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Women's Role in Environmental Management in Alice Walker's *The Chicken Chronicle*

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper seeks to examine the role of women in environmental management since their traditional activities bring them into daily interaction with nature. Their attitude towards elements of nature portrays them as good managers. To the author, women do not only exploit nature to feed their families but they play a great role in environmental management to meet up with daily survival and its preservation for future generations.

Methodology: Qualitative research was used to write this paper since it involves textual analysis. Information of this research paper was gathered from the primary sources (*The Chicken Chronicle*) and secondary sources. Ecofeminism was deemed a suitable theory on which this research paper could be hitched, in order to show women's role in environmental management.

Findings: it is realized that women do not have any intrinsic connection with the environment based only on their domestic responsibilities (the collection of firewood, fodder and water) but rather on their will to manage natural resources and preserve nature for the safety of all living things.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: This research will make people to understand that women are good managers of natural resources, they should be given the chance in each community to prove their worth, they should be encouraged by all means to be connected to nature rather than see them as exploiters of nature and the environment would be saved. This study will also deepen discussion in the field of ecofeminism. Readers of this article will help familiarize it to leaders of the world to encourage women's management of natural resources.

Keywords: *Ecofeminism, Environmental Management*

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INTRODUCTION

Women's role in Alice Walker's *The Chicken Chronicles* put them in direct contact with nature such as forests, water, land and animals. They use and conserve these environmental elements not only to supply basic needs for their families but also for future generation. This paper seeks to examine the role of women in environmental management since their traditional activities bring them into daily interaction with nature. Their attitude towards elements of nature portrays them as good managers. Similarly, Kiran Singh, in "women and their Role in Natural Resources: A Study in Western Himalayas", published in *International Journal of Research-Granthaalayah*, explains that women in Western Himalayas have a close relationship with the environment. They conserve natural resources to supply their basic needs and the conservation of natural resources cannot be done without the training and involvement of women. The critic continues that women need to be educated on the values, management and sustainability of natural resources as a source of livelihood (128-138). There is a need therefore for women to be appreciated as invisible land managers.

A woman according to the W.K.Brook in *The Law of Heredity: A Study of the Cause of Variation and the Origin of Living Organism*, has a brain that can deal with the known, the ordinary, and the everyday, keep track of traditions and social customs, in short, take care of everything (84-85). On the other hand, Marta Benavides in "Women and environmental activism" published in *Women in the Third World* posits that the environment is not only about natural surroundings, but about all that constitutes our life, and the mindset, logic, or understanding of the world that guides our thinking, analysis, and actions. She further notes that the environment is not only about ecology, but about our ways of being, about what is important in life, and the nature and meaning of healthy relations within ourselves and with others, starting with those closest and with that which provides our sustenance. It is about awareness of partnership in which we live with each other and with nature, and the respect and humility in which we carry ourselves on earth (370-375). Thus, the natural environment is all natural constituents such as man, forests, oceans, rivers, air, sunlight, water, and it consists of substances created by only nature and cannot contain anything man-made.

The concept of management when applied to the environment, suggests control over decision making concerning the rational and productive use of resources at the level of the community or village. management involves the needs of diverse resource users while ensuring that the rate of resource exploitation employed is sustainable in the long term and that ecological degradation is minimal. Although resource exploitation has been going on for centuries, the need to manage the resources and avoid environmental degradation is a call for concern. Environmental management according to Ahmed Maigari Ibrahim in "An Overview of the Concept and Practice of Environmental Management" published in *Dutse Journal of Pure and Applied Sciences* can be defined as the scientific study of the strategies and techniques of monitoring and manipulation of physical, chemical, and non-human biological system in order to preserve and maintain their natural qualities (50). Environmental management includes natural environment and built environment. It is concerned with the description and monitoring of environmental changes and with attempts to maximize human benefit and minimize environmental degradation due to human activities. C. J. Barrow in *Environmental Management and development* posits that environmental management is the process we use to reduce risk and keep harmful substances away from humans (179-199). Environmental management thus stresses on finding solution to practical problems that people face in cohabitation with nature, resource exploitation, and waste production. Environmental management involves the innovation of technology without the destruction of nature.

Most critics show how the environment is exploited by women but they do not seem to realize that Alice Walker in *The Chicken Chronicles* do not only demonstrate how nature is exploited by women but she highlights how women play a great role in environmental management to meet up with daily survival and its preservation for future generations. Their close relationship makes them perfect managers of the ecosystem. Women know what grass, herbs, shrubs, trees are best to be planted to maintain a balanced ecosystem and wellbeing of their families and communities. They always prefer an environment that can meet their demands of fuel, fodder, fruits and food. Environmental management is about encouraging sustainable forests and fisheries. People rely on them for their livelihoods but they have to maintain them for the future. Men are involved in income generating activities and decision making while women take on subsistence activities and looking after the family. This research paper will answer the question; What is the role of women in environmental management? This research paper therefore puts forward the hypothesis that women play a great role in environmental management to meet up with daily survival and its preservation for future generations despite their exploitation of nature to care for their families. Qualitative research was used to write this paper since it involves textual analysis. Information of this research paper was gathered from the primary source and secondary sources. Ecofeminism will be used in the analysis of this research paper.

The term ecofeminism, was coined in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne in *New French Feminism Anthology*, as a connection between ecology and women (4). Ecofeminists aim to construct new practices based on models of non-domination. Likewise, Greta Gaard and Patrick D Murphy in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism, Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, state that “Ecofeminism is a practical movement for social change arising out of the struggles of women to sustain themselves, their families, and their communities”(2). Women therefore struggle against the degradation of the environment caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism so that they can sustain themselves their families and communities. The aforementioned statement highlights the main focus of ecofeminism.

Ecofeminists also claim affiliation with nature since both women and the environment are dominated by men. Karen Warren in *Ecofeminism: Women, Nature, Culture*, notes that “trees, water, animals, toxicity and nature language are feminist issues because understanding them helps one to understand the status and plight of women cross culturally” (4). This shows that women, just like the environment, suffer the same fate.

Karen Warren further demonstrates that “patriarchy is the root of all ecofeminists problems . . . trees and forests are inextricably connected to rural and household economies governed by women, especially in the Third World countries, so trees shortages are about women, too” (5). This assertion proves that the domination exerted on the environment stems from patriarchy. The exploitation of the environment means stopping women in the Third World from surviving since they get food, water, medicine and energy from the forest to satisfy their daily needs.

Better still, Joni Seager in *Earth Follies: Feminism, Politics and the Environment*, affirms that women are related to the environment in terms of domination and ecofeminists are against any form of domination on women and the environment. Seager further adds that ecofeminism is “womanist earth wisdom”. Seager’s definition thus shows how ecofeminism extends its fight against all forms of oppression be it racism, classism, gender or poverty (27).

Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen, in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth* quote Rosemary Ruether who asserts that ecofeminists ask the following questions:

How has the domination of women's bodies and women's work by ruling class men been interconnected concretely with the exploitation of land, of water, or animals? How have women as a gender group been colonized by patriarchy as a legal, economic, social and political system? How does this colonization of women's bodies and work function as the invisible and unrecognized substructure for the extraction of natural resources for the enrichment of the male ruling class? How does the positioning of women as the caretakers of children, and of small animals, the gatherers of plants, the weavers, the cooks, the cleaners, the waste managers for men in the family . . . inferiorize? (11)

These critics show the relationship that exists between women and the environment by asking the above questions. They observe that women and the environment suffer oppression from patriarchy and colonialism. Women use elements of nature to care for their families: they cook, gather plants for food and medicine, and clean the house but men consider them and nature as inferior.

According to Greg Garrard in *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom*, "Ecofeminism also blames the androcentric dualism man/woman ... on the grounds of some alleged quality such as passion of immortal soul or relationality and then assumes that this distinction confers superiority upon humans ..." (23) Here, men are seen as superior to women. Garrard claims that men are considered superior to other human beings and nature because they are considered to have a larger brain size. Ecofeminists are therefore out to deconstruct this superiority over nature and women.

Likewise, Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Ornsten, in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, observe that ecofeminist politics is not against the dismantling of androcentric and anthropocentric biases of western civilization. *Rather*, ecofeminism seeks to reweave new stories that acknowledge and value the biological and cultural diversity that sustains life. (xi) Thus, ecofeminists value women and the environment because they are both perpetrators of life. Ecofeminists encourage men to honour women and the environment rather than fear and mistreat them because of their productive abilities.

The above view is supported by Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy* as they quote Hazel Heinderson: "Today's ecofeminism is restoring (the) earlier pre-history (of goddess worship and matriarchal societies), and its art and rituals, which celebrate Nature as an order that is, in principle not fully knowable precisely because humans are a part of it" (3). Ecofeminism celebrates goddess worship and matriarchal societies to show the strength of women and nature as sacred because of their connection with God. Gaard and Murphy think activists need to realise that "environmental issues cannot be intelligently approached without the perspectives of women, the poor, and those who come from other parts of the globe, as well as those of all races and cultural background" (3). Therefore, women are needed in the management of the environment which is the main focus of this research paper. The following paragraphs shall demonstrate how the environment is destroyed.

The Destruction of Elements of the Environment

Women's role in the society has been misinterpreted since they are classified as the first in the exploitation of the environment. Walker through her novel criticizes the mismanagement of elements of nature. The exploitation of nature is linked to the anthropocentric approach and the stoic Christian tradition that place man at the centre of the universe and confer power on him to control and subdue the rest of the world's living and non-living creatures. The following paragraphs will demonstrate how the environment is destroyed in Walker's *The Chicken Chronicles*.

Chickens are held captive for food (meat and eggs); Walker's consciousness about the destruction of nature showcases women's role in the management of natural resources. Walker notes that humans care for chickens for their selfish interest so that they will kill the chicken one day. The chickens also produce eggs which humans consume (43). Similarly, in *My Garden (Book)*, a pig is maltreated by humans. Kincaid uses imagery: "a knife into its neck . . . blood spurted out of its neck" (205) to show the suppression of nature. Besides, Kincaid explains that this act is done every day as people's meals each day contain pork. The chickens suffer in the course of reproduction since most of their eggs are taken away daily by humans. Humans destroy other living things as well; "They have done much damage to other creatures because they think their own big brain is of major importance and any being with a smaller brain is somehow deficient" (43-44). Humans also destroy other creatures like pigs apart from chickens.

Likewise, Walker sees three elephants in chains. This highlights the suppression of animals by man. An elephant is denied freedom because it has been held in chains by man; this can lead to the destruction of the animal in a long run. Walker as a woman instead feels bad for the animal and contemplates why such an old and big being be held in chains. Her attitude portrays women's role to protect animals. She finds delight with it when she touches the elephant; "The elephant I'd touched had flapped its ears—I sighed with relief" (45-57). After touching the elephant, she feels relieved. This further highlights women's relationship with nature unlike men's dominance over nature as they chain the elephants.

Chickens are fed with bad food; "... as chickens are raised in America? In cages without sufficient space or light? Fed abominable food and given drugs to make them grow faster than they are intended?" Walker is conscious about the type of food that chickens are fed with. She is able to identify that birds in America are fed with bad food. She intends to sensitize people to feed chickens with good food so that they can be healthy. While in Cohin, Walker's attitude towards her chicken shows her desire to feed chickens well: "Should I try to sneak a bit of it back in my bags for you to taste?" (47). She thinks of smuggling some plants to feed her birds. She feels bad losing her chickens.

Animals are considered the marginalized other and peopled bombed; "Men who stone women? People who cage animals for years on end, or, in the interest of "science," murder and dissect them? What happened to elected officials who say yes to bombing people who from the air appear to be frightened and scurrying ants?" (153). This quotation highlights how both women and nature are seen as the other in the society. Men kill women by stoning them, women pass through a painful death. Animals are deprived from freedom as they are caged for the interest of practical lessons in science since the animals are later killed to conduct experiments or for home consumption. Politicians equally kill people through bombing which also claim the lives of other living things. Here, Walker's thoughts about the destruction of living things showcase her managerial skills to protect nature.

Children destroy plants; "... Not only grew but was subjected to countless hoe assaults and the poisoning of its leaves. A job for small children, this poisoning of cotton plants to kill insects. Mommy was, briefly, one of those small children" (103). Walker destroys plants during her childhood because she was ignorant. Besides, in the *Color Purple*, Nettie affirms that "The ancient, giant mahogany trees, all the trees, the game, everything of the forest was being destroyed, and the land was forced to lie flat" (144). As the environment is destroyed, the people's life style changes. When Walker becomes an adult, she chooses to protect not only plants but other living things as well such as animals. Her behavior is worth emulating for man to change and focus in the preservation of the environment. Walker intends to make people to be aware that even children do destroy elements of nature by poisoning plants just to kill insects and they destroy plants too with the hoe.

Walker highlights how chickens are not honored in any way even though they feed the world; "Not one chicken memorialized and worshiped in all these shrines. I don't understand it. With your flesh and eggs, surely holy, you feed the world" (63). This shows that chickens are not given any value despite their importance. On the other hand chickens are instead used to offer sacrifices in some shrines.

Humans cause air pollution; "And, My Children, air pollution, a major health hazard in the urban world of humans (the atmosphere to my lungs in New Delhi, and later, Cairo, looked like a thick dust made from your chicken mash) was a big factor also" (66). This quotation highlights the negative effects of pollution to man as it destroys the lungs. Walker metaphorically compares the atmosphere to "thick dust made from chicken mash" to show how natural resources are destroyed both in India (New Delhi) and Africa (Cairo). C.V. Venkatusubramanian, in a dissertation, "Journey Towards Wholeness: Women in Alice Walker's Fiction", points out that Walker's characters stand as her mouthpiece in the fight against deforestation, pollution, Aids and in the promotion of the preservation of the environment.

Women are involved in environmental exploitation for useful purposes and not for selfish interest like men use it for money; "a nabbed Mommy is a pitiful thing, as we see in places in the world where Mommies are nabbed regularly and thrown into prisons or servitude when all they are trying to do is get something of value, usually food, to bring home to their children" (130). Walker in the above quotation notes how women exploit natural resources for something valuable like food and source of energy for the livelihood of their children. When these women exploit the environment to feed the family, they are arrested and thrown into prisons.

When Walker kills a pregnant spider, she later on regrets why she didn't protect it; walker urges humans to put to use what they have learned in order to protect nature; "just as when a human dies, he or she is gone but HUMANITY remains. Which means whatever is learned can be considered, absorbed, and in the future (or the present) put to use on whatever or whoever is left behind" (139). Preserving knowledge in books about the environment for future generation is beneficial as advocated by Walker. Women understand the importance of elements of nature, that's why they manage it better as Walker states; "We sit munching your eggs and I just love you more with every bite. What a gift you have given us! Saving us from who-knows-what rubbery flesh and unpalatable greens" (143). This quotation further highlights how man survives because of the environment. Therefore, a good management of the environment is required. The following paragraphs will demonstrate how women manage the environment in the text under study.

Women's Role in Environmental Management

Walker's family raised chickens for meat and eggs, "Though I grew up in the south where we raised chickens every year, for meat and for eggs" (pg1). This helps reduce the amount of money spent on food. They also raise chickens so that their shit can be used to fertilize their gardens for crops to grow well, this help increase soil fertility; "... and because their poop is basically from fruit and vegetable matter. I treasure the poop and always praise and thank them for it. In the spring, after winter composting (maybe two winters because chicken poop is so hot) it will go on the vegetable beds" (11) Walker uses the shit of chickens on the vegetable beds to increase soil fertility. This further highlights the process of the ecosystem which has to be intact, chickens feed from fruit and vegetable, they grow and provide protein to man, and their poop is used to grow vegetables. Ralph Waldo Emerson's "*Nature*" published in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* also underlines the ecosystem and the importance of the environment to man: The wind sows the seed; the sun evaporates the sea; the wind blows the vapor to the field; the ice, on the other side of the planet, condenses rain on this; the rain feeds the plant; the plant feeds the animal" (1085). This explains the ecosystem and shows how man is linked to the natural environment. Man cannot survive without plants and animals and these too cannot survive without rain which is possible with the help of the sun, air and ice. Thus, Walker's practical ecofeminism contrasts Emerson's philosophical nature worship as she connects directly to nature through gardening, raising birds and other animals.

Besides, Walker made a chicken house near her garden "Everyone loved the chicken house and yard, right next to my garden, so the chickens would have plenty of fresh produce, and admired the spacious interior of the chicken house, its roosts and its laying nests, which I had lovingly and with hopefulness filled with straw (pg3). Walker makes the chickens' house beside her garden so that the chicken will have enough fresh leaves to feed on and they will as well enjoy the natural environment. The garden also represents women's creativity in the preservation of the environment. Joy porter, in *Native American Environmentalism: Land Spirit and the Idea of Wilderness*, states that women gathered all that they loved about gardening and planted in order to preserve nature (20-30).

Walker's attitude of watering and feeding her chickens shows how good she is in the management of natural resources. Walker's caring nature is revealed. A Chicken climbs on her lap and she touches it's feathers, the chicken is comfortable on her laps and it remains there. "Babe in my lap, Gertrude S. in my lap, and I'm there. Eternity. How long have humans and nonhumans been carrying on this?" (18). This shows how humans and nonhumans should relate because they both need each other for survival. She names the chicken that climbed on her laps to portray that it is valuable, she later on gives names to other chickens as well such as Gertrude Stein, Babe, Babe II, Hortensia, Splendor, Glorious, Rufus, and Agnes of God (3). Walker also waters and feeds her chickens; "In other words, before a couple of days had passed, watering and feeding the chickens, I had fallen in love with them" (5). Walker always feeds and waters her chicken since it becomes as a routine, she didn't find it difficult in any way, this further reveals the strong bond that exists between women and the environment. Agnes Fidecaro, just like Walker in "Jamaica Kincaid's Practical Politics of the intimate in *My Garden (Book)*", discusses the different methods of conservation of the environment like gardening and park reserves (*Academic Journal Article: Women's Studies Quarterly* 1-15).

Likewise; Chickens climb on walker's arms. Chickens did not only climb on Walker's laps, but they also climb on her arms. Walker is patient with her chickens as she does not send them

away even though their claws gave her scratches. The chickens always leave Walker when they see a bug without saying goodbye (15). Walker's endurance to see that the chickens feel free and grow healthy portrays women as good managers of nature.

Besides, Walker gives her birds corn and she makes roosting bars from a few odd sticks. Walker uses few sticks to build the house of her chickens, this shows that she is able to manage the natural resources since she did not use many sticks. She also uses the less important sticks rather than the more important ones so that the environment can be preserved (7,15). Robert Chambers et al in *Trees As Savings and Security for the Rural Poor* explains that Women have gradually been recognized as significant assets in land-rehabilitation and forest-management efforts because of their perceived relationship with trees. The division of labor determines that, in most societies, it is women and sometimes children who collect firewood, fodder, and other forest products, (pg 365). The birds also eat cracked corn from Walker's hands; she decides to crack the corn so that it will ease digestion process for the chickens. She provides garbage cans for them to eat clean food and water dispenser for them to frequently drink clean water. Likewise, She feeds them with apples and kale; "... it was apples, I went over to a tree, shook it, and brought the apples back in my basket and tossed them across their straw-littered and scratched-up yard. I picked some outrageously healthy kale ... and tossed that in too" (10). Walker also harvests apples and kale for the chickens to have variety of food. The process of harvesting is by shaking the apple tree, a difficult thing to do, but she does it in a way that the tree is not destroyed, this highlight more on women's competence in the management of natural resources.

Walker considers herself as the mother of the chickens; "as I do: Hi, Girls, it's Mommy. They rushed to the fence, as they always do, and I counted them, as I always do; then I informed them, which they've heard before, that I was going to get a special treat for them" (pg 9-10). The chickens always rush to Walker whenever they see her. She promises them a special meal and she counts them to see that all are intact. Women are good managers as Walker usually counts her chickens. She does not only count it ones but she does it several times. She realizes that one of her chickens is missing. Walker exercises patience to preserve natural resources (26). Her attitude on the dead bird expresses her desire to preserve natural resources "I took her in my arms and expressed my sorrow. I am so sorry, I said. You met such a frightful fate and I was not here with you. I hope it was quick and painless; that you did not suffer" (27). Her wish is to accompany the bird in times of sorrowful or joyful moments; "LOSING BABE Was hard. Losing Bobbie, whose personality was so different, was as bad' (49). Walker feels so bad when she loses another bird Bobbie. This is because of her desire to preserve nature. Walker's mourning is an eco-ritual that criticizes capitalist animal exploitation. Walker buries Babe to improve soil fertility because according to her nothing good that goes in the earth is wasted. When human beings are buried with coffins, it is simply wasted; "Nothing good that goes into the earth is wasted, is my thought. Look what magical things come out of it! I have never understood why people choose to be buried so that they don't touch the earth. It seems shortsighted" (28). This attitude of mother-daughter/son bond strengthens the relationship between women and the environment that helps preserve natural resources. Mies and Shiva in *Ecofeminism* support the above view that since the early 1970s, there has been considerable interest in the relationship between women and the environment on which development depends (15). Walker's mothering skills towards elements of nature highlights ecofeminist's ideology unlike patriarchal domination of mother earth as a resource.

Women clean the environment for it to be healthy for both man and animals; "I am with my rusty spatula, scraping their poop off their porches, and from inside their nests as well, when

what do I see: four small light-brown eggs... Perfectly formed, clean as a whistle” (11). The chicken provides eggs for human consumption. It helps provide man with protein rather than destroying other animals: “This is the best gift of all. You have given us these four beautiful eggs. What wonderful people you are...” (11). Walker praises the chickens so that man can see its importance. This is a form of sensitization that helps in the preservation of nature.

Walker allows her chickens come together and play; “The chickens, though, burrow into the earth as far as they can, kicking aside the straw, and they will make a circle of their special friends, and they will slowly nod off. It is enchanting to watch them do this. There will be the most sumptuous quiet, as if the whole world feels drowsy” (14). Chicken’s attitude and quietness is worth emulating for humans in order to fight against disunity and war. Thanks to women’s knowledge in the preservation nature.

Likewise, women plant trees for preservation: “A maple I planted fifteen years ago gives shade over their dining area; when it is very hot, they congregate here; filling up the roosting sticks and slipping and sliding around the slippery tops of the garbage (food storage) cans” (14). These trees provide shade and oxygen for Walker’s family and the chickens, it also acts as a place for chickens to assemble and play together. Venerable Thubten Jampa, in “The Earth is Our Only Home”, purports that the planting of trees can help to absorb carbon dioxide caused by industries and at the same time produce oxygen important for the wellbeing of humans and animals (*Natural Disasters and the Environment* 1). Besides, Walker plants okra; “Today Mommy is planting okra in another country” (97). Walker’s attitude planting okra in another country shows how women are selfless just to manage the environment. Besides, women do not only plant household crops but cash crops like cotton; “... the fields on either side of it where so much cotton grew!” (103). Women plant cotton so that the society can benefit from it. The choice of cash crop (Cotton) is because it is used to make dresses that prevent man from cold. Cecil Jackson in *The Kano River Irrigation Project* notes that women also use forest products for a variety of income-earning opportunities they are involved in weeding, watering and preparing polythene bags for sapling, ... Women plant trees in order to combat desertification problem (the origin of deserts), (368). Thus, women also choose to plant cash crop like cotton that does not affect soil fertility like palm trees because of their objective to manage the environment. Walker’s domestic gardening highlights environmental stewardship and symbolic resistance to industrial agriculture that renders the soil infertile in a long run.

Walker does not only preserve chickens and plants, but she also preserves cats as well; “But who knows anything at all about cats? Miles will lie nearby, in complete silence, until I open my eyes or stretch or make some other movement or sound” (19). Walker’s cat always keeps her company even when she is asleep. This shows the importance of other living things as Walker ensures their preservation. Besides, women know how to please animals, Walker feeds the chickens and she allows them to enjoy out of their house, for an hour to relax; “So there Mommy sat, having opened your gate—through which you poured like a fluffy tide—surrounded by a flock of liberated chickens” (85). She brings them back with corn, clucks and grapes. Some of the birds are reluctant to get into their house, but Walker is vigilant enough to see Rufus and Agnes of God trying to hide. The birds climb on Walkers solders to show appreciation. She shows them love by allowing them on her arm. Likewise, Walker led the chickens of their house to feed on insects; “Each afternoon around four o’clock, as the day was beginning to cool, I let the chickens out of their house and yard through the magic door to the outside world, and herded them over to the arbor and a daily feast of insects” (50). She frees her birds to enjoy the natural environment everyday due to her aim to see them healthy. Besides,

Walker's love and care for chickens is further manifested as she provides her birds with best food, a clean chicken house, a nest ready for them and their eggs because of the love that she has for chickens (31). She sympathizes with her birds on man's cruelty on them as they are always killed for human's consumption.

Likewise, Walker sacrifices her time for her birds; Walker feeds her chickens even if she is about to travel to India. She feeds her birds with ripe and ripening persimmons. She takes time to spread the persimmons in the yard so that all the chickens can comfortably eat. She decides to give them both very ripe and less ripe ones to see that which the chickens desire most (38). Besides, Walker brings out the negative effect of eating unripe persimmons. When walker picks and eats unripe persimmons, her jaws swell up. The less ripe persimmons also taste bad like lemon. Walker discourages people to pick unripe persimmons because of their bad taste and the negative effects on man (39). In effect, she is out to manage fruits (natural resources), that only the ripe ones should be picked.

Walker also carter for dogs; "I wonder if you will miss me? I already miss you. Even though I am leaving you in very good hands, a number of them. You will have E. and L. and J. and K. and you will also have the dogs ..." (39). Walker takes care of different animals in her home including dogs. She makes sure that she leaves her animals under the care of another person before she can travel. Even though it is in good hands, she still thinks about the dog. Her dogs usually keep her company as she and her dogs observe how the birds fly from the sky to her yard without harming them, they allow them spend the night in the tree. "The birds left the fir tree several times to sweep the vineyard. Then, as the light faded completely, they settled in the tree perhaps to spend the night" (42). This shows the unity that exists between elements of nature. Donna Haraway in *The companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* explicates how dogs and other animals are seen by women as companions. The dogs alert them whenever there is danger and they help entertain humans during sport games (1-65).

Women also carter for other animals as a wise woman keeps goats. The woman keeps goats for daily survival even though she destroys an element of nature. The fact that she lives in the woods highlights the importance of the environment how it provides shelter. She lovingly kills a goat and prepares the meat for soldiers to eat. The manner in which she kills the goat shows women's love for other elements of nature. She does not kill many goats at the same time, the fact that she kills one goat portrays her ability as a good manager. (117-118). This further portrays how women destroy an element of nature for the survival of human beings.

Women make gardens to grow crops (the continuity) rather than destroy all the crops in the original state; "Bearing our curiosity, and a basket of produce from the garden..."(42). The garden provides Walker's family with some produce. This helps reduce cost of living, and it protects the environment as well. E. H. Jordan in *Survival at a low Ebb: Women farmers and Water Development in Bangladesh* supports Walker's view that women in southwest Bangladesh aims at improving agricultural yields and standards of living, by gardening (pg 363).

Likewise, Nuns make gardens irrigated by what appeared to be a solar-powered water system; "Mommy leaned into the beauty of lush and ample grounds with gardens, irrigated by what appeared to be a solar-powered water system. Behind all this rose the majestic Himalayas. It was breathtaking. The soul of woman, the spirit of woman, could find peace here" (98). Women's creativity can be seen through the garden. The garden beautifies the environment and provides oxygen, it equally reflects "the soul of a woman" bringing out the similarities that exists between women and nature. The garden also provides peace for those with trouble hearts.

Walker hardly eats chickens; “Do you still eat chickens? And I said to her, truthfully: yes, about ten of them a year, some years; other years I might eat none (60). Walker does not exaggerate eating chickens due to her knowledge to preserve natural resources. Walker sees chickens as beautiful; Walker’s attitude towards chicken by placing her hand under its wings admiring its entire body portrays her love for other living things. She feels sad for other human beings who do not find birds beautiful. Her act encourages other people to protect birds. Hence, she is seen as a good manager of natural resources (79).

Likewise, Walker sits with other elements of nature. Walker decides to sit in the company of her birds, dogs, miles and cat when Michael Jackson dies. This shows the importance of domestic animals to man. She feels comforted spending time with the animals. She carries the animals on her laps for them to be comforted too. This reveals how all living things need one another. Walker guards her chickens: “She is worried freeing you because of predators”. Walker’s protection of her chickens from predators points her as a good manager of natural resources (83-84).

Walker waters her garden; “this was before I had running water or electricity, and I sometimes saw them when I went outside to water my small flower garden by hand... they liked the succulence of all my flowers” (120). Walker did not mind watering her garden with her hand so that her flowers can grow well. Her dedication to see that her flowers grow beautifully shows women’s ability to manage natural resources. Walker explains how people liked the beauty of her flowers, this helps increase the life span of those who love nature. She further explains how she waters her garden; “In the morning all went well; there was the joy of freshness in the garden, as Mommy tilled and watered, while everyone in the flock pursued her own course” (176). Walker also tills her garden to plant crops and flowers so that the flowers can decorate the environment while the crops help feed her family. Her interest in gardening shows her managerial skills to manage natural resources. Women according to Braidotti et al in *Negotiating for Change: Debates on Women, the Environment, and Sustainable Development*. are seen as the solution to the development environmental crisis and as “fixers” of ecological crisis (problems). Women are not only care takers of the earth but they control natural resources, they have knowledge, information and decision-making systems in addition to their own labour. (25). This makes women to be seen as environmental managers

Walker portrays how female plants are more powerful than male plants; “Mommy immediately planted six plants: three female and three male. The male plants were beautiful but not potent”, she feels no special connection to anything while smoking the male plants. The female plants “were powerful, even when very little, and much more so when they grew tall, well over Mommy’s head. They were so powerful in their scent, a scent that was so familiar, that Mommy immediately called them Grown Women” (131). Walker metaphorically compares the strength and smell of a male and female plant and she discovers that a female plant dominates a male plant. Her results demonstrates women’s strength and skills in environmental management.

Walker puts the egg shells in the compost to manage resources. Walker’s managerial skill is highlighted as she keeps the eggshells safely to take it back home so that she can use it to fertilize plants or use it to make calcium tea (144). Shirley Nuss in *Women in the World of Work* states that women constitute the growing population of labour forces throughout the world. They are involved in agricultural practices as they use fertilizers. Walker also feeds her chickens with fresh greens; “Yesterday when Mommy came to collect eggs and to throw you fresh greens over the garden fence, she noticed Hortensia running into the chicken house to sit on a nest” (145). She never allows her chickens to grow hungry. Besides, Walker with the help

of her dog takes the chickens to the garden. Walker's stick and the tail of her dog help put order as the chickens left their house (149). Walker shows the importance of animals like a dog. She frequently allows her chickens out of their house so that they can enjoy a wider space, and for them to eat other variety of food such as worms, bugs, onions and strawberry.

Walker feeds her chickens with her palm. This portrays her love towards natural resources. Walker through flashback recalls on when she had an accident with her eyes. She was lonely since no one at that time seemed to notice. She metaphorically compares her incident with that of a chicken whose head has been cut off to show how both women and nature are mistreated in the society. This further highlights how women corroborate with nature to sustain themselves. This therefore makes them better managers. Walker also boils the back of a tree to cure the chickens' disease; at home she boils these chips until they rendered a thick red liquid that she mixes with the drinking water of her chicks: a cure for chicken cannibalism (153-159).

Walker states that the earth is our real mother. She concludes in her text that all human and non-human mothers in the planet are only surrogate mothers because their true mother is mother earth (nature) since it harbors all creatures. The chickens are always excited when they are free to move around the earth despite their comfort in their artificial house made by Walker. The earth provides them with natural food like the bugs, the grasses, the seeds, the worms, the fallen apples and plums. She also notes that she too trusts the earth and depends on nature just like the chickens. Walker's consciousness to know that both man and animals depend on the earth shows her ability to preserve and manage elements of the environment (186).

Conclusion

This paper has shown that women do not have any intrinsic connection with the environment based only on their domestic responsibilities (the collection of firewood, fodder and water) but rather on the will to manage elements of the environment and preserve nature for the safety of all living things. Walker holds that it is important to manage the natural resources for our safety. Walker contrasts her size to that of mother earth that the earth is very big in such a way that it carries all elements of nature. It does not worry about any element of nature that it is destroyed unlike Walker who does. But within a period of time, it changes to be fruitful depending on the intensity of destruction or preservation (32). Therefore, if women can be given the chance to control all natural resources, they would prove their worth and above all if they can exercise decision-making control over the resources on which they depend is one step in the process of empowerment and progress in the society. Walker states that; "Behind any progress, there is a woman; There is the song of the nuns, which is the song of the feminine. Without this song there is no movement, no progress" (99). This shows that for any progress in the society, there are women behind it. Walker further portrays that animals and other natural resources fosters the livelihood of all humanity; "Animals and other natural resources are the songs which human animals inhabit; It is the same with you and with the other animals of the planet. You are the song behind the world human animals inhabit" (100). Thus, women's understanding of the natural resources and their ability to preserve them brings them out as good managers of natural resources.

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