

War and Water:

An Ecowomanist Perspective on Expanding Casualties of War in Gaza

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INTRODUCTION

A time comes when silence is betrayal.

War is the enemy of the poor.

*Social change comes most meaningfully
through nonviolent action.*

*...the greatest purveyor of violence in the
world today – my own government.*

They must see Americans as strange liberators.

They know they must move or be destroyed by our bombs.

So they go – primarily women and children and the aged.

*They watch as we poison their water,
as we kill a million acres of their crops...*

*as the bulldozers roar through their areas
preparing to destroy the precious trees.*

We have destroyed their land and their crops.¹

The above statements were spoken initially on April 4, 1967, by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his famous speech, “A Time to Break Silence.” As a response to the Vietnam War, King’s prophetic words still ring true today as we witness the United States government’s involvement in the War in Palestine. As Israel continues to murder thousands of innocent women, men, children, and the elderly in response to a terrorist attack (Hamas), we also witness ongoing U.S. support through propaganda, policy, and praise for Israeli militarism. As the U.S. chose to involve itself in a war eight thousand miles away from its coast, today we see the U.S. engaged in a war over six thousand miles away. King spoke these words within one year of being assassinated. Given during a Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam meeting at Riverside Church in New York City, this speech marked the first time King formally addressed the Vietnam War. This conflict had poisoned America’s soul, with the autopsy report partially reading “Vietnam.”²

On October 7, 2023, Hamas – a Palestinian Sunni Islamist group – began surprise attacks upon Israel from the Gaza Strip. While declared by the U.S. to be a foreign terrorist organization (FTO), many argue that Hamas is a direct response to the apartheid experienced by Palestinians since 1948 – the year Israel was established as a nation-state. With vocal and financial support from countries like the United States, Israel maintains a stronghold in Palestine, resulting in the compounding devastation of an over eighty-year-long discussion of who will control the land. Any support of Palestinian land sovereignty is met with oppression kept in place through militarism reminiscent of apartheid. We



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know from history that apartheid is a tactic used by colonizers to systemically institute injustice against a people native to a coveted landscape and is regularly used in reference to the experience of Africans in South Africa. If we observe the response of Hamas, where do clergy and academics align themselves without compromising their calling to critical dialogue that holds humanity accountable for its actions?



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The obligatory question of “When is war necessary?” is not new to the discussion of America’s thirst for declaring democracy to be the best system of government that is most respectful of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In his “Break Silence” speech, King challenges the moral authority of interfaith leaders and concerned laity to “move beyond the prophesying of smooth patriotism to the high grounds of a firm dissent based upon the mandates of conscience and the reading of history.” Moving beyond this involves³ breaking the silence; we are meant to accept and realize that silence is the greatest enemy. King’s call to action is especially fitting for academics teaching the next generation of clergy, chaplains, leaders, and professors. The outcome of war is tied to the death of innocent women and children. Who will continue to decide if the use of force is overwhelming or necessary?

Once champions of free speech, since October 2023 college campuses have become an unwelcoming space for students protesting the Israel-Hamas war. Professors who support students for their bravery in combining theoretical analysis with mobilization and actualization of justice themes have experienced police action authorized by their employers. In May 2024, the presidents of universities like Rutgers, UCLA, and Northwest University defended their process and support of student rights to protest peacefully. Fitting with propaganda usage during the clash of First Amendment rights and allegiance to Israel, in one of many congressional hearings, Rep. Lloyd Kenneth Smucker, a Republican from Pennsylvania, criticized Rutgers University President Jonathan Holloway for allegedly negotiating with the “mob” in a protest encampment while neglecting the concerns of Jewish faculty, staff, and administrators on campus.⁴ In support of students exercising their First Amendment right, Holloway replied, “The first thing I’ll say is that I was not negotiating with the mob. I was talking with students.”⁵

While supporting student bravery and peaceful mass protests on some university campuses should be commended, many institutions challenged student and faculty jobs, degrees, and lives. Student and faculty protestors demanded that their institutions divest from any business ties to Israel. Historically, divestment has proven to be one of the strongest revolutionary tactics for seeking total social justice. Protest was an early method of praxis during the Civil Rights Movement and extended to college campuses with the support of organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee, led by Ella Baker (1903-1986). At the time of these congressional hearings, in May 2024, the reported number of those killed in Israel was 1,410 versus 34,844 Palestinians. This number is steadily increasing. With the vast majority being killed in the Gaza Strip, over 70 percent of those killed are women and minors. It is not surprising that students are calling out Israel’s war crimes as inhumane and are protesting for protection and peace in Palestine.

More is required of educators than avoiding propaganda in the classroom. As with other wars, many significant topics of interest must be explored as attention is focused on the war in Gaza. As the Israel-Hamas war is deeply rooted in the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict and territorial disputes, I ponder how the impacts of war extend far beyond what we realize and are prepared to confront. We are conscious of the fact that the war in Gaza has resulted in significant loss of life and is a humanitarian crisis, particularly affecting civilians in the densely populated Gaza Strip. While international efforts to broker peace continue to yield limited success and the conflict remains a crucial point of instability in the Middle East, continuing with the *Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* focus on “Ecology,” I posit that there is another muted voice and missed teaching moment involving environmental concerns. Whether as a historian, theologian, biblical scholar, or ethicist, how does an analysis of the environmental effects of war align with your review of the war and student protests within your respective field? The environmental effects of war are greatly overlooked and extend beyond the current discussions on the topic. With intention, now is the time to reflect on the environmental impact of war, and specifically on its incredible impact on water supply, greatly affecting the availability and quality of water for affected populations, the oppressed people of Gaza. This war’s direct and indirect effects continue to involve immediate and long-term issues that are often ignored but will be explored in this article.

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF WAR ON THE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH A WOMANIST PERSPECTIVE

As a scholar, my journey into research and teaching environmental theology and ethics is rooted in womanist thought. In 2004, Dr. Alton Pollard assigned Cheryl Townsend Gilkes’s book *If It Wasn’t for the Women: Black Women’s Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community*⁶ to our Intro to Black Church Studies class. This book challenged me deeply, leaving me with no other option but to confront the patriarchy embedded in my family’s church tradition. This text compelled me to grapple with the systemic

oppression often ignored or denied. Initially, I sought to defend the Church of God in Christ (the subject of Gilkes’s research) and advocate for its values, unaware of the entrenched patriarchal norms that persist in the refusal to ordain women, including individuals like myself with advanced theological education – dual Master’s degrees and a PhD in theology and ethics. Beyond ordination, women maintain a type of modified power rooted in an interpretation of the Judeo-Christian text weighing heavily on select Pauline readings instead of the theology and praxis of Jesus Christ. Gilkes’s book and this course introduced me to womanist principles and how womanist principles bring attention to environments that protect marginalized freedom.

Womanist thought was introduced as four principles in the 1980s by author Alice Walker and later constructed into a philosophy and social theory centering the experiences, concerns, and perspectives of Black women by four Black Women scholars at Union Theological Seminary in New York – Katie Geneva Canon (1950-2018), Delores Williams (1937-2022), Jacquelyn Grant, and Kelly Brown Douglas. As students of James Hal Cone (1938-2018) and Beverly Harrison (1932-2012), these four women adapted Walker’s principles of womanism into their work in theology, ethics, and biblical scholarship. The core principles are as follows:

1. *Radical Subjectivity*: Emphasizes the whole person despite the stereotypes of the hegemonic system of white supremacy. It promotes spiritual, emotional, and physical healing, recognizing and honoring the interconnectedness of all aspects of a person’s life without omitting cultural, spiritual, and social dimensions.
2. *Communal Praxis*: Prioritizes building and nurturing the entire community, especially within Black culture. Black women understand that freedom is not individual; it’s communal.
3. *Redemptive Self-Love*: Intentionally advocates for social justice through all areas of life – music, folk, the moon, Spirit, and roundness – and thus loves oneself regardless.

4. *Critical Engagement*: Acknowledges and celebrates the contributions of Black women outside, yet alongside the work of feminist thought.

Over the years, womanist thought cultivated a profound interest in understanding the spiritual and ethical dimensions of our relationship with the natural world. Throughout seminary, I was mentored by professors who challenged me to think critically, and I always did so with a passion for being a voice for the marginalized. I began a plant-based diet and thus further expanded my understanding and advocacy for the liberation of all of God's Creation. In the same year, I chose to go "vegan" and came across a podcast called "Food for Thought" by Colleen Patrick-Goudreau. This experience illuminated the tremendous potential for enriching my teaching and research as I embrace interdisciplinary approaches and many faith traditions to understand better what it means to advocate for the oppressed. It is when we, as educators, venture beyond conventional curriculum boundaries that we are empowered to create dynamic learning environments that nurture future change agents. This pedagogical approach equips our students to become driving forces for positive societal change, simultaneously benefiting the global community (land, human animals, and non-human animals) and aligning more closely with our fundamental role in Creation.

Thus, my inspiration comes from two unexpected sources: the work of a Black sociologist and the perspective of a white vegan activist. They both helped me realize that liberation is not always extended to every being in God's Creation. What would it look like if the natural world responded violently as a form of revolutionary resistance to those trying to manipulate, destroy, and ignore its existence?⁹ Furthermore, how are we working to best represent the marginalized voices within a marginalized society created by a capitalist world order that thrives off an "artificial" just economy and theoretical practices labeled as "sustainable living"?¹⁰ As this essay concludes, I aspire to illuminate for each reader the critical value of embracing unconventional interdisciplinary approaches.



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I demonstrate how these diverse methodologies can significantly broaden our academic horizons, enrich our pedagogical practices, and deepen our capacity for critical reflection. By exploring these multifaceted possibilities, we open doors to innovative scholarship that transcends traditional boundaries and fosters a more holistic understanding of complex issues like the war in Gaza and its impact on the land, specifically on its water resources. I aim to redirect global attention from solely human-centered social justice responses to war toward a thorough and more truthful evaluation of social justice initiatives prioritizing the natural world. Specifically, this article counters anthropocentric worldviews that posit humanity at the center of the phenomena of Creation by highlighting the often overlooked discussion of "water," its intrinsic value, and its continued manipulation by colonizing powers.

THE IMPACT OF WAR ON WATER SUPPLY

About 90 percent of Gaza's water supply is sourced from the Coastal Aquifer Basin that runs along the eastern Mediterranean coast from Egypt through Gaza and into Israel. There are four ways in which the war continues to affect the water supply in Gaza:

1. *Destruction and Infrastructure:* After repeated bombings, the critical water supply has been damaged. Pipelines and treatment facilities destroyed by bombings directly disrupt the distribution of water to the citizens of Gaza. The people of Gaza require access to water for personal reasons, including washing their bodies and sanitation during cooking.
2. *Pollution and Contamination:* In Gaza, 97 percent of the water supply is undrinkable, and hazardous materials have an increasing number of ways of being ingested by humans and non-human animals. The result is death and long-term effects on the quality of life.
3. *Access Restrictions:* With 97 percent of the water undrinkable, there is limited access to water resources due to physical and logistical barriers created by the destruction of water resources – chemical infiltration, seawater intrusion, and over extraction.¹¹ The fewer the sites where uncontaminated water exists, the more likely that overcrowding at these locations will increase the spread of waterborne illnesses.
4. *Resource Scarcity:* As physical and logistical access to water is limited, tensions will rise as citizens of Gaza are not just searching for clean water for personal use; some people rely on clean water for agriculture and industry. This limits access to food and diminishes the growth of the economy.
5. *Increased Demand and Strain:* As people travel to locations where there is likely to be clean water, they are displaced, which affects culture and adds additional strains on limited infrastructure.
6. *Health Risks:* With 97 percent of drinking water contaminated, waterborne diseases spread quickly, especially in areas where medical care and sanitation are already compromised.
7. *Long-term Environmental Damage:* War leads to long-term environmental damage, including water source degradation. The Israel-Hamas war has weaponized the rain during the wet months in Gaza (between November and March) as chemicals

from bombings are washed throughout the cities and into the ecosystem of the land.

8. *Disrupted Governance and Maintenance:* The war continues to disrupt the already fractured governance and maintenance of water systems for the citizens of Gaza.

The points outlined above underscore the multifaceted impact of armed conflicts on water resources, economic stability, and human welfare. Crucially, this reveals a pervasive failure to recognize and respect water's inherent worth and essential role in sustaining life. By focusing solely on human-centered concerns, we often overlook the intrinsic value of water as a vital component of Earth's ecosystems, independent of its utility to humankind. Let us move forward by examining several interfaith examples that collectively affirm water as fundamental to the origin of life and acknowledge it as a sacred gift from the Divine.

INTRINSIC VALUE OF WATER

Job 38:22-23

Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war? (ESV)

In Job 38, often read in conjunction with Genesis 1:1-10, God addresses Job about the natural world by giving special attention to water's purpose and intrinsic value, independent of its utility to humanity. The intrinsic value of water is mentioned three times in this chapter, thus intentionally urging the reader to reconsider the human-centered perspective typically applied to discussions about the natural world, particularly regarding water.



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John 7: 37-39

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." (NRSVUE)

The Gospel writers often incorporate water¹² into their testimonies of the ministry and life of Jesus. As a preacher, miracle worker, and leader, Jesus emphasizes the importance of water for human health, intertwining it with his divine mission to bring healing to a world of sin and corruption. However, there is a deeper discussion regarding Jesus signifying himself as the source of living water. In this Gospel passage, Jesus speaks during the Feast of Tabernacles – a Jewish festival celebrating the harvest and God's provision during the Israelites' time in the wilderness. During the festival, a water-pouring ceremony represents God's provision even in the desert spaces in life. As noted in Charles Long's¹³ exploration of the multifaceted ways humanity creates and interprets religious meaning through signs, symbols, and images, Jesus is signifying that his assignment as "the Anointed One" is to be the vehicle that helps materialize God's provision for believers. Continuing Long's exploration of "signification," as a historical figure, Jesus is presented to the oppressed as the accommodation to resist colonial power structures. Aligned with the allegorical writing of John, Jesus declares that God is capable and will provide believers with the source for their eternal victory despite their current reality. With this message, Jesus also emphasizes that falsehoods cannot compare to the "living water" he offers. Ultimately, the intrinsic value of water lies in Christ's designation of facilitating miraculous experiences of renewal, even in seemingly hopeless circumstances.

Quran 21:30

Do the disbelievers not realize that the heavens and earth were [once] one mass then We split them apart? And We created from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?¹⁴

This verse emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings throughout the universe and highlights water's fundamental role

as the source of life. This declaration also supports scientific assertions that water's intrinsic value lies in its capacity to both initiate and sustain life.¹⁵

The sacred texts above reveal that water is more than a resource for human use; it holds an intrinsic value deeply connected to human physical and spiritual existence on Earth. What are the consequences when war devastates this crucial element of human survival and undermines the divine purpose of the natural world? My lived experiences as an African American woman, mother, and scholar have proven that practices of injustice through violence affect generations that follow. This is realized in my examination of how gender personification of the Earth is appropriated by Western economic imperialism.

THE GENDERED PERSONIFICATION OF EARTH: AN ECOWOMANIST ANALYSIS

In examining the use of the term "Mother Earth," we encounter a complex interplay of linguistic, cultural, and sociopolitical factors. Though deeply woven into many indigenous cosmologies, this anthropomorphic designation by western society deserves critical scrutiny, particularly through the lens of ecowomanist theory.

1. *Patriarchal Influences on Environmental Discourse:* Usage of "Mother Earth" as a metaphor becomes a reflection of entrenched patriarchal control as the land is consistently extracted, extorted, and raped for government value.
2. *Socialization and Gender Roles:* From a sociological perspective, the common usage of "Mother Earth" limits femininity towards societal norms of nurturing and fertility, while simultaneously promoting notions of passivity and subordination.
3. *Implications for Gender-Based Violence and Oppression:* When the earth is gendered as female, it increases ease in exploitative practices towards both women and natural resources, such as water, that manifests in various forms of violence, dehumanization, and marginalization.

Beyond appropriation and semantic shift, the linguistic framing of assigning gender to the land necessitates an examination of who benefits from and perpetuates such metaphors as we see a continued success in reinforcing power through the gendered personification of Earth that does not align with Indigenous cosmologies nor sacred texts' respect for the land and water.

These realizations led me to contemplate how the impacts of war's violence against humanity similarly permeate the lived experience of the land, particularly concerning water as a resource. It is important to teach the vast repercussions of war beyond human suffering and extend advocacy to the natural world, which is also experiencing oppression. I will not outline further educational strategies for instructors to broaden students' understanding of warfare's far-reaching consequences. As King reminded his audience to no longer remain silent about the Vietnam War, may this article encourage you to no longer endorse wrongdoings by remaining silent about the environmental crisis caused by the war in Gaza within your classroom syllabi and research.

WATER: THE OVERLOOKED VICTIM OF WAR (AN ENGAGED ECOWOMANISM)

As discussed above, traditionally, human war casualties are the primary focus. However, in Indigenous cosmology one learns the importance of treating water as a living entity with inherent rights and values rather than merely as a resource to exploit. Thus, the indigenous concept of water's personhood is essential to the argument being made in this essay.

Historically, laws have been passed to uphold the exploitation of humanity, let alone the environment. For example, the Fourteenth Amendment, Section 2, Clause 3 relied on the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1788, giving slaveholding states disproportionate influence on the presidency, Supreme Court, and House of Representatives before the Civil War. The Three-Fifths Compromise counted enslaved populations as three-fifths of a person for taxation, representation, and presidential electors.

Abolitionists argued for the personhood of African Americans in the face of an established white supremacist political system. The only way in which African Americans could achieve and experience any liberty and protection was after the Thirteenth Amendment's declaration that slavery was illegal, thus acknowledging an end to the exploitation of black bodies through enslavement. Despite this, with the "election" of Donald Trump in 2016, the application of immunity by the Supreme Court Justice towards Trump despite being found guilty of thirty-four counts of criminal activity and also leading a mob to take over the United States capital buildings, African Americans are still living the lyrics to Nina Simone's classic, "Mr. Backlash."



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Mr. Backlash, Mr. Backlash
Just who do you think I am?
You raise my taxes, freeze my wages
And send my son to Vietnam

You give me second class houses
And second class schools
Do you think that all colored folks
Are just second class fools?

Oh, Mr. Backlash, I'm gonna leave you
With the backlash blues

When I try to find a job
To earn a little cash

All you got to offer
Is your mean old white backlash
But the world is big
Big and bright and round
And it's full of folks like me
Who are black, yellow, beige, and brown

You're the one who'll have the blues
*Not me, just wait and see*¹⁶

Over the past thirty years, a significant movement has occurred towards recognizing and affirming Indigenous relationships with nature. The shift has manifested in various ways, with Indigenous peoples actively championing the intrinsic rights of the natural world in the face of white supremacy. These efforts not only defend nature but also continue to challenge and dismantle the structure

of white supremacy that has long dominated our understanding and treatment of Creation. Included in this acknowledgment of the intrinsic rights of the natural world is the recognition of the personhood of water, which is both a sacred and living entity to be respected and protected by humanity. Thus, paralleling the human experience, nature too falls victim to the ravages of war. In this context, the natural world is often perceived as powerless, susceptible to conquest, and ripe for exploitation.

Within the first principle of womanism – *radical subjectivity* – we access indigenous methodology uniquely representing environmental justice by advocating for the protection of nature. Following the inception of the Environmental Justice Movement in the United States, indigenous groups around the world began demanding the protection of nature by reclaiming its identity – acknowledging nature's connection with identity and ancestors. In 2014, the Māori people of New Zealand won their battle with a parliament full of colonizers, resulting in the establishment of full “legal personhood” being given to the Whanganui River. Other countries followed, such as Colombia (2016), India (2017), Australia (2017), and Bangladesh (2019). Affirming that rivers have the right to flow and exist transforms the legislative approach and reverses the trajectory of the earth's description. Establishing the legal personhood of water areas resolves relationships between humanity and nature, current culture and spirit, and the intentional efforts of technological advancement and the state of the environment.

What occurs when, as educators, we expand our advocacy to include speaking for the environment? Given war's impact on the integrity of water, we can outline and model how students should understand that teaching subjects such as history, theology, ethics, and the Bible goes beyond simply focusing on the straightforward consequences of war's effects on people's lives. These war-driven economic impacts directly disrupt the longstanding cosmology that existed on Earth well before humanity's arrival. The various ways war directly compromises the quality of water include:

4. *Disrespecting Sacredness and Integrity*: Indigenous cosmology incorporates a sacredness to water that is integral to the spiritual and physical well-being of the community. Water acts as a conduit between the physical and spiritual for indigenous people. Destroying water sources disrespects the sacredness and integrity of water.
5. *Exploitation and Abuse*: Withholding water supply is often done for strategic or tactical purposes, gaining a military advantage. This violates the inherent right of water to flow freely.
6. *Ecological Damage*: Rivers, lakes, and wetlands are polluted by military activities, unexploded ordinance, and damaged infrastructure, thus violating water's inherent right to flow cleanly and unpolluted.
7. *Loss of Biodiversity*: War damages aquatic life and biodiversity through pollution, habitat destruction, and changes in water flow. These changes undermine the inherent value of water.
8. *Social and Cultural Impact*: War's impact on water systems damages the environment, affecting cultural and social ties among communities. These ties are often deeply rooted in cultural practices, traditions, and beliefs that support water's inherent power as a source of interdependence.

War profoundly impacts the personhood of water by disrupting its natural state, causing ecological harm, and challenging the legal and ethical frameworks that recognize its rights. As a theological ethicist, I call out war's impact on the water. As human beings and as educators entrusted to be good stewards of Creation (Judeo-Christian), and to cherish the Earth as a balanced gift to humanity (Qu'ran), the lasting harm war inflicts on the relationship between humanity and water should prompt us to explore war's profound impact on the environment and specifically on water – a living, sacred entity. We can further demonstrate a commitment to meaningful scholarship by engaging in this analysis. This approach transcends the traditional input/output teaching model, offering a

more holistic and nuanced methodology and understanding.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I've employed an ecowomanist analysis to restore water's identity through recognition of Indigenous cosmology and sacred texts as a more vital theological and ethical perspective



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much needed in understanding student protests as support for global justice. Let us *unremember* that humanity is the only casualty of war and reclaim the cosmologies teaching that Creation deserves our equal attention. We must intentionally consider the Earth in the context of war by emphasizing the interconnectedness of human and ecological well-being, recognizing that the degradation caused by conflict extends beyond human suffering to the land and water. Rooted in black feminist thought and spirituality, ecowomanism provides the rooted experience of speaking on behalf of the

marginalized. This article posits that a more authentic social justice is present beyond the human experience and fully embraces the environmental impact of our societal behaviors. While intersecting oppressions with environmental harm, ecowomanism identifies war as an exacerbation of existing injustices faced by marginalized members of God's Creation. Ecowomanism identifies how war disrupts these connections, further causing both physical and spiritual harm. Once these crucial topics are considered through an ecowomanist lens of redemptive self-love, I propose these final steps of healing:

1. *Resilience and Resistance:* Despite war, we can always find ways to be resilient and resist evil. Resilience and revolutionary tactics are solutions to evil, but where are the voices of those who disagree with the evils causing death to humanity, animals,

and the natural world? The time has come to voice our support for reclamation and restoration, for replanting native species, protecting water sources, and demanding the assertion of rights to land and water resources.

2. *Ethical Responsibility:* Earth care conversations during and after war involve recognizing the ethical responsibility to protect and restore natural resources damaged by violence. These conversations should be prioritized as they address war's long-term impacts, such as pollution, land

degradation, and displacement of communities.

3. *Holistic Healing:* An honest acknowledgment of the trauma inflicted on water involves working toward restorative justice that benefits both the environment and marginalized communities.
4. *Transformative Action:* An ecowomanist approach supports the transformative action of challenging the systems of oppression that began the war. This includes advocating for peace-building efforts, sustainable resource management, and equitable access to natural resources, like water.

By embracing these ecowomanist principles of redemptive self-love, we foster a deeper connection with ourselves and, more importantly, begin bringing awareness and giving attention to the Earth's experienced injustices. These solutions are meant to encourage teachers to cultivate a holistic sense of scholarship, giving a continued holistic sense of well-being that honors the intrinsic value and sacredness of the natural world across our unique disciplines. As we move forward, let us commit to contributing to a most just and compassionate world for the restoration of the land. Just as King risked criticism by speaking out against the Vietnam War, we must also continue to actively address interconnected issues of racial justice, economic equality, and environmental stewardship. The impact of this work extends far beyond the confines of academia, proving invaluable to grassroots organizations as well. This approach dismantles the artificial divide between scholarly pursuits and real-world applications, challenging the notion that we must choose between finding value in the classroom and effecting societal change. Instead, this work demonstrates how the knowledge we cultivate and share can seamlessly bridge these realms, fostering a dynamic interplay between academic insights and practical, community-driven solutions. In doing so, I hope we can continue to honor Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy and contribute to the ongoing struggle for a more just and peaceful world.



Photo credit: LOGAN WEAVER on Unsplash

Notes & Bibliography

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- ⁴ Eric Kelderman, "Yet Another Congressional Hearing Came for Higher Ed. College Presidents Tried to Fight Back," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 24, 2024, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/yet-another-congressional-hearing-came-for-higher-ed-college-presidents-tried-to-fight-back>.
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- ⁸ Colleen Patrick-Goudreau, "Food for Thought," podcast, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://colleenpatrickgoudreau.com/food-for-thought-podcast/>
- ⁹ The following films use dramatic storytelling to highlight the potential consequences of human actions on the environment, reminding us that the Earth is a reactive force capable of striking back against human actions: *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *The Host* (2006), *The Happening* (2008), *Avatar* (2009), and *Wondla* (2024).
- ¹⁰ My current collaborations with grassroots organizations such as Black Workers for Justice, Southern Workers Assembly, and The Fruit of Labor World Cultural Center (www.fruitoflabor.org) focus on advancing a more holistic approach to social justice, climate action, and sustainability. This perspective places the land and ecosystems at the forefront of ecological discourse, shifting away from anthropocentric models that prioritize human interests above all else. Centering the Earth as the primary beneficiary in our quest for environmental justice fosters a more comprehensive and equitable framework for addressing interconnected social and ecological challenges.
- ¹¹ "The Siege on Gaza's Water," Center for Strategic and International Studies, last modified January 12, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/siege-gazas-water#:~:text=About%2090%20percent%20of%20Gaza's,and%20sewage%20and%20chemical%20infiltration>.

- ¹² Jesus walking on water (Matthew 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-52, John 6:16-21), Jesus calming the storm (Mark 4:35-41, Matthew 8:23-27, Luke 8:22-25), Jesus turning water into wine (John 2:1-11), Jesus offering "living water" (John 4:10-14), Jesus washing the disciples' feet (John 13:1-17), and Jesus' teaching about giving water to the thirsty (Matthew 10:42, Mark 9:41).
- ¹³ Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Fortress Press, 1986).
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