



Feminist Ecopolitics And Resistance Narratives In N.K. Jemisin's The Broken Earth Trilogy

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Abstract

This paper analyzes N.K. Jemisin's Broken Earth trilogy as a feminist ecopolitical allegory that links environmental injustice to systemic oppression. Drawing on ecofeminist theory, postcolonial critique, and narrative analysis, the study explores how Jemisin's depiction of the Anthropocene foregrounds the intertwined exploitation of the Earth and marginalized bodies, particularly women and orogenes. The Sanzed Empire's extractive systems mirror real-world structures of capitalism, colonialism, and racial hierarchy, while the trilogy's resistance movements center care, reciprocity, and community-based governance. Through narrative strategies such as second-person perspective and the reimagining of the Earth as an active political subject, Jemisin reframes liberation as ecological as well as social. The analysis argues that the trilogy's vision resonates with contemporary climate justice movements, calling for the dismantling of intersecting systems of domination and the cultivation of sustainable, reciprocal relationships with the planet.

Keywords: Feminist Ecopolitics, Environmental justice, Political allegory, Anthropocene, Ecofeminism, Climate justice, Postcolonial critique, Speculative fiction Resistance, Narrative perspective

Introduction

Early in The Fifth Season, the narrator warns, "This is the way the world ends... for the last time" (Jemisin 7). The words are both prophecy and indictment, framing a world devastated not by a single disaster but by centuries of exploitation of the Earth and of those who can manipulate it. N.K. Jemisin's Broken Earth trilogy is more than a fantasy epic; it is a carefully constructed political allegory that entwines environmental collapse, systemic oppression, and the fight for liberation. At its heart lies a distinctly feminist ecopolitical vision one that refuses to separate the exploitation of the planet from the exploitation of marginalized bodies, particularly women and orogenes. As Ferrández-San Miguel argues, Jemisin "entangles the anthropogenic condition with experiences of oppression and trauma" (162), making ecological crisis inseparable from the hierarchies of race, gender, and power. This paper examines how Jemisin integrates feminist ecopolitics into her narrative to depict resistance as both political rebellion and the reclamation of ecological harmony, drawing on ecofeminist theory, postcolonial

critique, and narrative analysis to reveal the trilogy's enduring relevance to real-world struggles for environmental justice.

Feminist Ecopolitics and the Anthropocene

Ecofeminist theory insists that the domination of women and the domination of nature are linked through patriarchal, capitalist systems (Shiva 13). Jemisin's *Stillness* is a world that embodies this dual exploitation: seismic instability mirrors the fragility of its social order, while the ruling Sanzed Empire treats both the land and orogenes as resources to be managed, contained, and extracted from. Essun, the central protagonist, experiences this connection viscerally. As an orogene, she can sense "the endless, restless anger of the earth beneath" (Jemisin, *The Fifth Season* 102), an anger that mirrors her own life under constant surveillance and threat.

Ferrández-San Miguel notes that Jemisin's fiction "projects the Anthropocene as an inherently intersectional condition" (165), where environmental catastrophe is inseparable from histories of enslavement and racialized violence. This aligns with Vandana Shiva's ecofeminist critique, which views ecological collapse as a byproduct of the same systems that enforce gender and racial hierarchies. The trilogy refuses to present environmental crisis as a neutral, apolitical force; instead, it is deeply bound to human social structures, making resistance to one inseparable from resistance to the other.

Systemic Oppression: Capitalism, Colonialism, and Extraction

The Sanzed Empire's treatment of orogenes functions as a direct allegory for the exploitation inherent in capitalism and colonialism. Orogenes are trained from childhood in the Fulcrum, stripped of autonomy, and deployed as living tools to stabilize the *Stillness*'s volatile geology. Harris Satkunanathan identifies this as a "Plantationocene" framework, in which human and environmental exploitation are mutually reinforcing (112). The *Stillness* depends on this system to maintain its cities—just as modern economies depend on extractive industries that both degrade the planet and exploit marginalized labor forces.

Jemisin draws attention to the way these systems rewrite history to justify their existence. In *The Obelisk Gate*, Alabaster warns Essun, "They'll tell you anything to make you serve them. They'll make you forget you ever had another choice" (146). This manipulation echoes real-world colonial narratives that cast imperialism as civilization-building, erasing the histories of those exploited in the process. By embedding this dynamic into her worldbuilding, Jemisin forces readers to confront the ideological foundations of environmental injustice.

Grief and the Politics of Care as Resistance

While Jemisin's world is harsh and often violent, her vision of resistance is grounded not only in rebellion but in care. Springer's analysis of grief in speculative fiction suggests that mourning can become "a catalyst for reimagining political futures" (214). For Essun, grief is omnipresent—over her lost son, her fractured relationship with Nassun, and the collapse of familiar ways of life. Yet it is through grief that she forms bonds with the Castrima community, where survival depends on cooperation and mutual aid.

In Castrima, power is shared, and leadership emerges from dialogue rather than coercion. This mirrors feminist ecopolitical thought, which values interdependence and community-based governance over hierarchical control. As Essun reflects, "You can't fix a broken world alone" (Jemisin, *The Stone Sky* 287). These moments of collective care contrast sharply with the extractive logic of the Sanzed Empire, offering an alternative vision of how humans might live in balance with the Earth and with each other.

Narrative Form as a Tool of Resistance

Jemisin's use of second-person narration in Essun's storyline is more than a stylistic experiment; it is a political act. Greene argues that this narrative mode "forces the reader into complicity and intimacy" with the protagonist's trauma (89), making systemic oppression impossible to view from a safe, detached distance. When the narrator addresses Essun as "you," the reader is implicated in her experiences of fear, rage, and resilience.

This technique mirrors the way marginalized communities reclaim storytelling as a form of agency. By refusing the traditional third-person omniscience often found in epic fantasy, Jemisin centers the subjective, lived experience of the oppressed. The very structure of the trilogy thus becomes an act of resistance, asserting that whose story gets told and how it is told is a matter of political urgency.

Reimagining Earth and Agency

Perhaps Jemisin's boldest intervention in ecofeminist thought is her reimagining of the Earth itself as a political subject. In the trilogy, Father Earth is not a passive backdrop but an active agent with grievances, capable of both vengeance and reconciliation. As the PMLA "Anthropocene Fantasy" article notes, this portrayal "dismantles the human-nature binary, making the Earth a co-participant in political struggle" (73).

Nassun's decision at the trilogy's climax to heal rather than destroy reflects a shift from domination to reciprocity. She realizes that "the Earth doesn't hate us; it's just tired of being hurt" (Jemisin, *The Stone Sky* 356). This resolution embodies ecofeminist calls to move beyond exploitative relationships with the environment, toward partnerships that recognize the agency of all life systems.

Conclusion

In *The Broken Earth* trilogy, Jemisin fuses feminist ecopolitics, political allegory, and speculative worldbuilding to craft a narrative in which environmental and social justice are inseparable. By portraying systemic oppression as both ecological and human, and resistance as both communal and planetary, she challenges readers to rethink what liberation truly entails. Her work resonates with contemporary climate justice movements, which likewise demand the dismantling of intertwined systems of exploitation. Ultimately, Jemisin's vision suggests that survival depends not only on overthrowing oppressive powers but also on learning to live differently with each other, and with the Earth itself.

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