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GENERAL OVERVIEW OF ECOFEMINISM

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this work is to describe the general overview of ecofeminism, which is based exclusively on primary literature reviews.

Keywords : ecofeminism; environmentalism; feminism;

A. INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminism is a branch of feminism that sees environmentalism, and the relationship between women and the earth, as foundational to its analysis and practice. Ecofeminist thinkers draw on the concept of gender to analyse the relationships between humans and the natural world.[1] The term was coined by the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974).[2][3] Ecofeminist theory asserts that a feminist perspective of ecology does not place women in the dominant position of power, but rather calls for an egalitarian, collaborative society in which there is no one dominant group.[4] Today, there are several branches of ecofeminism, with varying approaches and analyses, including liberal ecofeminism, spiritual/cultural ecofeminism, and social/socialist ecofeminism (or materialist ecofeminism).[4] Interpretations of ecofeminism and how it might be applied to social thought include ecofeminist art, social justice and political philosophy, religion, contemporary feminism, and poetry.

Ecofeminist analysis explores the connections between women and nature in culture, religion, literature and iconography, and addresses the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. These parallels include but are not limited to seeing women and nature as property, seeing men as the curators of culture and women as the curators of nature, and how men dominate women and humans dominate nature. Ecofeminism emphasizes that both women and nature must be respected. [5] Charlene Spretnak has offered one way of categorizing ecofeminist work: 1) through the study of political theory as well as history; 2) through the belief and study of nature-based religions; 3) through environmentalism.[6]

According to Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974), ecofeminism relates the oppression and domination of all marginalized groups (women, people of color, children, the poor) to the oppression and domination of nature (animals, land, water, air, etc.). In the book, the author argues that oppression, domination, exploitation, and colonization from the Western patriarchal society has directly caused irreversible environmental damage.[7] Françoise d'Eaubonne was an activist and organizer, and her writing encouraged the eradication of all social injustice, not just injustice against women and the environment.[7]



This tradition includes a number of influential texts including: *Women and Nature* (Susan Griffin 1978), *The Death of Nature* (Carolyn Merchant 1980) and *Gyn/Ecology* (Mary Daly 1978). These texts helped to propel the association between domination by man on women and the domination of culture on nature. From these texts feminist activism of the 1980s linked ideas of ecology and the environment. Movements such as the National Toxics Campaign, Mothers of East Los Angeles (MELA), and Native Americans for a Clean Environment (NACE) were led by women devoted to issues of human health and environmental justice.[8] Writing in this circle discussed ecofeminism drawing from Green Party politics, peace movements, and direct action movements.[9] Modern ecofeminism, or feminist eco-criticism, eschews such essentialism and instead focuses more on intersectional questions, such as how the nature-culture split enables the oppression of female and nonhuman bodies. It is also an activist and academic movement that sees critical connections between the exploitation of nature and the domination over women both caused by men.

B. FRAMEWORK OF 'GENDERING NATURE'

One interpretation of ecofeminist theory is that capitalism reflects only paternalistic and patriarchal values. This notion implies that the effects of capitalism have not also benefited women and have led to a harmful split between nature and culture. In the 1970s, early ecofeminists discussed that the split can only be healed by the feminine instinct for nurture and holistic knowledge of nature's processes.

Several feminists make the distinction that it is not because women are female or "feminine" that they relate to nature, but because of their similar states of oppression by the same male-dominant forces. The marginalization is evident in the gendered language used to describe nature and the animalized language used to describe women. Some discourses link women specifically to the environment because of their traditional social role as a nurturer and caregiver.[10] Ecofeminists following in this line of thought believe that these connections are illustrated through the coherence of socially-labeled values associated with 'femininity' such as nurturing, which are present both among women and in nature.

Vandana Shiva says that women have a special connection to the environment through their daily interactions and this connection has been ignored. According to Shiva, women in subsistence economies who produce "wealth in partnership with nature, have been experts in their own right of holistic and ecological knowledge of nature's processes". She makes the point that "these alternative modes of knowing, which are oriented to the social benefits and sustenance needs are not recognized 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 (23)".[11] Shiva blames this failure on the Western patriarchal perceptions of development and progress. According to Shiva, patriarchy has labeled women, nature, and other groups not growing the economy as "unproductive".[12]

In the 1993 essay entitled "Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health" authors Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen outline what they call the "ecofeminist framework". The essay provides a wealth of data and statistics in addition to outlining the theoretical aspects of the ecofeminist critique. The framework described is intended to establish ways of viewing and understanding our current global situations so that we are better understand how we arrived at this point and what may be done to ameliorate the ills.



Gaard and Gruen argue that there are four sides to this framework:

1. The mechanistic materialist model of the universe that resulted from the scientific revolution and the subsequent reduction of all things into mere resources to be optimized, dead inert matter to be used.
2. The rise of patriarchal religions and their establishment of gender hierarchies along with their denial of immanent divinity.
3. Self and other dualisms and the inherent power and domination ethic it entails.
4. Capitalism and its claimed intrinsic need for the exploitation, destruction and instrumentalization of animals, earth and people for the sole purpose of creating wealth.

They hold that these four factors have brought us to what ecofeminists see as a "separation between nature and culture" that is for them the root source of our planetary ills.[13]

C. A MAP OF CONCEPTS

1. MODERN SCIENCE AND ECOFEMINISM

In *Ecofeminism* (1993) authors Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies ponder modern science and its acceptance as a universal and value-free system. They view the dominant stream of modern science not as objective science but as a projection of Western men's values.[14] The privilege of determining what is considered scientific knowledge and its usage has been controlled by men, and for the most part of history restricted to men. Bondi and Miles list examples including the medicalization of childbirth and the industrialization of plant reproduction.[14] Bondi argues that the medicalization of childbirth has marginalized midwife knowledge and changed the natural process of childbirth into a procedure dependent on specialized technologies and appropriated expertise. A common claim within ecofeminist literature is that patriarchal structures justify their dominance through binary opposition, these include but are not limited to: heaven/earth, mind/body, male/female, human/animal, spirit/matter, culture/nature and white/non-white.[15] Oppression, according to them, is reinforced by assuming truth in these binaries, which factuality they challenge, and instilling them as 'marvelous to behold' through what they consider to be religious and scientific constructs.[15]

2. VEGETARIAN ECOFEMINISM

The application of ecofeminism to animal rights has established vegetarian ecofeminism, which asserts that "omitting the oppression of animals from feminist and ecofeminist analyses [...] is inconsistent with the activist and philosophical foundations of both feminism (as a "movement to end all forms of oppression") and ecofeminism." [16] It puts into practice "the personal is political," as many ecofeminists believe that "meat-eating is a form of patriarchal domination...that suggests a link between male violence and a meat-based diet." [16] During a 1995 interview with *On the Issues*, Carol J. Adams stated, "Manhood is constructed in our culture in part by access to meat-eating and control of other bodies, whether it's women or animals". [17] According to Adams, "We cannot work for justice and challenge the oppression of nature without understanding that the most frequent way we interact with nature is by eating animals". [17] Vegetarian ecofeminism combines sympathy with the analysis of culture and politics to refine a system of ethics and action. [16]



3. MATERIALIST ECOFEMINISM

Ecofeminism as materialist is another common dimension ecofeminism. A materialist view connects some institutions such as labor, power, and property as the source of domination over women and nature. There are connections made between these subjects because of the values of production and reproduction.[18] This dimension of ecofeminism may also be referred to as "social feminism," "socialist ecofeminism," or "Marxist ecofeminism." According to Carolyn Merchant, "Social ecofeminism advocates the liberation of women through overturning economic and social hierarchies that turn all aspects of life into a market society that today even invades the womb".[4] Ecofeminism in this sense seeks to eliminate social hierarchies which favor the production of commodities (dominated by men) over biological and social reproduction.

4. SPIRITUAL ECOFEMINISM/CULTURAL ECOFEMINISM

Spiritual ecofeminism is another branch of ecofeminism, and it is popular among ecofeminist authors such as Starhawk, Riane Eisler, Carol J. Adams, and more. Starhawk calls this an earth-based spirituality, which recognizes that the Earth is alive, that we are interconnected, as well as a community.[19] Spiritual ecofeminism is not linked to one specific religion, but is centered around values of caring, compassion, and non-violence.[20] Often, ecofeminists refer to more ancient traditions, such as the worship of Gaia, the Goddess of nature and spirituality (also known as Mother Earth).[20] Wicca and Paganism are particularly influential to spiritual ecofeminism. Most Wicca covens demonstrate a deep respect for nature, a feminine outlook, and an aim to establish strong community values.[21] In her book *Radical Ecology*, Carolyn Merchant refers to spiritual ecofeminism as "cultural ecofeminism." According to Merchant, cultural ecofeminism, "celebrates the relationship between women and nature through the revival of ancient rituals centered on goddess worship, the moon, animals, and the female reproductive system." [4] In this sense, cultural ecofeminists tend to value intuition, an ethic of caring, and human-nature interrelationships.[4]

D. FROM CONCEPTS TO CONCRETE

Women participated in the environmental movements, specifically preservation and conservation beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing into the early twentieth century.[22] In northern India in 1973, women took part in the Chipko movement to protect forests from deforestation. Non-violent protest tactics were used to occupy trees so that loggers could not cut them down.[7]

In Kenya in 1977, the Green Belt Movement was initiated by environmental and political activist Professor Wangari Maathai. It is rural tree planting program led by women, which Maathai designed to help prevent desertification in the area. The program created a 'green belt' of at least 1,000 trees around villages, and gave participants the ability to take charge in their communities. In later years, the Green Belt Movement was an advocate for informing and empowering citizens through seminars for civic and environmental education, as well as holding national leaders accountable for their actions and instilling agency in citizens.[23] The work of the Greenbelt Movement continues today.



In 1978 in New York, mother and environmentalist Lois Gibbs led her community in protest after discovering that their entire neighborhood, Love Canal, was built on top of a toxic dump site. The toxins in the ground were causing illness among children and reproductive issues among women, as well as birth defects in babies born to pregnant women exposed to the toxins. The Love Canal movement eventually led to the evacuation and relocation of nearly 800 families by the federal government.[24]

In 1980 and 1981, members of such a conference organized a peaceful protest at the Pentagon. Women stood, hand in hand, demanding equal rights (including social, economic, and reproductive rights) as well as an end to militaristic actions taken by the government and exploitation of the community (people and the environment). This movement is known as the Women's Pentagon Actions.[9]

In 1985, the Akwesasne Mother's Milk Project was launched by Katsi Cook. This study was funded by the government, and investigated how the higher level of contaminants in water near the Mohawk reservation impacted babies. It revealed that through breast milk, Mohawk children were being exposed to 200% more toxins than children not on the reservation. Toxins contaminate water all over the world, but to due environmental racism, certain subversive groups are exposed to a much higher amount.[25]

The Greening of Harlem Coalition is another example of an ecofeminist movement. In 1989, Bernadette Cozart founded the coalition, which is responsible for many urban gardens around Harlem. Cozart's goal is to turn vacant lots into community gardens.[26] This is economically beneficial, and also provides a way for very urban communities to be in touch with nature and each other. The majority of people interested in this project (as noted in 1990) were women. Through these gardens, they were able to participate in and become leaders of their communities. Urban greening exists in other places as well. Beginning in 1994, a group of African-American women in Detroit have developed city gardens, and call themselves the Gardening Angels. Similar garden movements have been occurring globally.[27]

The development of vegetarian ecofeminism can be traced to the mid-80s and 90s, where it first appeared in writing. However, the roots of a vegetarian ecofeminist view can be traced back further by looking at sympathy for non-humans and counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s.[16] At the culmination of the decade ecofeminism had spread to both coasts and articulated an intersectional analysis of women and the environment. Eventually, challenging ideas of environmental classism and racism, resisting toxic dumping and other threats to the impoverished.[28]

In the 1980s and 1990s some began to see the advancing theories in ecofeminism as essentialist. Through analysis done by post structural and third wave feminists it was argued that ecofeminism equated women with nature. This dichotomy is dangerous because it groups all women into one category and enforces the very societal norms that feminism is trying to break. Out of this critique rose the anti-essentialist argument. Ecofeminist and author Noel Sturgeon says in an interview that what anti-essentialists are critiquing is a strategy used to mobilize large and diverse groups of both theorists and activists.[29]



Coming out of the 90s, ecofeminism met a lot of criticism from anti-essentialist feminism, which heavily critiqued what they viewed as essentialism. The essentialist view saw ecofeminism as reinforcing and growing patriarchal dominance and norms.[18] Feminist thought surrounding ecofeminism grew in some areas as it was criticized; vegetarian ecofeminism contributed intersectional analysis; and ecofeminisms that analyzed animal rights, labor rights and activism as they could draw lines among oppressed groups. To some, the inclusion of non-human animals also became to be viewed as essentialist. According to ecofeminist and author Charlene Spretnak, modern ecofeminism is concerned about a variety of issues, including reproductive technology, equal pay and equal rights, toxic poisoning, Third World development, and more.[6]

Ecofeminism as it propelled into the 21st century became aware of the criticisms, and in response ecofeminists with a materialist lens began doing research and renaming the topic, i.e. queer ecologies, global feminist environmental justice, and gender and the environment.[28]

Beginning in the late 20th century, women worked in efforts to protect wildlife, food, air and water.[30] These efforts depended largely on new developments in the environmental movement from influential writers, such as Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, John Muir, and Rachel Carson.[31][32] Fundamental examples of women's efforts in the 20th century are the books *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson and *Refuge* by Terry Tempest Williams. These works truly opened American's eyes to the environmental harm they were perpetuating, and created a platform for change.

Ecofeminist author Karren Warren lists Aldo Leopold's essay "Land Ethic" (1949) as a fundamental work to the ecofeminist conception, as Leopold was the first to pen an ethic for the land which understands all non-human parts of that community (animals, plants, land, air, water) as equal to and in a relationship with humans. This inclusive understanding of the environment launched the modern preservation movement and illustrated how issues can be viewed through a framework of caring.[7]

Susan A. Mann, an eco-feminist and professor of sociological and feminist theory, considers the roles women played in these activism to be the starter for ecofeminism in later centuries. Mann associates the beginning of ecofeminism not with feminists but with women of different race and class backgrounds who made connections among gender, race, class and environmental issues. This ideal is upheld through the notion that in activist and theory circles marginalized groups must be included in the discussion. In early environmental and women's movements, issues of varying races and classes were often separated.[33]

E. MAJOR CRITIQUES

The major criticism of ecofeminism is that it is essentialist.[34] The ascribed essentialism appears in two main areas:

1. Ecofeminism demonstrates an adherence to the strict dichotomy, among others, between men and women. Some ecofeminist critiques note that the dichotomy between women and men and nature and culture creates a dualism that is too stringent and focused on the differences of women and men. In this sense, ecofeminism too strongly correlates the social status of women with the social status of nature, rather



than the non-essentialist view that women along with nature both have masculine and feminine qualities, and that just like feminine qualities have often been seen as less worthy, nature is also seen as having lesser value than culture.[35]

2. A divergent view regarding participation in oppressive structures. As opposed to radical and liberation-based feminist movements, mainstream feminism which is most tightly bound with hegemonic social status strives to promote equality within the existing social and political structure,[36] such as making it possible for women to occupy positions of power in business, industry and politics, using direct involvement as the main tactic for achieving pay equity and influence. In contrast, many ecofeminists oppose active engagement in these areas, as these are the very structures that the movement intends to dismantle.[35]

Social ecologist and feminist Janet Biehl has criticized ecofeminism for focusing too much on a mystical connection between women and nature and not enough on the actual conditions of women.[37] She has also stated that rather than being a forward-moving theory, ecofeminism is an anti-progressive movement for women.[37] Rosemary Radford Ruether also critiques this focus on mysticism over work that focuses on helping women, but argues that spirituality and activism can be combined effectively in ecofeminism.[38] A. E. Kings has criticized ecofeminism for limiting itself to focusing only on gender and the environment, and neglecting to take an intersectional approach. Kings says that ecofeminists claim to be intersectional, however have fallen short on their commitment until recently.[39]

F. CONCLUSION

In the 1970s, Indian villagers had founded the Chipko movement, a protest against deforestation, a copy of an ecofeminist action before the letter. Another important date is that of a conference entitled "Ecofeminism and Life on Earth" in the United States in March 1980 after the Three Mile Island Nuclear Accident in 1979. Those present had adopted a report manifesto. between the ecological movements and the women's movements, between the destruction of nature, militarism, the discriminations and domination undergone by women.

Ecofeminism is a philosophy, an ethic and a movement born of the conjunction and union of feminist and ecological currents of thought. According to this movement, notably championed by Vandana Shiva, who founded a sanctuary of wild and agro-biodiversity in India, where women have an essential place, there are similarities and common causes of domination and women's oppression and non-respect of nature, which contribute to environmental destruction.

The term "ecofeminism" seems to have been published for the first time in 1974 by a French feminist, Françoise d'Eaubonne, in a book entitled "Feminism or death" but her principles have already been stated in 62 by Rachel Carson, in her *Silent spring* (silent spring) which, by its impact, contributed to the prohibition of DDT in the United States, and it is first and foremost in the English-speaking world that this concept has developed.

A common critique of ecofeminism is that the connection it promotes between women and nature is a form of essentialism. Traditional feminism is concerned, for example, that ecofeminism can restore women's confinement to the natural world through patriarchy cunning [insufficient source].



In 2019 ecofeminism is more and more present in society. In Greta Thunberg's various climate marches many young girls have taken the initiative to put a feminist touch on their placard: "lick clitos, not monsanto's ass", "fuck us, not the climate" or "My planet, my cat, save the wetlands", this slogan evoking the buffers whose components pollute the planet as much as our body. When giving part of her Freedom to Care award, Greta Thunberg identifies the association as supporting "the women and girls in the global South face the effects of rising temperatures and climate change".

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