

ENVIRONMENTAL RETERRITORIALIZATION IN LINDA HOGAN'S NOVEL, *POWER*

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*“Mystery is a form of Power”
(Power)*

Linda Hogan's novel, *Power*, published in 1998, begins with this epilogue. As a writer, Hogan opposes the western ideological constructs of nature, by giving prominence to the mysteries in nature. She belongs to the group of reinhabitory writers. Gary Snyder, in his book, *A Place in Space*, defined reinhabitory writers as “people who come out of the industrial societies and then start to turn back to the land, back to place” (190). Such people maintain an intimate relation with nature and believe in the interdependence of all living things in that place. The works of Hogan, the Native American Chickasaw writer, focus on Native American communities and their connection to nature, spirituality and cultural identity. Her mixed blood origin and her acquaintance with the dominant white culture and the American Indian culture give her a double perspective, which is reflected in her works. She spent her childhood days in Colorado and Germany. Her longing to be part of life in her native Oklahoma is fulfilled through her fictional narratives.

Reterritorialization is an attempt to overcome the cultural alienation and to retrieve and re-establish the lost identity. Physical, emotional and cultural dislocation result in the loss of self and traditions. According to Donelle Dreese, “Environmental reterritorialization involves writers who position themselves in natural settings in order to reinhabit a landscape or place that is

intrinsic to their philosophies of being in the world”(19). Hogan, through her fictional characters, emphasizes the relationship between human beings and the natural world and attempts to retrace the lost self and cultural traditions.

In the novel, *Power*, Hogan tells the story of the Taiga tribe living in the wild lands of Florida. The life of Taiga land and its people is given through the perspective of a sixteen-year old girl, Omishto, who comes from the city to live in the wilderness with her Aunt Ama. The meaning of the word “Omishto” in Taiga language is “the one who watches” (4). She becomes a witness to the mysterious events that take place in the Taiga land. Omishto decides to spend her days with Aunt Ama, a character who lives in close relationship with nature and its beings. The novel begins with the description of a hurricane, which transforms the entire physical world and also the lives of these characters. Ama speaks Taiga language, knows old stories and traditions and can track animals. In Omishto's words, “She can track anything. She hears animals and smells them” (165). After the hurricane, she tracks a panther and kills it. Omishto struggles to explain this mysterious act of Ama as “the panther is important to the old people. For thousands of years, they are connected to it, intricately, intimately” (166). She somehow manages to understand this shocking act on the part of her aunt as a noble sacrifice to save Taiga land and its inhabitants: “It is a sacrifice, It all is .This whole thing” (71). The conflict in laws of the white world and the native world is brought out during the trial of Ama. The court of the white man sets Ama free, while the jury of old men banishes Ama from her land and asks her to go for four years of walking. The novel ends with Omishto taking up the role of Ama Eaton and deciding to live in the Taiga land. Omishto identifies herself with the land and nature and she is heard saying, “I am the land , I am Ama and the Panther” (173).

Hogan, the activist who is sensitive to environmental concerns, maintains a kind of physical, moral and spiritual existence with nature. She stresses the need to maintain an intimate spiritual connection with nature, which she argues, is essential for the sustenance of the living world. For Hogan, the environment is an extension of self. She challenges the western constructs of nature and its elements. Hogan interprets the symbolic significance of animals, trees and other elements of nature. The tree Metheusaleh, which is described in the novel, is related to Taiga life and has symbolic significance. Animals and other elements of nature act as intermediaries between this world and the next world. She uses these symbols to dismantle the existing western notions, which, according to her, is destructive for nature. As Ama puts it, “Snakes are a sign of God” (39). They are the symbol of regeneration and not wicked or evil. “Oni,” which is the Taiga word for “hurricane,” is “like god,” and is not destructive.

Hogan's characters maintain a spiritual relationship with the land. According to Snyder, living an inhibitory life is not only a physical action, but also a spiritual and moral choice. He defines spirituality as “a feeling of gratitude to all; taking responsibility for your own acts; keeping contact with the sources of energy that flow into your own life” (188). Through this spiritual relationship with land and its beings, Hogan's characters show respect for the wisdom it contains, which is called terrestrial intelligence. As Omishto believes, “the animals have eyes that see us. The birds, trees, everything knows what we do” (52), and Aunt Ama “can read the tracks of all the animals. She has a different intelligence than the rest of us” (133). The respect for such a terrestrial intelligence is essential, according to Hogan, to maintain a balanced relationship between the human world and world of nature. Hogan, as Dreese comments in her

book *Ecocriticism*, “demonstrates that by studying this form of intelligence, we can learn how to take better care of our environment and one another” (73).

Hogan also uses creation stories and origin stories to dismantle the western notions of creation and birth. Through Omishto's words, Hogan retraces the old stories, and connects the past with the present. The passage reads: “This was how the world created,” Ama told me once, out of wind and lashing rain. “We were blown together by a storm in the first place”. It was all created out of storms” (43). Taigas call the Panther “Sisa;” their elder sister. The birth of the Sisa is another creation story in the novel. “There is a hole in the sky, the way the old stories say about the hole pecked by a bird, a hole through which our older sister, the panther Sisa is what we call her in our Taiga language entered this world” (55). From an ecofeminist point of view, it can be said that Omishto identifies Ama and herself with the Panther, when she says, “Sisa like the woman who wears boy's old shoe because she is poor, we are diminished and endangered” (69). Hogan brings together women and animal imagery to expose the suffering injustices against women and non-human natural world.

Hogan, as an environmental activist, also demonstrates stewardship for the earth. She stresses the need to protect earth's creatures and to heal the gap between the human and the non human world. As she muses in her book, *Dwellings*, “Caretaking is the utmost spiritual and physical responsibility of our time and perhaps that stewardship is the solution to mystery of what we are” (115). Hogan reterritorializes the lost environment by challenging the destructive western constructs of nature, by decentering human beings, and placing them at the guest table along with other living beings.

Works Cited

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