Feminism and Ecofeminism Consciousness in the Selected Literary Works of Some African Female Writers

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Abstract

This paper offers a feminist and ecofeminist study and examines the interplay between gender and ecological consciousness in selected works of some African writers. The study hinges on a critical analysis of women subjugation, power dynamics of the works of some female writers, focusing on the social, cultural, economic, ecological, and psychological constraints that shape the lives of Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* and *Scarlet Song*, Amma Darko's *Housemaid* and *Beyond The Horizon*, Nawal El Saddawi's *Woman At Point Zero* and *God Dies By The Nile,* Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols,* and Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind The Clouds*. This paper explores the connection between the oppression of women and the degradation of the natural environment. The study employs a qualitative, descriptive and comparative approach to identify patterns of female oppression, resistance and subjugation. By employing feminist, ecofeminist, and gender ecological frameworks, the study investigates how patriarchal domination not only subjugates women but also disrupts the natural environment, revealing a profound interconnectedness between social and ecological oppression. The analysis explores men's exploitative activity and its ravaging effects on women and animals, highlighting how systemic hierarchies generate ethical, psychological, and environmental consequences.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Feminism, Anthropocentrism, Ecosophy, Patriarchy.

Introduction

Gender struggles and female resistance are persuasive themes in literature, reflecting the societal realities of women in patriarchal societies. Gender inequality has remained one of the most persistent issues in African societies; women often face marginalisation, limited opportunities, and cultural expectation that restrict their freedom and growth, impacting the cultural environment negatively. Literature has long been a platform through which writers expose and challenge such injustices. African female authors, in particular use storytelling to reveal the challenges faced by women/environment and the strength that they display in resisting them.

Literature has consistently served as a medium through which societies interrogate structures of power, inequality, and survival. In contemporary, literature discourse, increasing attention has been paid to the interconnected nature of oppression, particularly how gender domination often exists alongside other forms of control such as gender hierarchy, economic maginalisation of the female, and environmental exploitation. The interconnected understanding of oppression has given rise to critical approaches such as ecofeminism and gendered ecology, which examine how patriarchal systems that subordinate women frequently operate through the same ideological mechanisms that justify the exploitation of nature and other vulnerable groups.

The emergence of feminism in the eighteenth century and ecofeminism in the late twentieth century particularly through the

works of scholars such as Elaine Showater, Francoise d' Eaubonne, Karen Warren and Val Plumwood, brought critical attention to the relationship between domination and hierarchy. Warren argues that "patriarchal thinking is structured around systems of superiority and inferiority, where women, nature, and marginalised populations are positioned within the same framework of subordination" (1). This intellectual development created a new direction in literary criticism where texts began to be examined not only as representation of gender struggle but also as reflections of broader ecological and social power dynamics.

Environmentalism is primarily concerned with environmental protection and is grounded in three conceptual frameworks: anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism (Kopnina et al 109).

Some feminist theories also share a commitment to environmental protection, one of which is ecofeminism. A key principle linking environmentalism and ecofeminism is ecosophy, a term rooted in deep ecology. Alan defines ecosophy as "the ecological wisdom characterised by harmonious dwelling in our places, which include all our relationships, both human and non-human" (41). The concept supports the close connection between environmentalist and ecofeminist and activism. According to Ohia, "Ecofeminism provides the conceptual basis for understanding the interconnected structures of domination that link the oppression of women with the exploitation of nature and other marginalised groups, while womanism provides

the cultural and philosophical grounding" (3).

This study assumes that patriarchal activities which feminism reject vehemently is the cause of violence against women and nature; these activities perpetrated by certain men, is both a human and a sexist problem. It also argues that attempts to sexualise the resolution of the problem will likely reinforce the concept of "otherness", which these efforts aim to solve, thereby negating the balance the world desperately needs – something that literature can help facilitate. The study uses feminism and ecofeminism to explore how literature (particularly the selected novels) illustrates the parallels between the plight of women (and men) and environmental abuse in African communities examining the authors' artistic visions for solving these problems.

Feminism interrogates the weight of patriarchal activities: subjugation, intimidation, marginalisation, inequality on women, while ecofeminism interrogates the discourses of "nature" that have historically reinforced gender dualities. "These discourses include sexism, racism, speciesism, nationalism, and homophobia" (Gaard Estok, and Oppermam, Serpil 2).

Research Design and Methods

This study adopts the descriptive research design in analysing feminism and ecofeminism consciousness in the selected literary works of some African female writers. The descriptive research design demands that the researcher simple describes the

given phenomenon the way it is without incorporating any external features or elements. Thus, the descriptive design is the most suitable for this paper. Data are analysed using descriptive analytical method. The data discussion and result are done simultaneously. There is no use of charts, diagrams, calculations and statistics in analysing the data. The data are purely qualitative.

The study adopts the purposive sampling technique as the researcher extracts only textual elements that fall within the scope of the research. Even though the primary data are extracted from the selected texts, the secondary data are got from other sources particularly books outside the selected texts, the internet, etc. Google search machines such as opera mini and chrome are used to sort for data online. Many of the secondary data are downloaded texts and research materials available on the internet. All these form the instrument and method of data collection.

Feminism Strand in Works of African Female Writers

This study situates the literary representation of selected African female writers in their works, highlighting how culture, tradition, patriarchy, poverty, and gender roles intersect to limit women's autonomy and opportunities. To investigate those patriarchal practices and the rise of feminism through the works of African female writers, the study carefully analyses the selected novels through the lens of feminism and ecofeminism, using a text-based qualitative technique. The chosen texts for analysis are Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter* and *Scarlet Song*, Amma Darko's *Housemaid* and

Beyond The Horizon, Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman At Point Zero* and *God Dies By Nile*, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols*, and Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind The Clouds*. These texts were selected for their shared focus on feminism and eco-poetics – the depiction of women, men and nature as vital parts of the ecosystem.

It is pertinent to state that feminism is a subversive theory that confronts the age-old macho male culture. "Men had consciously and unconsciously constructed women as inferior for so long that even women came to accept a lesser status" (Dobie 105). Through this inferior status, into which they have been socialised by patriarchal culture, women have suffered an imbalance of power, indignities, denials, and even brutalities at the hands of men. "This, from its inception, feminism has sought to address the oppression of women, which has allowed them little or no voice and has trivialised, degraded, and objectified them" (Bressler, 180; Udumukwu, 185). "Therefore, the goal of feminism is to achieve equality between sexes" (Horber, 1) by "changing the degrading view of women" (Bressler, 180). Ecofeminism is a theoretical perspective that has strong ties with feminism; because feminism gained momentum and birthed multiple perspectives.

As Bressler rightly noted "physical geography plays a significant role in determining the major interests of various voices of feminist criticism" (185). In other words, as cultural and physical climates vary across geographical regions, so do the voices of feminism. African feminism, thus, requires a different

colour in both theory and literary representation. Among the books and authors that gave currency to African feminism, Alice Walker, an African American, features prominently. This is because her theoretical postulations and her political and feminist activism throughout United States were primarily focused on African people and cultures. Notably, her novel, *The Color Purple* speaks volumes of her contribution to the female voice.

Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter* and *Scarlet Song*

Mariama Ba's works foreground the emotional and intellectual struggles of educated African women caught between tradition and modernity. In *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye's life is trample upon by betrayal and tradition, with the sudden arrival of co-wife, sanctioned by religion and cultural interpretations. In *Scarlet Song*, the intersection of race and gender becomes more complex as Mireilla faces the added layer of racial alienation in a foreign patriarchal structure. Through intimate narrative forms, Ba critiques polygamy, patriarchy, marriage, and cultural hypocrisy, while affirming female solidarity and education as tools of empowerment. In a similar vein, de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* perspective of women's historical denials, argues that "women are historically constructed as "the other", their freedom impinged upon by patriarchal definitions of femininity" (267). This shows how societal expectations of femininity act as barrier, limiting women's freedom and forcing them into a secondary role that serves patriarchal interests.

Mariama Ba underscores the intersection of tradition, marriage

and female autonomy. In *So Long a Letter*, Ba presents women's oppression through the lens of polygymy (polygamy), social expectations, and limited economic opportunities. The novel is a beautiful exploration of the pains, the deprivations and betrayal of a wise, progressive, devoted and resourceful mother of many children, Ramatoulaye, who is abandoned by her husband of twenty-five years in his quest for a second marriage to a classmate of his daughter. Adimora-Ezeigbo opines that *So Long a Letter* has been written specifically to: expose the cultural traditions that marginalise and oppress women in Senegal. Using Ramatoulaye as her voice, Ba criticises the situation where patriarchy and tradition continue to slow down women's development, even in post-independence Senegal (15).

In Mariama Ba's So Long a Letter, one already notices the ardent desire of the female writer to portray her African background and the particular female condition already mentioned in this discourse. Moreover, almost all the issues we are going to come across in subsequent novels authored by women are already in this novel. It therefore becomes important and interesting to trace the trajectory and development of these issues overtime. According to Adebayo, "the ideas of domination, inequality, suppression and oppression, are anathema to democracy, which is the form of government in many countries especially in Africa and francophone West Africa" (2).

Similarly, Mariama Ba's *Scarlet Song* portrays cross-cultural tensions in marriage, demonstrating how globalised

social structures intersect with local patriarchal norms to constrain women's freedom. Empirical analysis of Ba's novels suggests that her works not only depict oppression but also offer models of female solidarity and intellectual agency, illustrating African feminist principles in practice. Ba's *Scarlet Song* could be examined through Rutheelen Josselson's theory of women identity development, as the novel dramatises women's struggle for selfhood within oppressive cultural and patriarchal structures.

Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* and *Beyond The Horizon*

Amma Darko's novels have been the subject of extensive empirical study, particularly concerning urbanisation, poverty, and gendered vulnerability. His novels align with Chika Uniqwe's *On Black sisters' Street*, explores how migration exposes women to new forms of exploitation by men. "They had left home to seek freedom, but found themselves trapped in another kind of prison" (Darko's *Housemaid*, 12). This narrative demonstrates that women's subjugation is both locally and globally shaped by cultural expectations and economic desperation. Scholars such as Ogunyemi argues that "Darko's *The Housemaid* and *Beyond the Horizon*, highlight the socio-economic determinants of women's oppression, showing how economic dependence, migration, and class intersect with gender to limit autonomy and expose women to exploitation" (91).

Efia, the protagonist of *The Housemaid* navigates a precarious urban environment, negotiating abusive labour relations while striving to maintain dignity and

agency. Darko's emphasis on urban settings reflects the broader socio-political context of postcolonial Ghana, illustrating the continuity of patriarchal structures within rapidly changing societies. African women's experiences cannot be fully understood solely through gender, they are also shaped by class, ethnicity, education, religion, sexuality, etc.

In Ama Darko's *The Housemaid,* Efia's vulnerability emerges from her gender, her socio-economic marginality, and her rural-urban migration, illustrating how these factors converge to limit autonomy and create unique vulnerabilities. His works also enable the study to analyse the differential ways in which characters experience oppression and empowerment. This stresses that gender oppression cannot be separated from the race, class, culture, and global power dynamics. All these create unique forms of oppression. Darko, in *The Housemaid* and *Beyond the Horizon* explores themes of gender inequality, race, class, socio-economic marginality, patriarchal oppression and female empowerment, contributing to the rich tapestry of African literature that boosts social norms.

Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman At Point Zero* And *God Dies By The Nile*

Nawal El Saadawi's writng from an Egyptian perspective shows how cultural and religious traditions reinforce subordination. Her *Woman At Point Zero, God Dies By The Nile*, and *The Hidden Face of Eve*, attest that "The oppression of women is universal, but it takes different forms in different societies. *Woman At Point Zero* represents a critical intersection of African feminist thought,

illustrating the interplay between patriarchy, economic exploitation, and social injustice in African context. An analysis demonstrates that Firdaus' journey exemplifies how women negotiate multiple forms of oppression, including sexual exploitation, domestic violence and subjugation, and legal marginalisation. Saadawi's work also foregrounds narrative authority as a tool for empowerment, allowing women's voices to challenge societal structures that have historically silenced them.

Gray et al reveal that "female objectification plays out in such ways as dehumanising, devaluing, marginalising, and subjecting the body mainly for sexual gratification" (1). The position of Gray et al above implies that women are seen as objects of appetite. This explains why a lot of women are sexually abused, harassed, and raped. On this note, the observation of Shihada that Saadawi's works are "sharply drawn and deeply impressive works which bear witness to the treatment of women in Egypt and the Islamic world" (103) is valid. In his assessment of Saadawi's *Woman At Point Zero*, Al-Darayseh posits:

> Growth, development and advancement have not helped in the eradication of patriarchy in Africa. Women are still suffering from discrimination…. This is evident in Firdaus' childhood, during which she becomes aware of the inferiority that is accorded to her gender… how unperturbed her father feels when his female daughters die, but on the contrary if it happens to a

> male child, he vents his frustration on Firdaus' mother, blaming and beating her for the death of his son (18).

Similarly, Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile* portrays the intersection of patriarchy, political corruption, class oppression, and religious manipulation in a rural Egyptian community. It exposes how institutional power structure sustains gender inequality and social injustice. Saadawi's narrative critiques the authoritarian and patriarchal systems that silence marginalised voices. Adopting insights from the work of socialist feminist theorists, Shihada notes "that class and patriarchy are central constraints in women's lives and that "women in *God Dies by the Nile* are victims of the patriarchal class system consolidated by politics, religion, and social customs" (162). Shihada further observes that "for patriarchal class ideology to survive as an oppressive system, brutal forces are instilled and used to implement such ideology in society" (162).

Impliedly, the continuous existence of patriarchy heavily depends on the extent to which its ideologies are enforced with the backing of religion and tradition. From a socialist feminist perspective, El Saadawi's project in the novel, according to Shihada is "…to deconstruct the patriarchal class system by revealing its dark side where women are preyed upon, raped, and destroyed for being women, and even men are eliminated for failing to support such a system" (162). This is done through characters like Zakaya and Fatheya, who are symbols of female resistance against the

"patriarchal class structures that enslave them" (126). El Saadawi, through her female characters, rejects the objectivation of women, which is anchored in an ideology that a person or gender exists mainly as an object or tool to be exploited. It does not recognise the personality or group of personalities as spiritual beings with creative abilities and adventurous tendencies.

Discussion of the Comparative Analysis of Studies on Ba, Darko and El Saadawi's Works

There is no doubt that women are discriminated against in the work place, at home, and in the public sector. In El Saadawi's *Woman At Point Zero*, Firdaus is made to believe that her father is superior to her mother, which is why he marginalises and maltreats her at will. According to Mohanty, comparative studies show that "Firdaus' experiences resonate with African women's struggles, highlighting the universality of gendered oppression across cultural and geographic boundaries, while also revealing the importance of socio-historical context in shaping forms of resistance and agency" (34).

For Ezeigbo, Saadawi's works portray the experiences of rural women as well as women in the urban set-up whose fate is invariably burdened by male oppression and patriarchal domination, are compounded by the impositions of the tenets of Islam which marginalise women" (133 – 134). Ezeigbo's stance clearly points to the fact that women at all levels of society are affected by the oppression induced

by patriarchy and religion. Saadawi gives a clear insight into the oppression of women as wives, daughters, peasants, workers, prostitutes, and so on. In the researcher's opinion, both highlight how patriarchy crushes women everywhere, like Kehinde under Albert's control or Saadawi's victim forcing them to fight for basic rights. Also Ezeigbo shows religion chaining women while patriarchy hits women as daughters or prostitutes alike. In Marcel Farry's interview with El Saadawi, she claims:

> We as women are oppressed by this division between the spirit and the body. Because in religion, God became the symbol of the spirit and mind, and man was created in the image of God, so man represented spirit and mind. As for women, they were degraded to be the symbol of the body of the devil and of bad manners.

The above statement is what El Saadawi challenges in her novels. She liberates her female heroine from being confined in a body that is controlled by the patriarchal system and unleashes the spirit that revolts against injustice. In her works, Nawal El Saadawi's revolutionary spirit is the vehicle through which she pushes for a new identity and deconstructs all the limitations and paradoxes that come with societal religious institutions. The statement above shows that it is safe to think that feminist literature has played and will continue to play a useful role in Africa, namely the creation of the awareness that the woman is important, that both sexes are complimentary in the building of a stable and progressive world and

that there is a good need to reject unfavourable aspects of male-female relationship, especially those endorsed by asinine customs, religion and questionable modern legislation.

Onuekwusi in his critical analysis of *Woman At Point Zero* observes that *clitoridectomy* is one of the "atrocities enacted against the heroine, Firdaus because she is female; it contributes heavily to her formation" (91). On this note, he provides information on the culture of *clitoridectomy*, especially as a patriarchal tool for oppressing women. It also exposes the concept that women are less than property with which the male can do as he wishes. An appraisal of the ordeals of the heroine of *Woman At Point Zero* and the issues raised in the novel leads Onuekwusi to rightly submit that that novel "can be set fruitfully in the context of feminist fiction (115). Firdaus' experiences are the experiences of women. Unarguably, Zeidan attests that the novel "exposed patriarchy and its effects on women as individuals and declared the right to self-determination for its heroine" (235).

Royer goes further to reveal El Saadawi's commitment towards exposing the consequences of regarding women as a commodity and forcing them to do as the men wish, as practiced by the patriarchal social order that prevails in the Arabo-Islamic world. In *God Die By The Nile*, Royer opines, "holds nothing back in indicting an immoral and hypocritical government figure and his lackeys who feel no sense of responsibility for the land or the people who work it" (136). This position of Royer above was portrayed by El Saadawi, who

presents the cruel exploitation of the peasantry in Egypt by the Bourgeoisie. For instance, Firdaus' life in *Woman At Point Zero* is constrained by intersecting social, legal, and economic structures, but her acts of resistance demonstrate that empowerment occurs not in isolation but within a network of interdependent social and personal factors. Viewing from this lens, this study captures the multiplicity of barriers that women face while highlighting the strategies through which they negotiate or contest these constraints.

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols* and Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds*

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols* is one of the writings of the third wave as part of the evolution of the Nigerian literary canon and the upsurge of the female voice in literature. "…Early Nigerian literature often relegated the female character to the domestic periphery, serving only as a foil to the male protagonist's journey" (Achebe, 109). However, the late 1930s and 1970s witnessed a seismic shift with the emergence of female writers like Flora Nwapa, whose seminal work *Efuru* (1966) provided the first major challenge to the fiction narrative. This "first wave" of female-authored literature began the process of reclaiming the "House" as a sight of political and social agency. This was followed by Buchi Emecheta, who highlighted the "Double colonisation" of the Nigerian woman, oppressed by both the British colonial master and the local African patriarch.

Akochi Adimora-Ezeigbo occupies a unique position in this evolution. As a "third wave" female author, she does not merely document the

oppression of women; she seeks to re-engineer the very structure of power. In her Eagle woman trilogy, and specifically in *House of Symbols*, the background of this study is situated in this "Reclamation Project". The novel is not just a story of a family in the 1950s; it is a sophisticated analysis of how the Nigerian women transitioned from being a "Silent Object" in male-authored texts to becoming the "Architect of Destiny" in her own right. This study therefore, is grounded in the historical necessity of deconstructing how gender and power were negotiated during Nigeria's most transformative decade using the lens of feminism and ecofeminism as the transformation base. "…The reclamation of the African woman's narrative began in earnest with the publication of Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, which challenged the "silent mother" trope" (Nwapa 66).

The 1950s: Intersection of Tradition and Colonial Modernity

House of Symbols captures the "historical liminality, the space between the "Old World" of ancestral authority when women were subjugated and their rights stifled and the "New World" of colonial education when women reclaimed their rights and their voices are heard (restored). The novel captures this trend perfectly by showing how the female protagonist steps into this vacuum. When Josiah's health begins to fail, the novel reveals a shift: power moves from the "Head of the House". This study explores how this shift was not an accident of history but a systematic response

to the changing times of the 1950s, as Steady notes, "…the 1950s was a period of Emergent capitalism" where women's economic autonomy through trade began to shift the domestic power balance" (81).

The Spiritual and Symbolic Dimension of 1960 Female Power in *House of Symbols*

Symbolism gives the novel its title. In Igbo cosmology, power is rarely seen purely physical or political. It is deeply rooted in the spiritual and the symbolic. The "House" in the novel is a multi-layered symbol: it represents the womb, the family unit, the community, and ultimately, the nation of Nigeria itself. Adimora-Ezeigbo employs symbols like Eagle (representing strength and vision) and the "sun" to signify the rising authority of the woman. In House of Symbols, Eagle-woman is not just a trader; she is a "visionary". Her dreams and spiritual insights give her a form of "symbolic capital" that even the man in her community must respect.

This study examines the gap between "visible power" (the man's right to speak in the public square) and "invincible power" (the woman's control over the spiritual and domestic hearth). By interrogating these symbols, the study highlights that gender roles in the 1950s were far more fluid than previously recorded in history books. The "House" was not a prison for the woman; it was her headquartres, the site where she gathered the symbols of her power to lead her family into a new era.

Then, emerged the "eras of representation" in Nigerian fiction. In the pre-independence era, the Nigerian woman was often depicted through a lens of

romanticised passivity or primitive domesticity. Early male writers, while revolutionary in their fight against colonial stereotypes, frequently failed to grant their female characters internal lives. Women were seen as "adjunct" to the male hero, their value tied to their fertility or their obedience in clear reflection to societal realities and expectations.

As the 1960s progressed into the 1980s, writers like Flora Nwapa, and Buchi Emecheta began to dismantle these tropes. However, their focus was often on the clash, the woman against the man, or the woman against the tradition. Alkachi Adimora-Ezeigbo represents a more modern, nuanced "Third Wave" writer. Her work in *House of Symbols* moves beyond the "protest" phase of feminism and enters the "reconstruction" phase. She does not just show women suffering; she shows them building. This study indentifies this transition: from the "Woman as victim to the woman as institutional leader". By analysing the events of the 1950s, Adimora-Ezeigbo allows us to see the roots of female leadership that were always there, hidden beneath the surface of colonial history.

This study explores the "Sacred Agency" of woman in Igbo cosmology. Long before Christianity, women held roles as priestesses, healers, and *Umuada* (the collective daughters. While colonialism and Christianity tried to push women out of the sacred space, Adimora-Ezeigbo uses symbolism to show that this spiritual power never truly left. The women sustain their spiritual hegemony in Igbo land. The "symbols" in the novel, the visions, the dreams, and the ancestral

connections are tools of spiritual Hegemony. When Eagle woman receives a vision, she is accessing a source of authority that is higher than any man-made law. In the Igbo worldview, a woman with spiritual insight is "above" her gender. She becomes a vessel for the divine, Adimora-Ezeigbo uses the *House of Symbols* to remind the reader that power in Nigeria is multi-dimensional. It is not just about who speaks the loudest in the village square; it is about who holds the spiritual "key" to the family's survival and feature. The Eaglewoman in the novel is like the snail in Adimora-Ezeigbo's snail sense feminism. In the novel, the Eaglewoman's authority is built on this very principle; she is the "snail" that keeps the "house" on her back, ensuring that every member of the family is sheltered and moving forward at the same time.

In addition, the snail-sense principle focuses on the "slime" or the lubricant that the snail produces to make its journey easier. In human sense, this represents the "social capital" and the "diplomacy" that African women use to solve problems. Instead of hitting a wall head-on, the snail-sense feminist uses her words, her kindness, and her economic contributions to "grease the wheels" of her society. As Chukwuma notes in her analysis of Nigerian female writers, this type of power is "subtle but inevitable" because it achieves results without leaving scars or creating enemies (104).

In *House of Symbols,* we see this when the protagonist handles her husband's moods or the demands of his relatives; she does not fight them; she "negotiates" them into a position that favours her vision.

This makes snail-sense feminism a theory of "winning through wisdom", "proving that a woman's silence or her submissive posture is often a strategic choice made to ensure a smooth path for her business and her family. Moreover, the "antennae" of the snail represent the visionary and spiritual qualities of the woman. Just as the snail uses its antennae to feel the environment and detect danger from a distance, the African woman uses her intuition, her dreams, and her spiritual sensitivity to guide her household.

Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind The Clouds*

Behind the Clouds is an exploration of themes of gender inequality, patriarchal oppression and female empowerment; highlighting the struggles of women against oppressive cultural norms and their resistance against the constraints of a male dominated society. It explores deeply how social norms and traditional roles affect women, especially in marriage and family setting. Through the character Ije, the novel reveals how women are blamed for childlessness and suffer under patriarchal pressure; portraying female resilience and quiet resistance. The novel focuses on the lives of women in a patriarchal society where traditional expectations often clash with modern feminist aspirations. The novel highlights, through its characters, various forms of female resistance, coping mechanisms, and quest for autonomy, making it a significant text for understanding gender dynamics in African contexts.

This study seeks to explore the gender struggles in the novel and how the female characters challenge the structures that limit

them in the light of the author's feminist ideology and the Nigerian woman's experience.

Therefore, *Behind the Clouds* is a poignant exploration of gender dynamics and female agency in Nigerian society. According to Ugwu, "Okoye's *Behind The Clouds* presents a nuanced exploration of female experiences, underscoring the complexities of patriarchal oppression and female agency" (12). He notes that females' protagonists in the novel employ various strategies to resist patriarchal domination, including "subtle subversion, overt defiance, and negotiation. This aligns with the understanding that Okoye's work showcases the multifaceted nature of female resistance in Nigeria society. Consequently, *Behind the Clouds* underscores the need for women to assert their autonomy and challenge oppressive structures. Its central concern is gender struggles, where female protagonist confronts cultural expectations that blame women for infertility and subordinate their identities to patriarchal norms. The protagonist embodies feminist consciousness, challenging patriarchal norms and asserting her autonomy as a woman. Nfah-Abbenyi notes that "African female characters are often placed in positions where they must "negotiate space, voice, and autonomy" within both domestic and public spheres" (68).

In *Behind the Clouds,* this negotiation becomes evident in Ije's evolving resistance to her in-laws and societal norms. Her refusal to accept a co-wife and her emotional strength despite cultural pressures highlight the feminist undertones discussed by Nfah-

Abbenyi. In this novel, women redefine themselves within a cultural context that has historically subordinated female voices. The narrative is characterised by diverse and multiple consciousness that redefine the African woman's identity as she acquires a new voice that rejects the totalising traditional stereotypes that defined her womanhood within an African socio-cultural reality. Chukwuma states: "African female writers have taken up the gauntlet to portray the multifaceted images of women – not as passive recipients of culture but as active agents in reshaping their realities" (7). This statement directly relates to the novel, where the protagonist, Ije, defies the conventional image of a submissive wife, instead seeking agency in a society that marginalises women without children. Chukwuma also notes that "the new African woman is portrayed as one who is not afraid to question, to speak, and to act against the odds that confine her" (12). This aligns with Ije's character that resists societal stigma tied to infertility, a dominant cultural issue that defines female worth in traditional Nigerian (African) settings. Ije resists all the pressures in ways that align closely with liberal feminism.

The Evolution of Ecofeminism

As many tenets evolved in feminism, theorists also considered connecting between the treatment of the environment and the treatment of women in patriarchal societies and embedded these concerns within a frame that became ecofeminism. Ecofeminism, a term coined by the French feminist, Francoise d' Eaubonne highlights the connections between the injustice

to women and nature facilitated by patriarchal ideologies. It is anchored to the dualisms instituted by patriarchal systems, which have taken root in many cultures. Thus, the human/nature, man/woman, and other dualisms subsisted as scholars tried to explore the theoretical frame. Ecofeminism identifies links between the abuse of nature and the abuse of women by patriarchal structures. This means that all man/woman abuses indirectly impact the natural environment. Ecofeminism is connected to ecological criticism, and the basic ideologies that link female exploitation to environmental abuse, and the claim that women engage in environmentally sustainable practices because their nurturing abilities make them closer to nature than men.

Even though the various strands of ecofeminism are not unified in their perceptions of the relations between the origin of nature and gender domination, they share some commonalities in their theories. The common theoretical basis of all ecofeminist claims is that position that the oppression of women and the oppression of nature are intricately linked; to adequately understand the character of the oppression of women and nature, it is necessary to understand that connection. "Essentially, an ecological perspective must be included in feminist theory and practice; likewise, and solution to ecological problems must include an approach rooted in feminism (Archambault, 19).

Results

All the works analysed in this study, reveal attempts to reverse the subjugation of women and nature. However, social ecofeminism, especially the strand of it which Plumwood branded as critical ecofeminism emphasises the emancipation of men and women (together with nature) even from masculinist violence. Ecofeminism anchors its basic theory on the recognition of the symbiotic need, one for the other, among members of the eco-system encompassing human beings (female and male) and nature (soil, minerals, water, air, animals, and vegetation).

In ecofeminism as in feminism, the problem of oppression transcends a simple masculine identity as viewed in men's patriarchal oppression against women in the novels under review in this study. According to Plumwood, this includes "the complex cultural identity of the master formed in the context of class, race, species, and gender domination" (5). He further notes that dualistic notions of human-nature relations should be challenged by all, regardless of gender or class. He also points out that women are not only victims of domination but can be oppressors in certain contexts. To Ling, "critical ecofeminism is, thus, committed to the elimination of all forms of hierarchy; hence it is liberal in character, and in contradistinction to radical feminism or other separatist perspectives in ecofeminism" (27).

Conclusion

This study underscores feminism and ecofeminism consciously in the selected literary works of some African female writers – Mariama Ba, Amma Darko, Nawal El Saadawi, Akachi Adimoro-Ezeigbo,

and Ifeoma Okoye. Studies indicate that novels of these African female writers do more than depict oppression; they challenge readers to interrogate social norms, question patriarchal authority, and recognise women's agency. For example, Eze argues that African literature functions as both an educational tool and a site of activism, enabling readers to engage critically with issues of gender inequality while providing models of resilience and empowerment (23).

These works serve as key examples of how literature can document oppression, illuminate strategies of resistance, and advocate for social transformation. They collectively reinforce the importance of a multidimensional, intersectional, and culturally grounded approach to analysing women's marginalisation, confirming the value of African feminism and ecofeminism in the fight against man's inhumanity to women and nature. Feminism and ecofeminism could be seen as burning desires not just to reduce female dehumanisation anchored on sex-related issues and abuse of nature but as total eradication of such. Feminism/ecofeminism is an organism activity to promote women's right and interests and protect the environment from human abuse. It promotes women struggle to get their proper places in the society and quest by women to get their rights recognised; as well as enhances the protection of the natural environment. The term feminism/ecofeminism is linked with women's activism from the late 19th Century and early twentieth century to present.

Women cannot effectively and successfully assert themselves in a

male-dominated society without an ideology backing them. In the word of Emecheta, "men have written the history, it is high time women wrote the stories (6). Thus, the theories of liberation, which tilt toward the liberal philosophy, as is evident in feminism and ecofeminism, advocate just relationships among all inhabitants of the earth, which should work together in harmonious equalitarianism. However, not all strands of feminist and ecofeminist theories accept that understanding of the solutions to the female/male, and human/nature dualisms, were brought about by the mechanistic macho male competitive market culture. Such strands as radicals and lesbian feminisms and socialist ecofeminism (which is radical in orientation as well) favour separatist gender politics.

African feminist theory provides a robust conceptualisation of patriarchy, illustrating how it manifests in cultural traditions, economic dependencies, ideological systems, and social expectations. At the same time, these theoretical perspectives recognise that patriarchy is not absolute; it is contested and negotiated within social, personal, and narrative spaces, opening possibilities for resistance and empowerment. Through Ba, Darka, El Saadawi, Ezeigbo, and Okoye, Achebe opines that: "African literature captures the complex realities of women's lives, portraying oppression and resilience while interrogating social norms, patriarchal authority, and cultural expectations" (15). The novels provide a lens through which readers can examine the structural, ideological, and

personal dimensions of women's degradation, highlighting the experiences and social critique.

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