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## **Sexual Identity and Disturbed Intellectual Female Terrain in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *The Ship*: An Ecofeminist Reading**

Jihan Zakarriya <sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the representation of mental and cultural subjugation in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *The Ship* (1970) from an ecofeminist perspective. Central to the ecofeminist theory is the deconstruction of the systematic ways within which cultural and political forces act, and which do not merely buttress gender inequality, but also produce oppressive patriarchal and hierarchal social, spatial and environmental systems. This paper specifically relates the psychological effects of sexism and discrimination on the female characters in the two novels to both the workings of the social laws in their societies and the cultural and environmental adventures they encounter.

*Keywords:* Sexuality, Ecofeminism, Female Identity, Intellect

### **Introduction: Space, Place, and Female Identity: An Ecofeminist Reading**

In 'human geography', space and place are central concepts. While place is seen as 'a portion of geographical space' or as a 'territor[y] of meaning' (Holt-Jenson 224), and is frequently associated with the security and safety of home, space may be defined as a free 'neutral canvas that is filled in by human activity' (Thrift 98). According to Nigel Thrift, spaces and places, 'are intrinsic parts of our being in the world—defined and measured in terms of the nature and degree of people's values, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions about locations, districts and regions' (99). In this sense, relational space connotes the way people relate to other peoples and the surrounding physical environments and is consciously or unconsciously embedded in their intentions and actions. If an ecofeminist reading activates, according to Noel Sturgeon, a 'double intervention: the claim that feminist issues need to be part of environmentalist agendas and analyses; and the claim that environmental issues need to be part of feminist agendas and analyses' (23), with the aim of endorsing 'relatively new and diverse political positionings' of equality and justice free of gender, class or racial bias, then, the process of an ecofeminist reappraisal engages with the idea of identity. For Sturgeon, a genealogy of ecofeminism as a 'political' phenomenon reveals the fact that there are real 'connections between the unequal status of women and the life-threatening destruction of the environment' (26). These connections, Sturgeon continues, reflect problematic identity issues that:

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Construct meanings using a hierarchical binarism dependent on assumptions of culture's superiority to nature, understanding women as more 'natural' or closer to nature dooms them to an inferior position. Furthermore, in a political economy dependent on the freedom to exploit the environment, a moral and ethical relation to nature is suspect. If women are equated with nature, their struggle for freedom represents a challenge to the idea of a passive, disembodied, and objectified nature. (28)

I believe that Sturgeon's idea of the interdependence of women's and nature's socio-economic exploitation is perfectly applicable to female characters in *Foe* and *The Ship*. For example, while British Susan Barton in *Foe* is inferiorized as a woman by white colonialist Cruso and as an independent author by white writer Foe, Iraqi Luma Abdel-Ghani in *The Ship* is abused by her aristocratic, conservative family and by her liberal lover, Isam Salman, that marginalize her as a woman and as a citizen. Both women aspire for equality and freedom, but have to deal with forces of past and present violence and oppression that position them as inferior to men and restrict their economic and intellectual independence. In addition, although Catriona Sandilands warns that ecofeminist concern with identity 'opens up the real possibility of a kind of biological reductionism and essentialism' (3), she agrees with Sturgeon that 'certain groups-men-have constructed human value in terms opposite to a primal, organic state in their quest toward transcendence, disembodiment and the possession of power over' (3). Consequently, conceptual structures—hierarchy, value, separation, independence—are the root of the problem and 'need to be remedied through a claiming of alternative experience. At the heart of that alternative [is] nature' (4).

Greg Garrard also supports Sandilands's idea that women still face a male-centred world view and patriarchal social orders that have tried to legitimise changing gender constructions by referring them back to a supposedly fixed 'natural sexual identity' (13). However, Garrard affirms that 'femininity is a set of culturally prescribed behaviours' (13). I agree with Sturgeon's, Catriona's and Garrard's assessments that discussing environmental issues in the context of women's identity, needs and activism is a significant and complex political goal. Although ecofeminism involves different approaches that relate women's causes and environmental problems, I believe that all these different approaches encourage both a dynamic unity between theory and activism and a productive integration of women's experiences into the common experience of the community. Thus, ecofeminism's deep engagement in environmental discussions not only directs the critical efforts toward fighting political patriarchies and hierarchies as the main causes of injustice and oppressions in modern societies, but also defends the right of the individual, both male and female, to construct his/her singular, culturally and environmentally relational identity.

In the light of the above-mentioned ideas, this paper aims at presenting ecofeminist readings of female characters in Coetzee's *Foe* and Jabra's *The Ship* for two main reasons. Firstly, I think Coetzee's and Jabra's selected novels are particularly appropriate to a reading using the ecofeminist theory. The two texts examine and relate processes of racial/gender categorizations, hierarchies and polarities on the one side and the position of women in modern societies and environments on the other. In the two novels, some female characters perceive their home place, with its social pressures and forced solidarity, as suffocating, whereas other characters see space, even if unknown and a potential source of dangers and threats, as safe and comforting. Secondly, I choose to study Coetzee's *Foe* and Jabra's *The Ship* at the expense of other novels for the

significant universal intertextual elements in the two texts. I argue that *Foe* represents power and spatial struggles in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* from a female-centered perspective, while *The Ship* denotes experiences of femininity and masculinity in *A Thousand and One Nights*, as experienced in contemporary Arab societies. In this sense, I also utilize Edward Said's concept of identity and exile as a means of questioning the freedom and agency of the individual in the face of tyrannical cultural, political and institutional powers in *Foe* and *The Ship*, and as a reflection of the interactions among different historical and cultural patriarchal systems worldwide. I analyse the two novels as novels of escapees and exiles that try to negotiate their positions within patriarchal systems, spaces and places. Examples of the exiled, colonized characters are Palestinian Maha al-Hajj in *The Ship* and Friday in *Foe*, while characters of escapees are Luma Abdel Ghani in *The Ship* and Susan Barton in *Foe*.

### **Colonial/Patriarchal Spaces and Female Subjugation in *Foe* (1986) and *The Ship* (1970)**

The contrast between space and place is a dominant theme in Coetzee's *Foe* and Jabra's *The Ship*. This contrast reflects characters' feelings of alienation and estrangement, which they try to conquer by adopting virtual identities, rather than their real ones. When we read the two texts from an ecofeminist view, we see how 'the strands holding the text to society, author and culture' become materially manifest' (Said 2003 112). Undoubtedly, Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) must be read in the light of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said has pointed out that the white hero, Robinson Crusoe, in Defoe's novel, 'is virtually unthinkable without the colonizing mission that permits him to create a new world of his own in the distant reaches of the African, Pacific and Atlantic wilderness', a new world that 'he rules and reclaims for Christianity and England' (74). In this way, while Crusoe is establishing his new home overseas, he is serving and thinking of his original homeland, England. Both worlds, the homeland and the colony, are always interrelated. Crusoe finds a space and seeks to recreate a known place within it, a place for the performance of a virtual identity.

Coetzee's *Foe* provides an ecofeminist-inflected parody of cultural complicity in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, while also referring to, and challenging, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. *Foe* parodies *Robinson Crusoe* and *Heart of Darkness* by replacing their male colonizers, Robinson Crusoe and Charles Marlow, respectively, with the female explorer, Susan Barton, who is on a quest for truth and environmental exploration. Concluding that 'our feeling for home is never lost' (Coetzee 1986 14), Susan places herself in the dual role of the exile/colonizer. She is the estranged and exiled woman in search for her lost daughter and desperate to identify herself with new spaces and new identities, that necessarily require her, Said argues, to be 'mobile and adaptable' (1993 130). At the same time, Susan is the Western explorer taking charge of the colonial heritage, symbolized in Crusoe's island and his colonial subject, Friday, a role that compels her to follow a 'fundamentally narrow and constricted set of rules and laws' (Said 1993 130). The two roles stem from a position of marginality and vulnerability and both affect each other.

As an exile, Susan is in mental bondage to her native culture, which restricts and marginalizes her social roles. Even when she is in Bahia where women dress liberally and appear in public, Susan thinks of her expected behaviour as a European woman. Considering Bahia, Friday and the island as 'other histories, other cultures, and other aspirations', Susan does not merely judge them as 'inferior' so that she cannot even copy the example of progressive imagery of female conduct, but also 'confirms the West's wicked power' (Said 1993 xix). Accordingly, as an explorer, Susan simply applies her stereotypical images to the new people and places she

encounters. Thus, her spatial experiences and search for truth and knowledge are hampered and turns into an opportunist struggle for dominance. Susan confesses that: 'in a world of chance, we yield to a stranger's embrace or give ourselves to the waves; for the blink of an eyelid our vigilance relaxes; we are asleep; and when we awake, we lost the direction of our lives' (30). Susan's loss of direction is deeply related to her perception of her sexual identity and expected roles in society.

Accordingly, burdened by her gender and position in society, Susan introduces herself to Cruso as 'a woman, alone' (10) assigning herself victim-like and vulnerable roles within obviously phallogocentric systems. She cannot visualize for herself a 'substantial' role in life beyond the traditional roles of a wife, mother and mistress; all of which not only are premised upon sex and the female body, but restrict her inner feelings of ambition and freedom as well. Susan jumps into 'the Portuguese captain's bed' (29) to help her find her abducted daughter. On the island, though physically stronger, she justifies Cruso's rape of her by reflecting that 'he has not known a woman for fifteen years, why should he not have his desires' (32). Likewise, she sleeps with Daniel Foe, in order to help her write the island story. Susan appears to regard her body as a public domain to be owned and used by men. Nira Yuval-Davis indicates that 'gendered bodies and sexuality play pivotal roles as territories, markers and reproducers of the narratives of nations and other collectivities' (22). Consequently, women are either the biological reproducers of future members or the social producers of the national culture. They are structured within the collective consciousness of their societies as symbols, not equal human beings. In this way, through sex and obedience, Susan, Cruso and Foe are acting out their perception of their national values and roles. Foe and Cruso are exercising their authority and are also satisfying their sexual needs upon their women, symbolized in Susan, who sees her sexual and social submission as a 'national duty' (Grantham 176). Susan wonders: 'If Cruso had truly wished to be a colonialist and leave a colony, would not have been better advised to plant his seed in the only womb there was?' (83).

In a similar way, female characters in Jabra's *The Ship*, like in *A Thousand and One Nights*, are represented as living within a phallogocentric culture which discriminates against them not only as an inferior Other to men, but also as scapegoats and meddling symbols of their nations' political corruption and lack of sovereignty. Like Cruso's island in *Foe*, the events of *The Ship* take place on board the eponymous ship, Hercules, on a cruise from the East (Beirut) to the West (Marseille). On the ship, a group of desperate exiles and escapees from different parts of the world, including Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Italy and America, try to find an escape from reality. Like Susan, Cruso and Friday in Coetzee's novel, the hearts, minds and dreams of the characters onboard the ship, are focused on different places on shore. All fail to enjoy the sense of timelessness and placelessness provided either on board the ship or on the island. Moreover, as in *Foe*, the personal and intellectual attitudes of characters in *The Ship* are influenced by sex and politics, though, unlike the characters in *Foe*, Jabra's are more confrontational and overt in dealing with their personal and national feelings of disappointment and defeat.

Like Susan Barton in *Foe*, all female characters in *The Ship* have problems identifying with the spaces and places they inhabit. While Iraqi, Luma Abdel-Ghani feels like a 'stranger in [her] own country' (Jabra 1985 74), Palestinian, Maha al-Hajj asserts that 'real alienation is alienation from a place, from roots' (74), and Italian Emilia Farnesi longs for 'the memory of a landscape, the memory of a country' (12). The spatial experiences of Luma, Maha and Emilia shape their perception of their gender roles and attitudes to racial and gender difference. Like Susan, Luma's psychological slavery to the tribal and sexist customs of Iraq limits her personal freedom and warps her national affiliations. Despite her education at Oxford University, where she meets and falls in love with Iraqi architect Isam Salman, Luma, being a woman, has great difficulty in either defying

her family's rejection of their marriage or in escaping with her lover. Her act is seen as 'disgraceful', reflecting disrespect 'to the authority of the father' (Dodd 159), and bringing 'shame and dishonor on all of her kin' (Kaufman 280). In a traditional, patriarchal society, Luma's sexual behavior, Kaufman explains, is regarded as a direct expression of the honour of her family and even her 'national character' (280). Luma tells Isam that: 'I was afraid to make you part of my plans. It was as though you were a being from outer space. You and Baghdad were a contradiction' (140).

Luma's words shed light on the fact that the moral and social codes in *The Ship* constitute a set of secular and tribal traditions, rather than religious teachings. Here, place dictates specific codes of female behavior that Luma has to comply with. Otherwise, she is punished. Since Isam's poor father killed his cousin, who is Luma's rich uncle, the poor family is marginalized and excluded from the protection of the tribe. Feeling trapped within their social and familial affiliations and responsibilities, Luma and Isam realize that 'past and present [are] closely intertwined, each one of them alive and pointing to the other' (188). To uphold her national and familial responsibilities, Luma, like Susan in *Foe*, submits to the desires of her male guardians. In 'From State Security to Human Security and Gender Justice,' Vivienne Taylor argues that 'when it comes to security and human security, in particular, (eco)feminists need to rethink the fundamental relationships of knowledge and power, and how these shape individual and community experiences' (69). Taylor believes that there is a dire need to critique how and why existing processes of 'knowledge production are shaped within frameworks that automatically exclude women and people who challenge the status quo' (69). Eric M. Blanchard agrees with Taylor that 'national security discourses are typically part of the elite world of masculine high politics' (1289). To feel secure, protected and socially accepted, Luma, like Susan Barton in *Foe*, signs a contract with Falih Haseeb, the successful doctor, in order to retain her high prestige, wealth and familial support. Luma feels lonely in the face of 'spite and hatred' (146) from oppressed people around her, even Isam himself who does not support her in her crisis. Rather, Luma believes that Isam 'was waiting for a revolution that would destroy [her] family, so [he] could have [her]' (146).

The central issue of race in *Foe* is then replaced by class in *The Ship*. Yet, both novels replace the power of patriarchal Gods with the power of patriarchal cultures. Both powers, Said emphasizes, 'are shutting off human investigation, criticism and effort in deference to the authority of the more-than-human, the supernatural, the other-worldly' (290). In willingly giving up her freedom, Luma, like Susan, is complicit in upholding the regime of phallogocentric power, turning her body into a terrain of sexual oppression. Isam's and Falih's competition over Luma is mainly a political/cultural conflict, rather than a pure passion or love. While Dr. Falih takes Luma as the mother of his children and the one who produces and transmits the boundaries of his ethnic/national group, Isam regards his sexual domination over Luma as a form of political dominance since 'Luma's wealth and (hitherto) influential social status put her right in the enemy camp' (146). Consequently, both men consider their possession of Luma as an exercise of power and authority over land, establishing their masculinity as the only power to 'maintain their hold on Arab culture and women', a power that turns into a 'subjugating and enslaving obsession' (Hammami 29).

Edward Said clarifies that a person's national identity is the composite of 'a national language, like English [...] a national community, [and] a national set of traditions or a culture' (1993: 7). In order to be a member of a community, Said argues, a person has to accept that his/her community's culture 'always involve[s] hierarchies; it has separated the elite from the popular, the best from the less than best, and so forth. It has also made certain styles and modes of thought

prevail over others' (1993 10). Susan's insistence on being Cruso's widow and her regretting that she could not procreate his child is another form of following the national archetypes and being a member of this patriarchal community in which, according to Karen Warren, endorses 'metaphors and models which feminize nature and naturalize women' that 'conceptually permitted and ethically justified the exploitation of the (female) earth' (xiii). Karen's idea is valid to an analysis of Susan Barton. Susan is preoccupied with her body, her womb and her lost daughter/motherhood. Failing to bear Cruso's child or to justify her authority over the island, Friday or even her story, Susan takes virtual motherhood and maternity to claim power: 'a woman may bear a child she does not want, and rear it without loving it, yet be ready to defend it with her life. Thus, it has become between Friday and myself. I do not love him, but he is mine' (111). Susan has to 'belong' to a man in order to feel safe, protected and satisfied and has to embrace maternity in order to feel accepted and valued. As such, physical intimacy, submission and motherhood are an unavoidable part not only of Susan's deluded national identification with her (new) communities, but also seen by her as natural tasks. Cruso says to Susan:

If Providence were to watch over all of us, who would be left to pick the cotton and cut sugar-cane? [...]. Perhaps it is the doing of Providence that Friday finds himself on an island under a lenient master, rather than in Brazil, under the planter's lash, or in Africa, where the forests teem with cannibals. (23)

In a secular order, with the workings of Providence suspended, Cruso asserts class, gender, and racial hierarchies, establishing 'all of the subjugated peoples to be naturally subservient to a superior, advanced, developed, and morally mature Europe', and replacing the sacred power of religion with 'the [inviolable] power of culture' (Said 1993 11). Within the patriarchal, imperialist orders, natural places of the Other whether Brazilian plantations or African forests are undermined as dangerous or rough. However Cruso's Island turns into 'a lifeless fortress and barren spaces with rocky hills and drab bushes that never flowered and never shed their leaves' (7 & 54), Susan's patience with her oppressive systems turns her into 'a prisoner' and she decides to 'keep a tighter rein on [her] tongue' (25). In this way, Cruso's refusal to impregnate Susan and him turning her into a silent person can be seen as means of maintaining himself as the sole creator and consequently, the fertility of the earth is sacrificed in order to establish the cultural domain of the father's language (which is called, incorrectly, the mother tongue). As a colonizer, then, Susan is convinced that her 'elevated or superior position to authorize, to dominate, [and] to legitimate' is related to her 'agency, powerful differentiation within [her] domain and beyond it too' (1993 9). Susan is simultaneously a victim and a colonizing figure. She is subordinate to Cruso but in an imperial position of power with regard to nature and Friday. She dreams of returning to the island with 'a sack of corn' in order to 'plant the terraces and make them bloom' (44).

Likewise, as a result of the disturbing personal, political and social changes in her country, Luma in *The Ship*, like Susan, regards her marriage to Falih as a 'metaphysical' solution to her problems. Like Shahrazad in the *Thousand and One Nights*, Luma submits to the sexual desires of Isam and Falih, whose obsession with their sexual power over Luma, like Shahryar's obsession with his sexual superiority over Shahrazad and other women, not only imprison them within 'systems of unjustified domination of human and nonhuman others' (Warren 140), but also, according to Rosemary Radford Ruether, regenerate 'all the basic dualities' such as:

The alienation of the mind from the body, the alienation of the self from the

objective world; the subjective retreat of the individual, alienated from the social community, the domination or rejection of nature by spirit. [...] But the alienation of the masculine from the feminine is the primary sexual symbolism that sums up all these alienations. (267)

Like Cruso and Foe in *Foe*, Isam and Falih in *The Ship* live in the past and escape realities. Isam keeps telling stories about the sufferings of his family and his betrayal by the hypocrisy of his political leaders after the revolution. Similarly, Falih, suffocated by his tribal and masculine affiliations, like old colonialist Cruso, sees the ship as a microcosm of the world as ‘a prison cell’ and a ‘kingdom of worms’ (156). As Westernized secular liberals, Falih and Isam express progressive and emancipatory beliefs. However, in their daily practices, they are ‘locked within cultures [before the] Middle Ages’ (88). ‘Follow[ing] Luma as her shadow’, Isam, Roger Allen argues, is looking for ways ‘to break those ties to the land’ (46), while Falih commits suicide, failing to deal with ‘the shame afflicted upon him by his [promiscuous] wife’ (Fazah 75). Like Foe and Cruso in *Foe*, Falih and Isam in *The Ship* ascribe gendered cultural roles to themselves and to women. As a result, their fake secular beliefs, rather than making them free and tolerant of difference, ‘deprive [them] of all individuality and [they] become something like a herd of sheep’ (107). Similarly, Palestinian exile Wadi Assaf endows Maha al-Hajj with ‘[the] responsibility to reproduce the national culture, [which] simultaneously becomes the symbolic role of representing its fixity and timeless nature’ (Hammami 29). Though he is a free and liberal man, Wadi, like Falih and Isam, internalizes the calamity of his country as a private crisis of masculinity. Thus, he replaces his feelings towards the lost home and family with the possession of women, asserting that ‘physical presence and money are the only irrefutable truth’ (19).

In addition to this, *The Ship* exposes the Western mentality as still dominated by stereotypes. On seeing Luma for the first time, Italian Emilia Farnesi reveals that she is steeped in Western Orientalist discourses and imagery when the reader is informed that ‘Baghdad and Luma brought back to her mind the fantastic world of slave girls, of the harem, of the Sultan’s daughter and Sindbad the sailor’ (28). However, like Iraqi Luma, Italian Emilia accepts to be a sexual toy in the hands of Falih in order to keep her mind off feelings of ‘deep alienation’ (29), while Falih ‘admits that he was using Emilia [sexually] to keep his mind off Luma’ (29). Emilia confesses that Falih is driving her to ‘a silent, secret and insecure life’ but she does not want to either end the relation or to confront him with her feelings. Instead, Emilia flirts with Isam Salman and Wadi Assaf, only to ‘stay reasonably close to Falih’ (29). Like British Susan in *Foe*, Italian Emilia in *The Ship* assigns herself the role of a sexual object while exercising her superiority over the other. Locking themselves within the patriarchal essential gender categories, for Emilia, like Susan, the Hercules is unfriendly, manipulative and deceitful small ship. The significance of place, then, is ruined because of men.

Viewed in this way, submissive women like Susan in *Foe* and Luma and Emilia in *The Ship*, not only, as Elizabeth MacNabb puts it, ‘contribute in the production and reproduction of sexist culture’ (119), but also in the two texts, Nathaniel Greenberg argues, ‘the primacy of sex as the arena for self-determination marginalizes the role of women to that of a body’ (9). I partially agree with MacNabb and Greenberg that female characters in *Foe* and *The Ship* are responsible for their subjugation. However, I argue that some of these women are able to change their life of slavery and abuse. For example, despite the fact that Susan and Luma submit to what Simon De Beauvoir calls ‘the not-man or not-the-One perspective in [themselves] from infancy’ (xix), an attitude that enslaves them to the will of male-dominated and colonial hierarchies, these women’s

intellectual and cultural involvements with the colonial project and the patriarchal structures, respectively, encourage them to reconsider their personal choices, historical affiliations and cultural identity. In the second part of this paper, I argue that while Susan utilizes her position as an exile gradually to develop an ecofeminist literary perspective on her life and relations to the Other, deconstructing different forms of sexist and racial polarities, Luma in *The Ship* is an intellectual, not odalisque. She is neither concealed from public life nor is she a sexual toy. Rather, she is ambitious, strong and is aware of the political situations in her country.

### **Female Resistance and Intellectual Agency in *Foe* and *The Ship***

Edward Said describes the challenging, yet the distinctly privileged position of the exile as the following: 'The more one is able to leave one's cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance' (1979 260). On imitating Friday's dance, Susan confesses that:

Spinning round, my eyes closed, a smile on my lips, I fell, I believe, into a kind of trance; [...] I could summon back nothing distinct, yet felt a glow of after-memory, a message ... to tell me there were other lives open to me than this one in which I trudged with Friday across the English countryside, a life of which I was already heartily sick. (113-4)

Comparing herself to Friday, and emulating his actions, Susan gains a new insight into her life. Her personal 'memories [are] broken and mingled and altered' (138). She meets people but does not know them as they really are and experiences different places and cultures but is held captive 'to a set of [separatist] authorities and canonical ideas' (Said 1994 59). Only when Susan develops an ecofeminist understanding of the other, does she perceive Friday's difference in a new way, and devoid of stereotypical preconceptions. Susan reflects that Friday's 'casting of petals was the first sign she had that a spirit or soul, stirred beneath that dull and unpleasing exterior' (31-2). As she continues to observe him, she 'understood why Friday had sung and danced all day in [Foe's] house: it was to remove himself, or his spirit, from Newington and England, and from her too' (77). Susan shares Friday's feelings of alienation and rejection and works to overcome them together with him. Indeed, Samuel Durrant reads Susan's analysis of Friday's rituals as an '[act] of silent, inconsolable mourning [and] a sign of either an inability or a refusal to recover from history' (26 & 34). However, another way of viewing Friday's rituals and habits would be as a spiritual identification with the island in order to add a new 'current' of resistance to his lost identity. Rather than submitting to harsh reality, Friday utilizes his spatial experience to pave a 'road from chaos to order, or from desolation to happiness' (Said 2004 49). Through his spiritual and musical rituals, Friday may be seen, in Said's words, as 'a performer' whose acts 'defy many of the physical laws of nature' (49). Unlike Cruso's hysterical 'shouts' and blank 'contemplation of the wastes of water and sky' (37), which may be seen to reflect what Said calls 'the absence of tonality and a kind of homelessness, a kind of permanent exile' (49), Friday's flute performance, with its repeated tunes, reflects 'the logic of going forward from beginning to end' (49). No wonder, then, that Cruso dies onboard the rescue ship, while Friday not only survives but also his 'memories' (59) occupy the attention of Susan and Foe.

The main question of *Foe*, then, is how Susan reimagines and repositions herself within the social and environmental orders she inhabits. I argue that the efforts of Susan as a feminist author, searching for liberation from the shackles of what Said calls ‘frontiers and enclosures built around [her] either by nations or by other kinds of communities’ (1993 23), grow into an ecofeminist identification with the cause of the Other and her eventual defence of the right to equality freedom and difference. It is in fact when Susan comes to see herself as a human being with equal rights with men like Foe and Crusoe, not as a subjugated body or reproductive womb that she perceives her experiences with new places and people differently. Susan gives up her possession and comfortable life and identifies with nature to sustain her new knowledge:

I look like an old woman, a filthy old gipsy-woman. I sleep in doorways, in churchyards, under bridges. Can you believe this beggar’s life is what I desire? With a bath and new clothes and a letter of introduction from [Foe] I could tomorrow find myself a situation as a cook-maid and a comfortable situation too, in a good house [...] But such a life is abject. A whore used by men is used as a substantial body. (125)

These words mark a major transformation in Susan’s personal and intellectual vision. She confesses that ‘the condition of slavehood invades the heart and makes a slave a slave for life’ (85). Contemplating her own experiences and choices, Susan realizes that her heart has been enslaved to a Western culture in which ‘a woman who goes abroad freely is thought a whore’ (85). Reconsidering her physical and mental captivity to the traditional female roles of wife and mother, Susan initiates, according to Meyda Yegenoglu, her revolt not merely against ‘sexuality as a power that governs and structures the subject’s every relation with the other’ (26), but also against ‘phallogocentric discourses and nineteenth-century imperial categories of Eurocentric thought’ (124). Susan comes to understand gender and racial difference in terms of variety and diversity rather than antagonism and domination. She infers that ‘the world is more various than we ever give it credit for’ and consequently Friday may belong to ‘tribes in Africa among whom the men are mute and speech is reserved to women’, tribes that have the right to ‘exist, and procreate, and flourish, and be content’ (69).

In addition, since Susan insists on being the assertive ‘father to [her] story’ (123), she assumes for herself the position of authority and creation, previously perceived as exclusive male domains. As a rebellious feminist writer confronting her internalized attitudes, Susan ‘continue[s] to trust in [her] own authorship’ (133 & 71), explaining to Foe that ‘many strengths you have, but invention is not one of them’ (71). The challenge for Susan the artist, then, Coetzee asserts, is ‘how not to play the game by the rules of the state, how to establish one’s own authority’ (Coetzee 1992 346). In describing herself as ‘Sinbad of Persia and Friday [as] the tyrant riding on [her] shoulders’ (146), Susan emphasizes that ‘by art [she has] found a means of giving voice to the true story of Friday’ (118). She uses her artistic power of invention and imagination both to express her independent literary voice and to set free her historical guilt towards Friday.

In rewriting the island story from an independent viewpoint highlighting the ‘truth’ and ‘particularity’ (59) of her story, Susan challenges not only Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), often seen as ‘the prototypical colonial novel of the eighteenth century, if not in all of English literature’ (McInelly 1), but historical facts as well. Coetzee deforms the name Defoe to Foe to suggest that the writer can be his or her own enemy. Defoe is his own enemy when he presents his subjective vision as a historical, social and even linguistic fact. Susan’s mission as a

feminist intellectual, thus, is 'to speak truth to power' (Said 1994 12). Susan connects Cruso's political mission as a colonizer to Foe's literary mission as an Orientalist, seeing them both as 'men of the same time of life, and their way with a woman too was the same' (139). Susan's artistic liberation is, then, inseparable from her personal emancipation as a woman. Although Susan's spatial experiences in *Foe* lack memories, and hence 'her craft', Coetzee affirms, 'is all in reading *the other*: gaps, inverses, undersides; the veiled, the dark, the buried, the feminine; alterities' (Coetzee 1998 81), her ecofeminist interpretation of her world informs her commitment to effect change.

Likewise, in contrast to the passive and illusory world of Arab male characters, Arab female characters in *The Ship*, like Susan Barton in *Foe*, go through a positive process of creating what Said calls a 'resistant intellectual consciousness' (1994 13). In commenting on Isam's and Falih's depression, Luma relates it to the 'problems of the intellectuals in Baghdad' (36). She understands the predicament of the westernized Arab intellectuals in the face of 'politics that has given [them] hell' (33). In such a polarizing political and cultural atmosphere, Luma 'g[et]s lost between right and wrong, good and evil' (38). John Maier claims that 'Luma rarely speaks in her own voice' and hence she 'develops no interiority in *The Ship*, and remains a mythic figure' (42). I partially agree with Maier that Luma is a mythic figure in the sense that she 'ke[eps] a safe distance from people and look[s] down on everything around her' (138). Yet, I believe that Luma develops a personalized sense of ecofeminist liberation, mirrored in her changing choices and attitudes in the course of the novel. For Luma, her cruise where 'land and sea meet with the sky' not only 'enables [her] to communicate with [her] land again', but also 'its shores are the rallying ground of all the world's civilizations' (25).

In comparing his exiled and estranged characters to 'Sindbad', Jabra, like Coetzee, assigns them the task of encountering dangers and defying challenges for the sake of crossing geographical, cultural and linguistic borders. Said suggests that human contacts 'take place in time. The element of space ... brings [them] closer to each other to have a kind of tension, an in-depth [insight]' (2004 75). Said believes that one's interaction with and affiliations to places and spaces inform one's duties as well as one's rights. Like Susan, Luma's experiences with different places, cultures and peoples expose her intellectual dualities, inner weaknesses, and social fears. Luma approaches her tribal, phallogocentric culture with rebellious acts of desire and challenge to '[the discriminatory] law of the father', which is premised on 'an alienation and a separation for both social classes and sexes' (Rodd 52-3). Luma betrays her husband claiming to be let down by his severe depression and addiction to drinking. Yet, after the death of her husband and the end of her cruise, Luma, like Susan, questions the value of her 'sexual escapades' (153). Her personal suffering and mistakes open her eyes to diversity and the similarity between her experience and that of Others. Luma ponders the wealth of her feudal family, wondering how her 'ancestors acquired the land a hundred and fifty years ago? How many people did they kill in the process? How many women and children died of hunger and destitution?' (145). Luma's thinking of the sufferings of Others, particularly the oppressed and poor classes in her society, changes her life. She is no longer isolated in her ivory tower. Rather, she, like Susan Barton, is interested in any real 'opportunity to meet people' (150), testifying to her openness to difference.

In addition, Luma, like Friday and Susan in *Foe*, breaks her psychological siege and alienation from others by identifying with nature and music. Edward Said argues that in musical and dance shows and performances, 'there is also a kind of argument' (69). I believe that Said's analysis is relevant to *The Ship*. A secretive individual fixed by her social position, Luma nevertheless is able to use her body as a language of communication: 'she [does] a belly dance just

like a professional ...bending and straightening in time and music' (85). Since her performance combines time and music, Luma is comparing her pre-marriage 'life of limitless freedom', with her current situation under 'limitless despotism' (157). Living in a closed and conservative society, Luma's gender, race, class and sexuality shape her interactions with the environments and places she inhabits. Yet, as she develops an ecofeminist attitude towards her cultural environment, she uses her knowledge to incite action against suppression.

In this way, Arab women like Luma Abdel-Ghani in *The Ship* counters the idealized image of women as symbols of nations, as embodiments of honour and high culture, or as obedient sexual objects with the alternative image of women as loose, free and uncontrollable. Thus, she functions as a 'symbol of threat to the ideological anchor of an ordinary nuclear family, a source of legitimation for the state, which perpetuates the fiction that the family is the cornerstone of society' (65), as Jacqui Alexander clarifies. Jabra's foregrounding of sex can, therefore, be seen as a deliberate destabilizing of the status quo at the hands of women. This is evident through Palestinian Maha al-Hajj. After her family is murdered in an Israeli attack, Maha moves to Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. With her persistence and hard work, she becomes a physician. Described as 'mercurial, affectionate, eruptive and dormant' (157), Maha is an emerging feminist spirit who seeks control, regulation and self-realization in a world of chaos and colonial subjugation. Maha stands for what Sandra Gilbert, among many other feminists, puts it, 'the personal is political' (31). Maha considers her personal success as an individual as a force to uphold her country's political struggle. Both struggles are premised, Maha thinks, on the principle of 'fac[ing] up to things, accept[ing] whatever pains you' (197). Maha is banished from her country, Palestine, but is like a 'rock' in her 'resilience to failure or erasure' (186). She takes the cruise in the Mediterranean Sea because 'it is the sea of Palestine, of Jaffa and Haifa, of the western hills and look to the west' and because 'awesome, fascinating Mediterranean waves provide her with the power to survive' (26). Furthermore, in refusing Wadi's suggestion to return to Palestine 'to plant his land,' with Maha practicing medicine 'for free' and to 'build a family' (113), Maha defends her social and cultural gains as an independent woman. Thus, M.Mama argues, she not only resists her lover's attempts 'to force [her] to return to the domesticity of former years' (178) but also holds out against 'colonial society and its economy', which confines the colonized 'to the margins of economy' (178).

Maha's refusal to return to Palestine is a very challenging decision since the main role of Palestinian women, according to Said, is to 'assert the value of connection with the land'. They must symbolize 'the pride of ownership', and consequently, they have to stay 'in place' (1994 83). Yet, Maha's bold decision not to return to Palestine may be regarded as what Said calls a 'secular interpretation that proposes a way of dealing with, a way of avoiding the pitfalls of nationalism' that puts great 'emphasis upon forging a self-identity as a nation or a people that resists but has its own integrity' (2005 131). Marti Kheel and Maggie Humm agree with Said that the inferiorization and marginalization of women and environment in modern societies are inscribed in social institutions and national thought in order to naturalize hierarchy and domination. While Kheel argues that 'women's body parts are fetishized in our culture as women's identities are consumed by men' (334), Humm claims that 'the whole female body may be fetishized in order to counter the threat of sexual difference and women's independence' (181). In defying dominant fetishized national and gender ideas, Maha, like Luma and Susan, develops a positive situation out of her oppressive patriarchal and colonial experiences. They all adopt ecofeminist attitudes which mean that they grow to accept human diversity and freedom and that difference, both gender and racial, is a positive quality.

## Conclusion

The above analysis argues that Coetzee's *Foe* and Jabra's *The Ship* exemplify ecofeminist literature as self-consciously and positively engaging with politics of place and environment and as resistant to any form of hierarchy, insularity and provincialism. The two novels identify gender oppression as an essential part of patriarchal/colonialist thinking and systems. Gender discrimination worldwide is characterized by state sponsorship, institutional complicity, cultural silence and environmental exploitation, but this paper has shown that the selected novels of Coetzee and Jabra vigorously contest such covert acceptance. Stereotyped as cultural symbols of national authenticity and identity in their countries, white Susan Barton in *Foe* and Iraqi Luma Abdel-Ghani and Palestinian Maha al-Hajj in *The Ship* in particular fight for an advanced view not only of women as individual human beings, but also of the Other as equal.

In the two novels, violence, conflict and oppression, particularly environmental and gender violence, stem from contests not only over space, or bodies, or resources, but also over time and mental change. Being bound to a dominantly repressive and patriarchal world, the majority of characters in the two texts escape into illusion. Yet, since escape into illusion does not provide a solution, male characters in the two novels, either give up completely like Falih and Cruso, or just stand still, unable to either break their bondage to the past or move forward towards a different future, like Foe, Isam, and Wadi. Female characters, on the other hand, although their movements are repeatedly restricted and positioned as inferior to men, work hard to redefine their cultural positions and spatial experiences. While Arab women, Maha and Luma use their educational and economic knowledge to realize cultural and economic authority, British Susan Barton uses her creative writing. Yet, these female characters in Coetzee's *Foe* and Jabra's *The Ship* inhabit alternative and hybrid spaces and places of resistance to establish a different future possibility of human freedom and equality.

Additionally, this paper explores Said's unique perception of exile and creative practices, like music and art, as emancipatory forces that liberate the human soul and spirit from negative feelings of anger, injustice and hostility. In the two novels, oppressed characters, like Susan Barton and Friday in *Foe* and Luma Abdel-Ghani in *The Ship* use spiritual and creative practices like music, dance and the art of writing to overcome psychological and cultural subjugation and stereotypes and to sympathize and identify with the Other as a different human being, not as an enemy.

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