Introduction

Ecowomanism: Earth Honoring Faiths

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Ecowomanism is a growing field within Religion and Ecology that features the voices of women of African descent and women of color. Honoring distinct and particular approaches to earth justice emerging from religious worldviews based on African cosmology the essays in this volume illustrate global perspectives on the environmental crisis from countries across the African diaspora. Recognizing global links between women of African descent living in North America, West Africa, Brazil and other parts of the diaspora is an important hallmark of third wave of womanism. As I explain in my previous work, Gifts of Virtue, Alice Walker and Womanist Ethics, other hallmarks of third wave womanism include investigating the interreligious landscape of womanist and ecowomanist perspectives, and applying interdisciplinary approaches towards finding solutions to the environmental crisis we are facing.

“Ecowomanism: An Introduction” by Melanie L. Harris provides a frame for ecowomanism by providing a definition and explanation of how this aspect of religious discourse is connected to an environmental justice paradigm. This essay provides a definition and theoretical frame for ecowomanism. The ecowomanist approach to environmental justice centers the perspectives of women of African descent and reflects upon these women's activist methods, religious practices, and theories on how to engage earth justice. As a part of the womanist tradition methodologically, ecowomanism features race, class, gender intersectional analysis to examine environmental injustice around the planet. Thus, it builds upon an environmental justice paradigm that also links social justice to environmental justice. Ecowomanism highlights the necessity for race-class-gender intersectional analysis when examining the logic of domination, and unjust public policies that result in environmental health disparities that historically more negatively impact communities of color. As an aspect of third wave womanist religious thought, ecowomanism is also shaped by the religious practices and spiritual beliefs that uphold a moral imperative.
for earth justice within women's own faith practice. Noting the significance of African and Native American cosmologies that link divine, human and nature realms into an interconnected web of life and the influence this has on religious worldviews regarding earth justice, are crucial aspects of ecowomanism.

As the following chapters will show, the moral landscape of ecowomanism is vast but certain themes including, ecowomanist epistemology, ethics, eco-memory, method and praxis are clear touchstones for the field. Sofia Betancourt’s essay, “Between Dishwater and the River: Toward an Ecowomanist Methodology” brilliantly articulates ecowomanist values including agency, earth community, religious pluralism, interconnectedness, and intergenerational sharing and highlights the theme of black women’s agency in environmental justice and eco justice movements. In this work she describes ecowomanist ethics as situated in the interplay between “ecojustice and environmental justice approaches,” and honors the epistemologies that emerge from black women’s lived experiences of honoring their connection with the earth. Betancourt explores how black women’s earth justice commitments are interwoven with their womanist theological foundations and names several sources of womanist epistemology including theory, method, praxis, poetry and song that embody ecowomanist themes and values that result in “the preservation of both nature and human dignity.” (Betancourt, 1).

Building upon the theme of interconnectedness, Xiumei Pu’s essay, entitled, “Turning Weapons into Flowers: Eco spiritual Poetics and Politics of Bon and Ecowomanism” draws out a “particular thread of the rich tapestry of womanism.” This essay focuses on the connections between the natural, the human and the spiritual realms; connections traditionally noted in many African and Asian cosmologies. Moving from this kind of cosmological frame for ecowomanist spirituality, Pu connects the origins of “womanist” coined by Alice Walker with the distinctive form of Africana womanism described by Clenora Hudson-Weems. Pu claims that both are deeply spiritual. Noting this resonance, she opens us up to an interreligious ecowomanist dialogue noting some comparisons between ecowomanist spirituality and a form of Buddhism known as Bon, “that involves harmonizing the self with the environment.”

“Seeds of Light, Flowers of Power, Fruits of Change: Ecowomanism as Spiritualized Ecological Praxis” by Layli Maparyan emphasizes the praxis orientation of ecowomanism. Here, Maparyan highlights the core connections of womanism to social and ecological justice, and provides models of ecowomanism. These models include the work of Sister Chan Khong and sweet potato farming, Kiran Bedi’s transformation of Tihar Prison through a process of beautification, and adoption of ecological sustainability programs, and Wangari Maathai’s Green Belt movement. Bravely crossing interreligious,