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WOMEN AND CLIMATE ACTIVISM IN THE LIGHT OF ECOFEMINISM

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EKOFEMİNİZMİN İŞİĞINDA KADINLAR VE İKLİM AKTİVİZMİ

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ABSTRACT

Climate change has been one of the biggest challenges facing humanity in the modern era. It has now become the norm to hear frequent news stories from around the world about disasters and extreme weather events due to a result of worsening climate change that is impacting severely the environment and the lives of many species. Everyday more people join the climate movement to put pressure on governments, companies, and business leaders to take action in fighting climate change. Yet, especially women are at the forefront of fights for climate justice and their climate activism attracts wide publicity in the press. The voices of women climate activists are becoming more vocal all around the world. Ecofeminism is broadly defined as a school of thought, which looks for links between nature and women. With this in mind, this thesis attempts to understand the motivations and concerns of women lying behind their climate activism from the standpoint of ecofeminism. I believe the ecofeminist perspective will provide a strong foundation to better understand the women-nature relationship and their inclination for climate activism. In this thesis the narratives of prominent female climate activists and cases of women's resistance against the environmental crisis in Türkiye, namely İkizdere, Rize and Ida Mountain resistance will be examined to better understand women's concerns and motivations. The narratives of selected women climate activists and other cases about women's resistance against the environmental crisis referred to are collected from random news sources that are available online to the public. When these narratives and cases are analysed, it is possible to detect their connection with ecofeminist philosophy whether it is intended or unintended. This thesis focuses on the possibility for building a closer connection between ecofeminism and women climate activism. Therefore, in this thesis I use mixed methods by conducting a literature review, desk research, as well as discourse analysis of selected news items and cases of women in climate activism, their environmental movements, and motivations for activism.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Climate Activism, Women, Nature, Climate Change

ÖZET

İklim değışiklięi, modern çağda insanlığın karşılaştığı en büyük zorluklardan biri olmuştur. Çevreyi ve birçok türün yaşamını ciddi şekilde etkileyen iklim değışiklięinin bir sonucu olarak, dünyanın dört bir yanından felaketler ve aşırı hava olayları hakkında sık sık haberler duymak artık normal bir durum haline geldi. Her gün daha fazla insan iklim değışiklięiyle mücadelede hükümetlere, şirketlere ve iş dünyası liderlerine harekete geçmeleri için baskı yapmak amacıyla iklim hareketine katılıyor. Ancak iklim adaleti mücadelesinde özellikle kadınlar ön saflarda yer almakta ve onların iklim mücadelesi dünya genelinde ve basında geniş yankı bulmaktadır. Ekofeminizm genel olarak doğa ve kadınlar arasındaki bağlantı kuran bir teori olarak tanımlanır. Bu bağlamda, bu tez, kadınların iklim aktivizmi arkasında yatan motivasyonları ve kaygılarını ekofeminizmin bakış açısından anlamaya çalışmaktadır. Ekofeminist bakış açısının kadın-doğa ilişkisini ve onların iklim aktivizmine olan eğilimlerini daha iyi anlamak için güçlü bir temel olduğuna inanıyorum. Bu tezde, kadınların endişelerini ve motivasyonlarını daha iyi anlamak için önde gelen kadın iklim aktivistlerinin anlatıları ve Türkiye'deki çevre krizine karşı kadınların direnişine örnek vakalar, yani İkizdere, Rize ve Kaz Dağları direnişi, incelenecektir. Bu seçilen anlatılar ve örnek vakalar insanların kolayca erişebileceği rastgele çevrimiçi haber kaynaklarından toplanmıştır. Ayrıca bunlar incelendiğinde ekofeminist felsefe ile olan bağlantısını tespit etmek mümkündür. Bu tez, ekofeminizm ile kadın iklim aktivizmi arasında daha yakın bir bağlantı kurma olasılığına odaklanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bu bağı anlayabilmek için literatür taramasının yanı sıra seçilmiş çevrimiçi haberler, iklim aktivizminde yer alan kadınların anlatıları ve örnek vakaları incelediğim karma yöntemler kullanıyorum.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ekofeminizm, İklim Aktivizmi, Kadın, Doğa, İklim Değişimi

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is an undeniable fact with serious consequences. It has increasing dramatic impacts on the planet Earth, including all the species living on it. First, the rising emissions of the greenhouse gases (mainly Carbon dioxide, Methane, and Nitrous oxide) due to the human activities such as burning coal, oil and gas, and second, deforestation are the biggest reasons for the global climate change. The effects of climate change are accelerating with alarming speed: the melting glaciers, rising oceans, higher temperatures and extreme weather events, the loss of species, poverty, and displacements, etc.

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) presents in-depth analysis of the impacts and risks of the climate change at global and regional levels in its latest report, the Sixth Assessment Report, which was finalised in March 2023. The assessment indicates that the global warming will increase risks and cause multiple adverse effects on ecosystems, biodiversity, and humanity.¹

Meanwhile the growing negative consequences of the climate change such as drought, scarcity of food and water supply are presently causing a global crisis affecting millions of people. In particular, the developing countries, which do not have enough resources to tackle the climate change are the most vulnerable to its negative outcomes. Yet, women and men are not affected in the same way. Women experience the biggest negative impacts of climate change, which increasingly aggravates the existing gender inequalities and in turn threaten their health, safety, and livelihood.

As the negative effects of the climate change and related disasters increase, we hear the voices of woman climate activists louder and stronger from all over the world to fight the climate crisis. It must not be sheer coincidence seeing the female climate activists taking the front lines in climate justice protests and marches and voicing their concerns regarding the changes needed to fight climate change. The disproportionate effects of climate change on women push them to act immediately

¹ "IPCC Sixth Assessment Report," Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, accessed June 12, 2023, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2>.

to protect the environment and stop the climate crisis which will have catastrophic results for all living beings.

Ecofeminism, which is a theory that combines ecology and feminism, offers a framework for women, who fight the climate crisis. Throughout decades, ecofeminism has brought forward the link between gender inequalities and the environmental crisis, and it addresses the actions that need to be taken to resolve these issues. Ecofeminism highlights women-nature interconnection focusing on mutual problems that both women and nature have. This theory draws attention to the degradation of nature and the oppression of women by patriarchal societies and offers solutions both for women and for the natural world. It rings alarm bells to take action and summon people to protect the nature. With certain ethical positions and courses of actions it presents, ecofeminism introduces a fresh perspective on environmental considerations, emphasizing justice and promoting a shift towards ecological transformation. In this respect even if many climate activists do not call themselves ecofeminist, they are both driven by the same kind of motivations and passions as well as having similar objectives.

This thesis, which aims to explore the motivations of women in climate activism from the ecofeminist perspective, consists of three chapters. The first chapter presents the theoretical background about ecofeminism including its emergence, branches, evolvement throughout times, philosophy, movements, and critiques. I believe it is important to lay out a thorough analysis of ecofeminism to better understand the women's climate activism, so this part will provide as the foundational base for the thesis.

In the second chapter, my purpose is to provide an evolutionary timetable of climate change as a crisis. I will analyse the Anthropocene Epoch as a beginning of the climate crisis. This chapter will also tell of the effects of climate crisis on women which will give us a clue about women's climate activism. A detailed knowledge about the global climate crisis and its impact on women and nature will help us understand women's concerns and motivations to fight it.

In the third chapter, there will be firstly answers to the questions: "What is climate activism?" and "Why do we need climate activism?." Following that I will

take a closer look at the relationship between women and the environment, as well as women and climate activism. Thirdly, the intersection point of ecofeminism and climate activism will be analysed in order to have a clearer picture for the thesis. Furthermore, in order to better understand the motivations of women in climate activism, I will analyse the narratives of women climate activists whose statements are publicly available and accessible online. As an extension of the discussion, this chapter also covers two ecological resistance cases (environmental movements) that covered media outlets in 2019. Both cases have parallel stories, which provide insights into the topic of this thesis.

However, I must emphasize that I do not claim that all women in climate activism are ecofeminists, or all have the same goals, but I just want to present similarities and commonness they all share in the pathways of protecting nature, finding solutions for environmental problems and saving the planet earth.

Climate crisis is not just a concern for women, but also a serious issue for all, and poses a huge threat to all living species. In this thesis, my objective is not to make a comparison between women and men in their motivations for climate activism nor make unnecessary attempts to prove that women defend the environment better than men. Also, my motivation is not to determine which gender is more passionate about climate activism, instead just to bring critical thinking and highlight the connection between the women and nature. I seek to understand already concerned and acting women's motivations in climate activism through the lens of an ecofeminist perspective.

1. ECOFEMINISM

Feminism has evolved and been affected by many political and social movements and approaches. This has enabled the emergence of different theories within feminism that nourishes and flourishes itself with conflicts and confrontations and through intersectionality with other concepts and disciplines. There are many feminist theories focusing on different perspectives; and each one builds on, overlaps, or competes with each other. So, ecofeminism, as one of them, has emerged and evolved within these discussions where feminism overlapped with ecology. Val Plumwood states that ecofeminism "... is built on the work of other forms of feminism, and hence has a basis for partial agreement with each."² In other words, ecofeminism involves various feminist theories and practices. Bringing the feminist and ecological concerns together, ecofeminism expands the discussion from different perspectives and introduces new ways of understanding with the aim of finding solutions for women and environmental issues.

In order to present my whole argument, in this first chapter, I will give background information about ecofeminism including how it emerged, its branches, philosophy, movements, and major critiques by reviewing selections of the ecofeminist classics and identifying the general themes.

1.1. THE EMERGENCE OF ECOFEMINISM

Ecofeminism can be defined as a movement and theory that brings together feminist and ecological concerns. In other words, it is a connection point for feminism and environmentalism, which addresses the issues of women and nature. These issues that were discussed independently before have become connected issues within ecofeminism. As a consequence, two social movements, namely the women's liberation movement and the ecology movement, gave rise to the

² Val Plumwood, "Feminism and Ecofeminism; Beyond the Dualistic Assumptions of Women, Men and Nature," *The Ecologist*, 22, no.1 (1992): 46, quoted in Greta Gaard, *Ecological Politics* (Temple University Press, 1998), 67.

development of this new theory which offers new social structures, concepts and values. Especially through the end of the 1970s ecofeminism developed immensely and then gained huge popularity in the 1980s and 1990s.

Greta Gaard identifies the first ecofeminist works as Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature* (1978), Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), Rosemary Radford Ruether's *New Woman, New Earth* (1975), Elizabeth Dodson Gray's *Green Paradise Lost* (1979), Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980).³

The term “ecofeminism” was first used in the book titled *Feminism or Death* (*Le Feminisme ou la mort*) written by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 where she emphasizes the importance of “ecological revolution” by women to rebuild a new human-nature and man-woman relations.⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, who has significant contributions to feminist and ecofeminist theology, points out that the close interaction of the third type of feminism with deep ecology lays foundation for ecofeminism.⁵ According to her, ecofeminism is a unification of ecological and feminist concerns that is based on the understanding that there is a link between the domination of women and the domination of nature.⁶ Seeing the environmental destruction as a result of male culture, Ruether follows in her book titled *New Woman, New Earth* for the remedy:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping

³ Greta Gaard, *Ecological Politics* (Temple University Press, 1998), 31.

⁴ Trish Glazebrook. “Karen Warren's Ecofeminism.” *Ethics and the Environment*, 7, no. 2 (2002): 12, accessed June 20, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40339034>.

⁵ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Ecofeminism: First and Third World Women,” *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy*, 1 (University of Illinois Press, 1997), 34.

⁶ Ibid, 33.

of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this modern industrial society.⁷

Ecofeminism argues that the oppression of women and the domination of nature are interconnected, therefore it links feminism to ecology through common problems, goals and demands. It inherits different aspects of both theories, but formulates its own distinctive position. The prevalent themes of ecofeminist theory entail the critique of patriarchal culture, degradation of nature and the connection between the domination of women and nature. Karen Warren points out that ecofeminism “... is a concern about the connections- historical, empirical, conceptual, theoretical, symbolic, and experiential- between the domination of women and the domination of nature.”⁸

In the United States, ecofeminism flourished due to Ynestra King's contribution, particularly through her courses in the late 1970s. As one of the main organizers of two major events in the 1980s, namely the *Women and Life on Earth Conference* and the *Women's Pentagon Action*, with objectives focused on opposing nuclear war, weaponisation, and militarism, King gave momentum to the ecofeminist movement. These events were followed by a number of other conferences, works, and actions in the United States and other countries that established and reinforced the link between women and nature. Women with different backgrounds and perspectives began to engage internationally and developed ecofeminist understandings. Merchant points out that through the “coalition and partnership” of women, they drew ways to eliminate environmental problems and rescue the earth.⁹ According to Gaard the roots of ecofeminism come from various types of activism and movements: “peace and antinuclear activism,”

⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 204, quoted in Karen J. Warren, “Introduction,” in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, ed. Michael E. Zimmerman et al. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993), 263.

⁸ Karen J. Warren, “Introduction,” *Hypatia*, 6, no. 1 (1991): 1, accessed June 22, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810029>.

⁹ Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2005), 382.

“feminist spirituality,” “animal liberation activism,” “environmental activism,” “antitoxic activism,” and “the paths of lived experiences.”¹⁰ To put it another way, these grassroots movements led by women initiated ecofeminism. So, women, who had different beliefs and were involved in different social movements, were all connected under the umbrella of ecofeminism for the needs of women and nature.

It is also important to mention the intersectionality of ecofeminism, which is an important aspect of the theory. Gaard explains that “ecofeminism emerged from the intersections of feminist research and the various movements for social justice and environmental health, explorations that uncovered the linked oppressions of gender, ecology, race, species....”¹¹ She points out that issues such as “the global crises of climate justice, food security, energy justice, vanishing wildlife, maldevelopment, habitat loss, industrial animal food production, and more ... require both ecological and feminist analyses.”¹²

“Once I realized that my analysis inevitably led to the interconnections of human slavery, animal slavery, and women's oppression, then ecofeminism was the logical place from which I would articulate theory and articulate solutions,” expresses Carol Adams when it comes to her involvement in ecofeminism.¹³ The paths of women with different perspectives cross in the ecofeminist theory and they all work together to challenge all forms of oppression that are interlinked in many ways. In other words, ecofeminism is a destination for every female activist to engage with other fellow women and to link their activisms to defend women, nature and animals, and to eradicate all forms of oppressions. As Ariel Salleh puts it:

Ecofeminism is the only political framework I know of that can spell out the historical links between neoliberal capital, militarism, corporate science, worker

¹⁰ Greta Gaard, *Ecological Politics* (Temple University Press, 1998), 29.

¹¹ Greta Gaard, "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism," *Feminist Formations*, 23, no. 2 (2011): 28, accessed June 23, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2011.0017>.

¹² Ibid, 32.

¹³ Carol Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 1990), quoted in Greta Gaard, *Ecological Politics* (Temple University Press, 1998) 57.

alienation, domestic violence, reproductive technologies, sex tourism, child molestation, neocolonialism, Islamophobia, extractivism, nuclear weapons, industrial toxics, land and water grabs, deforestation, genetic engineering, climate change and the myth of modern progress. Ecofeminist solutions are also synergistic; the organization of daily life around subsistence fosters food sovereignty, participatory democracy and reciprocity with natural ecosystems.¹⁴

Gaard also notes that she does not recognize ecofeminism as a kind of “rebellion,” but a union of different understandings that analyse the “structure of oppression” and offer multiple and diverse alternatives.¹⁵ King also highlights the diverse nature of ecofeminism and its confrontation with various forms of domination.¹⁶ It can be said that ecofeminism involves a variety of activism and people with different concerns, so it advocates for inclusivity and diversity that can establish a common platform for each group. As Cudworth elaborates on the significance of ecofeminism: “...understanding of multiple kinds of social domination, of exclusion and inclusion based on varieties of hierarchies of difference (around class, “race” and place for example, in addition to gender) which both crosscut each other and enmesh, and which shape environment–society relations in important ways.”¹⁷

Finally, in more precise terms, the ecofeminist theory has emerged through various activisms and environmental movements as well as different feminist theories. It is an amalgamation of many different perspectives and understandings with a pluralistic and inclusive approach.

¹⁴ Ariel Salleh, “Foreword,” in *Ecofeminism*, ed. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, ix-xii (London: Zed Books, 1993), ix.

¹⁵ Greta Gaard, *Ecological Politics* (Temple University Press, 1998), 67.

¹⁶ Ynestra King, “In the interest of peace: Feminism, men and politics,” (unpublished paper, 1989), 20, quoted in Stephanie Lahar, “Ecofeminist Theory and Grassroots Politics,” *Hypatia*, 6, no. 1 (1991): 28, accessed June 23, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3810031>.

¹⁷ Erika Cudworth, *Developing Ecofeminist Theory: The Complexity of Difference*. (Houndmills Basingstoke Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1.

1.1.1. Ecofeminist Philosophy

In this part, along with other ecofeminist philosophers, I will generally rely on the perspectives of Karen Warren to explain ecofeminist philosophy since she brings fundamental insights into the theory. Her extensive studies and analysis lay a framework that provides critical understandings about ecofeminist philosophy to be recognized in-depth. Cuomo describes Warren as “... among the first to use the tools of analytic philosophy to articulate and argue for ecofeminism as a philosophical position, ethical approach, and political movement.”¹⁸

In the book, titled *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It is and Why It Matters*, Karen Warren, as a philosopher who theorizes about ecofeminist issues, lays her main arguments about ecofeminist philosophy. She points out: “... ecofeminist philosophy matters: it helps one understand how mainstream environmental practices and policies often reflect, reinforce, or create practices and policies that devalue, subvert, or make invisible the actual needs and contributions of women, people of colour, the underclass, and children.”¹⁹ She focuses on the importance of ecofeminist philosophy for “women” and “other human Others” which addresses their concerns and allow their voices to be heard.

Warren follows that “Ecofeminist philosophy draws on feminism, ecology and environmentalism, and philosophy in its analyses of human systems of unjustified domination (‘isms of domination’),” such as sexism, racism, ableism, ageism, classism, etc.²⁰ So, not only understanding nature and its relationship with humans, but also “interconnected dominations of women, other human Others, and nature,” is fundamental in ecofeminist philosophy.²¹ In other words, the ecofeminist philosophy denies justification of any domination types. To better understand this domination, she introduces the concept of “conceptual framework” which she describes as: “...a set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which shape and reflect how one views oneself and one's world... affected and shaped by

¹⁸ Chris Cuomo, “On Ecofeminist Philosophy,” *Ethics and the Environment*, 7, no. 2 (2002), 2.

¹⁹ Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It is and Why It Matters* (Lanham Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), xiv.

²⁰ Ibid, 43.

²¹ Ibid, 43.

such factors as sex-gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, affectional orientation, marital status, religion, nationality, colonial influences, and culture.”²² According to her, conceptual frameworks can be oppressive when it intends to perpetuate “domination and subordination” of one group over another.

Furthermore, Warren further identifies the “logic of domination” as the key element of oppressive conceptual framework that provides the explanatory basis for the subordination of women and the domination of nature. Warren condemns any androcentric point of view which sanctions “ism of dominations.” Gruen also agrees that it “constructs inferior others and uses this inferiority to justify their oppression.”²³ In another way, this system creates superior and inferior relationships and sanctions subordination of inferiority by superiority. In the book *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant describes in-depth this relation between the domination of women and the domination of nature. She states that women are associated with art, literature, nature, and men with reason, culture; so this positioning helps the system “to justify the subordination of women.”²⁴ Meanwhile, Plumwood concentrates on the dualism which establishes dualistic structures such as culture/nature, male/female, mind/body, etc. to better understand different forms of oppression.²⁵ As Plumwood puts it:

A dualism is an intense, established and developed cultural expression of such a hierarchical relationship, constructing central cultural concepts and identities so as to make equality and mutuality literally unthinkable. Dualism is a relation of separation and domination inscribed and naturalized in culture and characterized

²² Karen J. Warren, “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism,” in *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, ed. Zimmerman, Michael E., J. Baird Callicott, George Sessions, Karen J. Warren, and John Clark (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993), 325-326.

²³ Lori Gruen, “On the Oppression of Women and Animals,” *Environmental Ethics* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1996), 442, quoted in Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It is and Why It Matters* (Lanham Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 48.

²⁴ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 1 -2, quoted in Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It is and Why It Matters* (Lanham Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 50.

²⁵ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 43.

by radical exclusion, distancing and opposition between orders constructed as systematically higher and lower, as inferior and superior, as ruler and ruled, which treats the division as part of the natures of beings construed not merely as different but as belonging to radically different orders or kinds, and hence as not open to change.²⁶

She highlights the importance of “a critical and anti-dualist ecological feminism” in order to eliminate dualism and offers “relationship of non-hierarchical difference” which has the following characteristics: backgrounding (denial), radical exclusion, incorporation (relational definition), instrumentalism (objectification), and homogenization (stereotyping).²⁷ Moreover, Warren describes five primary characteristics for the ecofeminist philosophy:

(1) there are important interconnections among the unjustified dominations of women, other human Others, and nonhuman nature; (2) understanding the nature of these interconnections is important to an adequate understanding of and solutions to these unjustified dominations; (3) feminist philosophy should include ecofeminist insights into women-other human Others-nature interconnections; (4) solutions to gender issues should include ecofeminist insights into women-other human Others-nature interconnections; (4) solutions to gender issues should include ecofeminist insights into women-other human Others-nature connections; and, (5) solutions to environmental problems should include ecofeminist insights into women-other human Others-nature interconnections.²⁸

Ecofeminist philosophy extends its critiques to the multiple forms of oppression and understanding this existing structure of oppression enables to create

²⁶ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 47.

²⁷ Ibid, 60.

²⁸ Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (Lanham Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 43.

a pathway for the solutions of the problems emerging out of it. Cuomo emphasizes that Warren's "ecofeminism is far more than a critique of domination," but "... a positive and creative philosophy that can teach us about existing and available alternatives to oppression."²⁹

Warren draws three main areas of concern in ecofeminist practices and solutions: "feminism," "science, development, and technology," and "local or indigenous perspectives."³⁰ So, according to Warren, the ideal ecofeminist practice should incorporate all three of these areas to be recognized through an ecofeminist philosophical standpoint. She also categorizes ten different "women-other-human Others-nature interconnections: historical (typically causal), conceptual, empirical, socioeconomic, linguistic, symbolic and literary, spiritual and religious, epistemological, political, and ethical" that brings out philosophical discussions for ecofeminism.³¹ However, I will not take a closer look at each of them since it might build excessive details for this part.

Warren's ecofeminist philosophy highlights the interconnection of women-other human Others-nature, and any theory that excludes a part of this unity will not achieve its goals.³² In other words, she suggests a holistic, inclusive and diverse position that can generate solutions for the issues that adversely affect women and environment.

1.2. PERSPECTIVES OF ECOFEMINISM

Ecofeminist theory comprises different perspectives each contributing to different approaches. Although, Carlassare argues that the taxonomies of ecofeminism can split its form and underestimate its "complex connections and areas of overlap between and within ...," it is still useful to unfold the different

²⁹ Chris Cuomo, "On Ecofeminist Philosophy," *Ethics and the Environment*, 7, no. 2 (2002): 10, accessed June 25, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40339033>.

³⁰ Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It is and Why It Matters* (Lanham Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 44.

³¹ Ibid, 21.

³² Ibid, 43.

crossings within the theory. Leaving aside the concerns about taxonomies, I will introduce the four categories of ecofeminism based on Merchant's book *Radical Ecology*: liberal ecofeminism, cultural ecofeminism, social ecofeminism, and socialist ecofeminism.³³

1.2.1. Liberal Ecofeminism

In the 1960s, liberalism took part in the women's movement asking for equality for women in the workplace, access for education and participation in economy. Liberalism is "... the theory of human nature that views humans as individual rational agents who maximize their own self-interest, and capitalism as the optimal economic structure for human progress."³⁴ The theory acknowledges that an ideal society emerges when each individual maximizes their own productive capabilities. In order to put differently, what benefits each individual is also advantageous for the entire society. So rooted in liberalism, the liberal ecofeminism addresses the issues of women and environment, and demands equality and justice for both. They argue that environmental problems are caused by rapid economic development which has led to excessive industrialization that overuses natural resources and causes environmental pollution.

Distinguishing human from non-human nature, liberal ecofeminist states that if women are given the same opportunities as men do, they can manage the environment including its natural resources, resolve the environmental problems within the existing political and social system. In other words, women with equal educational and economic opportunities as man can achieve their full potential in all parts of life. Hence, women have the ability to overcome societal judgments related to their biology and participate alongside men in the cultural endeavour of environmental protection. The empowerment of women plays a key factor in

³³ Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005).

³⁴ Ibid, 200.

environmental conservation and sustainability, so they argue that women should have a more significant role in the environmental decision-making process.

1.2.2. Cultural Ecofeminism

Cultural ecofeminism shares the idea that there is a strong connection between women and nature. They argue that women have a more intimate and closer relationship with nature physiologically, socially, and psychologically. However, this relationship has been devaluated by the dualist perspectives of Western philosophy by attributing unjustifiable qualities to women and nature. According to this dualistic approach, they associate men with subject/mind/reason and women/nature with object/body/emotion, and regard former over latter. To cultural ecofeminists, a patriarchal culture and scientific advancement or changes degraded women and nature and viewed them as subservient beings within the system. So, cultural ecofeminism, emerging from a perspective that challenges science and technology, embraces the connection between women and nature through the revival of ancient rituals that center around goddess worship, lunar reverence, animals, and the female reproductive system. They welcome and acknowledge “intuition, an ethic of caring and web-like human-nature relationships.”³⁵

Carlassare states that the cultural ecofeminism “rebels against patriarchy's devaluing of the qualities associated with the gender construct ‘woman.’ In response to this devaluing, cultural ecofeminists, “celebrate and revalue qualities, such as intuition, care, nurture, emotions, and the body, for example, that have been associated culturally and historically with women.”³⁶ For Carlassare, the cultural ecofeminism creates “goddess-based spiritualities, invent new myths, or new linguistic or discursive styles, they do so in an effort to bring about an ecological

³⁵ Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 202.

³⁶ Elizabeth Carlassare, “Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism: Allies in Resistance,” *Ethics and the Environment*, 5, no. 1 (2000): 93, accessed June 27, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27766057>.

and egalitarian transformation of culture and human consciousness.”³⁷ In other words, by reclaiming and recovering the characteristics of women and their associations with nature that the patriarchy constructs, cultural ecofeminists seek to empower women and create ecological awareness.

Merchant also highlights that cultural ecofeminism “celebrates the relationship between women and nature through the revival of ancient rituals centred on goddess worship, the moon, animals, and the female reproductive system.” She further follows that this perspective of ecofeminism recognizes women’s biological reproduction and nature as “sources of female power.”³⁸

1.2.3. Social Ecofeminism

Social ecofeminism is based on Murray Bookchin’s social ecology which argues for structuring decentralized and ecologically sustainable society by reorganizing our social and political structure.³⁹ Social ecology asserts that all existing environmental problems which “emerge from a long history of hierarchical social relations that culminate in a class-ridden, profit-driven, accumulation-oriented capitalist society” are fundamentally social problems that cannot be resolved with a single method.⁴⁰ Therefore, the environmental crisis requires understanding of social dynamics and tailoring social methods that eliminate hierarchical relationships within society. On this basis, according to Janet Biehl, “Social ecofeminism accepts the basic tenet of social ecology, i.e., the idea of dominating nature stems from the domination of human by human. Only ending all systems of domination makes possible an ecological society, in which no states or capitalist economies attempt to subjugate nature, in which all aspects of human

³⁷ Elizabeth Carlassare, “Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism: Allies in Resistance,” *Ethics and the Environment*, 5, no. 1 (2000): 95, accessed June 27, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27766057>.

³⁸ Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 390.

³⁹ Ibid, 396.

⁴⁰ Steven Best, “Murray Bookchin’s Theory of Social Ecology: An Appraisal of ‘The Ecology of Freedom,’” *Organization & Environment*, 11, no. 3 (1998): 337, accessed January 28, 2024, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26161633>.

nature ... are freed.”⁴¹ For Merchant, social ecofeminism “... begins with the materialist, social feminist analysis of early radical feminism that sought to restructure the oppressions imposed on women, by marriage, the nuclear family, romantic love, capitalist state, and patriarchal religion.”⁴²

Social ecofeminism promotes the liberation of women by challenging the economic and social hierarchies that convert all aspects of life into a market-oriented society.⁴³ In other words, the objective of the social ecofeminism is the liberation of women from various forms of oppression that limit their freedom and access to the opportunities while advocating for their economic and social freedom. They argue that capitalism aggravates gender inequality and contributes to ecological crises; therefore, they challenge existing patriarchal systems and aim to build decentralized communities that ensure women can appear as free and equal participants in public life as well as workplaces. The courses on social ecofeminism were also offered at the Institute for Social Ecology, and the principles were further elucidated in the books and articles written by Ynestra King. Social ecofeminism differs from socialist ecofeminism which “centers on the traditional Marxist ideas of production and reproduction and use dialectics rather than dualism.”⁴⁴ It rather focuses on domination, hierarchy and confront dualistic perspectives within Western culture.

1.2.4. Socialist Ecofeminism

Socialist ecofeminism is a perspective of ecofeminism that combines feminist and socialist principles with a focus on ecological issues. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental problems and addresses these issues through a feminist and socialist perspective. Scholars like Carolyn

⁴¹ Janet Biehl, “What is Social Ecofeminism?” *Green Perspectives*, no. 11 (October 1988): 7, quoted in Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 396.

⁴² Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 206.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 207-208.

Merchant, Mary Mellor, and Ariel Salleh have made significant contributions to the development of socialist ecofeminism. In addition to gender and class, socialist ecofeminism analyses all forms of oppression. Further, Carlassare states that "... socialist ecofeminists add the concern that systems of domination, such as capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism, are ecologically destructive."⁴⁵ In other words, socialist ecofeminism critiques both capitalism and patriarchy as oppressive powers that exploit women, the environment and other marginalized communities. The perspective looks for social and ecological transformation and urges for social actions for "sustainability of life and a just society."⁴⁶

Originating from materialism and Marxism, socialist ecofeminism seeks to dismantle the structure of domination and create more equitable and sustainable societies, therefore demands a "material and institutional change" for the ecological wellbeing.⁴⁷ Based on the idea that the position of nature and humans have been constructed by social and historical perspectives, it suggests the need for transformation of relationships to foster a sustainable world. For Merchant, reproduction and ecology should be favoured over production for the maintenance of sustainable relationship with nature.⁴⁸ Carlassare summarizes socialist ecofeminism as "a social constructionist position, employs historical materialist methods, offers critiques of patriarchal capitalism, and promotes material and institutional change, more than changes in spirituality, consciousness, or culture, for an ecological transformation of society."⁴⁹ According to her, socialist ecofeminists introduce the perspective that systems of domination, including capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism, have detrimental ecological consequences. Stemming from Marxism and socialist feminism, social ecofeminism promotes the

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Carlassare, "Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism: Allies in Resistance," *Ethics and the Environment*, 5, no. 1 (2000): 92, accessed June 27, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27766057>.

⁴⁶ Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 208.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Carlassare, "Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism: Allies in Resistance," *Ethics and the Environment*, 5, no. 1 (2000): 93, accessed June 27, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27766057>.

⁴⁸ Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 405.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Carlassare, "Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism: Allies in Resistance," *Ethics and the Environment*, 5, no. 1 (2000): 93, accessed June 27, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27766057>.

utility of social and biological reproduction as analytical concepts and demonstrate the exploitation of both natural resources and women's unpaid labor within the capitalist system.⁵⁰ So, this perspective utilizes materialist approaches and advocates material and institutional change to achieve ecological transformation within society.

1.3. MAJOR CRITIQUES AGAINST ECOFEMINISM

Ecofeminism has faced various critiques and challenges within and outside the ecofeminist movement. For example, Janet Biehl, as an ecofeminist, brings harsh critiques in her book titled *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*. She even goes beyond by accusing the theory of being “irrational,” “incoherent,” and “full of contradictions.”⁵¹ Since the theory involves diverse opinions, it is understandable that it receives criticism from different perspectives. I believe that it is significant to thoroughly analyse the major critiques against ecofeminism to better understand the theory, including its disagreements and conflicts, therefore, in this section I will address some common critiques and challenges that ecofeminism has encountered.

The approach of cultural ecofeminism has raised criticism among some feminists. They argue that cultural ecofeminism essentializes and reinforces traditional gender roles that are associated with women. Essentialism has been one of the immense discussions among feminists also ecofeminists. According to essentialists, women are inherently or biologically closer to nature than men. In the ecofeminist movement, this idea has been both opposed and embraced by various women. Biehl identifies a number of works such as “Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature*, Carolyn Merchant's *Death of Nature*, Andrée Collard's *Rape of the Wild*” which establish and reinforce women-nature connection.⁵² Opposing the “poeticizing” wordplays of associating women with nature in Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature* and Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, Biehl

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Carlassare, “Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism: Allies in Resistance,” *Ethics and the Environment*, 5, no. 1 (2000): 93, [accessed June 27, 2023, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27766057](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27766057).

⁵¹ Janet Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 1-2.

⁵² Ibid, 2.

argues that “the ‘woman-nature’ metaphor is, in fact, a definition imposed by patricentric cultures to further the subordination of women.”⁵³ She follows that this association between women and nature “retain the patriarchal stereotypes of what men expect women to be.”⁵⁴ Also there are critiques that ecofeminism has become a force for irrationalism, most obviously in its embrace of goddess worship, its glorification of the early Neolithic, and its emphasis on metaphors and myths. According to Ynestra King, the woman-nature connection “is socially constructed, ... an ideology. It's not true. It was made up by men as a way to sentimentalize and devalue both.”⁵⁵ Similarly, embracing spirituality and goddess worship as well as adopting metaphors and symbols that portray women as “carer” and “nurturer” of ecofeminist movement has also been criticized.

Cuomo identifies four values that might be problematic in ecofeminism and need to be clarified: the care ethics, diversity, unity, and dualism.⁵⁶ According to Cuomo, the association of women with the ethics of care create concerns, and states that this “.... causes moral damage in women and, therefore, caring is not always a healthy and ethical choice for a moral agent.”⁵⁷ In other words, such connection might reinforce existing oppressor’s structure. However, she admits the benefits of “ethical caring relationship” within “appropriate object and context.”⁵⁸ Diversity is another issue to be clarified, for Cuomo “...an unqualified call for diversity is in ecofeminism is uninformative, if no nonsensical” and it should have concrete bases, specific agendas rather than abstract talks.⁵⁹ The talk of unity also causes misunderstandings in ecofeminism. Cuomo emphasizes that the terms “unity of beings” or “unified community” are contradictory whilst calling for diversity at the same time. The final problem Cuomo refers is the acknowledgement of dualisms

⁵³ Janet Biehl, “What is Social Ecofeminism?” *Green Perspectives*, no. 11 (October 1988): 1, accessed June 29, 2023, <https://social-ecology.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/GP-11.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Janet Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 15.

⁵⁵ Ynestra King, “Women, Ecology, and Peace: An Interview with Ynestra King,” interview by Peggy Luhrs, *Vermont Woman* (October 1988):10, quoted in Janet Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1999), 17.

⁵⁶ Chris Cuomo, “Unravelling the Problems in Ecofeminism,” *Environmental Ethics*, 14, no.4 (1992), 355-363.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 355.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 356.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 357.

within ecofeminism since Western thought is built on hierarchical dualistic thinking which is masculine. Dualisms might conflict with other ecofeminist principles since it promotes binary oppositions that maintain power structures and systems of domination and subordination. Cuomo believes that “this thinking devalues women, people of colour, nature, and anything that comes to be associated with these.”⁶⁰

However, critiques imposed on ecofeminism are significant for the theory to maintain its inclusive and diverse dialogues. Furthermore, they allow the theory to evolve and become stronger in its stance against ecological destruction.

1.4. ECOFEMINIST MOVEMENTS

The ecofeminist movements that I will mention here did not all call themselves or their movement ecofeminist. Yet, many sources have called them or their actions “ecofeminist” or “ecofeminist movements,” therefore, I will analyse these important events as such. As Cuomo puts it “these movements have not often been self-consciously constructed as ecofeminist, theorists lay claim to them in so far as the movements explicitly or implicitly acknowledge and address, at the very least, ways in which sexism and misogyny are related to human maltreatment of the environment and its members.”⁶¹

Ecofeminism as a social movement focuses on the protection of the environment and the liberation of women. Recognizing the link between women’s oppression and exploitation of nature, the discipline sets up its strategies to challenge these inequities.

Since it is a multi-focused and intersectional theory, it expands its analysis further by including but not limited to issues of gender, race, and class. As Salleh puts it “ecofeminists are concerned about global sustainability as much as gender

⁶⁰ Chris Cuomo, “Unravelling the Problems in Ecofeminism,” *Environmental Ethics*, 14, no.4 (1992), 359.

⁶¹ Chris J. Cuomo, *Feminism and Ecological Communities* (London: Routledge, 1998), 143.

justice.”⁶² Similarly, King states that ecofeminism is a “global movement that is founded on common interests yet celebrates diversity and opposes all forms of domination and violence.”⁶³

The ecofeminist movement involves a number of different ideas and views from women’s health to capitalism as well as all types of oppression, yet they all have common ground: equality and protection of the environment.

The ecofeminist movement emerged through political, social and environmental activism. Gaard describes it as a theory that involves “various fields of feminist inquiry and activism: peace movements, labour movements, women’s health care, and the anti-nuclear, environmental, and animal liberation movements” highlighting that all types of oppressions are linked since they are rooted in the same ideology.⁶⁴ The privileged groups are “upper- or middle-class, human, technologically and industrially “developed,” male, and the oppressed are poor or working-class, nonhuman animal, ‘undeveloped’ nature, and female”, the negative results of the degradation of environment affect the oppressed groups more, especially women.⁶⁵ So, the concern of ecofeminism is to challenge this dominating patriarchy and hierarchal system by generating an inclusive framework for all.

As an ecofeminist, Gaard manifests how the ecofeminists stand against this system: “As the human species approaches the capacity to annihilate all life on this planet, it becomes imperative that we challenge both the ideological assumptions and the hierarchical structures of power and domination that together serve to hold the majority of earth’s inhabitants in thrall to the privileged minority.”⁶⁶

Lahar, who describes ecofeminism as a “progressive and critical social theory” and “grassroots activist movement” claims that the ecofeminist movement

⁶² Ariel Salleh, “Nature, Woman, Labor, Capital: Living the Deepest Contradiction,” *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, 6(1), (1995): 89, quoted in Elizabeth Carlassare, “Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism: Allies in Resistance,” *Ethics and the Environment*, 5, no. 1 (2000): 89–106, accessed June 30, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27766057>.

⁶³ King, Ynestra. “In the interest of peace: Feminism, men and politics.” Unpublished paper. (1989), 20. Quoted in Stephanie Lahar, “Ecofeminist Theory and Grassroots Politics.” *Hypatia*, 6, no. 1 (1991): 28–45. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3810031>.

⁶⁴ Greta Gaard, “Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature,” quoted in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, eds. Greta Gaard (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 1.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 10.

involves “homemakers organizing to eliminate toxic chemicals from their homes and neighbourhoods, professors teaching and writing in universities, activists standing between trees and the bulldozers coming to cut them down, and protestors making peace encampments at military bases....”⁶⁷ She calls them all ecofeminists regardless of their affiliation with the theory. As an inclusive movement, ecofeminism involves every type of activism that stands against any type of oppression and domination. Lahar highlights the importance of ecofeminism as a common platform to advocate and take action to make “social and political changes”.⁶⁸ She also adds that the theory has to resist “militarism, violence against women, the nuclear industry, pollution and toxics, environmental destruction” in order to achieve its “deconstructive function.”⁶⁹ One can interpret that ecofeminism is a theory of activism, developed to take action against a variety of matters that threatens society and nature. It demands positive change for the survival of every human and nonhuman member of the entire planet. Ecofeminism points at social and environmental issues and develops understandings and solutions for them. As Lahar points out that the promise of ecofeminism “depends on theorists and activists who can embody the broad and integrated sensibilities of the self and the world that ecofeminism helps develop and advocate and who can find the power and the energy to action those sensibilities to make real social and political changes.”⁷⁰

History has seen many movements by women, but this section will only focus on specific “ecological movements,” also called “ecofeminist movements,” to describe women’s fight to protect the environment. Emerging within environmental movements, ecofeminism points out the issues of women caused by the environmental problems. The theory makes the connection between the oppression of women and the domination of nature more visible. In other words,

⁶⁷ Stephanie Lahar, “Ecofeminist Theory and Grassroots Politics,” *Hypatia*, 6, no. 1 (1991): 28–29, accessed July 2, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810031>.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 43.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 35.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 43.

environmental problems are deeply linked to gender issues and since they are interrelated, it requires a holistic approach to solve these problems.

Women are the ones who are affected the first and most by the degradation and exploitation of the environment, especially in many developing countries. As Vandana Shiva also notes how the impoverishment of women and gender inequalities increase with environmental degradation highlighting that “... women engaged in survival struggles which are, simultaneously, struggles for the protection of nature, women and nature are intimately related, and their domination and liberation similarly linked.”⁷¹ So, women are very vulnerable to the negative changes in their environment, their quality of life worsens if their environment undergoes drastic changes.

The United Nations reiterates how climate change impacts women’s life by increasing the existing gender inequalities and posing threats to their health, safety, security and livelihoods. Therefore, women are the first ones who raise their voices against environmental problems.

Gwyn Kirk focuses on the strong connection between ecofeminist and environment justice activists who have common issues such as “environmental health, “food production” and “making cities liveable,” and calls every activist approach as an ecofeminist.⁷² So, the degradation of the environment and its adverse effects on women bring them together to act upon regardless of their race or class. In the following part, I will mention a few of these movements led by women which have become symbolic for the ecofeminist movement. These movements are great examples to reveal us the interrelated connection between nature and women. Since ecofeminism brings together feminism and environmentalism, it is no surprise that these actions to protect environment by women are called “ecofeminist movements.”

⁷¹ Vandana Shiva, *Staying alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988), 47, quoted in Stephanie Lahar, “Ecofeminist Theory and Grassroots Politics,” *Hypatia* 6, no. 1 (1991), 33, accessed July 8, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810031>.

⁷² Gwyn Kirk, “Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice: Bridges across Gender, Race, and Class,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 18, no. 2 (1997): 14, accessed September 22, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3346962>.

There are a number of struggles of women against environmental destruction in history, for example the Chipko Movement, in 1974, is one of the most important and inspiring movements by Indian women to protect trees and forests. This non-violent civil disobedience was against the felling of trees, intended to replace them with more valuable commercial plantations by government backed companies. The aim was to preserve the forest in their village in northern India. The uprising is called Chipko which means to “hug” or “embrace” in Hindi, since village women hugged the trees and encircled them to stop them being cut down. It was very important to preserve the forest for these women who had primary responsibility for the household economy including managing livestock, cultivating and collecting foods. The environmental degradation such as deforestation, soil erosion, water and air pollution, and falling levels of ground water etc. cause significant adverse problems for the rural women. Maintaining the forests, soil, and water is extremely important for the survival of the women and their families living close to the land. According to Warren, this movement is “a grassroots, women-initiated, ecologically aware, nonviolent protest movement- is ostensibly about trees, ... but it is also about women-other human Others-nature interconnections.”⁷³ Shiva also states that the Chipko Movement, led by visionary and courageous women, was driven by ecological concerns, as reflected in their slogan “soil, water and oxygen.” She also adds that the “ecological world-view of Chipko provides a strategy for survival not only for tiny villages in the Garhwal Himalaya, but for all human societies threatened by environmental disasters.”⁷⁴ In other words, the Chipko Movement as one of the most dramatic ecological movements has had a long lasting effect which still inspire many women fighting to protect the environment and seek justice for all.

⁷³ Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It is and Why It Matters* (Lanham Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 3.

⁷⁴ Vandana Shiva and J. Bandyopadhyay, “The Chipko Movement,” in *Deforestation: Social Dynamics in Watersheds and Mountain Ecosystems*, ed. Ives, J., and D.C Pitt (Routledge: London and New York, 1988), 18.



Figure 1 The Chipko Movement⁷⁵

Another important ecofeminist movement is the Green Belt Movement of Kenya. It was initiated by the Professor Wangari Maathai in 1977 to meet the needs of rural women whose lives were affected by the ecological deterioration, especially related with decreasing water supply. The water was essential for women for their livelihoods, its scarcity caused multiple stresses and hardships in their lives. So, Maathi introduced a project to plant trees to avoid soil erosion and preserve their environment. Also, in order to empower and educate the community to protect their environment, she started “Community Empowerment and Education Program,” so, the locals could understand the importance of their actions, identify and solve the environmental problems and stand for their rights.⁷⁶ The program particularly encouraged women to take part in the decision-making process with regard to

⁷⁵ Figure 1, <https://thenonviolenceproject.wisc.edu/2022/04/18/the-chipko-movement-treehuggers-of-india/>

⁷⁶ “Our History,” The Green Belt Movement, accessed September 20, <http://www.greenbeltmovement.org/what-we-do/community-empowerment>.

environmental issues. Maathi summarizes her attempt as “environmental rehabilitation and conservation and ... sustainable development.”⁷⁷ This movement has a significant importance for grassroots and climate change activists in their effort to protect the environment. As Tokar emphasizes “the ideas and actions of ecological movements in the third world thus complement the efforts of grassroots ecoactivists in the United States, and also offer an important challenge to the highly publicized international campaigns of mainstream environmental groups.”⁷⁸



Figure 2 The Green Belt Movement ⁷⁹

The Love Canal in the United States was another environmental movement in 1978 fighting chemical pollution. In the Great Lakes region, the suburbs of Niagara Falls, the Love Canal became a toxic waste landfill, which affected the residents by causing a series of illnesses, cancer, birth defects and miscarriages, etc. Following her son’s experiences with leukemia, Lois Gibbs, a resident in the neighbourhood, discovered the link between this illness and waste, then founded

⁷⁷ Wangari Maathai, *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience* (Nairobi, Kenya: Environment Liaison Centre International, 1988), 5, quoted in Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 414.

⁷⁸ Brian Tokar, “Global Ecological Movements,” in *Ecology*, ed. Carolyn Merchant (New York: Humanity Books, 2008), 109.

⁷⁹ Figure 2, <https://thecenterforglobalawareness.wordpress.com/2016/04/05/a-tribute-to-kenyan-environmentalist-wangari-maathai/>

Citizens' Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste to organize campaigns against toxic waste and polluting industries.⁸⁰ Her attempts were crucial to raise women's awareness about the impact of toxic waste in their neighbourhood. As an antitoxic movement, it was extremely important to make the connection visible between women health and environmental health. Merchant explains the consciousness of women and their involvement in the grassroots with health concerns: "The majority of activists in the grassroots movement against toxics, are women. Many women were involved in environmental movements when they experienced miscarriages or their children suffered birth defects or contracted leukemia or other forms of cancer. Through networking with neighbourhood women, they began to link their problems to the nearby hazardous waste sites."⁸¹ Kirk also emphasizes the women's activism in environmental justice due to the concerns related to sickness or illness affecting either themselves or family members.⁸² As Merchant and Kirk cleared, it is obvious that the Love Canal Movement started involuntarily by the women who made the connection between the cause of declining health and environmental problems, it played an important role for future activists.



Figure 3 The Love Canal Movement⁸³

⁸⁰ Greta Gaard, *Ecological Politics* (Temple University Press, 1998), 29.

⁸¹ Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 203-204.

⁸² Gwyn Kirk, "Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice: Bridges across Gender, Race, and Class," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 18, no. 2 (1997): 10, accessed September 22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3346962>.

⁸³ Figure 3, <https://courses.bowdoin.edu/history-2203-fall-2020-ssalman/primary-source-analysis/>.

Women's day-to-day lives, work experiences, and knowledge enable them to understand environmental concerns and allow them to have critical insights to address environmental injustices. Moreover, their resistance to protect their environment and stand up for their rights draws attention, but also create awareness. These movements involve environmental concerns which are intertwined with political and social issues. All three movements initiated by the women who were affected by the environmental degradation. The Green Belt Movement was led by Wangari Maathai to protect the environment and empower women. Starting as a response to deforestation, the movement has evolved into a widespread initiative for planting trees. Today it still works to to advocate for environmental sustainability, empower communities, with a particular emphasis on women and girls, and promote democracy. In the Love Canal movement, Lois Gibbs, whose son faced health issues, discovered that his school was constructed on a toxic waste dump. Gibbs organized a campaign to draw attention to this environmental crisis and due to her efforts the people were relocated and toxic waste problem was solved in the area. She established the Center for Health, Environment and Justice (CHEJ), an organization that offers technical and organizational assistance to individuals and communities dealing with toxic hazards, still continues to help people in their efforts to advocate for a healthy environment. On the other hand, the Chipko Movement, initiated not by one but by many women who aimed to protect trees and forests from being cut down. Although it was a successful movement and remains a significant inspiration for many people, unlike the other two movements, it did not result in the formation of organisations and projects to perpetuate its legacy.

In this section I have focused on women's concerns regarding environmental issues such as land and water rights, forestry, and toxic dumping. I have explored how women suffer disproportionately from ecological degradation and raise their voice against environmental problems. Climate change has become the greatest factor affecting the environment adversely, therefore, it is important to have a better understanding of climate change. So, I will analyse the impact of climate change, its history, discussions about its origin and the connection between women and climate change in the next chapter.

2. THE CLIMATE CHANGE AS A MAJOR CRISIS

“Our house is on fire” cried out Greta Thunberg, a well-known climate activist, from the World Economic Forum in 2019, in Davos, to warn the entire world about the severity of the climate crisis and addressed to the world leaders assembled there, urging them to take an action immediately. She emphasized that this is a matter of life and death, and the necessary measures must be taken before irreparable damage has been done to the planet.⁸⁴ UN Secretary-General Guterres also emphasized the urgency of taking immediate actions in response to the climate emergency and called for agreements to phase out fossil fuels at COP28 in Dubai to maintain the 1.5-degree goal.⁸⁵

Climate change is the name for all the changes in global and regional climate patterns over time, primarily driven by human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, and industrial processes. As a consequence, we experience many adverse impacts such as rising global temperatures, melting ice and rising sea level, extreme weather events, accompanied with various problems that create huge risks for human beings and other forms of life on Earth.⁸⁶

We have been heating the planet with our actions, and in addition to that, there is nowhere to escape for humans and other species sharing the planet with unless we find another planet to live on. Climate change is a big threat affecting both humans and the natural system.

As the biggest and gravest crisis of the world, climate change needs to be tackled urgently. In this chapter I will lay out climate change and its impacts, the role of human impact and its analysis with a particular focus on gender aspects.

⁸⁴ Greta Thunberg, “Address at World Economic Forum: Our House Is on Fire,” Iowa State University. January 25, 2019, <https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2019/12/02/address-at-davos-our-house-is-on-fire-jan-25-2019/>

⁸⁵ “Climate and Environment,” The United Nations, accessed January 29, 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/114464>.

⁸⁶ “Causes of Climate Change,” The United Nations, accessed October 25, 2023, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change>.

2.1. FROM CLIMATE CHANGE TO CLIMATE CRISIS: WHAT HAS GONE WRONG IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ENVIRONMENT?

The United Nations refers to climate change as “... long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns.”⁸⁷ Although climate deniers still exist, there is a huge amount of scientific evidence that the climate is being impacted, showing changes from global temperature rise to melting glaciers, and human actions are the primary contributors to this catastrophe.

Climate scientists and other institutions have already provided data and reports and warned about the severity of impacts of climate change. For example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which was established by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), regularly evaluate the latest scientific research on climate change and inform policymakers and the public about the state of climate change. Accordingly, the IPCC also releases comprehensive assessment reports at regular intervals which provide information about the latest climate changes, the role of human impact and future climate change predictions. The Fifth Assessment Report, which was released by the IPCC in 2013, revealed a comprehensive assessment on climate change. The report's key findings were: “climate change is real and human activities, largely the release of polluting gases from burning fossil fuel (coal, oil, gas) is the main cause.”⁸⁸

Moreover, the IPCC has consistently been amplifying its stance on human impact on climate change with each assessment report it releases. The Sixth Assessment Report, which is the most recent one, has revealed an increasing understanding and confidence in the significant impact of human activities on our climate.⁸⁹ According to the report “it is unequivocal that human influence has

⁸⁷ “What is Climate Change?,” The United Nations, accessed October 10, 2023, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>.

⁸⁸ “Facts about the climate emergency,” The United Nations Environment Programme, accessed October 29, 2023, <https://www.unep.org/facts-about-climate-emergency>.

⁸⁹ “Human Influence on the Climate System,” in *Climate Change, 2021 – The Physical Science*, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), (Cambridge University Press; 2023) 425.

warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land since pre-industrial times.”⁹⁰ The assessment incorporate with a vast array of scientific findings and data, acknowledging the role of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, industrialization, deforestation, and various human activities in driving global temperature rise and environmental changes.

The climate clock is ticking against humanity and as I am writing these lines there is only 5 years 275 days left to limit global warming to 1.5C.⁹¹ The effort to keep “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and pursue efforts “to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels” is a goal set by the Paris Agreement and acknowledged by 196 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, 2015.⁹² In order to achieve this goal, countries as parties have agreed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and take various measures such as implementing renewable energy sources, sustainable land use practices, and water conservation, etc. to transition to a sustainable low-carbon future.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has been in existence since 1995. The 197 countries gather annually to hold discussions, make decisions and review commitments to limit climate change. The Kyoto Protocol, in 1997, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the Paris Agreement, in 2015, to keep the global warming increase to 1.5°C are significant outcomes of the COP that are acknowledged by the signatory countries. However, the current efforts of countries to mitigate climate change are not sufficient to limit the global average temperature increase to 2°C above preindustrial levels. This is a significant concern because a temperature increase of 2°C or more can have severe and widespread impacts on the planet, including more frequent and intense heat waves, rising sea levels, increased extreme weather events which will cause a devastating disruption to

⁹⁰ “Human Influence on the Climate System,” in *Climate Change, 2021 – The Physical Science*, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), (Cambridge University Press; 2023) 425.

⁹¹ “Climate Clock,” Climate Clock, accessed October 20, 2023, <https://climateclock.world/>.

⁹² “What is the Paris Agreement?,” The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), accessed October 30, 2023, <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>.

ecosystems. Besides, the global average level of carbon dioxide in atmosphere has already passed the critical level of 400 parts per million and reached a new record high in 2022 at 417.06 parts per million according to the Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii.⁹³ The observatory has measured the drastic increase of CO₂ as the most significant contributor to climate change “from 10.9 billion tons per year in the 1960s to about 36.6 billion tons per year in 2022”.⁹⁴

The reports have been already providing us analyses and assessment of likely impacts and risks associated with scenarios of the global temperature increase for years. For example, according to the World Bank report titled *Turn Down the Heat: Why a 4°C Warmer World Must be Avoided*, in 2012, “even with the current mitigation commitments and pledges fully implemented, there is roughly a 20 percent likelihood of exceeding 4°C by 2100.... Such a warming level and associated sea-level rise of 0.5 to 1 meter, or more, by 2100 would not be the end point: ...”⁹⁵ Further the report predicts scenarios with devastating results such as:

... the inundation of coastal cities; increasing risks for food production potentially leading to higher malnutrition rates; many dry regions becoming dryer, wet regions wetter; unprecedented heat waves in many regions, especially in the tropics; substantially exacerbated water scarcity in many regions; increased frequency of high-intensity tropical cyclones; and irreversible loss of biodiversity, including coral reef systems.⁹⁶

Based on all the aforementioned reports, it is clear to understand that climate change is happening, ubiquitous and is at a life-threatening level, and it will get

⁹³ “Greenhouse gases continued to increase rapidly in 2022,” The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, April 5, 2023, <https://www.noaa.gov/news-release/greenhouse-gases-continued-to-increase-rapidly-in-2022>.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ *Turn Down the Heat: Why a 4°C Warmer World Must be Avoided*, The World Bank, accessed October 29, 2023, xiii, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/865571468149107611/pdf/NonAsciiFileName0.pdf>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

even worse if we do not take action immediately. We should understand that the climate change is a global issue with extensive impacts threatening everyone and there is no nation immune to its effects. While developing nations often face more immediate and severe consequences due to factors like limited resources and infrastructure, developed countries are by no means immune to the impacts of climate change. Also, based on the World Bank report, the developed industrialized countries are also at risk and can experience serious disruptions and damage as a result of climate change.⁹⁷ However, its negative impacts disproportionately affect the poor and marginalized communities more, especially those in vulnerable geographical locations and poorer countries. According to the WHO “women, children, ethnic minorities, poor communities, migrants or displaced persons, older populations, and those with underlying health conditions” are the most vulnerable groups that experience the impacts of climate change.

Now climate-related news is being covered more widely and more often in the media outlets as extreme weather events such as floods, heat waves, storms, and their destructive effects have become more frequent. Scientists around the world have been monitoring and studying climate data and rising global temperatures. According to the report from the European Union’s Copernicus Climate Change Service, 2014-2002 are the eight warmest years on record.⁹⁸ Moreover, according to NOAA's National Center for Environmental Information report, “there is a greater than 99% chance that 2023 will rank as the warmest year.”⁹⁹

These events not only cause immediate damage and loss of life, but they also have long-term consequences for infrastructure, agriculture, and public health. World Health Organisation notices that “weather and climate hazards affect health

⁹⁷ *Turn Down the Heat: Why a 4°C Warmer World Must be Avoided*, The World Bank, accessed October 29, 2023, ix, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/865571468149107611/pdf/NonAsciiFileName0.pdf>.

⁹⁸ “Copernicus: 2022 was a year of climate extremes, with record high temperatures and rising concentrations of greenhouse gases,” The Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S), January 9, 2023, <https://climate.copernicus.eu/copernicus-2022-was-year-climate-extremes-record-high-temperatures-and-rising-concentrations>.

⁹⁹ “Selected Climate Anomalies and Events: September 2023,” The National Centres for Environmental Information, November 8, 2023, <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/monthly-report/global/202309>.

both directly and indirectly, increasing the risk of deaths, noncommunicable diseases, the emergence and spread of infectious diseases, and health emergencies.” The organisation also reveals that 3.6 billion people live in regions highly vulnerable to climate change.¹⁰⁰ A number of further facts and predictions of impacts of climate change have been also released from WHO:

... 2 billion people lack safe drinking water and 600 million suffer from foodborne illnesses annually, with children under 5 bearing 30% of foodborne fatalities. Climate stressors heighten waterborne and foodborne disease risks. In 2020, 770 million faced hunger, predominantly in Africa and Asia. Climate change affects food availability, quality and diversity, exacerbating food and nutrition crises.... Temperature and precipitation changes enhance the spread of vector-borne diseases. Without preventive actions, deaths from such diseases, currently over 700 000 annually, may rise. Climate change induces both immediate mental health issues, like anxiety and post-traumatic stress, and long-term disorders due to factors like displacement and disrupted social cohesion... Recent research attributes 37% of heat-related deaths to human-induced climate change. Heat-related deaths among those over 65 have risen by 70% in two decades. In 2020, 98 million more experienced food insecurity compared to the 1981–2010 average. The WHO conservatively projects 250 000 additional yearly deaths by the 2030s due to climate change impacts on diseases like malaria and coastal flooding...¹⁰¹

The climate change impacts the ecosystem on Earth threatening the biodiversity which is critical to “sustaining life, food provisioning, water purification, flood and drought control, nutrient cycling, and climate regulation.”¹⁰² In other words, the loss of biodiversity means the lives of all species under threat

¹⁰⁰ “Climate Change,” The World Health Organization, October 12, 2023, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² “Biodiversity and Ecosystems,” The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014, <https://www.oecd.org/env/resources/OECD-work-on-biodiversity-and-ecosystems.pdf>.

of food and water shortage, an increase in pests and disease pandemics. According to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) “1 million out of the estimated 8.1 million plant and animal species in the world are at risk of extinction – many within decades.”¹⁰³

Disrupting natural habitats for wild and domestic species creates challenges for their living. According to UN report:

Climate change has altered marine, terrestrial, and freshwater ecosystems around the world. It has caused the loss of local species, increased diseases, and driven mass mortality of plants and animals, resulting in the first climate-driven extinctions.... The risk of species extinction increases with every degree of warming... In the ocean, rising temperatures increase the risk of irreversible loss of marine and coastal ecosystems. Live coral reefs, for instance, have nearly halved in the past 150 years, and further warming threatens to destroy almost all remaining reefs. Overall, climate change affects the health of ecosystems, influencing shifts in the distribution of plants, viruses, animals, and even human settlements. This can create increased opportunities for animals to spread diseases and for viruses to spill over to humans. Human health can also be affected by reduced ecosystem services, such as the loss of food, medicine and livelihoods provided by nature.¹⁰⁴

Cuomo names the climate change as a climate chaos, a result of “planetary toxic overload” and describes the problem “an unprecedented, difficult, and urgent practical problem.”¹⁰⁵ Ecosystems are interconnected and a small shift can cause huge linked problems affecting not only plants and animals but humans. As Jane

¹⁰³ “Elizabeth Mrema: Protecting the world’s biodiversity,” The United Nations, May 19, 2022, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/thought-leaders-elizabeth-mrema>.

¹⁰⁴ “Biodiversity - our strongest natural defence against climate change,” The United Nations, accessed November 2, 2023, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/biodiversity>.

¹⁰⁵ Chris J. Cuomo, “Climate Change, Vulnerability, and Responsibility,” *Hypatia* 26, no. 4 (2011): 3, accessed November 2, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41328876>.

Bennett puts it: “everything on Earth as alive, interconnected, intentional, and fluid.”¹⁰⁶ The following part will provide a brief history of climate change.

2.1.1. The Anthropocene Epoch: The Beginning of Climate Change?

The Earth is over 4.54 billion years old. This huge length of geological time is divided into eras distinguished by fossil record.¹⁰⁷ These eras are further subdivided into periods, epochs, and ages. The Quaternary, which is the last period of geological time started 2.6 million years ago, consists of two epochs named the Pleistocene and the Holocene.¹⁰⁸ So, the current epoch Holocene began 11.500 years ago. This epoch is characterized by the prevailing impacts of human activities. That said, the concept of Anthropocene, which has appeared relatively recently as the new geological epoch we live in, is considered as a potential third epoch within the Quaternary. In 2000, scientists Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer coined the term Anthropocene, to better describe the present epoch in which human activities mark the Earth in devastating ways. Crutzen explains the term: “for the past three centuries, the effects of humans on the global environment have escalated... It seems appropriate to assign the term 'Anthropocene' to the present, in many ways human-dominated, geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene — the warm period of the past 10–12 millennia.”¹⁰⁹ The impacts of climate change and its implications on Earth are described by Crutzen and other scientists as:

. . . climate change is only the tip of the iceberg. In addition to the carbon cycle, humans are (i) significantly altering several other biogeochemical, or element

¹⁰⁶ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, (Duke University Press, 2010), quoted in Ariel Salleh, “The Anthropocene: Thinking in ‘Deep Geological Time’ or Deep Libidinal Time?,” *International Critical Thought*, 6, no.3, 2016, 430, accessed November 2, 2023, [doi: 10.1080/21598282.2016.1197784](https://doi.org/10.1080/21598282.2016.1197784).

¹⁰⁷ Jan Zalasiewicz, Williams Mark, Haywood Alan and Ellis Michael, “The Anthropocene: a new epoch of geological time?,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A*, 369, no.1938 (2011): 837, accessed November 3, 2023, <http://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2010.0339>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 837.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Crutzen, “Geology of mankind,” *Nature*, 415, 23 (2002), accessed November 5, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1038/415023a>.

cycles, such as nitrogen, phosphorus and sulphur, that are fundamental to life on the Earth; (ii) strongly modifying the terrestrial water cycle by intercepting river flow from uplands to the sea and, through land-cover change, altering the water vapour flow from the land to the atmosphere; and (iii) likely driving the sixth major extinction event in Earth history . . . these trends are strong evidence that humankind, our own species, has become so large and active that it now rivals some of the great forces of Nature in its impact on the functioning of the Earth system.¹¹⁰

According to Crutzen, the Anthropocene has begun through the end of eighteenth century especially with the discovery of “... growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane in polar ice which coincide with the development of the steam engine by James Watt in 1784.”¹¹¹

There are many discussions about when the Anthropocene started. The Industrial Revolution, followed by the extreme use of fossil fuels, the Second World War, the use of nuclear power or consumerism are said to have accelerated the changes on Earth and therefore are the marking stages of the Anthropocene.¹¹² While the term Anthropocene is widely used in the scientific community and appears in popular media discussions on climate change and environmental issues, it remains an informal term and the efforts to consider whether the term should be formally recognized as a new epoch in the Earth's geological time scale is still a question.¹¹³ Moreover, the start of the Anthropocene is also debatable, since

¹¹⁰ Will Steffen, Jacques Grinevald, Paul Crutzen, and John McNeill. “The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives.” *Philosophical Transactions: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 369, no. 1938 (2011): 843, accessed November 6, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41061703>.

¹¹¹ Paul Crutzen, “Geology of mankind,” *Nature* 415, 23 (2002), accessed November 5, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1038/415023a>.

¹¹² José Augusto Pádua, “Living in The Anthropocene: Uncertainties, Risks and Opportunities,” Museo do Amanha, accessed November 8, 2023, <https://museudoamanha.org.br/livro/en/10-vivendo-no-antropoceno.html>.

¹¹³ Will Steffen, Jacques Grinevald, Paul Crutzen, and John McNeill. “The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives.” *Philosophical Transactions: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 369, no. 1938 (2011): 843, accessed November 6, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41061703>.

scientists have not discovered “‘the golden spike’—a line or sign in rock or ice—that marks a distinct change from one epoch to another” yet.¹¹⁴

There are also other alternative terms coined for this epoch, one in which human activities are considered to be the dominant forces shaping the planet's biological, geological, and atmospheric processes, such as the Homogenocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene, Gynocene, and Capitalocene.¹¹⁵ Each term tries to describe the epoch from different perspectives and put forward their interpretations to climate change and human relations. Besides none of them denies the impacts of climate change on the planet.

Whilst the various discussions continue about the Anthropocene, it is obvious that there is a big shift in the ecosystem and the impacts are visible and undeniable. Furthermore, in the midst of these debates, ecofeminist philosophers, scholars and writers bring their own analyses and perspectives on this topic as well as critiques.

The ecofeminist philosopher Cuomo highlights the understandings of historical dimensions and power dynamics of climate change and addresses the real actors responsible for climate crisis. She puts it:

No other animals are directly responsible for the industrial greenhouse effect, and industrial greenhouse gases are indeed generated by humans, but the implication that humans as a species have caused climate change is also misleading. Particular people and particular cultures, nations, industries, and economic systems have caused and contributed to the pollution that created the industrial greenhouse effect, and we need not take those actors to be representative of the entire human species. Attributing blame to humans simpliciter diverts attention from the real sources of the problem and reproduces the narrow view that there is a universal greedy human nature that inevitably leads toward planetary destruction, and the

¹¹⁴ Carol Adams and Lori Gruen, “Ecofeminist Footings,” in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, ed. Carol Adams and Lori Gruen (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 27.

¹¹⁵ Carolyn Merchant, *The Anthropocene and the Humanities: From Climate Change to a New Age of Sustainability* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 15.

mistaken assumption that everyone naturally desires the lifestyles enabled by modern Western colonial development.¹¹⁶

Agreeing with Cuomo, Adams and Gruen critique “the politics of naming the epoch and determining its origin” and state that they fail to point out the severity of the ecological crises and the interconnected social and environmental injustices.¹¹⁷ Also, Di Chiro finds the “(m)Anthropocene” as a story glorifying “... Man as the master creation, the Master of the Universe, and now its destroyer and, possibly, its saviour.” and blames it for covering “... the gendered, racialized, and exploitative global capitalist system that is driving ecological and climatological destruction...”¹¹⁸

“Where, how and when did it start?” are questions we all ask in the midst of this climate crisis. The practices of naming the epoch and other discussions around the Anthropocene will continue, however it cannot be denied that there is a significant human impact on the Earth's geology and ecosystems, and it is getting worse. The fact of the matter is that the climate catastrophe is unfolding, and we all have to take action immediately. The responsibility lies with us to force accountable people, countries, and organizations to deal with this climate crisis.

2.2. WOMEN AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Climate change is a global issue impacting people everywhere, but it does not affect everyone in the same way. Therefore, it is crucial to address climate change in a more specific way to have a better understanding of the connection between gender and climate change, since it is not a gender-neutral phenomenon.

¹¹⁶ Chris J. Cuomo, “Climate Change, Vulnerability, and Responsibility,” *Hypatia*, 26, no. 4 (2011): 8, accessed November 2, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41328876>.

¹¹⁷ Carol Adams and Lori Gruen, “Ecofeminist Footings,” in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, ed. Carol Adams and Lori Gruen (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 28.

¹¹⁸ Giovanna Di Chiro, “Welcome to the White (M)Anthropocene?,” in *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment* Routledge, ed. Sherilyn MacGregor (New York, NY : Routledge, 2017), 489.

Therefore, in this section, I will particularly try to give short analysis of the effects of climate change on women.

As Greta Gaard puts it, “make no mistake: women are indeed the ones most severely affected by climate change and natural disasters, but their vulnerability is not innate; rather, it is the result of inequities produced through gendered social roles, discrimination, and poverty.”¹¹⁹ In another words, climate change worsens existing social inequalities and risks women’s health, livelihood, and safety. Women in many parts of the world depend heavily on natural resources such as water, forests, and fisheries for their livelihoods. They are often responsible for tasks such as collecting water, gathering firewood, and farming, making them directly dependent on the state of these natural resources. Therefore, climate change poses a significant threat to these resources, affecting ecosystems, weather patterns, and the availability of water. Also, having less access to resources such as education, finance, technology and other services limit women to cope with the impacts of climate change, hence make them even more vulnerable.

Also, another important fact is that the impact of climate change on women is a global phenomenon. According to The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) “women tend to be affected differently, and more harshly, by climate change because of their social roles and more impoverished status in both OECD and non-OECD countries.”¹²⁰ To put another way, due to the existing gender roles and economic structures, women are affected first and most by climate change in every part of the world.

In addition, in the case of disasters irrespective of geography, women are more likely to be hit hardest, to face the most difficult challenges, and to die compared to men. Following are some official statistics OECD provides: “... Hurricane Katrina in the United States, for example, those who were hardest hit and had the least ability to recover included women, who represent the majority of the

¹¹⁹ Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), 123.

¹²⁰ *Gender and Sustainable Development: Maximising the Economic, Social and Environmental Role of Women*, The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2008), 73, accessed November 12, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264049901-en>.

poor.... In the 2004 Asian tsunami, 70%-80% of all deaths were women. In the 1991 cyclone disasters in Bangladesh, 90% of victims were women. In Europe, more women than men died during the 2003 heat wave.”

Also, Cuomo emphasizes the increasing level of women’s vulnerability with regard to climate change in her essay titled “Climate Change, Vulnerability, and Responsibility.” She also highlights how climate change intensifies existing social and political inequalities for women, causing them to experience greater distress due to their social roles and division of labour.¹²¹

UNFCCC states that “it is increasingly evident that women are at the centre of the climate change challenge.”¹²² Also, Gaard states that despite women’s substantial contributions, they face systemic challenges and barriers that limit their adaptation to the impacts of climate change. She puts forward numbers collected from NGO: “2/3 of the world’s working hours, produce half the world’s food, and earn 10% of the world’s income; of the world’s one billion poorest people, women and girls make up 70%.”¹²³ As Cuomo emphasizes that “vulnerabilities are also shaped by norms of sex and gender.”¹²⁴ Since “gender affects the distribution of resources, wealth, work, decision-making and political power, and the enjoyment of rights and entitlements in all spheres,” specifically women who are lack of all these aforementioned opportunities struggle to cope with the hardship climate change causes.¹²⁵ Also, Irene Dankelman underlines that having disadvantaged positions, women might not “... access necessary information before, during and after disasters.”¹²⁶

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), describes climate change as “a ‘threat multiplier’, meaning

¹²¹ Chris Cuomo, “Climate Change, Vulnerability, and Responsibility,” *Hypatia*, 26, no. 4 (2011): 5, accessed November 2, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41328876>.

¹²² “UNFCCC Gender Mandate Guide,” The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), October 27, 2014, <https://unfccc.int/news/unfccc-gender-mandate-guide>.

¹²³ Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), 123.

¹²⁴ Chris Cuomo, “Climate Change, Vulnerability, and Responsibility,” *Hypatia*, 26, no. 4 (2011): 5, accessed November 2, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41328876>.

¹²⁵ Irene Dankelman, *Gender and Climate Change: An Introduction* (Global Environmental Politics, 2012), 11.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 14.

it escalates social, political and economic tensions in fragile and conflict-affected settings...” hence “... women face increased vulnerabilities to all forms of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, human trafficking, child marriage, and other forms of violence.”¹²⁷

Moreover, Dankelman points out that climate change influences not only the lives of women in rural environments but also those in other settings. According to her, urban populations, comprising a more diverse group of women than rural populations, may have more complex problems imposed by climate change.¹²⁸ In other words, women with intersectional identities in cities can face higher risk to climate-induced impacts.

It is clear that women experience the greatest effects of climate change across the world irrespective of their geography or locations. However, “... women have been very effective in mobilizing communities to respond to disasters and in disaster preparedness and mitigation.”¹²⁹ Therefore, it is only possible to tackle climate change by integrating women in climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies.

¹²⁷ “Explainer: How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected,” News and Stories, The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), February 22, 2022. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/02/explainer-how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected>.

¹²⁸ Irene Dankelman, *Gender and Climate Change: An Introduction* (Global Environmental Politics, 2012), 81.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 14.

3. WOMEN AND CLIMATE ACTIVISM

Women are often at the forefront of environmental movements to resist ecological destruction. It is needless to say that there are many men who are conscientious about the environment and protect it as well, yet statistics prove that women outnumber men when it comes to the environmental movements and the climate activism. Based on the report of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2022, women tend to be more sensitive than men in purchasing environmentally friendly and organic foods, recycling, minimizing wastage and using renewable energy sources, as a result, they leave a smaller ecological footprint as well.¹³⁰

It is important to understand how differently women are influenced by the impacts of climate change as well as their reactions to its challenges. The environmental degradation and pollution are major global challenges that have extensive adverse consequences for ecosystems, communities, and particularly vulnerable groups like women and children. Besides, women are more likely to be responsible for getting water, food, and other household goods for their families, making them more susceptible to the impacts of resource scarcity. Although women play a significant role in contributing to their households, as mentioned earlier, they have less decision-making power, and limited access to education and healthcare. The United Nations has concluded that “women’s actions are consequently essential to the institution of sustainable, ecologically sound patterns of production and consumption and approaches to natural resource management.”¹³¹

Women frequently take a leading role against ecological destruction which poses risk to their health and wellbeing of their family and the planet. It is crucial to recognize the critical role women play in climate activism and environmental movements around the world to tackle climate change. Their involvement in these movements has been instrumental in raising awareness about climate change,

¹³⁰ “Gender and Sustainable Development: Maximising the Economic, Social and Environmental Role of Women,” the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), accessed November 12, 2023. <https://www.oecd.org/social/40881538.pdf>.

¹³¹ “The Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women,” The United Nations, September 4-15, 1995, 103, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf>.

advocating for sustainable policies, and driving positive change. Dankelman points out that “many women worldwide have ideas on how to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and they organize themselves in order to have their voices heard.”¹³²

This chapter will analyse women’s involvement in climate activism. So, in order to better understand this topic, I will explain the connections between climate activism, women, and environment. This will include the reasons behind women’s involvement in climate activism, investigating the potential connection between ecofeminism and women’s climate activism, and finally presenting the narratives of women climate activists as well as two case studies from Türkiye.

3.1. CLIMATE ACTIVISM

Activism can be defined as an activity or actions taken by individuals, groups, or organizations to bring about social, political, economic, or environmental change.¹³³ There are also many forms of activism such as demonstrations, protests, boycotting, lobbying, and strikes. In this sense, we can define climate activism as actions and movements undertaken to address climate change.

Climate activism is rooted in a long history of movements to protect the Earth. There have been always environmental movements to raise concern against cutting down forests, development of nuclear weapons, use of chemical pesticides and increasing pollution, etc. That being said, increasing global warming as an urgent issue was only recognized during the 1970s and 1980s with organizations like Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace which have been actively advocating for climate change issues since then.¹³⁴ In the 1990s and onwards climate activism gained significant momentum which led to numerous campaigns and protests

¹³² Irene Dankelman, *Gender and Climate Change: An Introduction* (Global Environmental Politics, 2012), 14.

¹³³ “Activism (n),” The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, accessed October 22, 2023. <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/activism>.

¹³⁴ Joost de Moor, Michiel De Vydt, Katrin Uba and Mattias Wahlström. (2021) “New kids on the block: taking stock of the recent cycle of climate activism,” *Social Movement Studies*, 20, no. 5, (2021): 620, accessed October 22, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2020.1836617>.

addressing climate change. However, the UN Climate Change Conference (COP) in Copenhagen, in 2009 which was recognized as “the world's largest ever protest about global warming” marked a major moment for the international mobilization on climate change where thousands of people took to the streets demanding for strong climate agreement to tackle climate change.¹³⁵ The march and rally also were not only “on climate change,” but “on many other social issues including labour, indigenous rights, faith, gender, youth, and global justice.”¹³⁶ Climate activists protest every COP finding the outcomes of the summit insufficient and continue their protest “in the form of local direct action campaigns, climate Camps, meetings around World Social Forums, prefigurative projects, and divestment campaigns.”¹³⁷

In these ways, they want to raise awareness, advocate for policies, and engage in activities that aim to address climate change and related environmental, social, and economic problems. So, climate activists are passionate about reducing the impacts of climate change as well as creating and ensuring a more sustainable future.

As the impacts of climate change have become more life threatening and the need for action is more urgent, climate activism has gained significant momentum globally in recent years. The destructive effects of climate change have increased the awareness of many people and urge them to engage in climate activism. Therefore, there is a growing number of participants of climate activism each day who aim to put pressure on political and economic actors to change policies that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The climate change threatens humans and other species and can have catastrophic consequences for the entire planet, in response to these concerns climate activists raise their voice and want to prevent the approaching harm. In this

¹³⁵ Bibi van der Zee and David Batty, “Copenhagen climate protesters rally,” *The Guardian*, December 12, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/dec/12/copenhagen-demonstrators-rally-global-deal>.

¹³⁶ Jen Iris Allan, *The New Climate Activism: NGO Authority and Participation in Climate Change Governance* (University of Toronto Press, 2020), 3.

¹³⁷ Bibi van der Zee and David Batty, “Copenhagen climate protesters rally,” *The Guardian*, December 12, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/dec/12/copenhagen-demonstrators-rally-global-deal>.

sense, climate activists, who play a significant role in fighting climate change and protecting the planet for future generations, are influential in pushing for change at the grassroots level and influencing policies and practices at local, national, and international levels. Their demonstrations, protests, and other actions, which address climate emergency, draw attention to the environmental damage and the worsening impacts of climate change, gaining public attention.

Climate movements led by climate activists aim to bring attention to climate crisis and the need for urgent climate action by the governments, world leaders and organizations. Decreasing the carbon emission which will lead to keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius agreed under the Paris Agreement is the main goal of the climate activists.¹³⁸ Although Greta Thunberg has become the central figure for climate activism with her school strike to fight climate change and brought people's attention to this topic, yet there are many women climate activists who have already been battling against climate change for a long time.

Climate activists have been determined to protect the environment and achieve sustainable development for a better future for the planet and all species, but they are aware how climate change impacts disproportionately some groups over others as well as individuals with diverse background. Having said that, intersectionality, which refers to “interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage,” is a critical word to better understand the complex ways how each individual or group experiences the impacts of climate change.¹³⁹ In this regard, there is growing awareness about the multidimensional injustices associated with climate change which has sparked a rising interest in promoting climate justice. Climate change is not only an environmental matter but also related to the matters

¹³⁸ “Key aspects of the Paris Agreement,” The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), accessed October 22, 2023, <https://unfccc.int/most-requested/key-aspects-of-the-paris-agreement>.

¹³⁹ “Intersectionality,” The Oxford English Dictionary, accessed November 10, 2023, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/intersectionality_n.

of social, racial, and various other forms of justice.¹⁴⁰ Recognizing the link between climate change and other social issues has broadened discussions about climate. In this regard, the Paris Agreement is the first environmental accord acknowledging human rights along with other societal concerns which reinforced the perception of climate change as a social issue.¹⁴¹ Also, within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), discussions on gender and labour matters are now a significant part of the established programs of climate change governance.¹⁴² With the increasing recognition of the historical and ethical aspects of climate disruption, discussions in both public and policy spheres have moved towards the importance of promoting climate justice whilst addressing climate change.

Climate justice refers to “the unequal historical responsibility that countries and communities bear in relation to the climate crisis.”¹⁴³ Across the world climate change has big disparate impacts on vulnerable and marginalized communities who are often the least responsible for contributing to the climate crisis. Climate justice addresses the countries, governments, industries, businesses, and people that are accountable for climate change and demand systematic transformation for equal rights to every species.

The UN also states that “climate change is a matter of justice” and provides a few dimensions of climate change such as “structural inequalities,” “socioeconomic inequalities,” “intergenerational inequity.” Within this frame, women, people with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and low-income countries are more susceptible to the impacts of climate change. According to the IPCC Report in 2023 “climate change has impacted human and natural systems across the world

¹⁴⁰ Carlie D. Trott, Emmanuel-Sathya Gray, Stephanie Lam, R. Hayden Courtney, Jessica Roncker & Trevor L. Even, “People’s action for climate justice: a systematic review.” *Local Environment*, 28, no: 9 (February 2023):1131, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/13549839.2023.2187363?needAccess=true>.

¹⁴¹ Jen Iris Allan, *The New Climate Activism: NGO Authority and Participation in Climate Change Governance* (University of Toronto Press, 2020), 4.

¹⁴² “Introduction to Gender and Climate Change,” The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), accessed November 10, 2023, <https://unfccc.int/gender>.

¹⁴³ “Climate change is a matter of justice – here’s why,” The United Nations Development Programme, June 30, 2023, <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/climate-change-matter-justice-heres-why>.

with those who have generally least contributed to climate change being most vulnerable.” Apart from concerns about disproportionality of the climate change, climate justice also brings attention to the issues of wealth inequality, colonialism, capitalist extraction and profiteering, border imperialism, racism, patriarchy, and other related factors which needs to be analysed within the climate change discourse.¹⁴⁴ Sultana also points out that climate injustices are the result of the intertwined system which was built by “colonialism, capitalism, and globalization.”¹⁴⁵

“Climate change was once understood solely as an environmental issue, a matter of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the present to protect the atmosphere in the future. We now view climate change as an issue intimately connected to our present-day economic, political, and social systems.” says Allan in her book *The New Climate Activism*.¹⁴⁶ In other words, climate change involves many different connected matters, therefore it should be dealt with in a comprehensive way. As Adams puts it: “According to principles of transformative justice, we need to see harm as a structural and systemic problem; this requires that exploiters answer to the movement and not just to the person they victimized.”¹⁴⁷ So, climate activists bring everyone’s attention to such intersecting structural inequalities and climate-related issues. They put pressure on policymakers and organizations and hold them responsible for climate change.

¹⁴⁴ Carlie D. Trott, Emmanuel-Sathya Gray, Stephanie Lam, R. Hayden Courtney, Jessica Roncker & Trevor L. Even, “People’s action for climate justice: a systematic review.” *Local Environment*, 28, no:9 (February 2023): 1132, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/13549839.2023.2187363?needAccess=true>.

¹⁴⁵ Farhana Sultana, “Critical Climate Justice,” *The Geographical Journal*, 188, no. 1 (2021): 119, accessed November 14, 2023, <https://rgs-ibg.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/geoj.12417>.

¹⁴⁶ Jen Iris Allan, *The New Climate Activism: NGO Authority and Participation in Climate Change Governance* (University of Toronto Press, 2020), 39.

¹⁴⁷ Carol Adams and Lori Gruen, “Ecofeminist Footings,” in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, edited by Carol Adams and Lori Gruen, 34 (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

3.1.1. The Relationship Between Women and the Environment

Women constitute half of the world's population and play an important role in relation to their environment. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) points out the various roles women perform, from contribution to the prosperity and sustainable growth of their communities and nations, to the preservation of the Earth's ecosystems, biodiversity, and natural resources in their publication titled *Women and the Environment*.¹⁴⁸ The UN draws attention to the importance of the roles of women and emphasizes the necessity of adopting a gender perspective in the areas of environment and sustainable development, with a particular focus on recognizing and addressing “the contributions, needs, and visions of women.”¹⁴⁹ According to this publication, any discussion on women's relationship to the environment should involve the following determinants: “work; division of labour and responsibility; access to and control of resources, knowledge, status and power; culture and traditions; and political participation.”¹⁵⁰

The crucial link between women and the environment has been recognized by many international agreements and declarations. The United Nations Earth Summit (UNCED) in 1992, dedicated a specific chapter to gender and generated pivotal conventions on biological diversity and combating desertification, offering frameworks for incorporating gender considerations into environmental initiatives.¹⁵¹

For example, women and the environment represents one of the twelve vital areas of concerns outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was endorsed by global leaders during *the Fourth World Conference on*

¹⁴⁸ *Women and the Environment*, The United Nations Environment Programme, (UNEP, 2004), <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/13743/Women%20and%20the%20Environment.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Cate Owren, “Chapter 11: Women and the Environment,” BCcampus Open Publishing, accessed November 12, 2023, <https://opentextbc.ca/womenintheworld/chapter/chapter-11-women-and-the-environment/>.

Women in 1995.¹⁵² This conference also has vital importance since the notion of gender became more apparent and acknowledged on the international stage. Since then, there has been increasing recognition of women's roles in environmental issues and natural resource management.

Many international organizations and countries have recognized the necessity of women's vision and their active involvement in all environment and sustainable development for a healthy planet. In this regard, they begin to adapt gender perspectives to their environmental strategies and action plans. In 2005, the UNEP Governing Body made a decision urging both governments and UNEP to incorporate gender perspectives into their environmental policies and programs. This decision also emphasized the need to evaluate the impact of environmental policies on women and to further integrate considerations of gender equality and environmental aspects into their activities.¹⁵³

In many parts of the world women has various tasks because of their socially constructed position such as collecting and storing water, securing sources of fuel, managing land, producing food, as well as caring for children, the elderly and the sick. Since they are heavily dependent on natural resources, any changes in their environment make them extremely vulnerable.

Also, it is important to acknowledge women as a diverse group, as women in rural and urban areas interact differently with their environment. Braidotti et al. emphasize the importance of recognizing differences among women, including factors like race, social class, education, etc., in relation to the use of the environment and sustainable development.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, the position and needs of women in different environments should require specific attention and analysis.

¹⁵² "World Conferences on Women," The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), accessed November, 12, 2023, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women>.

¹⁵³ *Women and the Environment*, The United Nations Environment Programme, (UNEP, 2004), <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/13743/Women%20and%20the%20Environment.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>.

¹⁵⁴ Rosi Braidotti et al., *Women the Environment and Sustainable Development: Towards a Theoretical Synthesis* (London: Zed Books, 1994).

There is also a portrayal of women as being closer to nature and more sensitive to environmental issues thanks to their life-giving and nurturing role. This association also brings along many discussions especially among feminists. In her essay titled *Gender and the Environment*, Mellor analyse two claims of the gender aspect of environmental issues: “The first is that women and men stand in a different relationship to their environment, that the environment is a gendered issue. The second is that women and men respond differently to environmental issues, in particular, that women are more responsive to nature.”¹⁵⁵ The former claim is grounded in distinct experiences of women within society whose roles have been socially constructed. The latter one is related to the fact that women are inherently close to nature due to their biological difference.

Also, Di Chiro discusses the critiques of the portrayal of women either as “victims” or “heroes” when it comes to environmental issues.¹⁵⁶ Likewise, Braidotti et al. suggests women’s position alone does not qualify them to manage the environment better than anyone else.”¹⁵⁷

Whilst the debates about the link between women and the environment continue, it is undeniable that women play influential roles at all levels to achieve environmental conservation and sustainable development. Due to their first-hand experiences in environmental issues, they should take a leading role in decision-making with regard to sustainable development and efforts to mitigate climate change. Their perspectives need to be fully incorporated into policy formulation and implementation processes at every level to ensure the well-being of the planet. Therefore, women’s involvement in developing and implementing local, regional, and national sustainable development action plans is very crucial.

¹⁵⁵ Mary Mellor, "Gender and the Environment," in *Ecofeminism and Globalization: Exploring Culture, Context, and Religion*, eds. Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 12.

¹⁵⁶ Giovanna Di Chiro, “Welcome to the White (M)Anthropocene?,” in *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment*, eds. Sherilyn MacGregor (New York, NY : Routledge, 2017), 488.

¹⁵⁷ Rosi Braidotti et al., *Women, the Environment and Sustainable Development: Towards a Theoretical Synthesis* (London: Zed Books, 1994), 8.

3.1.2. Women as Climate Activists: The Defence of the Earth

Women are at the heart of the climate action seeking climate justice for every species. They either lead or take part in climate change movements and use their voice to call for action on climate change, holding governments and industries to account. Women's climate activism is rooted in a rich history of movements dedicated to the protection of the Earth. Women environmental activists have played crucial roles in ecological awareness and motivated people to take part in grassroots activism.

The history recorded many women movements and organizations around the world that have become symbolic for the protection of environmental and sustainable development. The earliest recorded instance of a woman protecting the environment dates back over three centuries. Amrita Devi, from Bishnois community of Khejarli in India, was recognized as first female environmental activist who hugged trees to stop them from being felled.¹⁵⁸ Since then, hugging trees has become a symbolic act of environmental activism. This incident and other significant environmental movements led by women inspired many female climate activists. Women have played an instrumental role in environmental movements during 1960s and 1970s. The Chipko Movement in India (1974), and the Green Belt Movement in Kenya (1977), both mentioned in previous chapters, and also organizations like Nakabaru Women's Society and Sanroku Women's Society in Japan, and Ação Democrática Feminina Gaúcha in Brazil (1964) were some of the significant examples showing women's involvement in the protection of the environment.¹⁵⁹ The book titled *Silent Spring* written by an American marine biologist, conservationist and environmental activist Rachel Carson in 1962 sparked health awareness. The book tells of the realities of pesticides and harm

¹⁵⁸ "The Original Tree Huggers: Let Us Not Forget Their Sacrifice," Women's Earth Alliance, April 22, 2013, <https://womensearthalliance.org/wea-voices/the-original-tree-huggers-let-us-not-forget-their-sacrifice-on-earth-day/>.

¹⁵⁹ Irene Dankelman, "Women: Agents of Change for a Healthy Environment," accessed November 18, 2023, 1-2, <https://aaws07.org/english3/speech/5.2.IreneDankelman.pdf>.

caused to both environment and human health raising both public awareness and grassroots action.¹⁶⁰

When faced with the environmental catastrophe, women are the ones most likely to react first. Therefore, most of the time their involvement within environmental movement happens instantaneously, just as a natural reaction. Although, many of these women have no former political and environmental experience, once they become engaged in grassroots environmentalist struggles, they actively take part in protests and demonstrations. Women initially get involved in these movements for local environmental concerns or individual reasons, but later they may engage with activism in other connected issues.

Women's environmental groups rallied to influence major intergovernmental accords, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in 1994.¹⁶¹ Additionally, these women organizations engage in monitoring for adherence of states to their declared commitments. The publication titled *Women and the Environment* which was created by The United Nations Environment Programme with the collaboration of Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) in 2004, acknowledged that:

“... women have proven to be highly effective agents of change, organizing all over the world to demand and work towards a healthy environment. Innumerable organizations with women at the helm have contributed to setting a sustainable agenda through their advocacy and lobbying, developing alternatives to

¹⁶⁰ “Why women are key to solving the climate crisis,” One Earth, September 15, 2023, <https://www.oneearth.org/why-women-are-key-to-solving-the-climate-crisis/>.

¹⁶¹ Jackie Smith et al., “Inter-organizational Relations in Transnational Environmental and Women’s Activism: Multilateralists, Pragmatists, and Rejectionists,” *Globalizations*, 18, no. 2 (2021): 301, accessed October 25, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1789028>.

unsustainable development, and making sure that women's voices are heard and their perspectives taken into account.”¹⁶²

Women are highly visible as key actors within the environmental movements. They lead global campaigns against climate change and have become powerful voices for the change that is needed to protect the Earth.

Across the world, for decades, women have rallied to protest nuclear weapons, the disposal of toxic substances, the use of pesticides, agricultural expansion, deforestation, the exploitation of indigenous land and resources, as well as air pollution.¹⁶³ However, the driving force and motives behind women's determination to confront environmental degradation and address environmental issues remains to be studied thoroughly.

Often their active roles in the contemporary climate movement are also associated with their persistent link with nature. According to Merchant “women become activists in part because their bodies, or the bodies of those with whom they have a caring relationship, are threatened by toxic or radioactive substances or when land or another species about which they care deeply is threatened with extinction.”¹⁶⁴ It is also believed that because of women's historical positioning, they care for their environment more and are therefore more inclined to support environmental movements, yet this argument is open to discussions. There are also many researches showing that women are more sensitive to environmental problems than men but this analogy is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Both in developed and developing countries women are concerned about environmental degradation. Women from different social backgrounds raise their voice for environmental protection and lead campaigns against climate change which affects their lives and the Planet. They all ask for climate justice and equal

¹⁶² *Women and the Environment*, The United Nations Environment Programme, (UNEP, 2004), <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/13743/Women%20and%20the%20Environment.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>.

¹⁶³ Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (Routledge, 1996), xviii.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, xviii.

rights for every species; therefore, they gather around the world to achieve their goals.

3.2. ECOFEMINISM: A COMMON GROUND FOR WOMEN CLIMATE ACTIVISM

Ecofeminism suggests that there are historical and cultural connections between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. It argues that both women and the environment have been marginalized, objectified, and subjected to exploitation within the patriarchal system. Ecofeminist critiques the societal structures which have contributed to the degradation of both women and the environment and seeks to address these issues. Moreover, it aims to bring the importance of understanding the intertwined system of injustice and find pathways to solve the issues with the goals of gender equality and a more harmonious relationship between humanity and the environment.

According to ecofeminist philosopher Carolyn Merchant "... ecofeminism in its various forms- liberal, cultural, social, and socialist- envisions ways to save the planet and achieve social justice ..."¹⁶⁵ For decades ecofeminists have warned about the implications of climate crisis. They drew a framework with comprehensive analysis and offer a variety of ideas and strategies to solve environmental and social problems. They present a vision for equal life where every species coexists in harmony. For example, Merchant developed the concept of partnership ethics, and as she puts it:

My own approach is a partnership ethic that treats humans (including male partners and female partners) as equals in personal, household, and political relations and humans as equal partners with (rather than controlled-by or dominant- over) nonhuman nature. Just as human partners, regardless of sex, race, or class must give each other space, time, and care, allowing each other to grow and develop

¹⁶⁵ Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (Routledge, 1996), xvi.

individually within supportive nondominating relationships, so humans must give nonhuman nature space, time, and care, allowing it to reproduce, evolve, and respond to human actions. In practice, this would mean not cutting forests and damming rivers that make people and wildlife in flood plains more vulnerable to "natural disasters"; curtailing development in areas subject to volcanos, earthquakes, hurricanes, and tornados to allow room for unpredictable, chaotic, natural surprises; and exercising ethical restraint in introducing new technologies such as pesticides, genetically-engineered organisms, and biological weapons into ecosystems.¹⁶⁶

According to her, a partnership ethics should include the following principles: "Equity between the human and nonhuman communities, moral consideration for humans and nonhuman nature, respect for cultural diversity and biodiversity, inclusion of women, minorities, and nonhuman nature in the code of ethical accountability."¹⁶⁷ On that note, Warren also points out the "pluralistic, inclusivist, and contextualist" attitude of ecofeminism and stated that the theory both "... recognizes the multiple voices of women, located differently by race, class, age, [and] ethnic considerations, it centralizes those voices."¹⁶⁸

Ecofeminists held meetings and conferences and mobilized environmental actions. In 1980, the first ecofeminist conference "Women and Life on Earth : Ecofeminism in the '80s," declared that women who had concerns about ecological destruction have power to restore the planet and should act to change the power structure that perpetuates the ongoing discrimination against women and minorities.¹⁶⁹ As one of the organizers of the conference, ecofeminist theorist and activist Ynestra King remarked the "connectedness and wholeness" of ecofeminism

¹⁶⁶ Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (Routledge, 1996), 8.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 217.

¹⁶⁸ Karen Warren, "Toward an Ecofeminist Ethic," *Studies in the Humanities* (December 1988): 151, quoted in Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (Routledge, 1996), 7.

¹⁶⁹ Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2005), 150.

and addressed the corporate and military warriors as responsible for “the devastation of the earth and her beings ...”¹⁷⁰

Philosopher Patsy Hallen describes “ecofeminism as a broad, diverse, worldwide movement, dedicated to preventing “further deterioration of both women's condition and that of nonhuman nature.”¹⁷¹ In this sense, it is clear that ecofeminists and women climate activists stand on common ground sharing the same concerns about the planet and its beings. They all demand protection of the environment and improvement of the quality of life for both human and non-human inhabitants of the planet.

The perspectives and analyses of ecofeminism enables a comprehensive understanding of the interconnected issues involving the environment, women, marginalized communities, and the systemic factors contributing to these problems. Therefore, it is no surprise that in 2023 UN Women launched a new paper titled *Feminist Climate Justice: A Framework for Action* which acknowledges the environmental degradation and gender, and social inequality are interconnected issues.¹⁷² The paper highlights the significance of acknowledging women's expertise in climate policies, reallocating resources to enhance women's resilience, promoting inclusive environmental decision-making, and confronting historical injustices. This shows the achievement of ecofeminist theory which has been bringing valuable perspectives on environmental crisis and other interconnected issues for decades.

Over the recent years, it has become more evident that the climate crisis is a global issue that is interconnected to the diverse systems of power and oppression. Ecofeminism brings forward intersectional analysis that questions these systems of

¹⁷⁰ Ynestra King, “The Eco-Feminist Perspective,” in: Caldecott, L. & S. Leland (eds), *Reclaiming the Earth: Women Speak out for Life on Earth*, *The Women's Press* (London 1983), 10, in Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London & New York: Zed Books, 2014), 14.

¹⁷¹ Patsy Hallen, “Reawakening the Erotic: Why the Conservation Movement Needs Ecofeminism,” *Habitat Australia: The Magazine of the Australian Conservation Foundation*, 22, no. 1 (February 1994): 18, in Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2005), 206.

¹⁷² *Feminist climate justice: A framework for action*, The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), accessed October 25, 2023, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/11/feminist-climate-justice-a-framework-for-action>.

power and works to find solutions to create a more equitable and sustainable planet for all. As Warren puts it: “ecological feminism is the position that there are important connections between how one treats women, people of colour, and the underclass on the one hand and how one treats the nonhuman natural environment on the other.”¹⁷³ The ecofeminist theory has been influential in understanding this intersectional relationship.

Examining women's climate activism through an ecofeminist lens is crucial for both comprehension and the development of practical solutions to address environmental degradation and the impacts of climate change. Therefore, ecofeminist theory establishes a robust foundation for women's activism, enhancing their endeavours to combat climate change.

3.2.1. Prominent Women Climate Activists: “Why Have I Become a Climate Activist?”

There are many women all around the world fighting against the degradation of the environment and the climate change. They are at the forefront of the climate crisis and demand justice for all. Each woman climate activist has different concerns or motives for their resistance. In this section, I analyse the statements of several climate activists, hence I have selected particular women activists who are not mainstream environmentalists yet very powerful and inspirational figures who empower their communities and preserve their cultures, in addition to their environmental protection efforts.

Berta Cáceres, an indigenous and environmental activist in Honduras, led opposition campaigns and protests to the construction of Agua Zarca Dam, which would have caused the displacement of the local Lenca community and destroyed the sacred Gualcarque River.¹⁷⁴ The dam also would have prevented people's access to water, food and land. In 2015, Cáceres was granted the Goldman Environmental Prize for her campaign “that successfully pressured the world's

¹⁷³ Karen J. Warren, “Introduction,” in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, eds. Karen J. Warren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), xi.

¹⁷⁴ “Berta Cáceres,” The Goldman Environmental Prize, accessed December 5, 2023, <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/berta-caceres/>.

largest dam builder to pull out of the Agua Zarca Dam.”¹⁷⁵ She was also the co-founder of the National Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras to fight against deforestation and protect rights of the indigenous communities. As an activist Cáceres expresses the motivation of her activism: “We must undertake the struggle in all parts of the world, wherever we may be, because we have no other spare or replacement planet. We have only this one, and we have to take action.”¹⁷⁶ Dedicating her life to the rights of human and nature, she influenced and encouraged her community and other people. Sadly, in 2016 she was murdered by the people who were related to the hydroelectric project.



Figure 4 Berta Cáceres¹⁷⁷

LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, a native American historian and genealogist, was also another woman activist defending Indigenous rights and fighting for racial

¹⁷⁵ “Berta Cáceres,” The Goldman Environmental Prize, accessed December 5, 2023, <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/berta-caceres/>.

¹⁷⁶ Jonathan Watts “Berta Cáceres, Honduran human rights and environment activist, murdered,” *The Guardian*, March 4, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/03/honduras-berta-caceres-murder-environment-activist-human-rights>.

¹⁷⁷ Figure 4, <https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/forests/justice-for-berta-caceres/>.

environmental justice. She was a member of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe who resisted the construction of Dakota Access Pipeline. There are major concerns that the pipeline might spill oil endangering their water and cultural resources. In this sense, she played a pivotal role in sparking the worldwide movement against the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline on her community's territory. The Standing Rock movement that she was involved in raised awareness of the impact of dependence on fossil fuels which exacerbated climate change and emphasized the significance of protecting the planet's water.¹⁷⁸ Allard said: "We are fighting for our rights as the Indigenous peoples of this land; we are fighting for our liberation, and the liberation of Unci Maka, Mother Earth. We want every last oil and gas pipe removed from her body. We want healing. We want clean water. We want to determine our own future."¹⁷⁹ She believed that her fight had broader significance since protecting water is a shared effort for all life on this planet.¹⁸⁰



Figure 5 LaDonna Brave Bull Allard¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Katharine Q. Seelye, "LaDonna Allard Dies at 64; Led Dakota Pipeline Protests," *The New York Times*, April 19, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/19/us/ladonna-allard-dead.html>.

¹⁷⁹ "Celebrating the life of climate hero LaDonna Brave Bull Allard," One Earth, October 25, 2021, <https://www.oneearth.org/celebrating-the-life-of-climate-hero-ladonna-brave-bull-allard/>.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Figure 5, <https://www.momscleanairforce.org/native-moms-story-dakota-pipeline/>.

Nemonte Nenquimo is an indigenous Waorani woman from the Ecuadorian Amazon. Leading her community, they filed a lawsuit against the Ecuadorian government that plan to sell their land to oil companies. In 2019, they won the case and preserved 500,000 acres of Amazon rainforest from extractivism. The indigenous people in the Amazon region have been suffering from deforestation, logging, health problems, human rights abuses, displacement and other negative impacts on their territories and cultures, because of the activities of extractive industries such as oil exploration, logging, road building, waste dumping, etc..¹⁸² So, the verdict on behalf of the local community set a significant legal precedent for the rights of indigenous people, who want to protect their lands across the Amazon and others around the world. The rainforest is crucial for the livelihoods of indigenous people, and its destruction means extinction of their culture and eventually their existence. Nenquimo also took part in the foundation of the Ceibo Alliance, a non-profit organization to bring together indigenous communities to protect their territories and cultures, while also supporting renewable energy and fostering economic empowerment for women.¹⁸³ She says that as a mother she feels an urge to raise her voice against climate change in a sense of responsibility for future generations. Nenquimo perceives her activism as part of a collective effort against climate change and says: “If we allow the Amazon to be destroyed little by little, of course, that affects us as indigenous peoples, but it will also affect everyone because of climate change...The struggle we do is for all humanity because we all live connected to the land.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² “Nemonte Nenquimo,” The Goldman Environmental Prize, accessed December 5, 2023, <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/nemonte-nenquimo/#recipient-bio>.

¹⁸³ “Nemonte Nenquimo - Inspiration and Action,” The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), accessed December 5, 2023, <https://www.unep.org/championsofearth/laureates/2020/nemonte-nenquimo>.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.



Figure 6 Nemonte Nenquimo¹⁸⁵

Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, an environmental activist, is a member of the indigenous Mbororo community of Chad. She has been working to promote the rights of indigenous peoples, as well as protect the environment. As a co-founder of the Association of Indigenous Peul Women and Peoples of Chad, she organizes various projects related with tackling climate change, improving health and education of her community, restoring biodiversity, etc.¹⁸⁶ The region suffers from humanitarian crisis due to the increasing temperature as a result of climate change, along with other conflicts in the area. This situation results in forced displacement, shortage of clean water, malnutrition, disease outbreaks, and violence against women and children. So, Oumarou Ibrahim works hard to tackle these problems and raise her voice to fight against climate change.

¹⁸⁵ Figure 6, <https://www.xprize.org/about/people/nemonte-nenquimo>.

¹⁸⁶ Leanne McNulty, "6 Indigenous Climate Activists we're celebrating this International Women's Day," Green is the New Black, March 7, 2023, <https://greenisthenewblack.com/indigenous-climate-activists/>.



Figure 7 Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim¹⁸⁷

Francia Márquez is an indigenous environmental activist from Colombia. She was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2018 for her efforts to prevent unauthorized gold mining in her community's ancestral lands which was going to contaminate the river with highly toxic chemicals affecting their drinking water and fishing.¹⁸⁸ Márquez also leads many projects including reforestation, recycling, increasing awareness about compostable products, etc. As she describes: “Humanity’s greatest challenge is to either work together to preserve this planet or destroy it. It’s up to us to assume our own responsibility and defend life.”¹⁸⁹ She

¹⁸⁷ Figure 7, <https://www.xprize.org/about/people/hindou-oumarou-ibrahim>.

¹⁸⁸ “Francia Márquez,” The Goldman Environmental Prize, accessed December 6, 2023, <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/francia-marquez/>.

¹⁸⁹ Robert Valencia, "Francia Márquez, Renowned Afro-Colombian Activist: What Environmental Racism Means to Me," *Earthjustice*, June 22, 2022, <https://earthjustice.org/article/francia-m-rquez-renowned-afro-colombian-activist-what-environmental-racism-means-to-me>.

advocates for fostering the culture and land rights of Afro-Colombian, as well as fighting against environmental racism, sexism, and corruption.¹⁹⁰



Figure 8 Francia Márquez¹⁹¹

Aleta Baun is a climate activist from indigenous Mollocommunity on Indonesia's Timor Island. For her community living on the island, which is also abundant with biodiversity and natural resources, water and forest are crucial for their livelihoods. After the government issued a permit to mine companies, Baun mobilized 150 women who block the mining site by sitting down and weaving as a peaceful protest for a year to stop mining activities. Later they have founded Pokja OAT, an organization to resist the degradation of the ecosystem caused by the companies. With this organization she establishes programs for food security, ecological restoration, planting trees, women's empowerment and legal advocacy which have made significant contributions to her and other communities on the

¹⁹⁰ "Francia Márquez," The Goldman Environmental Prize, accessed December 6, 2023, <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/francia-marquez/>.

¹⁹¹ Figure 8, <https://thecitypaperbogota.com/news/vp-francia-marquezs-angers-colombians-over-helicopter-commute/>.

island.¹⁹² In 2013, she won the Goldman Environmental Prize in recognition of her efforts for defending the forest.¹⁹³



Figure 9 Aleta Baun¹⁹⁴

Women around the world are increasingly taking action against environmental destruction and addressing the impacts of climate change. Motivated to protect the environment, their culture, and the livelihoods of their communities, these women play a crucial role in environmental advocacy. Their actions make big changes and significant contributions to climate activism. They mobilize people and inspire them with their dedication and determination even sometimes at the cost of their lives. Additionally, it appears that environmental movements or initiatives led by women are successful in preventing big companies realizing their projects that cause destruction of the ecosystem. The success stories of these local activist women give hope to everyone worldwide who is fighting against environmental degradation and climate change.

¹⁹² Chezza Zoeller, “Environmental Hero: Aleta Baun,” One Earth, October 25, 2021, <https://www.oneearth.org/environmental-hero-aleta-baun/>.

¹⁹³ “Aleta Baun.” The Goldman Environmental Prize, accessed December 6, 2023, <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/aleta-baun/>.

¹⁹⁴ Figure 9, <https://beritabeta.com/aleta-baun-pejuang-lingkungan-di-timur-indonesia>.

3.2.2. Selected Cases of Women's Resistance Against Environmental Crisis in Türkiye

In this part, I will analyse two cases of women's resistance against environmental destruction in Türkiye. These two cases are particularly significant as they form the central argument of my thesis. Watching and hearing the news about the events in these regions and seeing local women taking a leading role in the protests either confronting vehicles or opposing gendarmerie to stop felling trees, motivated me to write this thesis. After having studied the topic of ecofeminism in the *Gender and Culture* course, I have established a connection between the theory and the efforts of these local women activists. While there were men present in these protests, the media coverage predominantly featured images of women. These two cases can be considered as ecofeminist movements like the Chipko Movement or the Green Belt Movement.

The rise of women's presence in environmental movements in Türkiye coincides with the increased energy investments by the government. Conservation areas which should be protected under law are often viewed as potential sources by the government for economic gains through the construction of roads, dams, and power plants. In order to achieve their economic goals, they apply different methods like expropriation, undermining protective institutions, introducing exceptions in laws, and disregarding court rulings regarding the use of natural resources. Therefore, we see a number of similar cases continue to appear in the news daily in different parts of Türkiye and women take an active role in environmental movements to prevent the environmental degradation caused by the government or private projects. Accordingly, their inspirational resistance helps others take action to protect the environment.

Especially in rural areas of Türkiye, women have a direct connection with nature engaging in activities such as planting seeds, cultivating land, and harvesting crops. So, any damage to the environment directly affects their means of livelihood. This chapter will focus on two cases examining women's perspectives and motivations in the İkizdere, Rize Road and Mount Ida resistance. In order to

analyse women's stance in these cases, sources such as online news articles and magazines have been utilized.

3.2.2.1. The Case of İkizdere, Rize Resistance

İkizdere is a small village in Rize, in the Black Sea region (Karadeniz). The whole region is rich in natural resources; therefore, it is being targeted by companies with many projects from construction of hydroelectric power plants (HES) to gold mining. In the same way, there are projects for İkizdere Valley to build hydroelectric power plants and start a quarry mining. These projects continue intensely in the area despite its recognition as conservation areas under state protection due to their natural, ecological, or cultural significance in 2010.¹⁹⁵ There are currently six operational hydroelectric power plants and two active quarry mines causing destruction of nature and impacting the lives of people living there.¹⁹⁶

İkizdere people's resistance against hydroelectric power plants dates back to 2000, yet it only caught my attention in the media coverage recently when I saw local women protesting against quarry mining conducted by a company called Cengiz Construction. The company had been already notorious for its many environmentally destructive projects.¹⁹⁷ So, in 2021 Cengiz Construction wanted to start quarry mining to extract stones for the nearby port project.¹⁹⁸ For this mining project, they wanted to cut thousands of trees, and came to the site with big vehicles and the gendarmerie as having the government's support. In order to prevent them, local people especially women gathered and started to protest the project. Since the beginning of resistance, we constantly saw women at the tops of trees, along the riverbanks, confronting bulldozers, or hugging trees. There were also scenes where

¹⁹⁵ "İkizdere Artık SİT Alanı," *Bianet*, October 22, 2010, <https://bianet.org/haber/ikizdere-artik-sit-alani-125614>.

¹⁹⁶ "Koruma altındaki Rize İkizdere vadisinde Reis Holding HES projesi başlatıldı," *Birgün*, June 12, 2023, <https://www.birgun.net/haber/koruma-altindaki-rize-ikizdere-vadisinde-reis-holding-hes-projesi-baslatti-444893>.

¹⁹⁷ "İktidar destekli 5'li çetenin doğa katliamı," *Yeni Yaşam Gazetesi*, August 9, 2023, <https://yeniyasamgazetesi5.com/iktidar-destekli-5li-cetenin-doga-katliami/>.

¹⁹⁸ Tansu Pişkin, "İkizdere direnişi: Karadeniz'de doğa talanının resmi," *Gezegen 24*, May, 20 2021, <https://gezegen24.com/ikizdere-direnisi-karadeniz-talani/>.

these women were being dragged on the ground and taken into custody by the gendarmerie.



Figure 10 İkizdere, Rize¹⁹⁹

The environment is extremely important for the women in this area, since it is their primary source of livelihood. Heavily dependent on nature, women are the ones who spend more time in nature collecting wood and plants, cultivating farmlands, tending livestock among other activities whilst men gather in coffeehouses. Also, the execution of this quarry mining project in this region meant extinction of various species, displacement of local people, loss of income, water contamination, and more.

The local women have many concerns regarding the quarry mining operations. One of the women in the protests says “The quarry mining will lead to the devastation of everything. This is our living space, where we have grown up...No matter what, I will not give up the fight. Nature is our nature. I have memories in that forest with my children, my mother, and father, grandparents,

¹⁹⁹ Figure 10, <https://esitlikadaletkadin.org/rize-ikizderede-direninin-sembolu-kadin-koyluler/>.

ancestors, and great-grandmothers... The entire community is connected to the forest...”²⁰⁰ Another woman expresses her worries stating that she would lose her source of income which comes from cultivating tea plants in the lands that will be taken for mining activities.

Emine Tunceri, who takes part in the resistance, says, “I was born here, grew up here, and live here. Those are our lands. Our graveyards and tea fields are there...”²⁰¹ Likewise, Funda Okyar says that she grew up playing among those trees whose branches she used to swing in during her childhood. She spent time in this forest while her mother worked in the field and cutting them down means taking away a child's life. These women advocate for the nature, animals, and their living space, and the quarry mining will destroy everything they stand for.

Unfortunately, with the backing of the government, the company continues its operations up until this time, changing the entire appearance of the valley and disrupting the entire ecosystem of the region. The chair of the Environmental Committee of the İkizdere Associations Federation, Aslı Kahraman Eren emphasized the severe impacts of this environmental catastrophe. She says that after the construction of the quarry mining, thousands of trees were cut down, the river dried up, there was a shortage of water and countless plants and animals were affected.²⁰² Moreover, there are still more projects in the planning phase for this area. However, their resistance continues until today, activist Eren says: “We will never give up the fight against this destruction.”²⁰³ As she also believes that environmental activists are capable of changing this neoliberal capitalist system, and adds: “If there is no nature, there is no human, no land, and no life. Therefore, as we continue to protect nature, we will develop a different perspective against

²⁰⁰ “Rize İkizdere’de Direnişin Sembolü Kadın Köylüler,” SES Eşitlik, Adalet, Kadın Platformu, April 21, 2021, <https://esitlikadaletkadın.org/rize-ikizderede-direnisin-sembolu-kadin-koyluler/>.

²⁰¹ Sare Öztürk, “İkizdere’de Kadınlar Direniyor!,” Kadınışçi, May 4, 2021, <https://www.kadinisci.org/guncel/ikizderede-kadinlar-direniyor/>.

²⁰² Tolga Güney, “İkizdere’de yeni HES projesi | İkizdere Vadisi yok oluşa gidecek,” *Evrensel*, June 13, 2023, <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/492275/ikizderede-yeni-hes-projesi-ikizdere-vadisi-yok-olusa-gidecek>.

²⁰³ Ibid.

capitalism. In every place we fight, regardless of people's political views, we will continue to defend life.”²⁰⁴

The women in İkizdere are worried about the health of their children, loss of income and living space, and the destruction of ecosystem. They raise their voice fearlessly against this environmental degradation. Their resistance inspired and gave courage to other resistance groups in other parts of Türkiye. For example, women in Akbelen who are fighting against deforestation to expand the area of lignite mining are in contact with women in İkizdere. They state that they communicate with each other, share their feelings and support their resistance as well. Women in İkizdere will never stop their struggle against this environmental destruction. They want to protect nature and the future of their children.

3.2.2.2. The Case of Mount Ida Resistance

Mount Ida (Kaz Dağı) is located in northwestern Türkiye covering an area of 21.452 hectares. It is a mountain range that extends along the southern coast of the Sea of Marmara, near the town of Edremit in Balıkesir Province. Mount Ida is renowned for its natural beauty, diverse flora and fauna, and cultural significance in ancient mythology. The region, which also includes Mount Ida National Park, draws many people with its scenic landscapes and biodiversity but also attracts companies who seek to extract its rich natural resources.

The largest resistance in the Mount Ida region began in July 2019 against the mining project in Kirazlı, Çanakkale by the Canada-based company Alamos Gold. For the gold mining project, the company cut down nearly 350,000 trees which was four times more than what the company stated in its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report.²⁰⁵ Moreover, there are also a number of other companies who either want to start new mining projects or expand existing mining operations such as Cengiz Holding, Oreks Mining, Koza Mining, even Balıkesir

²⁰⁴ Tolga Güney, “İkizdere’de yeni HES projesi | ‘İkizdere Vadisi yok oluşa gidecek,’” *Evrensel*, June 13, 2023, <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/492275/ikizderede-yeni-hes-projesi-ikizdere-vadisi-yok-olusa-gidecek>.

²⁰⁵ Şeyda Öztürk, “Kaz Dağları’nda tehlike geçmiyor! Rant için doğa katliamı,” *Cumhuriyet*, July 18, 2023, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/kaz-daglarinda-tehlike-gecmiyor-rant-icin-doga-katliami-2100258>.

Municipality in the region.²⁰⁶ According to the “Mining in the Ida Mountain Region” report by the Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion, for Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA), 79% of the region has been licensed for mining activities.²⁰⁷ Apparently, this licensing has made the region highly attractive for businesses, as there are constantly new mining projects, resulting in ongoing resistance. Furthermore, there has been increasing repression and blockings for the environmental activists especially for the last two decades, and it is getting more challenging for them to advocate for environmental preservation. These non-violent resistances are being attacked violently by the police with teargas leading to the detention of protesters who subsequently face charges.



Figure 11 Mount Ida²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Şeyda Öztürk, “Kaz Dağları’nda tehlike geçmiyor! Rant için doğa katliamı,” *Cumhuriyet*, July 18, 2023, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/kaz-daglarinda-tehlike-gecmiyor-rant-icin-doga-katliami-2100258>.

²⁰⁷ “Mining in the Ida Mountain Region,” The Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion, Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA), April 2020, https://cdn-tema.mnecdn.com/Uploads/Cms/kaz-daglari-raporu_3.pdf.

²⁰⁸ Figure 11, <https://kadinsavunmasi.org/kazdaglari-direniscisi-kadinlar-onlar-ormandan-gidene-kadar-deniz-uysal/>.

Unlike İkizdere, we see that women protecting the forest are not just from the villages in the region but all around Türkiye. Certainly, it wasn't only women, but also men present, however women took the forefront in the resistance. In 2019, when Alamos Gold started to cut down trees, women from all different cities came together to stop the company. Sema Demir and Ferzan Aktaş are two women from other cities who came to the site as soon as they heard the news about the thousands of trees being cut. They said that they could not remain silent or be indifferent to the destruction of forest which is a habitat for many organisms that have the same right to life human do. Additionally, upon learning that the company planned to use cyanide in gold mining which would harm the ecosystem and pose a threat to people by poisoning water and agriculture fields, they were motivated them to take action. These women who had been in the resistance camp for months to defend the rights of people, animals and plants successfully stopped the company. Being aware of the impacts of climate change, Ferzan emphasizes that “We can only tackle the climate crisis by preserving our existing forests... The increasing deforestation, mining, industrial agriculture, soil and water contamination, and exploitation of wildlife are the causes of diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans. If we continue to exploit nature in this way, we may experience pandemics more frequently.”²⁰⁹ They also believe that women have a deeper connection to nature and when it is in danger, they are the ones who take action first. Additionally, they highlight the significance of women's role in society and gender equality in every field. As Sema adds that those who harm the nature and women have the same mindset, therefore in order to change this system, women have to be in this fight against the exploitation and destruction of Mount Ida.

Sevinç Özkaya is one of the local women in the protests whose main source of income is growing and selling fruits and vegetables. She expresses her concerns about the destructive impact of gold mining on livelihoods, saying that it will poison the air and water and she is determined to protect nature at whatever cost. Mining

²⁰⁹ Deniz Uysal, “Kazdağları direnişçisi kadınlar: ‘Onlar ormandan gidene kadar!’” Kadın Savunma Ağı, May 19, 2020, <https://kadinsavunmasi.org/kazdaglari-direniscisi-kadinlar-onlar-ormandan-gidene-kadar-deniz-uysal/>.

activities in the region already cause many health problems, especially posing huge risks to women and children as well as animals, therefore women who feel responsible towards their children are at the forefront of the protests to fight against environmental destruction.

As ecofeminist Süheyla Doğan, president of the Association for the Protection of Natural and Cultural Heritage of Mount Ida, states that they demand an equal and free life where every species is respected. For her it is not just the resistance to protect Mount Ida, but to address global climate crisis, as they are all connected. Doğan highlights that labour, nature, and women are exploited by the same male-dominated system and they need to be discussed more within the ecology movement. As she puts it: “All ecological movements must come together, embracing the richness of diversity without marginalizing anyone. We should strive for unity using a peaceful language, promoting gender equality, rejecting speciesism, militarism, sexism, and racism and fighting against multi-layered exploitation.”²¹⁰ Some women go to support other protests in different parts of Türkiye to fight against the environmental destruction, they are aware that they are all connected. Moreover, women's active involvement in the struggle has transformed certain aspects of the patriarchal nature of their socially assigned roles in the community. They have evolved into independent, brave and influential figures, no longer remaining passive members at home and in the fields. As they say: “In the past, we couldn't go to such places without asking our husbands... Now, things have changed, we're not afraid anymore. We gained courage and strength. Now, we've come together and become sisters.”²¹¹

It would be fair to say that Mount Ida Resistance has been one of the most significant environmental movements in Türkiye largely, if not entirely, due to the determination of women. Despite all challenges, difficulties, intimidations, and fines, they managed to stop Alamos Gold from starting mining and ultimately

²¹⁰ Süheyla Doğan ile Söyleşi: “Ekofeministim. Dünyayı ekofeministlerin kurtaracağına inanıyorum,” *Yeşil Direniş*, May 30, 2020, <https://www.yesildirenis.com/2020/05/30/suheyla-dogan-ile-soylesi-ekofeministim-dunyayi-ekofeministlerin-kurtaracagina-inaniyorum/>.

²¹¹ Gizem Örnek, “Hava, su, toprak, yaşam mücadelesinde kadınlar hep en önde!,” *Evrensel*, August 11, 2019, <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/384679/hava-su-toprak-yasam-mucadelesinde-kadinlar-hep-en-onde>.

forced the company out of the region. There are however still many other mining and energy projects going on in the Mount Ida region, but thankfully these women's resistance will continue until these companies stop environmental destruction. Their courage and persistence are inspiration for other activists in Türkiye.



CONCLUSION

The concept of this thesis started from the news about local woman protesters fighting to stop the cutting down of trees. Women who live in rural areas were throwing themselves in front of huge vehicles and raising their voice against environmental destruction. As news of these stories broke in the media, I realized that these activist women were present in different places in the world, fearlessly protecting nature and advocating for the rights of every species. At the same time people experiencing the severe impacts of climate change and environmental degradation all over the world were recurring news topics. Protest marches were being held worldwide to fight against climate change and again women were taking leading roles in these demonstrations gathering extensive coverage in media outlets. In my thesis, I aim to reveal how ecofeminism can shed light on the motivations behind women's climate activism in addressing climate and environment issues.

In order to better understand women's motivation for climate activism through the lens of ecofeminism, I have structured the thesis into three chapters, each exploring different aspects. The first chapter delves into ecofeminism, exploring its philosophy, branches, and presenting critical examinations of the theory. Ecofeminism which brings together women and ecological concerns, explores the connection between the dominations of women and nature originated from patriarchal and capitalist systems. It is important to understand the theory in detail since the theory establishes the link between lives and societal position of women and current environmental problems. Providing a holistic analysis of environmental problems, ecofeminism draws a framework for potential solutions. According to the theory, environmental degradation and women's oppression are interconnected issues that cannot be addressed separately, and their solution requires structural change. Women are disproportionately affected by the environmental issues such as deforestation, water pollution, and toxic waste. Therefore, ecofeminism plays a crucial role in bringing this connection to light, making this complex relationship clearer and more visible. As the theory evolved, ecofeminist discussions have become more inclusive and diverse expanding in variety of ways and perspectives. In addition to bringing new ways of thinking

about women, nature, and animals, the theory has fully adopted an intersectional approach by incorporating various interconnected social issues such as gender, race, class, disability, sexuality, and more. Intersectionality has become a significant aspect of the theory in addressing the disproportionate impacts of climate change. It is only possible to tackle the environmental injustices caused by climate change through an intersectional approach as ecofeminism suggests.

As more data reveals the connection between gender and climate change, it is important to explore the origins of climate change and understand its emergency and impacts on women. Therefore, I expand on these issues in the second chapter. As a result of shifts in climate patterns caused by human activities, we experience the adverse impacts of climate change such as increasing global temperatures, rising sea levels and extreme weather events. Climate change is a big crisis affecting all life on earth, but women suffer most the effects of climate change, as it worsens the existing gender inequalities and causes challenges to their health and livelihoods. In many areas in the world women heavily depend on natural resources and due to their socially constructed roles, they have many responsibilities for providing food, water and fuel. The climate crisis which causes environmental issues increases the vulnerabilities of women.

Before moving the discussion onto the individual narratives of women climate activists and examining two cases of women's environmental resistance in Türkiye, I explore the relationship between women and the environment to understand the motivations behind their involvement in climate activism. In this chapter I analyse the discussions over the depiction of women as more connected to nature and the environment, displaying increased sensitivity and awareness to environmental issues due to their life-giving and nurturing role. There are two arguments about women's closeness to the environment, one is grounded in their constructed roles in society, and the other is based on women's inherent biological differences. Whilst the debate over these claims continues, the fact remains that women exhibit greater concerns for environmental destruction and climate change, each driven by different motivations. The impacts of climate change risk women's lives in both developed and developing countries and women from diverse social

backgrounds advocate for environmental protection, taking the lead in campaigns against climate change. Women engage in climate activism for various reasons, including economic considerations, food and water security, health, environmental well-being personal and family safety, and community security. This is not a new phenomenon for ecofeminism which has already been addressing women's involvement in environmental issues through a holistic perspective and outlining paths to solutions. As part of discussion, the theory has also expanded the discussion by emphasizing the interconnectedness of social and racial issues with climate change as well as gender dimensions. Addressing these intersections is essential for achieving sustainable and equitable outcomes, and the ecofeminist movement helps us understand them in a comprehensive way.

Women play significant roles in environment movements, fighting against environmental degradation and climate change and also advocating for climate justice. In the last chapter I explore six individual narratives of climate activists analysing their stories and statements. Each activist is local, particularly indigenous, lead environmental campaigns to protect their environment and tackle the impacts of climate change. Some of these individuals even risk their lives to achieve their goals. I intentionally excluded very well-known female climate activists including Greta Thunberg, Elizabeth Wanjiru Wathuti, Vanessa Nakate and Dominika Lasota among others from this thesis, as I consider them youth climate activists which could be the focus of another thesis. Besides, I find the struggles of these indigenous women very valuable and want their contribution to climate action to be recognized and use my space to amplify their voices. These women fight against big companies or their governments who want to start business operations and extract the resources in their lands leading to the destruction of nature and the eradication of ecosystems. In their stories, we see that they all act instantaneously in response to problems, when the companies appear in their region to cut trees, open mines, build dam or lay pipelines. These projects have numerous destructive effects including loss of livelihood, endangerment of water and food resources, loss of biodiversity, extinction of their culture as well as displacement of people. Driven by a desire to protect the environment, preserve their culture, and secure the livelihoods of their

communities, including the health of their children, these indigenous women activists fight against environmental destruction. Besides, they all recognize that the interdependence among ecosystems establishes mutual reliance, and climate change negatively impacts this interconnectedness. Therefore, these women activists believe that their struggle against environmental destruction has global impact. For the continuity of their efforts, they establish associations and organizations to implement projects addressing climate change and its impacts. The courage and determination of these women have become inspiration for other climate activists all around the world.

The other two cases in Türkiye involve resistances of women from two different locations, namely İkizdere, Rize and Mount Ida. In İkizdere, local women opposed the company planning to cut thousands of trees for quarry mining by either throwing themselves in front of vehicles or hugging trees. This project meant deforestation, extinction of various species, displacement of local residents, loss of income, water contamination, and other adverse effects for community especially women who were heavily dependent on nature in this region. Based on their statements women were mainly concerned about their livelihoods, the future and health of younger generations, the loss of biodiversity, and cultural memory and heritage. Even the company still carries on their operations, their resistance is inspirational for other fights against environmental destruction in other part of Türkiye.

Unlike İkizdere, Mount Ida resistance involved women from every part of Türkiye, as well as local women. They took the front lines of the protests against the gold mining company for its exploitation and destruction of the environment which resulted in the termination of the company's operations. The local women were primarily concerned about their livelihood, water and air contamination, and increasing health problems, while women from outside expressed greater concerns about the loss of biodiversity, issues related to human and animal rights. Like the women in İkizdere, their resistance empowers other women who fight against the environmental destruction.

Women are affected disproportionately by the degradation of the environment and the impact of climate change, and when the environmental issues arise, they are the first ones to act. All the individual narratives and case studies in this thesis demonstrate that women may have a variety of motivations to engage in climate activism, with one sometimes taking precedence over another, but they all share the common objective of protecting nature.

The thesis is limited with analysis of narratives and statements of six individual indigenous women from different countries and two cases studies in Türkiye. It does not include the statements of many other women with different social backgrounds and further studies should be conducted to analyse their challenges and motivations in environmental issues. Still, I believe this thesis will contribute to highlighting the significance of women's activism in protecting the environment, fighting climate change and promoting the ecofeminist perspective to better understand their motivations.

In conclusion, women all over the world suffer from environmental degradation and the impacts of climate change. Ecofeminism highlights this connection, exploring its underlying reasons, and provides a framework for potential solutions. The ecofeminist theory and women climate activists both gain from each other's efforts, mutually evolving and developing. While ecofeminism provides analysis and understanding of the complex relationships between women, nature, and other intertwined social and racial issues, women climate activists, through grassroots actions, convert the theory into action intentionally or unintentionally, becoming influential agents of change for a better planet. Thanks to their effort, there is considerable progress in integration of women's and gender issues into specific policy domains at both the global and local scales. However, there are still huge obstacles for them to change the existing system, but ecofeminists and climate activists remain dedicated to addressing these problems.

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