ECOFEMINISM AS A WAY OF RESOLVING SOME ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

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ABSTRACT: Women and nature are connected in many different ways: with their biological status, reproductive role, discrimination. That is why ecofeminism stands for one of the main theoretical, philosophical and even practical ways of resolving the environmental problems. The representatives of this thinking find that changing positions and behaviors by leaving the patriarchal approach to everything – to the women and to the nature, can stop the degradation of the environment.

Demographic significance of the women’s role, in context of environmental changes, was represented by some feminist movements, as Chipko movement in India, Green Belt movement in Kenya, Love Canal in State of New York, etc. In this paper, the author gives a short overview of connections between women and nature, and proposes some new solutions.

KEYWORDS: ecofeminism, women, nature

INTRODUCTION – WHY ECOFEMINISM?

The nature became a new subject that should be protected in our modern life – it is devastated and ruined, but there is still a chance for it to be saved [Leopold 1948: 2–4]. Only the changing of paradigm regarding our behavior towards nature can save the nature of inevitable total destruction in the future. That can be done by reviewing all general ethical principles from this environmental standpoint.

“A set of moral relations created between the world of humans and the natural world” is called the environmental ethics [Taylor 2011: 18–19]. Some other theorists believe, that environmental ethics is the philosophical discipline that deals only with the moral relationship of human beings to the environment and creatures other than human [Brennan and Lo 2011]. On the other hand,

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Joseph R. de Jardin believes that “... ethics is an important step in process of making a self-conscious stepping back ... in our own lives as we think about the type of life we lead, how we should act and what kind of people we should be” [Žarden 2006: 31]. Jardin thinks that we should keep in mind that technology and other technical sciences cannot always provide necessary solutions to these problems. We must be fully capable of identifying the problems in this area and who people are responsible to [Žarden 2006: 40]. We must face the truth, we live in the world of risk (societies) in which “unlimited number of actors want nothing to do with one another, who pursue different political goals and who may even live in incommensurable worlds” [Beck 2009: 6]. Modernization is not always the solution, it is even something more – the key problem. We are living in the state of “antagonism of risk” [Beck 2009: 6] – modernization brings some benefits to one part of the population, but it is not that part of population which must bear the costs of modernization.

Women and nature are in the same position; they are observed as passive subjects and because of that, according to the ecofeminists, they are “eligible” to be the subjects of violence and different forms of social inequalities. Women are often seen as “wild” and “untamed” as nature itself. So, men must “tame” the women (and not educate them) in the same manner as the nature: by restricting their freedom and rights (marriage is often seen as a perfect tool for that purpose), or even by means of violence. Nevertheless, there is something “very wrong”, as Vandana Shiva says, if you must use violence in order to communicate and cooperate with other [Shiva 1988: 48].

One of the most comprehensive definitions of ecofeminism is given by K. Warren: “Eco-feminism is a term that encompasses many different viewpoints which are rooted in the different feminist practices and philosophies. All these perspectives do not only reflect the different feminist perspectives (e.g. liberal, traditional Marxist, radical, socialist feminism or feminist movement of black women and women of the Third world), but also the different understandings of nature and solutions to the growing environmental problems” [Warren 1987: 3–20]. So, the ecofeminism is not the environmental movement which is strictly feminine because of the women who lead it or participate in it, but because of its basic similarities between the status of women and nature in the modern world. The basic premise of ecofeminism is that “ideology which authorizes oppressions, based on race, gender, class, sexuality, physical abilities and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature” [Gaard 1993: 1–2]. That patriarchal framework is present in relations and behavior to nature in the same manner as it is leading principle in communication with women.

The first papers constituting ecofeminism appeared in the 1970s, although some authors think that true origins of this concept could be found in the work of Mary Woollstoncraft2 in 1792 [Ćorić 2013: 295; Green 1994: 119]. The patriarchal approach to environmental problems, as well as serious damage done by adopting that approach, is the reason why environment has been the subject of numerous works of ecofeminists until today.

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Gender perspective has become a necessary element in the theoretical and practical guidelines; we find it in international treaties and reports of international organizations\(^3\). For example, Agenda 21, adopted by the United Nations conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, says that women should be more engaged in combating deforestation, in planning and management of land resources, etc. The motives for adoption of this document are very important for ecofeminism and all feminists’ issues: “tribute to the solidarity with global women’s caucus... and helping to build a world in which women and men all share responsibilities and the rewards...”\(^4\). It was noted that there is a “pressing need to centralize women’s issues and to ensure the incorporation of their collective perspectives, experiences and contributions to sustainable development”\(^5\).

Gender equality policy has expanded, not only as a requirement for increased participation of women in political life, but also in other forms of social activities. “Engendering” all action plans and policies at all levels, local to global, has become constant of the modern world. Ecofeminism is based on gender perspective that is taken as an active component of the process of environmental protection [Baćanović 2011: 7].

**Presumed Connections Between Women and Nature**

Karen Warren identified eight kinds of connections [Warren 1991] between women and nature using the experiences of herself and her colleagues.\(^6\) We can say that those connections provide insight to a variety of positions of ecofeminism, and consequently to ecological (feminist) ethics. Although some of the listed connections could be sometimes mutually complementary or supportive or competitive, they all have one thing in common – they are all valuable sources and grounds for ecofeminism itself.

1. **Historical (causal) connections.** There is a long history of struggle against patriarchal culture and its outcomes: deprivation, discrimination and humiliation. Also, “when historical data are used to generate theories concerning the sources of the dominations of women and nature, it is also causal” [Warren 1991]. Aldo Leopold, at the beginning of his *The Land Ethic* [1948], debates about Odysseus and his act, after returning home. He hung twelve maids for their unethical behavior. They were simply things and he was not

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\(^3\) A list of international treaties and reports of international organizations that deal with women’s issues is available on: https://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2009/climateconnections_2_policy.pdf. This list is not final.

\(^4\) Capeling-Alakija, S., Message from the UNIFEM Director, available on: http://www.gdrc.org/gender/a21/agenda1.html

\(^5\) Strong, M., Message from the UNCED Secretary-General, available on: http://www.gdrc.org/gender/a21/agenda1.html

\(^6\) During her work on identifying the connections, Warren has assisted on the works of rather significant authors such as: Ariel Kay Salleh, Charlene Spretnak, Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, Ynestra King, Carolyn Merchant, Maria Mies. All those works were cited and used in Warren’s analysis of possible connections between women and nature, and consequently, possible theoretical grounds for ecofeminism. A great bibliography of these ecofeminists’ work can be found at the end of the Warren’s paper.
sad about it. That was not the question of life and death, or if his action was fair or not, but if he was the owner of the property or not. So, the dominant patriarchal culture must be – “reeducated” and changed.

2. Conceptual Connections. There are so many ways to connect historical and causal links between the dominations of women and nature with conceptual structures of domination that construct women and nature. Authors with this viewpoint think that “female bodily experiences (e.g. of reproduction and childbearing) situate women differently with respect to nature than men” [Warren 1991]. Women and men have different views on almost everything, especially in the area of protection of environment. “There is a pain that nature feels, that could be understood only by a women” [Warren 1991].

3. Empirical and Experiential Connections. Warren thinks that ecofeminists have focused on discovering empirical evidence linking women with environmental destruction. Women, who are fragmented and divided in different social, and some vulnerable groups, are disabled from reacting properly in situations where the response is required.

4. Symbolic Connections. Symbolic connections between women and nature are visible in religion, theology, art, literature. For example, Gaia is the alternative spiritual symbol depicted in the form of a woman. On the other hand, language can be rather discriminating weapon used against the women, particularly if we have in mind sexist language – “language that inferiorizes women and nonhuman nature by naturalizing women and feminizing nature” [Warren 1991]. We think that we maybe honor the Earth by saying: Mother Earth, but in fact we deceptively show subordination of men over women and nature.

5. Epistemological Connections. According to Val Plumwood, if there is a need for symbolic view of feminine side in ecology, why not providing a new, specific epistemology? This should give “a broader political aspect of the critique of instrumentalism” [Plumwood 1991: 3–37].

6. Political (Praxis) Connections. From the very first time when Francoise d’Eaubonne introduced the term “ecofeminism” in 1974 (this coined term was first mentioned in her work: Le Feminisme ou la Mort) in order to emphasize women’s potential for ecological revolution, ecofeminism has become a classical political movement. Although it has specific background, ecofeminism has the same basis as feminism, in general, or ecology itself, when seen from another point of view.

7. Ethical Connections. Ecofeminism is part of environmental ethics, in the same manner as deep ecology, new animism, and many other ecologically inspired philosophical or ethical standpoints. Some say that nature requires a feminist ethical analysis and response and that we must develop “ecofeminist ethic of care and appropriate reciprocity” [Warren 1991].

8. Theoretical Connections. This kind of connection between women and nature is tightly linked to ethical connections.

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7 Warren here mentioned the works of Plumwood, Grey, Ruether and Salleh, which are all focused on exposure and dismantling of the conceptual structures of domination which have kept various “isms of domination”. More on that in: Warren, K. J., Introduction to Ecofeminism, available on: http://environmental.lilithezine.com/Introduction-to-Ecofeminism.html.
We must say that this list of possible connections between women and nature is not final. There may be some connections that could include two or even more of the above listed connections (for example, ethical and theoretical connections, or historical and conceptual connections as well).

EARTH DEMOCRACY

One of the most prominent movements related to the ecofeminists is the Earth democracy. Vandana Shiva [Shiva 2006: 40–45] talks about Earth Democracy – the ancient principle that includes peace, justice and sustainability, which connects the individual with the universal, different and usual, local with global. She quoted the chief of an Indian tribe who said that they find it impossible to buy the sky, heat and earth, because these are things that belong to nature and not to other people from whom you can buy it. Nature cannot sell its resources; it offers them unconditionally to everyone, asking only that its consumers care about it and keep it safe and sound. Man belongs to the nature, and it is not the other way around. Democracy of Earth is, therefore, discovering all previous principles and fusing them into a single principle: protection of environment. Although focused on India, this doctrine can be, in our opinion, applied to other countries and cultures as well.

CONCLUSION

Why is ecofeminism so significant? “Vision of female liberation, social inequalities and, ultimately, social justice associates with the affirmation of degraded areas and subordinate non-human nature. Thereupon, the promotion of eco-feminist ethics, which is basically a partnership, is promotion of freedom from the dualisms of Western intellectual thought and male-gender bias about women and nature” [Buzov 2007: 1–16].

Karen Warren [Warren 2000: 34] finds that ecofeminism has its roots in all areas of feminism. She claims that in the developing countries more women than men depend on the nature and its resources, primarily on the trees and fruits thereof. Women are the primary victims of environmental degradation, and in particular the destruction of forests. Also, women are faced with customs and taboos which are not known to men. Having that in mind, Warren thinks that “trees, forests and forestry in particular are ‘women’s matter’ for conceptual reasons” [Warren1991]. For example, “The Chipko” movement [Jain 2000] in India arose from the protection of trees, namely “hugging” the trees

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9 Famous Indian poet Ghanasyam Raturi, also the Chipko poet, wrote a poem describing the method of embracing the trees to save them from falling:

‘Embrace the trees and
Save them from being felled;
The property of our hills,
Save them from being looted.’ Available on: http://edugreen.teri.res.in/explore/forestry/chipko.html.
order to prevent their cutting. Besides Chipko movement, there is also Love Canal movement named after the area in the vicinity of Niagara Falls which in the 1970s suffered ecological disaster due to leakage of toxic waste. Green belt movement was also founded in the 1970s in order to help rural women in Kenya to preserve woods and soils.

Ynestra King believes that feminism and ecology contain primordial rebellion scream against the human (male) domination, and against any kind of domination. Genus proximum here is a demand to re-think the relationship between humanity and nature. Present dualisms, such as body and soul, mind and heart, men and women, nature and society, are not that important because the time has come to unite and transform the society and to prevent domination that could destroy the world [King 1990: 112].

Fosters of the future generations, women and nature, are constantly under threat [Mayer 1994]. Their existence, according to the representatives of ecofeminism [King1990: 110; Warren 1991; Warren 2000], is on the edge of viability. However, changes of policies, which countries make due to their commitments to international conventions and bodies, remains largely on paper, while the mass destruction of nature in the name of people is continuing.

On the other hand, there are many critics regarding the return to nature and symbiosis with nature. Historical and social conditions of our ancestors, according to these authors, were such that they would not take from nature more than they really needed. Modernization of society leads to an increase of numerous needs regardless of whether they come from renewable resources or not.

After this short overview, we can say that ecofeminism brings new energy and a bit fresh, different view on environmental problems and their resolving. Ecofeminism, with its specific, although sometimes different approaches emphasized what is important: giving the true importance to the roles of women and nature. That is the main reason for further development of this ethical conception and also for its implementation in the real life solutions.

REFERENCES


Available on: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-environmental/


10 More about this: http://www2.epa.gov/aboutepa/love-canal-tragedy.


12 For example, see debate on GMO crops between Vandana Shiva and Michael Specter, available on: http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/08/25/seeds-of-doubt.

13 Or, there is a need for increasing profit.


**INTERNET SOURCES**

Agenda 21. An Easy Reference to Specific Recommendations on Women  
<http://www.gdrc.org/gender/a21/agenda1.html>

Agenda 21, United Nations. Sustainable Development.  
<http://sustainabledvelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>

Policy that Supports Gender Equality  

Seeds of Doubt:  
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/08/25/seeds-of-doubt>

The Love Canal Tragedy, by Eckardt C. Beck  
<http://www2.epa.gov/aboutepa/love-canal-traedgedy>

The Wangari Maathai Scholarship Fund Call for Applications (2012).  
<http://www.greenbeltmovement.org>
ПРЕГЛЕДНИ НАУЧНИ РАД

ЕКОФЕМИНИЗАМ КАО НАЧИН РЕШАВАЊА НЕКИХ ЕКОЛОШКИХ ПИТАЊА

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САЖЕТАК: Жене и природа вишеструко су повезани: биолошким статусом, репродуктивном улогом, дискриминацијом. Зато је екофеминизам један од основних теоретских, филозофских, па чак и практичних начина којим се могу решавати еколошки проблеми. Поборници ове идеје сматрају да другачији ставови и понашања, који би били резултат напуштања патријархалног приступа свему, па и жени и природи, могу зауставити уништавање природе.

Покрет „Chipkoˮ из Индије, „Green Beltˮ (Зелени појас) из Кеније, „Love Canalˮ (Љубавни канал) из државе Њујорк итд. указују на значај жене с аспекта демографије, а у контексту промена које се дешавају у природи. У овом раду аутор даје кратак преглед веза између жене и природе и предлаже нека нова решења.

КЉУЧНЕ РЕЧИ: екофеминизам, жене, природа