

Mary Kate Zimmerman

Dr. Boljkovac

Feminist Ecocinema

Intersectional Ecofeminism Framework: Uniting Reproductive Rights, Capitalism and Ecology

Ecofeminism aims to explore the interconnection of gender-based oppression and environmental degradation. Through the intersectional ecofeminist frameworks, we address the complex issues of reproductive rights, feminist, ecological, and capitalist exploitation, as well as the nuances of power, privilege and oppression that shape marginalized individuals' experiences in these contexts. Below examines Sally L. Kitch's and Johanna Oksala's argument of the patriarchy and how "resulting masculinist values have been foundational to the extractive and exploitative attitudes and practices regarding marginalized peoples," (Kitch, 2018) while highlighting how Jennifer Nash's *Intersectionality* collectively underscores the importance of an intersectional ecofeminist framework.

Ecofeminism acknowledges the importance of intersectionality with the recognition of an individual's experiences of multiple layers of oppression based on race, class, and sexuality. Saidiya Hartman claims, "The captive female body.... could be converted into cash, speculated and traded as a commodity, worked to death, taken, tortured, seeded and propagated like any other crop, or murdered." (Grande, 2021) Simultaneous oppressions in this manner according to Jennifer Nash are the formula in which racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism has created a perpetual structure of domination. She even goes as far as calling this structure, "post slavery" as the most marginalized group in this cycle is black women. She explains, "We also

often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously.” (Nash, 2021) Recognizing the intricate interplay of these oppressive structures provides a foundation that can be built upon in relation to the intersection of ecofeminism, capitalism and reproductive rights.

Johanna Oksala discusses in her article on "Feminism, Capitalism, and Ecology," that capitalism often encourages exploitative practices that prioritize profit above all else (Oksala, 2018). This drive for profit can lead to over-extraction of natural resources, environmental degradation, and ecological imbalances, impacting ecosystems. By examining how the pursuit of profit has come at the expense of women's rights and ecological balance, ecofeminism challenges raise essential questions about how the relentless pursuit of profit and economic growth may exacerbate inequalities, marginalize women, and degrade the natural world. Oksala points to materialist ecofeminism, Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen, and their argument that, "Globally, women produce approximately 80 percent of the world's food supplies, and for this reason women are most severely affected by food and fuel shortages and the pollution of water resources" (Gaard and Gruen 2005). According to them, it is thus not necessary to evoke metaphorical or essentialist ideas about women's greater propensity for protecting nature because for women living under harsh material conditions, environmental activism is simply a form of self-defense. (Oksala 2018) This argument is rooted in the neocolonial roots of capitalism. When the labor of women and colonial subjects was considered a natural resource, it was freely available like air and water. To further this Oksala points to Marxist-feminist theorists Maria Mies who states, "Without this infrastructure of nonfree, coerced female or colonial labor in the broadest sense, the noncoerced, contractual labor relations of free

proletarians would not be possible. Women and colonial peoples were defined as property, as nature, not as free subjects who could enter a contract. Both had to be subordinated by force and direct violence. (Mies 1986/1998) This early colonial “work force” was also valued for its future increase, meaning the labor of black women was also seen as potential for unborn commodities for farms, plantations, and markets.

Furthermore, critical intersecting issues such as environmentalism and the fundamentally right that empower women in relation to their bodies and lives are intrinsically linked. Sally Kitch explains, "Ecofeminists argue that environmental harm disproportionately impacts the health and well-being of women, particularly poor women, women of color, and Indigenous women. This perspective aligns with ecofeminism's broader focus on the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities, especially women." (Kitch, 2023) Kitch's exploration also touches upon the role of reproductive rights in the context of climate change and ecological sustainability. She states, "At a time when climate change threatens all life on the planet, birth control and reproductive health care can be framed as essential for ecological as well as gender justice." This perspective underscores the interconnectedness of reproductive rights and ecofeminism within the urgent context of environmental challenges.

The theoretical or systemic grounds for linking the oppression of women to ecological devastation are not primarily ideological, but functional. Both “women” and “nature” have a similar, indispensable function in the mechanism of expropriation: they occupy analogous positions in the logic of capitalist accumulation in which the mechanisms of exploitation are dependent on the invisible base of expropriation. In other words, women and the colonies are

not only conceived of as “nature,” they are expropriated as “nature.” Native American writer Louise Erdrich, for example, “makes it clear that ecofeminism is not solely a woman’s issue. Its values belong equally to Indigenous men and women who hold the land as sacred, not a possession that can easily be sold away” (Blend 2022, p. 209). This convergence of beliefs reinforces the urgency of transforming the attitudes, assumptions, and values that create gender hierarchies and all forms of social oppression in order to transform the attitudes, assumptions, and values driving the behaviors that endanger human well-being on our planet.

As we navigate the complexities of ecological concerns, reproductive rights, feminist struggles, and capitalist exploitation, it will be imperative to recognize the interdependence between these issues. Only by highlighting the ways in which masculinist values have historically underpinned exploitative practices will a paradigm shift of acknowledging the interconnection of gender-based and ecological injustices can we pave a way for an equitable and environmentally conscious future that empowers both human and non-human communities alike.

Works Cited:

Kitch, Sally L. "Reproductive Rights and Ecofeminism." *Humanities* [Basel], vol. 12, no. 2, Apr. 2023, p. NA. *Gale Academic OneFile*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A752148489/AONE?

u=colosprings&sid=summon&xid=dbf9a1d2. Accessed 20 Oct. 2023.

Oksala, J. (2018), Feminism, Capitalism, and Ecology. *Hypatia*, 33: 216-

234. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12395>

Nash, Jennifer C. "Intersectionality". The Keywords Feminist Editorial Collective. *Keywords for Gender and Sexuality Studies*. NYU Press, 2021. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2904820&site=ehost-live.