

Handout, Feminist Environmental Philosophies

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- Ideas about nature, women, people of color and indigenous people, as well as animals overlap and reinforce one another.
- Women and people of color are supposedly “closer to nature” than are men; associated with a life of the body and emotion and akin to non-human animals, more so than men who are associated with the mind and rationality.
- Women and nature reproduce; they have “usable” resources – nature produces for human self-sustenance, women reproduce the social order.
- Nature is gendered female, Mother Earth, and there are implications for environmentalism. Nature is “pure,” “virgin,” “fertile,” etc. Nature can also be “used” – it’s “there for the taking,” can be “spoiled” “raped” “ruined.”
- Under capitalism, nature’s “bounty” or ability to generate life is assumed to belong to those who own nature or control it. Women too struggle to control their reproductive abilities, and when they reproduce, they raise children for free. It is uncompensated social labor.
- Re: gender politics of movements. We can look around us and notice environmental movements are led by men, even as the majority of rank and file activists or lower paid staff people are women. We can think about the rhetorics of environmental movements too – like “Save the Wave.” We should ask, who are waves being saved for? For everyone equally? If only there were equal sharing of waves to start with, one might believe this more easily. Also, in terms of “saving” waves, isn’t this rescue language the kind of language that applies usually to women? Because men don’t need to be saved, only “ruined nature” (ie raped nature, or female gendered nature) needs “saving.” In order to get to these insights, we need a feminist analysis of the gender politics of environmentalism. We can’t get there through an emphasis on “exclusion.”
- Re: movements related to the Anthropocene (climate change) and the “we” of that movement, the “we” that is guilty of CO2 emissions. Who is this “we?” Again, it’s not everyone equally. “Everyone” has *not* equally consumed the resources, burned the fossil fuels that have created warming waters, melting ice caps, and rise in sea levels. No, it’s mainly North America, Europe, Japan, India, China. It is capitalist industries dominated by histories of male-dominated leadership that have charted this direction even if those of us living in these national geographies are implicated. The “we” does not help us recognize differential exposures – not everyone suffers equally. But it’s mainly feminists who point out that the “we” is the same voice or structure of masculine authority that *brought us* the problem. **We need new thinking and authority.**
- Stay tuned to IWS website for suggested readings. Lots of more or less decent material on YouTube re feminist environmentalism.