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Politics of Meat-Eating and Violence against Women and Others: An Eco-feminist Reading of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*

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Abstract

This study offers an eco-feminist reading of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* and explores it for the oppressive treatment of women, Others and nature. Under the umbrella of eco-feminist philosophy says that the oppression of women and other human others and the domination of nature are critically interconnected and drawing on Carol J. Adam's politics of meat eating which implies that the violence against women, marginalized other human groups and animals are interlinked because of patriarchal mindset, the study explores how the violence against animals lead to the oppression and victimization of not only of women but also of the lower-class people. Women are treated like animals, tyrannized and butchered to death in a patriarchal society where meat eating is taken as pride. The analysis of the selected text reveals that Penelope and the maids receive brutal treatment from Odysseus, Telemachus and the suitors. The selected text also offers evidence of violence where it is not the male identity but a typical patriarchal mindset which functions to turn human beings into meat/flesh and violence against animals leads to ferocity against women and weak human beings.

Keywords: ecofeminism, value dualism, meat eating, patriarchy, violence, animals, women and low human beings (Others)

1. Introduction

This study of Margret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* is rooted in the eco-feminist philosophy which seeks to explore critical interconnections between the oppression of women, and the domination and exploitation of Others and nature (Warren, 2000, p.1). These are termed as "women-other human Others-nature" (Warren, 2000, p.2) or "women-Others-nature" interconnections (Nhanenge, 2011, p. 98). The selected fictional text incorporates in itself the deep concerns which relate to culturally interiorized beings. The text supports Val Plumwood's standpoint on the notion that "dualism ... results from a certain kind of denied dependency on a subordinated other" (1993, p.41). This denied dependency licentiates the ups in the hierarchy to exploit those who are down in the chain of social system. Plumwood (1993) prefers to use the term "master identity" (p.67) to replace patriarchy. Following the path, in her works, Margret Atwood portrays women, Others and nature in a way that makes their dualistic treatment vivid.

Margaret Atwood, a Canadian award winner fictional writer, deals with issues of women victimization, degradation of nature, problems of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic world and the Canadian identity - to name but a few. "Most of her novels grapple with the politics of gender and deal with the women's experiences in a male dominated society" (Neeru and Anshul, 2009, p.19). Patriarchal/mechanistic ideologies and practices and the linked (mis)treatment find ample space in her writings. She even goes beyond the gendered outlook and extends her framework of oppression against non-human nature and the impact of human activities and ideologies on it. Regarding environmental abuse, Dongmei (2014) talks about criminal collusion between human beings and science and technology as it is reflected in Atwood's work. She comments:

"Atwood shows her critiques on humans' abuse of science and technology, the modern consumers' lifestyle and Christianity's anthropocentric and androcentric ideology, which act as the major criminal crisis" (Dongmei, 2014, p.333). This commentary supports the claim that concern for environmental degradation is at the heart of Atwood's attitude towards nature. *The Penelopiad* is one such novel which seems to have feminist and environmental concern. My point of concern in this regard is that the inclusion of Others is a missing link in the eco-feminist debate that links women objectification and environmental degradation. Another objective of this study is to explore link between meat eating and violence against animals and the extension of the oppressive ideology related to this dietary practice towards the subjugation of women and other human Others.

2. Theorizing Meat-eating and Violence against Dualized Human Groups

Out of various ideological tools which the oppressive agents employ in their respective cultural context, value dualisms are central in oppressive conceptual frameworks. In the backdrop of value dualisms, Plumwood (1993, 2002) argues that value dualisms are the basis for the colonization and subjugation of the marginalized beings that are "treated as nature" (1993, p.2). Both relate in the dualized construction of identities are taken as mutually exclusive beings which belong to different orders with no commonalities. McFague (1997) backs Plumwood's philosophy of value dualisms. She states that reason/nature is the core dualism which maps to the other dualisms. Karen J. Warren (2000) in her debate on conceptual interconnections which implicate the treatment of women, Others and nature. For her, value dualisms are key feature of oppressive conceptual frameworks which, according to her, function "to explain,

maintain, and 'justify' relationships of unjustified domination and subordination" (Warren 2000, 46). These value dualisms are in fact "the disjunctive pairs" where the disjuncts are taken as "exclusive and oppositional" (Warren, 2000, p. 46). Value dualism place prestige and high status to one disjunct over the other. Therefore, it is better and privileged to be man, male, white or human than woman, female, black or nature. This cultural imbalance engenders and perpetuates Up/Down hierarchy which permeates in individuals and cultures and hence licentiates the Ups to exercise their coercive powers against those who are culturally Down.

In the context of the claim that butchering of animals and eating of meat provoke violence and aggression, Donna Maurer (1995) refers to a sticker reading "Meat is Dead" and critically analyses the life/death binary opposition (value dualism). To live is the right of the animal and this is violated by externally imposing death on it. The meat is dead "connotes both the death of the animal and the deadly quality that the eater assimilates" (Maurer, 1995, p. 154). The one who eats violence exhibits violence in social life. On the other hand, the vegetarians, who eat life giving vegetables, show life and compassion for the fellow beings. Maurer develops a parallel between meat eating and aggression by quoting Rudolph Ballentine by mentioning that meat eating constructs propensity to bizarre violence or an unescapable sense of pointless anger and antagonism.

Catherine Villanueva Gardener (2009) in her book *The A to Z of Feminist Philosophy* alludes some of the eco/feminist philosophers who examine the ideologies and practices related to meat eating that "both support and is supported by patriarchal culture." They also investigate "how violence against women reflects violence against animals, and how women

are treated . . . as meat." (Gardener, 2009, p. 225). This inextricable connection between butchering of animals for getting meat and exercising the same coercive practice against women reflects patriarchal mind which assumes latter as pieces of meat meant to be consumed. The enjoyment and satisfaction which patriarchy/master identity feels during crushing of meat as food duplicates itself in the practice of employing violence against women. They are reduced to mere objects of flesh available to be gnawed and devoured. The power which is required to slaughter an animal and then cutting it into pieces gives vent to itself in the course of subjugation and domestication of women in a typical androcentric culture.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of the selected work in the eco-feminist background, we have resorted on the theoretical position taken by an Eco-feminist Carol J. Adam (2013). Under the umbrella of qualitative research paradigm, the selected text has been analyzed by using textual analysis as research method as proposed by Catherine Belsey (2013) in her famous essay "Textual Analysis as a Research Analysis". She encourages researchers to use this method as it is indispensable to the cultural criticism where it includes "English, cultural history and cultural studies, as well as any other discipline that focuses on texts, or seeks to understand the inscription of culture in its artefacts" (p. 160). This method helps the researchers to have a "close encounter" with the text itself and enables them to examine the details within the text without being influenced by any premeditated assumptions about the definitive signification. The interpretation of the selected work is supported by the "extra-textual knowledge" (Belsey, 2013, p. 163) available in the form of research essays and books on the area of study. The reference to the already

scholarship has enabled us to find how our interpretation of *The Penelopiad* is “different” from their interpretation which conforms to the research gap (Belsey, 2013, p. 169). The use of theoretical perspective has hindered us from “unbridled” signification of the text and the focus of the analysis remains on the “difference” that the research creates in already available scholarship.

Carol J. Adams (2010), in her book *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* - “a cohesive, passionate case linking meat-eating to the oppression of animals and women” (The [Australian] Age in Adams, 2010, p. iii), critically evaluates the interconnections between meat eating and the violence and tyranny against women and other marginalized human and non-human groups. She takes a dualistic outlook of the practice of meat eating with this forceful claim that “people with power have always eaten meat” (p. 48). She broadens her argument by taking a gendered stance with the statement that “a mythology permeates all classes that meat is a masculine food and meat eating a male activity” (p. 48). Thus, relating the practice of meat eating with power and masculinity, she declares meat eating as a prerogative of patriarchal social system where men hold power and women (and Others) are placed at the lower side of the social hierarchy. For her, in a patriarchal social system, meat eating is taken as a scale to measure the “individual and societal virility” whereas, “vegetables and other nonmeat foods are viewed as women’s food” (p. 48). This dichotomic relationship between virility and impoverishment reflected in the practices of meat eating and vegetarianism strengthens this claim that the former is a dietary activity performed by men (patriarchy).

The idea of meat eating in a patriarchal social system is implicated in the assumption,

as Adams (2010) puts it, that “one’s maleness is reassured by the food one eats” (p. 58). It is because of this reason that meat eating is taken as symbol of strength in a patriarchal society. This strength is invariably used against women and the weak human groups. Adams, in this context, claims that meat eating is a symbol of male dominance. She draws on mythological history of patriarchal culture in order to validate her arguments. She opines, “[M]eat promotes strength; the attributes of masculinity are achieved through eating these masculine foods” (p. 56). This alleged link between meat eating and masculinity has encouraged patriarchy to use meat in their regular diet. On the other hand, those who renounce meat eating are tagged with effeminateness and their aversion to eat meat announces that “they are not masculine” (p. 57). The concept of male power is directly connected with the concept of meat eating.

Adams also takes a classist view of meat eating in a social framework. She goes beyond the gendered outlook about meat eating and locates it in the elitist social setup where meat eating becomes a symbol of high class. In dominant social system based upon privileges and power, the sex roles infuse into “Up-Down” (Warren, 2000, p. 46) hierarchy of dominance and assume the status of homogeneity and coerce violence against women and other human groups. In the context of the Western societies, Adams argues, “[T]he diets of English upper-class women and men are much more similar than the diets of upper-class women and working-class women” (p. 52). The diets of these upper-class people include meat as an essential dish on their dining table and men and women eat it as a source of power, virility and maleness. Contrary to this, the diet of the working-class and low-class women include vegetables and non-meat food. The difference in the dietary practices creates a classist gulf among women and

hence the women and men of the low-class are tyrannized and oppressed by the upper-class men and women. Adams further argues that the women of upper-class treat the members of their sex as meat. These women, at times, treat men even as meat and they become the victims of sexual abuse. The eating of meat thus becomes a cause of oppression of the Others and also a reason for the butchering of animals (p. 69).

Meat eating has a broader implication, according to Adams, in the culture of oppression and violence, be it physical or sexual. Men are so possessive regarding meat eating in their regular meals that sometimes its absence becomes an excuse for violence against women. She widens the canvas of physical violence against animals and sexual violence against other human others particularly women by reiterating on the point that “sexual violence and meat eating, which appear to be discrete forms of violence, find a point of intersection” (p. 68). The nexus of different forms of violence replicates itself in different culturally embedded practices of exercise of power which ultimately bifurcates a society into two groups namely the oppressor and the oppressed. In this split society, “the experience of women thus becomes a vehicle for describing other oppressions” (p. 68). Adams further argues about the concept of absent referent. The absent referent is used, in an oppressive culture, as a hide to legitimize the maltreatment of the dualised and subordinated human and non-human groups. For her, “The structure of the absent referent in patriarchal culture strengthens individual oppressions by always recalling other oppressed groups” (p. 69). Meat eating and violence against women and Others are inter-related practices in male-centered societies. The act of meat eating in a social system which is fundamentally patriarchal, nurtures a thought which ultimately victimizes the other sex – women.

Positioning the act of meat eating in the western cultures, Adams (2010) makes a claim that meat itself has been a “metaphor for women’s oppression” (p. 75). The word meat itself appears to denote the oppression of women and, of course, all those who are relegated to the inferiorized position in the social stratification. The patriarchy, with all its dualistic approach, declares women as “pieces of meat” (p. 75) meant to be consumed for pleasure, animalistic satisfaction and enjoyment.

Margaret Atwood’s fictional works have been analyzed in different perspectives and backgrounds. different studies have been conducted on *The Penelopiad* which underscore multiple issues addressed in the novella. Corel Ann Howells (2006) in a chapter entitled “Five Ways of Looking at The Penelopiad” looks at the novella in a simplistic and mundane way. She enlists five dimensions including negotiating with the dead, revisioning myth, Penelope’s tale, The Handmaid’s tale and *The Penelopiad* as Performance. Her discussion in the aforementioned topics takes a bird eye view of Atwood’s work and ignores the in-depth analysis of the same in terms of its incorporation of issues related to women, nature and other human others.

Hatice Yurttas (2017) analyses *The Penelopiad* in the context of female subjectivity, representation of patriarchal power and suppression of matriarchal cultures. She focuses on the silences of the female characters who are given voice in the subject text. She focuses on the female subjectivity which remains silent in front of male dominance. She concludes her discussion with the remarks that Odysseus, instead of becoming an epic traveler, turns out to be a patriarchal figure who subjugates women. Yurttas’ feminist perspective is embedded in critiquing patriarchal mindset and thus ignores how the same ideology takes no gendered position and inferiorizes

and colonizes other marginalized human groups.

3. Linking Meat Eating and Violence against Women and Others in *The Penelopiad*

The Penelopiad, a novella by Canadian novelist, poet, critic and prose writer Margaret Atwood is a retelling of the story of Homer's *Odyssey* in which Penelope and her twelve maids give account of their own past according to their own perspective. Besides other themes and images, image of 'meat' appears as many as fifteen times in the text underscoring different nuances ranging from meat making to meat eating. The text highlights how Greeks, especially men enjoy meat eating as a cultural norm and practice. The link between meat eating and violence against women and nature (like the killing of animals for meat) is made visible by the narration of Penelope. She narrates her story in the state of "bonelessness, liplessness, breastlessness" (Atwood, 2005, p. 1). Her physical formlessness makes her identity as a woman blurred, ambiguous and meaningless. Yet she voices her thoughts to express her lived experiences because she was kept silent when she was alive. On the other hand, the twelve maids give lips to their feelings. The first reference of meat appears in the joint narration of these maids who are used as sexual objects for the enjoyment of the male guests who come to the palace. They are engaged in the physical labour besides being sexually exploited by men. They have no excess to the lavishness of the palace thus leading them to steal "meat into our mouth" which otherwise is not allowed to them (p. 14). Meat in the cultural context would reflect the "status of the host" and the meat grown for the "elite" is not supposed to be consumed by the "masses" as their food consists of vegetable – meals of the poor (Hastorf, 2017, p. 37). Meat, being 'food of kings' is not in access of the poor maids who long for it but cannot have it.

The symbol of meat has been used, in *The Penelopiad*, as a reflective of male dominance over women and animals and all those who are inferior in the social status. The maids, the suitors and the animals slaughtered for the sake of meat are subjugated by the dominant patriarchal mindset in the world of Penelope and Odysseus. In the perspective of the West, as Marti Kheel (2004) puts it that meat eating cultures engender and perpetuate male dominance and meat(eating) establishes a connection between patriarchal oppressive ideology which oppresses women as well as animals for exploitation and use (p. 327). In patriarchal cultures, meat eating is regarded as an institutional norm which is "imposed, managed, organized, and maintained by force for the purpose of ensuring male-dominated society's rightful access to nonhuman animals and to their flesh" (Kheel, 2004, p. 329). This privileged access to the meat /flesh of the animals corresponds to the concept of heterosexuality wherein sexual/physical interaction with the female body is carried through flesh.

The worthlessness of animals before master identity (patriarchy, anthropocentric identity and suppressing agencies) is relatively defined and are objectified merely to fulfill the needs of human beings who keep them at the lower stage of the cultural hierarchy and, therefore, their oppression and domination are justified. "Humans assume the right to sacrifice or kill animals" (Potts and Armstrong, 2013, p. 164). The spilling of animals' blood implicitly alludes to turning animals into meat which is consumed by men. Penelope jeers at the wish of the human beings to connect themselves with the spirits of the other world with the remarks that such practice benefits the dead as it brings for them "more, with other sheep, cows, pigs and so forth" (Atwood, 2005, p. 18). The blood is drunk by the spirits but the meat is eaten by the (wo)men.

In male dominated culture, the practice of meat eating is associated with the male strength and virility. Aversion to meat eating is equated with feminine attributes. In festive feasts and parties, meat constitutes an essential dish which is cooked with different recipes and styles. Meat eating is considered as a practice which enables the sons to disconnect themselves from female identity. Animal hunting is a great pride for the elite patriarchal figures. The meat of the hunted animal is eaten by the family which displays their pride and superiority. Telemachus is brought up in a culture which instills a patriarchal soul in his veins. He “grew from year to year, eating a lot of meat, indulged by all” (Atwood, 2005, p. 81). This fondness for meat eating shapes his tyrannical male identity. He becomes rude, arrogant and remorseless. He misbehaves with his mother who feels insecure even in his presence at many occasions and brutally kills the maids.

The connection between animals, meat and women is made obvious in the narration where Penelope mentions how she is handed over to her husband at the eve of her wedding. The shifting of a living woman from the house of her father to the palace of her husband like a package of meat signifies the link between animals and women. In this connection, Marti Kheel (2004) claims, “Symbolically, the woman is transferred in the wedding ceremony, like a commodity, from the property of father to that of the husband” (p. 334). The practice of meat eating is culturally relished activity and the frivolities are celebrated in social gatherings where men and women, irrespective of their gender, filch “meat into [their] mouths” to express their ecstasy at such feasts. Meat eating brings pleasure and heats up their brains. They laugh, fight and “snatched what [they] could” (Atwood, 2005, p. 20). The Ithacan cultural norms are steeped in bloodshed where simple social institutions

are meant to favor men only. In Penelope’s fatherland, marriages are arranged primarily for having children. The purpose of these children are not primarily a source of pleasure as it is generally understood, rather, they are the vehicles for passing “grudges, blood feuds” (p. 20). The thirst for killing in these people is unquenching and permanent and they are ready to instrumentalize their children for the sake of their revenge. They are so barbaric and the lust for taking revenge is dominating on them that they never hesitate to kill the babies of their enemies. Atwood portrays the blood-thirsty nature of these men, “If [they] ha(ve) an enemy it was best to kill his son, even if those sons were babies” (p. 20). So, the fondness for killing, blood, revenge and wish for meat have permeated in their very veins.

Atwood (2005) portrays the pitiable status of Penelope in her family when she describes how she is betrothed to Odysseus. Apparently, it does not seem like common wedding. Odysseus “wins” her as his wife against her free will. She has but the least willingness in accepting him as her husband. The metaphor of meat transforms a woman into a “package of meat” where her identity as a human being disappears. Her objectification as something material (gold) disfigures her fleshy human identity and she is taken away along with her dowry. She, unfortunately, fails to get rid of this meat identity even amongst her in-laws. The patriarchy at her in-laws relishes meat eating and she fears that she is shortly going to face the same lot and treatment as she was facing at her father’s kingdom. For her, this is only a change of master. At her wedding feast, there are “great glistening hunks of meat” along with bread and mellow wine and all the guests voluptuously “stuffed themselves so full” (Atwood, 2005, p. 27). The presence of diverse animals at her in-laws’ state reflects their cult for meat as one of the most desired foods. The sheep, pigs, goats and cows which

are reared there which refer to the butchering of these animals and turning them into meat for food and enjoyment. Penelope herself becomes so much used to the eating practice in Odysseus' family that she has got more "used to the place" and the eating rituals of her in-laws (Atwood, 2005, p. 35).

The objectification of women as mere producer of children because it pleases their menfolk specially their husbands is made clear by the nurse, Eurycleia who is holding a commanding position in Odysseus' palace. She warns Penelope by telling her that her position in the house is conditioned with her giving birth to "a nice big son for Odysseus!" (p. 37). Though she herself has a blue blood in her veins yet she is treated as a common woman whose stay in the house is conditional. Socially, she is enjoying a better status but as a woman, her position is not better than her twelve maids who are later killed by the "relentless command" (Atwood, 2005, p. 38) of Odysseus. The motherhood, which according to Eurycleia, is the sole purpose of a woman, is inferiorized by the lament song of the maids who present the opposite version of it. The process of motherhood for these poor women is akin to animals. These poor women lose their human existence and are taken as filthy animals. These poor women are "spawned merely, lambed, farrowed, littered, foaled, whelped and kittened, brooded, hatched out their clutch" (Atwood, 2005, p. 38). These young maids, similarly, are "animal young, to be disposed of at will, sold, drowned in the well, traded, used, discarded when bloomless" (Atwood, 2005, p. 38). The polarization in the social behaviors towards women is further elaborated in the context of meat eating. Here, the dichotomy of meatful/meatless furthers the debate where meat eating is taken as an elite and patriarchal privilege, not lawful for the women of inferior social group. The maids

express their low position by saying that they were, for the most part of their life "sandier, hungrier, sun-speckled, most days meatless" (Atwood, 2005, p. 39). Hence, a dichotomy between eating meat and not eating it develops a fracture between their social status and position. Atwood also develops women-nature relationship in the backdrop of their oppression and inferiorized treatment. The suitors representing patriarchy treat impoverished maids as they deal with animals. The rape, seduction and physical torture that they inflict on these maids find their parallel in their treatment towards low and weak animals. The suitors treat "maids in the same way" as they treat "sheep and pigs and goats and cows" (Atwood, 2005, p. 59). All these identities are slaughter-able and their bodies are turned into meat and blood as it happens in the later part of the story where Telemachus and Odysseus butcher some of these maids into flesh and bones.

Eating of meat is not a favourite dietary practice of men only, women are also fond of eating it. Women like Penelope's mother internalize in themselves the patriarchal soul. She has sharp teeth which she uses to eat and gnaw the flesh of sea animals and fish. Ironically, she does not care for the "kinds of meals" served and favored in the palace, though "big chunks of meat" are the main feature of the dining table. Paradoxically, she prefers "a small fish or two" with a manner of eating "fish raw, head first" (Atwood, 2005, p. 46). The reference to the pointed and sharp teeth of Penelope's mother strengthens the naturalization of patriarchal ideology that has become integral to the women-folk as well. Fondness for big hunks of meat has made her brutal and ruthless that she would not tolerate any disobedience and annoyance. She would "kill one who was annoying her" (Atwood, 2005, p. 46) without feeling any remorse for their bloodshed. The

internalization of patriarchal spirit is not limited only to the influential and royal women like Penelope's mother but the house maids like Eurycleia have also become ruthless, insensitive and hard at heart in terms of violence against the oppressed and weak individuals that she inexorably describes the killing of the maids to Penelope. She, in an enjoying and cherishing manner, informs Penelope about Odysseus's orders to Telemachus "to chop the maids into pieces with his swords" (Atwood, 2005, p. 78). The turning of the poor maids into meat reflects the pitiless facet of patriarchy which does not denounce the act of killing women and Others like suitors. Only Eurycleia has the heart to tell the act of murdering and hanging of the maids as well of the suitors in such details that creates a sensation in the blood of those who are fond of meat eating and are brought up in the society where meat eating is a cherished dietary practice. Odysseus and Telemachus not only kill maids but also "hang them" (Atwood, 2005, p. 79) in a row to create terror and horror in the hearts of the onlookers and the people living in the palace. Odysseus homogenizes Penelope with other women as weak, emotional and tender at heart and, therefore, shuts her up in women's quarter "when he was slaughtering the suitors" (Atwood, 2005, p. 71). Contrastingly, he does not include Eurycleia in the weak human group and relies on her when he slaughters these suitors. He prefers the maid to Penelope in assisting him in the act of killing the suitors. The collusion between Eurycleia and Odysseus in the act of waging atrocities against the marginalized human groups is reflective of the notion that "patriarchal oppression and degradation ... transcends the category of gender" (Martin, 2006, p. 548).

Inclusion of Others in eco-feminist debate is an important concern which the research conducted so far have

failed to locate and highlight. Atwood, in her novella *The Penelopiad* underscores the issues related to these human Others.. Odysseus leads an attack on Troy in the war of Trojan and becomes the victor. He rampages the city and kills the human beings regardless of their military and social status and connections. The reports of "great slaughtering and looting" in the city indicates the victors' lust for tasting blood and watching human beings turning into mere meat. The picture which Atwood presents where "The streets ran red with blood, the sky above the palace turned to fire" (Atwood, 2005, p. 44). The children and young boys who are relatively weaker beings suffer to death because of this craze for blood and meat by the overpowering men. "The innocent boys and children were thrown off a cliff" (Atwood, 2005, p. 44) incorporates in itself the brutality of a machoistic mentality where the individuals lose their human identity and become mere toys and objects devoid of any significance and importance. The parallelism between boys, children and women who were "parceled out as plunder" (Atwood, 2005, p. 44) reminisces the connection between all these marginalized and colonized identities in terms of their oppression, exploitation and suppression. Besides, Penelope's account enroots deep connections between human Others and nature where it has been represented in the forms of animals which are in the ownership of Odysseus. the "sheep", "cows" and "pigs" are the animals which are slaughtered and their meat is used as food in their feasts (Atwood, 2005, p. 47). Atwood again mentions the connection between animals and slaves who are equated with these animals in terms of their vulnerability and impoverishes. The delight which these patriarchal figures draw from "tormenting the vulnerable" (Atwood, 2005, p. 48) including women, nature and Others disengages them from the inferiorized

stratum and invests them with an identity akin to barbarism and brutality. That is the reason that Odysseus starts killing of the weak people from the suitors, relatively low human group. At the same time, these Others, when in control of the house of Odysseus, treated nature (the pet animals) with ruthlessness and savagery. They take advantage of the weakness of Penelope and start “butchering animals themselves, roasting the flesh with the help of their servants” (Atwood, 2005, p. 54). The violent treatment of nature is paid back to them by her when Odysseus and Telemachus kill them. The patriarchal spirit, when in power, treats women, Others and nature as slaves.

Penelope narrates how the eating of meat in the feasts by the suitors is used as an oppressive tool and intimidating act against her. The suitors exercise their “power-over” (Warren 2000, 46) on her by adding such items in their victuals as are reflective of male power and authority. Even the authoritative women participate in eating these dishes as if they want to “outdo all the others at eating” (Atwood, 2005, p. 51). Penelope delves into their “goal” of this power show. The objective is to wear down her “resistance with the threat of impoverishment” (Atwood, 2005, p. 54) so that she subjugates herself before them. The uncivilized and lusty way of eating their meals enhance the impact of savagery. The viciousness of their intentions is manifest in the proclamation which Penelope makes. The otherwise simple dietary activity becomes a means of threat and persuasion where they compel her to “choose any one of them as [her] husband” (Atwood, 2005, p. 54). The oppressive patriarchal ideologies exhibited by the suitors in the act of eating where meat is an essential ingredient connects objectification of women and animals in a patriarchal culture.

Atwood portrays the internalization of patriarchal spirit in women

and their insensitiveness to the sufferings of the poor and weak people through the narration of Eurycleia when she tells how Penelope and Telemachus mutilate Melanthius’ genitals and others parts of his body. The explicit happiness which she fails to hide reveals the master ideology working against the slaves. It is a matter of pleasure for her when she narrates how “Odysseus and Telemachus hacked off the ears and nose and hands and feet and genitals of Melanthius the evil goatherd and threw them to the dogs, paying no attention to the poor man’s agonised screams” (Atwood, 2005, p. 79). The act is done as an example to subjugate and dominate Others. Later on, the maids add their voice to the violence waged against these suitors and assimilate their pain with their suffering and agony. They affirm the act of inhuman killing of Melanthius and disfigurement of his genitals. They correct the narrative which Penelope presents and point to the missing link where the brutality against them has been mentioned neither by Eurycleia nor by Penelope. The untold part of their stories is added by these maids which is replete with genocidal act against maids. “Hanging did take place, but it was we, the twelve moon-maidens, who did the winging in his place” (Atwood, 2005, p. 82) tells how male identity is preferred over women in terms of pain and sufferings.

4. Conclusion

The eco-feminist reading of Margaret Atwood’s selected work *The Penelopiad* reveals that the text reflects the critical interconnectedness between the oppression of women and the domination of marginalized human being and nature. the study also reveals that these linkages in terms of the exploitation of these three entities take a new trajectory where violence against animals leads the ruthless treatment of women as well as of the Others. Women irrespective of their social status,

homogenized as weak and marginalized entities, suffer because of the patriarchal mind set. They are treated as packets of meat worthy to be gnawed, crushed and eaten. Penelope's existence is frequently in danger either because of the suitors or by the women like her mother-in-law whose patriarchal character intimidates her as soon as she enters into her husband's house. On the other hand, the maids are more like a raw flesh which if not eaten is crushed to the ground. They are killed, butchered and hanged by Telemachus and Odysseus without letting them know what their crime is. The suitors act as the manipulators and predators when there is no one to protect Penelope and the maids. Later on, the hunters become the hunted when the son and the father hunt them down and suffer from castration and death. All those who eat meat – Odysseus, Telemachus, the suitors, the women-in-power and the menfolk in general wage violence against all those who are weak and helpless in the Penelope's culture.

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