa as a husband quits a wife, leaving her with her naked body curled around the emptied-out mine of her womb" (*PWB*, 9). Explicit in Orleanna's assessment of Africa's situation is the imagery of a broken matrimony in which the West, through its 'conquering' representatives, is the husband, and Africa, invested with the feminine qualities of reproduction through the metaphor of the womb, is the abandoned wife.

Through this metaphor of reproduction and other such tropes, Africa is conceived of as feminine in the novel. Abstract as it may be, Africa is represented as the native primitive female, endowed with wealth and resources, whose 'lovers' exploit her and abandon her: "poor [Africa], barefoot bride of men who took her jewels and promised the Kingdom" (*PWB*, 201). Through this patronising imagery, Africa is cast not only as female but aslo as naïve. As implied by the metaphor of the womb, she also has regenerative abilities, though these may not be readily recognisable. She seems to be able to regenerate in two major ways: autogenously and heterogeneously, suggestive of a bisexuality that transcends gender stereotypes and defies traditional gender roles. In *PWB*, this dual reproductive ability is rendered in the observation that the

forest sustains itself and regenerates by feeding on itself, "this forest eats itself and lives forever" (*PWB*, 5). This is evocative of the fact that despite the plundering, Africa's 'womb' is never 'an emptied-out mine.' Due to this fact, Africa perpetually calls to herself rivalling powers which all seek to have dominance over her. Nevertheless, as Orleanna experiences: "Africa shifts under [her] hands, refusing to be party to failed relations" (10), defying exploitation from greedy, self-seeking profiteers and identification with abandoned wives and emptied-out wombs.

CONCLUSION

In sum, gender is deployed in both *HOD* and *PWB* to maintain the dynamics of power and superiority of the imperial West (the self) over Africa (the colonised other). This is evidenced in *HOD* in the way Africa and Africans are Othered through the systematic exclusion of women and the eventual erasure of the African woman (and therefore of Africa) from experiencing the supremacy of an individual self. In *PWB*, the reversal of gender roles and the obliteration of the domineering patriarch only serve to methodically obscure Africa and her people in the might of the West. While the African women (along with their emasculated men with whom Nathan gets thrown in) gradually lose their individuality as they are subsumed under the larger image of Africa as an entity that is both male and female, the gendered representation of Africa in reproductive terms confines it to an otherness dominated by the masculine Western self. This is an otherness that establishes the relationship between the colonised and the empire.

Endnote

[2] Hereafter referred to as *HOD* and *PWB*.

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