

ATILIM UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

ENGLISH CULTURE AND LITERATURE MASTER'S PROGRAM

AN ECOFEMINIST APPROACH TO MARGARET ATWOOD'S

SURFACING

AND DORIS LESSING'S *THE CLEFT*

Master's Thesis

Hani Hani

Ankara, 2017

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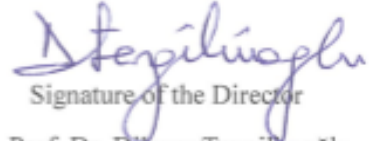
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Hani Hani

ÖZET

HANI HANI. MARGARET ATWOOD’UN *SURFACING* VE DORIS LESSING’İN *THE CLEFT* BAŞLIKLİ ESERLERİNİN EKOFEMİNİST YAKLAŞIMLA İNCELENMESİ. M.A thesis, Ankara, 2017.

Bu tez, Margaret Atwood’un *Surfacing* ve Doris Lessing’in *The Cleft* adlı eserlerindeki kadın, doğa ve ataerkillik arasındaki ilişkiyi ekofeminist yaklaşımla incelemektir. Bu çalışma, kadına ve çevreye karşı kötü muameleleri birlikte ele alarak, ataerkil yapıların bu koşulları nasıl meydana getirdiğini ele alır. Ekofeminizm kadının ve çevrenin değersizleştirilmesi arasında bir paralellik olduğunu ileri sürer. Bu çalışma ekofeminizmin tarihsel gelişimini ve bu kuramın dayandığı ilkeleri inceler. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda ekofeminizm ile benzer ideolojik özellikler taşıyan feminizm ve ekokritisizm gibi kuramlar arasındaki bağlantıları da ele alır. Bu çalışma ataerkil güçlerin ve yapıların, erkekleri kayırmak amacıyla yapılan çarpıtılmış kültürel değişimlerin sonucu olduğunu ortaya koyar. Bu güçler ve yapılar, erkeklerin daima kadın ve çevreye göre öncelikli olduğunu vurgular. Bu ataerkil benmerkezcilik kadın ve çevrenin istismar edilmesine yol açmaktadır. Üzerinde çalışılan iki roman karşılaştırmalı bir platformda ele alınmıştır ve bu romanlarda kadın, doğa ve ataerkillik gösterimlerinin arasında benzerlikler olduğu keşfedilmiştir. Ataerkillik üzerinde çalışılan bu romanlarda benzer araçları kullanarak kadın ve çevreyi istismar etmektedir. Bu çalışma ataerkil yapıların kadın ve çevreye saygı duyacak bir biçimde yeniden yapılandırılması gerekliliğini vurgulayan ekofeminist yaklaşımın sözü geçen romanlarda nasıl yansıtıldığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ekofeminizm, Ataerkillik, Çevre.

ABSTRACT

HANI HANI. AN ECOFEMINIST APPROACH TO MARGARET ATWOOD'S *SURFACING* AND DORIS LESSING'S *THE CLEFT*. M.A thesis, Ankara, 2017.

This thesis investigates the relationship between women, nature and patriarchy in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Doris Lessing's *The Cleft* with reference to the ecofeminist approach. The study interlocks the mistreatment of women and the mistreatment of environment, and interrogates patriarchal structures that create and reinforce such a condition. Ecofeminism argues that there is a parallelism between the debasement of women and the debasement of the environment. The study traces the historical development of ecofeminism and discusses the principles upon which it is founded. It also discusses the interconnections between ecofeminism and other theories that have similar ideological commonalities with it such as feminism and ecocriticism. The study discovers that patriarchal forces and structures are products of cultural permutations that have been skewed to favour men. These forces and structures always consider men first in their relation with the other (women and environment). This patriarchal self-centeredness leads to the abuse of both women and the environment. The two novels under study are placed on a comparative platform, and the discovery is that there are similarities in the representation of women, nature and patriarchy in the novels. Patriarchy uses similar tools in the novels under study to abuse women and environment. This study portrays the ecofeminist way of reconstructing patriarchal structures to respect women and the environment in the above mentioned novels.

Key words: Ecofeminism, Patriarchy, Environment.

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INTRODUCTION

The thesis aims at exploring patriarchy, women and nature in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Doris Lessing's *The Cleft* with reference to the ecofeminist approach. Although the information in *The Cleft* may appear rather unreal as a result of the mythological uncertainty of relative communal documents, yet the issue of human-nature conflict that it treats raises questions about human nature. Thus, beyond the fact of the seeming unreality of the narrative as an historical document is the sense of verisimilitude that the novel achieves as fiction. Atwood's *Surfacing* and Lessing's *The Cleft* are viewed in this study as ecofeminist meditations on the mistreatment of women and the environment by patriarchal structures. Patriarchy is always an unavoidable factor in an ecofeminist discourse.

Ecofeminism as a movement that needs to be understood along cultural lines. Like all other movements, it is a product of social and cultural influences in the society. Feminism is one of such cultural influences. Ecocriticism is another. An understanding of the ideological underpinnings of these two schools is essential to any assessment of ecofeminism as a theory and the analysis of the novels under study as ecofeminist readings. The tenets of these influential movements provided a template for an ecofeminist approach to Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Doris Lessing's *The Cleft*.

This study has used ecofeminism as both a theoretical and an analytical tool to study *Surfacing* and *The Cleft*. An account of the theory revealed that it is a product of both feminist and environmental consciousness. It has one leg in feminism and the second leg in environmentalism as it argues for the fair treatment of women and the natural environment. It interrogates patriarchy and questions the various ways patriarchal structures have been used to undermine women and the environment, with the view of establishing a change. Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing tapped into this theoretical impulse in their novels as they portrayed women, nature and patriarchy in various ecofeminist perspectives. They authors represent the self-serving tendencies of patriarchy in various forms as is argued that the relationship that exists between male and female is largely a relationship that is based on the intent to explore and to exploit. Men continuously try to take undue advantage of women even to the point of death as it is the case in *The Cleft*. The narrator

gives an account of the rape of a Cleft, a female to death, “the mass rape went on, it went on, they were feeding hungers it seemed they could never sate. Some lads who had gone off into the forest to find fruit came back, saw what was going on, and soon enough understood it and joined in. Then she no longer squirmed and kicked and moaned but lay still, and they understood, but not at once, that she was dead” (47).

This study interrogates the social forces that determine gender relations and environmental privation. The structural patterns that determine environmental and gender relations, and exploitations are taken to symbolic levels as there are symbolic characters and symbolic actions that point to the ecofeminist manifesto. It investigates how the ecofeminist vision in the novels is achieved on the ground of protest. In this case, protest does not mean a group match or the use of force. It investigates also the types and levels of revolution and protest as ecofeminist tools.

This thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter one discusses the theoretical framework, focusing on the theory of ecofeminism. It includes the thesis statement, historical background of the theory, its connection to feminism and ecocriticism, and its aspects. Chapters two and three are the analytical chapters. The analytical chapters consist of a short biography of the authors, a brief summary of the novels. They focus on the creation and reinforcement of gender roles, the male female relationship, women-nature association and the authors’ use of narrative techniques that echoed the ecofeminist approach. Chapter four is the conclusion. The chapter also compares the two novels under study to establish a relationship between the two novels with reference to the ecofeminist approach.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter discusses the evolution of the ecofeminist theory, its aspects, and its connections with other theories that share similar ideological concerns with it. Such theories as the feminist literary theory and eco-criticism are reviewed with the intent to establish connections to ecofeminism and motivations of ecofeminism.

Ecofeminism as a theory draws attention to a similarity in women's oppression to that of nature. In *Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature*, Greta Gaard (1993) argues that:

Ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature (1).

Ecofeminism unveils several forms of woman-nature oppression imposed by patriarchy. It identifies the similarity between such oppression of women and nature in order to correct all forms of oppression in the society. Ecofeminism therefore, seeks to foreground the oppression of nature as a feminist issue. It begins by making its priority the contributions of nature to the origin and subsistence of man in the society. It points to the need for man to contribute to nature rather than prey on nature as an object of gratification. Ecofeminism therefore sees the daily exploitation of women and the destruction of nature by man as a reason for contemporary gender and ecological challenges in western society and calls for a need to reverse the ugly trend.

According to Glazebrook, "ecofeminism has conceptual beginnings in French tradition of feminist theory" (12). Ecofeminism is a product of feminism's attempt to draw both a metaphorical and a symbolic relationship between what women stand for and what the natural environment stands for;

between the roles of women and the roles of the natural environment in a patriarchal structure. It appears to be a meeting point between the feminist struggles and the environmentalists' struggles. Glazebrook observes that "ecofeminists insist that feminism and environmentalism are inherently connected, but it is not always clear what the nature of that connection is" (13). The question of clarity between the connection of feminism and environmentalism, perhaps, is Glazebrook's surface prejudice or skepticism on how ecofeminism works. Ecofeminism has a soul whose life depends on connections and interconnections. The bridge between feminism and environmentalism is activism. This activism usually manifests in struggles for liberation. Ecofeminism appears as a feminist approach to environmentalism.

Although the term "ecofeminism" is linked to Francoise d'Eaubonne, who coined it in her 1974 paper, where she called women for environmental revolution, there have been feminist agitations for a sustainable environment before then. Glazebrook recognizes the efforts of Ruether and other American ecofeminists in consolidating the theory in North America. She says:

In North America, the alliance between feminism and ecology likewise began in 1974, when Sandra Marburg and Lisa Watson hosted a conference at Berkeley entitled "Women and the Environment". The following year, Rosemary Radford Ruether pointed out that "women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationship continues to be one of domination" (Ruether 1975, 204). She called for a unification of feminist and ecological interests in the vision of a society...." (12-13).

Apart from these efforts in North America, some other parts of the world produced feminists who were ecological activists before the term "ecofeminism" was coined. It is noteworthy that women were among the Chipko Movement protest in India in 1973. Chipko Movement existed primarily to protect the environment against deforestation. Shobita Jain in her article, "Standing Up for Trees in the Chipko Movement" stated that "the image of poor, rural women in the hills of northern India standing with their arms around trees to prevent them being cut down is a romantic and compelling one" (<http://www.fao.org/docrep/r0465e/r0465e03.htm>) . During the protest, the women held the trees in both arms and clung to them, protecting the trees from being cut down by loggers. In Africa, Professor Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan Nobel Peace winner formed her Green Belt

Movement in 1977 with the mandate for tree planting in order to prevent desertification. From the foregoing discussions, one can conclude that the steam of ecofeminism had simultaneous eruptions across the globe. The philosophy and ideology that pushed women to the periphery and margins of social existence appear to be prehistory. The lore and traditions of historical societies weaved structures that consistently and persistently hold women down, denying them the percipience and the courage for self-realization. Women had perforce, after centuries of relegation, to push up struggles for fair treatment in the scheme of human activities. These struggles are coordinated in the feminist manifesto and feminist visions; struggles for liberation from the dictates of the patriarchal societies. Feminism stepped on the tempo of environmental activism, arguing that the neglect of women and the neglect of nature are historically interlocked. One of the implications of this position therefore is the interconnection of the structures of women's domination and also nature's domination, giving birth to new dimensions in feminist struggles; dimensions of thought that have manifested in ecofeminism. Thompson sees this relatively new approach as "the idea that the rise of modern science, technology, and capitalism produced and relied on the death, domination, and exploitation of a nature gendered female, and that this reinforced and reflected the cultural subordination and exploitation of women" (505-506).

Thompson's opinion was derived from his critique of Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature*. *The Death of Nature* is one of the earliest texts that defined the scope and vision of ecofeminism. According to Thompson:

In *The Death of Nature*, Merchant argued persuasively for a view that subsequently became one of the two core tenets of ecofeminism: that the domination of women and the domination of nature are structurally linked. (As alluded to above, the second core tenet was a recognition and celebration of the values and activities traditionally associated with women, including childbirth and various kinds of nurturing). She suggested that it was necessary to "re-examine the formation of a world and a science that, by reconceptualizing reality as a machine rather than a living organism, sanctioned the domination of both nature and women (508).

This re-examination and reconceptualization as suggested by Merchant have the capacity to put a stop to the structures of exploitation of women and nature. Thompson further observes that "equality for women and care of the environment are two parts of a single remedy to modern

exploitation – united feminists and ecologists in an urgent call to action” (508). This, therefore, appears to be the most important stance and the meeting point of women’s movements and ecological movement. This also appears to be the springboard for ecofeminism, a platform that encourages women, to speak not only for themselves but on nature’s behalf.

1.1 Historical Background Of Ecofeminism

Contemporary studies on ecofeminism largely link the evolution of the theory to Francoise d’Eaubonne, a radical French feminist, “who called on women to lead ecological revolution and establish new relationships between humanity and nature as well as man and woman” (Ling Chen, 2014:104). The place of women in social strata has continuously been questioned even before such revolts as the Channar revolt of the early nineteenth century, where women protested against baring of chest; the French Revolution of mid eighteenth Century that fueled feminist agitations and challenged greatly the traditional roles of women. Ecofeminism is a mutation of the feminist literary theory, drawing its strengths from the perspectives of radical feminism which questions patriarchal structures and social forces that continued to keep women at the periphery in their composite social existence.

There exist obnoxious and questionable opinions about women. Such opinions have been expressed by the following scholars as quoted in Plumwood (1993:19).

‘Woman is a violent and uncontrolled animal’ (Ato 1989:193); ‘A woman is but an animal and an animal not of the highest order’(Burke 1989:187); ‘I cannot conceive of you to be human creatures, but a sort of species hardly a degree above a monkey’ (Swift 1989:191); ‘Howe’er man rules in science and in art/The sphere of women’s glories is the heart’(Moore 1989:166); ‘Women represent the interests of the family and sexual life; the work of civilization has become more and more men’s business’ (Freud 1989:80); ‘Women are certainly capable of learning but, they are not made for the higher forms of science, such as philosophy and certain types of creative activity; these require a universal ingredient’ (Hegel 1989:62); ‘A necessary object, woman, who is needed to preserve the species or to provide food and drink’(Aquinas 1989:183) (Plumwood 1993:19).

Inasmuch as it is beyond doubts that these are not true perspectives about women, it also appears that women have had to question these fallacies in order to dislodge them and other social structures that are inimical to them. This constrains women to defensive positions where they have had to reconstruct their history and tell their stories, not only to express their true beings but to counter the status quo. This is a part of feminist consciousness. Women struggle to recast their images and reconstruct their symbols, questioning the social structures that have held them in servitude.

It appears difficult to trace the origin of the neglect of women but easier to trace the history of the revolts against this neglect. The question is, when did this neglect start? The answer to this question is necessary because it touches on the motivation behind the creation of subservient roles for women. It will illuminate on how gender roles have been deeply entrenched in social structures and how women have had to contest them. These contested roles are some of the issues in feminist struggles.

Plumwood traces the origin of women's oppression and privation of nature and links it to the rise of dualistic thought, science and human psychology. The rise of dualism led to the formation of binary forms. Such binary opposites as male/female, reason/emotion, culture/nature, and so on came to be. These binary opposites are patriarchal creations; dualisms of unequal proportions, with superior/inferior relationship. Man is elevated above woman, reason above emotion, echoing an atmosphere of unequal values. Ecofeminism does not reject dualisms entirely or the existence of the binary forms as existential realities, rather it rejects the values assigned to these dualisms by patriarchal considerations.

The rise of science appears to be the rise of the incalculable exploitation of nature. Daily living moved from the organic to the mechanical, leading to the domination and exploitation of nature. Another factor that undermined women is a psychological factor that imbued a great sense of audacity in men, leaving women meek and gentle because of their fundamental responsibilities as child bearers and care-givers. This appears to be a biological obligation placed on women by their sex and exploited by patriarchal structures. In advocating for the merit of ecofeminism, Plumwood argued that:

the ecofeminist perspective, although as yet still heavily programmatic, is a promising and strongly integrative one, with potential for drawing out links not just between the ecological critique and the feminist critique but also between other parts of the set of interconnected dualisms. This gives promise of providing insight into, and ultimately weakening, the whole structure. Because of its stress on exploring connections between kinds of domination, it also has the potential for drawing out the implications of the challenge that existing critiques present to these dualisms more thoroughly, and resisting incompleteness of critique (137).

Plumwood's opinion is important, as the activist tendencies of ecofeminism are re-inscribed but the opinion is not new to ecofeminism. The opinion is one of the fundamental features of ecofeminism, which is activism. When it started as an activist movement, it set out for connections and interconnections with other movements or theories that have common ideologies.

1.2 The Link Between Feminism, Ecofeminism, And Eco-criticism

Ecofeminism is a product of the currents and fluctuations in feminism and eco-criticism. Feminism agitates for women's liberation from mistreatment while ecocriticism agitates for the liberation of nature from mistreatment. Feminism is a movement that arises from the need to draw attention to the patriarchal politics involved in socially constructed roles in the society. Feminism draws attention to the impact of existing social culture on role distribution in the society. The culture of patriarchy imposed on society by mid-class Western elite thrives on double "biological essentialism" (*Oxford Reference*), a framework that defines existence along gender line. This stratification of the biological make up of human species into male and female further results in the ascription of gender roles at the private and public spheres. Feminism redefines female roles that have been undermined by patriarchal ideologies.

Patriarchy privileges the male species over the female and establishes the perceived superiority of the former over the latter. To this end, patriarchy subjects all social activities to the valuation of masculine (male) standards and thus implants a license of superiority on masculinity. (Maleness). In "Masculinity and Culture," John Beynon (2002) questions this development as follows:

All agree that masculinity is socially and historically, not biologically, constructed.

A good point with which to start is Morgan's (1992) assertion that what is

masculinity (and femininity) is best approached from the standpoint of what men and women *do* (that is, how they behave) rather than what they *are*. If gender is cultural, then it follows that women as well as men can step into and inhabit (whether permanently or temporarily) masculinity as a 'cultural space', one with its own sets of behaviours. In this view 'the masculine' and 'the feminine' signify a range of culturally defined characteristics assignable to both men and women (7).

Patriarchy is a male-dominated culture that defines gender roles in the man - woman space. Patriarchal culture privileges male roles and sees the female species as inferior to the male. Patriarchy as a Western dominated culture imposes a masculine perspective on society and defines reality through patriarchal lenses. From the perspective of patriarchy, men are seen as courageous, decisive, intelligent and powerful. However, women possess the opposite qualities. They are weak, passionate, fearful, timid and indecisive. Patriarchy also privileges male positions in government, education, industry, and so on and confines women to the kitchen. In an essay on "Feminist Criticism", Tyson (1999) defines patriarchy as:

...any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles. *Traditional gender roles* cast men as rational, strong, protective and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive. These gender roles have been used very successfully to justify such inequities, which still occur today, as excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision-making positions... (83 - 84).

It is evident from the above assumptions that the assigning of privileged status to males presupposes the rise of a strong awareness on the part of women and the need to defend the female space by asserting their gender responsibilities. This is the kernel of feminist ideology.

Feminism emerged from a need to correct patriarchal oppression of females and the need to assert female roles in the social order and establish a sense of equality between the male and the female gender. Feminism may be said to be revolutionary in the sense that it insists on the need for gender reforms in the society. In "Sex Difference and Gender Dialogue: Issues and Perspectives", Emenyi Imoh (2005) explains that:

The society has invented certain attributes around the sexes to sustain the ethics of each system. The male and female human beings are assigned distinct characteristics and are evaluated differently, depending on social worth. In probing the nature of sex difference, it is useful to examine its impact on gender relations within the intellectual space...From the foregoing; it is obvious that individual responses to reality are more or less external manifestations of gender roles which have been internalized over a period of time. (36 – 37)

Feminist engagement with patriarchy recognizes cultural documents which the society ignores in the distribution of roles because such documents attempt to establish the primacy of women in the society. Doris Lessing's ability to draw from oral documents in *The Cleft* is highly commendable. However, such effort is a product of the motivation to point to the inequities that characterize patriarchal ascription of gender roles in the society for which the male is privileged over the female. A study of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* also provides a view of society's contribution to female oppression in favor of dominant patriarchal culture. This is done in such a way that the novel provides explicit grounds for the discovery of the impact of patriarchy on cultural practices for which the exploitation of women is continually prevalent. Emenyi addresses society's complicity in female oppression and concludes that, "female exploitation is sustained by tradition because her oppression is socially designed. This explains the veneration and vilification of women in all cultures and the resultant lower social status that 'makes them vulnerable to pressure or coercion in sexuality'", to use the words of Nafis Sadik. For Sadik, the powerful nature of men and the powerlessness of women are socially determined..." (45).

The link between ecocriticism and feminist theory is of significance to an understanding of ecofeminism in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Doris Lessing's *The Cleft*. Ecocriticism captures the perspective that human history is greatly associated with natural history. There is a sense in which feminists' view of patriarchy's attempt to dehumanize womanhood intersects with man's continuous efforts at exploiting nonhuman entities. The assigning of sexual power to women and the subsequent depletion of the forest in the novels is without doubt inscribed against the grain of dominant Patriarchal woman-nature act of exploitation that feminists and eco-critics decry. Ecofeminism is thus a symbol of the united effort of feminism and ecocriticism to address humans'

reckless relationships with nature. Ecofeminism therefore seeks to bring nature out of its marginal spaces to the center of social discourse.

Ecological criticism is also of cultural influence on ecofeminism. This perspective is informed by the novels' depiction of the association of humans to nonhuman others in nature. The location of *The Cleft* bears out this perspective. Set in an unknown island populated by rivers, mountains, caves and rocks, *The Cleft* celebrates the association of natural elements with humankind in nature. The association of human characters with natural elements on the island further espouses the seemingly inevitable nature of human intercourse with this natural world. Contrary to this intercourse; however, man is constantly engaged in the exploitation of nature. Ecocriticism emerged out of the need to question the rationale behind man's ecological violence.

Ecocriticism proceeds with the view that nature contributes greatly to human development and social progress and it questions the rationality behind man's continuous degradation of nature. Olaoluwa Senayon's essay, "Ecocriticism Beyond Animist Intimations in *Thing Fall Apart*" in Scott Slovic (ed) *Ecocriticism of the Global South* (2015) argues that man's constant depletion of nature to suit his whims results in his isolation from the realities of nature's benevolence. The scholar is of the view that man's continuous depletion of nature is premised on the demand that modern industrialization places on the world. Anantha Duraiappah (1996) accounts for the constant experience of "deforestation, land degradation, water shortage and contamination, air pollution and the loss of biodiversity..." (4), as a corollary to Olaoluwa Senayon's argument on the effects of human violence on nature.

Olaoluwa Senayon further stresses that man's continuous act of indifference to the degradation of nature also has its negative feedback on the society at large. The experience of earthquake, famine, draught and several forms of natural disasters prevalent in modern times are believed to have emerged out of man's unfair attitude to nature without any effort at preservation. Olaoluwa Senayon queries that human's isolation from nature and its constant degradation has led to man-nature rift, an area that ecological criticism is pertinent about. He submits that:

...as the Western world continues to seek justification for its actions against nature and the colonized, the implied isolation of nature has in turn produced a form of

natural tyranny that today haunts the advanced world: In other words, the human estrangement from nature through a systemic process of untrammelled pursuit of technological advancement has produced a world order that is at best compromised and at worst threatened by an apocalyptic expiration in the face of mitigation efforts that are incommensurate to the havoc seen everywhere on the planet(199).

Ecofeminism has succeeded in integrating this eco-critical perspective as both theories argue for the natural environment.

There is a shared relationship and a strong affinity between ecofeminism and eco-criticism, not only at the theoretical level but at the level where these theories meet with literary texts, the analytical level, the level of explication, the level of criticism. Ecofeminism echoes Buell's and Gomides' radical approaches to eco-criticism. Eco-criticism according to Buell, as quoted in Nwoma (2014:65) is the "... study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis". Nwoma further notes Gomides view of ecocriticism as "the field of enquiry that analyzes and promotes works of arts which raise moral questions about human interactions with nature, while also motivating audiences to live within a limit that will be binding over generations" (66). Buell's and Gomides' approaches to eco-criticism contribute to eco activists' argument that the natural environment should be protected against debasement and exploitation. The theoretical frame of eco-criticism appears to have encapsulated protest. The presence of protest as one of its tools seems to have attracted feminism to it. Nwoma notes that "feminism tries to interconnect with approaches that raise the question of domination the presence of domination of nonhuman nature in ecocriticism seems to have attracted feminists, therefore giving birth to ecofeminism" (69).

Eco-criticism and ecofeminism share in the spirit of environmental activism through the medium of literary studies. They are both products and aspects of environmental literature. Through them, the horizon and frontiers of literature are expanded, in the light of interdisciplinary studies and interconnections between literature and natural sciences. Literature becomes not only expansive but responsive to both remote and contemporary discourses, in this case, the discourse on environmental crisis. Ecofeminism sees environmental privations as a feminist issue that should be tackled through literary studies while eco-criticism sees the same privations of the environment

as an ecological issue that should also be tackled through literary studies. The two tend to question and hold responsible human cultures that have degraded the environment. Ecofeminism tries to be a step further by linking the neglect of the natural environment to the neglect of women. Nwoma observes that “ecofeminism is a feminist approach to ecocriticism” (66) as both theories have the environment, humans and literature as their focus. Ecofeminism draws from ecocriticism and feminism to establish that the mistreatment of women and the mistreatment of the natural environment are connected. These connections are what have been explored in *Surfacing* and *The Cleft*.

1.3 Aspects Of Ecofeminism

Susan Buckingham has broadly categorized the ecofeminist approach into two aspects: the constructivist aspect and the essentialist aspect. She sees a certain degree of dominance of constructivist aspect in French and British writings and observes that they:

drew from the Marxist and social feminist literature to show women’s position in society (as, for example, careers of children and other venerable family members, domestic workers, and low paid /status workers) derived from prevailing social and economic structures, which exposed them to a particular set of environmental incivilities. The specifically ecofeminist argument here proposed that, since the same social and economic structures also produced wide scale environmental damage, then women could, in some sense , ‘share’ this experience and were therefore better placed to argue on nature’s behalf (147).

The constructivist position is logical, at least, to the extent of drawing a parallel between phenomena that suffer debasement privation and neglect. The position further reinforces the argument that women should speak for the non-human nature. Unfortunately, this aspect of the ecofeminist approach appears to have excluded men who share in the feminist vision. The currents and fluctuations of feminist struggles undoubtedly have had perceptible masculine echo. Although insignificant in number, some men have continued to argue along the feminist lines. The position of the constructivist forecloses the opportunity for men to participate in feminist struggles and argue on nature’s behalf.

Buckingham throws up the second aspect of the ecofeminist approach and calls it “essentialism”. According to her, “the essentialist argument that underpinned some of the North American and Australian analyses proposed that women had a particular relationship with nature by virtue of their biology (predominantly as actual or potential child bearers) and that this proximity to nature qualified them to speak more eloquently on nature’s behalf (147). The strength of the essentialist position appears to draw from the paradigm that interconnects women to nature, a paradigm that raised some shared symbolic attributes. It is apparent that these two ecofeminist positions interconnect women to nature on the premise of shared experience. This shared experience appears valid only on a metaphorical level, where implicit metaphor situates women in the position of nature and on the ground of biological relationship. It can be observed that the relationship of women to nature is not based on the supposed femininities only but on the basis of shared experience, experience that emanates from domination. These two aspects discussed by Buckingham are not the only aspects.

It is obvious that the progenitors of ecofeminism have different critical orientations and perspectives. Ecofeminism is provoked by different views about women, nature and society. These views appear to be consolidated in a single motive that seeks restructuring and change. Some aspects of ecofeminism stand in opposition to others as there are unresolved conceptual debates among the various strands of ecofeminism. The assumptions that women are more connected to nature than men has been accepted and at the same time rejected by some ecofeminist strands. To some ecofeminists, this assumption appears to be creating similar hierarchical structures that ecofeminism fights. This assumption is what cultural ecofeminism focuses on. It builds a strong affinity between women and nature and develops a kind of metaphorical relationship where the qualities of women are directly transferred to nature. .Feminine qualities of nature are consolidated by cultural ecofeminists who have accepted such terms as mother-earth and so on. Gaard in “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism” (1997) observes that “today all those associated with nature and the erotic continue to experience the impact of centuries of Western cultures colonization. . . . Rejection that colonization requires embracing the erotic in all its diversity and building coalitions for creating a democratic, ecological culture based on our shared liberations”.(132).

Gaard is a proponent of queer ecofeminism and has argued that “any theory of ecofeminism must take into consideration the findings of queer theory; similarly, queer theory must consider the

findings of ecofeminism”(115). Her strand of ecofeminism is motivated by what she calls “the problem of oppression based on sexuality”(118) and manifests in heterosexual/queer dualism, where the former feels superior over the latter. Queer exists at the margins in the politics of sexuality as heterosexual takes centre stage. The argument is that queer issues are also ecofeminist issues as both are victims of structures of oppression and domination. The value of queer sexuality is vitiated by the notion that its tendencies are unnatural. The greater part of society looks at it with scorn and that part of society is dominated by heterosexuals. Closely associated with queer are identities such as gay, lesbian, bisexuals, transgendered (GLBT). These identities are part of queer ecofeminism. Queer domination, according to Gaard is based on its sexualities which have been seen as transgressive in at least three categories: as acts against biblical morality, against nature, or against psychology” (120). She concludes that “ecofeminists must be concerned with queer liberation, just as queers must be concerned with the liberation of women and of nature...” (132). Other aspects of ecofeminism include legal ecofeminism, Marxist ecofeminism, socialist ecofeminism, and so on.

It is the opinion of this study that ecofeminism is an approach that is modeled to investigate the interconnections between the mistreatment of women and the mistreatment of nature by patriarchy. Ecofeminism is a product of activism and has a link with similar theories that speak for women and the environment but its connection to such theories does not distort its identity. Its focus is on the relationship between women, nature and patriarchy.

CHAPTER TWO

SURFACING

This chapter lays out the biography of the author, the synopsis of the novel with an ecofeminist perspective. The chapter also discusses the issues of gender roles, male/female relationship and women-nature association. The inclusion of narrative techniques in the chapter is to account for how the uses of such techniques have aided an ecofeminist approach to the novel. The discovery is that the point-of-view, some symbols and images advance the ecofeminist arguments in the novel. Such symbols and images that point at the debasement of women and the environment are important to an ecofeminist discourse.

“Margaret Atwood was born in Ottawa in 1939” (*Surfacing*, 143). Her biography stated that she attended Leaside High School, Toronto and Victoria College, the University of Toronto, graduating in 1961 with a degree in English. She developed a writing career while in the University and has written many creative and critical books. She is a literary critic, environmental activist,

essayist, poet, novelist and a winner of many awards. “Atwood is the author of more than forty books – novels, short stories, poetry, non-fiction, and books for children” (*Surfacing*, 143). Her father, Edmund Atwood was an entomologist who spent most of his time in forested areas carrying out research. This may have influenced Margaret Atwood as her portrayal of the forest in *Surfacing* is not only vivid but argues for sustainability in human interaction with the environment. This is the point where her feminist struggles interconnect with her environmental activism, giving birth to the vision of ecofeminism in *Surfacing*. Her father’s research on forest may have influenced her to speak for the environment.

2.1 Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*: A Synopsis

The narrative revolves around an unnamed female narrator who goes in search of her missing father. The search party includes the unnamed narrator and her lover, Joe; David and his wife, Anna. They depart from an unnamed city and head for the Island of Northern Quebec where the narrator earlier spent her childhood. For the narrator, the journey is not only a search for her missing father but a reunion with her childhood environment. What motivates the search is a letter written by Paul, the narrator’s father’s friend, informing her of the disappearance of her father. To the narrator, the journey is a vision of hope as she believes that her father will certainly turn up before her arrival to the cabin where he lives. The hope to find her father becomes a structural pattern that conducts most of the actions of the novel. This hope is a major factor that keeps the narrator longer than expected on the Island. When the team arrives at the cabin where the narrator’s father lives, the place appears to be abandoned for a long time, which proves that his disappearance is not recent. It becomes an onerous task as the team does not have the capacity to conduct the required search, considering the number of people that will be needed to search the Island. The narrator gives up her hope as her father cannot be found.

The gaze of the team immediately shifts to other activities on the Island such as fishing, swimming, shooting film for cinema, reading and so on. The initial mission to search for the narrator’s missing father turns into opportunity for intimate relationships and romantic attachments. The psychological and physiological compositions of the characters are revealed through their daily life. The mission becomes an avenue for Joe to make a marriage proposal to the narrator which she turns down. She confesses that she has no confidence in men and their type of love. She sees love as a creation of patriarchy which is a tool for entrapment. Joe tries to force her to accept his

proposal but the narrator asserts some strength of will and rejects it with similar intensity she rejects some other patriarchal contraptions such as marrying for child-bearing, rape, being an object of pleasure to men and so on.

The narrative reveals the existing tension between David and Anna as their presence on the Island is an opportunity for David to humiliate his wife before the other members of the team. David derives joy from making fun of Anna as Anna spends most of her time trying to be a good wife to David. David attempts to have sex with the narrator by telling her a lie that Joe and Anna are somewhere having sex but the narrator rejects his antics.

What the characters think of their environment and how they interact with it are revealed in the novel. There is a constant devastation of the environment as deforestation and environmental pollution are recurrent factors. Capitalist motivations become a reason for the debasement of the environment. Industrialization and technological developments bring up factories that subject the environment to varying degrees of privation.

There is a parallelism between the debasement of the environment and the debasement of women in the novel. The privation Anna and the narrator suffer echoes the privation the environment suffers. This is the heart of an eco-critical approach. David and Joe represent the patriarchal structures that hold women in servitude and abuse the environment that nourishes humankind. Margaret Atwood draws this parallelism in *Surfacing* to show the extent of abuse of women and the environment and to argue for a patriarchal change of attitude.

2.2 Hegemonic Patriarchy: Male/Female Relationship In *Surfacing*

Gender relationship in *Surfacing* appears as a representation of male heroic audacity and female passivity. Men appear to have developed exaggerated personalities; some sort of personality anchored on social status. The male characters exude a sense of superiority over their female counterparts and dominate their relationships. The narrator acknowledges the domineering tendencies of her husband, whose decisions control their act of childbearing. As she notes:

But I couldn't have brought the child here, I never identified it as mine; I didn't name it before it was born even, the way you are supposed to. It was my husband's, he imposed it on me, all the time it was growing in me I felt like an incubator. He measured everything he would let me eat, he was feeding it on me, he wanted a

replica of himself; after it was born I was no more use. I couldn't prove it though, he was clever; he kept saying he loved me (20-21).

The narrator ends up bearing a child she does not want; a child she is not proud to be the mother. For the first and only time in the novel, cordiality that exists between mother and child is lacking. This is because the decision to have the child is not her decision; it is her husband's, who also controls everything about the pregnancy, wanting the child to be his replica.

This scenario evokes a sense of helplessness, helplessness that comes from defeat. The narrator is not only defeated, she is as well devastated. She has been robbed of her female power, the power to procreate and regenerate and the power to give life. This power has been usurped by her husband who appears to be in-charge of her fertility, and who also dominates and violates her will. The narrator's reference and use of the metaphor of the incubator is an evocation of the detached affinity between a fetus and its mother. An incubator as a microbiological process has no maternal or fraternal affinity between it and a fetus it incubates. This is what the narrator likens herself to, because she feels a void between her and her baby. Society has allowed men so much power to explore, to control, and to rule. The result of this is the exploitation of the other. Yakubu further observes that:

...the gender relation that exists between the male and female is termed by some to be "unequal", while some see it as "inequitable". Whatever the case may be, it is generally believed that men and women relate on a superior/inferior axis. As a result of this, women have had to suffer a vast measure of discriminatory practices from men within the confines of the home and through some of the structures and institutions of the state (123).

There is, undoubtedly, unequal relationship between the narrator and her husband, a relationship that is based on patriarchal permutations, leading to exploitation of the other. Her husband fails to consider her feelings and wishes in the decision of child-bearing, or rather; his own feelings and wishes are superior. It is ironical that her husband feels superior to her, even to her own body. Where then lays her power? This power that appears to have been lost will later be vigorously pursued in an effort to regain it. The ecofeminist, Carol Christ argues that, "though the protagonist continually imagines herself as powerless, she is extraordinarily concerned with power" (320).

The power is hibernated and it appears as if it were lost. The quest for this power has driven the actions of the protagonist further.

The relationship between Anna and David revolves around superior/inferior axis. Anna is rule-governed. It is right to ask, whose rules? Anna acknowledges that they are David's. Anna tells the narrator, "he's got this little set of rules. If I break one of them I get punished, except he keeps changing them so I'm never sure" (87). It is not only that David has a set of rules which Anna must obey, the issue is that the rules keep changing and Anna acknowledges it. She is not also sure of when and how it will change. Anna spends most of her time trying to please David while David spends most of his time plotting either to exploit or abuse Anna. The relationship has been rigidly structured that she cannot think otherwise; she cannot also think outside the box. She spends her time in the marriage making up to please David. Her life becomes a life of make-up; make-up that has stolen her natural looks. The narrator acknowledges this:

Anna is there, still in her sleeveless nylon nightgown and bare feet, standing in front of the wavery yellowish mirror. There's a zippered case on the counter in front of her, she's putting on makeup. I realize I've never seen her without it before; shorn of the pink cheeks and heightened eyes her face is curiously battered, a worn doll's, her artificial face is the natural one... Anna says in a low voice, "He doesn't like to see me without it"... (27-28).

Makeup becomes a part of Anna's past because David does not like to see her without it and she keeps to it, Anna does not complain and does not see any wrong in her roles because she comes from a background that has imbued a sense of inferiority in her; a society that has created heroism for men and timidity for women, a culture that has less respect for women and more for men. Anna has to follow this tradition and also has to bear the consequences of that. The patriarchal tradition negates her freedom, and limits her options. According to the scholar, Blamires ... "women are so moulded and indoctrinated by tradition that they are prevented from assuming the status of beings with liberty" (374).

David looms large in her life and portrays the hegemonic patriarchal traditions as he directly and indirectly controls her choices. David, consequently becomes the custodian of Anna's freedom Anna does not only suffer the negation of her freedom and the subversion of her liberty, she also

suffers debasement and humiliation. She acknowledges David's hatred for women as the narrator also accounts for David's demeaning dispositions and insult to Anna:

“The trouble with you is you hate women”, Anna said savagely; she threw the rest of her tea and the tea leaves out of her tin cup into the lake, they hit with a splat. David grimed. “That’s what they call a delayed reaction,” he said. “Goose Anna in the burn and three days later she squeals. Cheer up, you’re so cute when you’re mad”. He crawled over to her on all fours and rubbed his bristly burdock chin against her face and asked her how she would like to be raped by a porcupine. “You know that one?” he said. “How do porcupines do it? Carefully!” Anna smiled at him as though he was a brain-damaged child (80).

From the foregoing, it goes beyond doubts that the language David uses for Anna contains registers that evoke mockery and abuse of womanhood. Anna is David's wife. If David does not have respect for his wife, it might be opined that he will find it difficult to have for other women. He is a representation of the forces that have continued to hold women in servitude. David's question to Anna on how she would want to be raped by a porcupine is not only sarcastic but demeaning. It is a nasty idea to be raped by an animal but David never considered it, rather he imagines a porcupine rapping his wife.

The social hierarchy that assumes men superior to women has been extended to animals. David creates an intimidating status for the porcupine and ascribes some powers to it, such powers that men exude, including the powers to rape. Through David, rape gets into the language of the novel and represents a part of the tools used by patriarchal structures not only to downgrade the relevance of women but to reinvigorate patriarchal ego. David attempts to reduce Anna's worth through his language. In *Language, Gender and Society*, Thorne et al, argue that there are “varied ways in which language aids the defining, depreciating, and excluding of women...” (9). David intends to “depreciate” Anna through his language.

David gets some utility in Anna's negative situations; utility in terms of maximum satisfaction. He owns up to it as he asserts, “you’re so cute when you’re mad” (80). This presupposes that David does not consider Anna so cute under normal concomitances except when she is mad, and that also he would always want Anna mad so as to look cute. This is the same kind of relationship that has

been extended to the environment; a relationship that is based on unbridled selfishness, leading to the exploitation of the environment. The scholar, Andrienne Rich argues that women "... have been perceived for too many centuries as pure nature, exploited and raped like the earth and solar system..." (285). Anna has been exploited and abused. She has already established that David hates women. Although she attempts a revolt at the point David abuses her by throwing "the rest of her tea and the tea leave out of her tin cup into the lake" (80), she is grossly passive and appears to have accepted David the way he is. The narrator observes that "Anna smiled at him as though he was a brain-damaged child" (80). Anna appears to have accepted to live in peace with things she cannot change. But who tells her that she cannot change the situation, or at least, register a very strong protest? Anna's passivity has been misconstrued by David as timidity and naivety. He does not have a healthy opinion about her. He considers her a woman whose brain capacity is incapable of rational thoughts. The narrator observes David's opinion about Anna as David says:

"What would we talk about? She's too dumb, she can't figure out what I'm saying to her, Jesus, she moves her lips when she watches the T.V even. She doesn't know anything, every time she opens her mouth she makes an ass of herself... what I married was a pair of boobs, she manipulated me into it, it was when I was studying for the ministry, nobody knew any better then. But that's life." He wiggled his moustache and gave a woody woodpecker laugh, his eyes baffled (99).

In David's opinion, Anna is not worth a wife. To him, Anna is just "a pair of boobs". His marriage to her is a mistake but Anna lives in fool's paradise, stretching herself too far to please David.

What keeps the marriage going are the sexual gratifications David derives from Anna and Anna's misplaced consciousness. "It turns me on when she bends over", David said. "She's got a neat ass. I'm really into the whole ass thing. Joe, don't you think she's got a neat ass?" (62) Anna's ass, boobs, cute outlook when she is mad, and so on are what David sees as the oil that lubricates the wheels of the relationship he calls marriage. Anna keeps satisfying his ego and his lust, believing she is making their marriage work. Such consciousness constitutes her catastrophe as Layiwola observes of women that "false consciousness relegates them as inert objects of history (126). Anna's consciousness however appears an aftermath of a process that has conditioned her to think and act the ways she does; a process packaged and delivered by patriarchy. Women bear the consequences and often get abused by bearing the consequences as in the case of Anna. Anna is a

victim of patriarchal powers as Nyberg observes that “power is always found in relation, not in isolation and its presence is measured by references to effect and consequences” (58). The effects and consequences of power relations between male and female genders in the novel are heavily reflected on Anna.

The unnamed female narrator appears to avoid the effects and consequences of the gendered power relations more than Anna, although she is still a victim in some circumstances. She is more resolute than Anna in rejecting some gender roles and expectations, thereby carving out a stronger figure and character for herself than the figure Anna portrays. She revolts against child-bearing after her first sad experience:

I wonder how I feel about that. After the first I didn't ever want to have another child, it was too much to go through for nothing, they shut you into a hospital, they shave the hair off you and tie your hands down and they don't let you see, they don't want you to understand, they want you to believe it's their power, not yours. They stick needles into you so you won't hear anything, you might as well be a dead pig, your legs area up in a metal frame, they bend over you, technicians, mechanics, butchers, students clumsy or sniggering practicing on your body, they take the baby out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar ... he wasn't there with me, I couldn't remember why; he should have been, since it was his idea, his fault (55).

As noted earlier, there is a great deal of indifference on the part of the narrator toward her conception, pregnancy and childbirth. This indifference is a reaction to her husband's action. She must have been subjected to a certain kind of coercion that makes her give in to the whims and caprices of her husband. Her expectation that her husband will show some sense of responsibility at that trying moment gets betrayed as he is conspicuously absent. The pains of the childbirth get mixed with the pains of the collapse of her expectation, giving way to disillusionment about child-bearing and marriage. She abhors marriage in a similar intensity she abhors child-bearing. She turns down the marriage proposal of her lover, Joe as she reports their interaction:

“Look”, I said, “I've been married before and it didn't work out. I had a baby too”.
My ace voice patient. “I don't want to go through that again”... I've tried and failed,

I'm inoculated, exempt, classified as wounded. It wasn't that I didn't suffer; I was conscientious about that, that's what qualified me. But marriage was like playing Monopoly or doing crossword puzzles, either your mind worked that way, like Anna's, or it didn't; and I'd proved mine didn't (61).

The narrator forecloses another marriage and rebuffs Joe's pestering tendencies. This echoes Tsaaior's opinion in his article, "The Fallacy of Phallacy and the Politics of Prostitution in the African Novel", that "women have evolved subversive and transgressive strategies to undermine the potency of the hegemonic patriarchal meanings" (176). The narrator acknowledges that she does not have the kind of mind Anna has which sustains her marriage. She has tasted marriage and it is bitter; she has also been wounded, and she would never try it again. Joe's efforts to marry her are futile. He should rather save them for some other things and the narrator is not vague in showing him that.

Considering the foregoing discussions, Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* has a structural history of male dominance over women; dominance that has been sanctioned by patriarchy and aids a platform for uneven relationships between men and women. Men appear to draw strength and assertiveness from these structures that favour them while women seem to live in the shadow of their own strength and have had to endure the consequences of men's audacious actions. There are representations of male audacity, which by extension portray women as meek and feeble. David "puts his arm around Anna and hugs her..."(3), the narrator says, "Joe puts his arm around me..."(25), Joe also makes some sort of compelling marriage proposal to the narrator, as he says "we should get married", (60). These audacious dispositions of David and Joe have the capacity to negatively affect the psychology of these women.

The picture of dolls is being portrayed and the women may not only act as dolls in these circumstances but further lose the courage to be firm and strong in gender relationship. Through these means, the gulf that feeds inequality between men and women in the novel continuously expands. David and Joe see Anna and the narrator respectively as attractive objects with the capacity to satisfy. The satisfaction they would derive from them is their concentration and considerations at all times. The women do not enjoy the needed respect from these men. If they do, Joe would not have made a marriage proposal using a language that embodies compulsion and represents him as someone who is out of his mind. The narrator expresses her surprise:

I set the cup down carefully on the rock and turned to look at him, shielding my eyes. I wanted to laugh, it was incongruous, it wasn't what he would call his trip, the legal phrases and the paperwork and the vows, especially the finality; and he'd got the order wrong, he'd never asked whether I loved him, that was supposed to come first...(60).

A marriage proposal should seek to extract consent or commitment or both of them but Joe violates this procedural step, and asserts himself and compels the narrator to marry him by simply saying "we should get married". The narrator feels shame for Joe and surprised at his utterance. She asks him some basic questions he oversteps in order to bring him back to his lost consciousness. It is obvious that Joe is blinded by the powers and the authority conferred on the male gender over the female by his society. This makes him easily overstep his bounds and miscarry his ego. The narrator turns down his proposal and it is easy for her because Joe already violates some unwritten codes of courtesy. Joe's attempt to physically assault her in order to compel her to accept his proposal portrays the degree of repression and assault women suffer in this society. The narrator turns down the proposal and further observes Joe's reaction to her, "'then why not do it?' He had moved closer, he was being logical, he was threatening me with something. I swiveled, scouting for help...' (60). This appears the highest point of intimidation and assault from Joe which subsequently affects the psychology of the narrator. Joe's failure to extract consent from the narrator through verbal assault leads him to try a physical assault which he believes can compel the narrator to accept his marriage proposal. Joe's exaggerated sense of authority often drags him along the paths of ignoble behaviours. When his marriage turned to a forced affair, a contract without the consent of the both parties? This ignoble thought reveals Joe's society and the contempt it has for women.

David on his part, at a point attempts to use the nudity of his wife for pornography. One may ask what these men think of their women. It may be difficult to unravel all their thoughts but the most obvious is the fact that they have negative opinions of their women, conspicuously displaying negative affections. This portrays a society that is bereft of the moral codes that cover the interest of women; a society that degrades women and womanhood; a society where everything men do to women is covered with the garment of legitimacy, power and authority. Nobody questions anybody for any action in as much as men are involved. David takes his wife, Anna to ridicule and

he deeply humiliates her when he and Joe attempt to take nude pictures of Anna. David feels that Anna is his wife and his possession can serve any purpose. He feels he can do with Anna whatever he wishes at any point in time. Anna's resistance does not even deter him from his ignoble mission. David feels since they need "a naked lady with big tits and a big ass" (97) for their video production called *Random samples*, his wife that has just had her bath will be a substitute. Anna acknowledges that she knows David's purpose in doing what he is set to do; that purpose is to humiliate her. These actions do not only humiliate Anna, they desecrate womanhood and reveal the cheap value of women to men in this society.

The currents and fluctuations that keep women neglected among this social group may be responsible for the narrator's decision to alienate herself from her society, and also her quest for power. She has been a victim of power play at various times, and has also seen victim of brutal power. She is initially skeptical over what to do with power if acquired. Her society is not a woman's society otherwise she would have known what to do with power, if acquired. Her society is men's world, a super patriarchal society, where men do not wander in thoughts of what to do with power. They know how and when to use it. The narrator expresses her skepticism about the acquisition of power:

The garden's been rearranged: before there were scarlet runners up one side of the fence. The blossoms were redder than anything else in the garden, the hummingbirds went into them, hovering, their wings a blur. The beans that were left too long would yellow after the first frost and split open. Inside were pebbles, purple-black and frightening. I knew that if I could get some of them and keep them for myself I would be all-powerful; but later when I was tall enough and could finally reach to pick them it didn't work. Just as well, I think, as I had no idea what I would do with the power once I got it; if I'd turned out like the others with power I would be evil (22-23).

The narrator's eyes of infancy shift her gaze from focusing on acquiring power. Her own kind of power would have been more powerful than the patriarchal powers. Her own would have been spiritual and mystical powers derived from the power of nature but for her innocence. She is not sure of what she will do with the power and believes that if she gets it, she will be as evil as others that have power. Her submission presupposes that power generates evil. But does power actually

generate evil? One may accept this understanding considering the activities of men in her society, men who get intoxicated by their powers and often experiment with their women, to either test the efficacy of their powers or consolidate their powers. The narrator's indifference towards acquisition of power is at the early stage of her development, when she has not fully seen the brutality of men. She later seeks this power through an isolated life. She acknowledges that she stops open confrontations with men because they get her nowhere rather, she decides to live another kind of life, and says, "...I no longer fought back because I never won, the only defence was flight, invisibility" (97).

2.3 Re-Defining Women – Nature Parallelism In *Surfacing*:

Some earlier studies on the association of women with nature have established the two entities as parallels, arguing that women are closer to nature than men as they share certain attributes in common. This study does not follow such lines of argument as there is the possibility of creating further divisive structures to the existing ones already created by patriarchy. There appears to be nothing that makes women more natural than men or closer to nature than men. This seems a thought process that has not been empirically proven. This study associates women and nature at the level of metaphor, derived from shared experience of domination. The notion of metaphor in this study is based on Max Black's account of metaphor as observed in Abrams (1999):

Black proposed that each of the two elements in a metaphor has a "system of associated commonplaces", consisting of the properties and relations that we commonly attach to the object, person, or event... He also claims that in place of saying that metaphors simply formulate a pre-existing similarity between the two subjects "it would be more illuminating in some of these cases to say that the metaphor creates the similarity" (155 -156)

Following Black's argument, it is not out of place to argue that metaphor creates a similarity between women and nature. This similarity is motivated by a parallelism that interfaces the exploitation of women and the exploitation of nature. This appears to be the heart and the focus of

the ecofeminist theory. Women and the environment, to borrow from Black, have a “system of associated commonplaces”, (Black, quoted in Abrams, 155).

The ecofeminist critic, Warren observes that there are “important connections between how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on the one hand and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other” (xi). These “associated commonplaces” are based on the treatment of both entities by the patriarchal systems that have evolved structures that exploit and debase them. Atwood articulates levels of male domination of women and the environment in *Surfacing*; domination that leaves women and the environment pawns in the patriarchal power game. The exploitation and domination of women already observed interweaves with the exploitation and domination of the environment. The massive deforestation of the forested areas in the novel leaves the environment not only exploited but “raped”, to use David’s notion, who asks Anna how she will like to be raped by a porcupine. The narrator accounts for a heavy and destructive deforestation:

We’re on the trail inside the forest; the first part is fairly open, though now and then we pass gigantic stumps, level and saw-cut, remnants of the trees that were here before the district was logged out. The trees will never be allowed to grow that tall again, they’re killed as soon as they’re valuable, big trees are scarce as whales (30).

The narrator’s account portrays a great insensitivity to the environment and a lack of the desire for a sustainable environment, where all the species will thrive in their natural habitats. The destruction is much, to the extent that a whole “district was logged out”. What the narrator can see again is nothing but the “remnants of the trees” that have been “logged out”. She likens the scarcity of big trees to the scarcity of whales. This comparison brings out the degree of exploitation the environment suffers; exploitation that deepens everyday as the trees are “killed as soon as they’re valuable”. The privation of women is similar to the privation of the environment in the novel and buttresses Ynestra King’s opinion in his essay, “Toward an Ecological Feminism and Feminist Ecology” that “the hatred of women and the hatred of nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing” (118).

In Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*, the hatred of the environment appears to have been stimulated by capitalist motivations. As the narrator notes:

There was a covered bridge here once, but it was too far north to be quaint. They tore it down three years before I left, to improve the dam, and replaced it with the concrete bridge which is here now, enormous, monumental, dwarfing the village. It's the dam that controls the lake: sixty years ago they raised the lake level so that whenever they wanted to flush the logs down the narrow outflow river to the mill they would have enough water power (7).

Some of these companies use trees and dams for their production processes. They cut down trees indiscriminately without thinking of the consequences of their actions. They do not care to know that heavy deforestation can increase the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere because the trees that should use them as food are no longer there. This can adversely affect the environment. The company that constructs dam and raises the water level does not consider aquatic lives. This artificial increase in water level has the capacity to affect fish and other aquatic lives in the river because the water temperature is negatively induced. The companies appear to care only about their profit maximization and exploitation of the natural resources. Their relationship to the environment is based on domination and exploitation, an echo of the relationship of the sexes that is also based on male exploitation of the female. Tolan opines that “correspondingly, ecofeminists believe that there is a destructive opposition between masculine culture and feminine nature. This view is given considerable authority in *Surfacing*, in which nature is fragile and threatened” (43).

It is not only nature that is fragile and threatened in the novel, women are also victims. This is a case of the more powerful subverting the less powerful. The activities of these companies have negative effects on the environment. The narrator further accounts for heavy destruction of the environment:

I heard a sound, human sound. At first it was like on outboard starting; then it was a snarl. Chainsaw, I could see them now, two men in yellow helmets. They'd left a trail, trees felled at intervals into the bay, trunks cut cleanly as though by a knife. Surveyors, the paper company or the government, the power company. If it was the power company I knew what it meant: they were going to raise the lake level as they had sixty years ago... (81).

The occurrences of these destructions, most times, are as frequent as the neglect and exploitation of women in the novel. Women appear to exist for the purposes of satisfying the needs of men, in varying forms while the environment appears to exist for anthropocentric purposes.

There exists in the novel, a parallelism between how humans force themselves on the environment and how men force themselves on women in the novel. Humans have an uncontrolled incursion into the environment and decimate both flora and fauna. Trees are cut at intervals, water level is increased at any time which can affect aquatic lives, fishing and hunting are professional human activities in the novel. Similar structures of force and exploitation can be seen in Joe, the narrator's lover, who attempts to rape her. As the narrator observes:

He kissed me... mouth on my shoulder, fingers at the clasp behind my back... His hands descended, zipper sound, metal teeth on metal teeth... "Don't" I said, he was lowering himself down on me, "I don't want you to". "What's wrong with you?" he said, angry; then he was pinning me, hands manacles, teeth against my lips, censoring me, he was shoving against me, his body insistent as one side of an argument. I slid my arm between us, against his throat, windpipe, and pried his head away (105-106).

It takes the brevity and strong will of the narrator to neutralize this attempted rape. Joe has already lost his "sanity" and his self-control, and consequently forces himself on the narrator. He does not care if the narrator wants the sexual act or not, he does not want to know how she feels at that moment. He appears to have a blind passion; a passion to copulate, and the narrator becomes a victim of this blind passion, bearing the consequences of unbridled power and naked force. It may be seen as an attempted rape, but on another plane, it can be considered a rape. There is a consummation of non-genital sexual act by Joe. The narrator says that his teeth are against her lips as he shoves his body against her lower parts. He has already accomplished some degree of the sexual gratification he wants.

Joe's rape or attempted rape of the narrator and David's revolting question to Anna on how she will want to be raped by a porcupine portray men with supremacy of power and misguided sense of authority. They derive these powers and authority from a social condition that does not favour women, a condition that mutates both social and cultural structures according to the dictates of

patriarchy. One of such structures in the novel is the belief in the supremacy of men that has already been accepted by men and women. The narrator says that:

...in high school the right thing was to stare fixedly at the teacher as though at a movie screen, and it was worse for a girl to ask questions than for a boy. If a boy asked a question the other boys would make derisive sucking noises with their mouths, but if a girl asked one the other girls would say “Think you’re so great” in the washroom afterwards (69).

This quotation generates a serious concern, and this emanates from the fact that even in the high school, girls are already conditioned to accept that men are superior to them. The girls do not only accept that men are superior but believe that they belong to the washroom, some would say the kitchen. If “it was worse for a girl to ask questions” (Atwood, 69) as observed by the narrator, as early as high school days, and the girls accept that opinion, it then follows that the psychology of the girl-child is negatively and almost irredeemably affected. The issue again, in the foregoing scenario, is that the conspiracy to mock and the actual mockery are hatched and perpetrated by girls. It appears that women have the propensity to reduce themselves to the level patriarchal forces have designed for them. In that case, they have become enemies to themselves and will continue to reinforce the structures that hold them down. The attitude of the high school girls is not different from the attitude of the older women. The narrator herself is not immune to this kind of thought process. She notes her comment in a discussion, ‘ “I said “I think men ought to be superior”. But neither of them heard the actual words; Anna looked at me as though I’d betrayed her and said “Wow, are you ever brainwashed”, and David said “Want a job?” and to Joe, “Hear that, you’re superior” ’ (79).

The narrator is no way trying to be sarcastic. Her opinion is, to a great extent, a dramatic irony; a sudden collapse of some expectations. Her utterance not only violates but diminishes the personality she has carved for herself. She appears a relatively stronger character, who wants the equality of the sexes but she unconsciously holds an opinion that is inimical to the gender she belongs. It is even the docile and meek Anna that tries to jerk her up by asking her if she has been brainwashed. If there is anybody to be brainwashed, it is Anna and not the narrator. Unfortunately, the reverse appears to be the case.

Atwood appears to have used this as a potent tool to demonstrate the devastating effects of the deep-rooted patriarchal forces on women. The psychological grip on women appears so tight that their courage, at a point, will certainly fail them. The narrator acknowledges that Anna looks at her as though she had betrayed her. Of course, it is not only a betrayal to Anna but to the gender she belongs. Such opinion feeds the ego of men. David lays emphasis on the narrator's statement and tells Joe, "Hear that, you're superior". The emphasis is on the purposes of pride. It does not mean that David is unaware that he is superior, at least to Anna, whom he treats as a subordinate. Anna does not want the narrator to say that men ought to be superior but she also knows and accepts that men are superior. This, to Anna, may be the truth that needs not be spoken. Patriarchy appears to have been systematically entrenched and continuously reinvented that women and nature will always be victims.

Going by the various systems and structures that have imbued a sense of superiority and supremacy in men, it follows that every other thing, including women and environment exist under them, and perhaps, for their benefits. The condition upon which women and the environment are debased has a link to the history of patriarchy.

Margaret Atwood's use of the first person point of view in *Surfacing* renders the story of the novel incontestable. The degree of believability of the ordeals of women and the natural environment in a patriarchy increases with the presence of a participant narrator. Although the narrator has no name, it does not, in any significant way, affect her identity. The fact that she is a mature woman, who has had relationships with men is established. She tells her story and accounts for her experiences with the bluntness required of maturity. Apart from being the narrator, she is the protagonist around whom most of the actions of the story revolve around. Margaret Atwood structures the plot of the novel in a way that causes and effects are graphically portrayed. The later life of the narrator is an effect and a reaction to her previous experiences. This structure is in tandem with what a plot should be.

The plot embodies symbolisms that interconnect with the ecofeminist principles. Discussion of symbolism will include symbolic characters and symbolic actions. The use of symbolism in *Surfacing* is a technique Margaret Atwood used to get to the general from the particular, using some characters and structures to reveal the extent of exploitation women and the environment suffer. Therefore, some characters are representatives of a group while some actions are

representatives of a structure or a pattern. The study's approach to symbolism follows Abrams' notion that:

In discussing literature, however, the term "symbol" is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in its turn signifies something, or has a range of reference, beyond itself... the symbol remains indefinite, but richly-even infinity-suggestive in its significance; and also that for this very reason, a symbol is the higher mode of expression (311-313).

This study does not argue whether or not symbolism "is the higher mode of expression" but reinforce the idea that it is not only "suggestive in its significance" but also "has a range of reference, beyond itself" (Abrams, 311). This appears to be the focus of the use of symbolism in the novel.

The symbolism of patriarchy is reflected in the persons of David and Joe. Although there is Paul, the narrator's father's friend and others like Claude's dad, and so on, none symbolizes patriarchy the ways David and Joe do. Through these characters, it is revealed what men think of women; how they treat women and the various forces they use to keep women at the margins in their composite social existence. The utterances of these male characters represent the frame of men's mind. David expects to be served just as Joe does. These services are required to be provided by women. This is the understanding of this patriarchal society and David acknowledges it, "Christ, am I wiped", he says. "Somebody break me out a beer". Anna brings him one and he pats her on the rear and says "That's what I like, service" (22).

It is possible to argue that David does not mention Anna's name in his desire to be served. Anna knows that David wants her to serve him beer. David's statement within that context appears an unspoken presupposition which Anna fully understands because she is a member of that society. For David to call "somebody" to break him out a beer, one may ask, who is the "somebody"? Within that team, it is David and Anna, his wife; Joe and the narrator, his lover. Who does David want their services? It can neither be Joe nor his lover, the narrator. David represents a society that has built false consciousness in women, consciousness that always keeps them in servitude. David irresistibly owns up that he likes to be served, "that's what I like, service". He is representative of his society where men like to be served by women. This has been illustrated in gender roles.

Similarly, Anna and the narrator symbolize the female gender and the marginal existence of women in the scheme of human activities. Through Anna and the narrator, it is that the social group women belong to, the dichotomy that exists between men and women, and the pains women suffer in a male-dominated society are all revealed. That women exist as objects of sexual gratification for men is established through references to Anna and the narrator. Anna's attitude to make-up always, so as to be admired by David, is suggestive of women's desire to look beautiful, not only for the sake of looking beautiful but to be admired and sorted after by men. Anna makes up to please David and when she forgets, she exclaims, "what I'm going to do? I forgot my make-up, he'll kill me" (87). How David treats Anna draws a reference to a male-dominated society that has bottled the freedom of women.

The industries are symbols of an aspect of patriarchal structures that devastate the environment the way similar structures devastate and negate women in the novel. The narrator's desire for a conducive environment interconnects with women's desire for elusive freedom in the novel. The society that denies her gender its fundamental freedom is on the path to denying it also of a conducive environment. As the narrator notes, "there's a breeze, filtering through the screened window; it's better here than in the city, with the exhaust-pipe fumes and the damp heat, the burnt rubber smell of the subway, the brown grease that congeals on your skin if you walk around outside . How have I been able to live so long in the city, it isn't safe" (48).

The narrator juxtaposes the two geographical locations: the city and the island. She accounts for how the city has been polluted through industrialization and how she desires the island because of the serenity of its environment. The paper factory, the power plant and other industries stand as references, and are also suggestive of the agents that debase the environment.

There is also a symbolism of women's self-discovery and consciousness. The unnamed narrator symbolizes this as she transits into a much stronger woman when she distances herself from the very society that bottles her freedom and holds her in servitude. Burrige, in "Surfacing by Margaret Atwood: A study in borderlines", says that the narrator "is waiting to find a name and an identity that she has chosen for herself" (62). Total alienation becomes her only option to acquire the powers she needs to counter the forces that have been up against her. She realizes her real self in the absence of her socially constructed self. She symbolizes women's social metamorphosis and transformation, moving away from a weak and unfavorable social plane reserved for women to a

position of strength. This is also what her alienation symbolizes. Her alienation is a realization of her strong desire, and may not be seen as an accident. She acknowledges it, "...this is what I wanted, to stay here alone" (124). She achieves her desire and enjoys absolute freedom. Tolan argues that "the narrator's flight into the wilderness is an attempt to escape her entrapment within social guilt and recover her authentic, innocent self" (41). The excitement this freedom elicits in her reveals that she has been in bondage as she says, "the rules are over, I can go anywhere now, into the cabin, into the garden, I can walk on the paths. I am the only one left alive on the Island." (139).

Her alienation is a symbol of protest apart from being a symbol of strength. Through her protest, a protest based on detachment, she derives her strength. Her new or renewed strength gives her a new power of thought and she sees a past action differently, in the light of new insights: she says. "...Anna's soul closed in the gold compact, that and not the camera is what I should have broken" (129). The camera she breaks is the camera David and Joe use to take a shot of Anna's nudity. This is the very action she now regrets. Her self-realization places that past action as a misplaced hostility. To her, she should have used such efforts in breaking Anna's closed soul.

Anna's closed soul is a metaphor for lack of self-realization; a metaphor for docility and passivity in a patriarchal atmosphere. The narrator thinks better now because she understands better. She is up to radical actions because of her radical thoughts, but unfortunately, Anna is not her kind. Her alienation is a protest against mistreatment of women, against the subversion of her freedom. Linda Anderson in *Plotting Change in Contemporary Women's Fiction* argues that the female has found "ways of contesting her own silencing" (vii). Her alienation should not be seen as a problem of mental neurosis or schizophrenia. It is done out of consciousness to live among other species of the natural environment and "contest her own silencing". (Anderson, vii)

The use of imagery in *Surfacing* will be discussed as a technique and in the light of the mental pictures evoked, which advance discussions on the exploitation and debasement of both women and the environment. The dominant imagery that reveals the extent of environmental abuse is the image of decay. It is a recurrent structure in the novel, and portrays the environment at different points as stinking. The narrator observes a scene where her travelling team moves through the bank of the lake around the Island and their discovery of the decay caused by the indiscriminate dumping of unused logs in water. "David Prods at the dead trunk with the machete, poking holes in the

bark. Joe sits down on the ground: he's breathing hard, too much city, and the flies are getting to him..."(32). The level of decay of the log is deep, and that is why it oozes and emits an offensive gaseous odour. The stench is revolting that it affects Joe's breath and incapacitates his movement. He is also battling with the flies attracted by the odour of the dead wood. This reveals that the environment has the propensity to affect human beings in similar or the same proportion human beings affect it. Joe breathes hard because his immune system appears fragile to withstand the contaminated air. The irony is that he is a victim of the actions of his own system; the system that encourages capitalist expansion and abuse of the environment. Through Joe, the image of agony is interwoven with the image of decay; agony and decay that are the effects of human's negative interaction with the environment.

The team further stumbles on a dead bird, a heron they cannot explain the cause of its death, yet they know that it does not die naturally. It is a common phenomenon to see heron being killed indiscriminately on the Island. The experiences that consolidate the image of decay are interlinked from the image of a dead log to the image of a dead heron. "Heavy", David said. "What is it?" "A dead bird", Anna said. She held her nose with two fingers. I said "it's a heron. You can't eat them" I couldn't tell how it had been done, bullet, smashed with a stone, hit with a stick... "Shit", Joe said, "it really stinks" (83).

The narrator locates human action as the cause of death of the heron, considering her list of the possible actions that may be responsible for its death. Although she is not sure of which of the three actions she lists but the heron is a victim of human action and may have been killed with a bullet, a stone or a stick, according to the narrator. The big question is, why is the heron killed, knowing that such birds are not eaten, according to the narrator. This reveals the extent of domination and privation of the natural environment which result in a stinking environment.

The narrator observes another decaying heron in another location. As earlier observed, killing of heron in the Island is very common but the contradiction is that those who kill them do not eat them. The bird is not also as dangerous as to be killed on sight. The narrator says, "at the midway pond the heron was still there, hanging in the hot sunlight like something in a butcher's window, desecrated, unredeemed. It smelled worse. Around its head the flies vibrated, laying their eggs" (93-94). It is not out of place to consider this environment a smelling environment as it portrays

images of decay. Herons are indiscriminately killed and allowed to decay. They produce offensive stench, and generate flies. Dead logs also decay and produce revolting odour.

It is not only herons that are killed and allowed to decay and mess up the environment; beetles are also killed. They are not killed to be eaten; they are killed for other considerations. The narrator observes a dead beetle, “carion beetle, death beetle. Why had they strung it up like a lynch victim, why didn’t they just throw it away like the trash? To prove they could do it, they had the power to kill” (83). This reveals a society that enjoys killing of these animals even when they do not eat them. They kill them and celebrate such killings. This is why a dead beetle is hung up to prove their powers to kill. These powers to kill, by implications, mean the powers to deteriorate the environment, to cause decay and extinction of species, to abuse, and to dominate. These powers are derived from patriarchal forces, and are not different from the powers that abuse and hold women in servitude. Women as part of the victims of these powers portray different images in the novel.

The image of women in relation to men in the novel is that of master-servant. The father-figure of men is so hurting that there is a sense of agony and pain among the women. Anna and the narrator suffer different degrees of abuse that elicit empathy and pity. David creates for Anna negative images, including an image of a whore, an image of a sex toy, an image of a domestic servant, and so on. To David, these are the things Anna is good for. The narrator has similar experiences like Anna. Although she rejects further child - bearing, the account of her ordeal in her first experience portrays her as good for child-bearing. That seems to be opinion of her ex-husband. The various images portrayed by Anna and the narrator in *Surfacing* are the images provoked and motivated by the actions and activities of men. The women simply react to these actions, thereby portraying various images.

To conclude, Margaret Atwood offers a platform to argue for the fair treatment of women and the environment in *Surfacing*. Her representation of women-characters in the novel as victims of patriarchal forces is not to reinforce the ideologies that hold women down or to mock womanhood but to illuminate the wickedness and insensitivity of patriarchy. To achieve this, she used various narrative elements that allowed the characters to interact among themselves, reveal their thoughts and exert their actions.

Her vision for a sustainable environment is advanced through the portrayal of the various privations the environment suffers. She highlights this mistreatment in order to argue for a change in patriarchal attitude towards the environment. She portrays an argument that it is not wise to pretend as though all is well, with regard to human interaction with the environment.

Her constant portrayal of the mistreatment of women and mistreatment of the environment in *Surfacing* is an effort in support of ecofeminism. It is clear that ecofeminism identifies a similarity in the oppression of women and nonhuman nature and calls for a need to abolish such woman-nature oppression.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CLEFT

In this study, the ecofeminist approach to *The Cleft* raises three significant woman-nature issues. These issues espouse the gender-nature discourses in the text. One of these issues is the idea of gender hierarchy/role. Another issue is the textual engagement with male/female relationship. The third one is the novel's representation of woman-nature association. These tripartite features in accompaniment with other rhetorical strategies such as narrative technique, the use of imagery and symbolism will be addressed accordingly in this chapter. The chapter will first explore the biography of the author and present a synopsis of the novel in the light of ecofeminist perspective.

Doris May Tayler, later, Doris May Lessing was a British prolific writer who was born in Kermanshah, Persia (the modern day Iran), in 1919. (<https://www.biography.com/people/doris-lessing-9380070>) Her father fought in the First World War and got settled in Iran, where Doris Lessing was born. The family later moved from Iran to Rhodesia (which is now Zimbabwe), where Doris Lessing grew up. Her family was a very modest one as it engaged in an unsuccessful farming career. Her biography further stated that Doris Lessing had an unpleasant childhood as she worked as a maid, office clerk, telephone operator, and later as a journalist before getting married in 1939. She divorced her husband in 1943 after she could not condone the stifling patriarchal systems. She joined the Rhodesia's Communist party and later married one of the party members, Gottfried Lessing, in 1945.

She later switched to a writing career and moved to England where she produced her first novel, *The Grass is Singing* (1950). She became an acclaimed feminist with her 1962 novel, *The Golden Notebook*. (<https://www.biography.com/people/doris-lessing-9380070>). Lessing further wrote more than fifty other literary works that spanned across fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and so on. Her

novel under study, *The Cleft* is one of her narrative fiction. In 2007, she was honoured with the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature at the age of eighty eight. She died in 2013 at the age of ninety four.

Some of her works have African backdrops, where she was up against the White minority rule in southern African sub region. Katherine Fishburn (1987) opines that:

For Doris Lessing writing has always involved a special kind of commitment to other people, a commitment that allows her to function as their artistic representative, taking their side and speaking out when they cannot. Thus at one time or another she has written about the disaffections of the lower class, the stifled rebellions of middle-class women, the disenfranchisement of African blacks and the abuses of the mentally ill (5).

Doris Lessing's anti colonial tendencies incurred the wrath of the then governments of Rhodesia and South Africa, who barred her from stepping into the two countries. Ester Gendusa (2014) notes in her essay, "Doris Lessing's Fiction: Literature as Commitment" that "...Lessing is banned for twenty-five years from Rhodesia (and South Africa) due to her explicit opposition to the white minority government ruling the country during Ian Smith's regime, thus becoming one of the voices of that "white" Africa which strongly expressed their political identification with the black majority" (133)

Her growing up among the colonized peoples of Africa may have fanned the embers of her activism and feminist spirit. She was an advocate of equity and fairness, and these are greatly pronounced in *The Cleft*. It was easier for her activist dispositions to interlock with the ecofeminist spirit.

3.1 Synopsis Of The Novel

Doris Lessing's novel, *The Cleft* (2007), is a documentation of the oral creation story of the Roman people, "as I have said, the history I am relating is based on ancient documents, which are based on even earlier oral records" (7). It accounts for this history of origin from the perspective of female ancestors who live along the sea coast of an unknown island and work as cleft watchers (27). As cleft watchers, these female ancestors have a very strong link with nature and survive on

their relationships with natural elements such as the star, moon, sea, rock, mountain and sundry others.

The novel is written in an unconventional style as it lacks some elements of prose fiction. Overtly, the narrative voices are multiple and this can be problematic in establishing the point-of-view of the narrative. The character that coordinates the narratives is a Roman senator, who is a historian and has got hold of the disjointed manuscripts containing the ancient legends. The multiplicity of the narrative voices may be confusing to the reader. The narration argues that the first ancestors are women (Clefs) and are able to bring forth offspring by means of some divine intervention through asexual reproduction. This continues until the Clefs begin to give birth to babies with different biological compositions. Out of ignorance, the Clefs consider such births/babies abnormal and decide on the extermination of these 'abnormal/Monster' babies or 'Squirts' at the Killing Rock (a place designated for the infanticide). Thus, for several decades, countless numbers of Monster babies are sacrificed to eagles at the Killing Rock by the Clefs until it is discovered that the eagles are not feeding on the babies but are carrying them across the mountains to the valley (29) where a new community of Monsters evolved.

The Cleft is a novel that celebrates human acquaintanceship with nature. The novel places emphasis on the relationship between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature. The history of origin associated with the Clefs in the novel provides enough grounds for the assessment of female roles in the human-nature spaces. However, there is a reversal of this oppressive role in the opening pages of *The Cleft* and this is achieved by the extermination of Monster babies by the Cleft mothers. This act of extermination goes on for decades until a young Cleft wanders along the island and discovers a valley populated by Monsters. This Cleft is raped to death by several Monsters (men) as a reinforcement of female oppression.

Maire is the second Cleft to embark on a rediscovery of the Monsters' valley. Although she is welcomed with open arms by the Monsters; however, such warm a reception becomes a framing device by the Monsters to abuse her sexual right. This is manifested by the Monsters' attempt to copulate with Maire on many occasions until she is weak and helpless. Maire discovers that those ugly parts in the Monsters' bodies which make them different from the Clefs are actually body organs responsible for sexual reproduction. Although sex and procreation originate from this

discovery, however, sexual abuse becomes some sort of fun for the Monsters. This discovery makes the Clefts reason that those eagles that carry the baby Monsters away from the Killing Rock across the mountain are actually saving them from the savagery of ignorant Clefts. From this human-eagle relationship, the male chronicler establishes the claim that humans are the direct descendants of eagles (27).

The rediscovery of the Monsters' valley by Maire, then Astre and the unity of the two communities are of great importance to ecofeminists' agitation for equality and love in society. This idea of love is validated by Maire and Astre's ability to secretly canvass the younger Clefts to follow them to the valley. Although the 'Old Shes' (the old Clefts) suspect this move and plan to destroy Maire and Astre, but they do not succeed in the attempt. And as Maire and the younger Clefts decamp from the Old Clefts, live separately in faraway caves on the island, they are able to create their own community of Sister Clefts and forge a lasting relationship with the Monsters' community. For their epic engagement, Maire and Astre are deified in the Roman tradition by being identified with nature's symbols. Maire is given the qualities of the moon while Astre is seen as the brightest star.

The love relationship between the two communities latter grows and sexual activities become rampant between the Monsters and the Sister Clefts. The latter visit the valley regularly and return to the caves to conceive their babies. The Monsters also visit the Sister Clefts at the caves. Whenever the Clefts deliver their baby Monsters, they take them to the valley protected by the eagles that soar above them in the sky so as to see that nothing evil happens to the babies. The eagles also monitor the events at the Killing Rock by the Old Clefts. It is recorded that the eagles become so desperate that they swoop on the Old Clefts along the road to the Killing Rock, snatch away the babies and carry them across the mountain to the Monsters' valley.

The evolution of bilingualism as an attribute of female contribution to the male community is also of significance to ecofeminist agenda in *The Cleft*. As the Monster's population increased, a monolingual system of communication develops among the Monsters. They are able to communicate in a form of language that the chronicler considers 'childish'. The Monsters continue to relate to one another in this somewhat childish language until Maire, the more experienced from the Old Cleft community, comes to teach the monsters a more mature language. This impact raises Maire's reputation among the Monsters.

Maire's feminine impact on the rebuilding of the Monsters' monolingual community is also suggestive of a limitation to acclaimed Patriarchal notion of male superiority and a reinforcement of female contribution to masculine development. It is in the light of this development that the failure of the opposition created by the Old She Clefts against Maire and the sister Clefts may be understood. This opposition is crushed because the Monsters and the eagles help the sister Clefts. The scene of this battle is titled "The Arrival of the eagles" (134)

Ecofeminist critique of human-nature relationship is central to the analysis of *The Cleft*. In the valley, the Monsters are rapidly learning how to live together; this is achieved by serious adaptation to nature. They pluck feathers and leaves and use them as apron. They tear branches from trees and use them as brooms to remove heaps and debris from their domiciliary environment. They make knives from shells (74). Combs are devised from the skeletons of fish (126). They eat fish from the sea, fruits from the forest, and drink water from the sea. At night, the moon provides light and the sunlight for day. Their major occupations are fishing and hunting. They use stones to kill animals. They can also throw clubs and sticks. Several of them can outrun a small beast for prey (90). They are learning very fast and adapting to their environment.

There is also a human-nature fusion in the enhancement of the relationships between the male and female communities of *The Cleft*. Whenever the Sister Clefts bring forth their babies, they will take them to the valley. The Monsters will cut seaweeds as bandage to stop blood or 'birth flow' (74). Later, they will bathe the nursing mother in the sea. The babies are nursed by the doe that will clean up the blood from the baby's body with its feathers. As time elapses, nature teaches the nursing Clefts that the swollen organs on their chests contained milk for nursing their babies.

This human-nature relationship continues until Maire's generation passes and is further validated by Maire's deification as the first mother ancestor for her contribution to the rebuilding of the human family as well as her association with the moon, a symbol of love, piety and virginity. Others of her kind such as Astre are likened to other heavenly bodies and "...their statues are in every town....Artemis, Diana and Venus" (102). It is recorded that Maire is heavily guarded and that a band of eagles float above Maire during her outings. Maire attains an epic stature until her death.

After Maire, Maronna (female) and Horsa (male) who rise to lead the human family are also vulnerable to ecofeminist view of human-nature association. Horsa is possessed by the spirit of adventure. Maronna's insistence that Horsa should not take the young ones away to face the hazards of the island leads to the break up between the male-female communities yet the migration is achieved. Maeve takes over to assist Horsa and the migrant groups in migrating to the island and the migrants are not perturbed by the challenges on the mountains; for there are stories of children, who fall into the river and are eaten by wild animals, beasts, snakes, and so on.

Man's inevitable relationship with nature is further driven by the logic of an occurrence on the island. By some act of divine intervention, a great noise ruffles the island. The old habitation of the first female ancestors is blown up by this metaphysical occurrence and nothing is heard about the Old Clefts again. After several years of migration, Horsa and Maronna are finally in peace. The story of *The Cleft* ends with the return of the migrant groups, the destruction of the Old Clefts' habitation and the evolution of male and female families united by kinship ties. A new human community has also evolved from the old order.

3.2 Gender Roles In Doris Lessing's *The Cleft*

In *The Cleft*, Doris Lessing critiques the patriarchal construct for gender hierarchies that place the male species above all creatures. Patriarchal hierarchical construction places the male in the first order of creatures, followed by female and simultaneously nonhuman and 'otherizes' women and nature respectively. Such hierarchical construct legislated by patriarchy would define social relationships and determine all social responsibilities. In the novel, it is acknowledged that men are regarded as first of all creatures, "so, I shall end the explanations and come to my attempt at a history; one that both Clefts and Monsters, males and females, would agree to. Immediately I confront a problem. I wrote there 'males and females'. Males are always put first, in our practice. They are first in our society, despite the influence of certain great ladies of the noble Houses" (28).

This sense of "first" translates to a sense of intimidation; intimidation of the female gender. *The Cleft* offers an ecofeminist critique of such patriarchal structure through a creation story that emphasizes the primacy of women (the Clefts) as mother ancestors of the Roman people (a microcosm of the human race).

Although there are cases of female intimidation and debasement, the novel reverses this patriarchal trend in order to argue for equity in gender classifications. Thus, ecofeminism agitates for gender equality among men, women and nonhuman others. This equality may be seen at the level of social responsibilities. Each nature species is responsible for performing duties that will contribute to the general well-being of the society; and so the question of superiority of one being over the other does not arise.

In *The Cleft*, the female characters (the Clefts) possess the reproductive potential and therefore the procreative ability and responsibility. The male characters (the Squirts) are endowed with the potential to devour the forest by fetching woods and hunting games as a means of livelihood. Equally, the nonhuman other is not left out. Nature provides sources of food and shelter for the island inhabitants (the Clefts and the Squirts). On the island are sources of nature's providence, fishes, animals, fruits, and so on, without which survival will be impossible. Ecofeminism therefore identifies this symbiosis in the human-nature space. It argues for equality in gender classification in the society. Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children Research Report, "Impact of Gender Inequality" (2005) revealed the negative impact of gender inequality in the society. The commission's report argues that:

Unequal power relationships negatively affect both men and women. Inequality is a form of structural or institutional violence and it is apparent in laws that treat women as second-class citizens in social norms and in customs that deprive them of knowledge about their own bodies and that take away their authority to make independent decisions...gender power relations have left a legacy whereby women are more likely to be disadvantaged than men, to have less access to resources, benefits, information and decision-making, and to have fewer rights within the household and within public life (11).

Ecofeminists argue that the tendency to construct social hierarchies have always tended to result in domination, exploitation and oppression by men in the society. It therefore insists on the equality of gender in order to reverse the discriminatory and oppressive practices that usually result from such constructive paradigms. As a corollary to this view, Stephanie Lahar (1993) in "Roots: Rejoining Natural and Social History" argues that, "those who are written out of history are those

who suffer at the hands of dominant groups.... Ecofeminism sees as destructive not only the perceptual distancing and isolation of different peoples from each other, but also the habits of dualistic thought that separate human society from nature” (96). As an addition to the argument on human-nature equality, ecofeminists also argue for the decentralization of social power that patriarchy places in the hands of men. The story of *The Cleft* bears out this ecofeminist posture. In the text, the power to bear children is given to the Clefts just as the power to provide means of livelihood is given to the Squirts or Monsters. In the same way, the Clefts and Monsters do not have the potential to produce fishes, animals or games. This is the responsibility of nature.

This distribution of roles to human and nonhuman other establishes ecofeminist arguments with regards to the decentralization of social power. Ecofeminists hold that power is not consigned to one creature. It is distributive. It is therefore patriarchal and oppressive to assume that power is the prerogative of men. To assume that others are vulnerable to this privileged class is to miss the point. In “New Historicism and Cultural Criticism,” Lois Tyson argues that:

...., according to new historicists, *power* does not emanate from the top of the political and economic structure. According to French philosopher Michel Foucault, whose ideas have strongly influenced the development of new historicism, power *circulates* in all directions, to and fro all social levels, at all times. And the vehicle by which power circulates is a never-ending proliferation of exchange ... (281).

Ecofeminists also argue that the patriarchal construct that results in the classification of society into hierarchies is flawed. According to ecofeminists, there seems to be no basis for such classification. Doris Lessing undermines such patriarchal assumption by using *The Cleft* to deconstruct the perceived superiority of the male species over other species in nature. The opening of the novel is of great significance to this point. The reader’s attention is quickly brought to a revision of social hierarchy in which case the female specie is given the privileged role of the male. In *The Cleft*, the female is represented as the mother ancestor of the Roman race. To such degree, the popular idea of “Mother Nature” is thus privileged in the male-female space.

In *The Cleft*, women and nature are considered to be the root of male existence in the universe. We understand from the progression of the narratives in that all cosmic beings and elements are

traceable to a Mother Nature ancestry typified by the Clefts. The characterization of female-types to reinforce human ancestry is an echo of the need to establish this Mother-Nature parlance represented in ecofeminists ideology.

The powerlessness of man is unveiled in *The Cleft* in the context of human vulnerability to wild animals, such as beasts and snakes and other natural objects as captured in the text. Ecofeminists seek to ask: why do men get drowned, killed by wild animals and remain vulnerable to nature if they possess all powers? Lori Gruen (1993) in "Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of the Connection Between Women and Animals", presents an analysis of myths that are socially constructed to foreground the social abilities and superiority of men over women and non-nature others and which are alternatively meant to undermine the social abilities of women and nature and foreground their inferiority.

This Myth of Man the Hunter was created by mid-twentieth-century Western minds (influenced by post-World War II political hostilities; the creation, use, and continuing development of nuclear weapons; and increased consumption in "advanced" Western societies); it defined a biologically determined being whose "natural" behavior served as the foundation of culture. It is hardly a coincidence that the act of killing was what established the superiority of man over animal and that the value of such behavior was naturalized and exalted... The myth thus serves not only to posit an essential difference between man and animal but also to elevate man because of his ability to systematically destroy animals (62).

Doris Lessing's *The Cleft* is an ecofeminist narrative on the balance of power between men, women and nonhuman nature and the subversion of domineering tendencies of patriarchy. Women are represented as the forces of social existence, having a controlling influence over men.

3.3 *The Cleft*: Male/Female Relationship Redefined

The ecofeminists' arguments built in *The Cleft* may be examined in terms of character presentation. The reference to character presentation in the human-nature discourse of *The Cleft* is symbolic. Therefore, the relationship between characters in the text places much meaning on the need to reassess ecofeminist perspective of male/female roles in the society. Patriarchy defines males as

heads of homes and invariably all social structures. The male specie is assigned masculine roles considered by the society to be superior. Alternatively, females are at the prerogatives of the males. They are supposed to answer male orders and are considered amenable to socially designed male regulations and opinions.

The narrator expresses a negative opinion about the Clefts; an opinion that portrays them as weak beings, who are incapable of questioning the disappearance of one of their own. He says, “over among the Clefts, they noticed the absence of one of their own, wondered, fretted, in their soft lazy way, mentioned her absence, looked to see if she had fallen into one of the near pools, wondered again . . .” (49). The narrator’s use of the phrase “soft lazy way”, and its reference to the Clefts is more of a socio-cultural opinion about the Clefts than an individual’s perspective. The females are seen to be weak; a motivation for males to often take advantage of them. This is a social-cultural perspective that feeds the ego of men and advances the intent to rape women in the novel.

Among the things the Clefts are scared of is rape. This is because they already know the frame of mind of their male counterparts. This fear is not hidden, “when they reached the top there were whoops and yells from the valley floor, and the boys came running up to greet the girls – who had to defend themselves, as otherwise they would have been raped...” (98). Rape therefore becomes a recurring decimal, one of the structural patterns men manifest their relationship with the female gender in the novel.

The debasement of women interconnects with the debasement of the natural environment in the novel. The Cleft that has been raped to death receives no proper burial. Her body has been treated as evil by those who are guilty of the rape. They dispose of her body in a fast-moving river. The narrator observes:

In the morning light she lay there on the grass by the river – dirty, smeared, smelling bad of their excretions, the wide empty eyes accusing them. What were they to do? Carry her to where the eagles would find her? But something forbade them to do this. In the end they carried her stiff soiled body to the river bank where the water ran faster and pushed her in, and watched her being swirled away downstream towards the sea (48).

The “pollution” of the Cleft’s body by way of rape and consequent soiling interconnects with the pollution of the water that washes away her body and shows the tendency of men to do evil; evil to women and the natural environment. The narrator says, “this was the first murder committed by our kind (I except the exposing of crippled newborn infants) and it taught them in that act what they were capable of; they learned what their natures could be” (48).

The Cleft sheds light on the patriarchal mindset as it relates to marriage. The self-serving tendencies of men always keep them on the path to the exploitation of women as the narrator’s intent to marry Julia is purposely for child-bearing. “I asked Julia to marry me, saying that we must agree on a deal. She would give me two children, and I would ask nothing of her beyond that...” (57). Julia bears two children for him and he hands them over to slave girls. The narrator further notes that “the two infants once born were handed into the care of the slave girls working in the children’s wing – and I don’t think she thereafter ever thought of them. It had not occurred to me to make part of our bargain ‘Give me two babes and be a mother to them’ “(57).

It is beyond doubts that the purpose of Julia’s marriage is to bear children; nothing more, nothing less. Julia fulfills this expectation which is also an obligation. To her, it may not be a big deal but that single act, has in it, elements that motivate women’s exploitation and neglect.

Patriarchy also constructs the female as a care giver as in the case of the slave girls taking care of abandoned babies. The female is a provider of refreshment for the male, in some cases sexual refreshment. Thus, male/female relationship as constructed by patriarchy is redefined in the narrative structures of the *The Cleft*. There are neither superior nor inferior species. Male, female and non-human others mutually engage each other and serve as collaborators in their respective contributions to social progress. This collaboration between nature’s species creates social progress. In *The Cleft*, the narrative casts the origin of the race in the stock of female ancestors. This story of origins moves gradually to the origin of male species and the separation of these two groups. In order to contest this separatist patriarchal construct, the narrative provides the reader with a view of the secession of Maire from the Clefts and the discovery and reunion between the Clefts and the Monsters. This reunion between the sexes is logical to ecofeminists’ perspective of the unity of the human community.

The destruction of the old Clefts' habitation and the union between Maire's Sister Clefts and the valley Monsters/the male Squirts is implicit of the need for collaboration between all members of the society. The return to natural activities that shows the hunting and fishing, cooking and mating exercises in the text is also typical of ecofeminists' argument for a return to nature as well as the call for an end to all forms of discrimination, exploitation and human-nature oppression. The union between men and women as well as the return to agrarian life of the text may be said to be a symbol of ecofeminists' love of nature which is the foundation of peace and love of universal beings. There is a sense in which the women-mother symbol is implicated in the textual association of characters with nature in *The Cleft*. This woman-mother symbol also has an implication for "Womanism" (Mozimo, 2006) as an ideology. As an outgrowth of feminist theory, womanism is anti-sexist in nature. It centers on love, fellowship and selflessness. It is in line with these three parameters that our study of *The Cleft* as an ecofeminist text may be understood. Amatareotubo Mozimo (2006), in his "One is Not Enough: The Aporia of Feminism in Nwapa's *One is Enough*" is of the opinion that "Womanism ... is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism; unlike radical feminism it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand" (147).

The above assumption establishes the fact that there is a theoretical link between ecofeminists' idea of nature's love and the theory of womanism. Thus, if womanism is all about love, collaboration and progress, and feminism is about equality between sexes and the need for social change, ecofeminism incorporates these ideals and agitates for the mutual cooperation of men, women and nature. Ecofeminism explicates the need for reciprocity among nature's kind. Janis Birkeland (1993) in "Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice," is of the view that:

There are many types of "feminisms" (such as liberal Marxist, Separatist, and anarchical feminism), as well as individual interpretations of these positions. Catherine Mackinnon has explained these prefixes by suggesting that "Liberal feminism is liberalism applied to women, Marxist feminism is Marxism applied to women, and Radical feminism is feminism. Along similar lines, I see ecofeminism as feminism taken to its logical conclusion, because it theorizes the interrelations among self, societies, and nature. (17 - 18).

Accordingly, there is a need to experience the self, society and nature inclusion in the ecofeminist arguments as represented in *The Cleft*. The community of males and females in the novel is incapable of divorcing itself from male-female association with nature.

Patriarchy constructs gender roles and makes females submissive to males. This construction subsequently results in the construction of females as some form of refreshment to male bodies. There is a sense in which this form of commodification of the female for the pride of male bodily development is undermined in *The Cleft*. In the novel, patriarchy's privileging of masculine role is represented. However, ecofeminism subverts this social role.

A close reading of *The Cleft* clearly suggests that rather than the female becoming some kind of refreshment to male bodies; males are made vulnerable to females. This is implied in the depiction of the Monsters' inability to restrain themselves from daily visitation to the Clefts as the importance of copulation and the need for proliferation and social expansion of the community becomes a necessity. At a stage in the narrative, the relationship becomes reciprocal.

Maire and the Sister Clefts take occasional voyages to the male valley in order to carry out this sexual responsibility. As the narrative draws to a close, an imagined community of families and friends has already emerged. In a sense, reproductive activities are no longer at the prerogative of any one gender but seen as collective obligation that sexes must share with each other. It is therefore noteworthy to see *The Cleft* as a narrative that showcases an ecofeminist agenda bothering on the need to redefine erroneous patriarchal construct with regard to male/female relationship in the society.

3.4 Woman-Nature Association In *The Cleft*

In *The Cleft*, a common experience that unites women and nature is oppression. This explains patriarchy's anthropocentric perspective that is imposed on all values in the society. Ultimately, patriarchy subjects women and nature to male instruments of domination and exploitation. Ecofeminism sees the need for women and nature to be united in order to fight the oppression of dominant male values. Lori Gruen observes that:

The traditionally constructed role of women as cleaner and the sight/site of male pleasure allows for the diminishment of women and the pain of animals. At least since the rise of industrial culture, women have been confined to the domestic sphere, where one of their primary roles is to produce food. Certain animals have been domesticated and forced to provide food in a different sense. Women prepare and cook; animals are prepared and cooked. Both plays subservient roles in the male-dominated institution of meat eating. (71-72)

Gruen's opinion underlines the interconnection between the domination of women and the domination of nature. This reinforces the ecofeminist consciousness. The story of *The Cleft* captures a part of the patriarchal ideologies in which women and nature have been constructed and used as instruments of men. The story about the first female Cleft who courageously leaves her enclave and discovers the valley of the Monsters ends on a sad note. The innocent Cleft (unnamed) is raped to death by a number of savage Monsters who see the experience of sex as a fun:

And now instincts that had ranged free and untrammelled and often unrecognised spoke all at once in this crowd of males, and one of the captors threw down this soft, squirming female, and in a moment had his squirt inside her. In a moment he was off her and another had taken his place. The mass rape went on, it went on, they were feeding hungers it seemed they could never sate. Some lads who had gone off into the forest to find fruit came back, saw what was going on, and soon enough understood it and joined in. Then she no longer squirmed and kicked and moaned but lay still, and they understood, but not at once, that she was dead (47).

The rape is a horror but most despicable because it is a mass rape. Even young children who accidentally stumbled on the scene quickly joined in the act. This is not only a moral travesty but an abuse of men's sense of authority. The rape of the Cleft and the consequent death constitute a history of suffering of the female gender in the hands of their male counterparts.

Subsequent sexual encounters with the Cleft Sisters in Maire's group do not seem to acquit the Monsters of such act of savagery to and exploitation of their female colleagues. In "Male Power, Female Violation:" Chioma Opara(2006) argues that "the powerful can use various mechanisms

to control or even dominate the womenfolk, taking advantage of their vulnerabilities. Men often use violence to control women both in the domestic and public precincts. Male superiority is often maintained by such manifestations of violence, which often includes sexual violence” (159). The Monsters, in addition to their sexual exploitation of female Clefts, develop the experience of exploiting nature as a form of adventure and they jolly in these escapes. They would continue to abuse nature’s diversity by hunting down animals not only for food but as some form of games without any sense of preservation. Ecofeminists frown at such form of exploitation and nature’s devastation. They are of the view that it is in patriarchal practice to “Other” women and nature in order to exalt male domination in the world. Lori Gruen reflects on this practice of “Othering” and submits that:

Science, developed and conducted by white, middle-class Western men, has systematically exploited the bodies and minds of women and animals in a variety of ways. These practices, supported in part by a fallacious belief that objective science is value-free, are based on a conception of women and animals as different and lesser beings, beings whose suffering and death are justifiable sacrifices in the name of “progress” (69).

Ecofeminists are of the view that the sense of self/other composition of patriarchal thought is exploitative and oppressive. The theory argues for a revision of such premise and hastens to bring both women and nature to the centre of human-nature space discourse. It is in line with this viewpoint that the environment is a feminist issue in the same way that women’s exploitation and oppression are also environmental issues. This perspective is also relevant to a discussion of contemporary environmental degradation in which women and nature appear to be primary victims.

The effects of environmental pollution on women and nature in the world have been documented in several literatures. The novel-genre has also relentlessly captured the same and offered hypothetical submissions that have proven beneficial to policy planners. In *The Cleft*, the destruction of the Clefts’ habitation may be said to be an implicit statement on the oppression of women and nature. There seems to be no rational explanation to justify this destruction. And to approach the narrative with a moralist interpretation that has an implication for retribution would

appear rather fallacious. Given the narrative trend and the preceding events that lead to the destruction of the Old Clefts' shelter, It may be justified to conclude that the destruction occurs as a part of the novelist's attempt to address gender conflicts emanating from patriarchy's attempt to undermine female social responsibility in the society.

The idea of reproductive justice which answers for the moralist interpretation of the action of destruction in *The Cleft* is also flawed by the action of ignorance which justifies the Clefts' attitude to baby Squirt/Monsters at the beginning of the novel. It could be said that ignorance is a crime in law but the tendency to preserve racial memory (suggestive of the extermination of babies Monsters) by the Clefts does not give vent to the moral sanction that the accident of habitat destruction warrants. It is in the light of the above view that one is tempted to settle for the interpretation which rather appeals to a gender-conflict context.

The destruction of the Clefts' habitat is a reenactment of the existing male-female gender conflict in the world. In *The Cleft*, the impact of this action on nature itself is symbolic. The total extinction of primordial forest life of the Clefts is also implicit on the impact of modernity on indigenous traditions in the society. In ecofeminist parlance, deforestation, for instance, has come to imply male-dominated patriarchal attitude to women and nature because both women and nature bear the consequences of natural devastation in the world for which men as agents of patriarchy and heads of the social strata are complicit. Gaard in "Living Interconnection with Women and Nature" in Greta Gaard (ed) *Ecofeminism, Women, Animal and Nature* (1993) stresses this view that:

Another connection between feminism, animal liberation, and environmentalism has been made by documenting the effects of environmental pollution and degradation on the lives of women and animals. Many writers note that toxic pesticides, chemical wastes, acid rain, radiation, and other pollutants take their first toll on women, women's reproductive systems, and children. These hazardous chemicals are often initially tested on laboratory animals to determine levels of toxicity; this practice, together with the enormous environmental costs of factory farming and meat eating, demonstrate the linkages between environmental degradation and the oppression of nonhuman animals (speciesism) (5).

Ecofeminist literature provides a link to women-nature oppression. It is however, important to note that ecofeminists are not only concerned with the oppression of woman and nature but with all forms of oppression and for this reason Gaard is of the view that “instead of being a “single-issue” movement, ecofeminism rests on the notion that the liberation of all oppressed groups must be addressed simultaneously”(5).

3.5 Rewriting The Canon: Narratives Techniques In *The Cleft*:

The Cleft is a literary documentation of mythical narratives pertaining to the origin of a race. The narrative decries patriarchal imposition of male role over that of the female in society and reverses the trend. One of the narrative techniques in the text is the imposition of dual narrators in the transmission of communal history. In a way, the narrative captures a communal document and the ability of the novelist to project such sense of communality in the delivery of information is striking. It provides the work with its local color as an oral document and invests it with some form of literary strength.

In addition, the duality of narrative voice in *The Cleft* is also space-time inclusive. The spatiotemporal dimension of the novel is such that provides a view of objective values demonstrated by multiple narrative voices that are the characteristics of an oral text. The space-time contest to which reference is made, in itself is a synergy for artistic productivity. The human-nature conflict in *The Cleft* seems to give vent to the grandiose appeal that the novel strikes in the reader. Conflict/crisis is a catalyst to great art. In “Opon Ifa’s Rebirth: Chaos and Creativity in Our Literary Compound¹,” Femi Osofisan (2006) is of the view that:

The creative impulse seems to be stimulated best when it is ruffled by fear or scandal, or when it is violently stung to revolt against prevalent chaos, or suffering or injustice. The weight of hurt in the air is what, it seems, determines the weight and the tenor of artistic response: and thus, the greater the pain, the more profound and the more fascinating the reach and feel of the art that captures it (62).

More remarkable about the greatness of *The Cleft* is the novelist’s ability to recreate aspects of a historical past, the myth of origin, as a way of projecting communal lore in a continually evolving globalized world. The use of multiple voices to project the handing down of oral materials

intersects with the multicultural worldview of globalization and the need to provide a framework for the assessment of contending voices in the transmission of racial memory. In this case, the voice of women is heard in narrating and transmitting the history of a race.

In *The Cleft*, the language is also appropriated as an instrument for projecting local customs and practices in the modern world. The location of an oral narrative within a modern setting is a way of emphasizing the need for a cross-cultural consciousness. *The Cleft* makes use of the adoption of folk values as illustrated by the avalanche of mythic and legendary materials from an oral tradition as a way of creating not only a sense of cultural diversity of the race but a sense of enlisting and deconstructing the Eurocentric notion of Western Universalist assumptions.

Ecofeminists' perspective of nature's ambience is implicated in the narrative style of *The Cleft* by the novelist's ability to portray a panoply of natural elements as sea, mountain, rocks and caves in order to provide grounds for a unilateral assessment of indigenous values. In 'Post-coloniality and Theory', Ashcroft et al. (1989) stress the need for a 'post-colonial literary theory' that would meet the needs of indigenous tastes. The scholars opine that:

The idea of 'post-colonial literary theory' emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing. European theories themselves emerge from particular cultural traditions which are hidden by false notions of 'the universal'. Theories of style and genre, assumptions about the universal features of language, epistemologies and value systems are all radically questioned by the practices of post-colonial writing. Post-colonial theory has proceeded from the need to address this different practice. Indigenous theories have developed to accommodate the differences within the various cultural traditions as well as the desire to describe in a comparative way the features shared across those traditions (11).

It is therefore important to state that the context of assimilation of indigenous cultural elements for use in *The Cleft* provides a means of evaluating indigenous traditional belief systems against contemporary multiculturalist context. The lore and legend expressed in the novel are not common. This is because women have been given the uncommon opportunity to render the history of a race.

Consequently, the influence of patriarchy is diminished. The imposition of dual narrators on the transmission of racial memory in *The Cleft* is connected to the need to reinforce an ecofeminist sense of the emerging gender conflict in the society. This is because, to a large extent, the context of dual narration in *The Cleft* is of great influence on points of view.

Ecofeminism examines the oppression of women and nature as constructed by patriarchy. It reverses this trend in theory and practice. In *The Cleft*, the creation of a multiple narrative voices is meant to reinforce an ecofeminist view of the male-female conflict created by patriarchy in the ascription of social roles to men and women as well as nonhuman others in nature. Thus, the emerging conflict represented in *The Cleft*, - the second male chronicler argues that the first ancestors were males and that the eagles hatched them from their eggs and that the eagle was the progenitor of man; as against the background of the first female chronicler who says otherwise - points to an ecofeminist context of a social conflict created by patriarchy and the need to rescue social power from the hands of male by giving vent to feminine viewpoints. Although the narrative trend of *The Cleft* may appear conflicting; however, it must be assessed against the backdrop of a dialogical framework meant to harmonize contending male-female voices; and dialogue between man, woman and nature is the hallmark of ecofeminist literature.

In *The Cleft*, the need to authenticate the veracity of multiple viewpoints is also reinforced by the oral context of the text. Since such a document is believed to be the product of the community, the context of individual authorship is unfounded. It is from such a communal perspective that any valuation of the divergent perspectives may be foregrounded. In addition, counter-discourse also has its implication for the use of double narrators in *The Cleft*. As a depiction of the Judeo-Christian concept of human creation that privileges men over women and nonhuman nature, *The Cleft* appears to have adapted the Judeo-Christian myth of origin, subverted the context of the myth to favour an ecofeminist perspective, particularly in the periodization of women. Against such Judeo-Christian backdrop, the novel interrogates gender roles by arrogating the status of first ancestors to females. In a way, counter-discourse is achieved by means of a post-colonial discourse of subversion in *The Cleft*.

The novel's use of counter-discourse to subvert and undermine the currency of dominant male canons speaks volume of the social significance of *The Cleft*. In a reference to Richard Terdiman's (1986) argument in the theory of counter-discourse, Ashcroft et al. explain that:

Terdiman also 'detects within (Saussurian) binary opposition a *hierarchy*, socially determined and determining'(33) and so concludes with Foucault that culture is a 'field of struggle'. For Terdiman, the multi-accentuality of the sign suggests that 'no discourse is ever a monologue...it always presupposes a horizon of competing, contrary utterances against which it asserts its own energies'(36), so discourses come into being in a structure of counter- discourse practices (169).

Counter-discourse in *The Cleft* provides grounds for plurality of voices which not only lead to the diversity of perspectives, but also help to reverse the monolithic assumptions associated with patriarchy's role distribution. It is in line with such context that *The Cleft* may be said to have reinforced ecofeminist agenda pertaining to the rewriting of the hegemonic perspectives typical of Western male-dominated canons.

The Cleft is a highly symbolic novel. Symbolism in *The Cleft* is achieved in both content and form. The novel opens with the Clefts as the first ancestors of the race. This is succeeded by the sudden experience of births of baby Clefts; a memorable experience that is suddenly shattered by the accidental births of baby Monsters:

We always used to throw deformed babies there, on that rock, the sloping rock just past The Cleft itself. One side of The Cleft rises out of the Killing Rock, yes, that's what we call it. We didn't keep damaged babies, and we didn't keep twins. We were careful to limit our numbers because it was better that way. Why was it? Because that's how it has always been, and we never thought to change things. We did not have a lot of births, perhaps two or three to a cave in a long time, and sometimes a cave had no babies at all in it. Of course we are pleased when a baby is born, but if we kept all the babes born there would be no room for us all (12).

The policy of exclusion (typified by the extermination of baby Monsters) by the Clefts results in the sentence of death; and the constitutional provenance of a law symbolized by the Killing Rock. To this end, it may be concluded that the Killing Rock is symbolic of the age of ignorance, the limitation of human knowledge brought about by the tendency to refuse change, “because that’s how it has always been, and we never thought to change things” (12). The impact of such ignorance on the human community is striking. However, the ecological devastation that takes place across the island leading to the extermination of the old Clefts’ habitation is the moral sanction provided in the novel for the restitution of the sin of genocide perpetrated on innocent Squirts by the Old Clefts.

An important aspect of this symbolism is the use of sex symbols as a signifying agency of ecofeminist codes. In *The Cleft*, the first major problem that confronts the Clefts and which eventually leads to the split between the Clefts and the Squirts is the birth of baby Squirts and the awareness of difference in biological composition. The Clefts are surprised by this discovery. This biological difference creates confusion and tension among the Clefts. The result of the threat posed by the Clefts’ awareness of this difference results in the decision to exterminate the Squirts (now called Monsters) because they are seen as abnormal types by the Clefts and a threat to the Clefts’ community. The nuance posed by sex symbols in the novel ultimately re-echoes the male-female conflict created by patriarchy. In “Masculinity, Labour and Sexual Power,” Ann McGinley (2013) addresses the use of sex and gender in the construction of difference and the creation of social conflict in the public sphere, “here I am using feminist and masculinities theory to define sex and gender. Sex, as I use it, is biological, basically the different organs that define men’s and women’s reproductive capacities. Gender, on the other hand, is much more important and consuming. It is a constantly evolving socially constructed set of behaviours and performances that change depending on context” (198).

McGinley further explains that “gender is ever-present. It influences our choices about how to act, how to dress, whom to befriend, whom to hire. It is a social construction even more powerful than biological sex. In fact, non-conforming gender performance rather than one’s sex often leads to discrimination or harassment in the work place” (799).

The Killing Rock is also symbolic of female power and superiority over the male, that is, the Clefts over the Squirts. The Killing Rock therefore stands as an ecofeminist symbol meant to subvert the Patriarchal assumption of male superiority and female inferiority. Thus, the vulnerability of baby Squirts to the infanticide law of the Clefts is sustained in the perspective of female power and superiority represented by the Clefts at the Killing Rock.

In addition, the eagles are represented as saviors of baby Monsters from the hands of Clefts at the Killing Rock. The continual arrival of the eagles is therefore symbolic. The eagle may be said to be suggestive of nature's intervention in the gender conflict created by the patriarchal culture. The story of the eagles and their humane commitment to the salvation of the baby Monsters help to reinforce an ecofeminist view of nature's contribution to the salvation and progress of society in general. This nature's contribution to human salvation is further exemplified by the contribution of the doe to the feeding of baby Squirts at early birth. In the same vein, the intervention of the eagles and their contribution to the rescue of Maire from the trap of the She Clefts at the battle of 'The Arrival of the eagles' also help to establish the role of the eagles as nature's agencies.

More symbolic is the epic status of Maire, Maeve, Astre and Maronna as legendary types in the male-female space. The heroic activities of these characters in the evolution of the human community portray women in positive light in the society. This also recalls ecofeminists' view of the tendency of patriarchy to undermine the role of women in the public sphere. To this end, the activities of these female icons all add to reinvigorate the ego of women and make their voices to be heard in the male-dominated public sphere.

The ascription to Maire and Astre the status of the moon and star is a continuation of this symbolism in *The Cleft*. Being symbols of love, virginity and hope, Maire and Astre stand as gender icons whose contributions to the human society are acknowledged. For this reason, the two characters continue to strike as ecofeminist ideologies of love, sanctity and progress.

In *The Cleft*, there is an allusion to the great noise that results in a serious windstorm leading to a very serious devastation on the island. Although the narrator provides no rational explanation for this occurrence, the events leading to this occurrence provide a view of Olaoluwa Senayon's

analysis of “political ecology”, sustained by Europe’s colonization of the world. The motif of change that bears out this discovery in *The Cleft* may be seen to have its political dimension. The narrative language used to relay the extinction of primitive existence of island life in the novel is highly symbolic and equally political. Such language which is achieved by what Olaoluwa (2012) calls the “imagery of global woes of dislocation” is imperative. Olaoluwa opines that it is the feature of ecofeminist text to transact the text in nature’s imagery that enables the reader to evaluate the extent of imperialist exploitation of colonized societies.

Symbolism in *The Cleft* is also achieved at the level of form. The plurality of voices used in the chronicling of the oral history of the Roman nation is also symbolic of the democratic perspective in the ecofeminist space. Overall, the picture of the eagle pasted on several pages of the novel is an ecofeminist logo meant to reinforce an assumption on the need to enter into a dialogue with nature.

The Cleft is characterized by an extensive use of imagery. The implication for human-nature association is great. In *The Cleft*, the activities of nature’s creatures as birds, animals, wind, sea, river and the like intersect with those of humans. There is every reason to argue that human beings and nature are engaged in a relationship of interdependence in the novel. The use of seaweed, leaves, feathers and other nature’s provenance as a therapy for human survival does not only reinforce man’s destruction of natural products for human survival; but it equally evokes the need for humans to preserve nature’s endowment in all ramifications.

Ecofeminism represents such images in order to enhance both its feminist and ecological agenda. The sea and ocean images, the rocks and mountain images on the island are also necessary as depictions of ecofeminist agitation for a democratic human-nature space where multiplicity of voices could be heard. The use of imagery therefore becomes a way of associating humans with nature as well as projecting ecofeminist view of human-nature relationship in the world.

The Cleft may be regarded as an ecofeminist treatise meant to redefine the dominant canon of patriarchy with regard to male-female roles as well as the patriarchal exploitation and oppression of women and nature. The novel as a revision of the myth of creation of a nation therefore

establishes *The Cleft* in the realm of ecofeminist literature. The social context of *The Cleft* also projects ecofeminism both in theory and practice. This is reflected in the novel's representation of all shades of patriarchal practices and in bringing ecofeminist perspectives to the centre of human-nature discourse. The recognition of female types in the text helps to achieve the subversive processes of ecofeminist agenda. Ecofeminists' assumption of the equality of man, woman and nature is also reinforced in *The Cleft*. The incidental separation of the island inhabitants and the final reunion of Horsa and Maronna also point to a reassessment of ecofeminist notion of the balance of power between human and nonhuman order.

The silencing of all forms of oppression symbolized by the Killing Rock, the Old Clefts' revolt against the Sister Clefts and the rescue operation at the battle of "The Arrival of the Eagles" also explain the novelist's ecofeminist notion of justice. *The Cleft* also espouses a communal sensibility through myths, lore and legends of an oral tradition. This sense of communality is representative of ecofeminist tenet. The ecofeminist's vision of the enhancement of all life process, whether man, woman and nature, is essentially captured *The Cleft*.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Doris Lessing's *The Cleft* are structured in ways that they yield

themselves to an ecofeminist reading. Although Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing are of different geographical backgrounds, with different narratives and narrative styles, there is aggressive interlock of ideological perspectives in the novels. Margaret Atwood represents patriarchy in a modern society while Doris Lessing represents the same patriarchy in Western legends and mythology. David and Joe in *Surfacing* are a part of the forces of patriarchy in a modern society. They represent the structures that have so much compressed women in their social existence. The result is an aggressive reaction from the women who feel that they cannot take the marginalization and insult anymore. The female narrator, rising from her sad memories declares, “this above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I can do nothing. I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless ...” (141). The above statement by the narrator in *Surfacing* is considered the climax of the ecofeminist vision in the novel. Ecofeminism advances the argument that women are not powerless and should not be victims of patriarchal forces.

Doris Lessing projects a similar ecofeminist vision in *The Cleft* by portraying women as the cause of human existence and diffusing patriarchal powers through women’s roles. The Monsters (men) cannot stand the terror of the Clefts (women). It is the Eagles that usually protect the existence of the Monsters from the extermination of the Clefts. This shows the capacity of nature (The Eagles) to protect patriarchy from harm even when patriarchy is in the habit of undermining women and nature. The boldness the monsters enjoy is boldness derived from the protection by the Eagles. Such boldness leads them to compose a song that underlines the fragility of the Monsters, the superiority of the Clefts and the protective roles of the Eagles, “we are the Eagles, the Eagle, the Children of the Eagle. The Eagles bore us on their wings, they bear us on their breath, they are the wings of the wind, the Great Eagle watches us, he knows us, he is our Father, he hates our enemies, he fights for us against the Clefts” (27).

The above song is a strong narrative tool Lessing uses to portray the depth and breadth of the power of women and nature, the relegated species. She portrays how the Eagles are the refuge of the Monsters. The Monsters sort a refuge against the oppression of the Clefts. The novel achieves its vision of a harmonious relationship, a relationship based on mutual respect among the species (women, men and nature) but not without extolling the great qualities of women and nature. This vision the novel projects is largely an ecofeminist vision, a vision that acknowledges the importance of men, women and nature in social existence.

Surfacing and *The Cleft* share similar narrative styles in the representation of women, environment and patriarchy. The forces of patriarchy were foregrounded at different points in the novels and women were initially presented as vulnerable to these forces. This is a craft Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing used to reveal the depth and magnitude of forces women will have to overcome in order to rise above their depressing realities. These forces that dragged women to ignoble paths later served as factors that ignited and fueled women's resistance to patriarchy. The narrator in *Surfacing* who initially accepts that "...men ought to be superior " (79) over women later questions it as a false assumption through her allegorical analogy between the head and the body:

The trouble is all in the knob at the top of our bodies. I'm not against the body or the head either: only the neck, which creates the illusion that they are separate. The language is wrong; it shouldn't have different words for them. If the head extended directly into the shoulders like a worm's or a frog's without that constriction, that lie, they wouldn't be able to look down at their bodies and move them around as if they were robots or puppets; they would have to realize that if the head is detached from the body both of them will die (52).

This questioning of the status quo is Margaret Atwood's craft to challenge patriarchy in areas it has erred against women. This challenge maybe better appreciated if juxtaposed by the initial ordeals of the women. The narrator and Anna initially suffered emotional trauma and physical abuse within the confines of their homes. This questioning of the status quo is an ecofeminist manifesto which echoes Janis Birkeland's (1993) stand on ecofeminism. In 'Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice' (1993), Birkeland states one of the major premises of ecofeminism in clear terms, "we cannot change the nature of the system by playing patriarchal 'games'. If we do, we are abetting those who are directly involved in human oppression and environmental exploitation. We must therefore withdraw power and energy from the Patriarchy (20).

Similarly, the marginal roles of women are acknowledged by the Roman narrator in Doris Lessing's *The Cleft*. The narrator says that "I have always found entertaining that females are worshipped as goddesses, while in ordinary life they are kept secondary and thought inferior" (27). The later events in the novel where the ancient history of the Romans is relayed prove the heroism of women and questions the notion that "...in ordinary life they are kept secondary and thought inferior "(27). The projection of women's roles above patriarchal thoughts is one of the

preoccupations of Doris Lessing in *The Cleft*. *The Cleft* and *Surfacing* portray women as they are against the backdrop of patriarchal thoughts. Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing in their novels under study portrayed the illusions of patriarchy and the realities of women.

The two novels interrogate the abuses of the natural environment and locate these abuses in the domain of patriarchy. The subversion of the environment and the subversion of women are structurally interwoven in *Surfacing* and *The Cleft* and represent an ecofeminist argument that the debasement of women and the debasement of environment share great similarities. In *Surfacing*, David acknowledges that fascism and capitalism are the bane of sustainable environment. “If we could only kick out the fascist pig Yanks and the capitalists this would be a neat country. But then, who would be left?” (24). The implication of David’s statement is that the fascists and the capitalists have greatly contributed to deteriorating his environment. The dilemma is that it is a fascist and capitalist society because if all of them are kicked out, according to David, nobody would be left. These economic systems are patriarchal creations. The Monsters in *The Cleft* subdue their environment in similar ways industrial firms and other human activities subdue the environment in *Surfacing*. The Monsters hunt down animals not only as a source of food but games.

The exploitation of the environment in the novels interlocks with the exploitation of women. Rape is a factor that exists in *Surfacing* and *The Cleft*. Joe attempts to rape the narrator in *Surfacing* while the Monsters rape a Cleft to death in *The Cleft*. Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing artistically present the rape of the female gender to echo the “rape” of the environment.

This study has revealed the tripartite relationship between patriarchy, women and the environment in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* and Doris Lessing’s *The Cleft*. The triangular relationship that exists among these three phenomena is not only unequal but exploitative. Patriarchy has a comparative advantage over women and the environment in the novels under study. The connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature in *Surfacing* and *The Cleft* is what has been explored in this study. This domination is not left unchallenged, Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing crafted women characters that challenged patriarchy and exuded courage in the face of intimidations and stifling circumstances.

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