

# Applying a Feminist Critique to Environmental Education

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## Introduction

One thing about which there is widespread consensus is that the earth and its inhabitants are in social and environmental peril. This is where the consensus ends, however, for there is equally widespread disagreement as to the nature and causes of the problems (more social or more environmental), the severity of the problems (for whom are they recognised and felt as problems), and the most appropriate and effective solutions necessary to deal with them. This paper argues for the adoption of a critical, feminist perspective in examining the area of Environmental Education (EE) as an 'appropriate response' to this globally perceived socio-environmental crisis.

Historically, environmental education emerged out of the early 1970's during the time when the environmental movement was gaining momentum and vitality on a worldwide scale (Disinger, 1983; Robottom, 1985a; Stapp, 1970). It was envisioned by the international participants at the three major UNESCO-UNEP Environment Conferences held that decade, that EE was the most appropriate and hopeful educational response to the crisis situation of the deterioration of quality of life and the environment (Fensham, 1978).

The aims of EE that emerged from the UN conference in Tbilisi, USSR in 1977 were particularly ambitious in that they transcended a concern with the roles, objectives and guiding principles of EE and spelled out the need for an understanding of:

... the epistemological and institutional structures that affect consideration of environmental demands"..... and .... "the obstacles (epistemological, cultural or social) restricting access to educational messages and their utilization" (Robottom, 1985b).

Put simply, the report from Tbilisi appealed to the need for a socially, culturally and epistemologically critical role for EE in order to respond adequately to increasing environmental problems. Such a critical role for EE would:

Encourage careful analysis and awareness of the various factors involved in the situation (of the environment)..... All decisions regarding the development of society and the improvement of the lot of individuals are based on considerations, usually implicit, concerning what is good, useful, beautiful, and so on. The educated individual should be in a position to ask such questions as: Who took this decision? According to what criteria? With what immediate ends in mind? Have the long term consequences been calculated? In short, he (sic) must know what choices have been made and what value-system determined them (Unesco, 1980).

Here, it is clear how EE is at the same time a critique of the value components (the politics) of environmental decisions and actions, and itself a political enterprise making value judgements on who, what, where, and how to educate for the environment. As is the case with any form of education, EE is a social practice that aims to bring about changes and improvements in its field of action – the education for an environmentally aware and active citizenry. It is essential, therefore, for EE to examine the dialectics of its practice. In other words, EE must at once play a role in combatting ever-increasing environmental problems, and also be involved in self critique with regard to its role in sustaining those social structures and relations that cause or support environmental problems.

Such a critique could take a variety of different paths. The direction which will be explored in this essay is to re-examine the major substantive area of EE – its environmental problem-solving focus. One way to explore how EE addresses its environmental problem-solving approach and also how it may simultaneously be contributing to the perpetuation of those societal values that sustain environmental problems, is to critique the view of "environment" and the concept of "environmental problem" that is understood and promulgated by proponents of EE. What would be the nature of such a critique?

Firstly, let us look at the term "environment". The popular conception of "environment" has become equated with "nature" and "ecology". This is true despite the efforts of the early stages of the environmental movement (including the EE movement) to link the physical/ecological with the social, political and economic aspects of the world in which we all live. Today's environmentalists have even symbolically taken on the perceived color of nature, and refer to themselves as "green". A concern for the environment has, to all intents and purposes, become a concern for the restoration and protection of "nature". The EE movement has evolved similarly despite the highly politicised and socio-cultural intentions that emerged from the deliberations of member states at the three UN conferences in the 1970's.

### The Social Nature of "Environment"

Green politics, which have become the orthodoxy of the modern environmental movement, have succeeded in re-casting the "social world" as being determined or shaped by the "physical environment". This view, sometimes referred to as "ecological determinism" both neglects to recognise the dialectical relationship between the ecological and social worlds and denies the notion that our concept of "environment" is socially constructed. Weston (1986) explains this idea further:

For it is we, as a society who shape our environment by deciding which social and economic priorities should prevail; we choose our environment rather than have it imposed upon us by "nature". Whether we live in the centre of a large city or on the edge of a forest, the physical environment starts at our front doors, making environmental issues those which are concerned with our surroundings – both physical and social – rather than those which are in some way related to "nature".

The "environment" is what surrounds us, both materially and socially. We define it as such by use of our own individual and culturally imposed interpretive categories, and it exists as the "environment" at the moment that we name it and imbue it with meaning. Therefore, "environment" is not something that has a reality totally outside or separate from ourselves and our social milieu. Rather, "environment" should be understood more as the conceptual interactions between our physical surroundings and the social, political and economic forces that organise us in the context of these surroundings. It is in this sense that we can say that the concept "environment" is socially constructed. To be socially constructed suggests that certain qualities of the environment can be changed or transformed according to which social relationships are in operation. If we begin to view "environment" as a social construction, then we also begin to view the notion of an "environmental problem" very differently.

With so much poverty and social deprivation within our society it is increasingly difficult to accept the view that what we are faced with today is an 'ecological crisis' rather than a social or economic crisis. Indeed, such concepts as 'ecological crisis' tend to suggest that problems like acid rain, deforestation, and the spread of the deserts are somehow separate from the social world. People,

although recognised by greens as the cause of such problems, are not seen as the main victims. The victim, as the phrase 'ecological crisis' suggests, is seen as being 'nature' – which relegates those suffering poverty, despair and hunger throughout the world to the periphery of their concern. Yet, in fact it is people and not 'nature' who suffer the greatest hardship as a result of ecological damage. 'Nature' after all, will always reappear, albeit in a different form from that which has been destroyed; people, however, rarely live long enough to make up for the disruption and poverty caused to them when other people destroy their environment for personal economic gain (Weston 1986).

The idea that 'environment' is socially constructed suggests the same for the conceptualisation of 'environmental problem'. Environmental problems are therefore, social problems, caused by societal practices and structures and only viewed or socially constructed as problems because of their effects on human individuals and groups (of course other living things and systems are affected as well). This has broad implications for environmental educators, as EE is strongly environmental problem-solving oriented. An environmental problem must be adequately defined and understood in order for an effective EE curriculum to be created and before real solutions can be developed and undertaken.

This is not to say that an appreciation and sense of unity or connectedness with "nature" is not important to an understanding of our social world. Nor is it to imply that a strong philosophical base or nature/ecology paradigm would not contribute to EE's environmental problem solving goals. The point is that an adequate understanding of environmental problems requires that they be viewed as the products of contesting discourses, activities and interactions amongst human societies. Simply viewing them as issues of over-industrialisation, or poor management of natural resources which can be mitigated with well designed technical fixes, ignores the real causes of the problems. And by narrowly focussing on nature or ecological balance as the primary "victims" of the problems, they are removed from the messy realm of society and effectively depoliticised.

As we discussed earlier, EE is a social practice whose mission is educating for the environment with a problem-solving orientation. It follows that the examination of environmental problems, more clearly defined or understood as social problems, requires a perspective that makes connections between social systems and structures and the environmental problem – that is, a social theory. What is the significance of being clear and conscious about the social theories we hold? Nancy Hartstock (1979) explains this point well:

We must understand that theorizing is not just something done by academic intellectuals but that a theory is always implicit in our activity and goes so deep as to include our very understanding of reality..... we can either accept the categories given to us by capitalist society or we can begin to develop a critical understanding of our world. If we choose the first alternative, our theory may forever

remain implicit. In contrast the second is to commit ourselves to working out critical and explicit theory.

The socially critical aims put forth at the UNESCO-UNEP EE Programme Conference at Tbilisi, Russia in 1977, require a social theory that critiques the patterns and structures of social organisation in the environments in which we live. Without such a critical theory EE maintains the assumptions and taken-for-granted beliefs that current global environmental conditions exist due to the natural order of things and the innateness of "human nature".

The next section will explore the possibilities of a critical social theory that would be useful to EE's dual efforts of environmental problem solving and educational change – a feminist critique.

#### **A Feminist Perspective for Environmental Education**

A feminist analysis of society is one of a variety of critical social theories that take an historical and political economic view on human social relations, and structures and the problems that grow out of them. Other critical approaches which will not be discussed here include Marxist socio-economic theory, critical reinterpretations of psychoanalytic theory, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and radical humanistic/phenomenological theories. The difference in feminist theory, and why I believe it is an essential analysis, is that it encompasses all components of the forementioned theories, including class, race, age, etc. by illuminating the gendered-construction of all such social categories. In this section I consider that the implications of gender are important to the field of EE in both the areas of environmental problem solving and educational change.

The question of gender is the critical benchmark of all forms of feminism (Eisenstein, 1984). The term "gender" is used to refer to socially and culturally created distinctions between femininity and masculinity (gentleness-toughness; intuitive/logical; passive/aggressive; body/mind; peaceable/violent) while the term "sex" is used to refer to biological differences associated with reproduction between men and women. Hence, a feminist perspective takes into account the socially created gender structure of society which assigns roles, expectations, behaviours more or less arbitrarily to that biological sex. This tenet of feminism refutes the biological determinism of "anatomy is destiny" which believes that sex roles are genetically controlled. A belief that gender differences are socially constructed and not genetically determined is a belief that they are susceptible to transformation – that the sexes do not necessarily have to conform to their gender stereotypes. The other primary feature of all feminist argument is that these socially constructed differences in gender roles between men and women systematically work to the advantage of men so that the two sexes in fact have unequal power, opportunities and social status.

So, feminism is not, as it is popularly understood, a study simply into "women's issues" and how to afford women equality of opportunity and participation (although these areas are of importance); it is an analysis of the gendered roles of men and women and an account of how these social constructions have shaped society and its institutions and practices throughout history. Hence, it is

a study of "men" as well. Feminism believes that men must recognise and understand the gendered construction of their position in society – that is, they must understand that they are located in the gendered category "man" and do not represent the generic category "human" (as our language might make us believe). Feminism embraces the gender roles of women and men and critically illuminates the inequality of these roles.

Moreover, feminism is not (again, contrary to popular belief) an enterprise to retroactively "add" or include women into patriarchal social systems, accounts of history or theoretical discourses. An example is the current trend of "tagging" women onto pre-existing systems as a "corrective" of past omissions – Women and Natural Resources, Women and Development, Women and Peace. While it aims to understand the patriarchal (male created and centred) underpinnings of these areas and how they created the "invisibility" of women, feminism critically questions the adequacy of their presumptions, methods and frameworks for both understanding and living in the world.

Most importantly, feminism aims to explore ways in which current practices in society might be changed in order to deconstruct those gendered structures that subordinate women and create social values of oppression and exploitation affecting not only women but the other major social categories of race and class. One form of feminism, eco-feminism, expands the notion of the victim of exploitative social values to also include non-human life forms and eco-systems.

Feminist theories do not aim to construct monolithic "universals" or rigid orthodoxies with privileged truths and "correct" methods. It does aim to challenge unquestioned assumptions and modus operandi and to present alternative interpretations and discourses of "reality" and what it means to be a human social being. Although there exists a wide variety of feminist perspectives, we can identify two broad approaches addressing the questions of why and how the gendered divisions in society have arisen and how they provide insight into the forces shaping the state of the world, socially and environmentally, in modern times.

The first approach, referred to as radical feminism (referring to its etymological meaning of "root"), examines the interrelationships between the two genders and how they operate to advantage men and subordinate women. This most fundamental or "root" cause of social divisions and conflict is termed patriarchy by radical feminists and is used to explain why sex (a biological fact) becomes gender (a social phenomenon). As Kate Millett ([1970] 1979) states:

Our society, like other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance – in short, every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands.

The subordination of women under patriarchy is seen as a complex matter operating at different levels. Two distinct levels are those of the public sphere – male control of organisations, institutions and their rules,

technology and culture, and the private sphere, or the personal, domestic level – male control of medical and political aspects of reproduction and the opportunities of women doing “waged work” outside the home, thereby making them economically dependent on men. Radical feminists assert that the rule of men has not been enforced by means of visible coercion, but rather through the continued reproduction of an ideology that reinforces a separation between male and female roles, and then creates or sustains a set of beliefs about the roles thus created.

The essential concept put forth by radical feminism, therefore, is not that men as a group consciously determine to dominate women, but that the institutional and hegemonic force of patriarchy accords to men the privilege and benefits of social, economic, and political power. Moreover, these gendered patterns of domination and subordination are embedded in our socio-cultural metaphors as woman is associated with “nature” and man with “culture”. This will be elaborated in later sections.

The second major feminist analysis of society works toward linking gender relations to the wider social sphere and asserts that other factors such as socio-economic class and race interact with gender to produce complex patterns of dominance and subordination in society. This analysis, used by socialist feminists, looks at the historical and economic factors that relate to the position of women under capitalist society. Specifically, socialist feminists aim to understand the relationship amongst the variety of class struggles over the control of the means of production (raw materials, machines, technology used in the manufacture of commodities) in a given society and the gendered nature of the social relations of production in that society. In other words, how does the gendered construction of society under patriarchy interact with other social forces of domination and subordination under capitalism? The “sexual division of labour” which assigned to males the world of production and the paid workforce and to women the world of reproduction and the unpaid or underpaid workforce, became a key framework for analysis. This apparent neat and tidy (and “natural”) division of labour serves to perpetuate certain patriarchal/capitalist values as the different types of labour are not equally valued nor compensated, and close scrutiny demonstrates that the system appears tidy only because many of its contradictions remain invisible.

Women are primarily responsible for child care and domestic work in all capitalist societies (and in virtually all other existing societies as well), then women in their domestic role have an important, although unpaid, place in the maintenance of capitalism..... Capitalists thus benefit not only from exploiting the labour of waged workers, but also indirectly from the cheap labour provided by women in reproducing the labour force. It is assumed that such labour is paid for out of men’s wages. Men, although exploited, benefit from the fact that women are primarily responsible for domestic work and the family..... Not only are the isolation and many of the stresses and strains involved in this domestic work, largely avoided by men, but women find themselves in a position where they, together with their children are legally and economically

dependent upon men..... Many women not only play a vital part in the reproduction of the labour force, but they also do waged work – often in the home..... in theory the woman does not need to work (for wages) because she is supported by her husband’s wage, but in practice vast numbers have to do some kind of paid work in order to make ends meet (Women and Geography Study Group, 1984).

This so called “double shift” of women (i.e. working to maintain the home and rear the family plus working for a wage) is one of the hidden structures of worldwide socio-economic systems which is becoming increasingly explicated as the numbers of woman-headed families expands yearly (Women: A World Report, 1985). Socialist feminism focuses on the history and economics of the gendered workforce in capitalist political economies and attempts to shed light on such current trends in global environmental problems.

The following sections will look more closely at what a feminist perspective on the field of EE might look like. This will be undertaken by examining a feminist view of “environment” and “environmental problem”.

### **A Feminist Analysis of “Environment”**

In earlier sections I presented an argument for the importance of an understanding of the social construction of the concept “environment”. Similarly, the rationale for a feminist critique of society was briefly discussed throwing up the notion of the gendered construction of the social world. How is, therefore, the social construct “environment” gendered? The variety of feminisms has taken on this issue in different ways. One of these analyses focuses on the historical development of culture and how certain views of reality and the “natural order of things” based on sexual divisions have become deeply embedded in our socio-cultural discourses and practices. Rosemary Radford Ruether (1975) puts this quite clearly:

Sexual symbolism is foundational to the perception of order and relationship that has been built up in cultures. The psychic organisation of consciousness, the dualistic view of the self and the world, the hierarchical concept of society, the relation of humanity and nature, and of God and creation – all these relationships have been modelled on sexual dualism.

Ruether (1975) posits that by melding the world view of sexual dualisms with an hierarchical ordering of inferior and superior, a cultural symbolic model of domination and subordination is created which legitimates the subjugation of the “lower” race, class, or sexual castes by the “higher” ones. Animals, plants and “nature” are also relegated to the inferior end of the spectrum in our cultural metaphors.

These symbolic psychical and religious roots of patriarchy form the foundation of radical feminism’s concept of the nature/culture dichotomy. Man has been identified with culture – the mind, the intellectual, autonomous, spiritual, transcendent “God the Father”. Woman has been identified with nature – the body, passivity, sensuality, dependency, fecundity, “Mother Earth”. The Judeo-Christian tradition decrees, through its genesis doctrine, the Father-Right of male’s dominion

over females, children, peoples of "other" color, "other" religions, animals, plants and finally, at the bottom of the hierarchy – nature (land, water, air). It seems almost a truism to say that the ideology that regarded the natural environment as an object of domination had its roots in and was supported by the values and structures of social domination, particularly that of males over females. The language of domination and "man" against "nature"/-woman is evident in our socio-cultural metaphors: conquer and subdue the wilds of nature, spoiling virgin wilderness, the rape of Gaia, manage, exploit, use, mastery over nature, "you can't trust mother nature". Ruether (1975) comments on this point in reference to the effects of science and technology on the environment.

.....Francis Bacon (represents) the transition from the earlier mythic and religious roots of the language of domination of nature to its modern scientific, technological expression..... The roots of the language of domination of nature.... (are) in social domination..... The "master of nature" is imaged as a patriarchal despot whose subjugation of nature is expressed in the language of domination over women and slaves..... The language is both that of despotism and that of sexual aggression. Nature is pictured as a fecund female slave whose "children" are to be used by rulers by reducing her to a condition of total submission.... (The) ecological crisis and the collapse of faith in scientific technology in the twentieth century .... (is) the result of this relationship of "use" of nature to social domination. The productivity that resulted from the application of instrumentalist science to nature was fed into a magnification of the structures of social domination, rather than providing the basis for a post scarcity, equalitarian society.

The radical feminist critique of the patriarchal dualism of nature (woman) vs culture (man) finds expression in the philosophy of eco-feminism. One of the central concerns of eco-feminism is the historical division of unity to polarity of the Western concepts masculine and feminine. They believe that a dialectical relationship between the polar opposite masculine and feminine principles (as Yin and Yang in Eastern philosophy) existed in ancient times. For example, the Egyptian deity, Neith who personified the eternal female and male principles in one form was prominent in ancient civilisations (Stone, 1976). At some point in history sexual differentiation occurred in human societies and each culture imposed its own values and definitions on masculine and feminine and simultaneously they were identified with biological maleness or femaleness. It is the reintegration of these polarities into the consciousness of society that is the primary aim of eco-feminists. That is, each individual expressing his/her masculine and feminine essences of individuation/collectivity, power/passivity and letting be, and separation/relationship would produce a more holistic, equalitarian society.

There are positive aspects of this genre of radical feminism that specifically undertake to examine the connections between feminism, ecology, and environmental problems; but there are also problems. Consider for example these comments by Petra Kelly, the first woman to be elected head of the German Green (Ecologist) Party.

While women have increasingly discovered their own oppression in Western Europe, in the USA, in Australia and elsewhere, they have also learned to organise themselves and speak out against the oppression of others. There has been much consciousness raising. Political issues have become personal – and personal issues political. I have hope for the world..... because women all over the world are rising up, infusing the anti-nuclear, peace and alternative movements with a vitality and creativity never seen before.

..... All our major problems: nuclear war, over-population, pollution, hunger, the desolation of the planet, the inequality among people.... (are) a crisis, not of information, but of policy. We cannot cope with all the problems that threaten us while maximising profits.... As things stand now, the people, especially women and children of the Third World are to perish first....

In the last few years, I have also observed that women, through their downgrading have sought to raise their status at times by becoming part of the masculine world (cf. Mrs. Thatcher, Indira Gandhi). When women fight for equal status with men, the danger is that one day they may become four star generals, build death technology, and join the front ranks in times of war.

Coming to terms with and relating to the masculine within ourselves is a crucial part of our development as women, both collectively and individually.

.... Women most lose all their fears in speaking up, in demanding what is theirs and their children's. Only if we begin to rediscover our own nature can we forge new ways, ways of wholeness, balance, decentralization, preservation, mutual-interdependence, co-operation, gentleness, non-possessiveness and soft energies.

.... in order to stop living against the earth, in order to create technology that serves us and does not enslave us, we must reassert feminine values of wholeness, balance and harmony. It must become impossible for a small ruling class to monopolize the wealth from the world resources, while transferring the social costs for the people in the form of poisoned air, water, soil and cells ..... One of my greatest hopes is that men would recover the affective and nurturing roles with children and other people historically denied to them..... and which has repressed the gentle humane side of males and shaped the male personality into that hyper-aggressiveness and antagonistic combativeness (Cambridge Women's Peace Collective, 1984).

Although Kelly makes direct and clear connections between the historical gender division of society and ecological destruction, environmental problems and militarism, she falls into the common trap of "false universalism". Such universalism, characteristic of the radical/eco-feminist perspective, generalises about the experience of all women, ignoring the specificities of race, class and culture. The limiting aspect of this perspective is that all too often it gives rise to analysis that purport to speak about and on behalf of all women, black and white, poor

or rich, thereby masking some of the economic and cultural structures supporting sexism, racism, classism and environmental destruction. Implicit in this false universalism is the eco-feminist vision of the "meta-physical" woman – that women have a bond which is eternal, biological, historical and spiritual (Eisenstein 1984). A view that believes there is an inherent "essence" of woman; those feminine values of nurturing, gentleness, peaceableness and nature-loving. The net effect of such a vision, however, is deterministic in the sense that it accepts gender division on the basis of biological sex and formulates woman as the "other" (and similarly, nature as the "other" as in man vs. nature).

Clearly when we examine the composition of social change organisations and activist groups working on issues of disarmament, anti-nuclear issues, peace, environmental protection and education, we find them to be highly "gendered" in favor of women. Penny Strange (1983) cautions us to consider this fact with a more critical feminist view.

It is our vision and our practice of a new way to peace that makes women such an important force in the peace movement – not any "natural pacifism" attributed to women. The common belief that women are by nature non-aggressive is itself part of the feminine stereotype of passivity, the complement to the idea that violence and war are "natural" to men. Just as boys are initiated into the male club, so girls are taught to accept male dominance. They learn to distrust their own opinions, and their physical abilities: in place of confidence and assertion, they learn endurance and patience.... Women are not inherently nonviolent: they are traditionally oppressed, and as an oppressed group, have often turned their anger and violent in upon themselves. Nor are men inherently violent; they are traditionally and structurally dominant, and retain that dominance through the cultivation of toughness and violence. Women are not "Earth Mothers" who will save the planet from the deadly games of the boys – this too is part of the support and nurture role that women are given in the world. Upon the support and silence of women has been built the male edifice of dominance, exploitation and war.

Some environmental educators speak to the importance of the "feminization" (Ellyard, 1981) of our war-oriented and anti-ecological societies, i.e. that society should value and incorporate the "innate" gentle, creative, holistic and peace-loving properties of "feminine" woman. Needless to say, such values are virtuous and undoubtedly essential to the development of a new social and ecological order. The dangers of this deterministic view of social relations arise when a simplistic essentialism asserts that male chemistry (testosterone-poisoning) causes war, destruction and decay of the earth and that female chemistry (life-producing estrogen) will protect and save it. In other words, the gendered relations and structures of patriarchy come to be viewed as eternal, natural, and, therefore, not subject to transformation. In this way, the possibility of men "naturally" engaging in alternatives to war in conflict resolution is effectively removed, and the burden of

nurturing and peace-making is placed onto women in the characterisation of such qualities as "female nature".

Another major analysis of how the concept "environment" is gendered emerges from a socialist feminist perspective. A socialist feminist perspective on the social constructs "environment" and "environmental problem" would consider the interactive resonances between gender and socio-economic class. This analysis would take a "binocular approach", that is, an approach that considers how these structures of power – gender and class – have historically developed in interaction with each other. Connell (1982) points out the importance of seeing how both categories do not operate in isolation, but do interact.

.... Sometimes people think of class relations as confined to the factory and gender relations to family.... this is mistaken. There are gender relations inside factories, and there are class relations inside families and in the upbringing of children.... They involve control by some people over others, and the ability of some groups to organise social life to their own advantage. As power is exercised and contested, social relations are organised, and come to be, in some degree, a system .... Both class and gender are historical systems.... riddled with tension and contradiction, and always subject to change. Indeed, it may be better to think of them as structuring processes rather than 'systems', that is, ways in which social life is constantly being organised (and ruptured and disorganised) through time.

Put simply, socialist feminism looks at the joint dynamic of power structures relating to the organisation of sexual social relations and reproduction (gender) and the organisation of socio-cultural production (class). How are the resonances between these two categories reflected in our critical analyses of "environment" and "environmental problem?" This can be explored by looking at a problem of global currency: the connections between development and environment. A class analysis alone has been applied in critical theorising about global environmental problems and political environmentalism (e.g., Weston, 1986; Schumacher, 1973; Pepper, 1984). Even in the area of international EE, notions of "North-South" (rich countries – poor countries) relations have been evoked to conceptualise the educational responsibilities and challenges of developed and developing countries (Tuntawiroon, 1986). Redclift (1986) shows how "environment" and "environmental problem" are conceived differently through the eyes of the poor in "third world" countries:

First, when we refer to 'the environment' in developing countries we are referring to something which has been produced by history, through struggles and exploitation, usually as part of the colonial and post-colonial accumulation process.... It is important not to divorce the environment from its parts, especially the human populations whose productive activities have contributed to its evolution.... Second, most.... small-scale societies depend upon good ecological management to ensure future production. For most.... peasant or

pastoralist groups, the viability of the 'natural' environment is a condition of their existence. There is no divorce between their 'culture' and their ecology; 'nature' as a social category, assumes importance in their.... 'world view'..... Third, the impact of capitalism in.... 'less developed' countries implies contradictions for those with limited access to resources and power..... Self-sufficiency in food production or energy is difficult when labour, especially that of women, has to be allocated to gaining cash or to meeting the exigencies of the market and the state. Under these circumstances poor people inevitably have greater recourse to their 'natural' environment – which acts as the focus of the household's attempt to reconcile the needs of the family with those of the market.

By reflecting on this different view of environment and the problems resulting from its "use", it is easy to see how people of developing countries do not always display unequivocal commitment to environmental goals as they are conceived in the "North". Consequently, the poor are often blamed for ecological degradation as they are forced into opposition with their own environments in the struggle for survival. A class analysis of the environmental crisis, therefore, concerns itself with the role played by the socio-economic structures of international capital, trade relations between developed and developing countries, and large scale, high-tech agribusiness. What is almost always omitted or relegated to insignificance in such environmental critiques, are the questions of gender relations and the patriarchal underpinnings of these structural elements. In other words, looking at the problem more critically, we find that it is neither one of a technical nature to be ameliorated by advanced technology, nor is it simply an economic problem, eliminated solely by class redistribution of wealth.

Again, we take as an example the interface of development and environment. In recent years, the massive quantity of statistics generated by a variety of international aid, training and extension services has focused international attention on how the negative effects or externalities of trans-national economic policies and their resultant environmental consequences disproportionately affect the poor and specifically women and their children (Boserup, 1970). Consider these statements made at a UN General Assembly in 1985 on the worldwide condition of women:

Women suffer dual oppression of sex and class within and outside the family. The effects are strikingly apparent in the present world profile of women. While women represent 50 per cent of the world population, they perform nearly two-thirds of all working hours, receive only one-tenth of the world income and own less than 1 per cent of world property..... Women's work (has become) visible: her bearing and raising children, her sole responsibility for domestic work, her provision of most of the world's health care, her growing of half the world's food – all of this done for no wages – plus over a third of the world's paid labour too (Women: A World Report, 1985).

Third world development planning and aid often ignores women as they are rendered "invisible" by their domestic gender role and the sexual inequalities that devalue this role and get its labour for free. Patriarchal culture, which enforces these different gender roles, imposes social norms, taboos and practices which make it difficult if not impossible for women in developing countries or poor women in rich countries to: do waged labour; own land for cultivation to earn a livelihood; carry and use cash; not have children; reduce childbearing and childcare responsibilities; use contraception; get an education; procure development loans and other forms of aid due to their low rank in the political process; be involved in decision making that affects their and their children's welfare (Women: A World Report, 1985). Hence the recent coinage of the phrase "The Feminisation of Poverty" referring to the UN's recognition of the disproportionate increase of poverty in the world's women (Caldecott and Leland, 1983).

If we examine the seats of power and resources concerning decisions about planning, policy-making, legislation and the economics of environmental issues and practices, we find they are overwhelmingly in men's control. So, if we integrate the radical and socialist feminist perspectives on the nature of "environmental problem" we find that gender (in association with race and class) relations play a significant role in societies' cultural metaphors and norms of environmental practice (the ideological underpinnings) and in the power structures that control and sustain environmental practice (the political/economic underpinnings).

### **Environmental Education Re-Constructed**

As EE is environmental problem-solving focussed, the feminist perspective offers a more complete analysis of the environmental issue and thereby a better understanding of the problem and its potential solutions. Such an analysis is a political one, in that it looks at how power relations (in, for example, gender, class, race) shape the world in which we live. It is political in that it asserts that the "polity" (human social world) determines and controls how this social world is and has been historically constructed and organised and hence, refutes the myth that the past and present state of the world is a "natural" and therefore justifiable progression. Moreover, EE's analysis of socio-environmental problems is political in that it believes that if human social relations create the problems, they can also change and improve them.

Here we return to our initial premise about the mission of EE as it was formulated at Tbilisi. The 75 UNESCO-UNEP member states (most of which were classified as Third World or developing countries) clearly and systematically outlined the ever-growing list of "symptoms" of worldwide environmental problems. An initial analysis of the nature of these problems was proposed by conference participants, focusing on questions of conflicting value choices and their political implications. In this essay, this analysis was further expanded to include a feminist perspective of how environmental problems are gendered.

A critical EE curriculum must heed the recommendations that came out of Tbilisi and more effectively address the political nature of its environmental problem solving focus. The application of a feminist analysis in EE would

contribute to gaining a greater understanding of the underlying causes of environmental problems and hence, to move towards the goal of creating an appropriate educational context to aid in their resolution.

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