Ecofeminism: Confinement of Women in Barbara Kingsolver's Homeland

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ABSTRACT

The glorious creation, man and woman are created to coexist with all the creation that are in nature which would make a wonderful and heavenly atmosphere, but dominating, taking an upper-hand over the weaker/other being either woman or nature results in destruction, distortion of the society. The anthropocentric attitude of men pushes women and nature to the margin as they suppress, underestimate the abilities of women and nature. Ecofeminism a wonderful collaboration of word brings out the bond of women and nature physically and psychologically. Confinement, a psychological prison women were trapped in the rules and environments shaped by the masculine society. They explore their inability on analyzing with nature and break free from the bondage as they emerge from their cocoon of oppression, disbelief and pessimism.

KEY WORDS: ECOFEMINISM, ANTHROPOCENTRIC, CONFINEMENT, OPPRESSION, TRANSFORMATION.

INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminism a wide explored topic unveiled the connection between two terms ecology and feminism. Women have many things in common when pertaining to the environment or nature. The acquaintances that women and nature share are physical, emotional and transcendental. Confinement is a psychological suffering of women in losing someone or something important in their lives: the anguish can be the death of their children or their loved ones, and distress of not accomplishing their desired ambition in life. In nature, confinement can be understood by restriction of the natural boundaries, destruction of the resources in the environment and decrease of natural boundaries by clearing the forestland, and increase of the human borders through urbanization. The anthropocentric attitude of men takes an upper-hand on nature and suppresses women which results in victimizing, oppressing and overpowering both women and nature.

Mary Mellor in Feminism and Ecology enunciates that "Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection

between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women". This article focuses on the want and desire of women to connect to the elements in nature. The oppression of the masculine society has prevented women to triumph their desired eminence in the society. The anthropogenic arrogance of human being has curbed the growth of nature. Together the confinement of women and their bond with nature reverberates in the novel Homeland.

Confinement of Women and Nature in Homeland:

Homeland, a novel written by Barbara Kingsolver who talked about the interrelatedness of women and nature, and also voiced the oppression of married women in the patriarchal society. The novel is a collection of twelve short stories; the protagonists in the stories experienced transformation as a result of a breakthrough that ensued in their life. The female protagonists in the novels are ardent towards nature both emotionally and physically. Gloria St. Clair was the protagonist of the first story, she was called as Murray by the children, but she was entitled as Waterbug by her Great-Grand mother. The Cherokee tribes consisted of seven tribes representing the elements in nature, her Great Mam belonged to the bird clan of the Cherokee region, and the bird- clan believed that birds are the messenger which connected people to the heavenly entities. Due to the trace of gold found in the regions of Appalachia, the tribes were forced to evacuate from their native land to the nearby villages, and they lived as refugees in different places.

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The tyrannical rule of President Andrew Jackson ordered for the eviction of the tribes, which was instigated by General Winfred Scott. Many Cherokee lost their lives in the long journey and many were left in the forest to die. The removal of the tribe from their homeland has represented the demeanor of the anthropocentric nature of men plundering the resources of nature by clearing the forest, burning down the houses of the tribe to force exile, and killing innocent people to extract gold. The Cherokee tribes persecuted by General Scott signified women under the control of autocratic male-dominated society, and the forest obliterated of its resources symbolized nature being devoured by arrogance of anthropogenic human beings. He made the tribe to leave their original birth place, the forest, abandoning their children and the old ones to die. "The ones who could not travel, the aged and the infirm and the very young, were hidden in deep cane thickets where they would remain undiscovered until they were bones".

Even though the custom of the ancient Cherokee tribe was to smoke, the confinement of her Great Mam made her to continue to smoke after losing her four sons in a terrible accident in coal mine and her daughter died of fever giving birth to an illegitimate child, who was supposed to be the father of Waterbug. Great Mam named her grandchildren to elements in nature and addressed the natural elements as her relatives. The scar remained with them in their heart, even though they washed them off the sins for leaving behind their children and weak to die. "a sheltered place inside the flesh, exactly the way a fruit that has gone soft still carries inside itself the clean, hard stone of its future."

Susan Griffin in her work *Woman and Nature*: The Roaring inside Her accurately talked about the correlation between women and nature, "woman speak with nature. She hears voices from under the earth. That wind blow in her ears and trees whisper to her. That the death sings in her mouth and the cries of the infants are clear to her." She also added that men were indifferent to their connection with nature, and hence to them it becomes anomalous. Waterbug's Great Mam addressed the stars as "the small people" and gives strange names to animals and even months. She called February as "Hungry Month.", she spoke to dog as relatives and called them "the sad little cousin." She chanted stories on everything that is in nature and related them to her life. The confinement of Great Mam was that she had a deep scar in her heart for abandoning their infants and the elders for the burden of hauling them. They feared the infants and elders would delay their escape, so they left them to die in the forest. She did not blame her, rather consoled her thoughts by obtaining strength from nature. The Great Mam had special rapport with nature, she believed that the spirit of their lost children and the elders mingled with nature, and their spirits had transmuted to every creature in the forest.

She associated the souls of the dead ones to the creatures in nature. "She would tell me the stories about the animals, their personalities and trickery, and the

permanent physical markings they invariably earned to do something they ought not to have done." She was in harmony with nature she considered flowers as her cousins, and it was a sin in their custom to take a flower for one's own sake as it would make a seed for another generation to grow. Waterbug realized the importance of every creature that is in nature, even if it is as trivial as a flower. She has learned to value nature and its being as an entity created a harmonious and peaceful environment.

'Blue print', the protagonist of the story worked as a school teacher, named Lydia. She stayed in the small apartment with her husband, Whitman, a carpenter. She loved nature and shared a personal liaison with it which her husband cannot understand. "The bugs, and the plants too, are all related to her in a complicated family tree that Lydia can describe in convincing detail." Her passion for nature was criticized by her husband, she temporarily worked as a schoolteacher, but it was not the appropriate job for her interest. She had an affinity in collecting bowls and crockery for the pleasure of admiring.

In school she described the imprinting of ducks, the moment they hatched, the ducklings imprint on the first things that they saw, and mated with it when they grew up. Lydia compared the downtrodden women of the entire Father John family to the experiment ducks, and Father John to the scientist Konrad Lorenz. She was very furious thinking about the lives of poor downtrodden women dominated by Father John, and for the experimental duck. "She wakes up furious, those women and ducks still on her mind." In both the cases, the lives of the victims suffered oppression, enslavement and dreariness. The dominance of the patriarchal society has confined the liberty, thoughts and actions of women as the experimental ducks. She became hysterical by the very facts of captivity, but realized that her passion for nature was wasted among people who were unable to converse with nature which included her husband. She burnt with agony when she discovered that she was in her confinement made by the masculine society unconsciously. As a result, she broke the collection of her desired bowls and crockery symbolized that she was able to break free the confinement of dominance.

'Covered Bridges', a story told by the narrator's unpredictable life of his wife, Lena. He was forty, a professor in botany who had interest in gardening, plants and the ecosystem. His wife a stunning woman of thirty seven, was a specialist in toxicology. She worked hotline in poison control hospital, because Lena's sister died of insect bite and the gene ran in her family. A sting from a bee or a wasp could be the death of Lena that was the reason she worked in poison control hospital. The narrator confessed that "I like to think of myself as a congenial hermit in blue jeans and Nikes,.". He wanted to settle his life and had apprehension of the extra responsibility of being a father, but Lena wanted a child as her life was unpredictable. The confinement of Lena was to have a baby after marriage, but her husband did

not want to entangle in such commitment in life which would be an added responsibility. Her husband blamed her weakness for progressing to the next step of having a baby after marriage, but the ideas of the male dominate society was to postpone the pregnancy of women for the desire of continual sensual pleasure. In the case of Lena, getting pregnant becomes life unpredictable, she also wanted to live a life free from her threatening notions and to enjoy nature “It was a remarkable caterpillar... “I wish I could weave a cocoon around myself and change into something beautiful”... “The kind of person who’s very sure, on the inside, of what she wants to be.”

In ‘Quality Time’, Miriam managed balance between works and took care of her daughter being a single parent. “She was unexpectedly pregnant with Rennie... Miriam was frantic she’d wanted a baby but didn’t feel ready yet.” She did not abort the baby when she knew she was pregnant without a husband. Miriam was not confined by the patriarchal attitude of men whereas she boldly ventured to bring forth the child even when her lover left her. ‘Stone Dreams’, the protagonist, a nymphomaniac as early as she was sixteen. A woman of thirty nine she went on a vacation with someone other than her husband. Nathan, her husband was an eye surgeon and had interest in collecting fossils and that was how she and Nathan decided to get married. They lived in a large and well-polished house with their daughter Julie, he loved her daughter when she was little, and as she grew up he started to dominate her. Julie didn’t like her father, and became close to her mother. “He really was good with her when she was a baby, but now that she’s threatening to turn into a woman he seems to feel a great need to boss her around.”

Their marriage seemed to be a failure, “I hadn’t consciously made love with Nathan in over a year” as a result she had sexual affair with too many men and her husband was aware of that too. She was with Nathan for the sake of having husband and for her daughter Julie, a father and a shelter. “Nathan. I cling to steady things, like a barnacle to a boulder.” The narrator desired to see the petrified forest or stone forest which was her dream, her husband was not interested in the adventure so she made Peter, her illicit lover to accompany her in fulfilling of her dream. She was worried by the suspicion of her husband when he knew the secret plan, he would divorce her. She accidentally read the note written by her daughter about Peter whom she wanted to confine both to her husband and her daughter.

The very moment she realized all her dream got shattered like the stone forest. “WHAT-EVER YOU, WANT TO DO ABOUT DAD IS OKAY. JUST YOU AND ME IS OKAY.” She did not love Peter too, she let Peter go the rest of the way and tuned off the lights. The stone forest resembled her marriage which shatters in her mind with great sound of destruction. The fear of losing husband, father for her daughter, and a sophisticated abode for the sake of the society was overthrown by the message of her daughter, she was ready to face the consequence. “When it was

over, there would be only Julie and me left standing in the desert, not looking back.”

In ‘Survival Zones’, Roberta and Ed was husband and wife lived in a joint family. In an animal card game, Roberta wanted to be a kangaroo, which travelled around the world, but Ed commented she was a koala bear, spending her life in single place for the lifetime. Roberta had a daughter named Roxanna; she lost a boy on the Thanksgiving Day and became very ill due to severe bleeding. She realized her life resembled to that of a movie in “One minute they’re kissing and the next minute they’re in the kitchen”. She knew she had lost all her exciting part of her life. The confinement of Roberta reflected in rejection of her life’s ability turned into gardening while she loved to grow azalea. Her daughter was matured to realize her potential in life “I’d have to do something. I couldn’t just be Danny’s wife.” Roberta wanted to go away from her responsibility to establish her abilities, because of her husband and her daughter she remained a house wife doing the daily chores “chasing my tail doing nothing, here I still am” Women were proved to be multitasking, managing both family and work. Due to invention of machineries and gadgets they became bored and lose their connection to nature.

Women pushed really hard to balance their life between work and family. Some inventions made them to remain at home “She once told Roberta that the vacuum cleaner was invented to get women out of the factories.”. Every invention like washing machine, stove, cleaning appliance was not make the work easy, but assign women to work with them. A subtle strategy of men to confine women by segregating the work assigned for women and men. She continuously thought of the household chores every woman had to do after any celebration at home. Aggie, her co-sister emphasized in calling her children boys with the intention to make Roberta jealous. Roberta occasionally remembered and felt depressed about her bereaved son that she never got to hold. Like a river that has dried up or gone down Roberta’s depression did not vanish, but it surfaced at times when she thought of all the blessings. The death of her son rarely surfaced her mind, but the death of a son never affected Ed and Roxanna which was not their personal pain to bear. “a river that has gone underground, surfacing only rarely at times”.

CONCLUSION

Women drew energy from nature; destruction, deforestation and change in the seasons weaken them both physically and mentally. Great Mam believed the ancestors even if they were dead, lived forever in spirits of the forest. She was shattered to see the forest turned into a town and deforestation made her to realize she had lost all the connection from her ancestors. Lydia became furious when she realized the domination of the masculine society on women and nature, down-trodden women and experimental animals respectively. Lena wanted to transform to motherhood as a caterpillar transforms

itself to a butterfly, but her husband was hesitant of her future. The dream of the Petrified Forest shattered once she realized the imperfections of men and the future of the narrator's daughter. The confinement of Roberta in losing her child and her life after marriage reflected in the growth of family garden. Women, the protagonists in the novel underwent a certain transformation once they realized their confinement.

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