

February 2020

## An Ecofeminist, Comparative Reading of Moniru Ravanipor's *The Gypsy by the Fire* and Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*

Elahe Khafi

Follow this and additional works at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Khafi, Elahe (2020). An Ecofeminist, Comparative Reading of Moniru Ravanipor's *The Gypsy by the Fire* and Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 21(1), 106-118.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol21/iss1/9>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

## **An Ecofeminist, Comparative Reading of Moniru Ravanipor's *The Gypsy by the Fire* and Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo***

By Elahe Khafi<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

Binary oppositions are the concepts that graft many approaches like feminism, postcolonialism, ecocriticism, African-American, and zoo-poetics. Considering one race, gender, or nationality as superior is what constitutes the dichotomies like, white/black, man/woman, and European/non-European. Ecofeminism, the focal point of this paper, deals with the connection between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. Oppositions such as culture/nature, human/animal, and male/female culminate in a myriad discrimination. Among many writers around the world whose concerns are the marginalized, one African-American and one Iranian female novelist are selected to be surveyed in this study. Both Ntozake Shange (1948-2018) and Moniro Ravanipor (1952-present) are caring for nature, women, and women's aesthetics. They utilize varied elements like language, style, characterization, and setting to render their meanings. Ravanipor's *The Gypsy by the Fire* (1999) and Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (1976) are the two novels that abound the examples of female oppression and social constructionism. Both writers cherish nature, art, and female journey throughout her life. The aim of this paper is a comparative study of the aforementioned novels, the main approach is ecofeminism and it will be pursued in different features; for example, style of writing, characterization, symbolism, language, and form. Some concepts like, traditional gender role, intersectionality, ecriture feminine, women's aesthetics, and animal abuse are going to be investigated too. The present study is not an essentialist type of study which stabilizes some innate characteristics in women or nature. Moreover, the comparative study of the two novels does not signify any essentialist similarities, but it is only examining the journeys that women in various parts of the world experience.

*Keywords:* Ecofeminism, Nature, Women's aesthetics, Intersectionality, Binary opposition, Ecriture feminine, Animal abuse.

### **Introduction**

Where there is a woman there is magic. If there is a moon falling from her mouth, she is a woman who knows her magic, who can share or not share

---

<sup>1</sup> The present article is written by Elahe Khafi, holding a Master's degree in English literature. She was born in Iran, in 1989 She graduated from Kharazmi university of Tehran and is also a PhD candidate in Munster University in Germany. She has a wide range of interests in reading and research, and Ecofeminism is one of them. The other important point about the article is its comparative aspect, as comparative literature is the study of the literatures of two or more groups differing in cultural background and, usually, in language, concentrating on their relationships to and influences upon each other, the writer attempts to do comparative works related to the literatures of other civilizations and the literature her own country Iran.

her powers. A woman with a moon falling from her mouth, roses between her legs and tiaras of Spanish moss, this woman is a consort of the spirits.

(Ntozoke Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*)

Ecofeminism is a neologism combined by ecocriticism and feminism. Ecocriticism is an approach that glorifies nature including landscapes, plants, and animals. It begins to emerge in the late 1970s and it itself is melded by ecology and criticism as well.

In accordance with Karen Warren, ecofeminism is a word coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort*, she tries to show the connection between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women. As a result, Female enslaving for benefit of patriarchal societies is comparable with nature enslaving by capitalist and industrial societies.

Both environmentalism and green studies influence ecofeminism extensively. Nature writing and cherishing nature date back to ancient Greece, when Theocritus idealizes the simplicity, peace, and harmony in rural life and nature (Abrams 87).

Serious nature writing and care about nature begin when environmentalists warn about the exploitation of nature. Environmentalism is not a recent way of thought and dates from the 1800s, by the strike of industrialism which causes a heavy toll in plants and animals, they pursue their goals more seriously. Environmentalists reject human exceptionalism and denounce his/her being in the apex of all other beings (Toadvine 181).

What environmentalists inaugurate, is revoking the central role of human i.e. anthropocentrism which justifies nature abuse. Dominating religions like Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and also western philosophy such as the Renaissance humanism and the Enlightenment, which are predominant over the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, overestimate the dignity and the central position of human and human reason in the universe and consider the human reason sufficient to solve the problems and found the essential norms in life; This kind of essentialism believes in human essence and logos as transcendental and places him/her in the first class of being, superior to other beings, so that he/she can rule and subdue others which are known as less important.

The aforementioned way of thinking culminates in dichotomies; to exemplify, human/nature. The process continues to create other binaries like man/woman, white/black, human/animal, and culture/nature. A binary opposition is a notion that causes many exploitation, destruction, and discrimination. As African criticism and zoo-poets survey white/black, and human/animal dichotomies respectively; man/woman, man/nature, and culture/nature binaries are the significant subjects of ecofeminism altogether.

Other exacerbating cause by human/nature binary is capitalism. Capitalism plays a destructive role alongside the industrialism, as capitalism devours the natural sources for greater production based on technology and economics. This attitude leads to exploitation of nature since people consider nature as a property.

Then, before initiating the main discussion, it is helpful to point out a crucial issue that is the subject of many debates among ecofeminist theoreticians; association of nature domination and female domination is not an essentialist view signifying that women and nature are alike in a way that both are nurturing, reproductive, and calling the Earth the mother, since by so doing, the traditional role giving poisons the thought. To put it another way, the essentialist outlook endows women and nature with some innate traits which many thinkers escape from for many years.

Environmental deterioration prompts many people, including writers to write about the dangers that threaten the planet and whatever exists in it. For instance, Alice Walker who is an activist in nature conservation and feminism, and Annette Kolodny who gives impetus to what has

come to be called “ecofeminism”. The ecofeminists unanimously believe that the Earth is the nigger of the world.

Among many writers and poets whose concerns are the environment and women simultaneously, Ntozake Shange (1948-2018) and Moniru Ravanipor (1952-present) are selected to be discussed in this study. Both of them devote their careers to write about the oppressed. Shange as a woman of color includes writing about black people too.

In this essay, ecofeminist ideas are going to be examined via miscellaneous factors, like setting, characterization, content, form, narration, and style.

Moniru Ravanipor is a renowned Iranian author, born in Bushehr, where constitutes settings of many of her works. Her books encompass different genres ranging from short stories, novels, to poetry, children literature, and plays. As she writes about various types of oppression and suppression, she cares about nature; for example, seas that are polluted with oil, engendered birds, and every other damage that human being causes in jungles and deserts. She uses magic realism, owing to the fact that, she is a social political writer and magic realism is the perfect way to depict what is undepictable in reality writing. Her works are reminiscences of Kafka, Garcia Marquez, and Tutuola. Furthermore, *The Gypsy by the Fire* is dealing with women, the Earth’s troubles, and the cruelties toward female and the Earth. She talks about them in her other works like *The drowned* (1989) as well. In this novel, she also follows her environmental, social, and feminist approach. She utilizes practical styles of writing for what she wants to render, for instance, magic realism, stream of consciousness, mythology, and metafiction (Taslimi 244-248). Some of these methods are going to be debated later.

Ntozake Shange is an eminent playwright, poet, novelist, and self-proclaimed black feminist. Her best-known work is entitled, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (1975), it is a combination of using dance, poetry, and drama. She also uses this blend in *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*. Her magic realism which enables her to create some scenes that cannot be created in reality writing. Her language is poetical and smooth, and replete with music, nature, and creation. She pursues varied themes in her novel, such as art, family heritage, gender/sexuality, ethnic culture, mother- daughter relationship, sisterhood, spirituality, womanhood, nurturing, female body, and women’s career (officialntozakeshange.com).

## Discussion

*The Gypsy by the Fire* is a story of a nomadic girl named *Ayene* who has to dance in front of men to earn money for her family. Among her audience, there is a sophisticated writer who is planning on writing about *Ayene*’s life; she likes him and begins to meet him at nights to talk about her story and gradually, she falls in love and sleeps with him. When the writer, called *Manes*, leaves the nomad, *Ayene* decides to go after him, find him, and be with him. When *Ayene* leaves her nomad and family to search for *Manes*, the prejudiced nomad finds out, and hunts her down and starts striking her for some days. Being desperate and crushed, *Ayene* leaves her nomad and her family forever. She begins her journey to bigger cities to find her *Manes*; throughout her journey, many incidents happen, she meets people with different backgrounds like other women- who have difficult lives too- undergoes various incidents, learns how to paint with the help of her professor, *Hanibal*, and at last, returns to her nomad being an artist, when her father is badly sick.

As mentioned before, Ravanipor is a postmodern artist utilizing features of postmodernist writing in her works. In this case, she uses metafiction as the way of developing her novel, therefore, the characters particularly, *Ayene* is meeting and interacting with the writer many times.

The writer tries to help her by sending supporting characters or interference, which *Ayene* does not approve of, and constantly attempts to evade. Once she says, “the author wants to make something out of me, that I am not” (138).

Using metafiction instead of a conventional style, as her writing style, Ravanipor tries to elucidate the distinction between the traditional way of thinking about women dominating for centuries, especially in a small and conservative nomad, and the new way of thinking which brings about women’s emancipation.

Ravanipor’s choice of style for writing her novel cooperates with her intended content. She develops her book by “metafiction” which is a postmodern way of writing. As Patricia Waugh defines in her book *Metafiction, The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984):

Metafiction is a form of literature that emphasizes its own constructedness in a way that continually reminds the reader to be aware that they are reading or viewing a fictional work. Metafiction is self-conscious about language, literary form, storytelling, and directly or indirectly draw attention to their status as artifacts (2)

The artists who use metafiction, try to undermine literary conventions, such as a unified plot, flat characters, chronological order, and the conventional method of narration. In *The gypsy by the Fire*, the metafictional, and unconventional form is compatible with the unconventional, non-conservative, and revolutionary content.

For instance, the characters specifically *Ayene*, endeavors to elude the writer’s interference with her life. She does not expect the author to help her out of every trouble and disturbance, she does not endure being entangled, controlled, and supervised by an exterior force, in contrast, she demands being independent of any intervention: “Do not escape Ayene....where do you want to go??? Nowhere, I just want to leave this story, she stands up and steps out” (35). In this case, the writer symbolizes the patriarchal society, who is pushing the characters as puppets, hence, they do not have many choices.

The other novel which is the focal point of this essay is *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*. This is a novel written by an African-American novelist who centralizes the marginalized such as women, nature, and black people.

The novel is a story about three sisters and their journeys in life. As black females in a society filled with discriminating attitudes, the three girls must find their own ways of living. The eldest sister *Sassafrass* is following weaving, her ancestors’ legacy as a career. She is living with her boyfriend *Mitch* who does not treat her decently, and finally she leaves him. The second sister, *Cypress*, is a strong and ambitious woman who pursues her dream, dancing, as her career and passion.

The youngest sister, *Indigo*, a remarkably special kid is stepping into her puberty, as the beginning of the novel describes her womanhood experience as she menstruates. She is a music enthusiast and loves to play violin, but she has her own style which sounds strumming in the first place. Her exclusivity in playing music is symbolic, as her unique life style. In the end, they all are at home waiting for *Sassafrass’* baby to be born.

Ntozake’s style of writing entails both magic realism, and surrealism. She conveys her meanings by utilizing imaginary talking, dream, and art. In other words, she endows every leading character with passion for art through which they are going to discover their identity and womanhood.

In this paper, the aforementioned novels are going to be surveyed, regarding their uniqueness and their resemblances. For example, both writers use magic realism as a method to portray the oppression, and the incidents that cannot be portrayed in reality, and the horrifying incidents. In, *The Gypsy by the Fire*, the author portrays a morbid and bleak cemetery, and some poor and miserable women who undergo terrible situations as a result of sexism and tribalism. Ravanipor situates those people in a cemetery that is not a place where vibrant and alive people live, as symbols of the invisible and trivial women described in the novel. The scenes are mingled with a touch of unreality as Shange too is describing some phenomena like *Indigo's* period magically, and also goes through some characters' imagination and dreams.

As both writers have profound concerns about female role and character in the society, to begin with, "social constructionism" will be debated. Social constructionism is what forces a woman to become what the society demands and dictates, as Simone de Beauvoir says "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" in her book *second sex* (267).

A myriad of musts and must nots, arranged by patriarchal society, form the concept of womanhood. Traditional gender roles recognize men as strong, rational, supportive, and decisive; conversely, cast women as emotional, submissive, and hysterical. These traditional roles which are constructed in the society rationalize inequalities like low wages and non-decision-making job positions toward women.

In both novels, some revolutionary characters try to emancipate themselves from what the patriarchal power system demands. In *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*, the three main characters find their own way of living, even though sometimes their mother attempts to stop them from anything that is hard for a black girl to be among the white. On the contrary, some female characters are obedient like *Mable*, who is a dutiful girl and "she was overwhelmed by her mission to have things be the way they used to be" (43).

*Ayene*, the central character in the other novel, is not satisfied with what her nomad requires, she likes to be settled in a permanent house, go to school, follow her heart, and find her lover. The same themes of sisterhood and, mother-daughter relation run into both novels. *Ayene's* mother wants her daughter to follow the rules and not to breach what is demanded by the nomad. She is caring for her daughter's virginity too much.

The second notion that is going to be investigated in both novels is "intersectionality". Sometimes, more than one issue, cause a person or a community to be discriminated. In other words, when race, sex, or social class converge, that community is going to be doubly or triply marginalized. As Lois Tyson states in her book *Critical Theory Today* (2006), "in African-American women, race overlaps with sex" (369).

In both novels, being a female is mixed with other concepts like blackness, ethnicity, tribalism, and nomadic life.

In, *The Gypsy by the Fire*, *Ayene* and her family live a nomadic life. A difficult life style that is not settled in one place. Other people call them *Kowli*, it means somehow gypsy. They are considered not as civilized and ethical as the rest of the society. Even the gypsy men are not as respected as other men. The conditions are even tougher for women, who are suppressed doubly; first by virtue of their sex, and then their race.

In other novel, the marginalization is worse, the history of African-American people indicates their oppression well enough; the mechanism of white/black binary opposition regards the white as superior who can subdue black people. Throughout the novel the three girls' mother, *Effania* reminds the reader how hard it can be to be both a woman and a nigger, she is cautious about what her daughters are going to select in their lives and tries hard to protect them.

Although some people like *Mitz Fitzhugh* treats black people appropriately, in the eyes of the black it is a guardianship which does not allow them to find their own way. *Hilda*, the girls' mother disapproves of the way *Mitz Fitzhugh*, a benevolent white woman, tries to help the girls, as she considers it that as if she owns them as properties:

What she didn't know was that Hilda Effania let the girls use that money as they pleased. Hilda believed every family needed only one mother. She was the mother to her girls. That white lady was mighty generous, she wasn't her daughters' mama or mama from Heaven. If somebody needed taking care of, Hilda Effania determined that was her responsibility; knowing in her heart that that white folks were just peculiar (61)

Racism exists strongly at their schools, as they decide to hire *Indigo* a tutor owing to the segregation there. A noteworthy point about black men is that they suffer from racism and are not treated equally too. For instance, *Leroy* a black musician is not pleased with the way white folks tell him what to do and what not to do in music.

As mentioned before, dichotomies lead to some repercussions such as violence. Physical violence against women is a common issue in both novels. The dichotomy of man/woman which tops men over women and lets men treat women like properties results in physical violence toward women. Good illustrations abound in both novels.

In, *The Gypsy by the Fire*, men of the nomad hunt *Ayene* down after she leaves to find her lover and beat her to death. Their strict regulations do not allow *Ayene* to return and visit her family. Some other peripheral female characters like the face-burnt old woman goes through the similar process as well. This woman wants to elope with her lover, while her family burns her face.

In the other novel, *Sassafrass* does not like the way her boyfriend *Mitch*, treats her and the way he intends to change her. He strikes her so that she leaves him as *Mitch's* action reminds *Sassafrass* pictures of slave auctions:

Sassafrass ran to pick it up, and Mitch shoved her to the side. Once he had the tube in his hands again, he twirled it-and struck again, again, and again. Mitch, have you gone crazy...stop, stop, stop...I can't stand it, you're hurting me...stop it, Mitch you are hurting me (80)

In addition to women, both writers pay close attention to nature and use various phenomena like the moon, stars, rivers and, etc. They appreciate every single thing in nature and condemn anything that sabotages any creature in nature. An appealing resemblance happens in both novels and that is both writers' disapproval of abusing animals. Cockfighting scenes are described in both novels which occur at the hands of men. The cruelty of men who hold a cockfight indicates both writers' concerns for animals. Human as a physically superior being regards himself a better creature that can misuse other creatures the way he desires. It is an anthropocentric attitude that dominates western philosophy for centuries. Based on their classification in the great chain of being, animals are lower and less valuable than humans. Heidegger in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (1929) identifies animal being as "poor in the world" (196).

Ravanipor too shows the other chilling anti-animal part in her novel which signifies disrespect of human to his natural surroundings and other creatures; when a tribe tries to punish a

girl, who is eloping with her lover, they compel her to ride on a mule and set fire to the mule's tail. The mule is suffering from burning its tail and is bouncing up and down, and it leads to burning of the girl's face. Both scenes can be construed symbolically as well, animals symbolize women who are abused at the hands of the men, who are physically stronger.

Other point raised by Ravanipor, that proves her concerns for nature destruction is related to the nomadic life style. In countries which have nomadic tribes, moving from one place to another place, and doing husbandry for their living, their governments encourage the nomadic people to settle down. Owing to the fact that, the flocks destroy the meadows, when they are grazing, and this is the other one of Ravanipor's point in the novel, as she appreciates helping nomads to settle down for their own and nature's sakes.

Now after analyzing some aspects of the selected novels, it is beneficial to go through the point which both writers highlight throughout the novels and better to say throughout their careers i.e. womanhood. The most significant part of this study is dedicated to discussing the womanhood journey that main characters in both novels are experiencing.

Shange initiates her book, by describing a magical and symbolic scene about women, then *Indigo's* menstruation as her entrance into puberty:

Where there is a woman there is magic. If there is a moon falling from her mouth, she is a woman who knows her magic, who share or not share her powers. A woman with a moon falling from her mouth, roses between her legs and tiara of Spanish moss, this woman is a consort of the spirits. (13)

*Indigo* is an especial girl, she is imaginative and creative, but she seldom speaks. She loves her dolls, she loves making dolls, and she decorates them as white people. As a black girl, she is not pleased with the way the white think of the black, therefore, in her imagination, she fantasizes being a white girl. *Miranda* is her beloved doll, *Indigo* talks to her all the time, the doll is like a confidante to *Indigo*. After her entrance into puberty, *indigo's* mother forces her to behave like an adult and give up her dolls. She hates growing up, since she thinks, it is hard to be a grown colored woman, and she does not want the same for her dolls, as a result, she intends to bury her dolls to prevent them from growing up:

I couldn't bear for them to grow up, I couldn't stand, I just couldn't. Mama, it's hard, isn't it? What's hard, Indigo?  
Being a grown colored woman is hard, ain't? just like you told me. Just cause I haveta grow up, my dolls don't haveta. I can save them. (47)

*Indigo* loves playing fiddle, but in the first place, she plays awfully. She likes the way she plays and does not accept an instructor, it symbolizes her novel and different life style, and she does not want to comply with the conventions around her. In the beginning, everybody does not appreciate the people revolutionizing, as they do not appreciate *Indigo's* fiddle playing at first. In spite of all the difficulties, she finds her way out of it.

Other sisters are experiencing their own especial journeys in life as well; all three choose art, they find their freedom in art. They are creators. *Sassafrass* pursues her family legacy, i.e. weaving. She experiences weaving as an expression of herself. She likes the way she is and does not like the way her boyfriend thinks of her as a black girl who must be prepared for sex. She once



shouts: “I am not about to sit heah and listen to a bunch of no account niggahs talk about black women; me and my sisters: like we was the same bought and sold at slave auction” (73).

*Cypress* who is following her passion i.e. dancing, moves to New York to be trained for dancing, her mother does not let her to be a dancer, since she thinks dance is for white people: “You’ve been standing round that ballet class, haven’t you? Ballet is for white girls; can’t you understand your ass is too big and your legs are too short, and you can’t afford all those shoes and special clothes...” (107).

When she dances, she is alive; when she dances, she is free. Her dance takes on the essence of struggle of colored American to survive their enslavement.

In this novel, nature, music, dancing, weaving, and female body are remarkably significant notions. Shange’s language is blowing like a breeze, babbling like a brook, and harmonizing with contents of the novel. It is what Helen Cixous calls “écriture feminine”. Shange writes herself out of the world men construct for women. She connects nature with female body and expresses how both of them are abused in a patriarchal and capitalist society.

When she talks about dance and a dancing woman’s body, she describes it as a female dance, a dance for discovering themselves, “a gender dance, a dance of ovaries and cervix uncovered and swelling, menses falling like a waterfall in a golden forest” (112).

In the other novel, the same thing is happening. Ravanipor’s language is connected with nature; she interrelates the moon and stars with woman’s body and tries to foreground her unique language. She utilizes the moon to express her characters’ spiritual transformations, *Ayene*, in particular.

*Ayene* likewise experiences a life journey apart from her nomad and other women in her nomad who are conventionally attached to their old roles, which are defined by the patriarchal society. In the nomad, the women have to work and earn money by dancing and fortune telling, but men do not work. The women’s ankles are swollen on account of too much dancing. Most of them get sick and die like *Ayene*’s mother.

*Ayene* desires to be settled and educated, she criticizes nomadic moving life style. She begrudges little girls who have notebooks and pencils and the ability to write, and she trades her bracelets for a notebook and a pencil. She envisions a sweet home with her lover *Manes*, “what was in her mind for many years, white houses, gardens full of flowers, her *Manes* sitting on the stairs writing...” (21).

*Ayene* is going to find herself, her identity, and her womanhood, as her name symbolizes; *Ayene* means mirror in Persian language, where human can see the true self. She disrespects the tribal regulations and undergoes many troubles to do what she believes.

As concisely pointed before, the Moon has a vital role in both novels, and both novelists utilize it to develop their leading characters’ spiritual transformations, side by side their journeys. *Ayene*, *Sassafrass*, *Cypress*, and *Indigo* have physical and spiritual completion, like the moon from the beginning until the full moon. The word “moon” is repeated in both novels reminding the female energy which is connected to the energy of nature.

The Moon, being the symbol of feminine power and dominance, has a presentable role in the ancient mythology and cultures. In Greek mythology, *Selene* is the goddess of the moon, and she is depicted as a woman who is either horseback riding or in a chariot drawn by a pair of winged steeds (universavvy.com).

Being a powerful and free goddess, *Selene* symbolizes the non-conformist women in both novels. The non-conformist women who are experiencing their physical and spiritual evolving, suffer from being objectified in both novels. As discussed before, *Ayene* has to work for her family

like other women in her nomad; the ones who work as dancers, have to wear their best clothes, jewelry, and make-up so that they seem appealing to the audience who is watching them. The more they enjoy, the more they pay. The upshot of this action is objectifying female body for male pleasure.

The notion of scopophilia denotes pleasure in looking according to Oxford dictionary; to elaborate, it derives from what known as “male gaze”. According to Anne Eaton in her “Feminist Philosophy of Art,” male gaze means:

“The male gaze” refers to the androcentric attitude of an image; that is, its depiction of the world, and in particular of women, in terms of male or masculine interests, emotions, attitudes, or values. More specifically, ‘the male gaze’ usually refers to the sexually objectifying attitude that a representation takes toward its feminine subject matter, presenting her as a primarily passive object for heterosexual-male erotic gratification. (878)

Male gaze is not limited to literature only, it can be found in other media too, and above all, in the society. In the society, male gaze requires women to adorn themselves to be accepted in a patriarchal community, and also sets some standards for being a lovable and eligible lady.

In Shange’s novel, male gaze is also a recurrent theme. For example, when *Sassafrass*’ boyfriend and his friend are talking about her body, her sexual organs, and also other women that they sleep with. They regard female body as a means for their joy.

It is more complicated in *Cypress*’ case, since she is a dancer too, and she is always in relation with her body, its fitness, elegance, and movements. *Cypress*, herself is not satisfied with the way everybody beholds a woman’s body, and the way a woman is recognized; to clarify, a woman is recognized provided that she is with an “and”, “women couldn’t come as women but only as women and: women and jewelry and attitude and talent and ennui and good taste and body” (115).

The last but not least issue that is going to be debated is women’s art and aesthetics. As stated before, both writers accentuate female art and creating in their works. The fact is more conspicuous in Shange’s novel. She follows art in her three characters, and likewise, she adds many recipes for preparing food and cookies which are the legacies of the “Gullah culture”. Gullah people are the descendants of Central and West Africans who come from different ethnic and social groups. These people are so much fond of music, art, and craft. Throughout the novel, many references to African music and art, for example, weaving and dancing can be traced.

Gullah people emphasize on the potential for symbiosis between human life and natural world, they respect nature and own many supernatural stories about human and natural connection. The other significant feature of the Gullahs’ life is cooking. As food is the inseparable part of human gatherings and celebrations, Gullah people have many various recipes which are passed down to them from their ancestors (gullahgeecheecorridor.org).

African women are more involved in cooking tradition, since throughout their enslavement, they try to maintain their creativity. They concoct many types of ingredients to cook and come up with useful recipes.

Shange devotes some considerable parts of her novel to cooking recipes to express women’s intelligence and contributes in women’s aesthetics and narratives which are disregarded for many centuries. According to her in her interview with Henry Blackwell, she writes about:

"those parts of reality that are ours, those things about our bodies, the cycles of our lives that have been ignored for centuries" (136).

She restores the reality and legacy of both women and African people at the same time. The epistemology of these recipes indicates that they are not only some directions for preparing food but as Patricia E. Clark suggests in her article "Archiving Epistemologies and the Narrativity of Recipes in Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*".

These recipes, many containing centuries-old information about the traditional preparation of different foods throughout several regions in Africa, crossed the Atlantic along with the slave cargo during the three-hundred-year period of the transatlantic trade. Along the way, African women modified their traditional recipes to make up for the lack of some of their native foods and to put to use the unfamiliar indigenous and European ingredients, cooking utensils, and methods they encountered in the New World. (150)

The aforementioned notion of social constructionism which fossilizes some statements like women cannot be geniuses and does not consider them having aesthetic capabilities and potential leads some writers and feminist activists to recollect women's aesthetic works in spite of the fact that the fields like cooking, weaving, and embroidery do not count as fine arts, in patriarchal definitions, but regarded as just some crafts. Therefore, Shange's collection of recipes is an archive, marks women's literacy and their approach and technologies (Clark 151).

Dominating the society as the holder of aesthetics, men control systems of privilege and oppression using the aesthetics and narratives. Depriving women of having literature, narrative, art, and aesthetics results in their oppression, as they do not have any voice and agency in the society.

Ravanipor does the same as Shange for recognizing women's art and aesthetics. *Ayene* who is enduring many difficulties to find herself, her talent, and her voice among many overpowering and opposite voices, becomes an artist and creates a world of her own. From the beginning of the novel, writing and creating are two crucial issues. Notwithstanding the fact that the reader faces *Manes*, a male character, as a writer in the first place, his central role as the symbol of a long-lost desire, talent, and passion in *Ayene's* mind, who incites her riot and encourages her to pursue her dreams, is regarded as creating as well.

As the novel is being developed as a metafiction, the presence of a female writer as the creator and the interferer in the story is not only a technique of compiling a book, but it is also laying stress on the necessity of the women's writing which grants her the voice in the society.

### **Conclusion:**

In comparison with *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*, *The Gypsy by the Fire* is more embittered. Its author depicts more horrible and morbid incidents which happen to the characters. Her themes are revolution against hegemony of men, poverty, desperation, misery, and more noticeable, women's self-awareness and accomplishment alongside harmony with nature. Throughout the novel, men have the dominant subjectivity which represents the same situation in the society. Although *Ayene* is the leading character, the writer too exhibits other women's difficulties, for instance, some widows, *Ayene's* mother, and the face-burnt woman. Violence, polygamy, and uneducation are other points that can be noticed in Ravanipor's novel.

Shange as a black female writer who is developing some stories about women, whose rights are established in a developed country, does not have to talk about some heated issues in comparison to a writer like Ravanipor who writes in a third-world country.

## References

- Abrams, M.H. *A glossary Literary Terms*. Canada: Wadsworth, 2009.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *Second sex*, translated by Sheila Malovany-chevallier, Vintage Publication, 2011.
- Bertens, Hans. *Literary Theory: The Basics*. London; Routledge, 2001.
- Clark, Patricia. "Archiving Epistemologies and the Narrativity of Recipes in Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*." *Callaloo* (2007): 150-162.
- Clark, Timothy. *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a threshold*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2015.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, translated by David Wills, The University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Driscoll, Kari, and Eva Hoffmann. *What Is Zoopetics?* Springer Nature, 2018.
- Eaton, A.W. "Feminist Philosophy of Art." *Philosophy Compass* (2008):873–893.
- Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: a critical introduction*, translated by Maryam Alemzade, Tehran: Cultural Institute, 2012.
- Gullah Geechee*. www.Gullahgeecheecorridor.org. Accessed 7 August 2018.
- Heidegger, Martin. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, translated by. W. McNeill and N.Walker Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Lundblad, Michael. *Animalities: Literary and Cultural Studies Beyond the Human*. Edinburgh University Press, 2017.
- Miri, Afsane. "Critical Discourse on Moniru Ravanipor's *The Gypsy by the Fire*." *Stylistics Quarterly in Persian Prose and Poetry* (2012): 79-90.
- Moonesan, Farzane. "Mythological Meaning in Moniru Rvanipor's works." *Mythological and Mystical Literature quarterly* (2014): 303-337.
- Ntozake Shange*. www.officialNtozakeshange.com. Accessed 21 August 2018.
- Phillips, Dana. "Introduction: Special issue on Animal Studies and Ecocriticism." *Safundi The Journal of South African American Studies* (2010).
- Rando, David. "The cat's Meo: Ulysses, Animals, and the Veterinary Gaze." *James Joyce Quarterly* (2009).
- Ravanipor, Moniru. *The Gypsy by the Fire*. Tehran: Markaz Publication, 1999.
- Shange, Ntozake. *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*. New York: St. Martin's press, 1982.
- Shange, Ntozake. Interview by Henry Blackwell. *Black American Literature Forum*. 1979. 134-138.
- Slovic, Scott. "Introduction: Animality and Ecocriticism." *World literature Studies* (2014): 1-5.
- Taslimi, Ali. *Statements in Contemporary Literature of Iran*. Tehran: Ameh Book Publication, 2009.
- Toadvine, Ted. "Naturalism, Estrangement, and Resistance: On the lived Senses of Nature." *Springer International Publishing* (2017).
- Tubbs, Nigel. *History of Western Philosophy*. England: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2009.
- Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Universavvy*. www.univesavvy.com. Accessed 15 September 2018.
- Verne, Donald Philip. *The history of Philosophy*. United States: Northwestern University Press, 2008.
- Warren, Karren. "Karen Warren's Ecofeminism". *Ethics & the Environment* (2002).
- Waugh, Patricia. *The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London, New York: Routledge, 1984.

Wicks, Robert. *Modern French Philosophy*. London: One world, 2003.  
Wolfe, Cary. *What is Posthumanism?* University of Minnesota Press, 2009.