



ECOFEMINIST PHILOSOPHY

A WESTERN PERSPECTIVE
ON WHAT IT IS AND
WHY IT MATTERS

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Chapter One

Nature Is a Feminist Issue

Motivating Ecofeminism by Taking Empirical Data Seriously

Trees, forests, and deforestation. Water, drought, and desertification. Food production, poverty, and toxic wastes. The biodiversity crisis, wildlife, and maltreatment of animals. What do such environmental issues have to do with women, people of color, the poor, and children?

Ecological feminists (“ecofeminists”) claim that there are important connections between the unjustified dominations of women, people of color, children, and the poor and the unjustified domination of nature. Throughout this book, I refer to unjustifiably dominated groups as “Others,” both “human Others” (such as women, people of color, children, and the poor) and “earth Others” (such as animals, forests, the land). The reference to “Others” is intended to highlight the status of those subordinate groups in unjustifiable relationships and systems of domination and subordination. According to ecofeminists, “nature” (referring to nonhuman animals, plants, and ecosystems) is included among those Others who/that have been unjustifiably exploited and dominated. “Nature is a feminist issue” might well be called the slogan of ecofeminism.

What does it mean to say “nature is a feminist issue”? Minimally, something is a “feminist issue” if an understanding of it helps one understand the oppression, subordination, or domination of women. Equal rights, comparable pay for comparable work, and day care centers are feminist issues because understanding them sheds light on the subordination or inferior status of women cross-culturally. Racism, classism, ableism, ageism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, and colonialism are feminist issues because understanding them helps one understand the subordination of women. (More is said about this in chapter 3.) According to ecofeminists, trees, water, food production, animals, toxins, and, more generally, naturism (i.e., the unjustified domination of nonhuman nature) are feminist issues because understanding them helps one understand the interconnections among

the dominations of women and other subordinated groups of humans (the human Others?), on the one hand, and the domination of nonhuman nature, on the other hand. I call these interconnections women–other human Others–nature interconnections.

What does it mean to take a *feminist approach* to untangling these interconnections? A feminist approach uses gender analysis as the starting point, gender is the *lens* through which the initial description and analysis occur. Ecofeminism uses a feminist approach when exploring women–other human Others–nature interconnections.

If ecofeminism is about interconnections among all systems of unjust human domination, why is special attention given to women—only one of the groups of humans who are unjustifiably dominated? Ecofeminists begin with gender as a category of analysis. As such, ecofeminists highlight claims about women as women in their discussions of interconnected systems of unjust domination (rather than, for example, on women as humans, as mothers, as wives, as daughters, as sisters).¹ But this is not because gender oppression more important than other forms of oppression; it is not. It is because a focus on “women” reveals important features of interconnected systems of human domination. First, among white people, people of color, poor people, children, the elderly, colonized peoples, so-called Third World people, and other human groups, harmed by environmental destruction, it is often women who suffer disproportionately higher risks and harms than men. Second, often female-gender roles (e.g., as managers of domestic economies) overlap with a particular environmental issue in a way that male-gender roles do not. Third, some of the Western ideologies that underlie the conception and domination of “nature” are male-gender-biased in ways that are distinct from other sorts of bias (a topic discussed in chapter 3). So, in order to unpack specific gender features of human systems of domination, ecofeminists often (but not exclusively) focus on “women.”

This chapter uses a feminist approach to discuss *empirical* women–other human Others–nature interconnections. These empirical considerations set the stage for subsequent considerations of a variety of ecofeminist positions (given in chapter 2) and the particular version of ecofeminist philosophy (given in chapter 3). I defend throughout this book.

WOMEN AND TREES, FORESTS, AND FORESTRY

In 1974, twenty-seven women of Reni in northern India took simple but effective action to stop tree felling. They threatened to hug the trees if the lumberjack attempted to cut them down. The women’s protest, known as the Chipko movement (“chipko” in Hindi means “to embrace” or “hug”), saved 12,000 square kilometers of sensitive watershed. The Chipko movement also gave visibility to two basic complaints of local people: commercial felling by contractors damage

a large number of other trees, and the teak and eucalyptus monoculture plantations are replacing valuable indigenous forests.²

Forests have been central to the evolution of Indian civilization. India being known in ancient times as “Aranya Sanskriti” or a “forest culture.”³ The commercialization of forestry under British rule, however, restricted the access of local Indians to forests, and management practices that aimed at maximizing timber output for a cash economy were introduced. This led to widespread Gandhian *satyagrahas*—campaigns of nonviolent civil disobedience by local Indian women. The Chipko movement is “historically, philosophically and organizationally, an extension of traditional Gandhian *satyagrahas*.”⁴

Both the earlier forest *satyagrahas* and their contemporary expression in the Chipko movement are responses to conflicts over forest resource use and degradation. According to Jayanta Bandyopadhyay and Vandana Shiva, what distinguishes Chipko from the earlier struggles is its ecological basis:

The new concern to save and protect forests through Chipko *satyagraha* did not arise from resentment against further encroachment on the people’s access to forest resources. It arose from the alarming signals of rapid ecological destabilisation in the hills. . . . It has now evolved to the demand for ecological rehabilitation. Since the Chipko movement is based upon the perception of forests in their ecological context, it exposes the social and ecological costs of short term growth-oriented forest management. This is clearly seen in the slogan of the Chipko movement which claims that the main products of the forests are not timber or resin, but “soil, water, and oxygen.”⁵

“Soil, water, and oxygen.” The Chipko women understand the ecological significance of forests.

The Chipko movement—a grassroots, women-initiated, ecologically aware, nonviolent protest movement—is ostensibly about trees. But it is also about women–other human Others–nature interconnections. This is because, in India (as in many countries of the Southern Hemisphere, hereafter referred to as the South), forests are inextricably connected to rural and household economies governed by women. Tree shortages in India pose significant problems for rural Indian women. The “eucalyptus controversy” illustrates why this is so.

As a result of First World development decisions, indigenous, multispecies forests have been replaced in India by monoculture tree plantations, most notably eucalyptus plantations. The replacement of natural forests in India with eucalyptus plantations typically is justified by outside development theoreticians on the grounds of increased productivity. While eucalyptus covers nearly half a million hectares, it is very unpopular among local women. According to Bandyopadhyay and Shiva:

What has been called the “eucalyptus controversy” is in reality a conflict of paradigms, between an ecological approach to forestry on the one hand, and a reductionist, partisan approach which only responds to industrial requirements on the other. While the former views natural forests and many indigenous tree species as more

productive than eucalyptus, the reverse is true according to the paradigm of Commercial Forestry. The scientific conflict is in fact an economic conflict over *women's needs and whose needs are important*.⁵

Which needs and whose needs *are* important? Ecofeminists insist that the needs of women as primary managers of household economies are important for at least three reasons.

First, in the South women are typically more dependent than men on the forest products,⁷ and they are the primary sufferers of forest resource depletion. Trees provide five essential elements in these household economies: food (fodder, products for the home (including building materials, household implements, dyes, medicines), and income-generating activities.⁹ As trees become scarce, it is women who must walk farther for fuelwood and fodder and who carry it all back themselves (e.g., without the help of animals). As men increasingly seek employment in towns and cities, especially to work in eucalyptus plantations, it is women who must carry out men's former jobs plus the laborious tasks of collecting and processing forest products on degraded soils. As new technologies targeted at cash economies are introduced, it is women who have decreased opportunities to use trees as a source of income (e.g., by making objects that can be sold at market). As development projects that fail to address women's specific needs are introduced, it is women who are confronted with challenges of cooking with inferior fuelwood. Because of their gendered responsibilities for maintaining domestic households, tree shortages have a significant, and disproportionate impact on women. As the U.N. publication *World's Women, 1995* states:

Rough estimates of the proportion of rural women affected by fuelwood scarcity—based on estimates by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations of the percentage of household energy provided by fuelwood—are 60 percent in 22 African countries, nearly 80 percent in 18 Asian countries, and nearly 40 percent in 14 Latin American and Caribbean countries.¹⁰

In highly deforested areas, the situation for women is the worst, since women must devote more time to collecting fuelwood, thereby reducing the time available to do other activities.

Second, there are customs, taboos, and legal and time constraints that women face that men do not face. As the United Nations documents:

Economic productivity and development in rural areas of developing regions are low and women in poor rural regions are overwhelmingly disadvantaged in dealing with their environment. They have less education and training than urban women or men, and they are excluded from traditional rural development programmes that might provide such training—and from the credit and other institutional support needed for rural development.¹¹

Men and women often have different access to credit and land. The rights of men and women regarding trees often differ significantly. In the United Republic of Tanzania, for example, women (who may be one of several wives of one man) often are permitted to stay on land they do not and cannot own at the discretion of their husbands or fathers.¹² Women in rural areas of developing countries are largely without access to the sort of institutional support needed to participate in and control local development:

In rural areas, women's roles are those of the poorest-paid labourers—weeding, hoeing and carrying water and wood, combined with the traditional family roles of cooking, child care, health care and reproduction—without even the pay that a labourer expects. While consciousness of these traditional roles has fostered the idea that women are in some sense natural custodians of the environment in rural areas, there is no evidence of this notion and women in rural areas are largely ill-equipped for it. They are without training, status, access to community-based organizations and cooperatives, land and property rights, capital, or environmental institutions that make up the dense fabric of rural life and control its development.¹³

Third, key assumptions of commercial Western forestry work to women's disadvantage. One such assumption is that *the outsider knows best*—that the First World forester (an "outsider") has the requisite technical expertise to solve the problem of the lack of trees in Third World countries. But this assumption is false or problematic. Sometimes it is "the insider" (i.e., the local people most inside the culture)—the Chipko women of India, for example—who are the experts, who have what feminist foresters call "indigenous technical knowledge" about forestry production.¹⁴ Because local women are the primary users of forest commodities in most developing countries, their "day-to-day, hands-on involvement with forestry goes far beyond that of many professionally trained foresters."¹⁵ For example, in a Sierra Leone village, women were able to identify thirty-one products from nearby bushes and trees while men could identify only eight.¹⁶ Women's indigenous technical knowledge grows out of their daily, lived experiences as managers of trees and tree products.

A second assumption of commercial Western forestry is that activities that fall outside the boundaries of commercial fiber production are less important.¹⁷ Yet these activities are precisely those that women engage in on a daily basis. Conceptually, the "invisibility" of what women do accounts for the mistaken assumption that management and production policies of orthodox forestry are not gender-biased. It also explains why many foresters "literally do not see trees that are used as hedgerows or living fence poles; trees that provide materials for basketry, dyes, medicines, or decorations; trees that provide sites for honey barrels; trees that provide shade; or trees that provide human food."¹⁸ Because these foresters literally do not see these multiple uses of trees, they also often do not see a lot more, for example, that a diversity of tree species is useful, that men and women may have very different uses for the same tree or may use different trees for different purposes.

A third assumption of orthodox Western forestry concerns efficiency: it usually is better to have large-scale production using a small number of species than small-scale, community-based forestry using a wide variety of species. Again, the Chipko movement challenges this assumption. Since small-scale production reflects local priorities, involves multiple uses of many species of trees, and is responsive to the social reality of women's importance in agriculture and forest production, to threaten small-scale production is to threaten the livelihood and well-being of women.

The empirical data about women and trees in India remind us to notice that other issues usually raised outside an ecofeminist context, such as the loss of old-growth temperate and rainforest trees and the effects of deforestation on indigenous cultures, can usefully become part of an ecofeminist discussion as well. Consider, for example, the impact of the destruction of native forests—those never logged or planted by humans—on indigenous and land-based peoples in Brazil. In the northwest Amazon, an invasion of gold miners has “wrecked devastation on the Yanomami—one of the largest and most culturally intact indigenous groups in the Amazon.”¹⁹ Despite current action by the Brazilian government, the destruction of Yanomami culture and livelihood has continued; Yanomami gardens have been destroyed; streams have been polluted with deadly mercury; malaria and other illnesses contribute to the death, starvation, and malnutrition that plagues these native peoples. Between 1987 and 1990, nearly 13 percent of the Yanomami population (about 1,300 people) died as a result of the miners' actions.²⁰ The military governments that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985 viewed indigenous people as “ethnic cysts” to be “excised” from or assimilated into the body politic.²¹ Blatant disregard for the culture and health of indigenous peoples is intimately connected with the destruction of the forests and land that constitute their homes.

WOMEN, WATER, AND DROUGHT

The demand for water for agricultural irrigation in developing countries accounted for 30 percent of the growth in water consumption in 1990. World water use is divided among irrigation uses (73 percent), industry uses (22 percent), and domestic uses (5 percent). But less than 3 percent of all water on earth is fresh. The atmosphere, rivers, streams, lakes, and underground stores hold less than 1 percent of the earth's water.

Furthermore, millions of humans have difficulty getting sufficient water necessary for survival, about 5 liters per day. In more than half of the developing countries, less than 50 percent of the population has a source of potable water or facilities for sewage disposal. The World Health Organization estimates that approximately 85 percent of all sicknesses and diseases in developing countries, including diarrhea, trachoma, parasitic worms, and malaria, are attributable to

inadequate potable water or sanitation. It also estimates that as many as 25 million deaths a year are due to water-related illnesses. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 15 million children die every year before they are five; half of them could be saved if they had access to safe drinking water.²²

Water scarcity is of special concern for women and children. According to *The World's Women, 1995*, the majority of countries in Africa and many countries of Asia and Latin America are considered water-scarcity countries.²³ In these countries, women and children perform most of the water collection work. Small-scale studies in Africa and Asia indicate that women and girls spend up to forty-three hours per week collecting and carrying water (e.g., in Africa, approximately seventeen hours in Senegal, five hours in rural areas of Botswana, and forty-three hours on northern farms in Ghana; in Asia, seven hours in the Baroda region of India, one to five hours in Nepalese villages, depending on the ages of the girls, and three hours in Pakistan).²⁴ Because of natural resource depletion, women also must walk farther for water (e.g., up to fifteen kilometers daily through rough terrain in Uttarakhanda, India). The effects on women in these countries is significant:

The proportion of rural women affected by water scarcity is estimated at 55 per cent in Africa, 32 per cent in Asia and 45 per cent in Latin America. Even where water is abundant overall in countries, there still are significant parts of many countries where at least seasonal water scarcity burdens women with added time for water collection.²⁵

According to Joni Seager, approximately half the population in the Third World is still without safe drinking water.²⁶ There are 250 million cases of water-related diseases, resulting in ten million deaths, reported each year.²⁷ Drinking water is often drawn from public bathing and laundering places, and the same water is frequently used as a public toilet. Lack of sanitary water is of special concern for women and children since, as the primary providers of household water, they experience disproportionately higher health risks in the presence of unsanitary water.

Contaminated water and its disproportionate effects on women, particularly among people of color and the poor, is not just a problem in developing countries. In 1980, the United States produced 125 billion pounds of hazardous waste, enough to fill approximately 3,000 Love Canals. By the mid-1990s, 38 percent of the rivers in the United States were too polluted to swim in. Groundwater, the drinking water source for nearly half of the population of the United States, is contaminated by leaking chemical wastes and other substances.²⁸

As an example, in Hardeman County, Tennessee, in 1964, the Velsicol Chemical Company dumped 300,000 fifty-five gallon barrels of unknown chemicals on their 242-acre farm. Some of the barrels burst open, and their contents seeped into the soil. In 1967 a U.S. Geological Survey report showed that the chemicals from the dump site were reaching local water wells. No action was taken. By 1977 residents noticed that their drinking water had a

foul odor and taste. Nell Grantham, a licensed practical nurse, took samples of their water for testing. The results confirmed their suspicions: Their water contained harmful chemicals, twelve clearly identified. Local residents were told the water was not safe to drink, cook with, bathe in; vegetables and animals could not be raised on their land. Residents experienced a host of health problems: skin rashes, liver damage, birth defects.²⁹

A different sort of water issue that affects women, people of color, the poor, and children are the so-called natural disasters of droughts and floods. A drought is too little water; a flood is too much water. Traditionally, droughts and floods are considered "disasters" only when humans, human communities, and property have been seriously affected. Humans make land more drought-prone and more flood-prone (and, hence, more disaster-prone) by removing the vegetation and soil systems that absorb and store water. As Anders Wijkman and Lloyd Timberlake claim about droughts, "reduced rainfall may trigger a drought, but human pressure on the land is the primary cause."³⁰

Wijkman and Timberlake argue that forces of nature ("natural events") trigger disaster events, but they are not the main cause. In the developing world, they identify three main causes of "natural disasters": human vulnerability resulting from poverty and inequality; environmental degradation owing to poor land use; and rapid population growth, especially among the poor.³¹ But these three main causes involve a complex set of institutional, economic, cultural, and political factors. According to Wijkman and Timberlake, these complex factors bear an important and typically undernoticed causal role in the occurrence of "natural disasters," such as droughts and floods, that affect millions of humans and animals.

Economic or class interests head the list of human-induced factors that affect the occurrences and locations of droughts as "natural disasters." Wijkman and Timberlake poignantly express this point when they claim that "no wealthy person ever died in a drought," "no relief worker has starved to death during a drought," and "no journalist has died of hunger while covering a drought."³²

Are droughts and floods—obvious environmental issues with class implications—also gender and age issues? Yes, especially considering that it is poor women and children who are most significantly affected. This is due to a constellation of interconnected factors—with poverty a major factor. No matter how poverty is measured, the poor population is largely and increasingly comprised of women and children. Poverty differentials among both groups are magnified by race, ethnicity, and age.³³ For example, cross-culturally, women are paid less than men, and women in most regions spend as much or more time working than men when unpaid housework is taken into account.³⁴ Women everywhere control fewer resources and reap a lesser share of the world's wealth than men: Women do more than one-half of the world's work, but receive only 10 percent of the world's income and own only 1 percent of the world's property.³⁵ Women-headed households are a growing worldwide phenomenon, with between 80 and 90 percent of poor families headed by women.³⁶ When one remembers that the three

film is caused by a water crisis

elements that make up the major part of Third World disasters are deforestation, desertification, and soil erosion, and that, among humans, it is the poor who are most significantly affected by them, one can then understand why women and children will be disproportionately victims of these disasters.

WOMEN, FOOD, AND FARMING

It is estimated that women farmers grow at least half of the world's food. According to Mayra Buvinic and Sally Yudelman, between one-third and one-half of the agricultural laborers in the Third World are women.³⁷ They claim that:

As a rule, women farmers work longer hours, have fewer assets and lower incomes than men farmers do, and have almost as many dependents to support. The disparity is not due to lack of education or competence. Women farmers are poorer because their access to credit is limited. Without credit they cannot acquire productive assets, such as cattle, fertilizer or improved seeds, to improve the productivity of their labor.³⁸

Women's share in farming varies widely cross-culturally, but in general men do more of the actual fieldwork when access to machinery or large farm animals is involved (such as in the United States or India), and women do more when the work is done by hand (such as in Amazonia and sub-Saharan Africa).

Women in Africa produce more than 70 percent of Africa's food, typically without tractors, oxen, or even plows.³⁹ "When one speaks today of 'the African farmer,' one is talking about a woman."⁴⁰ The Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek poignantly expresses this view in his "Song of Ocol."

Woman of Africa
Sweeper
Smearing floors and walls
With cow dung and black soil
Cook, ayah, the baby on your back
Washer of dishes,
Planting, weeding, harvesting
Store-keeper, builder
Runner of errands,
Cart, lorry, donkey . . .
Woman of Africa
What are you not?⁴¹

To illustrate the plight of women farmers in Africa, consider the root crop cassava. Women do 70 to 80 percent of the growing and harvesting of cassava, and 100 percent of the processing, which includes washing out the natural cyanide found in it (a process that takes eighteen five-hour days). Yet little money has been devoted to research on cassava and the development of processing tech-

nologies that would increase both the productivity of women farmers and the demand and price for cassava.⁴²

The so-called feminization of agriculture refers to the increasing proportion of women in the agricultural labor force. Women are farm owners and farm managers, with major decision-making responsibilities about production and most agricultural tasks. Women are farm partners, sharing responsibility for agricultural production, typically with another household member. Women are farm workers, either as unpaid family laborers or as wage laborers.⁴³ The number of women for each 100 men working in agriculture is seventy-one in Africa, fifty-four in Western Europe, forty-seven in Asia and the Pacific, and eighty-four in Eastern Europe.⁴⁴

However, a failure to realize the extent of women's contribution to agriculture (e.g., by First World development policies and practices) has contributed historically to the invisibility of women in all aspects of agricultural work: in ploughing, planting, caring for farm animals, harvesting, weeding, processing, and the storing of crops. It also has contributed to a failure to see ways in which women and their families have been deeply affected by development decisions and projects that have depleted the resource bases on which their productive activities depend (e.g., subsistence agriculture, food processing). This is exacerbated by the fact that women historically have often had little input into those decisions and projects.⁴⁵

Chris Cuomo argues that farms are sites of human oppression in the United States as well:

Eighty to ninety percent of the approximately two million hired farmworkers are Latino, followed by African-Americans, Caribbeans, Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Koreans, and Jamaicans. It is estimated that as many as 313,000 farmworkers experience pesticide-related illnesses each year. Not surprisingly, Hispanic women generally show higher levels of pesticides in their milk than white women do.⁴⁶

Although it is not known how many of the agricultural workforce in the United States, including the percentage of migrant and seasonal farmworkers, are women, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has determined that 22 percent of all hired farmworkers in the United States are women. Of this 22 percent, 9 percent are classified as migrant workers, and 45 percent of migrant farmworking women were Hispanic, 45 percent were white, and 6 percent were classified by the USDA as "Black and Other."⁴⁷ This sort of empirical data shows why farming, agriculture, and food are important to ecofeminist philosophers.

WOMEN, PEOPLE OF COLOR, CHILDREN, AND HEALTH

The health of women and children, particularly in poor communities of color, is adversely and disproportionately affected by harmful human environmental practices. For example, in some developing countries, women spend much of their

time cooking with biomass—wood, straw, or dung—in poorly ventilated areas. They are thereby exposed to high levels of indoor pollution. As the United Nations reports in *The World's Women, 1995*, significant health risks are experienced by women who cook indoors in developing countries.

One study in Nepal found that women cook for about five hours a day, with indoor particulate concentrations in rural areas as high as 20,000 micrograms per cubic meter. As a result, acute respiratory infections and bronchitis are said to be very common in rural areas.

Nonsmoking women in India and Nepal exposed to biomass smoke have been found to have abnormally high levels of chronic respiratory diseases—with mortality rates comparable to that of heavy male smokers. The enormously high levels of women's exposure to indoor air pollution during cooking found in 15 countries of Africa and Asia indicate very significant health risks to the many women who cook indoors in developing countries.⁴⁸

Health issues in Western countries around chemical sensitivity also affect women. There are three main ways in which chemicals can enter the body: through inhalation, ingestion, or absorption through the skin.⁴⁹ In the United States and Canada, the chemical sensitivity literature shows that human sensitivities to substances like formaldehyde are strongly gender related (two to three times the number of cases among women than men) and age dependent (children and older women are the most vulnerable). In the Great Lakes Basin ecosystem, pesticides, heavy metals, PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), and dioxins have been shown not only to produce reproductive impairments, cancers, and tumors in fish and mammals and deformities in insect larvae, but in human tissue as well. PCBs have contributed to adverse reproductive outcomes (including decreased sperm count in males), low birth weight, infants born with smaller head circumferences, increased rates of cancer of all types, and circulatory and immune system diseases.⁵⁰ Similarly, pesticides and industrial pollutants contribute to many types of reproductive impairment in humans, for example, difficulty conceiving, miscarriages and spontaneous abortions, sperm toxicity, and fetal/infant related health problems.⁵¹ Due largely to their ability to cross the placenta, to bioaccumulate, and to occur as mixtures, persistent toxic chemicals pose disproportionate serious health threats to infants, mothers, and the elderly.

There are important psychosocial aspects of exposure to environmental toxins. Studies in the United States of people exposed to relatively high levels of hazardous substances in Love Canal, New York, and Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania, show the prevalence of fear and anxieties about the future health impacts of such exposure.⁵² According to Tom Muir and Anne Sudar, "These impacts are exacerbated by the people's feelings that they have no control over the situation."⁵³ They live in homes and communities from which no escape seems financially possible. This high level of distress has been shown to be associated with significantly poorer DNA repair in lymphocytes, as compared to low-distress subjects.⁵⁴

Take, for example, the Exxon Valdez case. On March 24, 1989, the Exxon Valdez ran aground in Prince William Sound, Alaska, spilling 11 million gallons of oil, wiping out countless numbers of birds and sea otters, and drastically affecting ecosystems in the region. The toll on human lives has also been great. Aleut Indian villages of Chenegea Bay and Tatituk and the cities of Valdez and Cordova face increased depression and alcoholism. According to Paul Koberstein:

In Valdez, records show the divorce rate is four times higher than before the spill. In Cordova, a state survey indicates that nearly two-thirds of the population suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome, an emotional breakdown that typically occurs after a catastrophe or war. In Homer, demand for substance abuse programs doubled. In Kodiak, admissions to the local mental health centers increased by nearly 50 percent. In many communities, health officials are seeing increases in child abuse and neglect.⁵⁵

Like other indigenous populations, the seventy villagers of Chenegea Bay "face the paradox of good money for ruined lives. Many of them earned \$2,000 a week on the spill, but the tribe lost an entire year of subsistence fishing" and untold disruptions to their traditional way of life.

While environmental disasters such as those caused by the Exxon Valdez affect both men and women, some environmental problems affect women more harshly. In the United States, American Indian women historically have faced unique health risks.

A survey of households and hospitals on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota revealed that in one month in 1979, 38 percent of the pregnant women on the reservation suffered miscarriages, compared to the normal rate of between 10 and 20 percent . . . [there were] extremely high rates of cleft palate and other birth defects, as well as hepatitis, jaundice, and serious diarrhea. Health officials confirmed that their reservation had higher than average rates of bone and gynecological cancers.⁵⁶

Inadequate sewage treatment facilities have led to fecal contamination of drinking and bathing water. "Tests done by government officials also showed high levels of radioactivity in the water. The reservation is downwind from old mines surrounded by uranium tailings."⁵⁷

Children are also particularly vulnerable to toxins. According to "What's Gone Into Our Children," published by Children Now, a California-based children's advocacy organization, some characteristics unique to children make them particularly vulnerable to environmental hazards. Children Now cites four specific areas in which children are physically more vulnerable than adults: food and water, home, schools, and outdoor play areas. Children tend to consume greater amounts of food that contain toxins, thereby multiplying the potential risk.⁵⁸ In the United States, the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) estimates that more than half of the lifetime risk of cancer associated with pesticides on fruit is incurred before the age of six.⁵⁹ In homes and schools, hazardous products (e.g., cleaning products), and exposure to lead, radon, asbestos, and indoor air

pollution (e.g., tobacco smoke, formaldehyde found in some carpeting, wall-board, and insulation) are thought to be particularly harmful to children since the same amount of exposure to children and adults is believed to produce higher concentrations in the smaller bodies of children. Outdoors, pesticides, harmful sun exposure (due to depletion of the ozone layer), air pollution, and unsafe play areas can result in serious health conditions in children (e.g., breathing certain kinds of asbestos fibers can increase the chance of developing chronic diseases, ground level ozone-caused air pollution can cause respiratory problems such as shortness of breath, coughing).

Furthermore, in the United States, over 700,000 inner-city children are suffering from lead poisoning (and the learning disabilities that result), 50 percent of whom are African, Hispanic, and Asian American.⁶⁰ While all children are at risk, poor children are at greater risk: they are more likely to live in neighborhoods with environmental hazards; poor families lack the financial resources to remove hazards from their home or purchase alternative, nonhazardous products; poor children are less likely to have access to health care for treatment; the families of poor children often lack the necessary political clout to insist on the cleanup of hazards in the neighborhood.⁶¹ Furthermore, in Third World countries, usually over half the people are under fifteen years old. So children are a majority of any group. In increasing numbers, children are developing environmental sensitivities, allergies, and asthma (the study and treatment of which is developing into a field of its own, clinical ecology).⁶²

WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

In 1987, the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice published a stunning and now-classic report entitled "Toxic Waste and Race in the United States." Using sophisticated statistical analysis, the report indicated that race (not class) is the primary factor in the location of hazardous waste in the United States: Three out of every five African and Hispanic Americans (more than 15 million of the nation's 26 million African Americans, and over 8 million of the 15 million Hispanics), and over half of all Asian Pacific Islanders and American Indians, live in communities with one or more uncontrolled toxic waste sites. The nation's largest hazardous waste landfill, receiving toxins from forty-five states, is in Emelle, Alabama, which is 79.9 percent African American. Probably the greatest concentration of hazardous waste sites in the United States is on the predominantly African American and Hispanic South Side of Chicago. In Houston, Texas, six of eight municipal incinerators, and all five city landfills, are located in predominately African American neighborhoods.⁶³

The federal Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, documents that lead poisoning endangers the health of nearly 8 million inner-city, largely African American and Hispanic, children. Countless more live with crumbling asbestos

Argument

in housing projects and schools. Seventy-five percent of the residents in rural areas of the southwestern United States, mainly Hispanic Americans, are drinking pesticide-contaminated water. Yet Hispanics hold only 1 percent of substantive policy-making positions at the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).⁶⁴ Hispanics thereby have limited institutional input at policy-making levels to the plights of Hispanic communities affected by lead poisoning. Women, especially poor women of color, are organizing throughout the world to fight environmental contaminations of all kinds in their communities. For example, in the United States, Mothers of East Los Angeles (MELA), founded in 1985, protested a hazardous-waste incinerator in the small city of Vernon, California. According to Dick Russell:

Even in state-of-the-art hazardous-waste incinerators, pollutants escape through the stacks. In Vernon, the burning of an estimated 225,000 tons a year of solvents, pesticides, alcohols, oil and paint sludges, heavy metal residues, industrial liquids, pestiferous wastes from hospitals would also leave some 19,000 tons of highly toxic ash, dust, and other by-products to dispose of. All this in close proximity not only to twenty-six schools, but also dozens of food-related industries.⁶⁵

Time magazine reported the outcome of MELA's activities:

Last week, after six years of agitation marked by four lawsuits, 16 hearings and six mile-long protest marches, the 400-strong Mothers of East L.A. passed around cookies to celebrate a major victory: cancellation of a proposed commercial incinerator they claimed could spew cancer-causing particles over the community by burning 22,500 tons of used motor oil and industrial sludge annually. Citing "political pressure" and the prospect of "interminable litigation," attorneys for Security Environmental Systems, which was to build the facility, ruefully announced "abandonment" of the project.⁶⁶

Women often play a primary role in community environmental activism because environmental ills touch their lives in direct, immediate ways.⁶⁷ As Cynthia Hamilton writes:

Women often play a primary role in community action because it is about things they know best. They also tend to use organizing strategies and methods that are the antithesis of those of the traditional environmental movement. Minority women in several urban areas [of the United States] have found themselves part of a new radical core of environmental activists, motivated by the irrationalities of capital-intensive growth. These individuals are responding not to "nature" in the abstract but to their homes and the health of their children. . . . Women are more likely to take on these issues than men precisely because the home has been defined as a woman's domain.⁶⁸

Because of the direct impact of environmental degradation on their lives, working-class minority women organize around "very pragmatic environmental issues."⁶⁹

The early roots of the upsurge of minority environmental activism in the United States can be found in Warren County, North Carolina, where, in 1982, the state decided to build a PCB disposal site with \$2.5 million in federal monies. The EPA modified the permit to locate the site only fifteen feet above the water table (normally fifty feet is required for PCBs).⁷⁰ The area's 16,000 residents—60 percent African American and 4 percent Native American—organized a series of marches and protests involving "a cross-section of religious leaders, farmers, educators, citizens of all races" because they felt the decision was racially motivated. The residents lost. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. General Accounting Office reported "on racial and socioeconomic characteristics of communities surrounding hazardous waste landfills in the Southeast [United States]. It found that three out of four were predominantly black and poor."⁷¹

Citizens for a Better Environment (CBE) released a report in 1989 on the Richmond, California, area, located sixteen miles across the bay from San Francisco and home to about 100,000 residents, about half of whom are African American. Richmond has more than 350 industrial facilities that handle hazardous chemicals, and 210 toxins are routinely emitted into the air, water, as solid waste or in industrial storage sites. According to CBE, "All of the lower income, minority neighborhoods are in the western and southern parts of Richmond where the highest concentration of petrochemical facilities are also located."⁷²

Navajo Indians are the primary workforce in the mining of uranium in the United States. According to a 1986 report, "Toxics and Minority Communities" by the Center for Third World Organizing (Oakland, California), 2 million tons of radioactive uranium tailings have been dumped on Native American lands. Reproductive organ cancer among Navajo teenagers is seventeen times the national average. Indian reservations of the Kaibab Paiutes (northern Arizona) and other tribes across the United States are targeted sites for hazardous waste incinerators, disposal, and storage facilities.⁷³ On July 4, 1990, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* reported that members of the Kaibab Paiute reservation in northern Arizona were negotiating to bring about 70,000 tons of hazardous waste each year to the Kaibab Paiute reservation in Northern Arizona. An incinerator would burn the waste, and the ash would be buried on tribal land. The Paiutes stand to reap \$1 million a year from the waste-burning operation. The Kaibab Paiutes and other tribes are torn between the economic gains and the integrity of their land and traditional ways. "The plans are seductive on reservations where unemployment averages 40 percent."⁷⁴

Garbage and hazardous waste firms are well aware that the majority of reservations, governed by tribal leaders, do not have strict environmental regulations. "On self-governing Indian lands, where tribal councils are the authority, waste companies can avoid tough state laws and the prying eyes of county and local governments."⁷⁵ As reported by the *Christian Science Monitor*:

Recently, over the objection of tribal members, the Rosebud Sioux Tribal Council in South Dakota signed a contract with a Connecticut-based waste disposal firm to

develop a 5,000-acre garbage dump that will accept wastes from Minneapolis, Denver, and beyond. The proposed dump, located on what is thought to be an ancient Indian burial ground, is 70 miles from the site of the massacre at Wounded Knee and in the heart of the unspoiled prairie [North] Americans recently viewed in Kevin Costner's epic drama "Dances with Wolves." The contract states that not any existing environmental regulations of South Dakota are applicable and forbids the Sioux from enacting any laws to govern the waste project. What will the Sioux receive in return for receiving this waste? A little more than \$1 per ton for the garbage they will be host to forever.⁷⁶

In Canada, much of the land being proposed for parks is already claimed by original peoples. For example, Auyuitung National Park Reserve, located on Cumberland Peninsula, Baffin Island, established as a park in 1972, was probably first inhabited about 4,000 years ago by Inuit.⁷⁷ While several native groups have proposed "joint native-government management regimes," no joint management regimes now exist in the Canadian national park system.⁷⁸ Furthermore, subjecting such land to be used as parks and a government-run management scheme raises significant concerns about whether national parks established on lands claimed by aboriginal peoples legally prejudice future land claim settlements by natives.

CONCLUSION

This chapter uses a feminist approach to discuss empirical women—other human Others—nature interconnections. While all humans are affected by environmental degradation, women, people of color, children, and the poor throughout the world experience environmental harms disproportionately. Nature is, indeed, a feminist issue. I turn to a discussion of other sorts of reasons why nature is a feminist issue in chapter 2.

NOTES

1. As I discuss in chapter 3, the category "women" is philosophically problematic. However, for practical and strategic purposes of exploring empirical generalizations that can truthfully be made regarding sex/gendered females, I use the term "women."
2. *The State of India's Environment, 1983-84: The Second Citizen's Report* (New Delhi: Center for Science and Environment, 1985), 94.
3. Jayanta Bandyopadhyay and Vandana Shiva, "Chipko: Rekindling India's Forest Culture," *The Ecologist* 17, no. 1 (1987), 26.
4. *State of India's Environment*, 28.
5. Bandyopadhyay and Shiva, "Chipko," 3, 5.
6. Bandyopadhyay and Shiva, "Chipko," 33, italics in original.
7. *Restoring the Balance: Women and Forest Resources* (Rome: Food and Culture Organization and Swedish International Development Authority, 1987), 4.

8. Louise P. Fortmann and Dianne Rocheleau, "Women and Agroforestry: Four Myths and Three Case Studies," *Agroforestry Systems* 9, no. 2 (1985), 256.
9. *Restoring the Balance*, 104.
10. *The World's Women, 1995: Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 1995), 48.
11. *World's Women, 1995*, 48.
12. From Sun Up, video (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Maryknoll World Productions, 1987).
13. *World's Women, 1995*, 48.
14. See, e.g., Louise P. Fortmann and Sally K. Fairfax, "American Forestry Professionalism in the Third World: Some Preliminary Observations on Effects," in *Women Creating Wealth: Transforming Economic Development*, Selected Papers and Speeches from the Association of Women in Development Conference (Washington, D.C., 1988), 105-8; Fortmann and Rocheleau, "Women and Agroforestry"; *Linking Energy with Survival: A Guide to Energy, Environment, and Rural Women's Work* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1987); *Restoring the Balance*; Irene Tinker, "Women and Energy: Program Implications" (Washington, D.C.: Equity Policy Center, 1980); *Women and the World Conservation Strategy* (Gland: International Union for the Conservancy of Nature, 1987).
15. Fortmann and Fairfax, "American Forestry Professionalism," 105.
16. Marilyn Hoskins, "Observations on Indigenous and Modern Agroforestry Activities in West Africa," in *Problems of Agroforestry* (Freiburg: University of Freiburg, 1982); cited in Fortmann and Fairfax, "American Forestry Professionalism," 105.
17. Fortmann and Fairfax, "American Forestry Professionalism," 106.
18. Fortmann and Fairfax, "American Forestry Professionalism," 106.
19. David Moberg, "In the Amazon, An Epidemic of Greed," *In These Times*, 1-7 May 1991, 3.
20. Moberg, "In the Amazon," 3.
21. Moberg, "In the Amazon," 3.
22. Cited in Waring, "Your Economic Theory," 257.
23. *World's Women, 1995*, 49.
24. *The World's Women, 1970-1990, Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 1990), 75.
25. *World's Women, 1995*, 49-50.
26. Joni Seager, *The New State of the Earth Atlas*, 2nd edition (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 104.
27. Seager, *New State of the Earth Atlas*, 19.
28. Waring, "Your Economic Theory," 259.
29. Nicholia Freudenberg and Ellen Zaltzberg, "From Grassroots Activism to Political Power: Women Organizing Against Environmental Hazards," in *Double Exposure: Women's Health Hazards on the Job and at Home*, ed. Wendy Chavkin (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 246-47.
30. Anders Wikman and Lloyd Timberlake, *Natural Disasters: Acts of God or Acts of Man?* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1988), 6. To emphasize the causal role human-induced changes play in so-called natural disasters, Wikman and Timberlake urge a conceptual change in the common view of natural disasters. They urge a distinction between the trigger events of a nature disaster—too little rain, too much rain, earthquakes, hurricanes, typically "natural events"—and the associated disasters that affect humans and other animals and that are largely human-made. A strong earthquake in an unoccupied

desert area that affects no human or animal populations, then, would be a natural disaster but not a natural disaster.

31. Wijkman and Timberlake, *Natural Disasters*, 27.
32. Wijkman and Timberlake, *Natural Disasters*, 49.
33. Seeger, *New State of the Earth Atlas*, 121.
34. *World's Women, 1970-1990*, 88, 82, respectively.
35. Seeger, *New State of the Earth Atlas*, 120.
36. Seeger, *New State of the Earth Atlas*, 21.
37. Mayra Buvinic and Sally W. Yudelman, *Women, Poverty, and Progress in the Third World* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1989), 22.
38. Buvinic and Yudelman, *Women, Poverty*, 24.
39. Jane Perlez, "Inequalities Plague African Women," *Minneapolis Star/Tribune*, March 1991, 4A.
40. Quoted in Lloyd Timberlake, *Africa in Crisis: The Causes, the Cures of Environmental Bankruptcy* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1986), 144.
41. Cited in Timberlake, *Africa in Crisis*, 145.
42. Timberlake, *Africa in Crisis*, 30.
43. Buvinic and Yudelman, *Women, Poverty*, 24-26.
44. Seeger, *New State of the Earth Atlas*, 62.
45. *World's Women, 1970-1990*, 75.
46. Chris J. Cuomo, *Feminism and Ecological Communities: An Ethic of Flourishing* (London: Routledge, 1998), 20. The quote is from Beverly White, "Environmental Equity Justice Centers: A Response to Inequity," in *Environmental Justice: Issues, Politics, and Solutions*, ed. Bunyan Bryant (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1995), 60.
47. Sonia Jasso and Maria Mazorra, "Following the Harvest: The Health Hazards of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworking Women," in *Double Exposure: Women's Health Hazards on the Job and at Home*, ed. Wendy Chavkin (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 81.
48. *World's Women*, 1995, 49.
49. Jasso and Mazorra, "Following the Harvest," 94.
50. See Tom Muir and Anne Sudar, "Toxic Chemicals in the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem: Some Observations" (Burlington, Ont.: Environment Canada, 1988, unpublished).
51. Muir and Sudar, "Toxic Chemicals," 61.
52. Muir and Sudar, "Toxic Chemicals," 82.
53. Muir and Sudar, "Toxic Chemicals," 82.
54. Muir and Sudar, "Toxic Chemicals," 82.
55. Paul Koberstein, "Exxon Oil Spill Taints Lives of Aleut Indian Villagers," *The Sunday Oregonian*, 24 September 1989, A2.
56. Freudenberg and Zaltzberg, "From Grassroots Activism," 249.
57. Freudenberg and Zaltzberg, "From Grassroots Activism," 249.
58. Dana Hughes, "What's Gotten Into Our Children" (Los Angeles: Children Now, 1990).
59. Children Now can be reached at 10951 West Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90064).
60. Hughes, "What's Gotten Into Our Children," 6.
61. Cynthia Hamilton, "Women, Home, and Community," *woman of power: a magazine of feminism, spirituality, and politics*, 20 (Spring 1991), 42.
62. Muir and Sudar, "Toxic Chemicals," 35.
63. "Toxic Waste and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites," 1987.
- Commission for Racial Justice, United Church of Christ, 105 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016.
64. Centers for Disease Control, Atlanta, Georgia, cited in Dick Russell, "Environmental Racism," *The Americas Journal* (Spring 1989), 24.
65. Dick Russell, "Environmental Racism," 29.
66. "Mothers of Prevention," *Time*, 10 June 1991, 25.
67. For example, the South West Organizing Project (SWOP) has been actively involved in protesting and publicizing acts of environmental racism. (SWOP can be reached at 211 10th St. S.W., Albuquerque, NM 87102.)
68. Hamilton, "Women, Home," 43.
69. Hamilton, "Women, Home," 42.
70. Russell, "Environmental Racism," 24.
71. Russell, "Environmental Racism," 24.
72. Cited in Russell, "Environmental Racism," 25.
73. "Toxics and Minority Communities," the Center for Third World Organizing (Oakland, California), 1986.
74. "The Indian and Toxic Waste," *Minneapolis Star/Tribune*, 4 July 1990.
75. "The Indian and Toxic Waste," *Minneapolis Star/Tribune*, 4 July 1990.
76. Thomas A. Daschle, "Dances with Garbage," *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 February 1991, 18.
77. Nicholas Lawson, "Where Whitemen Come to Play," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1989), 54.
78. Lawson, "Where Whitemen," 56.

Chapter Two

What Are Ecofeminists Saying?

An Overview of Ecofeminist Positions

As a political movement, ecological feminism began in the 1970s. French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term “ecological feminisme” in 1974 to call attention to women’s potential to bring about an ecological revolution.¹ Since then, ecofeminist political events, conferences, and publications aimed at showing important connections among the dominations of women, other subordinated human groups, and nonhuman nature have surfaced throughout the world.

All ecofeminists agree that there are important connections between the unjustified dominations of women and nature, but they disagree about both the nature of those connections and whether some of the connections are potentially liberating or grounds for reinforcing harmful stereotypes about women.

This disagreement among ecofeminists is to be expected. Just as there is not one version of feminism, there also is not one version of ecofeminism. The umbrella term “ecofeminism” refers to a plurality of positions, some of which are mutually compatible and some of which are not. Since ecofeminism grows out of and reflects different and distinct feminisms (e.g., liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism), ecofeminist positions are as diverse as the feminisms from which they gain their strength and meaning.

In the literature on ecofeminism, ten types of women–other human Others–nature interconnections tend to be discussed: historical (typically causal), conceptual, empirical, socioeconomic, linguistic, symbolic and literary, spiritual and religious, epistemological, political, and ethical interconnections. While not all of these positions are themselves *philosophical* positions, each raises interesting philosophical issues.

HISTORICAL (TYPICALLY CAUSAL) INTERCONNECTIONS

Historical data and causal explanations are used to generate theories concerning the sources of the dominations of women, other human Others, and nonhuman nature. The historical pervasiveness of patriarchal domination of women (nature has led some ecofeminists to suggest that androcentrism (male-centered thinking) is the root cause of environmental destruction—a claim critics of ecofeminism love to hate.)

What are the bases of these alleged historical-causal connections? Again, ecofeminists disagree. Some ecofeminists trace these connections to prototypical patterns of domination that began with the invasion of Indo-European societies by nomadic tribes from Eurasia between the sixth and third millennia B.C.E. For example, Riane Eisler argues:

The archaeological evidence thus supports the conclusion that it was not metals per se, but rather their use in developing ever more effective technologies of destruction, that played such a critical part in what Engels termed "the world historical defeat of the female sex." Nor did male dominance become the norm in Western prehistory, as Engels implies, when gathering-hunting peoples first begin to domesticate and breed animals (in other words, when herding became their main technology of production). Rather, it happened much later, during the millennia-long incursions of pastoral hordes into the more fertile lands where farming had become the main technology of production.³

Eisler: patriarchal patriarchy, equal + natural violence

In her book *The Chalice and the Blade*, Eisler describes the time before these invasions by pastoral patriarchs as a peaceful agrarian era, as a partnership society ruled by "the chalice, not the blade." "The chalice" symbolizes a cooperative, peaceful, egalitarian, partnership society characterized by nurturing relationships among humans and with nonhuman nature; "the blade" symbolizes an aggressive, violent, war-prone, male-dominated society characterized by unequal power relationships and militaristic domination. Eisler then claims that "the root of the problem lies in a social system in which the power of the Blade is idealized—in which both men and women are taught to equate true masculinity with violence and dominance and to see men who do not conform to this ideal as 'too soft' or 'effeminate'."⁴

Other ecofeminists locate the historical-causal explanations of the interconnected dominations of women and nature in cultural and scientific changes that occurred more recently. In her 1980 book, *The Death of Nature*, environmental historian Carolyn Merchant identifies the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the key turning point in "the death of nature." She observes that as late as 1500 "the daily interaction with nature was still structured for most Europeans, as it was for other peoples, by close-knit, cooperative, organic communities." She goes on to claim that "central to the organic theory was the identification of nature, especially the earth, with a nurturing mother: a

scientific revolution = mechanism of mastery of nature

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kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered, planned universe."⁵

Merchant argues that another opposing image of nature as female was also present though not prevalent: wild and uncontrollable nature that could render violence, storms, droughts, and general chaos. According to Merchant, between 1500 and 1700 the older, organic worldview was replaced by a reductionist, "mechanistic world view of modern science"—one that sanctioned the exploitation of nature, unchecked commercial and industrial expansion, and the subordination of women:

The metaphor of the earth as a nurturing mother was gradually to vanish as a dominant image as the Scientific Revolution proceeded to mechanize and to rationalize the world view. The second image, nature as disorder, called forth an important modern idea, that of power over nature. Two new ideas, those of mechanism and of the domination and mastery of nature, became core concepts of the modern world.⁶

The Death of Nature weaves together scholarly material from politics, art, literature, physics, technology, philosophy, and popular culture to show how this mechanistic worldview replaced an older, organic worldview, which provided gendered moral restraints on how one treated nature. Merchant writes:

The change in controlling imagery was directly related to changes in human attitudes and behavior toward the earth. Whereas the nurturing earth image can be viewed as a cultural constraint restricting the types of socially and morally sanctioned human actions allowable with respect to the earth, the new images of mastery and domination functioned as cultural sanctions for the denudation of nature. Society needed these new images as it continued the processes of commercialism and industrialization.⁷

Plumwood - Post modern dualisms

Like Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade*, Merchant's *The Death of Nature* is not without critics. Some ecofeminist philosophers such as Val Plumwood argue that the historical roots of the unjustified domination of nature originated in classical Greek philosophy and the rationalist tradition. For Plumwood, the culprit is "rationalism," that long-standing philosophical tradition that both defines rationality as the hallmark of humanness and elevates humans over nonhuman animals and nature on grounds of humans' superior abilities to reason. Plumwood argues that the human/nature value dualism at the heart of rationalism has spawned other harmful value dualisms (e.g., masculine/feminine, reason/emotion, spirit/body).⁸ She argues that these dualisms have not only been human-centered (or anthropocentric) but also male-centered (or androcentric). Plumwood criticizes environmental philosophy generally for its failure "to engage properly various positions within the rationalist tradition, which has been inimical to both women and nature":

The failure to observe such connections is the result of an inadequate historical analysis and understanding of the way in which the inferiorization of both women and nature is grounded in rationalism, and the connections of both to the inferioriz-

ing of the body, hierarchical concepts of labor, and disembodied and individualistic accounts of the self.⁹

Plumwood urges environmental philosophers to see important connections between anthropocentrism and androcentrism: while anthropocentrism (i.e., human-centered thinking that assumes the superiority of humans over nature) is objectionable, historically anthropocentrism is intimately connected with androcentrism (i.e., male-centered thinking that assumes the superiority of men over women). Within the Western philosophical tradition, anthropocentrism has often taken the form of androcentrism. As such, Plumwood argues, "the effect of ecofeminism is not to absorb or sacrifice the critique of anthropocentrism, but to deepen and enrich it."¹⁰

It is unlikely that ecofeminist philosophers will resolve historical questions about the onset of patriarchy and the "twin dominations of women and nature." In fact, claims about the origins of patriarchy may never be resolved. However, as I show in chapter 3, to establish harmful women-other human Others-nature interconnections, one need only show that, at least in Western societies, whenever there has been a historical identification of women and other human Others with inferior nature, the domination of women and other human Others will be explained and "justified" by their connection with nonhuman nature.

CONCEPTUAL INTERCONNECTIONS

Conceptual interconnections are at the heart of ecofeminist philosophy. Since the primary focus in chapter 3 is on such conceptual connections, I offer only brief remarks about conceptual interconnections here.

Plumwood's account of the historical role rationalism plays in the dominations of women and nonhuman nature is also a conceptual account: Plumwood locates the conceptual basis of structures of domination in hierarchically organized value dualisms (such as reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, human/nature, and man/woman) and an exaggerated focus on reason and rationality divorced from the realm of the body, nature, and the physical. The account I offer (in chapter 3) is similar, locating the conceptual connections in an oppressive and patriarchal conceptual framework, mediated by what I call "a logic of domination." But some ecofeminists offer a different sort of account altogether. Some locate the conceptual connections in sex-gender differences, particularly in differentiated personality formation or consciousness.¹¹ Typically, the claim is that socially constructed female bodily experiences (e.g., of childbearing and child rearing), situate women differently with respect to nonhuman nature than men. These sex-gender differences are subsequently manifested in different sorts of consciousness in women and men, different "ways of knowing" for women than for men.

The work of ecofeminist sociologist Ariel Salleh is a good example of this approach. Salleh criticizes the position in the field of environmental ethics known

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as "deep ecology" (described in chapter 4) for its failure to "recognize the primal source of the destructive [man/nature] dualism . . . or the deeply ingrained motivational complexes which grow out of it."¹² According to Salleh, this "primal source" is "a distinctly masculine sensibility," the result of "the self-estranged male reaching for the original androgynous natural unity within himself." Salleh criticizes deep ecology's desire for transcendence as a masculinist, "supremely rationalist and technicist" way of thinking. According to Salleh, a preferable approach is based on "women's lived experience." She claims that deep ecology

overlooks the point that if women's lived experience were recognized as meaningful and were given legitimization in our culture, it could provide an immediate 'living' social basis for the alternative consciousness which the deep ecologist is trying to formulate and introduce as an abstract ethical construct.¹³

According to Salleh, "the unconscious connection between women and nature needs to be made conscious" if there is to be "any real growth towards a sane, humane, ecological future."¹⁴

EMPIRICAL INTERCONNECTIONS

Many ecofeminists focus on the sort of empirical evidence offered in chapter 1—data that link women, people of color, the underclass, and children with environmental destruction. As we have seen, some ecofeminists point to various health and risk factors borne disproportionately by these human subordinate groups by the presence of low-level radiation, pesticides, toxins, and other pollutants. Some ecofeminists provide data to show how First World development policies result in policies and practices that directly contribute to the inability of women to provide adequately for themselves and their families. Ecofeminist animal rights well-farists (discussed in chapter 6) argue that factory farming, animal experimentation, hunting, and meat-eating are tied to patriarchal concepts and practices. Some ecofeminists connect violence against women through rape and pornography to violence against nature. Such empirical data document the very real, lived "experiential" interconnections among the dominations of women, other human Others, and nature.

SOCIOECONOMIC INTERCONNECTIONS

One sort of empirical interconnection is sufficiently distinct to warrant separate mention: socioeconomic interconnections. Physicist and Chipko movement activist Vandana Shiva is an internationally renowned ecofeminist who defends socioeconomic interconnections between the exploitation of women, women's bodies, and women's labor, and the exploitation of nature. After conducting a

Is this true?

thorough empirical study of the effects of Western agricultural development strategies in India. Shiva argues that Western development is really "maldevelopment": a development "bereft of the feminine" (which Shiva identifies as a conservation or ecological principle). Shiva argues that maldevelopment rests on several false, male-biased assumptions:

The assumptions are evident: nature is unproductive; organic agriculture based on nature's cycles of renewability spells poverty; women and tribal and peasant societies embedded in nature are similarly unproductive, not because it has been demonstrated that in cooperation they produce less goods and services for needs, but because it is assumed that "production" takes place only when mediated by technologies for commodity production, even when such technologies destroy life. A stable and clean river is not a productive resource in this view; it needs to be 'developed' with dams in order to become so. Women, sharing the river as a commons to satisfy the water needs of their families and society, are not involved in productive labour: when substituted by the engineering man, water management and water use become productive activities. Natural forests remain unproductive till they are developed into monoculture plantations of commercial species.¹⁵

According to Shiva, "maldevelopment" is a paradigm that sees all work that does not produce profits and capital as non- or unproductive work. The neglect of nature's work "in renewing herself" and of women's work in producing sustenance in the form of basic, vital needs is an essential part of the paradigm of maldevelopment fostered by industrial capitalism.

María Mies agrees. Using a Marxist-feminist perspective, Mies argues that just as women's bodies and labor are colonized by a combination of capitalism and patriarchy (or capitalist patriarchy), so is nature.¹⁶ The term capitalist patriarchy stresses the ways in which capitalism, as one version of the gender division of labor, gives men control over, and access to, resources not given to women. Mies argues that under capitalist patriarchy, both women and nature function as exploited resources, without which the wealth of ruling-class men cannot be created. Other ecofeminists argue that a socioeconomic analysis of women-nature interconnections links patriarchy to domination in "an ideological superstructure by which the system of economic and legal domination of women, land, and animals is justified and made to appear 'natural' and inevitable within the total patriarchal cosmovision."¹⁷ Included in this "ideological superstructure" are religions and philosophical perspectives that reinforce the domination of women, people of color, animals, and land as reflecting the will of a supreme, deified, patriarchal male God.

Mary Mellor also uses a historical materialist approach to criticize capitalist patriarchy. Mellor argues that although both men and women mediate between culture and nature, they do not do so equally.¹⁸ This is because the conditions of exploitation and domination affect women and nature differently than they affect men and culture. Although all human beings, as animals themselves, are embodied and embedded in a natural environment, men and women stand in a different

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relationship to the natural world. The difference in human embodiment is a gendered, material and historical phenomenon—one involving power relations around the allocation of resources.¹⁹ Mellor defends what she calls "materialist ecofeminism," which is premised on "the fact that the boundaries of women's lives are not defined by capitalist patriarchal economic relations."²⁰ By naming her version of ecofeminism "materialist ecofeminism," Mellor shows that patriarchy is not simply cultural domination; it is importantly also a material or economic domination.

LINGUISTIC INTERCONNECTIONS

Many philosophers (e.g., Ludwig Wittgenstein) have argued that the language one uses mirrors and reflects one's concept of oneself and one's world. As such, language plays a crucial role in concept formation. Ecofeminists argue that it also plays a crucial role in keeping intact mutually reinforcing sexist, racist, and nationalist views of women, people of color, and nonhuman nature.

Euro-American language is riddled with examples of "sexist-naturist language," that is, language that depicts women, animals, and nonhuman nature as inferior to (having less status, value, or prestige than) men and male-identified culture. Women routinely are described in pejorative animal terms: Women are dogs, cats, catty, pussycats, pussies, pets, bunnies, dumb bunnies, cows, sows, foxes, chicks, bitches, beavers, old bats, old hens, old crows, queen bees, cheetahs, vixen, serpents, bird-brains, hare-brains, elephants, and whales. Women cackle, go to hen parties, henpeck their husbands, become old biddies (old hens no longer sexually attractive or able to reproduce) and social butterflies.²¹ Anti-muzzling women in a patriarchal culture where animals are seen as inferior to humans, thereby reinforces and authorizes women's inferior status.

Similarly, language that feminizes nature in a patriarchal culture, where women are viewed as subordinate and inferior, reinforces and authorizes the domination of nature. Mother Nature (not Father Nature) is raped, mastered, controlled, conquered, mined. Her (not his) secrets are penetrated, and her womb (men don't have one) is put into the service of the man of science (not woman of science, or simply scientist). Virgin timber is felled, cut down. Fertile (not potent) soil is tilled, and land that lies fallow is useless or barren, like a woman unable to conceive a child. Feigning nature and animals is justified by feminizing (not masculinizing) them: the exploitation of nature and animals is justified by naturalizing or animalizing (not masculinizing or culturalizing) them. As Carol Adams argues in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, language that feminizes nature and naturalizes women describes, reflects, and perpetuates unjustified patriarchal domination by failing to see the extent to which the dominations of women and nature, especially animals, are culturally analogous and not metaphorically analogous.²²

This brief discussion of sexist-naturist language deserves two clarifications. First, the point of these examples of sexist-naturist language is not to claim that only female humans are denigrated by the use of animal language. That would be false: some nonhuman animal terms are used pejoratively against men and boys. For example, men and boys are called studs, wolves, sharks, skunks, snakes, toads, jackasses, weasels, old buzzards, and goats.²³ Nor is it to claim that all uses of animal or nature language to describe humans is derogatory. That would also be false: some nonhuman animal terms are complimentary. For example, in Western culture, it generally is complimentary to describe someone as busy as a bee, eagle-eyed, lion-hearted, or brave as a lion.²⁴ Rather, the point is that, *within patriarchal contexts*, the vast majority of animal terms used to denigrate women, and the vast majority of female terms used to describe animals and nature, function differently from those animal terms used to denigrate men. And (as I show in chapter 3) that functional difference is significant: The majority of animal terms used to describe women identify women with (inferior) bodies, sexual objects, domesticated pets or playthings, man's property, spiritually sinful or sin-prone (tempress) creatures vis-à-vis (at least ruling-class) men; the majority of animal terms used to describe (at least ruling-class) men identify men with (superior) intellects or minds, agency, sexual subjects, spirits, rulers, and sovereigns who have power over both women and nature. This is an important cultural difference that occurs within a historical, material context which sees women, animals, and nature as inferior to (at least ruling-class) men.

There is a second reason the cultural context in which animal language is used is important: all uses of derogatory animal language function to denigrate, inferiorize, and reinforce the exploitation of nonhuman animals. As Joan Dunayer claims, "While only some nonhuman animal pejoratives denigrate women, all denigrate nonhuman animals."²⁵ Dunayer argues that this basic distinction, human versus animal, is "the essence of speciesism," the view that nonhuman animals are inferior to (the species) human animals.²⁶

SPECIESISM

SYMBOLIC AND LITERARY INTERCONNECTIONS

We have already seen how Merchant's discussion of two images of nature—an older Greek notion of nature as a benevolent female and a nurturing mother, and a newer, modern image of nature as a (mere) machine, inert, dead—is central to her argument that the move from an organic to a mechanistic model conceptually sanctioned and ethically justified the exploitation of the (female) earth. It did so by removing the sorts of moral barriers to such treatment that the metaphor of nature as alive previously prevented. As Merchant claims:

One does not readily slay a mother, dig into her entrails for gold or mutilate her body, although commercial mining would soon require that. As long as the earth was con-

sidered alive and sensitive, it could be considered a breach of human ethical behavior to carry out such destructive acts against it.²⁷

A discussion of images of women and nonhuman nature, then, raises larger issues about symbolic patterns linking women and nature. Some ecofeminists explore these symbolic patterns in literature and popular culture.

Many ecofeminists draw on "women's nature writing" to unpack the nature of the women—other human Others—nature interconnections.²⁸ One of the first to do so is Susan Griffin. In the prologue to the epic poem that is her book *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, Griffin writes,

He says that woman speaks with nature. That she hears voices from under the earth. That wind blows in her ears and trees whisper to her. That the dead sing through her mouth and the cries of infants are clear to her. But for him this dialogue is over. He says he is not part of this world, that he was set on this world as a stranger. He sets himself apart from woman and nature.

And so it is Goldilocks who goes to the home of the three bears, Little Red Riding Hood who converses with the wolf, Dorothy who befriends a lion, Snow White who talks to the birds, Cinderella with mice as her allies, the Mermaid who is half fish, Thumbelina courted by a mole. (And when we hear in the Navajo chant of the mountain that a grown man sits and smokes with bears and follows directions given to him by squirrels, we are surprised. We had thought only little girls spoke with animals.)

We are the bird's eggs, flowers, butterflies, rabbits, cows, sheep; we are caterpillars; we are leaves of ivy and sprigs of wallflower. We are women. We rise from the wave. We are gazelle and doe, elephant and whale, lilies and roses and peach, we are air, we are flame, we are oyster and pearl, we are girls. We are women and nature. And he says he cannot hear us speak. But we hear.²⁹

Griffin's writing is impactful. Her writing is testimony to the power of literature and language to convey basic attitudes about women and nature.

A new genre of literary analysis called ecofeminist literary criticism has emerged. According to one of its main proponents, Patrick Murphy, this approach to literary criticism uses

ecofeminism as a ground for critiquing all the literature that one reads. For literary critics in particular this would mean reevaluating the canon that constitutes the list of major works and texts, and calling for a dialogue between critical evaluations based on humanistic criteria and those based on de-homocentric criteria. This would require, for instance, reevaluating the poetic tradition of the "pastoral," which tends to be based on an idealization of nature rather than a genuine encounter with it.³⁰

Ecofeminist literary criticism does not seek only "a literature that meets equally the criteria of ecological and feminist sophistication," but work "that to some extent embody both dimensions."³¹

SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS INTERCONNECTIONS

Ecofeminist theologian Elizabeth Dodson Gray was among the first ecofeminists to examine the roles that religious and sexual imagery play in the patriarchal heritage of the Judeo-Christian and Western intellectual traditions. In her book *Green Paradise Lost*, first published in 1979, Gray claims that a destructive hierarchy of beings is at the heart of biblical accounts of creation:

In this biblical view of the nature of things woman comes after and also below. Man, Woman was created (according to this chronologically earliest account of the creation of the world in Gen. 2) out of man's body (rather than from a woman's body as happens naturally). . . . Then come children, so derivative that they are not even in the Creation story. . . . Then come animals, who do not have the unique human spirit at all. . . . Thus animals are below. Further down are plants, which do not even move about. Below them is the ground of nature itself—the hills and mountains, streams and valleys—which is the bottom of everything just as the heavens, the moon and the stars are close to God at the top of everything.³²

In this hierarchical "pyramid of dominance and status," the higher up one goes, the closer one is to all that is spiritual and superior. Gray claims that "even women, whom today we might view as equally human, are subordinate and inferior precisely on the ground of 'spirit'."³³ She argues:

Women are not stepping back from these ancient religious myths, so basic to our Judeo-Christian and Western tradition. They are looking at these myths from the newly found perspective of a feminist consciousness and realizing that these myths are patriarchal—i.e., they rationalize and justify a society that puts men "up" and women "down."

But the creation myth also puts down children, animals, plants—and Nature itself. . . . What is clearly articulated here is a hierarchical order of *being* in which the lower orders—whether female or child or animal—can be treated, mistreated, violated, sold, sacrificed, or killed at the convenience of the higher states of spiritual being found in males and in God. Nature, being not only at the bottom of this pyramid but being the most full of dirt, blood and such nasty natural surprises as earthquakes, floods and bad storms, is obviously a prize candidate for the most ruthless "mastering" of all.³⁴

Given Gray's account, it is not surprising that the symbols, images, and stories of traditional patriarchal religions receive the attention they do from ecofeminists. Among theologians, it has fueled the debate over "reform or revolution" in traditional religions: Can patriarchal religions be reformed from within to eliminate the harmful patriarchal biases, or are new or prepatriarchal religions required in their place?

Western theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that ecofeminism sounds significantly different when contextualized by women from the Third

World. This is because, for women in countries struggling against the effects of Western colonialism, both the religions of colonizing powers and the religious traditions within their own cultures have complex and historically specific dominating and liberating roles. Ruether cites two important differences:

First, women from Asia, Africa, and Latin America are much less likely to forget, unlike Northern women, that the base line of domination of women and of nature is impoverishment: the impoverishment of the majority of their people, particularly women and children, and the impoverishment of the land. . . . Second, although many women of Asia, Africa, and Latin America are deeply interested in recovering patterns of spirituality from a pre-Christian past, these spiritualities are those of their own indigenous roots. They are not fetched in as an idealized story from long ago and far away with which one has no cultural experience, but rather this pre-Christian indigenous past is still present. It has been broken and silenced by colonialism and Christianization, but it is still present in the contemporary indigenous people of one's own land, descendants of one's own indigenous ancestors, or even as customs with which the woman writer herself grew up in her earlier years.³⁵

Ruether encourages Northern women to "free ourselves from both our chauvinism and our escapism" by playing creatively with what is liberating in our own heritages, including religious and spiritual heritages, while also "letting go of both the urge to inflate our identity as the one true way or to repudiate it as total toxic waste." Ruether also argues that Northern women must become "more truthful and responsible," dealing transformatively with who we are, culturally and economically, rather than appropriating the ideas and practices of indigenous peoples of other worlds. She concludes, "Only in this way can we [Northern women] begin to find how to be true friends and sisters with women—with people—of other worlds, no longer as oppressors trying to suppress other people's identities but also not as 'white blanks' seeking to fill our own emptiness at the expense of others."³⁶

Spiritual ecofeminists were among the first ecofeminists in the United States. However, like ecofeminism generally, there is no one version of "spiritual ecofeminism." Spiritual ecofeminists disagree about such basic issues as whether mainstream religious traditions (e.g., Christianity) can be reformed (reconceived, reinterpreted) to provide environmentally responsible and nonsexist practices and theologies; whether any specific environmental practice (e.g., vegetarianism, bans on hunting and animal experimentation, organic farming, population control) is mandated by ecofeminist spirituality; and whether some ecofeminist spiritualities inappropriately mystify and romanticize nature, or coopt indigenous cultural beliefs and practices.

Nonetheless, spiritual ecofeminists agree that earth-based, feminist spiritualities and symbols (such as Gaia and Goddess) are essential to ecofeminism. The works of Starhawk, Charlene Spretnak, Joanna Macy, and Carol Christ are examples of spiritual ecofeminist positions. Consider what they say about ecofeminism.

Starhawk defines "ecofeminism" as a spiritual movement:

Ecofeminism is a movement with an implicit and sometimes explicit spiritual base. . . . To say that ecofeminism is a spiritual movement, in an earth-rooted sense, means that it encompasses a dimension that profoundly challenges our ordinary sense of value, that counters the root stories of our culture and attempts to shift them.³⁷

Like other spiritual ecofeminists, Starhawk insists that women's spirituality is also political.³⁸ Carol Christ agrees. She claims spirituality is central to ecofeminist politics:

With many spiritual feminists, ecofeminists, ecologists, antinuclear activists, and others, I share the conviction that the crisis that threatens the destruction of the Earth is not only social, political, economic, and technological, but is at root spiritual. We have lost the sense that this Earth is our true home. . . . The preservation of the Earth requires a profound shift in consciousness: a recovery of more ancient and traditional views that revere the profound connection of all beings in the web of life and a rethinking of the relation of both humanity and divinity in nature.³⁹

Spretak describes the path she took into ecofeminism as involving the embrace of ancient, pre-patriarchal, nature-based religion:

In the mid-1970s many radical/cultural feminists experienced the exhilarating discovery, through historic and archaeological sources, of a religion that honored the female and seemed to have as its "good book" nature itself. We were drawn to it like a magnet, but only, I feel, because both of those features were central. We would not have been interested in "Yāhweh in a skirt," a distant, detached, domineering god-head who happened to be female. What was cosmologically wholesome and healing was the discovery of the Divine as immanent in and around us. What was intriguing was the sacred link between the Goddess in her many guises and totemic animals and plants, sacred groves, and womblike caves, in the moon-rhythm blood of menses, the ecstatic dance—the experience of knowing Gaia, her voluptuous contours and fertile plains, her flowing waters that give life, her animal teachers.⁴⁰

Spretak claims that the ecofeminist sense of the spiritual emerges through experiences of ecocommunion with nature—an experience of grace whereby one experiences oneself as a particular expression of the sacred cosmic body.⁴¹

Like Starhawk and Spretak, Macy claims that the "ecological self" is a spiritual self:

There is the experience of being acted 'through' and sustained by something greater than oneself. It is close to the religious concept of grace, but, as distinct from the traditional Western understanding of grace, it does not require belief in God or supernatural agency. One simply finds oneself empowered to act on behalf of other beings—or on behalf of the larger whole—and the empowerment itself seems to come 'through' that or those for whose sake one acts.⁴²

For Macy, a requisite condition for awakening to "our ecological selves" is to find new spiritual selves and powers.

Many spiritual ecofeminists invoke the notion of "the Goddess" to capture the sacredness of both nonhuman nature and the human body. Goddess worship has no hierarchy, no centralized institutions, no monumental structures, no liturgy. Carol Christ claims that the symbol of the Goddess " aids the process of naming and reclaiming the female body and its cycles and processes."⁴³

What is the Goddess? According to Christ, "the Goddess" is three things. First, the Goddess is divine female, a personification who can be invoked in prayer and ritual. Second, the Goddess is a symbol of life, death, and rebirth—encouraging us to see the changing phases of our lives as holy. Third, the Goddess is a symbol of the legitimacy and beauty of women's power to nurture and create but also to limit and destroy when necessary.

For all spiritual ecofeminists, Goddess worship brings about a shift in the sense of self which is important for both men and women. The shift is allegedly from an atomistic, purely self-interested, egoistic self to an ecological and spiritual self. As Starhawk claims, the Goddess is not for women only: "The Goddess is also important for men. The oppression of men in Father God-ruled patriarchy is perhaps less obvious but no less tragic than that of women. . . . men are encouraged to identify with a model no human being can successfully emulate. . . . they are at war with themselves."⁴⁴

EPISTEMOLOGICAL INTERCONNECTIONS

Many ecofeminists address epistemological dimensions of women—other human Other—nature interconnections. Epistemological concerns are concerns about knowledge. Ecofeminists interested in epistemology challenge some trademark Western views about knowledge: for example, that knowledge is objective; that the "knower" is an objective, detached, independent, and rational observer; and that nonhuman nature is a passive object of knowledge. To build their case, they often turn to recent work in epistemology by feminist philosophers of science such as Sandra Harding.

Harding argues that the social location of the knower is crucial to understanding and assessing epistemological claims.

The activities of those at the bottom of . . . social hierarchies can provide starting points for thought—for *everyone's* research and scholarship—from which humans' relations with each other and the natural world can become visible. This is because the experience and lives of marginalized peoples, as they understand them, provide particularly significant *problems to be explained*, or research agendas.⁴⁵

Many ecofeminists agree. They argue that only by listening to the perspectives of "those at the bottom of social hierarchies" can one begin to see alternative ways

of viewing an environmental problem, analyzing data, or theorizing about women—other human Others—nature interconnections. The Chipko movement illustrates that often local women foresters “on the bottom” have indigenous technical knowledge based on their hands-on, daily, lived experience as forest managers. This knowledge provides an invaluable perspective on what it is like to live the lives they live—information and perspectives not readily accessible to those who live outside the culture.

Ecofeminist philosopher Lori Gruen builds on the work in feminist philosophy of science in developing an ecofeminist moral epistemology. She argues that ecofeminist theory always grows out of and examines the social context in which moral and epistemological claims are generated. Recognition of the interdependence of science and society, facts and values, reason and emotion “is the first step towards any legitimate knowledge.”⁴⁶ Gruen writes:

Ecofeminists recognize that claims to knowledge are always influenced by the values of the culture in which they are generated. Following the arguments made by feminist philosophers of science, Marxists, cultural critics, and others, ecofeminists believe that facts are theory-laden, theories are value-laden, and values are molded by historical and philosophical ideologies, social norms, and individual processes of categorization.⁴⁷

Ecofeminist epistemologies often critique Western notions of objectivity and conceptions of nature as a passive object of study. Probably the most radical critique was initially given by Donna Haraway who claimed that modern Western conceptions of objectivity and nature-as-object are patriarchal ideologies of domination and control. Haraway argues for an alternative, pluralistic, context-dependent view of knowledge, what she calls “situated knowledges”:

Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of “objective” knowledge. . . . A corollary of the insistence that ethics and politics covertly or overtly provide the bases for objectivity . . . is granting the status of agent/actor to the “objects” of the world.⁴⁸

On this view, nature is an active subject—not a mere object or resource to be studied. Nature actively contributes to what humans know about nature. The job of the scientist, philosopher, and theorist is not to try to give accounts that “mirror nature,” since mirroring assumes that nature is an unconstructed “given.” Nor is it to act as if one “discovers” nature, since claims to discovery (like “Columbus discovered America”) mistakenly assume that there isn’t anything (or anything important) that already exists and that has agency. Rather, the job of the scientist, philosopher, and theorist is to provide knowledge claims and accounts that are relationally “situated” in important social and material contexts.

Haraway: situated knowledges
nature as active subject

women: moral
epistemology

What Are Ecofeminists Saying?

According to Haraway, the notion of nature as active subject is something stressed by ecofeminists. She stresses that “ecofeminists have perhaps been most insistent on some version of the world as active subject, not as resource to be mapped and appropriated in bourgeois, Marxist, or masculinist projects. Acknowledging the agency of the world in knowledge makes room for some unsettling possibilities.”⁴⁹ Haraway says that when one acknowledges “nature as subject.”

Accounts of a “real” world do not, then, depend on a logic of “discovery” but on a power-charged social relation of “conversation.” Acknowledging the agency of the world in knowledge makes room for some unsettling possibilities, including a sense of the world’s independent sense of humor. . . . Perhaps our hopes for accountability, for politics, for ecofeminism, turn on revisiting the world as coding trickster with whom we must learn to converse.⁵⁰

Haraway argues for a reconception of the practice of science as a socially and politically charged “conversation” with nature, reconceived as active agent. The image of nature as a “coding trickster” conveys the sense of play, interaction, and agency Haraway imputes to all epistemic relationships.

Some ecofeminists who discuss epistemological connections appeal, instead, to the critical theory of such authors as Horkheimer, Adorno, Balbus, and the Frankfurt circle. Saleh, for instance, claims that “their epistemological and substantive analysis both point to a convergence of feminist and ecological concerns, anticipating the more recent arrival of ecofeminism.”⁵¹ Patricia Jagentowicz Mills agrees. She argues that “critical theory” provides a critique of the “nature versus culture” dichotomy and an epistemological structure for critiquing the relationships between the domination of women and the domination of nature.⁵²

POLITICAL INTERCONNECTIONS

Other epistemologists

Ecofeminism has always been a grassroots political movement motivated by pressing pragmatic concerns.⁵³ These include issues of women’s and environmental health, to science, development and technology, the treatment of animals, and peace, anti-nuclear, anti-militarism activism. The varieties of ecofeminist perspectives on the environment are properly seen as an attempt to take seriously such grassroots activism and political concerns by developing analyses of domination that explain, clarify, and guide that praxis.

Stephanie Lahar states this point well. Lahar concludes her analysis of the links between ecofeminist theory and grassroots political activism as follows:

Ecofeminism’s political goals include the deconstruction of oppressive social, economic, and political systems and the reconstruction of more viable social and political forms. No version of ecofeminist theory dictates exactly what people should do

in the face of situations they encounter in personal and public life, nor is it a single political platform. The relation of ecofeminist theory to political activism is ideally informative and generative and not one of either prescribing or "owning" particular actions. Ecofeminist theory advocates a combined politics of resistance and creative projects, but the specific enactment of these is a result of dialogue between the individuals involved and the actual situation or issue.

Lahar goes on to claim that ecofeminism "contributes an overall framework and conceptual links to the political understanding of the interplay between social and environmental issues, and routes to political empowerment through understanding the effects of one's actions extended through multiple human and nonhuman communities."⁵⁴

Plumwood agrees with Lahar. Plumwood argues that if one mistakenly construes environmental philosophy as only or primarily concerned with ethics, one will neglect "a key aspect of the overall problem which is concerned with the definition of the human self as separate from nature, the connection between this and the instrumental view of nature, and broader *political* aspects of the critique of instrumentalism."⁵⁵

The political aspects of ecofeminist critiques of ethics and knowledge are explicitly addressed by political scientist Noél Sturgeon in her book *Ecofeminist Natures*. Sturgeon argues for a conception of ecofeminism as an "oppositional political discourse and set of practices imbedded in particular historical, material, and political contexts." Sturgeon interprets ecofeminism as "a fractured, contested, discontinuous entity that constitutes itself as a social movement." Sturgeon's characterization of ecofeminism as a social movement is based on her understanding of social movements as:

contestants in hegemonic power relations, through which change is produced by numerous kinds of "action," including that of the deployment of symbolic resources, shifts in identity construction, and the production of both popular and scholarly knowledge—as well as direct action, civil disobedience, strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, lobbying, and other more traditionally recognized forms of political action.⁵⁶

According to Sturgeon, ecofeminism is a social movement involved in both the deployment of and theorizing about concepts (e.g., of nature, women, race)—what she calls the "direct theory" aspect of a social movement. Sturgeon's book is a critique of ecofeminist theory and practice "with the goal of making suggestions for the formation of a more inclusive, more politically engaged ecofeminist movement."⁵⁷

Much of the debate among ecofeminists about politics turns on the type of feminism that underlies a particular ecofeminist position. Different ecofeminist politics finds roots in liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, and postcolonial feminisms. What is accepted as an appropriate ecofeminist action, then, will reflect the different and differing perspectives of these feminisms.

ETHICAL INTERCONNECTIONS

Much of the scholarly literature of ecofeminist philosophy has focused on environmental ethics. Ecofeminist philosophers argue that the interconnections among the conceptualizations and treatment of women, other subordinated humans, animals, and (the rest of) nature require a feminist ethical analysis and response. Minimally, the goal of ecofeminist environmental ethics is to develop theories and practices concerning humans and the natural environment that are not male-biased and that provide a guide to action in the pre-feminist present.

Ecofeminist philosopher Chris Cuomo argues for "ethics at the crossroads of ethical and political theory and practice" in the form of an "ethic of Flourishing." An ethic of flourishing draws on Aristotelian concepts of *eudaimonia* (translated variously as happiness, the good life, living well, excellence, and flourishing) and the *polis* (or, community),⁵⁸ as well as a commitment to the value of flourishing or well-being, of individuals, species, and communities. According to Cuomo:

in ecological feminism, it is an entity's *dynamic charm*—its diffuse, "internal" ability to adapt to or resist change, and its unique causal and motivational patterns and character—that renders it morally considerable, and that serves as a primary site for determining what is good for that being or thing.⁵⁹

Cuomo's conception of the flourishing of living things and the "dynamic charm" of systems presumes a degree of physical health and self-directedness that is achievable by both individuals in communities (both social and ecological) and communities themselves.

Ynestra King is among the first North American theorists to defend an ecofeminist ethic based in socialist feminism. King calls for a *rapprochement* between cultural (or spiritual ecofeminism) and socialist feminism within ecofeminism:

Both feminism and ecology embody the revolt of nature against human domination. They demand that we rethink the relationship between humanity and the rest of nature, including our natural, embodied selves. In ecofeminism, nature is the central category of analysis. An analysis of the interrelated dominations of nature—psyche and sexuality, human oppression, and nonhuman nature—and the historic position of women in relation to those forms of domination is the starting point of ecofeminist theory. We share with cultural feminism the necessity of a politics with heart and a beloved community, recognizing our connection with each other, and nonhuman nature. Socialist feminism has given us a powerful critical perspective with which to understand and transform history. Separately, they perpetuate the dualism of "mind" and "nature." Together they make possible a new ecological relationship between nature and culture, in which mind and nature, heart and reason, join forces to transform the internal and external systems of domination that threaten the existence of life on Earth.⁶⁰

Psyche

King's view of ecofeminism recommends that ecofeminist ethics dismantle dualisms of mind and body, reason and emotion by finding a place "in which

ethic of flourishing

mind and nature, heart and reason, join forces to transform the internal and external systems of domination that threaten the existence of life on earth."⁶¹ (The version of ecofeminist ethics I defend in chapter 5 attempts to do just that.)

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the literature on ecofeminism by describing ten types of women–other human Other–nature interconnections discussed by ecofeminists. I turn now, in chapters 3 through 9, to a description and defense of the version of ecofeminist philosophy I am defending. It is one that addresses key issues raised within each of these ten types of positions.

NOTES

1. Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Le Féminisme ou La Mort* (Paris: Pierre Horay, 1974), 213–52.
2. For many environmental ethicists, it is anthropocentrism (human-centeredness) that is the problem, not androcentrism (male-centeredness). For ecofeminists, the historical manifestation of anthropocentrism, at least in Western societies, has been androcentric.
3. Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 46. The quote by Engels is from *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (New York: International Publishers, 1972).
4. Eisler, *The Chalice*, xviii.
5. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 1, 2.
6. Merchant, *Death of Nature*, 2.
7. Merchant, *Death of Nature*, 2.
8. Val Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism," in *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*, ed. Karen J. Warren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 155–80.
9. Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender," 22.
10. Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender," 22.
11. See, e.g., Jim Cheney, "Eco-Feminism and Deep Ecology," *Environmental Ethics* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1987), 115–45; Elizabeth Dodson Gray, *Green Paradise Lost* (Wellesley, Mass.: Roundtable Press, 1981); Stephanie Leland, "Feminism and Ecology: Theoretical Connections," in *Reclaim the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth*, ed. Leonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland (London: Women's Press, 1983), 67–72; Ariel Kay Sallen, "Deeper than Deep Ecology: The Eco-Feminist Connection," *Environmental Ethics* 6, no. 4 (Winter 1984), 339–45.
12. Sallen, "Deeper than Deep Ecology," 340.
13. Sallen, "Deeper than Deep Ecology," 340.
14. Ariel Kay Sallen, "Working with Nature: Reciprocity or Control?" in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, 2nd edition, ed. Michael E. Zimmerman, J. Baird Callicott, George Sessions, Karen J. Warren, and John Clark (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1998), 323.
15. Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1988), 4.
16. Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labor* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed Books, 1986).
17. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Introduction," in *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 3.
18. Mary Mellor, *Feminism and Ecology* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 86.
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