Dualism and the Relational Self in Ghada Al-Samman's "No Sea in Beirut": An Ecofeminist Perspective

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Abstract: By reading Ghada Al-Samman's "No Sea in Beirut" (1963) from an ecofeminist perspective, the current study argues that the story challenges the dualism behind the domination of women and nature and instead advocates the development of a relational self that acknowledges the interconnectedness and interdependence between humans and nature. The female protagonist's domination in the patriarchal Damascene society, in which her partner, Ayman, strives to confine her to the domestic sphere, is analogized to the domination of the sea, which is fenced and privatized under the pretext of development. It is posited that the female protagonist and the sea are constructed as the other because of dualism, and thus their domination is unjustly sanctioned. This study also examines the concerted efforts of the female protagonist to dismantle dualism and develop the relational self. By crossing the fence into the privatized area of the sea, the female protagonist connects with it and thus secures freedom for both herself and the sea, declaring that only through this connection can all individuals—and the sea—be liberated. Therefore, it is concluded that Al-Samman's story promotes the existence of a just world for all beings, and this is determined by human behavior.

Keywords: domination, dualism, ecofeminism, other, relationality

1. Introduction

Ecocriticism studies the relationship between literature and the environment, postulating that "human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (Glotfelty 1996: xix). Ecofeminism or ecological feminism is a branch of ecocriticism; the term ecofeminism was coined by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*. Ecofeminism investigates the connection between women and nature, linking the domination of women with the domination of nature. Griffin argues that the social construction of nature, which explains the destruction as well as exploitation of nature, is "inseparable from the social construction of gender" (1997: 220), which is behind the domination of women. Moreover, Warren states that ecofeminism insists that nature as well as "naturism (i.e., the unjustified domination of nature) are feminist issues" (1997: 4), in addition to criticizing other forms of domination like sexism, classicism, racism, ageism, and others. According to Glazebrook, Warren's ecofeminism emphasizes the interconnections "between all the -isms of domination" as well as the connection between feminism and environmentalism

and stresses the fact that "*none of the problems generated by patriarchy's logic of domination will be solved in isolation*" (2002: 16). In addition, Gaard maintains: "Ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature" (1993: 1). Accordingly, ecofeminism draws attention to the connection between all forms of oppression in that it "approaches the problems of environmental degradation and social injustice from the premise that how we treat nature and how we treat each other are inseparably linked" (Gaard 2001: 158). Ecofeminism rejects the oppressions resulting from domination, positing that domination through "rape, slavery, animal experimentation, colonialism, clear-cutting, or damming—has been called 'power over' and is part of the violent and oppressive framework that feminists reject" (168). Therefore, ecofeminism seeks to end all forms of oppression including the oppression of women, arguing that "no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature" (Gaard 1993: 1).

The current study examines the short story "No Sea in Beirut," which is published in *No Sea in Beirut* (1963), a collection of stories by Syrian writer Ghada Al-Samman. The writer was born in Damascus in 1942. This study mainly applies the notions of "dualism" as well as the "relational self," analyzing Al-Samman's selected short story from an ecofeminist perspective. It sheds light on the link between the domination of women and nature by investigating the experiences of an unnamed female protagonist dominated by patriarchy. It is argued that the domination of the female protagonist can be analogized to the domination of the sea in Beirut. This domination of the female protagonist and sea results from the dualism of self and other in which reason, culture, and men are constructed as the self, whereas emotion, nature, and women are constructed as the other. The study also argues that the female protagonist develops a relational self, one that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all beings, and thus challenges the dualism that separates humans from nature. The female protagonist interconnects with the sea, realizing that she, along with the sea and all other individuals, will not be liberated unless the sea is interconnected with. Hence, it is posited that Al-Samman's "No Sea in Beirut" challenges dualism and promotes the interconnectedness between humans and nature as a way to achieve justice for all beings.

2. Ecofeminism, dualism, and relationality

The link between women and nature is attributed to the fact that "women have historically been seen as closer to the earth or nature (perhaps due to childbirth and menstruation)" (Birkeland 1993: 18). Ecofeminism investigates the connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature, affirming that "the oppressed are often both feminised and naturalised" (Plumwood 1993: 18). Ecofeminism emphasizes this connection with the aim of advocating a more sustainable world in which women and nature are liberated from domination. Warren points out: "Establishing the nature of … women-nature connections, and

determining which are potentially liberating for both women and nonhuman nature is a major project of ecofeminist philosophy" (1997:3). Ecofeminist ethics criticize this unjustified domination of nature and women, asserting that "the dominations of women and of nature are morally wrong and ought to be eliminated" (Warren and Cheney 1991: 180). Ecofeminism ascribes the domination of women and nature to patriarchy, contending that "the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man's attitude toward women" (Birkeland 1993: 18). Shiva (1989) also criticizes patriarchy which, in the name of development or what she calls "maldevelopment," treats women and nature as passive objects and thus sanctions their domination. In addition, Warren (1990) argues that socially constructed conceptual frameworks such as patriarchy are oppressive because they are based on hierarchical, or up-down thinking, dualism, and the logic of domination. Due to hierarchical thinking and dualism, the mind, males, and reason are valued, while the body, females, and emotion are devalued. Warren describes the logic of the domination of the patriarchal framework as unjust since it is based on arguments that aim to justify subordination. Thus, patriarchy is opposed to ecofeminism, inasmuch as it is behind the domination of women and nature.

The domination of women and nature in patriarchal systems is sanctioned through dualism, which constructs men as the self and women as well as nature as the other. In dualism, the attributes associated with men, reason, humans, and culture are elevated, and those associated with women, emotion, animals, and nature are undervalued. Consequently, ecofeminists find it necessary "to expose these dualisms and the ways in which feminizing nature and naturalizing or animalizing women has served as justification for the domination of women, animals, and the earth" (Gaard 1993: 5). From an ecofeminist perspective, the structure of oppressive systems is based on "first, alienation (the belief in a separate self-identity, individualism, autonomy), then hierarchy (elevating the self based on its unique characteristic), and finally, domination (justifying the subordination of others based on their inferiority and lack of the Self's unique characteristic)" (Gaard 2008: 12). Gaard and Gruen (1993) state that in the dualism of the self and other, the self is valued and is always male, whereas the other is devalued and is always female. In culture/nature dualism, nature is constructed as the other; so, Plumwood (1993) postulates that women in the West are oppressed because they are associated with nature, as opposed to men, who are associated with reason or culture. Associating women with nature aims to attribute domesticity to them and justify men's power over them. Consequently, ecofeminism challenges dualism; on account of dualism, both nature and women are perceived as inferior and treated as the other so that their domination is justified.

Culture/nature dualism is criticized in ecofeminism because it entails the separation between humans and nature and the denial of the interdependence between humans and nature. In *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, Merchant describes the changes in the view of nature that led to the domination of nature and women. She states that before the Scientific Revolution nature was viewed as a living organism and a "nurturing mother: a kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered,

planned universe" (1980: 2); however, this image restricts the human activities that alter nature using new technologies. Consequently, the image was replaced during the Scientific Revolution with the image of "nature as disorder" (2), an image used to sanction the mastery over nature. Like in nature, women were also described as disorderly so that their domination is vindicated. Culture/nature dualism aims to legitimize the advances made at the expense of nature and women, as nature and women are perceived as lower than culture. King also criticizes the culture/nature dualism enforced by capitalism, as capitalism demands a worldview "which asserts that human science and technology are inherently progressive" and "asserts that human beings are entitled to dominion over nonhuman nature" (1990:108). Consequently, ecofeminism condemns the damage which nature has been subject to in the name of progress and development.

Ecofeminism challenges the dualism that places women and nature in inferior positions; instead, it advocates for a holistic view that acknowledges the interconnectedness between humans and nature and replaces the domination of nature with a relationship based on care and empathy. Thus, dualism is challenged through relationality. Plumwood argues that "both men and women must challenge the dualised conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognises *human* identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature" (1993: 36). Relationality is stressed in deep ecology, a term coined by Arne Naess who states that organisms are "knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations" (1973: 95). This relationality entails identifying with other living beings and realizing that all living beings would like to live. Naess points out that "a lack of identification leads to indifference" (1989: 174), and that "the greater our comprehension of our togetherness with other beings, the greater the identification, and the greater care we will take" (175). Accordingly, other beings should be valued and their interests protected along with ours. Naess says: "We seek what is best for ourselves, but through the extension of the self, our 'own' best is also that of others" (175). Hence, the identity of the relational self is based on identification and interconnectedness with other beings, rather than isolation from them. Naess maintains: "The identity of the individual, 'that I am something', is developed through interaction with a broad manifold, organic and inorganic. There is no completely isolatable I" (164). Relationality, which contrasts with the isolation of the self from other beings, challenges dualism that legitimizes domination. Thus, for Plumwood, ecofeminism promotes "a form of justice in social relations that honors the interdependence of diverse humans with each other, other animal species, and the earth" and advocates the development of "a more ecological, relational notion of the self as interdependent" (Gaard 2001: 159) rather than a separate or isolated self.

The current study reads the short story "No Sea in Beirut" from an ecofeminist perspective, positing that the story advocates the interconnectedness between humans and nature as a way to achieve justice not only for women but for all beings including nature. As a prominent Syrian journalist, poet, short-story writer, and novelist, Ghada Al-Samman has been recognized as a voice of equality in the Arab world. Although she has traveled around Europe and is currently

residing in Paris, Al-Samman has always had a sense of belonging to the Arab world, which is reflected in her fiction and travelogues. Vinson (2002) affirms that the cry for liberty has characterized both Al-Samman's personal life and her writings, noting that Al-Samman founded her own publishing house in 1977 to avoid editorial interference, and as a journalist, she has examined neglected aspects of life like the plight of the poor in certain areas of Lebanon. Al-Samman moved to Beirut to pursue her MA degree, and she has explored the Lebanese Civil War in her works *Beirut 75* (1975), *Beirut Nightmares* (1976), and *The Night of the First Billion* (1986). As a feminist, Al-Samman has tackled the oppression of women in many of her works including *The Impossible Novel: Damascene Mosaic* (1997) and her first two collections of short stories, namely *Your Eyes Are My Destiny* (1962) and *No Sea in Beirut* (1963). Al-Samman has also depicted the impact of war on women and affirmed that women's liberation from patriarchy and national liberation are inseparable. The current study focuses on the link between the domination of women and the domination of nature in Al-Samman's "No Sea in Beirut," arguing that the selected short story challenges the dualistic thinking that separates humans from nature and presents women and nature as the other. The story promotes the development of the relational self, which acknowledges the interconnectedness and interdependence between humans and nature. The contribution of the paper lies in the selection of the primary work and the analysis of its ecofeminist import. By applying ecofeminist notions to Al-Samman's "No Sea in Beirut," this paper attempts to offer fresh insights into an Arabic short story published almost a decade before the coinage of the term "ecofeminism." Al-Samman, who has been an advocate for justice and gender equality, arguably manages to show through this short story that all individuals are responsible for achieving justice not only for themselves but also for all beings, including nature. Therefore, the existence of a more just and sustainable world for all beings in the future is a responsibility that humans should not neglect, as it will be determined by human behavior towards each other and towards nature.

3. An ecofeminist reading of Al-Samman's "No Sea in Beirut"

3.1 Dualism and the construction of the female protagonist and the sea as the other

Plumwood defines dualism as "the process by which contrasting concepts (for example, masculine and feminine gender identities) are formed by domination and subordination and constructed as oppositional and exclusive" (1993: 31). In male/female and reason/nature dualisms, men are associated with reason and rationality under the assumption that reason is superior, whereas women are associated with nature and a lack of rationality, which are deemed inferior. Gaard and Gruen (1993) state that ecofeminists see that the dualisms that associate valued components with the self (male) and devalued components with the other (female and nature) account for the domination over both women and nature. In addition, ecofeminism attributes the domination of women and nature to patriarchy. Warren (1990) describes patriarchy as an oppressive socially constructed framework, since

it is based on dualism and the unjust logic of domination that postulates the moral superiority of men to justify the subordination and domination of women.

The male/female, reason/emotion, and culture/nature dualisms are portrayed in "No Sea in Beirut." The story shows how the female protagonist is dominated in the depicted androcentric, patriarchal Damascene society by being associated with a lack of reason as opposed to her partner Ayman. At the beginning of the story, it is revealed that, up to that point in the female protagonist's life, all her ideas were shaped by Ayman and the boarding school she attended. Thus, the female protagonist has been socialized to hold certain beliefs and conform to traditional standards of behavior because of the male/female and reason/emotion dualisms that construct her as the other and presume her lack of reason and inability to make choices. The story opens with a description of the female protagonist and her partner Ayman; while she is walking with him, "her naive hand is lying in the cave of his large hand" (Al-Samman 1993: 128). The female protagonist is closely linked to nature; she is characterized more by naivety and emotion than by reason in that "love, this wondrous bird, that has built a nest for itself in her youthful chest never rests … It wants to eat everything in her depths so that nothing remains except it" (128). However, it is confirmed that the female protagonist desperately "wants to preserve her many other things, her will, her mind … and the wonderful world that she does not want to see from one angle, through the eyes of Ayman or the angle that he determines for her" (128). After realizing that her love for Ayman is behind the fact that she views the world from Ayman's perspective rather than her own and that her beliefs have been shaped by the school that she has attended, she decides to rebel against such dominating constructions. It can be argued that Al-Samman's selected story does not depict the male/female and reason/emotion dualisms to reinforce dualism and the resulting domination; rather, the story challenges dualism by drawing attention to the concerted efforts of the female protagonist to dismantle the dualisms that lead to her domination and, later, to that of the sea.

Evidently, the female protagonist feels the need to dismantle the male/female and reason/emotion dualisms that construct her as the other. Plumwood states that due to dualism the other is treated as the background, and this backgrounding of the other foregrounds the master. Backgrounding leads the master to exploit the other and benefit from the services that the other provides; simultaneously, the master asserts autonomy, denying any dependence on the other. Moreover, Plumwood states that "the identity of the underside is constructed instrumentally, and the canons of virtue for a good wife, a good colonised, or a good worker are written in terms of usefulness to the centre" (1993: 53), and that "those on the lower side of the dualisms are obliged to put aside their own interests for those of the master or centre, that they are conceived of as his instruments, a means to his ends" (53). Ayman in the selected short story strongly holds a belief that his partner is only fit to be a housewife and to "emit the smell of food in the kitchen" (Al-Samman 1993: 145). Conceivably, he is aware that by backgrounding and instrumentalizing his partner and belittling her skills, he will dominate the relationship, so he desperately wants his partner to settle for being a housewife. Birkeland (1993) argues that, because of the androcentric premise that associates

women with nature and elevates masculine traits, men distance themselves from nature and the feminine so that they exercise their power and instrumentalize women and nature. Since the female protagonist is dominated and constructed as the other in the depicted patriarchal society, she is valued more by her partner when she plays a role that works to his advantage–the role of a prospective, obedient wife. The domination of the female protagonist lies in the fact that Ayman deliberately wants to instrumentalize the female protagonist by confining her to the domestic sphere in an attempt to separate her from the outside world.

Ayman, who is associated with reason and control on account of the male/female and reason/emotion dualisms, also emphasizes the differences between him and his partner. Ayman studied in Beirut but disapproves of his partner's decision to leave Damascus and pursue education there. He ridicules her views and attributes the formation of her ideas to the books she is addicted to reading. When the female protagonist tells Ayman that she wants to study at a university in Beirut so that she can be far away from him and can have the opportunity to find herself, he tells her: "Stop this nonsense, and let's get married" (Al-Samman 1993: 129). Ayman derides the female protagonist's decision to study in Beirut and wants her to settle for being a housewife. In addition, he erects barriers to his partner's coping and success in Beirut. Ayman emphasizes the big differences between Damascus and Beirut, insisting that his partner will not be able to adapt to life in Beirut, since she has spent ten years in a convent boarding school. The fact that Ayman depicts Beirut as an uneasy and inconvenient environment for his partner is a technique that he uses to pressure her into believing that she can be nothing beyond a housewife.

However, Al-Samman's story, which aims to challenge dualism and domination, does not portray a submissive female who gives up on her dreams, because the female protagonist is strengthened to assert her point in the presence of Ayman. She tells Ayman, "Why do you make me fear the world and want to make our marriage an escape for me? … Will you strive to turn our house into a new convent school and claim that you do it for me?" (129). The female protagonist challenges Ayman's viewpoint and insists on going to Beirut, dismantling the male/female and reason/emotion dualisms behind her domination and separation from the outside world. The female protagonist also states that she wants to go to Beirut because of the sea, implying that the sea will pave the way for her emancipation from patriarchal constraints. She describes the sea in Beirut, saying: "An endless blue sea in which each of us has a share … The generations that grow from its sands are happy because men have stopped burying their sweethearts in them" (130). Since the women in Beirut have attained liberty thanks to the sea, the female protagonist is full of hope that her dependency on the sea will help her attain liberty. However, Ayman, who fears losing control over his partner's life, alienates himself from the sea and deliberately presents an opposing view: a dead sea that can never be found. So, when the female protagonist asks him what she can bring him from Beirut, he defyingly tells her: "Nothing but a little water from the sea that you like if you find it" (131). Ayman adopts a mechanistic view of nature that, according to Merchant, contrasts with the organic view of nature as a living

organism. During the Scientific Revolution, the exploitation of nature and the separation between humans and nature were legitimized by viewing nature as a machine and "as a system of dead, inert particles moved by external, rather than inherent forces" (1980: 193). Ayman, a symbol of patriarchy in the story, intentionally alienates himself from the sea, thinking of the sea as merely a passive entity that must be controlled. The fact that he defies the female protagonist to find the sea suggests that he is well aware that the sea in Beirut is dominated by fences and privatization, yet he is not willing to take action to combat the domination. Instead, Ayman makes use of the domination to mock his partner's intention to depend on the sea to attain liberty and show that she is not reasonable, emphasizing the differences between him and his partner, which are backed up by male/female and reason/emotion dualisms.

The domination of the female protagonist due to patriarchy can be analogized to the domination of the sea under the pretext of development, in that both the female protagonist and the sea are constructed as the other due to dualism. When the female protagonist arrives in Beirut, she realizes that the sea is dominated. Although she has been to one of the finest places that overlook the sea of Beirut, she has been able to see the sea only from the balconies of the cafeterias she has been to. She was not able to touch the sea and make sure that it exists. The sea she has seen "has always been humiliated and surrendering to the stings of the sun of August. She has not seen in it a fish jumping or a wave lilting and has not heard the sound of oars and songs" (Al-Samman 1993: 136). The female protagonist has even started to doubt that the sea in Beirut is real; "she imagines that it is a gray painting hammered on the horizon, a solid painting … It [The sea] is a continuation of the asphalt of the street, and the experts have been interested in making its color bluer" (136). So, she realizes that the sea is subject to a culture/nature dualism and thus dominated in the name of development and progress.

Merchant postulates that the developments in science, the economy, and technology sanction the domination of nature, asserting that developments are behind "the death of nature as a living being and the accelerating exploitation of both human and natural resources in the name of culture and progress" (1980: xviii). Plumwood also mentions how nature is exploited and dominated by technology:

> We die of the product (the destruction of nature) and also of the process (technological brutality alias technological rationality serving the end of commodification). As the free water we drink from common streams, and the free air we breathe in common, become increasingly unfit to sustain life, the biospheric means for a healthy life will increasingly be privatised and become the privilege of those who can afford to pay for them (1993: 13).

Plumwood states that anthropocentrism is also behind the domination of nature. Anthropocentrism separates humans from nature since nature lacks human qualities like the mind, so "identification and sympathy are blocked for those classed as nature, as Other" (1997: 340). Plumwood argues that, from an anthropocentric point of view, nature is devalued because it lacks the rationality

that humans have; therefore, the disorder of nature is ordered by humans in development without any limits or restrictions. Nature is, therefore, instrumentalized in that it is used as a means to the ends of humans, gaining value only from serving humans. Shiva (1989) describes development as a project of patriarchy that leads to the exploitation of both women and nature; she criticizes development or "maldevelopment" since it associates women and nature with passivity. Thus, in the name of development patriarchy perpetuates the domination of both women and nature by devaluing and instrumentalizing them. Warren (1990) also describes patriarchy as oppressive because it is based on the logic of domination, which posits the moral superiority of humans and men to justify the subordination of nature and women, respectively. She argued that the logic of domination should be opposed by all feminists, including ecofeminists, because it sanctions the domination of both women and nature.

The fences and privatization of the sea in Al-Samman's "No Sea in Beirut" are indicative of the passivity imposed on the sea in the name of development. Fences and privatization also signify the domination of nature, which, according to ecofeminism, patriarchy is responsible for. Evidently, in the story, the female protagonist's reaction to the domination of the sea contrasts sharply with Ayman's, as Ayman does not question this domination of the sea. However, the female protagonist does not take a passive role in that she reacts angrily to the privatization of the sea under the pretext of development and separation between the sea and humans on account of the culture/nature dualism. She wonders, "Have they also divided the sea into fiefdoms and properties? Have they planted their flags in the corpse of the sea, divided it, and fenced it?" (Al-Samman 1993: 150). When she goes to a military swimming pool, a soldier who guards the sea tells her that she cannot enter without a card. The female protagonist is greatly saddened by the fact that the sea is not free; she asks, "Why do they fence the sea like this in Beirut? My sea that I am looking for cannot be fenced; it is borderless" (149). The female protagonist is deeply affected by the sea's fencing, which signifies its domination and mirrors her own subjugation. Separation from the sea can be analogized to the separation that the female protagonist has been subject to in the convent boarding school she attended, as well as the separation from the outside world that Ayman wanted to impose on her by getting her to settle for being a housewife and talking her out of studying in Beirut. This separation is arguably justified by dualism, which values men and culture, and devalues women and nature. Consequently, the female protagonist declares that she desperately wants a fenceless sea, calling for an interconnection with the sea and a liberation of the sea as well as a resultant liberation of herself.

The female protagonist in the selected story identifies with the sea. Just as she has been dominated by patriarchy, the sea has been dominated and subject to backgrounding, instrumentalization, and hyperseparation in the name of development. In backgrounding, the other is treated by the dominating parties as "inessential and substitutable or as the unimportant background to their own foreground" (Plumwood 2006: 129). Accordingly, in human projects, human goals are prioritized at the expense of the needs of nature. The divisions of the sea with

fences surrounding it, the fact that only certain people are allowed to use the sea, and the fact that certain luxurious places overlook the sea indicate that the sea has been backgrounded and instrumentalized in the name of development and progress. Ecofeminism argues against the separation between humans and nature. Plumwood argues that human–nature hyperseparation leads humans to "see themselves as 'outside nature,'" and she urges countering it by "recognizing continuity and hybridity between the human and the natural, and also dependency of humans on nature" (128). In the selected short story, the female protagonist realizes that the sea is just as dominated as she is and that she will not be liberated if the sea is dominated, confirming the interdependency between her and the sea. Thus, it can be argued that the female protagonist develops a relational self, as she does not alienate and separate herself from the sea, but rather interconnects with it.

3.2 The female protagonist's development of the relational self

Ecofeminism challenges dualism, which entails the separation between humans and nature; therefore, the relational self contrasts with dualism since it emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence between humans and nature. The relationship that ecofeminism fosters with nature is a relationship based on "respect, sympathy, care, concern, compassion, gratitude, friendship and responsibility" (Anjum 2020: 846). Plumwood states that the relational self "includes the goal of the flourishing of earth others and the earth community among its own primary ends, and hence respects or cares for these others for their own sake" (1993: 154-155). While achieving their own ends, individuals should also ensure that the ends of the other are achieved so the other should be treated as valuable and worthy of concern. The female protagonist in Al-Samman's "No Sea in Beirut" places a high value on the sea in that she challenges Ayman's assumption that the sea in Beirut is dead and affirms that everyone should have a responsibility to protect the sea. She says, "If the sea really died, then you must meet a sad rebellious generation that struggles to resurrect it" (Al-Samman 1993: 137). As a patriarchal figure, Ayman separates himself from the sea and declines to oppose its domination, as if subduing nature supports his control of his partner. Contrarily, upon her arrival in Beirut, the female protagonist is genuinely moved by the state of the sea, so she steps forward and takes responsibility for finding and reviving the sea and developing a relational self. The female protagonist's development of the relational self lies in the fact that she does not separate herself from nature; rather, she interconnects with nature and cares about it for its own sake. At first, the female protagonist comes to Beirut to break away from the dominant constrictions in Damascus; however, because of the relational self she develops, she broadens her focus to include saving the sea. Accordingly, she undertakes a mission to "prove to Ayman that there is a sea in Beirut. In every human being there is a sea. The woman also has the right to find her sea in order to find herself" (140). The female protagonist acknowledges the interdependence between humans and nature; she desperately wants to find the sea to find herself. She is aware that by helping to liberate the sea, she will be liberated along the way, so she takes responsibility as a woman to fight against the domination of women and nature.

Hernawati states that the "intrinsic connection and interdependence" (2021:266) between women and nature lies behind the fact that women can communicate with nature. As a woman subject to domination, the female protagonist does not separate or alienate herself from the dominated sea; instead, she identifies with it and develops a relational self. Plumwood (1993) argues that the identity of the relational self is not constructed through the (hyper)separation from the other; safeguarding the other's interests along with your own is necessary to build a relational self. The female protagonist realizes that she will not be liberated if the sea is dominated. At first, she desperately wanted the sea to take the first step; she wanted the sea to "rebel once and throw the waves and scatter them from afar … on her face" (Al-Samman 1993: 138) as though the revolt of the sea will pave the way for her liberation. The female protagonist is aware of the power which nature has when rebelling. In the same vein, Shirkhani describes nature in Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott" as secure when the Lady of Shalott is detained and unwilling to react to what is happening around her; however, when the Lady of Shalott "heads towards her salvation," nature rebels with her, "gets out of order and gets stormy" (2023: 567). In a similar context, Alharbi who reads Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* from an ecofeminist perspective argues that Elba is motivated by nature to look for independence and liberation from patriarchal constraints; nature in the novel is portrayed as "a powerful source of peace, security, healing and hope for the human world" (2022: 397). Similar to the Lady of Shalott and Elba, the female protagonist in Al-Samman's story seeks refuge in nature to attain the liberation she is seeking. Nonetheless, because the sea in Beirut is fenced in and dominated, the female protagonist steps up to achieve her liberty.

Because the sea is fenced in, the protagonist cannot interconnect with the sea and fill her bottle with seawater. She asks an old man to fill the bottle for her, and he does. Nevertheless, she feels that she has not yet found the sea since it has been privatized and dominated. The bottle that the old man has filled for her is "not blue with her sorrows, not raging with her revolutions, and not dense with her values and myths" (Al-Samman 1993: 153). Consequently, she hits the bottle with her hand and the water spills. The sea's fencing and privatization—and her inability to fill the bottle herself—reveal how its domination is linked to hers. This domination stems from the culture/nature dualism that, in the name of culture and development, separates humans from nature. Consequently, the female protagonist makes an effort to dismantle this dualism, which accounts for the separation of the sea from her, persisting in interconnecting with the sea and filling the bottle with seawater by herself. The protagonist firmly believes that her liberation cannot be attained unless she breaks through the barriers surrounding the sea, so "she stands in front of the wall as if it were the wall that separates two lives, two stages. She jumps over it, crosses it to the other side towards the sea, and walks with her head held high" (156). The protagonist fills the bottle with water from the sea by herself, expressing indifference to decorum by not caring how people by the sea judge her when she jumps on the rocks so that she reaches the sea. She says, "With my own hands I have had to create my own sea, to be a person worthy of it" (157).

The fact that the female protagonist applies herself to combating the domination of the sea and dismantling the culture/nature dualism behind the domination and separation between her and the sea is lauded in the story. By crossing the fence into the privatized area created in the name of culture and development, the female protagonist manages to break down the barriers between her and nature and is able to interconnect with the sea. The female protagonist's interconnection with the sea is fostered in the story because it marks the liberty she has attained for the sea and the liberty she has attained for herself along the way. By linking the liberation of the female protagonist to the liberation of the sea, Al-Samman's story emphasizes the interdependence of humans and nature. The female protagonist confirms that she has been liberated owing to the sea, confirming her dependence on nature to attain liberty. Al-Samman's story also stresses the dependency of nature on humans. At the end, the female protagonist says,

> Oh beautiful Beirut, oh sad Beirut, oh face stained with dyes. You are not fake, but the dyes have become the skin of the world. You are not evil because you are Damascus, Paris, China, and everywhere and because you are from our souls. And the day we all find our sea, your sea will return to you (157).

By declaring at the end of the story that Beirut can get back its sea when all individuals find their seas, the story points to the need for an interconnection between humans and nature, which will pave the way for the liberation of humans as well as nature. This story arguably suggests that saving nature depends on the action taken by humans, affirming the interdependence between humans and nature. Thus, the development of a relational self is promoted in Al-Samman's short story, which suggests that only by interconnecting with nature and acknowledging the interdependency between humans and nature can the self and nature be liberated. According to Plumwood, "the relational account of self" which can be applied to "human relations with nature and to place" recognizes both "the distinctness of nature" and "our relationship and continuity with it" (1991: 20). This relationality is expected to help overcome domination which is legitimized by dualism; ecofeminism can make us aware of "the need for getting beyond dualism and striving to embrace more virtuous ways of living on the planet, ways of living within ecosystems that recognize and respect both our continuity with and differences from their other inhabitants" (Hawkins 1998: 189). By applying ecofeminist notions to "No Sea in Beirut," it can be concluded that the story promotes the existence of a more just world for not only women but also all beings, including nature. By depicting the concerted effort of the female protagonist to dismantle the dualism behind her domination and the domination of the sea, the story propounds the idea that a person's responsibility in a place should not only be to achieve his/her own personal goals but also the goals of other beings, including nature, and this can be achieved by developing a relational self that acknowledges the interconnectedness and interdependence of all beings. Therefore, the existence of a just and sustainable future can be determined by human behavior towards each other and towards nature.

4. Conclusion

The current study has read the short story "No Sea in Beirut" (1963) by Syrian writer Ghada Al-Samman from an ecofeminist perspective, mainly employing the notions of "dualism" and the "relational self." In dualism, men and reason are valued and associated with the self, whereas women and nature are devalued and associated with the other. In Al-Samman's story, the unnamed female protagonist's subjugation under patriarchy is paralleled with the sea's domination justified under the pretext of development. Both the woman and the sea are cast as the other, which serves to legitimate their domination. The female protagonist realizes that the sea is just as dominated as she is and that she will not be liberated unless the sea is liberated too. Accordingly, it has been argued that the female protagonist develops a relational self as she does not alienate herself from the sea but rather identifies and interconnects with it. Ecofeminism proposes that neither women nor nature can be liberated from domination unless dualism is dismantled and posits that relationality challenges dualism. Therefore, individuals should ensure that the ends of the other are achieved while achieving their own ends because the other should be treated as worthy of concern. The female protagonist in Al-Samman's short story values and identifies with Beirut's sea, believing she cannot be liberated while the sea is dominated. By crossing the fence into the privatized area of the sea and filling a bottle with seawater herself, she dismantles the culture/nature dualism, interconnects with the sea, and secures freedom for both. She concludes that only by interconnecting with the sea can all individuals—and the sea—be liberated, affirming human–nature interconnection and interdependence. Therefore, Al-Samman's "No Sea in Beirut" challenges the dualisms behind domination and promotes the interconnectedness between humans and nature as a way to achieve justice for all beings.

Note: The quotations taken from Al-Samman's "No Sea in Beirut" are translated from Arabic into English by the author of the current study.

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