Critical Ecofeminism:
A Feminist Environmental Research Network (FERN)
for Collaborative and Relational Praxis Within and Beyond Climate Emergency

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Abstract
We start from the premise that the world is in the middle of a climate emergency. In an effort to explain this emergency and to make plans to survive it, we run the risk of reproducing the same patriarchal and capitalist-driven inequalities that produced this emergency. We argue that critical ecofeminist analysis helps us understand what conditions led us to this emergency and can serve as a guiding framework for imagining better futures. Toward this end, we first discursively frame climate emergencies; explore some of the ideologies and systems responsible for climate change; and finally we look towards the future of intersectional ecofeminism as a useful framework for resistance, and for praxis, in the effort to build a better world out of emergency.

Introduction

> *"The oppressed have an alternative perspective, whereas the oppressor has only one. And, that, is why we have to turn to the oppressed, we have to turn to nature, we have to turn to women, we have to turn to indigenous people, we have to have to turn to the marginalized of society to make the shift that will create a world that is good for all."*
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> - *Vandana Shiva*

The world is in the middle of a climate emergency. To explain this emergency and to make plans to survive it, there is need to caution against reproducing the same patriarchal and capitalist-driven inequalities that produced this emergency. We argue that critical, intersectional ecofeminist analysis helps us understand what conditions led us to this emergency and can serve as a guiding framework for imagining better

futures.[1] Toward this end, we first discursively frame climate emergencies; explore some of the ideologies and systems responsible for climate change; and finally we look towards the future of collaborative and intersectional ecofeminism as a useful framework for resistance, and for praxis, in the effort to build a better world beyond a climate of everyday emergency conditions.

Specifically, we contend that a revitalized critical ecofeminist lens can offer important ways of experiencing, feeling, seeing and understanding the pressing and urgent problems related to climate change while calling attention to the harmful politics of extraction while seeking to uphold non-extractive relationships of solidarity. A more reciprocal, relational, emancipatory approach to the pressing environmental climate emergency we face presents a vital space for drawing together diverse voices who are imagining and fighting for alternative futures with their bodies on the frontlines. This paper has two main objectives: first, to explain how this critical and revitalized relational ecofeminism can help us to notice our current climate emergency and to imagine worlds beyond it; and second to elaborate what we mean by a relational ecofeminism and articulate its value to political science. This imaginative praxis requires engagement beyond the academy, including a critical approach to extractive practices and politics, creative articulations of alternative possibilities to the colonial status quo, and collaborations across communities including artistic forms of resistance

[1] We also acknowledge our relative positions of privilege as we write about this topic as three non-Indigenous, female, able-bodied scholars with relative security within academic institutions who intend to write in solidarity, and amplify the voices of those involved in the ongoing struggle against dominant systems of power tied to crises of the climate emergency, extractive capitalism, and ongoing colonialism. Contact us at: ferncollaborative@gmail.com

to systems of oppression. First, we put forward ways of detecting climate emergency through discursive framing of fast and slow moving disasters and through community activism. Then, we discuss ecofeminist frameworks for engaging the climate emergency. Finally, we look towards the design and implementation of a collaborative feminst environmental research network, called FERN, as a node of organization, resources and community-engaged scholarship.

From the emergent Extinction Rebellion movement with roots in the colonial heart of the United Kingdom to the widespread social mobilization against resource extraction in unceded Wet'suwet'en territory in settler-colonial Canada reveal, the changes we are seeing, feeling, and witnessing are urgent and command our attention (Extinction Rebellion, 2021). This paper articulates a sense of urgency about our current climate emergency while also highlighting avenues for intervention, disruption, alternatives and collaboration. As we will discuss in the final section of this paper, by convening the Feminist Environmental Research Network (FERN), we aim to curate these critical conversations, support collaborative research and grow community in order to envision and enact alternative futures to the oppressive, colonial status quo through our grounded normative approach to environmental political thought.

What spaces of convergence might we envision between radical ecofeminism, critical Indigenous studies and environmental justice not just in theory, but in practice? This paper is an attempt to put these polyphonic voices in conversation, highlighting possible avenues for shifting narratives about climate change to create space for visions of emancipatory, sustainable, decolonial futures. In contention with narratives of

climate denial, or the impending doom of our drastically changing climate, many communities are rising up, speaking out, and actively cultivating conditions for radical social, political, economic, and ecological change. Indigenous political theorists offer a rich foundation for place-based solidarity and grounded approaches to the pressing colonial problems of our time, which are deeply entwined with our climate emergency (Coulthard and Simpson, 2016). These scholars remind us that colonization is ongoing and capitalist resource extraction exacerbates the colonial present as well as fuels the no-longer slow-moving crisis of climate change.

Climate Emergency and the Ecofeminist Lens

With erratic weather shifts, rising seas poised to consume coastlines and forests burning with voracious force, it is evident that we are in a climate emergency. Many island communities across the Pacific and around the world, from Hawai‘i to the Caribbean, find themselves in compromised environments with limited resources to respond to the systemic changes affecting their livelihoods and are organizing to articulate their local responses to this global phenomenon (KUA, 2020a). On February 26th 2020, Hawai'i-based environmental grassroots organization Kua signed the Climate Strong Declaration as a call to action to create more sustainable and resilient island communities, calling for island based leadership in responding to the UN Sustainable Development goals to complement the Local2030 Islands Network launched at the UN General Assembly as a network of island leaders. The declaration noted island communities' layered lived realities when contending with the current climate emergency: dealing with compromised critical infrastructures, overburdened and

under-resourced health care, food, education and housing systems, changes in marine environments devastating fisheries and degrading important ecosystems on which island communities rely for their livelihoods, and geographical isolation in conjunction with limited political power (KUA, 2020b). These vulnerabilities become particularly apparent during emergency and disaster response scenarios. Further signalling the severity of the climate emergency, scientists around the world are chiming in about our unprecedented climate crisis.

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) noted that 2019 marked a year of exceptional global heat, retreating ice and rising sea levels. With this swell of urgency in relation to shifting the debate about climate change, Oxford Dictionary declared "climate emergency" the word of the year in 2019 (UNEP, 2021; Zhou, 2019). The discourse, science, and widespread global mobilization all point to a drastically changing climate that commands political attention. Jurisdictions around the world are declaring climate emergencies in their governing assemblies. From the forest fires in Australia and across the Western Provinces and States of North America to the hurricanes and their aftermath in archipelagos like Puerto Rico, humans have much to learn from these dramatic shifts about the radical elemental forces in our surrounding more-than-human environments. These environments are making themselves known. Scholars are challenged today with finding innovative ways to hear these concerns and collaborate with those speaking up and out for environmental change – youth activists, Indigenous elders, students, mothers, fathers, to name but a few – and find ways to listen to those advocating for worlds beyond our present one.

A gendered lens is critical to these conversations. For academics trying to engage in radical political critique through applied academic praxis, this requires humility and decentering the egoism of the human as a master over nature, something feminists have been calling our attention to for decades (Plumwood 1993; Shiva & Mies, 1993; MacGregor, 2021; Merchant, 1980). Women have long organized around pressing concerns related to contaminated environments, health and reproductive justice, while also calling for attention to treating climate change as more than a technological problem requiring a scientific response (Gaard, 2015). Feminist scholarship broadly, and ecofeminist analysis in particular, is well-situated to expand the horizons of engagement to address structural inequalities as well as discursive contexts apparent in responses to climate change. As Greta Gaard has pointed out, the overconsumption of climate change is deeply gendered (Gaard, 2015). Her analysis highlights how there can be no climate justice without gender justice. This requires widening out the scope of ecofeminist thought to build upon radical, intersectional ecofeminist critique to account for a diversity of voices, and enhancing ecofeminist praxis that foregrounds black and indgenous voices who have historically been excluded from spaces of knowledge production, as well as queer and posthumanist feminist ecological citizenship (MacGregor, 2014; Alaimo, 2008; Sandilands, 1999). Ecofeminist political thought, posthumanism and critical Indigenous studies press the boundaries of how to understand the problem of climate change and the threats it poses to human and more-than-human lives. We take our cue from Gaard to bring an intersectional ecofeminist lens to examine climate change as a structural, material, discursive and

colonial problem while also calling attention to the voices articulating alternatives. In this way, we understand critical ecofeminism as intersectional feminism as it helps to "unite and empower different groups of oppressed people without collapsing or dismissing the meaningful differences between these groups" (Johnson, et. al., 2020).

While the origin point of ecofeminism is hard to pin down, the theory of intersectionality is often attributed to Kimberlé Crenshaw. Intersectionality can be understood as a set of theoretical and organizing principles that have been around for a long time and that highlight entangled relations of power along gender, class and race. An intersectional approach to the climate emergency reveals how bodies feel the impacts of extraction differently. The experiences of Indigenous and black women draw this into sharp focus. Deborah King notes that black women in particular have long been aware of the multiple pressures they face based on both race and gender. "For us, the notion of double jeopardy is not a new one" (King, 1988; 42). In Frances Beale's *Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female,* she calls racism the "afterbirth of capitalism", and argues that black women suffer under capitalism and racism differently than their black male counterparts. Beale argued that the black liberation movement has, at times, called for black women to return to their natural place as mothers and homemakers, while outside of the home, black women experienced more economic exploitation than black men or white women. Beale recognized the possibilities for solidarity between white feminist movements and black liberation, but on certain conditions:

> The white women's movement is far from being monolithic. Any white group that does not have an anti-imperialist and anti-racist ideology has absolutely nothing in common with the Black women's struggle. In fact, some groups come to the incorrect assumption that their oppression is

> due simply to male chauvinism . . . While it is true that male chauvinism has become institutionalized in American society, one must always look for the main enemy – the fundamental cause of the female condition (Beale, 1970; 121).

The main antagonist we write against is extraction. Specifically, we contend with extractive capitalism, and in so doing we account for Beale's argument that capitalism spawned racism, and not the other way around. King is not convinced that each jeopardizing condition can be collapsed into one or another, and argues that class, race, and gender should be taken as independent but interconnected issues (King, 1988).

King is critical of ideological monism found in many liberation movements, which asserts that all forms of oppression can be reduced to one primary issue. For example, Marxists have argued that concern for race and gender misdirect attention away from the central issue of class antagonism. Marxism has long struggled with "the woman problem" and, as Heidi Hartmann describes, tends to reduce inequalities between men and women into a set of problems addressed to capitalism, and not to patriarchy. Not only can Marxist analyses of the conditions of labor and living be "sex blind", as Hartmann puts it, but they can also be dismissive of categories of identity beyond class (Hartmann, 1979). Ecofeminism, with its long-standing interest in lived experiences and activism, already has strong affinities with analyses of power that directly engage race, class, and gender, among other categories of identity that are often under-represented in ecofeminism and Marxist feminism.

Ecofeminism has, in some demonstrable ways, started to connect with intersectionality. Even in complicated texts like that of Mies and Shiva, they made clear their connections between colonialism, racism, environmental degradation, and

violence towards women (Mies & Shiva, 1993). Others, like Carol Adams and Lori Gruen (2014) made connections between the oppression of non-human animals and women, while also challenging the perceived divisions between these categories of human and other (Haraway, 1998). Ecofeminist work should be diligent about addressing the multiple pressures of capitalism, race, and gender, and address the different ways that people are affected by climate change, the multitude of strategies they use to fight the systems that promote climate change, and the ways they organize to protect and enrich their communities. Activists like Vandana Shiva and the late Wangari Maathai have dedicated themselves to drawing connections between the vulnerability of women in the global south to climate change and patriarchy and to the resilience of these same women and their organizing efforts to rehabilitate forests and watersheds, and to protect biodiversity through seed saving and sharing. These movements, however, are typically analyzed through an ecofeminist and international development lens, rather than explicitly as an intersectional effort.

Attention to race and environment in the United States is mostly reserved for scholarship on environmental justice. While environmental justice accounts for race and class, scholarship often limits a gendered analysis to acknowledging the special contributions of women as organizers and grassroots activists. Gender is not attended to as its own sphere of experiences, and instead is often subordinated to analyses based on race and class. Attending to race, class, and gender, explicitly, and acknowledging the complicated relationships between each of these categories and how they come to bear on the relationship between people and the environment, could help ecofeminist

scholarship address oppression with more accuracy and care to specificity of place and experience.

Ecofeminism can learn from intersectionality to address some of the criticisms of traditional Marxist feminism, which sometimes excludes race from consideration, and overextends a Western, white, middle-class view of womanhood to apply to all women. Audre Lorde writes about some of the consequences of feminism centered on a universal woman with white, middle-class characteristics: "As white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define *woman* in terms of their own experience alone, then women of Color become 'other,' the outsider whose experience and tradition are too 'alien' to comprehend" (Lorde, 1984; 117). Ecofeminism has similarly struggled with identifying who women are and how women of color and women in the global south are included and depicted in academic and activist discussions. Women of color are often identified as victims of patriarchy, climate change, and capitalism, which fail to capture the relational nature of power. "This way, intersectionality also highlights new linkages and positions that can facilitate alliances between voices that are usually marginalised in the dominant climate agenda" (Kaijser and Kronsell, 419). The women who are often the subject of ecofeminist analysis and activism are sometimes viewed as women in peril. Ecofeminism, following long-standing patterns in feminism, tend to focus exclusively on the category of woman, as though it stands freely apart from race, class, ability, and other categories that makes it difficult to talk about being a woman as a homogenous group. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) draws attention to the problem of single-issue analysis:

> Unable to grasp the importance of Black women's intersectional experiences, not only courts, but feminist and civil rights thinkers as well have treated Black women in ways that deny both the unique compoundedness of their situation and the centrality of their experiences to the larger classes of women and Blacks (1989, 150).

The experiences of Black women are often reduced to race or gender, and if feminist and ecofeminist theory continue to use a universal concept of "woman", then many women will continue to be excluded from scholarship and activism.

> The value of feminist theory to Black women is diminished because it evolves from a white racial context that is seldom acknowledged. Not only are women of color in fact overlooked, but their exclusion is reinforced when *white* women speak for and as *women*. The authoritative universal voice – usually white male subjectivity masquerading as non-racial, non-gendered objectivity – is merely transferred to those who, but for gender, share many of the same cultural, economic, and social characteristics (Crenshaw, 1989; 154).

The critique of feminism holds true for ecofeminism and thus carries the same challenges of speaking from a white, middle class, western point of view. Departing from Crenshaw's argument that feminist theory is less valuable when it centers on white women, ecofeminism similarly needs to come to terms with the problems inherent in its relationship to feminist theory. In doing so, ecofeminism can move forward a critique of exploitative conditions for labor and living that includes race and class in a more nuanced analysis, particularly in the context of environmental harms and climate change.

One of the critiques of third wave feminism, of which intersectionality is a prominent part, is the overemphasis on the importance of identity and recognition, at

the expense of focusing on neoliberalism as an ideology in which the exploitation of environment, labor, gender, and race is written off as externalities or the just deserts of those suffering a lack of ambition and resourcefulness. Despite the shortcomings of second wave feminism, this wave put forth a strong Marxist feminist critique of capitalism and patriarchy. Writing in the LIES Journal, the collective of authors who go by FLOC (2016) states:

> Marxist feminism has given us some conceptual tools to understand how and why patriarchal gender relations, and the relational categories 'man' and 'woman,' continue to be reproduced in capitalism. As a body of inquiry it demonstrates that men and women exist and are materially real; not in a biological sense, but as produced through a matrix of social relationships and institutions sustained by the needs of capital and of men as a group (60).

Marxism emphasizes the primacy of class relations as the driver of exploitation, and recognizes the state as the means by which the bourgeoisie control the means of production and the subsequent social and cultural systems that emerge from a particular mode of production. What Marxism does not do very well is acknowledge race and gender as experiences and conditions integral to understanding the relations and mechanisms of capitalism. One of the most important critiques of second wave feminism, and Marxist feminism in particular, came from women of color and women from the global south asserting the universal "woman" at the center of Marxist feminist was conceived as western, white, and middle class. "As feminists increasingly took account of differences that exist among women, many feminists also moved from the tenets of modernism with its notion of a unified subject, that is, a universal (female)

nature, to several postmodern tenets, especially the notion of a multiple and socially construed subject (Malson et. al., 1989)" (Mack-Canty, 2004; 158). Third wave and intersectional feminism spent significant energy on dealing with the question of identity in ways that benefit the essentialism problem in ecofeminism.

Drifting from the universal woman also became a drift from Marxian analysis of oppression. However, Marxian analysis with intersectionality offers a way to deal with the essentialism debates by addressing identity in socio-economic context. As Nancy Fraser argued, identity does not need to be pitted against socio-economic justice (Fraser, 2013). In fact, identity discussions are critical to understanding the subjects for which feminist, intersectional, and environmental movements claim to advocate. Linking intersectionality to ecofeminism provides a set of tools for helping ecofeminist scholarship work through the debates that have hamstrung the field, even as economic and environmental pressures compound for women in the age of climate change.

To do so, we turn our attention to Indigenous political theorists to engage in solidarity-building for alternative anti-colonial political systems, and Indigenous leaders mobilizing at the frontlines of resource extraction initiatives who demonstrate with their bodies on the line that radical action is necessary for transformative politics. Recent work from Macarena Gomez-Barris (2017), Thea Riofrancos (2020), and Dana Powell (2018) all illustrate the power of womens' movements against extractive projects to slow or halt the steady march of continual accumulation by extraction, while also cultivating future imaginaries of what a decolonial and post-extractive world can be.

From their efforts, we have much to learn about the intersections of settler-colonialism, gender and the environment.

Capitalism Will Not Save Us: The Climate Emergency is a Colonial Crisis

Widespread social mobilization across the Province of British Columbia, Canada and the world articulate and enact emancipatory solidarity movements for alternative, anti-capitalist, anti-extractive, decolonial politics. Hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en and leaders of the Likhts'amisyu Clan are taking the federal government to court in Canada, demanding that the state take climate change seriously, which they consider to be an existential threat and a violation of their Section 7 Charter of Rights and Freedoms protections, including the right to life, liberty and security of the person (Proctor 2020). Their lawsuit would also challenge the Canadian government's approval of 670km Coastal GasLink Pipeline through their territory without the free, prior and informed consent of hereditary leadership. This issue is not a standalone event, but a microcosm of larger geopolitical tensions about the state's continuous push for capitalist extraction to the detriment of Indigenous rights and the health of the planet. The state encroachment on Wet'suwet'en territory without consent of those most directly affected also alerts our attention to the limits of liberal reconciliation politics and the gendered dimensions of extraction. For instance, Indigenous leaders from Wet'suwet'en territories have long expressed concern about the slow moving, often overlooked environmental violence of "man camps" and the ways in which extractive labor affects Indigenous women's lands, bodies and livelihoods (Kojola & Pellow 2021; Nixon 2011; Parson & Ray, 2020). While the Provincial Government of British Columbia passed the United

National Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) into law on October 24th 2019 - twelve years after its introduction to the United Nations General Assembly - committing itself to a clear plan for reconciliation, the state's efforts to ease extraction on Wet'suwet'en territory calls this commitment into question (Larsen 2019).

With "Reconciliation is Dead" flags surrounding them and the sounds of their drums reverberating, staring down the approaching authorities, as helicopters dropped tactical teams from above, Wet'suwet'en women leaders, chiefs and land defenders sang, danced and held ceremony as they were arrested for breaching a court injunction (Reconciliation is Dead 2021). The advancing police extinguished the matriarchs' sacred fire and tore down red dresses placed to hold an honor the spirits of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people. Allowing the GasLink pipeline to intersect Wet'suwet'en territory would bring with it a 450 man camp along the now infamous Highway of Tears (Levin, 2016). This stretch of road - many of which is without cell service - is well-known as a site for the disappearance of many Indigenous women and girls. This heartbreaking standoff between the police arresting Wet'suwet'en leaders draws into clear view the politics of slow violence (Nixon 2011), environmental injustice and settler-colonialism (Coulthard 2014; Kojola & Pellow 2021) and the disproportionate harm felt by Indigenous women as a result of extractive processes. Moreover, this extractive violence exposes the discursive rhetoric of reconciliation and continuation of patriarchal colonialism in Canada. The climate emergency is felt across borders, across the globe, and the examples cited above highlight the need for critical ecofeminist approaches to climate emergency.

In the summer of 2020, California burned. In northern California not far from the bay, the sky color was determined by the smoke layer, and the only precipitation was a steady rain of ash. The air quality reading on mobile devices was a deep purple warning with the cartoon figure of a man in a gas mask. How do you protect yourself from breathing air? This presented a fundamental contradiction for survival: breathing air would make us sick and shorten our lives, and yet breathing air is essential for human life. Californians appeared divided in their analysis of the record-setting fire season. Most mainstream news outlets connected the fires to climate change-driven drought, poor funding, concern for forest management, and a dangerously wrong-headed relationship to fire on public lands. This competed with another narrative, one pushed by the 45th President: that Californians simply needed to rake their leaves and take personal responsibility for the state of their public lands. In this account, the choking fires were not a reckoning with climate change as an emergency, this was not a call to radically rethink our relationship with the environment and with our socio-economic systems. The impacts of the fires were felt differently across the region, with Latino/a/x farmworkers in low wage labor positions exposed to toxic smoke and debris while wealthy celebrity vineyard owners could watch from afar in any number of homes located safely away from danger. During the summer of burning the Forest Service partnered with the Karuk and Yurok tribes, giving tribes permission to conduct traditional controlled burns on their own lands that were stolen from them during the height of the California genocide (Sommer, 2020; Madley, 2016). Tribal Chairman of the North Fork Mono, Ron Goode, puts it this way: "This is old land . . . It's been in use for

thousands and thousands of years. And so what we're doing out here is restoring life" (Sommer, 2020). The fires in California were not just a jarring demonstration of climate emergency, they revealed stark inequalities in climate change vulnerability and the challenging position of native tribes seeking to share their life-saving knowledge while also operating in a colonial context with the state.

Most people move through the world without making the conscious connection that their bodies, lives, homes and families are affected by the interconnected forces of climate change. Yet, we are not just living in a climate emergency, but a global public health emergency. Human and more-than-human bodies are sites of concern. The health of our atmospheres, oceans, forests, waterways relate to the wellbeing of human bodies. To understand the severity of living in a climate emergency requires a shift material praxis, discourse and emancipatory possibilities for alternative futures. A waking up to the lived-realities facing our environments and us. This is a critical moment for us to realize that we can no longer be complacent in our normalized way of living in this world premised upon limitless extraction and thoughtless waste. As we highlight below, there are alternatives, oases of community restoration, and regeneration across the globe that call for our attention as we simultaneously critique this world and enact new ones.

Our current climate emergency demands attention to its gendered dimensions. Women and queer voices are at the forefront of the global environmental movement. Young activists from across diverse backgrounds are taking on the intersecting trifecta of capitalism, misogyny, and extraction. Greta Thunberg, Takaya Blaney, Kathy

Jetnil-Kijiner, and Amber Pelletier are but some of the constellating young women leaders and activists animating this conversation, calling out the patriarchal and colonial underpinnings of extractive capitalism and putting decision-makers on alert. Their actions remind us that environmental justice involves multiple dimensions. For instance, an awareness of the ideological forces that enabled an uneven distribution of goods and bads among societies – i.e. petrochemical and polymer refineries situated in close proximity to communities of color – which have asymmetrical consequences for those living with toxins posing harm to their bodies and ecosystems (MacGregor, 2021; Kojola & Pellow, 2021; Wiebe, 2016). Moreover, their resistance to capitalist patriarchy exposes the embedded hierarchical forces apparent in procedural, bureaucratic and administrative responses to experiences of environmental injustice; and further, with their words, these women give expression to the need for an entirely different ontology, beyond the extractivist neoliberal status quo that gives primacy to the atomistic, possessive, property-owning individual. Instead, their moving words highlight how we (humans) exist in relation to our surrounding more-than-human environments and in fact are dependent on them for survival. This multispecies orientation to environmental justice is gaining momentum in environmental political thought, and our collaborative efforts aim to contribute to this critical conversation (Celermajer et al., 2021).

The climate emergency we are in signals that we need new languages, words and tools for understanding our intersectional, embedded, entangled relationships with/in our hurting ecosystems. As such, critical ecofeminism presents a critique of the liberal status quo way of thinking about, seeing and feeling in relation to the environment as

property to be owned, contained and controlled. Classical liberalism posits that freedom is founded on property ownership, a stable state to provide security and legal frameworks for addressing justice, and the opportunity for those rational, moderate, motivated individuals to succeed. As such, liberalism and its cousin, neoliberalism, are used to address climate change through policy incrementalism and market-based solutions. They provide no challenge to the economic and political order that produces climate change and environmental injustice. Since liberalism and neoliberalism contribute to the climate emergency, they cannot be seen as starting points for solutions. Critical ecofeminism goes further to examine and interrogate the historical, structural, colonial, economic, and foundational forces that enabled these systemic inequities to persist through categorizations of Western superiority and human dominance over nature. A critical, relational ecofeminist orientation does not stop at critique, but also centres creation through collaboration. For instance, the ecofeminism we flesh out in this paper challenges the rigid dualisms or essentialisms produced through anthropomorphic political thought while centering creative forms of resistance and articulations of radical alternatives. We contend that this intersectional, feminist mode of critique creates space for multiple forms of truth, perspectives, worldviews and necessitates relational awareness of more-than-human environments and co-creation of pathways for sustainable possibilities.

Ecofeminist Knowledge Production as Anti-Oppressive Praxis

Climate emergency requires us to confront paradigms of endless economic growth, and critically reappraise the meaning and force of everyday discourses and practices that

shape material realities through words like 'progress', by way of policies that enable continual violence against women and nature, and also through the circulation of mythologies that repress potential for emancipatory futures. The entrenched framing of scholarship and praxis as separate, fixed, domains not only conserves capitalist world systems, but also maintains the roots of violence by erasing and silencing ecofeminist perspectives and possibilities to confront climate emergency. For example, the derogatory and persistent adage 'those who can't do, teach' indicates that people involved in the production of knowledge do not have enough skill to engage in the things they are teaching about. This concept has been taken up alongside populist and anti-intellectual factions in recent years, ignoring the fact that the overwhelming majority of faculty in the United States are contingent workers with no access to tenure, and who are working for less than a living wage (Childress). This mythological and divisive frame emboldens the supposed town/gown divide, the idea that academics are set apart from society in an ivory tower, out of touch with the experiences of society as if the exploitative processes of capitalism stop at the border of university campuses, as if universities are not built on and sustained by stolen land and through extracted labor. A recent project by Kalen Goodluck, Tristan Ahtone, and Robert Lee entitled "Landgrab University" (Goodluck et. al., 2020) bring this reality to light and help us to critically evaluate how diversionary tactics enable status quo power relations and capital accumulation to persist. From a critical ecofeminist perspective this so-called division between research and praxis functionally oppresses possibilities for collective organizing and deeper social understanding of our shared experiences and fates under

capitalism. Thus, the false frame of knowledge production and action as separate actions must be confronted on the basis of its illusory power. Instead, knowledge and praxis are interdependent, integrated, and imbued with creative possibility.

As it has historically done, ecofeminism in this critical moment offers "its ideas and its political commitments to justice and sustainability" which have "always been materialist and always been rooted in the quotidian labours that reproduce life" (MacGregor, 2021; 55). Moreover, it allows for an important interrogation about the framing of absences, disconnections, and the emergence of new strands of thought within environmental discourses. Here, the production of knowledge and the "politics of knowledge production in the field of environmental politics" (ibid) are confronted. For critical ecofeminism, and critical projects writ large, the research-praxis-nexus is not new. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Friere built on a Marxist philosophy of praxis to articulate the importance of the knowledge-praxis nexus in the struggle for freedom. He insists, "within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action" and that "if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers" therefore, "there is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world" (Friere, 87). In the same spirit of critical pedagogy, which requires accessibility, openness, and freedom for all to speak, critical ecofeminism shakes the foundation of oppressive structures. In her seminal work "Feminism and the Mastery of Nature" Val Plumwood praises the contributions of ecofeminism to "both activist struggle and to theorising links between women's oppression and the domination of nature" and calls for a critical ecofeminism to be wielded as a "critical and analytical

force" and a "powerful political tool" (Plumwood, 1). Assessing how we move from extractive ontologies to ones informed by ecofeminism, anti-oppressive knowledge, relationality necessitates a critical appraisal of ecofeminism, not simply as an ideological orientation, but as an anti-oppressive, co-creative process and political tool that bridges thought and practice. While it may seem that efforts to connect "work to concrete experience" can result in frustrated outcomes and unrealized ideals in the quest for emancipation, the creative construction of alternative worlds, even unfinished and imperfect ones, allow for resistance to take hold and imagination to flourish; bell hooks remarks on this experience in her feminist theory classes where she indicates that "student frustration is directed at the inability of the methodology, analysis, and abstract writing to make the work connect to their efforts to live more fully, to transform society, to live a politics of feminism", that is a politics of freedom (hooks, 88). Taking inspiration from the expressed aims of Critical Theory as an explicitly political project, critical ecofeminist scholarship is not about a value-neutral quest for knowledge. Rather, critical ecofeminism acknowledges the importance of thought, reflection on, and engagement with structural violence and dominant worldviews, which have historically exploited women and nature, in order to create anti-oppressive materialities and liberatory futures. In this way, critical ecofeminism provides a way to imagine and build the futures through constructive "anti-oppressive practice in the process of inquiry" that maintains "ambivalence and uncertainty that enables us to question that which appears 'normal' and taken for granted to renegotiate process and create spaces for ourselves and others who are commonly excluded from the creation of

knowledge" (Potts and Brown, 263). Moreover, it answers the call for Critical Theory to embrace a more intersectional approach that "promotes emancipatory aims by uncovering injustices, power structures, and problematic assumptions within the ideological status quo" (Hammond, 293). The creation of knowledge and anti-oppressive struggles are/should be domains for all, not just the privileged or powerful. Yet, in a global fossil-empire, language, policies, and practices coalesce to maintain exploitative systems of production.

Certainly, in a moment of climate emergency an ecofeminist confrontation of fossil-fuel empire and the knowledge structures that sustain it is of critical importance. More than a refusal, it is a constructive effort to find a better way, creating paths forward, cultivating meaningful work, and regenerative possibilities. This orientation to knowledge production presents a challenge for some institutions of higher education whose research portfolios and endowments are supported by petrochemical industries and other merchants of doubt whose efforts minimize or silence scholarship that calls into account the role that industry interests play in crafting and legitimizing data and evidence about environmental harm. The fossil-fuel industry has a rock solid record not only in delegitimizing citizens' claims to harm, in particular within sites of extractive violence with environmental and human health impacts (Lawrence, 172), but also plays an active role in funding research to preserve the ability of the industry to continue their life-negating practices. Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway articulate the ways in which powerful industries (Big Tobacco and Big Oil, in particular) have effectively merged knowledge domains to the material realities of our contemporary world through the

production of climate emergency and public health crises (2011). Casting doubt on climate and public health researchers is an insidious, yet legal practice whereby powerful industries can utilize the tools of the state to silence, attack, and delegitimize.

Prominent climate researcher Michael Mann was the mark of such a campaign which targeted his unpublished climate data and research by utilizing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to discredit his work by accessing his private correspondence (Union, 2017). Although his university (University of Virginia) initially supported Mann, the administration ultimately bowed to the pressures of ATI, the American Tradition Institute, now the Energy and Environmental Legal Institute, a Koch funded think tank with deep financial ties to the fossil fuel industry. After years in court and fighting other industry-funded attacks on his work and personal life, Mann won his case but warned of the deterrent and chilling effects of such harassment on young climate researchers at a moment when they are desperately needed in the fight against climate emergency:

> I fear the chill that could descend. I worry especially that younger scientists might be deterred from going into climate research (or any topic where scientific findings can prove inconvenient to powerful vested interests). As someone who has weathered many attacks, I would urge these scientists to have courage. The fate of the planet hangs in the balance. (Mann, 2016).

These attacks compound the efforts of corporations to frame the climate emergency, and women's exposures and erasures, in a way that obviates responsibility. While these targets, omissions, and efforts to silence may not be direct evidence of the power of research and knowledge production to shape the material world, to upend status-quo

power relations, and to imagine, generate, and build liberatory futures, such efforts indicate an anxiety about the possibilities of transformative knowledge to democratize power. In her article, "Making Matter Great Again?: Ecofeminism, New Materialism, and the Everyday Turn in Environmental Politics", Sherilyn MacGregor speaks truth to power and forcefully reminds us that "ecofeminist theory *has never not* been grounded in materiality" and "everyday material practices" (41).

It is clear that the creation of knowledge shapes policy, and thus informs and forms our realities. However, we should not be so arrogant to either understand the research-praxis-nexus as a new phenomenon that is particular to ecofeminism nor should we see the production of knowledge as something that occurs solely within the halls of academia. The Critical Theory project was always about an unbounded approach to thinking about and creating "alternatives to the dominance of technical reason, disciplinary modes of power, and false consciousness that govern our contemporary everyday lives" (Boros, 5). This refrain about the deep entanglements of the material world is further supported by Marcuse in a candid articulation of Critical Theory's purpose to move beyond the object of theorization:

> "It is the conviction of its founders that critical theory of society is essentially linked with materialism . . . The theory of society is an economic, not a philosophical system. There are two basic elements linking materialism to correct social theory: concern with human happiness, and the conviction that it can be attained only through a transformation of the material conditions of existence. The actual course of the transformation and the fundamental measures to be taken in order to arrive at a rational organization of society are prescribed by analysis of the economic and political conditions in the given historical situation. The subsequent construction of the new society cannot be the object of theory,

> for it is to occur as the free creation of the liberated individuals" (Marcuse, 135).

Cultivating explicit anti-oppressive, anti-extractive knowledge and material realities is foundational to critical ecofeminism. While there is not, and perhaps should not be, a framework or prescription for how this is enacted, ecofeminist praxis characterized by democratized processes of inquiry and everyday practices that include "negotiation, reciprocity, and empowerment" are essential (Lather, 257). If it is true that "any form of transformation of society must include a discussion of the social organization and political action necessary to achieve this goal" (Akard, 213), then we must respond with a celebration of spaces of resistance and hopes for fully emancipated futures. In this spirit, we highlight several projects that harness the potential of creating with nature, with rich diversity, and in an open-form way cultivates power with as opposed to power over.

First, Navdanya, an organization led by Vandana Shiva and whose name means 'nine seeds' offers a way to engage collective action for policy change. Navdanya works to conserve diversity and reclaim the commons through "Earth-centric, Women-centric, and Farmer-led" movement for the protection of biological and cultural diversity. Just as rich soil allows for growth and sustenance, a critical ecofeminist embrace of diverse ways of knowing "is a gift of life, of heritage, and continuity" (Navdanya). For more than three decades, this organization has resisted the commodification of seeds and food by embracing indigenous knowledge and seed saving practices which pave the way for a democratized earth. Food sovereignty is not only a social struggle, but a feminist issue. "Promoting food sovereignty can advance women's rights based on

gender, but only if organizers and actors involved in this movement open their eyes and take on board feminist analyses and practices" (Leroy). The link between reproduction and agency is made clear in the work of Navdanya to flatten hierarchies within the global food economy, seeing food as a giver of life, not a commodity.

Second, the All We Can Save Project is a solidarity movement and community care initiative to nurture emergent climate feminists of all ages and genders. This is a powerfully compelling and creative project to build feminist leadership on the climate emergency. Co-founded by Drs. Ayanna Elizabeth Johnson and Katherine K. Wilkinson, All We Can Save promotes the work of women who are "already leading boldly and effectively and throwing doors open to welcome people into climate work" (All We Can Save). Amplifying the perspectives of Black, Indigenous, and other women of color as forerunners to a "transformational climate-feminist ecosystem", All We Can Save moves past "burdens, systemic barriers, and burnout" through solidarity and community building, a true inspiration for imaginative and critical ecofeminist research/practice. Third, Women's Voices for the Earth (WVE) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to amplify women's voices to eliminate toxic chemicals that harm health and communities. Bridging work, equity, and environment, WVE imagines a world free of toxins at "every point in the cycle of production and consumption – from extraction, to processing, to use, to disposal" (Women's Voices). This vision has been the basis of more than 25 years of word to cultivate a thriving world through efforts to shift chemical policy and highlight intersections of race, class, gender, health and the

environment. Acknowledging the disproportionate impact that toxic chemicals have on women and children is foundational to ecofeminist work.

Finally, WeDo is a global women's advocacy organization for a just world that promotes and protects human rights, gender equality, and the integrity of the environment. WeDo is working to build feminist solidarity and resilience in times of crisis, including at this moment of climate emergency and global public health crisis. For WeDo the creation of knowledge to empower women is central as is the ability to support families and communities by acknowledging and attending to the "deeply personal and embodied crisis" that each person faces in their own intersecting ways. Centering care, community and compassion are foundational to the work of WeDo in its struggle for global justice, recognition of the violence of borders, and the cultivation of democratic and multilateral spaces to address "critical areas of concern including climate change, biodiversity, macro-economic issues, and health" (Feminist Solidarity).

There are hundreds of other organizations and movements, and thousands of voices, that we can highlight in relation to the power of critical ecofeminism to create new realities and to push back upon the framing of climate emergency as totalizing and inevitable. There are anti-extractive resistance movements across the world which are primarily led by women – from the mountains of Appalachia in which blockades have been erected to slow the devastation of the ecosystem as Equitrans decimates habitats to make way for the proposed Mountain Valley Pipeline, and the Unist'ot'en Camp, an indigenous reoccupation of the Wet'suwet'en land in northern British Columbia. In these spaces, and so many others, women's bodies are on the frontlines of resistance

(Cirefice and Sullivan), even as their lives are threatened through state violence as well as the slow disaster of climate emergency. Ariel Salleh's concept of "embodied materialism" allows us to see the connected nature of knowledge and these diverse struggles and efforts to imagine liberatory futures, to engage in anti-oppressive scholarship, and encourages structural shifts. She notes: "Too many political programs rest in ossified and disembodied belief systems, whereas an embodied materialism is a transitional idea, a tool for making change at this moment now. Once attitudes and structures shift, the ecofeminist critique can be discarded" (Salleh, 2017; 298-299). Until that time, we continue our work and consider what might be next for FERN as an anti-oppressive endeavor to examine the roots of exploitation.

Cultivating Critical Ecofeminism

By advancing a praxis of critical ecofeminist scholarship, we are suggesting this requires a movement to address the multiple pressures of capitalism, race, and gender, alongside the different ways that people are affected by climate change, the multitude of strategies they use to fight the systems that promote climate change, and the ways they organize to protect and enrich their communities. This requires creativity, critical reflection, imagination and collaboration. For over a decade, we have sought to cultivate a sense of community for scholars who bring feminst and gender-based approaches to the pressing environmental challenges of our time. Through active participation in the Western Political Science Association (WPSA) environmental political theory community, we have organized panels, pre-conference workshops and produced publications that weave together critical ecofeminism, environmental justice and

political theory. We are excited about convening this intellectual community and look forward to opening up this conversation more broadly to engage with critical, creative and intersectional approaches to climate change and ongoing crises such as the climate emergency. By founding FERN -- a collaborative Feminist Environmental Research Network -- we aim to amplify both the voices of scholars reflecting on these pertinent matters and those at the frontlines, facing the visceral impacts of climate change in their everyday lives.

FERN is a collaborative research network that aims to grow community and cultivate collaboration through critical scholarship and creative approaches. This includes participatory and arts-based methods of community-engaged scholarship. Through social media, a listserv and website, we aim to elevate conversations about environmental issues such as the climate emergency and promote opportunities for further academic-activist connections. As a research collaborative, we aim to convene a space for critical engagement with ideas and pathways for sustainable futures while promoting just relations between all living things, thus taking seriously a relational orientation to human/more-than-human relations and contending with neoliberal extractivism. There are three main areas of emphasis for this collaborative effort: *growing community, cultivating collaboration,* and *critique and creativity.*

Growing community: as an emergent and rhizomatic community, FERN is the connective tissue for a body of scholarship that investigates environmental issues from a gendered lens. This community of practice, virtually and in person, seeks to reach from the academy into community respectfully and reciprocally, while centering care

and refusing extractive relations. **Cultivating Collaboration**: as a transdisciplinary collective, FERN engages ideas within the academy and beyond, including activist, artistic, and policy researchers from diverse backgrounds and life-experiences to address pressing environmental challenges. This approach celebrates collaboration to address environmental injustices through multiple methods and angles of vision. **Critique and Creativity**: from an imaginative lens, FERN expresses hope for future generations. We are committed to a shared vision that engages creative methods and media to envision sustainable, decolonial, emancipatory futures. FERN is dedicated to supporting research, art, activism, and open dialogue about socio-environmental relations with special attention to interconnected injustices, the lived realities of climate change, and oppressive systems of power (racism, sexism, patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism). We hope you join us to grow this community as we collaboratively interrogate the intersecting forces of extractive capitalism, colonialism and elevate a more radical, loving, caring praxis of relational engagement with more-than-human lives inside the academy and beyond.

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