Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a social and political movement which points to the existence of considerable common ground between environmentalism and feminism,[1] with some currents linking deep ecology and feminism.[2] Ecofeminists argue that important experiential, theoretical, and linguistic parallels exist between the oppression and subordination of women and nature in Western cultural tradition through the transformation of differences into culturally constructed conceptual binaries and ideological hierarchies that allow a systematic justification of domination ("power-over power") by subjects classed into higher-ranking categories over objects classed into lower-ranking categories (e.g. man over woman, culture over nature). Beyond these nature/culture, male/female dualisms, ecofeminists posit that the Western cosmology dichotomizes all aspects of perceived reality; in examples without a cultural "opposite," the category "x" is split into "x" and "not-x" or the absence of "x." Ecofeminists also explore the intersectionality between sexism, the domination of nature, racism, speciesism, and other characteristics of social inequality. In some of their current work, ecofeminists argue that the capitalist and patriarchal systems that predominate throughout the world reveal a triple domination of the Global South (people who live in the Third World), women, and nature.[3] This domination and exploitation of women, of poorly resourced peoples and of nature sits at the core of the ecofeminist analysis.

Ecofeminist analysis

Ecofeminism, or ecological feminism, is a term coined in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne. It is a philosophy and movement born from the union of feminist and ecological thinking and the belief that the social mentality that leads to the domination and oppression of women is directly connected to the social mentality that leads to the abuse of the natural environment. It combines eco-anarchism or bioregional democracy with a strong ideal of feminism. Its advocates often emphasize a deep reverence for all life, and the importance of interrelationships between humans, non-human others (e.g. pigs, squirrels, toads), and the earth.

A central tenet in ecofeminism states that male ownership of land has led to a dominator culture (patriarchy), manifesting itself in food export, over-grazing, the tragedy of the commons, exploitation of people, and an abusive land ethic, in which animals and land are valued only as economic resources. Other ecofeminists claim that the degradation of nature contributes to the degradation of women. For example, Thomas-Slayter and Rocheleau detail how in Kenya, the capitalist driven export economy has caused most of the agriculturally productive land to be used for monoculture cash crops. This led to intensification of pesticide use, resource depletion and relocation of subsistence farmers, especially women, to the hillsides and less productive land, where their deforestation and cultivation led to soil erosion, furthering the environmental degradation that hurts their own productivity (Thomas-Slayter, B. and D. Rocheleau. (1995) Gender, Environment and Development in Kenya: A Grassroots Perspective).

Vandana Shiva makes it clear that one of the missions of ecofeminism is to redefine how societies look at productivity and activity of both women and nature who have mistakenly been deemed passive, allowing for them both to be ill-used. For example, she draws a picture of a stream in a forest. According to her, in our society it is perceived as unproductive if it is simply there, fulfilling the needs for water of women's families and communities, until engineers come along and tinker with it, perhaps damming it and using it for generating hydropower. The same is true of a forest unless it is planted with a monoculture plantation of a commercial species. A forest may very well be productive, protecting groundwater, creating oxygen, allowing villagers to harvest fruit, fuel, and craft materials, and creating a habitat for animals that are also a valuable resource. However, for many, if it is not for export or contribution to GDP, without a dollar value attached, it cannot be seen as a productive resource (4 Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development 1988).

Some ecofeminists point to the linguistic links between oppression of women and land, such as the term "rape the land." Terms also express nature as feminine (using the pronoun "she" and the term "Mother Nature") and women as...
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"wild" and "untamed" (like nature). Ecofeminists also criticize Western lifestyle choices, such as consuming food that has travelled thousands of miles and playing sports (such as golf and downhill skiing) which inherently require ecological destruction.

Feminist and social ecologist Janet Biehl has criticized ecofeminism as idealist, focusing too much on the idea of a mystical connection with nature and not enough on the actual conditions of women. However, this line of criticism may not apply to many ecofeminists who reject both mysticism and essentialist ideas about the connection between women and nature. This antiessentialist ecofeminism has become more prominent since the early 1990s: it has an epistemological analysis of the Enlightenment places the spirituality in immanent world and then practices modern activism. The materialist ecofeminism discuss economical and political issues and can use metaphorically the link of Great mother earth or Gaia (while the idealistic tendency uses it literally).

Views on technology

Françoise d’Eaubonne proposed a cooperative system in small unities (villages) with autonomization, without alienating technology. With ecofeminist ideals and pagan practices, these projects are sometimes seen as a form of primitivism. However, while some ecofeminists see technology as inherently alienating, many see a substantial role for modern technologies in the creation and operation of such villages. A number of ecofeminists advocate the use of technologies such as solar power as a way to stay off ‘the grid’, which they regard as more important than relying upon poisonous industrial processes or materials. The ecological movement is itself split on issues like this. However, it is likely that an intermediate technology, appropriate technology, would be preferred in general if an ecofeminist movement sought to spread into developing nations quickly.

Views on human/animal relations

One strand of ecofeminism, associated with Carol J. Adams, Marti Kheel and Greta Gaard has consistently argued that veganism is an important part of ecofeminist ethics. Other positions represented by Val Plumwood and Karen J. Warren argue for a contextual vegetarianism which ties animal ethics more to material and social context. Yet other ecofeminists place ethical emphasis on ecosystem health at the expense of valuing individual animals or stipulating vegetarianism or veganism.

Schools of ecofeminist thought

There are different relevant schools of feminist thought and activism that relate to the analysis of the environment. Ecofeminism argues that there is a connection between women and nature that comes from their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal society; this connection also comes from the positive identification of women with nature. This relationship can be argued from an essentialist position, attributing it to biological factors, or from a position that explains it as a social construct. Vandana Shiva claims that women have a special connection to the environment through their daily interactions with it that has been ignored. "Women in subsistence economies, producing and reproducing wealth in partnership with nature, have been experts in their own right of holistic and ecological knowledge of nature’s processes. But these alternative modes of knowing, which are oriented to the social benefits and sustenance needs are not recognised by the capitalist reductionist paradigm, because it fails to perceive the interconnectedness of nature, or the connection of women’s lives, work and knowledge with the creation of wealth." Feminist environmentalists study gender interests in natural resources and processes based on their different roles in daily work and responsibilities. Social feminists focus on the role of gender in political economy by analyzing the impact of production and reproduction of men and women's relation to economic systems. Feminist poststructuralists explain gender's relation to the environment as a reflection of beliefs of identity and difference such as race, class, gender, age, and ethnicity. In this way they try to explain the relation of gender and development. Liberal feminist environmentalists treat women as having an active role in environmental protection and conservation programs. This
role can become problematic. There is a common symbolism in the idea of ‘man’ pitted against nature while nature is feminized and "woman" is assumed to have profound connections with her environment.[10]

These views of gender and environment constitute feminist political ecology, which links feminist cultural ecology, political ecology, geographical ecology and feminist political ecology into one concept. It argues that gender is a relevant factor in determining access and control of natural resources as it relates to class, race, culture and ethnicity to transform the environment and to achieve the community's opportunities of sustainable development.[11]

The ecofeminist approach that best fits the Nariva Swamp issue in Trinidad and Tobago comes from "Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism (1990) in which the editors, Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein lay out three strands in ecofeminism (quoted in Mack-Canty, 2004). One strand emphasizes that social justice has to be achieved in concert with the well-being of the Earth since human life is dependent on the Earth. Another strand in ecofeminism is spiritual, emphasizing that the Earth is sacred unto itself. A third strand emphasizes the necessity of sustainability—a need to learn the many ways people can walk the fine line between using the Earth as a resource while respecting the Earth's needs. MacGregor (2004) writes that a focus on women acting on "survival" or "subsistence" imperatives erases moral choice and practices of making principled decisions to act, or not to act, in particular ways by focussing solely on "the view from below": the moral insight that comes out of so-called unmediated experiences of survival. MacGregor (2004) states the problems that arise from the lack of acknowledgement that many of the women who ecofeminists romanticize as exhibiting a "subsistence perspective" or "barefoot epistemology" do so in conditions that they did not choose and that "lifestyle" does not necessarily determine human morality.

The push towards quantifying Nature as 'ecosystem services', or the economic benefits provided by natural ecosystems is part of a market-oriented mechanism for conservation says McCauley (2006) in a much-discussed article in the journal Nature. The underlying assumption is that if scientists can identify ecosystem services, like the Manzanilla Windbelt, Bush Bush and Bois Neuf islands for birds, other wildlife, and the mud volcanoes and the tourist potential they represent, then they can quantify their economic value, and align conservation with market ideologies. This will then move decision makers away from environmental destruction (McCauley, 2006).

This McCauley claims is akin to saying that civil-rights advocates would have been more effective if they provided economic justifications for racial integration. Nature conservation should be framed as a moral issue and argued as such to policy-makers, says McCauley, since policy makers are just as accustomed to making decisions based on morality as on finances.

References

[3] Introduction in Ecofeminism by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva
[5] see chapter 1 of "eco feminism" Mies and Shiva, which applies to materialist and spiritualist ecofeminism
[6] see Starhawk
[7] "eco feminism" Mies and Shiva
[8] Vandana Shiva, for example http://www.solarconference.net/news.htm
Further reading

Anthologies

- *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, edited by Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan
- *EcoFeminism & Globalization: exploring culture, context and religion*, edited by Heather Eaton & Lois Ann Lorentzen
- *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, edited by Carol J. Adams
- *Reclaim the Earth*, edited by Leonie Caldecott & Stephanie Leland
- *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, edited by Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein

Non-fiction

- *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*, by Helena Norberg-Hodge
- *The Body of God* by Sallie McFague
- *The Chalice & The Blade: Our History, Our Future*, by Riane Eisler
- *Ecofeminism* by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva
- *Ecofeminist Philosophy* by Karen J. Warren
- *Environmental Culture* by Val Plumwood
- *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, by Val Plumwood
- *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, by Rosemary Radford Ruether
- *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*, by Rosemary Radford Ruether
- *Neither Man Nor Beast* by Carol J. Adams
- *Refuge: A Unnatural History of Family and Place* by Terry Tempest Williams
- *Sacred Longings: Ecofeminist theology and Globalization* by Mary Grey
- *The Sexual Politics of Meat* by Carol J. Adams
- *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson
- *The Spiral Dance* by Starhawk
- *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* by Vandana Shiva
- *Thinking Green! Essays on Environmentalism, Feminism, and Nonviolence*, by Petra Kelly
- *Tomorrow’s Biodiversity* by Vandana Shiva
- *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, by Susan Griffin

Fiction

Also see ecotopian literature and feminist science fiction "Clementa" by Jim Martin

- *A Door Into Ocean* by Joan Slonczewski
- *Always Coming Home* by Ursula K. Le Guin
• *Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight* by Ursula K. Le Guin
• *The Fifth Sacred Thing* by Starhawk
• *The Gate to Women’s Country* by Sheri S. Tepper
• *The Holdfast Chronicles* by Suzy McKee Charnas
• *Native Tongue* by Suzette Haden Elgin
• *The Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler
• *Prodigal Summer* by Barbara Kingsolver
• *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood
• *The Wanderground* by Sally Miller Gearhart
• *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy
• *The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You* by Dorothy Bryant
• *Bear* by Marian Engel
• *The Temple of My Familiar* by Alice Walker
• A Bengali play "NEELKANTHA DESH" (2010) by Supratim Roy. (A theatre group named GOTROHEEN is performing this play in Kolkata.)

**External links**

• [www.ecofem.org](http://www.ecofem.org) (http://www.ecofem.org) Includes the regularly updated Ecofeminism Bibliography
• [ecofeminism.net](http://www.ecofeminism.net)
• Catherine Keller's 2005 pdf article: Ecofeminism and the Democracy of Creation (http://www.users.drew.edu/ckeller/Dark-Vibe.pdf)
• [An Ecology of Knowledge: Feminism, Ecology and the Science and Religion Discourse](http://www.metanexus.net/metanexus_online/show_article2.asp?ID=2669)" by Lisa Stenmark
• Toward a Queer Ecofeminism (http://www.lespantheresroses.org/textes/ecology_toward_a_queer_ecofeminism.pdf)" by Greta Gaard
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