

Feminism and Ecofeminism: A Social Ecology Approach

Institute for Social Ecology
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Eight Tuesdays @ 1PM (EST), Beginning October 18, 2022



This class explores the many stranded feminist and ecofeminist movements, examining various theoretical and activist perspectives through a social ecology lens. Taking a one-room schoolhouse approach, the class is designed for both newcomers and 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 a range of ecofeminist perspectives on issues including cis-heteropatriarchy, antiracism, anti-colonialism, as well as science, climate justice, reproductive rights, and direct democracy.

We'll also take on epistemological challenges, exploring how ideas such as intersectionality, sex/gender diversity, and dialectical biology can complexify categories of 'woman' and 'nature' so central to all feminist theory. Throughout, we'll also be mindful of the relationship between the particular and general dimensions 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 is two hours long with one ten-minute break at the end of the first hour. Each week will start with a short lecture/presentation by the instructor, followed by large and small group discussion. The video lectures and texts are hosted on the ISE course portal and can be accessed anytime; the readings are downloadable. Participants are expected to consult video lectures and/or readings *before* each course meeting.

Schedule of Course Topics and Readings

Note that the readings and other resources presented here are often numerous, often surpassing what you can get through each week before class. Please see the resources posted here as part of a working bibliography that for you to engage with both during the class and long after the class ends. At times, you might choose to skim readings that are particularly long or dense, focusing on the introductory and conclusionary sections of pieces you feel unable to read in full. My aim is to provide a wide array of resources for you to peruse at your own leisure as you familiarize yourself with various sets of literatures related to different strands of feminist theory. For those who are more visual or auditory learners, please take advantage of the videos or podcasts offered for different sessions as well.

Part One: Social Ecology and Feminism

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

This class session provides an overview of social ecology as an ever-emerging body of ideas developed primarily by the theorist Murray Bookchin whose writings spanned the decades 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 from class oppression but from all forms of social and political hierarchy. Bookchin's critique of patriarchy as a central form of hierarchy sets up social ecology to be politically aligned with the feminist project as a whole. Ynestra King, a student of Bookchin, developed and taught feminist theory at the Institute for Social Ecology for many years and was a central figure in developing early ecofeminist theory and activism. King's essay here makes an articulate case for why feminism must be integral not just 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 Wounds*.

Videos

- Social Ecology, Human Nature, and Hierarchy
- Video on why Bookchin turned away from Marxism and towards anarchism
- On what is social ecology (from the Institute for Social Ecology, 1988)

Podcasts:

- Seriously Wrong, “Social Ecology and the Critique of Hierarchy.”

Class 2 Feminism in Two Waves

We’ll now shift our focus to trace the emergence first and second wave feminism in the context of historical debates surrounding who ‘counts’ as a human being 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. Seeking to be seen as fully human, 19th century first wave feminists fought for freedoms including the franchise (voting rights); In turn, second wave feminists of the 60s and 70s fought for their own humanity by demanding sexual and reproductive freedom as well as inclusion in the workforce. A central theme that we’ll see running through both waves of feminism, is the degree to which feminists promote a reformist (liberal) or revolutionary (radical) orientation to feminism. We’ll also ongoingly assess the degree to which feminists have been able to address dehumanizing societal formations that include institutionalized racism/white supremacy and coloniality that dramatically diminish the integrity and freedoms of BIPOC women+* both within and outside of the movements.

Readings:

- Charlotte Krolokke, “Three Waves of Feminism, from Suffragettes to Grlls.”
- Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.
- Sojourner Truth, speech delivered at the 1851 Women’s Convention in Akron, Ohio.
- Simone de Beauvoir, excerpts from *The Second Sex*.

- Shulamith Firestone, excerpts from *The Dialectic of Sex*.
- bell hooks, excerpts from *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*.

Class 3

Black Feminism, Identity Politics, Intersectionality

First and second wave feminism were influenced by the Marxist template that used universal categories such as the proletariat, class, and class consciousness to define the revolutionary subject and trajectory. Feminists often followed suit by invoking class-like universal categories such as of ‘women’, ‘patriarchy’, and ‘feminist/women’s’ consciousness’ to define the subject and reach of the feminist project. By the early 1970s and 1980s, however, Black and/or 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 relationships to each other. In other words, being a ‘woman’ is always complicated for those who are born female *and* Black, queer, or working class/underclass. In this session, we’ll take a peek into the worlds and words of feminists such as Audre Lorde and Kimberly Crenshaw who articulated the need for feminism to be anchored in an intersectional understanding of the multiple identities held by women whose lives are complicated not just by the singular force of patriarchy but also by institutionalized white supremacy, colonialism, cis-heteropatriarchy, and capitalism.

Readings:

- Combahee River Collective, “Combahee River Collective Statement.”
- Audre Lorde, excerpts from *Sister Outsider*.
- Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.”

Videos:

- Combahee River Collective
- Intersectional Feminism: Living in Colour
- Kimberlé Crenshaw, “The Urgency of Intersectionality” Ted Talk.

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 transcend modern notions of what counts for ‘woman’, ‘nature’, ‘sex/gender’, cultural or class ‘identity’ or ‘biology’. During this class, we’ll survey a canonic set of readings that reflect

this epistemological sea-change that forever transformed the feminist project by advancing a post-structuralist perspective that we will explore together. As feminists critiqued hegemonic domains of science, philosophy, anthropology, and political theory, they gave voice to new sets of actors who articulated new ways of understanding the complexity of our natural and cultural worlds. As we'll see, in the 70s and 80s, thinkers like 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', redefining the scientific project forever. At the same time, thinkers such as Gloria Anzeldua and Judith Butler reconfigured modern notions of sex, gender, and ethnic identities, revealing them to be active and dynamic processes of cultural action, change, and contradiction rather than passive, monolithic, and static entities.

Readings:

- Sandra Harding, "From the Woman Question in Science, to the Science Question in Feminism." In, "The Science Question in Feminism."
- 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."
- Gloria Anzeldua, "La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness" (page 77)
- Judith Butler, "Performance Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist theory."
- Butler interview with Jules Gleeson, "We Need to Rethink the Category of Woman."
- Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Toward a Specifically Feminist Materialism."
- Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin, "Dialectics and Reduction in Ecology."
- Levins and Lewontin, "Conclusion," from *The Dialectical Biologist*.

Videos:

- 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 is a daunting task as movements are truly living and breathing entities that can

emerge simultaneously in multiple locations across time. During this class, we'll do our best to periodize 'ecofeminism' as both a social/activist movement and as a set of theoretical meditations on modern categories of 'women' and 'ecology'. As we'll discover, 'ecofeminism' means different things to different people. Yet despite the broad variety of ecofeminist perspectives that emerged primarily during the 1980-2000 period, we will examine a set of common and pervasive themes that indeed surfaced in ecofeminist writings that range from the anti-militarist and 'deep' ecofeminism/s of the 1980s and 1990s to the queer, anti-racist, and intersectional decolonial ecofeminist perspectives today.

Readings:

- Chaia Heller, "The Reach for the Ecological," or (!!!!!) "Ecofeminist Desire for Nature" and "Rescuing Lady Nature, In, *The Ecology of Everyday life*."
- Carolyn Merchant, "Ecofeminism," in *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 183-210 (New York: Routledge, 1992).
- Ynestra King and Grace Paley, "Women's Unity Statement."
- Sasha Roseneil, *Queering home and family in the 1980s: The Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp*.
- Greta Gaard, excerpts from *Women, Nature, Animals*.
- Dr. Chelsea Mikael Frazier, "Black Feminist Ecological Thought: A Manifesto"
- Paula Serafini, "A Decolonial Ethics of Care."

Video:

- Greta Gaard, "Ecofeminism Now." Get ready for some 1980s quiche!

Podcast:

- Catriona Sandilands in "Ecofeminism and Queer Ecology."

Class 6 The Ecofeminism of Vandana Shiva and Perspectives from Kenya

Vandana Shiva is a scientist/activist who has 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 and 90s) by advancing an explicitly materialist, decolonial, and anti-capitalist position. We'll also see how Shiva's perspective as an Indian theorist gives rise to clashes with western feminists who regard her spiritual notions of 'mother nature' or a 'feminine principle' as problematic. In addition to Shiva, we will also look at ecofeminist

perspectives of two activist scholars who offer an important Kenyan outlook and framing of feminist ecological issues.

Readings:

- Vandana Shiva and Maria Meiss, excerpts from *Ecofeminism*.
- Anna Shattuck, “One Person, One Tree: Wangari Maathai and Ecofeminism in the Greenbelt Movement.” Volume 6, Issue No. 2. Women Leading Change © Newcomb Institute 21
- Mechthild Nagel, “Environmental Justice and Women’s Rights: A Tribute to Wangari Maathai.
- Rethinking the Ecofeminism: Wangari Maathai and the Greenbelt Movement in Kenya.
- Leigh Brownhill and Terisa Turner, “Ecofeminism at the heart of eco-socialism.”

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 are crucial if we’re to have a truly representational understanding of how policies on climate and reproduction inform women’s everyday lives on the ground as they live lives informed by 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.”
- Fact sheet, “The Implications of the Overturning of Roe v. Wade for Racial Disparities.

- 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*.
- 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 late 2000s, the Kurdish women’s movement has risen to prominence within the broader Kurdish freedom movement that is currently most active on the ground in a part of northern Syria called Rojava. The leader of this movement, Abdullah Öcalan, developed a ‘science of woman’ that he calls Jineology that places gender equality at the center of a revolutionary project that also rests on the pillars of ecology and stateless direct democracy. The Kurdish women’s movement is a rare case in which feminists—of either the first or second wave of feminism—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 feminism 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:

- Jineology: Feminism & Patriarchy in the Middle East
- Jineology / jineolojî / ژنولوژی Explained!

*A note on my use of the word 'women+'. While the initialism LGBTQ emerged in the 90s, in the 2000s, 'LGBTQ+' has become a more prominent way to acknowledge the unbounded identities that comprise the category of sex/gender diverse people.

I invoke 'women+' to acknowledge the unbounded identities of many who identify in some way as 'women' but fall outside of the biologized and culturally received understanding of what 'woman' means. When I use the term 'woman+' or 'women+', I point to the many transgender, non-binary, queer, agender, androgenous or intersex people who might identify in some way with the category, 'women' (or who are inaccurately identified as women by others in society) whose experience and histories are central to the feminist project.

For a simplified but hopefully helpful discussion of the ever-evolving nomenclature of sexed/gendered bodies, please consult the following piece linked here:

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-does-lgbtq-mean-5069804>