

## **Ecofeminism as a Means of Spiritual Healing of Kate's Character in Alice Walker's Novel "Now is the Time to Open Your Heart"**

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### **Abstract**

This paper shows the impact of the Ecofeminism as a way to Spiritual caring and being well from the current issues, in Kate's society, Ecofeminism based on the theory that the mistreatment of women and the repression of nature are ultimately related. Within ecofeminist literature, Ecofeminism is the idea that feminism and environmentalism are intrinsically linked, and Alice Walker used this concept within her novel. "Now is the time to open your heart" Applying this to Kate's personality, the research examines the interaction between human beings and the non-human and natural universe and the essence of the relationship between human beings and the environment. Walker utilized Ecofeminism as a form of spiritual healing force, and as a cure for Kate's personality, to liberate her from all anxious thoughts and hardships in her life, and to promote a bond between people and nature away from challenges in their world.

*Keywords:* Kate, nature, ecofeminism, spiritual, women

### **Introduction**

Females have historically is connected with the environment, and this association has contributed to both the women's oppression and the oppression of the planet. Ecofeminism has emerged through this social connection. Ecofeminism aims to highlight the interconnectedness of all life through trying to care for the environment as well as many other marginalized groups. Many chains in Ecofeminism carry this association too far and argue that women fundamentally have a greater connection to the planet than anyone, that is why they are the only ones who can drive the earth in healing movement. Nonetheless, this is an unsubstantiated and harmful point that most Ecofeminists do not embrace. Despite such critiques, Ecofeminism has the potential to drive the way in the regeneration of the environment and the development of a society of conservation. Females from around the globe have established a precedent for the treatment of the planet. It is evident that there is at least a spiritual connection between females and nature, and that is why feminists have started to acknowledge the correlation between the degradation and the oppression of women of the planet. The continuation of these ideas is the rise of Ecofeminism. The word "ecofeminism" is a word invented just recently. The Ecofeminism, defined as a feminist environmental ideology, originated in the 1970s, building on the impact of the second wave of Feminism and the Green Movement. With the publishing of 'Feminism or Death' in 1974 by Francoise d'Eaubonne, the French feminist writer, Ecofeminism, as an activist and academic movement, is perceived as a distinct discourse as a critical link between women and nature. Ecofeminism is a social and political movement that points to the existence of a firm common ground between environmentalism and feminism, with some currents connecting deep ecology and females. Walker shows how her main character Kate was suffering from mental and physical conflicts, She notices the changes caused by aging to her body, but there is also

an unidentified psychological shift that she is unable to express. Her mates persuaded her to make a trip to the Colorado River with the expectation that she would seek some purity. As Kate embarks on her adventure, she leaves behind Yolo, her boyfriend, and her housemate. At first, both seem to feel that the departure of Kate would indicate the end of their relationship. But, shortly after she leaves, Yolo discovers that he can't imagine his life without Kate in it.

### **Women and Ecofeminism**

Forests, trees, deforestation. Water dryness, or desertification. Food, toxic waste. And deprivation The destruction of the environment and women According to environmental feminists ("ecofeminists"), there are significant similarities among the treatment of women, black people, and working-class and, on the other, the treatment of non-human nature. Ecological feminists argue that any feminism, environmental activism, and environmental ethics that fails to take such relations seriously is profoundly inadequate. (Warren&Erkal,1997, p.3) Establishing the essence of these connections, in general, what they call women-nature ties, and deciding which are ultimately transformative for both females and non-human nature, is a significant ecofeminist project. (Carol J. Adams&Karen J,1991, p.148).

Ecofeminism embodied as an ecological and feminist ideology grounded in deep consciousness and committed to the abolition of inequalities such as those based on race, sexuality, sexual orientation, age, and other categorical distinctions. That is because they people live in an androcentric and anthropocentric environment, where importance is put on some, but not on others. Emerging from the basis of different feminist theories, Ecofeminism, as defined by Carol Adams (1993),Carolyn Merchant (1990), Val Plumwood (1993),Karen J. Warren (2000),, Maria Mies & Vandana Shiva (1993), et al., has gained from liberal revolutionary and socialist , while at the same time developing an environmental ethos of caring and compassion, and also a spiritual strength born of a realization of deep interconnectedness As Charlene Spretnak (1990) points out in response to some ecofeminism strategies:

Perhaps the most effective strategy for us—and indeed the most difficult—is to lead by example: to contribute to the new philosophical base and to work in its new ecopolitics and eco economics; to organize around the concrete issues of suffering and exploitation; to speak out clearly but without malice against those who further policies of injustice and ecological ignorance; ...to cultivate our spiritual impulses; to act, as best we can, with pure mind/pure heart; to celebrate with gratitude the wonders of life on earth; and to seek intimate communion with the natural world. All of these are the flowering of Ecofeminism. (p. 14)

The ecofeminist concept, therefore, breathes the nature of creation through a desire to act. This reflects a society in which the inequities embodied in our developed environments cannot reverse until the complicated relations between them are made conscious, and their failure to act is made a priority. It sets up safe zones for oppressed Others to stand up for their rights, and for those around them to listen intensely, with intent, to a better future. Barbara Smith illustrates a feminist strategy that challenges all types of social domination: "Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women, as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women.

Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement." (Smith,1982,p.49).

King (1989) expands this examination to include the domination of nature that is widespread in the modern western nation: "[Ecofeminism's] challenge of social domination extends beyond sex to social domination of all kinds, because the domination of sex, race, and class and the domination of nature are mutually reinforcing." (p. 20).The word Ecofeminism may seem to suggest that eco-feminists are concerned only with the oppression of women and the exploitation of the environment. Yet as Karen J.Warren(1991)states, "Because all feminists do or must oppose the logic of domination which keeps oppressive conceptual frameworks in place, all feminists must also oppose any isms of domination that are maintained and justified by that logic of domination." (p.21).Most ecofeminist theorists claim that there is no dominant form of oppression, as all societal inequalities are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Nevertheless, depending on one's positions in society, often, there is one form of abuse that seems most critical in one's everyday life. For example, King (1989) mentions that "domination of woman was the original domination in human society from which all other hierarchies of rank, class and political power flow" (p.25) Suggests that sexism to her is the most significant form of oppression.

For eco-feminists, it is clear that patriarchal society put women someplace between males and the rest of humankind on a symbolic hierarchy of existence. This allowed ecofeminists to recognize what they perceive as a related logic of power concerning the destructiveness of non-human beings and the mistreatment of women. Nonetheless, the central claim of several ecofeminists is that the greater culture's deflation of natural forces was a result of male consciousness as Simone de Beauvoir noted in her extensive study of "second gender" females as non-human animals were typically more concerned With the renewal and reproduction of creation, while men are generally Easy to search for means of the transcendence of nature through transforming, restructuring and re-creating the world by innovation and signs (Eckersley,1992, p. 2210). Women's dominance and sex unfairness are similar to ecological ruin (Humphrey, 2002).

Viewpoints that interpret Ecofeminism As a reflection of gender disparities, there are aspects that suggest that "the solution to environmental problems must include a feminist perspective" (Warren,1987). Ecofeminism is a community association from another view. As a community association, Ecofeminism can be described as a women's community involvement in the regeneration and preservation of work. Through the past of manhood, females have active with environmental movements around the world. Ecofeminism is also involved in ecological integrity and feminine morality (Kronlid,2003). Banerjeea & Bellb (2007) also claimed that Ecofeminism undergoes from a propensity to become more ideological than scholarly. Nevertheless, even with a new spike in Cross-disciplinary practice, specifically in essential political ecology, geography, and post-structuralism, sex issues are hardly addressed in traditional ecological, social sciences. In light of this neglect, attempt to show an alternate interpretation. (p. 3-19).

### **Ecofeminism as a means of spiritual healing of kate's character**

Spirituality is an essential part of Ecofeminism. It is also true of people-of-color environmental justice movements, in which spirituality is promoted, and there is a clear connection to religious organizations. However, the connections between women's environmental justice movement and radical Ecofeminism stop there. Radical ecofeminists were dismissive of the religion of a father god or transcendental goddess; they worship goddesses, arguing that the replacing of goddesses with a transcendental god is related to the emergence of patriarchy, male domination, war and the loss of value and

destruction of the environment. The growth of male superiority, they claim, reflected in the subordination and devaluation of female identities and resources, the unity of women and nurture, and the devaluation of both. (Warren, 1993),

King, Ynestra (1990) notes that these views have been disputed by both ecofeminists and in-cofeminists, who contend that the evidence presented to support these claims is poor and uncertain. Lahar (1991) points out that females in the environmental justice movement convey their spirituality in a variety of ways. Religious observances vary from the worship of the transcendental God to the observance of the far-eastern rituals or the ancient practices and rites of native Americans. Since many in the environmental justice community recognize diversity as power, there is respect and understanding for the various sources from which people draw their spirituality and power. Feminist Susan Griffin argues that the bond between women and nature is ontological. At the start of her *Woman and Nurture: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978), Griffin says:

We are the bird's eggs. Bird's eggs, flowers, butterflies, rabbits, cows, sheep; we are caterpillars; we are leaves of ivy and sprigs of a wallflower. We are women. We rise from the wave. We are gazelle and doe, elephant and whale, lilies and roses and peach. We are air, and we are flame, we are oyster and pearl, we are girls. We are women and nature. (Griffin,1989,p.1)

Griffin (1989) lists and challenges all the faults of male dominated society to control women and nature. She asserts that Western patriarchal societies have made use of this ontological relationship between women and nature to oppress women. Griffin focuses on this point in her article 'Split Culture' when she states, "[w]e are taught that we live not through the understanding of nature, but through the manipulation of Nature" (p. 7). As said by Griffin, the best way to free all women and nature is to move outside all long-held Western dualities. Socialist feminists, though, argue that women and nature must be re-associated on a transformative basis. This is to transform the connection between women and nature. In her article 'Survival on Earth: The Meaning of Ecofeminism,' Dinnerstein (1989) finds out that:

What feminism most urgently means is something very much broader than the right to equal pay for equal work (such rights are, of course, essential parts of it). It means withdrawing from old forms of male-female collaboration, not only because they restrict female access to some major sources of power, status, and pleasure, but now, most centrally, because they express and support the insanity that is killing the world.(Dinnerstein,1989,p.194)

As said by Dinnerstein (1989), women should not condemn their domestic skills as in first-wave feminism; instead, they must implement these abilities to 'correct' or 're-order' the world (p. 194). Likewise, men should not lose their domestic duties. Perhaps the biggest group of feminists who equate women with nature are those who contend from a spiritual point of view. They see the earth as a way of questioning other long-standing Western dualisms, such as those of men/women, religion/science, and nature/culture. Ruether (1989) asserts that "[a]n ecological-feminist theology of nature must rethink the whole western theological tradition of the hierarchical chain of being and chain of command. This theology must question the hierarchy of human over non-human nature as a relationship of ontological and moral value" (p.145). Likewise, the spiritual ecofeminist Cameron claims in her article 'First Mother and Rainbow Children':

The feminist movement has long believed and lived "the personal is political, the political is personal," and now we have learned that the spiritual is an integral part of both personal and political. There can be no separation of spirituality, it is not something you do for an hour on Sunday afternoon. (Cameron, 1989, p.58)

According to Cameron (1990), spirituality is not a passive luxury. It entails political action to change the world for the better. Following the same line of thought, Riane Eisler calls for "reclaiming our partnership traditions" with nature (p.33). In these traditions, according to Eisler (1990), "there was then no splintering of culture and nature, spirituality, science, and technology. Both our intuition and our reason were applied to the building of civilization, to devising better ways for us to live and work cooperatively" (p.34). Eisler (1990) maintains that "we have been taught that in Western Tradition, religion is the spiritual realm and that spirituality is separate from and superior to nature. But for our Goddess-worshipping ancestors, spirituality and nature were one." (p.30)

Women and men need to come together to understand the positive value of Ecofeminism. Each must acknowledge the equal contribution of the other; women should realize the restrained desire of men to be compassionate and express their feelings, and together should identify that females have also Internalized the hierarchical structure for dominance. It needs a cautious operation of transformative political construction, and Simultaneously deconstructing current systems that reproduce domination structures. In the process of setting up new circumstances, care must be occupied not to build new Specific concepts of ecofeminism trace to the patriarchal the source of control of nature and gender Patriarchy as described in the sociology dictionary is the social system of men who had the right to rule and control over all The family members. In the system patriarch, the essence of women is tied to the skin, blood, content, nature feelings, etc., while the culture of men is connected to mind, knowledge, sense, and culture. Merchant (1990), mentioning how females and environment provide an analogous method of the patriarchs, says in "Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory" suggests that "in fact bring nature and all her descendants to you, let her serve you, be your servant" (p.37). Ecofeminist society becomes possible only when both the victim and the persecutor understand dualism is the source of totally panaceas in the world and get on to terms that will live a happy and contented existence altogether. Ynestra King illustrates in "Ecofeminist Imperative" the connectedness in Eco-Feminism thus:

. . . We believe in the philosophy of nonviolence—that no person should be made into an "other" to despise, dehumanize, and exploit. As women, we have been an "other," but we are refusing to be the 'other' any longer, and we will not make anyone else into an 'other.' Sexism, racism, class divisions, homophobia, and the rape of nature depend on this process of objectification. (p.12)

In Alice walker's novel, Kate is the essential character; throughout this paper, the connection between Kate's character and the nature will be shown. Kate's starting on a cathartic adventure, a trip to the Colorado River, a trip of discovery that Re-exploration of her life and potential, and Kate's strong relationship to the world of nature. During the adventures, she encounters the shamans and the mystical religious Reality of the Indians. Her quest takes her to a variety of Self-searching experiences. That inevitably leads to a more accurate perception of herself and everyone around her. She develops a deep respect for animals and plants, including moths and rats and bats. She sees life in its different

dimensions and starts to understand and Understand the connectedness that exists between human beings and non-humans. Happiness only comes when you contribute to take care of it. Kate learns the message, and she finds satisfaction towards the end of the novel.

The main character Kate has A lot of things in common with her creator, and she meditates in a space surrounded by redwood trees. She thinks she was naming herself Kate nelson fir because she liked fir trees. Her attitude turns as her Spiritual teacher speaks about the collapse of "hot revolutions" of violence and guns and its vulnerabilities. He urges individuals to adopt the "cool revolution" started by Buddha twenty-five hundred years ago. Kate starts to think and believe that "she had reached an impasse on the Buddhist road." (Walker 2005, p.3) Kate acknowledges that Patriarchy is life destroying. Devoid of unrestricted Love and domestic happiness, Kate becomes frustrated. The males she knew, before her lover Yolo, were egocentric, so those men see Kate as a mule. Also, Kate's boyfriend, Yolo, at last, leaves her. Kate opposes the oppressive system that surrounds her, so she wishes to be a free woman. The hierarchy finds females and nature as objects to be dominated and dominated. Alice walker's novel is mostly a representation of her dream of environmental identity and eco-spirituality. Attempts are being taken to see how the character learns her personality, and her primary ecological self has Participated in ecological issues.

In the introduction to "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism," Greta Gaard & Patrick D. Murphy (1998) delineate that "ecofeminism grew out of the struggles of women to sustain themselves, their families and their communities. These struggles are waged against the mal-development and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism".(p.2) this patriarchal power is being practiced against nature, and perceives the environment as something to be degraded or ruined. The frustration is curbing back the Creative motives, and she's banging the pen, one of Kate's friends recommends that she had better take a rest from her Earthly life. Completely Irritated with the material world, she burns "several hundred-dollar bills just to demonstrate to herself that these items were not the God/Goddess of her life" (Walker, 2005, p.12). She's not any more concerned about her house and all the stuff she needs to fix.

Moreover, she even plans to sell it. She's not sure about the need to do anything more about her own life. The repeated dream of the river is her new life in decay, which acts as a catalyst to walk out and search for enlightenment.

Kate is a wandered A famous writer, and married many times, Kate lived a life productive of exploring human nature and spirit. Currently, at 57 years of age, she quits Yolo, her husband, to start a new journey, the first trip starts with the Colorado River, passes through the past and proceeds, inevitably, to the future. The novel shows Walker's commitment to equality. When we first see Kate, she's 57 years old, "a slim, slender girl with good skin and creamy white teeth" (Walker,2005, p.9). Still disturbed by the freshly polished knees and the mind that had not happy to pursue a well-trodden route. Always a searcher starts a spiritual voyage in which she explores the healing and esthetic qualities of nature, the importance of human being ties also the strength of the family connection. Kate condemns materialism, religious belief, and also, the horrors of violent behavior and "uncivilized" society. Kate's self-discovery is the main character of the novel within the Womanist Ethics paradigm; Kate experiences self-discovery. Although discerning paradoxes and dilemmas in people's lives, Kate Talking-tree needs a twist in her daily life, even though she is a widely published author. She retains an over-ordained home, especially oversensitive about its unpreparedness. She's connected through several failed relationships. Discomfort and suffering are starting to fix Kate's focus on herself. Kate recognizes the aging process in her bulk. As indicated, "One day she hears her knees

creaking like unoiled door hinges." (Walker,2005, p.11) and discovers, "wrenching pain in her hip." (Walker,2005, p.12) Exactly unmanageable. Her age development sets her necessity for change. Kate's physical barriers are not just material objects and their immediate surroundings, but also Institutionalization of religion, Kate is no longer holding structured Meetings of Buddhist meditation. While she appreciates her mentor and her Peaceful Revolution, she suspects that her mentor, a cultured popular tutor, lacks a revolutionary nature that could inspire him to fight for the development of the oppressed people. It shows:

Easy enough for him to dismiss the brown and black and yellow and poor white people all over the globe who always worried where their next meal was coming . (Walker,2005, p. 4-5)

Besides, Kate recognizes the weirdness of the participants who have come together with them. "well-fed look," and "were overwhelmingly white and middle- to upper-middle-class and had the money and leisure time to be at retreat" (Walker,2005, p.5). Kate is nervous because she's the only woman who has black skin in the team, Kate decides to sit down near a large tree, and she doesn't prefer to go to the mediation room. She finds out that the tree as a sample of profound holiness that provides harmony. In fact, she is questioning religion She acknowledges that even as a small boy he may never focus on church prayer, observing trees from the windows, spiritual closeness to creation is one of the main themes in the story, Kate is accepted by the spirit of a welcoming tree which encourages her to change her name from Nelson to Talking Tree. Therefore, to avoid her husband's restrictive presence, she wishes of being, "upon a hillside in the heat" (Walker, 2005, p. 28). She also dreams of Anaconda, a sign of human life's insecurity. Kate is feeling, "We are all on the back of a giant anaconda. It is slithering and sliding, darting and diving like anacondas do. This is the reality of the world".(Walker, 2005, p. 7)

She recalls how her "bird nature became activated" at the art exhibition. (Walker, 2005, p. 20) And Doubted, she could float. Finally, Kate begins to conceive of a dry river of darkness, of life, and her creativity as an author, Here again, Walker explores the idea of Ecofeminism in which A female symbolizes her loneliness, a dry stream in her head. The reflections were nothing more than the feeling's consequence. The dry river is life's dying nature. She carries her thoughts as a journey of discovery. She starts to feel the following:

Her mission now was to be with a woman only women, because she had seemed to explore and to wonder aloud about the possibility that only women these days dreamed of rivers and were alarmed that they were dry. (Walker, 2005, p.16)

Hence, her mates motivate Kate to go on Transcendental journey to the river of Colorado. Boat ride rockiness causes motion sickness, and Kate's body is going purifying itself. This action is a requirement for her spiritual enlightenment, involving a self-examination. On this trip, Kate encounters a closer sense of spirituality. Unintentionally she excretes an unfamiliar yellow flower that relieves her stomach She learns that plants are also part of the natural world and should have the same right of universe — until we start to realize that the challenge for Walker is to identify the therapeutic plants that provide: they are the root of our well-being, both body and soul. Kate's Colorado trip breaks her spiritual path. This continues with another travel to the River of Amazon, where the ceremonial member consumes "a frothy liquid that tastes like soapsuds"

(Walker, 2005, p.51-52), as a tea before swallowing the holy medicinal plant Yage, known as "grandmother." It is claimed that the herb creates spiritual shift and treatment. Grandmother Earth's therapy helps them connect to their inner world, their fears, and anxieties, and see what they lacked with their existence and where they were damaged. Over a process involving extreme purification caused by plant-based fluid causing vomiting and diarrhea since, they contend, "you could never put a sacred medicine into a polluted body" (Walker, 2005, p. 52) and the exquisite encounters of Grandmother Earth exposing her secrets and wisdom, seekers could find their place in the intricate design of life and enter their river Walker uses the novel's term "river" as life's metaphor. As Kate thinks of empty rivers, she considers her life pointless. At the end of Kate's grandmother's session, Mother Nature gives a message from the relationship between Kate and her family, and she feels calm. She said in one of the final chapters, "I am peace, said grandmother and nothing has died for me to exist. Not tobacco, not grapes of sugarcane. Not human beings and not me! She added, laughing. When you circle, paint your faces with yage to remember this." (Walker, 2005, p.118). Kate encounters lovers and celibates, shamans and snakes at the end of the river voyage, stories of family misery and marriage struggles, and emerges in a position where nothing remains except passion. She's remembering:

Armando's voice as he sang 'icaros,' healing songs that had come down to him through countless generations... 'Now is the time to open your heart.'  
(Walker, 2005, p.210)

She recently returned from the woods, exposing her heart as 'pure love' for all the creatures, nature, and history where her ancestors had lived. Within her book, Walker honestly believes that hat humans are the earth's flesh. Walker insists that Nature, Planet constructs our organs, male and female, whose cycles mirror their phases. To Alice Walker, we were planet's co-conspirators, inherent from her in death and life, heading to her hands at the end of our time. According to the traditions of many native tribes, Walker saw the earth as a caring and ever-green mother of all, and "it was meant to be appreciated for its wonderfulness." (Walker, 2005, p. 176) Although some indigenous people loved the world by singing it, as Yolo understood in the novel, the original Hawaiian people "mapped the land by singing it... no location had its proper music."

### **Conclusion**

Ecofeminists agree that women play a significant role in environmental protection because women appreciate nature, and men control women and nature. Men are responsible for the destruction of the environment. Women are the most influential group responsible for eco-literacy transformation and household intake management. Walker encouraged the audience through her book to learn about the intimate relationship between nature and planet and the life of Mother nature and her healing power. Alice Walker's stories and essays are soothing. Compassion is the key to saving the world, it's the way to protect and resolve issues, and it brings us closer. Although Black-skinned humans used to see the environment with reverence, glorious and inspiring, their relationship with Mother Earth renders them sadly classified pagans. While eco-feminists contend, Alice Walker demonstrates that human beings must follow the ideology of empathy, Equal rights of life, and role to overcome inequality and build a harmonious world. It avoids interaction with the environment based on sacred feminine fear, injustice, and negation. Her "earth-centered, feminine-reverent beliefs" conflict to old religions that ignore female's rights. Alice Walker's novel addresses specific issues. As an ecofeminist novel, the story, full of



religious reading, meditation and yoga, shamanism, healing practices, and medicinal demonstrated by the neo-pagan philosophy of the environmental. It represents the spiritual significance of women acting as the "voice of nature" and allowing us to build a "new national community" The quest for a new religion helps Yolo to join Kate is leading a contemplative existence.

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