

**Ecological Imperialism in British Colonial Fiction\***

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**Abstract**

This article focuses on the ecological dimension of British imperialism and its manifestations in British colonial fictions which rest on the closely linked Eurocentric and anthropocentric discourses. Ecological imperialism can be defined as the intentional destruction, through exploitation, extraction and transfer of natural resources of the colonized lands in the interests of scientific and economic progress. Its roots lie in the 17th century mechanistic worldview advocated by Francis Bacon and other British thinkers of the time, including Lewis Roberts and Robert Boyle. Within this specific historical context the article discusses, with specific references to the colonial novels of Kipling, Henty, Haggard, Conrad, Forster and Orwell, how the degradation of the natural environments were legitimated which resulted in an irreversible loss of biodiversity in the indigenous lands, and how the British colonial fictions continually supported the hegemony of imperial power over the flora and fauna of these lands and their peoples.

**Key words:** ecological imperialism, anthropocentrism, eurocentrism, biodiversity, colonial fiction, mechanistic worldview.

**Özet**

Bu makale İngiliz emperyalizminin ekolojik boyutunu ve bunun İngiliz sömürge dönemi romanlarında nasıl yansıtıldığını tartışmaya açmakta, ve birbirini tamamlayan Batı merkezci ve insan merkezci ideolojilerin nasıl doğanın tahribine yol açtığını irdelemektedir. Ekolojik emperyalizm, sömürgeleştirilmiş toprakların yerüstü ve yeraltı zenginliklerinin bilinçli olarak Batıya taşınması, ekonomik çıkarlar adına sömürülmesi ve kıyımı olarak tanımlanabilir. Bu bölgelerde yok edilen biyo-çeşitlilik ve dengeleri bozulan yerel ekosistemler tarihi bağlamda incelenmekte ve kökleri 17. yüzyıla dayanan ve Francis Bacon, Lewis Roberts, ve Robert Boyle gibi İngiliz düşünürlerinin savunduğu mekanik dünya görüşünün ve emperyalist ideolojilerin sömürgecilik dönemi romanlarında nasıl desteklendiği ve meşrulaştırıldığı tartışılmaktadır. Bu yaklaşım Kipling, Henty, Haggard, Conrad, Forster ve Orwell'in romanlarından örneklerle ele alınmaktadır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** ekolojik emperyalizm, insan merkezcilik, Batı merkezcilik, biyo-çeşitlilik, sömürge dönemi romanı, mekanik dünya görüşü.

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In order to fully understand ecological imperialism it is essential to recognize its roots in the anthropocentric worldview. Its overriding impact on the Western thought was so profound that the resulting environmental policies have altered the fundamental ecological cycles of the planet. Ecophilosophy locates its source in the 17th century Scientific Revolution which has ostensibly shaped the entire Western epistemology, reordered the socio-cultural and political structures of Western societies, and widely informed their discursive practices and economic mechanisms. But more than that, it has unmistakably given impetus and scientific legitimacy to the colonial expansion of Britain and Europe over distant territories. It is therefore no accident that the beginnings of this process in the 17th century coincide with the emergence of the Scientific Revolution and the imperious mentality of its anthropocentric ideology. Since then the world came to be seen as divided into center and periphery, whereby the center's economic growth and material progress became increasingly dependent on a massive exploitation of the people and the ecosystems of the periphery. In this context the European colonial expansion involves an "... imperialist relation to the planet" (Foster, 1994, p. 85). When the European states expanded into the world's remote geographies largely by means of military violence, they pursued a merchantalist policy of conquest and possession. As Ania Loomba (1998) puts it, "military violence was used almost everywhere ... to secure both occupation and trading 'rights:' the colonial genocide in North America and South Africa was spectacular" (p.112). What was even more spectacular than the the brutal atrocities exercised on the indigenous peoples at the time were the acts of ecological mastery over nature in the colonized lands, because their consequences continue to affect the entire planet today. By the end of the 19th century, "most of the Earth had been parcelled out to one metropolitan power or another" (Foster, 1994, p.87).

Although Britain does not "stand alone in this enterprise" (Hobson, 1938/1965, p.19), it is the first and foremost imperial power to have had a profound effect on the ecosystem itself. From the 17th century onwards, Britain's economic and cultural dominion over vast portions of North America, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand (which became white-settler colonies), India, Asia, and over "numerous islands in the Pacific and elsewhere" (Hobson, 1938/1965, p.15), made it the leader of ecological imperialism. Praising the achievement of the British in 1883, Sir John Robert Seeley wrote, for instance that, "whether good or bad then, the growth of Great Britain is an event of enormous magnitude" ("The Expansion of England"). Perhaps the words of Cecil Rhodes, the founder of Rhodesia, better explain the true nature of British imperialism and the chief motivation behind it: "We must find new lands from which we can easily obtain raw materials and at the same time exploit the cheap slave labour that is available from the natives of the colonies. The colonies would also provide a

dumping ground for the surplus goods produced in our factories” (cited in Foster,1994, pp.87-8). As if plundering the planet’s resources were not enough, he also said: “I would annex the planets if I could” (p.87). Needless to say this type of mindset had devastating effects on the natural environments. Therefore, ecological imperialism is mostly a British enterprise which, as a specific manifestation of anthropocentric thought, can be defined as the systematic exploitation and re-shaping of the local ecosystems of the peripheries for the economic welfare of the center. In John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark’s (2004) words ecological imperialism is “robbing the periphery of its natural wealth and exploiting ecological resources”(p.189), which according to them went hand in hand with the “genocide inflicted on the indigenous populations” (p.188); and “undisguised looting, enslavement and murder” (p.189) were turned into a capital in the dominating center. Natural environments were, thus, subjected to a relentless expropriation in an ongoing plunder and massive pillage just as mercilessly as the colonized peoples themselves. Since the control of nature was a matter of economic priority for the British, they disregarded the environmental consequences of their actions unless of course their economic interests were at risk. For instance, massive deforestation and soil erosion on the Malabar Coast, because of “silting up of commercially important harbours” (Grove, 1995, p.11) in the mid 19th century, convinced the East India Company to consider setting up a forest-protection system. They did so however, not for ecological reasons but because “forest conservation and associated forced resettlement methods ... became a highly convenient form of social control” (Grove, 1995, p.12). Similarly, the progressive deforestation on the Canary Islands, Medeira and on Barbados had resulted in the loss of fertility of the soil which demanded conservation policies to be implemented. Apart from deforestation, whose adverse effects on the climate is well known today, contamination of water and air, and “pollution caused by extractive and productive proceses” (Foster and Clark, 2004, p.193), as the most significant consequence of ecological imperialism, led to the loss of biodiversity, the extinction of plant and animal species, which disrupted the precarious balance of the important bioregions across the globe. Moreover, the exploitation of the native owners of the pillaged environments resulted in socio-economic problems on such scale that even today their legacy, as international conflicts, is not resolved. To exemplify this process Foster and Clark (2004) point to the shocking effects of British exploitation of land resources in South America, calling it the ‘curse of nitrates in Peru and Chile.’ They document how due to loss of soil nutrients in England, British agriculturalists exploited in the 1860s the nitrate fields in Peru, making it heavily indebted to British investors “with its guano exports mortgaged well into the future” (p.190). When the Peruvian government tried to regulate the output of guano and nitrates the British started the nitrate war by making Chile declare war on Bolivia and Peru.

Backed by the British navy Chile won the war and the Peruvian economy collapsed. But after Chile seized the nitrate territories it took on the curse because Europe, and especially Britain needed guano and nitrate in “vast quantities to maintain their agricultural productivity and thus sought to control this trade imperialistically ... exploiting these ecological resources to their limit” (pp.190-192). As the writers cogently state this type of ecological imperialism “has led to ecological degradation on a scale that threatens to undermine all existing ecosystems and species including the human species” (p.193).

There is yet another adverse effect of ecological imperialism which Alfred W. Crosby, in his pioneering book, *Ecological Imperialism* (1986), calls ‘biological expansion’ of Europe, and defines it as the introduction of Old World species into the flora and fauna of the indigenous environments. He states that the success of European imperialism “has a biological, an ecological component” (p.7). The colonial practices of farming, plantation crops, livestock raising, hunting, clearance of trees, and the introduction of non-native species to the regions of the native biota are the main components of biological expansion, which ultimately altered, in Timothy Weiskel’s (1987) words, “flows of matter and energy in localized ecosystems” (p.275). According to Crosby’s (1986) observation the colonizers rationalized “landscape, flora and fauna previously unaffected by anything but the blind forces of nature” (p.75). In other words, when the British entered into the colonized territories so did their Old World explosive plant and animal species, Old World disease organisms, infectious germs, and explosive microbes, which led to the extinction of many native plants and animals. The biological expansion significantly disrupted the ecological balance in practically every bioregion the British invaded. For instance, brought on the British ships, the catastrophic impact which the rabbits wrought on Australia’s ecosystem is a well known incident. In his now a classic book, *They All Ran Wild: The Animals and Plants That Plague Australia* (1984) E.C. Rolls gives a detailed account of the damage caused to plants and animals in the specific bioregions of Australia due to the massive rabbit population explosion: “The men could be replaced, but not the animals or the plants. Several kinds of birds and animals were drastically reduced indirectly through the poisoning of the rabbits”(pp.66-7). According to Peter Berg, who coined the term, ‘bioregions,’ “Bioregions are geographic areas having common characteristics of soil, water-sheds, climate, and native plants and animals that exist within the whole planetary biosphere as unique and intrinsic contributive parts” (cited in Merchant, 1992, p.218). Since bioregions are “regions with mutually supporting life systems that are generally self-sustaining” (Berry, 1990, pp.67-8), their disruption through the introduction of non-native species, like the rabbits in this example, resulted in an irreversible loss of biodiversity. Commenting on

the extinction of animal species in the colonized territories of Australia, New Zealand, South America and Africa, the early 19th century geographer Mary Sommerville indicated in her book, *Physical Geography* (1848) that “many land animals and birds are disappearing before the advance of civilization. Drainage, cultivation, cutting down of forests, and even the introduction of new plants animals, destroy some of the old and alter the relations between those that remain” (p.49). Similarly the Victorian writer Thomas Carlyle drew attention to the adverse effects of this destructive policy. In his “Signs of the times” (1829) he ironically wrote: “We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highways; nothing can resist us. We war with rude Nature; and by our resistless engines, come off always victorious; and loaded with spoils” (p.143) . Despite these warnings from the British writers, however, the ongoing depletion of the bioregions continued.

As Foster (1994) reminds us, “To lose entire species is not only to reduce the diversity of life on earth, but also to lose the genetic library that provide new foods, new cancer-fighting drugs, and other products” (p.25). Needless to say the British imperialists were less than willing to acknowledge this fact, for it did not suit their commercial interests. Yet they needed to explain their acts, and as Andrew Pagden (1998) notes, they found their reasons “in natural law which would justify their all-too-frequent resort to violent means” (p.38). As Nicholas Dirks (1992) also argues, “Not only did colonial rulers align themselves with the inexorable and universal forces of science, progress, rationality, and modernity, they displayed many of the disruptions and excesses of rule into institutions and cultures that were labeled as tradition” (p.8). Science thus became a useful means of legitimating the imperial dominion over nature, as well as a useful tool to regulate the lives of the colonized peoples. In other words, “the scientific foundation for economic and social policy” (Anker, 2001, p.3) lay in the control of the environment. Thus, both social and ecological mastery was justified in the name of scientific and social progress.

The driving force of science itself was the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter, which opened the path to the idea and practice of ultimate dominion over and control of natural bodies by the superior human agency, and inadvertently to the process of colonization itself. Carolyn Merchant (1992) calls this approach in the mechanistic science as “egocentric ethics” (p.66). The mechanistic philosophers and scientists, as she contends, “postulated a world of spirit separate from that of matter. Nature, the human body, and animals could all be described, repaired, and controlled, as could the parts of a machine, by a separate human mind acting according to rational laws” (p.69). Similarly J. A Hobson (1938/1965) writes:

Indeed, from the ranks of the biological profession itself, scientists of such eminence as Huxley and A.R.Wallace have lent themselves to this separatism, distinguishing the ethical or spiritual progress of the human race from the general cosmic process, and endowing men with qualities and with laws of action different in kind from those which obtain in the rest of the animal kingdom. (p.153)

Evidently this anthropocentric paradigm gained such an “automatic momentum” that it turned into “broad cultural movement” (Muller, 1963, p.247) over the last 300 years. Referring to the obsession with dominion and control, which characterize British imperialism at the outset, Fritjof Capra (1995) states that the end result of this view is the “belief that an *understanding* of nature implies *domination* of nature by man” (p.22). As he puts it, “Since the seventeenth century, the goal of science has been knowledge that can be used to control, manipulate, and exploit nature” (p.23), which have proved to be “dangerous, harmful, and profoundly anti-ecological” (p.23).

The anti-ecological thought was launched by Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and Isaac Newton, the chief culprits of Scientific Revolution. The major architect of dualism, however, was René Descartes who viewed nature as a machine and believed that “the new science would make humans the masters and possessors of nature” (Sessions, 1995, p.161). Claiming that animals lacked mental faculties which the humans had, and were therefore merely bodies or machines, and thus could feel no pain, Descartes reduced them to the level of automata to be analyzed by dissecting them into their physical and chemical components for the sole benefit of mankind. Accordingly, all natural organisms were mere machines which could be explained in terms of universal mathematical laws, whereas man, by contrast, was a rational being who had the right to impart a secondary status to nature which is, thus, reduced to inanimate matter to be utilized for man’s benefit. Descartes’s mechanistic view found its scientific justification in the Newtonian mechanistic model of the universe, which could be discovered by reason and experiment, and expressed by the supposedly distinct and clear mathematical laws. Consequently the principles of classical science came to be known as the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm.

It was Francis Bacon, however, who first established the link between scientific knowledge and imperialism. As Bacon emphasized, scientific knowledge and imperial power had to go hand in hand for anchoring the colonial ideologies that sustained ecological imperialism. Therefore, the idea of material progress initially belongs to Bacon, who, before Newton, “fashioned a new ethic sanctioning the exploitation of nature” (Merchant, 1983, p.164), and “ultimately benefitting the middle class male entrepreneur” (p.165). Being the first 17th century thinker responsible for transmitting the new scientific objectives and methods to this end, Bacon stands at the crossroads of

scientific breakthrough in Britain. Thus his influence on the shaping of anthropocentric doctrines is definite, for his work provided a scientific model for the practical mastery of nature, which culminated in the Newtonian mechanics. In Bacon's epistemology human beings are promoted as agents of imperialism, and nature as a mere commodity. He strikingly outlined how knowledge was to be linked to power politics in *Novum Organum* (1629):

Nor must it go for nothing that by the distant voyages and travels which have become frequent in our times, many things in nature have been laid open and discovered which may let in new light upon philosophy. And surely it would be disgraceful if, while the regions of the material globe, - that is, of the earth, of the sea, and of the stars,- have been in our times laid widely open and revealed, the intellectual globe should remain shut up within the narrow limits of old discoveries. (p.58)

This is an important point because here Bacon underlines the importance of scientific knowledge in the process of colonization. In *The Great Instauration* (1620) he openly declared his aim: "In behalf of the business which is at hand I entreat men to believe that it is not an opinion to be held, but a work to be done; and to be well assured that I am labouring to lay the foundation, not of any sect, but of human utility and power" (p.13). For him "the true and lawful goal of the sciences" was that "human life be endowed with new discoveries and powers" (*Novum Organum*, p.56). Bacon believed that "the roads to human power and to human knowledge lie close together, and are nearly the same" (*NO*, p.89). He repeatedly argued for the importance of developing new methods for the "advancement of sciences" (*NO*, p.64), "by which," he stated, "nature maybe be commanded and subdued" (*NO*, p.62). He advocated his "purpose ... to dissect [nature] into parts" (*NO*, p.38) as the only method to understand, interpret and to control it. *Novum Organum* is filled with the repetition of words like penetration, division, solution, separation, alteration, dominion, and transformation, concerning nature. In his own words: "For I am building in the human understanding a true model of the world, such as it is in fact, not such as a man's own reason would have it to be; a thing which cannot be done without a very diligent dissection and anatomy of the world" (*NO*, p.82). What Bacon meant with "true model of the world" was a national program for the ultimate control of the non-human forces; plants, animals and other organisms. As Carolyn Merchant emphasizes (1983), "The Baconian program, so important to the rise of Western science, contained within it a set of attitudes about nature and the scientist that reinforced the tendencies toward growth and progress inherent in early capitalism" (p.185). Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627) is of special importance in this regard which, as Carolyn Merchant (1983) contends, "postulated a program of a scientific study that would be a foundation for the progress and advancement of 'the whole of mankind'" (p.177). *New Atlantis* (1627) draws a picture of an ideal society ruled by scientists

representing the future of human knowledge: “The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible” (p.129). In this policy of enlarging such an empire, manipulation of organic life to create new species, for example, was the ultimate goal of science. The scientists here conduct experiments on a variety of plant and animal species to produce altered and more resilient new species: “We have also means to make diverse plants rise by mixtures of earths without seeds, and likewise to make diverse new plants, differing from the vulgar (ordinary) and to make one tree or plant turn into another” (p.131). As this example shows, Bacon strikingly anticipated the modern developments in genetic engineering today in creating new species.

Bacon’s program to establish man’s superiority over nature was very useful in enabling the imperialist policies of environmental conquest in the colonized lands. In his essay “Of Plantations” (1625) this policy is most evident and outlined in detail. Here Bacon elaborates on the specifics of transplanting the mother country to the American colonial frontier. In his words: “Planting of countries is like planting of woods; for you must make account to lease almost twenty years profit, and expect your recompense in the end” (p.140). The main emphasis of this text is on profit and “commodities” to be carried home. Indeed it was common among Bacon’s contemporaries to view nature as “the richest and most precious commodities of all others” as his follower Lewis Roberts wrote in his *Trafikke or a Discourse of Foreign Trade* (1641) (cited in Merchant, 1983, p.187). Bacon’s essay in particular promotes biological expansion, since Bacon recommends that the settlers bring their own domestic animals and plants:

In a country of plantation, first look about what kind of victual the country yields of itself to hand ... and make use of them. Then consider what victual or esculent things there are which grow speedily and within the year, as parsnips, carrots, turnips, onions ... and the like ... For beasts or birds, take chiefly such as are least subject to diseases, and multiply fastest, as swine, goats, cocks, hens, turkeys, geese, house doves, and the like. (p.141)

As it is evident here, it was through such a biological expansion that the Europeans were able to establish, in Crosby’s (1986) words, “demographic dominance so quickly. Carrying their domesticated animals, pests, pathogens, and weeds the settlers constituted an incidental dimension of imperialism” (pp.155-56, p.199).

Ecological imperialism and mechanistic science emptied nature of its intrinsic value and turned it into an wholesale commodity. The impact of enforced land conversion to production value, or for capital resource, regardless of its suitability to the local ecosystems, in the indigenous environments, for instance, resulted in such damage that it included not only the non-human resources but also the indigenous peoples themselves. According to E.C Rolls (1984), legacies of ecological imperialism range

from damage by alien land use practices to the decimation of indigenous species, including humans: "The first settlers were enthusiastic poisoners. Everything that seemed at all likely to be troublesome was poisoned– the wombat, the rat-kangaroo, the wedge-tailed eagle, any species of hawk, the raven, the dingo ... the native cat and the tiger-cat for poultry-raiding, and the goanna for egg-eating. The aboriginals were also nearly gone" (p.18). But worse than that the colonial imperialist expansion spread the culture of ecological imperialism among the colonized peoples around the world. Mastery of nature is therefore closely linked with racist ideologies, Eurocentric colonialist discourses, and imperialist power politics. As Max Horkheimer (1982) explains:

The concept of having power over something includes deciding for oneself and making use of it for one's own purposes. But domination over nature ... merely serves as an instrument for individuals, groups and nations which use it in their struggle against one another and, as they develop it, at the same time reciprocally circumscribe it and bend it to destructive ends. (p.412).

In the like fashion literature of the anthropocentric paradigm proved to be an even more useful tool in spreading and circulating the erratic set of values about the natural environment, and reflected the whole machinery of ecological imperialism in a such a way that all the informed British people would agree on. Novel genre in particular helped sustain the ideological imperative of British imperialism complicit with the economic objectives. In this regard the colonial fictions produced during Britain's imperialist expansion infused the minds of both the oppressed and the oppressor with the necessity of controlling the natural habitats. As such, "The stories of the white man" (Said, 1994, p.22) not only celebrated the economic and cultural hegemony, and the political authority of the British colonizers, but also they were the most effective cultural documents in reproducing, and reinforcing the dominant Eurocentric values, especially through their subversive landscape descriptions. For example in the early European descriptions of Australia, as Simon Ryan (1994) notes, "The animals were seen as bizarre, the trees peculiar and even monstrous, the vegetation continually green; indeed the country in its entirety seemed to be the product of whimsy and an affront to good taste" (p.120). The same holds true for the environmental representations in early colonial American literature. Captain Smith's *Generall History of Virginia* (1624), for instance, as an early account of empire building, represents both the human and non-human world the colonists encounter in their voyage in anti-ecological terms. Captain Smith's definition of the iguana he saw on the Caribbean islands as "a loathsome beast

like crocodile” (p.15) exemplifies this approach. As Myra Jehlen (1997) argues, “John Smith does not control the history that he records; he records it in order to control it” (p.57). Environmental representations in British colonial fictions can be read in the same light, because they helped promulgate the values of ecological imperialism. In this context it can be stated with certainty that the British colonial fictions carried the anthropocentric legacy of earlier colonial narratives. The most obvious example of the distorted rhetoric of anthropocentrism is found in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719):

My island was now peopled, and I thought my self very rich in Subjects; and it was a merry reflection which I frequently made, how like a king I looked. First of all, the whole country was my own meer property; so that I had an undoubted right of dominion. 2ndly my people were perfectly subjected: I was absolute lord and lawgiver; they all owed their lives to me. (pp.240-41)

This passage is doubtless a striking example to indicate how the traditional narratives of the novel genre are structured by the language of this dominant worldview which continued to be appropriated in the novels written by Haggard, Henty, Ballantyne, Kipling, Conrad, Forster, and Orwell, to name a few writers, in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

By portraying, in a self-righteous narrative tone, the self-confidence and arrogance of the characters struggling under adverse conditions to achieve their intentions, these texts fulfill their imperialist objectives. After filling his pockets with as much diamonds as possible in the chamber of King Solomon’s Mines the narrator of Rider Haggard’s (1885) novel of the same title, Alan Quatermain’s words, for instance, are typical of such objectives and mentality: “My old shooting coat and the basket still held sufficient treasure to make us all, if not millionaires as the term is used in America, at least exceedingly wealthy men, and yet to keep enough stones each to form the three finest sets of gems in Europe. So we had not done badly” (p.212).

The will to exploit the natural resources for merchantalist purposes is perhaps best exemplified in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899). As Marlow explains it: “To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe” (p.45). Conrad’s depiction of sheer brutality of the white men, and the atrocities they committed against the elephants and the native inhabitants in the Congo Basin emphatically underline the process of inhuman commodification of the non-human world. As Jeffrey Myers (2001) points out, ivory stands “as an emblem for the commodification of the African landscape” (p.100), and Kurtz “is the master of the Congo ivory trade” (p.101). In Marlow’s words, “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” (p.65). The Manager’s report to Marlow openly reveals this fact: “Kurtz’s methods had ruined the district” (p.73), he says, which makes manifest the degradation of an invaluable bioregion, and thus highlights the dire

consequences of ecological imperialism. The overwhelming magnitude of elephant slaughter to satisfy his desire to possess more ivory eventually brings Kurtz to a painful realization which culminates in his final words: "The horror! The horror!" (p.93).

Anthropocentric thought also informs the text's overall narrative. "We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness" (p.50) says Marlow, using the Baconian metaphor of penetration into nature, and defines the African landscape as an ultimate place of darkness. Moreover, the Africans are portrayed in a state of "incomprehensible frenzy" (p.50), repeatedly referred to as "a mass of naked, breathing, quivering, bronze bodies" (p.83), and thus reduced to the most basic life forms in their "howling" (p.51). The colonialist implication of this depiction is of course to show that the Africans are unworthy of the riches of their own land. The scene where the Pilgrims shoot blindly into the forest without even acknowledging these peoples' presence there, is another example to reveal how the European mind puts the natural world and its inhabitants into the same category of its ultimate Other. Evidently both the human inhabitants and the elephants are alienated as the Other in an undifferentiated way by the European traders and thus emptied of their intrinsic value so that the extermination of the entire elephant population for more ivory can be justified. The underlying implications of such negative representations then clarify the rationale behind the the destructive process of the ivory trade.

It is interesting to see that the representations of the Africans and their land in terms of extreme racist distortion, both ecologically and culturally, actually serve to expose the hollowness of Western civilization's anthropocentric orientation in its absurd superiority complex to achieve mastery over the world. As Marlow underlines it, they were all "hollow at the core" (p.73).

Another typical example to such negative stereotyping of the African environment can be given from George Alfred Henty's novel, *By Sheer Pluck* (1884). Here the characters embark on an expedition "into the center of Africa in search for specimens of natural history" (p.106). Similar to Marlow's language, their words also strikingly echo Bacon's discourse of control. The young naturalist Frank's words to his senior Mr. Goodenough say it all: "it would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast than between this mountainous island of Madeira and the country which we are about to penetrate" (p.112). Though their mission is one of discovery, Frank and Mr. Goodenough's sheer pleasure of shooting animals for fun, and stereotyping them as inferior to the European animals are indicative of the anthropocentric imperialist mindset. Goodenough says to Frank about the animals they encounter: "they may yelp and howl, but they never bark like European dogs. What you hear is the bark of some sort of monkey or baboon" (p.142).

This type of commitment to subjugate, control and exploit the natural landscape is described as a "metaphysical obligation to rule" by Edward Said (1994, p.10), and

informs the narratives of colonial fictions as such. The common theme running through these texts is the inculcation of dualistic thought in the reading public. Therefore nature invariably stands in opposition to culture in their narratives. We can pause to consider again Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) in which there is a pretty obvious scene about the coast of Natal to exemplify this:

But just before you come to Durban there is a peculiar richness about the landscape. There are the sheer kloofs cut in the hills by the rushing rains of centuries, down which the rivers sparkle; there are deep green of the bush, growing as God planted it, and the other greens of the mealie gardens and the sugar patches, while now and again a white house, smiling out at the placid sea, puts a finish and gives an air of homeliness to the scene. For to my mind, however beautiful a view maybe, it requires the presence of man to make it complete, but perhaps that is because I lived so much in the wilderness, and therefore know the value of civilization, though to be sure it drives away the game. (p.29)

Such anthropocentric thought also served the cultural project of control. Linked together cultural colonialism and ecological imperialism opened a complex interplay of what Nicholas Dirks (1992) calls "coersion and hegemony" (p.4), and made the enforced Otherness of the natural environment seem natural. Although the colonial fictions aimed at reinforcing the idea of the British hegemony over the colonized territories as an inevitable process and the hypocritical idea of what Rudyard Kipling (1899) called 'The White Man's Burden' as the harbinger of true civilization, they actually exposed the brutal process of the commodification of the local ecosystems and mindless exploitation of the natural resources. Therefore, when writers like Kipling, Henty, Haggard, among others, wrote to celebrate the British acts of mastery over the indigenous peoples and the natural world, they quite ironically achieved the opposite of what they meant to transmit, because they were unwittingly exposing the monstrosity of their own cultural heritage.

Even the early 20th century writers like Orwell and Forster, who did oppose the machinations of imperialism, were circulating the ideology of ecological imperialism and the anthropocentric worldview. E.M. Forster's much referred novel, *A Passage to India* (1924) is a case in point. Much like Africa in Conrad's fiction the landscape here is "declared unknowable and formless" as Elleke Boehmer contends (1995, p.152). The Marabar Caves stand out in the novel as the ultimate symbol of this formlessness: "Having seen one such cave, having seen two, having seen three, four, fourteen, twenty-four, the visitor returns to Chandrapore uncertain whether he has had an interesting experience or a dull one or any experience at all" (p.138). Not only the Marabar Caves but also the entire landscape reflects the anthropocentric set of values in the novel. There is "nothing extraordinary" to the natural environment (p.31), even "the very wood

seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving. So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye” (p.31). As Nicholas Dirks (1992) puts it, “it is all nature at its lowest ebb” (p.1). Using this type of negative environmental representation Forster was actually making a point about the Indian culture, in keeping with the anthropocentric colonialist conception of the environment and its inhabitants. Nature here becomes a symbolic inscription of the totalizing hegemony of the British and their culture over the colonized land and its people. “In Europe life retreats out of the cold, and exquisite fireside myths have resulted ... but here the retreat is from the source of life, the treacherous sun, and no poetry adorns it, because disillusionment cannot be beautiful” (Dirks, 1994, pp.214-15). This narrative remark, for example, is typical of the contempt with which the British viewed the colonized lands. And since this feeling was shared by everyone, they would inevitably be blind to ecological degradation. Narrative representations of nature as such masked exploitation, control and domination of the natural environments and thus transformed ecological imperialism into a socially acceptable reality of the oppressive imperialist policies. This is what Forster’s novel exemplifies.

In a similar vein Orwell’s *Burmese Days* (1934) exhibits the underpinned process of environmental exploitation. Although the novel is highly critical of the hypocrisy of the British colonial practices, rendered through the putative expostulations of its major character John Flory, it is also marked by an underlying uncertainty about an open critique of imperialism and its ecological dimension. Ecological imperialism is manifest here in the form of timber business managed by a small European settlement in Upper Burma. Flory runs a lumber camp in Burma’s previously untouched jungle, and is unaware of the environmental impact his company’s systematic tree clearance causes on the local ecosystem. There is no recognition of the potential exhaustability of the native biota, and environmental degradation in the text. Although Flory is unusually receptive to the Burmese culture, and talks very negatively of the oppressive colonial rule, he is also, by all odds, unusually blind to the resource depletion he participates in. In a conversation with his Indian friend Dr. Veraswami, for example, Flory openly reveals the real motive of the British presence in Burma, which is to exploit the natural resources, but does not indicate any ecological concern over these practices:

How can you make out that we are in this country for any purpose except to steal? It’s so simple. The official holds the Burman down while the businessman goes through his pockets. Do you suppose my firm, for instance, could get its timber contracts if the country weren’t in the hands of the British? Or the other timber firms, or the oil companies, or the miners and planters and traders? (p.60)

Furthermore, the negative descriptions of the landscape in terms of stereotypical flora and fauna imagery show how the text presents nature as the alien Other against which the European self defines itself in an intensely enjoyed process of ego gratification. This self is wholly anthropocentric and is marked by the desire to possess and exploit the Other. Flory's depiction outlines this process in a revealing light:

The lower jungle paths turned into morasses, and the paddy fields were great wastes of stagnant water with a stale, mousy smell... It was the beginning of the short winter, when Upper Burma seemed haunted by the ghost of England. Wild flowers sprang into bloom everywhere, not quite the same as the English ones, but very like them - honeysuckle in thick bushes, field roses smelling of peardrops, even violets in dark places of the forest ...One went shooting after duck and snipe. (p.66)

Simultaneously the shooting scenes throw revealing light on the anthropocentric colonialist mindset complicit with the unambiguously presented socio-political imperialist structures imposed by the British on the Burmese. Ecological imperialism is perennially present in such scenes where the act of shooting animals for fun is narrated as a natural pastime activity of the British. When the novel presents the fallacy of British superiority uncritically in these instances, its critique of the colonialist rule loses its credibility making the text rather undecidable in its intended message about imperialism. In a shooting expedition the exclamation of Elizabeth, the English girl Flory dreams about marrying, is indicative of this fallacy. "Oh a leopard!" she shouts with great enthusiasm. "How lovely if we could shoot it!" (p.161). Obviously the only value nature has for the colonizers is entirely instrumental, and colonial fictions, like *Burmese Days*, spread this anti-ecological message quite successfully.

Consequently, the most effective form of ecological imperialism was sustained by the colonial fictions. Hence the literary component of ecological imperialism stands out as the most dangerous form, for it transmitted and circulated the anthropocentric set of values among the colonizer and the colonized alike, and made the entire process a socio-cultural tradition that we and the our ecosystem still suffer from. Although ecological imperialism has taken on more complicated and intricate new forms today in keeping with the multi-national capitalist system itself, ecophilosophy, the science of ecology, and environmental movements continue to create resistance that allows me to say, in the midst of the global ecological crisis, that there is still hope for our endangered planet. The evidence comes from the paradigm shift from the anthropocentric to the ecocentric set of values that is occurring in the scientific and cultural, social and literary discourses together. What is left is the inculcation of ecocentric value system into the mass consciousness. Just as the colonial literature had done in spreading the anti-ecological values, contemporary literature today can similarly shoulder the same task and transmit ecological values among the reading public. Literature has this power and can use it for the sake of our planet.

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