

## **Ecofeminism: Personal Reflections**

I'm extremely hesitant to write anything on this topic, yet Australian biocentric/ecocentric friends asked for a possible contribution on "ecofeminism and women in the green movement". Recently, Joe Cummins, who is a Canadian academic activist and consumed by a passion against biotechnology, distributed a droll, "Hitchhikers Guide to the Environment Movement". Arguing that environmentalism was once "simple" to define, because authorities used this term negatively, Cummins says today "Environmentalism has many schisms requiring a guide for the unwary". His comment about ecofeminism was a simple "I am not a member of the sex allowed to discuss the movement". I share such sentiment.

This seems ridiculous, given that I discuss with my partner Helga and she shapes everything that I write; that I consider myself a supporter of feminist values; work with women activists; believe that a shared basic ecophilosophy is necessary – as well as involvement in practical work; and I am not aware that, in the movement literature, there has been any male exclusionary principle articulated.

My partner, as a woman, feels excluded from the debate unless she endorses ecofeminism. Ecofeminism often uses ecology as a "cover" to fight for feminist values, which are in themselves legitimate, but in the process, ecology is used as a front.

There is one other arena of discussion where I also have had hesitations to participate, although feeling it necessary to give views. That is in the growing relationship between indigenous peoples and the rest of us, in the environmental and green movements in Canada. For example, at a conference on the destruction of the boreal forests in northern Sweden, which I attended (September/October 1992) as part of a Canadian delegation (four women, two indigenous males, and me), a resolution asking for the support of the conference for the Algonquin of Barriere Lake (northern Quebec), in a particular struggle was put forth. While I supported the resolution, I did not agree with the implicit support in the resolution for the concept of "sustainable development", or the use of the term "resources", which implies a human-centered view of nature. With some misgivings, I raised these objections, which after some limited discussion, were not taken into account. Also, in preparing with another organization a composite picture of forestry in Nova Scotia for the Swedish conference, I was asked by the leader of the Canadian delegation to delete a position opposing commercial trapping and hunting, because this would be seen as offensive to indigenous people. We are ultimately all people of the Earth, even though clearly some indigenous people have a closer connection. But in developing the necessary coalition of forces to reorient the human path, we must have an atmosphere which encourages critical discussion about real problems, whether between women and men, or between indigenous and non-indigenous people in the environmental and green movements.

In June of 1989, Helga and I gave a paper Green Marginality in Canada, at a Learned Societies' Conference session on "The Red-Green Movement in Canada". There was a short section on ecofeminism where we noted:

In Canada, women are economically, sexually and culturally oppressed. We are committed to the position that 'A new, non-exploitive and sustainable, relationship with

the natural world needs an accompanying social world where the oppression of women has been eliminated, and women participate on the basis of equality in every sphere of social life.’

We also stated that we saw ecofeminism as coming out of a human-centered social ecology perspective. Today, we would not agree with the position of Robyn Eckersley in her 1992 book, Environmentalism and Political Theory: Toward an Ecocentric Approach, that ecofeminism is a “variety” of ecocentrism. For us, the fundamental critique of ecofeminism remains its human-centeredness; its exclusiveness and hence splitting character; and its inability to agree on the definition of what is being discussed. Philosophical discussion must lead to moving forward practically. Patriarchy is very real, but let’s try to sort it out within the deep ecology approach, where at least we have a provisional basis of ecophilosophical unity.

This article is being submitted to the Australian movement publication, formerly called The Deep Ecologist, for consideration of publication.

David Orton, December 6, 1992

---

**To obtain any of the Green Web publications, write to us at:  
Green Web, R.R. #3, Saltsprings, Nova Scotia, Canada, BOK 1PO  
E-mail us at: [greenweb@tncwireless.ca](mailto:greenweb@tncwireless.ca)**

---

**[Back to  
The Green Web  
A Taste of Green Web Writings and Left Biocentrism](#)**

---

<http://home.ca.inter.net/~greenweb/Ecofeminism.pdf>

Last updated: September 10, 2012