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**WOMAN-NATURE CONNECTION IN CAMILLE T.
DUNGY'S SOIL: THE STORY OF A BLACK MOTHER'S
GARDEN (2023): A CONSTRUCTIVE STONE IN THE
ECOWOMANIST DISCUSSION**

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Abstract: The present paper investigates the issue of woman-nature connection through the theoretical framework of ecowomanism. The portrayal of women's connection to nature has long been a subject of debate within ecofeminism, the first critical approach to address the unjust practices towards women and nature. Nonetheless, while ecofeminism is one of the foundational frameworks upon which eco-womanism was built, it overlooked the concerns of Black women and their ecological experiences. Hence, ecowomanism has emerged in reaction to the limitations identified within ecofeminism. Ecowomanism, while similar to ecofeminism, introduces a distinct and more involved discourse that moves beyond earlier debates. The analysis

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conducted in this article reveals that women of African descent and their communities have an empowering connection with the earth; a connection that has various dimensions: inclusive, spiritual, remedial, epistemological, and even paradoxical. They are both a part of the web of life which interconnects humanity, nature and the divine. In order to examine these findings, the discussion is directed towards Camille T. Dungy's memoir, *Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden* (2023) as a literary work by an African American female writer that echoes and exemplifies such empowering multi-dimensional connections. Through detailed thematic and textual analysis, the article examines how the author views gardening as more than a physical act, but an act of resistance, personal growth, and connection to the earth.

Keywords: African-Descended Women, Ecowomanism, Multi-Dimensional Connections, Nature, *Soil*.

**CAMILLE T. DUNGY'NİN SOIL: BİR SİYAH ANNE'NİN
BAHÇESİ (2023) ESERİNDE KADIN-DOĞA BAĞI:
ECO-WOMANİST TARTIŞMASINDA YAPICI BİR TAŞ**

Öz: Bu makale, kadın-doğa bağlantısı sorununu ekokadıncılık teorik çerçevesiyle incelemektedir. Kadınların doğayla ilişkisi, kadınlara ve doğaya yönelik adaletsiz uygulamalara dikkat çeken ilk eleştirel yaklaşım olan ekofeminizm içinde uzun süredir tartışılan bir konudur. Ancak ekofeminizm, ekokadıncılığın temelini oluşturmasına rağmen, siyah kadınların ve onların ekolojik deneyimlerinin kaygılarını göz ardı etmiştir. Bu nedenle, ekokadıncılık ekofeminizmdeki sınırlamalara tepki olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Ekokadıncılık, ekofeminizme benzerlik taşısa da, önceki tartışmaların ötesine geçen özgün ve daha kapsamlı bir söylem sunar. Bu makalede yapılan analiz, Afrika kökenli kadınlar ve topluluklarının doğayla güçlendirici bir bağa sahip olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır; bu bağ kapsayıcı, ruhani, iyileştirici, epistemolojik ve hatta paradoksal olmak üzere çeşitli boyutlara sahiptir. Onlar, insanlık, doğa ve ilahi arasındaki yaşam ağına dâhildirler. Bu bulguları incelemek amacıyla, tartışma Afrika Amerikalı kadın yazar Camille T. Dungy'nin 2023 tarihli anı kitabı *Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden* üzerinden yürütülmüştür; bu eser, güçlendirici çok boyutlu bağları yansıtan ve örnekleyen bir çalışmadır. Ayrıntılı tematik ve metin analizi yoluyla, makale yazarın bahçeciliği sadece fiziksel bir eylem olarak değil, aynı zamanda bir direniş, kişisel gelişim ve toprakla bağ kurma eylemi olarak gördüğünü incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Afrika Kökenli Kadınlar, Ekokadıncılık, Çok Boyutlu Bağlantılar, Doğa, Toprak.

Introduction

Women and nature have consistently been targeted variables in justice-related discussions. Separate social and literary movements emerged tackling issues related to them. However, a combination of movements holding

twin concepts seemed to be more powerful and persuasive. The woman-nature nexus came to the fore with ecofeminist school of thought. The latter combines social and environmental injustice that is closely linked to women and nature. Its basic assertion is that both women and nature are victims of an oppressive and exploitative patriarchal capitalist system. Ecofeminist scholar Karren Warren (1996) argues that "any feminist theory and any environmental ethic which fails to take seriously the twin and interconnected dominations of women and nature is at best incomplete and at worst simply inadequate" (Warren, 1996: 19). The aim of ecofeminist philosophy is then the emancipation of women and nature from the surrounding subjugation. Nevertheless, while ecofeminist scholarship consistently argues that the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature are interlinked and both rooted in the hierarchical logic of Western industrial civilization and patriarchal social systems (Merchant, 1980; Plumwood, 1993), they differ in their views when it comes to the question of whether "there is a connection between women and nature". Many of the founders and advocates of ecofeminism emphasize the tight bond between women and nature (though they differ in the type of this connection). Others see that admitting such association is in itself a kind of injustice. These differences have created two different branches within ecofeminism; spiritual and social ecofeminism.

Spiritual ecofeminists who support the first view base their arguments on two major premises. The first is related to the biological experiences of women such as giving birth and nurturing which render them closer to nature. The second is based upon the shared oppression between women and nature; one that puts them within the same dominated side and also provides women with clearer image on how to achieve an ecological recovery (Eckersley, 1992: 66). On the other hand, opponents of the idea of associating women with nature (most of them are social ecofeminists) put forwards different arguments. For instance, Ortner (1974) maintains that the inferiority of women is caused by her consistent association with nature (Ortner, 1974: 83) either on a physiological, social or psychological ground (Ortner, 1974: 74) which is basically a culturally built conviction that intends to keep her under dominance (Ortner, 1974: 87). Roach (1991) from her part repudiates the view that links nature and women on the ground that both men and women are part of nature

and none of them is "closer" or "farther" (Roach, 1991: 53). Moreover, Roach asserts that the debate of woman-nature connection carries a culture–nature dualism and that keeps the hierarchical system ongoing since it might simply reverse the case and place men in the inferior position of the dichotomy (Roach, 1991: 55). This last idea is asserted by Eckersley, too (Eckersley, 1992: 66). In their view the solution does not lie on spreading ideas that support the interconnectedness of nature and women; rather the clue lies in changing the social beliefs and attitudes that are dualistically constructed. As this contradictory debate remains continuing on theoretical ground, a number of quantitative researches have been conducted to address the extent to which the premise of human /nature connection in general affects human's behavior towards nature. As an illustration, a study published under the title "Connections with Nature and Environmental Behaviours" (2015) by Geng (et al) suggests that people's perspective of nature determines their actions towards it, i.e. the more people are connected to nature, the better their behaviours are.

1. The Woman-Nature Connection From An Ecowomanist Angle

Ecowomanism is born out of ecofeminism and both carry the same emancipatory tone to nature and women. However, ecofeminism considers gender as the only hallmark to address when it comes to the white women's concerns. Ecowomanism, on the other hand, came on stage because it widens the circle of hallmarks so that it suits the living conditions of a distinct category in the society: The Black woman and her community (the consistent reference to the community is related to the principle of wholeness and inclusiveness that distinguishes ecowomanism from ecofeminism) together with environmental crisis (Riley, 2003: 373). Statistically speaking, members of the African American community are more vulnerable towards climate change because of the high rates of poverty and the direct contact with toxic wastes thrown into their territories. As a result, they are placed directly in front of the dangers of climate change and left with no choice but to be part of the environmental activism agenda. bell hooks (2009) assumes that Black self-recovery can never be achieved without taking part in the ecological salvation (bell hooks, 2009: 40). Concerning the Black woman, life experiences, theological beliefs and the intersectional set of oppressions combining racism, sexism and classism are major factors that set her apart from the other members of the society. Ecofeminism could not realize this uniqueness and thus, it could not speak for them.

Contrarily, ecowomanism spots light on the concerns of women of African descent together with ecological disasters (global warming, pollution, species extinction, among others). It seeks the salvation of African-descended women and their communities, alongside nature, while also uncovering the true participation of Black women in the past and the present in enhancing the environmental movement.

In fact, the white environmentalists prejudicially have underestimated the African American environmental history (Harris, 2017: 17). They assume that the African descended people lack the required requisites to be active participants in environmental activism. Alternatively, works of the ecowomanist scholars have dismantled these prejudgments and demonstrated the crucial role played by the African American woman and her community in promoting the American land via their agricultural expertise.

One basic feature that intensifies the case of the Black woman is that she does not only struggle to defend her "femaleness" but even her "very humanity" (Riley, 2003: 374). Due to the Western dualistic thinking, Black people in general and Black women in particular were associated with animals. Dualism is made up of opposing pairs wherein one part is always considered superior while the other part is deemed inferior and under control. Among the most famous dualistic pairs are culture /nature, white/ black, male/ female, colonizer/ colonized. The first element of each dichotomy is the privileged one as opposed to the second that is seen as passive, as "non agent and non subject" (Plumwood, 1993: 4). This is what Karren Warren calls "the logic of domination" according to which the superior entity has the right to subjugate lower level one. The women from African descent were categorized with the second half of the dichotomy and they were thus associated with whatever inferior entity, like animals and nature. To hooks and West (1991), "the Black female body has been seen in Western eyes as the quintessential symbol of a "natural" female presence that is organic, closer to nature, animalistic, primitive" (hooks & West, 1991: 153). Despite the fact that this association of women with nature and animals is abusive, Riley (2003) maintains that the solution is not in disassociation of people from nature; rather the key is in rebuilding our relation with nature while restoring fair social roles (Riley, 2003: 370).

In ecowomanism, the issue of woman-nature connection is not controver-

sial but it is different and deeper. The ecowomanist approach believes in the close relation between women of African descent and the earth, but the difference is in the perception of this relation and its particularities. In other words, the woman-nature connection in ecowomanism is believed to be an enhancing rather than a hindering factor in the promotion of social and environmental justice. Essentially, this relation is multi-dimensional, it is inclusive, spiritual, remedial, epistemological and yet paradoxical. These types of relations explain the distinctiveness of ecowomanism and identify the essence of the connection between the African American woman and the earth.

A. Woman-Nature Inclusive Connection

Based on Melanie Harris's thoughts, ecowomanism is inclusive in the sense that it is about wholeness. That is to say, for the ecofeminists the issue is between two variables nature and women, but for the ecowomanists, their philosophy addresses the web of life as a whole that is composed of "spirit, nature and humanity". This tripartite, drawn from the African cosmology, considers women and the earth as a part of a larger cycle whose elements share the same needs and concerns. Throughout her book *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth Honoring Faiths*, Harris uses the term African women or women of African descent 150 times, while she uses the term African or African American (without women) when referring to people, environmental history, communities and cosmology 116 times. At first glance, a book that is talking about Black women needs to have this key word repeated each time the subject under study is mentioned but Harris does not do so because ecowomanism is far more inclusive; that is why it had to be addressed apart and with much focus and special attention. According to Harris (2017) "ecowomanism is unapologetically for the liberation of African peoples and the wholeness of the earth community" (Harris, 2017: 19). It is true that the core interest of ecowomanism is the Black woman, but a close examination of Harris's study of ecowomanism reveals that it "embodies values that suggest all beings have innate worth and dignity" (Harris, 2017: 152).

B. Woman-Nature Spiritual Connection

The connection between women of African descent and nature is also characterized by a spiritual dimension. Ecowomanism glorifies the earth and associates it with divine value. This spirituality stems in the first place from

African cosmology that identifies the cultural background of the Africans and the African Americans who were brought to America as slaves and passed their cultural and spiritual heritage to the coming generations. According to the African cosmology, nature and its various elements, land water, plants and animals, are sacred. They are related to the ancestors and the protection of nature brings about prosperity to the whole community because the ancestors are satisfied (Ruffin, 2010: 9). Such sacredness dictates an ethical code towards nature. Hence, all elements of life; nature, humans and the divine are interrelated with no superiority or privilege of one over the other (Harris, 2017: 70). On that account, ecowomanism derives its major arguments from the African cosmology with its inherently supportive attitude to the earth. Women of African descent in particular and people of African descent in general have adopted the beliefs of their ancestors who were brought to America. Their relation with nature is far more than being material. it is about the soul and "spiritual nourishment" as bell hooks (2009) calls it. Black people find peace and relief in the earth via "Growing food to sustain life and flowers to please the soul " (bell hooks, 2009: 36).

C. Woman-Nature Remedial Connection

The sense of empowerment they absorb from the land is also healing or remedial. The earth as a healing agent is a fundamental aspect in ecowomanism. from slavery days up to today the African American people used their interconnection with the earth to heal their wounds, calm their rage and regain their souls to stand in front of the brutal white slave owners in the past and the racist, sexist and classist powers since then. This healing power has been a crucial theme in Alice Walker's writings for it conveys the ecostories of Black women surviving thanks to the power they get from the earth. One of these stories is the one Walker tells about her own mother who was struggling while working in a huge field. Walker narrates

I remember my mother telling me of a time when she was hugely pregnant and had an enormous field of cotton, twenty or thirty acres to chop...as my mother looked out over the immense acreage still to be covered, she felt so ill she could barely lift the hoe...coming to the end of a row, she lay down under a tree and asked to die. Instead she fell into a deep sleep and when she

awakens, she was fully restored. In fact, she felt wonderful, as if a healing breeze had touched her soul. She picked up the hoe and continued her work. (Walker, 1991: 13)

Additionally, in her masterpiece, *In Search of Our Mother Garden* (1983) Alice Walker admires her mother's gardening skills and describes her plants as magic. the beauty of the garden and the passion that her mother worked with inspired Alice to the extent that she never thought of their misery and poverty but of the charming beauty of her mother's flowers.

D. Woman-Nature Epistemological Connection

Originally, the African Americans came from agrarian societies. They brought with them great agricultural knowledge that helped them in the Antebellum South and flourished the American land thanks to not only the African slaves' cultivation skills but also the crops and seeds they brought with them. In their article "Contributions of African Crops to American Culture and Beyond the Slave Trade and Other Journeys of Resilient Peoples and Crops" (2020), Emily Sousa and Manish Raizada focus on the valuable contributions of the crops native to Africa to the United States of America. These crops such as watermelon, okra, yam, oil palm, leafy greens and many others were introduced to America in the seventeenth century through slavery. An important detail that the article refers to is the ignorance of most people and professionals of the origin of these crops and the great addition of the African Americans to American agriculture through their human resources and knowledge. The African farm laborers most of whom were women working land and bearing children to be future slaves had exceptional cultivation techniques. Even today these skills can participate in crop evolution which would help the world fighting climate change and food scarcity. Moreover, Sousa and Raizada discuss the relation between racial practices and originally African crops. That is to say, one of the malicious Western colonial strategies is to attack the identity elements of the colonized and disparage their culture, religion, language, food and knowledge. As a result, the agricultural contributions of the African slaves has rarely been reported or admitted. So, uncovering these facts might end racial and inequity practices against peoples of African origins. Now, from an ecowomanist view, it is obligatory to restore the African American's ecomemory which embodies environmental history, experiences and cultivation skills of Black people in general and Black women in particular. The

latter would then have an empowering tool to free them from the dualistic oppressive Western thought and practice in addition to enriching the environmental movement and assist in the rescuing process.

E. Woman-Nature Paradoxical Connection

The healing breeze that Walker's mother felt, the spiritual nourishment that hooks talks about and the concept of land as "home" that Harris focuses on represent only the bright side of the scene. This relation between women of African descent and nature is complex, in fact, it is paradoxical. This paradoxity marks the distinctiveness of ecowomanism. Ruffin (2010) labels this relation "burden and beauty paradox" to demonstrate that it is terrifying as much as it is charming. To rephrase it, history reveals the horrific scenes lived by the enslaved African Americans who were brutally forced to land labor. The view of the Black people hung in trees was an ordinary view at that time and the lynching tree became a symbol of the cruel life they had. In addition, scenes of Black women being raped, tortured or have their children sold to slavery was among the unforgettable nightmares women of the African descent lived. the African American people witnessed all this terror on the American South plantations in the middle of the crops they grow days and nights. The land acts as a reminder of the blood and tears the African Americans and especially Black women went through. Although they considered earth a sacred and inseparable part of their lives, the inhuman events they experienced stuck to their minds and became part of their memories and the coming generations trauma. In "Black Women and the Wilderness," Evelyn White (1995) talks about her fears of the outdoors and of exploring nature. These fears are the outcome of her childhood and the stories about the racial treatment that the Black people and especially Black women were victims to. White was obsessed with the idea that nature is a dangerous place for a woman like her. She would probably be raped or murdered. Fortunately, she decided to engage in a trip to defeat this fear and finally she was able to enjoy nature. White is just one sample of the many cases of the African Americans suffering from such contradictory feelings.

2. Woman-Nature Connection In Soil: *The Story of A Black Mother Garden*

Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden (2023) traces Dungy's tough yet inspirational journey to grow a garden in her new house back yard in Fort Collins, Colorado. Seemingly, *Soil* turns around the garden, gardening and various plants. However, in reality this narrative is far beyond. Dungy's memoir befits the notions of ecowomanism as she explores themes of community, diversity, racism, sexism, social and environmental justice, history and patience. Being a Black woman in a white supremacist ecosystem "that often sprays women and brown people with toxins for the sake of more profit and yield" (Dungy, 2023: 12), Dungy emphasizes the intricate connectivity between the Blacks and the environment or what she calls the "greater-than-human world"(Dungy, 2023: 92, 168). Dungy's connection to nature begins first and for most with her immense concerns about climate change and its subsequent outcomes. She is willing to take part in change even if in a small garden via creating a diverse and nurturing environment for plants and little insects. More importantly, she feels satisfied and happy when admiring the beauty of her garden.

Furthermore, the book delves into the shared danger faced by the humans more precisely the Blacks and nature. Dungy believes in the close relationship that must be between the humans and the "greater-than-human world" despite the old socially constructed assumptions. She writes

Whether a plot in a yard or pots in a window, every politically engaged person should have a garden. By politically engaged, I mean everyone with a vested interest in the direction the people on this planet take in relationship to others. We should all take some time to plant life in the soil. Even when such planting isn't easy (Dungy, 2023: 10).

Dungy sheds lights on the significance of gardening and connecting with nature. According to her, anyone who is interested in the future of the environment and the surrounding social concerns needs to protect the ecosystem. Despite the possible hardships, a simple act like gardening can change the course of events, intensify human nature connection and save the future.

From an ecowomanist perspective, Camille T. Dungy's memoir *Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden* offers a fertile literary landscape that displays the various types of connections a Black woman can have with nature:

Inclusive, spiritual, remedial, epistemological and even paradoxical.

A major theme in *Soil* is community and inclusivity. The garden is a metaphor for the society. Dungy talks about plants but she implies ideas about the structure of the society and the realities lived by the Black people and the environment. Political policies of the city she moved to impose growing particular types of plants to keep homogeneity. But Dungy defies these policies and she enriches her garden with a diversity of plants. By violating the restrictions, she rebels in her own small garden against the ongoing aggressive racist unfair acts against the Blacks and the environment. Accordingly, she refuses the use of any chemicals that would hurt the soil and the plants. Her garden becomes also home to different birds, insects and even rabbits. She responded to suggestions about fencing the garden to keep rabbits away by "plant more mallows, bigger bluestems...Let the rabbits make themselves at home" (Dungy, 2023: 244). Dungy insists on the importance of diversity and acceptance starting from her own garden where she notices the difficulty of surviving without community and help of the others. While taking care of her garden, Dungy keeps digging into African-American past and present racial segregation Black people have been subject to insisting on the close relation between environmental and social justice issues. She quotes her father saying "for us, there is no separation between environmental and social justice" (Dungy, 2023: 212). Dungy talks about one of the most past painful experiences of the Blacks when they could not get flowers for their funerals from white people and therefore they had to plant their own flowers. Also, she portrays current incidents of white policeman killing Black people like Jorden Edwards and Elijah McClain. She emphasizes the reasons why some people suffer just because they are "being too plain, and too Black and too womanish" (Dungy, 2023: 74). In addition, throughout the book, Dungy binds environmental elements from her garden to social justice issues. For instance, she recounts how around 150 birds were named after racist figures from history but thanks to the American Ornithological Society, these birds were renamed as a step to eradicate such reminder of the American racial system against people of color. In another incident, Dungy reports her husband Ray's statement in which he compares Black people to dandelions, a common type of weeds that

are always removed. Ray expresses his frustration regarding the unfair and violent practices Black people have always been affected by.

In her gardening and in her relation with the earth, Dungy experiences spiritual reflections and a self-development process. Spirituality implies themes linked to religious beliefs, values and inner thoughts. Accordingly, her inclination to the environmental concerns is partly driven by "a desire to construct meaning from and connection with what is beyond -her-...it's a spiritual question and a practical one"(Dungy, 2023: 168). Gardening stimulates Dungy's reflections about the interconnectedness of the universe, the creator and creatures. She engages in a kind of meditation and she expresses her beliefs that nature is a manifestation of God (Dungy, 2023: 173). She thinks of the greater-than-human world as a means of communication with the creator. Besides, in her reflections, Dungy often talks about the process of personal development she is undertaking thanks to gardening and attachment to nature. She speaks about patience and growth as "a key to survival" (Dungy, 2023: 11). The seeds are a metaphor for Dungy 's soul. Like the seeds that flourish under the bright sun, Dungy matures by virtue of the events she lives among her plants. Her inner thoughts are full of peace, pleasure, and gratitude. She trusts that faith keeps hope and hope requires resilience.

During the period from 2013 to 2020 Dungy witnesses various depressing events: Covid19 lockdown, the Cameron Peak fire, the incident of the killing of Elijah McClain, a Black child. Nevertheless, the garden is Dungy's remedy, a constant source of relief and happiness. She believes that "every person who finds herself constantly navigating political spaces by which I mean every person who regularly finds herself demoralized and exhausted by the everyday patterns of life in America should have access to a garden"(Dungy, 2023: 14). The life Dungy sustains in her back yard helps her fighting anxiety, frustration and depression. She enjoys her work and loves the creators she deals with. It is love and passion that motivate her to persist with the good work despite all the surrounding tough events. The Cameron Peak fire, a huge wildfire that lasted from August to December 2020, burned more than 200,000 acres throughout Colorado and it made matters worse for Dungy and her family like all other inhabitants of the area who were already locked in their houses because of Covid. Amongst the crisis, Dungy develops a healing and empowering connection with the earth through working on her garden, the garden offers

her relief and satisfaction. The therapeutic power of gardening displays itself in her parents' life too. Gardening encouraged them "to keep living, keep prospering and keep laughing " (Dungy, 2023: 229) in defiance of long years of racial segregation and disappointment with the white supremacist system. In other words, the acts of gardening play a crucial role in reducing the effects of race-based traumatic stress (RBTS) which has haunted the majority of the African American people. Considered from another angle, the overwhelming joy that Dungy feels thanks to her garden is rooted in the agency she has over the garden itself. The idea of having a yard that she works on freely proves her authority and ownership, something her enslaved ancestors were forbidden from. She wants to put in her daughter's mind that there is no one in charge of their life or future unlike many Black people who have had and still have no choice but to perform innumerable hours of work and be poorly paid (Dungy, 2023: 33). The psychological value of the garden is inestimably precious for Dungy and her family.

Dungy's gardening skills and ecological consciousness is deeply rooted in her family's knowledge and attitudes. Through her book, she goes back to the times of her great grandfather who was a farm demonstration agent teaching Black people and even white men planting techniques. Nonetheless, racial segregation laws that allowed the exploitation of the Blacks' agricultural skills, forbade them from owning any land. Similarly, her grandparents and parents lived similar circumstances. Dungy claims that most of the plants available now "grow up from land that generations of Black people carefully cultivated and tended and loved" (Dungy, 2023: 116). However, the white racist Americans denied such reality. Dungy does not only dig into the history of the African Americans and their contributions in developing the American plantations but also she admires their legacy be it of her own family or the other Blacks. She honors their heritage and admits her role to develop and protect the ecosystem just like her ancestors. Proud of her ancestors' abilities, Dungy talks about Black inventors such as John Albert Burr, the inventor of the patented rotary blade for lawn mowers. In another instance, Dungy eagerly recounts the struggle of Anne Spencer, the first African American woman poet, to construct her intellectual life and her garden in a racial sexist society

of the early 1900s. Spencer's garden, a significant cultural landscape and a museum today in Lynchburg, inspired Dungy to a great extent because she found a common ground between the two of them. Both are Black women, writers and gardeners. The varied plants Spencer grew and the gardening practices she adopted influenced much of Dungy's work. Even ideas of diversity and poison-free landscapes are shared by both of them.

Although Dungy realizes the value of land for her and her ancestors, she employs imagery and symbolism to reinforce hidden paradoxical themes. Literally, soil refers to the ground, earth and clay, but metaphorically it signifies more profound meanings. As soil can stand for birth and growth, it might represent death and dirt. Dead bodies, like the ones of the Black people killed brutally by the white supremacists, are buried under ground while the white killers' hands become dirty after that. On the contrary, "under what appears to be dirt, (one) might find the root system of some kind of insistent thriving" (Dungy, 2023: 212). Soil gives birth to new lives if it is sown with seeds and took care of under the bright sun and fresh air. It is all about the human hands that manipulate the earth. Dungy is convinced that gardens, as part of nature, are exactly like history and hope "without anyone's dedication and care, much will be totally lost" (Dungy, 2023: 114). Moreover, the writer talks about "fidelity born from... brutality" (Dungy, 2023: 115) implying paradoxical feelings of the African Americans towards the plantations they were enslaved and tortured in. On the other hand, plants that grow out of the soil differ in their nature and goal. Some of them, basically weeds, grow just to hurt and kill other plants like some human beings. Bindweeds, a type of weeds, is used metaphorically in certain passages to symbolize the idea of invasion, seizure and brutality underlying slavery, racism and capitalism. Dungy quotes Louise Penny's description of the slow damaging effect of bindweed on healthy plants. Even The garden itself is tiring as much as it is pleasing. Dungy feels overloaded with responsibilities towards her little daughter home schooling and caring besides the work in the garden that becomes at some point a burden.

Conclusion

The analytical framework conducted above using writings of some fundamental ecowomanist scholars such as Melanie Harris, bell hooks and Alice Walker illustrates that ecowomanism inherently believes in a close relation that joins women of African descent and the earth. Particularly, the analysis

spells out the multi-dimensional connections concluded from the works of these different ecowomanist scholars. These connections can be inclusive, spiritual, remedial, epistemological and even paradoxical. By the same token, *Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden* displays elements of such connections through Dungy's principles, practices and emotions. Dungy's devotion and enthusiasm towards her garden stems from her sincere beliefs in the connection that links her to nature. Being a Black woman in a racial white capitalist society, Dungy expresses her total conviction of the importance of diversity whether in her small garden or in the world as a whole. The idea of inclusivity encompassing the Blacks and the "greater-than-human world" prevails throughout her narrative. What sets the ecowomanists apart from the ecofeminists is that they do not speak for Black women only. They speak for the community and humanity as a whole. Planting her garden and preserving plants, trying over and over again and standing in front of circumstances is a direct challenge from Dungy to the surrounding social and unfair policies towards the African Americans and nature. She creates a heterogeneous garden full of acceptance and harmony. This vision is what she hopes to see in the outer world among humans and between humans and the greater-than-the human world. In addition, Dungy feels spiritually empowered by her garden. She finds peace among her plants in times of distress and pain just like her parents and ancestors. The symbolic bond between Dungy and the garden acts like a healing tool, too. Moreover, Dungy explores the history of her African American ancestors revealing their agricultural knowledge that helped the coming generations, including herself, master gardening skills. Bearing in mind the multifaceted sufferings of the African American woman and her community and the cruel bloody experiences they went through, and still experience, on the American land, the relation of Black people with nature took another turn namely paradoxical. Feelings of fear and hatred together with feelings of longing and love have accompanied the African Americans since slavery days which gives the issue more depth. Dungy herself undergoes such opposing feelings.

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Extended Abstract

1. Purpose

Ecowomanism, a movement that incorporates womanist perspectives within an ecological context, seeks to deconstruct culturally constructed oppressive ideologies that marginalize both Black women and nature. It emerged as a response to the deficiencies highlighted within ecofeminism. Considering woman and nature as the two fundamental variables in ecowomanism, this article aims to explore the issue of women-nature connection through ecowomanist lenses. It investigates the multi-dimensional connections identified by ecowomanist scholarship focusing on Camille T. Dungy's memoir, *Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden* (2023) to exemplify these connections.

2. Method

This study employs a *critical qualitative methodology based on thematic analysis of Camille T. Dungy's memoir, Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden* (2023), using ecowomanism as a guiding theory. *Dungy's memoir is appropriate because it embodies themes central to ecowomanism such as Black women, land, memory, ancestors, and social and ecological injustice. The ecowomanist scholarship reveals that women and nature are closely related and part of the larger web of life. Their connection is shaped by multiple dimensions, particularly inclusive, spiritual, remedial, epistemological, and even paradoxical. Inclusive connection is about wholeness and viewing of all members of the society male and female along with nature as parts of the web of life. None is regarded as superior or dominant. Spiritual connection concerns the divine value Black women attribute to the earth. Such sacredness can be empowering and remedial too in that it helps heal their wounded souls. The epistemological connection revolves around the agricultural knowledge and skills Black women in particular, and African American communities in general, inherited from their ancestors. Last but not least, the paradoxical connection between women and nature draws attention to the possible contradictory feelings African Americans have towards land as it reminds them of the inhuman events they endured because of slavery. A close reading of Dungy's memoir and her personal experience with land demonstrates those types of connections, offering real-life illustrations of each of these multidimensional themes.*

3. Findings

The analysis first reveals that Dungy's memoir is deeply ecowomanist because it examines themes related to intersectionality and ecojustice. As a memoir of a black woman striving to cultivate a garden in a racist capitalist society that exploits both

back people and the environment, *Soil* demonstrates the different connections that a Black woman can have with nature.

In making her garden home to a diversity of plants, Dungy expresses her beliefs about inclusivity and acceptance of the other regardless of race, class, sex, or species. The spiritual connection is unveiled through Dungy's inner reflections about the sacredness of the earth and its connection to the creator. The remedial connection is seen in the garden as a source of healing, relief, and happiness in difficult times. Epistemologically, Dungy's personal narrative uncovers and celebrates African Americans' agricultural knowledge and heritage. Finally, elements of paradoxical connection are articulated via the opposing feelings of pain and attachment Dungy and her ancestors experienced on American land.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

Dungy's narrative contributes considerably to ecowomanist scholarship by illustrating ecowomanist concerns embodied in the recognition of Black women's *ecological wisdom and spiritual traditions* within systems of social and ecological injustice. While Dungy interacts with her backyard garden and the surrounding sociopolitical landscape, she reflects multiple connections with nature: inclusive, spiritual, remedial, epistemological, and paradoxical. These connections mirror the author's goal, which extends beyond the mere portrayal of events to criticize and appeal for environmental and social change.

Geniřletilmiř Özet

1. Amaç

Ekowomanizm, ekolojik bir bağlam içinde womanist perspektifleri bir-leřtiren bir hareket olarak, hem siyah kadınları hem de doęayı marjinalize eden kültürel olarak inşa edilmiř baskıcı ideolojileri çözmeyi amaçlar. Ekofeminizmde ortaya konan eksikliklere bir yanıt olarak ortaya çıkmıřtır. Ekowomanizmde kadın ve doęa iki temel deęiřken olarak ele alındıęında, bu makale kadın-doęa bağlantısı sorununu ekowomanist bakıř açısıyla incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu bağlantıları örnekleme için Camille T. Dungy'nin anı kitabı *Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden* (2023) odaęa alınarak, ekowomanist akademik çalıřmaların ortaya koyduęu çok boyutlu bağlantılar arařtırılmaktadır.

2. Yöntem

Bu çalıřma, Camille T. Dungy'nin anı kitabı *Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden* (2023) üzerinden tematik analiz yapan eleřtirel nitel bir yöntem kullanmakta ve ekowomanizmi rehber kuram olarak benimsemektedir. Dungy'nin anı kitabı, siyah kadınlar, toprak, hafıza, atalar ve sosyal ile ekolojik adaletsizlik gibi ekowomanizmin temel temalarını taşıması sebebiyle uygundur. Ekowomanist akademik çalıřmalar kadın ve doęanın birbirine sıkı sıkıya baęlı ve yařam aęının bir parçası olduęunu

ortaya koyar. Bu bağlantı, kapsayıcı, manevi, iyileştirici, epistemolojik ve hatta paradoksal olmak üzere çoklu boyutlarla şekillenir. Kapsayıcı bağlantı, toplumun tüm üyeleri (erkek, kadın ve doğa) arasındaki bütünlüğü ve eşitliği vurgular; hiçbirinin üstün ya da baskın görülmediği bir yaşam ağı anlayışıdır. Manevi bağlantı, Siyah kadınların toprağa atfettikleri kutsal değeri içerir; bu kutsallık güçlendirici ve iyileştirici olabilir, çünkü yaralı ruhlarının iyileşmesine yardım eder. Epistemolojik bağlantı, özellikle Siyah kadınların ve genel olarak Afrika kökenli Amerikan topluluklarının atalarından miras aldığı tarımsal bilgi ve becerilerle ilgilidir. Son olarak, kadın ve doğa arasındaki paradoksal bağlantı, Afro-Amerikanların kölelik nedeniyle yaşadıkları insanlık dışı olayları hatırlattığı için toprakla ilgili çelişkili duygularını ortaya koyar. Dungy'nin anı kitabının yakından okunması ve toprakla kişisel deneyimleri, bu tür bağlantıları gerçek yaşam örnekleriyle göstermektedir.

3. Bulgular

Analiz, öncelikle Dungy'nin anı kitabının derinlemesine ekowomanist olduğunu ortaya koyar; çünkü kesişimsellik ve ekolojik adaletle ilgili temaları ele alır. Irkçı kapitalist bir toplumda hem Siyah insanları hem de çevreyi sömüren bir ortamda bahçe yetiştirmeye çalışan bir Siyah kadının anıları olan *Soil*, Siyah bir kadının doğayla kurabileceği farklı bağlantıları sergiler.

Dungy, bahçesinde çeşit çeşit bitki yetiştirerek, ırk, sınıf, cinsiyet veya tür farkı gözetmeksizin kapsayıcılık ve diğerini kabul etme inancını ifade eder. Manevi bağlantı, Dungy'nin toprağın kutsallığı ve yaratıcısıyla bağlantısı üzerine içsel yansımalarıyla ortaya çıkar. İyileştirici bağlantı, zor zamanlarda bahçenin bir iyileşme, rahatlatma ve mutluluk kaynağı olarak görülmesinde kendini gösterir. Epistemolojik açıdan, Dungy'nin kişisel anlatısı Afrika kökenli Amerikalıların tarımsal bilgilerini ve mirasını ortaya çıkarır ve kutlar. Son olarak, paradoksal bağlantı unsurları, Dungy ve atalarının Amerikan toprağında yaşadığı acı ve bağımlılık duygularındaki zıtlıklar aracılığıyla dile getirilir.

4. Sonuç ve Tartışma

Dungy'nin anlatısı, Siyah kadınların ekolojik bilgeliği ve manevi geleneklerinin sosyal ve ekolojik adaletsizlik sistemleri içinde tanınmasını somutlaştırarak ekowomanist akademik çalışmalara önemli katkılar sunar. Dungy, arka bahçesi ve çevresindeki sosyopolitik manzarayla etkileşimde bulunurken, doğayla çoklu bağlantılarını yansıtır: kapsayıcı, manevi, iyileştirici, epistemolojik ve paradoksal. Bu bağlantılar, yazarın sadece olayları anlatmak-la kalmayıp aynı zamanda çevresel ve sosyal değişim için eleştiri yapma ve çağrıda bulunma amacını yansıtır.

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