

## Empowering Nature and Women: Ecofeminist Analysis of Atwood's *The Edible Woman* and Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway*

*Abdulhamid Alansary*

Assistant Professor,  
Faculty of Arts, Sohag  
University, Egypt.

### Abstract

Margret Atwood's novel *The Edible Woman* (1969) has been analyzed by scholars as a novel, which explores the themes of sexual identity and the struggle of women against society in an attempt to establish an identity for themselves. Christine Watson's novel *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway* (2011) has been analyzed as a work that depicts the importance of the presence of father and mother in the lives of the members of a family, in particular, and its importance for a consolidated society, in general. A striking notion that is worth analyzing in both novels, however, has not been given any attention, namely, the relationship between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women in the two novels. Though the texts' settings differ, *The Edible Woman's* context is Canada, whereas the context of *Tiny Sunbirds* is the Niger Delta area, Nigeria, Africa, both are undergirded by the preservation of nature for the benefit of man and woman. The present study investigates feminist ecological principles in the two

novels. It also calls for the preservation and development of nature for the benefit of man within the framework of the joint relations between women and nature, on one hand, and between women and nature and the environment, on the other. The study relies on textual analysis and applies the principles of the environmental feminist critical movement called ecofeminism. Exceeding previous studies' treatment of feminist ecology within an ideological framework of different orientations with some historical depth, the current study seeks, through the analysis of the two texts under investigation, to put solutions for the future relationship of cooperation between men and women in an ethical context that transcends male domination and prevents women's oppression. It also seeks to present an ideological critique based on women's experiences in the field of social production and nature conservation.

**Keywords:** Oppression, Nature, women, Ecofeminism, Atwood, Watson, *The Edible Woman*, *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway*

## Empowering Nature and Women: Ecofeminist Analysis of Atwood's *The Edible Woman* and Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway*

*Abdulhamid Alansary*

### Introduction

Oppression and dominance of marginalized groups (women, people of color, children, and the poor) and oppression and dominance of nature are closely connected. Francoise d'Eaubonne argues that the oppression, dominance, exploitation, and colonialism of Western patriarchal civilization directly caused irreparable environmental harm (13). According to d'Eaubonne, Ecofeminism describes feminist efforts towards environmental attitudes and practices. She also argues that there are many parallels that exist between patriarchal suppression of women and the suppression of nature. This suppression results, therefore, in environmental destruction.

Environmental themes have been incorporated into works by feminist activists since the 1980s, and this has cemented the link between the control of culture over nature and the dominance of men over women (Britannica). Mothers of East Los Angeles (MELA), Native Americans for a Clean Environment (NACE), and the National Poison Campaign are just a few of the female-led organizations that developed in the 1980s to address issues of environmental justice and human health.

Modern ecofeminism, also known as Ecofeminist critique, is an intellectual and activist movement that is focused on the critical connections between the destruction of the natural world and men's dominance over women. It also focuses on interconnected issues including the relationship between empowerment and the split of cultures that occurs naturally. The politics of the Green Party, peace organizations, and direct-action groups were

often the sources of early Ecofeminist publications (Britannica).

### Review of Literature

Previous studies on Margaret Atwood's Novel *The Edible Woman* (1969) have concentrated on different aspects in the novel. A study by Bajwa, titled, "Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* and the Commercialization of Literary Scholarship" views the work as a novel that "critiques consumer society in general and, in so doing, examines the life of one consumer..., in particular" (145). Another study by Sofia Sanchez Grant, titled, "The Female Body in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*" is concerned "with the complexities of body image [and] attempts to demystify the female form" (77). A third study by Edita Bratanovic, titled, "The Psychological State of Mind of Female Characters in Margaret Atwood's Novel 'The Edible Woman,'" discusses the "psychological state of mind of women who feel pressured to fulfill the role that the society imposes on them" (42). The study also focuses on psychological transformations of the female characters in the novel. Another study by Robinson and Mathanavalli, titled "The Study of Identity Crisis in Atwood's *The Edible Woman*" explores Canadian women's search for identity in an attempt to "reconcile their sense of identity with the expectations of society at large" (Robinson and Mathanavalli 3133). Therefore, previous studies on Atwood's novel, *The Edible Woman* (1969), have dealt with the work as a text that explores the themes of sexual identity and the struggle of women against society in an attempt to establish an independent identity for themselves.

On the other hand, studies on Christine Watson's novel, *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway*, (2011) have analyzed the novel as a work that depicts the importance of the presence of father and mother in the lives of the members of a family, in particular, and its importance for a consolidated society. Other studies relate the novel to political issues such as the Niger Delta issue and its bad consequences on environment. Ogbazi and Oparah argue in their study "Ecocritical Reading of Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway*: A Corrective Route" that their study "investigates the effects of environmental degradation caused by oil exploration on innocent citizens of the region and on the environment" (22). Another study, by Lkechukwu Asika, titled, "The Other side of a Polluted Coin: White Expatriates in Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds, Faraway*" investigates the portrayal of white expatriates [who] are recreated as predators that laid siege over the entire region feeding on the impoverished and vulnerable Niger Delta women.

Nevertheless, a crucial issue that has not been given enough investigation in both texts is the relationship between the oppression of the environment and the oppression of women, or what is called an Ecofeminist analysis of the two works. It also seeks to develop solutions for the future relationship of cooperation between men and women in an ethical context that transcends male dominance and prevents women's oppression. This is done through the textual analysis of Atwood's novel *The edible Woman* (1969) and Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway* (2011) to bridge the gap between historical issues and future objectives. Therefore, the current study attempts to do this from a feminist ecological or ecofeminist angle.

## Ecofeminism and Literature

Ecofeminism, also known as ecological feminism, is a branch of the feminist literary theory. The term is first used by French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Feminism or Death* (1974). Ecofeminism takes as its primary concern the way the relationship between the human and nonhuman is both material and cultural. It also investigates how this relationship is inherently entangled with questions of gender equity and social justice. Ecofeminism is a movement that emphasizes the connection between social and environmental matters. Ecofeminism explores the interconnectedness between the environment and women. It finds that oppression of women is interconnected to the oppression of nature under the same patriarchal practices. (Laroche & Jennifer 22).

Since the early 1970s, Ecofeminism has "developed as a theoretical discourse ... [in which] early Ecofeminist analyses of the causes and solutions for the environmental crisis were based on the idea of a feminine principle ... as a foundation for a sustainable livelihood" (Kronlid 13). Environmentalists emphasize the close relatedness between nature and women and share the idea that women are closer to nature than men. Therefore, they regard women to be more caring towards nature than men are (14).

British Ecofeminist writer Marry Mellor defines Ecofeminism as "a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women" (73). Ecofeminists argue that the treatment of women in society is a likely indicator of the treatment of earth and vice versa. They also claim that because we live in a capitalist, or male-centered society, the oppression of women and the destruction of nature are a natural consequence. However, Ecofeminism cannot be reduced to

emancipating women and caring for nature. Ecofeminism is more than finding reasons for such social activities. As Kronlid explains: “Ecofeminism is rooted in environmental ethics and feminist ethics. Environmental ethics and feminist ethics focus on two important social and theoretical issues, namely the welfare of nonhuman nature and the unequal relationship between men and women” (14). It is in such a way that ecofeminism is closely connected with environmental ethics. Both environmental ethics and Ecofeminism are concerned with the welfare of both human beings and non-humans. As it is put by Alicia Puleo, “critical ecofeminist theory ... argues that, based on the feminist approach, elements such as ...freedom of choice in motherhood, food sovereignty or environmental education in childhood in childhood are the principles that guide society’s actions towards sustainable development” (175).

Ecofeminism explicitly combines feminist concerns with nature issues. It is this combination of issues and concerns which the present study attempts to achieve through text analysis of Atwood’s novel *The Edible Woman* and Atwood’s novel *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*. Preserving and protecting nature goes side by side with respecting women’s role in society. The connection between nature or the environment and women is natural and any separation between them is devastating. Atwood’s novel and Watson’s novel seek possibilities for empowering the environment and women.

### **Interconnectedness of Environment and Women**

Ecofeminism relates to, and is based on, the ancient union between women and nature or between nature and women. This ancient union was expressed by two modern social movements: the women's liberation movement, which was launched by the writings of Betty Friedan and Carolyn

Merchant in the 1960s on the feminine ambiguous debate in 1963, and the gradually emerging environmental movement. What caught the eye at Earth Day celebrations in 1975 is that the two movements shared an egalitarian perspective, with women struggling to free themselves from the cultural and economic constraints that kept them in a subordinate position to men in American society (Shiva 88).

Both movements urged and pushed for laws to be passed in order to protect the environment's purity and access to clean water and air. A number of critics emphasize this interrelation between the oppression of the environment and the oppression of women. Karen Warren suggests that the interconnection between domination of nature and domination of women should be a principal tenet of ecofeminism. Since women and nature are oppressed in a certain way, Warren states:

Understanding the nature of these connections [between nature and women] is necessary to any adequate understanding of the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective; and solutions to ecological problems must include a feminist perspective. (4-5)

Other conceptions of Ecofeminism, most importantly cultural Ecofeminism emphasize the natural interconnections between the oppression of the environment and the oppression of women under the same patriarchal domination. In her book *Staying Alive*, Vandana Shiva states: “Forests have always been central to Indian civilization. They have been worshipped as Aranyani, the Goddess of the Forest, the primary source of life and fertility...” (53). Whether the interconnection between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women is

natural or social construct, there is no denying the fact that women and nature share the suffering of injustice under the domination of masculine domination. Therefore, ecofeminism should be a theory that bridges the gap between feminism and ecology, a movement that puts an end to all forms of domination (Sandilands 3). By bridging the gap, Feminist ecology, or Ecofeminism, calls for the future allocation of resources and energy across societies in agreement with the complementarity between people and other ecosystems.

Environmental concerns like exploitation and degradation are feminist issues since they help perpetuate inequality. The foundation of ecofeminism is the rejection of injustice, whether it is the rejection of injustice based on the mistreatment of environment or the knowledge of women's oppression due to gender discrimination (Shiva 88). Environmentalism and feminism, therefore, can never be talked about separately. The interconnectedness between nature and women is unavoidable. The role of Ecofeminists is to try to find solutions to injustices practiced against nature and women. As Gaard states that ecofeminism is "more than a theory about feminism and environmentalism, or women and nature, as the name might imply, ecofeminism approaches the problems of environmental degradation and social injustice from the premise that how we treat nature and how we treat each other are inseparably linked" (157-172).

The relationship between the aforementioned Ecofeminist principles and the two novels of Atwood and Watson can be explained in that both advocate the abolition of all factors that contribute to the continued domination or systematic oppression of women. It can be clearly seen that the effects of capitalism did not benefit women, and led to a harmful division between nature and

culture. The two novels depict these principles and are in an egalitarian perspective as women struggle to liberate themselves from cultural and economic constraints and the establishment of fair practices in society.

### **Women and Non-human creatures in Atwood's *The Edible Woman* and Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds, Faraway***

Margaret Atwood is a well-known writer in Canadian literature. She is known as a feminist and social activist writer. Atwood's writings have received critical acclaim in her homeland, Asia, America, and Europe. Her works have been published in at least fifteen language worldwide. *The Edible Woman* (1969) is Atwood's first novel. As Bratanovic points out that *The Edible Woman* established Atwood as the author who tackles the topics which were considered taboo at that time: "*The Edible Woman* sheds light to a plethora of issues related to the women living in the 1960s and the 1970s, such as the influence of patriarchal institutions on them and how the female identity gets oppressed by men and the society" (42).

Ecofeminism addresses the connection between the rights of human beings, particularly women, and non-human creatures like animals and trees. Binary oppositions like heaven/earth, mind/body, male/female, human/animal, nature/culture should be dismantled, according to Ecofeminism. Nature should, therefore, be treated with respect since human and non-human are embedded in nature (Lakshmi 255). These Ecofeminist assumptions will be shortly analyzed in both texts.

The year in which the novel is published witnessed the rise of feminism in North America. In the introduction to *The Edible Woman*, Atwood describes her novel as a "proto-feminist" novel (370), a novel that anticipates modern feminism in eras

when the feminist concept as such was still unknown. Yet, some critics describe it as a feminist novel since society was controlled by men when she started writing it. Machpherson argues that Atwood is widely considered a feminist writer though she insists that she is only describing the world as it is. According to Machpherson, Atwood “is not a propagandist but an observer, [and] her work merely reflects the reality of an uneven distribution of power between men and women” (Machpherson 23). Modern women were defeating traditional gender roles where women were seen as just mothers, wives, or housekeepers. It is such attitudes that paved the way for Atwood’s novel to achieve a critical acclaim in literary circles.

The major theme in *The Edible Woman* (1969) is gender equality and women’s connection with men and society at large. Atwood describes this connection in an unusual way when she tells the story through eating disorders and cannibalism (Buibul) Atwood uses the eating disturbances as a metaphor that indicates women’s revolt and protest against masculine dominance. Atwood displays gender equality in the novel through Marian’s relationship with Peter. She describes the relationship by portraying Marian as having an equal position like Peter, then as having Marian giving up everything to Peter. Peter is now responsible for all decisions and is, thus, the dominant person. However, at the end of the novel, Marian changes all that and becomes, literally, independent. Marian grows immensely to let everyone know that women have just as much a right as anybody else.

*The Edible woman* consists of three parts: part one is a background where Atwood explains the causes of writing the novel; part two indicates the mind/body split; and the third part indicates the unprompted declaration of the problem in the novel. Marian Mac Alpin, the protagonist, is a young, successful woman, who works in a

market research firm. The story starts when Marian receives a marriage proposal from Peter, her boyfriend. She accepts Peter’s proposal without hesitation. Suddenly, she meets Duncan, an English literature student, who is, unlike Peter, indifferent. Marian finds out Peter’s consumer nature during a talk in the restaurant. She, then, starts to question his marriage proposal, love, and her own body. Marian asks: “Is her own body also an object to be consumed for Peter?” (*Edible Woman* 22). Marian spends the remaining parts of the novel trying to find an answer to this question, which marks a crucial point in her relationship with Peter, in particular, and with other men, in general.

Peter’s consuming nature leads to Marian’s initial aversion: she starts to hate eating. When she understands what society, and Peter, expects from her as a woman, she loses appetite to eat. In other words, when she conceives of herself as food for a consuming society, she rejects the idea of being easily consumed by society and by Peter. She rejects a male-dominated society that imposes its policies on her. Later, Marian begins to regain her independence. She also becomes aware of her own needs and feelings when she realizes her nature and the reasons that led to her eating disorders. When she meets Peter, she refuses to have her dinner though she is very hungry. She is aware of the point that as she consumes food, Peter will consume her body. This has led to her decision to question her marriage to Peter. She is disappointed by Peter’s manner and attitude toward sex.

In the third part of the novel, Marian starts resolving her own problems. Her attitudes toward society change radically: she is no longer bound to any rules. When they meet in a party, Marian leaves the party and goes to meet Duncan in a hotel room. The result is that she starts eating again because she is now free to do whatever she likes to do without being forced to do it. She bakes a

cake in the shape of a woman and asks Peter to eat. The woman-shaped cake represents *The Edible Woman*, who is an ideal woman that Peter wants Marian to be. He wants her to be loyal, meek, and controllable. When Marian asks Peter to eat the cake, he becomes furious because of her strange behavior. When he leaves her, Marian becomes really hungry and begins swallowing the cake. Marian's consumption of the cake demonstrates her rejection to be the type of woman the society expects her to be. She expresses her dissatisfaction with patriarchal society in her own way: she prefers to eat herself rather than allow others, particularly males, to eat, or consume, her.

*The Edible Woman* represents the interconnectedness between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature. In an essay titled "Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of the Connections Between Women and Animals", Lori Gruen clarifies the hierarchical order which governs society:

Constructing, and then naturalizing hierarchies has been one of the more insidious justifying mechanisms for the oppression of both women and animals. Ecofeminism will thus focus on the elimination of all institutionalized hierarchy as another principle force for ending oppression. (80)

According to Lori, Ecofeminism must challenge dualistic constructions such as human/animal, culture/nature, man/woman, etc. In so doing, Ecofeminism attempt to establish a different system of values in which the normative category of "other" (animals, people of color, "Third World" people, the lower classes, etc.) is reevaluated. By recognizing that the exploitation that occurs as a result of establishing power over one group is unlikely to be confined to that group only, ecofeminists are committed to a

reexamination and rejection of all forms of domination (80).

Atwood depicts Marian as a woman who suffers inequality at work, at home, and in all aspects of daily life. Marian's delicate identity is first formed by her parents' plans for her future, then by her boyfriend, Peter, who treats her like a commodity, something that can be easily consumed. Marian is afraid that Peter's tough personality will ruin her own delicate identity. Marian hates Peter's consuming nature, which is clearly indicated in his shooting rabbits:

One shot, right through the heart. The rest of them got away. I picked it up and Trigger said, "You know how to gut them, you just shit her down the belly and give her a good hard shake and all the guts fall out". So, I whipped out my knife, good knife, German steel and slit the belly and took her by the hind legs and gave her one hell of a crack, ... there was blood and guts all over the place. All over me, what a mess, rabbit guts dangling from the trees, god the trees were red for yards... (*Edible Woman* 74).

Peter's disgusting manner of shooting and getting rabbits 'guts out leads to Marian's sense of being manipulated in the same way. Peter is totally unconcerned about the ethical implications of annihilating the life of any other beings. Peter's boasting is a reflection of a society or a culture that associates masculine behaviors with victimizing other people. His hunting adventure with a recreational focus erodes the significance of the oppressive act itself. She sees in him the hunter, whereas she is the prey. Just like the rabbit, she sees herself sold, along with her body, to the consumer industry goods market. It is in such description by Atwood that feminism and environmentalism can be clearly seen in the novel. Marian sees that she is consumed like the rabbit and the result is

that she cannot eat. She suffers anorexia. When they meet at a restaurant, Marian cannot consume meat, particularly steak. She feels pain in all her muscles. She makes a comparison between Peter's barbarous act of slaughtering the rabbit and his delicate, polite etiquette while slicing and swallowing a thick, flat piece of meat. Atwood writes: "She watched the capable hands holding the knife and fork, slicing preciously with an exact adjustment of pressures cutting and violence in connection with Peter seemed incongruous to her. How skillfully he did it: bi tearing, no ragged edges, and yet it was a violent action" (180). Later, Marian becomes unable to eat vegetables, not only meat. This is symbolic of her conscious awareness of victimization. Food items, which remind Marian of her human body, become inedible. This also reminds Marian of her bodily experiences and her own identity in a male-centered society. Women and animals are, therefore, victims of a society that deals with the relationship between man and woman, on one hand, and man and nature, on the other, as one that is based on hunter/hunted dichotomy.

In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood starts with a basic Ecofeminist premise: the dualistic model of patriarchy, which governs the society. Atwood puts under scrutiny the standards of patriarchy, which alienate women and nature. She exposes the rigid dichotomy found in a male-centered society between woman and man, and between man and nature. She also calls for a harmony between human and non-human. Atwood uses the symbols of cooking and eating in the novel to highlight a horrible factor in the relationship between man and woman and man and nature, namely patriarchal consumption of woman and nature. *The Edible Woman* is a cry against patriarchal tyranny of women and nature and it is a call for a peaceful relationship between the binary oppositions of life. Through her novel,

Atwood seeks possibilities and solutions for empowering women and environment.

Christine Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway* is a novel published in 2011. Born in 1976, Watson is a retired British nurse and writer. She is married to a Nigerian. This has made it possible for her to write about the Niger Delta environmental degradation that affected man and nature passively. She also spent most of her career as a nurse in pediatric intensive care hospitals, before becoming a resuscitation officer, a position that enabled her to write about the Niger Delta issue from the lenses of an outsider. Watson is brave enough to tell about the degradation of the environment due to oil exploration and exploitation, which is harmful to man, plants, and animals (Ogbazi and Oparah 22).

Watson's novel *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway* is her first novel and it won the Costa First Novel Award in 2011. Partly set in Warri, and partly set in Lagos, Nigeria, *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway* depicts the plight of the Niger Delta region through the experiences of the female characters in the novel. Characters experienced terrifying moments in the African village. The novel also shows in an organized way the interconnectedness between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women under masculine tyranny. Watson begins the novel by giving a wonderful description of the amazing Niger Delta region:

The Niger Delta known as "the Big Heart" is home to proud people with good reason. It is a beautiful land with extraordinary wildlife, an amazing landscape, bustling cosmopolitan towns, and peaceful villages. Port Harcourt and Warri are fast becoming centers of cultural importance, with thriving arts and literature scenes... The Niger Delta is a place of laughter, music, and diversity. But the majority



of people who live in the Niger Delta survive on less than one dollar a day. They enjoy none of the enormous wealth generated by the oil-rich land. Many people in the Niger Delta have no access to schools, health care, or clean water. They live with the effect of environmental devastation caused by the continued gas flaring and frequent ecological accidents, which have amounted to more than one and a half million tons of spilled oil: starvation, asthma, chest infection, cancers, and birth deformities. They live with the threat of violence, rape, and death.

(*Tinny Sunbirds* 34)

In the context of the Niger Delta region, the interconnectedness between the environment and man is clearly depicted in *Tinny Sunbirds Faraway*. Defined by Fatubarin, the environment is “the surrounding of an organism in the place where it lives” (1). The environment has always played a central role in the life of human beings. There is, thus, a mutual relationship between man and his ecological surroundings. Watson’s novel chronicles the myriads of problems of the Niger Delta. With charm and humor, Watson portrays the real sufferings of the Niger Delta inhabitants, particularly women. Oppression of women and the environment is among the sufferings of Niger Delta people, beside so many problems like pollution, rape, killing, brutality, molestation, etc.

A significant reality in the Niger Delta region that is beautifully portrayed in Watson’s novel is the abuse and exploitation of the Niger Delta women: Niger Delta girls and women are abused and oppressed just in the same way as their environment at the hands of oil workers. When they are not coping with problems of devastation, impoverishment, and pollution, Niger Delta

girls live in fear of rape, molestation, and oppression from all fronts in the Niger Delta region. Commenting on the plight of a Niger Delta girl, Chukwumah argues that a Niger Delta girl is “...a fruit of a Greek father and an Ijaw mother, a father who absconded without the knowledge of his burgeoning seed in the girl that has warmed his bed throughout his short stay in Port Harcourt” (4). Niger Delta women escape the polluted, impoverished villages in search for a survival in Port Harcourt or anywhere else. White oil workers use Niger Delta women as playthings in their hands, just as they make best use of the oil Niger Delta region. This indicates how nature and women are closely interconnected. When exposed to danger and risk, women and nature are greatly affected, which is not the case of man.

The events of the novel begin when mother of tiny sunbirds, Blessing, twelve-year-old girl and her fourteen-year-old brother Ezekiel, catches their father with a strange woman. Blessing and Ezekiel are then forced to leave their home in Lagos to stay in a despoiled Niger Delta village. They leave the village to live with their mother’s family in Warri, a place where there is no electricity or water. At first, Warri forms a nightmare for Blessing. Her brother, Ezekiel, is affected by the gradual decline of the neighborhood gathering of savage high school guys who call themselves freedom fighters. Her mother works all day until night to pay school fees for the children. The grandfather is a kind of misguided man; the grandmother is wise and practical. She teaches Blessing midwifery in rural Nigeria. When exposed to midwifery, Blessing suffers from the horrors of genital mutilation that Niger Delta girls face as well as the devastation of the environment caused by American and British oil companies. Blessing becomes then aware of the dangerous traditions and the relentless carelessness of the modern world.

In *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway*, Watson portrays the daily sufferings of a family which tries to survive the difficulties of life. The novel gives a real picture of the events that take place in the Niger Delta, an environment which suffers the effects of oil spills. The effects of oil spills are so tremendous that inhabitants of the region lack the basic elements of a healthy life. Both human beings and the environment, surrounding them, are greatly affected by the events of the exploitation and exploration of oil. Watson, through the characters in the novel, condemns such exploration and exploitation, which have led to degradation and devastation of man and the environment. The setting of the novel is Warri, a poor town in the Niger Delta region where there is no health care, no sufficient food. Ezekiel, the heroine's brother, tells about the state of the town, in general, and his health status in the region, particularly as he suffers from asthma: "Even if you did make up, Ezekiel said, "Warri is not safe, and those villages are even worse! Swamp villages! I googled Warri at the Internet Café. Oil bunkering, hostage taking, illness, guns and poverty. What about my asthma? They burn poisonous chemicals straight into the air. It's not a safe place to live" (*Tiny Sunbirds* 8).

People in Warri suffer from a high rate of crime, pollution, killing, poverty, hunger, and rape. People are not safe in Warri. The people who suffer most in the region are women. Mama has no other choice except moving to Warri. People suffer from pipeline fires and flames. This has badly affected the health status of the people living there. On their way to Warri, Blessing and Ezekiel witness one of the devastating environmental injustices caused by oil companies. Blessing narrates: "As we neared Warri, the sky became even brighter. I saw a flame in the distance. A giant torch which made the sky angry. "Pipeline fires, said Zafi. "They are burning the gases from the

oil". He started coughing again... Warri even smelled different from Lagos. I closed my eyes and sniffed. The air smelled like book unopened for a very long time" (12).

The environment is totally polluted as a result of gas flaring. The place is unsafe and people, particularly women, suffer greatly. Because women are the ones who become naturally pregnant and take care of young babies, they suffer most. In degraded Warri, women are forced to face ecological problems while they work to support their families. Both nature and women are oppressed and dominated, controlled, and exploited by local men and Western oil Company workers.

Watson attracts her readers' attention to the relationship between the oppression of nature and the domination of women when she starts the narrative from Allen Avenue in Lagos. It is a polluted, notorious street full of crimes and filthy activities. The atmosphere of the start of the novel is characterized by pollution in all aspects of life. Noise and other sources of pollution affect the psyche of inhabitants. Blessing, then, describes her father:

Father was aloud man. I could hear him shouting from the neighbours' apartment where he argued about football with Dr. Adeshina, and drunk so much Remy Martin that he could not stand up properly. I could hear him singing when he returned from the Everlasting Open Hands House of Salvation Church, on a bus that had the words "UP JESUS DOWN SATAN" written on the side. The singing will reach my ear right up on the fourth floor. From my window, I watched the bus driver and Pastor King Junior Carry Father towards the apartment because he could not stand up at all. (8)

Being part of the environment, father is affected by the polluted environment in Warri. However, it is Mama who suffers the greater damage. She struggles to keep her children safe, healthy by moving to another place. Father is a loud man, but it is mother who screams. Father has a loud lifestyle, allowing the polluted environment in Warri to corrupt him. It is Mama who feels the deep pain as she is the victim of father's and Allen Avenue's loudness.

The relationship between the domination and exploitation of nature and women is vividly described by Watson in the section that narrates the bed symbol. The bed is described as a polluted place by the lustful life styles of father. Here, bed represents nature or the environment. The peaceful life of family is determined by the bed, and peace in Niger Delta region can be specified when it is related to nature. Degradation of the bed is a symbol of the degradation and exploitation of nature. When father abandons Mama, the family's peaceful life is threatened. It is in the same way that the environment in Warri is abandoned by multinational companies after it has been degraded.

This demonstrates the bond between women and nature; nature is a representation of woman. When compared to Mama's situation in the novel. Nature and women face the same predicament: they are exploited, dominated and abandoned. Being a single mother, Mama was not allowed to work at Royal Imperial Hotel. Blessing tells us: "It was a month after that when Mama had to stop working at the Royal Imperial Hotel. She said that the owners only employed married women. Since Father had left, I did not dare ask her anything at all" (10-11). Because women are dominated by men, Mama could not work or stay in the region. The hotel where she used to work to earn a living for herself and children refused to keep her since she is a divorced woman- a woman

without a man to whom she attaches herself. No place to spend the night in and no money to survive, Mama and children decided to leave for Warri.

In Warri, the second setting in the novel, Mama becomes an object: she suffers because she has no man to attach herself to. She, then, finds refuge in Alhaji to survive. She needs to care for Blessing and Ezekiel. That is why she works as father and mother for them. A depressed character, Mama has no other option except leaving for Warri, though she is well aware of the dirty activities in the region. Mama and nature are oppressed in the same rude way. Oppression of nature is also oppression of women. When nature is liberated from pollution and other filthy activities, women can also be liberated since women are greatly affected by degraded nature. Warri is a war zone area and living there is something like committing suicide. Ezekiel observes: "It's dangerous. The whole Delta region. And if we don't get shot, the bacteria and parasites will surely kill us" (12). Mama was abandoned by father, and what makes things worse for her and children is that she becomes depressed. However, she has no option other than getting accustomed to the polluted life in Warri. She and her children have been trapped in the environment of Warri. They had to face numerous problems: unsanitary water, polluted air, parasites, beside political problems because of war there. Life in Warri is completely different from life in Lagos. Mama, Blessing and Ezekiel are victims of dual exploitation that is caused by father and the environment. In Lagos and in Warri, the characters face environmental disasters. Degraded Allen Avenue, the first setting of the novel, rendered the characters homeless; the second setting, Warri, causes them more and more suffering. Although Warri is an industrial area, people there live in poverty, violence, and filthy environment.

An important social ecofeminist principle, put by Merchant, is that ignoring the bad consequences of man's interaction with nature causes nature to take revenge on man. Merchant states: "When we ignore the consequences of our interaction with nature..., our conquest "take...revenge on us" (Merchant 209). Warri is an exploited, polluted area. Blessing describes water in Niger Delta as the "blood of Nigeria" (31). This description indicates that water before the coming of Oil companies to the region was taken good care of. But with the coming of these Western Oil workers, water, and the whole environment, became polluted. This is also a sign of the devastating wars in Niger Delta that changed the color of water to be red. People struggle to keep their environment clean because it is degraded and polluted by Western workers who left environmental crises behind them. Although Mama and her children are indigenous people, they enjoy nothing from the resources of their land. All luxuries go to the White men, the expatriates. Although Mama finds care in Dan, another white man, she suffers from the damages he himself did to the environment. He is a double oppressor: he takes care of Mama, while he is indirectly exploiting and causing her great damage. He is actually part of their suffering. In a suggestive conversation between him and Dan, Ezikiel summarizes the problem:

You give me a chocolate bar? A chocolate bar? Offer to help me find a school. Well, instead of that, I'd prefer my country back please.... You people come here...making us all jump, and take over our women... and our money. And our jobs... Nobody moved. You pay people to kill us and rape our land, then our women! And you give me a chocolate bar? (269-70).

To Ezikiel, Dan is not different from other oppressors. With the help of the government,

Dan and other oppressors exploit and degrade land, environment and women in the same brutal way. To set the environment and women free in the Niger Delta region, Ezekiel joins a local militia called "Sibeye Boys" who believed in regaining land and women through violence. The change in Ezekiel's situation from a promising student in medicine to a violent member of a militia is caused mainly by the harsh environment he lives in. It is the same environment which gives privilege to expatriates, while leaving indigenous people suffer from poverty, illnesses, and crime. Ezikiel changes from a book-loving child to a violent Sibeye boy in an attempt to free the environment and women as he sees the two are similarly oppressed. The militant group seek justice for their Niger Delta environment and their mothers, sisters, and daughters. When justice is achieved in environmental matters, everybody in the region will live in peace of mind. The well-off are not affected by environmental problems; women and children become victims of such injustices. Blessing realizes the effects of environmental pollution on inhabitants, particularly women and young, helpless children who are their mothers' responsibility: [the environment] gives us respiratory diseases, cancers, makes our women suffer miscarriage, and make our children deformed! Some of the stories I hear from my own sister, who is an Assistant Birth Attendant, prove that the air is poisoning our women! (188).

The impact of the polluted environment on women and children is unbelievable: Oil companies bribe the government to allow them burn poisonous gases, which in turn destroys the environment and its inhabitants. Only rich people can drink pure water, while poor people suffer the plight of being unable to buy fresh, sanitary water.

Blessing's struggle for emancipation is individual, just like the struggle to get the

environment free from the disastrous activities of oil companies. Blessing changes from being addressed “just a girl” (183) to being called a woman. When she was young, Blessing, Ezekiel’s sister, left school to give room for her brother to continue his education. She goes with her grandmother in midwifery journeys, though her mother refused. Blessing helps her local women who could not afford to go to hospitals. In so doing, Blessing tries to mitigate the suffering of her local women because of the polluted environment. Blessing engages herself in positive and advantageous positions to get herself liberated from degraded environment. Blessing and her grandmother give an example of having women able to prove their identity, face crises, and liberate themselves and their environment.

In this enterprise, one can see the relationship between ecofeminism and ethics, or what is called environmental ethics (Mies and Shiva 61, 64). Environmental ethics in *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway* can be clearly observed in Ezekiel and Blessing’s struggles to stay in harmony with their environment though it has been degraded and exploited by oil companies. The story is, undoubtedly, a moral call to encourage people to work in teams for the welfare of man and the environment where he lives.

## Findings

As a starting point, Atwood’s novel *The Edible Woman* and Watson’s novel *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway*, emphasize the interconnectedness between women and nature, a central point that determines the relationship between ecology and feminism. The interconnectedness between women and the environment in the two novels is a key point in human planning for a friendly-environment in which human beings live peacefully.

Atwood’s novel *The Edible Woman* explores the theme of sexual identity and

women’s struggle against society to establish an independent identity in a male-centered society. Watson’s novel *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway* depicts the importance of the presence of husband and father in the life of wife and poor young children. In both novels, women’s search for an identity in a male-dominated society has been connected to the degradation and exploitation of nature. Women and the environment have been depicted as inferior to man, who is directly responsible for the subjugation of women and nature.

Although the two novels are written in two different centuries, there is a shared background that brings them together, namely, the interconnectedness between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature. In Atwood’s novel, the relationship between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature has been clearly portrayed in woman’s aspiration to harmony, equality, perfection and mutual benefit by getting close to nature. Women’s aspiration to mutual benefit shows the healing power of nature on women and the interconnectedness between women and nature. Watson’s novel, on the other hand, depicts various confrontations of women and their exposure to mistreatment due to natural emergencies in their current circumstances, especially issues of climate deterioration and the suffering of women and children from natural disasters in an African environment.

On the other hand, there is a concurring opinion in the two accounts of Atwood and Watson in the thought that the position of women is inferior to that of men in societies that place both sides into different economic or cultural categories. Women are not treated equally and do not get their rights in societies that organize their affairs and set their priorities according to the vision and interests of men, not for anything other than being a woman. Under this patriarchal model, women become everything that is not

recognized by man, or everything that does not satisfy him. This perspective relates women everywhere with passivity and deprives them of the right to join public life. It also deprives them of playing a role in the fields of culture, politics and economics, on equal basis, as men do.

The contrast in the direction between the two novels is highlighted by the fact that Watson's novel adopts liberal thought in general in dealing with the feminist issue, which it shares with all other feminist trends, and takes this direction from individual philosophy and competition between individuals as a basis and reference. So, one can find equality between men and women and all human beings in providing job opportunities and achieving equal opportunities. Atwood's novel, on the other hand, calls for the radical fundamentalist trend that calls for separating women from the world of men and refraining from dealing with them and building a society for women only. It considers that the weakness of the female body is an indication of the general weakness of the female in various competencies and fields extending to all mental, cultural, scientific and social abilities.

One can also find that the social ecofeminist trend uses the same masculine tools in dealing with the duality between male and female, with the difference that it changes this duality to prove the superiority of women. One may find many feminists reject this tendency to perpetuate the state of conflict between males and females and to maintain it on the preferential binary thought. In *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway*, Watson tries to prove that duality between male and female is for the sake of females who, in the end, achieve independent entity. Thus, the direction advocated by Watson's novel is the preferred direction of ecofeminists and that the concept of feminist care can be expanded from its appropriate specific scope that it sees

as interpersonal relations intimate to the broader realm of social and political ethics.

The aim of giving a critical reading of the two novels has been to reveal the most important factors that led to the subjugation of Women, in addition to identifying feminist thought and how it deals with women under the concept of feminism. The reading and analysis of the two texts has revealed the fact that the two novels present two forms of women: a woman who thinks with feminist thinking based on feminist reactions towards male domination, as it is represented by *The Edible Woman*, and a woman who thinks in a way normal within the logic of society, as it is represented by *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway*. The analysis has also resulted in an understanding of the fact that the reorientation of environmental ethics is based on an understanding of how humans relate to each other. By stopping violence against women and degradation of nature, future generations can be best educated to live in harmony with nature for the well-being of the whole community surrounding them. Instead of having depressed women and devastated nature, we can have empowered women and nature.

## Conclusion

Atwood and Watson are not only interweaving ecofeminist perspectives in their novels but also, and even more importantly, they seek possibilities for empowering women and the environment. Both authors have clearly portrayed the irreparable damages that can result from the interconnectedness between the oppression of women and nature. Since Ecofeminism attacks dualism and patriarchy to develop harmony between nature and human beings, males and females, Atwood and Watson advise humans to change their destructive activities toward nature and their ecosystem. When men focus only on the strength and power that technology and civilization have

brought to them, females hope to find harmony, equality, wholeness and mutual benefit by getting close to nature, which shows nature's healing power upon women and the interconnectedness between women and nature. Atwood and Watson seek to emancipate women and nature through their constant attempts to find harmony between nature and women. Social ecofeminist premise advises all human beings, particularly men, to live within the allowed

limits of nature. It is by changing the destructive activities towards nature and working in harmony with nature that humans can contribute to the well-being of the whole ecological system. It is by stopping the degradation and exploitation of nature that women and nature can get their empowerment and will work for a sustainable environment where nature and humans are safe.

## Works Cited

- Alicia H. Puleo Garcia. "What is Ecofeminism?". <https://Semanticscholar.org/corpus> ID: 214621645.
- Armstrong, Elisabeth. "Marxist and Socialist Feminism," *Companion to Feminist Studies: Studies of Women and Gender*. Edited by Nancy Naples. Malden: Blackwell, 2020, pp. 35- 52.
- Asika, Lkechukwu. "The Other Side of Polluted Coin: White Expatriates in Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway*," <https://www.nigerianjournalsonline.com>
- Atwood, Margaret. "Introduction to *The Edible Woman*," *Second Words: Selected Critical Prose 1960-1982*. Toronto: Anansi, 2018.
- . "The Year of the Flood," *New Horizons in English Studies*, 3 (2018), pp. 112-122.
- Bajwa, Poonam. "Margaret Atwood The Edible Woman and the Commercialization of Literary Scholarship." *Studies in Canadian Literature*, Vol., 35, No., 2 (2010), pp. 145-164. Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topics/Ecofeminism>.
- Buibul, Cagla Deniz. "Feminism and Consumption: Margaret Atwood's The Edible Woman" *Arcadia*, August 1, 2021, <https://www.byarcadia.org/post/feminism-and-consumption-margaret-atwood-theEdible-woman>.
- Chukwumah, Ignatius. "The displaced Male-Image in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*," *TYDSKRIF VIR LETTERKUNDE*, vol 50, no 2, 2013, pp 42-62.
- d' Eaubonne, Françoise. *Feminism or Death*. (1974). English Translation of the book is published by Verso, London, 2020.
- Edita Bratanovic. "The Psychological State of Mind of Female Characters in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Edible Woman*," *International Academic Conference on Research in Social Sciences* (8-10 November, 2019), pp. 42-54.
- Fatubarin, A. "Towards a better understanding of the Concept "Man and his environment" through an "Integrated Environment" Approach," *European Journal of Biology and Medical Science Research*. 2 (3), 2014, pp. 1-2.
- Gaard, Greta and, Gruen, Lori. "Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health", *Society and Nature*, 2 (1993), pp. 1-35.
- "Women, Water, Energy: An Eco-feminist Approach," *Organization and Environment*, 14, No. 2, 2001, pp. 157-172.
- Gruen, Lori. "Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of the Connections between Women and Animals," In Ed. Greta Gaard, *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993, pp. 60-90.
- Kronlid, David. *Ecofeminism and Environmental Ethics: An Analysis of Ecofeminist Ethical Theory*. Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 2003.
- Janet Biehl. *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*. Boston: South End Press, 1991.



- Heidi Slettedahl Machpherson. *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*. New York: CambridgeUP, 2010.
- Laroche, Rebecca, and Jennifer Munroe. *Shakespeare and Ecofeminist Theory*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.
- Lakshmi, Vijay. "Consumption of Woman and Nature: An Ecofeminist Reading of Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*," *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*, Vol.10. Issue 1. 2022 (Jan-Mar), pp. 254-259.
- Machpherson, Heidi S. *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Mathanavalli, S. and Robinson, C. S. "The Study of Identity Crisis in Atwood's *The Edible Woman*," *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17 (4), 2021, pp. 3133-3139.
- Mellor, Marry, *Feminism and Ecology: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- . *Breaking the Boundaries: Towards a Feminist Green Socialism*. London: Virago, 1992.
- Merchant, C. *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World (Revolutionary Thought and Radical Movements)*. Second Edition. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- . *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980.
- Mies, Maria, and Vandana Shiva. *Ecofeminism*. Halifax: Fernwood Publications, 1993.
- Ogbazi, Ifeyinwa, Oparah, Chiamaka. "Ecocritical Reading of Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Faraway: A Corrective Route*," *Interdisciplinary Journal of African \$Asian Studies (IJAAS)*, Vol., 8, No., 1, 2022, pp. 22-28.
- Sanchez, Sofia G. "The Female Body in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* and *Lady Oracle*," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol., 9, No. 2 (2008), pp. 77-92.
- Sandilands, Kate. "Ecofeminism and Its Discontent: Notes Toward a Politic of Diversity," *The Trumpeter* 8 (2), 1991, pp. 92-96.
- Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, London: Zed Books, 1988.
- "Development as a New Project of Western Patriarchy, " *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Feminism*, edited by Irene Diamond and Gloria Ornstein. California: Sierra Club Books, 1990, pp. 189-200.
- Warren, Karen. *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters: Studies in Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy*. Lanham, Maryland: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000.
- . "Ecofeminism," Michael E. Zimmerman, J. Baird Callicott et al (Eds.). *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*. United States: Prentice-Hall, 1993, pp. 253-267.

---. "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections." *Environmental Ethics* 9, 1987, 3-20. Watson, C. *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away: A Novel*. New York: Other Press. 2011.