Feminism and Ecofeminism:
A Social Ecology Approach

Institute for Social Ecology
Instructor: Dr. Chaia Heller
Eight sessions

This class utilizes a social ecology lens to explore the multistranded feminist and ecofeminist movements, examining their numerous theoretical and activist trajectories. Taking a one-room schoolhouse approach, the class is designed for both newcomers and for those familiar with the dynamic fields of social ecology, feminism, and ecofeminism. After providing a social ecology analysis of first and second wave feminism, we'll explore ecofeminist perspectives on issues ranging from climate justice and reproductive rights to antiracism, decolonialism, and direct democracy.

We'll also examine how ideas such as intersectionality, sex/gender performativity, and dialectical biology complexify categories of 'woman' and 'nature' that are central components of a third wave of feminist theory. Throughout, we'll also be mindful of the relationship between the particular and general aspects of the revolutionary project, discussing how particularized forms of sex/gender-based oppression are central to the general humanitarian project to create a non-hierarchical, directly democratic, and ecological society.

Course format

Each class period is two hours with a break at the hour mark. Each session will begin with a short lecture/presentation by the instructor, followed by large and small group discussion in breakout groups. All video lectures and texts are hosted on the ISE course portal and can be accessed anytime. Please complete readings and other course materials *before* each class meeting.

Schedule of Course Topics and Readings

Please don't be overwhelmed by the texts and resources offered in the course schedule. The readings and other resources paired with each class are multiple, surpassing what can be completed each week before class. At times, you might choose to skim or peruse readings that are particularly long or dense, focusing on introductory and conclusionary sections of pieces you feel unable to read in full at this time. My aim is to provide you with a wide survey of resources for you to explore at your leisure as you familiarize yourself with various sets of literatures associated with different strands of feminist theory. Please see the resources as an inexhaustive curated working bibliography for you to consult during and after the class's ending. For more visual or auditory learners, I hope you enjoy the videos or podcasts offered here as well.

I've used an asterisk (*) to signal readings that I encourage you to complete before particular class meetings if you feel that you can do so. If you are taking this class for credit, please make sure to complete all asterisked readings or other resources.

<u>Part One: Social Ecology and Feminism</u>

Class 1:
Introduction to Social Ecology
and its Relationship to the Feminist Project

This session provides an overview of social ecology as an ever-emerging body of ideas developed primarily by theorist Murray Bookchin who produced his works between the late 1950s to the early 2000s. We'll discuss how Bookchin sought to integrate but also transcend the limits of the Marxist tradition, contemplating a society free not only of class oppression but of all forms of social hierarchy. Bookchin's critique of patriarchy as an historically early and central form of hierarchy makes social ecology's universal revolutionary program a potentially complementary counterpart to the more particularistic feminist project. Ynestra King, a student of Bookchin, developed and taught ecofeminist theory at the Institute for Social Ecology during the 1980s and was a central figure in developing early ecofeminist theory and activism in the US. King's essay here makes an articulate case for why feminism is integral not only to social ecology, but to any project to create a free, democratic, and ecological society.

Readings:

- *Murray Bookchin, "*What is Social Ecology*?"
- *Ynestra King, "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology." In, *Healing the Wound*.

Videos

- Leslie Fluette, "Social Ecology, Human Nature, and Hierarchy."
- "Murray Bookchin Explains Anarchism" (Video on why Bookchin turned away from Marxism and towards anarchism)
- Murray Bookchin, "Advanced Concepts, Pt. 2," on what is social ecology (from the Institute for Social Ecology, 1988)

Podcasts:

- Srsly Wrong, "Social Ecology and the Critique of Hierarchy."

Class 2

Feminism in Two Waves: What *Is* Feminism, Anyway?

The feminist movement emerged in two waves during the 19th and 20th centuries respectively. Together, we'll explore first and second wave feminism in the context of historical debates surrounding who 'counts' as human beings worthy of basic rights and freedoms. As white feminists considered the dehumanization of Black people facing slavery and much later, Jim Crow, they began contemplating the features of their own dehumanization as women. As 19th century first wave feminists fought for freedoms including the right to vote, second wave feminists of the 1960s and 1970s fought for changes ranging from sexual/reproductive freedom and asylum from male violence to inclusion in a male-dominated

workforce. A central theme running through both waves is the degree to which feminists promote a reformist (liberal) or revolutionary (radical) orientation to the feminist project. Also central, is the degree to which feminists center questions of racism and white supremacy that make the feminist project relevant and necessary within a broader antiracist left.

Readings:

- *Charlotte Krolokke, "Three Waves of Feminism, from Suffragettes to Grlls."
- *Sojourner Truth, speech delivered at the 1851 Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio.
- *Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Please at least skim the introduction).
- *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Seneca Falls Keynote Address Delivered July 19, 1848, Seneca Falls, New York.
- *Simone de Beauvoir, Introduction to *The Second Sex*.
- *bell hooks, "Rethinking the Nature of Work" in, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*. (Credit-seeking students, please select 2 additional chapters to read).
- bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*. (Credit-seeking students, please choose two chapters to read)
- Dina Gilio-Whitaker, "The Indigenous Roots of Modern Feminism," In *Beacon Broadside*, March 11, 2020.
- Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence."
- Adrienne Rich, "Notes Toward a Politics of Location."

Videos:

- Audre Lorde, "Last Reading in Berlin 1992."
- bell hooks and Gloria Steinem Dialogue at Saint Norbert College, 2015.

Class 3
Black Feminism, Identity Politics, and the Intersectionality Concept

Marxism relies on universal categories such as the proletariat and class to define the revolutionary subject. Feminists followed suit, invoking class-like categories such as women and patriarchy to define the subject and reach of the feminist project. By the early 1970s however, Black and queer radical feminists such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Angela Davis challenged monolithic categories of 'woman' by arguing that all identities are multiple, overlapping, and existing in hierarchical fields of power; Being a 'woman', they asserted, is always complicated for those born female *in addition to*

being Black, queer, or working class/underclass etc. In this session, we'll explore the worlds and words of feminists such as Audre Lorde who argued that feminism be anchored in an understanding of the multiple and interconnected identities of women whose lives are marked not just by patriarchy but also by a rang of oppressive institutions including white supremacy, colonialism, cis-heteropatriarchy, and capitalism. We'll also examine the intersectionality concept articulated by Kimberly Crenshaw that made a deep and lasting impact on how feminists talk about identity today. We'll look additionally at how the intersectionality concept excludes antisemitsm or anti-Jewish racism as an intersecting form of oppression and the implications of this omission for Jewish feminists and feminism generally.

Readings:

- *Combahee River Collective, "Combahee River Collective Statement.
- *Audre Lorde, excerpts from *Sister Outsider*. Please read chapters, "The Masters Tools," "Uses of the Erotic."
- *Kimberly Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics."
- *Karin Stögner, "Antisemitism and Intersectionality, a New Approach," in *Fathom*.
- Adrienne Rich, "Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity"
- Two really compelling pieces on intersectionality by political theorist Marcel Stoetlzer
    - "Intersectional Individuality: Georg Simmel's Concept of 'The Intersection of Social Circles' and the Emancipation of Women" (2016)
    - "From interacting systems to a system of divisions" (2017)
- Ruth Fremson, *New York Times*, "How Russian Trolls Helped Keep the Women's March Out of Lock Step" (September 18, 2022)

Videos:

- Combahee River Collective
- "Intersectional Feminism: Living in Colour"
- Kimberly Crenshaw, "The Urgency of Intersectionality" Ted Talk.
- Angela Davis on Audre Lorde

Class 4
Overview of Feminist Epistemologies:
Rethinking Categories of 'Woman', 'Nature' and 'Gender'

This class explores the ways in which feminists have developed new epistemologies—or ways of thinking—that surpass modernist notions of what counts for 'woman', 'nature', 'sex/gender', or class 'identity' or 'biology'. New post-structural ways of thinking that emerged during the 1980s and 1990s are often regarded as a 'third wave' of feminist theory that transformed broader fields of science studies and political theory generally. As feminists critiqued hegemonic domains of science, philosophy, anthropology, and political theory, they created new ways of conveying the complexity and contradictions inherent in positivist and modernist ways of thinking about our natural and cultural worlds. As we'll see, in the 1970s and 1980s, thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Sandra Harding, as well as Richard Lewontin and Richard Levins were but a few of the many scientists who interrogated the nature of 'nature', profoundly redefining the scope and meaning of the scientific project. At the same time, figures such as Gloria Anzeldua and Judith Butler recast modern notions of identities based on sex, gender, and ethnicity, revealing identity itself as more verb than noun. As these thinkers illustrate, identity is a dynamic and often 'messy' process of action, change, and contradiction.

Readings:

- *Sandra Harding, "From the Woman Question in Science, to the Science Question in feminism." In, "The Science Question in Feminism."
- *Gloria Anzeldua, "La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness"
- *Judith Butler, "Performance Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist theory."
- *Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Toward a Specifically Feminist Materialism."
- Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14:3 (1988).
- Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto."
- Butler interview with Jules Gleeson, "We Need to Rethink the Category of Woman."
- Anne Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes Revisited."
- Claire Ainsworth, "Sex Redefined: The Idea of 2 Sexes is Overly Simplistic," In *Nature* magazine.
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- Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin, “Dialectics and Reduction in Ecology.”
- Levins and Lewontin, “Conclusion,” from *The Dialectical Biologist*.

Video:
- Judith Butler’s Theory of Gender Performativity Explained
- Murray Bookchin on Nature and Ideology

Part Two: Welcome to Ecofeminism/s

Class 5
Ecofeminism: A Broad (and Incomplete) Overview

Determining the origins, features, or history of any social movement can be daunting, as movements are living and breathing entities that often emerge simultaneously in multiple locations across time. During this class, we’ll attempt to periodize ecofeminism as both a social movement and a discursive intervention that allowed feminists to weigh in on categories of ‘woman’ and ‘nature’, thus giving feminists a robust platform in the broader male-dominated ecology movement. As we’ll discover, ‘ecofeminism’ means different things to different people as they confront specific challenges across different cultures and geographies. Yet despite the broad variety of ecofeminist perspectives that emerged primarily during the 1980-2000 period, we’ll examine a set of common and pervasive themes that indeed surfaced in ecofeminist writings that range from anti-militarism and animal rights to intersectional decolonial ecofeminist perspectives.

Readings:
- *Chaia Heller, “The Reach for the Ecological,” **OR** “Ecofeminist Desire for Nature” and “Rescuing Lady Nature.” In, *The Ecology of Everyday Life*.
- *Ynestra King and Grace Paley, “Women’s Unity Statement.”
- *Dr. Chelsea Mikael Frazier, “Black Feminist Ecological Thought: A Manifesto.”
- *Elizabeth Carlassare, “Destabilizing the Criticism of Essentialized in Ecofeminist Discourse,” *Capital, Nature, Socialism*, 5:3, 50-66 (1994).
- Carolyn Merchant, "Ecofeminism," in *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World,* 183-210 (New York: Routledge, 1992).
- Sasha Roseneil, *Queering home and family in the 1980s: The Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp*.
- Greta Gaard, *Women, Nature, Animals.* (Credit-folks, please read chapter one).
- Paula Serafini, “A Decolonial Ethics of Care.”

Videos:
- *Greta Gaard, "Ecofeminism Now." (Get ready for some 1980s kitsch!)

Podcast:
- Catriona Sandilands in "Ecofeminism and Queer Ecology."

Class 6
The Ecofeminism, Feminism, and Decoloniality
Vandana Shiva and Kenyan and Latin American Perspectives

The rise of feminism or ecofeminism in the global South often emerges first from a response to coloniality, state power, and capitalism, rather than from a response to categories of "woman" and "nature" that tend to drive ecofeminism in the global North. Vandana Shiva is a scientist/activist who contributed so profoundly to an international ecofeminism that her work deserves special attention and focus. As we'll see, Shiva departs from many western ecofeminists (particularly during the 80s/90s) by advancing an explicitly decolonial and anti-capitalist position. But we'll also see how Shiva's perspective as an Indian theorist gives rise to clashes with western feminists who see her spiritual notions of 'mother nature' or a 'feminine principle' as problematic and essentialist. We will also look at ecofeminist perspectives of activist scholars who offer a distinctive Kenyan outlook and framing of feminist ecological issues. In particular, we will explore the legacy of Wangari Mattai, the creator of the Greenbelt movement in that country. Finally, we'll think through the reflections of revolutionary activist and writer Raquel Guitierrez Aguilar whose organizing work led her from from Mexico to El Salavador, Bolivia, and Argentina. For Aguilar, it was her confrontation with powerful institutions such as the state, coloniality, and authoritarianism generally that led her to a focus on patriarchy and feminism. Though her writing is not explicitly 'ecofeminist', Aguilar offers inter-generational knowledge, proving clear and crucial insights about patriarchal power in Latin America that provides crucial insights to young ecofeminists today.

Readings:
- *Vandana Shiva, Introduction to *Staying Alive.*
- *Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, Introduction to *Ecofeminism*.
- *Anna Shattuck, "One Person, One Tree: Wangari Maathai and Ecofeminism in the Greenbelt Movement." Volume 6, In, *Women Leading*

Change: Case Studies on Women, Gender, and Feminism, Issue No. 6 Vol. 2 (2022).
- *Raquel Gutierrez Aguilar, "Letters to My Younger Sisters," In, *Ill Will*, February 8, 2023.
- Mechthild Nagel, "Environmental Justice and Women's Rights: A Tribute to Wangari Maathai. In, Wagadu, Volume 2, Summer 2005.
- Janet Muthuki, "Rethinking the Ecofeminism: Wangari Maathai and the Greenbelt Movement in Kenya." Masters thesis, Howard University, 2006.
- Leigh Brownhill and Terisa Turner, "Ecofeminism at the heart of eco-socialism." In, *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, Vol. 30. No. 1, 1-10.

Videos:
- Vedas and Ecofeminism: In Conversation with Vandana Shiva
- Vandana Shiva, "Vandana Shiva: We Must Fight Back Against the 1 Percent to Stop the Sixth Mass Extinction."

Class 7
Ecofeminist Perspectives on Climate Crisis and Reproductive Rights

Ecofeminism addresses a wide spectrum of issues ranging from environmental justice, animal rights, and food sovereignty to environmental racism, and queer liberation. While it's not in the scope of this course to explore all key issues, here we'll focus on two important topics, one from the realm of ecology and the other from women's health. As we'll discuss, a feminist/ecofeminist take on climate justice and reproductive rights and freedom is crucial. Indeed, if we seek a truly representational understanding of how policies on climate and reproduction inform women's everyday lives on the ground, we need to explore how lives are informed by institutions such as white supremacy, coloniality, cis-heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and state power.

Readings:
- *Greta Gaard, "Ecofeminism and Climate Change." *Women's Studies International Forum*, 49 (2015): 20-33.
- *Anna Kaijser and Annica Kronsell, "Climate Change Through the Lens of Intersectionality."
- *Greta Gaard, "Reproductive Technology, or Reproductive Justice?: An Ecofeminist, Environmental Justice Perspective on the Rhetoric of Choice."
- *Jael Silliman, Marlene Gerber Fried, Loretta Ross, and Elena Gutierrez. *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice.*

- Fact sheet, “The Implications of the Overturning of Roe v. Wade for Racial Disparities.
- Yazar Stefania Barks, “Forces of Reproduction: Socialist Ecofeminism and the Global Ecological Crisis.”

***Videos*:**
- Carteret Islands going underwater
- Sahena, flooding in Bangladesh

Class 8
Ecofeminism as Kurdish Jineology

Since the later 2000s, the Kurdish women’s movement has risen to prominence within the broader Kurdish freedom movement that is currently active on the ground in an area of northern Syria called Rojava. The leader of this movement, Abdullah Öcalan, developed a ‘science of woman’ that he calls Jineology that establishes gender equality as one of three pillars within the revolutionary project, the other two being ecology and stateless direct democracy. The Kurdish women’s movement is a rare case in which feminists—of either the first or second wave—advance an explicitly revolutionary and internationalist political vision. As we will explore together, their movement for women’s freedom is inseparable from the broader struggle to abolish all forms of hierarchy that include but go beyond patriarchy: Kurdish feminists see fighting women’s oppression as but one node of a wider project to create a directly democratic society that Öcalan calls democratic confederalism—a confederation of self-governing cities, towns, and villages in which women+ and men co-chair all political bodies where policies are made.

Readings:
- *Brecht Neven, Marlene Schaffer, “Jineology: From Women’s Struggles to Social Liberation.” In *Roar Magazine*.
- Eleonora Gea Piccardi, “The Challenges of a Kurdish Ecofeminist Perspective: Maria Mies, Abdullah Öcalan, and the Praxis of Jineolojî.”
- Nadje Al-Ali, Isabel Kaser, “Beyond Feminism? Jineolojî and the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement.” Published online by Cambridge University Press: 09 November 2020*

***Videos*:**
- Dilar Dirik, Elif Sarican, The Kurdish Women's Movement: History, Theory, Practice
- Jineology: Feminism & Patriarchy in the Middle East
- Jineology / jineolojî / ژنولوژی Explained!