

82. The Water is Rising, Families are Drowning: An Ecocritical Reading of *The Wall* by John Lanchester

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APA: Yiğit, A. (2023). The Water is Rising, Families are Drowning: An Ecocritical Reading of *The Wall* by John Lanchester. *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Arařtırmaları Dergisi*, (35), 1351-1364. DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1346632.

Twenty-first-century literature is going to be about the environment, in the same way as twentieth-century literature was "about" psychoanalysis.

(Rehding, 2011, p. 409)

Abstract

Written in a plain and unsophisticated style like numerous other popular novels, *the Wall* by John Lanchester deals with a series of contemporary global issues including climate change, rising totalitarianism and protracted refugee crisis. Set in a dystopian future, but conscious of the contemporary problems afflicting humanity and environment, *the Wall* also presents in an interrogant tone scenes of empathy toward refugees or "the Others". In this essay, referring to the postulations raised in the field of ecocriticism, but particularly to understanding of environmentalism in apocalyptic, postapocalyptic, and dystopian senses, I will attempt to analyze how rising environmental crises and concerns shape the family structure of modern people, and the relationships between children and parents. Based on problematic family images drawn in *the Wall*, I propose that the rise of environmental disasters has disruptive and destructive effects on traditional family (nuclear family) structure regardless of geographical location, family bonds and intrafamilial relationships, which makes people more vulnerable to external threats in so far as they are left emotionally and mentally, if not physically, debilitated in a devastated environment.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, *the Wall*, eco-dystopia, climate change, eroded family structure, and family disintegration

Sular Yükseliyor, Aileler Boğuluyor: John Lanchester'in *Duvar* Adlı Eserinin Ekoeleřtirel Bir Yaklaşım İncelemesi

Öz

Diğer popüler romanları gibi yalın ve basit bir üslupla yazılmış olan John Lanchester'in *Duvar* adlı eseri, iklim deęişikliği, artan totalitaryanizm, ve sürüncemede kalmış mülteci krizi gibi konular dahil olmak üzere çok sayıda güncel ve küresel konuları ele almaktadır. Distopyan bir gelecekte geçen, ancak insanlığı ve çevreyi kötü etkileyen ama günümüz sorunlarının farkında olan *Duvar* romanı mültecilere ve "Ötekilere" karşı sorgulayıcı bir tonda empati sahneleri de sunmaktadır. Bu makalede, ekoeleřtiri alanında ortaya atılan görüşlere, ama özellikle de çevreciliğin apokaliptik, postapokaliptik ve distopyan bağlamlardaki algılanış şekillerine atıfta bulunarak, artan çevre krizleri ve kaygıların modern insanın aile yapısını ve çocuklar ve ebeveynler arasındaki ilişkileri nasıl etkilediğini analiz etmeye çalışacağım. *Duvar*'da resmedilen problemler aile imajlarına dayanarak, şunu öne sürüyorum: artan çevre felaketlerinin, coğrafi konum fark etmeksizin geleneksel aile yapısı, aile bağları ve aile içi

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ilişkiler üzerinde bozucu ve tahrip edici etkileri var; bu etkiler de insanları mahvedilmiş bir ortamda fiziksel olarak olmasa bile, duygusal ve zihinsel olarak güçsüz kalmış insanları dış tehditlere karşı daha savunmasız hale getirmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ekoeleşiri, *Duvar*, eko-distopya, iklim değişikliği, aşınan aile yapısı, ve aile dağılması

Introduction

“Ecologically oriented literature occupies an ever-increasing sector of mainstream literary production” (2011, p. 409) notes Alexander Rehding. Today numerous books, whether prose or poetry, are published in order to call attention to rising environmental problems, and disappearance of natural beauties rather than celebrating the unique and calmative aspects of nature as it is witnessed with British Romantics like Wordsworth and Samuel T. Coleridge, and American Transcendentalists Nathaniel Hawthorne and Ralph W. Emerson, among others. Put it differently, it is mostly written and read not about nature but for nature. Writing on nature has taken on a professional and disciplinary form called Environmental Humanities, and today it has numerous sub-branches, one of which is ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism since defined by Cheryl Glotfelty as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (1996, p. xviii), and as “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world” by Rueckert (1996, p. 107), has boomed owing to the growing environmental disasters and climate changes, and become the integral discipline of Humanities. We cannot afford enumerating here all contributors to the discipline, yet, to count but a few: Scott Slovic (*Fundamentals of Ecocriticism and Environmental Literature*), Ursula K. Heise (*Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*), Timothy Clark (*The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*) Simon Estok (*The Ecophobia Hypothesis*), Jonathan Bate (*The Song of the Earth*), Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (*Postcolonial Ecocriticism*), and Stacy Alaimo (*Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*). Each scholar approached the relationship between nature/environment and man in cultural sphere from a different perspective, thus enhanced our understanding of world ecology as well as gaining them environmental consciousness. In the field of Humanities, ecocriticism has gained a wide acceptance and evolved yielding new sub-branches and derivations of new concepts including: Marxist ecocriticism, postcolonial ecocriticism, pastoral ecocriticism, feminist ecocriticism, material ecocriticism, animal studies, post-apocalyptic environmentalism, and eco-dystopia.

In this paper, I will deal with the relationship between environment and human with a particular focus on how the environmental changes affect families and intra-familial relationships. To this end, I deploy the concepts of apocalypse, post-apocalypse and dystopia, all of which present at an extreme level the consequences of increasing environmental disasters on individuals and societies. Although they are at times interchangeably used, there are differences between the terms of post-apocalypse and dystopia. As John Joseph Adams writes:

“Dystopia” is not a synonym for “post-apocalyptic”; it also is not a synonym for a bleak, or darkly imagined future. In a dystopian story, society itself is typically the antagonist; it is society that is actively working against the protagonist’s aims and desires. This oppression frequently is enacted by a totalitarian or authoritarian government, resulting in the loss of civil liberties and untenable living conditions, caused by any number of circumstances, such as world overpopulation, laws controlling a person’s sexual or reproductive freedom, and living under constant surveillance (2011, n.p.).

Introduced into literature by “Gottfried Christian” Friedrich Lücke in 1832, in the context of an introduction to the Apocalypse of John, or Book of Revelation” (Collins, 2014, p. 1), the term “apocalyptic”, according to Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, describes “very serious damage and destruction in past or future events” (Oxford University Press, n.d.), and post-apocalyptic is used to “describe or relate to the situation after the destruction of the world, or to an extremely bad situation in which it seems as if the world has been destroyed” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). In literary studies, Monika Kaup makes such a distinction between these two terms as follows: “While apocalyptic narrative is about getting ready for the coming end of the world, post-apocalyptic fiction is about crawling out of the rubble and remaking world and society from within the wasteland of ruins” (2021, p. 5).

According to the above given definition of apocalypse, in the fiction I hereby analyze, the British who live inside “the Wall” have still time to correct some things (that’s why the elites in the novel negotiate “the Change” at different sites) even if “the Change” has taken a lot from their lives. For the Third World, however, it is too late because the countries in the south are inundated, and huge number of people called “Others” are floating on the sea to search for a land. In this respect, they live in a post-apocalyptic world. The difference of life and conditions in the south and Britain then “believe a linear conception of time” (Sandrock, 2020, p. 169). In the same vein, it is possible to consider the inundation of the south both as a past, present (for the Southern countries), and future (for Britain which is not inundated yet) phenomenon, which justifies what Friberg argued as “that the boundary between present and future evaporates, creating an ‘omnipresent present’” (quoted in de Moor & Marquardt, 2023, p. 3). Hence, the novel’s setting is apocalyptic in that it sets in an indeterminate future Britain surrounded by “the Wall” built as a shield against the sea water that has already risen beyond control, and therefore beaches have disappeared; and postapocalyptic now that in the South “entire countries have become uninhabitable” (Sandrock, 2020, p. 165), which has culminated in the global scale population move. As Kirsten Sandrock points out, *the Wall* “enters global debates about rebordering processes, mass migration, environmental change, biometric surveillance, and the role of the nation-state vis-a-vis contemporary global crises” (2020, p. 164).

As an important dystopian element, the novel introduces a developed form of the surveillance system or panopticon (as the term is known to us from Jeremy Bentham and Michel Foucault) one finds in Orwell’s *1984*, namely, biometric surveillance. A bit different from the dystopian tradition, in *the Wall*, the reader is intimated that the world has witnessed a calamity named in the text as “the Change”, along which “the shelter blew away, the waters rose to the higher ground, the ground baked, the crops died, the ledge crumbled, the well dried up” (Lanchester, 2019, p. 89). After this “Change”, “the safety” became “an illusion” (Lanchester, 2019, p. 89), and in this post-disaster environ, people try to survive inside *the Wall*. As the novel progresses, the protagonist of the book, Joseph Kavanagh, finds himself at the Sea, where a small group of people try to survive under challenging natural conditions and with very limited facilities, another setting that bears the traits of post-apocalypse. Accordingly, it would be better to categorize *the Wall* under the sub-genre of eco-dystopia which “merges the catastrophic imagery of the post-apocalyptic tradition with the consequential mode of dystopia” (Malvestio, 2022, p. 24).

As if responding to the argument the British nature writer and academic Robert MacFarlane puts forward in his famous essay “The Burning Question” “that writers can play a crucial role in helping us to imagine the impact of climate change” (2005, n.p.) and his call to writers “where is the literature of climate change?” (2005, n.p.), Lanchester, like Omar el Akkad (*American War*), in *the Wall*, draws our attention to the detrimental effects of climate change in the future. In this paper, I will concentrate upon *the Wall* by Lanchester, the author of the *Debt to Pleasure* (1996), *Mr Phillips* (2000), *Fragrant*

Harbour (2002), and *Capital* (2012), so as to demonstrate how the author problematizes traditional family values, relationships, and lack of healthy reproduction in a post-apocalyptic setting.

Traditional Family Structure Vis-à-vis Unofficial Cohabitation

Beginning with the emergence of man on Earth, family is perhaps the oldest social institution of human beings. Although the definition of family may vary from society to society, what is understood from the traditional family is,

[n]uclear family, also called elementary family, in sociology and anthropology, a group of people who are united by ties of partnership and parenthood and consisting of a pair of adults and their socially recognized children. Typically, but not always, the adults in a nuclear family are married (Britannica, 2023, n.p.).

Since parental roles may change from culture to culture, it is not an easy task to make universal categorizations dealing with the duties and responsibilities parents had come to uphold during the course of history. Yet, what comes to one's mind in pre-industrial societies, is, as Rachel Ann Elder pointed out,

[t]he traditional conception of the family holds that the father is head of the house, that the mother is entrusted with the care of the house and of the children, and that in return for the unselfish devotion of the parents to their duties, the children owe their parents honor and obedience (1949, p. 98).

More or less this was the family typology in most parts of the world up until the advent of industrial age and European modernity in the 18th and 19th centuries when women began to take more active role in society working in factories and running their own business. The real and most important causes of today's and tomorrow's environmental disasters are embedded in the birth of industrial capitalism and Western modernity that prescribes constant progress for the history of human civilization on earth. As Anna Friberg, rightly observed, today "we have left the modern world's fixation on progress" (2022, p. 56). Opposed to this progressive understanding of economic and cultural development, *the Wall* pictures a dystopian future world where people hanker for the past world, beauties, nature, animals that they can only see on TV screens as to be discussed in the following sections.

In our modern age, however, the traditional family structure and the meanings associated with family have begun to face extinction. Today, unofficial cohabitation which is already legal in many parts of the world is becoming more and more common across the world, say in the US, Canada, Australia, Asia and South America. The only exception is the Islamic states where cohabitation without wedlock is frowned upon but not immune to infringement. Since our context is UK, considering the setting of *the Wall*, it is given the statistics in the UK, where, "cohabitation is perfectly acceptable. Data released in 2019 shows that the proportion of cohabiting couples was up to 3.4 million – totaling at 17.9% of couples living together. This is up from 15% just a few years prior (Lawyer, 2020, n.p.). Further, as the same magazine *Lawyer Monthly* gives, "cohabiting was highlighted as the "fastest growing family type" in the UK" (2020, n.p.). Couples have preferred to live together without wedlock, maybe they get married later or not even if they have children. My point in this essay is not to criticize the moral aspect of such an unofficial cohabitation, but rather I seek to tease out; how traditional family structure, family ties and intrafamilial relations are becoming disrupted owing to the rise of environmental crises and climate changes, represented throughout the novel by "the Change"; and how individuals become more vulnerable to external environmental threats and docile subjects to be governed by totalitarian regimes.

In traditional sense, as readers, we are accustomed to father and mother figures in real life and literary texts that take care of their children by providing material sources such as food, clothing, education; and immaterial support like love, care, and compassion. In the background of rising global environmental disasters, nowadays, there is a need to broaden the duties and responsibilities of classical parents to include protecting the natural sources and beauties, wildlife, flora and fauna, in brief all of nature. Otherwise, as I shall attempt to demonstrate in this paper, family relations may go sour even be shattered. For the young generation will be deprived of the opportunity to see the beauties of the world such as beaches, forests, animals, islands, and etc. which were existing in their parents' or grandparents' time because these are becoming day by day dead and buried in the pages of history.

The employment of the concept of family in dystopian fiction is not new. It is in Aldous L. Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) that first comes to our mind in so far as the novel presents a disheveled vista of traditional family structure; the meanings of father, mother and child-rearing are reversed owing to scientific advances, thus envisages "the family system will disappear" (Nicol, 2007, p. 46). Different from Huxley, in *the Wall*, Lanchester highlights the expanding environmental problems as one of the root causes for intra-familial disgruntlements.

Relatively overlooked in ecocritical studies, the concept of family is indeed at the very center of this field as clear in Lawrence Buell's definition of the term ecology in the glossary at the end of his work titled *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*: "Etymologically, the Greek *oikos* — signifying "household" in the comprehensive sense of residence and grounds, as well as family — is the root of both 'ecology' and 'economy'" (2005, p. 140). Intentionally or not, Lanchester directly addresses this issue in *the Wall* painting a somewhat gruesome family portrait.

In this novel, love relationships are very few and do not result in marriages, children are few in number and have to live in mostly in desperate situations. The protagonist Joseph Kavanagh, who develops a kind of love relationship with Hifa, has no intention of proposing as one finds in classical love stories. Instead of classical proposal made by the male "Will you marry me?", it is seen that it is the female (Hifa) who proposes Kavanagh: "Do you want to Breed with me?" (Lanchester, 2019, p. 105). This may be given to the perks earned by becoming a "Breeder" as detailed in the story:

Breeders, or people trying to Breed, get special quarters on the Wall. They get rooms to share. In addition to the room and the extra rations you also get some say in where you want to serve your time on the Wall, and the ability to change shifts. In other words you can move away from the place and the squad you were previously with — as far as I know, becoming a Breeder is the only way you get to have any say in that. A pretty sweet deal (Lanchester, 2019, p. 106).

A deal between individual and the state, through which the individual is persuaded more about the importance of his/her profession as a "Breeder" to fulfill for the benefit of the nation and society, which is quite similar to the situation we are familiar with Orwell's *1984*, in which "the only recognized purpose of marriage was to beget children for the service of the Party" (2013/1949, pp. 83-84).

On the other hand, it should not be ignored that the younger generation has largely adopted unofficial cohabitation as a mode of life has also a role in Hifa's proposal. Later, she reveals her real intention in suggesting Kavanagh to become "Breeder": "I didn't actually want to Breed,' said Hifa. 'It was more about wanting sex. And wanting to get off the "Wall". I got tired of waiting, I thought you'd never ask'" (Lanchester, 2019, p. 203), whereby it is clear that sex is not perceived as a part of "Breeder's" life either, let alone family life. It equally holds true for Kavanagh who never entertains the idea of having a

traditional family like his parents. Instead, he wants to live independently of wedlock and family responsibilities, together with Hifa and his friends as he apprises:

I quite liked the idea of going and living with some of my new friends, Hifa and Cooper and Shoona and Mary and Hughes, going off together and finding a new way of living, more communal, not family-based but where we would live together and look after each other and maybe other like-minded people would join us (Lanchester, 2019, p. 94).

In all cases, other than elites, freedoms of people whether “Breeders”, or “Defenders”, not to mention “Others” are always restricted. Accordingly, the striking term used by Jeremy Bentham and excogitated by Foucault, the panopticon eye represented in the story by microchips hangs over all of them like the sword of Damocles. As the novel suggests, even couples or “Breeders” prefer to reproduce, their offspring, at any rate, will be coerced between neo-modern slavery and natural disasters.

Broken Family Ties in a Ravaged Environment

In fear of the fact that the world will be ecologically a worse place, even uninhabitable, many people in “the Wall” do not want to have children. They are worried about being able to provide their children proper housing, food and education, all of which are peculiar to the elites. The protagonist of the novel Kavanagh, as if the spokesman of the author, uncovers the close relationship between environmental disasters and reluctance to breed:

Why don't people want to Breed? It's an idea that caught on after the Change: that we shouldn't want to bring children into the world. We broke the world and have no right to keep populating it. We can't feed and look after all the humans there already are, here and now; the humans who are here and now, most of them, are starving and drowning, dying and desperate; so how dare we make more of them? They aren't starving and drowning here, in this country, but they are almost everywhere else; so how dare we make more humans to come into this world? (Lanchester, 2019, p. 33)

Other than the environmental concerns, for some people it “isn't fair to the children, who are born into a world where they have to do time on the Wall in their turn” (Lanchester, 2019, p. 33). “The Wall” dominates all matters as if it is the main hero of the novel. It was built to protect the citizens of an island, namely, Britain in the future from external threats mainly resulting from climate changes, rise of sea level, i.e. following “the Change” (it obviously refers to enormous climate changes whose effects are seriously felt by all humanity across the globe). One can see its horridness when Kavanagh inquires the meaning of “the Change” from a “Help” (it refers to servants who can be called neomodern slaves) who responds him “*Kuishia*” (emphasis original), “a Swahili word” that “means ‘the ending’” (Lanchester, 2019, p. 68). That's why it gives us a postapocalyptic taste, and there are, as the text intimates, still inhabitable places, albeit very few, like islands. Since “the Wall” was made of concrete, its cold effect is felt thoroughly by Kavanagh and other “Defenders”. By concrete, the author draws attention to the rapid concretization across the globe. As Fateh Belaïd rightly puts, “concrete is constantly accumulating in the earth's crust as a result of rapid expansion of urbanization, especially in developing countries. It is currently considered among the Anthropocene markers, with an approximate accumulation of 900 Gt since the industrial revolution began” (2022, p. 2). This, however, does not mean that the developed countries have stopped concrete and cement use, because “most of the modern urban environment is built of concrete - which is cement-based - and steel” (Belaïd, 2022, p. 2). Rapid concretization in all parts of the world harms the environment both at its manufacture stage coming at a “considerable cost in energy and greenhouse gas emissions” (Belaïd, 2022, p. 2) and at its usage stage, covering the earth and limiting if not totally destroying the living spaces of animals and plants, not to mention causing floods in cities. Reflecting this rapid concretization in human life, the story passes on the concrete rather

than in nature and with nature. That can also be considered among the reasons why people do not want to have children who will serve on the concrete “Wall” which shapes their relations, making them cold, insensitive, inconsiderate of “the Others”, and their life simple, ordinary, straight, monotonous as Kavanagh complains:

The days are the same, with variations in the weather, and the view is the same, with variations in the visibility, and the people either side of you are the same, so it's static; it's not a story, it's an image which is fixed-with-variations. It's a poem and as I already said, it's a concrete poem with a few repeating elements. One would be concrete itself:

concrete concreteconcreteconcreteconcrete

concrete concreteconcreteconcreteconcrete

concrete concreteconcreteconcreteconcrete

concrete concreteconcreteconcreteconcrete (Lanchester, 2019, p. 19).

It is not “the Wall” alone but the climate change as well that hypothecate the coming generation's lives as the narrator expresses with a haiku:

sky!

cold

water

concrete

wind (Lanchester, 2019, p. 20).

Here, Lanchester draws our attention to the role of climate changes in the deterioration of conditions for people to survive. That being the case, *the Wall* presents characters that do not want to bring up children in this hostile environ is understandable. With haiku, the author also underlines the difficulty of writing a rich story in such a poor environment, because we do not have a rich imagination and environment and healthy relations, instead we may have poetry short, and sometimes repetitive, all of these are, for sure, influential in people's thoughts/decisions whether to have a baby or not.

Along with the accusatory psychology² Kavanagh is entangled with due to the loss of natural beauties like beaches, the cold of “the Wall”, wind and concrete is also reflected into the familial relations of both Hifa and Kavanagh who do not want to be with their parents let alone see them as clearly articulated by Kavanagh: “I didn't know anything about her family other than that she was no keener on seeing them than I was on seeing mine” (Lanchester, 2019, p. 107).

We do not see new marriages, or young families consisting of parents and children, in the new generation, but see “Breeders”, who, by raising children to be Defenders on “the Wall”, serve for the ruling regime just like in George Orwell's *1984*, in which “Love and the enjoyment of sex are forbidden by the Party” because sex, according to the Party, “should be an act of procreation not to be enjoyed (certainly not by the woman), but to be barely endured as a ‘duty to the Party’” (Storrie & Martin, 2018, p. 23). In this sense, the way Lanchester approaches human reproduction is profoundly different from Huxley's ectogenesis that “describes the notion of creating human life outside the womb” (Nicol, 2007, p. 46). There are still parents though few. The only parents are those of Kavanagh and Hifa, namely the traditional family structure represented by this old generation is obsolescent.

² Since I will discuss it later, I do not elaborate it here.

The most obvious example that shows the erosion of the concept of family as a social unifying institution is the class called “Breeders”. Through “Breeders”, marrying and starting a family is derided and traditional family concept is relegated into the status of reproduction not for the sake of love relationship but for the maintenance of defending system. The new generation as clearly depicted in the novel is accumbered with defending “the Wall” by replacing their predecessors.

Loss of familial bonds exacerbates the degree of despair felt by Kavanagh. When he is offered to write a letter to his loved ones, this loss is better revealed:

In my case ‘loved ones’ meant my parents, and I decided I didn’t want to write to them, because I had nothing to say. Hifa talked me out of that. I put down some platitudes about being sorry, even though I wasn’t. I said I loved them, even though I didn’t, at least not in that moment (Lanchester, 2019, p. 139).

Even in his most difficult times, Kavanagh cannot share his agony, trouble and feelings of despair with his parents. The underlying reason for this rupture of his emotional attachment with his parents is as stated above, the loss of natural beauties on earth, the loss of beautiful sceneries because of the irresponsibility of his parents’ generation. He keeps his parents responsible for the rupture of ecological balances and unrecapturable fauna and flora. In another scene, the sense of loss of family ties is dovetailed with other losses as Kavanagh lists:

My anger subsided and began to turn into a sense of loss. I felt sad. Loss, loss, there was just so much loss, in what had happened to us, in what the Captain had done, in what we had done to the world, in what we had done to each other and in what was happening to us (Lanchester, 2019, 145).

Although Kavanagh does not clearly express the loss in his connections with his parents, this can be understood from the loss in “what we had done to each other”, and not surprisingly it comes after the loss “we had done to the world”, the point thus far I have tried to pinpoint: rupture of ecological balance, environmental disasters, and corollary social drama accompanied by eroded family bonds.

Another example that shows Kavanagh’s loss of ties with his family and home is described as follows:

What did I want to be when I grew up? If I wasn’t going to be a member of the elite, what was I going to do instead? I might be comrades and friends with my fellow Defenders, might feel I had things in common with them, but that didn’t mean I liked or had things in common with my parents. I wasn’t going to go back home. Home no longer felt like home. I’d go to college and then what? (Lanchester, 2019, p. 94)

By home, it is his parents’ home in the first narrow sense Kavanagh means here, but we would be far of appreciating the real ecological message hidden here if we did not relate the underlying home concept with the world and ecosystem. If we replace home with the world/earth, it will be world/earth “no longer felt like home” because it lost its beauty and meaning for the young after “the Change”. To the knowledge of all, earth/nature is frequently associated by scholars, intellectuals, writers and more with home, and mother. In the relevant literature, there are numerous studies that use this trope such as: “Mother nature speaks: Coronavirus, connectedness, and consciousness” by Larry Dossey, “Entangled with Mother Nature through Anthropogenic and Natural Disasters” by Sina V. Pfister, Edwin B. P. de Jong, and *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Biblical Studies : Interpretations in the Context of Climate Change* (2021) by Ericka Shawndricka Dunbar et al. Henceforth, it comes as no surprise that the author problematizes the relations between parents and son, which can be metaphorically compared to the breakdown of relations between mother earth and its human children.

The concept of family has lost its original meaning in terms of “the Others” too inasmuch as environmental disasters have radically removed the privacy between the couples. In the chapter titled “The Sea”, Kavanagh, Hifa and the others in their party are accepted by Kellan and his wife Mara, whose life at the sea can be viewed within the concept of postapocalyptic life. The novel never catches a private and emotional moment of this middle-aged couple because their privacy is breached, and rather than love relations it is the survival struggles that dominate their life. They are trying to sustain themselves on small boats attached to one another on the coast of a small island³ by hunting seabirds and fish. Because they do not have facilities of fire and cooking, they eat what they catch raw, a kind of life we find in post-apocalyptic novels and movies. They have no children. There are three girls living with them but not theirs, these girls of different ethnicities are somehow, most probably lost their parents or relative while on their way as climate refugees to a safe haven on a boat, left to the care of Kellan and Mara. The author does not allow their story to develop for long in this hostile environment. These girls are first kidnapped by the pirates and then killed by the grenade James throws in order to kill the pirates. In brief, the difficult life at the sea includes no affirmative message for the future of family life in a post-apocalyptic setting.

In the same vein, the family life of Captain, who is once an “Other”, is completely disrupted. He has a sort of traditional family (consisting of wife and children) as we learn from Kavanagh: “It occurred to me that he was the only one of us who had left children behind” (Lanchester, 2019, p. 162), but we never see them unified with his wife and children since Captain left them behind so as to pass over the Wall and live inside “the Wall”. By his disintegrated family, Lanchester manifestly refers to the refugees who try to enter Europe or the Western countries leaving their family behind but with the hope of reunification. The vice versa of this scenario is also common today. In other words, there are also numerous children who left their father behind in search for a better life as UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM inform us: “Between January and June 2018, 10,404 children arrived in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Spain of whom 4,684 (45%) were unaccompanied or separated children” (2018, p. 1). In brief, even if the the Third World has more traditional families than the Western world, these families are at a high risk of being disintegrated largely because of natural catastrophes, wars and economic factors.

Betrayal

The theme of betrayal Lanchester makes central to his novel is closely related with the impairment of family bonds and relations. Betrayal is first and foremost represented by the Captain character that is like a father figure to the young defenders on “the Wall”:

. . . thought of all the things the Captain had been to me, the different selves he had incarnated, from my first minutes on the Wall through the weeks of duty to fighting together to his betrayal to the time at sea; and through all of that the side of his life I had never seen and did not know, the place he had come from, his family, his people, his overt treachery and secret loyalty and the terrible consistency of his courage and his betrayal. The bravest man I would ever know, and the most loyal, and the biggest traitor. He had at one point been the person I admired most; he had saved my life. . . (2019, pp. 171-72)

It is quite possible to link Captain's betrayal to the defender on “the Wall” with the old generation's betrayal to the young and future such that the author creates an experienced Captain character that is liked. Yet, because of his betrayal, he brings terrible results for the young. Kavanagh both admires and

³ Though not specified in the story, this island is placed in the south of Britain inasmuch as Kavanagh, Hifa, James and the Captain reach there by heading towards south. In a way, by this unnamed island and the new life form of life (we can classify as post-apocalyptic) at the sea, the novel seems to accrue or advocate the “global culture” and “global citizenship” that undermines place attachment (Buell, 2005, p. 69).

hates him; he admires him for what he did for him but hates him because of his treachery to him and his fellows. In our context, father-like Captain is both liked by his son/s for his support to him, and disliked for his betrayal to his children by not doing anything for the preservation of natural environment or remaining indifferent to the growing environmental problems, which deprives the young old beautiful environment and worse forces them to struggle to survive in an unlivable or uninhabitable place. Also worthy of note in this excerpt, it seems no coincidence that the author puts the words related with each other side by side like: “The place he had come from, his family, his people, his overt treachery” (Lanchester, 2019, p. 72), which somehow emphasizes effect of betrayal on the inextricable networks between land and family/society.

Since Kavanagh was born after “the Change” and has to bear the brunt of its consequences, he feels offended by his father’s generation indifference to environment. In his interior monologue while at stay with Hifa’s mother, Kavanagh’s accusation of the old generation is revealed as follows:

Being with Hifa’s mother made me think about my parents; about the difference between me and them, so different from Hifa and her mother, and yet maybe not, at the same time. Who broke the world? They wouldn’t say that they did. And yet it broke on their watch (Lanchester, 2019, 116-17).

Notwithstanding counter claims⁴, as the famous British naturalist David Attenborough said, there is a common belief among the young generation particularly the Generation Z that “Older generations have “messed up the planet”, letting down younger people, who are “angry” about it and want it to stop (quoted in Rowling, 2018, n.p.). This sort of accusatory at times vindictive manner held by the young, for sure, exacerbates the existing generational conflicts opening irrecoverable wounds in the mind and heart of both generations. A member of the young generation Kavanagh aspires to see the world beauties like beaches before all were hit by “the Change”, which manifestly refers to the rise of natural sea levels because of climate changes, but he can’t do it because the sea level has risen and the country was encircled by “the Wall”, whereby the apocalyptic atmosphere is emphasized. On behalf of the young who crave to see and experience the old natural beauties, Kavanagh says:

There are admittedly some people my age who are curious about what things were like before, who like to hear about it, who love the stories and the amazing facts. Put it like this: there are some people my age who have a thing about beaches. They watch movies and TV programmes about beaches, they look at pictures of beaches, they ask the olds what it was like to go to a beach, what it felt like to lie on sand all day, and what was it like to build a sandcastle and watch the water come in and see the sandcastle fight off the water and then succumb to it, a castle which once looked so big and invulnerable, just melting away, so that when the tide goes out you can’t see that there was ever anything there, and what was it like to have a picnic on the beach, didn’t sand get in the food, and what was surfing like, what was it like to be carried towards a beach on a wave, with people standing on the beach watching you, and was it really true the water was sometimes warm, even here, even this far north? (Lanchester, 2019, pp. 48-49).

Then his sadness mixed with fury surfaces:

There are people who love all that shit. Not me. Show me an actual beach, and I’ll express some interest in beaches. But you know what? The level of my interest exactly corresponds to the number of existing beaches. And there isn’t a single beach left, anywhere in the world (Lanchester, 2019, p. 49).

We can relate Kavanagh’s sadness and fury “to the longing for an inaccessible (or inexistent) Edenic past” and “eco-nostalgia” that “anticipates *future* feelings of loss and regret” Jenifer K. Ladino

⁴ For opposite views and further debates, one can have a look at the essays Teenagers should stop blaming old people for climate crisis” by Anita Singh, and “Who is really to blame for climate change?” by Jocelyn Timperley.

promulgated in her *Reclaiming Nostalgia: Longing for Nature in American Literature* (quoted in von Mossner, 2020, p. 130). What is original in *the Wall* is the sense of eco-nostalgia morphs into resentment with parents. Therefore the more he thinks about the natural beauties left behind, the angrier he feels towards the old generations, and of course his parents. In other words, he is emotionally detached from his family and home. Emotions, as Heather Houser puts, “can carry us from the micro-scale of the individual to the macro-scale of institutions, nation, and the planet” (2024, p. 223), the vice versa of which is also open to debate. In Kavanagh’s case, his emotional void draws him away from his family, a traditional social institution.

In this backdrop, he is incapable of developing healthy and intimate relations or emotional bonds with his parents. He also underlines the period of time that passed before “the Change” occurred with the following words:

As you all know, the Change was not a single solitary event. We speak of it in that manner because here we experienced one particular shift, of sea level and weather, over a period of years it is true, but it felt then and when we look back on it today still feels like an incident that happened, a defined moment in time with a before and an after. There was our parents’ world, and now there is our world (Lanchester, 2019, p. 88).

The quote explicitly shows where and when the generation conflicts thus intra-familial relationships began to deteriorate. Kavanagh thinks that since the old did not care about the environmental changes or connived passively at them in the past, the young now have to deal with its consequences. In a way, his loss of ties with his family can be interpreted, drawing on Theodor Adorno’s statement that “after Auachwitz, poetry is impossible” (quoted in Rowland, 1997, p. 57), as traditional warm family environment and friendly family relationships between children and parents are difficult if not impossible after “the Change”.

The Trope of “the Others” as Non-biological Family Members

The refugees who try to climb over “the Wall” and enter the country (Britain) are conceived of by the British authorities in the novel, but we can consider the whole Western world (Europe in particular) in general looking at contemporary refugee crisis as it is today, as “the Others”. Their entrance is strictly forbidden, which suggests that these people, mostly from the Third World countries, are not accepted as the equal members of the family of humanity. As Sandrock underlines, “Edward Said’s concept of the Other (*Orientalism*, 1978) shapes the underlying grammar of the novel’s use of the term ‘Other’” (2020, p. 164). Before he is expelled from “the Wall”, Kavanagh’s thought about “the Others” is in tune with Saidian conception as clear in his words: “Like most sayings about most things, this is partly true, partly not. Yes, the Wall is the Wall and the Others are the Others and a twelve-hour shift is a twelve-hour shift” (Lanchester, 2019, p. 119). Representing the cold face of the self, Kavanagh’s words promise almost no hope of change indifferent race people’s empathizing with each other as if attesting what Kipling said “East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet” (1954, p.233).

To break the existing prejudices among the members of humanity family, Lanchester, who was born in Hmaburg but brought up in Hong Kong and lived in several different parts of the world such as Rangoon, Burma (now Myanmar); Calcutta, India; Labuan, Malaysia; and the Asian nation of Brunei” (Steinberg, 2002, n. p.), and who sees himself a “well-disguised immigrant” (quoted in Allardice, 2019, n.p.) drives his protagonist Kavanagh out of his safe haven to “the Others” side at the sea to confront the real face of “the Others”. In his stay with “the Others”, Kavanagh promotes the sense of mutual respect and

understanding and his prejudices about “the Others” are broken because now Kavanagh feels as if he is one of them:

Their crews were from nowhere and anywhere. I'd been brought up not to think about the Others in terms of where they came from or who they were, to ignore all that – they were just Others. But maybe, now that I was one of them, they weren't Others anymore? If I was an Other and they were Others perhaps none of us were Others but instead we were a new Us. It was confusing (Lanchester, 2019, p. 152).

Without any objection, he accepts what is demanded by Kellan, the leader of “the Others” because the environment urgently requires it and the ecologically disrupted world forces him to hold on to “the Others” that he has despised. The author emphasizes the insignificance of identical associations and land attachments in the face of heightened sea level, and scarcity of food and fuel. That Kavanagh begins to see himself and “the Others” as equal members of humanity, namely, as “us” can be viewed as one of the few moments of hope in the story for the future of humanity as a family, however, their unity does not last long in that they are attacked by pirates and all but Kavanagh and Hifa, are killed.

Conclusion

Our reading of *the Wall* by having recourse to the recent concepts revolving around ecocriticism, has made it once more evident that in order to help human beings survive and sustain their mental and spiritual resistance/health as well as physical being, today when global environmental problems surrender us like a bell jar, it is important more than ever before to have healthy family bonds and relationships. For individuals deprived of strong intra-family bonds and support may, as the text suggests, and a large body of research that “links marriage to better health and decreases in health-risk behavior, particularly for men” (Duncan et al., 2006, p. 691), confirms, feel emaciated and be more inclined to develop anger in face of the growing global disasters, pandemics and crises. Lanchester's novel, building parallelisms between the destruction of environment and collapse of family ties, remarkably aid us visualize the broken-up families awaiting people whether from the Global South or Global North, some of which can be substantiated with present researches.

The unfriendly relationships between family members and the decline of marriages in *the Wall*, if raked through with the lenses of contemporary relevant researches and statistics, portend the collapse of traditional/biological family structure in the near future, but the author does not completely deprive his readers of a flicker of hope for the future of humanity. Kavanagh's life among “the Other”s at the sea can be considered, in light of “global culture and global citizenship” emphasized by Buell, as an invitation by the author to his readers and a call to the world to destroy boundaries between self and other and see humanity as a family without excluding any group or any individual. Kavanagh, in the company of “the Others”, does not feel isolated or as an outcast, to the contrary, they welcome him, Hifa, the Captain, and James without making any discrimination, a microcosm of humanity as a family and an example that shows the possibility of common survival despite arduous external factors.

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