

Cape Coast Summer School, 2017

DAY 2: Unit 1/Module 4

Feminist and Intersectional Theories on Nature, Ecology and Resource Policies

Report

Christa Wichterich delivered the presentation. She opened the presentation by posing three main questions. The questions were:

1. What are the different feminist and intersectional theories relating to resources and ecology? What are they all about?
2. How are theories of care linked to theories of sustainability?
3. Are there emancipatory movements, which link feminist approaches to sustainability? If so, where and how do they apply?

She moved on to introduce five main feminist theories on nature, ecology and resource. These were:

1. Ecofeminism
2. Feminist political ecology
3. New materialism
4. Sustainable livelihood approach
5. Care approach

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism sprang out of social movements in the 1970s, which sought to change policies. The movements sparked out of the feeling that changes in nature affected life and harmony of existence between people and nature. Women reproduce, nurture, and so are close to nature.

It was also important to note that there are many strands of the Ecofeminism perspective. This leads to multiplicity of ideologies within the field. Mainly, seek to critique science in order to break the binaries of nature and culture that are perpetuated by science and capital. Further, the founding of new worlds through patriarchal colonialism led to the subsequent colonisation of women, foreign bodies and their lands and nature for purposes of modernisation and development.

The 1993 strand of Ecofeminism sought to analogise the subjugation and oppression of women and nature. Premised on the assumptions that; nature is exploited by both patriarchy and capital, as argued by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva. This gave way to other grassroots movements such as the Greenbelt Movement by Wangari Maathai that transform into an Ecofeminist movement.

Summarily, Ecofeminism assume that all living beings are interconnected. Women are also predisposed to care and healing. The perspective avow that there is the need for diversity instead of divide and hierarchy.

It therefore has the objective to change power relations and provides the alternative of subsistence production.

Feminist Political Ecology

The Feminist Political Ecology was the second feminist perspective presented. It rose out of the critique of the Ecofeminism. This perspective treats gender as a critical variable in shaping resource access and control in interacting with class, caste, race, culture and ethnicity to shape processes of ecological change. It present three critical themes:

1. Gendered knowledge,
2. Gendered environmental rights and responsibilities
3. Gendered environmental policies and grassroots activism,

There is the division of power that is gender-based. Gendered spaces are widespread and these spaces needs to less diversified.

It is important to note that the Feminist Political Economy is more of an analytical tool and not necessarily advocating for the protection of nature. As a tool, it analyses the gaps and then activism is built on it.

Critiques to Sciences and Development

1. Critique of dichotomies; woman = nature, emotions; man = culture, ration
2. Critique of science and technology and society nature relation in mainstream development; subjugation of nature by fragmentation and technology in the lab

(Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton); subjugation of women – sexuality by witch hunting and torture

3. Progress in sciences and development = domination, appropriation and colonisation

The main point of critique is Essentialism. Women are caring, closer to nature, by nature peaceful, life creating, distant to technology.

Another strand of feminist political economy that came up in 1997 was non-essentialist in ideology. It sought to do more of an intersectional, contextualised and specific analysis.

It also focuses on gendered knowledge and production, gendered rights and responsibilities, gendered agency, struggles and social movements. In terms of geography, the Feminist Political Ecology looks at the gendered attribution and usage of space. The key concern is who have *access* and *control* of resources.

Few of the scholars and activists heralding this perspective included Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayter, Esther Wanagari, Andrea Nightingale and Rebecca Elmhirst.

Interwovenness of material structures, discourses/cultural representation and subjectivities/agency

1. Feminist environmentalists: gendered interests in resources based on gendered work
2. Rights based approach, environmental and gender justice
3. Post-colonial critique of othering
4. Post-structuralist, deconstructive approach

Care for the nature and environment everyday practices by women

1. Vandana Shiva: Feminine Principle (1989)
2. Carolyn Merchant: Ethics of Earth Care by women's groups (1996)
3. Ariel Salleh: Barefoot epistemology of women from the South, logic of reproduction (1997)
4. Mary Mellor (1997): material relation between women and nature, embodied materialism

5. Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen/Mara Mies (200): subsistence perspective
6. Sherilyn MacGregor: not romanticize but politicise care = feminist ecological citizenship (2004/2010)
7. Melissa Leach (2007): days of discourse on women as natural environmental carers are over/ is passed

New materialism: Material Turn in feminism

New materialism is another feminist ecology perspective where it sought:

1. Bring the material back in feminist theory and practice. To radically rethink materiality of body and nature, focus on agency and vitality of bodies and natures
2. Proposed that human, nonhuman, technological and natural = agents that jointly construct parameters of our common world, mutual co-constitution of mind and matter relationship between discourse and matter that does not privilege discourse. It provides a revision of paradigms of post structuralism, postmodernism and cultural studies.

Emerging issues

Genetically Modified Organism (GMO), nuclear energy: **Where do you stop as a scientist?**
To what extent should science and technology change nature? Where is the borderline?

By;

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