

|| Book Review ||

## **Feminist Ecologies: Changing Environments in the Anthropocene**

Lara Stevens, Peta Tait, and Denise Varney (Eds.).

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 271 pages

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*Feminist Ecologies* is an edited volume that aims at showing “how contemporary feminist and ecological scholarship, activism and artistic practice progress ecofeminist thinking in response to environmental problems.” To that extent, the book does deliver on its own stated premise and promise and is a most timely intervention for two reasons: the future of the planet as well as ecofeminism hang in the balance; there is a lot at stake here. We live in an era when both are in jeopardy; planetary imperilment (climate change and species extinction) and the role of ecofeminism in preserving the earth are equally denied.

The book provides us with an interesting amalgamation of theory and practice. Its time-frame covers the last three decades of ecofeminism, and uses the theoretical perspective of classical materialist ecofeminism as evidenced in the chapters by Val Plumwood, Ariel Salleh, and Kate Rigby, who represent the classic foundational base of ecofeminism (when it was at its peak in the 1990s). These chapters base themselves in ecofeminism’s ability to draw out the interconnection between every conceivable social justice issue, ranging from the trauma of colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, ecological degradation, species extinction, climate change, industrialism, militarism, science and technology, “progress,” racism, migration issues, environmental refugees, and political refugees, and the disproportionate effects of all of the above on particular communities of women and their lives.

Simultaneously, postmodern and postcolonial ecofeminisms are highlighted through the coverage provided of activism and the performative, artistic, and cultural forms of protest and representation, which is in keeping with the latest developments in the developed world. Here, due cognizance is given to the fact that we live in a visual age where activism needs media for communication.

Activism is expressed through the shock value of art to make a political statement in the chapter by Denise Varney, where climate change guardians dressed as angels create a dramatic spectacle dissolving boundaries between nature and humans and even between genders. Similarly, Peta Tait brings to the fore the issues of indigenous women's concerns through photography reflected in a postmodern interpretation. Thus, we witness the role of ecofeminist protest and resistance through art and representation.

Another common theme, despite the different authors and extensive time-period covered, is the exploration of the uneasy relationship between deep ecology and the anthropocentrism of ecofeminism, as reflected in the chapters by Ariel Salleh and Freya Mathews. Both authors are critical of deep ecology because issues of social justice cannot be separated from environmental concerns and Salleh is categorical that no progress on an ecological front can be made without acknowledgment of women's exploitation at the hands of men.

A central theme in the book is the cause of Australia's and New Zealand's indigenous women, which can be seen in the ecofeminist struggle that ties in with racism, capitalism, and colonialism. An anti-colonial ecofeminism is visible in different chapters; Lara Stevens interprets celebrated white feminist Germaine Greer as a pioneering ecofeminist deeply inspired by the ecofeminist perspective of native women; Anne Elvey shows how feminist theology needs to be guided by the ecofeminist concerns of the native women of NZ and Australia. Similarly, in the chapter by Ambelin Kwaymullina we see a postcolonial critique of the complicity of white western women in the oppression of indigenous women, while Deborah Bird Rose shows how indigenous women continue to be marginalized even in contemporary reforms and rights that are supposed to benefit indigenous populations in Australia.

Vintage ecofeminist activism of the 1980s is showcased in the chapter by Alison Bartlett depicting the anti-nuclear actions of women in Australia and the UK. Similarly, Emma Shortis brings to light the critical role played by women in ensuring an international mining ban in Antarctica.

The book emphasizes the "glocal" with a geographical location of Australia and New Zealand. This is a good region to represent ecofeminism because, while it represents advanced capitalism, it has also seen considerable resistance to mining, industrialism, colonialism, environmental degradation, and the consequent marginalization and exploitation of an indigenous community and its ecocentric values and knowledge. Ecofeminism as a way of life, a force of resistance, and an alternate model to the dominant patriarchal-capitalist-neo-colonial model has been

sustained in the region through indigenous women's knowledge as well as by academics and theory at universities. Maryse Helbert devotes her chapter to exposing the link between patriarchy, capitalism, and the exploitation of women and nature by using the mining industry in Australia as a case study.

The only lacuna in the book is that it could perhaps have further enriched itself by covering exciting new developments in the field by looking at formerly colonized women in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, who are largely subsistence farmers and practicing ecofeminists and have gone rather unrepresented in this volume. And yet, it does showcase the need to adopt the endangered yet guiding beacon of the ecofeminist way of life of indigenous populations at a time when the overarching global cause of planetary survival requires urgent attention.

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