

# ECOFEMINISM IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD

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**Abstract**—Ecofeminism is a branch of feminism that sees environmentalism as a cornerstone of its theory and practice, and it elaborates the relationship between women and the earth. Ecofeminist theorists use the idea of gender to examine human – natural relationships. The connection of women with nature, ideologies, different cultures are inexplicable. It also paves way to addressing the notion of oppression of women as that of nature. The association of nature in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* is unaltered. The novel provides a comprehensive and expository survey of the traditional African Society, its dogmas; it is very many ills directed more particularly towards subordinating a woman to a man. The story grows through the changes in the description of nature. The representation of nature imparts a strong change in the portrait of the character also. The close association of the protagonist and nature is flawless. The strong beliefs of the traditional Igbo society and the modern industrial Lagos develops around the protagonist, Nnu Ego. Also, other characters in Igbo rely entirely on the faith of their 'chi' (personal God) and how this faith can control their psyche. Ecofeminism emphasizes that both women and nature must be respected. The novel showcases the oppression of women of different generation same as that of the natural environment. Their body is always compared to nature and its fruitfulness. This paper intends to draw a connection between the women and the environment around her.

**Keywords**—Ecofeminism, nature, women, oppression, African society

## I. INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminism shows a deep connection between nature and women and how this association itself creates a problem for women. This ecofeminist analysis has shown the most contentious problem, as generated structures ignore other identities that identify women such as culture, age and sex. This also means that in terms of caring for nature, all men differ from women. Similar collections of beliefs that women should be subordinate to men have enshrined and misinformed others around the world within environmental policies. Environmentalism is valuable as the main purpose is to protect the natural environment. Many cultures, both Western and non-Western, often have comparison to nature as a mother. Therefore, it is certain that these sentiments offer many a rational understanding of the feminist nature. Furthermore, it brings a mutually understanding to why both nature and women have experienced exploitation and oppression, also the understanding of protection.

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* is a story of Nnu Ego who survives all the unpleasant experiences around her. The story is set in true drastically separate places one in Lagos, then a British colony and another in Iboza, a traditional Ibo town. Females are often seen in the Igbo culture according to their relationship with a man. They are daughters, wives or mothers. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, a woman is lucky enough to be all three in this patriarchal society.

Emecheta's text draws attention to feminist issues very directly, sometimes being almost disturbing in its outspoken form. She addresses topics such as women's education, (in) equality between genders and the role of women. Her poignant illustrations of the hardships of a woman lead the reader to think there is hardly anything more difficult in this world than being a woman (Vesanummi, 23). The ultimate need to be a mother is emphasized in many societies which are showcased in the present novel also.

A. *Women and Nature in The Joys Of Motherhood*

The novel begins with the suicidal attempt of the protagonist Nnu Ego who attempts the same because of her son's death. She was born to Nwokocha Agbadi, a wealthy local chief and Ona (a priceless jewel). Ona was named by Agbadi. Ona was brought up by her father, Obi Umunna as a strong woman because he did not have any sons left.

"He had maintained that she must never marry; his daughter was never going to stoop to any man. She was free to have men, however, and if she bore a son, he would take her father's name, thereby rectifying the omission nature had made". (12)

Ona was different because she was not like other Ibuza women. She was strong, confident and self-reliant like a man. Agbadi had many wives, two mistresses and many slaves who were brought after his wanderings. Agbadi was more interested in Ona rather than his other wives because she was hard to attain. The need to conquer Ona became his sole aim as she was very hard to be wooed. Ona is presented as a strong, enticing personality who was different from other women in her society. So she had to face constant criticism from men and women around her. But she was backed up by her father. Nnu Ego was a product of her lovemaking.

"He knew he had reduced her to longing and craving for him. He knew he had won" (20)

The need to overpower nature and women are seen as same. The hunting of animals in the forest to showcase the masculinity and tame women are seen as a quality of a strong man. Ona gives birth to Nnu Ego and passes away during childbirth. Nnu Ego became a symbol of Agbadi's passion for Ona.

The overemphasis of fertility itself points towards the expectation of society from a woman. If the land is barren it's considered to be useless. The same rule applies to women also. Their ultimate aim is to produce an heir for the family. When it comes to Igbo society producing male heirs is more important. Wives who can bear male heirs are given more status in the family and the culture. Women are considered only for their bride price which could be used for the education or welfare of male heirs in the family. Commodifications of women to mere child-bearers are strictly unrespectable. Nnu Ego was excluded by her husband Amatokwu for being barren. She gets neglected in the household and as a result, her father brings her home. This brings in a change in her after her return to her father's house. Nnu Ego changes as expected out of an Ibuza woman.

"It was clear, however, that she did not want to go back to Amatokwu's house. She was taking the trouble to look more feminine than usual, Agbadi noticed. That was a quality many Ibuza men appreciated; they wanted women who could claim to be helpless without them". (36)

Ecofeminism also deals with the invasion of resources by manipulating it. Women are also the victim of the same. The number of children in the family adds value to it by earning more income. Igbo society is reliant on nature doing farming and hunting. Ibuza men and women rely entirely on nature for their daily chores. It is evident when Nnu Ego's *chi* (personal god) is blamed for her being barren. Her *chi* was the slave of her mother who was buried alive with her mother, as it was their custom. That too these sacrifices were only meant for women slaves. The association of the feminine nature of women is a mode of restricting them from getting hold of the very new aspects of life. The limitation of women within the household is a way to restrict them from exploring the external world. The duties of motherhood and household set the boundaries for them as they might be engrossed in it for a large part of their life. It is same as attributing the notion of 'Mother Nature'. The Ostentatious nature of this notion limits the threshold of women's sphere.

Nnu ego was not happy with Nnaife Owulum who worked for Dr Meers, his white master in Lagos. Dr Meers worked at the Forensic Science Laboratory in Yaba. Nnaife was a slave to them who did the laundry and this made Nnu Ego feel disconnected with him. Later, when she became pregnant and gave

birth to a son as ideal to Ibuza tradition, she started respecting him and started to care for Nnaife. This brought a change in Nnaife also. In the meanwhile, Nnu Ego gave birth to two more children, which made her happy. He was conscripted for world war and when he returned a good sum of money.

“One thing was sure: he gained the respect and even the fear of his wife Nnu Ego. He could even now afford to beat her up, if she went beyond the limit she could stand”. (117)

Nnu Ego managed to educate her sons and marry off her daughters for good bride price. She had suffered everything during her life with Nnaife -suffering, poverty and even mental abuse. She returned to her home town during her last days where she was acknowledged by her tribal people for educating her sons and marrying off her daughters which fetch her good respect which was denied during her life in Lagos. She was sent to Lagos near her husband because she was barren. But when she returned, she was glorified for her deeds and they even asked her to pray for them to be fertile as her but she did not answer those prayers. Her sons did not visit her and she had to die in a roadside without the accompaniment of friends and family. The reward she got for her sacrifices was a great funeral Ibuza had never seen. And she was accused for not answering the prayers of women in Ibuza. Even death could not get her away from her sufferings as that of Nature.

## II. CONCLUSIONS

The clear image before us of the irreparable after-effects that can germinate from the exploitation of women and nature and spread into the future like a deadly disease that can call into question the whole creation and technology that man has created up to this point. It also says that only by modifying our every day relationships and behaviours towards women and nature can bring more peace and prosperity. To contribute to the well-being and overall empowerment of the entire ecological system we have to take forth the need to strengthen the relationship between man's nature rather than the woman. The close association of women with nature has brought the major share of marginalization. Buchi Emecheta also tries to prove this through her novel *The Joys of Motherhood*. The gendered language used and the animalized language use to describe women is evident throughout the novel. The traditional role of caregiver and nurturer makes women an alternative to nature. The exploitation of women and nature is done daily by the patriarchal society. The merit of intuition and collaboration is to be advocated society. The capitalist benefit of out of this would bring out a good way outlook and productivity. The women in the novel try to defy the social structure in the traditional Ibuza village and modern Lagos but fail to do so by succumbing to the rules of the society. The novel tries to explore the feministic approach of nature through its characters and story.

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