

**Ecofeminist and Feminist Philosophy:  
A Bibliographic Overview of Current Theory**

**Sub-Topics:**

**Cosmology**

**Sustainability and Politics**

**Gaia Theory and the New Science**



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<sup>1</sup> Fractal art depicting Gaia. <http://imagecache2.allposters.com/images/AMB/FC3603.jpg>

Ecofeminism is a new term for an ancient wisdom as a great and difficult idea.

-Gloria Orenstein and Irene Diamond<sup>2</sup>

Ecofeminism is a relatively new field of study encompassing our most ancient human sensibilities and our most modern ideas. Philosophically, ecofeminism is a constellation of diverse theories representing an exciting and necessary evolution of Western thought. The term *écoféminisme* was coined by the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 to name the parallels between the systematic subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature and to call upon women's unique potential in creating an ecological evolution.<sup>3</sup> The term describes women's diverse efforts to further environmental sustainability. It describes restructured theoretical perceptions of women's relationship to nature and the ways in which that relationship has been used by modern Western culture to validate the oppression of both.<sup>4</sup>

Ecofeminism includes fundamental ideas of feminism and some insights that are common to the deep-ecology<sup>5</sup> movement. Feminism, as Rita Gross puts it, is the "radical assumption that women are human beings."<sup>6</sup> It is both a method and a social vision calling for equality for women as one half of the species and for historic visibility of

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<sup>2</sup> Gloria Orenstein and Irene Diamond, *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (San Francisco: Sierra Books, 1990), xv.

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Merchant, "Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory," in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, eds. Gloria Orenstein and Irene Diamond (San Francisco: Sierra Books, 1990),100.

<sup>4</sup> Orenstein and Diamond, *Reweaving the World*, ix.

<sup>5</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Ecofeminism: Symbolic and Social Connections of the Oppression of Women and the Domination of Nature," in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*. Carol J. Adams, ed., (New York: Continuum, 1993),13.

<sup>6</sup> Rita M. Gross, *Feminism & Religion: An Introduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 23.

women's experiences and contributions. Further, it asserts that women have the right to full and equal participation in the making of culture<sup>7</sup> and access to resources.

Philosophical ecology maintains that our current environmental crisis is the inevitable conclusion of the history of Western culture.<sup>8</sup> It is also fundamentally concerned with the study of nature's subtle web of interconnected processes and how the principles of relation, interdependence, diversity, and flexibility may inform our human relationship with the earth and with ourselves.<sup>9</sup>

Inherent here is a critique of patriarchy and the systematic devaluation, commodification, and annihilation of all that is relegated as "other" in modern Western society.<sup>10</sup> This "other" includes women, people of color, working-class people, and other-than-human species.<sup>11</sup> Central to the discussion is the role, and subsequent deconstruction, of dualistic Western philosophies of separation that validate hierarchical societal structures in which some aspects of creation are valued more highly than others. The ramifications of this Western philosophical split are evident in gender roles, issues of race and colonialism, and the issues of ecological sustainability. The diverse voices within eco-feminism tackle these problems by discussing the philosophical implications of shifting from hierarchal and patriarchal assumptions of god, human society, and nature to models that are relational, egalitarian, and reciprocal. They also bring the philosophical into the political and activist arenas by addressing those Western dualist assumptions that

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<sup>7</sup> Orenstein and diamond, *Reweaving the World*, ix.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Zimmerman, "Deep ecology and Ecofeminism: The Emerging Dialogue," in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, eds. Gloria Orenstein and Irene Diamond (San Francisco: Sierra Books, 1990), 138.

<sup>9</sup> Charlene Spretnak, *The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics*. (New Mexico: Bear, 1986.), 23.

<sup>10</sup> Orenstein, *Reweaving the World*, x.

<sup>11</sup> Ynestra King, "'Healing the Wounds: feminism, Ecology and Nature/Culture Dualism,'" in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, eds. Gloria Orenstein and Irene Diamond (San Francisco: Sierra Books, 1990), 106-107.

underlie economic and social systems that create oppression and poverty and that compromise sustainable practices causing human suffering and ecological disaster. Also woven into the diverse theories within the broader category of ecofeminism are the new sciences such as Gaia theory and quantum theory, which illuminate a new Western understanding of reality. No longer is the world seen as static but, rather, as a matrix of inextricably inter-relational individual manifestations that are interdependent with each other and ultimately in continual interaction. This dance of diversity is now understood to make up a complex and emergent whole.

Ecofeminism represents an array of diverse voices speaking from within the context of many women's experiences, personal, political and religious perspectives, and particular relationships with geographical space. In fact, not all contributors embrace the term "ecofeminist" or even "feminist" because they may be grounded in sensibilities that position them primarily in a particular culture,<sup>12</sup> local issues of sustainability, and non-Western societal values that are not constellated around the issue of gender, which has historically been the emphasis of Western Euro-feminism. True to ecofeminist theory, which emphasizes diversity as a central tenet to healthy systems, each voice is unique and important and chimes a tone that is part of a larger holism of thought. However, a very real sense of urgency rings through this diverse body of material. These women are not kidding. They see, and feel, the logical conclusion of our Western culture's institutionalized dependency on abstract rationality, mechanistic thinking, patriarchal politics, and our disconnection from the natural systems that sustain us as nothing less than apocalyptic. Because of this felt urgency, they are calling for an ancient

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<sup>12</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 2.

apprehension of humanity as part of a complex living web of life. They are calling for inclusion of marginalized “others” into the philosophical and political discussion. They also advocate new sustainable ways of managing and distributing resources. The ecofeminist agenda calls for nothingless than a radical change in consciousness and a corrective restructuring of human society, from the local to the global level. This is no small task, but it is necessary because the ecological crises we are witnessing and experiencing is affecting our species’ ability to sustain itself on the earth. At its heart, ecofeminism is calling for the human community to wake up from our collective amnesia before we burn down the house.

This bibliographical essay looks at three general topics within the theories of ecofeminism. The first section is concerned with cosmology and the feminist rethinking of a philosophical order of the universe. By taking on such ideas as “god” and the origins of creation, these feminist thinkers seek to reveal the inextricable role religion plays in perpetuating our current ecological and social dilemmas. Central to this discussion is the Western patriarchal monotheistic creator and how this idea of god perpetuates entire systems of thought that no longer work, are in contradiction to the findings of contemporary science, and psychically support the pillars holding up oppressive and apocalyptic social orders that are clearly “anti-evolutionary” in that they do not sustain or nourish life. These emerging revised cosmologies incorporate a creator who is inherently relational and reflective of a world no longer understood to be mechanistic but, rather, a complex holism of dynamic interacting systems. Some of these theorists rethink god in terms of gender and also in terms of the role god plays in creating and interacting with her/his creation. Inherent in an ecofeminist discussion of cosmology is a deep ontological

shift that recognizes the earth and its creatures as having intrinsic value. This assumes a way of thinking that does not situate nature solely within its relation to human society or assign value to it solely based on its usefulness to human consumption.<sup>13</sup>

The second section discusses issues of sustainability, justice, economics, and the politics of access and management of natural resources. These works represent a practical application of ecofeminist theories of relation, ecology, and diversity, one that moves into the political and activist realms. For these thinkers and doers, once one understands the relational reality of the world, our human embeddedness within nature, and the suffering inflicted by patriarchal politics and economics on living entities, then corrective action should naturally follow. These voices have heralded new ways of interacting with the body politic, with reassigning power dynamics, and rethinking the value placed on specific kinds of work. Women's sustenance work, for example, is left out the equation of the Gross National Product, and qualities often associated with women, such as nurturing and compassion, are deemed inconsequential when assessing economical status and the distribution of wealth. Vital to the discussion here are the voices of women worldwide who experience the structures of oppression that are different from those familiar to affluent Western women. To women from Asia, Latin America, and Africa, race and the effects of colonization are as integral to the systems of oppression as is gender. Their voices speak from within particular world traditions, many indigenous, and their suffering of ecological destruction may be so deeply embedded in cultural identity that its loss represents genocide. Here, the connection of impoverished woman and the impoverishment of land becomes more than theory, being literally the concrete facts of survival. Deforestation, for example, means that women must walk twice as far each day

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<sup>13</sup> Orenstein, *Reweaving the World*, xi.

as previously to gather firewood; pollution of water sources means long treks for water. Not having access to clean water *does* result in children's dying from dehydration in shantytowns.<sup>14</sup> Lastly, the ways in which these women understand cosmology and religion do not necessarily employ the same framework of assumptions common to Western feminists. Women from "third world" countries often take a different view of Christianity and Islam and a sense of what is redemptive spiritually about these systems, based on their unique social and geographical contexts.<sup>15</sup>

The last section focuses on some of the newest revelations of science, including Gaia theory proposed by James Lovelock, quantum physics, and the new biology. These new directions in science have sculpted and validated ecofeminist philosophies of relational cosmologies and the green and inclusive politics that assume inherent interconnectedness. The authors in this section are scientists and philosophers who have taken the lead in expanding the parameters of traditional Western science by showing the limitations of reductionist methodology that has failed to synthesize an inclusive theory of how the world works. Central to these discussions is how science is now attempting to correct itself philosophically, according to its own findings, and to postulate new models for analysis that are able to assimilate what has been discovered. The challenge is for science to refocus itself on the findings that the world at the micro and macro levels does not function as mere machine but, rather, exhibits tendencies of interrelatedness, self-organization, and organic order that characterize a living system.

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<sup>14</sup> Ruether, *Women Healing Earth*, 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

## Perspective

Because ecofeminism is a relatively new field of intellectual discourse, all the works discussed in this essay are classics in that each one offers something theoretically exiting and original. Yet each is also part of an evolving body of work that is timely, necessary, and will continue to grow as our species faces accelerated evolutionary pressures. In this work, I do not assume that I have represented every voice completely or included every theoretic position within the larger body of material. For example, I do not discuss the issue of whether it is theoretically feasible to even bring spirituality into the ecofeminist discussion.<sup>16</sup> Similarly I do not discuss whether gender is a social construction without real roots in physicality. The ecofeminist material is deeply grounded in the physical, so these deconstructionist critiques seem hyper-intellectual and distracting. I am also aware that the entire notion of feminism is itself situated within class- and race-based access to power. Writing about ecological and social issues using an intellectual voice, and for Western academia no less, implies a certain amount of privilege, including access to leisure<sup>17</sup> time and resources,<sup>18</sup> as well as implying a particular cultural upbringing that valued such things as philosophy and activism.

However, from my perspective as a feminist scholar and pagan Euro-American, I have been stimulated and validated by these women's brave forays into this arena where philosophy, science, and activism merge. Of particular interest to me are the

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<sup>16</sup> Karen J. Warren, "A feminist Philosophical Perspective on Ecofeminist Spiritualities," in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*. Carol J. Adams, ed., (New York: Continuum, 1993),120.

<sup>17</sup> Though it certainly doesn't feel like leisure when working three jobs just to survive in this 21<sup>st</sup> century declining civilization, but it is when compared to other women who spend all day getting water and firewood so they can continue to live.

<sup>18</sup> Again, it doesn't feel like much privilege when the debt and sacrifice to do graduate school have taken such a huge toll on my ability to live. But again, it's still a privilege to even have had a chance to be in this situation.



cosmological questions. When I was young woman and active in feminist causes,<sup>19</sup> I had an epiphany. I somehow concluded intellectually, and felt intuitively, that beneath the politics, the issues, and the social factors, the real root of everything that was wrong in the world stemmed from the idea that god was a man. Like many of the women discussed here, I went searching for the face of a Western god who looked like me, my mother, and my sisters, rather than my father. This led me to female-based spiritual traditions and a feminist academic path. It was wonderful to have found the goddess espoused by several thinkers here and to be part of a diverse community that reclaims the divine feminine in so many ways. This idea of an immanent female god served me well for many years. However, over time my beliefs evolved beyond monotheism and toward a more indigenous informed ontology, so my position today is that there is no single god or goddess that embodies or exemplifies the totality of creation. As a polytheist, I perceive a reality populated by many deities and entities, in the same way that many bacteria populate the stomach. They are all a fact of nature, all equally sacred because all aspects of nature are inherently sentient, and they represent an opportunity for potential relationship or reciprocity. The negotiating of relationship with the multiple “persons,”<sup>20</sup> corporal and non-corporal, human and non-human, for the good of the community is what I understand to be the function of ritual, rite, and ceremony. The stories we tell ourselves, which define us and tell us who we are in relation to the land we live upon, the ancestors who came before us, and the ways in which we deal with environmental pressures, is what we call myth. It is from this perspective that I approach this essay.

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<sup>19</sup> I had a degree in journalism from SFSU and was on the board of the San Francisco chapter of the National Organization of Women as newsletter editor in 1989.

<sup>20</sup> A “person:” is any manifestation of reality that one can engage with to some degree reciprocally, and are understood to be relational, volitional, and social beings in their own unique ecosystems. Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), xvii.

### **Cosmology**

The philosophical heart of the ecofeminist cosmological discussion is the question of whether the natural world, with all its diverse forms, is alive or dead. The assumption that non-human manifestations of reality are dead, that is, not sentient or self-determined and therefore not sacred, is supported by Western theological interpretations of the Abrahamic transcendent male creator whose divine nature and presence is not reflected in the world he supposedly created. In the Protestant view, the world is understood to serve his purpose only in that it reveals its innate sin of physicality and its remoteness from its creator. This assumption supports a mechanistic worldview in which all matter is seen to be inert and becomes animated only when acted upon by a largely Deist creator or according to the narrowly described rules of mechanistic, reductionist science. Further, this assumption underlies current systems, both philosophical and social, which validate and perpetuate hierarchical models that have produced inequities and injustices in the human and non-human communities and are directly related to present ecological crises. Ecofeminists who engage in the cosmological discussion opt for the latter assumption: that the world is living. Their response is varied in tone and in focus, but all posit that if the world is understood to be alive, then theology needs a face-lift, that our modern Western perception of creator, and our human relationship to it and to the world, must transform.

No essay on feminist cosmology would be complete without including the work of Mary Daly, who was one of the first to take on the spiritual ramifications of patriarchy.

Daly began as a Catholic philosopher who wrote a feminist critique of Christianity in *The Church and the Second Sex*. She later became unable to resolve the inherent problem of the Christian god as male and then wrote *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. By the time she wrote *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, she had completely rejected her faith and was convinced that the idea of patriarchy was so inextricably bound with the word “god” that she refused to use it.<sup>21</sup> With this work she moved into what she terms as the territory of “radical feminism,” which she describes as the “journey of women becoming.”<sup>22</sup> This work is a fundamental feminist discourse on the ubiquity of patriarchy and how it has infiltrated every part of Western culture, within and without collective and individual women minds and bodies, social institutions, the mythologies that uphold those institutions, and the even the words we use to describe the rebellion against our own oppression by those systems. For Daly, patriarchy *is* the dominant religion in which all other issues are subsets,<sup>23</sup> and it is one that supports the death culture at the core of contemporary socially unjust and ecologically unsustainable traditions.

With *Gynecology*, Daly attempts to deconstruct patriarchy at its insidious philosophical heart and re-ground Western mythos completely into a female-oriented and relational ontology. She does this by shock technique as she fearlessly uses provocative language to “exorcise” and “castrate” the “internalized “Godfather”<sup>24</sup> in his various mythic manifestations. Her weapon and her magick is the “word.” She intentionally reclaims common language, based in now tired and invisible patriarchal connotations,

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<sup>21</sup> Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), xi.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

strips them of their normal usage and context, and then enlivens with them fresh gynocentric meanings. Feminists have long held that women need to take back the power to name ourselves and our experiences, and Daly is certainly doing that here. However, even more wickedly wonderful is that she is attacking the very foundation of the Abrahamic male god whose power is the “word,” which is the power to name and, therefore, the power of creation. This identifies the issue at the core of feminist cosmological questions and Western philosophical critique: the systematic, social and symbolic male usurpation of the life-giving powers embodied in women. Daly calls this the “great reversal.”<sup>25</sup>

In this work she specifically connects the word “Gyn,” as grounded in the female, with word “Ecology,” meaning the complex interrelationships between organisms and their environments.<sup>26</sup> She picks up on the word “ecofeminism” as defined by Françoise d’Eaubonne and reiterates that no male-led revolution is able to counteract the horrors of our current ecological issues, such as overpopulation and the destruction of nature, because these issues are squarely grounded in patriarchal culture. Her work is foundational because it is a testament to feminism’s evolution from primarily seeking equal rights for women to a call for radical changes in ontology, as well as heretical re-envisionings of male-centered cosmologies. It is a stepping stone that made possible the subsequent works of women who would come later and bring race, class, and ecology more deeply into the discussion.

Certainly Daly has been critiqued, mostly for her apparent essentialism that can be read so as to homogenize all women’s experiences. This critique comes from

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 9.

deconstructionist and other feminists and womanists, many who are not European-derived and who have accused her of relying on the Western-biased intellectualism that she has so vehemently eviscerated. She has also been accused of being culturally insensitive by assuming for speak for “brown” women, or citing white men about brown women, rather than allowing women from other than Euro-Western cultures to speak for themselves.<sup>27</sup> However, her work is important to the discussion because it reflects the herstorical context of this time period. It is also important because it was a catalyst that succeeded in inciting response, whether in solidarity or in critique, from the next generation of feminist and womanist thinkers.

Another feminist pioneer in the area of feminist cosmology, and one of the early advocates of an ecofeminist perspective within Christian theology, was Rosemary Radford Ruether. In *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* she takes the opposite tact from Daly and attempts to reconcile, rather than rend, ecological and feminist assumptions of an innately living creation with a Christian idea of a monotheistic creator. She asks whether Gaia, as the living and sacred earth, and god, as the monotheistic deity of the bible, “are on speaking terms.”<sup>28</sup> As a Christian revisionist, Ruether is deeply concerned with this question and uses an ecofeminist critical perspective in which to evaluate the legacy of Western Christian culture.

This work is concerned with the historical mechanics of *how* the assumption that the world is inherently dead evolved in Western philosophy. She begins with the Hebrew and Christian stories, moves into the Greek influence (including Plato), the Enlightenment, and finally modern science. Like other ecofeminists who pursue this line

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<sup>27</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY. WKJ Press, 2005), 72.

<sup>28</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (HarperCollins, 1994), 3.

of inquiry, she holds that classical Western cultural traditions that were codified between 5600 B.C.E and 800 C.E have made normative systems of domination that are antithetical to feminist and ecological perspectives because they have sacralized patriarchal hierarchy. Ruether takes us on a relatively comprehensive theological journey through the three major creation myths that inform Western cosmology beginning with Babylon and the destruction of the goddess Tiamat by the hero king Marduk. She sees this mythic template rooted in earlier Sumerian stories in which a primal cosmogonic and theogonic female deity represents an earlier cosmological model of reality. Ruether sees the story of the destruction of Tiamat by Marduk as evidence of an older “matriarchal”<sup>29</sup> order conquered by the rising powers of a city state. These forces are distinguished by their military focus and by their appropriation of the life force inherent in the elemental or natural power of the original creator Tiamat. She contends that the warrior male god, as the self-declared cosmological transcendent source of life, and the subsequent demotion of the goddess of birth and growth as a bearer of sin and death, is the philosophical expression at the heart of our current social and ecological crises.

Here is the “great reversal” also named by Daly, and it is an interpretation agreed upon by other thinkers. However, Ruether’s use of the term of “matriarchal” to describe this earlier order, and narrowly defining it as a reversal of patriarchy in which the “female is dominant, with subordinate male consorts,”<sup>30</sup> is not shared by all feminists and is a point of theoretical departure. Further, it lacks an expansion of vision called for by some ecofeminists to imagine non-patriarchal possibilities and to move beyond dualisms. Neither would all voices agree with Ruether’s depiction and dismissal of the work of the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>30</sup> ibid

archaeologist Marija Gimbutas who studied the material finds of Neolithic Europe and found the artifacts, burial patterns, and other evidence from dozens of Neolithic settlements to be distinct from those of later periods. What was significant to Gimbutas was that the Neolithic art—resplendent with images of cycling plant and animal life and with the stylized bodies of women—and the excavated structures and burial sites did not show evidence of the male-domination and warfare that mark the later Bronze Age. After years of extensive multi-disciplinary analysis of the sites and the patterns of the sublime art, Gimbutas concluded that the center of the indigenous European cosmology was an immanent “goddess” who embodied all aspects of the lifecycle, including birth, death and regeneration.<sup>31</sup> Further, she found that these ancient ancestors appeared to have lived in relatively egalitarian, peaceful, and matristic<sup>32</sup> societies.<sup>33</sup> Gimbutas’ theory places the reversal of Europe’s indigenous cosmology, alluded to in the story of Tiamat, to the time of tribal invasions of Neolithic culture by a proto-Indo-European people she named the Kurgans. These pastoral people from the Steppes brought with them a transcendent sky god, a warrior culture, and a patriarchal social system reflected in the new burial patterns and eclipse of female-honoring art. As the Kurgans conquered and merged with the indigenous societies, the older cosmology was destroyed or subsumed within the new world order. Our modern European legacy of patriarchy, hierarchy, and disconnection from nature was initiated.

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<sup>31</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess: Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), xix.

<sup>32</sup> Gimbutas intentionally did not use the term “matriarchy” precisely because its connotation as a reversal of patriarchy. Within matristic cultures several aspects of indigenous societal models are present such as matrilineality and matrilocality. Marija Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 324.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

Ruether, along with other anti-Gimbutas scholars, rejects this interpretation as Pollyanna in vision, essentialist in argument, and problematic due to the potentially constructed, and therefore biased, linking of woman and nature.<sup>34</sup> She ultimately finds ecofeminist redemption not in an idea of a newly gendered creator,<sup>35</sup> or in a radically different vision of our past as evidenced by prehistoric art, but in particular historically eclipsed and skewed biblical elements that reposition the human relationship with the Abrahamic god who ultimately provided nature for his children but did not necessarily stand against it.<sup>36</sup> From a Christian ecofeminist perspective, she rejects the idea of human domination over nature and decries its exploitation on the theological grounds that it is ultimately not ours to desecrate. It is god's creation. Further, she attests that human abuse of our ecological responsibility to steward god's gift of the natural world dangerously violates our primary relationship, which is our original covenant with god.<sup>37</sup>

Other diverse and non-revisionist voices in the Ecofeminist arena such as Daly, Riane Eisler, and Carol P. Christ, who were similarly critiqued by Ruether,<sup>38</sup> found Gimbutas' interpretation illuminating and informative to their scholarship. Ecofeminist and Green party pioneer Charlene Spretnak has written extensively on modernity, ecology, and feminist spirituality, and is another who found value in the Gimbutas interpretation of Western prehistory. In her work *The Resurgence of the Real: Body, Nature, and Place in a Hypermodern World*, she, like Ruether, deftly deconstructs the

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<sup>34</sup> Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 152.

<sup>35</sup> Although she makes mention of the "first personification of the divine, as the Goddess, the source of all life" in her introduction to *Women Healing the Earth* and then puts down those modern "Northern" women who "choose to worship her" while somehow holding a superior position that "other women of Christian background" use the newly found ancient divine feminine as a way of informing their version of the mono god as "the Ultimate Mystery." How this is any different or any better I surely do not know. 4-5.

<sup>36</sup> Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 207.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.



historic evolution of Western thought, but traces the beginning of patriarchal philosophy to the Kurgan invasions, not to Sumner. Like others, Spretnak sees the Neolithic art as provocative enough to be a significant element in the analysis of modern cosmology and reflective of a more harmonious human relationship with nature, one that she is calling for in this work. She traces the threads of this earlier “goddess” cosmology to the foundation of pre-Socratic philosophers whose ideas were still grounded in a holistic and elemental sensibility. Here Spretnak pierces a hole in the veil of “ideologies of denial”<sup>39</sup> that positions the origins of philosophy solely with the patriarchal Greeks. She asserts that the pre-Socratic schools were actually preserving a rich philosophical tradition that stretched back at least twenty-five thousand years into prehistory. Her investigation of modern philosophy and its sanctified assumption that the world is dead ultimately covers more ground than Ruether’s. Besides offering an evolution of theology, Spretnak deepens the context of the discussion by bringing in the historic shifts in art, architecture, and counterculture movements that arose as a counterforce to Western hierarchical philosophical and political trends. In this work she calls for the recognition of a philosophical course correction that is embedded in the “real.” Like other scholars who ground their arguments in the new physics and discoveries of the life sciences, she rejects the mechanistic worldview that informs classical science. For Spretnak, the “real” includes our physicality: a sense of place or community that is eco-social,<sup>40</sup> or grounded in place, and a renewed understanding, supported by modern science at its most advanced, of the inherent relational and creative nature of the world. Further, she calls for

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<sup>39</sup> Charlene Spretnak. *Resurgence of the Real: Body, Nature, and Place in a Hypermodern World* (NY: Routledge, 1999), 46.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

awareness of our sense of self as grounded in the “unified body/mind.”<sup>41</sup> In this complex and detailed work, Spretnak shifts the paradigm ontologically when she says it is not just that thinking about these things would be “a good idea”<sup>42</sup> but that the actual presence and power of body, of nature *are now* asserting themselves and poking large holes through the modern ideologies of denial. Philosophically, this assertion implies that what is embodied has intrinsic power through relation, regardless of whether it has been conquered and cut up by the ruling body politic or demonized in lieu of an abstracted male deity. She holds that the power inherent in the “real” has also asserted itself into philosophical absolutes of the Western experiment as ways of addressing the deconstructionist theories and beliefs of modernity that view any real meaning as vacant or as merely referential to other inherently meaningless things. Most hopefully, she finds the seeds of the positive as natural reactions embedded in the negative structures of modernity.<sup>43</sup> In this work, Spretnak brings together the diverse global and political issues addressed by ecofeminists and grounds them into their common philosophical core. For Spretnak, the deep structure that unites the “worrisome” facts of our current social and ecological predicament is modernity itself.<sup>44</sup>

In her book *The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics*, Spretnak explores what spirituality might look like if grounded in core ecological premises of relation and sustainability.<sup>45</sup> She asks a radical question: what can green principles contribute to the contemporary evolution of postmodern religions?<sup>46</sup> For Spretnak, the spiritual component

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>45</sup> Spretnak, *The Spiritual Dimension*, 22.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 34.

is necessary to balance the political and social arenas, and rather than reject spirituality in a knee-jerk reaction to its past abuse by religion, she calls for a reclamation and redefinition of this aspect of our humanity. She grounds the idea of spirituality into the elements of ecology and describes it as the focusing of awareness on subtle aspects of existences so that the “profound interconnectness”<sup>47</sup> of existence is revealed and the experience of unification with the oneness that relates everything is possible. This is core ecofeminist cosmology because it posits not only that the world is alive, but that everything is connected and ultimately one. Taking this concept as our spiritual premise, rather than the hierarchal model offered by the warring transcendent male sky god model, would fundamentally change the way we practiced our politics and structured our societies. If everything is one then there would be no expendable, exploitable, or valueless “other.”

The concept of reality being ultimately relational is a fundamental theme in feminist spirituality and ecofeminism. Several thinkers have incorporated an idea of a relational creator into their cosmologies, drawing upon the process philosophy of philosophers Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. Whitehead is as important and as unique as Gimbutas in contributing rich new grand fields of theory to Western thought. His works are dense and full of precise metaphysical terminology. He painstakingly searches for patterns that tie seemingly disparate external elements together and is foremost in his ability to illuminate the inherent error in the Western philosophical tendency to solely identify with, and ultimately deify, the abstract. He assumes that because we experience more than we can analyze, any abstraction is a false construct because it can only ultimately represent a selection of the available information within an

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 41.

infinitely complex totality. One of his most profound terms for this is “the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.”<sup>48</sup> For Whitehead, god is both transcendent and immanent and is a priori for initiating the temporal actualities that co-create the world.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Hartshorne, who was a teaching assistant to Whitehead, also envisioned a creator that is inherently relational and, in fact, growing, as well as being in a co-creative dynamic, rather than static, relationship with the diverse manifestations of creation. One of his best contributions to a new cosmology is his succinct tearing down of the inherent philosophical fallacies that plague an omnipotent and omnipresent creator in his work *Omnipotence: and Other Theological Mistakes*.<sup>50</sup>

One of the foremost thinkers informed by process theology is the feminist theologian Carol P. Christ. In her work *The Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality*, she takes the premise of a relational creator and embodies it within an immanent goddess who reflects the sacredness of women and nature. Christ discusses the Neolithic period and similarly places the beginning of patriarchy with the proto-Indo-European invasions and the shift from agriculture to Bronze Age weapons technologies. She, like Gimbutas, finds that the Neolithic proliferation of female and natural imagery offers hope that “we do not have to live as do today.”<sup>51</sup> True to process philosophy, her idea of creator is dynamic and living in all creation, yet for Christ she is still personal in a Western way. In this work she calls for a *theology* rather a *theology*, one which is epistemologically grounded in experience, in the feminine, and one which expresses the

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas E. Hosinki, *Stubborn Fact and Creative Advance: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1993), 6.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence: and Other Theological Mistakes* (New York: State University of New York, 1984), 10.

<sup>51</sup> Carol P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1997), 69.

creative and holistic nature of the world. Her goddess theology calls for embodied thinking as a correction to the illusion of objectivity that is the core of the normative patriarchal model and for the fostering of empathy, of putting oneself in the place of another in order to see reality from multiple perspectives—all of which, ultimately, would be aspects of the self through relation with goddess.

Similarly, the feminist theologian Catherine Keller takes a Western patriarchal concept of a separate self and rethinks it within a process model. Her work *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self* weaves a wonderful web of myth, including the dismemberment of Tiamat; history, including the Kurgans and Neolithic Europe; and modern psychoanalysis to analyze the ways in which patriarchy and the legacy of the transcendent male god sculpted a distorted and dysfunctional Western sense of self.<sup>52</sup> She explores the ways in which our legacy of dualism has skewed identity into a kind of frozen schizophrenia that manifests uniquely along gender lines. For Keller, the Western female identity reflects the soluble self, perpetually dissolved into relation and relegated historically and psychologically to the realm of “other,” even as she is destined to hold up the inherent weakness of the male who has usurped her creativity and is, therefore, dependent upon her. The male identity in this work is the hero warrior self. He is Marduk and the Kurgans, transcendent but never immanent, and destined to despise that which he is ultimately dependent upon and in relationship with. Here she is pointing to a distressed and disconnected Western psyche so indoctrinated into identifying with dualistic extremes that it is not only absurd but unsustainable. According to Keller, “As long as

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<sup>52</sup> Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 2.

separation itself is deified, women of faith will end up in the doubly dependent role of subjugation to God and the male, who himself is subjugated to God.”<sup>53</sup>

In her essay *Thinking with the weight of the Earth: Feminist Contributions to an Epistemology of Concreteness*, Linda Holler takes the process theological discussion to feminist epistemologies. Like Christ who calls for experiential and empathetic ways of knowing, Holler calls for knowing through relationship with “particulars” rather than abstracted “objects-in-general.”<sup>54</sup> This essay deconstructs Western thought, as does the work of Ruether and Spretnak, but focuses on how objective ways of knowing have changed the landscape of what and how we know and, therefore, how we relate. She cites the work of Susan Griffin, who brilliantly addressed this dynamic, as well as Keller and the new physics, which has determined that there is no absolute (“unentangled,” as physicists put it) or measurable objective distinction between the knower and known. Holler finds an epistemology that values the fallacy of objectivity at the expense of the subjective to be an attempt to “gain distance from the concrete”<sup>55</sup> and the ultimate patriarchal cry against death. Further, she asserts, as do others, that such dualism arises from, and serves to perpetuate, the hierarchical dynamics of “othering” addressed by feminist and ecofeminist critiques.

No one more uniquely expresses the devastating ramifications of the Western dualistic split of object and subject than the poet and scholar Susan Griffin. Her pioneering work *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* stands out as one of the most evocative revelations of the damage Western culture has done to women and nature

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>54</sup> Linda Holler. “Thinking with the Weight of the Earth: Feminist Contributions to an Epistemology of Concreteness,” *Hypatia*, vol 5, no 1 (Spring, 1990): 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 5.

to date. In this work, she uses a viscerally potent series of partial conversations, story fragments, poetry, and confessionals in counterpoint to the classically rational, authoritative, academic tone. She sets the male voices that speak for systems of domination against the embodied voices of women and animals that are affected by these systems. She does this intentionally to bring to the forefront the illusionary value patriarchy places upon objectivity in its theologically driven rejection of the subjective: "It is decided that the existence of God can be proved by reason and that reason exists to apprehend God and Nature....*And we are reminded that we have brought death into the world.*"<sup>56</sup> Both voices, which are glaringly distinct, work in tandem to invoke the depth of the Western split of body and mind, the dichotomy between immanent and transcendent perceptions of reality, and the devastating dynamics of patriarchal power that engage both.

In *Essays on Ecology, Gender and Society*, Griffin puts to practice the feminist idea of embodied scholarship, as she specifically states her perspective as both object and subject, focuses on an embodied epistemology based in empathy, and seeks the daring and self-reflective act of naming experience (as noted in Daly) as part of reclaiming forgotten and embodied aspects of Western consciousness and distorted ideas of power. In a series of beautifully written essays, she explores Western dualist assumptions and the ways in which they have affected our experience of the world and our relationship with self and with nature. She grounds this Ecofeminist philosophical exploration within the particulars of her experiences as a modern middle class Euro-feminist from Los

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<sup>56</sup> Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (NY:Garner & Row, 1978), 10-11.

Angeles<sup>57</sup> who witnessed her childhood environments systematically lost to modernization.

Another theorist to take the cosmological into the deeply embodied is the witch and ecological activist Starhawk. She has written several books that reclaim European pagan traditions and their earth-based and feminine-focused ontologies. Her work *The Earth Path: Grounding Your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature* presents the culmination of her other offerings and presents a matured view of living the cosmology that ecofeminism discusses. Here she grounds the spiritual and political, literally, into the dirt and into the dynamics of permaculture, a deeply ecological movement of holistic and relational agricultural practices she has pioneered. This work discusses the great rending of our modern consciousness from that of our ancestors and weaves a tale of reclamation using personal accounts of her own journey as she re-learned, as a contemporary Euro-American, how to be in true stewardship to the land while actually making her life on it. This is, of course, what Ruether was calling for in redefining the Christian idea of dominion. Starhawk's definition of an immanent goddess, who is the matrix embodying the great regenerative process underlying<sup>58</sup> the living world, is similar to other scholars who were informed by the Neolithic European art and the interpretations of Gimbutas. However, through Starhawk's embodied process we see the deep ontological deconstruction that is a necessary step in the evolution of Western-driven ecofeminist cosmology. Inherent within intellectual contributions toward a holistic paradigm shift is the danger of a philosophical fallacy of misplaced concreteness by the very act of theorizing about an immanent goddess as a correction to the monotheistic patriarchal god.

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<sup>57</sup> I can relate here, being born and raised in Southern California.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



This is because theorizing itself is ultimately still an act of abstraction. Describing intellectually a relational and embodied creator and creation, though necessary, is simply not the same as living intimately with the Earth's water<sup>59</sup> and fire cycles<sup>60</sup> as does Starhawk. Her lived experiences, as she attempts to apply her spiritual beliefs to her world, are informed empirically by the moods and cycles of the earth. This is what makes this work an important bridge from classic Western theoretic feminism toward more indigenous, female-oriented, and eco-conscious belief systems.

The Indian<sup>61</sup> and European-American feminist scholar Paula Gunn Allen's work offers another cosmological bridge between Western feminist and indigenous sensibilities. In *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* and *Grandmothers of the Light: A Medicine Woman's Sourcebook*, Allen addresses the epistemological and ontological differences between American Indian and Western worldviews in which basic assumptions about cosmology, the feminine, and our relationship with nature come into bold relief. These works center upon the potency and form of Indian stories as literature, history, and myth. The medium of story as catalyst, rather than theory, is integral to the epistemology of indigenous and pre-patriarchal societies that maintained cultural cohesion, ancestral integrity, and masterful techniques of environmental adaptation through oral traditions.

According to Allen, it is the stories, through the power of "the word" that connect us to the "universe of power," or the "Great Mystery."<sup>62</sup> Indian cosmologies are grounded

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<sup>59</sup> Starhawk, *The Earth Path: Grounding Your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 137.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>61</sup> Gunn Allen used the term "Indian" rather than "Native" to describe herself, so I use that identification here.

<sup>62</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, *Grandmothers of the Light: A Medicine Woman's Sourcebook* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 3.

in the power of the feminine, the power of the land, and the power of myth as a magical and participatory realm. This takes the ecofeminist cosmological assumption that the world is alive rather than dead to a non-Western theological understanding of the relational. It is not a covenant with a monotheistic god or a personal relationship with an embodied female creator that informs Indian cosmology; nor is it simply the understanding that the earth and her creatures are sentient and imbued inherently with value in their own right. Rather, the Indian spirituality itself is based in the living and relational physicality of the environment of which humans are an inextricable part. Further, it is by way of ceremony, not text, that those sacred relationships between the human and non-human world of multiple persons are perceived and articulated. The detached, analytical objectivity espoused by Western science as the only true tool by which one gains knowledge literally does not function in cosmologies that depend on the “magic” of relationship and participation.<sup>63</sup>

In the earliest Pueblo creation myths it is Thought Woman<sup>64</sup> who is the original creatrix of the world. She is also known as Spider Woman and Hard Beings Woman.<sup>65</sup> For the Iroquois she is called Falling Woman.<sup>66</sup> She achieved this first great act of creation by her thought, which is the power of the “word” later usurped by the Abrahamic god. It can also be understood as vibration, which physics tells us is the quantum basis of all forms of matter. It is vital to understand that the original creatrix is neither a bearer as in mother nor a parent as in father. Rather, she is the first parthenogenetic initiator of the life cycle who birthed herself, twinning into daughters, then sons, and then all the persons

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<sup>63</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 11.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 105

<sup>65</sup> Hamilton A. Tyler, *Pueblo Gods and Myths* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 82.

<sup>66</sup> Alice Barbara Mann, *Iroquoian Women: The Gantowisas* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 3.

who inhabit the worlds. Gunn Allen describes Thought Woman as the template of complexity that is the necessary condition for material creation and is fundamentally female in nature.<sup>67</sup>

A careful study of these works reveals a subtle, sometimes barely detectable Western bias within feminism that tells us that even as we passionately attempt to deconstruct dualism and overturn patriarchy for the good of everything, we are still unconsciously embedded in an anthropocentric worldview. In *The Woman I Love is a Planet: The Planet I Love is a Tree*, Gunn Allen writes that we may focus on our current ecological crisis and believe it caused by “men, or White people, or capitalism, or industrialism, or loss of spiritual vision, or social turmoil, or war, or psychic disease,” when in fact it is the planet going through *her own process of initiation* and it is our great honor to attend her rites.<sup>68</sup> This bias is also illuminated when modern people say that “we have to save the earth,” which shifts the power of the planet to human beings and assumes that she needs us to save her, rather than the reverse.

A good example of this ontological shift that goes beyond dualist thinking is Jane Caputi’s essay *Nuclear Power and the Sacred*. Here she explores the “god-like” power of nuclear energy, and the mythic, historic, and social references that have arisen around the modern realization of this deadly force. She discusses the ways in which nuclear technology approximates the patriarchally defined sacred and his “awesome and limitless power, omniscience, eternity, and omnipresence.”<sup>69</sup> She includes images of war-mongering males with giant missile phalluses dominating and annihilating women and

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<sup>67</sup> Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 14.

<sup>68</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, “The Woman I Love is a Planet,” in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, eds., Gloria Orenstein and Irene Diamond (San Francisco: Sierra Books, 1990), 54.

<sup>69</sup> Jane Caputi, *Nuclear Power and the Sacred*, in “Ecofeminism and the Sacred,” ed. Carol Adams (New York: Continuum, 1993), 238.

nature. However, she astutely notes that women under patriarchy are apotheosized under male supremacy as mothers and givers of life but are denied the death powers of the Crone and her necessary function of destruction that facilitates rebirth.<sup>70</sup> To this end, she recognizes her own Euro-American biased impulse to focus on exposing the phallic nature of nuclear technology as a feminist reaction. She brings in American Indian<sup>71</sup> voices such as Gunn Allen, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Carol Lee Sanchez who attempt to liberate the force of the atom from patriarchal usurpation and revision it with a gynocentric face. Here she cites Awiakta who ponders whether as the atom began “asserting its nature.....Perhaps the universe resembled a great thought more than a great machine,” and Silko who sees the immense power of nuclear energy as Thought Woman herself.<sup>72</sup>

### Sustainability and Politics

Violation and exploitation of the land and of women’s bodies is, in part caused by widespread human disrespect for the unity of nature’s placement...that has led to the destruction of natural process. - Delores Williams<sup>73</sup>

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The idea of sustainability is based on the Ecofeminist cosmological principal of relation: that the earth and its forms are alive, that all living systems are interdependent, and that if you poison one well, you have poisoned the entire system. It assumes that life

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>71</sup> I am still using “Indian” in respect to Paula Gunn Allen.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>73</sup> Delores S. Williams, “Sin, Nature and Black Women’s Bodies,” in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, ed. Carol J. Adams (New York: Continuum, 1993), 26.

holds value in its own right and that the cultivation of diversity is necessary for a healthy system. Further, it is based on the idea that current economical and social models are inherently flawed and dangerous because they do not originate from the premise that human sustainability is directly connected to, and impacted by, our dependence upon the earth and its resources. Fundamentally tied in to these ideas are the ways in which women, and their energies and their bodies, are perceived and the ways in which Western reality affects issues of spirituality, sustainability, and ecology.

Toward this end, the thinkers in this section heretically merge the social with the economic. They discuss the exploitive nature of a “free market,” the economic and social imperialism of corporate globalization, and the real and devastating results of these systems on human and non-human life. A dominant topic here is the effects of the current world economy on women and their ability to sustain their families and on communities and their ability to sustain their traditional ways of life. They critique the dominant worldview, aligned within patriarchal cosmology, which defines and deifies economics as a main indicator and regulator of world systems and defines progress in terms of technology and the expansion consumption of goods. This material offers new and holistic ways of rethinking our assumptions about the distribution of wealth and resources by taking into account the health of ecosystems and the quality of life as means to benefit the entire interdependent system of global communities. Lastly, they bring the call for change through non-violent activism as a response to the political and economic violence that is perpetuated on “othered” people and societies and serves to maintain the current patriarchal death culture.

One of the most potent and sobering books to address the issue of economic, ecological, and social sustainability is Vandana Shiva's *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*. Intensely relevant in light of our current chaotic global world reality, she brings together the contemporary issues of systemic global poverty, access to food and water, the current prevalence of war as integral to, and as result of, our current patriarchal economic policies, the effects of globalization and corporate transnationalism on local communities. She also brings to her analysis an understanding of social movements that seek to address our current environmental and social dilemmas. She grounds her discussion in the history of her native land, India, and its ecological and social degradation through colonialism and the corporate privatization of basic resources such as water and seeds, which has adversely affected agricultural traditions and has served to impoverish local communities.

Shiva calls for a new vision of an "Earth Democracy" as a contemporary model for global sustainability. She assumes that economy, politics, and culture are interconnected and that the ways we exchange goods inherently impacts the quality of life and the wealth of living local economies.<sup>74</sup> Her idea of an Earth Democracy is based on the ecofeminist idea that to be sustainable we must re-root our consciousness and our energy locally in our environment while remaining connected to others as global citizens. To do this she calls for the inclusion of environmental impact in policy decisions, an emphasis on working cooperatively for the benefit of the local and global communities and on reassigning value to the nurturing of peace and dignity for all persons.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 11.

She also debunks the myth of transnational corporations as liberators of the world through technology, which she says serves only to take resources out of the local community and shift wealth to the disconnected, wealthiest Westerners in a hierarchical patriarchal model and which is fundamentally grounded in bigoted class, race, and gender assumptions that values the few over the many. Further, she deconstructs the fallacy of an objective market by noting that the sustenance economy is maintained by the integral daily work of mothers and others marginalized by Western society. She strikingly points out the economic reality arising from a patriarchal cosmology when she asserts that the global economy utilizes this sustenance workforce, while devastating its real livelihood, one that is grounded in the local environment, even as it systematically erases their contributions from the economic equation. Mythically this is the story of Tiamat and the great cosmological reversal of source and usurpation of power named by Rutherford, Daly, and Keller applied to world economics. Shiva sees the supposedly “free market,” in which corporations dangerously take resources out of an ecosystem at the expense of those who live within them, without assuming any responsibility for the consequences, as contributing to the growth of worldwide fundamentalist movements and violent rebellions.<sup>76</sup>

Shiva identifies the colonialist weapon of corporate globalization to universalize particular disembodied agendas as an instigator of violence, and even terrorism.<sup>77</sup> Without sustainable communities, and stripped of the political power to affect change, desperate and displaced people are driven to desperate actions. Further, she deconstructs the assumption that democracy means a centralized and government-sanctioned corporate

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<sup>76</sup> The current phenomenon of armed teenaged Somalian pirates attacking more technologically advanced vessels from wealthier nations comes to mind.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 96.

control of resources. For Shiva, democracy means self-rule, not as informed by the hyper-individualization of Western culture but as an organic product of the healthy tendency of organisms to self-organize based on individuals in constant relationship with each other and mindful of the specific dynamics of their communities and environments.<sup>78</sup> Shiva calls on nonviolent activism “through everyday actions on everyday issues that reweave the web of life.”<sup>79</sup> She cites here the successful and nonviolent resistance organized by poor Indian women against the biopiracy of corporations such as Monsanto and the WTO, which are destroying their traditional agricultural ways of life.

In *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics* the feminist and cultural historian Riane Eisler calls for a redefinition of classic economics that would include the relational tasks of caring and caretaking, the life-supporting activities of households and communities, and the traditions that value the stewardship of nature.<sup>80</sup> This is a natural progression from her previous works, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, which outlines the reversal of matristic worldviews by patriarchal cultural systems informed by the Gimbutas material, and *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth and the Politics of the Body* in which she explores the ramifications of this shift biologically, psychologically and socially. In those works, Eisler introduced her social partnership model, which posits a fundamental premise of mutual respect and reciprocity, caring, and community well-being in contrast to the values of our current patriarchal systems that necessitate the domination of “others” and facilitate hierarchical social structures.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>80</sup> Riane Eisler, *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2007), 3.



In *The Real Wealth of Nations* Eisler applies her theories of a partnership model to economics and calls, as does Shiva, for new definitions of productivity and consumption.<sup>81</sup> She calls for economics to include the “hidden system of valuations in which women and the work of caring and caregiving stereotypically associated with women is devalued.”<sup>82</sup> She proffers a new map that envisions a revised economics based on caring and includes modified elements of capitalism and socialism that are not based in hyper-individualism but focuses, instead, on partnership-building that benefit the entire system by taking into account the inherent value of reciprocal relationships. In this model she makes salient the traditionally invisible areas of production, such as the household economy, volunteer work, the illegal markets, and government policies that foster the nurturing of children, and which function to sustain daily human life. An important point here, one also picked up by Shiva in her critique of transnational corporate policies, is the artificial manufacturing of scarcity through a market that serves to perpetuate over-consumption and the generation of unsustainable amounts of waste, while validating the continual preparation for, and eventual implementation of, war.<sup>83</sup>

A major force in the ecology movement and a founding member of the German Green Party was Petra Kelly. In *Thinking Green! Essays on Environmentalism, Feminism, and Nonviolence*, she presents a series of essays outlining the social and political issues that inform, and are the focus of, Green politics, which has long advocated policymaking that is consistent with the core tenants of Shiva’s Earth Democracy and Eisler’s caring economics. For Kelly, nonviolence, ecology, social justice, and feminism are inseparably linked. True to Ecofeminist theory, Kelly equates

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 130.

the oppression of women and nature with the dualistic structures of domination that create less valued and expendable “others” on the basis of gender, race, class and species. She, like others, names male domination of women as the common thread running through all systems of oppression and as the pattern that connects the acts of individual rape with the ecological rape of the planet.<sup>84</sup>

Kelly’s Green economy shifts focus from industrial growth as the guiding indicator of a society’s prosperity to values that further and protect human and environmental health. She rejects the narrow barometer of the number of goods produced and greatly expands the economic equation to include those production methods that conserve resources, protect human health, and result in durable, rather than expendable, goods. She insists on factoring in access to water, un-poisoned food, clean air, and a flourishing of diverse life forms to any measure of economic success.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, she notes the cost of an inflated arms race, the necessity of fostering nonviolence as social defense, and the immensely important issue of human rights. In these essays she applies these Green principals to contemporary issues, such as the colonization of Tibet and the failure of early efforts to achieve German reunification. This work addresses many of the same issues as do other thinkers here but is uniquely important in that it marks the historic evolution and dynamics of the Green party and Kelly’s larger-than-life contribution within and without the German parliament. Here she discusses her personal participation in the consensus-building process during her political career and her unique experiences as a pioneer in ecofeminist activism.

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<sup>84</sup> Petra Kelly, *Thinking Green! Essays on Environmentalism, Feminism, and Nonviolence* (California: Parallax, 1993), 14.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

Another ecofeminist who has taken her commitment to sustainable systems, social justice, and nonviolence into the arena of political activism is Starhawk. In *Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority and Mystery* she weaves a tale of eco-pagan theory, the evolution of Western philosophy, the psychologies of domination, introspective work, and her personal experiences facing law enforcement and incarceration as an ecosocial protester. As in Kelly's work, *Truth or Dare* represents a unique historic document of the ecological counterculture movement set within contemporary particulars, such as protests at weapon sites at California's Lawrence Livermore laboratories<sup>86</sup> and the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common in England in the 1980s.<sup>87</sup> Most striking about this work is her analysis of the patterns of domination and the ways we are controlled by, and complicit with, the normative structures of authority that cultivate violence and unsustainable social and ecological systems. Starhawk strips the term "power" out of patriarchal-hierarchical definitions that inherently include hyper-individualism, exploitation, and the generation of fear through violence and scarcity and places it newly within a context of individual empowerment as conviction and as the deliberate cultivation of acts of relation and reciprocity. Her models of "power-over" to indicate the former and "power-within" as the latter are as significant a contribution to the ecofeminist and new-paradigm philosophies as Eisler's dominator and partnership models. She writes that power-over systems are embedded in culture and shape every modern institution, including schools, courts, law enforcement, and the workplace. Inherent within this model is the implied threat of violence, whether by gun,

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<sup>86</sup> Starhawk, *Truth Or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority, and Mystery*. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 4.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

or by lack of access to information and resources.<sup>88</sup> For Starhawk, power-within is a result of our relationship with the immanent, with spirit, and is accessible through our innate and living connection with each other and with all manifestations of life.<sup>89</sup> Her call to activism combines her eco-pagan cosmological belief systems with her working knowledge of sustainability through her experiences with permaculture.

In *Women Healing The Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*, an important anthology edited by Ruether, women from Abrahamic religions in non-Western cultures and diverse sensibilities speak in a wonderful series of essays that covers cosmology and sustainability, as well as the detailed effects of ecological warfare and patriarchal systems on non-Western women and society and the effects of class and race on the spirits and livelihoods of real women across the globe. This work is divided into three sections, covering writers from Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Ruether set as her goal the expansion of ecofeminist discussion to include voices that do not always agree with Western feminist values, or call themselves feminists, and to make them “audible to women of the North”<sup>90</sup> as an inclusionary and educational act. The idea of god as diverse and interconnected, both in indigenous and Christian theologies, is a theme running through many of these offerings.

However, responses to the patriarchal patterns of the Abrahamic religion imported by the colonizers of these regions and to reclaiming elements of sustainability within these traditions are different for each writer because each woman is situated within her unique experience of place and community. For the Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara, in “The Trinity and Human Experience: an Ecofeminist Approach,” the

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>90</sup> Ruether, *Women Healing Earth*, 7.

Christian Trinity is a way of understanding god as an expression of the dynamic process by which life pours forth its variety of expressions and as representative of the inherent social and ecological good of cultivating relation. She finds the Trinitarian structure imposed by Christianity through colonization of the Americas to be a recoverable model that invites “whites, blacks, indigenous peoples, Asiatics and *mestizos*, all with different languages, customs, statures and sexes...” to come together as the diverse multiplicity that is in fact the unity of the expression of the vital process of life.<sup>91</sup>

In “Earth-Healing in South Africa” Denise Ackermann, a Christian, and Tahira Joyner, a Muslim, identify patriarchal patterns of dominance bolstered by racist and classist attitudes in contemporary Abrahamic religions as incompatible with the tenets of religions that call for caring for, and about, creation.<sup>92</sup> Rather than rejecting Abrahamic religion, they advocate using the church as a forum for ecological reform. They also bring to light the legacies of patriarchal apartheid relevant to issues of sustainability and justice, citing the deliberate policies of social engineering by which the South African government sought “separate development” for black South Africans, and which had disastrous ecological effects and impoverished millions.<sup>93</sup>

The Venezuelan feminist theologian Gladys Parentelli contributes an essay on the effects Spanish colonization and evangelization has had on Latin America and its poor, especially black and indigenous women who have no support from either the government or the church. In Latin America, 80 percent of the total population is made up of women,

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<sup>91</sup> Ivone Gebara, “The Trinity and Human Experience: An Ecofeminist Approach,” in *Women Healing the Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 17.

<sup>92</sup> Denise Ackerman and Tahira Joyner, “Earth-Healing in South Africa: Challenges to Church and Mosque,” in *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 124.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

and their children, and immigrants. Meanwhile, the political patriarchs consume the bulk of resources and control the financial pools while hospitals and schools go unfunded. She critiques the Vatican, which is “part and parcel”<sup>94</sup> of the same patriarchal system as the conquerors and which perpetuates and benefits from the oppression of women. She emphasizes that poor women are the region’s greatest resource because they uniquely know how to care for life and the land and are least likely to destroy the environment that sustains them. According to Parentelli, these women are administrators “par excellence”<sup>95</sup> because no one makes better use of things while having so little. Further, they maintain communities, often without husbands, and come together in grassroots activism, for example organizing and pooling resources to feed community children when the government does not.

Aruna Gnanadason makes this same point about poor women’s activism: it originates from an intimate relationship with struggle and also from an innate love and reverence for life.<sup>96</sup> She cites the grassroots activism of Indian women protecting the trees of their forest in the Chipko Andolan and fighting against the Narmada Valley dam project. Further, she points out, as Gimbutas did, that in pre-Aryan times, nature was symbolized as the embodiment of the female principle and that the abuse and debasement of women and of nature is what has corrupted this once sacred connection. She finds that the power that poor women bring is not the breaking of their bonds with nature in order to elevate themselves as females from the subjugation of patriarchal systems, as some

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<sup>94</sup> Gladys Parentelli, “Latin America’s Poor Women: Inherent Guardians of Life,” in *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 31.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>96</sup> Aruna Gnanadason, “Toward a Feminist Eco-Theology for India,” in *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 75.

Western feminists have argued for and have done, but rather in protecting their unique connection with the environments they survive within and that they deeply love.<sup>97</sup>

Another important pioneering anthology to address the diverse voices within a growing Ecofeminist movement is *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* edited by Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein. Many of the authors discussed earlier here are represented by essays that expound upon their theories. A new area, in relation to issues of politics and sustainability, was framed in Sally Abbot's essay, "The Origins of God in the Blood of the Lamb," which discusses the theological and ecological implications of animal sacrifice. Here she outlines the early human relationships with animals as ritualized and serious business because they were based on the understanding that animals are ensouled.<sup>98</sup> Further, she equates the Christian notion of the human expulsion from paradise as a reflection of the enmity between humans and animals, related to our modern sense of shame about nudity and our "animal" nature.<sup>99</sup> Lastly, she calls for a cultural recognition of animal rights and the restoration of a more sustainable and compassion relationship with those souls that feed us, including a call to vegetarianism, which would eliminate the need to kill 15 million animals a year<sup>100</sup> and would increase the efficiency of resources used in food production.

Marti Kheel's "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology: Reflections on Identity and Difference" also discusses the human dilemma regarding the relationship with killing animals in her more broad discussion of the nuanced differences of the identification of

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>98</sup> Sally Abbott, "the Origins of God in the blood of the Lamb," in *Reweaving the world: the Emergence of Ecofeminism*, eds. Gloria Orenstein and Irene Diamond (San Francisco: Sierra Books, 1990), 38.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, 39.

<sup>100</sup> She is quoting Frances Moore Lappé's work here which is dated. The actual number is closer to 9 billion factory farmed animals that are slaughtered for food in America alone, according to farm animal activist group Farmsanctuary.com.

self in deep ecology and ecofeminism. This is a Western psychoanalytic treatment of gender and objects-relation theory<sup>101</sup> in relation to ideas of the self, which include our culturally perceived relationship to “other,” including animals.<sup>102</sup> Here she attempts to reconcile the seeming contradiction of hunting with the intuition of not harming another needlessly. She makes the point that in deep ecology it is the widest sense of identification to the biotic community as a whole rather than to other sentient individuals that is emphasized and that this juncture is where feminism and deep ecology are differently situated upon gender-defined definitions of self.

In “Toward A Womanist Analysis of Birth,” the midwife and theorist Arisika Razak brings a womanist lens to the discussion of birth as a template for inclusiveness, justice, and sustainability that includes the entire community and more importantly includes men as nurturers and caregivers. “Womanism”<sup>103</sup> is a term used by women of color to name their own unique experiences of race, class, and community in light of traditional Western Euro-feminism, which has traditionally been intellectually focused upon gender as the main impetus of oppression. Razak here is expanding the ecofeminist and womanist ideas of relation into one of the most physically intensive and symbolically rich female initiations, that of women’s capacity to give birth.<sup>104</sup> Her main question is how to reposition this fundamental human physical experience with new ideas of relation

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<sup>101</sup> Marti Kheel, “Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology: Reflections on Identity and Difference,” in *Reweaving the world: the Emergence of Ecofeminism*, eds. Gloria Orenstein and Irene Diamond (San Francisco: Sierra Books, 1990), 134.

<sup>103</sup> She is quoting novelist and poet Alice Walker here who coined this term to include black feminists and feminists of color who may be non-separatists and who bring into the expanding feminist definition issues of race, diversity and sexuality. Alice Walker, “Womanist: A Letter to the Editor of MS,” in *Feminisms and Womanisms: A Women's Studies Reader* eds., Althea Prince and Susan Silva-Wayne (Toronto: Women's Press, 2004), 107.

<sup>104</sup> Arisika Razak, “Toward a Womanist Analysis of Birth, in *Reweaving the world: the Emergence of Ecofeminism*, eds. Gloria Orenstein and Irene Diamond (San Francisco: Sierra Books, 1990), 169.



and sustainability. Inherent here is a critique of patriarchal birthing practices and attitudes, as well as a reclaiming of “woman-controlled and woman-dominated” traditions oriented toward the healing and care-giving of life that is “of, by, and for the people.”<sup>105</sup> Irene Diamond further takes up the issue of childbirth and its link to the well-being of children and the well-being of the earth. She also critiques the current patriarchal models of regulating birth and reproductive rights as an “unmitigated attack on women,” including the appropriation of the “product” of childbirth through certain technologies that are claimed to further women’s freedom.<sup>106</sup> She also discusses the issues of overpopulation, genetic manipulation, and the idea of reproductive choice in light of current social and ecological issues.

Another noteworthy anthology is *Ecofeminism and Sacred*, edited by Carol J. Adams. The essays here include feminists and womanists speaking from diverse spiritual traditions including Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Native American traditions, and shamanism. Gunn Allen’s and Caputi’s essays, already cited here, are included in this book, which focuses on the sacred as the sustainable and on spirituality as based in relation and reciprocity. Some highlights include Lina Gupta’s “Purity, Pollution and Hinduism,” which focuses on the Ganga River in India as the living system around which myth, spirituality, issues of environmental activism and ecological crises constellate.<sup>107</sup> She equates the purity and the pollution of the Ganga with patriarchal and colonialist forces that have similarly split the feminine and its power into dualisms that are both revered and denigrated. She focuses on the complexity of the personal and

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>107</sup> Lina Gupta, “Ganga: Purity, Pollution, and Hinduism,” in *Ecofeminism and Sacred*, ed., Carol Adams, (York: Continuum, 1993), 99.

communal relationship with the life-sustaining and defiled river as an ecofeminist call for a religious and environmental reform within Hinduism.<sup>108</sup>

Gloria Orenstein's essay "Toward an Ecofeminist Ethic of Shamanism and the Sacred" identifies the growing interest in shamanism by ecofeminists. In this offering, she acknowledges that shamanism, which is a Western term for a spiritual and societal function within many diverse indigenous cultures, offers modern people a model of deep relationship with nature and its many "persons," as shamanism arises from an ancient earth-based relational spirituality.<sup>109</sup> She is careful to delineate the ethical issues that modern people face when attempting to understand and assimilate shamanic ontologies and practices, including reductionist and essentialist interpretations, which are still based in a Western tendency to abstract and which are perceived by Indigenous people as a further colonization of their traditions.

In Shamara Shantu Riley's essay "Ecology is a Sistah's Issue Too: the Politics of Emergent Afrocentric Ecowomanism," she addresses what Aruna Gnanadason also described: a patriarchal severing of black women from their connection to the environment as a tactic of slavery and colonialism in which hierarchical dominance is situated precisely on women's connection with nature. She cites sobering statistics relevant to this disconnection that include the "objectification of black women as less than human and equated with animals in that they were forced to breed against their will."<sup>110</sup> She further discusses, among other things, the display of Sarah Bartmann who was an African woman, known as the "Hottentot Venus, and who was used to uphold

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 106

<sup>109</sup> Gloria Feman Orenstein, "Toward an Ecofeminist Ethic of Shamanism and the Sacred," in *Ecofeminism and Sacred*, ed., Carol Adams, (York: Continuum, 1993), 172.

<sup>110</sup> Shamara Shantu Riley, "Ecology is a Sistah's Issue Too: the Politics of Emergent Afrocentric Ecowomanism," in *Ecofeminism and Sacred*, ed., Carol Adams, (York: Continuum, 1993), 192.

white supremacist notations by way of a traveling side-show that “proved,” using the medium of “science,” that blacks, like animals, are inferior to “rational and civilized” whites. At her death in 1815, Bartmann, most horribly, was dissected and her genitalia and buttocks put on display in Paris.<sup>111</sup> Riley takes on the systematic racism, and the denigration of people of color and nonhuman persons, as part of the Western tendency toward dualism that has ultimately resulted in our current ecological crises. She calls for a rethinking of a modern black relationship to environment, including the reclamation of motherhood, and of African earth-based spiritualities and their indigenous roots that emphasize the cultivation of diversity that sustains life. She cites here the differences between ecofeminism and afrocentric womanism most poignantly when she writes, “Unlike most white women, Black women are not limited to issues defined by our femaleness but are rather often limited to questions raised about our very humanity.”<sup>112</sup>

Certainly, issues of race, gender, and colonization are historical. Barbara Alice Mann’s work *Iroquoian Women: The Gantowisas* is a witty and complex herstoric retrieval of the power of Iroquoian women and their central social and economic roles in the highly prosperous communities of the longhouses in the colonial Eastern United States. Here she sifts through distorted references and prejudicial data about the First Nations and their complex consensus-building society, including their eclipsed contributions to the development of early American democratic principals. The fact of commanding women and their central status in the Iroquois world was not only intentionally erased and skewed from historic documents, it was not even conceivable to

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 197.

many European men; consequently, the historic documents are just plain lacking.<sup>113</sup>

Mann uses stories, as does Gunn Allen, to present the epistemology of this culture; and to resurrect the Gantowisas by setting women's traditions as the "keynote" to each chapter.<sup>114</sup> One important highlight of this work is the role that women's spiritual, economic and social status played in their agricultural success: "Stunned Europeans recorded the agricultural cornucopia...there were beautiful valleys and fields rich in corn...along with other products in abundance."<sup>115</sup> Colonial attempts to strip Indian women of their power were attempts to take down the culture, and raids upon these people included razing and seizing their vast supplies of food, which were the result of women's sacred intimate and practical relationship with their environment. Another highlight of this work is the revelations of the shameful details of early European settlers' genocide against the First Nations. Besides destroying agricultural and social systems antithetical to patriarchal European Christian ideology (common to dominator systems), they also employed bio-warfare to infect entire populations with smallpox.

One other important thread of the discussion of politics and the rights of "others" is addressed in Greta Gaard's "Toward a queer Ecofeminism" in which she extends the ecofeminist discussion to the demonization of homosexuality. Here she calls for "queer" rights to be included in ecofeminist theory that associates domination based on gender, class, race, and species, and the exploitation of nature with current patriarchal systems—which also most vehemently demonize homosexuality. Like the other thinkers discussed, she associates the Christian dogma that posits the denigration of nature as integral to understanding the rejection of people with homosexual proclivities. Further, she sees

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<sup>113</sup> Alice Barbara, *Iroquoian Women: The Gantowisas* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 23.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

patriarchal religion as working in tandem with imperialist and militaristic structures that are inherently “erotophobic,”<sup>116</sup> in that they seek to limit sexual relations in terms of heterosexual reproduction and to resist a diversity of expression and a broad definition of life that is fundamental to a new paradigm of complex and mutually reciprocal relations.

### Gaia Theory and the New Science

The idea that the Earth is alive is at the outer bounds of scientific credibility.

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-James Lovelock<sup>117</sup>

Cutting-edge contributions from quantum physics and the life sciences have greatly influenced new paradigm thinking, including ecofeminist theory. In these works, the authoritative voice of Western science (finally) asserts that reality is inherently relational and finds the idea of a mechanistic world, and an absolute objectivity, to be obsolete. This shift became apparent with the wave/particle conundrum faced by physicists who found that matter was not actually solid but was characterized by wave functions as descriptions of potentialities. This is where science “went through the looking glass” because quantum particles exhibit complementarity; that is, they have the properties of both a particle and a wave and can exhibit both behaviors at the same instance. Most fantastically, they can exhibit these behaviors seemingly based on their

<sup>116</sup> Greta Gaard, “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism,” *Hypatia* vol. 12, no. 1 (1997): 137.

<sup>117</sup> James Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

own whim. Another equally important and disorienting breakthrough in physics was Werner Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, which states that the focus of the observer on either the velocity or the location of a subatomic particle alters the very action of observation.<sup>118</sup> These findings effectively relegated classic Newtonian physics, with its fundamental principles of local causality and linearity, out of god's absolute kingdom of platonic abstractions and forever into the realm of the relative.

One important voice at this frontier was physicist and philosopher David Bohm. His work *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* discusses quantum physics and its ramifications for scientific theory and is an attempt toward a new understanding of the nature of reality. Like Whitehead, he finds the world in continuous flux and concludes that all knowledge is ultimately abstracted.<sup>119</sup> He writes that that both relativity and quantum theory point to the need to look at the world as an "undivided hole," in which all parts of the universe, including the observer and his (*sic*) instruments, merge and unite in totality."<sup>120</sup> His theory of a new notion of order based on the relational is holographic in that the form and structure of all objects may be said to be enfolded within all regions. His idea of an "implicate order" with unlimited information is carried by the holomovement, while the explicate order is what is "manifest" at the time.<sup>121</sup> This new way of understanding reality blurs the boundaries of what is one and what is many, or what is fragmented (as Catherine Keller discusses). He observes, "...we are able to look on all aspects of existence as not divided from each other, and thus we can bring to an

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<sup>118</sup> Michael Talbot, *Mysticism and the New Physics* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 15.

<sup>119</sup> David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge, 1980), 63.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

end the fragmentation explicate in the current attitude toward the atomic point of view, which leads us to divide everything from everything...”<sup>122</sup>

In light of science’s understanding of the relative and relational nature of reality, the question again arises: is the world alive or is it dead? Controversial scientist James Lovelock,<sup>123</sup> an atmospheric chemist who once worked for NASA in a project to find life on Mars, takes this question to the planet herself: he proposes Gaia Theory, which asserts that the earth functions as if it were a living organism. He discusses science’s problematic methodological barrier in producing a conclusive definition of what constitutes life and yet, he notes that we know when something is alive even if science cannot agree, because it is either “edible, lovable or lethal.”<sup>124</sup> Here he points to epistemologies not accepted in traditional science, which are perhaps based in intuition, holistic ways of thinking, and plain common sense and that are more evident in indigenous ontologies. In his work *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth*, he discusses his Gaia theory and addresses the ensuing critiques from his earlier work, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, for which he was censured by scientists for taking the liberty of moving beyond reductionist methodology, for citing few besides himself, and for his interpretation of Darwinism. Further, he was critiqued for not being decisive enough in his application of Gaia theory toward global environmental issues and transnational corporate culpability in ecological destruction.<sup>125</sup>

Lovelock’s controversial theory supposes that the earth maintains her own homeostasis, necessary for, and characteristic of, a living system, by an active feedback

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>123</sup> He acknowledges working on the “fringes” of life sciences because he rejected reductionist methodologies. Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia*, 19.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>125</sup> F.H. Bormann, “The Gaia Hypothesis,” *Ecology*, vol. 62 no. 2 (1981): 502.

process regulated by the life forms that arise upon her. To this end he posited his hypothetical model of “Daisyworld” in which two species of daisies one dark, and one light, react, evolve, and affect the conditions of light and atmosphere. His Daisy-world computer model illustrates the ability of life forms to regulate and create a state of sustainability that benefits the planet and the life forms themselves.<sup>126</sup> This is relation at the chemical and atmospheric levels, and it points to another theory in the new sciences, that of “emergence,” which states that complexity works, not from the top down, as is mirrored in a transcendent god model that informs classical science but from the qualities of complex and self-organizing systems like cellular communities that ultimately create something that is greater than the sum of its parts.<sup>127</sup>

Another major voice in the discussion of the Gaia material and new paradigm thinking in the life sciences is the biologist Lynn Margulis. In *Slanted Truths: Essays on Gaia, Symbiosis, and Evolution*, which she co-wrote with her son Dorian Sagan, she dismantles the scientific allusions of the “pretense of objectivity” and reclaims science as “a highly social, self-correcting, interactive enterprise.”<sup>128</sup> In this series of illuminating essays, she discusses J. Robert Oppenheimer, the director of the Manhattan Project to develop the first atom bomb, her experiences of being a woman in science, and the details of atmosphere, soil, bacteria and chemistry as it relates to Gaia theory. She describes the theory as does Lovelock, as a result of the earth’s physiology and the sum of the energy and material exchanging activity of the living network at our planet’s surface. Here she is careful not to postulate a spiritual or cosmological basis for this theory, steering clear of

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>127</sup> Allen Combs, *The Radiance of Being: Complexity, Chaos and the Evolution of Consciousness* (St. Paul Minnesota: Paragon House, 1996), 224.

<sup>128</sup> Lynn Margulis, and Dorian Sagan, *Slanted Truths: Essays on Gaia, Symbiosis, and Evolution*. (Copernicus. 1997), xxi.



the theological critique with which Lovelock met, instead using scientific methodology to postulate the interactions of complex organic systems and their relation to each other. She discusses Gaia's self-sustaining systems as autopoietic in that they self-organize and self-regulate within a boundary<sup>129</sup> like other manifestations of life and they challenge the notions of neo-Darwinist mechanics. She shifts the focus of Darwinian novelty from random mutations in DNA to symbiogenesis (her specialty), which involves evolutionary change through long-term contact between various members of different species.<sup>130</sup> She cites the example of the eukaryotic cell, a necessary component in life forms, and its ancestral joining with a bacterial symbiont as being responsible for a fundamental branching in the evolutionary tree of life.<sup>131</sup>

In *Biology Revisioned*, Willis W. Harman and Elisabet Sahtoris, discuss themes mentioned by Bohm, Lovelock, and Margulis. They postulate that the advances in quantum physics and complexity theory offer a theoretical pathway toward a more holistic biology, one that recognizes, and can encompass, the autopoietic and emergent properties of living systems. For these "biophilosophers,"<sup>132</sup> neo-Darwinism and genetics have been "unconvincing" in explaining the tendency of living systems to self-organize, to maintain homeostatic states, to self-replicate, and to endure, which they postulate indicates an apparent "purposefulness."<sup>133</sup> In this work they address the teleological dilemma an intrinsic evolutionary order causes biologists by looking toward the new physics for models, which are beyond reductionism, and in which order can be seen to

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>132</sup> Willis Harman and Elisabeth Sahtouris Willis. *Biology Revisioned* (North Atlantic Books, 1998), 13.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., xv.

arise of out seeming chaos. Most radically, they call for an exploration of the emergent property of consciousness as a biological inquiry.

This work envisions a new holistic biology that understands an organism to be inseparable from its environment. That is, all life operates individually as a single ecology and “the multileveled embedded consequence of life’s continuous metabolic operations.”<sup>134</sup> Toward this end, they call for a participatory or qualitative methodology that takes into account the scientist’s experience with the object as a source of knowledge. This is both the “empathetic” methodology discussed by Christ in her thealogy and the dissolution of an absolute objective observer described by Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, now taken into the realm of the life sciences.

A more controversial figure is the biochemist and plant physiologist Rupert Sheldrake, who theoretically moves even further from materialist explanations of life and into the unseen order that creates pattern, drives self-replication and growth, and accounts for the “purposefulness” noted by Harman and Sahtoris. In *The Rebirth of Nature: The Greening of Science and God*, he describes the evolution of Western philosophy and cosmology, and the ways in which it has shaped current scientific thinking (as Spretnak also discusses). He looks at mechanistic, animist, and holographic theories to map the scientific philosophical shift from the assumption of matter as dead machine to living systems. Further, he discusses Gaia theory and its controversies, as well as the epistemological and philosophical problems now facing science when confronted by the idea, proposed by scientists themselves, in which the earth functions as a living being.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., xvii.

<sup>135</sup> Rupert Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature: The Greening of Science and God* (New York: Bantam, 1991), 156.

Sheldrake is most noted for his theory of “morphic resonance” developed from the theory of morphogenetic fields,<sup>136</sup> which are proposed to be invisible fields of influence, like magnets or quantum forces, responsible for ordering molecules, cells, and all living components into distinct patterns. He argues that relying solely on genetics to explain the diverse and evolutionary intelligence evident in the patterns of diverse life is still using the machine model of matter because genes function to dictate the sequences of proteins that make up an organ or entity but not the specific shape. He cites that the muscle and nerve cells of the legs and arms, for example, are made of the same substance as the bones and teeth. All the cells of these components are identically genetically coded yet somehow behave differently. He asserts that chemicals alone do not determine form and likens the assumption of genetics, as the ultimate answer to the mystery of life, to delivering “the right materials to a building site at the right times and expecting a house to grow spontaneously.”<sup>137</sup>

For Sheldrake, it is not the mechanics of the physical that perpetuates living systems and their transformation through the life cycle but the transfer of information as holographic pattern. His hypothesis of formative causation suggests that self-organizing and autopoietic systems at all levels of complexity are organized by morphic fields, which self-replicate.<sup>138</sup> This proposed causation is not limited to the physical but is also applicable to systems such as instinct, memory, and social order. From his perspective, living organisms inherit not only genes from their ancestors but also morphic fields that

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 110.

are templates of patterns. It is the resonance<sup>139</sup> of these fields that act as quantum attractors moving and shaping the forms of organism and their systems. Cosmologically, this force is reflected in Thought Woman, the template of material condition discussed by Gunn Allen, and the original her original creative power of the word as vibration.

One very delightful contribution to this body of literature is *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era – A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* by mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme and “geologist”<sup>140</sup> Thomas Berry. This is an evolutionary history of the earth that reads like a great bardic tale, weaving geology, biology, astronomy, physics, and cosmology into a living system of deep and complex interrelation. This work takes the particulars of these different disciplines and illuminates their interdependency through enlivened poetic language that draws a visceral picture of how each phase in earth’s history created the conditions for the next. Relevant here is their discussion of the “Cosmological Principle,” a term attributed to Einstein, which assumes that the universe is the same everywhere and that the earth does not have a privileged position because it is part of the same system of space-time parameters and consists of the same basic elements as everything else.<sup>141</sup> For Swimme and Berry, the Cosmological principle is holographic and isotropic. It is similar to the undivided whole expressed by Bohm’s implicate order,<sup>142</sup> and the morphogenetic fields expressed by Sheldrake. They also expand on this causative principle, taking it beyond the reductionism of classic science to include the idea of the universe as

<sup>139</sup> Resonance produces the phenomena of entrainment that occurs when separate phenomena begin to vibrate at the identical frequency, effectively merging them into a single wave (form) but with increased amplitude.

<sup>140</sup> His term for himself. <http://www.thomasberry.org/>

<sup>141</sup> <http://www.321books.co.uk/biography/einstein/cosmology.htm>

<sup>142</sup> Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era: A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 66.

cosmogenetic (expounded by Margulis), in that is a living, developing and ongoing reality that is autopoietic, exhibits a tendency toward diversity, and is inherently interrelational or in communion.<sup>143</sup>

Another offering in this genre is the anthology *Gaia's Hidden Life: The Unseen Intelligence of Nature*, which discusses to the philosophy of the new science and how it is beginning to speak some of the same language as mystics and indigenous people. The editors, Shirley Nicholson and Brenda Rosen, bring Lovelock, Sahtoris, Berry, and Carolyn Merchant, among others, into the same work with Geoffrey Hodson (who has channeled, and artistically rendered, elemental [devic] persons), Joan Halifax (a Buddhism anthropologist who has studied shamans extensively) and the clairvoyant C.W. Leadbeater. This is an important collection of essays on “coming to our senses” and realizing that earth kinship requires a dialogue with nature. They contend that intellectual concepts and principles can help create contexts for understanding, but without actual perceptions of nature’s messages...”we live in dangerous alienation from ourselves as well as nature.”<sup>144</sup> This is a multifaceted bridge work that is reminiscent of Starhawk and Gunn Allen.

### Closing Thoughts

Exploring these themes within ecofeminism has changed me. I am more aware of the suffering of others and more sensitive to my own complicity with, and rebellion against, modern culture and its dysfunctional systems. Particularly interesting to me is the

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>144</sup> Shirley Nicholson, ed. *Gaia's Hidden Life: The Unseen Intelligence of Nature* (Wheaton, Ill. Quest Books, 1992), 3.

link between religion and science. Both seem to seek a causative hypothesis for the organic order and sublime complexities of nature's systems that we are hard-wired to perceive, whether that is god, goddess, process, morphic fields, or a cosmological principle. Somehow we humans seek to explain the "Great Mystery" that surrounds and indwells us.

There are many other voices in the chorus, relevant to an ecofeminist discussion, which I have not named but that are part of this exciting and provocative body of work. Those perspectives are also necessary components in this human effort to transform our species' relationship with ourselves and our environment. Worthy of mention here are Buddhist, Jewish, and Muslim practitioners who seek to reclaim the interrelational aspects of their faith in spite of patriarchy. Also relevant are indigenous people, and people of color, working politically and as community for better social systems, both in the United States and globally, to benefit diverse sustainable traditions and that steward the land. Further, there are many diverse activists who work for the rights of the marginalized, the working class, impoverished people, women, children and animals.

This is the good news in the face of increasing environmental pressure on our species to change or be selected out by the forces of evolution that do not tolerate for long those who cannot adapt. This expediency pulses at the heart of all these works and calls on us to find new ways of being. We are a cognitive species who evolved the ability to think abstractly so we possess the evolutionary trait to be able to imagine ourselves out of time, out of the present moment, and to postulate a past cause and a future conclusion. This gives us a strategic advantage that is only now being realized through these diverse thinkers and activists. I believe these many voices and hearts are ourselves as individual

talking to ourselves as a collective. We are explicate manifestations within an undivided implicate whole, sending messages coded like DNA as theory and action for the purpose of the evolution of our species. It is an exciting time that brings grief over the relationships and potentialities we have lost, merged with the hope that our ultimately resilient human spirit will remember its place in creation.