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Ecofeminism

A social movement and form of discourse analysis deriving from women's insight that sustainability and equality are interlocking goals.

While ecofeminists may adopt different styles of argument, all consider the late 20th century crises - social and environmental - an inevitable outcome of "masculine" values and behaviours. The keystone of this destructive patriarchalism is identified in the everyday notion that men represent the sphere of "humanity and culture", while women, indigenes, children, animals, plants, and so on, are part of "nature". Protected by this socially constructed rationale, men globally (though not necessarily *universally) colonise and resource ecological nature and women's bodies with little regard to consequence. The "humanity/nature" *opposition and associated *binaries such as masculine/feminine, *self/other, reason/chaos, white/black, clean/dirty, etc. are linguistic devices which systematically proscribe the life world of women and others deemed closer to nature.

In contesting these traditionally essentialised relations, most ecofeminists focus on the dominant eurocentric industrial capitalist patriarchal formation and its material impacts. Thus, ecofeminist activists are found working wherever the means of "social reproduction" is under threat: in the ecology movement or domestic violence refuges, in struggles for indigenous sovereignty or campaigns over genetically engineered food. Ecofeminists in academia focus on the *deconstruction of patriarchal knowledges such as medicine, theology, or corporate PR. Their analyses tend to be interdisciplinary in scope, and reveal both *modernist and postmodern tendencies.

A phenomenon of counter *globalisation, ecofeminist ideas have emerged spontaneously over the past 3 decades from several continents, regardless of ethnic, age, or class, differences that mark women's experiences. First usage of the actual term "ecofeminism" appears to have been in Françoise D'Eaubonne's 1974 book Le féminisme ou la mort. However, it can be argued that the Chipko tree huggers of North India practised ecofeminism 300 years ago. Susan Griffin pioneered the standpoint in the United States; Maria Mies in Germany; and Vandana Shiva in India. A number of politically aware men also identify with ecofeminist objectives as demonstrated by contributions to the journal Environmental Ethics.

In deepening and broadening women's political concerns within a global ecological frame, ecofeminists may draw on liberal, radical, socialist, cultural, or poststructural *feminist paradigms. As Mary Mellor's history of ecofeminism shows, its literature

and strategies for change continue to reflect the diversity of feminist and womanist thought. Similarly, by calling for *gender awareness, ecofeminism deepens environmental philosophy and political programs like deep ecology, social ecology, ecosocialism, Green parties, and bio-regionalism. On a yet further political front; ecofeminist destabilisation of eurocentric capitalist patriarchy, opens up a *discursive space for indigenous and other *postcolonial voices to be heard.

Further Reading

Griffin, Susan (1978) Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her, New York: Harper.

Mellor, Mary (1997) Feminism and Ecology, Oxford: Polity.

Mies, Maria and Shiva, Vandana (1993) Ecofeminism, London: Zed.

Salleh, Ariel (1997) Ecofeminism as Politics: nature, Marx, and the postmodern, London: Zed.