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Quest for Co-existence in Michelle Obama's *Becoming*: An Eco-feminist Reading

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## Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Quest for Coexistence in Michelle Obama’s Becoming: An Ecofeminist Reading ” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Sharmila Jugjali, has been approved by the undersigned member of the Research Committee:

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## Quest for Co-existence in Michelle Obama's *Becoming*: An Ecofeminist Reading

### Abstract

*This research paper attempts to explore the quest for co-existence through ecofeminism in the memoir *Becoming* by Michelle Obama. The text is a story of resilience, empowerment, and the pursuit of one's true self, offering people a glimpse into the life of a remarkable woman who became an influential advocate for change and inclusivity. Drawing on key ecofeminist theories presented by Greta Gaard, Maria Mies, and Vandana Shiva, this study delves into the narrative to uncover the subtle ways in which Obama's life journey embodies ecofeminist principles. The paper begins by providing an overview of ecofeminism and its core tenets, including the interconnectedness of the exploitation of women and nature, the critique of patriarchal capitalism, and the call for environmental and women's justice. It elucidates how Obama's narrative underscores the interconnectedness of social and environmental issues, highlighting her commitment to issues such as community engagement, sustainable living, and access to education. It explores how her experiences as a woman of color inform her advocacy for both gender equality and environmental protection. Furthermore, the study investigates how Michelle Obama's experiences as a First Lady resonate with ecofeminist principles, particularly in her initiatives related to healthy living, education, and community empowerment. It has also examined her role as a global influencer and how she utilizes her platform to amplify ecofeminist ideas and principles on a broader scale.*

Keywords: Co-existence, Ecofeminism, Gender, Equality, Race, and Environment

This research study conducts an analysis of Michelle Obama's memoir, *Becoming* from an eco-feminist perspective, focusing particularly on the pursuit of co-existence between the natural environment and women within the context of a

patriarchal societal framework. The deeds and statements she has made within the text explore Michelle Obama's experiences during her childhood, adulthood, youth, and womanhood in relation to her quest for co-existence within her family and society as a whole. Her trials, joys, emotions, and actions are all illuminated by her underlying intention to seek co-existence as she advances through life. Moreover, pivotal events such as her personal growth, marriage, and First Lady privilege are significant junctures where she seeks to create a sense of harmony with the people of her communities and nation.

To undertake this analysis of *Becoming* through the lens of eco-feminist theory, the researcher draws upon the theoretical insights of prominent ecocritics and ecofeminists, including Greta Gaard, Maria Mies, and Vandana Shiva. These theorists' overarching arguments align with ecofeminist concepts that explore the interconnectedness of nature and women. While some argue that the suppression of nature and women are analogous within patriarchal social structures, others contend that nature and women share common attributes as life-affirming forces essential for the preservation of both the natural world and human existence. In this research endeavor, by applying the theoretical perspectives of the aforementioned ecofeminist scholars, the researcher aims to assert and substantiate the assertion that Michelle Obama's *Becoming* can be characterized as an ecofeminist narrative primarily concerned with the concept of mutualism between nature and women, and its treatment within a male-dominated social framework. In essence, *Becoming* elucidates the notion of male dominance over nature and women through various thematic dimensions.

Promoting gender equality and empowering women can contribute to better environmental outcomes. When women are educated, economically empowered, and

have decision-making power, they can make more sustainable choices for their families and communities. Ecofeminism is a social and political movement that combines environmentalism and feminism. It emerged in the late 20th century as a response to the recognition that both women and the environment have historically been marginalized and exploited. Ecofeminism posits that there are significant parallels between the oppression of women and the degradation of the environment.

Furthermore, it argues that patriarchal systems that dominate and exploit women are also responsible for the exploitation and degradation of the natural world. Key tenets of ecofeminism include the belief that both women and nature have been objectified and commodified and that the domination of one is linked to the domination of the other. It calls for the dismantling of hierarchical power structures and advocates for a more holistic and interconnected approach to addressing social and environmental issues. The idea of co-existence promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women as a means to achieve better environmental outcomes. Empowered women are more likely to make sustainable choices for their families and communities.

On the top, this research paper also analyzes Michelle Obama's memoir *Becoming* and examines the concept of identity in order to understand how the author attempts to establish a connection between her livelihoods to the outer world. The memoir explores the challenges faced by an African American girl from a working-class background as she strives for her place in American society, where black women have historically been stereotyped as submissive, passive, nurturing, and defined in relation to white American women. Michelle Obama's identity undergoes significant changes as she transitions from Chicago to the White House, where she assumes the role of First Lady. As a black woman, she interacts with people from various cultural

backgrounds. Throughout the book, Obama reflects on her upbringing in Chicago, her career, her relationship with Barack Obama, and her years as the First Lady in the White House. This research delves into how Michelle Obama's identity evolves as she moves from one location to another and engages with different social contexts.

Obama reflects on her time as the First Lady, which is a position of high visibility and influence in the United States. This role allowed her to gain insights and experiences that contributed to her evolving sense of identity. As the First, she felt increasingly empowered to speak openly and honestly about particularly those related to being marginalized due to their race and gender. This suggests that her identity played a significant role in shaping her perspective and actions. She writes;

The deeper I got into the experience of being First Lady, the more emboldened I felt to speak honestly and directly about what it meant to be marginalized by race and gender. My intention was to give younger people a context for the hate surfacing in the news and in political discourse and to give them a reason to hope. I tried to communicate the one message about myself and my station in the world that I felt might really mean something. Which was that I knew invisibility. I'd lived invisibility. I came from a history of invisibility. (324)

Obama aimed to provide context for younger generations who were witnessing hate, discrimination, and divisive discourse in the news and politics. By sharing her own experiences of marginalization, she sought to help young people understand the root causes of such issues and the challenges faced by marginalized communities. The key point the author makes is that she comes from a history of invisibility. This implies that her identity is deeply rooted in a background where people like her were often overlooked, ignored, or marginalized throughout history. By acknowledging this history of invisibility, the author is highlighting a fundamental aspect of their identity.

*Becoming* tells the story of Michelle Obama and how she faced many challenges and difficult situations. Despite these obstacles, she transformed into someone who works for peace, justice, and the empowerment of others. She dedicated herself to helping women and children in disadvantaged communities who lack basic needs like education and proper living conditions. In her life, Michelle had different roles and identities. She was born in a small African community and was called Michelle Robinson. When she married Barack Obama, her name changed to Michelle Obama. Then, she moved to Washington and became the First Lady of the United States, which was a completely new and different role for her. So, she adapted to these various aspects of her life.

*Becoming* by Michelle Obama is a compelling memoir that offers a deep and intimate look into the life of the former First Lady of the United States. Published in 2018, the book provides a comprehensive account of her journey from a humble upbringing on the South Side of Chicago to *becoming* one of the most influential women in the world. It explores the key themes, experiences, and messages conveyed throughout the book. *Becoming* begins by introducing Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama and her roots in the working-class neighborhood of South Shore in Chicago. She describes her childhood, emphasizing the values instilled in her by her parents, Fraser and Marian Robinson. Fraser was a hardworking and resilient man who battled multiple sclerosis, and Marian was a dedicated homemaker who placed a strong emphasis on education.

At the beginning, the book traces Michelle's early years and her experiences growing up in a loving and supportive family. She shares anecdotes from her childhood, highlighting the impact of her extended family and the influence of her parents' values on her character development. Education was a central focus in her

family, and Michelle excelled in school, earning a spot at Whitney Young Magnet High School. At Whitney Young, Michelle had her first experiences with the stark disparities in educational opportunities between the black and white communities in Chicago. This awakened her to issues of race, privilege, and inequality, which would later become central themes in her life and career.

Michelle delves into her years at Princeton University, where she faced feelings of isolation as one of the few African-American students. She recalls grappling with the challenge of being seen as an affirmative action token while striving to excel academically. Her experiences at Princeton also included her meeting Barack Obama for the first time. They both worked at the law firm Sidley Austin, and their friendship slowly evolved into a romantic relationship. Michelle discusses her initial resistance to the idea of marriage and the doubts she had about whether she and Barack could balance their ambitions and relationship. Despite her initial hesitations, they eventually married, and Michelle highlights the transformative power of their partnership. She shares how their shared values, love, and mutual respect formed the bedrock of their relationship, enabling both of them to pursue their individual and shared goals. This follows Michelle and Barack as they navigate their careers and personal lives. Michelle recounts her experiences working at a prestigious law firm and her growing awareness of the limitations of corporate law. She eventually transitioned to a role in public service, working for the city of Chicago and then for the nonprofit sector.

Meanwhile, Barack's political career is on the rise. Michelle describes the challenges of being the spouse of a public figure and the demands that politics places on their family. She is candid about the strains on their marriage and the difficulty of juggling their responsibilities as parents to their two daughters, Malia and Sasha. As

Barack decides to run for the U.S. Senate, Michelle grapples with the prospect of a political life and the potential impact on their family. Ultimately, she embraces her role as a political spouse and becomes a powerful advocate for her husband's candidacy. *Becoming* explores Michelle's time as First Lady of the United States. She reflects on the historic nature of Barack Obama's presidency as the first African-American president and the unique challenges and opportunities that came with it.

Michelle's tenure as First Lady is marked by her commitment to addressing important issues such as education, veterans' support, and childhood obesity through initiatives like "Let's Move!" She emphasizes the importance of using her platform to make a positive impact and inspire change. Michelle also candidly discusses the personal toll of living in the White House and the challenges of raising her daughters in the public eye. She shares touching stories of her interactions with people across the country and the world, underscoring the importance of empathy and connection.

Finally *Becoming* reflects on Michelle's life after leaving the White House. She discusses the mix of relief and uncertainty that comes with transitioning out of the public spotlight. Michelle continues her work on issues close to her heart, such as education and empowering young people. She also addresses the political climate in the United States, expressing her concerns about the divisiveness and polarization that have become increasingly prevalent. Michelle encourages individuals to engage in meaningful conversations and take action to create positive change.

*Becoming* is a powerful memoir that offers a glimpse into the life and experiences of Michelle Obama. Through her storytelling, she touches on themes of family, education, race, equality, and the pursuit of one's true self. Michelle's journey from a modest upbringing to becoming an influential figure and the First Lady of the United States serves as an inspiring testament to the possibilities that exist for anyone

who dares to dream and work hard. The book is not only a personal memoir but also a call to action. The author encourages them to reflect on their own stories, embrace their authenticity, and strive for positive change in their communities and the world. *Becoming* is a testament to the idea that our individual and collective journeys are still unfolding, and we have the power to shape our own narratives.

Obama holds diversity because it fosters the growth of human society and encourages diverse groups in society to live together in harmony and co-existence. She suggests that historically underrepresented or marginalized groups, often based on factors like race, ethnicity, or possibly gender, were gradually making progress and achieving more significant roles in key areas of society. She asserts; “As minorities across the country were gradually beginning to take on more significant roles in politics, business, and entertainment, our family had become the most prominent example” (319). Obama underscores the importance of representation in various sectors of society. When minority individuals rise to prominent positions, they can serve as role models and inspire others from similar backgrounds. Her success serves as an example of what can be achieved and may contribute to the broader social and cultural changes associated with increased diversity and representation.

Various critics and reviewers offer their own interpretations of *Becoming*. Some focus on Michelle Obama's experiences and challenges as a woman of color, while others explore feminist themes within the book. Additionally, some critics contend that political themes can also be discerned in the memoir. In the New York Times, Isabel Wilkerson writes;

Michelle Obama's *Becoming* is a tour de force memoir that offers readers an intimate and inspiring look into her life. In her own words, she takes us on a journey from her humble beginnings in Chicago to the White House. Her

candid storytelling and insightful reflections on family, equality, and the American dream make this book a must-read for anyone seeking inspiration and a deeper understanding of one of the most remarkable women in modern history. (7)

It describes the memoir as a powerful and inspirational work that provides us with an intimate glimpse into her life, starting from her modest upbringing in Chicago and leading to her time in the White House. The review highlights her candid storytelling and meaningful insights on topics like family, equality, and the American dream, making it a recommended read for those seeking inspiration and a deeper understanding of Michelle Obama's remarkable journey as one of the most notable women in modern history.

Similarly, in the Guardian, Peter Conrad reviews;

*Becoming* is a captivating memoir that transcends politics and reaches the heart of what it means to be human. Michelle Obama's eloquent prose and genuine storytelling make her experiences relatable to readers from all walks of life. Her dedication to empowering young people and promoting equality shines through in every chapter. This book is not just about her journey; it's about the collective journey toward a more inclusive and compassionate world.(3)

Obama's memoir is praised for its ability to transcend political boundaries and touch on universal human experiences. It applauds her eloquent writing and authentic storytelling, which make her life's journey relatable to a wide range of readers. The review highlights Michelle Obama's commitment to empowering young people and advocating for equality, emphasizing that the book goes beyond her personal story to

address the broader pursuit of a more inclusive and compassionate world. Moreover, Ron Charles puts his views in the Washington Post;

*Becoming* Michelle Obama shares her story with grace and poise. Her commitment to family and community shines brightly throughout the narrative. Her experiences as First Lady are particularly enlightening, offering a behind-the-scenes look at the responsibilities and pressures of that role.

*Becoming* is a testament to her strength and the enduring power of her message.(9)

Closely, Oprah Winfrey in Oprah Magazine states that *Becoming* is a powerful testament to the impact of one woman's determination and authenticity. Michelle Obama's memoir is an ode to the pursuit of one's dreams and the importance of staying true to oneself. Her warmth and humanity are palpable on every page, making this book a deeply moving and relatable read for all. Likewise, Time Magazine makes a review of Michelle Obama's *Becoming*. It states; "It is more than just a memoir; it's a cultural touchstone. Her storytelling is both intimate and universal, offering readers a glimpse into her life while also addressing broader themes of race, gender, and societal change. This book is a call to action, urging us all to become agents of positive change in our own lives and communities"(2). Tara Lal Shrestha's study has delved into the profound impact of the enduring history of racial discrimination and capitalist inclinations within American society, a central theme in the memoir. He has particularly emphasized the persistence of prejudicial practices and their ongoing influence, which continues to marginalize minority groups and erode their autonomy and freedom, according to his perspective. As he opines:

She presents the dynamics of dehumanization and racialization being continued in America to impact global black experience and the condition

of minorities. The bildungsroman story of Michelle Obama, which presents her development of various aspects of life, helps to understand the persisting dynamics of the dehumanization of minorities in America and beyond. (45)

Shrestha's analysis engages with the factors in Obama's life that significantly contributed to shaping her identity as portrayed in the memoir. While critiquing the negative aspects of American society, Shrestha expresses substantial admiration for Obama's courage and boldness, which allowed her to continuously enhance her standing and position.

Likewise, another author, Candace Howze, presents a similar viewpoint; "*Becoming* is a story that focuses more on hard work and sacrifice than a privilege; it grapples with the nuances of understanding identity, and it overflows with an emotional call to perseverance" (42). Howze's argument underscores Obama's unwavering determination to achieve success in her life. Her continuous dedication, coupled with a keen awareness of the challenges posed by racial identity, served as the foundation for her ability to surpass the seemingly insurmountable limitations imposed upon her.

Furthermore, Shalon Van Tine examines the distorted aspects of society in which women encounter numerous obstacles and challenges on their journey. In this context, Shalon asserts, "Obama's story shows how the cards are already stacked against women in the first place, so to be successful requires a collection of built-in advantages—advantages that most women would never have access to regardless of how much they overperform" (2). From a critical perspective, Shalon appears somewhat hesitant, if not entirely so, about fully accepting Obama's success due to society's preconceived expectations and established norms that

women are expected to conform to. Nonetheless, Obama achieved a remarkable victory over these obstacles, as she was both relatable and possessed undeniable agency, allowing her to effectively dismantle the barriers in her path. Ashika Prajnya Paramitain *Humaniora Journal* states:

Obama also experienced, now more than ever, the lies of the post-feminist myth. If she was “Other” in Princeton and Harvard because of her skin, now she is “Other” in her own relationship because she was a woman as this is what the role of the first lady traditionally entails. Obama shares how she worked on establishing her identity through her initiatives. Focusing on what she held dear in her heart, she began developing initiatives that dealt with the welfare of military families, as well as and the health and education for children, especially young girls and the underprivileged. (104-05)

In her evaluation, Obama effectively conveyed her message nationwide and connected with people spanning various age groups by leveraging her affection for popular culture as a platform. This unique approach set her apart from her predecessors in the role of First Lady. She consistently exuded a refreshing charisma that drew in and held the attention of her audience. Once more, she achieved success in her endeavors. As her tenure as First Lady concluded, she did so with poise and as an individual with her own identity intact.

While examining and delving into various aspects of *Becoming*, other critics, such as Gloria Y. A. Ayee and her colleagues, explore different issues;

From the beginning of her tenure as first lady, Michelle Obama was fully

aware that many Americans had not been exposed to the meaning and themes of motherhood in black culture, although they would likely be quite familiar with the long-standing stereotypes and misrepresentations of black women and mothers in society promulgated in public discourse. Consciously or subconsciously, in her role as First Lady, Obama made the institution of black motherhood more transparent to those living in the United States and around the world. In doing so, she defied the long-standing dominant and oppressive stereotypes of black women and mothers while simultaneously redefining black motherhood and black families on the nation's most public stage. (483)

These statements contribute to our understanding of how Obama's identity as a black woman, her portrayal of motherhood, and her advocacy efforts defined her role as the First Lady. Some of the policies she championed were instrumental in breaking down enduring stereotypes associated with black women and mothers. When we scrutinize her policy initiatives more closely, we contend that the way the public perceived her as the "mother of the nation" was closely linked to the policies she decided to promote.

As Obama's work has been simply viewed and interpreted as a memoir and a collection of selective stories, the researcher has gone beyond this mere confinement of such ideas. With this profound realization, Obama's memoir has been studied in the light of an ecofeminist perspective. The core premise of ecofeminism revolves around the interconnectedness of ecology and women. This theoretical framework seeks to harmonize the diverse facets of women's experiences with environmental concerns, just as it analyzes environmental elements in the context of feminine attributes.

Furthermore, ecofeminism endeavors to establish a profound and intimate connection between the environment and women. It also recognizes the inherent linkage between feminist and ecological issues, underscoring the inevitable nature of the relationship between nature and women for the sustainable coexistence of both on Earth. Prominent ecofeminist scholars have articulated various arguments to emphasize the interdependence between nature and women.

In their jointly authored book titled *Ecofeminism*, Maria Mies, a German sociology professor, and Vandana Shiva, an Indian environmental activist, engage in a collaborative exploration of the ecofeminist theory. The foreword section of their book commences with a central theme of ecofeminism. Both authors argue that ecofeminism serves as a bridge connecting feminism with the realm of nature and the natural world. They assert:

The word 'ecofeminism' might be new, but the pulse behind it has always driven women's efforts to save their livelihood and make their communities safe. From the Chipko forest dwellers of North India some 300 years ago to the mothers of coalmining Appalachia right now, the struggle to create life-affirming societies goes on. (3)

Mies and Shiva assert that ecofeminism has consistently inspired and energized women to actively engage in the enduring preservation and conservation of the entire environment. They contend that these efforts have contributed to the development of healthier societies. The authors emphasize that women's initiatives aimed at safeguarding forests, in particular, have played a pivotal role in maintaining their ways of life and overall well-being. Their deep affection and involvement in various environmental movements worldwide have, over time, given rise to numerous nature-friendly societies. These societies, in turn, hold the

potential to ensure prolonged sustainability and an extended life expectancy for their inhabitants

The term 'ecofeminisme' (ecofeminism) was originally coined by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Feminisme ou la mort* (Feminism or Death), which she wrote in 1980 but was published in 1974. In a research article published in *The International Journal of Literary Humanities*, Danielle Roth-Johnson notes, "In 1974, she authored 'Le Feminisme ou la mort' (Feminism or Death), the first work in which she introduces the term ecofeminism to discuss how society's disregard for women is akin to its disrespect for the environment" (5). Prominent instances of the direct impact of ecofeminism on global environmental initiatives include the Green Belt Movement of 1977 initiated by Wangari Maathai in Africa, and the Chipko Movement of 1973 spearheaded by Vandana Shiva in India. These environmentally conscious endeavors represent compelling examples of worldwide movements increasingly recognized under the banner of 'ecofeminism.' These movements are dedicated to the preservation and sustenance of life on Earth.

The term 'ecofeminism' combines two significant viewpoints: ecology and women. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary tenth edition*, "Ecofeminism is defined as a philosophical and political theory and movement which combines ecological concerns with feminist ones, regarding both as resulting from male domination of society" (485). This definition suggests that both ecological concerns and feminist movements have emerged as a consequence of a male-dominated society. It underscores the philosophical and political aspects that have motivated women to become more aware of the shared experiences of suppression affecting both the natural world and women. Their heightened consciousness regarding this mutual oppression serves to maintain a balance between human

existence and ecological sustainability over the long term

Karen J. Warren, an American ecofeminist, endorses the concept of ecofeminism by acknowledging that “According to ecofeminists, trees, water, animals, toxics, and nature language are feminist issues because understanding them helps one understand the status and plight of women cross-culturally” (4). Warren concedes that a significant portion of ecofeminists consider all-natural elements as integral to feminism. This perspective sheds light on the status of women, linking them to cultural values and practices.

Susan Griffin, an American radical feminist philosopher, delves into the connection between women and the Earth. She portrays women as both a source of sustenance for humanity and as victims of male anger and violence. Griffin draws parallels between women and nature, asserting that there exists a mutual relationship between them. She argues; “We are woman and nature” (6). In this statement, she acknowledges that there is equality between nature and women for several reasons, primarily because they share a mutual experience of being subjugated or dominated in certain respects.

Vandana Shiva asserts; "Ecofeminism is not just about saving the planet; it's about creating a more just and equitable world for all beings" (87). By this statement, she reinforces the idea of equality and justice especially for women. It is women she means to elevate unprivileged women in the male-dominated society. She further, says that diversity creates harmony, and harmony creates beauty, balance, and peace in nature and society. Also, it applies to the domains of agriculture, science, and politics. So, diversity is the key to such an egalitarian society where everyone can live with an idea of acceptance of other's existence. She argues that human beings have to share this planet which is our home, with millions of other species that have an equal

right to live here with us. This is how we can create justice and sustainability, and both of these demand that we do not use more resources than we need.(Shiva 50)

More importantly, empowerment through Nature, and planting a garden represents a connection with nature, which has historically been associated with femininity and the nurturing qualities of women. By taking on this initiative, Michelle Obama is harnessing the power of nature to convey important messages about health, well-being, and sustainability. It's a way of embracing her role as a woman in a position of influence and using it to promote positive change:

Planting a garden at the White House was my response to this problem, and I hoped it would signal the start of something bigger. Barack's administration was focused on improving access to affordable health care, and for me the garden was a way to offer a parallel message about healthy living. I saw it as an early test, a trial run that could help me determine what I might be able to accomplish as First Lady, a literal way to root myself in this new job. (264)

Michelle Obama's decision to plant a garden at the White House can be seen as a symbolic and practical way to establish a relationship between women and nature, reflecting her personal values and her role as First Lady of the United States. Obama's garden is not just about growing vegetables; it's also about promoting healthy living. In this context, nature represents the source of nourishment and vitality. By growing fresh, organic produce at the White House, she is sending a message about the importance of wholesome, natural foods and their role in a healthy lifestyle. This resonates with the idea that women often play a central role in family nutrition and well-being.

Similarly, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva perceive the connection between nature and women as having benevolent and nurturing qualities. Both authors

acknowledge that nature and women possess a kind and caring disposition. They see nature and women as life-affirming forces that bring everything into existence. These scholars believe that women's efforts to protect nature have provided them with opportunities to live in healthy and prosperous communities. They argue that while the term "ecofeminism" may be relatively recent, the underlying spirit of women striving to safeguard their livelihoods and create secure communities has always been present. This underscores that ecofeminism has consistently supported women in living within safe communities.

The garden also carries metaphorical significance. Just as she tends to the garden, Michelle Obama is also nurturing her role as First Lady and her influence within the White House. It's a way for her to find her place and purpose in this new position, much like a plant takes root and grows over time. Michelle Obama's garden can be seen as a symbol of environmental stewardship. Women, historically and in many cultures, have been associated with caretaking and nurturing. By caring for the garden, she is promoting the idea that women, like nature itself, have a vital role in caring for the planet and ensuring its sustainability for future generations.

In essence, Michelle Obama's decision to plant a garden at the White House goes beyond mere horticulture; it's a statement about her relationship with nature and how that relationship can be leveraged to address important issues, promote healthy living, and empower women in leadership roles. It serves as a tangible representation of her values and aspirations as First Lady and as a woman in a position of influence. Additionally, Mies and Shiva clarify how the establishment of safe communities is achievable and emphasize, "From the historical Chipko forest protectors in North India some three centuries ago to the present-day mothers in coalmining Appalachia, the struggle to build a society that affirms life continues"(219). They justify that

women's collective engagement in nature conservation efforts has brought about a new way of life for many societies. They believe that women's environmentally friendly behavior has the potential to transform the world into an eco-friendly common home for all individuals. They place their trust in the idea that nurturing nature is equivalent to nurturing our global environment.

The critic of ecofeminism, Susan Griffin explores an important theoretical insight through her book, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*. Griffin asserts that women are inherently intertwined with nature, essentially constituting an integral aspect of it. She contends that women not only exist within the realm of nature but are, in fact, inseparable parts of it. She strongly expresses; “We are Women. We rise from the wave. We are gazelle and doe, elephant and whale, lilies and roses and peach, we are air, we are flame, we are oyster and pearl, we are girls. We are women and nature” (6). Indeed, she intends to connect women with nature in the sense that both can produce and are able to give continuity to generations of living beings.

Ynestra King says that the intersection of feminism and environmentalism reveals the interconnectedness of all forms of oppression and the need for holistic solutions. Acknowledging nature and women being oppressed, she suggests looking for a long-term solution to tackle it. In the spirit of her motif, Obama refers to the idea that history has never told men anything different, meaning that history hasn't challenged their perceived superiority. This aspect can be connected to broader historical patterns of racial discrimination and sexism. Throughout history, certain racial and gender groups have been privileged and have held positions of power, while others have been marginalized. She mentions:

I tried not to feel intimidated when classroom conversation was dominated by male students, which it often was. Hearing them, I realized that they weren't at

all smarter than the rest of us. They were simply emboldened, floating on an ancient tide of superiority, buoyed by the fact that history had never told them anything different. (69)

Obama unfolds a racially prejudice moment where male students dominate classroom conversations, suggesting that their voices are more frequently heard and respected.

In the context of race, it's important to recognize that this dynamic can intersect with racial privilege. White males, for example, may experience more privilege and have their voices more readily acknowledged than individuals who are not white or not male. She also speaks of the confidence and sense of entitlement displayed by some male students. This confidence may be linked to their perception of superiority, which can be influenced by societal structures that have historically favored white males.

It's not necessarily that these individuals are inherently smarter, but they may feel more emboldened because they have rarely been challenged or confronted with different perspectives due to their race and gender. The text mentions classroom conversation, which highlights the role of education in addressing these issues. Education can serve as a platform for challenging historical biases and encouraging more inclusive and equitable dialogue. It can also empower individuals, including those from marginalized racial and gender backgrounds, to speak up and assert their perspectives. In this context, according to Rosemary Radford Ruether, ecofeminism is the radical notion that the oppression of women and the exploitation of the environment are intimately connected. This explicitly indicates that there is a close relationship between nature and women. In one way or another, they are exploited in the male-dominated world.

Karen Warren, as an ecofeminist, puts her view regarding women and nature in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, and Nature*. According to her thought, ecofeminism calls for a shift from a patriarchal worldview of dominance and exploitation to one of partnership and respect for both women and nature. The critic underscores the idea that women and nature are long been manipulated by the males, which she exerts to end this tendency as it is unjust to them. Hence, the author somehow attempts to demand equal treatment and dignity for women and nature because both women and nature are part and parcel of society and mankind. Obama reveals how women suffer in societies and families. In essence, she draws attention to the ongoing struggles that many women encounter and the need for societal change to address these injustices. The writer shares her experience in this way:

Women endure entire lifetimes of these indignities—in the form of catcalls, groping, assault, oppression. These things injure us. They sap our strength. Some of the cuts are so small they're barely visible. Others are huge and gaping, leaving scars that never heal. Either way, they accumulate. We carry them everywhere, to and from school and work, at home while raising our children, at our places of worship, anytime we try to advance. (326)

This passage highlights the enduring hardships that women face throughout their lives, including instances of harassment, assault, and oppression. It emphasizes how these experiences, whether minor or severe, have a cumulative and damaging effect on women's well-being, sapping their strength and leaving emotional scars. The message underscores the pervasive nature of these challenges, impacting women in various aspects of their lives, from education and work to their roles as caregivers and even in their places of worship. Furthermore, Karen J. Warren claims; “. . . nonhuman nature and naturism are feminist issues” (4). The point she wants to make here is

simple and clear. She argues that nature and women share the same kind of fate laden by unjust patriarchal norms and values. In this sense, both of them are a single entity and they have to be viewed holistically.

The critic of ecofeminist, Ariel Salleh in her work, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx, and the Postmodern* mentions that ecofeminism is a call to action. She is urging us to embrace a more balanced and sustainable way of living that respects the rights and dignity of all beings." (Salleh, 249). The time to take action has already been delayed. She urges people to follow sustainable methods when it comes to the development of all beings. She unabashedly asks all the stakeholders for equal respect for women and nature. In one moment, Obama clearly exposes herself and tries her best to make us understand why we need to accept other people's existence, and in many ways, their importance in our lives. She pens:

For every door that's been opened to me, I've tried to open my door to others. And here is what I have to say, finally: Let's invite one another in. Maybe then we can begin to fear less, to make fewer wrong assumptions, to let go of the biases and stereotypes that unnecessarily divide us. Maybe we can better embrace the ways we are the same. It's not about being perfect. It's not about where you get yourself in the end. There's power in allowing yourself to be known and heard, in owning your unique story, in using your authentic voice. And there's grace in being willing to know and hear others. This, for me, is how we become. (334)

The passage emphasizes the importance of open communication, empathy, and mutual understanding. It encourages people to reciprocate the opportunities they've received by welcoming others into their lives. By doing so, it suggests that we can reduce fear, minimize assumptions, and overcome biases that often divide us. The

focus is on recognizing our shared humanity rather than striving for perfection or specific outcomes. It highlights the power of being authentic, both in sharing our own stories and listening to others. Ultimately, the message is that genuine connection and empathy are the keys to personal and collective growth.

An American ecofeminist, Greta Gaard in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, writes; "Ecofeminism reminds us that the earth is not a resource to be exploited but a community to which we belong"(271). She reveals the fact that men have come closer to using up natural gifts. So, all the creatures living on Earth deserve to consume the treasures equally and we have to save them for the future existence of the planet itself. It is the women who only can achieve this because they are closer to nature in many respects. Gaard discusses ecofeminism in the context of men's arrogant behavior towards both nature and women. She uses distinct terms to describe men as having "privileged" or "developed" status while characterizing nature and women as "oppressed" and "undeveloped." Gaard categorizes the connection between men and nature-women into two distinct groups and treats them as opposing categories. Numerous textual examples align with and support Gaard's argument. Obama reflects her strong conviction in the importance of speaking out against bullies and divisive rhetoric, as exemplified by a particular political figure. In her book, she puts it this way;

Since childhood, I'd believed it was important to speak out against bullies while also not stooping to their level. And to be clear, we were now up against a bully, a man who among other things demeaned minorities and expressed contempt for prisoners of war, challenging the dignity of our country with practically his every utterance. I wanted Americans to understand that words matter—that the hateful language they heard coming from their TVs did not

reflect the true spirit of our country and that we could vote against it. It was dignity I wanted to make an appeal for—the idea that as a nation we might hold on to the core thing that had sustained my family, going back generations. (326)

The author emphasizes the significance of upholding dignity, both as individuals and as a nation, in the face of hateful language and actions. The goal is to remind Americans that the values they cherish should guide their actions, particularly at the ballot box. The phrase "When they go low, we go high" encapsulates the idea that responding to negativity with dignity and integrity is not always easy, but it is an honorable and principled choice. It's a call for people to rise above the divisive discourse and maintain the core values that have sustained the country for generations, ultimately advocating for a more respectful and dignified political discourse.

In *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, Winona LaDuke argues that women are often at the forefront of the environmental justice movement. They play pivotal roles in defending their local communities and the planet from exploitation and environmental harm because of their strong connection to the environment. Women, who bear the brunt of environmental degradation, are caregivers and nurturers in their communities and keenly aware of the impact of environmental injustices on their families. As a result, they are resilient advocates for sustainability and hold industries and governments accountable. Women's dedication to environmental justice highlights their essential role in protecting our planet for future generations. The author, Michelle Obama, reflects on her experience of coexisting with her husband Barack Obama's strong sense of purpose within the family sphere. She describes how Barack's unwavering confidence and his belief in

his ability to make a positive impact on the world were admirable qualities. However, she also acknowledges the challenges of living with such a strong sense of purpose.

She discloses:

When it came to the home-for-dinner dilemma, I installed new boundaries, ones that worked better for me and the girls. We made our schedule and stuck to it. ...It went back to my wishes for them to grow up strong and centered and also unaccommodating to any form of old-school patriarchy: I didn't want them ever to believe that life began when the man of the house arrived home. We didn't wait for Dad. It was his job now to catch up with us. (151)

Within the family sphere, this dynamic can be seen as a common experience in households where one member has a particularly clear and passionate life mission or career focus. In Michelle's case, she had to adjust to living with someone whose sense of purpose was so vivid and all-encompassing that it unintentionally posed a challenge to her own sense of purpose and self-confidence. This situation can lead to feelings of being overshadowed or struggling to find one's own path in the shadow of a partner's intense dedication. In many families, balancing individual aspirations and family life can be complex. It requires open communication, mutual support, and a willingness to adapt to each other's goals and needs. Michelle's candid reflection highlights the importance of maintaining a sense of self and purpose within the family sphere while also being supportive of and inspired by each other's ambitions.

Marti Kheel, in *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective*, opines; "Ecofeminism recognizes that the exploitation of nature mirrors the oppression of women, and both must be addressed to achieve true liberation" (97). It clearly exposes the subjugated women in the patriarchal society. Women and nature have been adversely misused for man's advantage. By and large, women are deprived of freedom

and rights whereas natural resources are commercially produced in such an amount that they will be used up near future. However, this pressing issue must be resolved in order to create a harmonious relationship between man, woman, and nature. In other words, it is all the existence that ecofeminists demand in a society on the same foot regardless of their gender.

Regarding gender discrimination, Michelle Obama discusses a landmark Supreme Court decision that affirmed the right of same-sex couples to marry in all fifty states of the United States. While this decision primarily focuses on the rights of same-sex couples and marriage equality, it has broader implications for the broader LGBTQ+ community, including those who identify as non-binary or as part of a third gender. The Supreme Court's decision to recognize the right to same-sex marriage acknowledges and respects the diverse identities within the LGBTQ+ community, including those who do not conform to a traditional binary gender system.

This recognition is an important step towards understanding and validating the existence and rights of individuals who identify as non-binary or part of a third gender. Similarly, the decision promotes inclusivity and equality under the law, not just for same-sex couples but for all individuals within the LGBTQ+ spectrum. It reinforces the principle that everyone should be treated equally and have the same legal rights, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. In retrospect, like many civil rights struggles, the battle for LGBTQ+ rights, including recognition and acceptance of third genders, has been ongoing and methodical. It often involves legal battles, education, and activism over many years. The mention of decades of effort underscores the historical context and the importance of perseverance in achieving rights for marginalized communities.

As per Michelle Obama, the process of becoming is portrayed as an ongoing and dynamic journey rather than a static destination or a fixed achievement. She states; "For me, becoming isn't about arriving somewhere or achieving a certain aim. I see it instead as forward motion, a means of evolving, a way to reach continuously toward a better self. The journey doesn't end" (333). It's not about reaching a specific endpoint or accomplishing a particular goal; instead, it's about constant forward movement and personal growth. It's a continuous effort to become a better version of oneself, an ever-evolving process that doesn't have a final conclusion. This viewpoint reminds us that personal development is a lifelong endeavor, and the quest for self-improvement is a journey with no predetermined end, emphasizing the importance of embracing change and growth throughout one's life.

The author highlights the damaging nature of stereotypes, specifically the stereotype of the "angry black woman." It points out that stereotypes can function as a self-fulfilling prophecy, trapping individuals in a cycle of expectations and biases. She says; "It's remarkable how a stereotype functions as an actual trap. How many "angry black women" have been caught in the circular logic of that phrase? When you aren't being listened to, why wouldn't you get louder? If you're written off as angry or emotional, doesn't that just cause more of the same? (235). The author suggests that when people of a certain racial or gender group are not being heard or taken seriously, they may understandably become more vocal or assertive to make their voices heard. However, this assertiveness can then be misinterpreted or used to reinforce the stereotype, labeling them as "angry" or "emotional." This, in turn, can perpetuate the cycle of not being listened to, as people are more likely to dismiss or disregard individuals they perceive as "angry."

In conclusion, this research paper has demonstrated that *Becoming* has served as a powerful narrative of co-existence. Through the insightful exploration of ecofeminist theories proposed by eminent scholars like Greta Gaard, Maria Mies, and Vandana Shiva, it is unveiled the nuanced ways in which Michelle Obama's personal story embodies these principles. Throughout *Becoming*, it has become evident that Michelle Obama's commitment to addressing pressing societal and environmental issues is deeply rooted in her experiences as a woman of color.

Her advocacy for community engagement, sustainable living, and access to education reflects a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of social and environmental challenges. Her tenure as First Lady further underscores her alignment with ecofeminist ideals, as evidenced by her initiatives promoting healthy living, education, and community empowerment. Furthermore, Obama's global influence as a public figure has enabled her to amplify ecofeminist ideas and principles on a broader scale, inspiring change and fostering crucial dialogues on coexistence. Her personal narrative serves as a powerful testament to the potential for individuals to effect positive change, bridging the gap between gender and environmental issues.

In essence, Michelle Obama's *Becoming* offers not only a captivating personal story but also a significant contribution to the broader discourse on coexistence and the pursuit of a more equitable and sustainable world. Her journey, as illuminated through the ecofeminist perspective, encourages us to recognize the inseparable links between gender equity, environmental justice, and social progress. It serves as a compelling reminder of the vital role that women, particularly women of color, play in shaping a future characterized by coexistence, harmony, and shared well-being. So, this research paper has showcased how her life journey and experiences align with

key ecofeminist principles, emphasizing the intricate interplay between gender equality, environmental sustainability, and social justice.

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