

NAGY Szilvia

Interconnected Relations in Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a union of the radical ecology movement and feminism. It is both a social and a spiritual movement recognising a common threat in the oppression of women, of nature and of every “other” than the dominant culture. This is a movement valuing differences and searching for the hidden female values and natural values to enrich and transform our traditional concept of the world. However, this movement does not want to be a women’s group with certain interests concerning the moon and the greens but wants to open the door for the fullness of life. This open door means knowing, valuing and supporting the other, seeking to understand the interconnected roots of all domination, as well as ways to resist and change.

History from Symbols to Wholeness

The word ‘eco-’ emerges from the biological science of natural environmental systems. Ecology was born as a combined socio-economic and biological study in the late sixties. Its main aim was to examine how the human use of nature causes pollution of soil, air and water. It also considered the destruction of the natural systems of plants and animals, threatening the basis of life on which humanity itself depends and how we can stop these progresses and create a sustainable relationship between humanity and nature.

Ecofeminism takes the above mentioned studies and efforts one step further. Ecofeminism examines the symbolic, psychological and ethical connections of domination and monopolisation of natural and human resources

NAGY Szilvia is an ecumenical theologian from Hungary, a member of KÖD (Magyar SCM). She is a graduate of the Evangelical-Lutheran Faculty of Theology (Budapest) and the Bossey Ecumenical Institute (Switzerland). Currently she is writing her PhD on ecumenical and interreligious liturgies. She is a member of the Executive Committee of the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE).

and controlling power. Analysing patterns of human relations with nature, ecofeminism envisions and creates a life-affirming culture. As Judith PLANT sums up: "Ecology speaks for the Earth, for the 'other' in human–environmental relationships; feminism speaks for the 'other' in female–male relations."¹

Even if it seems that ecofeminism is too young to have its own history, we will find that it is already in its third stage. Ecofeminism was started mostly by white European women. The term was coined by Francoise D'EAUBONNE in 1974. Rosemary RADFORD RUETHER authored the first ecofeminist book, *New Woman / New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (1975). At this time women in Europe became aware of the special relationship and interconnectedness of women and nature and they emphasized their symbolic connections and their commonalities as life-support systems and nurturing beings. The aim was to reclaim a spiritual relationship with the Earth and to celebrate this emotional connection.

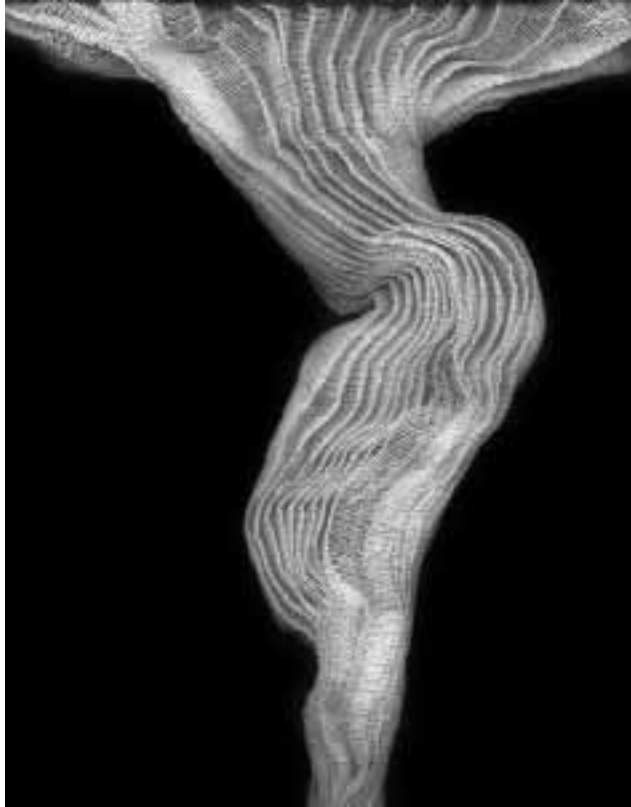
The involvement of Southern women characterized the second period. They enriched the special relationship between women and the Earth with their own experiences of colonialism and of Western enlightenment with its outside forces influencing their cultural development. Women and nature as degraded, dominated and devalued by Western civilisation became a new issue for ecofeminism to deal with. Similarly, the pursuit of stronger involvement in environmental and social movements and actions grew in importance as well.

The third period is the age of seeking and fighting for wholeness and balance. Ecofeminists believe in the interconnectedness of all forms of life and in the fact that all forms of oppression affect all of us. All life is sacred and to respect it we need to make changes to the rules of the society and also modify its structures and processes. The given structures and processes determine a system of oppression. Therefore, the first task of ecofeminism is to give an example of how to listen to each other and to the whole diversity of the living creatures and how to respect and involve them into the everyday concerns and businesses.

Being Yin and Yang in a Structurally Yang Society

Analysing the process of how our society works, we realise that the understanding of the male principle has changed from a productive and caring nature into a wild, aggressive, fighting and instinctive one. In contrast the female principle shifted from a reproductive and nurturing nature to a powerless, asexual, homely, and ceremonial one.

¹ Quoted by FORSEY Helen, *Feminism and Ecology: a Matter of Survival*.
<http://www.life.ca/nl/57/ecofem.html>



Due to these developments, certain changes happened first in the visions and worldviews of the society, then in the ways of structuring the relationships between culture and nature, technicalized knowledge and intuition, women and men. Instead of a balance of yin (female) and yang (male) roles and values, the yang principle gains dominance in almost every field of life. Instead of an effort to find agreement and to work together we find hierarchical systems and an expected fulfilment of rules and commandments. Instead of accepting responsibility and considering the foreseeable consequences, we find aggressive selfishness and mercantilism. Instead of cooperation, we find high value placed on the mentality of risk and profit.

Instead of striving for an approach of synthesis, we encounter analytical and conquering argumentation.

The main danger embedded in the above-mentioned attitudes is that we stop valuing the yin character of ourselves (the messages of our own senses), and at the end we misjudge reality and lose diversity. The trend today is to replace natural reality and personal consideration with the media. Virtual visions and value systems are imposed upon us from outside. Social groups are formed not on the basis of their common and inherited culture but on the basis of their wealth and position. Quick cultural and biological homogenisation destroys necessary diversity of life and ruins the genetic system as well. It is not our calling to be a hypnotised medium of political games and a consumer of economic interests.

Breaking the rules of the community for personal advances happened in ancient times but has never become a commonly used and accepted ethical rule. In this recent crisis only a radically ecofeminine society, a new balanced matriatriarchalism, can offer a human solution.

Life-Producing Matrix

Ecofeminism came into being in the early 1970s when women of the West became disillusioned with the ideologies of the day. The environmental movement lacked a feminist angle. Moreover, feminism had little concern for nature

Ecofeminism is in contrast with historical feminism because of the way that historical feminism supports women's rights and women's personality in an oftentimes overly assertive way—valuing the yin to such an extreme that the yang became completely displaced. Historical feminism was busy with taking revenge on masculinism – whose meaning, content and appearance was defined and circumscribed by feminist activists – and was hurt deeply enough to think and work for the balance of yin and yang in culture and society. However this effort strengthened our society's masculinity and left femininity without representation and advocacy. The consequence of victorious feminism is that the six billion humans of the Earth live and fight as men

While society placed entirely upon women the responsibility of finding and defining their place within society and culture, ecofeminism sought a liberating alternative. Ecofeminism rejected this paradigm which defines itself by opposing the feminine aspects.

One element is to reshape the society's dualistic concept of reality, which divides and separates into two distinct sides. The pattern of female-male, race and class, culture and nature must be socially reconstructed. Work and the fruits of work must be shared equitably, rather than one side of the

relation being the subjugated and impoverished basis for the power and wealth of the other. In terms of female-male relations, this does not mean an enlarged space for women in public affairs. Instead, it requires a conversion of men – accepting an equal share in the traditionally gender-prescribed tasks such as child-care and household maintenance.

A revolution of incorporating female roles into areas of life traditionally dominated by men presupposes an equivalent revolution in the realm of male roles. Without this, the basic pattern of patriarchal exploitation of women is left untouched. Women are simply overworked, just in a new way. They are expected to accept both a male work day (for lower salary) and the traditionally-female (unpaid) home-based work.

Recognising our utter dependence on the great life-producing matrix of the planet is the first step to learn to reintegrate our human systems of production, consumption and waste into the ecological patterns by which nature sustains the mechanism of life. There needs to be more focus on men's relationship with nature. This might begin by revisualising the relation of mind, or human intelligence, to nature. Mind or consciousness is the place where nature herself becomes conscious. We need to think about human consciousness as a gift enabling us to learn to harmonise our needs with the natural system around—the natural system of which we are a dependent part.

In the first place, it is important for both genders to practice listening and dialogue actively and daily. The second step would be to acquire more knowledge about issues concerning women, to value and involve the female principle of nurturing and caring, and to gain organising skills to make changes in communities of regional, national and international character.

The current flight from mortality is a flight from the disintegration part of the life cycle, from accepting ourselves as part of the natural process. By pretending that we can immortalise ourselves, souls and bodies, we are immortalising our rubbish and we are polluting the Earth. In order to learn to recycle our rubbish as a fertiliser for new life, as matter for new artefacts, we need to accept our selfhood as participating in the same process.

Finally, an ecofeminist culture must reshape our basic sense of the self in relation to the life cycle and lead us to the experience of being “woven into an embodied, all-embracing web of life”². The willingness to exploit the environment without reciprocity must be reconsidered. Taking into consideration the nurturing behaviour of women seems to be a vital basis for the acknowledgement of the dignity of creation.

² SHIWY Marlene A. – ROSEN Steven M., *Spinning the Web of Life: Feminism, Ecology, and Christa Wolf*.
<http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/content/v7.1/schiwy-rosen.html>

This conversion from alienated, hierarchical dualism to life-sustaining mutuality will radically change the old patterns of our culture. But these explorations of change must be matched with a new social practice generated by an environmental ethic that can incarnate these conversions in new social and technological ways of organising human life, and in creative forms of being, relating and perceiving each other and nature.

How does Ecofeminism Go with Christianity?

Ecofeminism is infused with a deep affinity for the non-linear, non-rational, emotional realm. Alternative spiritualities, especially paganism, women's spirituality, shamanism, and New Age rituals which have strong focus on oneness with nature are very popular with ecofeminists. Christian ecofeminism has its own answer for these Earth-based spiritual needs, discovering its own special and powerful ecofeminist emphasis in Christianity.

Christian ecofeminists envision the world according to the Trinitarian structure. The Trinitarian structure means a continuous process of creation and destruction generated by the single vital process coming from the interaction between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The fellowship of the three persons of the Trinity constitutes the entire cosmos and all life forms. This reality shows the value of multiplicity and unity, of a constant flow of vitality and motion, of the differences between all things as well as their interdependence. The Trinity lives in an I–Thou relationship which provides an example of how to accept, respect and care for the multiplicity of each other and of nature, various faces and oneness in createdness and interconnectedness.

In ecofeminist spirituality God is the immanent source of life that sustains the whole planetary community. God is neither male nor anthropomorphic but incorporates both yin and yang. In ecofeminist culture and ethics, mutual inter-dependency replaces the hierarchy of domination as the model of relationship between women and men, between human groups, and between humans and other beings.

There must be a conversion of both men and women, accepting their share in work, along with the conversion of their consciousness to the Earth. Such conversions can reshape the symbolic vision of salvation. Instead of salvation sought either in the disembodied soul or the immortalised body, in a flight to heaven or to the end of history, salvation would be seen as a continual conversion to the centre, to the concrete basis through which we sustain our relationship with nature, and with one another.

Ecofeminism suggests putting aside paradigms in which both Earth and women, as well as powerless people, can be exploited. Instead of these,

ecofeminist ethics offers a new paradigm where the Earth and all life are to be seen as sacred. Nature is to show invisible revelation in visible things.

Nature shows God's sense of beauty. The Earth is imagined as the body of God, which leads us beyond the horizon to meet God the Creator. God is sensuous; creation is the expression of divine imagination. So far the Earth and all life were not questioned as being God's property, but now they are seen as bodily expressions (as incarnations) of the Spirit. This means that neither the Earth nor human beings can be possessed, exploited or owned.

Final Words by the Choir of Angels

"To make free choice of vice or virtue,
 A proud ideal for man to bear
 And still to know that God above us
 Extends God's shield with tender care.
 Take courage then, expect derision,
 Ignore the masses' howl of scorn,
 'Tis not for their thanks that you labour,
 When honour is of great deeds born,
 All other action would be shameful;
 It is the knowledge of his shame
 That pins against the earth the wretched
 But raises high the hero's name.
 However your road may lead upward,
 Do not be dazzled by thought
 That God is honoured by your efforts,
 God's Glory is honoured with your prowess bought,
 Or that in some way God depended
 On you to carry through God's scheme:
 Think rather that God does you honour
 Allowing you to act for God."³

³MADÁCH Imre, *The Tragedy of Man*. Gyomaendrőd, 1988.

Suggested Reading

FORSEY Helen, *Feminism and Ecology a Matter of Survival*.

<http://www.life.ca/nl/57/ecofem.html>

JOHNSON Scott, *Ecofeminism*. <http://www.csuchico.edu/jour/catbytes/f99/fem/fem.html>

PLUMWOOD Val, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London – New York, 1997.

RADFORD RUETHER Rosemary, *Ecofeminism*.

<http://www.spunk.org/library/pubs/openeye/sp000943.txt>

SHIWIY Marlene A. – ROSEN Steven M., *Spinning the Web of Life: Feminism, Ecology, and*

Christa Wolf. In.: <http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/content/v7.1/schiwy-rosen.html>

WARREN Karen J., *What is Ecofeminism*.

<http://www2.pfeiffer.edu/~ilridener/courses/ecowarrn.html>

Women's Environmental Leadership and Legacy (Well), *Ecofeminism*.

<http://www.chatham.edu/rci/well/history/feminism.html>

ZÁGONI Miklós, *Feminizmus és ökológia* [Feminism and Ecology]. Esély 2001/4.

<http://hps.elte.hu/~zagoni/esely.htm>



NAGY Szilvia: Kölcsönös egymásrautaltság az ökofeminizmusban

Az ökofeminizmus föllismerve a nő, a természet és minden, az uralkodó kultúrához képest “más” elnyomásának szoros összefüggéseit, egyesítette magában a radikális ökológiai mozgalom és a feminizmus alapelveit. Ihletet merített mindkettőből, ugyanakkor át is alakította azokat. Míg a történeti feminizmus a nő személyiséghez való jogának támogatásával csak tovább erősítette társadalmunk férfias jellegét, addig az új ökofeminizmus kutat, küzd a teljesség és az egyensúly megteremtéséért. A már kialakult és válságos helyzet gyökereit nyomozza, és kutatja azon lehetőségeket, amelyek segítségével az ember és környezete, illetve a férfiség és nőiség harmonikusan és egymást támogatva élhet együtt. Ennek lényeges eleme, hogy átfőmáljuk a valóságról alkotott dualisztikus fogalmainkat, ezekben ugyanis élesen elkülönül az anyag és a szellem, a természet és a kultúra, a nő és a férfi. Az emberi öntudat voltaképpen ajándék, melynek révén megtanulhatjuk, hogyan hozzuk összhangba igényeinket és szükségleteinket a természettel. Semmi sincs önmagában, csak kölcsönös függőségben. Érdemes hát ráébrednünk arra, hogy a teremtés méltóságának elismerése elsőként is önmagunk mint a természet ajándékainak, sokszínűségének és ellentéteinek hordozójának mélyebb megértésében következik be. A keresztyén ökofeminizmusról szólva megidéződik egy olyan világ, amelynek szerkezete a Szentháromságé: a háromszemélyű, isteni közösség a maga kölcsönös egymásrautaltságában és egymásért élésében.



NAGY Szilvia: Polczenie relacji w ekofeminizmie

Ekofeminizm dostrzegając wspólne zagrożenie w uciskaniu kobiet, przyrody oraz wszystkiego, co “inne” od obowiązującej kultury, jest połączeniem radykalnych ruchów ekologicznych i feminizmu; czerpie z obu, ale jednocześnie oba przekształca. Historycznie feminizm wspierając prawa kobiet umacniał męskość naszego społeczeństwa; współczesny ekofeminizm natomiast poszukuje i walczy o całość i równowagę. Stara się wysledzić korzenie ostatniej krytycznej sytuacji i zbadać drogi prowadzące z powrotem do równowagi. Jednym z jego elementów jest przekształcenie naszej dualistycznej koncepcji rzeczywistości jako rozdzwienku między bezduszną materią a transcendentną męską świadomością. Musimy myśleć o świadomości człowieka jak o darze umożliwiającym nam rozpoznanie jak zharmonizować nasze potrzeby z przyrodą. Pod uwagę trzeba wziąć współzależność i rozpoznanie samego siebie w relacji do cyklu życiowego jak np. matkujące zachowanie kobiety jako podstawa do uznania godności stworzenia. Ekofeminisci – Chrześcijanie widzą świat według struktury trynitarnej, jako braterstwo trzech osób Trójcy z wzajemną współzależnością zastępującą hierarchię dominacji.

NAGY Szilvia: Prepojenie vzťahov v ekofeminizme

Eko-feminizmus, uvedomujúc si nebezpečenstvo útlaku ženy, prírody a všetkého „iného“ než dominantnej kultúry, je spojením radikálneho ekologického hnutia a feminizmu. Podnety čerpá z oboch týchto zdrojov, ktoré ale pretvára. Zatiaľ čo tradičný feminizmus vo svojej podpore práv žien skôr posilnil maskulinitu v našej spoločnosti, ekofeminizmus sa snaží o nájdenie a presadenie celistvosti a rovnováhy. Pokúša sa lokalizovať korene súčasnej krízy a najsť spôsoby vedúce späť k rovnováhe. Jednou z ciest je premena dualistického konceptu skutočnosti s jej rozdelením na bezduchú matériu a transcendentné mužské vedomie. Musíme sa naučiť chápať toto vedomie ako dar, ktorý nám umožňuje harmonizovať naše potreby s prírodou. Je treba uvedomiť si vzájomnú závislosť a základné hodnoty človeka vo vzťahu k životným cyklom. Čo sa týka kresťanského eko-feminizmu, je vhodné spomenúť jeho pohľad na svet cez prizmu Trojice – vzťah troch osôb Trojice vo vzájomnej závislosti, ktorá nahradzuje hierarchiu a dominanciu.

NAGY Szilvia: Zusammenhänge im Ökofeminismus

Ökofeminismus ist eine Verknüpfung der radikalen Ökobewegung und Feminismus. Der Berührungspunkt hierbei ist die Bedrohung nicht nur durch die Unterdrückung der Frauen sondern auch der Natur und allem anderen, dass von der vorherrschenden Kultur abweicht, wobei die Ziele beider Bewegungen aufgenommen und dann der anderen angepasst werden. Im Unterschied zum klassischen Feminismus, der vor allem die Rechte der Frauen und die Persönlichkeitsentwicklung in unserer von Männer geprägten Welt fördert, legt der Ökofeminismus besonderen Wert auf Einheit und Ausgeglichenheit. Es wird versucht die Ursache der momentanten kritischen Situations zu finden und dann einen Weg zurück zur Balance zu finden. Eine Möglichkeit ist unsere dualistische Sichtweise der Realität (seelenlose Materie auf der einen Seite und transzedentes männliches Bewusstsein auf der anderen) zu überdenken. Wir sollten das menschliche Bewusstsein als ein Geschenk ansehen, dass es uns ermöglicht zu lernen wie wir unsere Bedürfnisse in Einklang mit der Natur bringen können. Unabhängigkeit und das Wissen, welchen Platz im Kreis des Lebens man einnimmt, müssen in Betracht gezogen werden. Dies geschieht z.B. durch den Mutterinstinkt einer Frau, der die Grossartigkeit der Schöpfung preist. Auf den christlichen Ökofeminismus bezogen heisst das, dass die Vision der Welt im Einklang mit der Trinitätsvorstellung steht. Die Trinität wird als Gemeinschaft von drei Personen angesehen, in der eine gegenseitige Abhängigkeit die Hierarchie der Glaubensbekenntnisse ersetzt.