

Hegemonic Control over Nature: A Postcolonial Study of Golding's Lord of the Flies

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ABSTRACT

Nature is represented as the mother of humanity but are humans actually the loyal children of nature? People usually depend on nature but the irony is they are so ungrateful that when needed, they misuse nature for their own benefits. Hence, nature has become the toy of humankind. William Golding's Lord of the Flies exposes the power practice on nature through the hands of humans. This study explains the colonial ideologies of the characters by hegemonizing the environment. Hegemony deals with the dominance or authority over something. The idea of hegemony is connected to colonialism. The story is represented as a miniature of colonial systems, unfolding how human will is imposed on nature and dilapidating ecological balance. It employs a qualitative close reading approach to explore the connection of nature with the idea of colonial intention. This research reveals how the characters weaponize nature to achieve their self-interest. Overall, this study explores the connection between environmentalism and colonialism by understanding the complex dynamics between humans and nature from a hegemonic perspective.

INTRODUCTION

William Golding, Nobel laureate and winner of the Man Booker Award, published his first and highly acclaimed novel *Lord of the Flies*, originally titled *Strangers from Within*, in 1954 (Golding, 1954, p. 45). Before publication, it was rejected more than twenty times and considered boring and uninteresting. Though it was not acknowledged in its initial stage, critics appreciated the novel later. The story unravels the deeper darkness of humankind and discovers the innate savage nature within them. Hegemony is derived from the Greek word *hēgemonia*, which is a noun form of the verb *hēgeisthai*, meaning “to lead.” This word, or the concept, was popularized by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist philosopher. Gramsci elaborates the idea of cultural hegemony in his *Prison Notebooks*, where he explains how ruling classes maintain their dominance over subordinate classes by controlling the production and dissemination of ideas and values in society (Gramsci, 1971, p. 57).

In one of the seminal works on hegemony, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe explored the concept of hegemony and emphasized it as a crucial part of political struggle and social change. They argue that hegemony is not merely a top-down process but involves negotiation and contestation, shaping power relations within society and the environment (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 112). Though hegemony is a concept from postcolonial ideology, it crosses borders and connects with ecocriticism as hegemonic power dynamics shape environmental situations and world politics. Paul Wapner, in his *Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics*, highlights how dominant ideologies and interests often prioritize financial growth and business profit over environmental sustainability, leading to ecological degradation and social injustice (Wapner, 1996, p. 203).

In William Golding's classic novel *Lord of the Flies*, the eerie story of schoolboys who become stuck on a deserted island acts as a microcosm that highlights the complexity of both social institutions and human nature. The pupils were scared at first but later they showed their inner beastly behavior through different activities. The boys lose their innocence and turn into some kind of monstrous figure from which there is no hope to return. Here, nature *plays* an important role to justify their activities as an evil figure. They were supposed to be frightened of the situation, but Jack and his tribe or the hunter boys actually frightened others, including the innocent creatures of nature. As Ria, Ahmed, and Tithi (2024) opined, violence can never become a viable solution, and thus killing should not be seen as commendable (p. 29) yet the boys' acts of dominance over nature and each other dangerously blur these moral lines. Though existential and psychological analyses of the novel are common, this study takes a postcolonial approach to the text, stressing the recurring subject of hegemonic control over the natural world. The island, which appears to have been secured from civilization, turns into a blank canvas on which colonial ideals are painted, influencing how the people interact with the environment and exposing larger themes of control and power. Power is the source of all exploitation; as such, the

boys establish their authority by using nature as a tool for their dominance (Akhter & Tabassum, 2023, p. 119). The paper explores the subtle ways that the characters' view toward the environment reflects past exploitation and control practices in this postcolonial analysis. This study tries to dissect the layers of hegemonic influence on nature in *Lord of the Flies*, illuminating the symbolic implications and advancing our knowledge of the relationships between colonialism, human behavior, and the natural world. It does this by placing the story within a postcolonial framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critics explore the text from different perspectives. From exposing the inherent darkness to ecofeminism, the text has been described through many theoretical lenses. *Lord of the Flies* was seen as an epitome of exploring inherent human darkness. Thus, in 2018, XU Jian-gang and ZOU Cheng-bo in their article "On the Fragility of the Civilization in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*" reflect how civilized boys turned into uncivilized brutes in different contexts. Therein, they were supposed to be evil because of the fragility of humanity. Their anger, fear, sadness, and terror drive them to do such things which they were not meant to do. They actually lack the proper skill of emotional intelligence. In this respect, Pelin (2017) highlights the emotional intelligence skill of the boys on the island in his paper named "The Coral Island vs. *Lord of the Flies* Variations in Emotional Intelligence Skills".

In "The Symbolism of Power in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*," Bruns (2008) stresses the symbols that explain the idea of power; for example, Jack and his tribe resembled dictatorship, Piggy's glasses, and the conch resembled democracy, the dance of the boys depicted fear, and hunting symbolized violence and domination. All centered on power dynamics.

Shumaila Mazhar, Mahwish Malghani, and Fouzia Rehman Khan (2015) demonstrate the psychology of the boys behind their senseless atrocities in the forest. Ralph's ego basically kept him sane and that's why it was only Ralph at the end who tried to maintain order and justice.

Sugimura (1994) in his article explores the impossibility of having a war on that island, though the boys have self-destructive nature. On the other hand, Thapliyal and Kunwar (2011) showcase how the situation in the forest changes from order and harmony to chaos and anarchy.

Establishing power over other boys is a usual analysis of *Lord of the Flies*. Even this text is described from an ecocritical perspective, but it is not analyzed from the combination of environment and colonialism. So, there is room for analysis on this factor. Nature was subjugated through the self-oriented mentality of the boys. Thus, this article will help to unshackle the particle of hegemonic power over nature.

Gashout (2015) recounts the text *Lord of the Flies* from a psychoanalytic perspective. Jack resonates the component of Id by fulfilling his urge to be a leader. Id diverts him to seek immediate pleasure and not to think about the future. On the other side, Piggy exemplifies Superego, who always tries to remind others about their responsibility. Interestingly, Ralph resembles the qualities of Ego. He actually is the bridge between Jack and Piggy.

Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is such a text that can be analyzed from every theoretical lens. Though it has been scrutinized from an ecocritical perspective so many times, there is a gap where ecocriticism is not connected with hegemony, a key topic of postcolonialism. Under this mindset, this study will help to reveal the brutality towards nature from an inherent colonial bloodline. As a consequence, this analysis is a bridge between an ecocritical view with a postcolonial mindset.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore colonial ideologies through the hands of hegemonic perspective on William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. It involves a close reading and scrutinizing of the text to identify the power game and colonial instances involving nature and natural elements. Drawing on postcolonial theory and environmentalism, this study applies concepts of hegemony to explore the power dynamics between humans and nature. By employing a theoretical lens, the research aims to unveil the underlying colonial ideologies rooted within the narrative. The textbook *Lord of the Flies* is considered the primary data and scholarly articles, books, and essays on postcolonial theory, environmentalism, and literary criticism are treated as secondary sources of the study. Through the interaction between nature and humans, the paper unbosoms the subjugation of nature.

OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The research objective of this study is to highlight the colonial mindset of the boys while interacting with nature. This interaction reveals the power dynamics and hierarchical relationship between the boys and natural forces. To accomplish this aim, the current study is driven by the following research question:

- How does William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* depict hegemonic control over nature, and what insights does a postcolonial analysis provide about the themes of power and domination in the novel?

DISCUSSION

There is a special bond between humans and nature. With the advancement of science and technology, this bond has weakened due to the passive role of nature (Rivers, 2003). In literature, we find this sort of bond, but the problem is that there are some texts where we can see the distortion of this bond. Humans are dependent on nature for food, water, energy overall for everything (Fedele et al., 2021). Nevertheless, this ungrateful creature destroys nature and dominates it for their self-interest. In *Lord of the Flies*, Golding shows the inborn beastly nature of

innocent schoolboys. From the ecocritical lens, these boys are actually disrupting the order and harmony of the forest.

The Unseen Face of Hegemony

This section specifically applies Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, a process where a dominant group maintains power not only through direct force but by shaping cultural norms, beliefs, and values so that subordinate groups consent to their own subordination (Gramsci, 1971). The cob of hegemony is visible throughout the story where at the beginning the boys were destroying the beauty of nature in the name of survival. In many instances it was shown that their sole perspective was not to be rescued but to hunt and enjoy the hunting process. Hence, the boys reproduce hierarchical and colonial behaviors which shape their understanding of ownership, superiority and control. Thereafter, Gramsci's notion of hegemony refers to the ruling group's ability to secure consent and shape cultural meanings, saturating everyday life with values perceived as "common sense" (Said, 1993). Thus the act of the boys has been seen as natural and unchallenged. For example, when Jack and other boys were trying to search Ralph, they simply burnt the forest without having second thoughts as if this forest is meant for them and they can do whatever they want and this notion is perceived as common sense. The boys treat the forest by using force as if they actually own the island just like Robinson in Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe. According to Lears (1985), "...the weakest are forced to rely on domination" (p. 568). Being stuck in an Island, Robinson started to dominate the place and the inhabitants of the place just like a true colonizer. In the same way the boys in *Lord of the Flies* tried to exploit the place by hunting and burning. This resonates with Cesair's (2000) observation, "Between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, degraded masses" (p. 06). Thus, between the boys and forest, there is no mutual respect, only the intention to exploit the marginalized, in this case, nature. They were focusing on the establishment of their power: "This is our island. It's a good island. Until the grownups come to fetch us we'll have fun" (Golding, 1954, p. 45). By "fun" Ralph refers to the newly found superiority over nature. This text used to be read to explore the inner beastly nature of the boys. Truly, the real beast lies in the boys' impulse to dominate nature itself. Their colonial mindset is also revealed when Ralph says:

You couldn't have a beastie, a snake - thing, on an island this size,"
Ralph explained kindly. "You only get them in big countries, like
Africa, or India. (Golding, 1954, p. 47)

So according to Ralph, Africa or India is a place for beasts, revealing a colonial projection of their existence. This postcolonial incident directly ties to the ecocritical reading as they project their superiority not only over non-European people but also over the nonhuman world. Being from Western countries, the boys practice common colonial stereotyping, dehumanizing the people of Africa, India, or other Eastern nations. This mirrors their upbringing, as "for the west,

the east is from another part of the world and different from western idea of modernity and progress" (Sigdel, 2020, p. 03). Ralph's declaration of "This belongs to us" exposes his intention of taking possession of the land. That is why Rohitash Thapliyal and Shakuntala Kunwar (2011) in their article "Ecocritical Reading of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.", said,

Man excelling in scientific and technological development, considers himself as outside of nature and feels free to use and abuse nature and even to create laws for it. (Golding, 1954, p. 89)

Capitalist society uses different mediums or ideologies to perpetuate their dominance. In the same way, the school boys in *Lord of the Flies* started their dominance over the calm nature and disrupted the harmony of the ecosystem.

Here, struck down by the heat, the sow fell and the hunters hurled themselves at her. This dreadful eruption from an unknown world made her frantic; she squealed and bucked and the air was full of sweat and noise and blood and terror. (Golding, 1954, p. 167)

From the extract, "unknown world" has taken the power from their own land. The boys were simply called as "hunters" suggested their savage thinking which resembles the ideologies of colonizers. Through their activities it was quite clear that they were not concerned about their survival rather they were concerned about controlling the forest and that is why Jack said "This head is for the beast. It's a gift." Jack and the hunter team are stuck here but they behave like the master of the forest as "it is not surprising at all that it is almost unimaginable for us to put plants and trees at our level (Ferrari, 2019, p. 92). Even nature obeyed them just like a "dominated class". The line "The silence accepted the gift and awed them" shows its consent to be dominated by the boys.

Self-centered Attitude of the Boys

In environmental ethics, anthropocentrism refers to the belief that only human interests have intrinsic value, often neglecting the intrinsic value of non-human entities and ecosystems.

By neglecting the origin of this silence in the breakdown of animism, the humanist critics of deep ecology reiterate a discourse that by its very logocentrism marginalizes nature, mutes it, and pushes it into a hazy backdrop against which the rational human subject struts upon the epistemological stage. (Glottfelty, 1997, p. 16)

In *Lord of the Flies*, Golding explores the anthropocentric attitudes of the boys. They don't care about the order of the forest. They use the elements of nature as though it was made only for them. The colonial world divided humans into colonizers and colonized, causing damage to the environment, culture, and national identity. This division also created psychological disorders and

economic exploitation (Saeed et al., 2019, p. 58). *Lord of the Flies* reflects this colonial dynamic through the boys' behavior on an island, where they seize power, exploit resources, and exert psychological domination, illustrating how colonial powers historically seized wealth and left the land devastated.

There is always a clash between science and nature. Scientific advancement destroys the peaceful atmosphere of nature. Even in the novel, Piggy symbolizes science as he is the one who lit the fire. Piggy's assertion, "We could experiment. We could find out how to make a small hot fire and then put green branches on to make smoke (Golding, 1954, p. 51)" suggests the utilizing of greenery as a means to serve human invention and survival, transforming natural resources into tools. However, it also warns of unintended harm and disruption of natural balance due to human interference.

Listen all of you. Me and my hunters, we're living along the beach by a flat rock. We hunt and feast and have fun. If you want to join my tribe come and see us. Perhaps I'll let you join. Perhaps not. (Golding, 1954, p. 174)

It was clear that they were not anxious about their situation. They made the forest their land and Jack indirectly declared himself the king of the island. The animals became their feast and they enjoyed killing the pigs. To support this, Ferrari (2019) opined, "Jack kills pigs because he feels the urge to exert power and control over other living beings and, throughout the novel, hunting becomes an instrument to establish his leadership" (86). Hence, Jack and his team treat the head of the dead as their winning award. Their actions prove the anthropocentric view of themselves.

Grass was worn away in front of each trunk but grew tall and untrodden in the centre of the triangle. Then, at the apex, the grass was thick again because no one sat there". (Golding, 1954, p. 97)

They do not care about nature. They are not acknowledging the fact that they are making the forest worse. By the word "no one", it actually indicates humans which means "the boys". From the excerpt, it is quite clear that no one actually bothers about nature's disrupted situation. Moreover, their decision to burn the forest makes it clear that they do not think about other animals. It showed that they were happy to burn the place. Thus, Arne Naess (1989), a deep ecologist, criticizes anthropocentrism as a narrow perspective that places undue importance on human interests and calls for a more ecologically inclusive worldview that values the intrinsic worth of all living beings.

Weaponization of Nature

In the novel, the boys use the elements of nature as their weapon to fulfil their self-interest. That is why, Gwiazdowicz and Janicki (2024) construe that

For millennia humans have used natural resources and created their world, imposing their own rules and laws. As a result the landscape has been transformed from the natural and pristine, to what was considered friendly to humans. (p. 11)

As Ralph said "All ours", they actually treated the island as theirs. They used the shell to establish power over another person, they used leaves to light the fire, they used the branches of the trees to make spears, they used animals not only for feast but also for enjoyment and at last they burned the forest only to find their enemy Ralph. All these activities indicate their intentions of misusing the blessings of nature for their own benefit. Therefore, humanity's relentless and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources pushes beyond what nature can heal on its own (Ganguly, 2023). They didn't think about the nature on which they are living. Jack and his hunting team successfully captured the hill and using the rock killed Piggy. They even tried to kill Ralph as well by burning the forest. "Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood" (Golding, 1954, p. 187).

Without a governance mechanism, the innocent school boys become the murderer. Here nature is manipulated and transformed into a weapon for their conflicts. Jack and the hunting team felt a sense of beastliness while killing the pig, even killing Piggy. As nature was obediently listening to them, some of the reactions from other creatures can evidently show the powerlessness of them. "Even the butterflies deserted the open space where the obscene thing grinned and dripped" (Golding, 1954, p. 152).

This simple creature also felt the superiority of humans and as a result they deserted the land as early as possible. Humans are so cruel that they do not want to coexist with nature, rather they want to control nature and that's what the boys were doing on the island. In this context, Humayra Akhter and Sarah Tabassum (2023) in their article discuss the cruel nature of humans and barbarism towards nature just to become superior. They said,

Capitalism makes people think about gaining materialistic wealth. In the process, they become selfish, only thinking about 'I, me, and myself.' Thus, despite claiming superiority, human beings still could not escape the shed of barbarism. As a result, we cut down trees, exploit the river, pollute water, kill other animals unnecessarily, and thus pollute our environment. (p. 119)

The boys actually mirror the human kind as Bhise (2016) in his essay titled "Power over Authority: A Human Instinct in *Lord of the Flies*" alludes "The fact is that the boys act on impulses of human instinct that represent the rest of the world" (p. 05).

One of the cruelest parts was to use the forest to find and kill Ralph. A true colonizer uses different mediums like education, religion, media to circulate the idea that they are the savior who will civilize the uncivilized so that they can dominate "the others" and exploit the place. Following the same footpath, Jack and his tribe take control over the island and use the forest as their weapon to

kill Piggy or try to kill Ralph. "Gradually, boys spoiled the island by setting bonfires and killing wild animals, particularly wild pork. The beautiful island, which was like paradise for them in the beginning, was transformed into a battlefield at the end of the story" (Ghimire, 2023). Consequently, the boys reveal their cruellest features as a murderer that defy the claim of Barutlu (2019) who opines the beasts in the forest like pigs are the representation of evil God and the boys are actually worshipping them (p. 22). If they truly worshiped the animals, they wouldn't murder them brutally, revealing their ultimate drive for power, not reverence.

IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

Lord of the Flies is a classic novel. Through this study, it is observed that Golding's creation of the island symbolizes the minority that are always on the verge of exploitation. Barbarism of the boys in nature reveals their true spirit of being colonizers. Colonization is not a new topic but this text shows the glimpse of colonization in an allegorical manner. Through the analysis, it can be said that people cling to destroying nature for their own good. Thus in today's situation, this study helps to understand the psychology behind destroying the ecocritical balance. It is not only a thirst for power, deep down it is about the mentality of being superior to something they think is unimportant. By the analysis, we came to understand that it is human psychology to treat others as "other". For maintaining the balance, it is necessary to understand the present situation of the environment and rectify our thought process. Here, the Gaia hypothesis becomes relevant, as it proposes Earth's self-regulating living system which requires a shift in mindset from domination to cooperation with nature. Otherwise, Nature will take her revenge in her own way and humans will be the worst sufferer of it.

At the end, the novel does not only unravel individual savagery but also serves as a microcosm of colonial structures, where superiority is constructed, resources are exploited and the land is left degraded.

CONCLUSION

In an era of globalization, Postcolonial perspectives are a highly talked topic. On the other hand, Climate has changed due to global exploitation. So there is a deep connection between environmental issues with capitalist attitudes of colonizers. *Lord of the Flies* provides a keen view of exploitation over nature through the hands of British school boys. Moreover the power dynamics played an important role to reflect the colonial attitude of the innocent school boys who apparently are not so innocent as their age. The colonial attitudes prove their inner beastly nature or the darkness of humanity. Usually, colonization is connected with people but this paper shows the connection with the environment where the school boys played the role of the "colonizer" and the island played the role of the "colonized". Thus, the findings of this study suggest a need to rethink how colonial mindsets continue to shape human-environment relationships today. Consequently, it helps readers understand the roots of today's ecological crises and inspires more responsible attitudes toward nature.

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