

An Ecofeminist Critical Approach
to Linda Hogan's Mean Spirit

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The aim of the present paper is to attempt an ecofeminist critical approach to Linda Hogan's novel, *Mean Spirit* (1990), which is actually an application of the fundamental ecofeminist critical principles. The late twentieth century witnessed the emergence of ecological feminism or ecofeminism as a critical approach which associates between feminism and ecology. The term ecofeminism was first used in 1974 by the French writer, Françoise D' Eaubonne, who called upon women to initiate an ecological revolution in order to save the planet from destruction. However, ecofeminism had not a coherent theoretical framework until the 1980s. Ecofeminism is actually a social and political movement that calls for social change; it advocates social equality and rejects all types of exploitation. Ecofeminism, on the other hand, asserts the interconnections between the oppression of women and that of nature as well as all other forms of oppression. As Noel Sturgeon puts it, "[E]cofeminism is a contemporary political movement operating on the theory that the ideologies which authorize injustices based on gender, race and class are related to the ideologies which sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment" (260). Hence, Ecofeminists are against all forms of oppression; they aim at liberating all oppressed groups; consequently, ecofeminism is against class exploitation, racism and colonialism as well as the exploitation of nature.

Unlike liberal feminists who believe that the oppression of woman resides in depriving her of education and opportunities of work, and that her liberation can be achieved by being provided equal access to jobs, ecofeminists are of the view that the liberation of woman denotes putting an end to all forms of oppression: sexual, ethnic as well as the oppression of nonhuman nature. In her introduction to *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, the eminent ecofeminist critic, Karen J. Warren, defines ecological feminism or ecofeminism as "the position that there are important connections between how one treats color, and the underclass

on the one hand and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other" (xi). Warren points out that ecological feminists are of the view that the failure to recognize such close "connections seriously is grossly inadequate" ("Taking Empirical Data", 3). As a consequence, Warren stresses the interconnection between human and nonhuman nature; she is against the various kinds of domination such as racial domination, class domination and nonhuman nature domination. In addition, Warren is of the view that one of the fundamental aims of ecofeminism is to explore the close relationship between woman and nature, and to put an end to the oppression inflicted upon them. She believes that "A main project of ecofeminism is to make visible these 'woman-nature connections' and where harmful to woman and nature to dismantle them" ("Introduction to Ecofeminism" n. p.). Warren, thus, pinpoints the elimination of the abuse of both woman and nature as an ultimate aim of ecofeminism.

Greta Gaard, another outstanding ecofeminist critic, adopts the same notions of Warren. She is against all types of oppression such as the oppression of race, class and gender. Additionally, she points out that ecofeminism confirms the fact that the liberation of woman is inseparable from that of nature. In an article entitled "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature", Gaard contends:

[E]cofeminism is a theory that has evolved from various fields of feminist inquiry and activism: peace movements, women's health care, and the anti-nuclear environmental, and animal liberation movements. Drawing on the insights of ecology, feminism and socialism, ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. (1)

The fact is that woman has been linked with nature "for her ability to bring forth life" (Gruen 61). According to Janis Brikeland, the association of woman and nature is "perhaps due to the childbearing and menstruation" (18). Gaard argues that in Western tradition and throughout history women and nature have been conceptualized. This resulted in the degradation of "whatever associated with women, emotion, nature and the body, while simultaneously elevating in value those associated with men, reason, humans, culture and the mind. One task of ecofeminism is to expose these dualisms" (Living Interconnections 5). Ecofeminists should withstand such dualisms since they justify men's domination of both women and nature. Meanwhile, they should exert their efforts in order to liberate women, nature and animals, which are interconnected, from the oppression inflicted upon them.

Like Gaard, Karen J. Warren is of the view that ecofeminists should associate the liberation of woman with that of nature since both of them experienced a shared history of oppression and exploitation by patriarchal Western society which identified woman with nature, and regarded them as objects of domination. Warren maintains that "[W]hat makes ecofeminism distinct is its insistence that nonhuman nature and naturism (i.e. the unjustified domination of nature) are feminist issues" (Taking Empirical Data 4). Hence, ecofeminism "is interested in the struggles on behalf of women, animals, and earth" (Gaard, "Preface" VII). Unlike feminists who focus their concern on the liberation of women regardless that of animals, ecofeminists believe that the liberation of women is inseparable from that of animals. They argue that "we need not and must not isolate the subjugation of women at the expense of the exploitation of animals. Indeed, the struggle for women's liberation is inextricably linked to the abolition of all oppression" (Gruen 82). Hence, Warren asserts the fact that the liberation of women implies the liberation of nature as well as all the oppressed whether human or nonhuman.

According to the theorist Rosemary Ruether, who is regarded as one of the earliest ecofeminists, ecofeminism or ecological feminism focuses on "the interconnections between the domination of women and

the domination of nature. It aims at strategies and world views to liberate or heal these interconnected dominations by better understanding of their etiology and enforcement" ("Ecofeminism", 1). Ruether is of the view that ecofeminism is concerned with the interrelationship between the subordination of woman and that of nature, and it seeks to put an end to this terrible malady. In her book, *New Woman/ New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, Ruether, asserts that the liberation of women is closely connected with that of nature. Subsequently, the liberation of women cannot be attained without the liberation of nature. She maintains:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society. (204)

Ruether, thus, perceives that feminist concerns are inseparable from ecological concerns, and that in their struggle for their liberation, feminists should take this into consideration. They should not only withstand the oppressive practices of men against women but also the domination and destruction of nature.

Similarly, the ecofeminism theorists, Maria Mies and Vanada Shiva, assert the link between the oppression of woman and the abuse and exploitation of nature. Additionally, they criticize modern science because of its degradation of nature. In their book, *Ecofeminism*, Maria Mies and Vanada Shiva attempt to withstand the abuse and exploitation of women together with the degradation and oppression of nature in modern societies. Subsequently, they launch an attack against modern science and technology. In their Introduction to *Ecofeminism*, they claim that modern civilization oppresses both women (particularly Third World and

indigenous women) as well as nature which are regarded as the "other", and are subordinated by man, the "one". They maintain:

[C]apitalist patriarchy or 'modern' civilization is based on a cosmology and anthropology that structurally dichotomizes reality, and hierarchically opposes the two parts to each other: the one always considered superior, always thriving, and progressing at the expense of the other. Thus, nature is subordinated to man; woman to man [...]. Feminists have long criticized this dichotomy particularly the structural division of man and nature, which is seen as analogous to that of man and woman. (5)

Mies and Shiva are actually against modern science since it participated in the pollution and destruction of nature. The great advance of science brought about new inventions and modern methods which participated in conquering and ruining nature. Accordingly, they oppose nuclear proliferation; meanwhile, industrialization, capitalist growth and the need for natural resources resulted in deforestation which they vehemently withstand.

Since ecofeminists regard ecological problems as feminist concerns and aim at resisting the abuse of human and nonhuman nature, they held conferences in order to declare their goals. In March 1980, for instance, a conference was held at Amherst. At this conference, "the connections between feminism, militarization, healing and ecology were explored" (Mies and Shiva 14). Ynestra King, one of the conference organizers pointed out:

Ecofeminism is about connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice. It asserts the special strength and integrity of every living thing [...]. We are a woman-identified movement and we believe we have a special work to do in these imperiled times. We see the devastation of the earth and her beings by corporate

warriors, and the threat on annihilation by the military warriors as feminist concerns. (qtd in Mies and Shiva 14)

Ecofeminists who took part in this conference called for eliminating environmental destruction as well as liberating women and all oppressed groups since they believe in the "connection between patriarchal violence against women, other people and nature" (Mies and Shiva 14). This conference was followed by a series of conferences which gave impetus to ecofeminist organizations as well as the struggle against the oppression of human and nonhuman nature. In 1987, the university of California hosted the "Ecofeminist Perspectives: Culture, Nature" conference. This was followed by similar conferences which provoked the publication of significant anthologies that expressed the principles of ecofeminism previously discussed (Lorentzen n. p.). On November 9-12, 1991, over a thousand women gathered in Miami to negotiate an agenda for presentation at the United Nations conference on environment and development (Gaard "Living Interconnection" 2). All these great efforts had their positive impact on the production of works of literature that reflect the interconnection between the oppression of women and that of nature, and that the liberation of women cannot be isolated from that of nature. Additionally, the writers of literature were inspired by ecofeminists' stance which extends to put an end to all forms of oppression since they believe in "the interdependence and connectedness of everything" (Mies and Shiva 16).

Approaching Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit* from an ecofeminist point of view, one perceives that it is really an application of the previously discussed ecofeminist principles. Linda Hogan (1947-) is an Indian-American or Native American novelist, essayist and poet. Her novel *Mean Spirit*, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for novel, demonstrates both feminist and ecological concerns; it explores the close connection between the human and nonhuman world and discloses the oppression inflicted upon both women and nature. Additionally, it exposes racial

issues; the novel vehemently explores, as will be illustrated, various forms of injustice, exploitation and subjugation due to racial differences.

As a Native American, Hogan is greatly connected with the land; subsequently, she employs literature as a means of attacking environmental degradation in the twentieth century. In other words, her writings have a political purpose. In an interview with Bard Johnson, she maintains:

I've found that talking about issues somehow doesn't create change in the world, but if I can take of the issues, political issue, or a tribe that is being devastated because of development, or land that's being devastated because of development - and I put it into a story, it has more of an impact. People read it and they get it because it's not a political diatribe; they find characters that they can relate to and care about and they see a story from inside their body inside their own selves, instead of hearing about it and going back to their lives. (qtd in Cook 2)

Linda Hogan is born in Colorado; however, she has her Chickasaw roots in central Oklahoma to which she is greatly attached. It is the place of her "interior". She writes about Oklahoma, "It was not my birthplace, but it was my home, the place of my heart, my inner world, the place where I lived before I was born" (*Woman* 116). *Mean Spirit* is set in the early 1920s in Watona, a fictionalized town of the Osage Indian tribe in Oklahoma.

The Osage is actually a major Indian or Native American tribe who lived in the American Great Plains region, and controlled a large area of land known today as Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas and Oklahoma. They were mainly woodland farmers and buffalo hunters. However, in the nineteenth century, they were forced by the white Americans to leave their fertile lands and inhabit Oklahoma Indian Territory. Upon

discovering oil in their new lands at the beginning of the twentieth century, the white Americans sought to dislocate them again in order to control their oil rich lands. In fact, Hogan's *Mean Spirit* is a historically based novel which depicts the Osage community during Oklahoma's oil boom years, "when the oil rights were being grabbed from the people in the Indian Nations" (Hogan, "An Interview" 116). Barbara J. Cook maintains, "[D]rawing on stories from her childhood as well as historical documents, Hogan chronicles in fictional form the historic saga of the development of the oil-rich Oklahoma Indian Territory. She grew up immersed in the stories of Oklahoma oil boom of the 1920s" (37). *Mean Spirit* portrays the victimization, exploitation and oppression experienced by the Osage tribe during that period. In her interview with Brabara J. Cook, Hogan states:

With *Mean Spirit*, much of it was family history, but I completely fictionalized the place. It is in reality a grassland, but I made it much like the area around my family allotment lands. This bothers people, but it is fiction and that is hard to accept. The murders are real, as are the names of the killers. Some of the children of survivors knew the killers. They were let out of jail early, and two women in Ponca city told me they had lived near them all their lives and not known. (12)

Hogan deviated from some historical facts, and some parts of the story were repressed because the FBI reports themselves [were] so thoroughly blacked in order to protect national secrets". (Hogan, "An Interview" 123).

Mean Spirit revolves around two Osage families, the Blankets and the Grayclouds. The Blankets were Hill Indians; they were "a peaceful group who had gone away from the changing world some sixty years earlier. Their survival depended on returning to a simpler way of life (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 5). The Grayclouds lived close to Watona, an Indian town inhabited by both Native Americans and white Americans. Lila Blanket was told a prophecy by the blue river that the "white world was

going to infringe on the peaceful Hill People" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 5- 6). As a consequence, she decided to send her young daughter, Grace Blanket, to live with her cousin, Moses Graycloud, and his wife, Belle Graycloud, so as to know about the white world. Later, Lila sent her two twin daughters, Sara and Molene to live with Grace and go to school. Molene died due to "an illness spread by the white men who worked in the railroad", and Sara became paralyzed (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 7). In the early 1900s, each Indian had been given the choice to select any area of land not claimed by the white Americans to farm or sell. After finishing her study, Grace and Sara "in total ignorance, selected dried-up acreages that no one else wanted. No one guessed that black undercurrents of oil moved beneath that earth's surface". After being called "The Barren Land, Grace called it "The Barron Land" upon discovering that it was rich with oil (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 8). After becoming the richest Osage woman, Grace was murdered by the oil man, John Hale, who sought to control her land. The Grayclouds adopted Nola, Grace's young daughter, who witnessed her mother's murder. Nola suffered for years due to the tragic loss of her mother.

Thereafter, Sara Blanket died as a result of an explosion which completely devastated her house. Despite being innocent, Benoit, Sara's husband, was accused of killing her by the Sheriff who jailed him. Thereafter, Benoit was hanged in his cell. Stace Red Hawk, a Sioux Indian who worked for the Bureau of Indian affairs in Wasington D. C., arrived in Watona to investigate the murders. Nevertheless, he could not help his people due to the absence of justice. As soon as she became thirteen years old, Nola married Will, a white young man and the son of Mr. Forster, her assigned guardian, and the lawyer of Benoit. Nola married Will, not out of love, but to seek her safety. However, she was oppressed by both Will and his father. A short time later, she became afraid of Will; she believed that he would murder her one day. Being pregnant, she greatly feared for her baby. As a consequence, she shot Will, and was sent to the Hill Indians for fear of her life.

Some of the Grayclouds' lands were leased by Hale, an act which the administrator regarded as legal. On discovering oil in Belle's land, holes in the land mysteriously appear. Soon, the Sheriff tried to shoot Belle since her bees stung him. Upon his death, Belle Graycloud was shot and accused of involuntary manslaughter because the stings of her bees resulted in the death of the Sheriff. Subsequently, Moses and Stace decided to send her to the Hill Indians for fear of her arrest. Meanwhile, her family prepared a funeral for her as a sort of disguise. Shortly after Belle returned home, fires began to break out in Osage homes. Ruth, Moses's twin sister, was killed by her white husband, Tate, who, in turn, was killed by Moses. *Mean Spirit* ends with the Grayclouds's departure from their land and home for fear of Moses's arrest and due to the devastation of their home.

In fact, *Mean Spirit* is an ecofeminist novel, and demonstrates Linda Hogan's ecofeminist concerns. It explores the interconnectedness between the human and nonhuman world. In her nonfiction work, *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Natural World*, Hogan states:

We need new stories, new terms and conditions that are relevant to the love of land, a new narrative that would imagine another way, to learn the infinite mystery and movement at work in the world. It would mean we, like the corn people of the Maya, give praise and nurture creation. (94)

In *Mean Spirit*, Hogan affirms the ecofeminist view that the human and nonhuman worlds are mutually related. As a Native American, she believes that human beings are closely connected with nature, plants and animals. Despite the fact that she is not a theorist, Hogan adopts the fundamental principles of ecofeminism. As the notable ecofeminist critic Greta Gaard puts it, "Native American women have not needed to build ecofeminist theory because their own cultures provide them with an ample understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of humans and nature" ("Ecofeminism and Native American Culture", 295-

96). Hogan actually assures the interconnectedness between the human and nonhuman worlds; Hence, she believes that as a result of the split between nature and human beings, "something has broken deep in the core of ourselves" (*Dwellings* 52). Accordingly, she writes, "out of respect for the natural world, recognizing that humankind is not separate from nature" (*Dwellings* 12).

Throughout *Mean Spirit*, Hogan foregrounds the inseparable relationship between humankind and nature. Hogan actually adopts "the traditional view of and relationship to the land, animals and plants- an interconnected, reciprocal relationship between the human and the nonhuman world" (Cook 2). Very early in the novel, Hogan asserts the interconnectedness between the human and nonhuman world. As the novel opens, she portrays the landscapes as intimately related to the people inhabiting them. Because of the hot weather, many Native Americans moved their beds outdoors. Hogan narrates:

Cots were unfolded in kitchen gardens. White iron bedsat in horse pastures. Four- posters rested in cornfields that were lying fallow [...]. [T]he vines and leaves would have crept up the beds and overgrown the sleeping bodies of people [...]. [B]eneath the protection of an oak tree a man's lantern burned beside his sleeping form. Near the marshland, tents of gauzy mosquito netting sloped over the bony shoulders and hips of dreamers. A hand hung over the edge of a bed, fingers reaching down toward bluegrass that grew upward in field. Given half a chance, the vine leaves have crept up the beds and overgrown the sleeping bodies of people. (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 3)

Grace Blanket slept with her daughter in a bed in their flower garden; a "dim lantern burned on a small table beside Grace. Its light fell across the shocking red blooms of roses" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 3). Meanwhile, Belle Graycloud, a principal character in the novel and the matriarch of the

Grayclouds, slept in "her herb garden with a stubborn golden chicken roosting on the foot of the bed, a calico cat by the old woman's side, a fat spotted dog on the ground, and a white horse standing as close to Belle as the fence permitted, looking at her with wide reverent eyes" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 10). In fact, these quotations explore Hogan's emphasis on the mutual relationship between the human and nonhuman world which is considered, as previously illustrated, one of the basic principles of ecofeminism. Additionally, as Peggy Maddux Ackerberg points out, Hogan "advocates the belief that nature resists spatial confinement"; she attempts to stress her conviction that any attempt of white Americans to separate human beings from nature is "futile" (33).

In her attempt to emphasize the close connection between the natural world and the human beings inhabiting it, Hogan portrays nature as responding to and sharing the grief and pain experienced by the Osage due to the murder of Grace Blanket. On the day Grace was murdered, the "turn wind, a current from the south, blew grit up from the ground. The hillsides stirred with dust devils. Branches broke off the older trees" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 25). Additionally, it rained after the murder of Grace. It seemed, as Alex Casteel maintains, that something "upset[s] the balance of earth itself" (62). Despite the fact that Michael Horse, an Osage old water diviner, predicts dry weather, "it rained again on the day Grace Blanket was buried" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 41). Similarly, the "day of Benoit's funeral, the earth was frozen" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 202).

In spite of the fact that discovering oil brings her wealth, Belle Graycloud was disturbed upon the boom of oil in her land. She did not want such good fortune; "it made no sense to her" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 229). Belle was greatly connected with the natural world; she had close connections with the land which she prepared herself for cultivation as well as the plants which she cultivated herself. Hence, discovering oil in her land, would result in the violation of this natural world by the greed of the white man. Hogan narrates:

One morning, when the corn was six inches high, the

clothing was stolen off Belle's scarecrow. At the same time, three large holes mysteriously appeared in the cornfield. It worried her. A cornfield was the very heart of life and Belle nursed her corn. She knew it needed more than water, light and food; it needed the care of a woman. So, she was filling the holes back in with a small hand shovel. (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 225)

Belle did her best to conceal these holes. Moses, her husband, and Floyd, her son in law, helped her. They spent the day "covering the seeping oil as best as they could" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 229). Nola's watchers, who were Hill Indians, likewise, "rush to cover the wound with rock" (Brice 130). They departed immediately; they "didn't want to be around the broken earth's black blood and its pain" ((Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 229).

As formerly illustrated, ecofeminists call for the struggle against the oppression of women, animals and nature; they are against western culture which has oppressed them. According to Lori Gruen, "[E]cofeminists argue that we must not isolate the subjugation of women at the expense of exploitation of animals. Indeed, the struggle for women's liberation is inextricably linked to the abolition of all oppression" (82). In fact, *Mean Spirit* demonstrates the oppression and injustice inflicted upon women and nature. Hogan pinpoints these fundamental ecofeminist issues; she employs literature as a means of liberating both women and nature from the oppressive practices committed against them. Since ecofeminists, as previously illustrated, believe that there is a close connection between women and nature, they affirm that putting an end to the oppression of women will ultimately result in the abolishment of the abuse and exploitation of nature. As regards the oppression of women, Hogan foregrounds the oppression of some female characters such as Nola and Ruth who were abused and maltreated by their white husbands.

After discovering oil in the lands of Native Americans, white men began to marry Native American women in order to exploit them and get

access to their wealth. Marriage between white men and Native American women became an example of "vulgar, dangerous transaction" (Krasteva 56). It "benefited white men financially" since Native American women were regarded as "business investment" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 34). Hogan quotes a letter sent to an Indian agent in which a white man asked for a Native American woman to marry. He said:

If you can place me in correspondence with a good woman and I succeed in marrying her for every thousand Dollars she is worth I will give you Twenty-Five Dollars. If she is worth 25,000 you will get 125 Dollars if I got her. This is a plain business proposition and I trust you will consider it as such. (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 34)

Hogan narrates, "[A]nother white man, when asked what he did for a living said, by way of answer that he'd married an Osage woman, and everyone who listened understood what that meant, that he didn't work; he lived off her money" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 34). As Alex Casteel puts it, the "main route to the possession of dark wealth is through a dark and wealthy woman" (65). Hence, Native American women were oppressed, exploited and subjugated by their white husbands.

After Grace Blanket's murder as well as the murder of her sister Sara, Nola, Grace Blanket's daughter who is a principal character in *Mean Spirit*, became the only heir to her mother's great wealth. Being young, Nola had a court-appointed white guardian, Mr. Forrest, who was a dishonest lawyer; subsequently, he exploited Nola. Upon marrying his son, Will, Nola was exploited and oppressed by both Will and his father. Nola accepted Will's proposal to marry her so as to save herself and the Grayclouds, who adopted her after her mother's murder, from the threats they might encounter if she rejected his proposal. She had no choice but to marry Will despite the fact that white men marry "Indian women to possess their wife's and children's allotments" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 165). As Alex Casteel points out, Nola "marries a man without believing that he loves her to ensure her own safety, weeping most nights before the

wedding" (65). Soon, Nola realized that "these two men [Forest and Will] were lightening-crooked and were probably going to steal her land, but that they wouldn't hurt her until after they'd had a chance to swindle her" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 133). Forrest exploited Nola by using his authority to invest her money in a company owned by the oil man, Hale. When Will asked Forrest about the money gone from Nola's bank account, he answered him, "I'm the attorney here. It's up to me to decide about Nola's estate" (191). On gathering his strength and telling his father that he should ask before using Nola's money, Forrest replied him:

"Why should I ask?"

"She's my wife."

"Yes, Will, she is. She is your paycheck. Now she is the one who pays for your good suits and hats". (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 191)

In short, as Alex Casteel, puts it, "Will has married a paycheck rather than for love" (65). Like Forrest, Will exploited Nola. One of Will's friends commented on Will's status saying that "[H]e doesn't need a business. He's got an Indian wife" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 193).

When Nola conceived, she became very upset for her baby since Will was attracted to the life of cities and bars, and started to spend Nola's money foolishly. Nola "began to think that even their marriage was like glass and that it would take little to fracture it [...]. She began to think that she herself, as an Indian woman, represented something old and gone to him, something from another time" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 195). Will exploited Nola; he squandered her money, neglected her and knew a white woman from the city. As a consequence, Nola thought that Will would kill her and her unborn baby, and marry the white woman who was "more like him than Nola was. She was city and blonde and slender. She wasn't awkward with a baby" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 299). Nola constantly spoke to her unborn baby; She swore that they would leave Will and

Watona. As Nola felt the throes of childbirth, Will wanted to call the doctor. However, Nola was sure that they would kill her. It was not just her life, it was "the new life, also, they would kill. They would say she died of natural causes, she knew it and when felt the baby kick her from inside, she thought she heard it saying, 'help me. Help me' " (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 357). In order to protect herself and her unborn baby, Nola shot Will to death. By so doing, she managed to put an end to his oppression.

Like Nola, Ruth Graycloud, was exploited and subjugated by her white husband, John Tate. Ruth was Moses Graycloud's twin sister. Like Nola, Ruth was an Osage woman who became a victim of one of the white men who married Native American women to get access to Osage oil wealth. Despite marrying a Native American woman, Tate had no respect to Native Americans. As Yanka Kroumova Krasteva contends, "Tate constantly takes pictures of the Indians, as if they were archaeological finds. And this is the way he treats his Indian wife" (55). Tate was a photographer; he used to appear at all significant events in the Indian territory "standing behind the three- legged stand that held his camera, his head covered with black cloth, his own good eye seeing everything through glass lenses (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 58). He used to photograph Native Americans and send their pictures to magazines. Tate first used Ruth as "a model then as source of income". (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 179). He humiliated and abused her; he did not love her, disliked to be seen with her. They "seldom went anywhere together, but when they did, he never walked at her side (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 134). At the end of *Mean Spirit* Tate killed Ruth. As a result, Moses shot him dead.

In fact, Hogan highlights the oppression inflicted upon women. Meanwhile, she pinpoints the previously discussed ecofeminist principle that women's liberation is inseparable from the struggle against the oppression and abuse of nature because there is a close relationship between women and nature. In *Mean Spirit*, Belle Graycloud is portrayed as very close to nature; at the same time, she withstands the oppression and abuse of nature. She grew corn herself and worked in her cornfield

without fatigue. While planting corn, Belle and other old women sang "a new song made for the new corn, and it was so sweet and fascinating and delicate, it sounded like a river running" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 261). Belle cared for her chicken and spoke to them "in the same affectionate tone as she used when speaking to her girls and corn" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 211). Additionally, she looked after her bees; when she noticed a number of dead bees on the ground near her hives, she checked the hives herself. She "pulled on her leather work gloves as she walked outside to change the racks of honey in her beehives and to check for signs of disease" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 45). Furthermore, Belle became sick and tired of oil drillers because " '[T]hey burn the poor birds out of the sky' " (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 76). Belle's great connection with the natural world is explored in her extreme resistance of the oppression of nature; she fiercely attacked the eagle white hunters who used to hunt eagles and send them to the city to be sold as souvenirs. One day, on her way to Watona to deliver eggs to an old lady there, Belle was extremely shocked by the sight of some eagle hunters who were busy in counting murdered eagles taken away in the back of a truck:

Belle stood dead still a moment, turned and looked again at what she hoped was an error of vision. What met her eyes was a truck filled with eagle carcasses. They were golden brown birds, with the blue-white membranes of death closed over their eyes. For what seemed like a long time, Belle stood rooted to the spot. Her marrow went cold. [...] They [the eagles] looked like a tribe of small, gone people, murdered and taken away in the back of a truck. (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 109- 110)

Belle violently dropped her eggs and bags and ran toward the truck screaming at the hunters. She removed the dead eagles from the truck, put them on the grass and began to ruin them as the hunters planned to sell, undamaged, as souvenirs. The hunters regarded eagles as "a natural resource to be blundered [...]. [They] have no individual significance" (Casteel 52). They were just birds. On the contrary, Belle regarded them

as indispensable for keeping balance in nature. Belle actually fought for environmental justice; she was against the oppression committed against nonhuman nature.

Similarly, Belle bravely struggled to protect the bats from the intense attack of the whites at the Sorrow Cave. After a young girl died of rabies, the white people mistakenly believed that the bats carried the disease. Therefore, they declared war against bats offering a one dollar bounty on each dead bat. Subsequently, a great number of young white men and their fathers "stood outside the cave and shot into it, knocking the frightened bats to the ground, then shooting randomly while the animals screamed with terror, unable to escape the man-blocked entrance to the cave" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 277). At that time, Belle was near the cave; she heard a shot followed with cheers. As she approached the cave, she heard the cries of the bats. Therefore, she immediately moved towards the men to prevent this terrible massacre pointing a pistol at them; she "looked like a mountain" in her attempt to protect "the beautiful creatures who were hated by those who lived in what they called the light" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 279). As Ana Crew Miller points out, Belle served as a caretaker; the "aspect of caretaking" is explored in her fight to protect the bats; "her intervention comes in time to prevent [their] destruction" (42-43). As a woman who is connected with the natural world, Belle struggled to put an end to the oppression of nature, birds and animals.

As previously discussed, ecofeminists' purpose is not only to put an end to the oppression of women and nature but also to liberate all oppressed groups. According to the eminent ecofeminist critic Greta Gaard, "ecofeminism rests on the notion that the liberation of all oppressed groups must be addressed simultaneously" (Living Interconnections, 5). This is actually what Hogan discloses in *Mean Spirit*. In addition to focusing on the oppression and exploitation of women and nature, Hogan foregrounds the oppression and subjugation of the Osage people who were actually an oppressed and marginalized group; they were exploited and subordinated by the white Americans as a result of racial differences. *Mean Spirit*, as Ernest Stromberg, points out,

explicitly engaged the political issues facing the Osage as a specific tribe" (107).

The setting of *Mean Spirit* in Oklahoma actually recalls the removal of the Native Americans from their homelands "in the nineteenth century [...] from the Southeast to the 'Indian Territory'_much of present day Oklahoma" (Strongberg 104). In *The Woman Who Watches Over the World: A Native Memoir*, Hogan writes:

The United States government planned to place all Indians inside this seemingly insignificant place they named "Indian Territory," and then build a wall around it.

It was a dangerous thing to be Indian. My grandparents witnessed what some called the end of our nations. They survived through treaty-breaking times, gunpowder times, and finally, the whirling sands of a defrosted Oklahoma where even their trees were stolen by white men looking to sell hardwood for gunstocks. (118)

The destruction of the Osage tribe in *Mean Spirit* is really a symbol of the destruction of all Native American tribes; Hogan, as Petty Louise Belle contends, "outrageously creates a pan-Indian community brought together by a shared history of sorrow and struggle [...]. [T]he Osage tragedy serves without diminishment or distortion, as a metaphor for the attempted devastation of tribal peoples" (5). Upon discovering oil in Oklahoma, the Osage Indians suffered from the exploitation and the oppression of the white Americans who swindled the Natives and even murdered them so as to take over their lands. According to Yanka Kroumova Krasteva, "Once rivers of oil were found under the barren soil of Oklahoma which has been sold to the Indians because of its uselessness, years of intimidation, fraud and murder began" (49). On the other hand, Elizabeth Blair states:

Historically, the Osage Indians [...] were forced by encroaching white immigration and governmental pressure to sell their land [...]. Immediately following reports

that oil has been discovered, drilling rigs pock the land and whites came in droves, an influx that results in the exploitation, dispossession, and death of Watona's Indian inhabitants. (16)

Early in *Mean Spirit*, Grace Blanket, who became the richest Osage woman owing to the discovery of oil in her land, was violently murdered by the men of the white oil man John Hale who wanted to control her land. After murdering Grace, one of the murderers "placed a pistol in the dead woman's hand. [...] He opened a bottle of whisky and poured it on Grace Blanket's body" in order to suggest suicide (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 25). Accordingly, the local law enforcement passed it off as such. Within six months, seventeen Osage people were murdered; among them were Sara Blanket and her husband Benoit. Sara was murdered in a mysterious explosion since she became the guardian of Grace's property after her death, Benoit, who, in turn, became the guardian of Grace's property after Sara's death, was hanged in jail after being accused of murdering Sara. As Alex Casteel states, "Euro-Americans view the oil rich Osage as a form of natural resource akin to the oil itself" (49). Like the land which was exploited and oppressed by the white men, the Native Americans were subjugated and humiliated by the white Americans. This is actually what Michael Horse remarked when he said, "the land is ravaged and covered with scares and so are the broken people" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 341). The white Americans regarded the Native Americans as "objects to be cleared or hunted" (Casteel 50). As Joe Billy, one of the characters of *Mean Spirit*, remarked, "The Indian world is on a collision with the white world, [...]. It is more than a race war" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 13- 14).

After the rapid increase in the number of murdered Native Americans under suspicious conditions, many letters were sent to the Federal agents in Washington in order to investigate these murders; yet there was no answer. Despite the fact that it was obvious that the oil man John Hale was responsible for all of them, the U.S Bureau of Investigation took no action. Finally, Stace Red Hawk, a Native American from South Dakota who worked for the U. S. Investigation Bureau,

arrived to investigate the murders. Stace had become a Federal agent thinking that "he could do more for his people in Washington than he could do at home" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 50). He hoped that "law enforcement can be made honest" (Shapiro N. P.). Stace did his best to "rescue his dark brothers and sisters who were constantly under siege by the Americans" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 52). However, he encountered obstacles due to white American's deception, artifice and crookedness. Despairing of justice, he resigned from his work as a Federal agent and went to the hills.

As an oppressed group, the Native Americans suffered from the unfair treatment due to racial prejudice; they had no equal rights as the white Americans. Upon discovering oil in their lands, the white Americans forced the Natives to sell their lands paying them as little as possible. When Moses Graycloud went to Watona to receive his annual royalty payment, he was paid only half of his due amount. On asking about the rest of his money, the clerk told him that they "' changed the regulations.' He paused, then went on. 'You're a full-blood Indian, Graycloud. According to the rolls here.' He pointed to the piece of paper. 'Full-bloods only get part of their money' " (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 60). As Alex Casteel points out, White Americans "cheat the Indians of their money because they exhibited financial innocence" (59).

Leasing lands of the Native Americans is actually one of the corrupt practices committed by the white Americans. Upon leasing their land, Moses and Belle went to the Indian Agency demanding an explanation from the Administrator who coldly told them, "It's not me doing it. It's not even the leasers. It's what is legal". Astonished, Belle asked him, "Why is it so many crimes are backed up by your laws?" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 305). Oppression of the Native Indians culminated when the white Americans began to burn their lands and homes in order to force them leave and subsequently seize their oil rich lands. Towards the end of *Mean Spirit*, fires began to break out in the lands and homes of the Native Americans so that they can be dislocated once more from their lands. Initially, the white Americans changed the Indian name of Watona

into Talbert, a white name, so as to eliminate any trace of the Native Americans. *Mean Spirit* ends with the Grayclouds fleeing their burning home and land; "they looked back once and saw it all rising up in the reddened sky, the house, the barn, the broken string of lights, the life they had lived, nothing more than a distant burning" (Hogan, *Mean Spirit* 375). The Native Americans had no choice but to leave to the hills where they could find peace and safety.

To conclude, though Linda Hogan is not considered an ecofeminist theorist, she is really an ecofeminist writer. In *Mean Spirit*, which is actually an ecofeminist novel, Hogan advocates the fundamental principles of ecofeminism. She severely attacks environmental degradation; she is against the destruction of farms, birds and animals. Additionally, she affirms the interconnectedness and the mutual relationship between the human and nonhuman world. Furthermore, she counteracts all kinds of oppression such as the oppression inflicted upon women and nature as well as the oppression of marginalized groups. The novel demonstrates Hogan's disapproval of the subjugation of women and using them as mere financial instruments. In addition, *Mean Spirit* exhibits Hogan's bitter attack against the devastation of farms as well as hunting birds for material profit. Moreover, the novel tackles the oppression of marginalized groups due to racial differences as explored in the exploitation and subordination of the Native Americans by the white Americans. In fact, Hogan, as an ecofeminist writer, aims at putting an end to the various types of oppression, and calls for social equality. Subsequently, she realizes that literature has a vocation; hence, she employs *Mean Spirit* as a means for social and political change.

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