



# FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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- ▶ The field of gender and environmental studies deals with the ways that gender roles shape the access to and management of resources.
  - ▶ From being dominated by old debates on whether the earth is our mother goddess or whether women are inherently closer to nature than men, gender and environmental studies has evolved into a largely activist-informed and materially-focused discipline.



# MAIN FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES FOR STUDYING WOMEN & THE ENVIRONMENT

- ▶ Ecofeminist approach
- ▶ Materialist approach

# ECOFEMINIST APPROACH



- ▶ Conceptual connections between women and nature
- ▶ Historical connections between women and nature
- ▶ Spiritual connections between women and nature

# Conceptual connections between Women and Nature

- ▶ Most of the ecofeminists who adopted this conceptual approach followed radical feminists in identifying Western patriarchy as the main source of global ecological destruction.
- ▶ They argue that because it is women who do most of the caring work that sustains human life, they assume a sense of compassion toward their environment which leads them to take action to preserve and repair it (Mies and Shiva 1993; Salleh 1997).

# Historical Connections between Women and Nature

- ▶ Feminist scholars such as Riane Eisler have pointed to the matrilineal nature of societies before 4500 BCE as being relatively at peace with nature. This ended with the invasion of Indo-European societies by Eurasian nomadic tribes (Eisler 1990:29).
- ▶ More contemporary analyses of history focus on the scientific revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They argue that this ushered in an era of reductionist and mechanistic science which led to unhindered industrial expansion and the subordination of women (Merchant 1980).

# Spiritual Connections between Women and Nature

- ▶ Spiritual ecofeminists see the problem of ecological destruction not only as a social, economic, and technological problem but also a spiritual one.
- ▶ They have pointed to the extreme anthropocentrism and androcentrism that exists in religion and offer alternative spiritual symbols (for example, Gaia and goddess symbols).
- ▶ They have asked how hierarchies of gender in religion and culture have translated into hierarchies of humans in nature and argue for a return to more traditional views that stress the interconnected nature of life (Starhawk 1979; Christ 1995, 1997).

# Spiritual connections

- ▶ In recent times more comprehensive work has been done by ecofeminists to link corporate globalization and its challenges to both ecofeminism and interfaith ecological theology (Ruether 1996, 2003, 2005; Eaton 2003, 2005).
- ▶ For instance, Rosemary Ruether in her 2005 book *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions* dedicates a chapter to the “Greening of World Religion”
- ▶ Ruther argues that “most of these religions have patterns that justify domination of women, both in the religious practices and in society. Hierarchies over lower- class and slave people and marginalized races are also factors in many of the world's religions. From an ecofeminist and ecojustice perspective, it is essential for the religions to deal with interface of domination of nature and social domination (Ruether, 2005)

# MATERIALIST APPROACH

- ▶ The materialist approach has an integrated understanding of women's oppression as rooted in structural and material inequalities.
- ▶ This approach rejects ecofeminist arguments claiming that there is any “innate” connection between women and nature.
- ▶ The thinkers of this approach argue that the access and distribution of natural resources are differentiated through gender within societies.
  - ▶ Women, particularly in developing countries, do most of the agricultural and domestic work, putting them at the frontlines in struggles for health, food, and water.

# “MATERIALIST “APPROACH

- ▶ Environmental feminism
  - ▶ Feminist environmentalism emphasizes material conceptions of gender-environment relations and their connections with particular ideological conceptions.
- ▶ Feminist Political Ecology (FPE)
  - ▶ Drawing on environmental feminism broader works within political ecology theory, FPE draws particular attention to issues of gendered knowledge, resource access and control, and the engagement between local and global issues.

# Feminist Environmentalism & Feminist Political Ecology

- ▶ It is important to note here that there are less explicit differences between these two bodies of work.
- ▶ The unifying theme in this scholarship is that there is no “innate”/”natural” connection between women and the environment.
- ▶
- ▶ Rather, they argue that women's relationship with the environment is based on the fact that women are primarily responsible for tending the land and gathering products from forests, particularly in the global South.
- ▶ The two fields also share a commitment to examining in an intersectional way the ways in which gender, class, and race mediate people's lives.

# Feminist Environmentalism

- ▶ Bina Agarwal's work has been a significant contribution to debates around gender and the environment. Although she also argues that rural women's environmental knowledge is important, she bases her claim on material practices such as men's and women's work and land ownership practices.
- ▶ Agarwal's focus on material conditions has made visible how certain kinds of environmental problems are produced and how these problems make women's lives more difficult by increasing their household labor.





# Feminist Political Ecology

- ▶ Building on the work done in the field of ecofeminism and feminist environmentalism, scholars such as Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayer, and Esther Wangari have laid out what they saw as the key issues emerging from feminist theorizing on gender and the environment and recent political ecology work.
- ▶ The first to provide a coherent analytical framework to the FPE approach, their analysis joins three critical themes: first, gendered knowledge; second, gendered environmental rights and responsibilities; and third, gendered environmental politics and grassroots activism (Rocheleau et al. 1996).

# Women and Purun (*Lepironia articulata*)

- ▶ Purun (*Lepironia articulata*) is a specific plant of peatland that has ecological, social and cultural functions



- ▶ Women holds knowledge in purun weaving as well as purun resources management
- ▶ Women weavers of purun produce varieties of weaving products that have socio-cultural-economic benefits











# Oil Palm: A Golden Crop for Investors

- ▶ Oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) is a crop native to West Africa
- ▶ Today, it is a globally traded commodity
- ▶ Nowadays, more than 50% of the products in a supermarket contain palm oil
- ▶ The consumption trend worldwide has made oil palm a 'golden crop' for investors in agribusiness

# Oil Palm: A Contentious Crop

- ▶ Deforestation
- ▶ Forest and Land Fires
- ▶ High carbon emission
- ▶ Loss of biodiversity
- ▶ Land grabbing
- ▶ Gendered inequalities
- ▶ Gender injustices
- ▶ Violation of workers' rights
- ▶ Precarious work and lives of workers





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# Taking care of nature, taking care of the future

