I. Ecofeminist Roots

Although it hardly seems likely in a decade characterized by an overwhelming assault on the gains of the feminist movement in television, print media, education, and the workplace, the 1980s marked the birth and coming of age of ecofeminism in the United States. The decade was bookended by two events that signify the direction and development of ecofeminism: on one end was the April 1980 conference "Women and Life on Earth: Eco-Feminism in the '80s," followed in seven months by the Women's Pentagon Action in November; on the other end was the publication of the first North American ecofeminist anthology, Judith Plant's *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*,[1] and the formation in June 1989 of the Ecofeminist Caucus of the National Women's Studies Association. Between these two events was the process of a movement becoming self-conscious, naming itself, and distinguishing its views from its parent movements like any rebellious offspring. But by the end of the decade what had begun as a movement anchored in both activism and education seemed to be caught midstride, as more energy was spent on articulating and refining a theory that could provide the foundations or communicate the intentions and implications of that activism.[2] One of my intentions here, and throughout this book, is to examine how and why ecofeminism as a movement has faltered and to speculate about what might get it moving again.

During the eighties, the definition of ecofeminism had multiple meanings, as women from various backgrounds and affiliations used the word to describe their own activities and beliefs. Although outsiders could discern an ecofeminist

commitment to both feminism and ecology, based on the belief that these two systems were somehow connected, the character of that connection was explained in widely various ways: Did it mean women were somehow "closer" to nature—and if so, what were the implications for men? Did it mean women and nature had experienced similar treatment under patriarchal systems? Or did it mean women who were active in both feminist and environmental movements now had a name for their dual involvements? Through the dialogue among ecofeminists addressing each of these questions, the several branches of ecofeminist thought developed. Ecofeminism has been a theory-in-process for nearly twenty years, and it is only in the mid-1990s that theorists are beginning to name the various branches of ecofeminist thought. During that developmental process, ecofeminists have been plagued by philosophers and political theorists who call the theory "internally contradictory" or "incoherent," demanding that we make up our minds on its singular definition and create a set of universal rules (a tactic antithetical to ecofeminism), or worse yet, creating taxonomies of ecofeminism and organizing our thoughts for us, without invitation. External assaults were often mirrored as internal debates, and in some cases ideological differences among ecofeminists tore at the movement, leading some people to disassociate themselves from it entirely.

What's in a Name?

Probably the most serious difficulty attending any discussion of ecofeminism is deciding whom to include: if scholars or activists do not claim the term "ecofeminism" to describe themselves or their work, is it accurate, respectful, or responsible for ecofeminists to include such people nonetheless? Many of the early texts that laid the foundation for ecofeminism—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)[1]—did not use the term "ecofeminist" to describe their approach, and yet these books are regularly named and even discussed at length as "early ecofeminist works" by some scholars. Because some of these writers later embraced the term "ecofeminism," such discussions, though anachronistic, may not be inherently problematic.

The problem becomes more noticeable when such naming is used to refer to the activism of those who have not claimed the term—and to name their activism as an articulation of ecofeminism. Because every action articulates a

theory, however simple or complex, naming the activism of others in a way that they have not effectively puts words in their mouths; contradicts, silences, or erases their activist speech; and colonizes or appropriates their labor for the use of others. The problem becomes obvious, finally, when one realizes that the naming and appropriation is taking place across the lines of race, class, or nationality: that is, the activism most likely to be named as exemplifying ecofeminism is the activism of women or communities of color (i.e., the environmental justice movement), working-class or poor women (i.e., the antitoxics movement), or women in the third world (i.e., the chipko movement)—and those most likely to engage in such naming tend to be white, middle-class academic women in industrialized nations.

This same problem is very much at work in the "origin stories" of ecofeminism. In 1988, an article in *Studies in the Humanities* attributed the creation of the word "ecofeminism" to a French writer, Françoise d'Eaubonne, and her 1974 publication *Le féminisme ou la mort*.[4] From that point forward, many writers cited this attribution without verification, and the cumulative force of so many citations angered some and puzzled others, who felt certain they had learned the term elsewhere. In a 1991 review published in *Hypatia*, Ariel Salleh was the first writer to challenge the attribution in print, asserting that "the term 'ecofeminism' [appeared] spontaneously . . . across several continents during the 1970s" and that d'Eaubonne's 1974 text was not translated into English until fifteen years after its initial publication.[5] Some ecofeminists, perhaps anticipating this charge, had claimed that the substance of d'Eaubonne's argument was found in translation, excerpted in Elaine Marks and Isabelle deCourtivron's anthology *New French Feminisms*—but even if this is the case, the word "ecofeminism" still did not appear in the excerpted text.[6] Others, such as Carol Adams, claim they had learned the term "ecofeminism" from Mary Daly, whose work *Gyn/Ecology* had used it in 1978 and whose classes included a study of Françoise d'Eaubonne's text in its original language.[7] What none of these defenses of d'Eaubonne addresses is the different political implications of attributing the origin of the term (and, by implication, the movement and the ideas behind it) to a lone, white, first world scholar—or to the "spontaneous combustion" of many women around the globe.

Salleh comes closest to this speculation, when she observes that, "for politico-economic reasons, . . . ecofeminists working from more visible niches in the dominant English-speaking culture have tended to get their views broadcast first—even feminism is touched by its imperialist context."[8] It would seem that the dispute over the lineage of "ecofeminism" has been to some extent a

class war over whether the idea was born from a single woman laboring alone in the library or from many women laboring in the forests, the military bases, and the nuclear power plants. For ecofeminists who want to open up the movement in such a way that activists themselves will claim the term, a more populist origin for the word would seem to have better strategic appeal. Fortunately, it's also true.

In the United States, it seems, the term "ecofeminism"—both the concept and the movement—formally originated at the Institute for Social Ecology, where it was used as the title of summer courses offered there by Ynestra King, who notes:

> At the time that I wrote "Feminism and the Revolt of Nature" and began thinking about the relationship between these things, "ecofeminism" was a term that I came up with. It's sort of an obvious term, in a way; when you put these things together, that's the word that makes sense, that comes up to talk about them. I understood later that Françoise d'Eaubonne in France had also used this term, "ecofeminism," and Mary Daly came out with *Gyn/Ecology* in which she used the term "ecofeminism" as well, right around the same time.[9]

Throughout the eighties, many women thought they had invented the word "ecofeminism" themselves, to describe their activism and their way of thinking. Others who heard the word for the first time immediately recognized it as having deep resonance with their beliefs and values. Charlene Spretnak explains: "After the ecofeminist conference at USC in 1987, when *Ms.* had just a little write-up about it, they got all these letters saying, 'I've never heard of this, but I know this is for me.' 'Ecofeminism—yes! This is what I do in my community. I'm an ecofeminist.' It was just an amazing response. . . . The word had a lot of power to the people who heard it, because they had already thought through this connection."[10]

What is clear is that "ecofeminism" was not the brainchild of a single identifiable woman. The movement can trace its roots to the work of Rachel Carson, whose research on the effects of pesticides on lakes and birds was assailed by the chemical industry and whose own premature death from breast cancer foretold the entirely unromantic links connecting women, animals, and nature, links it would take ecofeminists thirty more years to uncover. The work of women gardeners (Bernadette Cozart, Mattie Davenport, Kate Sessions, Celia Thaxter) and illustrators (Grace Albee, Lucy Say, Deborah Passmore), the sto-

ries of Native American women (Paula Gunn Allen, Leslie Marmon Silko, Pauline Johnson) and African-American women (Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker), even the literary tradition of women regionalist and revolutionary writers (Sarah Orne Jewett, Willa Cather, Mary Austin, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Meridel Le Seuer) all created a climate and a tradition that can be claimed as foundational to ecofeminism.[11] More immediately, however, ecofeminists themselves have named the paths that drew them to an expanded vision of the functioning of oppression and the need to liberate woman and nature simultaneously.

A Geography of Ecofeminisms

The idea for illustrating the various ecofeminisms came to me one summer in Wyoming, as I watched the late afternoon sun fall behind the Grand Tetons, casting their shadows across Jackson Lake. Although it was August, I could see glacier packs on the high slopes and from them could trace the paths the snowmelt might take as it poured into the lake. From my position on the land, I could see various trails that led toward the lake, both from the field around it and down from the mountains themselves. In the lake were several islands, and though I couldn't see them from where I stood, the map showed there were a few creeks feeding the lake on the north end and several possible outflows to the east and south. Figure 1 (p. 16) took shape for me from that landscape.

Women have arrived at ecofeminist insights through a variety of paths and perspectives. In this drawing, I have depicted the various paths of activism leading to the lake of ecofeminism as peace and antinuclear activism, feminist spirituality, animal liberation, environmentalism, and antitoxics work. Next to the paths leading to ecofeminism, I have taken care to draw some dry streambeds. These lines represent the paths that might have led torrents of feminists to ecofeminism but that never drew more than a trickle—the streams of labor activism, civil rights activism, and the movement for gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender (GLBT) liberation. Why didn't activists from these three movements feel drawn to ecofeminism?

For GLBT and civil rights activists, the immediate issues of human rights (i.e., fighting discrimination in employment and housing, combating violence, challenging oppressive legislation) have demanded tremendous efforts in mounting educational campaigns, drafting legislation, and building community—basic issues of survival and well-being that take precedence over all else.

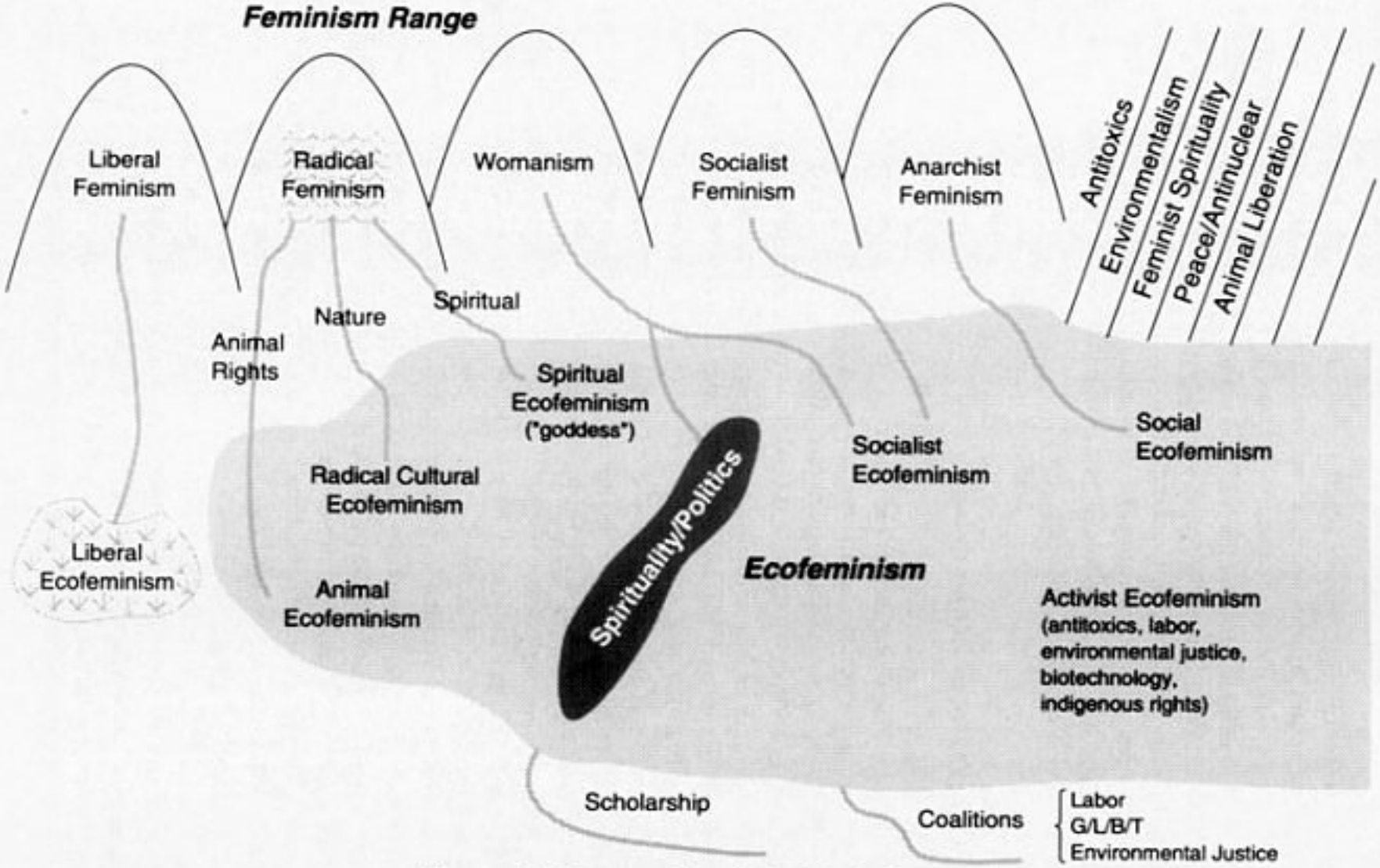

Figure 1: Geography of Ecofeminisms