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Spring 5-11-2022

## **A Woman's Place is in the Resistance: An Ecofeminist Response to Climate Change**

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A Woman's Place is in the Resistance:  
An Ecofeminist Response to Climate Change

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*Abstract*

This paper addresses the unique impacts of climate change on women and gender diverse people throughout the world, and seeks to move beyond identifying them solely as victims by instead focusing on their dynamic role in environmental activism while addressing the need for a gendered approach to climate policy. The inclusion of gender is often absent in much of environmental literature, which leaves women's experience of climate change unseen and unaddressed. Beginning with a case study of the Indigenous women of Standing Rock and their battle against the Dakota Access Pipeline, this paper seeks to understand the critical involvement of women in climate change activism and investigates the proper policy initiatives required to build an equitable future for all marginalized groups. Chapter One provides quantitative data on the specific burdens women face from climate change-induced disasters, including increased sexual and gender-based violence, decreased access to education, and a heightened exposure to poverty. Chapter Two examines the economic implications of these risks through an ecofeminist lens, offering a critique of capitalist patriarchy. Chapter Three delves into the lack of a gendered approach in environmental research, policy, and law, and how this exclusion has left women more vulnerable to climate change. Further, this chapter will analyze the relationship between feminism, the patriarchy, and environmentalism in examining this exclusion. Chapter Four introduces the prominent leadership role women have taken in the grassroots environmental justice movement, specifically focusing on the work of BIPOC women. Finally, Chapter Five proposes policy initiatives that highlight the overlooked connections between gender and climate change while actively involving the voices and experiences of women in order to create a more equitable future.

Keywords: gender, climate change, ecofeminism, environmental economics, environmental politics, environmental justice

*Table of Contents*

Introduction: The Women of Standing Rock

Chapter 1: The Gendered Reality of Climate Change

Chapter 2: The Capitalist Construction of Gender: an Ecofeminist Analysis

Chapter 3: Exclusion in Environmental Policy & Law

Chapter 4: Leadership in the Environmental Activism Arena

Chapter 5: An Equitable Future

*Acknowledgements*

This paper would not be complete without a formal acknowledgement of Indigenous land.

Fordham University resides on the Lenapehoking, the stolen land of the Lenape who occupied what is now New York City long before the arrival of the white man and the continued genocide of Indigenous peoples. The statement on Lenapehoking by the Lenape Center reads:

Lenapehoking is the Lenape name for Lenape Land, which spans from Western Connecticut to Eastern Pennsylvania, and the Hudson Valley to Delaware, with Manhattan at its center. Due to centuries of colonialism perpetuated by genocide, forced displacement, and systematic oppression, today the Lenape Diaspora is dispersed throughout the US and Canada. The Lenape diaspora includes five federally recognized nations in Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and Ontario. (The Lenape Center)

For resources on where to donate, how to take action, and more information regarding land reclamation efforts, refer to the reference list on page 60.

*Introduction: The Women of Standing Rock*

Throughout the course of our lifetime, every single one of us will witness in some capacity the devastating effects of human-driven climate change that is already wreaking havoc on the world's ecosystems and the multitude of lives they sustain. However, the degree to which we are each able to cope with and recover from these disasters varies immensely, and will be determined by factors such as socioeconomic status, geographical location, political standing, and gender identity. The latter element, despite its critical role in the individual experience of climate change, is often overlooked in much of environmental literature and policy. Climate change analysis that includes a gendered perspective is essential for equitable, intersectional, and effective action.

Women have long been at the forefront of the environmental justice movement, leading grassroots initiatives to protect their land and resources not only for their communities, but for generations to come. Recently, Indigenous Lakota women in the United States (US) spearheaded the battle against the proposed construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) in Fort Yates, North Dakota. The pipeline was originally designed to run through Bismarck, a predominantly white area with low poverty rates, but was denied permits due to the known catastrophic damages that pipeline leaks could cause. Instead, and without consent, it was rerouted to cut directly through the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, potentially contaminating the nation's water supply and threatening the livelihoods of thousands already living in poverty. Lakota activist Wasté Win Young describes the nature of their battle against continued colonialism and corporate greed, stating, "The earth is not just something that we put our house on, that we pollute, that we take advantage of, that we rape. The earth is our mother. She has given us all the opportunity to live and to breathe, and she has never asked anything in return. Every time we

deny the earth the right to be who she is, we're denying women all around the world the right to be who they are" (King, 2021). This was not a new fight, but rather a continued effort to defend their sacred land, resources, and right to their way of life.

In September of 2016, DAPL bulldozers began tearing up sacred burial sites on Lakota treaty land in preparation for pipeline construction. They were met by hundreds of protestors, and those who were on the frontlines were women. As months went on, the non-violent water defenders were assaulted with pepper spray, dogs, and rubber bullets by the National Guard. Yet they persisted, setting up permanent encampments as Indigenous people and their allies from around the world mobilized to protest in solidarity for the right to clean water. In December of 2016, as a result of widespread media coverage and sustained opposition, the US federal government blocked construction of the pipeline. However, in early 2017, the new presidential administration, in a move to support corporate interests over human rights, signed an executive order allowing for construction to continue. The pipeline has already leaked several times, but the women of Standing Rock continue to fight in court and rally international support for divestment from DAPL.

For the Lakota women, the resistance against DAPL represents a decades-long struggle against colonialism that continues to threaten their very existence. Remembering the recent past of forced indoctrination through Indian boarding schools and the lasting trauma that has manifested itself in the form of widespread addiction, Indigenous women, especially mothers, are central in the fight to protect their identities and way of life. In response to DAPL, citizens of the Standing Rock Lakota Nation and their Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota allies, established the first water protector encampment under the leadership of LaDonna Brave Bull Allard with the aim of creating a sustainable sovereign economy centered around independent food production

(Sacred Stone Camp - Injyanj Wakhánagapi Othí, n.d.). Referencing the modern corporate industrial system, Allard stated, “We’ve given our power over to an entity that doesn’t deserve our power. We must take back that empowerment of self. We must take back our own health care. We must take back our own food. We must take back our families. We must take back our environment...We gave the power to an entity, and the entity is destroying the world around us” (Barnett, 2019). By revitalizing traditional food systems and reclaiming ownership of natural resources, leaders of the Sacred Stone Village encampment exemplified a path to establishing sovereign economies, resisting corporate capitalism, and maintaining effective climate change resilience.

This paper will address the underlying social, cultural, and economic factors that leave women particularly vulnerable to climate change to demonstrate the necessity of a gendered perspective in climate change analysis and action. Moreover, I will argue that effective and equitable climate change action must include women, as they have long stood at the forefront of grassroots environmental initiatives. Chapter One introduces an analysis based on quantitative data of the gendered disparity in the individual experience of climate change, focusing on the intersection of various socioeconomic factors. Chapter Two involves examining the issue through a critical ecofeminist lens to establish the role of capitalism in the subjugation of women and the environment. Chapter Three explores the history of gendered exclusion in environmental policy and law, and Chapter Four discusses the vital role women have played in the environmental justice arena, especially in grassroots initiatives, as a result of this exclusion. Finally, Chapter Five offers a formal list of policy recommendations that will uplift women in climate change action, resilience, and justice.



*Chapter One: The Gendered Reality of Climate Change*

In his 2019 United Nations (UN) Security Council report *Women and Peace and Security*, Secretary-General António Guterres commented on the uniquely complex threat climate change poses to the livelihoods of women throughout the world. He stated:

The global threat of climate change and environmental degradation is poised to exacerbate the already increasing number of complex emergencies, which disproportionately affect women and girls. There is therefore an urgent need for better analysis and concrete, immediate actions to address the linkages between climate change and conflict from a gender perspective. (UN, 2019)

Although these subjects have been thoroughly addressed in reports of previous years as isolated developments, this marked one of the first instances of recognition of the intersection of climate change and gender within UN literature. Guterres's call to action highlighted not only the gravity of the situation, but also the overall lack of sufficient academic research and data on this topic. As climate change-induced disasters continue to devastate marginalized communities at an increasingly rapid rate, it is imperative that these crises be examined through a gendered framework in order to deliver the most equitable and efficient response.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently released its Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) on the latest scientific updates regarding the anthropogenic increases in greenhouse gasses (GHG) concentrations that have undoubtedly caused the increase in atmospheric, oceanic, and land temperatures since around 1750. Since 2011, there have been steady reported increases in GHG emissions in the earth's atmosphere as a result of human activities. There has been an established 0.19°C increase in global surface temperature since the IPCC's AR5, released just eight years prior to AR6. As average temperatures and GHG

emissions continue to rise, the detrimental effects of climate change are only increasing in severity. The report states, “Human-induced climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe. Evidence of observed changes in extremes such as heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts, and tropical cyclones, and in particular, their attribution to human influence, has strengthened since AR5” (IPCC, 2021). According to AR6, human activity has very likely increased the likelihood of compound extreme weather events since the 1950s. (IPCC, 2021)

The report includes projected depictions of future possible GHG emissions rates and the resulting changes in global surface temperatures. Regardless of any significant changes in the emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane, nitrous oxide, and sulfur dioxide, the global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least 2050. If extreme action is not taken to dramatically reduce CO<sub>2</sub> and other GHG emissions in the next few decades, the earth will experience a global warming between 1.5°C and 2°C before 2100. The seemingly small increase in temperatures will produce devastating environmental effects, most evidenced by weather-related disasters. AR6 states:

With every additional increment of global warming, changes in extremes continue to be larger. For example, every additional 0.5°C of global warming causes clearly discernible increases in the intensity of hot extremes, including heatwaves, and heavy precipitation, as well as agricultural and ecological droughts in some regions...There will be an increasing occurrence of some extreme events unprecedented in the observational record with additional global warming, even at 1.5°C of global warming. (IPCC, 2021)

As global warming increases, all regions on earth are projected to experience increasingly frequent changes in what the report terms “climatic impact-drivers”, including physical climate

system conditions such as temperature averages and weather events. The report concludes that if human-driven global warming and the resulting climate change is to be limited, significant reductions in cumulative CO<sub>2</sub> and other GHG emissions must be made with the aim of reaching *at least* net zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. (IPCC, 2021)

Although every region on earth will fall victim to the increases in global warming, there is a substantial disparity between human populations who currently and will eventually bear the brunt of anthropogenic climate change and the human populations responsible for the GHG emissions responsible for these changes. This distinction is most clearly evidenced by the divide between the Global North and Global South. These two geographical regions are generally defined in terms of overall wealth and development, and are divided by the Brandt Line, a term coined in the 1980s, to depict international inequalities (Lees, 2021). The Global North refers to the majority of the Northern Hemisphere, also including Australia and New Zealand. As of 2015, this region was responsible for 92% of excess global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, whereas the Global South was responsible for only 8%. Despite being the most vulnerable continent to the impacts of climate change, Africa is accountable for only 2% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (MSI Reproductive Choices, 2021). The US alone is responsible for 40% of excess CO<sub>2</sub> global emissions, despite containing only 4.21% of the total world population (Hickel, 2020). The majority of the world's 9.2% of people living in poverty reside in the Global South; the World Bank projects this figure to increase due to climate change (World Bank, 2020). Further, the majority of the world's poor are women.

The current climate emergency is the direct result of the unsustainable erosion of vital ecosystem services due to sustained exploitation of the earth's ecosystems by human activity. The UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, conducted between 2001 and 2005, aimed to better

understand the consequences of human-driven ecosystem change and establish a scientific basis to guide future action (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). At the time, approximately 60% of all ecosystem services evaluated were being degraded or used unsustainably, and this percentage has very likely grown throughout the past 20 years. According to the assessment, “This has resulted in a substantial and largely irreversible loss in the diversity of life on Earth” (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). Ecosystem services are divided into four categories: supporting, provisioning, regulating, and cultural. Although each of these will be impacted by climate change, the degradation of certain ecosystem services are detrimental to the livelihoods of those most vulnerable to environmental disasters.

Due to their traditional roles as key resource providers, historical marginalization in society, and particular vulnerability to violence in times of disaster, women are more severely impacted by the effects of climate change. In many areas, especially in rural environments, women rely heavily on natural resources to provide for themselves and their families. These resources fall under the category of provisioning services, which include factors such as food, water, timber, fuel, and fiber (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). As climate change drives increasing rates of severe storms, prolonged droughts, and water shortages, women face heightened difficulties and dangers in attempts to attain these resources. Additionally, they are often forced to spend longer periods of time transporting resources due to increased scarcity, which limits the amount of time they have to engage in leisure activities, formal education, community discussions, and economic opportunities. This puts women at an even greater disadvantage when compared to men, who typically are not the main providers of natural resources for the home. For example, the United Nations found that in Malawi, women spend an

average of 54 minutes per day collecting water, while men only spend 6 minutes per day (Boyer *et al.*, 2021).

The stress put on provisioning ecosystem services from climate change also exposes women to an increased risk of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) as they are forced to venture further from their homes in search of water, food, and fuel. The United Nations defines SGBV as:

...an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private.

(United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2020)

SGBV is perhaps the most pervasive risk associated with climate change, and although men and boys are certainly victims as well, women and girls tend to suffer the highest rates of SGBV due to changing environmental factors and disasters. According to a CARE International 2020 report, all forms of SGBV against women and girls spike during disaster and conflict (Desai and Mandal, 2021). SGBV manifests in the form of rape, human trafficking and child marriage, human rights violations which are currently being exacerbated by climate change. Additionally, women often are forced to engage in sex work in order to sustain themselves and their families following disasters. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) conducted a survey in 2014 which found that 5% of refugee households in Chad and 4% in Uganda reported incidents of rape during the collection of firewood over a six-month period (Boyer *et al.*, 2021). This number is likely a conservative estimate given the social stigma surrounding sexual assault in addition to the barriers in reporting cases. Between 2014 and 2018, rates of sexual abuse,

domestic violence, and female genital mutilation increased during periods of drought in Uganda. Following the 2009 bushfires in Australia, rates of domestic violence against women and children increased as existing SGBV in the home was exacerbated. (Women Deliver, 2021)

SGBV impacts women not only in their efforts to manage provisioning resources, but also threatens their ability to survive and recover from climate-related disasters and the insecurity that ensues. Following catastrophic environmental events, regions often experience conflict and a breakdown of law. This compromises the pathways to effective reporting and legal justice that allow perpetrators to roam free while victims are left to suffer alone. This often occurs alongside climate-driven migration and displacement in low security conditions where protective systems fail. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, for example, there was a reported increase of intimate-partner violence against women in New Orleans; further, PTSD occurrences were found to be 2.7 times more likely in women than in men (Le Masson *et al.*, 2016). A report produced by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) addressed this common phenomenon, stating:

Women and girls, members of the LGBT community, and people who do not conform with societal gender norms report increased instances of sexual violence and GBV in post-disaster contexts in emergency shelters that are overcrowded, unsafe, unfamiliar, and lack privacy. Additionally, when aid workers who are not sensitized to gender issues, or where emergency shelters do not provide adequate resources, there is a risk of exacerbating gender inequalities, as evidenced by instances where LGBT people were turned away or arrested for trying to access emergency shelters in disaster situations. (Boyer *et al.*, 2021)

LGBTQIA+ individuals experience increased marginalization and barriers to essential support services following climate-related disasters. Prejudices against people of underrepresented sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) can compromise access to relief efforts such as emergency housing and healthcare. Humanitarian response services to such disasters can, in some instances, actually increase abuses against LGBTQIA+ individuals by reinforcing these existing prejudices. In Pakistan, for instance, it was reported that in the aftermath of severe floods in the province of Sindh, relief camps denied entry to transgender people because others were made uncomfortable by their presence.

Although communities may recover from climate-related disasters, the extreme impact of SGBV on a person's mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing may endure a lifetime. However, SGBV cannot be analyzed as an isolated issue, and is reflective of larger structural issues of gender inequality that predate climate change. Although gender equality has seemingly improved in recent decades, it still runs deep in many societies today. A 2018 World Bank study found that worldwide, 189 economies have at least one gender difference in legal treatment, 133 economies have at least one restriction on women's access to justice, 75 economies restrict women's rights to access and own property, and 68 economies constrain women's decision making and freedom of movement (World Bank, 2018). Not only do these inequalities impede women's self-determination, ability to engage in economic affairs, and agency in seeking justice, but they also prevent women from attaining climate resiliency.

The issue of SGBV, especially in relation to climate change, must be examined alongside sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Similarly to SGBV, SRHR is inextricably linked to gender equality and climate change, yet is often overlooked as a top priority in climate change preparedness and recovery. Although climate change is not gender neutral, persisting

gaps in gender-disaggregated data allow harms to SRHR to go unnoticed. The increasing prevalence of widespread drought, vector-borne diseases, rising temperatures, and other climate-related disasters directly compromises access to reproductive healthcare and the crucial right to bodily autonomy (Women Deliver, 2021). Dehydration and nutrient deficiencies due to changes in resource availability can be extremely dangerous for pregnant individuals, increasing the risk of miscarriage, maternal morbidity, death during childbirth, and other complications. Additionally, pregnancy can be affected due to environmental hazards such as air pollution. In the United States, women with asthma, especially Black women, have been found to be at greater risk for preterm births due to a higher exposure to polluted environments.

As climate change continues to jeopardize provisional resource supplies, SRHR is further compromised, especially for girls and young women. Cases of child brides and forced marriages are seen to increase during climate-related stresses as a means of coping with economic instability. In Nepal and Bangladesh, research found that girls were pulled out of school and forced into marriages following climate-related weather disasters. In Malawi alone, an estimated 1.5 million girls are at risk of becoming child brides as families are unable to feed their children due to extreme weather events. Child marriage is an extremely harmful phenomenon and severely endangers the health of young girls as they are put at an increased risk for maternal mortality and complications from STIs. (Women Deliver, 2021)

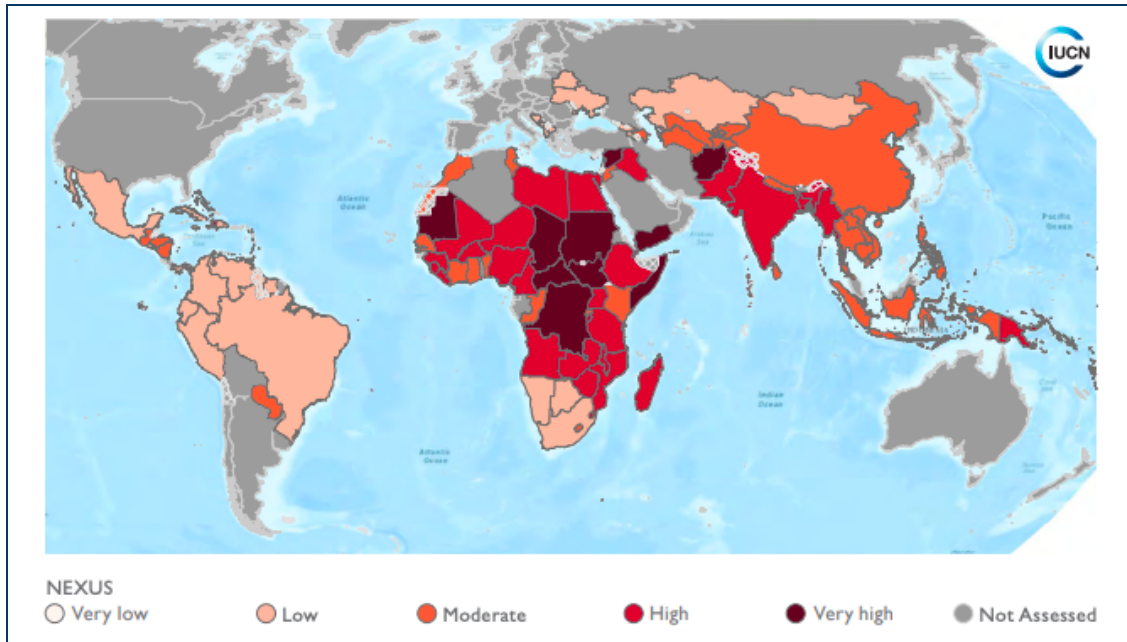
Climate change-related disasters directly threaten access to appropriate reproductive healthcare, which can be detrimental for individuals having a uterus and menstruating people. A recent study published by Women Deliver on the link between climate change and SRHR explains, “Disruptions in health services can compromise access to contraceptives, maternal and child care, treatments and testing for HIV infections and other STIs, counselling, psychosocial



support, abortion services, and post-abortion care for crisis-affected communities” (Women Deliver, 2021). In Bangladesh, for example, increasing frequency of flooding have diminished quantities of contraceptives available in rural communities. In Mozambique, drought induced by El Niño decreased water availability for personal hygiene use and limited the supply of a plant traditionally used for menstrual blood. An analysis by MSI Reproductive Choices found that since 2011, disruptions from climate change caused an estimated 11.5 million women across 26 countries to experience disrupted access to contraception. Over the next decade, 14 million more are at risk of losing access to contraceptive healthcare (MSI, 2021). SRHR is a foundational aspect of maintaining climate resiliency, and therefore must be prioritized in all climate-related policy along with gender-responsive climate action.

In 2021, the IUCN and USAID released “Advancing Gender in the Environment: Exploring the Triple Nexus of Gender Inequality, State Fragility, and Climate Vulnerability”, the report of a ten-year study exploring the quantitative intersection of these three highly complex issues. Gender inequality, state fragility, and climate vulnerability have each been thoroughly addressed in individual pairs, but the interconnectedness of the three remains generally unexplored. The study evaluated the prevalence of the “triple nexus” issues within 122 countries, shown below, based on 27 various country level indicators. This framework included indicators such as basic education ratio, violent conflict, control of corruption, natural disasters, access to drinking water, and GDP per capita.

Figure 1: Relative Prevalence of the Triple Nexus of Gender-Inequality, State Fragility, and Climate Vulnerability (Boyer *et al.*, 2021)



Researchers concluded that scores for gender inequality, state fragility, and climate vulnerability were each positively correlated with one another; countries which had high scores in one factor tended to also have high scores in the other two factors. The ten countries with the highest prevalence of the “triple nexus” were Somalia, Yemen, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Sudan, Mauritania, and Syrian Arab Republic. The report also highlighted concluding policy recommendations, stating, “Ensuring women’s rights, needs, and agency is a moral obligation from a human-rights perspective. Empowering women and striving toward gender equality can also contribute to a more effective, equitable and sustainable way to support climate resilience, adaptive capacity, and effective, legitimate states” (Boyer *et al.*, 2021). This study encapsulates an extremely productive method of an intersectional approach to climate change action which addresses the gendered impacts of environmental disaster by examining the structural origins of gender inequality.

The majority of countries which displayed high instances of the “triple nexus” were also located primarily in the Global South. This demonstrates how although climate change does levy a uniquely negative impact on women, not all women experience this to the same degree. Women living in the Global South experience increased exposure to poverty, while many also reside in regions that are extremely vulnerable to climate change. A report published in the journal *Environmental Policy and Law* states, “Poor and marginalized women have less access to law, policy and decision-making processes in the wake of climate change induced disasters, displacements and conflicts” (Desai and Mandel, 2021). This demographic tends to live in areas that are more exposed to environmental stressors and are equipped with little resources with which to prepare for, adapt to, and recover from disasters. (Boyer *et al.*, 2021)

### *Chapter Two: The Capitalist Construction of Gender: an Ecofeminist Analysis*

On November 17, 1980, two thousand women marched to the Pentagon in Washington, DC, in a demonstration to denounce military action, promote peace, and defend life on earth. This event, which came to be known as the Women’s Pentagon Action, was a response to the violence carried out by the US on both foreign land and its own during the Cold War. They acknowledged how the arms race and the nuclear testing that accompanied it was responsible for destroying Indigenous land, supporting racist regimes abroad, and sacrificing minority youth by forcing them into the draft. The Unity Statement read, “We are gathering at the Pentagon on November 17 because we fear for our lives. We fear for the life of this planet, our Earth, and the life of our children who are our human future... We women are gathering because life on the precipice is intolerable” (Women and Life on Earth, 2006). Together, these women marched in resistance against masculine greed of the military-industrial complex that has endured to this day.

Although the Cold War has since ended, the violence inflicted against the earth has only accelerated. The Women's Pentagon Action is emblematic of ecofeminism, a relatively new term for a centuries-old concept which explores the correlation between the exploitation of women and the degradation of the environment. Modern ecofeminism grew out of the feminist, anti-war, and environmental movements of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The term was first formally used by French feminist Françoise D'Eaubonne in her 1974 work *Le Féminisme ou La Mort*. It is an intersectional framework which connects climate change and gender, as well as their relationship with neoliberal capitalism, domestic violence, neocolonialism, deforestation, militarism, and other related factors. Ecological feminists are regarded not just as philosophers, but even more so as grassroots activists and leaders of environmental action.

*Ecofeminism*, originally published in 1993 by Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, is one of the earlier works detailing the intersection between feminism, capitalism, and the environment. In 2014, the authors published an updated version of their book. Commenting on the situation over 20 years later, Shiva states, "Every threat we identified has grown deeper. And with it has grown the relevance of an alternative to capitalist patriarchy if humanity and the diverse species with which we share the planet are to survive" (Shiva *et al.*, 2014). Since the time of original publication, violence against women has only intensified, manifesting itself in even more pervasive and brutal forms.

Before delving into the ecofeminist analysis of capitalism and the lasting inequalities it has enforced, it is critical to unpack the nature of gender as a modern concept. In her work "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System", María Lugones explains how the Western tool of gender is not universal nor is it intrinsic to human nature. She states:

The reason to historicize gender formation is that without this history, we keep centering our analysis on the patriarchy; that is, on a binary, hierarchical, oppressive gender formation that rests on male supremacy without any clear understanding of the mechanisms by which heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification are impossible to understand apart from each other. (Lugones, 2007)

Gender was constructed to fit the cognitive needs of capitalism. It is merely an idea, albeit a powerful one, composed by the West and enforced by colonialism to organize the exploitation of the colonized. Gender has been warped to be portrayed as an ahistorical phenomenon; yet, in many societies, gender as it is understood today had little if any cultural basis prior to the advent of colonialism.

Many Indigenous cultures were matriarchal and employed an egalitarian function of gender, rather than the subordination context of modern patriarchy (maria). Further, many did not adhere to the Western gender binary and recognized more than two genders, as well as the ability to shift between male and female. The lack of strict boundaries on gender identity was also extended to sexual orientation, and homosexuality was honored rather than demonized. In her book *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, Laguna activist Paula Gunn Allen illustrates the sacred importance of women derived from traditional creation stories. Allen states, “She is the Eldest God, the one who Remembers and Re-members; and though the history of the past 500 years has taught us bitterness and helpless rage, we endure into the present, alive, certain of our significance, certain of her centrality, her identity as the Sacred Hoop of Be-ing” (Allen, 1992). When the white men arrived on Turtle Island, they brought with them their understanding of gender and weaponized it as a tool of genocide. In order to diminish the power of Indigenous nations, the colonizers imposed the oppressive class system of

patriarchy. Many tribal nations were forced to assimilate for survival, which left Indigenous women powerless and subject to new forms of violence that were not previously experienced.

While this cultural transformation was devastating, it was not unique. In her book *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Nigerian scholar Oyèrónké Oyêwùmí offers an analysis of the manifestation of the Western myth of gender in Indigenous Yorùbá society before and after the arrival of the Europeans. She explains:

The constant in this Western narrative is the centrality of the body: two bodies on display, two sexes, two categories persistently viewed— one in relation to the other. That narrative is about the unwavering elaboration of the body as the site and cause of differences and hierarchies in society. In the West, so long as the issue is difference and social hierarchy, then the body is constantly positioned, posed, exposed, and reexposed as their cause.

(Oyêwùmí, 2016)

Prior to colonization, gender was not an organizing principle in Yorùbá society; rather, individual status was based on seniority, irrelevant of superficial biological characteristics. Their language did not contain any gender-specific words, and the categories of “men” and “women” simply did not possess any higher meaning other than basic anatomic differences. The onslaught of colonization involved the inferiorization of Yorùbá society through forced indoctrination of Western Christian ideals, including the imposition of a gendered hierarchy. Half the population was reduced to the category of “women” and faced a double colonization, where they were exploited as Africans and dominated as women (Oyêwùmí, 2016). The Yorùbá did not suffer this experience alone; gender was enforced by colonization in many other African societies where it previously did not exist.

Speaking on the function of gender as a means of upholding colonialism, Lugones states, “Europe was mythically understood to predate this pattern of power as a world capitalist center that colonized the rest of the world and, as such, the most advanced moment in the linear, unidirectional, continuous path of the species” (Lugones, 2007). Gender was therefore imposed as a universal truth, a way to maintain control over the oppressed. Colonization is not a fixed period in history, but rather an ongoing process that continues to devastate the environment and suppress marginalized groups. Just as the creation of gender was essential to the success of colonialism, colonialism continues to be a necessary component to the dominance of capitalism over the earth. Capitalism, therefore, is extremely reliant upon the perpetuation of the modern gender system by the patriarchy.

Shiva and Mies presuppose the existence of a capitalist patriarchal society in their analysis of ecofeminism, which is structured within traditional Western gender norms. Although this economic system and social hierarchy are certainly not intrinsic to human life nor are they applicable to every society today, their analysis remains relevant in a world suffering from capitalist exploitation. Shiva and Mies begin with a critique of the current predominant economic model, particularly in how it functions as an act of violence against both women and the environment. Growth in terms of economic gains and productivity, specifically the illusion of unlimited growth, are the main focal point of this system. The authors describe its inherent problematic nature, stating:

But as, in fact, we inhabit a limited world, this limitlessness is mythical and can be upheld only by colonial divisions: between centers and peripheries, men and women, urban and rural areas, modern industrial societies of the North and ‘backward’, ‘traditional’, ‘underdeveloped’ societies of the South. The relationship between these

parts is hierarchical not egalitarian, and characterized by exploitation, oppression and dominance. (Shiva *et al.*, 2014)

Patriarchal capitalist economic models exclude women and those who contribute to subsistence economies. Although capitalism could not function without the subsistence work traditionally performed by women, their contributions to the economy and to society are devalued as they are discounted as “economically inactive”. They become alienated from the natural resources which sustain their livelihoods while being further distanced from decision-making processes regarding the management of these resources. This production boundary completely overlooks the economic value produced in two vital economies which are essential to maintaining life on earth: the ecological economy of nature, and the economy of human sustenance. (Shiva *et al.*, 2014)

When the value of these two economies is overlooked, they easily become subject to commodification and exploitation. This is emblematic of the modern scientific method of reductionism which patriarchal capitalism relies heavily upon to maintain its supposed validity. Women are reduced to objects just as ecosystems are reduced to their individual components that can be extracted and sold as capital. By the same token, Indigenous land claims are ignored as the potential for value creation overtakes the priceless yet nonconsumable value of their very existence. Commercial capitalism denies the inherent value of ecosystems as life-giving societies which sustain an incredible balance of diversity. It enforces the continuation of colonialism, claiming dominion over women’s bodies and nature’s resources under the guise of development and modernization. (Shiva *et al.*, 2014)

An ecofeminist perspective is vital to understanding why gender must be a focal point of climate change analysis, policy, and action. Feminism and environmentalism are not mutually exclusive, and must be used in tandem to fully understand the complex economic, social, and



political factors that drive global warming and the consequences of its effects on marginalized groups. Mainstream environmentalism tends to focus solely on the plight of the environment; even if it does include elements of environmental justice, it rarely comes close to encapsulating the framework of radical ecofeminism. Without the application of this philosophy, the environmental movement fails in examining climate change from a broader perspective that contextualizes this issue as a product of patriarchal capitalist economies. These environmental actors, including powerful state actors and non-governmental organizations, continue to seek solutions within this exploitative system, ultimately producing unsustainable and inequitable results. Instead of targeting the root causes of climate change, such as overconsumption and corporate greed, they tend to favor policy initiatives which promote “sustainable development”, “green consumerism”, and other technological fixes.

Ecofeminist environmental initiatives seek to move beyond this narrow view of climate action. Shiva and Mies explain the core differences between these approaches, stating, “[Ecofeminism] problematizes ‘production’ by exposing the destruction inherent in much of what capitalist patriarchy has defined as productive and creates new spaces for the perception and experience of the creative act” (Shiva *et al.*, 2014). By rejecting the tenets of production and consumption, ecofeminism promotes a return to subsistence approaches to survival as a way of healing the deep social wounds of inequality and promoting a return to ecological balance. A further discussion of this approach to addressing climate change will be included in Chapter Five.

Although gender and climate change are certainly linked under the lens of capitalism, the origin of this relationship can be further understood using a conceptual framework that predates modern capitalist structures. In 1990, Karen J. Warren published “The Power and the Promise of

Ecological Feminism”, offering a critical analysis of the fundamental connection between feminism, environmentalism, and the opportunity it creates for intersectional liberation. Warren states, “Because there are no ‘monolithic experiences’ that all women share, feminism must be a ‘solidarity movement’ based on shared beliefs and interests rather than a ‘unity in sameness’ movement based on shared experiences and shared victimization” (Warren, 1990). Warren broadens ecofeminism to encompass the individual experiences of women and other diverse gender identities while acknowledging the additional layers of oppression endured by marginalized groups. She argues that the domination of women and the domination of nonhuman nature are connected through an oppressive patriarchal conceptual framework which “explains, justifies, and maintains relationships of domination and subordination” (Warren, 1990). This logic of domination is rooted in value-hierarchical thinking and normative value dualisms which seek to justify the subordination of one group by another. These two concepts are indeed socially constructed and lacking in scientific basis, yet are extremely powerful ideas that have yielded detrimental outcomes for certain groups of people whose oppression they justify.

Value-hierarchical thinking refers to the process of placing higher value, status, and prestige on what is considered “up” rather than what is considered “down”. This process is taken a step further with the creation of value dualisms, disjunctive pairs which are not seen as complementary and inclusive, but rather oppositional and conflicting. One disjunct is given higher value, status, and prestige, while the other is stripped of these qualities. Once established, this structure of augmentation allows for a seemingly “logical” justification of subordination; because one group supposedly lacks some characteristic that has been misconstrued to equate to moral superiority, the dominant group is able to establish an ethical premise that permits the “just” subordination of the other.

Philosopher and ecofeminist Val Plumwood expanded upon this idea of dualized pairs within the context of Western culture in her 1993 work *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Her critique of Western philosophy explains how it has adopted these ideas to reinforce the alienation and subjectation of the “other” through methods such as imperialism, colonization, and patriarchal norms. She offers a set of dualized pairs which have been used to justify systems of oppression which have been and continue to be used in Western culture:

culture / nature

reason / nature

male / female

mind / body (nature)

master / slave

reason / matter (physicality)

rationality / animality (nature)

reason / emotion (nature)

mind, spirit / nature

freedom / necessity (nature)

universal / particular

human / nature (non-human)

civilized / primitive (nature)

production / reproduction (nature)

public / private

subject / object

self / other (Plumwood, 43)

Plumwood insists that this list is nonexhaustive nor is it complete. This set of dualisms explains the normative parallels drawn between nature and women and how both are perceived within the context of a Western patriarchal capitalist system. This system seeks to differentiate between the two categories and put them in conflict with each other rather than view them as complements to the same whole. Rather than viewing male and female bodies as complementary pieces, this logic dictates that the male disjunct is superior, and therefore all things traditionally associated with masculinity possess more value than those traditionally associated with femininity. Not only does this system reinforce the harmful narrative of a preexisting gender binary, but it also arrogantly assumes its universality, as explained above in the discussion of alternative perceptions of gender outside Western societies. Nature, which is associated with the feminine, is alienated alongside women because the two are viewed as disjunctive from reason, rationality, freedom, mind, and so on.

It is critical to note this ideological framework of Western culture which rests upon normative dualisms, value-hierarchical thinking, and the logic of domination are not uniquely applied to ecofeminism alone. Rather, they work to explain the root of ecofeminism, the understanding that many systems of oppression upheld under this system are mutually reinforcing. This framework can be expanded to include the associated dualisms of white / nonwhite, heterosexual / queer, able-bodied / disabled, young / old, and financially empowered / impoverished which enforce other forms of human oppression such as racism, heterosexism, ableism, agism, and classism. Just as the liberation of women cannot exist without the liberation of nature and vice versa, ecofeminism cannot be truly inclusive without also prioritizing other marginalized groups that suffer under the same logic of domination that justifies their oppression.

Ecofeminist scholar and activist Greta Gaard expands this discussion with the inclusion of queer theory. In her work “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism”, Gaard outlines the linkages between Plumwood’s dualisms both “horizontally” and “vertically”:

- 1) Backgrounding, in which the master relies on the services of the other and simultaneously denies his dependency
- 2) Radical exclusion, in which the master magnifies the differences between self and other and minimizes the shared qualities
- 3) Incorporation, in which the master’s qualities are taken as the standard, and the other is defined in terms of her possession or lack of those qualities
- 4) Instrumentalism, in which the other is constructed as having no ends of her own, and her sole purpose is to serve as a resource for the master
- 5) Homogenization, in which the dominated class of others is perceived as uniformly homogeneous (Gaard 1997, Plumwood 1993)

Gaard explains:

As Plumwood has ably demonstrated, Western culture’s oppression of nature can be traced back to the construction of the dominant human male as a self fundamentally defined by its property of reason, and the construction of reason as definitionally opposed to nature and all that is associated with nature, including women, the body, emotions, and reproduction. (Gaard, 1997)

Nature, women, and sexuality are eroticized and stigmatized under the same logic. Queer sexualities are especially demonized as simultaneously opposed to nature and associated with the untamed wildness and irrationality of nature. This is a curious oxymoron, as queer sexualities are often devalued for being “unnatural” by a society that does not value nature in the first place.

However, as Gaard argues, the true “transgression” queers are charged with is the inability to comply with the dominant paradigm of heterosexuality, a mere social construction that again lacks any real scientific backing.

It is critical to reiterate that the ecofeminist philosophy is not a new worldview, nor is it applicable to every society. Further, it must be expanded to include the compounding levels of oppression that women of marginalized groups experience. There exist many other ways of knowing that lie outside of this inherently Western perspective. Intersectionality, therefore, is essential for the realization of the goals of ecofeminism; Warren states, “Like any collage or mosaic, the point is not to have *one picture* based on a unity of voices, but a *pattern* which emerges out of the very different voices of people located in different circumstances” (Warren, 1993). Although not all women face subjugation by capitalist patriarchy, few will be able to escape the political, economic, and environmental consequences of extractive capitalism as it continues to aggravate climate change. Women have long been at the forefront of grassroots environmental movements around the world; any future climate change policy should consult their wisdom if it is to be truly effective.

### *Chapter Three: Exclusion in Environmental Policy and Law*

Our bodies are a mirror of our mother, and of Mother Earth. And so we walk, healthy, beautiful, vibrant, voluptuous through the minefield of industrialism! It is a minefield of toxic chemicals and of toxic sexual images that poison and entrap our bodies. It is a minefield of laws that justify taking and destroying all that is beautiful, pristine, all that is the integrity of life. It is a minefield of laws that take control even of our own bodies themselves.

-Winona Laduke, *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice* (Stein, 2004)

Despite the extensive history and improvement of environmental policy in the past decades, the inclusion of a gendered perspective in climate change analysis has largely been absent until very recently. Many of the major climate change treaties, including the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, and the 2015 Paris Agreement, fail to even mention the dimension of gender in relation to climate change (Desai *et al.*, 2021). The 2019 UN report “Women and Peace and Security” addresses the danger of this oversight, stating, “Conversely, a gender-blind approach to addressing climate-related security risks— or a ‘climate-blind’ approach to women, peace and security programming— can exacerbate the vulnerabilities of groups most exposed to the impacts of climate change, deepening existing inequalities and potentially aggravating environmental and security threats” (UN, 2019). Failure in properly addressing the relationship between gender and climate change will only put women at an increased risk of SGBV, a decrease in social mobility, and deepened gender inequalities. (UN, 2020a)

A recent 2021 study published in the journal *Environmental Policy and Law* examined the role of climate change in exacerbating SGBV and the lack of international legal pathways to prevention, recovery, and justice. In an analysis of the four main areas of international law, researchers found an alarming absence of any international legal instruments that address the SGBV imposed on women during and following climate change-induced disasters (Desai *et al.*, 2021). This is symptomatic of an insufficient amount of academic research and literature devoted to this issue. The report argues that as the increasing frequency of climate related disasters continue to drive the increasing frequency of SGBV, the existing international law mechanisms are insufficient in addressing the severity of this pervasive form of violence. The 2019 IPCC publication “Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C” affirms that SGBV will only worsen if it

is not properly addressed, heightening the urgency of the situation as the time window for effective action narrows (IPCC, 2019).

The time period following climate-related disasters has proven to be detrimental for women, especially those particularly vulnerable to climate change in areas with high rates of gender inequality. However, disasters can also create a critical “window of opportunity” to expand traditional gender norms and power relations as societies experience structural changes in the process of recovery. The 2020 UN report “Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change” argues that this can be a crucial turning point where women can expand their social status. The report states, “...in some regions, the impacts of climate change are also leading to important socio-economic shifts that are transforming traditional gender norms around economic activity, decision-making and leadership...such changes have the potential to open-up new spaces for more inclusive peace and development processes” (UN, 2020a). It is imperative, therefore, that climate change action focuses on supporting female leadership, especially within disaster-relief policies.

This “window of opportunity” must be taken advantage of as a critical yet brief opportunity to increase the social mobility of women in society and address underlying gender inequalities. This entails encouraging meaningful female leadership, a factor which has previously been linked to an increased climate change resiliency in society (Boyer *et al.*, 2020). Conversely, a lack of women in leadership roles at the local and broader spheres of the environmental arena will only further exacerbate underlying gender inequalities and lessen the efficacy of climate change policy due to a lack of diverse perspectives. A 2016 study by the Overseas Development Institute warns of the consequences if this action is not prioritized, stating:



Existing socioeconomic and gender-based inequalities, discriminatory gendered norms, power abuse and the resulting pervasive violence against women and girls, however, are also able to occupy this space, thereby increasing the potential for worsening conditions in the aftermath of disasters and leaving those traditionally marginalized even more vulnerable to subsequent risks. (Le Masson *et al.*, 2020)

Although the “window of opportunity” following climate-related disasters is a viable path to achieving equitable change in terms of gender equality and strengthening a society’s ability to cope with climate change, the current trend has shown to produce opposite and detrimental results. However, if significant and long-term action is taken at the local, regional, and international level to broaden the range of voices in the climate change debate, this time window may prove to be transformational.

Much of climate change policy recommendation and action initiatives stem from international institutions, such as the UN. Therefore, it is imperative that such organizations not only address the linkages between women and climate change, but also make sincere efforts to make female leadership a priority in the agendas of all UN entities, as the intersectional nature of climate change demands attention from all fields of study. In the past eight years in her role as Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka has overseen significant progress in the entity’s investment in the realm of women, peace, and security. She notes, however, that equal gender representation in terms of leadership in decision-making processes continues to be a goal far from being realized. As of 2020, even after the implementation of new measures addressing this disparity, women represented only 23% of delegates in peace processes led or co-led by the UN (UN, 2021). This number is nearly identical to the global average of national parliamentary seats held by women, which was found to be 23.4% in 2017 (Boyer *et al.*, 2020).

Mlambo-Ngcuka states, “One quarter is not enough. One quarter is not equality”; Secretary-General Guterres continues, “We cannot hope to turn the climate crisis around, reduce social divisions and build sustained peace without shifting power towards equality and justice, and we cannot stop until we get there” (UN, 2021). This statistic is extremely alarming considering the rate at which climate change is increasing and is symptomatic of the larger failure on behalf of the UN to seriously consider the relationship between gender and environmental degradation.

In January of 2019, the Dominican Republic, as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) President, organized a debate to examine the intersectional impacts of climate change. Alarmingly, yet unsurprisingly, only 5 out of 75 member states recognized gender considerations as a key issue in relation to climate-related disasters on international peace and security (Desai and Mandal, 2021). Further, an external study by the IUCN in 2015 found that women made up only 12% of 881 environment-sector ministries from 193 UN member states (Boyer *et al.*, 2020). These differentiated levels of participation in decision-making, especially in influential intergovernmental organizations such as the UN, have already resulted in policy initiatives that overlook the specific needs of women, and in some cases even exacerbate inequalities in areas such as education and health that jeopardize their livelihoods.

The 2021 UN annual report “Women and Peace and Security” from Secretary-General Guterres addresses the implementation of resolutions 1325, 2122, and 2493, which together called for updates on progress in these areas as well as reinforced measures to achieve a complete implementation of prior UN agendas. The report also revisits Guterres’s five goals for the decade laid out in reports of previous years. These goals addressing women, peace, and security consist of:

- (a) Push for a radical shift in the meaningful participation of women in our peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts, ensuring that women are fully involved as equal partners in peace and from the earliest stages in each and every peace and political process that the United Nations supports.
- (b) Turn the unconditional defense of women's rights into the most visible and identifiable markers of the work of the United Nations on peace and security.
- (c) Reverse the upward trajectory in global military spending with a view to encouraging greater investment in the social infrastructure and services that buttress human security.
- (d) Galvanize the donor community's support for universal compliance with the target of allocating a minimum of 15 percent of official development assistance to conflict-affected countries to advancing gender equality, and the remaining 85% to integrating gender considerations, including by multiplying by five direct assistance to women's organizations, currently at 0.2 percent.
- (e) Bring about a gender data revolution on women and peace and security that reaches the general public, focuses on closing data gaps and increases our knowledge of today's most pressing issues, building on my data strategy. (UN, 2020b)

In the annual "Women and Peace and Security" reports prior to 2020, these goals had not been sufficiently contextualized within the current climate crisis. This is emblematic of the common tendency to address issues surrounding climate change and gender as if they were mutually exclusive, something that remains a consistent oversight in a majority of climate change literature and policy. In National Action Plans on women, peace, and security operating

independent from the UN, only 17 out of 80 even mention climate change (UN, 2020b).

Although the specific term “climate change” is absent from these five goals, significant progress has been made in reports of 2020 and 2021 to include it as a focal point in carrying out these objectives.

Persistent data gaps remain a major obstacle to effectively integrating a gendered perspective in climate analysis, policy, and law. Although there has been some progress in addressing this particular goal, there are still large information deficiencies especially on diverse gender communities. This is concerning considering the compounded dangers LGBTQIA+ individuals face in the wake of climate-related disasters, especially in places where freedom of sexuality is limited. Gaps in updated and reputable sex-disaggregated data with wide coverage, especially in less-developed countries, become a limiting factor for thoroughly addressing the intersection between gender inequality and climate vulnerability (Boyer *et al.*, 2020). This perpetuates a cycle where a lack of data prevents a comprehensive assessment of these issues, which then further impedes initiatives to obtain said data.

As global crises such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic escalate and threaten to undo progress towards gender equality, it is imperative that pathways to leadership be made accessible and center a diverse set of voices. In 36 conflict and post-conflict countries, the UN found that women comprised only 25% of COVID-19 task force membership. In 2021, UN Women published “Beyond COVID-19: A Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice”, a report linking the current pandemic, global gender inequalities, and climate change. Researchers state:

This trio of interlocking crises is deeply rooted in an economic system that, despite significant cross-country variations, displays some critical features everywhere: it

freerides on women's unpaid and underpaid labour, exploits the natural environment and has led to an extreme concentration of wealth and power among the few while causing a deep sense of insecurity among the many. (UN Women, 2021a)

This report is critical in how it legitimizes on an institutional level the imperative for an ecofeminist approach towards climate change that centers around environmental justice. A further discussion of their proposal for an intersectional, ecofeminist agenda will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Although significant progress has been made in the past decades for gender equality, exclusion on the basis of gender in environmental policy and law is still extremely prevalent. This inequality is so pervasive not just because of mere surface-level sexism, but largely because the necessary dramatic shifts to achieve such inclusion would directly challenge the current economic system whose success is dependent on the logic of domination framework discussed in the previous chapter. The denial of the importance of female and other diverse forms of leadership is a denial of the institutional barriers which uphold this exclusion. It is incredibly convenient for those in power, and especially for capitalists who directly benefit from ecological abuse, to prevent those who seek to expose the root causes of climate change from having a seat at the table. This theme is evident in mainstream environmentalism, much of which can be classified as ecocidal environmentalism, a form of advocacy that promotes environmental care while ignoring capitalism, colonialism, and other root causes of climate change (Doermann, 2021). Ecocidal environmentalism is dangerous in how it naturalizes capitalist and heteropatriarchal structures, and therefore assumes all action to address climate change can be achieved within the context of the very structures that enable it. In her essay "Against Ecocidal Environmentalism", Hannah Doermann explains, "This belief system allows some white and

privileged environmentalists to separate environmental care from the opposition structures of violence that harm humans as well as nonhuman life, such as racism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy... The fallacies of ecological environmentalism therefore demonstrate the inseparability of social and ecological violence” (Doermann, 2021). The failure to address the root causes of climate change is emblematic of Western anthropocentrism, the belief that not only draws a harsh distinction between human and non-human life, but also asserts that human life is morally superior to all other forms of life and therefore is the most important element of existence (Doermann, 2021).

Because women, especially BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities, have been historically excluded from institutional pathways to environmental leadership and policy-making, they have turned to other methods of achieving change. Traditional environmental organizations have defined the environment in terms of uninhabited wilderness, endangered species, and places untouched by human society (Stein, 2004). It is problematic because it tends to ignore the environmental abuses suffered by humans at the hands of pollutive industries. Environmental justice, on the other hand, is a resistance movement against human oppressors who directly threaten the livelihoods of communities. It employs an alternative definition of the environment as the place “where we live, work, play, and worship”, and is an essentialist form of activism as people are forced to defend their homes and families (Stein, 2004). Race and class are the main determining factors of being subjected to environmental injustices; the modern environmental justice movement relies on the foundational work of Black and Indigenous women. In her work “Women of Color, Environmental Justice, and Ecofeminism”, prominent environmental sociologist Dorceta Taylor explains, “In no other sector of the environmental movement... can one find such high percentages of women of color occupying positions as founders and leaders

of organizations, workshop and conference organizers, researchers, strategists, lawyers, academics, policymakers, community organizers, and environmental educators” (Taylor, 1997). An in-depth discussion of the importance of BIPOC women in the environmental justice movement will be included in Chapter Four.

Racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia all have been and continue to be used to delegitimize calls for environmental justice. In the early 1900s as the US became increasingly industrialized and urbanized, calls for reforms were made regarding declining sanitation and health conditions experienced by many of the urban lower-class. Poor urban women experienced a huge toll on their health, enduring high rates of miscarriage, venereal disease, self-induced abortion, and frequent childbirth which kept them trapped in the cycle of poverty (Unger, 2004). Although advocates at the time promoted bodily autonomy and access to reproductive health resources such as birth control, poor women, women of color, and other various ethnic groups were blamed for disease and sanitation problems. In 1962, pioneer ecofeminist Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, one of the most influential books of the century. She directly challenged the paternalism and environmental abuses of the US government and its scientific postwar policies. A review published in *Time* brutally criticized Carson and her work, writing her off as “hysterically overemphatic” (Unger, 2004). She was criticized for being overly-emotional, dismissed by the scientific community for her supposed political affiliation as a communist, and was scrutinized by the public for her rejection of prevailing sexual stereotypes and her sexual identity as a lesbian. In 1970, Indigenous women in the United States formed Women of All Red Nations (WARN), a coalition with the purpose of strengthening themselves and their families as their cultures, lands, and autonomy were coming under attack. Co-founder Lorelei DeCora Means argued that the abuses against tribal people as a whole were not uniform, and stated, “On

reservations Indian women and children bore the greater burden of poor nutrition, inadequate health care, and forced or deceptive sterilization programs; Native women and children also faced higher levels of domestic violence resulting from poverty, joblessness, substance abuse, and hopelessness” (Unger, 2004). Indigenous women within the US experienced dramatic increases in miscarriages, birth defects, and childhood deaths due to cancer, all higher than the national average (Unger, 2004). In 1980, at a public meeting by Indian Health Service officials, Lakota women raised concerns over these disproportionate statistics. Instead of looking into potential sources such as suspected water pollution, government officials placed the blame on the women, inaccurately pinning the problem on fetal alcohol syndrome. In recent years, gender equality activists and women’s human rights defenders have come under attack around the world as the rate of political violence against women has risen (UN Women, 2021b).

Lasting gender inequalities and harmful gender norms enforce barriers to meaningful participation and leadership among women in critical decision-making processes surrounding climate change. This occurs both within and outside of prominent entities like the UN, and is visible at local, national, and international governmental levels worldwide. However, it is crucial to refrain from portraying women as passive victims, as this only reinforces negative gender stereotypes. Their vulnerability has not left them powerless; on the contrary, women have stood at the forefront of climate change activism for decades.

#### *Chapter Four: Leadership in the Environmental Activism Arena*

Women have long served as pivotal leaders on the frontlines of the environmental activism movement. This is not a mere coincidence, but rather is evident of their complex relationship to climate change and its unique impacts they have been forced to endure. For years,



women have been deeply involved with grassroots efforts and community organizing surrounding climate change. In patriarchal societies, environmental burdens are layered upon adverse gender inequalities; in defending the environment, women are also reclaiming their power from structures which seek to keep them silent. Many women activists resort to climate action outside of government systems which traditionally exclude them from decision-making processes and are often tainted with corruption. Consequently, their climate activism is inherently feminist, and vice versa.

Women-led grassroots environmental initiatives have been largely successful. In choosing to operate outside of government structures that are often influenced by the prospect of capitalist gains, they have been able to achieve critical change. This is especially true of women of color and women residing in the Global South who together bear the brunt of the adverse effects of climate change. However, their accomplishments are often overshadowed by the predominantly white, male environmental organizations in popular media, which typically prefers to showcase easily digestible, less radical news. The mainstream environmental movement continues to be extremely problematic, and the dominance of white voices within it is a continuation of its legacy of racism and exclusion (“Legacy of White Supremacy in the Environmental Movement”, n.d.). This is evidenced by the exploitative relationship between the Global North and South, and is also present even in supposed first world countries like the United States in the form of environmental racism. In a 2018 study conducted on over 2,000 environmental nonprofits, Dorceta Taylor found that the majority of these organizations, despite claiming to promote inclusion, continue to lack diversity in race and gender. On average, white people composed more than 80% of board members and men occupied 62% of board positions of the groups studied (Taylor, 2018). Although there has been a noticeable shift in diversity

statistics, these groups have been criticized for racial tokenism and continue to be predominantly white (Ortiz, 2021).

Racial and gendered exclusion remains a steady obstacle for women in the environmental activism arena. Especially in patriarchal societies, women continue to be heavily criticized by the opposition and those profiting from environmentally harmful activities. They are often faced with vile verbal threats of sexual violence and rape. Some activists, especially Indigenous women protesting extractive industries, find their lives at serious risk. Dozens of female activists have been reportedly murdered, and the killing of many continues to go largely unrecorded (UN, 2019). As environmental activism has been receiving more exposure due to social media and other technology, there has been an alarming increase in threats and violence against female activists (UN, 2021). It is imperative that their protection become an integral part of global climate agendas.

The remaining portion of this chapter involves a closer look at three grassroots environmental initiatives led by women that have produced considerable change in the effort to combat climate change. The inclusion of their stories is reflective of decolonial environmentalism, a concept developed by Indigenous, Latin American, and Latinx scholars which rejects the Western dichotomy of nature and culture. Instead, as Priscilla Solis Ybarra defines it, this form of activism centers upon Indigenous epistemologies and the interdependence of nature and culture. Doermann explains the value of decolonizing environmentalism, stating, “Rather than idealizing Indigenous people’s connection to the land as a model for environmental sustainability– thereby separating Indigenous knowledge from actual Indigenous people and their political concerns– decolonial environmentalism makes Indigenous perspectives around self-determination and sovereignty central to its environmental activism” (Doermann, 2021).

Mainstream environmentalism often tends to cherry-pick the aspects of Indigenous cultures that fit within its agenda, portraying unique Indigenous cultural practices as homogenous while ignoring their individual political goals of land reclamation and sovereignty. This chapter aims to recognize the unique experiences of activists throughout the world and offer various forms of alternative pathways to environmental justice.

*Uttarakhand, India.* During the 1970s and 1980s, an environmental movement grew out of Northern India as the threat of unsustainable extractive mining and logging industries prompted Indigenous villages to mobilize in defense of their land. What became known as the Chipko movement set the foundation for ecofeminist movements worldwide as women began to recognize their oppression operated in tandem with ecological genocide (Pallavi, 2022). It is crucial to note that the movement was not an organized effort to fight solely for conservation, but instead a spontaneous economic struggle for survival by the rural poor against a government who prioritized profit over their lives. The word *chipko*, meaning “to hug” in Hindi, speaks to the nonviolent nature of the movement as well as the literal tactics employed by protestors. The origin of the Chipko movement dates back to 1730 in the Indigenous village of Khejarli when native Amrita Devi Bishnoi led a successful movement against the attack on her forests. Soldiers were sent to cut down the trees by order of the Maharaja of Marwar for the construction of a new palace. Together, Amrita and members of the Bishnoi tribe hugged the trees, clinging to their trunks to prevent them from being cut. Even at the threat of death they refused to let go; Amrita’s last words were “A chopped head is cheaper than a chopped tree” which quickly became a rallying cry for the Bishnoi (Mitra, 1993). 363 men, women, and children were beheaded as they hugged the trees, sacrificing themselves in collective resistance. Their actions forced the Maharaja to pass a decree forbidding the felling of trees in the area.

The legacy of this massacre demonstrated the efficacy of peaceful protest in wake of brutal environmental violence and the central role women played in community resistance. Over 200 years later, the Chipko movement arose in response to the same ecological destruction. Following a colonial practice that began in 1821 that allowed the Indian government to systematically restrict Indigenous people from their forests and their life-sustaining resources, the villages in Uttarakhand began experiencing severe ecological degradation due to increased activity by unsustainable, exploitative industries (Pallavi, 2022). The government sold contracts to private companies who would assault Indigenous lands without an inkling of concern of the devastating impacts on rural Indigenous villages. Villages became prone to landslides, erosion, watershed damage, and resource depletion. The economic impact fell disproportionately on women, who were often charged with the responsibility of running their households as single-mothers due to the large-scale male migration at the time. They were extremely aware of their economic dependence on the environment, as much of their labor involved subsistence work such as harvesting the fields and collecting resources from the forests.

One of the earliest battles of Chipko occurred in 1974 when the women of Reni drove laborers hired by a contractor out of their village after the forest department had marked trees for felling in the Peng Murenda forest (Mitra, 1993). The state government established a committee whose work led to a ten-year ban on commercial forestry in Reni. Numerous other local protests under the Chipko movement were fought over the next decade, and although protesters were peaceful in their resistance, they were sometimes met with severe violence from soldiers and developers. In November of 1986, Chamundeyi, a woman of the Nahi-Kala village in Doon Valley literally looked death in the face when she threw herself in front of trucks headed up a mountain to a limestone quarry. Chamundeyi stood in front of them, daring them to drive over

her dead body (Shiva *et al.*, 2020). Eventually, they reversed and left temporarily. Their mining operations were in violation of the 1980 Forest Conservation Act achieved by previous Chipko efforts, but failure of the act to be implemented by the government allowed operations to continue. Taking law enforcement into their own hands, protestors formed a blockade camp in spring of 1997 on the road to the quarry and were met with vicious attacks by quarry workers who assaulted them with stones and iron rods. The men, women, and children refused to abandon their land, and did not withdraw from the blockade. In an interview with Itwari Devi and Chamundeyi, two female leaders of Chipko, Vandana Shiva asked them to describe their *shakti*, their source of strength. Itwari responded, stating:

“*Shakti* comes to us from these forests and grasslands, we watch them grow, year in and year out through their internal *shakti* and we derive our strength from it...All this gives us not just nourishment for the body but a moral strength, that we are our own masters, we control and produce our own wealth. That is why it is ‘primitive’, ‘backward’ women who do not buy their needs from the market but produce for themselves, who are leading Chipko. Our power is nature’s power” (Shiva *et al.*, 2020).

The Chipko movement left an incredibly important legacy that demonstrated the power of women in defending their participation in economic decision-making spheres against a patriarchal, capitalist system. Chipko also offered women pathways to organize, setting a precedent for later ecofeminist movements. Although it was not the movement’s original intention, the Chipko resistance became an umbrella movement for environmental protection against corporate greed and government elitist interests.

*Turkana, Kenya.* In Kenya, women of the northern drought-prone region of Turkana have mobilized against an extractive industry that threatens their societal balance and access to vital

resources. Turkana remains one of the most economically marginalized communities in Kenya (Wasike, 2021). In 2012, the London-based corporation Tullow Oil discovered oil in Turkana. Without consulting the local Indigenous community, the corporation began the extraction process and construction of an oil pipeline. In 2018, they began ramping up the drilling on traditional ancestral lands, prompting significant water problems for the Turkana people. At various points, their water reserves were shut down entirely, and the community was forced to become dependent on Tullow Oil to transport water to them. The corporation arrived with the promise of positive development for the region, offering jobs and cash to men in attempts to increase their leverage for further expansion. (Nayar, 2020)

Women in Turkana are unable to own land and are traditionally banned from community business negotiations, and therefore were excluded from any potential economic gains from Tullow Oil. They made several attempts to protest against the company's environmental exploitation but were met with harsh backlash from Turkana men who suppressed their efforts. Seeing the many dangers facing her community, Selina Asekon Chumchum initiated an independent coalition of women to address these abuses. She states:

The scrambling for oil will bring unrest in the community. I see it. There will be no peace at all. This is not development...It's not Tullow but rather the men in our community that prevent us women from having a voice. We were wrong to accept the idea that men are wiser. We have a lot of work here in our community raising women's voices. It starts here. It starts now. (Nayar, 2020)

In an effort to challenge Tullow Oil, corrupt politics, and patriarchal ideals, Chumchum unified women from across the region for coordinated action. The women organized by holding private

meetings in their homes, and continue to protest for their rights to resource access and land ownership.

The magnitude of the problem has since expanded, and the Kenyan government is attempting to acquire more than 60,000 acres of Turkana land for oil extraction. Tullow Oil plans to sell its shares in the Turkana oil fields and walk away with \$2 billion in revenue, leaving the region at the mercy of other oil companies to continue the exploitation of the Turkana land and people. In 2019, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta signed a new petroleum law which held that the local community will only receive 5% of oil revenue discovered in Turkana County (Wasike, 2021).

*Cauca, Colombia.* In Colombia, Indigenous leader and activist Celia Umenza Velasco has dedicated decades of her life in defense of her people, their territory, the environment, and peace. She is a member of Cxhab Wala Kiwe, translated to “Great People’s Territory” in the Nasa Yuwe language, residing in the northern Cauca region of southwestern Colombia. Umenza Velasco serves as the Legal Coordinator for the Indigenous Reservation of Tacueyó and is a member of the Association of Indigenous Councils of the North of Cauca (ACIN). Since the 1970s, Indigenous people of the Cauca region have fought the expansion of extractive industries, including sugarcane plantations which have destroyed their forests and threatened their water supply (France 24, 2021). Colombia is considered to be one of the most dangerous countries for human rights and land defenders in the world, and on average at least one Indigenous defender is murdered every week.

Umenza Velasco explains the threat of violence, stating, “Attacks on human rights defenders, especially women, LGBTQI+, *campesino*, Afro-descendent and Indigenous leaders have continued, including in response to the recent protests in Colombia against extreme

inequality, violence and scant implementation of the Peace Accord” (UN Women, 2021c). She has endured threats and physical attacks on her life countless times since she first became an activist. Activists in Colombia pose a powerful threat to large corporations and harmful industries, many of which are supported by the Colombian government. During recent national protests, state police and government forces have used excessive force against peaceful protesters, who have been subjected to torture, gender-based violence, disappearances, and killings (UN Women, 2021c). The severity of conflict escalated to such a level that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights intervened to call for the overall demilitarization of the police in Colombia.

The 2016 Peace Accord, which ended five decades of conflict with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerillas, established 130 provisions on gender equality and women’s rights. This was a huge achievement on behalf of the persistence of Colombian feminist movements, but the implementation of the Peace Accord has not progressed even five years after its signing. It established the Special Forum of Women and the High Level Forum for Ethnic Peoples, but both are underfunded, lacking in political support, and have been physically threatened. Umenza Velasco spoke at the 2021 UN Security Council Open Debate on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. She called on the UN to address the violence experienced by human rights defenders, stating:

Threats faced by women peacebuilders and human rights defenders in one community are a threat to women everywhere...although Security Council members have regularly condemned the targeting of human rights defenders and social leaders, they have not done enough to turn words into action. Ending attacks against women human rights defenders, not only in Colombia, but in all conflicts on its agenda, and ensuring the full,



equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women in all their diversity, is essential for sustainable peace. (UN Women, 2021c)

Umenza Velasco reprimanded the Security Council's failure to properly address the issue of women human rights defenders in their implementation of the women, peace and security agenda discussed in Chapter Three.

Research has established a positive correlation between women holding leadership positions regarding environmental decisions and successful mitigation efforts associated with climate-related harms (UN, 2019). This evidence is affirmed by the countless female environmental defenders risking their lives by taking up grassroots initiatives to defend their communities. The UN 2020 report of "Women and Peace and Security" emphasized the importance of prioritizing women's environmental activism in its future policy, stating, "...it is critical to recognize the importance of directing resources, through pooled funds and other means, to local women's groups at the front lines of climate change, and to support the leadership of women in addressing those interlinked crises" (UN, 2020b). As women continue to champion the environmental movement, significant policy initiatives that promote environmental justice as a focal point of equitable climate action; policy recommendations will be discussed in Chapter Five.

### *Chapter Five: An Equitable Future*

As climate change continues to wreak havoc on the world's ecosystems, it is imperative that equitable climate policy must include gender considerations and prioritize disadvantaged groups who remain subject to its most adverse consequences. As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, a lack of sustained gender representation has produced policy that fails to address the

complexity of gendered experiences of climate change and remains dominated by patriarchal discourses. Although it has been made evident that climate change aggravates gender inequalities, sexual and gender-based violence, there still lacks sustained policy initiatives to target these injustices in many spheres of governance. A refusal to incorporate an intersectional gendered framework creates ineffective policy which only reinforces these inequalities. Despite progress by the UN to include gender as a focal point of climate policy, barriers remain intact and prevent the full implementation of these goals. Therefore, any policy initiatives must support diverse gender leadership in all spheres of climate action ranging from grassroots activism to international institutions.

At an institutional level, inclusive gender representation across all environmental fields is still largely inadequate, and climate-related social factors continue to be neglected by many policy-makers. In her report “Gender and Climate Change: from Impacts to Discourses”, Sherilyn MacGregor describes a root cause of this problematic oversight, stating, “The lack of women sitting at the climate change policy table is not a cause of gender-blindness but a symptom of gender ideology and a framing of the issue by exclusionary, masculinist discourses” (MacGregor, 2010). The traditional approaches to climate change action tend to maintain the natural science community as the primary authority, and thus global climate agendas are dominated by highly scientific, elitist, and patriarchal discourses which prioritize emissions reductions over equally as important social implications (Vandenbergh *et al.*, 2009). Environmental research and financial efforts are devoted to technological fixes and carbon mitigation efforts, leaving few resources for further analysis of the gendered dimension of climate change.

This is a prevailing theme in institutional climate policy due in part to path dependence, a concept outlined by Gunnhildur Lily Magnúsdóttir and Annica Kronsell in their recent work *Gender, Intersectionality and Climate Institutions in Industrialized States*. Path dependence refers to the process by which certain rules and norms of behavior are locked into place. It manifests in institutions and is evident in policy-making procedures by the maintenance of traditionally narrow notions of gender, resulting in climate policy that has long disregarded intersectional gender considerations as appropriate factors worth consideration. This “gendered logic of appropriateness” is rooted in patriarchal systems which dictate acceptable and differentiated roles and behaviors for men and women (Magnúsdóttir and Kronsell, 2021). This is common especially in institutional settings of wealthy industrialized countries in the Global North. According to Magnúsdóttir and Kronsell, these countries should be the focus of climate policy analysis and critique because they possess the resources to implement innovative climate policy, are largely influential in establishing normative climate policies, and are ultimately the largest contributors of carbon emissions.

The institutional climate policies generated by these countries heavily prioritize development, and specifically the notion of sustainable development. Capitalist patriarchal ideals are the underlying foundation of this development and often skew the climate crisis as an exclusively economic problem. The authors state:

Ecological modernization centres around the idea that climate issues can be resolved in tandem and harmoniously with continued economic growth, and increase wealth and prosperity, as the market adjusts resource and energy use through prize mechanisms and from a continuum of innovations... This powerful normality informs and structures climate policy-making so that it will privilege efficiency arguments and technical

knowledge making over other types of knowledge that could help address social issues.

(Magnusdottir and Kronsell, 2021)

Although sustainable development is often praised as a realistic remedy in curbing emissions, it relies on the perpetuation of exploitative colonial relationships between the Global North and South. In reality, it is an extremely exclusionary policy standard which serves the profit ambitions of the global elite at the expense of further disenfranchising women and other marginalized groups.

Sustainable development as a policy solution to climate change is a harmful narrative perpetuated by many already industrialized countries, and is impossible to achieve on a global scale. The initial development and foundation of wealth for many countries in the Global North stems from the era of colonization and is upheld by its extractive relationship with the Global South. The North is highly regarded for its efforts to curb climate change, yet its ability to afford clean environments is upheld by its exploitation of pollutive economies in the South. Wealthy countries live in a delusional fantasy, chasing the impossible reality that they can simultaneously address the climate crisis while maintaining their current standards of living and overconsumption of resources. Less-developed countries remain under the guise that they too can achieve these same standards of living, a legacy of colonialism which perpetuates Western lifestyles as superior. *Ecofeminism*, previously mentioned in Chapter Two, discusses the ramifications of what it calls the myth of catch up development and the concept of limitless growth of dominant capitalist discourses. The authors state, “In short, the prevailing world market system, oriented towards unending growth and profit, cannot be maintained unless it can exploit external and internal colonies: nature, women and other people, but it also needs people as consumers who never say: ‘IT IS ENOUGH’ (Shiva *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, while sustainable

development is an achievable and even objectively positive goal for some, it is overall an insufficient policy option. It remains ineffective in addressing the gendered experience of climate change, as it only perpetuates gender inequalities and exclusion. This is of course not to demonize development, but rather to shift development objectives away from patriarchal capitalist agendas to instead reaffirm traditional, sustainable subsistence economies that have maintained a balance with the environment for many years. (Shiva *et al.*, 2014)

*Ecofeminist Economic Transformation.* Chapter Two establishes that ecofeminism and the liberation of all oppressed peoples cannot coexist with an economic system whose success requires the domination of marginalized groups by heteronormative, patriarchal capitalism. The current COVID-19 pandemic makes extremely clear that the world's current dominant economic system is ill-equipped to cope with large-scale crises. During the pandemic, women suffered disproportionate losses in employment, decreased access to vital resources, and reduced human rights. Just as the impacts of climate change are unevenly distributed, the effects of the pandemic impacted low-income countries and marginalized women the most, despite the fact that they contribute the least to these crises. Studies have shown that by the end of 2021 an estimated additional 47 million women worldwide were pushed into extreme poverty (UN Women, 2021c). UN Women's "A Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice" outlines the need for a complete restructuring of the current global economy that throws out the old idea of endless consumption and replaces it with an economy that rests upon the foundation of social justice and values all labor and natural resources that were previously taken for granted. This would center upon gender-just transitions to create a sustainable future. The report explains:

Making available the necessary resources to finance these critical investments, particularly for poorer and highly indebted countries, calls for global policies to enlarge

fiscle space through progressive macroeconomic policies and multilateral cooperation; for governments to implement progressive tax policies to ensure that the wealthiest people, companies and countries contribute the most; and for resources to be directed to sectors that support human flourishing with planetary boundaries. (UN Women, 2021c)

This new economic vision would finally hold countries and corporations that consume the most resources accountable for their environmental abuses. It would support women's livelihoods and put care at the center of a sustainable and just economy (UN Women, 2021c). Although this may seem like a utopian fantasy, this dramatic economic transformation is necessary for the survival of economies and societies throughout the world.

The pandemic revealed how unequipped current state and international systems are in preparing for large scale crises, including impending climate-change induced disasters. The tragedies of the past several years must be taken as a wake up call; the current prevailing economic system is no longer viable. In 2020, the combined earnings of workers around the world fell by US \$3.7 trillion while global billionaire wealth increased by US \$3.9 trillion (UN Women, 2021c). Financial inequalities are becoming even more pronounced due to a failure by policymakers to address the widening wealth gap that has only worsened since the 2008 global financial crisis. As a result, wealthy actors have gained significant political power, taxes have become more regressive, and social protection services have declined. Democracies around the globe have become increasingly fragile and many states have experienced democratic backsliding. Distrust of governments continues to grow as trust between the political elite and the general public erodes. Many governments have used the pandemic as an excuse to employ "tyranny of the urgent", allowing them to operate in crisis mode and squash any political dissent, including that by feminist and women's rights organizations, in the name of public health. The

UN Women's report states, "This asymmetrical fallout is not accidental but the result of economic policies that have shifted the balance of power squarely towards large corporations and financial capital through privatization, deregulation, and trade liberalization" (UN Women, 2021c). An economy that allowed the very small number of wealthy elites to not only evade, but also benefit from a global health emergency that left millions dead, deteriorated human rights, and intensified poverty on a global scale must be dismantled. This is the same economic system operating under the US government that allowed the Dakota Access Pipeline to be constructed on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, letting the corporate greed of extractive industries take priority over land rights established in former treaties, protection of culturally significant sites, and access to provisioning services like clean water. A sustainable economic transformation would include provisions for land reclamation, returning stolen Indigenous land to those who understand how to live in harmony with it. Capitalism in its current form must be replaced with a people-centered economic system that centers gender equality, sustainability, and justice for all marginalized groups.

*Funding for Gender-Disaggregated Research.* Viable alternative policy options must be implemented with diverse gender considerations if institutions are to produce equitable, sustainable, and intersectional action. The pandemic disrupted data collection efforts in many countries, further exacerbating the already minimal amount of credible data available, especially in certain areas like the gender and climate nexus (UN Women, 2021c). A lack of gender-disaggregated data prevents decision-makers from being held accountable and allows gender inequalities to deepen as societal stressors like climate change intensify. Filling in these gaps will support accountability among policymakers by formally establishing gender dimensions as a legitimate realm of climate change. This would also promote a more

comprehensive, widespread knowledge of the relationship between gender and climate that is still relatively misunderstood at the institutional level. Long-term research commitments would close the problematic data gaps, especially in regions with pervasive gender inequalities and historically unreliable data reporting. Funding would also ensure sustained commitments to implementing these policies, whose efficacy is currently impeded by financial restrictions.

In addition to an overall expansion of data collection efforts, significant changes to data metrics are imperative in addressing the significant methodological gaps that make measuring progress very difficult. Currently, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the measure of the monetary value of commodities produced and exchanged for money, is often used as a primary measure of economic development (UN Women, 2021c). This method of measuring economic success and wellbeing has been criticized for excluding the many social inequalities and changing environmental conditions that accompany economic development. UN Women states:

Innovative analysis of existing datasets has provided new perspectives on women's position within labour markets, and sex-disaggregated data availability on informal employment has improved, but there is still much room for improvement, including on earnings. The gaps in data on social protection are particularly stark and will require new methodologies and data collection efforts to build gender-responsive systems for the future (UN Women, 2021c).

The Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) is a more promising approach, factoring externalities such as the costs of crime, resource depletion, pollution, and other factors that reduce the overall welfare of a nation. GPI also accounts for economic activity that does not leave a distinct financial footprint, including unpaid housework, volunteerism, and other essential realms of



work that are provided often by women without monetary compensation. The exact formula is as follows:

$$\text{GPI} = C_{\text{ADJ}} + G + W - D - S - E - N$$

$C_{\text{ADJ}}$  = personal consumption with income distribution adjustments

G = capital growth

W = unconventional contributions to welfare

D = defensive private spending

S = activities that negatively impact social capital

E = costs associated with the deterioration of the environment

N = activities that negatively impact natural capital (Hayes, 2022)

GPI measures the health of a nation's economy and naturally advocates for the ideal of a feminist, sustainable, people-first economic model. After taking into account the environmental impact and social costs of economic production and consumption, the economy of highly pollutive countries like the US would appear to be far less healthy than when solely measuring economic progress by GDP. Adopting more effective methods of data analysis and financially advocating for an expansion of data collection based on an informed feminist understanding of climate change would "bring about a gender data revolution...that reaches the general public, focuses on closing data gaps and increases our knowledge of today's most pressing issues", accomplishing the fifth of Guterres's five goals regarding Women and Peace and Security discussed in Chapter Three.

*Financial Support of Grassroots Feminist Environmental Justice Organizations.*

Meaningful leadership among women and other diverse gender groups must be a top priority of all climate policy, both in its construction and implementation. Further, policy initiatives should

build upon the foundational work laid by environmental activists with a focus on BIPOC women at the frontlines of grassroots movements. Going forward, these policies must be highlighted in depth in significant international climate treaties, such as the Paris Agreement and Kyoto Protocol, to establish a normative discourse on the intersection of gender and climate change. Support for these organizations cannot be made only in name; significant funding from the international community needs to be devoted towards these organizations in order to ensure a sustainable future built upon gender equality and intersectionality. Head of the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) Secretariat Ghita El Khyari states, "Our latest WPHF global survey of local women's organizations found that 44% of respondents reported their organizations are at risk of not being able to sustain themselves because of limited institutional funding available. That is cause for profound concern, and urgent action" (WPHF, 2022). Funding is incredibly important to ensure women's autonomy and decision-making power in their communities. (WPHF, 2022)

Although bilateral allocable aid for gender equality is steadily increasing, very little of it is directly funded towards local women's rights organizations (WROs). For example, between 2017 and 2018, 42% of Official Development Assistance, government aid that promotes economic development and welfare of developing countries, was contributed towards gender equality goals and female empowerment. Of that US \$48.7 billion, only one percent was committed towards women's rights organizations (WPHF, 2022). The pandemic made it even more difficult for WROs to access funds that were allocated to them on top of cumbersome bureaucratic barriers. In their recent report, "A Missing Brick for Sustaining Women's Movements", the WPHF laid out seven policy recommendations to develop more efficient funding methods for WROs:

- 1) “Providing flexibility to civil society organizations grantees/partners to adjust budget lines to adapt to changing contexts, based on their needs and in consultation with them,
- 2) Simplifying and adapting institutional funding calls for proposals to enhance access to small, grassroots local women’s and youth organizations,
- 3) Funding directly to local women’s organizations,
- 4) Fund from a position of trust,
- 5) Invest more intentionally in a portfolio of small grants to direct institutional funding for national and local women’s organizations– without any programmatic requirements,
- 6) Combine funding with context specific and customized capacity development in consultation with recipient organizations,
- 7) As allies of feminist movements, funders should pursue internal advocacy work amongst the international donor community to shift the larger funding ecosystem and contribute to moving the money to local women’s organizations” (WPHF, 2022).

It is essential this funding be both flexible, functional, and feminist in nature. Removing accessibility barriers by providing grant applications in multiple languages allows local WROs to acquire funds directly rather than go through additional entities that may impose restrictions or agendas. These recommendations also emphasize how intersectional funding must prioritize the autonomy of WROs above all else, sharing decision-making power and allowing them to determine their own funding priorities. A report funded by the Association for Women’s Rights in Development and Mama Cash, the oldest international women’s fund in the world, affirms the importance of direct funding to WROs. Authors Kasia Staszewska, Kellea Miller, and Esther Lever explain:

‘Direct Funding’ intentionally delivers resources to feminist groups and movements,

allowing them to determine their own priorities and recognizing them as the agents and drivers of change. By definition, these groups are led by women, girls, and trans people speaking for themselves, representing their own interests, and demanding their own rights. When groups and movements are rooted in their local communities and speak on the basis of lived experience about realities that they know well, they own the advocacy and are best positioned to pursue solutions that are deep, empowering, and lasting (Staszewska *et al.*, 2020 ).

Especially considering the pervasive lack of diverse gender representation in IGOs like the UN whose missions do not embrace an explicitly ecofeminist agenda, aid must be transferred directly to WROs instead of letting it slowly trickle down to them. Direct funding allows movements such as the Standing Rock resistance against DAPL to succeed; their organization website includes a link to donate directly to their fund, and much of their financial support came from direct donations. In 2020, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe received an award of \$120k from the EPA in Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Agreements for environmental emergency planning (Khan, 2020). However, one of the key partners in the project included Chief Oilfield Services, LLC, an oil and gas corporation. Their participation in the project directly violates the seven proposed funding modalities, as it removes any potential for autonomous decision-making by Standing Rock. They were likely unable to implement their own independent agenda due to financial manipulation by the EPA to follow government-approved plans. Truly meaningful and effective funding would allow for an inherently ecofeminist agenda to be pursued without any external pressures or influence. Overall, Adopting these funding modalities would “push for a radical shift in the meaningful participation of women in our peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding efforts”, the first of Guterres’s

five goals regarding Women and Peace and Security previously mentioned in Chapter Three. While the dynamic between gender and climate change is still relatively misunderstood at the institutional level, local grassroots organizations are incredibly familiar with the realities of the current climate crisis and the impact it has on women, marginalized communities, and gender diverse groups. Therefore, their voices should be centered in the conversation and their experiences should dictate policies that directly fund their work.

An ecofeminist economic transformation, funding for gender-disaggregated research, and financial support of grassroots environmental justice organizations are all realistic policy measures that must be adopted on a global scale to address the complex relationship between pervasive gender inequalities and climate change. Chapter One established the disproportionate effects from climate change-induced disasters threatening the livelihoods of women and gender diverse individuals. Chapter Two unpacked the underlying causes of gender inequalities within a capitalist, patriarchal economic framework. A discussion of ecofeminism revealed how the liberation of women, the environment, and all other groups whose suppression is essential to the survival of capitalism cannot exist under this system, and called for its immediate dismantling. Chapter Three revealed the lack of diverse gender representation within environmental organizations, government agencies, and powerful IGOs like the UN. Chapter Four emphasized how local grassroots environmental organizations are the most important actors in achieving climate justice for the earth and all who inhabit it. Finally, Chapter Five offered policy solutions that would implement an ecofeminist agenda to address the overlooked connections between gender and climate change to achieve a more equitable future.

## Land Acknowledgement Resources

Link to learn more about Lenapehoking, the Lenape homeland on which Fordham University resides: <https://thelenapecenter.com>

Link to more information about the Land Back Movement by Cheyenne Bearfoot:

<https://www.kqed.org/education/535779/land-back-the-indigenous-fight-to-reclaim-stolen-lands>

Link to the history of colonization, forced displacement, and Indigenous erasure in NYC:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/true-native-new-yorkers-can-never-truly-reclaim-their-homeland-180970472/>

Link to donate to the Lenape Center in Manhattan:

<https://www.nyfa.org/fiscal-sponsorship/project-directory/view-project/?id=L3600>

Link to Indian Country Today, an independent, nonprofit news enterprise serving Indigenous communities: <https://indiancountrytoday.com/page/about-us>

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