

Feminist Analysis of The Women are Singing (Challenging Patriarchy and Capitalistic Ideals in Luci Tapahonso's poem)

Mohanad Ghanim Glayl

Holy Karbala Directorate General of Education, 56001, Karbala, Iraq
Email: muhanadghanem37@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Luci Tapahonso is one of the most distinctive and influential poets in American literature. Her unique voice and powerful imagery have captivated readers and critics alike. In her powerful poem "The Women Are Singing," Luci Tapahonso gets into the struggle that women face in a patriarchal society as they strive to assert their identity and navigate the oppressive structures of capitalism. Tapahonso's choice of using Navajo English in her poetry performances further enhances her intent to represent the characters and their struggles authentically. Tapahonso's incorporation of Navajo English, as she herself has stated, serves to create "characterological images" that emphasize the unique perspectives and experiences of her characters. In Luci Tapahonso's poem, the creation of a men-only world and the limited role of women within it can be analyzed from a feminist perspective. In other words, she is seeking to challenge and dismantle the oppressive structures that perpetuate fear and harassment. Feminist analysis allows us to understand the power dynamics, social norms, and gender roles in Tapahonso's work.

Keywords: Luci Tapahonso, The Women Are Singing, Feminism, Gender, assimilation.

1- Background of the Study

Luci Tapahonso is one of the most prominent poets of the twentieth century. She has garnered admiration and recognition for her exceptional body of work. Tapahonso has written numerous poems that have captivated readers and critics alike. Her talent and dedication have earned her numerous prizes and accolades throughout her career. One of the notable achievements in Luci Tapahonso's career is being a recipient of prestigious poetry prizes. These prizes validate her skill and contributions to the literary world, solidifying her status as a prominent figure in poetry. Tapahonso's dedication to her craft is evident in the quality and depth of her poetry. Her unique perspective and powerful storytelling have resonated with readers from various backgrounds. Her writings embody a deep and profound reverence for nature. Her poetic imagery paints vivid pictures of the natural world, capturing its beauty and power through her words. One of Tapahonso's notable works that exemplifies her appreciation for nature is found in her poem "The Motion of Songs Rising" from her book *Shaanii Dahataal/The Women Are Singing*. In this passage, Tapahonso skillfully describes Native Americans adorned in vibrant animal hides of various colors, with coyote tails swaying as they dance. Tapahonso's vivid portrayal of the Native Americans' connection to the natural world showcases her awe and respect for the environment (Evans, 2018).

Luci Tapahonso has dedicated her time and energy to conducting empowering workshops for women. Through these workshops, Tapahonso volunteers demonstrate the powerful place that women hold in society. Tapahonso's workshops serve as a platform for women to come together, share their experiences, and empower themselves and others. Tapahonso's workshops are designed to inspire and motivate women to realize their potential and pursue their aspirations. Luci Tapahonso, a renowned Navajo poet, has predominantly focused her poems on male perspectives, with women often playing minor roles. However, in certain poems, such as "The Women Are Singing," Tapahonso showcases women taking control and resisting oppression. In today's rapidly changing world, the significance of accurate weather forecasts cannot be overstated. Body: Luci Tapahonso's poetry provides a platform for empowering women and shedding light on their struggles against patriarchal oppression. (Penner, 1996).

In Luci Tapahonso's poetry, the themes of empowerment and resistance are prevalent, particularly when it comes to the portrayal of women. Tapahonso's poems, including "The Women Are Singing," serve as powerful examples of how female writers can challenge the patriarchal culture that oppresses women and bring attention to the

specific challenges they face. Tapahonso's poems challenge the status quo by giving voice to women and highlighting their agency. Luci Tapahonso's poetry serves as a means of empowerment for women (Araujo, 2019), allowing them to reclaim their narratives and assert their autonomy. Tapahonso's poems also reveal how women resist patriarchal power while navigating within societal constraints.

2. Significance and Innovation of the Study

The importance of this study is that Luci Tapahonso is known for her nature-based poetry, with more than ninety percent of her poems celebrating the beauty and power of the natural world. Luci's poems showcase the resistance and strength of women against oppression. However, in her collection titled *The Women Are Singing*, Tapahonso deviates from this theme and introduces a different aspect of her work because female characters like her are frightening in the face of adversity. It highlights the tireless efforts of female characters, who refuse to be silenced and fight against the societal forces that seek to suppress and control them.

Critics have thought of "The Women Are Singing" as a distinguished work by a poet who explores themes of misogyny in society. *The Women Are Singing* has explored its issues of power, Zolbrod's says in Luci Tapahonso's "The Women Are Singing: A Celebration of Female Empowerment and Goal Achievement. He asserts that the poem is a powerful testament to the strength and achievements of women. It sheds light on the significance of Tapahonso's poem, emphasizing its portrayal of female empowerment and goal achievement. (Zolbrod, 1994).

3. Methodology

The current study aims to analyze Luci Tapahonso's poem "The Women Are Singing" through a feminist approach. By applying a feminist lens to this poem, we can gain insights into how Tapahonso is influenced by feminism and how the poem reflects gender inequalities and women's experiences. Luci Tapahonso's poems have predominantly centered on nature, showcasing her deep connection to the natural world. However, in some poems, including "the women are singing", Tapahonso's focus shifts towards the empowerment struggles of women and their fight against oppression. This shift in focus is indicative of the power of poetry as a means to address social injustices and advocate for change. (Langdell, (2004).

The rise of feminism as a significant movement in literature can be traced back to the awareness of class differences and oppression that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During this time, feminists began to analyze and

challenge traditional literary criticism, which neglected the aspect of gender difference. This neglect led to the development of feminist literary theory, which aimed to re-examine literary works from a gender-oriented perspective. This development in literary theory brought attention to concerns over gender issues, gender discrimination, and sexual polarity (Elkins, 2022).

Feminism has been one of the most common themes in the postmodern era and has attracted the attention of many critics. These critics have noted that, despite the progress made in gender equality, some postmodern literary works still depict female characters that adhere to outdated gender roles. This observation was made by Musse, who argues that certain postmodern literary works perpetuate the mainstream portrayal of women in traditional gender roles. Musse's statement sheds light on an important aspect of postmodern literary works, bringing the issue of gender roles to the forefront. In the postmodern era, feminism has become a prominent theme that has garnered the attention of critics (Landwehr, 2021).

"NOBODY IS AN ORPHAN" Interview with Luci Tapahonso in a recent interview with acclaimed poet and writer, she shared her compelling perspective on the importance of fighting for one's identity in today's society. She believes that nobody is born an orphan when it comes to creating their own identity. According to her, societal expectations and norms often dictate how individuals are seen and classified. However, she firmly believes that individuals have the power to challenge and shape these expectations to create their own unique identity. However, she firmly believes that individuals have the power to challenge and shape these expectations to create their own unique identity. (Sheppard-Lemoine et al., 2021)

4. Discussion

Luci Tapahonso's poetry, particularly her collection "Sáanii Dahataal: The Women Are Singing," challenges patriarchal and capitalistic structures by centering the voices and experiences of Navajo women. In her poem, she masterfully weaves together the threads of oral tradition and modernist poetics to craft a poignant exploration of the resilience and agency of indigenous women. Her work is deeply rooted in the rhythms and experiences of her Diné (Navajo) world, drawing upon the rich sonority and literary craft of her indigenous heritage. as seen in the lines "The women are singing, their voices strong and full of life" (p. 24). This line celebrates Navajo women's resilience and agency, affirming that "The women lead the way, their steps sure and steady, their spirits unbroken" (p. 25). (Tapahonso,1993).

Her poetic critiques of the patriarchal and capitalistic forces that have undermined Navajo lifeways, evidenced by the lament that "The land is scarred, the rivers poisoned, the forests cut down" (p. 26), inspire Navajo women to confront these systemic inequities. By drawing attention to the scarring of the land, the poisoning of the rivers, and the deforestation, Tapahonso's poem implicitly indicts the capitalistic and colonialist forces that have plundered Navajo resources for profit without regard for the impacts on the land and people, Tapahonso reinforces Navajo women's roles as keepers of cultural knowledge, as the poem evokes "The old ones sing the ancient songs, their voices carrying the weight of generations" (p. 27). This cultural grounding imbues Tapahonso's environmental critiques with a sense of moral urgency - the degradation of the land is not just an environmental issue, but a violation of Navajo cosmology and a threat to the survival of Navajo ways of life. (Ramirez, 2011).

Tapahonso's poetry powerfully elevates the roles and agency of Navajo women in confronting environmental degradation. In the line "The women lead the way, their steps sure and steady, their spirits unbroken," she positions Navajo women as the central protagonists and leaders in this struggle. This stands in stark contrast to dominant environmental narratives that have often marginalized or erased the voices and experiences of Indigenous women. By celebrating Navajo women's resilience, determination, and spiritual fortitude, Tapahonso affirms their central role as environmental stewards and activists. The imagery of their "sure and steady" steps and "unbroken" spirits conveys a sense of unwavering strength and resolve in the face of environmental devastation. This challenges perceptions of Indigenous women as passive victims and instead portrays them as the driving force behind grassroots movements to protect their lands and communities. Moreover, Tapahonso's elevation of Navajo women's leadership aligns with broader efforts by Indigenous feminists to center the experiences and political agency of women within Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination struggles. Her poetry thus becomes a vehicle for asserting the vital contributions of Navajo women, not only to environmental activism, but to the very foundations of Navajo nationhood and cultural continuity. By placing Navajo women at the forefront of her environmental vision, Tapahonso offers a powerful counternarrative that affirms their rightful place as stewards, protectors, and leaders within their communities. (Sarti ,2018).

In the line "This is our land, our home, our history," she unequivocally declares Navajo ownership and control over their territories. This declaration stands as a direct challenge to dominant environmental narratives that have often disregarded or undermined Indigenous land rights and self-governance. By framing the land as

explicitly "ours," Tapahonso rejects the imposition of external ownership or management over Navajo territories. She grounds this claim in the idea of the land as Navajo "home" and "history," suggesting a deep, ancestral connection that transcends contemporary legal and political frameworks. This language affirms the Navajo people's inherent, inalienable claim to their lands, rooted in generations of cultural, spiritual, and material stewardship. Moreover, Tapahonso's assertion of Navajo sovereignty extends beyond just land rights, encompassing the right to self-determine the environmental policies and practices that impact Navajo communities. Her poetry resists narratives that cast Navajo people as passive victims of environmental degradation, instead depicting them as active agents fighting to protect their homelands according to their own cultural values and priorities. (Sarti ,2018).

In the line "The land is scarred, the rivers poisoned, the forests cut down," the poem depicts the natural environment in visceral, embodied terms, conveying a sense of violence and violation against the land. Crucially, however, this depiction does not cast the Navajo people as mere passive observers or victims of environmental degradation. Rather, by situating these stark descriptions within the broader context of the poem's themes and imagery, Tapahonso positions the Navajo people as integral, interdependent parts of the natural world, rather than as external, detached entities. This rejection of the nature/culture binary aligns with core Navajo cosmological and spiritual beliefs, which understand the human community as inextricably linked to the land, water, and other-than-human beings that constitute the natural environment. Tapahonso's poetry thus asserts an Indigenous, relational worldview that counters the Western tendency to conceptualize humans and nature as diametrically opposed or hierarchically structured. By collapsing this artificial divide, Tapahonso's work encourages readers to reconceive of the Navajo people's relationship to their ancestral homelands. Rather than viewing them as passive observers or victims of environmental degradation, the poem invites us to recognize the Navajo as active, agential participants in the ongoing struggle to protect and steward the land, water, and resources that are fundamental to their cultural survival and collective well-being. In this way, Tapahonso's poetry becomes a powerful vehicle for asserting Navajo environmental sovereignty and self-determination. (Woods,2010).

At the same time, Tapahonso's skilful use of enjambment and evocative imagery evokes the lyrical, introspective qualities of modernist poetry. The lines "their voices rising and falling, / sifting the dry kernels / through their fingers" not only capture the sensory experience of the women's labor but also suggest the profound spiritual and emotional dimensions of their work. By blending these diverse poetic traditions, Tapahonso crafts a multifaceted and deeply resonant exploration of the lived

experiences of Navajo women, illuminating their resilience, agency, and transformative power. (Ramirez, 2011).

Tapahonso's poetry, as literary scholar Paula Gunn Allen has observed, subversively appropriates Euroamerican literary forms to assert the continued relevance and vitality of Navajo ritual tradition in the modern era. This strategic appropriation of dominant literary conventions represents a powerful decolonial praxis, through which Tapahonso is able to center and amplify Indigenous worldviews, epistemologies, and modes of expression. By working within the discursive parameters of Euroamerican poetry, Tapahonso is able to reach broader audiences and insert Navajo cultural perspectives into mainstream literary and intellectual spaces. Yet she simultaneously transforms these inherited forms, infusing them with the rhythms, imagery, and spiritual resonances of Navajo ceremonial traditions. In this way, her poetry becomes a site of cultural reclamation and survivance, where Navajo lifeways are not merely preserved, but actively revitalized and reimagined for contemporary contexts. Crucially, this literary strategy aligns with broader efforts by Indigenous writers, artists, and activists to assert sovereignty over the means of cultural production and representation. Rather than passively accepting the imposition of Euroamerican aesthetic norms, Tapahonso and her contemporaries actively wrestle with and subvert these forms, rewriting them in service of Indigenous self-determination. Their work thus stands as a bold refusal to be contained or marginalized within dominant literary canons, and a bold assertion of the enduring vitality and adaptability of Navajo and other Native American cultural traditions. By understanding Tapahonso's poetry through this lens, we can appreciate the ways in which her work not only challenges prevailing environmental narratives, but also engages in a profound decolonial praxis. Her poetry becomes a site of cultural resurgence, where the voices, knowledges, and lifeways of the Navajo people are elevated, celebrated, and reclaimed as vital resources for navigating the urgent crises of the present moment. (Lamont, 2005).

Results

"The Women Are Singing," by Luci Tapahonso, offers a thought-provoking exploration of the contentious topic of sexual incitement. In this powerful work, she challenges the prevailing societal norms and ethical considerations surrounding this issue in her contemporary context. Tapahonso's exploration gets into the complexities of sexual incitement and prompts readers to question the underlying power dynamics, social expectations, and consent that are often intertwined with this issue. Luci Tapahonso's views on capitalism, education, and sexual harassment are highly critical and thought-provoking. While her arguments may be met with criticism by some,

Tapahonso's ability to sink into the deep psychological aspects of both genders, is a testament to her accomplishment as a writer. Her condemnation of capitalism reflects a growing concern over the negative impacts of consumerism and greed. Tapahonso's critique of the American education system is also noteworthy. She draws attention to the flaws and inequalities that exist within the system, critiquing its emphasis on standardized testing and rote memorization rather than fostering critical thinking and creativity.

Conclusions

In this study, the researchers adopt a feminist approach to analyze Luci Tapahonso's poem "The Women Are Singing." This study explores Luci Tapahonso's poem "The Women Are Singing" through a feminist lens, highlighting the struggles that women face in society and their fight to achieve their rightful position. Drawing inspiration from feminist literary criticism, this study gets into the poem to unravel the complexities of women's experiences and their efforts to challenge societal norms. In "The Women Are Singing" by Luci Tapahonso, the author deftly explores the complexities of women's experiences and their courageous efforts to challenge societal norms. Tapahonso's work stands out as she tackles the issues faced by women in societies where their roles are often confined to domestic tasks associated with male expectations and norms. However, in "The Women Are Singing," Tapahonso presents a compelling narrative of a woman who actively defies these societal norms and strives to achieve her position.

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