Ecofeminism and Chicano Environmental Struggles: Bridges across Gender and Race

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This chapter comes out of many conversations during the 1990s with Devon Peña, a former colleague at Colorado College, who introduced me to Chicano environmental struggles and challenged me to think about what ecofeminism could offer them.

The widespread and profoundly serious nature of environmental devastation means that ecological issues have great potential to bring people together across lines of race, class, and gender. My main focus in this chapter is on the interconnections, overlappings, disjunctions, and gaps between ecofeminist perspectives and Chicano environmental struggles. My interest in the Chicano environmental movement comes from networking with antimilitarist organizations in Texas and New Mexico and living and teaching in Colorado and the San Francisco Bay Area. I consider myself an insider with respect to ecofeminism; I want to be an ally to Chicano environmentalists. Here I explore common ground between ecofeminism and Chicano environmentalism to suggest what we can learn from each other. Neither ecofeminism nor Chicano environmentalism are unitary perspectives, of course, though I emphasize the points of comparison between then here, rather than their internal variations.

Ecofeminism: The Domination of Women and Nature

The term "ecofeminism" was first used by a group of feminists in France who established the Ecology-Feminism Center in 1974, based on their analysis of the connections between male-dominated social institutions and the destruction of the physical environment (d'Eaubonne 1994, 174-97). A few years later in the United States, Susan Griffin and Carolyn Merchant each explored the connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature, where nature is often feminized and sexualized as the "virgin forest," "the rape of the earth," or "penetrating" the wilderness (Griffin 1978; Merchant 1980). But domination … applies more broadly than just to women and the

nonhuman world. Patriarchal capitalist systems also involve exploitation based on race and class. The creation of inferiors and superiors is a core mechanism underlying systems of oppressions including sexism, racism, militarism, colonialism, and the destruction of ecological systems. Val Plumwood argues that such hierarchies are mutually reinforcing and should be thought of as an interlocking set (Plumwood 1993, 41-68). Moreover, the capitalist economic system turns sources of life—whether forests, seeds, or women's bodies—into *re*sources that are objectified, controlled, and used (Mies and Shiva 1993, 22-35; Shiva 1988, 1-37). Potentially, an ecofeminist perspective links the oppression of women, racism, economic exploitation, and the ecological crisis. It is concerned with personal and planetary survival and makes connections between the politics of food, health, population, land, development, and security. It is a politics of opposition and resistance as well as a politics of reconstruction and hope. (1)

In the United States, ecofeminism has activist antecedents in antinuclear and antimilitarist campaigns, workplace and community organizing, and the women's liberation movement of the 1970s. Various ecofeminist writers bring their own distinctive frameworks to the subject. Ynestra King emphasizes ecofeminism as political theory and practice. Starhawk and Charlene Spretnak give a central place to earth-centered spirituality and goddess reverences (King 1983c, 118-129; Spretnak 1990, 3-14; and Starhawk 1990, 73-86). Animal rights feminists emphasize the oppression of animals (Collard and Contrucci 1988; Adams 1990; Gaard 1993). Vandana Shiva critiques Western reductionist science and its counterpart—unsustainable development. She promotes traditional Indian concepts of sustainable agriculture and forestry (Shiva 1988, 55-217; Mies and Shiva 1993, 164-73).

This diversity of approaches raises the question of whether there is a sufficiently consistent, intellectually coherent, identifiable ecofeminist perspective, and many academics claim that there is not. Women of color critics argue that, as with much Western feminism, U.S, ecofeminism emphasizes gender over race and class (Smith 1983, 581-92; Amos and Parmer 1984, 3-19; Omolade 1989, 171-89). Some Third World feminists argue that ecofeminism has no material basis (Agarwal 1992, 119-57). Some leftist radicals and socialist feminists reject ecofeminism as synonymous with goddess worship or on the grounds that it assumes women are essentially closer to nature

than men (Biehl 1991). These criticisms are substantial, and some feminists who are concerned with environmental issues avoid the term ecofeminism because they consider it a liability (Seager 1993).

Worldwide, compared to men, women disproportionately are involved in campaigning around environmental issues at a grassroots level. I do not see women as somehow closer to nature than men, as is sometimes argued, or as having an essentially nurturing, caring nature. Rather, I see women's environmental activism as an extension of their roles as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers, caring for families and communities. I agree that ecofeminists need to integrate issues of race and class with gender, and this chapter makes some suggestions for such integration. Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor (1987) argue that all true spirituality is profoundly political and that all meaningful politics has a spiritual dimension. Many Native American, African American, and Chicano environmentalists do not seem to polarize spirituality and politics as some ecofeminists do (Sanchez 1993, 207-28). Even the most secular leftist theorists and activists derive their passion for social and economic justice from a fundamental *belief*, for example, in people's equality. As a way of resolving these theoretical problems, I argue for a *materialist ecological feminism* that focuses on the social and material reasons for women's environmental concerns and activism, that integrates gender, race, and class in its analysis, and that has an integrated view of spiritual politics (Kirk 1994, 69-89; 1997b, 345-63). This is what I mean when I use the term "ecofeminism."

Ecofeminist Practices

Such a broad, integrative body of ideas does not translate into one particular political practice, but antimilitarist protests such as the Women's Pentagon Action in the United States in the early 1980s and the peace camp at Greenham Common in England are good examples of ecofeminism in action (Cook and Kirk 1983; King 1983b, 40-46; Kirk 1989, 263-80). These protests focused on militarism as central to the oppression of women and the destruction of the nonhuman world. Military organizations cause more ecological destruction than any other social institutions. They have massive budgets that might otherwise be used for socially useful programs, particularly those that support women and children who are the majority of the poor. The military generates a culture of

violence that manifests itself in everything from war toys to video games and films. It involves the construction of a "militarized masculinity" (Enloe 1993, 52), especially during basic training, that connects violence and sexuality, that sees rape as a weapon of war, and pornography and sexual servicing as an integral part of military culture. At root, the military organizations are sexist and racist institutions (Reardon 1985: Omolade 1989, 171-89). The Women's Pentagon Action Unity Statement (excerpts included below) exemplifies the feminist critique of militarization….

During the 1980s, many thousands of women in North America, western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand participated in nonviolent antimilitarist protests. They maintained an oppositional presence outside military bases and weapons manufacturing plants, sometimes blockading the gates to close down these facilities. At the U.S. Air Force base at Greenham Common in England, for example, women climbed over and cut down the fence as a way of saying that we should not separate ourselves from military policy, that what goes on inside military bases should be open to public scrutiny. These actions manifest a deep concern for a life-sustaining future by using political confrontation and public education. This (largely white) women's peace movement led some commentators to suggest that a new global movement was taking root, but it did not sustain its early growth (Kamel 1985, 1). Ebbs and flows of activity are characteristic of informal organizing, where each person chooses what form her involvement will take and where there are no paid staff. Such informal organization can also suffer from strong personalities, from leadership that is not accountable and therefore hard to challenge, and from personality conflicts.

Differences of political opinion probably cannot and should not be "processed" away. Many who were previously involved in women's peace groups saw the myriad connections between militarism and many other issues. Some moved on to become involved in rape crisis centers, domestic violence work, campaigns for reproductive rights, Central America solidarity work, and environmental projects and protests. The movement was also limited by its theoretical perspectives. Fundamental connections between militarism and the oppression of women were emphasized, but the significance of racism and class oppression received little attention Women of color critiqued these

antimilitarist movements as racist, and this issue ultimately divided both the Women's Pentagon Action and Greenham networks.

Current ecofeminist practices in the United States include long-term women's land projects (Cheney 1985), ecofeminist newsletters and study groups, and animal rights organizing. Some ecofeminist writers and researchers work with local and regional activist groups and contribute to national and international debates. Examples include feminist work on industrial and environmental health; critiques of reproductive technology and genetic engineering; critiques of environmental approaches to population control; the development of a women's agenda for the U.N. Conference on environment and Development in June 1992; and the promotion of economic development projects that serve women. (2) These projects draw on a variety of overlapping and somewhat disjointed frameworks and are not always explicitly defined as ecofeminist, especially in view of the problems associated with the term.

Those most affected by degraded physical environments in the United States are disproportionately women and children, particularly African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinas. Due to the gendered division of labor between home and work, women have a long-standing history of involvement in community organizing and urban politics—campaigning against bad housing conditions, high rents, unsafe streets, lead in gasoline, toxic dumps, and so on—and much urban environmental activism can be seen in this context (Cockburn 1977; McCourt 1977; Gilkes 1988; Krauss 1993). Sixty percent of the delegates to the First National People of Color Conference in October 1991 were women.

Many women first get involved in environmental activism because they become ill, or from the experience of caring for a sick relative, often a child. Women have persisted in raising questions and searching for plausible explanations for such illnesses. They have publicized their findings and taken on corporations and governmental agencies responsible for contamination (Zeff, Love, and Stults 1989; Pardo 1990; Krauss 1993; Gibbs 1995). In this process they are often ridiculed as "hysterical housewives" and their research trivialized as emotional and unscholarly. By contrast, Lin Nelson (1990, 172-87) honors this work as kitchen-table science.

The gap between much ecofeminist theorizing and women's grassroots activist has been significant, despite feminist aspirations to integrate theory and practice. Ecofeminists have often not taken into account the experiences and perspectives of many working-class women—Chicanas, Native Americans, and African Americans—working on ecological issues in the United States. Ecofeminism has been irrelevant for such activists. It is largely the preserve of writers and scholars, albeit often on the margins of the academy in precarious part-time or temporary positions. This leads to an "activism of scholarship" —by no means insignificant, as I suggested above—which does not often connect directly with the reality of life for many women organizing around environmental issues in their living and working spaces. Some ecofeminist writers and the editors of ecofeminist anthologies have attempted to bridge this gap by including a few articles by women of color, implying that these contributors subscribe to ecofeminist ideas. This appropriation maybe inadvertent, but it is thoughtless and unscholarly. Those of us who write and teach about ecofeminism need to remedy the class, race, and ethnic limitations of our perspectives so as to build authentic alliances that can cross race and class lines.

Chicano Environmental Struggles

As evidenced by the work in this anthology, the Chicano environmental movement involves the struggle for economic and environmental justice, a demand for healthful living and working conditions, increased democracy in local communities and workplaces, and the maintenance of traditional agricultural practices that link ecological and cultural survival. This movement is based in the rural communities of southern Colorado, northern New Mexico, and Texas, in urban centers in the Southwest and California, and along the border between the United States and Mexico. Its roots are in civil rights organizing, labor unions, land-grant movements, *acequia* organizations that maintain collective irrigation systems, social justice organizations, and liberation theology. Tactics include demonstrations and rallies, public education, research and monitoring of toxic sites, preparing and presenting expert testimony to government agencies such as water court or the Board of Mines, reclaiming land through direct action, and maintaining and teaching traditional agricultural practices. Particular

organizations draw on these different strands in various ways, depending on their membership, geographical location, and key concerns.

The conviction that ecological, economic, and cultural survival are inextricably intertwined is an underlying theme within this movement. I briefly discuss a number of organizations below as examples of the scope and focus of Chicano ecoactivism. Some of these are multiracial and multicultural organization, but Chicanos are very active in them.

Two multicultural coalitions comprised mainly of Chicanos, together with Native Americans and African Americans, are the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), based in Albuquerque, and the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ), based in Albuquerque and Austin. Key issues for both organizations include toxins in communities of color, clean air and water, and labor struggles. A women's union, Fuerza Unida (United Force) is involved in struggles against plant closings and relocations by Levi Strauss in San Antonio. The Southwest Organizing Project is active at local, regional, and national levels and has taken a leading role in confronting the major established U.S. environmental organizations (e.g., the National Audobon Society, National Wildlife Federation, The Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club, Greenpeace, Wilderness Society, and the Environmental Defense Fund) with environmental racism.

Along with SWOP, SNEEJ was a founding organization in the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, held in Washington, D.C., in October 1991. This organization is also involved with environmental problems in the U.S.-Mexico border area as a result of *maquiladoras*, industrial production through subcontractors to U.S.-based corporations, and broader questions of economic democracy and social justice (Peña 1997a). For example, economic conversion from military production is an explicit goal. Through its connections with the Texas Farm Workers Union, SNEEJ is concerned with farm workers' labor rights and campaigns against pesticides. Another important influence in SNEEJ comes from activists associated with Texas Center for Policy Studies, a left-liberal think tank that supports groups such as the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, an umbrella organization based in Austin and Brownsville that works on environmental and labor issues in the *maquiladoras*. The coalition provides technical assistance to *maquila* workers wanting to organize against

toxins and other hazards in the workplace. It actively monitors toxic waste discharged along the U.S.-Mexico border, and it pressures the Environmental Protection Agency and its Mexican counterpart, SEMARNAP (Secretary of Ecology, Oceans, and National Resources) for support.

Two local organizations in the Southwest concerned with the toxic waste impacts of industrial mining are Concerned Citizens of Questa (New Mexico), an all-male group comprised of local farmers, ranchers, educators, and residents opposed to the Molycorp mine; and the Costilla County Committee for Environmental Soundness (CES), based in San Luis, Colorado. The Committee for Environmental Soundness draws its membership from similar groups, as well as land-grant activists, business people, and clergy; it also has key participation by women. It opposes the expansion of the Battle Mountain Gold Mine and is active at state, regional, and national levels in leading opposition to the expansion of cyanide leach mining and milling in the Southwest (Peña and Gallegos 1993). Members of CES are involved in efforts to promote sustainable agriculture through producer cooperatives, to revive artisan crafts, and to advocate for ecologically sound land-use planning. Some activists are involved in efforts to keep land in agricultural use and to protect natural areas, especially the sensitive headwaters of the *acequia* network. More recently, Chicano farmers, *acequia* groups, and land-grant activists have developed ties with radical environmentalists. As discussed in Chapter 5, Chicano social justice activists in San Luis joined forces with Ancient Forest Rescue, Earth First! and Greenpeace ecoactivists to form the Culebra Coalition, a multiracial grassroots group involved in an antilogging campaign to protect the watersheds in land-grant communities of southern Colorado.(3)

Given the crucial importance of water as a political issue in the Southwest and in California, many Chicano environmentalists are involved in struggles to protect traditional water rights. Every watershed in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado has *acequia* associations that are directly involved in such struggles, but several regional organizations have emerged to focus on water rights. The Rio Grande Institute in Embudo, New Mexico, is a research organization made up of land-grant activists, researchers, and water lawyers, the majority of whom are Chicanos and Pueblo Indians. The institute advocates the protection of *acequia* water rights and clean water. The Water

Information Network, a mainly Native American and Chicano umbrella organization in New Mexico and the Greater San Juan Basin area, provides technical assistance to grassroots organizations such as *acequia* associations and other water users. It concentrates on the protection of water rights and clean water and on the control of, and resistance to, strip mining.

The Taos Valley Acequia Association (TVAA), like many other *acequia* organizations, works to protect indigenous water rights in the Upper Rio Grande watershed. Key issues here range from protection of water quality and quantity from the effects of development—condos in the Taos Ski Basin, for example—to discussion about the designation of the Rio Grande from the Colorado border to Taos as a national natural resource conservation area, an issue that pits the white-water rafting industry and other recreational users against farmer and ranchers. In San Luis, the Costilla County Conservancy District (CCCD) and it Acequia Advisory Board have played a major role in Colorado water politics, working against interbasin transfers or changes from agricultural to industrial and residential uses of water.

In California, Colorado, and Texas, many Chicanos are agricultural workers. A report of the University of California--Davis Pesticide Farm Safety Center Advisory panel noted that chemically dependent, industrialized, corporate agricultural production is as dangerous to workers' health as mining. (4) The United Farm Workers of America, based in northern California and founded by the late Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, veterans of the 1960s Chicano Movement, has negotiated collective bargaining agreements between farm workers and growers and has also initiated some successful experiments in cooperative production. Currently, a key organizing issue is pesticides, and long-standing boycotts of table grapes have pushed growers to agree to contracts that safeguard workers' health. (5)

Chicanos are also involved in urban struggles around environmental racism, especially in Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, and California. The Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO), based in Oakland with a regional office in Denver, is a multicultural community organization with a strong presence of Latinos and African Americans.(6) It focuses on toxic wastes and racial issues and in Denver has been active against the ASARCO medical-waste incinerator through Neighbors for a Toxic-Free

Community. In Oakland, CTWO is active against lead poisoning together with People United for a Better Oakland (PUEBLO). In Kettleman City, California, People for Clean Air and Water has opposed Waste Management, Inc., which planned to open a toxic waste processing and storage facility in the town. Local activists are predominantly Latino and African American residents—mainly women concerned with family health problems. Other members come from social justice organizations, especially CTWO in the nearby Bay Area. In Los Angeles, Chicanos have been active in numerous environmental justice campaigns through organizations such as the Labor/Community Strategy Center, Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles, and the Mothers of East Los Angeles (Hamilton 1993, 67-75; Pardo 1990, 1-7).

Also in an urban context, SWOP and SNEEJ have more recently led a grassroots social and environmental justice campaign against the Intel Corporation, which recently built one of the world's largest semiconductor plants in what was once a rural farming area north of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Activists from SWOP and SNEEJ have remained opposed to Intel's plans to mine the groundwater aquifer for use in its industrial productions processes. (7) They have also focused on problems related to environmental hazards as well as health and safety in the workplace and have worked with area native nations affected by the presence of the sprawling factory and subdivision developments.

Beyond antitoxin struggles in the cities and among farm workers, Chicano activists are involved in initiating and supporting ecologically sound economic development projects such as Ganados del Valle/Tierra Wools in the Tierra Amarilla land-grant area of northern New Mexico (discussed by Laura Pulido, chapter 4). This worker cooperative has raised large flocks of Churro sheep, well suited to local conditions. This hardy breed was nearly extinct as commercial ranchers favored other breeds. Ganados del Valle/Tierra Wools produces high quality, hand-woven woolen rugs and clothing, and organically produced lamb. The weavers design and undertake their own work, uniting mental and manual labor. This project seeks to integrate cultural revival and conservation, workplace democracy, and social justice. It also sponsors Pastores, a general store and meeting place that sells a wide variety of locally produced craftwork. (8) In Colorado's San Luis Valley, the Culebra Cooperative Growers organization is involved in promoting organic farming among Chicanos and in working

to increase the number of younger farmers and women farmers. Plans are afoot among co-op members to establish a Chicano farmer-to-farmer land-trust organization. This organization will acquire land for landless farmers and work to protect open space, farmland, and wildlife habitat from threats posed by extractive industries and subdivision developments.

Women play key roles in Chicano environmental organizing in urban and rural settings. Though many Chicano environmental and civil rights organizations have broad agendas, the women activists within these organizations are particularly involved in carrying forward feminist and environmental issues. Women hold influential positions on the coordinating committee of the Southwest Organizing Project, for example. They are predominant in people for Clear Air and Water (Kettleman City, California), Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles, and the Mothers of East Los Angeles. Women had leadership roles in the Taos Valley "condo wars," and they continue to be active in organizations such as CES, LRC, and CTWO in Denver. The weavers of Tierra Wools are women, and María Varela has played a key role in initiating this project.

In rural area, Chicanas work on family garden plots, planting, harvesting, and processing fruit and vegetables for home use. As ethnobotanists, some women know the backcountry in great detail because they go there at different seasons to gather herbs for medicinal purposes. *Curanderas*, traditional healers, continue to work with herbal remedies (Perrone, Stockel, and Kreuger 1989). They oppose the institutional framework of medicine and acquire their knowledge through female oral traditions. In Chicano bioregional narrative, women are the main storytellers.

Gender, then, is highly significant in Chicano environmentalism, but this is not a concept of gender separated from race and class perspectives. Chicana activists see their identity as women integrated with their ethnic identity. Race as compared to gender is just as much, if not more, a place of empowerment for them. Malia Davis's respondents, for example, struggle with the difficulties of being strong women in a male-dominated culture and sometime find themselves in conflict with their culture's traditional gender roles (See Davis, chapter 7). But such activists are not interested in separating themselves from the men of their community, and they frame their activism, as women, in class and race-conscious ways.

Ecofeminism and Chicano Environmental Struggles: Common Ground?

Despite the considerable differences in emphasis and approach suggested above, ecofeminists and Chicano environmental activists share crucial common ground. In this section, I will explore some of the commonalities in perspective and struggles before closing with some reflections on future prospects for cooperation across bridges of race, class, and gender.

Understanding the Economic Roots of Environmental Devastation

Many ecofeminists and Chicano environmental activists see environmental degradation as intrinsically related to the process of capital accumulation. The economic goal of profit entails great environmental damage with an all-too-familiar list of consequences, including, for example, air and water pollution, clear-cutting of timber, a loss of water in underground aquifers through the use of center-pivot irrigation systems, and the dereliction of inner-city areas. Environmental quality is often pitted against jobs by corporate employers, this on the argument that "cleaner" production processes are more costly. But toxic production methods are only part of the problem. An economy based on making a profit rather than meeting people's basic needs generates polluted environments, stress, and overcrowding as an integral part of its day-to-day operations. In rural areas traditional Chicano land-based culture is under pressure to assimilate into Anglo-American economic life and values, or become commodified through tourism, one of the few economic opportunities for Chicanos in the Southwest. (9)

Addressing Interlocking Structures of Domination

For ecofeminists, environmental degradation parallels the domination of "others" under patriarchal capitalism, particularly white women and people of color, as mentioned above. Chicano environmentalists also see environmental issues in the wider context of race, class, and cultural oppression. Many ecofeminists and Chicano ecojustice activists offer incisive critiques of mainstream environmentalism as exemplified by the Big Ten environmental organizations as well as Earth First! and other radical environmental

groups. Mainstream and radical approaches generally have remained blind to issues of gender, race, and class, and are often anti-urban. They appear to have no analysis of structures of dominance among people in capitalist, patriarchal societies. As its name implies, Earth First! is more interested in "saving the earth" than in safeguarding the human population. This biocentric view, which emphasizes the intricate ecological connections for the entire biosphere, has led to outrageous claims—for example, that if AIDS didn't exist, it would have had to be invented, or that starving people in Africa should be left to die so that the human population can be brought back into balance with the carrying capacity of the land (Miss Ann Thropy 1991).

Currently, right-wing politicians are using radical environmentalist rhetoric to oppose immigration into the United States and Europe; they argue that immigration is a drain on natural resources and increases pollution (Schapiro 1992, 6-7; Political Ecology Group 1996, 37-38). This biocentric view also prevails within the largely white bioregional movements, which emphasizes decentralization, agricultural and economics self-sufficiency within bioregions, and a strongly developed attachment to place (Sale 1989). Many ecofeminists and Chicano environmentalists are critical of this strand of bioregionalism. Bioregionalism is not specifically committed to women's liberation or to opposing racism, and it has no principles for dealing with social and economic inequality within a bioregion. The assumption is that decentralized, small-scale regional structures and a shift from a human-centered to a biocentered perspective will solve all our environmental problems. Without an explicit social ethics this seems highly unlikely.

Reinforcing Connections between People and Nature

Nature is not just something out there to be experienced on occasional backpacking trips to remote locations. At its worst, this separation of people and nature produces a "nature good, people bad" view of the world, where nature is seen in terms of a pastoral fantasy, a romance with a virgin, feminized wilderness—vulnerable, innocent, and weak—and where protecting her draws on old militaristic iconography (King 1987). Amongst many middle-class white environmentalists, wilderness is not thought of as the (home)land of indigenous peoples but as a place for city dwellers' leisure time enjoyment.

Both ecofeminists and Chicano environmentalists see people as intimately connected to the nonhuman world in the most profound, yet mundane way: through the water we drink, the air we breathe, the food we eat, and our own bodily processes. As embodied human beings, we are part of the continuum of life. To imply a separation between people and nonhuman nature is to deny the very real day-to-day connection with nature through our sensuous, lived experience. This denial is also poor politics. Rainforests do not vote or engage in political activism, people do; and people should not be condemned as irredeemable if they are to change environmentally damaging habits and the economic structures that produce them. The connection between people and nonhuman nature cannot be overemphasized, and it needs to be remade for many in industrialized countries, perhaps especially those who live in urban areas.

Challenging Institutionalized Science

Starting with the ground-breaking work of Rachel Carson (1962) on the environmental dangers of chemical pesticides, there is a wealth of academic work by U.S. feminist scientists and philosophers of science that challenges the alleged objectivity and neutral values of institutionalized science and its masculine biases in methodology, content, and purposes (e.g., Fausto-Sterling 1985; Fox Keller 1985; Harding 1986; Haraway 1989; Tuana 1989). Many ecofeminists and Chicano environmental activists see institutionalized science as a major contributor to ecological destruction, indeed to the "death of nature," as Carolyn Merchant (1980) put it; they offer trenchant critiques of models of development, science, and technology driven by an exploitative economy that puts profits before human needs. (10) Both perspectives are highly critical of the prevailing scientific approach which assumes that there will always be a "technical fix." In the context of Himalayan India Vandana Shiva (1988 and 1993b) writes of ethnoscience, compared to the institutionalized science introduced by British imperial power, and about how sustainable agricultural practices are learned and passed on by indigenous farmers from generation to generation. Joni Seager (1993, 194-198) emphasizes the importance of "home-collected information" concerning toxins, information pieced together by U.S. women.

These critiques raise important questions about what constitutes valid knowledge and who can claim expertise and authoritativeness, key points also in Chicano critiques of science. Ecofeminists and Chicano environmentalists need to define research goals that will be of value to them and to policy makers rather than posit abstract notions of scholarship supposedly uncontaminated by political concerns (Peña and Gallegos 1997). Such a cooperative undertaking requires contexts where working relationships among activists, researchers, and policy makers can develop and where students can learn this approach by observing it in practice. In addition, there need to be effective means for getting useful information out to ordinary people so that the knowledge is readily accessible. (11)

A Politics of Reconstruction

Ecofeminists and Chicano environmentalists share a concern for change. The goal of their struggles is not to pursue the liberal ideal of equal opportunity, an equal piece of a rotten carcinogenic pie (King 1987). Nor is it to buy "green" products, where the emphasis is still on consumption (Hynes 1991; Mies 1993). Instead, the goal is to transform relationships among people and between people and the nonhuman world, so that there is the possibility that our children's children will inherit a healthier planet. Ganados del Valle is just one exemplary … project. In discussing women's peace activism above, I emphasized protest and resistance; but while saying NO to destruction and violence, women were also saying YES to life-affirming, sustainable ways of living. These visions are often fragmentary, and they are usually worked out in small-scale projects that are beset by the contradictions of trying to create genuinely alternative models in the dominant economic and cultural context. Examples include community gardens, farmers' markets, cooperative organic farming, seed banks that safeguard genetic diversity, ecohousing, recycling centers, and renovated land and buildings, especially in blighted post-industrial cities. Such a vision of transformation requires a much broader definition of wealth, a definition that goes beyond material amenities to place value on health, physical energy, security, time, skill, creativity, love, community support, a connection to one's history and cultural heritage, and a sense of belonging to a place and time.

Integrating Race, Class, and Gender

As I suggested above, U.S. ecofeminists need to place more emphasis on integrating race, ethnicity, and class with our analysis of gender and ecology; we have much to learn from Chicana environmental activists in this regard. This anthology is an important educational resource for ecofeminists. We need to know more about organizing for environmental justice, about Chicano land ethics, the connections between ecological and cultural survival, and about ecologically sound economic development projects currently being pursued in the United States.

A Sense of Place

A "sense of place" is also an important concept that few ecofeminists address, perhaps because many of us live in urban areas, or are relatively mobile. Writing in the context of biocentered bioregionalism, Judith Plant (1990a, 1990b) is one of the few ecofeminists who focuses on home, a place that has often been seen as limiting, oppressive, and unsafe for women. Elsewhere in this volume, Devon Peña argues that by emphasizing lococentrism—identity tied to locality—rather than biocentrism, activists can perhaps begin to avoid some of the problems associated with more conventional varieties of bioregionalism. He states that Chicano bioregional narratives locate us in a moral space that is also the physical space where we live. This assumes a profound shared connection to a particular place and to the people and other species who jointly inhabit it; within the experience of such sharing, people can be relied upon to act ethically toward one another as well as live in environmentally sound ways.

For people who have lived and farmed in one area for many generations, such as Chicano families in San Luis and Tierra Amarilla, or for extremely tight-knit urban neighborhoods, lococentrism may make sense. But this reformulation raises a number of questions. How do you learn this place-centered morality? Do you have to be born into it? City dwellers have little direct control over major environmental issues—where their water comes from, how it is used, whether it is polluted and by whom, where their food comes from, how it is produced, who their neighbors are, and so on. The exigencies of the job market mean that many people in the United States move several times in their

adult lives. For many city dwellers there is little sense of connection to the land, which may be polluted by lead another other heavy meals or covered in asphalt. There is often little sense of the history of any given place. How does one develop this kind of lococentric consciousness as a city resident, as a newcomer to a particular area, as someone who either chooses or is forced to move regularly? How can one guarantee that this lococenteredness does not become xenophobic, homophobic, racist, or sexist? On the other hand, how do those who already have a "sense of place" learn to understand those who leave rural communities such as San Luis, especially young people, for what they perceive to be greater freedom and opportunities of urban life?

A sense of place needs to become a much wider concept that encompasses a sense of being connected to the whole planet so that I am not tempted to respect my place at the expense of yours, which gets back to the divisions of "not-in-my-backyard" thinking. I am not convinced that lococenteredness necessarily comes with a guarantee of social ethics any more than biocenteredness does.

Sexism as a Key Mechanism of Oppression

Ecofeminists can offer Chicano environmental activists an understanding of how the domination of nature is linked to the domination of women, and how sexism is a key mechanism of oppression with parallels to racial and class oppression. Understanding the parallels means seeing women's liberation as an integral part of creating a sustainable future, a point very often missing from Chicano environmental perspectives to date. Women of color often comment that white women conveniently ignore our privilege as white while emphasizing our oppression as women. To build bridges across gender and race for white feminists means understanding that we cannot separate race and ethnicity from gender. We have to make alliances with Chicanas and Chicanos, and in the process we may have to deal with what we consider to be sexist assumptions and behavior.

Ecofeminists and Chicano environmentalists can build on common ground in many practical ways. Ecofeminists need to consider how to support Chicano struggles against incinerators and toxic waste dumps, or against hazardous work conditions, whether in factories or on farms. They also need to support Chicano organic farming methods and ecologically sound development projects in inner cities and rural areas. It is

important to make a distinction between a politics of solidarity, implying support for others in struggle, and a politics of engagement where we are struggling together—the "subversive kin" of this anthology—and hopefully becoming part of a wider, oppositional politics.

Subversive Kin: Toward a Wider Movement for Environmental Justice

I have argued elsewhere that a wider movement for environmental justice needs alliances between ecofeminists and environmental justice activists (Kirk 1997a). For such collaboration to take place, people need to have some basis for knowing one another, some shared stake in the community, and the prospect for developing trust despite differences in culture, ethnicity, and class. Such a coming together requires projects where people can work together as well as the development of a shared political culture and language, with a key role for individuals whose experiences and connections enable them to cross lines of gender, race, ethnicity, and class.

One possible setting for such alliances may be through Women's Studies and Chicano Studies programs, with their origins in the women's liberation and Chicano movements of the 1960s and 1970s. These programs focus on the lived experiences of women and Chicanos respectively, through interdisciplinary studies that draw from literature, history, language, art, the natural and social sciences, religion and law, They have generated a growing literature and are often on the cutting edge of academic disciplines, especially in the humanities and social sciences, though their significance is often not accepted by established white male scholars. These programs offer critiques of current curriculum and pedagogy as well as evaluations of what constitutes valid scholarship and knowledge. Indeed, they repudiate the division between scholarship and activism that generally exists in academia. These programs, therefore, share a marginalized status and are most often poorly funded. They are under continual pressure to conform to traditional ways of teaching (even though the traditional ways are often the least effective for student learning) and to turn out scholarly work that is judged by very limited criteria.

I believe these pressures are designed to separate Women's Studies and Chicano Studies from their underlying social movements, that being the price of access to the

academy (hooks 1992). I argue for a closer collaboration between these programs as a means of strengthening both and becoming an important alliance in an academic world that deals with multicultural education, for the most part, in highly token ways. By contrast, women of color have challenged Women's Studies programs to look at women's experiences from an integrated perspective that includes race, class, and gender, and to honor both the crucial differences among women and the things they hold in common. The work of Chicana scholars, writers, and activists provides an important bridge, as both Women's and Chicano Studies continue to redefine relevant notions of activist scholarship.

Issues such as environmental health, food production and making cities livable are just three examples of environmental concerns that affect many people across lines of race, class, and gender. Pesticide poisoning of Chicano farm workers, for example, should also be the concern of consumers who are buying contaminated produce. Middle-class mothers were responsible for getting the pesticide Alar banned in the United States in the late 1980s because it damages children's health, but they demonstrated no apparent awareness or concern for the health of farm workers who had been exposed to it in their work (Mott and Snyder 1987; Garland 1989). Buying organically grown produce is an option for some people, thought the produce is usually more expensive and not always widely available. But this sidesteps the issue of farm workers' health. Much more needs to be done to build alliances between farm workers and consumer groups. An example might be campaigns to improve conditions for farm workers, support for farmers' markets and producer/consumer cooperatives, and increase public education concerning the dangers of pesticides. Many ecofeminists are interested in holistic health based on a wholesome diet and the use of herbal remedies. Few of us were taught the medicinal properties of plants as we grew up, and we need to learn this lost information (Potts 1988).

Another environmental concern is the pollution of the Rio Grande by *maquiladora* factories along the U.S.-Mexico border. The global economy is structured so that transnational corporations exploit favorable production conditions in third-world countries with a fraction of the labor costs they would incur in the United States or Western Europe, and without stringent environmental restrictions. Mexico is in a unique

position in this regard, because it shares a border with United States. Little explicit ecofeminist work has been done on this in the United States, but feminists in Mexico have been working through the Centro de Orientación de la Mujer Obrera (Center for the Orientation of Women Workers), the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, and the Centro del Obrero Fronterizo (Center for the Border Worker). There is great potential for collaboration among ecofeminists, *maquila* workers, labor activists, and Chicano environmentalists. (12)

Ecofeminists and Chicano environmental activists have crucial experiences and insights to bring to a broader movement for environmental justice. As subversive kin, we need to create an oppositional politics in the United States that radically challenges white-dominated, patriarchal, global capitalism and includes agenda and strategies for change to bring about sustainable living.

UNITY STATEMENT OF THE WOMEN'S PENTAGON ACTION (ABRIDGED) (13)

We are gathering at the Pentagon on November 16 because we fear for our lives. We fear for the life of this planet, our Earth, and the life of our children who are our human future.

We are mostly women who come from the northeastern region of our United States. We are city women who know the wreckage and fear of city streets, we are country women who grieve the loss of the small farm and have lived on the poisoned earth. We are young and older, we are married, single, lesbian. We live in different kinds of households: in groups, families, alone; some are single parents.

We work at a variety of jobs. We are students, teachers, factory workers, office workers, lawyers, farmers, doctors, builders, waitresses, weavers, poets, engineers, homeworkers, electricians, artists, blacksmiths. We are all daughters and sisters.

We have come here to mourn and rage and defy the Pentagon because it is the workplace of the imperial power that threatens us all….

The very same men, the same legislative committees that offer trillions of dollars to the Pentagon, have brutally cut day care, children's lunches, battered women's

shelters. The same men have concocted the Family Protection Act, which will mandate the strictly patriarchal family and thrust federal authority into our home life. They are preventing the passage of ERA's simple statement and supporting the Human Life Amendment, which will deprive all women of choice and many women of life itself.

We are in the hands of men whose power and wealth have separated them from the reality of daily life and from the imagination. We are right to be afraid.

At the same time our cities are in ruins, bankrupt; they suffer the devastation of war. Hospitals are closed, our schools deprived of books and teachers. Our Black and Latino youth are without decent work. They will be forced, drafted to become the cannon fodder for the very power that oppresses them. Whatever help the poor receive is cut or withdrawn to feed the Pentagon which needs about $500,000,000 a day for its murderous health. It extracted $157 billion last year from our own tax money, $1,800 from a family of four.

With this wealth our scientists are corrupted; more than 40% work in government and corporate laboratories that refine the methods for destroying or deforming life. The lands of the Native American people have been turned into radioactive rubble in order to enlarge the nuclear warehouse. The uranium of South Africa, necessary to the nuclear enterprise, enriches the white minority and encourages the vicious system of racist oppression and war….

We women are gathering because life on the precipice is intolerable. We want to know what anger in these men, what fear, which can only be satisfied by destruction, what coldness of heart and ambition drives their days.

What is it that we women need for our ordinary lives, that we want for ourselves and also for our sisters in the new nations and old colonies who suffer the white man's exploitation and too often the oppression of their own countrymen?

We want enough good food, decent housing, communities with clean air and water, good care for our children while we work. We want work that is useful to a sensible society….

We want health care which respects and understands out bodies….

We want education for children which tells the true story of our women's lives, which describes the earth as our home to be cherished, to be fed as well as harvested.

We want to be free from violence in our streets and in our houses. One in every three of us will be raped in her lifetime….

We want the right to have or not to have children—we do not want gangs of politicians and medical men to say we must be sterilized for the country's good. We know that this technique is the racists' method for controlling populations….

We do not want to be drafted into the army. We do not want our young brothers drafted. We want them to be equal with us.

We want to se the pathology of racism ended in our time. It has been the imperial arrogance of white male power that has separated us from the suffering and wisdom of our sisters in Asia, Africa, South America and in our on country. Many North American women look down on the minority nearest them: the Black, the Hispanic, the Jew, the Native American, the Asian, the immigrant. Racism has offered them privilege and convenience; they often fail to see that they themselves have bent to the unnatural authority and violence of men in government, at work, at home. Privilege does not increase knowledge or spirit or understanding. There can be no peace while one race dominates another, one people, one nation, one sex despises another.

We must not forget the tens of thousands of American women who live much of their lives in cages, away from family, lovers, all the growing-up years of their children. Most of them were born at the intersection of oppressions: people of color, female, poor. Women on the outside have been taught to fear those sisters. We refuse that separation. We need each other's knowledge and anger in our common struggle against the builders of jails and bombs.

We want the uranium left in the earth and the earth given back to the people who tilled it. We want a system of energy which is renewable, which does not take resources out of the earth without returning them. We want those systems to belong to the people and their communities, not to the giant corporations which invariably turn knowledge into weaponry….

We want an end to the arms race. No more bombs. No more amazing inventions for death.

We understand all is connectedness. We know the life and work of animals and plants in seeding, reseeding and in fact simply inhabiting this planet. Their exploitation

and the organized destruction of never-to-be-seen-again species threatens and sorrows us. The earth nourishes us as we with our bodies will eventually feed it. Through us, our mothers connected the human past to the human future.

With that sense, that ecological right, we oppose the financial connections between the Pentagon and the multinational corporations and banks that the Pentagon serves. Those connections are made of gold and oil. We are made of blood and bone, we are made of the sweet and finite resource, water. We will not allow these violent games to continue. If we are here in our stubborn thousands today, we will certainly return in the hundreds of thousands in the months and years to come.

We know there is a healthy, sensible, loving way to live and we intend to live that way in our neighborhoods and our farms in these United States, and among our sisters and brothers in all the countries of the world.

Notes (updated 2006)

1. This paragraph is based on the introduction to *What Is Ecofeminism*? a pamphlet consisting of Ynestra King's early essays, edited by Gwyn Kirk, and published privately in 1990.

2. See The National Women's Health Network: www.nwhn.org
Committee on Women, Population and Environment: www.cwpe.org
Women's Environment and Development Organization: www.wedo.org
WEDO distributed *Women's Action Agenda 21*, finalized at the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet, November 1991. For the promotion of economic development projects that serve women, see Dankleman and Davidson 1988; Leonard 1989; and Rodda 1990.

3. On the antilogging struggle in San Luis, see Brooke 1997, and Peña and Mondragon Valdéz 1998.

4. The UC-Davis study was available from Migrant Legal Action Program, Washington D.C.; see www.mlap.org

5. See Pulido 1996 for a study of the early pesticides campaign among farmworkers in California.

6. Center for Third World Organizing, 1218 East 21st. St, Oakland, CA 94606; www.ctwo.org

7. SWOP and SNEEJ published a comprehensive study of the Intel struggle, *Intel inside New Mexico: A Case Study of Environmental and Economic Injustice*. See Southwest Organizing Project 1995.

8. For more on Ganados del Valle and Tierra Wools: Los Ojos Handweavers, see Jackson 1991; Sargent, Lusk, Rivera, and Varela 1991; S. Peña 1992; and Pulido 1993, 1996. Also see www.handweavers.com

9. The distinction between urban and rural is not always meaningful. Both are the terrain of capitalist economics, and both are affected in various ways by industrialization.

10. Also see Pena 1997a (chapters 6-7) for a more recent third-world, ecofeminist critique of science and technology.

11. Good examples are *Everyone's Backyard,* a magazine produced by the Center for Health, Environment and Justice (formerly Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes); also *Science for the People*.

12. On *maquila* workers' struggles in the workplace and the community, see Peña 1997a.

13. First published in 1980.

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