CHAPTER 5

ECOLOGIES OF BLACK WOMANHOOD: A COMPARATIVE ECOFEMINIST READING OF TONI MORRISON'S *TAR BABY* AND ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE*

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Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the interrelated dynamics of patriarchal oppression, the racial marginalization of women, and the exploitation of the nonhuman world, using an ecofeminist comparative approach to analyze Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* (1981) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). Many theorists and scholars have described ecofeminism as a means of identifying and analyzing the interconnected historical, material, and conceptual structures that dominate women and nature (Mies & Shiva, 2014: 14; Zein & Setiawan, 2017: 2). At the beginning stages of ecofeminism, Western capitalist patriarchy was supported by an array of dualistic thinking, culture, nature, mind, body, subject and object, to substantiate that all subjugation should apply to both human and nonhuman bodies (Avcil, 2021: 941; Merchant, 2005: 194). The traditional ecofeminist models have been criticized for their failure to adequately represent the intersectionality unique to Black women who have experienced both gender and ecological oppression as a result of slavery, colonization, and ongoing racial discrimination (Power, 2020: 73). Therefore, an ecofeminist analysis must involve multiple species as well as multiple forms of oppression to provide a thorough explanation of how African American women interact with their social and physical environments. The central research question in this study concerns Morrison and Walker's portrayals of the relationship between the natural environment and their Black female protagonists. It seeks to answer the question, "How do Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* and Alice Walker's

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The Color Purple use the non-human world and ecological relationships to express postcolonial resistance, spiritual healing, and self-actualization in the face of intersectional oppression towards women?

Both novels contribute distinct and overarching ecocritical concepts of Black womanhood. *Tar Baby* removes Morrison from anthropocentric stories and gives the environment the status of a postcolonial protest entity (Wardi, 2011: 1). The environment and animals at Isle des Chevaliers, Avenue des Fleurs represent a political, activist realm and bear witness to the suffering colonialism inflicted on the land and animals (Morrison, 2004: 9). Finally, Morrison uses Jadine's cultural disconnect from her roots, as well as the colonial division of both land and people, to demonstrate the parallel between them (Al-Halbosy, 2019: 145). In contrast, in *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker provides an eco-feminist perspective toward the natural world and incorporates concepts of spiritual healing and reciprocal responsibility. The transformation of Celie from a person abused without a voice into an empowered agent is profoundly tied to her change in perception of God, whom she now sees as present in the natural world (135). Literary ecofeminism therefore provides a transformative place through which both the healing of one's own self and the healing of the earth can occur together. This chapter uses comparative analysis to demonstrate that both Morrison and Walker have dismantled patriarchal, anthropocentric structures and offered insight into Black women's ability to act for themselves within their relationship with the more-than-human world.

Ecofeminism: Theoretical Perspectives

Ecofeminism originated in the 1970s as an important interdisciplinary approach that fused feminist theory with ecological ideas. Ecofeminist theorists posit that the oppression of women and the destruction of the environment should be connected; they are linked to patriarchy, which values domination, hierarchy, and control, as opposed to valuing partnership, diversity, and interconnectedness. Françoise d'Eaubonne was the first person to use the term "ecofeminism". She coined the term in her book, *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974), in which she discussed how environmental degradation and the subjugation of women go hand-in-hand, both occurring because of patriarchal civilization. What began as simply a political movement has now developed into a complex theoretical model used within areas such as

philosophy, ethics, literary criticism, environmental justice, postcolonial studies, and cultural analysis. According to Karen Warren, ecofeminism is not just a philosophy but a collection of different ones. The main thing they all have in common is that they see the oppression of people and nature simultaneously through similar forms of domination (Warren 1997: xi-xiii).

Environmentalism focuses on preserving nature, while traditional environmentalism focuses on social issues as part of environmental destruction. Ecofeminists demonstrate that the same conceptual frameworks that enable sexism also enable racism, colonialism, speciesism, and environmental destruction. This logic of domination, developed by Warren, includes binary opposites such as male/female, culture/nature, reason/emotion, and human/nonhuman. As ecofeminists argue, this concept of hierarchy among binary opposites legitimizes systems of political, economic, and ecological oppression. (Warren, 1997: 11–18).

One of the most important theoretical contributions of ecofeminism is ecofeminist criticisms of hierarchical dualism. Traditional modern Western philosophy has assumed masculinity to represent rationality, culture, objectivity, civilization, and associated femininity with emotion, the body, reproduction, and nature. Ecofeminists argue that centuries of oppression against women have been justified by binary oppositions as well as centuries of exploitation of natural systems. According to Greta Gaard, patriarchal systems are founded on interconnected systems of oppression. They therefore cannot be separated from environmental exploitation, gender inequality, racial oppression, economic oppression, heterosexism, and colonial violence. Therefore, the ecofeminist movement supports intersectional analyses that reveal multiple forms of domination rather than focusing solely on environmental issues. (Gaard 2017: xiii-xviii)

Both Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva expand on the critique noted above by looking at how the development of capitalist systems, the scientific reductionism accompanying modern science, and globalization further reinforce patriarchal relations between humanity and nature. Mies and Shiva (2014) assert that modern science, although it purports to be objective and universal, reduces nature to mere raw materials for exploitation. The mechanistic worldview emerged during the Scientific Revolution, replacing organic worldviews of the earth with mechanical metaphors of nature as dead

and inanimate, waiting to be manipulated by humanity. They believe this shift in worldview also changed how women were perceived; formerly, males valued reproductive and ecological knowledge and subsistence practices, but within capitalist economies, women have progressively lost their value due to industrial and capitalist processes. They argue that what seems like progress in production often leads to greater inequality through the commodification of natural resources and women's labor. This combines to create a very rapid loss of local ecological systems necessary for communities' survival (Mies & Shiva, 2014: 1-18).

In the context of ecofeminist theory, one of the main goals is to question traditional definitions of development. Most common models of development primarily focus on economic growth, technological advances, and market productivity, without a corresponding focus on ecological sustainability or social justice. Jytte Nhanenge (2011) has stated that none of the contemporary global problems, including environmental degradation, poverty, militarization, and violations of human rights, exist independently of the others, as they all stem from a common reductionist view of the world that places a strong emphasis on competitiveness, domination, and unlimited growth. Nhanenge contends, drawing on the same concept of ecofeminism, that sustainable societies must be built on an alternative paradigm grounded in cooperation and interdependence, valuing ecological balance over exploitation. Also, in this paradigm, the transformation of society will not only involve the creation of new economic systems. However, it will also challenge the current philosophical ideas that shape how humans relate to other humans, non-human life forms, and the environment.

Environmental ethics characterizes ecofeminism. Conventional ethical theories assign moral worth solely to rational humans and do not consider other animals, ecosystems, or future human beings. Ecofeminist approaches oppose this anthropocentric perspective by advocating relational ethics grounded in care, relationship, interdependence, and reciprocity. In place of abstract, universal, and generic principles that are completely detached from life itself, ecofeminist ethics values empathy, contextual knowledge, and responsibility to both human and non-human communities. Warren therefore contends that ethical decision-making must account for relationships of care while also dissociating from oppressive social systems that promote dominance. Through the use of such a paradigm in ethical decision-making,

environmental responsibility is expanded beyond just conservation to include gender equity, racial justice, and economic justice (Warren, 1997: 3–20).

Ecofeminists hold many different ideas, and as a result, there are several theories of ecofeminism. The two primary are cultural and social. According to cultural ecofeminist theorists, women have a spiritual and symbolic connection with nature through Indigenous traditions, ecological spirituality, and maternal culture. Social and material ecofeminists, in contrast to essentialist social theories, reject the essentialization of women as having a natural connection to nature. They believe that women have suffered similar patterns of oppression to that of the natural world because of our collective (historical/political/economic) conditions of oppression. Critical ecofeminists seek to unite the two schools of ecofeminism by emphasizing intersectionality and rejecting biological determinism. According to Gaard, "Ecofeminism, as a contemporary movement, must constantly question its beliefs regarding gender, sexuality, race, disability and colonialism if the movement wants to continue being relevant politically in the 21st century." (Gaard, 2017: 3–24).

Recent developments in ecofeminism have expanded through conversations with posthumanism, animal studies, disability studies, queer theory, and environmental humanities. Douglas Vakoch argues that the new global interdisciplinary form of ecofeminism has become a framework for addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental racism, as well as literary depictions of ecological disasters; it no longer functions as a feminist-based environmental philosophy. As ecofeminists draw on many cultural traditions and intersectional approaches, they continue to confront anthropocentric and patriarchal ideas and propose inclusive ways of relating humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems (Vakoch, 2023: 1-8).

Ecofeminism advanced philosophically through Karen Warren's illustrations of a systematic framework of dominance. The exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are not accidental and unrelated, according to Warren; however, Warren believes the two occurrences are upheld through interconnected frameworks designed to make hierarchy normal and also to rationalize oppression. Her argument for the logic of dominance relies on how the logic of dominance formulates two differentiated categories of values to make the ultimate subjugation of ultimately subordinate categories logical, rational, and morally justified by creating a

distinction between dominance and subordination. Dualisms of reason and emotion, culture and nature, mind and body, male and female, as well as human and animal, serve not simply to distinguish between two categorical classes, but also function to establish the superiority of one over the other. As such, Ecofeminism aims not only to invert these hierarchies but also to deconstruct their conceptual foundations (Karen Warren, 1997: 3-18).

Val Plumwood expands this argument by showing that anthropocentrism and androcentrism operate in almost identical ways in philosophy. To illustrate this point, she claims that Western rationalism has historically been used to place humans above nature, much as men have historically been placed above women. This, then, leads to a dualistic worldview which depicts nature as purely a passive object for human consumption, while also conveniently reducing women to mere bodies connected with reproduction, emotions, and domestic life. Within this framework, Plumwood argues, the environmental crisis will not be resolved until this dualistic concept of identity is replaced by a relational concept of identity that recognizes that all living beings rely on one another. Moreover, rather than viewing humans as separate from nature, ecofeminists hold that humans are ecological beings and that their survival depends on maintaining a reciprocal relationship with the natural world. (Plumwood, 1997: 327-355).

This relational worldview helps set ecofeminism apart from most other previous environmental philosophies. Deep ecology promotes the concept of intrinsic value for all forms of life as a means of advocating against anthropocentrism. Ecofeminists argue that social inequalities must be considered within environmental ethics. Greta Gaard argues that ecological sustainability can not be achieved until we can eliminate all forms of sexism, racism, colonialism, class oppression, heterosexism, and speciesism. For these reasons, you will find now that the majority of ecological feminisms are adopting the methodological standard of intersectionality. Intersectional ecofeminism is not limited to seeing gender as an isolated experience, but how all forms of oppression interact with each other in creating environmental injustices for an individual. Women of color, indigenous people, economically marginalized people, and non-human animals all experience multiple systems of control that cannot be understood through individual axes (as said by Gaard, 2017: 3–25)

The new emergence of critical ecofeminism has been marked by the growth of critical theory within this discipline. Critical ecofeminism rejects biological determinism, unlike earlier ecofeminist literature that often faced criticism for emphasizing essential connections between women and nature. However, critical ecofeminism retains the ethical foundations of ecofeminism, including an emphasis on justice. Contemporary ecofeminism must be self-critical so that the different races, sexual orientations, nationalities, disabilities, and classes within the feminist movements will all be recognized (Gaard, 2017: xiii–xviii, 3–24). Such reflexivity will allow ecofeminism to respond more effectively to ongoing environmental crises while avoiding the replication of the exclusions it is working hard to overcome.

Another significant advance in this theory is eco-feminist thinking as it relates to globalization; Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen contend that globalization has increased the destruction of the earth by transnational systems of production and consumption and that many women, First Nations, and people experiencing poverty pay an unfair share of this destruction. Global capitalism increasingly commodifies forests, rivers, fields, and biodiverse ecosystems while silencing local epistemologies historically associated with sustainable use and management of natural resources. Consequently, ecofeminist organizations object to development policies that promote economic growth at the expense of ecological justice. As a result, they endorse new models based on four principles (Eaton & Lorentzen, 2003: 1–12).

Both Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva address globalization by highlighting its costs and negative effects on both the environment and women. In particular, they claim that capitalist patriarchy has constructed nature as ultimately being a collection of natural resources that is ultimately limitless, and that women's work (i.e., the reproduction of life/generation of subsistence) has been rendered invisible in economic terms. Industrial agriculture, biotechnology, and multinational development projects frequently damage local ecosystems and displace traditional ecological knowledge, preserved mainly by women. According to Shiva, biodiversity conservation requires not only scientific expertise but also Indigenous knowledge systems and community-based environmental practices. Ecofeminism calls for a regenerative model of development based on ecological diversity, subsistence

economies, and democratic participation, instead of continuous economic growth (Mies & Shiva, 2014: 47-71; 109-135).

These issues have contributed to the development of a new approach to ecofeminist literary criticism. Patrick Murphy has asserted that literature is a powerful cultural force in which we build our relationship with nature in terms of gender. Ecofeminist literary criticism examines how literature portrays landscapes, animals, plants, and the human body in a domestic context, and the extent to which these portrayals are sustained by violence and the memory of nature. The relationship between these elements of nature and narrative is used to support or oppose a patriarchal system of thinking. Ecofeminist literary criticism interprets landscape as an active participant in narrative structure and uses its representation to reflect the cultural relationship to ecological responsibility. In addition, literary works provide a venue for the intersection of environmental justice, colonialism, racial injustice, and gender issues (Murphy, 2023: 1-14).

The interdisciplinary nature of ecofeminism has expanded even further in the past several decades. As a result, there are many new branches of ecofeminism today, many of which are not related to philosophy but rather to literature, religious studies, environmental humanities, postcolonial theory, Indigenous studies, and climate change justice. The contributors do not regard ecofeminism as a static theory; rather, they emphasize dialogue among various intellectual traditions that create new ecological imaginaries. An openness to experience is demonstrated by the contributors' presentations of ecofeminism's continual evolution as scholars respond to accelerating climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental displacement, and unequal distribution of ecological risks. (Carroll, 2018: 1–10).

Nhanenge (2011) agrees that ecofeminism must be seen as a paradigm of transformation, not only as an environmental philosophy. She demonstrates how the current distress manifested in violence, poverty, militarism, environmental degradation, and social injustice results from a common understanding of the universe. This dominant paradigm promotes the concepts of domination, fragmentation, and mechanical rationality. Ecofeminists assert that all four aspects of human existence (ecology, economy, culture, and politics) are interconnected and interdependent. Sustainable societies will develop through creating relationships that are cooperative rather than

hierarchical, emphasizing diversity rather than conformity and regeneration over exploitation. The transformation of all our institutions will occur through the development of new cultural values and educational practices, as well as an updated understanding of our relationship to natural-world paradigms (Nhanenge, 2011).

Together, these theoretical advancements demonstrate how ecofeminism has progressed far beyond its original formation into a new, well-developed, and extensive set of critical theoretical frameworks within the environmental humanities. Through the fusion of feminist ethics, environmental philosophy, postcolonial critique, globalization studies, and literary theory, ecofeminism offers an intersectional approach to analyzing the numerous forms of interconnected domination that define human society and the natural world. The focus on relationships, care, reciprocity, and environmental justice makes ecofeminism an incredibly strong alternative to reductionist models rooted in hierarchy and dominance. The development of the theoretical frameworks provides a conceptual framework for reading and comprehending literary works in which the landscape, the ecosystem, and non-human life are integral to issues of race, gender, identity, memory, and resistance. Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* are examined within an ecofeminist framework as examples of black women's lived experiences. Both novels are powerful ecofeminist works that show how the roles of land attachment, environmental memory, and ecological relationships are critical to cultural Survival, self-definition, and resistance to intersecting patriarchal and colonial forms of domination.

Land, Memory, and Cultural Identity

Land plays an important role in the two novels, serving not only as a physical space but also as a repository of a society's memories and culture, and as a way of connecting with ancestors. The relationship between a woman and the land is understood as more than just a symbol in ecofeminist thought. There is a network of interconnected elements, and patriarchy and colonization shape how society treats the land (Warren, 1997; Mies & Shiva, 2014). Both Tony Morrison and Alice Walker can break out of this view of nature as purely human-based because their settings show that nature is a living thing that recollects violence and stores cultural history. This is important to the rebuilding of identity, which is evident in both novels.

Through their portrayal of the recovery of black womanhood in their novels, Morrison and Walker are tied to the Earth's healing.

In her novel *Tar Baby*, Morrison makes an immediate effort to portray the Caribbean island as having a role in the history of its people, rather than as a passive geographic place. The narrator describes the conversion of Isle des Chevaliers through colonization using the following visual imagery: "the men had already folded the earth where there was no fold and hollowed it out when there was no hollow" (Morrison, 2004: 16). The short but vivid statement creates a living tree being mutilated. The verbs "folded" and "hollowed" create an image of physical injury and suggest that colonial settlement is an overlay of violent acts committed upon the earth itself. Instead of presenting development as modern, Morrison presents it as the destruction of the ecosystem. Images like this demonstrate the point of Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, who argued that patriarchal capitalism views nature as a passive item that can be freely exploited; at the same time, it also sees women and colonized people as exploitable resources (Mies & Shiva, 2014: 47–71). In turn, Morrison transforms the landscape into a historical witness that records the legacy of colonial violence through its own body.

The island's environmental influence is amplified by Morrison's depiction of the displaced river. After colonial contact, the river becomes "ill and grieving," as the narrator observes, until it finally loses its way (Morrison, 2004: 17). Morrison extends an emotional and historical consciousness to the river's ecological element, rather than merely using it as a decorative element of the scenery. The river's grieving nature symbolizes the disruption colonial expansion caused to the community's natural and cultural continuity. As a rejection of the Cartesian dualisms of human and nature, ecofeminism advocates for an existence within relationships; thus, when one experiences ecological damage, they experience social and psychological damage (Plumwood, 1997). As a result of Morrison's anthropomorphizing of the river, environmental damage is seen as cultural violence, particularly by those communities whose identities have historically relied on close bonds with their land.

The way environmental elements shape characters' understanding of memory is similarly important in *The Color Purple*, but Walker uses a different narrative technique to develop this relationship. While Morrison uses

the Caribbean landscape to show how colonial history shaped it, Walker uses the American South as a means for Celie to reintegrate her sense of self through agricultural work and the everyday spiritual connection she shares with nature. A particularly significant eco-spiritual example of this occurs in the conversation between Shug Avery and Celie, in which Shug tells her, "I think God gets mad when people see a purple flower out in a field and do not notice it" (Walker, 1982: 196). What appears to be a very simple statement does many things: it challenges how people perceive spirituality and shifts it from being associated only with religious institutions to being recognized and embraced in the natural world. Shug represents a break from patriarchal religious ideology, which held that transcendence is more important than material existence, and she instead finds sanctity in the ordinary experiences of life.

The consequences of this transformation are political on a deep level, when viewed through an ecofeminist lens. Karen Warren (1997) holds that the function of patriarchal ideology is to divide reality into two aspects of existence, which are culture and nature, and to assign greater value to the abstract, rational aspect than to the body-based aspect. Walker reverses this value system by proposing that being present to and fully experiencing flowers, fields, and the beauty of the seasons is an act of worship. Celie's growing connection to nature can be paralleled with her developing independence from the patriarchal structures of authority imposed on her. Thus, the development of an ecological consciousness becomes a significant aspect of Celie's journey of true liberation. Therefore, nature is not only a healing force for Celie; it is also epistemological, providing her with another means to learn and understand her place in the world through observation, by developing relationships with other living beings, and by connecting with them through feelings and emotions.

Land acts as an ancestral memory bank in both novels. In *Tar Baby*, Son's connection to the land and nature stands in stark contrast to Jadine's modern, urban lifestyle. Son connects true life to nature, family history, an established community, and inherited traditions. However, through her European education and career, Jadine has severed herself from her cultural and historical roots. Morrison avoids romanticizing either perspective, instead developing the tension between the modern mobility that Jadine represents and the rootedness in local culture that Son represents. Son's bond with the

land is continuous with African diasporic traditions of memory, linked to place rather than to written history alone. Morrison's ecological imagination transforms the landscape into a force of resistance to colonial erasure by allowing the natural environment to preserve histories. (Wardi, 2011).

Walker ties the way people see themselves to space, their identity to the way the space was created and worked such as gardens, fields, yards, and work are all ways that women connect and support each other outside of the scope of what patriarchy can control; like where Celie was abused as a child is replaced with safe space and support through the act of gardening, making clothing and enjoying the season. Many ecofeminist writers (Greta Gaard, 1993) believe ecofeminism is based on relationships that are equal and reciprocal rather than hierarchical, and the way Walker shows women working together to create a sustainable food source or another sustainable resource to support themselves is exactly what ecofeminism is. Women working with the land is an act of cultural preservation.

Both authors use memory in their novels to look back on single events and the ecological history of the same place. In her work, Morrison continues to show how natural environments hold the historical memory of events that often cannot be found in traditional historical research. Walker also illustrates that the everyday experience of the natural world helps marginalized people to heal from the effects of an identity that was broken due to either or both racial and gender oppression. In addition, both authors challenge the Western idea that land is simply something to be owned or used to produce wealth; rather, they treat the land or landscape as a living record, a place where all aspects of history, such as spirituality, ancestors, and identity, are interconnected.

The novels are similar in that they reject the dominant colonial narratives about humankind's relationship with the surrounding environment. The relationship between humankind and the surrounding landscape is evidenced in Morrison's depiction of the island as a remembrance of all colonial violence. Walker, on the other hand, uses daily interactions with the environment as a means to heal from the trauma associated with colonialism. Despite differences in perspective, both convey that Black cultural identity is developed through reciprocal relationships with the earth, not through domination of the earth. The relationship they develop through the earth is

similarly reflected in the ecofeminist theories of Warren (1997), Plumwood (1997), and Mies and Shiva (2014), all of which propose that until we dismantle the conceptual hierarchies that have been used to subjugate women, to subjugate marginalized communities, to subjugate the earth, we cannot truly create environmental justice (1997). Both *Tar Baby* and *The Color Purple*, then, provide a way for black women to regain their collective culture and personal agency through the land not just as a physical space, but as a dynamic source of memory, cultural continuity, and ecological resistance.

In both novels, the idea of land can be connected to cultural heritage and intergenerational continuity, as well as to a geographical sense of belonging. Morrison demonstrates repeatedly in the novels how land functions to keep memories that human-created institutions have erased. The colonial history of the Caribbean tried to turn it into a commodity to be exploited for economic gain. However, the land itself has resisted through its continued existence in nature. The rivers, mountains, trees, and other natural elements that exist on the island are silent witnesses to the history of slavery, displacement, and migration that have been erased from the written record and historical documents. Morrison creates an ecological archive, or way of storing memories that exists independently of written documentation. This perspective aligns with ecofeminist views of historical processes, as ecofeminists believe the earth is an active participant in them (Vakoch, 2023).

Son's ecological relationship with the land is evident in his intimacy with nature. While her European education and capitalist modernity largely shaped Jadine's cosmopolitan identity, Son experiences Jadine's island through his body rather than through mere visual observation. Son's movement through the forests, rivers, and hills of Jadine's island bears exhaustive knowledge accrued over time, from experiencing non-consumptive possession of the land to developing an oppositional relationship to the land. Morrison contrasts the competing epistemologies of control, mobility, and consumption with belonging, memory, and reciprocal ecological relationships. Greta Gaard (2017) contends that ecofeminists today have moved away from hierarchical relationships with nature and are instead working towards building relational epistemologies that support a symbiotic relationship among all beings and their interdependence. Son represents this new ecological worldview because his sense of self-identity is inextricably connected to the land that sustains his cultural memory.

Jadine's relationship with the island reveals the alienating effects of cultural displacement. She lives in the same geographic area, but she very rarely views the landscape as historically or emotionally significant or as connected to her. Her education and career aspirations have led her to associate mobility with success or the opportunity for individual achievement rather than with being grounded; this also reflects capitalist ideals that encourage individuals to value their own personal success or to exclude them from the value of community and ecological relationships. Morrison does not criticize Jadine's ambitions. Rather, she demonstrates how psychological tensions arise from modern identities completely dissociated from ancestral lands. Ecofeminists have continually argued that environmental alienation is often accompanied by cultural fragmentation because both are products of systems that prioritize abstraction over experience (Plumwood, 1997). In this way, Jadine's lack of a meaningful relationship with the island represents her disconnection from collective memory.

Walker also explores similar issues through her use of rural Georgia's agricultural landscape, but she is more concerned with rebuilding it than simply displacing it. Throughout *The Color Purple*, nature becomes the place where individuals who have been broken are healed through the daily practices of caring for others. Gardening, making clothes, growing vegetables, and watching the seasons change are never presented as merely domestic; rather, they are acts of cultural survival that bring people together with one another and with their natural environment. The evolution of Celie demonstrates that healing occurs not by being separated from the natural world, but by becoming more engaged with it. Celie's continued appreciation of ordinary ecological beauty coincides with the development of a new ethical worldview grounded in reciprocity rather than dominance.

Celie's relationship with God will hold great significance when considered in light of Walker's critique of patriarchal Christianity. When Celie first begins to understand God, she does so through a lens shaped by hierarchical power structures. By presenting God as present in all of nature, Shug Avery introduces Celie to an entirely new form of spirituality not tied to institutional religion. This new type of spiritual connection to God is very much an ecological one. This type of spirituality fully supports ecofeminist concepts and the rejection of dualisms (spirit vs. matter, culture vs. nature, etc.) (Warren, 1997). By presenting Celie's religious experiences as an ecological

awareness of God and nature, Walker shows that as one recognizes the intrinsic value of nature, one can also discover one's individual self-worth.

Therefore, they both advance the ecofeminist discourse far beyond environmental advocacy to a comprehensive examination of colonialism, patriarchy, and the capitalist modern era. Their natural environments are not simply backdrops for the characters' events, but are active participants in shaping the characters' identities, remembering their histories, and organizing resistance. When Morrison and Walker restore agency to natural environments, they also reintegrate black women's agency into their lives, which historically has been silenced through both patriarchal and colonial narratives. Land becomes an important vehicle through which ecological integrity, ancestral knowledge, and culture can be integrated and can help provide women with a way to validate the basic premise of ecofeminism, which is that fighting for women's freedom and fighting for the earth's continued existence are inseparable, as both have a shared history of oppression and a shared potential for renewal.

Nature as a Site of Patriarchal and Racial Oppression

As ecofeminist scholar Warren argues, there are important conceptual, historical, and experiential connections between the domination of women and people of color on the one hand. The domination of nature on the other hand (Warren, 2000: 43). In this literary context, the exploitation of nature in the novels is inseparable from patriarchal and racial oppression. The exploitation of nature in the novels is inseparable from patriarchal and racial oppression. It shows that all forms of oppression are linked structurally, according to ecofeminist theory. Karen Warren sees the creation of social and cultural value dichotomies by patriarchy as the mechanism for legitimizing the subordination of both women and nature according to a common logic of dominance (Warren, 1990: 125-127). Both Walker and Morrison build on this theory by demonstrating that the landscape functions not only as an exterior backdrop but is a place where racial violence, colonial exploitation, and patriarchal power have left their mark, both symbolically and physically.

Impressive imagery in *Tar Baby* describes the Caribbean island as a transformed landscape due to colonial intervention: the presence of colonists created an environment in which the earth was folded where there had been no fold and hollowed where there had been no hollow. Morrison does not

describe colonization as turning development into progress, but as forces that have violently attacked the body of earth. The imagery of the land as represented through women and nature further demonstrates an ecofeminist perspective that patriarchal cultures see women and nature as places and objects that can be controlled and exploited. The violence of colonization still exists in the memory of Morrison's island in the sense that the island opposes the attempts by colonizers to erase the ecological damage that colonialism and slavery created. (Wardi, 2011). She stated that the literature African Americans wrote also contained evidence of the environmental afterlives of slavery, which demonstrate that racial oppression has continued to influence how ecological spaces have been formed after formal emancipation (James, 2026).

Walker shows how the environment and patriarchy controlling women have a similar effect on Celie's life. At the beginning of the novel, Celie's body is treated like a piece of property that can be used and abused by the patriarchy. Her body is continually subjected to sexual abuse. For example, Celie recalls: "He had never been good to me in his life," and then we see him abusing her. (Walker, 1982: 2). This kind of violence comes from the same way of thinking about women as property or things to be possessed and owned. As the novel progresses, Walker begins to redefine her concept of nature from something that oppresses Celie to something that she uses to fight back. Shug is reconnecting spiritual dominion, as defined by a male-centered religious system, to the Earth when she says, "I think God is mad if he sees you walking across a field of lavender and you do not even see it. Do not notice it." Celie will find her own freedom as she acknowledges that awareness of the environment is part of that freedom, allowing her to let go of the things that have taken away her humanity or her ability to connect with nature (Walker, 1982: 100).

The comparison of the two novels shows how much race and gender oppression is linked to exploiting nature. Morrison uses the idea that colonial landscapes were shaped through violence and made full of the scars of slavery and displacement. Walker uses the idea of daily interactions with nature to show how people can heal and find themselves. Both stories confirm the notion of the interconnectedness of race, gender, class, and environmental injustice, as articulated by Kings (2017) in the theory of ecofeminism, according to which these elements coexist and reconstruct/environmentalize

one another rather than exist as individual entities. Their stories demonstrate that nature represents a terrain of conflict and struggle as a result of patriarchal and racial dominance. The narration of both novels demonstrates that ecological relationships are inextricably linked to the redevelopment of African American women's identity, cultural pride, and historical consciousness.

Ecological Resistance and Female Agency

Ecological resistance constitutes one of the central concerns of contemporary ecofeminist thought, emphasizing the interconnected struggle against environmental degradation, patriarchal domination, and social injustice. Rather than understanding resistance solely as political opposition, ecofeminists conceptualize it as an ethical practice that restores reciprocal relationships between humans and the natural world. Warren (1997) argues that ecological destruction and the oppression of women originate from the same conceptual framework of domination, which legitimizes hierarchical relationships based on gender, race, class, and species. Similarly, Mies and Shiva (2014) contend that patriarchal capitalism transforms both women and nature into exploitable resources, reducing ecological systems and female labor to instruments of economic production. Consequently, ecological resistance involves challenging these structures by promoting care, sustainability, and mutual interdependence rather than exploitation.

Within this framework, female agency emerges not simply as individual empowerment but as a transformative force capable of resisting both environmental and social oppression. Gaard (2017) emphasizes that contemporary ecofeminism understands agency through an intersectional perspective, recognizing that race, gender, class, colonialism, and ecological injustice operate simultaneously rather than independently. Women's relationships with land, community, and nonhuman life therefore become important sites of resistance against systems that seek to commodify both human beings and the environment. Likewise, Vakoch and Mickey (2018) argue that ecofeminist literature reimagines nature as an active participant in cultural survival and social transformation rather than a passive backdrop to human action. Through this perspective, literary texts reveal how ecological consciousness enables marginalized women to reclaim identity, memory, and agency while challenging patriarchal and colonial ideologies. Accordingly,

they exemplify ecological resistance by portraying female protagonists whose connections to nature powerfully express resilience, cultural continuity, and liberation.

Ecological resistance in the novels emerges through female characters whose relationships with the natural world challenge patriarchal, colonial, and racial systems of domination. Rather than portraying women merely as victims of environmental and social oppression, both novels present female agency as an ecological force grounded in memory, care, resilience, and spiritual renewal. Ecofeminism conceptualizes such resistance as the rejection of hierarchical structures that separate humans from nature while simultaneously subordinating women and marginalized communities (Mies & Shiva, 2014). Morrison and Walker demonstrate that reclaiming one's relationship with the environment becomes an essential step toward reclaiming personal autonomy and cultural identity.

Celie's transformation illustrates how ecological awareness facilitates psychological liberation. At the beginning of the novel, her identity is shaped by patriarchal violence and silence, yet her perception gradually changes through Shug Avery's alternative understanding of spirituality. Shug explains, "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and do not notice it" (Walker, 1982: 196). This brief statement fundamentally redefines the relationship between divinity, women, and nature. Instead of locating spiritual authority within patriarchal religious institutions, Walker situates the sacred in the ordinary beauty of the natural world. Celie's growing ability to recognize this beauty symbolizes her rejection of the patriarchal worldview that has taught her to perceive herself as worthless. As Warren (1997) argues, ecofeminist ethics replace domination with relationships based on care, reciprocity, and interconnectedness. Celie's attentiveness to nature therefore becomes an act of resistance against both gender oppression and spiritual alienation. Walker further demonstrates female agency through Celie's economic and emotional independence. Her decision to establish her own household and sewing business reflects a broader ecofeminist commitment to creativity, sustainability, and communal care rather than domination. As recent ecofeminist scholarship suggests, women's resistance often takes the form of practices that restore ecological balance and social cooperation rather than reproducing patriarchal power structures (Lestari & Farida, 2025). Celie's transformation illustrates that liberation is achieved not

through violence but through rebuilding meaningful relationships with both human and nonhuman communities.

Similarly, Morrison portrays ecological resistance as inseparable from cultural memory and ancestral belonging. Throughout *Tar Baby*, the Caribbean landscape actively challenges colonial attempts to dominate both land and people. Morrison describes how colonial settlers had "folded the earth where there had been no fold and hollowed her where there had been no hollow" (Morrison, 2004: 16). The feminized representation of the landscape transforms ecological destruction into an act of violence against a living body. However, the island refuses to submit completely. Rivers, forests, and the sea continually assert their own agency, disrupting human control and preserving memories that colonial history attempts to erase. Wardi (2011) argues that Morrison's ecological imagination positions nature as an active participant in Black resistance rather than a passive background to human experience.

Although Jadine initially embraces a cosmopolitan identity detached from the island, Morrison suggests that ecological disconnection ultimately produces cultural fragmentation. In contrast, Son's intimate relationship with the landscape represents an alternative form of knowledge grounded in memory, reciprocity, and belonging. Ecofeminist criticism emphasizes that genuine agency emerges through relational rather than hierarchical interactions with the environment (Gaard, 2017). Morrison therefore proposes that resistance requires the recovery of ecological consciousness alongside cultural identity.

Read together, *Tar Baby* and *The Color Purple* redefine female agency as an ecological practice that resists patriarchal domination without reproducing its logic. Walker foregrounds healing through spiritual reconnection with nature, while Morrison emphasizes the enduring resistance embedded within landscapes marked by colonial history. Despite these different narrative strategies, both novels reject anthropocentric and patriarchal assumptions by presenting women and nature as mutually sustaining forces. Their protagonists discover that liberation depends not on mastering the environment but on recognizing the interconnectedness of ecological integrity, cultural memory, and female selfhood. Such representations embody what contemporary ecofeminist scholars describe as ecological resistance, where environmental awareness becomes inseparable from struggles for

gender equality, racial justice, and cultural survival (Agarwal & Mishra, 2025; Zhang, 2025).

Comparative Discussion: *Tar Baby* and *The Color Purple*

Despite their distinct historical, cultural, and geographical settings, they share powerful ecofeminist critiques of intersecting patriarchal, racist, colonial, and environmentally destructive systems. Morrison's Isle des Chevaliers, in the Caribbean, is a setting shaped by colonialism and therefore serves as a representative of an essentially colonized landscape; Walker sets her novel in the rural southern USA, within an agricultural context where the natural landscape is a fundamental element of black women's livelihoods. Despite differences in setting, both authors challenge the Western dualisms that have created divisions between human and nature and between culture and environment, and represent ecological space as an active, living entity that holds memory, maintains identity, and provides a means of resistance against destructive social systems. Read together, the novels demonstrate that Black women's liberation depends not only upon social and economic emancipation but also upon the restoration of reciprocal relationships with the natural world.

Major parallels exist between the two novels from an ecofeminist perspective because both reject patriarchal ownership and domination. In addition, ecofeminist theorists note that patriarchy is based on hierarchically structured binary oppositions that subordinate women and exploit nature, as described by Warren (1997) as the logic of domination. Both Morrison and Walker show that these conceptual hierarchies operate in tandem with respect to landscapes in both nature and black women's bodies. In *Tar Baby*, colonial capitalism transforms the Caribbean landscape into private property to generate wealth and enable consumption. Valerian Street's ostentatious estate represents this possession-based mentality: both the island itself and its people are viewed as Valerian's possessions. The disturbance of the natural environment caused by the colonialism that created the Caribbean also mirrors the dislocation of Indigenous history and black cultural memory; thus, environmental destruction is portrayed as another form of racial domination. *The Color Purple*, as well, shows patriarchal power in a way that asserts itself as reducing females to both domestic and reproductive work while also devaluing the rural landscapes that historically have been linked to female labor. The governing worldview that structures all gender, race, class, and

nature relationships is how domination is represented in both novels; not just as an expression of interpersonal violence.

However, because of their differing critiques of domination, both authors developed distinct ecological philosophies. Morrison presents nature as an account of human-geographic experience, documenting the past erased by colonialism as environmental memory. The island acts as a historical witness and carries the traces of slavery, exploitation, and displacement that are generally suppressed from official historical records. The rivers, forests, and vegetation each symbolize their own cultural significance, representing cultural continuity beyond the existence of human institutions. Morrison's ecological imagination creates an active landscape as part of the black resistance, refusing to separate environmental history from the African diasporic identity (Wardi, 2011). Thinking of the island as a metaphor for collective memory would remind readers that the destruction of the ecological system also has historical and cultural ramifications.

Unlike Morrison, whose novel emphasizes memory, Walker has shifted the focus to what she terms ecological spirituality and personal transformation. Nature functions more as a place to enjoy natural beauty and to heal and renew oneself emotionally than as a metaphorical graveyard of historical trauma. Celie's growing appreciation of flowers, trees, gardens, and the cycles of the seasons is an external marker of her internal evolution from silence, submission, and dependence on others to self-confidence and independence. In this sense, the changes taking place in the ways Celie sees and interacts with nature reflect how she is changing her perception of spirituality in general. Whereas she previously found God in patriarchal religious organizations, now she sees him through her personal connection in her daily experience living in an environmentally connected manner. Walker redefines spiritual experience away from hierarchical patriarchy through this metaphorical space, where people experience the divine through their connectedness to one another and to their environment.

Tar Baby does not show clearly how much control the female characters have. Jadine exhibits modern education and career success, as well as the ability to travel the world, all attributes generally associated with being free. However, Morrison helps readers explore the idea that assimilation into Western capitalist culture as a means of liberation actually results in complete

freedom. Jadine's feeling of not being connected to the island is very opposite from how Son feels about the land in the Caribbean. Son's connection to the land is not about possessing it in a financial sense, but his past, the stories passed down to him, and his real-life experiences. Morrison does not merely place Son's point of view above Jadine's; instead, she reveals the tension between the individuality associated with modernity and a collective ecological identity. This means that female agency is represented as resolving the opposing values of conflicting cultures, rather than choosing one culture over another. The complexity of the situation, therefore, sets Morrison's eco-feminism apart from the more successful stories of empowerment. It highlights how the colonial past continues to influence individuals' present-day identities.

Both authors have different eco-feminist visions that separate the concept of race. Historically, the main focus of classical eco-feminism was the relationship between women and the natural world. Contemporary eco-feminism emphasizes how different elements of identity intersect in how they experience environmental injustice. The examples discussed here provide strong examples of the intersectional vision by showing how environmental exploitation disproportionately affects communities marginalized by race and class. In the novel Tar Baby, the colonial alteration of the Caribbean environment is inextricably linked to the history of both slavery and imperialism. The way that environmental destruction takes place is a reflection of the larger system of racial capitalism that is responsible for commodifying both the land and the bodies of Black people. Similarly, Walker presents the rural South as a social environment where racial discrimination has compounded patriarchal oppression and limited the ability of Black women to obtain education, own property, and achieve personal autonomy. Thus, nature becomes a space where several inequities converge, creating a non-neutral environment in which people experience life.

Another Shared trait of Morrison's and Walker's writing is that both authors have rejected anthropocentric thinking. Both writers acknowledge that nonhuman nature is granted agency, challenging the Western assumption that humans are separated from nature above the world's ecological system. Morrison's forests, rivers, oceans, and seas play a central role in shaping the narrative, influencing how characters move through space and experience their past and sense of self/identity. Walker's works also represent flowers,

fields, and trees as part of spiritual existence. Both of these representations demonstrate what Mies and Shiva described as an ecofeminist ethic of interdependence, which argues that humans are interconnected through the natural means of their existence and thus human well-being relies on maintaining respectful relations with the more-than-human world. Thus, nature exists as an active participant in constructing the basis of identity as well as the means of resistance.

In conclusion, both *Tar Baby* and *The Color Purple* provide complementary ecofeminist critiques of patriarchal culture and colonial modernity. Morrison draws attention to the ecological past and relocation experiences of people of culture, as well as the lasting impacts of colonization. In contrast, Walker explores the concepts of spiritual connection with nature, emotional healing, and community being united in strength. However, both novels ultimately convey an essential truth: related systems of control are oppressing women and nature, and they need to be opposed concurrently. Both authors use their creative settings and detailed female lead characters to describe a new, innovative view of liberation as an environmental action rooted in cultural and historical heritage, through reciprocal relationships and environmental justice. Their stories show us that, to restore the relationship between women and nature, it is not enough to avoid participating in the political struggle; rather, we must work toward social equality, cultural continuity, and ecological sustainability.

Conclusion

This chapter, through a comparative approach, shows that both novels challenge basic patriarchal ideologies, colonialism, and anthropocentrism. They fundamentally challenge patriarchal, colonial, and anthropocentric ideologies. The novels achieve this fundamental challenge by redefining the relationship between black women and the natural world. Unlike the traditional representation of nature as a mere backdrop on which events in the human world unfold, both Morrison and Walker demonstrate in their works how ecological space can be an active co-participant in shaping identity and cultural memory, as well as in expressing resistance and healing. An ecofeminist perspective of these novels demonstrates the interconnectedness of women and racial oppression as well as environmental degradation through systems of domination that are defined by hierarchy, ownership, and control as opposed to reciprocity and coexistence. Therefore, black women's

liberation cannot be separated from the creation of ethical relationships with the natural world.

In this chapter, ecofeminism provides a framework for analyzing the intersectionality and interdependence among the novel's land, memory, spiritual representation, and women's voices, as well as other dimensions of freedom and self-determination. According to Warren (1997), patriarchal cultures create hierarchical dualisms such as culture/nature, man/woman, reason/emotion, and human/nonhuman that are used to justify multiple forms of domination by framing inequality as normal, acceptable, and expected. Morrison and Walker consistently subvert the dualistic constructions of identity by demonstrating that identities emerge from interconnectedness with nature rather than from isolation. The characters created by Morrison and Walker did not have to overcome or escape their connections with nature to experience personal and cultural change; indeed, the most significant changes they experienced came through their willingness to recognize the interconnectedness of their lives with their environments. These representations by Morrison and Walker support Plumwood's (1997) claim that humanity can only cope with environmental problems by adopting relational models of existence grounded in interdependence rather than dualistic models.

One of the most essential contributions of the readings is the comparison between how Walker and Morrison expanded the ecofeminist paradigm by including black reality in ecological dialogue. The first ecofeminists were criticized for generalizing all women's reality and not including race, colonialism, and past inequality. However, ecofeminists today have developed the concept of intersectionality to provide the context for interpreting environmental injustice (Gaard, 2017; Kings, 2017). Both *Tar Baby* and *The Color Purple* have demonstrated an intersectional approach to ecofeminism in that an understanding of environmental destruction cannot be separated from an understanding of the history of slavery, segregation, imperialism, and the history of racial capitalism. Therefore, the environmental violence depicted in the novels constitutes political, cultural, and historical violence, and achieving ecological justice will require both racial and gender justice.

The analysis also shows that Morrison and Walker both have ecofeminist concerns. However, their ecological philosophies are distinct and represent

significant contributions to the wider study of environmental literature. Morrison explores the concept of environmental memory by turning the Caribbean landscape into a living record of history. The Isle des Chevaliers retains evidence of colonial violence, slavery, and displacement long after the official historical narratives attempt to erase them. Therefore, the natural world is an active observer of collective history that can be maintained without the influence of human institutions. According to Wardi (2011), Morrison's ecological imagination rejects the separation of environmental history and African American cultural identity and uses the landscape as a means of post-colonial resistance. In particular, the forests, rivers, and plants of the Island represent a continual connection to the past and suggest that cultural sustainability depends on maintaining mutual relationships with the land, rather than viewing them as commodities in the marketplace.

Walker's approach to ecofeminism includes language relating to spiritual transformation and emotional healing. In *The Color Purple*, nature serves as the main representation through which individuals can find a state of conscious moral renewal and transformation, as demonstrated by Celie's increasing ability to enjoy and appreciate flowers, gardens, agricultural work, and seasonal cycles, which move her away from silence and submission and toward self-determination and confidence. By relocating the sacred from patriarchal religious ideologies to everyday ecological experience, Walker challenges those ideologies. She does so within the context of a spiritual ecology which parallels Warren's (1997) ecofeminist care ethics and demonstrates the connection between sustainable futures and the restoration of the reciprocal relationship between human communities and nature, as Mies and Shiva (2014) have stated. As such, Walker's portrayal of the spiritual connection between black women and the environment, or ecological spirituality, cannot be separated from black female empowerment, as achieving psychological freedom also requires understanding the environment alongside gaining freedom in society.

Another important aspect to consider is how both books depict women acting on their own will. Both authors oppose traditional stories in which women gain power by following men's rules for leading and controlling others. Instead, both authors show that women can gain power by working together, supporting one another, being creative, demonstrating strength, and taking responsibility for the environment. Celie's change demonstrates how

having a group of women support one another and be connected to nature can provide alternative forms of strength against patriarchy without repeating its system of dominance over others. Morrison gives a more uncertain representation of female power through Jadine and Son's contrasted links to contemporary society and their cultures' natural surroundings, highlighting the psychological effects of environmental and cultural uprooting. However, the central message is that complete liberation comes from reestablishing links to the community, the past, memories, and the world that surround each of us, rather than merely through personal achievement. This type of relational agency is closely aligned with today's ecofeminist beliefs, which view liberation collectively and ecologically (Gaard, 2017; Vakoch & Mickey, 2018).

Another key point that Morrison and Walker transform is what has traditionally been seen as the nonfiction purposes of landscape in fiction: the way they redefine the literary function of landscape, or how it is written into fictional works. Neither novel uses natural elements simply for their aesthetic beauty nor does it use them as a symbolic part of the narrative. Landscape in fiction provides authors with a means of narrating events that define characters' identities, ethical choices, and resistance to oppression. In this chapter, it is argued that both Morrison and Walker challenge anthropocentric literary traditions by providing a voice to nature and offering a challenge to capitalist notions of how to view land; that is, through its ownership or its use as an economic resource (Murphy, 2023). Ecofeminist literary criticism, as Murphy notes, identifies landscape as an active narrative participant rather than a passive scene, as demonstrated by both Morrison's Caribbean ecology and Walker's rural Southern American landscape.

Aside from contributing to the literature, this comparative analysis highlights that ecofeminism continues to provide relevant critical frameworks for explaining the intersection of environmental degradation and racial and gender injustice from the past to the present day. The ecological themes that Morrison and Walker use in their stories remain relevant in the 21st century, even though both stories were written in the early 1980s. Current debates about climate change, environmental racism, biodiversity loss, forced migration, and extractive capitalism indicate that ecological crises predominantly impact communities already marginalized by race, gender, and socioeconomic inequality. Thus, about ecological justice, both of these stories

serve as precursors to many of the issues addressed by later critical and intersectional ecofeminists, and thus indicate that achieving environmental justice requires simultaneously addressing the historical structures which have led to social injustice (Gaard, 2017; Kings, 2017; Vakoch & Mickey, 2018).

The most significant addition made by Morrison and Walker in their fiction is the denial of anthropocentrism, combined with the recognition of the capacity of the more-than-human world to produce outcomes. Other researchers in the ecofeminist field are now demanding that literary works be considered as representations of the landscape, the animal, the plant, and the ecosystem as participants in the processes that form history. Ecofeminist scholars are increasingly demanding that literature move beyond nature as a symbol and instead treat landscape, animals, plants, and ecosystems as active contributors to culture and history (Murphy, 2023; Vakoch, 2023). Both novels, therefore, exemplify the new trend. Morrison's Caribbean island in her novel resists the colonial oppressors by retaining memories that, according to the official history, were erased. On the other hand, the fields, gardens, and forests in Walker's novel are spaces where the development and renewal of the spiritual and emotional self take place. By doing all of this, the natural environment is transformed from an object used to create better possibilities into an ethical subject that will challenge traditional philosophical values rooted in Western humanism and capitalist modernity (Plumwood, 1997: 8).

The comparative lens employed within this particular section confirms that black ecofeminism cannot be understood solely as a form of African American literary criticism and ecofeminism as defined by traditional ecofeminism, but rather must be viewed as an intersectional, critical construct which can expose the interconnected processes of environmental destruction, racial subjugation, gender discrimination, and colonialism. Morrison and Walker both demonstrate that black women's ecologies differ radically from the normative ecological experience of women in the larger, universalist sense primarily because their lived experiences have been formed through historical contexts involving enslavement, displacement, segregation, oppression, and economic marginalization, thus creating fictional works which challenge ecofeminists themselves to develop ecofeminism into an historically grounded and inclusive paradigm. According to Power (2020), contemporary ecofeminism acknowledges multispecies connections, in addition to intersectionality, as criteria for justice. Therefore, these facts, in relation to the representation of

earlier ecofeminist scholarship, provide a broadened theoretical context for contemporary ecofeminism. Likewise, Gaard (2017) argues that ecofeminism can only stay politically and intellectually relevant if it continues to transform through engagement with issues such as race, colonialism, disability, sexuality, and global inequality.

One major takeaway from these findings is that this research helps reconceptualize female agency. Throughout both novels, neither domination nor assimilation nor reproductive patriarchal norms are used to empower women. Instead, Morrison and Walker present women as having agency through acts of caring for others, mutual relationships, creative expression, communal responsibility, and awareness of their impact on the ecology. In this manner, the notions of agency proposed by these two authors are relational and challenge traditional liberal models of autonomy that often stress individualism as the most important component of existence; instead, they challenge that individualism with concepts of identity that rely on cooperative relationships with other individuals within the community. Because ecofeminism recognizes that human flourishing cannot occur unless humans have established ethical relationships with their larger ecological communities (Mies & Shiva, 2014; Warren, 1997), the liberation of women is therefore intimately tied to establishing ethical relationships between all humans, nonhuman forms of life, and nature itself.

The results of this chapter are relevant to the ongoing ecocritical scholarship by exemplifying the need for postcolonial approaches in the study of environmental literature. Ecocriticism in the past has primarily focused on the wilderness, conservation, and the aesthetic qualities of the environment while neglecting the history of slavery, colonialism, and the development of racial capitalism that have contributed to the definition of ecological spaces. Morrison and Walker challenge these ideas by showing that landscapes have a historical origin and are politically debatable. Their works of fiction describe the inseparable nature of environmental destruction from present ecological realities and past events of forced labor, land deprivation, displacement, and exploitation. They develop the eco-humanities field by pointing out that ecological questions should always be asked alongside race, gender, memory, and history as responsibilities (Merchant, 2005; Wardi, 2011).

Morrison and Walker prove that ecological deterioration and human oppression are directly linked through ideological structures, and authentic liberation will depend on dismantling two interrelated systems at once. They also demonstrate that humanity's treatment of Earth's nature, as reflected in historical traditions and stories, is linked by the two ideologies. Both authors present an alternative view of justice by restoring agency to landscapes, recovering lost cultural memories and cultural identities, and re-establishing African-American women's relationship with the more-than-human aspects of nature. Finally, their novels remind readers of the importance of caring for Earth while advancing social justice. By examining these two texts from an ecofeminist perspective, it can be shown that *Tar Baby* and *The Color Purple* constitute significant literary works that remain influential in the modern day dialogue concerning environmental justice, the black feminist movement, postcolonial ecotheory, and the academic disciplines of environmental studies and humanities because they clearly show that the fate of the human race and the earth we live on will be determined by recognition of the fact that environmental sustainability and social equality must be intertwine

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