Women's Interaction with Natural Resources in British West Africa in The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries: Ecofeminism Perspective

By

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Abstract

The predominant thrust of ecofeminism is the domination of women and nature, indeed the degradation of the environment which are offshoots of patriarchy and capitalism. This article explored women's interaction with natural resources in the Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, four countries of British West Africa in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries from the perspective of ecofeminism. Secondary sources such as newspapers, journal articles, chapters in books, conference reports and other articles from governmental and non-governmental organizations provided data for this discourse. Certainly, patriarchal values, norms, orientation and capitalism as ecofeminists argue negatively affect women's engagement in virtually all facets of human endeavour in British West Africa, namely agriculture and agribusiness, entrepreneurship, mining of minerals, industrialization as they interact with natural resources. The knot to be untied is a deconstruction of patriachalist system in British West Africa. Men should appreciate women's labour and contributions to the development of society, live and work with them, complementing each other in consideration of equity. Women need more sensitization, training for skills and the use of technologies for advancement and to cope with modern equipment in industries among others. Natural resources need care and should not be exploited to the detriment of human beings who live and benefit from the natural environment.

Keywords: Natural Resources, British West Africa, Ecofeminism, Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

Introduction

Women interact with nature in a variety of ways in every human society as such the ubiquity and universality of this phenomenon is profound and unequivocal. The issues at stake are whether women enjoy de facto or de jure rights in relation to access, exploration and exploitation of these natural resources; do they have the capacity and capability to meaningfully interact with these natural resources in their domains? How have they been

empowered in the process to contribute to the development of their societies and countries in general? What are the challenges that have served as limitations to their full interaction with nature and its resources in the process? To what extent can these issues be substantially explained by the Ecofeminism approach?

The Republic of the Gambia, the Republic of Ghana, the Republic of Sierra Leone and the Federal Republic of Nigeria, countries of British West Africa form the focal point of this discourse. These countries had the same experience as British colonial territories. While Ghana became independent in 1957, others gained independence in early 1960s. It is therefore plausible that the issues at stake were influenced by British colonial policies. Leaning on a comparative analysis of these issues, it is possible that there might be significant differences that would facilitate an appreciation and understanding of their lived experiences.

Ecofeminism is a type of feminism that reflects the relationship between women and nature which became prominent at about the time both women's and environmental movements were rife. Ecofeminism has been described as 'a philosophy made flesh by our passion to create ourselves in deep communion with our planet' (Rodda 4). Other definitions of ecofeminism would be explored in the analysis of issues in this discourse.

Women and Natural Resources in the Twentieth and Twenty First Centuries in British West Africa

The Natural Environment

The atmosphere (all gases that surround the earth), hydrosphere (all bodies of water on earth), geosphere (the central core and the outer layer of the earth's crust) and the biosphere where different types of organisms live on the earth is a little above and below the surface of the land and in water and air. All these spheres form the natural environment with which women are intimately associated. Shiva declared that this assumption allowed the domination of both women and nature (5). However, given the insight on the interaction between the natural environment and women, particularly in the Third World, Shiva opined that women and nature are associated not in passivity but in creativity and in the maintenance of life (5).

Natural Resources

Within the natural environment are a variety of natural resources that enable human beings to adapt and survive on earth. Some of these include soil, water, air, petroleum, natural gas, coal, forests, animals, iron, salt, copper, bauxite, Helium, Phosphorus, gold

and other minerals (Conserve Energy Future 5). Each British West African country is endowed with many natural resource but the concern is whether women have equal access with men in owning land, exploiting minerals, processing these natural resources and marketing them.

In the Republic of Gambia for example, clay (laterite), silica sand, titanium (rutile and limonite), tin, zircon and gravel (Tih 1) are available natural resources. Some of them have not been exploited as the country's mining industry does not play a significant role in the country's economy. Timber, gold, diamonds, bauxite, manganese, and oil (Tappan 1) are natural resources in the Republic of Ghana. The Republic of Sierra Leone is richly endowed with minerals which include diamonds, rutile, bauxite, gold, iron ore, limonite, platinum, chromite, coltan, tantalite, columbite and zircon (International Trade Administration 2).

The Federal Republic of Nigeria has a rich array of about 40 minerals most of which are under exploited or unexploited. Among these include bitumen, gold, coal, iron ore, limestone, lead/zinc ores, barites, tin, tantalite, niobium, gygpsum, gemstones kaolin, and feldspar (Lar 2). Oil/Gas, salt, clay, dolomite, marble, bentonite, uranium, glass-sand, lignite, phosphate, manganese, copper, sapphire, talc, tourmaline quartz and zireon, bauxite, potash, silica sand, soda ash and so on (Embassy of Nigeria 1-3).

Women and Natural Resources

From the array of natural resources found in all the countries of British West Africa (BWA), land is fundamental and critical to women's economic activities as they interact with nature. Tih, F notes that the economy of the Gambia heavily depends on agriculture from which the majority of the population makes a living (1). Agriculture as Tappan wrote remains a major economic sector in Ghana, providing income for nearly half of Ghanaians (1). In Sierra Leone the agriculture sector employs 60 percent of the population (FAO 3.2). This implies a major dependence on farming. Smith on the other hand notes that agriculture is the backbone of the Sierra Leonean economy and accounts for 60.7 percent of the country's G.D.P. (1). Agriculture is a key sector of Nigeria's economy and it employs 34.7 percent of the workforce. It contributes about 21.9 percent of GDP (Santander 1). It is the largest single economic sector in Nigeria by contribution to real GDP growth and a major source of employment for the country (Oxford Business Group 4).

From the discussion so far, land is ubiquitous in BWA and should be readily accessible to women particularly for economic activities. Farming is prevalent for women as such they need unrestricted access to land for farming economy which provides income for majority of families in the rural areas. Women dominate in subsistence farming in BWA from which

mainly food crops are produced. Division of labour is clearly observed as men cultivate cash crops and women produce subsistence crops. This situation is worrisome given the fact that this traditional practice subsists despite changes and improvements in technology, ability to acquire large land acreage for individual and commercial farming over the twentieth and present twenty-first centuries. What then can be the hindering forces? There are three main avenues for women to have access to land in the Gambia and they are:

1. through her spouse, the fields so acquired have usually been worked by her mother-in-law;
2. the compound can give pieces of land to daughters as part of their marriage dowries, in which case, this plot of land is usually removed from that of the original compound owners; and
3. rice land can be acquired on loan from friends in other compounds who have excess land (Gambia Information Site 4).

In the Gambia land rights as enshrined in the constitution recognizes inheritance rights that are granted under personal law, even if it discriminates against women. Women's rights are limited under the Islamic Law of Inheritance which entitles them to only half the amount of a male's share of the estate. A large majority of women under this customary law which has pre-eminence over State law denies women equal access to land (Songwe 90). Indeed, the reality is that ninety percent of Gambians are Muslims as such most women's rights are limited. The exercise of customary law rights over them is prevalent especially in ownership of land in both urban and rural areas. Gender inequalities in religious (Islam) and cultural practices entrust men with the control over land for agricultural activities among others. Crops cultivated by women include maize, cowpea, cassava (manioc), yams, eggplant, tomatoes, lentils, millet, sesame, sorghum, vegetables and rice in lowland riverine areas (rain fed swamps or under irrigation, mangrove and mangrove salt – tolerant).

Access to land, ownership and transfer of land in Ghana does not favour women. About 80 percent of the land in Ghana is regulated under customary land tenure systems which varies from ethnic group to community even within a single ethnic group (Higgins and Fenrich 9). Customary law with regard to land use is based on kinship and other social and political relationships, with women having significantly less secure access to land. Some of the forces responsible for this situation are that:

(a) men have strength to clear forests and cultivate the land therefore women are given smaller parcels of land and also more marginal and over worked less fertile land;

(b) men and women use land for different purposes as such women farmers cultivate land that is half the size of that cultivated by men in all agricultural areas in Ghana;
(c) inability to consistently use lineage land particularly when they leave their home community to live in the community of their husband's family and/or because their other household obligations preclude this kind of work;
(d) marriage accords access to land because many women farm on land that is given to them by their husbands, particularly in patrilineal areas of Ghana. However, there is the lack of recognition of marital property;
(e) trading labour for land access is another avenue for women and this essentially implies sharecropping whereby the tenant (woman) cultivates the crop(s) and gives the landlord a specified portion of the produce at harvest (Higgins and Fenrich 12-14).

Women cultivate crops such as yam, cassava, tomatoes, peppers, and groundnuts which are harvested within a short period such as three months. They also gather nuts of fallen fruits, herbs and fruits which gives them additional access to land.

Customary law largely determines access to land in Sierra Leone where women represent between 60 to 80 percent of the agricultural labour force in food production. Customary law grants men ownership and land rights or to kinship groups also controlled by men (Tarawallie 2). Among the Mende ethnic group in the eastern and southern districts of the country where female Paramount Chiefs exist, women's rights generally remain on the periphery and land ownership and control is a taboo (Hitchen 7). Conteh explains that "a daughter is usually not permitted to manage or inherit family land"(1). This is because she is expected to marry and gain access to land from her husband's family land. Here again, she cannot own, control or inherit her husband's family land. This is the reality for women in Sierra Leone, particularly those in the rural areas/communities. Women's productive agricultural activities – crop production serve as a major source of livelihood for their families. They cultivate crops such as rice, cassava, potatoes, vegetables, and groundnuts for subsistence and cash.

Nigeria is not an exception as women do not enjoy ownership and land rights. Men are perceived as the primary land owners, a phenomenon that is rooted in patriarchy. Emery argues that the requirement of family consultation is a rule of law, and not a matter of convenience as such women who are viewed as temporary members of the community or family do not have a right to a portion of the land (qtd. in Achinewhu-Nworgu et al 355). Inspite of this situation Nigerian women produce most of the food crops that sustain family livelihood. These include cassava, sorghum or guinea corn, millet, maize, cocoyam,

sweet potatoes, okra, fluted pumpkin, melon, cucumber, waterleaves among others (Mustapha 2). Men dominate cash crop cultivation that require large acres/hectares of land they control by customary law and or outright purchase. Major cash crops in Nigeria include cocoa, oil palm, groundnuts, cotton, ginger, sesame, rubber, yam, kolanut, guinea corn, soy beans, sugarcane, cashew (Mustapha 2). Women do not also own economic trees such as Iroko, African bread fruit, African pear, plum and so on.

The various forms of access to land by women in British West Africa (BWA) and the reality that women do not own land reify the explanation by ecofeminists that patriarchal systems promote male domination over women and nature. Indeed, in the social relations between men and women, ecofeminists contend that "a hierarchical structure grants power to men and allows for the exploitation of women and nature" (Miles 2). Considering the role of women and their contribution in agriculture which provides for subsistence and sustenance of the family, limitation to land accessed for these activities even in this twenty-first century becomes extremely worrisome. Another fact is that women contribute to their country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), yet they are hindered from accessing large land acreage and ownership. Reflecting on the development of Ecofeminism, Francoise d'Eaubonne a French Feminst in her book Le feminisme ou la mort (1974) Feminism or Death, coined the term Ecofeminism (Ourkiya 3). She was concerned about all marginalized groups (women, people of colour, children, the poor) who are oppressed and dominated as well as the oppression and domination of nature (animals, land, water, air, and so on). She strongly argued that oppression, domination, exploitation, and colonization from the western patriarchal society has directly caused irreversible environmental damage (Zein and Setiawan 1).

British West African countries as most countries in Africa operate the patriarchal system as the western societies referred to by Francoise d'Eaubonne. Europeans reinforced this system in their colonies during the colonial era which marginalized women, particularly in the public sphere. However, Ourkiya elaborated the scope of ecofeminism to include other groups that are marginalized on the basis of their ethnicity, race, sexuality, religion and so on. Therefore its focus is not only at women. Consequently, it asserts that the same oppressive system that marginalizes these groups is the same one that is ruining the environment.

Patriarchy, misogyny and capitalism combined are also part of ecofeminism foci (4). The essence is a change of mind set because the patriarchal system can be a government, a company, an industry, a group of individuals or even non-governmental organizations. In

sum, ecofeminism should eradicate all forms of social injustice not only injustice against women and the environment.

Cash Crop Economy and Capitalism

Groundnut has been Gambia's major export crop since 1830. In 1923 the Department of Agriculture was entrusted with improving the quality and quantity of this crop and its preparation for export. Others include cotton, sesame, cashew nuts, mangoes and fish. Men cultivate these crops and haul fish (Tih 1). Richardson and Gaafar claim that "men in Ghana cultivate maize and other cash crops because women generally cannot afford more expensive crop" (5). Cocoa and palm trees are other cash crops. The mind set and the fact that women are not perceived socially as farmers of cash crops, Higgins and Fenrich stated, limits the size of plots of land they access (15). Men have large acres of land for cultivating their cash crops. It would be recalled that women's crops are for family livelihood and sales from their subsistence crops are spent on school fees, medical bills and other family needs. Men do not declare the proceeds from their cash crops. This subordination has its roots in the patriarchal systems as ecofeminists explain. In fact, Zein and Setiawan state that "one interpretation of ecofeminist theory is that capitalism reflects only paternalistic and patriarchal values" (2). Capitalism has not benefited women but has further marginalized them as would be subsequently discussed.

In Sierra Leone where cocoa and coffee are export crops cultivated by only men who control and inherit land according to patriarchal customary law, access to land for commercial agriculture is not an issue. Another strategy employed particularly in this twenty-first century for displacing women from accessing land is that of leasing, outright sale and contracting land to companies and private individuals for estate development, building of factories/industries among others. This source of dispossession includes land already being cultivated by women. Sonkita Conteh notes that women's "right under communal land ownership in Sierra Leone are not defined, thereby allowing men to dispose of family land without consulting them (1). For example, at a land owners meeting convened by Addax Bioenergy in February, 2015 there was only one woman out of 153 land owners representatives that "engage" with the company. This company she further added, leased land from 51 villages in northern Sierra Leone for ethanol production.

A number of multinational corporations are involved in mining and bio-fuel production in northern Sierra Leone as Mariama Tarawallie explains (2) and this has worsened women's dispossession of land following this large – scale land acquisitions. In the case of Ya Marie, the land she was cultivating to support her family was leased to a Swiss bio-energy company, Addax Bio-energy by her relatives without her consent. She did not

participate in all the negotiations and neither shared from the payment for the land (1). Similarly, in Lunsar, northern Sierra Leone men leased the entire supply of arable land in the village to an investor in 2013. "The women desired to retain a part of the land to continue their farming but the men refused being more interested in the $5 (five dollars USD) per acre offered by the company" (1). Sonkita Conteh recorded that one of the leaders claimed that "land transaction is a man's business and not a women's affair". The deal eventually fell through.

Ecofeminists interpretation of these incidents in Sierra Leone reflects capitalism with paternalistic and patriarchal values that women have not benefited from. Capitalism, Marguerita Cheng explained, is "an economic system characterized by private ownership of the means of production, especially in industrial sector"(2). Land, a source of capital for production in British West African countries is privately owned and controlled by men. Private property rights are fundamental to capitalism as they provide incentives for investment in productive activities. Land as a productive capital for women in BWA does not provide opportunity for ownership, accumulation and profiting from capital which is the central principle of capitalism. More explicitly, "capitalism" which originated from the Latin "capitalis" (head of cattle) was first used by French socialist Louis Blanc in 1850, to signify a system of exclusive ownership of industrial means of production by private individuals rather than shared ownership (Cheng 5). Industrial means of production particularly as a result of industrial revolution that commenced in the nineteenth century involved acquisition of machineries, land, finance, and experts in the specific industry. In northern Nigeria, gender norms in a region with predominantly conservative and patriarchal culture limit women's access to land, markets, financial services and even agribusiness training. It is partly for these reasons that women have not established industries. Efforts to launch women into commercial agriculture and agribusiness have been made by many organizations. For example, the Business Women Connect (BWC) programme, which is a partnership between TechnoServe and ExxonMobil Foundation has been helping women rice farmers access the knowledge, tools and connections they need to achieve greater economic independence since 2017 (Technoserve 2). Women in Jigawa State affirmed benefiting from this good agronomic practices (GAP) they were exposed to and have in turn generated a multiplier effect, training other women. Apart from increased rice yields they also received training on rice processing. This is merely a step towards industrialization that can leverage exportation of rice by Nigeria.

Sweet potato, a crop traditionally cultivated by men is now cultivated by women who engage in market-oriented crop production. Religious (Islam in particular) and cultural norms based on patriarchy and the practice of spouses cultivating separate plots that are

controlled by the individual are some of the conditions that favoured women in this regard. "Women in Nasarawa State (North Central) and Kwara State (South West), sold 90-95 percent compared to 80-90 percent sold by their husbands and 80-90 percent in Kwara compared with 70-80 percent sold by husbands (David 10). By contrast, "in Ebonyi State (South East) women (the main producers of sweet potato) were expected to provide most of the sweet potato consumed by their households even if their husbands cultivated the crop" David and Madu (qtd in Okoye, et al 346).

George et al note that "most older women with land rights in Ota, Ogun State engage in agrarian activities and do not sell their land as men do" (12). Ota which before the last decade of the twentieth century was mainly an agricultural community is now an industrial town, largely due to land availability for foreign investors with large sums of money to purchase land. Women are not involved in the establishment of industries and large commercial activities. Gender discrimination over land they explained is not a major issue in Ota but that minor forms of gender discrimination exist in the share of land as inheritance. However, most times, family rules influence the rights over the land as well as prominent decisions in that regard (7-8). In Igboland, women do not inherit any ancestral land or house no matter what the supreme court says about the tradition (the Sun 3). The Nigerian Supreme Court had in 2014 declared the Igbo tradition that denied women inheritance rights of their fathers' property unconstitutional having affirmed two lower courts decisions, yet the practice is till rife. Barth Iriele stated that "ladies should be included in financial part of the inheritance because it will help them to overcome problems in their matrimonial homes, but they should be excluded from landed prosperities" (qtd in the Sun 3). For Justice Chioma Ihekere, she said "of course women should be allowed to inherit from their fathers and husbands! My blood is just as much from my father as my brother's is. The old ways in this issue are incredibly archaic and are an indication of how far Nigeria really has to go in order to be considered a progressive nation" (the Sun 3). Given this situation, it is difficult for women to become industrialists and factory owners. Women in the urban cities work in government and non-governmental establishments or as entrepreneurs in their small and medium sized enterprises. A major breakthrough in a male dominated area was recorded in Ghana where Kate Quartey-Papafio is the founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Reroy Cables. Lionesses of Africa noted the recent completion of a new manufacturing plant, which makes it the largest Electrical Cables manufacturing pant in Ghana (3).. It is no wonder that the company exports its products to countries in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) subregion. There are women entrepreneurs in all the countries of BWA but they engage on enterprises such as tie-dyeing, soap-making, beauty salons, sewing and textiles, catering services, horticulture, (Keita) in Gambia; bead making,

boutique business, Event planning, cooking gas and restaurant businesses and inclusive of the businesses listed for the Gambia are among women's businesses in Nigeria. Unique among women entrepreneurs in Nigeria are Mo Abudu, CEO of EbonyLife TV, Deola Sagoe of Lady of African haute couture fashion, Ugochi Ugbomeh in IT based mobility service (Lionesses of Africa 3, 29). Among the large scale enterprises owned by women are the Digital Reality prints limited, Famfa oil, Bolmus Group International, a conglomerate in real estate in Europe and America, Practoil – one of the largest distributors of base oil in Nigeria. She also imports photographic materials. Leatherworld, a furniture company started in 1994 as a retail outlet in Lagos. In 1999, having partnered with top five Italian Luxury brands opened other outlets in other Nigerian States. In 2005 she established an ultramodern factory where world-class furnitures are manufactured in Nigeria (Ojo 2). The very rich women own these large size enterprises while the others own micro small and medium size enterprises.

Chocolate manufacturing of world class repute by 57 Chocolate company owned by two sisters, transform cocoa bean into chocolate in Ghana. This gives an added premium value in the chain process. Shea butter cosmetics has been used to produce natural skincare brand by Sava Shea Company Limited in Ghana (Lionesses of Africa 6, 8). For Sierra Leone according to the Guardian, "women are at the forefront of driving and dictating the Sierra Leonean economy as it relates to entrepreneurship"(1). Apart from aforementioned micro small enterprises, the following are their large size enterprises owned by women: Unimax Logistics company that is engaged in local courier delivery, dispatch, clearing and forwarding. She has also a pharmacy in Freetown. Similarly, a woman is the Managing Director of Imatrix101, an indigenous logistics company with key clients in the Mining Industry and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Ariana owns one of Sierra Leone's First-Day Care Centres for headstart education (The Guardian 3).

There is a preponderance of women entrepreneurs in similar micro small and medium size enterprise in BWA. The seemingly large size enterprises do not compare with those established by men. Many challenges in the business world relegate many women to the informal sector that they dominate. Some of them include inadequate knowledge, lack of expertise, machineries, networks and how to access finance from international agencies among others. Whatever the size of women's business, they are creators of jobs, employers of labour and contribute to the development of their nation's economy.

Shiva's understanding of women's daily interaction with nature, the environment is rich and productive but has been ignored due to patriarchal values and paternalism. Shiva stressed that women in subsistence economies who produce "wealth in partnership with

nature, have been experts in their own right of holistic and ecological knowledge of nature's process"(2). However, the capitalist reductionist paradigm she affirmed "fails to perceive the interconnectedness of nature, or the connection of women's lives, work and knowledge with the creation of wealth(2). It means that these alternative modes of knowing, which are oriented to the social benefits and sustenance needs are not germane and consequently recognized by capitalist ideology.

Chinese capitalists in Gambia displaced artisanal fishermen and women involved in fish hauling and smoking in mud huts respectively, that have been their trades practiced for several decades in the coastal town of Sanyang (Okai 3). She also notes that "almost all West African countries, in spite of their extensive, previously rich coastlines, are currently importers of fish"(4). Chinese – owned fishmeal factories are three in Sanyang. It is the one in Nessim that was burnt while 40 fishing vessels were destroyed. Gunjur hosts Golden Lead, a Chinese fishmeal factory while JXYG factory is located in Kartong, all along the Gambia Atlantic Ocean coast. The discharge of toxic waste, dumping of rotten fish at sea and on land have caused loss of patronage of ecotourism, environmental pollution, plummeted artisanal fishing, fish smoking and local trade by women, river pollution – as local lagoon in Gynjur turned red, health hazards as people complained about skin and eye irritation while children suffered from coughs and chest infections (The Guardian 5;9).

Artisanal fishing in Nigeria is dominated by men who own motorized boats, big size fishing nets largely used for deep sea and commercial fishing. Wokocha and Gabriel stated that 'women embark on small scale fishing at ebb tide and in shallow creeks, ponds and lakes with smaller size nets and traps"(78). Significantly, there is a difference in the types of fishes men and women haul because of their fishing space and fishing gears. While men sell most of their catch, women use theirs for family consumption. In addition women pick periwinkles, oysters crayfish, shrimps, crabs and other sea foods for the sustenance of their families.

Some women in Sierra Leone own fishing companies, motorized boats and fishing trawler but they employ men crew to fish for them (Browne, 172). While these women show that they have the ability to generate capital – finance to buy motorized out board engine boats and trawlers, they do not have the skill to physically fish with the boats and fishing gears as men do.

The fact that women in BWA dominate post-harvest processing of landed fresh fish catch has been severally attested to by the following:

Browne (170); FAO in Sierra Leone; Wokocha and Gabriel (81-86). The Food and Agriculture organization (FAO) focused on introducing a Thiaroye Processing Technology (FTT) improved cost-effective smoking ovens while Wokocha and Gabriel explained in a great detail, the various skills employed by women in fish smoking. Constraints against women participation in artisanal fishing include low financial return, high input cost, lack of micro credit, inadequate processing and storage facilities and paddling difficulties (Fakoye and Oloruntoba 1). In order to reduce these constraints, Ipinmoroti et al suggest the "provision of easy credit and loan facilities with reduced interest rate, adequate provision of infrastructure for optimal processing of sea foods to reduce post harvest loss, constant monitoring and evaluation of water bodies for sustainable exploitation of sea foods, sensitization and enlightenment of fishers on rational exploitation of water bodies to avoid depletion of sea foods" (722).

Mining of Minerals

Mineral mining and processing is another sphere where women interact with natural resources in the environment in BWA. The National President, Mining Association of Nigeria (MAN), Kabiru Mohammed said "there are efforts to bring on board the Women in Mining and share with them the knowledge and technicalities to move the sector forward" (qtd in The Guardian 4). At present Nigerian women are involved in the processing end of the industry such as in gemstones, jewelry-making among others. The President, Women in Mining (WIMIN), Janet Adeyemi affirmed that the sector is male dominated largely because "By virtue of our culture, Nigeria runs a patriarchy system of government where everything is male dominated" (qtd in the Guardian 3). This view corroborates ecofeminism doctrine.

Mining is a capital intensive venture and involves a lot of technicalities such as sourcing and exploration of the mine site, use of explosives, setting up mines, equipment, site management, dealing with community leaders in mining communities and so on. Technologies, automated mining equipment and smart innovations would give women access to and get them more occupied in the downstream than in the upstream mining sector. Finland and Mali are examples of countries where women use automated machines for most of the work in the mines and women are more than the men working. Work in Mali gold mines is 100 percent with automated equipment.

Women dig gold in shallow pits either alone or with another person in Sierra Leone. They are not sponsored by a supporter like men. Women assist in the transportation of the ore-bearing rock and the processing work itself. Women are paid cash or given portions of ore-bearing rock. Those recruited through kin networks are not paid because they are simply

contributing to family work. For example, husbands do not pay their wives who work with them in the mines. Rutherford, et al stated that there was no evidence of gender mainstreaming in draft Artisanal Mining Policy of October, 2017 in Sierra Leone(4). Again, inequalities in women's representation across the mining value chain, such as women as holders of mining or buyer's licenses were not addressed.

Gender inequality prevails in Ghana's underground mining and mineral processing in this economically viable industry. Rufai, et al explain that this phenomenon is due to the culture of male dominance (265). Ampofo (qtd in Rufai, et al 269) stated that Ghana's patriarchal structure that privileged men, make women encounter greater inequalities in organizational life. He therefore urged mining companies to be gender mediators of development policies and practices. Kwame (qtd in Rufai, et al 269) also stated that women who participate in Ghanaian mines encounter similar problems as women in any other technical industry. Some problems such as lack of skills, due partly to lack of interest, prejudice and cultural restrictions, challenge women's participation in mining. Conclusively, some mining companies in Ghana overtly advertised their mining jobs with preference for male employees (Rufai, et al 270). A challenge to this 'macho style' traditional mining competences is the dependence on technology, particularly automated machines as practiced in gold mines in Mali. This new approach to mining in BWA would reduce masculinisation of labour force and male dominance in the mining industry.

Nature and Environmental Degradation

There are many other ways through which women interact with nature and these include: weeding of farms, fetching fuel wood, water, preparing compost manure, processing cassava into various forms of food, collecting fruits and processing some into drinks among others. Valuable as these are for family livelihood and sustenance, women's labour in this regard is hardly acknowledged. Radical ecofeminists who contend that patriarchy equates nature and women in order to degrade both also add that their commodifiable attributes make men who are capable of establishing order to dominate them. Thus, non-acknowledgement of women's input as described above encourages the exploitation of women and nature for cheap labour and resources (Miles qtd in Britannica 4). On the other hand, Cultural ecofeminists who uphold women's intimate relationship with nature because of their roles as family nurturers and providers of food believe that women are more sensitive to the sanctity and degradation of the environment. Consequently, society should value and appreciate women's sensitivity as explained because it establishes a more direct connection to the natural world with which human beings must coexist. Environmental degradation mostly affect women because of their vulnerability and household provision of water, fuel wood, edible crops, child care, and so on. In this

discourse, pollution of the Gambia's Atlantic coastline with rotten fish loads was evident. Pollution of water bodies in Nigeria with crude oil, leading to loss of aquatic resources and loss of biodiversity among others is also evident of degradation of nature. Other forms of degradation of nature include: deforestation, wrong disposal of waste into water bodies and on the ground, bush burning and so on.

Conclusion

Human beings exist in the natural world and depend on natural resources for their existence. It is for this reason that nature, natural resources and the environment in its totality should be protected. This responsibility should be the concern of both men and women as beneficiaries of the environment. Regan stated that ecofeminists belief in patriarchal dominance which presupposes that masculine attributes are more valuable, has led to the degradation of nature and oppression of women and other marginalized groups. This core thesis of ecofeminism notes that capitalism is another strategy for oppression since it values productivity by any means, as such women's attributes are not valued, including nature itself.

Patriarchal domination in this discourse is prevalent in all facets of human endeavour in British West Africa. Men who wield power have the right to dominate, control and exploit everyone else and nature. This view partially explains why reforms for land ownership and land rights have not been implemented in all countries of BWA. Women have been indoctrinated based on this tradition and practice of patriarchy to play second fiddle in many activities that are male dominated. However, ecofeminism advocates a complete end to patriarchal systems that leverage privilege hierarchies, control, and unequal socio-economic relations. Capitalist tendencies promote the exploitation of women's labour (cheap labour) and the use of the earth (resources) that leads to degradation. It is worrisome that women have continued to trudge on, even in this twenty-first century without success in this quest to end patriarchalism.

Ecofeminism from the discourse is set to liberate and empower the marginalized/disenfranchised as well as restore the health of nature. Typical examples are the Chipko Andolan movement in India that resisted rapid deforestation in the 1970s and the Green Belt Movement in Kenya. Professor Wangari Maathai led women in Kenya to plant trees to prevent desertification. Women in BWA therefore have to seek non violent strategies to attain/achieve the goals of ecofeminism in their relationship with men and nature for effective and sustained participation in all human activities in their countries. Aggressive and regular enlightenment can drive this desired transformation.

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