

## ***La Llorona Revisited: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Reading of Josephina López's Unconquered Spirits***

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Folk tales have always been a fertile subject for retelling through adaptations where different rewritings are informed by perspectives that formulate them and, consequently, put the conventional versions of traditional tales and the stereotypes they create into question. In “The Critical Impulse in Fairy-Tale Rewritings,” Vanessa Joosen (2018) emphasizes this idea, arguing that “numerous ... fictional fairy-tale rewritings ... share interpretations with fairy-tale criticism” (504). That is, many rewritings of traditional folk tales become a form of criticism of these tales and the tradition they create and endorse. Josephina López’s *Unconquered Spirits* (1995) is a powerful example of this revisionary writing where traditional mythology is adapted and its conventional interpretation subverted to shed light on the experience of native people in North America in two different historical epochs. This research argues that the play rewrites the Mexican myth *La Llorona* to criticize the colonial legacy of injustice which has not ceased to delineate the lives of indigenous people in North America. The analysis aims at exploring how *La Llorona* is adapted to dramatize coloniality and post-coloniality, two cultural contexts which share issues that are at stake in the myth such as racial prejudice, exploitation, and deception.

In Mexican folklore, *La Llorona* is the tale of the Wailing Woman. *La Llorona* is an indigenous woman who drowns her twin babies, whom she bears from her disloyal white lover, then drowns herself. The myth has it that the spirit of *La Llorona* is forbidden to enter heaven until she finds her children and so, she spends eternity weeping and wandering around the whole Earth, trying to find them to atone for her guilt. In traditional Mexican heritage, *La Llorona* is the epitome of cruelty, being a heartless mother who kills her children to avenge herself.

The influence of the *La Llorona* plot on López’s play is compelling. *Unconquered Spirits* introduces *La Llorona* in the first scene. The scene takes place in Mexico, in 1913 between ten-year old Xochimilco and Juana, her mother, on the night before their immigration to America. Trying to convince Xochimilco to go to bed, Juana tells her the story of *La Llorona*, warning her that *La Llorona* would come and take her away if she misbehaves. Scared, young Xochimilco goes to bed only to dream of the destruction of Tecochtitlan in 1521, the conquest of Mexico, the ravishment of a sixteenth-century Mexican woman, Xochitl, by a Spanish friar, and the death and transformation of Xochitl into monstrous *La Llorona* after she drowns her twin white

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babies and herself afterwards. The play then moves on to Xochimilco's story, set in San Antonio, Texas, in 1938, another story where the fate of the main character is shaped by the unbroken encroachment of colonial legacy. Xochimilco is now a Mexican widow and mother who works in a pecan factory. Besides facing poverty and racial bias, she is the victim of a relationship with Chris, her white supervisor at work. When she discovers that he has been deceiving her and that he is not going to marry her, she has an abortion during which she realizes that she was carrying twins. Later, she is fired and is victimized again by Chris who presses false charges against her according to which she is sentenced to ten years in prison. With the dynamics of (post)coloniality involved, it will be argued, the heroine becomes a victim and her killing of her babies—conventionally seen as a vengeful, cruel act—becomes an act of love, selflessness, sacrifice, and resistance she is driven to by the coercion of (post) colonial authority.

The present research proposes a reading of this enduring pattern of suffering through examining the experiences of the two heroines against the backdrops of coloniality and post-coloniality. It will be argued that as representatives of the native people, the two heroines embody the suffering of their communities during the two historical periods they live in—and probably in epochs separating them—through weaving elements of the *La Llorona* myth into portraying the characters of Xochitl and Xochimilco, two Mexican women characters who exist in the play four centuries apart, yet manifest similar experiences of exploitation, betrayal and injustice. I will explore issues that are central to the post-colonial ecocritical approach to literature and they are also at the core of the two stories the play dramatizes, such as entitlement, belonging, colonialist asset-stripping, the place of the human in a post-human world, among others. The metaphorical and semiotic articulation of the relation between man and the natural environment will be examined through the text that depicts the manifestation of coloniality and post-coloniality on the life and culture of indigenous people. The analysis will be informed by post-colonial psychoanalytic theory, one of the theoretical paradigms that plays a pivotal role in this rewriting. The study is, thus, an endeavour to bring to the fore a broader perspective of the experiences depicted in López's play, placing them within their political and historical contexts.

Many critics have approached López's adaptation of the myth from a feminist perspective, challenging the popular image of *La Llorona* as a ruthless mother and incompetent wife and attacking the myth's contribution to creating a coercive discourse which normalizes the victimization of women, denounces their defiance, and enforces the grip of power over them. For example, in his article "La Llorona on Stage," Trevor Boffone (2018) holds that this discourse, founded on decontextualization and gender prejudice, which lead to the failure to notice the character's victimization. Starting off from destabilizing the "bad woman" and "failed mother" archetypes in *Unconquered Spirits*, Boffone believes that López revises *La Llorona* from a Chicana feminist perspective, noting that "*La Llorona* ... [has] been examined from male perspectives that do not adequately give a reason for [her] actions" (98-99) and thus, *La Llorona* has been "used to strengthen the patriarchy" (91). In

his critique of the play, Boffone uses theories of the body to examine how Chicana feminist playwrights create discourses of resistance through transforming patriarchal discourses. In his introduction to López's play, Jorge Huerta (1995) also focuses on the oppression of Mexican women as the central subject of López's adaptation. He writes that "*Unconquered Spirits* is López's homage to La Llorona as well as to the Mechicana pecan shellers who went on strike in San Antonio, Texas in 1938," an undertaking aiming at "redeeming La Llorona and all women from their marginalized and demonized positions" (11).

The post-colonial ecocritical approach to *Unconquered Spirits* is meant to yield a more comprehensive vision of the dynamics of coercion at play which involve more than gender bias. While ecocriticism studies the phenomena of inhabiting and changing the world, post-colonial ecocriticism is a politically oriented branch of environmental humanities which focuses on the political processes involved in the colonized-colonizer encounter and their social and cultural impact, an area where literature and history play a pivotal role (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 4). This intersection between political history—written by the patriarchal (post)colonial conqueror—and the personal history of individuals subjected to coloniality lies at the core of writing *Unconquered Spirits*. In her notes on the play, López describes *Unconquered Spirits* as a recognition of the experience of native American women in Mexico as shaped by colonialism, as a historical drama where she attempts to tell the story of "women and their bodies [who] have always been the battlefield on which personal and political wars (rape) are fought" (López 1995, 175). From this perspective, the play portrays the cultural restructuring of the society as an outcome of coloniality.

Post-colonial concerns such as conquest, colonialization, racism, indigeneity and diaspora, and the relations between native and invader societies and cultures, therefore, become central concerns of environmental studies (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 6). As a way of approaching literary texts, post-colonial ecocriticism is influenced by political ecology, "a field within environmental studies focusing on power relations as well as the coproduction of nature and society" (Tor A. Benjaminsen and Hanne Svarstad 2019, 391). Post-colonial ecocriticism is also influenced by the contributions of political ecology which engages in "social theoretical debates where "ecology" refers to the environment more broadly" (391). That is, rather than dealing with the environment only in its physical, natural sense, post-colonial ecocriticism examines the environment as a cultural and social outcome of history. The present analysis will focus not only on the relation between the characters and their physical environment, but also on the environment as a product of the socio-political conditions and the impact of the imposed colonial environment on the characters and their culture.

A dominant aspect in the play is the relationship between native North Americans and their physical natural environment, a central concept in postcolonial ecocriticism which holds that "indigenous peoples [...] tend to have relationships with the land and the environment that are qualitatively different than populations built on

imperialism and heavy industrialization” (Dina Gilio-Whitaker 2017, para. 1). According to postcolonial ecocriticism, indigenous people are closer to nature than are colonizers. This relation between the natives and nature plays a critical role in their lives. The pages that follow will elaborate the various manifestations of this relationship, placing it within the contexts of colonialism and post-colonialism.

Tecochtitlan, the setting of Xochitl’s story, is the ancient city that was built on an island in Lake Texcoco. It was the capital of the Aztec Empire in the 15th century until it was captured by the Spanish in 1521. Despite its very short length, the second scene powerfully sets the tone for Xochitl’s story, dramatizing the Spanish conquest of Mexico. The scene comprises two utterances, the first by Tonantzin, the Aztec goddess of the earth, screaming in lament of the city that is destroyed and burnt, and the second by a Spanish bishop trying to convince the natives of the erroneousness of their religious beliefs and preaching them about Christianity, concluding that invading and colonizing their land is an act of God: “the true and omnipotent God has allowed his faithful servants, the Spaniards, to conquer Mexico” (López 1995, 181). At the outset, therefore, the play establishes the concept of entitlement, which is one of the main characteristics of colonial ideology and a tool colonialism has always employed to achieve its goals. In addition to affecting the conquered physical environment, entitlement affects the indigenous people on the personal level, as is the case with Xochitl. Friar Francisco sees himself as superior, righteous, and, therefore, entitled to have the natives succumb to his orders and wishes. He exploits Xochitl for his pleasure, forcing her to believe that submission to suffering is the way to be loved by God. She, therefore, endures his sexual exploitation of her, and finally puts an end to her life.

A central concept in postcolonial ecocriticism is that the natural environment is an essential constituent of the indigenous people’s identity and psychological make up and, therefore, the harmony between Man and nature is key to a peaceful and balanced life. The bond between Man and his environment transcends attachment to become a kind of unity where Man and the environment are parts of one whole. Deane Curtin (2005) argues for the idea that “human beings are one part of the community of nature” (7). This fusion between the native people and their natural environment in the precolonial period is powerfully depicted in *Unconquered Spirits* where land conquest and the humiliation, homicide and ravishment of the natives echo each other. Not only do we, as recipients, see this connection in the play but also, as noted by post-colonial ecocritics, this idea is part of the indigenous people’s culture. “Many cultures, including those that were destroyed by American colonialism, see human beings as distinctive parts of nature, not beings whose nature sets them apart from, and outside of, nature,” Curtin (2005) writes (6). In the play, Texcoco expresses an awareness of this concept. For example, when Xochitl cries, he tells her that her tears “make the moon cry,” a statement that establishes a parallelism between the manipulation and disruption of the natural environment and the oppression of Xochitl, both caused by colonial power (López 1995, 187). In addition, Xochitl’s Aztec name—which means flower—links her to her physical

environment, and, indeed, her predicament is parallel to that of “the flowers [which] are dying” in the scene dramatizing her town’s destruction (181).

However, the encroachment of coloniality on the lives of the characters loosens their tie to nature, causing them to become two separate entities. Xochitl’s exposure to the colonizer—represented by Friar Francisco—and his imposed culture disrupts her unity with nature, a unity she needs to get back in order to regain peace. This gives her action of drowning her babies in the river a significance deeply rooted in the post-colonial and ecocritical realm: Xochitl chooses to give her children back to nature, to where they originally belong. “Mother earth, to you I give this child. I return him to you ... so that his soul will not be conquered,” she says at the moment of drowning her babies (López 1995, 196). She chooses for them a world that is unconquered and unexploited to find peace which she can no longer provide them with, peace which has disappeared from life after the conquest of the land. She explicitly emphasizes this, saying to her babies “It is because I love you that I’ve returned you to a better place” (196). In this sense, Xochitl sacrifices to give her children a better life, which casts her in the image of a selfless, loving mother. On the other hand, Xochimilco’s fetuses are killed before they are born and, instead of a river, they are thrown in a bucket, a dehumanizing gesture, signifying that owing to the imperial legacy people are still living in, human beings are reduced to no more than garbage. This post-human world which lacks balance, justice, and peace is no longer worth living. López’s heroines, thus, depart from the negative traditional interpretation of the character of *La Llorona* as the “bad woman and terrible mother” who killed her children “out of revenge” (López 1995, 180).

Similarly, the union between Xochimilco and her native locale is compelling. Xochimilco, a borough in Mexico City, was centered on the city of Xochimilco which had been an independent settlement from the pre-Hispanic period to the 20th century. The heroine of the contemporary story in the play is named after this formerly independent city, which was established on the shore of Lake Xochimilco in the precolonial period. Besides fusing the land with the character, the choice of this particular name contributes to the portrayal of the heroine’s character. Due to its historic separation from Mexico City during most of its history, the city of Xochimilco has an identity that is separate from the historic center of Mexico City. As a character in the play, Xochimilco also reflects independence and defiance that put her in opposition to post-colonial power. As a Mexican immigrant living in America, Xochimilco refuses racial oppression and challenges the injustice inflicted upon her, knowing that this will cost her a great price under a biased legal and social system. She challenges her white employer’s victimization and exploitation, facing a ten-year prison sentence, despite her innocence.

Xochimilco’s journey of resistance culminates in a state of unity and ultimate connection with nature and its nonhuman elements. Trying to comfort her crying daughter at the moment of their separation, she says to her “When you see the little birds flying...always think of me. Because that’s where I’ll be, with them” (López 1995, 220). This connection with the natural environment which does not come to

an end with the end of the character's life is based on the native Americans' belief that "life and death are part of an ongoing cycle" in which there is incarnation after death and there is a possibility for communication between the living and the dead ("Traditional Native Concepts of Death" 2014, para. 8). Combining these nature-oriented beliefs with resistance portrays nature as a refuge for the oppressed who neither find a place in this unjust world nor have the ability to change reality.

Although Xochimilco's association with her native land links her to her indigenous culture, her relation to the latter involves more complexity. Whereas her defiance of white authority enhances her indigenous identity, this very resistance sets her apart from her native culture as far as the roles of women are concerned. When Xochimilco decides to kill her fetuses, she casts herself in the popularly detested image of La Llorona. Nevertheless, her story brings to the myth a new dimension, that of standing up in the face of exploitation and deception. Her statement against victimization, therefore, makes her a voice of dissidence against her culture which endorses women's submission.

Colonialism, however, makes this connection with nature a tool of coercion. Regarded as part of nature, the natives were seen as "others" and were "thus treated instrumentally as animals" (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 6). This idea is reflected in the cruel and inhumane treatment of Xochitl and Xochimilco by Friar Francisco and Chris, respectively. The two women are the "others," the animals who are supposed to have no say in their destinies and no voice to challenge their exploitation. Huggan and Tiffin further add that because of their proximity to nature, the natives were also "forced or co-opted over time into western views of the environment, thereby rendering cultural and environmental restitution difficult if not impossible to achieve" (6). Indeed, both Xochitl and Xochimilco are forced to accept their inferior positions within the Christian colonial and the capitalist post-colonial environments, otherwise they would face serious consequences.

In addition, *Unconquered Spirits* employs the relationship between Man and nature to shed light on the contrast between the indigenous people and the representatives of European power in terms of nature's role in determining character nobility. Noteworthy here is the reference to the use of the word "savage" which has come to represent problems due to its manipulation in colonial discourse. According to Shepard Krech's *The Ecological Indian* (1999), "savage originally connoted a state of nature" (17). When the New World was discovered, Krech writes, Europeans described the serenity of the natives' lives as "void of all guile and treason," associating "primitiveness with virtue," as opposed to the corruption, greed and vanity characterizing European life at the time (18). This concept is behind the creation of the term "Ecological Indian," a manifestation of the "Noble Indian" that has been used for the stereotypes of the "Noble Savage," all used to refer to the indigenous people (17). This stereotype draws on the "benign and increasingly romantic associations" between the emotional proximity to nature and innocence, implications of "savage" which emphasize the "rationality, vigor and, morality of the nature-dwelling native" (16). Thus, a link was established between nobility and a state of life that has maintained its purity, being nearer to nature and

uncontaminated by the complexity and corruption that inevitably characterize a more sophisticated and materially advanced condition.

This concept is woven into *Unconquered Spirits*. Xochitl represents the “nature-dwelling nobles” whose grace and purity develop from their proximity to nature (17). But, under colonial power, this nobility becomes a peril. Xochitl’s innocence facilitates her manipulation by Friar Francisco, as his corrupt and cunning approach is foreign to her nature. At the moment of ravishing her, he tells her “Your people need to suffer, to repent for all of your sins . . . Only after you have suffered on earth can you truly deserve to enter through the gates of heaven,” and she submits to him, believing that “if [she] endured, the Lord would love [her] more” (López 1995, 186, 187). Thus, it can be argued that Xochitl’s dilemma is caused by her nobility which is manifested in innocently believing what she is told and a genuine desire to purge her soul. This nobility created by connectedness to nature contrasts, ironically, with the hypocrisy and cruelty of the European friar who is clad in the cloak of piety and civilization while manipulating religion to exploit the powerless native for his own personal ends.

On the other hand, implied in the colonialist “civilizing mission” as a pretext for invading land and conquering its people is the adoption and promotion of the other nature-based stereotype, namely the “Ignoble Savage,” one drawing on “a menacing malignancy” which characterizes the indigenous people (Krech 1999, 16). This image of the proximity to nature as derogatory was based on the idea that “wilderness is not occupied by human beings” (Curtin 2005, 6). This concept was further endorsed by nineteenth-century European anthropologists and sociologists to justify and support colonialist endeavour through “positioning savages on the earliest and lowest rungs of human society” (Krech 1999, 17). This is the view Spanish missionaries reflect toward the natives in *Unconquered Spirits*. “They are savages, idiots! They are not human,” Fray Francisco says at the outset of Xochitl’s story (López 1995, 183).

Ironically, however, it is the colonizers who are depicted in the play as savages in the derogatory sense of the word. This depiction is manifested in their attitude toward the land. The European invasion and usurpation of the land and the destruction of its elements—both natural and manmade—cast the West in a way that reverses Western discourse about colonization as a European enterprise of civilizing the indigenous people. Driven by greed, and legitimizing cruelty and humiliation of the natives to achieve power and control, the colonizers fit into the stereotype of the “Ignoble Savage” which emphasizes the “cannibalistic, bloodthirsty, inhuman aspects of savage life” (Krech 1999, 16). This portrayal contrasts with that of the oppressed indigenous people living peacefully on their land, not seeking to cross others’ boundaries, yet humiliated and victimized. Furthermore, the colonizers’ deception is highlighted at the beginning to shed light on the malignance of the Mission. Preaching the natives, the bishop tells them that God “does not deceive; He lies not . . . , despises no one. There is nothing evil in Him . . . He is the essence of love, compassion and mercy” (López 1995, 181). His speech defeats his purpose not only

through the stark contrast between the missionaries' practices and God's qualities they are expected to be guided by, but also through the parallelism it implies between the missionaries and the derogatory meaning of "savage."

In the colonial context, this attitude toward the land also establishes a contrast between two modes of life, namely a precolonial "natural, altruistic, and reverent" past and an "artificial, selfish, and materialistic" present drawn by European invaders and founded on an unjust power relation between land conquerors and the land's "natural residents" (Krech 1999, 19, 19, 17). The quote emphasizes selflessness, honour and respect as attributes of indigenous people, being closer to nature. Contributing to the association between nature and values that make human life civilized, this quote depicts the precolonial period as more humane and civilized than the following period with its fake promise of civilization.

Such contrast between a "natural" past and an "artificial" present ushers in a bleak, demoralizing future, represented in *Unconquered Spirits* by Xochimilco's story which takes place four centuries after Xochitl's. The structure throws light on "the continuing abuses of authority that operate in humanity's name," a central theme in postcolonial ecocriticism (Huggan and Tiffin 2015,13). Xochimilco represents another instance of social history delineated by specific discourses rooted in colonialism. In a postcolonial context, the dynamics of racial oppression are still at play in Xochimilco's life. Like Xochitl, Xochimilco is treated without the least regard of her feelings as a human being and, similar to Friar Francisco, Chris reflects the colonial construction of a hierarchal system which allows and normalizes manipulation of the natives. Chris tells Xochimilco that he loves her and hides from her the fact that he is married to make her believe he is going to marry her and, consequently, make it easier for her to have a relationship with him. Later, his exploitation of her as well as his intention not to marry her are exposed as racially based: "I can't marry you because ... you're Mexican ... A love like this isn't supposed to happen," he says to her (López 1995, 206). Yet, he refuses to end his relationship with her and rapes her in retaliation for her resistance.

The way Chris treats Xochimilco reflects the idea that Xochimilco's racial identity makes her oppression an easy task that would pass with no consequences. In other words, their relationship is one of power where he, as white, has an uncensored ability to exploit her, a continuation of the colonial value system Xochitl falls victim of. While it is true that Xochitl is coerced by Friar Francisco while Xochimilco voluntarily has a relationship with Chris, both women are tricked into believing the stories they are told. It is their innocence that leads to their dilemmas; Xochitl is driven by her genuine desire for spiritual purgation and Xochimilco's true love for Chris is the reason for her having a relationship with him.

The disruption coloniality brings about is significantly represented in the transformation the environments in both stories undergo. The first scene in Xochitl's story focuses on the devastation of the conquered land, Tecochtitlan, and how this conquest is changing the land's face. Chaos and fires prevail, destroying the elements of the physical environment, both natural and man-made. The plants are dying, the holy Pyramid of the Sun is transformed into a mission, and a cross is placed on the



temple on top of it. The scene finally signals the experience of acculturation, the assimilation of the indigenous culture to that of the conquerors', foreshadowing the dominance of the latter. At the end of the scene, Tonantzin is captured and tied to a cross by the Spanish soldiers, symbolizing the final and complete annihilation of the natives' culture through seizing the symbol of their religious belief around which all aspects of their life used to revolve.

This transformation involves desolation for the native people, in contrast to the Europeans' claims. When the New World was first discovered, it was linked to the mythic places of the Islands of the Blessed and the Garden of Eden with their connotations of peace, innocence, serenity, wisdom and a life free of worries and troubles (Krech 1999, 17). Tecochtlan represents a land where life has been founded on the natural attributes of the environment as well as the culture created by the indigenous people. To conquer this land and change its physical and cultural environment is, therefore, to put an end to this earthly paradise and transform it into hell, an interpretation which also establishes a parallelism between the European conquerors and Satan. This is indeed how the native people view the conquest of their land. Preparing to ruin the baptism of some natives including Xochitl, Texcoco expresses this idea, saying that "those demons have come and disrespected and destroyed our mother earth" and that, as a result of this destruction, life has become "hell on earth for us" (López 1995, 190).

In terms of time and space, Xochimilco's story is similarly set in a land which was seized by European colonizers centuries ago and where the effects of the colonial past still haunts the present. The colonizers of the past have come to control the land whose natives are now immigrants working for the post-colonizers' economy. The Texas shelling factory which is managed by Chris and where the workers are Mexican immigrants represent such transformed environment. Choosing for her adaptation of *La Llorona* a setting which reflects such cultural and economic oppression, López sheds light on issues of power, class, race, and culture, providing context for the conditions of indigenous women in the United States during the 1930s. Xochimilco is crushed by the transformed environment in a way that makes her racially, socially, and legally inferior.

Through the inhumane working conditions of the workers and the injustice done to Xochimilco, we see the legacy of the past dominating the scene with López drawing on the idea that colonialism has changed the economic landscape of the world, creating an underprivileged working class of non-European people. In *Environmental Ethics for a Postcolonial World*, Curtin (2005) presents an anthropocentric social justice movement which competes with the ecocentric environmental movement, shifting the focus from the place to the people. Curtin sheds light on the idea that socio-economic conditions are manifestations of environmental conditions.

Reading *Unconquered Spirits* in the light of this idea, it can be argued that post-colonial discrimination, in the form of seizing the land, its resources, and the means of production, has created an unjust economic system and, consequently,

restructured social hierarchy. Anthony Vital (2008) discusses the interconnectedness between ecocriticism and post-colonial critique, encouraging a “reading for nature with an awareness of colonial history” as a way to “address inequities among human populations and the attendant suffering and meager life-opportunities” (87, 90). Vital emphasizes the ways natural environments are impacted by colonialism and the subsequent injustices that inevitably arise. As depicted in the play, colonialism has caused the indigenous people to occupy the bottom social strata and, therefore, become the most vulnerable group, both socially and economically. Xochimilco explicitly expresses the exploitation of the economic system, saying that no matter how hard workers toil, “they [business owners] will still pay you the same miserable wage” (López 1995, 204). *Unconquered Spirits*, thus, shares the attack of postcolonial ecocriticism on “the global-capitalist system that continues to support colonialism in the present, much as it sustained it in the past” (Huggan and Tiffin 2015, 14). The social and economic injustice depicted as a result of the transformation of the environment reflects a condition opposite to that advocated by postcolonial ecocriticism. Instead of an inclusive environment which recognizes all members of the community as equal individuals, the play presents an economic environment of exclusion and discrimination founded on exploitation.

Together with racial and cultural prejudice, this unjust economic environment enhances the power relation between Europeans and natives, contributing to a corrupt, partial legal system. The conflict which arises between Chris and Xochimilco results in Xochimilco being sentenced to ten years in prison. This is a conflict between an economic and racial power and an exploited, underprivileged, indigenous worker whose racial and economic oppression makes her vulnerable on the legal level too. Chris’ power as a white employer suffices to disguise his personal issues with Xochimilco as serious accusations that lead to her imprisonment. When she challenges Chris’ deception and victimization of her, Xochimilco is crushed by the court, based on the false accusations that she has caused “espionage, and subversive activities aimed to overthrow the government of the United States” (López 1995, 220). Thus, racial and economic injustice is supported by a court system which becomes a tool of personal revenge for the powerful.

In regard to the goal of post-colonial ecocriticism, Curtin (2005) writes that postcolonial ecocriticism should work toward confirming “an environmental ethic [that sees] environmental justice, social justice, and economic justice as parts of the same whole, not as dissonant competitors” (7). The statement suggests the interdependence of environmental justice and socio-economic justice. In the same vein, Huggan and Tiffin (2015) note the role of postcolonial ecocriticism in promoting the rights of abused people and advocating the liberation of the oppressed, describing postcolonial ecocriticism as “eco-socialist in inspiration” (14). To elaborate, postcolonial ecocriticism examines the relationship between social and environmental conditions and aims at reforming social and economic injustice through achieving an environment which equally recognizes all its members. Therefore, when justice is replaced by oppression and discrimination—as with the

experience of coloniality—chaos and destruction follow on the level of both nature and Man.

Besides the perspective post-colonial ecocriticism adds to the present reading of *Unconquered Spirits* as a revisionist play, examining the text from the point of view of post-colonial psychoanalytic theory would further elucidate López's attack on the traditional interpretation of the myth. Exploring the characters' psyches against the (post)colonial backdrop of the play contributes to a deeper understanding of the power relations involved, with (post)colonizers as the key players and the indigenous people as the weak, manipulated object of power. The link between (post)coloniality and psychology has been noted across disciplines. Many scholars drew attention to the long-enduring impact of coloniality on post colonies. For example, in "Colonialism and Psychology of Culture," a research where this link is handled from the perspectives of anthropology and ethnic psychology, Sumie Okazaki, E. J. R. David and Nancy Abelmann (2008) emphasize the role of historical and ideological forces in creating cultural values and cultural identity. The authors argue that "the hegemonic Western-centered psychologies in former colonies" continue to affect psychological experiences in relation to identity and social functioning (91). Derek Hook (2008) also underlines the necessary role of psychoanalysis in understanding the desires of colonial power and unravelling the complexity in colonial practices and discourse. Hook maintains that the (post)colony is a context characterized by "radical gaps" and "extreme asymmetries of power," asserting the critical role of these gaps in the construction of both the (post)colonizer and (post)colonized psyches and the (post)colonial framework (270).

These ideas owe much to J. M. Coetzee's "The Mind of Apartheid". Although Coetzee's article examines the psychological rationale of apartheid, it is by no means solely relevant to this particular colonial experience. In fact, the article provides perspective on the colonizer-colonized dynamics in various colonial contexts. Accordingly, drawing on Coetzee's postcolonial psychological theory in analysing Xochilt's and Xochimilco's experiences would illuminate broadly psychological issues depicted in *Unconquered Spirits* as constructed by the forces of coloniality.

In his article, Coetzee (1991) argues that in terms of legislation, practices and thinking, apartheid is created by irrational forces which he refers to as a kind of "madness" (1) and identifies as self-interest/greed/desire, hatred, anxiety, and fear (3). This madness, he explains, is a "form of hubris," which hints to the excessive pride and defiance of basic essential values on the part of the colonizer, leading to his inescapable downfall (1). It is my contention that overlooking these irrational forces involved in creating the (post)colony, a context of extremely disparate power relations, undermines our understanding of the literature depicting such context. This gives rise to the need for further investigation of the psychological structure behind the forces governing social life in the (post)colony. The analysis will, therefore, explore these feelings that form the psyche of the (post)colonizer, extending their relevance to the (post)colonized.

Both stories in López's play reveal such emotional forces on the part of the representatives of (post)colonial power as well as their subjects, with varying degrees of manifestations due to the disparity in the characters' position within the power relations. From an ecocritical point of view, these forces of desire, hate and fear blinded by self-interest and nurtured by absolute power are products of the (post)colonial situation which restructures the environment to be the (post)colonizer's. Desire and self-interest drive Friar Francisco and Chris to their physical exploitation of Xochitl and Xochimilco. This is typical of the colonial mentality of invading, ravishing and controlling foreign lands in pursuit of power at the expense of the native people. Both Friar Francisco and Chris reflect cruelty. They make love to Xochitl and Xochimilco for their own pleasure and leave their victims to face "shame" and ultimately lose their lives either in the form of death or prison (López 1995, 195). This fate is ascribed by the positions of Francisco and Chris as the powerful parties in the power relations of coloniality and post coloniality which place the indigenous people as their inferior, coerced victims.

According to Coetzee, fear is a force that determines the attitudes and practices in this relation. Examining the context of apartheid, Coetzee (1991) argues that racial prejudice produces feelings of horror and anxiety which significantly impact the whites' policies in relation to the Black people. Believing that being coloured is "a deplorable fate" and that "coloured consciousness is an intrinsically unhappy one," the colonizer projects his own fear and hostility on the natives, creating a monstrous enemy to be feared and against whom the Afrikaner should defend himself (8). In this way, the colonizer justifies his own aggression against the native people.

López communicates the (post)colonizer's fear and hatred toward the indigenous people explicitly in the scene where Xochimilco recovers from her abortion. In a trans state, Xochimilco dreams that she is dead and that two angels take her to meet God. When she complains to God about the crimes that have been done to her and her people and asks why white people hate the natives, God replies "They don't hate you. They're afraid of you. They're afraid to discover in themselves the same pain, the same longings and dreams that you have. They fear the anger and the hatred of all your people whom they have hurt" (López 1995, 215). This reply sheds light on the post-colonizer's insecurity. Deep down, the post-colonizers are aware of their injustice and prejudice against the indigenous people. This generates in them fear of the natives' response, a kind of fear expressed in the form of racism, exploitation, and oppression and disguised under the mask of hatred and aggression. In Xochimilco's story, Chris reflects this psychological make up of post-colonialism. He is aware of his oppressive treatment of the native factory workers as well as his injustice to Xochimilco. When Xochimilco shows signs of dissatisfaction and defiance, he feels threatened and reacts by raping her and pressing false charges against her, causing her imprisonment. In López's notes on *Unconquered Spirits*, she refers to native American women and their bodies as "the prize" won by the Spanish invaders of Latin America (175). This implies a parallelism between ravished women and the conquered land, a central idea in ecocritical theory. Seen in the light of this idea, Chris' rape of Xochimilco gains an additional dimension. It becomes not

only an act of punishment and humiliation for the rebellious (post)colonized, but also a way of giving Chris, the (post)colonizer, a sense of victory and security to overcome his hidden fear.

In *Unconquered Spirits*, however, fear does not only haunt the (post)colonizer but also the (post)colonized. Xochitl's submission to the Spanish missionaries and her acculturation through changing her religion are manifestations of her fear in response to the oppression she is subjected to. She is the weaker party in the colonizer-colonized relationship and, therefore, she is forced to comply with the changes to her social and cultural environments.

Coetzee further theorizes that the effect of this feeling of anxiety on the colonizer's part extends to include inter-race relationships. He writes that this horror intensifies where the white psyche becomes haunted by a "morbid fear of miscegenation" (20). This is because race mixing would mean the inevitable end of the white race (8) and facing the bleak existence of the coloured people. On the other hand, López's play depicts this fear and refusal of race mixing but in relation to the (post)colonized. In both stories, it is the native mother who puts an end to her mixed-blood babies' lives, weaving the postcolonial ecocritical idea of the conquered land as a ravished mother into the motif of infanticide. Xochitl's identity as a native defines her motherhood. She becomes a symbol of her motherland which expels outsiders and fights back invasion and acculturation in an attempt to purge itself from disruption and restore the original state of balance and harmony between the natives and their original environment. Similarly, Xochimilco's abortion can be read as an act of resistance and anti-assimilation where she defies racial prejudice and exploitation. Thus, *La Llorona* is subverted, transforming the spiteful wife into a defiant heroine who tries to maintain her community's identity. The fact that Xochimilco does not commit suicide is also significant. It is another statement of resistance, transforming the oppression done to her into challenge, strength and, determination to survive. From a postcolonial ecocritical perspective, the attempt to preserve race purity and the determination to survive are acts of maintaining the original state of the environment and protecting it against socio-cultural changes.

Nevertheless, Xochimilco's survival acquires more power through being spiritual rather than physical. The play ends with a tree on the top of which are La Llorona, Xochitl and Tonantzin, the goddess of the earth, calling Xochimilco who climbs the tree and joins them. The ending suggests the persistence and survival of the values the heroines as well as their mythical ancestor stand for. The final stage directions, thus, are a dramatization of the play's title. Material destruction does not mean annihilation. Through their defiance, crushed cultures, ravished women, and overpowered people are "unconquered." Their history is told, and their legacy will always be a source of resistance to injustice and inspiration for the coerced. In addition, the survival of the oppressed through going back to nature harps on the ecocritical concept of the never-ending bond between Man and his natural environment. The ending implies that nature is the only haven for those crushed in a transformed, hostile environment where they have lost their place.

Thus, López takes her audience back and forth in time and place between sixteenth-century Mexico and twentieth-century America where La Llorona's presence is sensed as symbolic of the contemporary political condition portrayed. In so doing, the playwright sheds light on the long-enduring legacy of suffering which only changes in manifestation across time and place, while, in essence, it remains the same. With the emotional as well as the material oppression *La Llorona* amounts to, the myth becomes a rich source to draw upon to portray experiences which typically characterize the lives of a considerable portion of indigenous people in America. López subverts traditional mythology to make a statement about issues of concern in post-colonial ecocritical thought and various forms of injustice such as racism, colonialism, and acculturation. In her subversion of the myth, López contextualizes her characters' experiences, powerfully undermining the conventional interpretation of the myth, replacing it with a fresh perspective on the realities of (post)coloniality and the psychological structure it creates.

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