Exploring the development of Female Subjectivity through Eco-Feminism: An Analysis of the film *Out of Africa*

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Abstract

Eco-feminism has creatively merged feminism and environmental protection, highlighting the close connection between women and nature. While there are internal disagreements, eco-feminism emphasizes women's liberation and environmental protection as intertwined goals. The development of eco-feminism is linked to the awakening of female self-awareness, which provides a foundation for environmental efforts. The film *Out of Africa* depicts the protagonist's self-discovery in the natural environment, inspiring viewers to reflect on its relationship with nature. Ultimately, achieving ecological balance requires equal cooperation between genders and a new model of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

Keywords

1. Introduction

1.1   Background of the Research

Eco-feminist theory, a fusion of ecology and feminism, represents a crucial interdisciplinary research theme. Eco-feminism addresses the intertwined oppression of nature and women, highlighting their mutual connections. Ecological theory opposes human control and exploitation of nature, advocating for equal treatment of all species on Earth, fostering care and protection of the environment. Feminist theory opposes patriarchy and the male-dominated binary that heavily oppresses and subjugates women, urging for equal dialogue and increased communication between genders to free women from marginalization and to establish their subjectivity in relation to men. "Patriarchy is not only the root of women's issues but also the root of ecological problems" (Luo & Xie, 2004). From this perspective, ecology and feminism share common theoretical foundations and demands, leading to the emergence of Eco-feminism through their integration. This became one of the most significant theoretical developments in the third wave of feminism. Rosemary Radford Ruether emphasized the necessity of combining these movements, aiming for a new society and value system based primarily on pure economic relationships (Jardins, 2012).

The biographical film *Out of Africa* is adapted from the eponymous novel by Danish author Karen Blixen. The protagonist of the film is Karen herself, who arrived in Africa in 1914 as a white plantation owner.

Historical records indicate that Britain invaded Kenya in the late 19th century, establishing the so-called "East Africa Protectorate." By 1920, Kenya had become a full-fledged British colony, and its people were subjected to humiliating colonial rule. The British government aggressively seized land from African residents, displacing indigenous people from their ancestral homes into barren "reserves" and imposing heavy taxes on them. Concurrently, the British government encouraged white immigration to Kenya, granting these immigrants cheap or even free land and various legal political rights, thus placing them in a superior, dominant position on African soil. Many Africans were forced to work as cheap labor in the "White Highlands," barely sustaining their livelihoods.

In this social context, Karen enters the chaotic environment of Kenya to gain aristocratic status by running a coffee plantation with her husband. She is not only a representative of the aristocracy but also a white plantation owner, or essentially, a colonizer in Africa. The film, narrated from Karen's perspective, uses a retrospective approach to depict the Kenyan landscape, tenderly recounting the past through the lens of her caring and compassionate heart. It is through the ecological inspiration of the African land, her deep interactions with the Kikuyu people, and her transcendent love with Denys that Karen's female subjectivity progresses from suppression to budding, from development to the eventual realization of independence and transcendence.

1.2   Motivation and Significance of the Research

This paper chooses to explore the development and presentation of female subjectivity in films (using *Out of Africa* as an example) from an Eco-feminist perspective, primarily for the following reasons.

Firstly, from a theoretical perspective, Eco-feminism is an emerging interdisciplinary field, and research analyzing female subjectivity in films through the framework of Eco-feminism is still very scarce. Since the 1960s, humanity has faced an escalating ecological crisis, and gender issues have also become increasingly prominent. Individuals from various fields are contributing to environmental protection and feminism within their professional domains. Concurrently, films focusing on natural ecology and feminism have begun to emerge. Such film creations, reflecting the themes of the times, are significant and worthy of further scholarly research and exploration. Investigating the development of female subjectivity in the biographical film *Out of Africa* from an Eco-feminist perspective can provide a new angle for related feminist film theory research, particularly addressing the lack of Eco-feminist film studies in China.

Secondly, from a practical perspective, examining film works from an Eco-feminist viewpoint holds certain practical significance in advocating for environmental protection and gender equality. Researching Eco-feminism in film can lead people to rethink the relationship between nature and humanity, as well as human relationships. In *Out of Africa*, the protagonist Karen is inspired by the African land, developing a profound love for it. The pristine African environment provides a favorable setting for the development of Karen's subjectivity. Viewers are unconsciously drawn to the vast and majestic ecological landscapes and the "natural" human existence depicted in the film, prompting reflections on the natural environment and humanity in contemporary civilized society. This process constantly reminds people to further distance themselves from anthropocentrism, creating a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, as well as among humans themselves. Eco-feminism has profound practical significance. With the continuous advancement of science and technology, "the development and application of science and technology not only cause tensions between society and individuals, and divergences between social development and human development, but also lead to the alienation of the relationship between humans and nature." (Wang, 2006) In today's society, with the improvement of women's rights protection laws, the convening of global women's summits, and the continuous development of feminist theory, women's issues have become a focal

point of global attention. However, it is undeniable that gender discrimination and deep-seated stereotypes about the sexes still exist worldwide. Similarly, humanity faces the severe problem of environmental degradation, with many developed countries prioritizing their own interests over the global ecological environment, highlighting the underlying issues in human thought. Anthropocentric views of nature will only further exacerbate the ecological crisis.

Eco-feminism is both a cultural trend and a social movement; it is both a value system and a political analysis framework (Wang & Li, 2010). Theoretically, this paper discusses the relationship between the development of Eco-feminism and female subjectivity and provides a detailed analysis of the audiovisual language of the film Out of Africa, exploring the reasons and process of the protagonist Karen's ecological thinking and subjectivity development. Practically, this paper, through in-depth analysis of the film's ecological elements, calls for humanity to jointly build a green society of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature on the basis of gender equality.

1.3 Film Overview

Out of Africa is originally an autobiographical novel by Danish writer Isak Dinesen, which meticulously recounts her life experiences in Africa. In 1985, renowned American director Sydney Pollack adapted it into the eponymous film Out of Africa. The film won seven Oscars in 1986, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Cinematography, Best Music, Best Sound, and Best Art Direction, captivating audiences worldwide.

Out of Africa is a biographical film with a rich ecofeminist undertone. It narrates the story of the protagonist Karen, who in 1913 married Danish nobleman Baron Bror Blixen for financial reasons and followed her husband to Kenya, Africa, where they embarked on a 17-year journey running a coffee farm. Throughout this process, Karen continually ventures, explores, and profoundly connects with the land. She also develops a stirring love story with an English aristocrat, Denys Finch Hatton, whom she meets in Africa. The film frequently employs wide and aerial shots to fully showcase the primitive and rugged natural landscapes of the African continent. The use of a flashback narrative technique and Karen's somber and low-pitched voice-over set a poignant tone for the film. Through these slowly unfolding images, the film intricately depicts Karen's transformation from a naive, dependent girl into a nature-loving, strong, brave, equality-advocating, resilient, and graceful independent woman, crafting an epic tale of female growth.

This paper will study the construction process of the female subjectivity of the protagonist Karen in the film *Out of Africa* from an Eco-feminist perspective. By closely analyzing the film's audiovisual language and storyline, it explores the three stages Karen undergoes in developing her subjectivity -- suppression, emergence, and maturity -- and her connection with the ecological environment, providing a deeper examination of Eco-feminist concepts through the development of female subjectivity in the film.

1.4 Innovation of Research

1.4.1 In-depth and Creative Exploration of Eco-feminism in Film

This research delves deeply and creatively into eco-feminism within the context of film, combining it with the analysis of female subjectivity. It explores the theoretical and practical implications behind these concepts. Given the relative scarcity of research on eco-feminism in the film domain, this study provides new perspectives and methodologies for examining eco-feminism in cinema.

1.4.2   Diversification of Perspectives on Out of Africa

This research enhances the multi-faceted perspectives on the film *Out of Africa*, enriching the extended significance of the work. It also further examines the eco-feminist ideas present in Karen Blixen's real-life Northern frontier and the film's narrative.

2.   Literature review

2.1   patriarchy

The term "patriarchy" derives from the Greek language, meaning "rule of the father," and refers to a male-centered social system where men hold higher power and authority within the family and society, while women are typically in subordinate positions. This system maintains male dominance through laws, cultural norms, customs, and social structures, while limiting women's rights and opportunities. Political theorists of the 19th and 20th centuries viewed patriarchy as a stage following the "matriarchal" system of primitive communal societies. Key theoretical perspectives on the critique of patriarchy are as follows:

In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir argues that patriarchy maintains male dominance by positioning women as the "Other," or the opposite of the male-centered norm. The identity and role of women are defined as supplementary or contrary to men, thus stripping women of their subjectivity and independence (Beauvoir, 2011). In a patriarchal society, women's existence and value are marginalized and suppressed by a male-centric social structure. Beauvoir contends that male social status and power are consolidated by demeaning women to a secondary and subordinate status. She emphasizes that women need to transcend traditional gender roles to seek their own independence and self-fulfillment, breaking free from the restrictions imposed by a male-dominated social structure. In *Sexual Politics* (1970), Kate Millett introduces the concept of sexual politics, arguing that gender inequality is not merely a result of individual behavior but a product of social institutions and culture (Millett, 1971). Millett posits that sexual inequality in a patriarchal society pervades various aspects, including family, workplace, education, and culture, affecting women's social status and rights. Marxist feminist scholars, such as Isabel Almeida and others, link patriarchy with the capitalist economic system, analyzing how economic exploitation intersects with gender oppression. They argue that capitalist economies exploit women through unpaid domestic labor and low-wage work, while patriarchy reinforces this economic inequality through social and cultural mechanisms. They suggest that male economic dominance is intertwined with capitalist economic exploitation. Economic and gender inequalities are inseparable, with patriarchy and capitalism together forming a system of oppression against women.

In the early 20th century, as male-dominated societies solidified and male subjectivity continued to develop, women's subjectivity gradually eroded in domestic labor. Women began to shape themselves according to male consciousness and thinking patterns, losing their unique cultural perspectives. The rise of the feminist movement became a powerful weapon against the patriarchal worldview, and the enhancement of female subjectivity also relied on the achievements of the feminist movement.

2.2   Female Subjectivity

"Subjectivity refers to the individual's free, conscious understanding and grasp of their internal autonomy in relation to self and other. Subjective consciousness is a manifestation of the essential human force." (Li, 1994) The enhancement of subjectivity enables individuals to actively perceive and transform the world. For women, the development of female subjectivity generally unfolds in two stages: equality under uniformity

and equality under difference.

Following the first wave of feminism and extending into the 1960s, renowned feminist theorist Betty Friedan, in her seminal work *The Feminine Mystique*, incisively exposed the so-called "mystique of femininity" as merely a fantasy imposed on women by men. This fantasy adheres to women as men's status ascends, becoming a set of behavioral norms for women. The differences between genders lie solely in physiological sex, and such differences should not justify unequal status between men and women. "Women should transcend the roles of mother and wife, engage in more intellectual work, and boldly enter the public sphere to fully exercise their subjective agency, thereby dismantling the myth of the feminine mystique." (Friedan, 1963) This represents the first stage of female subjectivity development, advocating for equality under uniformity. The book caused a sensation in the U.S. and ignited the second wave of feminism.

As the feminist movement progressed through its two waves, female subjectivity continued to evolve. In her book *The Second Stage*, Betty Friedan acknowledged the unique aspects of female subjectivity. Women differ from men, possessing unique ways of thinking and perspectives on issues. It is more reasonable to emphasize female subjectivity based on respect for these differences (Friedan, 1963). Friedan also pointed out that men are victims under patriarchy as well, burdened with significant family responsibilities, working hard for meager incomes, and struggling under masculine norms. She called for men to join the feminist movement, arguing that the movement aims for a better way of life that benefits all humanity. Men and women must unite to challenge unjust social systems and discard inequitable cultural frameworks to pursue a more equal and harmonious society.

The evolution of female subjectivity in the feminist waves has transitioned from "de-differentiation" to "recognizing and respecting differences," marking a milestone in breaking the binary gender opposition. Only by acknowledging gender differences, rejecting complete imitation of men by women, and affirming women's modes of thinking, language mechanisms, and behavioral characteristics can we better view male societal models from an egalitarian perspective. This approach allows exploration of fundamental aspects of human existence from a female perspective, thereby constructing a female philosophy.

2.3   Eco-Feminism

Eco-feminism is a social and political movement theory that emerged in the late 1970s in the West, combining feminism and ecology to reveal and combat the connections between the oppression of women and environmental degradation. With the rise of ecological crises and feminist movements, Eco-feminism has gradually attracted scholarly attention and research. This article reviews the origins and development of Eco-feminism as well as its main theoretical viewpoints.

2.3.1   Origins and Development

French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne was the first to introduce the term "Eco-feminism" in her 1974 work *Feminism or Death*. She called for women to unite in defending their interests and protecting the environment. In her book *Feminism or Death*, d'Eaubonne also used the term "Eco-feminism" and argued that the roots of women's oppression and the increasing destruction of nature are both consequences of patriarchy. She believed that only through Eco-feminism could both women and nature be fundamentally liberated. She also urged all women to bravely participate in the struggle for women's rights while opposing activities that excessively harm the environment and advocating for the protection of both nature and women.

Carolyn Merchant stated, "The Eco-feminist movement remains a unified movement, with cross-pollination and borrowing among different schools of thought. It encompasses a broad concept of

reproduction, including both the biological and social reproduction of human life and the proliferation of life on Earth." (Carolyn, 1992)

The film *Out of Africa* was released in 1985, during a period when Eco-feminism was rapidly developing in the United States throughout the 1980s. Eco-feminism became an important academic and social movement. Scholars such as Yvonne Gebara and Mary Daly explored Eco-feminism in depth during this time, advancing its theoretical development.

2.3.2　Main Theoretical Foundations and Viewpoints

(1)　Non-Anthropocentrism

Non-anthropocentrism is a crucial theoretical foundation of eco-feminism. It opposes anthropocentrism, advocating for the intrinsic value and rights of all living beings. Non-anthropocentrism rejects placing humans at the center of the natural world and asserts that all life forms have inherent value. Plumwood notes, "Anthropocentrism is a viewpoint that sees humans as the center of the universe, ignoring the intrinsic value of other beings (Plumwood, 1993)." Eco-feminists argue that this perspective is one of the roots of environmental destruction and ecological crises. Non-anthropocentrism emphasizes the value of biodiversity, asserting that every species is crucial to the stability of ecosystems. Warren states, "Biodiversity is the cornerstone of ecosystem stability and health, and every species has its own value and significance." (Warren, 2000) Eco-feminism advocates for respecting and protecting biodiversity and opposes the exploitation of natural resources centered around human interests.

In the 1970s and 1980s, with the rise of Eco-feminism, Non-anthropocentrism rapidly developed. Scholars such as Greta Gaard and Val Plumwood emphasized the importance of challenging anthropocentrism by revealing the connection between gender oppression and environmental degradation. Gaard notes, "The oppression of women and the destruction of nature share a common root, namely the combination of anthropocentrism and patriarchy." (Gaard, 1993) Plumwood adds, "Only by challenging anthropocentrism can we achieve true ecological justice and gender equality." (Plumwood, 1993)

Since the 1990s, the theory of non-anthropocentrism within Eco-feminism has been further deepened. Scholars have explored the application of non-anthropocentrism in various cultural and social contexts, proposing diverse practical approaches. For example, Mary Midgley presents a cross-cultural ethical perspective, emphasizing the wisdom and value of different cultures in addressing the relationship between humans and nature. Midgley states, "Different cultures have rich wisdom in dealing with the relationship between humans and nature. We need to draw on this wisdom to achieve global ecological balance." (Midgley, 1997)

(2)　Critique of Dualism

Dualism is one of the central targets of eco-feminist critique because it divides the world into mutually exclusive and opposing categories, creating relationships of dominance and subordination. Dualism refers to the division of the world into two opposing categories, such as male and female, culture and nature, reason and emotion. This division often comes with a hierarchical relationship of dominance and subordination. Plumwood points out, "Dualism is a process that transforms differences into hierarchies, placing one side in a dominant position and marginalizing the other." (Plumwood, 1993) This structure is evident not only in gender relations but also in the relationship between humans and nature.

Eco-feminists argue that dualism is one of the fundamental causes of gender oppression and environmental destruction. Their critique primarily involves opposing the dualism between humans and nature, opposing gender dualism, and revealing the intersectionality of dualistic structures. Eco-feminists

oppose the dichotomy between humans and nature, arguing that this division overlooks the interdependence between the two. Warren states, "The opposition between humans and nature is at the root of the ecological crisis. We need to recognize that humans are a part of nature, not superior to it." (Warren, 2000) Eco-feminism advocates breaking down this opposition by establishing harmonious, symbiotic relationships to achieve ecological balance. Eco-feminists also critique the gender dualism, which they believe leads to the marginalization and oppression of women. Daly notes, "Gender dualism reinforces male dominance and female subordination, hindering the development of gender equality." (Daly, 1978) They advocate dismantling this dualism to promote gender equality and women's liberation. Moreover, Eco-feminists reveal the intersectionality of dualism, asserting that gender oppression intersects with other forms of oppression, such as race and class. Shiva states, "Oppressions based on gender, race, and class are intertwined, and we cannot view any one form of oppression in isolation." (Shiva, 1989) They emphasize addressing various forms of oppression from an intersectional perspective.

(3) The Connection Between Female Oppression and Environmental Destruction

Eco-feminists highlight the interconnection and symbiotic relationship between female oppression and environmental destruction, which is a core theory of Eco-feminism. They argue that there is a profound structural link between female oppression and environmental degradation. This link is primarily reflected in the social structures of domination and control, economic exploitation and environmental destruction, and the cultural symbolism of nature as feminine.

Eco-feminists believe that the social structures of domination and control are a common root cause of both female oppression and environmental destruction. Plumwood elaborates on this relationship in her book Feminism and the Mastery of Nature. She writes, "Both women and nature are seen as objects to be controlled and conquered. This perspective is rooted in Western dualistic thinking, leading to systemic oppression of both women and nature." (Plumwood, 1993)

Eco-feminists also reveal the connection between capitalist economic exploitation and environmental destruction. Shiva, analyzing the Green Revolution in India, states, "The Green Revolution not only led to the depletion of soil and water resources but also deprived women of their traditional roles in agriculture, making them more impoverished and marginalized." (Shiva, 1989) This exploitation not only causes environmental harm but also exacerbates poverty and inequality among women.

Additionally, eco-feminists critique the cultural symbolism of nature as feminine. Griffin points out in Woman and Nature that "In Western culture, nature is often depicted as female and viewed as something to be conquered and controlled." (Griffin, 1978) This symbolism reinforces the dominative relationship between women and nature, leading to dual oppression of both.

(4) Ethics of Care

The Ethics of Care, as an important theoretical perspective within eco-feminism, emphasizes the centrality of care, relationships, and responsibility in moral life.

The Ethics of Care focuses on the interdependent relationship between humans and nature, arguing that moral behavior should be based on the specific relationships within an ecological system rather than abstract principles. As Held puts it, "The ethics of care focuses on concrete relationships and situations rather than abstract moral principles." (Held, 2006) The relationship between humans and nature is a complex network of interdependence, where each individual's actions impact others and the entire ecosystem. Therefore, moral judgments must take this interdependence into account rather than relying solely on universal principles or norms.

The Ethics of Care also emphasizes the importance of emotions and compassion in moral judgment, advocating for empathy and care towards the natural world. Slote observes, "Compassion and emotion are indispensable elements of the ethics of care, as they guide people in making more moral choices." (Slote, 2007) This view highlights that when interacting with the natural environment, individuals should adopt an attitude of compassion and concern, addressing the suffering and needs of the natural world to engage in responsible and benevolent actions. Emotions are not only a bond between humans and nature but also a crucial motivator for moral action.

Additionally, the Ethics of Care advocates for individuals to attend to the needs of the natural world and respond actively to environmental destruction. Tronto emphasizes, "The ethics of care requires us to respond to the needs of nature, which is a relationship-based responsibility." (Tronto, 1993) Within this framework, humans have a responsibility not only to care for each other's well-being but also to ensure the health and stability of the natural world. This sense of responsibility necessitates that people not only avoid causing environmental harm but also actively participate in environmental protection and restoration efforts.

3.   Methodology

3.1   Literature Review

During the research period, extensive literature will be reviewed, including works by scholars from the West and China. This involves studying existing critiques of the film *Out of Africa* and exploring newer research approaches to provide fresh interpretations.

3.2   Theoretical and Audiovisual Analysis

After studying the theories of eco-feminism and female subjectivity, key viewpoints will be summarized and organized. The analysis will include a detailed examination of the film's plot and audiovisual language, as well as investigating the historical context of the film's production and narrative. The relationship between theory and audiovisual elements will be analyzed to further validate the research findings.

3.3   Qualitative Analysis:

The information and data obtained will be processed using methods such as induction, analysis, and deduction. This approach aims to explore the essence of the subject matter from surface-level observations to deeper insights.

4.   Suppression Period of Female Subjectivity

In the film *Out of Africa*, Karen's female consciousness is initially suppressed while she is still living in Denmark. At the beginning of the film, Karen's desperate desire to leave Denmark is illustrated through a significant conversation with Baron Bror Blixen. She says: "I've got no life at all. They wouldn't teach me anything useful, and now I've failed to marry. You know the punishment for that. Miss Dinesen's at home. And you've gone through all your money. You're off seducing the servant girls." This indicates that Karen's decision to go to Africa was, in essence, an escape from the humiliation she faced in a patriarchal society. In their conversation, Karen is mocked by Baron Blixen for having lost her virginity. She then attempts to attract Baron Blixen with her considerable wealth to persuade him to marry her, seeking the title of Baroness as proof of her social status. Karen tries in various ways to escape the rejection and discrimination faced by unmarried women who are not virgins in high society. In early 20th-century European society, women still

needed to rely on men to attain noble status. It is evident that Denmark, and Europe at large, were shrouded in a rigid patriarchal system and materialistic values. The highly secular environment molded Karen into a woman who valued fame and vanity, a persona she herself seemed unable to tolerate. Her subjectivity was suppressed under patriarchal and capitalist systems, yet it was not lost. Her inner drive constantly urged her to leave Denmark and Europe. Ultimately, Karen seized the opportunity to leave her homeland and venture into the unknown, leveraging her family's wealth to win Baron Blixen's affection.

Even after arriving in Africa, Karen did not find peace amidst the sudden changes but instead felt more distressed and helpless. At the start of the film, after Karen and Baron Blixen hurriedly hold their wedding and move into their new home, Karen discovers that Baron Blixen, without consulting her, has turned the land originally intended for dairy farming into a coffee plantation, which leaves her frustrated and confused. Meanwhile, Baron Blixen, who is passionate about hunting, often stays away for days, leaving Karen alone at the farm. Shortly after their marriage, he departs for the front lines, leaving Karen to wait alone. All these circumstances force Karen to take initiative, manage the coffee plantation, build relationships with the Kikuyu people, and endure the solitude and loneliness on her own. This demonstrates that at this stage, Karen's female subjectivity remains suppressed by the patriarchal system, and she is compelled to make compromises under intense pressure. However, much like a spring that rebounds after compression, Karen's autonomy and subjectivity are waiting to be awakened by the vast and pristine African landscape.

5. Emergence of Female Subjectivity

5.1 Ecological Enlightenment of the African Land

The relationship between ecology and humanity parallels that between women and men. Upon her arrival in Africa, Karen is struck by the stark contrast between the harmonious African environment and the industrially polluted Europe, which inspires her to begin contemplating the relationship between humans and nature, sparking the emergence of her female subjectivity.

The most striking aspect for Karen upon arriving in Africa is the lush greenery and vast expanses of land. At the beginning of the film, accompanied by Karen's slow and graceful narration, the rhythmic rumble of the train, and the majestic Mozart piece Clarinet Concerto in A Major, K. 622, the screen presents the magnificent and expansive beauty of Kenya in East Africa. The continent, at an altitude of 1,800 meters, appears simple and stable. The Ngong Hills, with their steep terrain and rugged landscape, feature short trees hugging the ground, giving an impression of tranquility and gentleness. The clouds floating around the plateau are thick and majestic, drifting in pairs to distant horizons. At sunset, the settlement below occasionally sends up wisps of smoke, while the Ngong Hills are home to buffaloes, large-horned antelopes, and rhinos, with elephants leisurely strolling about and various antelopes grazing on the green fields. This picturesque and grandiose audiovisual imagery at the film's beginning communicates to the audience that in Africa, humanity is merely one element within the ecological system. Both humans and plants and animals live in harmony, following the natural rhythms of Africa, coexisting under the same clear blue sky.

Karen, from an upper-class European background, had not previously recognized that human development depends on the forces of nature within a materialistic society. The solemn, free, and noble African plateau quietly narrates that in this land, humans and nature are not hierarchical or mutually exclusive but are closely interconnected. With the wisps of smoke rising from the expansive grasslands, from the moment Karen first gazes upon Kenya's landscapes, she is captivated by a sacred force of nature. Gradually, she is enlightened by the African land, and the value and meaning of her existence as a woman begin to emerge within her consciousness.

5.2 Genuine Friendship with the Kikuyu People

In the film, Karen's love for the majestic African landscapes is matched by her affection for the indigenous people of Africa. Over the 17 years of her interactions with the Kikuyu people, her transition from a white landowner to a friend, from a colonial merchant to an opponent of colonialism, reflects the maturation of her subjectivity and embodies the humanistic care advocated by Eco-feminism.

In the late 19th century, Britain established the East African Protectorate in Kenya, encouraging European colonists to migrate and develop the economy. Similarly, Karen enters Africa as a white landowner, still embodying the blood of colonizers and the ways of the ruling class. Her relationship with the indigenous people is initially limited to the employer-employee or master-servant dynamic. At first, she moves into her new home in Savo and presents white gloves to each Kikuyu servant, communicating in a somewhat arrogant and offensive manner in English with Kikuyu chiefs who do not understand the language. However, Karen also begins to form a more affectionate and caring connection with the Kikuyu through her natural sympathy and rudimentary medical skills.

Early in the film, Karen feels compassion for a Kikuyu boy named Kamante. Kamante's lower legs are covered in pus-filled sores, continually festering and decaying, yet he remains expressionless with an air of stubbornness and resignation. The sight of Kamante's suffering shocks and saddens Karen deeply, prompting her to offer medical assistance to this poor boy. As a result, many sick Kikuyu people come to her door seeking treatment, and Karen warmly accepts and treats each of them. This indicates that Karen's relationship with the Kikuyu is progressively becoming more intimate, reflecting the care ethics advocated by Eco-feminism.

As Karen spends more time in Africa, her management of the coffee plantation becomes increasingly adept. During a war outbreak and her expedition to Lake Natron, her conversations with the Kikuyu follower Farah Aden allow her to feel the deep, inseparable bond between the African land and the Kikuyu people. This bond infuses Karen with vitality, deepening her understanding of her relationship with the Kikuyu. In one evening, as Karen sets up camp in the wilderness, she anxiously tells Farah Aden, "I may have got us lost." Farah Aden responds simply, "God is great, msabu." Karen, upon hearing this, gazes at the blazing firewood and smiles with relief, falling asleep peacefully. On another night, when Karen's camp is attacked by lions and despite her efforts to drive them away with a whip, she fails to save an ox from being savagely torn apart and is injured herself. In the tent, Farah Aden tends to Karen's wounds while saying, "Msabu's bleeding. She does not have this ox. This lion is hungry. He does not have this ox. This wagon is heavy. It doesn't have this ox. God is happy, msabu. He plays with us." Despite the dangers and challenges Karen faces on the expedition, Farah Aden's optimistic attitude towards natural forces repeatedly provides Karen with the strength and courage to overcome hardships. To Karen, Farah Aden represents bravery, independence, and an optimistic and open-hearted person. Farah Aden's attitude towards nature profoundly influences Karen, leading her to view every aspect of nature, including animals, as independent entities. The relationship between human subjectivity and nature's subjectivity relies on each other and develops together, reflecting the harmonious coexistence advocated by Eco-feminism. The non-anthropocentrism promoted by Eco-feminism calls for a reimagining of the world, viewing nature, humans, and society as a dialectical process of development (Yuan, 2008). Karen begins to appreciate the Kikuyu people's subjectivity and value, and their relationship evolves into a genuine friendship characterized by mutual admiration and support.

In the middle part of the film, Karen suffers from syphilis. After months of struggle with the disease, she recovers but loses her fertility. She then dedicates all her energy to her farm and the Kikuyu people, marking the true elevation of her self-awareness. She treats Kikuyu children as her own, establishing a school for them and teaching them English. Moreover, Karen immerses herself in coffee cultivation, working alongside

the Kikuyu in irrigation, weeding, and fertilizing, to the point of exhaustion by dinner time. Simultaneously, she allocates 500 acres of the 1,000 acres of land she purchased for the Kikuyu people to live on. Even when Karen leaves Africa penniless, she gifts her most cherished compass to Farah Aden, symbolizing their enduring and sincere friendship. Through this process, Karen truly learns to respect everyone, shedding her racial prejudices and engaging with others on equal terms, profoundly reflecting the equal and harmonious social environment emphasized by Eco-feminism.

6.   The Maturation of Female Subjectivity

6.1   The Romantic Love of Gender Convergence

Eco-feminist scholar Carolyn Merchant has proposed the concept of "relational ethics," which suggests that every individual possesses both masculine and feminine qualities. These qualities are social and cultural constructs. Merchant advocates for an integration of human power and natural power on the basis of gender equality and harmony between humans and nature, considering the equality between humans and non-human nature as well as between men and women (Sun, 2009). Her "relational ethics" emphasizes that the relationships between men and women and between humans and non-human nature are interdependent and mutually growing, respecting cultural and species diversity.

The film tells a sweeping love story between Karen and Denys. Their relationship is built on the foundation of equal cooperation, with each maintaining independence while relying on the other. Karen discovers her true self in love with Denys. They read together and share their insights, fly over the African landscapes together, and embark on long drives to track wild animals. Through their relationship, Karen learns to respect and achieve spiritual independence.

The film does not delve deeply into Denys Finch Hatton's personal background, but his rebellious spirit against European aristocratic society is evident through the calm and objective lens. Denys, who often plays Mozart on a gramophone, embodies his noble heritage and refined taste. When most white men eagerly went to fight in the Anglo-German War, Denys, with a furrowed brow, tells his friend Berkeley, "It's a silly argument between two spoiled countries." This shows Denys's deep recognition of the dominance of materialism and self-interest in industrialized European societies and his disappointment with the era's insatiable greed. In a way, Karen and Denys's reasons for leaving Europe are similar; both long for a pure land to realize their vision of a beautiful home.

The portrayal of Denys, a European man, in the film offers a deeper reflection on Eco-feminism. While Karen's identity as a woman is more closely associated with nature, Denys's intimate relationship with the environment is also noteworthy. Although Denys is a typical European aristocrat, his uniqueness lies in his rejection of male-dominated systems and his immersion in Africa's primal natural environment. He understands the land's seasonal cycles, flora, fauna, cultural nuances, and weather changes. In a scene where Karen encounters a lioness while hunting, Denys uses his knowledge of lion behavior to rescue her. He also observes how monkeys react to Mozart music and experiences Africa from a three-dimensional perspective with Karen in a plane. Denys has a deep emotional connection to the African land. As a European man, Denys's social and gender advantages surpass Karen's, yet his love for African ecology and its people far exceeds hers. From an Eco-feminist perspective, this prompts us to reflect on how both men and women are components of human society and ecological systems. Pursuing gender equality allows us to envision new models for male involvement in nature conservation, leveraging gender differences to collectively challenge patriarchal worldviews and liberate both women and nature.

Denys has a particular trait that is invaluable to Karen: his love for storytelling. In a Europe where the art

of listening has long been lost and people are agitated by desire, Denys often sits on a soft sofa by the fireplace, attentively listening to Karen's long stories. Karen, who loves to create stories, finds a profound connection with Denys, who loves to listen. This collaboration between a storyteller and a listener, two equal spiritual worlds merging, reaches the highest level of emotional connection. This embodies Carolyn Merchant's "relational ethics" of equal cooperation and mutual dependence between genders.

A memorable scene in the film is when Denys first takes Karen flying. Accompanied by grand music, Karen and Denys soar over the African plateau, viewing animals on the plains, crossing Lake Natron to admire its gem-like surface, and even flying through mountains to observe herds of buffalo grazing. As they hold hands in the sky, Karen's voice-over reflects, "Only in the sky do you gain complete freedom of the three-dimensional space; after enduring the long years of exile and yearning for home, you embrace the vastness of space... When I am in the plane, ascending and looking down, I realize: I have freed myself from the constraints of the ground and experience a great new discovery." The high-altitude experience Denys provides Karen offers her a new visual and cognitive perspective. Karen, seeing the world from a three-dimensional view, feels enlightened, declaring, "I understand everything now." Karen's inherent bravery and adventurous spirit, which Denys admires, create a mutual admiration between them.

Karen's previous marriage is based on money and power, while her relationship with Denys is built on spiritual independence and self-affirmation. More importantly, Karen and Denys's love challenges traditional views of male superiority and the patriarchal dichotomy, representing an ideal interaction between two independent individuals. Through her relationship with Denys, Karen learns respect, independence, and spiritual communication, further refining and maturing her sense of self.

6.2   Fighting Against Colonialism for the Kikuyu People

In the final part of the film, Karen repeatedly negotiates with European settlers to secure land for the native people, facing disappointment after disappointment while persistently arguing her case. Through her resistance against colonialism and defense of justice, Karen once again experiences a profound elevation of her self-awareness.

In the 1880s, Britain and Germany emerged as colonial powers, intensifying their competition for land in East Africa. Between 1886 and 1890, Britain and Germany signed treaties dividing East Africa, making Kenya a British colony. By 1895, Britain had formally established the East African Protectorate in Kenya. Subsequently, Britain encouraged a large influx of settlers into Kenya, selling the plundered African land to them. By 1914, British colonizers had seized approximately 1.8 million hectares of land. The indigenous people were displaced to barren "reserves" and were forced to work as cheap labor on white-owned farms, living in conditions akin to slavery (Wei, 2015). The invasion by British colonizers sparked resistance among the African communities, especially the Kikuyu. They protested land policies, labor laws, and various forms of racial discrimination. As the anti-colonial and labor strike movements escalated, Kenyans finally launched the "Mau Mau Uprising" in 1952 to fight against imperialism and colonialism. Kenya eventually gained independence in 1963.

At the end of the film, an accidental fire destroys Karen's coffee plantation, which she has managed for over a decade. Now penniless in Kenya, Karen continues to travel tirelessly, fighting for the Kikuyu people's right to their land. When the British government attempted to reallocate Kikuyu land to white settlers, Karen courageously defended the Kikuyu, even going so far as to kneel at the feet of the new governor, Sir Joseph, pleading with the white settlers not to occupy Kikuyu land. In this struggle against colonialism, Karen could not change the fact of Kenya's invasion, but she firmly stood with the indigenous people and devoted herself to protecting their way of life. At this point, Karen has grown into a strong, courageous, and just woman. Her

strong sense of self allows her to confront power bravely and defy the wishes of Western colonizers. She earns the profound respect of the African residents, the admiration of colonialists under the patriarchal system, and demonstrates the maturity of her self-awareness.

Eco-feminism opposes all forms of colonial activities. While Karen's initial entry into Africa still bears traces of a colonizer's mentality, by this time she has become a fierce opponent of European colonizers. Karen's experiences in the colony provides her with the ability to think independently and the courage to defend justice, further enhancing her self-awareness.

In Kenya's highlands, Karen experiences the harmony and beauty of the pristine natural environment. From Farah Aden, she learns to face difficulties with optimism and resilience. From Denys, she experiences both spiritual and physical liberation. Ultimately, through her anti-colonial struggle for the Kikuyu people, Karen achieves independence and transcendence of herself.

7.   Conclusion

Since the emergence of Eco-feminism, it has traversed a path full of twists and turns, creatively merging the feminist movement with environmental protection efforts and placing gender relations within the broader context of human-nature relationships. This unique perspective provides a novel vision and pathway for addressing both women's issues and environmental problems. Eco-feminism emphasizes the close connection between women and nature. Although there are internal disagreements within Eco-feminism regarding whether this connection should be strengthened, it is undeniable that women, through their closeness to nature, experience freedom and achieve liberation of body and mind. Whether advocating for women's solidarity to protect the environment is viewed as a strategy or a strategic arrangement, the ultimate goal remains the liberation of women and nature. The development of Eco-feminism is inextricably linked with the awakening of female self-awareness. This self-awareness highlights women's independence, self-reflection, and serves as a solid foundation for the advancement of Eco-feminist theory (Chen, 2006). The natural environment offers women a space to liberate themselves and enhance their self-awareness, while the development of female self-awareness provides a social foundation for environmental protection efforts. Eco-feminism is a theory with great inclusivity, extensibility, and practical significance.

Out of Africa is a classic biographical film that showcases Africa's magnificent natural landscapes, unique local customs, and the specific historical context, all of which contribute to Karen Blixen's exceptional 17-year experience in Africa. The Karen portrayed in the film differs from the traditional female image of her time; she is braver, more rebellious, and possesses an independent spirit and courage to pursue love. The natural ecology of Africa provides Karen with an opportunity to break free from constraints and reassess herself, allowing her self-awareness to develop. Furthermore, the strength, optimism, and inherent resilience of the African people inspire Karen and foster the elevation of her self-awareness. Karen's development of self-awareness is significantly influenced by her life experiences in Africa. As viewers watch Out of Africa, accompanied by the majestic Mozart score and the unique natural beauty of the African landscape, they often reflect on their own natural environment. The conquest and destruction of nature by industrial and technological civilization remain striking.

As Karen Blixen described Africa, "Boundless and majestic, everything you see is born with an inherent dignity and freedom, carrying unimaginable nobility." Only by actively improving our relationship with nature, halting the oppression and exploitation of nature, respecting and cherishing nature, and adopting a perspective of equality and sustainable development towards all life forms, can we truly embrace nature and move towards a path of harmonious coexistence. This requires not only equal cooperation between genders but also the collective effort of society to build a new model where humans and nature can prosper together.

Only then can we achieve true ecological balance and lasting environmental harmony.

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