

## Rachel Carson Died of Breast Cancer: The Coming of Age of Feminist Environmentalism

**F**eminist environmentalism is shifting paradigms in public health, political economy, philosophy, science, and ecology. Feminist environmental theory and women's on-the-ground ecoactivism are challenging and transforming approaches to a breathtakingly wide range of issues, from animal rights to the environmental economy of illness and well-being, from exposing and theorizing complex processes such as global ecopiracy to interrogating the distortive privileging of "science" as an arbiter of the state of the environment. Feminist environmentalism is hot, and getting hotter.

But this may be news to most people outside the field. The one thing people typically seem to know about feminist environmentalism is that it involves something called *ecofeminism*, which they vaguely associate with spirituality and earth-loving women. From the outside looking in, feminist environmentalism can look like a large tent occupied by an elephant almost as large. Even from the inside it can look that way too. It is impossible to do work under the rubric of feminist environmentalism, or even to talk about it, without first explaining or positioning oneself in reference to ecofeminism.

### Ecofeminism

Among scholars and activists closest to the project there is little agreement on what ecofeminism is or what its relationship is to the (presumptively) broader endeavor of feminist environmentalism. Browsing the literature we find *ecofeminism* variously described as a political stance, a take-it-to-the-streets movement, a feminist spiritual affirmation, an inspirational wellspring for women's activism, a retrieval of womanist earth wisdom, a feminist theory, an applied scholarship, a feminist rebellion within radical environmentalism (Sturgeon 1997, 31), an oppositional positionality, a praxis, and a remapping of women's relationship to place and ecology.

Despite a long trail of ecofeminist footprints on the U.S. activist and

academic landscape—almost three decades’ worth, depending on where you put the head-of-the-trail marker—there is still little agreement on what it is, what its import is, and what its future is. As Noël Sturgeon (1997) wryly remarks, a concept that is invoked to “usefully if partially describe the work of Donna Haraway *and* Mary Daly, Alice Walker *and* Rachel Carson, Starhawk *and* Vandana Shiva . . . is a shifting theoretical and political location that can be defined to serve various intentions” (24; emphasis mine).

Despite this plasticity, the very term *ecofeminism* typically invokes strong reactions—and generally precipitates a rush to “for” or “against” camp making. There are three touchstone issues that separate ecofeminism-embracers from ecofeminism-distancers: the prominent association of ecofeminist thought with womanist spirituality, the (putative) essentialism of the ecofeminist affirmation of a meaningful nature-woman connection, and the old gown/town split between the presumptive sophistication of theory building and the presumptively atheoretical naïveté of social movement and activist practices.

Debates around these issues were once fresh and exciting. Indeed, what we might consider to be protoecofeminist insights played a more significant role than is often acknowledged in shaping the overall development of second-wave feminism in the United States. Second-wave feminists cut their political teeth on debates over the “unnatural divorce of spirituality and politics” (see, e.g., Bunch 1976; Iglehart 1978) and over fierce dissections of the existence and meaning of “female/male, nature/culture” dualisms (Ortner 1974). Feminist environmental issues, often refracted through the lens of peace issues, anchored the 1970s radical feminist debates on separatism, identity, and women’s activism that, in the United States, swirled around key figures such as Mary Daly, Susan Griffin, and Ellen Willis (see Daly 1978; Griffin 1978).

As conceptualized by ecofeminist pioneers such as Ynestra King, ecological feminism held promise as a bridge across the analytical divide between radical cultural and socialist feminism. King identified ecofeminism as a “third direction,” neither severing the connection between woman and nature (as socialist feminists would have it) nor reinforcing it (as many cultural feminists did): “the liberation of women is to be found neither in severing all connections that root us in nature nor in believing ourselves to be more natural than men” (1981, 15). Early articulations of the intersectional and interdependent oppressions of ecology, race, sex, and class (e.g., Reuther 1975) pointed to a path that transcended the dichotomous rendition of the human/nature relationship, the classic subject/object

split at the heart of Western philosophical inquiry. By the late 1970s, then, ecofeminism was on a roll, full of promise and intellectual excitement.

The first discernibly coherent feminist environmentalism emerged in the United States through these broader feminist debates and explorations. In tandem with antimilitarist movements and a then-nascent environmental movement, feminist environmentalism emerged as a fusion of powerful analytical and paradigmatic challenges and activist energies.<sup>1</sup> Environmentalists provided baseline insights into the interdependence of human life and planet life and offered a systems analysis of the ways ecological destruction cascaded through intertwined social and ecological webs. Feminists honed these understandings with analyses of the ways the construction of social power, in its ineluctably gendered dimensions, produced those conditions of ecological threat.

Thus, by the early 1980s, feminists were considering whether nuclear power and strip mining might be “women’s issues.” Feminists stretched extant analyses of the exercise of patriarchal and capitalist power to accommodate an interrogation of the deployment of violent life-threatening and planet-threatening technologies and modalities. The “Unity Statement” for the Women and Life on Earth Conference held in Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1980 (an event widely acknowledged as germinal in the emergence of U.S. ecofeminism) reads in part:

We are women who have come together to act on a common hope in a fearful time. We enter the eighties with alarm for the future of our planet. The forces that control our society threaten our very existence with nuclear weapons and power plants, toxic wastes and genetic engineering. A society and world economy organized for the profit of a small number of white men has created the conditions for wide-spread unemployment, violence at home and in the streets, oppression of third world peoples, racist attacks, inadequate food, housing and health care, and finally, the ecological devastation of the earth. We see connections between the exploitation and brutalization of the earth and her people and the physical, economic and psychological violence that women face every day. We want to understand and try to overcome the historical divisions of race, poverty, class, age and sexual preference that have kept women apart and politically powerless. Our concerns are many, but understanding

<sup>1</sup> One of the most comprehensive overviews of the emergence of ecofeminism in the United States is Sturgeon 1997.

the problems that confront us helps us imagine how we would like to live. (Women and Life on Earth 1979)

These were heady analytical and movement convergences. But even as ecofeminism emerged, it was already coming apart at the seams.

For many women, the eco-focused feminism emerging in the 1980s was necessarily rooted in a reawakening of earth honoring and earth caring, involving a rehabilitation of nature-centered traditions and invoking anew the salience of earth goddess, women-wise spirituality. For these women, the central project of what they called ecofeminism was reclaiming the sacred and celebrating women's nurturing—and special—relationship with earth forces and life forces. Ecofeminism put spirituality, earth goddesses, nature/culture identities, and debates about essentialism, antiessentialism, and maternalism on the feminist front burner.

As this school of thought emerged under the rubric of ecofeminism, a peculiar elision occurred. Inexplicably, even as the association of *ecofeminism* with a spirituality-inclined school of thought became more fixed, that word also remained in circulation as a term to refer indiscriminately to all manner of feminist environmentalisms. The word *ecofeminism* thus became a dual signifier, both meaning the specific spiritually centered school of environmental thought and also being used as a generic term for all feminist environmentalisms.

This meant that by the late 1980s, *ecofeminism* had become a fighting word. For every woman who reveled in the association of ecofeminism with earth goddesses, there was one who winced. Many women rejected ecofeminism, particularly academics in the social and biological sciences whose engagement with environmentalism was forged in a rationalist tradition, and who feared that talk of goddesses and life forces would undermine their hard-won but precarious professional credibility. For many political feminists, *ecofeminism* was a word to define *against*; the spiritual side of ecofeminism was derided as mystical bunk, dangerously apolitical and atheoretical. In 1993, Carol Adams calmly assessed the divide in this way: “There has been no one perspective on the place of spirituality in ecofeminism. . . . For some, the spiritual aspect of ecofeminism is integrally a part of their ecofeminism. For others spirituality is thought to derail the ecofeminist engagement with social conditions and political decisions that tolerate environmental exploitation, encourage unbridled consumerism, and fail to rein in military spending” (4).

The contributions of ecofeminism to feminist environmentalism are myriad, and ecofeminism itself is clearly an enduring part of the feminist environmental mix. Spiritual engagement with the fate of the planet brings

many women to the environmental table—and to the environmental barricades. Contemplation and contestation of the issues provoked by ecofeminism have produced a robust and challenging literature: on anthropomorphism, on the “sex-typing” of the planet, on encounters between feminism and deep ecology, on the nature of nature. The philosophy of ecofeminism is a well-developed field (see, e.g., Plumwood 1993; Salleh 1997; Warren 1997, 2000). Ecofeminist interrogations of spirituality, essentialism, and nature have generated smart, sharp, often witty feminist environmental writing, including now classics such as Sharon Doubiago’s rant at deep ecologists, “Mama Coyote Talks to the Boys” (1989), and Yaakov Garb’s (1990) provocative deconstruction of space images of the whole earth as “pornographic.” The ferocious back and forth between ecofeminist “factions,” and between feminists and deep ecologists, much of it waged in the pages of *Environmental Ethics*, was compelling reading—even juicy, in a mild academic way—throughout the late 1980s and mid-1990s.

But feminist internecine debates about ecofeminism also have been downright nasty, and many women have been deeply wounded by the exchange. The debates have also become inward turning (debating the debate as much as anything else) and, in my view, counterproductive to the larger enterprise of putting and keeping environmentalism on the feminist agenda and feminism on the environmental agenda. Feminist environmentalism has become bogged down in tiresome “pro-/anti-ecofeminist” reprises: Is the earth our mother? Are women closer to nature than men? Should they be? Should we decry the cultural association of women with earthy nature as a patriarchal contrivance or celebrate it as a privileged positionality? Is ecofeminism even feminist (or is it a complicity with the patriarchy that would inexorably bind women to nature, to the disadvantage of both)? Is the disparagement of ecofeminism by (many) academics reductive elitism (and a complicity with the patriarchal appeal to masculinist reason that would separate women from a meaningful relationship with their sacred earth origins)? We have interrogated these questions to the point of exhaustion, and well past the point of diminishing intellectual and political returns.

#### **Beyond ecofeminist debates: Commonalities and agendas**

In 1997, Noël Sturgeon argued that despite the travails, the term *ecofeminism* retained salience, especially as understood within the larger feminist project of “naming”: “Why ecofeminism? Why not just call the feminist analysis of the interaction between sexism and environmental problems

‘feminism’? I believe that ‘ecofeminism’ as a term indicates a double political intervention, of environmentalism into feminism and feminism into environmentalism, that is as politically important as the designations ‘socialist feminism’ and ‘Black feminism’ were previously. Perhaps it is a name that will only be transiently useful within our history; but the stakes in such a politics of naming are deeply embedded in a long tradition within the development of U.S. feminism” (169).

I think Sturgeon was right—then. But I now detect the end of the useful era of transience. Feminist environmentalism is a mature enough field to move beyond the ecofeminist debates. It needs to. A substantial agenda—which in this new world order is infused with a certain sense of urgency—commands the attention of feminist environmentalism.

Moving beyond the ecofeminist debates, we find that most feminists who pursue scholarship and activist work on the environment—whether from “ecofeminist” positions or not—share common interests, among them a commitment to illuminating the ways in which gender, class, and race mediate people’s lived experiences in local environments; an interest in examining the ways in which human-environment perceptions and values may be mediated through “gendered” lenses and shaped by gender roles and assumptions; an interest in examining the gendered nature of the constellation of political, economic, and ecological power in institutions that are instrumental players in the state of the environment; and an interest in exploring the interconnectedness of systems of oppression and domination. The best of the recent feminist environmental scholarship engages with and extends transnational, postcolonial, and poststructuralist deconstructions and challenges.

### **Animal rights and feminist environmentalism**

Animal rights, for example. Feminist work on animal rights builds on the foundational ecofeminist effort to understand linkages between environmental oppressions on the one hand (such as speciesist hierarchies, or the hierarchy of value established through the commodification of nature), and human social oppressions of many kinds (such as those based on class, or race, gender, and sexuality classifications; or judgments of “value” attributed to physical ability) on the other. At the same time, the serious contemplation of animal rights makes a considerable contribution to destabilizing identity categories and adds a new dimension to theorizing the mutability of identity.

Feminist environmental scholarship and grassroots activism on animals pivot around three concerns: elucidating the commonalities in

structures of oppressions across gender, race, class, and species; developing feminist-informed theories of animal rights; and exposing the gendered assumptions and perceptions that underlie human treatment of nonhuman animals.

Like nineteenth-century racial and gender taxonomies that were constructed and then frantically repatched to keep pace with contravening evidence and with shifts in social and economic realities, efforts to fix a firm line between “us” (humans) and “them” (animals) are similarly becoming increasingly frenetic as the old standard-bearers of asserted human/animal difference topple. For example, the insistence that animals do not feel pain—until very recently the central subterfuge of vivisectionists and other animal experimenters—has been all but abandoned in the face of overwhelming contrary evidence. In response, the contested terrains have been shifted away from a simple “pain”-threshold test of animal rights to arguments about whether animals have consciousness or social awareness, whether they feel or express abstract emotions, can feel loss and deprivation, and the extent to which they demonstrate cognitive skills, curiosity, and problem-solving capacity, whether their behavior is motivated more by “instinct” or “intelligence.” (Not unimportantly, this last debate is taking place even while the measurement and very concept of human “intelligence” itself are increasingly called into question.)

The myriad specific justifications for the oppression, enslavement, and exploitation of animals (which is occurring on a massive scale) are all rooted in dual assertions: of significant human/animal difference, and of the putatively scientifically provable “lesser” intellectual (or even emotional) capacities of animals. These are aching close reprises of the conceptual bases for racial, sexual, and gender hierarchies. Echoing through the debates about animals are unmistakable invocations of familiar racist and sexist ideologies about “natural affinities,” categories authorized by nature, destinies inscribed in biology, and “scientific proofs” of the limited capacities of the “other” that have rumbled through the centuries to justify slavery, the oppression of women, and ethnically and racially based holocausts and genocides. Two early feminist works remain unsurpassed trenchant analyses of these parallels: Marjorie Spiegel’s comparison between animal and human slavery, *The Dreaded Comparison* (1988), and Carol Adams’s treatise on the *Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990). A newer work by geographers Glen Elder, Jennifer Wolch, and Jody Emel (1998) adds an important postcolonial and place-sensitive analysis of the ways in which animal-human relations are used in the representational politics of cultural difference and in the production of notions of hierarchies of “civilized” societies (the contrast drawn, e.g., between “savages” who

ritually sacrifice animals vs. “civilized” societies that kill animals, but in a more modern industrialized way).

Out of struggles against the artifices of race, gender, and sex categories, feminists have developed sharp analyses of the distortions of binary dualisms and of the falsity of “science-based” identity categories. Furthermore, feminists have been in the forefront in exposing the sham of “universal” social hierarchies that are patently driven by culture-, gender-, and race-specific values. These insights are central to feminist reimaginings of animal rights.

Since animal exploiters rely on tropes about animals being “different from” humans (and thus not protected by human-like considerations or rights) and about animals being “lesser than” us in myriad ways, animal rights activists often start by arguing the opposite. Complacency about human exceptionalism is challenged by every report of parrots who can count, of whales with globe-spanning languages, of elephant mourning and memory, of gorillas who acquire extensive sign language vocabularies, of cephalopods who solve spatial problems, of cows who escape slaughterhouses with prodigious feats of athleticism and cunning, of lifelong devotional pairings between birds, of ants who form intentional alliances in supercolonies that stretch across hundreds of miles, of remarkable feats of dolphin intelligence. Recent discoveries that genetic differences between human and most nonhuman animals are slight (even negligible) have opened a new dimension in animal rights debates.

Such assertions of similitude between human and nonhuman animals are theoretically and philosophically congruent with the larger feminist project of destabilizing identity categories. Thus many animal rights feminists aver that the “line” between human animals and nonhuman animals is more of a broad, smudgy band than a sharp demarcation. Feminist and queer theorizing has blurred the line of “authorized by nature” identity categories. Feminist animal rights environmentalism queers the line even more. The “science”-based ideology that creates metrics of human/animal “difference” in its own image and then uses those metrics as if they were neutral analytical tools is the same value-laden universalizing science that puts gender, sex, and sexuality identity into discrete hierarchically stacked boxes—and it has been widely discredited, particularly in feminist theory. This is what Donna Haraway calls a moment of “boundary breakdown”: “the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached. . . . Movements for animal rights are not irrational denials of human uniqueness; they are clear-sighted recognition of connection across the discredited breach of culture and nature . . . the line between humans and

animals [is reduced] to a faint trace re-etched in ideological struggle” (Haraway 2000, quoted in Kirkup 2000, 52).

Calling into question the premise and measurement of the human/animal divide, though, is complicated by deeply theorized feminist political commitments to respecting and retaining the integrity of “difference.” In this, feminists part company with prominent male animal rights advocates such as Peter Singer (1975) and Tom Regan (1983), who argue for an extension of the moral community to include animals primarily on the basis of their sameness to humans. The examples above, of animals learning to speak and count, that seem at first so unsettling, are, of course, yet another way of valuing animals only to the extent that they meet or mimic human tests of “intelligence” and behavior. In this light, I might reframe my prior point: an animal rights philosophy that creates metrics of human/animal sameness in its own human image and then uses those metrics as if they were neutral analytical tools is flawed by the same presumptive universalizing that has so distorted our understanding of sex, sexuality, and gender—and should therefore be rejected. Philosophers Karen Warren (1990), Deborah Slicer (1991), and Val Plumwood (1993) elaborate most clearly the importance of developing a feminist animal rights theory that does not sanctify the “erasure of difference,” an erasure that almost always works primarily to the advantage of the dominant class. Internationally prominent environmentalist Vandana Shiva presents a key feminist assertion that “even the tiniest life form [must be] recognized as having intrinsic worth, integrity, and autonomy” (2000, 74).

Bioengineering, with its potential to elide all sorts of biological difference, throws feminist animal rights theorizing into contentious debate. Extending her point about the necessity of recognizing the worth of animals in their own terms, Shiva, for example, chides Western feminists for playing with the postmodernist idealization of transgenicism. Directly challenging Donna Haraway’s “cyborg feminism,” Shiva argues that measured against the real-world impact of transgenicism on food production and lived ecologies, fantasies about “border crossings” (between humans and animals, or among nonhuman animals themselves) are an indulgence. The intellectual pleasure of playing with ideational subjectivities, Shiva says, is a Western luxury that ignores the harsh realities of the bioengineering assault on the integrity of animal identities:

The mad cow is a product of “border crossings” in industrial agriculture. It is a product of the border crossing between herbivores and carnivores. It is the product of the border crossing between ethical treatment of other beings and violent exploitation of animals

to maximize profits and human greed. . . . Species boundaries between humans and cattle are also being crossed to create pharmaceuticals in the milk of factory-farmed animals. . . . These border crossings, promoted by corporate elites for profit, are rationalized by the popular postmodern stances taken by some academics. . . . This [Haraway's defense of transgenic border crossing] academic rationale for an attack on environmental and Third World movements is based on false assumptions. . . . The mad cow, as a product of border crossings is a "cyborg" in Donna Haraway's brand of "cyborg feminism." (2000, 72–75)

This particular challenge has not been well developed elsewhere, but it will become increasingly important as genetic manipulation of plants and animals escalates.

Most feminists in the forefront of developing and advancing animal rights theory locate the primary challenge of their work against the positions of Singer and Regan, the two men whose work largely frames Western contemporary animal rights analyses. Both Singer and Regan are notoriously known in feminist circles for their sneering rejection of expressions of "caring" for animals, a position they both offhandedly feminize. Singer prefaces his 1975 book, *Animal Liberation*, a truly groundbreaking work, with a nasty misogynist swipe at a woman who is exuberant in professing her love of animals (while eating a ham sandwich).<sup>2</sup> Regan prefaces his 1983 treatise, *The Case for Animal Rights*, with an extended complaint against "sentimentality" in animal rights: "all who work on behalf of animals . . . are familiar with the tired charge of being 'irrational,' 'sentimental,' 'emotional,' or worse. . . . We can give the lie to these accusations only by making a concerted effort not to indulge our emotions or parade our sentiments. And that requires making a sustained commitment to rational inquiry" (xii).

Regan and Singer's unflinching embrace of what Susan Bordo (1986) calls "masculinized Cartesian thought" thus paints animal rights, ironically, with the same brush used by those who justify animal exploitation. Josephine Donovan, a prominent feminist animal rights theorist, makes this point: "In their reliance on theory that derives from the mechanistic premises of Enlightenment epistemology (natural rights in the case of Regan and utilitarian calculation in the case of Singer), and in their suppression/denial of emotional knowledge, [they] continue to employ Car-

<sup>2</sup> Singer's recent rationalization of human-animal sex might also be productively held up to feminist scrutiny.

tesian, or objectivist, modes even while they condemn the scientific practices enabled by them" (1990, 177–78). Evelyn Fox Keller (1978) elaborates on the construction of science as "antithetical to Eros." Sandra Harding (1986) remarks on the synergy between masculinism and appeals to scientific rationality: "Science reaffirms its masculine-dominant practices, and masculine dominance its purportedly objective scientific rationale, through continued mutual support. Not only is this set of associations objectionable because it is sexist; it also makes bad science" (121). The tenor of mainstream animal rights theory set by Regan and Singer taps into this "mutual support" of male reification of Western scientism and rationality, a factor that may largely explain their dominant position in the pantheon of animal rights advocates.

Some of the most exciting work in theorizing a feminist approach to animal rights, then, is rooted in the effort to break from this rationalist tradition. In its place, feminists are developing a new ethic of animal rights around care-based theory. The central philosophical tenets of this approach include consideration of a "particular other" and "attentive love" (a phrase derived from Simone Weil) and a recognition of the importance of feeling, emotions, and personal experience in moral decision making. Several feminists make the point that there is a tradition even among male Western philosophers to locate ethics in emotion, sympathy, and compassion (Hume, Schopenhauer, Buber, Husserl, and Scheler, among others), but that this "sympathy tradition" has been overshadowed by rationalist theory (Donovan 1994).

The best of feminist animal rights theorizing does not simply resuscitate this overshadowed Western philosophical tradition of "care." Rather, it reimagines a human relationship to the nonhuman world by locating action and theory in the lived world and moral universe of women's identity and on the basis of feminist political insights. As a genre, feminist animal rights theorizing thus emerges as one of the sharpest cutting edges of contemporary philosophical and environmental work. Four anthologies encompass the range of this work: a special issue of *Hypatia* edited by Karen Warren in 1991; *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, edited by Greta Gaard (1993); Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan's anthology *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (Adams and Donovan 1995); and a second anthology by the same editors, *Beyond Animal Rights: A Feminist Caring Ethic for the Treatment of Animals* (Donovan and Adams 1996).

Some of this work returns us to ecofeminist discourses about women's "special kinship" with animals, an assertion that raises specters of essentialism again. However, most feminist animal rights theorists insist that

developing a care-based ethic cannot rest on an appeal to a “natural(ized)” extension of women’s affinities and experiences but rather must also reflect a honed political analysis. Donovan, for example, insists that while a caring ethic might seem to make particular “sense” within women’s lives, “feminists must insist that it be framed within a political perspective” (1994, 160), a perspective she enumerates as including analyses of power relations in animal exploitation industries, in the commodification of animals, and in the hegemonic export of Western constructions of human-animal relations.

One of the particular contributions of feminist analyses of these processes lies in exposing the patriarchal foundations of the exploitation of animals and in detailing the gender/race/class specificity of what are typically portrayed as “universal” norms of human-animal relations. The feminist literature on this ranges widely. Carol Adams’s (1990) provocative analysis of the masculinist privileging of meat eating, and of feminist interventions to destabilize Western patriarchal (animal) consumption, is a classic. My own brief analysis of the fur industry (in Seager 1993a) adds another dimension to this type of analysis. Feminist analyses of the gendered foundations of industrial and “recreational” animal abuses can be shocking, even in a cultural context where both the casual and the systematic abuse of animals is taken for granted. One of the contributions to this genre that I find particularly revealing and analytically challenging is Jody Emel’s analysis of wolf hunting in the United States, “Are You Man Enough, Big and Bad Enough?” (1995). The unremitting ferocity and depravity of wolf eradication in the United States, Emel argues, is deeply embedded in the license given to distorted male power through the normalization of hunting. The hunting and killing of “fierce animals,” she argues, is demarcated (in the American frontier-referent imagination) as a pinnacle expression of virility and manhood. In this argument, Emel builds on a rich literature of feminist analyses of hunting (see, e.g., Kheel 1995). But the power of Emel’s analysis is in its particularly sophisticated locating of raw male brutality within even larger structures of rationalization: “Constructions of masculinity, cruelty, regimes of bureaucracy, commodity production, class relations, myth and superstition, all determined the wolf’s demise. Altogether they supported and mutually defended one another” (1995, 732).

And, finally, a robust area of feminist inquiry interrogates gender, race, and class differences in attitudes to and perceptions of animals, nature, and the environment. A germinal study on American attitudes toward wildlife by Stephen Kellert and Joyce Berry (1987) revealed startling gender differences, with men expressing “dominionistic” and “utilitarian”

attitudes and framing wildlife management priorities in terms of whether animal populations could sustain particular levels of “harvesting,” while women expressed more affection-based concern for the welfare of animals and for their protection. Kellert and Berry concluded that gender was the strongest demographic factor in patterning attitudes to wildlife; they went on to point out that to the extent that men dominated the wildlife/conservation bureaucracy and industry, then the formulation of public policies on wildlife would be particularistically gendered. Geographer Jennifer Wolch has extended these analyses with studies of attitudes toward wildlife in California across race, class, and gender (Wolch, Brownlow, and Lassiter 2000; Wolch 2001). She finds, again, sharp differences across gender and also across racial and ethnic groupings in perceptions of animal protection policies, in attitudes toward culturally specific animal practices, and on broad measures of animal welfare.

#### **Public health and feminist environmentalism**

Odd as it may seem to any woman who is living with cancer, or who worries about the likelihood of being diagnosed with breast cancer, or who worries about her child’s asthma, “health” and “environment” issues until very recently were seldom linked, at least in mainstream and official channels. It has taken (and still takes) relentless pressure from environmental justice and women’s health advocates to shift paradigms—to put human health issues on the mainstream environmental movement agenda and to put environmental issues on the health map. Even now, virtually all assertions of causality between health disruptions and environmental assaults are fiercely contested, all the more so when women are the primary proponents of linkage.

Since the 1960s, women’s health activists have forged sophisticated transnational coalitions to draw attention to the health needs and threats specific to women. The specificity of those needs and threats are sometimes a consequence of biology (women are “not just small men,” as a popular book title proclaims [Goldberg 2002]) and sometimes due to social location, but averring the particularity of *women’s* health was the first radical challenge. Beyond drawing attention to “women’s issues,” these movements simultaneously drew attention to the patriarchal, economic, and social structures that pose particular dangers to women’s health and that keep women’s health issues from being taken seriously. The recent history of women’s health advocacy includes a long list of accomplishments: exposing international patterns of forced sterilization and other systematic reproductive rights abuses, drawing attention to the global epidemic of

violence against women, tracing the emergence of the epidemic of breast cancer in Western countries, challenging the normative assumption of conventional health care and assessment practices that white men's health issues are generalizable and universal, and exposing the dumping of unsafe pharmaceuticals and devices in minority communities and "third world" countries.

On a parallel but separate track, throughout the 1980s and 1990s a growing chorus of voices from women's and social justice movements challenged the mostly male-led mainstream environmental movement on its bias in prioritizing wilderness, animal conservation, and wildlife protection and its concomitant neglect of urban and social environmental issues, including, prominently, human health issues. The human costs of environmental deterioration had always been on the agenda of local, community social justice, and women's groups; indeed, typically, health issues brought many women activists to environmentalism. But mainstream environmental groups were slow—and even resistant—to take up the challenge of human health (Taylor 1989; Bullard 1990; Seager 1993a).

Around the world, public awareness of the impact of environmental deterioration on human health was focused by a series of "discoveries" and spectacular environmental accidents in the 1970s and 1980s: discovery of the ozone hole, chemical disasters in Seveso in 1976 and Bhopal in 1984, nuclear catastrophes at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl among them. But while these hyperevents catalyzed public attention, the attention was usually temporary. The broader trend toward making a sustained connection between health and environmental movements was forged around more mundane and modest health issues that disproportionately affected women and that women were the first to "notice." In the United States and Europe, through sheer persistence and painstaking efforts to develop evidentiary support for their claims, women's health and environmental justice advocates were instrumental in forcing attention to the possible environmental sources of health problems such as escalating rates of asthma and lead poisoning in urban children, epidemics of breast cancer in women in Western countries, and rampant endocrine disruption and "estrogen mimicking" chemical derangement in animals and humans. At the same time, throughout the third world and particularly in South Asia, feminists were collaborating across gender and environmental movements to focus attention on the interlinkages of ecology, health, and "[mal]development."

In both North and South, women's involvement with health/environment issues typically started from concerns about the health of themselves and their families in daily life, an insistence on taking seriously the

particularity of the impacts of environmental degradation on *women's* bodies and health (and particularly reproductive health), and a “personal” connection to “the environment.” As Vandana Shiva points out, “Women’s involvement in the environmental movement has started with their lives and the severe threat to the health of their families. . . . The ‘environment’ is not an external, distant category. . . . The ‘environment’ for women . . . is the place we live in and that means everything that affects our lives” (1994, 2). From women’s social location, with their primary responsibility for the health and maintenance of communities and families, “environmental problems become health problems because there is a continuity between the earth and the human body through the processes that maintain life” (Shiva 1994, 3).

One of the most globally ubiquitous threats to human health is the saturation of the environment with “man-made” chemicals—developed and introduced with virtually no understanding of their singular let alone their synergistic impact on humans, animals, and ecosystems. Rachel Carson was not the first to suggest that the chemical fog produced by modern industry was carcinogenic. But her prodigious feat of synthesizing a jumble of scientific and medical information into an understandable, coherent argument about health and environment was transformative. In so doing, Carson pointed the way to the key paths of inquiry for contemporary feminist environmental public health interventions: the importance of persistence in accumulating evidence on chemical/carcinogenic linkages in the face of industry efforts to obfuscate the evidence and to hinder these efforts; foregrounding the synergistic effects of multiple chemical exposures, despite the inherently “unknowable” character of such effects; advocating precaution in the face of scientific uncertainty; and insisting on the necessity of intervening in the fight against cancer at the causal level, not merely the palliative.

At the forty-year mark of the publication of *Silent Spring*, its salience and brilliance remain undiminished. But much of its “information” is out of date. It now seems quaint, for example, to worry as Carson did about “the over 200 basic chemicals [that] have been created for use in killing insects, weeds, rodents and other organisms described in the modern vernacular as ‘pests’”; and what a luxury to worry only about “500 new chemicals that annually find their way into actual use in the United States alone” (1962, 7).

Two contemporary books, both of a kinship with *Silent Spring*, are “must” reading for an informational and analytical update on Carson: *Living Downstream* (Steingraber 1997) and *Our Stolen Future* (Colborn, Dumanoski, and Myers 1996). *Our Stolen Future*, a collaboration by sci-

entists and journalists, is the clearest exposition available of the overwhelming evidence that synthetic chemicals are disrupting the hormonal/endocrinal systems of humans and nonhuman animals. Certain broad classes of synthetic chemical compounds, which turn up ubiquitously in consumer products from detergents to paints to plastic food wrap, have the biological effect of “estrogen mimicry” when released into the environment. This raises alarming prospects about several health effects, particularly the “feminization” of male reproductive systems in wildlife (and possibly in humans) and the known association of breast cancer and estrogenic exposure. Knowledge of the relationship between chemicals, endocrine disruption, and cancer is not new; Rachel Carson herself detailed the link in the 1960s. What is new is the evidence pointing to a widening array of substances with these effects, their persistence in the environment, and evidence of the increasing link to breast cancers.

Sandra Steingraber’s *Living Downstream* (1997) is a staggering narrative of carefully assembled and interpreted scientific information about the connections between cancer and environmental derangement, interwoven with personal reflections on the author’s own struggle with cancer. Like reading Carson, reading Steingraber is maddening and saddening and ultimately inspiring. The title of her book invokes not only a familiar environmental problem but a parable: “this image comes from a fable about a village along a river. The residents who live here, according to parable, begin noticing increasing numbers of drowning people caught in the river’s swift current and so went to work inventing ever more elaborate technologies to resuscitate them. So preoccupied were these heroic villagers with rescue and treatment that they never thought to look upstream to see who was pushing the victims in” (xxii).

Steingraber’s book is a walk upstream, and her challenge to “business as usual” is uncompromising: “When carcinogens are deliberately or accidentally introduced into the environment, some number of vulnerable persons are consigned to death. . . . These deaths are a form of homicide” (268–69). In a more meditative moment, Steingraber offers a reflection on groundwater pollution and the failure of imagination that produces so much contemporary environmental damage: “Cultivating an ability to imagine these vast basins [of groundwater] beneath us is an imperative need. What is required is a kind of mental divining rod that would connect this subterranean world to the images we see every day: a kettle boiling on the stove, a sprinkler bowing over the garden, a bathtub filling up. Our drinking water should not contain the fear of cancer. The presence of carcinogens in groundwater, no matter how faint, means we have paid too high a price for accepting the unimaginative way things are” (211).

Steingraber's feminist environmentalism is evident in her positionality and her close attention to the carcinogenic subjectivity of the female body. Her position as a woman/scientist/cancer survivor/outsider is explicit. Her engagement with critical environmental analyses and her challenge to the "normal" corporate/industrial capitalist order are explicit. Her resolute rejection of the "lifestyle modification" approaches to preventing breast cancer (so heavily advocated by the medical and cancer care mainstream) puts her in close company with the most radical of the "beyond-the-pink-ribbon" feminist health activists and environmentalists (see, e.g., Brenner and Ehrenreich 2001).

Disappointingly, however, neither in *Living Downstream* nor in *Our Stolen Future* do the authors engage with the rich literature of feminist deconstructions of the institutionalization of gender and power. Both authors are clear that they *are* raising challenges to institutionalized power—confronting the "cancer/chemical industrial complex" and challenging the "medical establishment(s)"—but they do not bring to that challenge feminist analyses of the nature of bureaucracy, of institutions, of the cultures of medical and chemical and regulatory industries. In fact, this is a piece of the puzzle that is missing from most of the feminist environmental health literature. The strength of feminist environmentalism—bringing into focus environmental assaults on the (female) *body*—could be considerably enhanced by curiosity about the production of the culture of (masculinist) institutions that plan and produce those assaults.

Steingraber's latest book, *Having Faith* (2001), is a chronicle of the author's pregnancy that draws on the same stylistic interplay between personal meditation and intensely concentrated environmental analysis. This time Steingraber tracks the assault on the reproductive process, including a detailed assessment of the synthetic chemicals traveling through her pregnant body to the developing fetus. She asks ecological questions of her own pregnancy: How do synthetic chemicals cross the placenta? migrate through amniotic fluid? affect the fetus? Steingraber mostly finds no answers. The absolute lack of curiosity in mainstream science about these questions is itself shocking. *Having Faith* will bring environmentalism to a new readership, but this book has even less structural analysis than *Living Downstream*, and there is a bit too much of the "wonder of life" trope for my tastes. Nonetheless, Steingraber's analysis is worth reading, even when she's a bit sappy.

Rachel Carson died from breast cancer. Surprisingly few people know this. Carson herself was resolutely unforthcoming about her diagnosis (most likely fearing that disclosure of her cancer would be used by her

critics to call into question her integrity as a critic of the chemical industry). But Carson's dual legacy—as one of the most prominent whistleblowers on synthetic chemicals and as a casualty of a “women's” disease that was given short shrift by the male medical establishment—has sparked a remarkable effort to trace the linkages between chemical assaults and breast cancer.

In Carson's name and spirit, feminists who have insisted on bridging the health/environmental gap are transforming what we know about breast cancer in particular and human public health in general. National women's groups such as Breast Cancer Action ([www.bcaction.org](http://www.bcaction.org)) and Silent Spring Institute ([www.silentsspring.org](http://www.silentsspring.org)) track medical and environmental advances, releasing a steady stream of analyses and reports on topics as diverse as “Risk of Breast Cancer and Organochloride Exposure,” or “Electromagnetic Exposure as a Potential Risk Factor for Breast Cancer,” or “Awash in Atrazine: Herbicides, Hormones, and Cancer.”<sup>3</sup>

Environmentalism has taken a radical movement—women's health—and made it even more so. It has propelled women's breast cancer support and activist groups well beyond the “pink ribbon” phase (Brenner and Ehrenreich 2001). The new wave of feminist health environmentalism is not a passive enterprise: groups such as Breast Cancer Action do not just “track” information, they are actively involved in the production of new knowledge. One of the central insights of community-based, social justice, and feminist environmental organizing is that the human costs of environmental destruction accrue differently across sexes, races, classes, ethnicities, and geographies. One repeated pattern manifested at scales from the local to the global is that the health “fallout” from environmental damage cascades down the social power gradient: people marginalized or stigmatized, people without a voice in the official expert and authority structures, people on the economic and social edges, feel the effects of environmental derangement first, longest, and most acutely. A related insight is that “place matters.” Following these analytical bread crumbs, feminist environmentalists are on the leading edge of developing and deploying spatial proximity analysis.

Social justice environmentalism, including women's local activism on health and environment, has often been prompted by a local awareness of unusual distributions and odd geographic “clusters” of illness or of environmentally dangerous facilities and activities. In the last five or six years, activists have transformed this awareness into a powerful tool of

<sup>3</sup> These and related reports are available at: [www.ourstolenfuture.org](http://www.ourstolenfuture.org); [www.silentsspring.org](http://www.silentsspring.org); [www.bcaction.org](http://www.bcaction.org).

environmental investigation. Using spatial analysis and particularly geographic information system (GIS) technologies, justice and health activists have started to develop sophisticated locational analyses of environmental correlations. Use of GIS allows the simultaneous mapping of layers of demographic, environmental, land use, historical, and social data, offering the ability to transpose maps of breast cancer incidence, for example, over maps of known chemical release sites. There is virtually no limit to the number of layers of data that can be accumulated and compared. Currently, two of the largest environmental health studies in the United States involve multidisciplinary research teams working with women's environmental health grassroots organizations in Massachusetts and New York to assess the elevated rates and distinctive geographic patterning of disproportionately high rates of breast cancer incidence found on Cape Cod and Long Island.<sup>4</sup>

This is a breakthrough adaptation of technology for feminist inquiry. In the environmental community, women's breast cancer researchers and activists have been in the lead in the adaptation of these technologies, and their efforts are already changing the broader nature of environmental investigation. Adoption (and adaptation) of this "scientific" approach has won for women and women's issues a new respect. Women's complaints about breast cancer (and other illness) clusters—previously dismissed as phantoms of overwrought female anxiety—are now being taken seriously.

But this engagement with mainstream science needs careful scrutiny. This is a good moment in feminist environmentalism to revisit Audre Lorde's caution about the use of the master's tools to dismantle the master's house. By entering into the environmental "big time" through the portal of mainline science, feminists risk losing their distinctive stance of oppositionality and their insistence that environmental knowledge comes in myriad forms. They also risk losing their way in what Sandra Steingraber has called the "miasma of uncertainty" (1997, 71). Breast cancer researchers using GIS technologies are entering into the "scientific proof" game on terms that they do not set, and on terms that are stacked against them.

Environmental investigation of all kinds is dogged by "scientific uncertainty"—the fact that it is almost impossible to "prove" direct environmental causes and effects. Ecological systems from the local to the global are complex and not fully comprehended by tools of scientific

<sup>4</sup> Health/GIS studies are also occurring elsewhere, but the Massachusetts and New York breast cancer studies are the largest. Information on these studies is available through [www.silenstspring.org](http://www.silenstspring.org) and [www.healthgis-li.com](http://www.healthgis-li.com).

investigation; in the environmental domain, there is almost always room for (scientific) doubt, and the possibility of contravening evidence is always present. This uncertainty is particularly acute in matters of health: it is virtually impossible to establish scientifically certain “proof” that exposure to any given chemical at any given point in time “causes” cancer that may appear several years later and in people who may have moved to a new location far from the exposure site.

Scientific uncertainty serves as a refuge for scoundrels of all kinds. Chemical-producing and pollution-causing industries have relied for years on the “cover” that scientific uncertainty affords them. The assurance that there will always be scientific uncertainty has long given solace to polluters and has served as a barrier to enactment of remediative public policy and legislation. The uncertainty that is inherent in environmental assessment favors policy inaction, particularly in the hands of politically conservative politicians and regulators.

However, that paradigm is about to shift. In the last decade, the articulation of a principle of “precaution” is one of the most radical developments in global environmental thought. The most far-reaching implication of the “precautionary principle” may be that it offers an intervention against the closed loop of scientific uncertainty. The commonsensical and deceptively simple precautionary principle displaces the expectation that environmental action requires post facto scientific proof of harm. In a series of interlinked doctrines, the precautionary principle asserts that public and private interests have a positive obligation to act to prevent environmental/health harm before it occurs; that the indication of harm, rather than “proof” of harm, should be the trigger for action; that the burden of proof needs to be shifted to the front of the chain of production (the presumption of safety should be tested before potentially harmful substances are released into the environment rather than waiting to test for harm after the fact); and that all activities with potential health consequences should be guided by the principle of the least toxic alternative.<sup>5</sup>

A 1998 conference in Wingspread, Illinois, brought together environmental activists, scientists, and ethicists to formalize and gather into a single document the strands of precautionary environmental thought that have been emerging over the last half century. Several feminist environmentalists and health activists participated in drafting the “Wingspread

<sup>5</sup> The precautionary principle is now widely discussed. Some of the best articulations of it can be found in Steingraber 1997; Raffensperger and Tickner 1999; and the Web site of the Science and Environmental Health Network, [www.sehn.org](http://www.sehn.org).

Statement on the Precautionary Principle” (1998), and the influence of their social justice perspective is evident in the final document, which reads in part: “The release and use of toxic substances, the exploitation of resources, and physical alterations of the environment have had substantial unintended consequences affecting human health and the environment. Some of these concerns are high rates of learning deficiencies, asthma, cancer, birth defects and species extinctions. . . . Therefore it is necessary to implement the Precautionary Principle: When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically.”

The Wingspread statement built on the work of countless antecedents and forebears. Prominent among others, Rachel Carson pressed the case for preventing carcinogens from being developed and released rather than waiting until the damage was done and then trying to find a “cure.” Elements of a precautionary principle shaped a 1987 European treaty that banned the dumping of toxic substances into the North Sea. The precautionary principle also echoes ethical positions that social justice and health activists—women prominently among them—have articulated for years. Integral to the precautionary principle is an ethical underpinning that Carolyn Raffensperger calls “forecaring” (Raffensperger 2000). As with the emergence of women’s animal rights theorizing, this positionality of “caring for” and “forecaring” is distinctly feminized and—at least nascently—feminist.

And now it has policy clout. An overhaul of environmental laws is under way in Sweden and Germany to bring regulation and practice into compliance with precaution. As I write this in early 2002, the European Union is seriously studying a Union-wide policy shift to bring industrial and environmental policies into alignment with precautionary principles. While the regime of scientific uncertainty is not poised to fall quite yet, hairline cracks are showing in its foundation.

### **Global political economy and feminist environmentalism**

Feminist environmentalism digs deepest into structural explanations for the state of the earth in work done under the broad rubric of “feminist political ecology.” This is not a coherent subfield in a disciplinary sense, but rather it describes practices and inquiries at a point of convergence of critical studies of science, global structural power, gender, and environment. Work in this domain ranges widely; much of it focuses on transnational or international processes, and most feminist political ecology

starts from a curiosity about the material conditions of lives rooted in specific environmental contexts. Much of this work includes a strong focus on the uneven distribution of access to and control over resources, and economies of uneven development (see, e.g., Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996; Sachs 1996); challenges to modernist inscriptions of resource-as-commodity relationships, especially the imposition of Western systems of the commodification of nature; and exposing environmental effects of the forced integration of local environments/communities into global capital flows, world trade regimes, and military webs.<sup>6</sup>

Gender is a particularly important explanatory variable in environmental relations of these kinds. Several axes of power define people's access to resources and to control over environments, but the particular foregrounding of gender, as well as race and class, across scales from the local to the global, produces potent analyses. The gendered nature of ecologically based power structures is often most apparent at moments of ecological change: when land is transferred from a commons system to private ownership, for example, or from forest to cropland, or from subsistence cropping to export cash cropping. Such shifts not only reveal patterns of gendered power but are also instrumental in the actual transference of power—typically away from women to men and away from local control to external control.

Feminist scholarship on the construction of science, much of which is built on the foundation set by Carolyn Merchant (1980), exerts a strong influence on the political ecology literature. The widespread export of Western technologies and ideologies of the “control of nature,” whether as part of eighteenth-century colonialism or twenty-first century corporatist “development” strategies, is a strong determinant of the state of the global environment, and feminist political ecologists have been particularly attentive to the gendered import of the global spread of these ideologies (see, e.g., Shiva 1988, 1993, 2000; Agarwal 1992; Seager 1993b).

### **Blaming women as environmental policy: The population debates**

One of the issues that has driven feminist political ecology for the past decade—and promises to continue to be a front-burner issue—is the “population question.” This is one of the most contentious domains in environmental explanation and is the issue where feminist positionalities are

<sup>6</sup> Sardar 1988; Agarwal 1992; Mies and Shiva 1993; Seager 1999; Silliman and King 1999; Kurian 2000; Shiva 2000.

in sharpest contradistinction to (and sharpest conflict with) mainstream environmentalism (Hartmann 1994; Bandarage 1997).

The “overpopulation” explanation for global environmental ills just will not go away, despite compelling evidence that points to other forces of environmental derangement, particularly at the global scale. Alternative analyses spotlight larger structures of inequality and manipulation, such as the maldistribution of social (and natural) resources at global and local scales, the hyperconsumption of affluence, resource extraction pressures exerted by globalization and global flows of capital, presumptions of the “imperatives” of constant economic growth, bioprospecting by the first world in the third, agroindustrialization, the largely unregulated production and disposal of toxic chemicals and “by-products” of industrial processes, and rampant global militarism that destroys vast swaths of the earth, consumes resources at an unimaginable rate, and distorts budgets and national priorities everywhere.

Nonetheless, mainstream environmental analysis—both in the popular press and imagination and in the official policy positions of many of the major U.S. and European environmental groups—detours neatly around these structural factors to place the blame for global environmental ills, instead, on the fertility of women in the third world. Population “problems” are associated with faceless and undifferentiated poor women of color in intricately coded ways. At the same time, actual women’s lives are left entirely out of the environmental picture. Blaming women without ever actually paying attention to them is a standard patriarchal analytical feat, but it seems particularly pernicious in population environment debates.

Poor women, “minority” women, and women in non-Euro-American countries pay a high price for being blamed for global environmental ills. Population control—in many guises, including anti-immigrant political alliances between environmentalists and nativist groups—is a particularly harmful “green” solution for women. Unbridled racism and sexism are intertwined with the politics of international fertility control; if nothing else, this makes its advocacy by predominantly white, male, first-world environmental groups particularly disturbing. Environmental advocates of population control typically ignore its history and ideological underpinnings, especially its association with repressive regimes and genocidal governments. Mainstream environmentalists are uncomfortable acknowledging that population control, no matter how euphemistically couched, is essentially a vehicle for the control of women; intervening in “fertility” always means, above all, intervening in women’s lives, in female repro-

ductive organs, and in the exercise of reproductive freedom. Population control always implies the exercise of centralized authority—a government, typically in concert with international development agencies—in imposing restrictions on women’s reproductive activities. In the name of population control, women are used as international guinea pigs for birth control wonders produced by pharmaceutical conglomerates in the rich world; third-world women’s bodies are dumping grounds for medications that first-world industry can no longer sell at home; women have been subjected to mass sterilizations, without consent, in Puerto Rico, India, China, Peru, and on Native American reservations.

Feminist environmentalists are active in producing a critical literature opposing the prevailing populationism (see, e.g., Hartmann 1994; Bandarage 1997; Silliman and King 1999). In the early 1990s, an international group of feminist scholars and activists created an alliance, the Committee on Women, Population and Environment (CWPE), to establish an environmental position to counter “populationism.”<sup>7</sup> The CWPE’s 1992 “Statement on Women, Population and Environment” (reprinted in Silliman and King 1999) made some inroads into the environmental consensus at the 1992 United Nations environmental conference in Rio de Janeiro, and CWPE continues to exert influence in international environmental circles, but population-based environmental explanation is deeply entrenched and mostly unmoved by these countervailing feminist positions. As recently as 2001, for example, John Flicker, president of the (U.S.) National Audubon Society, unequivocally asserted that “human population growth is the most pressing environmental problem facing the U.S. and the world.” In 1999, a popular book from the influential U.S.-based Worldwatch Institute used odd metaphors to drive home its anxiety about (over)population: “As the global population locomotive hurtles forward—despite pressure applied to the demographic brakes—there are hazards on the tracks ahead” (Brown, Gardner, and Halweil 1999, 22); and later, “What is needed, to use a basketball term, is a full-court press—an all-out effort to lower fertility, particularly in high-fertility countries, before demographic fatigue takes over” (127). More worryingly, government policies in several key first-world states explicitly identify population as a preeminent global environmental problem.

Given the precarious state of the earth—and the urgent need to come to terms with the real causes of environmental destruction—the fierceness with which many environmentalists cling to populationist explanations

<sup>7</sup> The CWPE can be reached through the Population and Development program, Hampshire College, Amherst, MA 01002; it produces a quarterly publication, *Political Environments*.

itself needs explanation. At its core, the attachment to populationism is a deeply patriarchal obsession: in the patriarchal worldview, women's bodies are seen to be malleable objects of public policy intervention. In the global environmental arena, it is presumed to be easier, cheaper, and faster to interfere in women's fertility than to challenge large masculinist structures such as militarism and global capital formation; and, indeed, in a patriarchal global culture it *is* easier, cheaper, and faster to do so. But blaming women for the sorry state of the earth is shabby policy and bad analysis—and it will not solve environmental problems either.

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