

Women and the climate crisis: **- Is Ecofeminism part of the climate solution?**

*The month of May 2019 was the warmest ever in humanities history.
The melting of Greenland's glaciers' has never been so fast as the past summer.
In one day August 1st no less than 12,5 billion tons of water came from there in only one day. Simultaneously the worst forest fires are occurring even on Greenland!
I do not dare to think what will be the outcome of the summer in front of us...
The collective of researchers says we do have a **climate emergency** and we need to act NOW.*

The current climate crisis is nothing less than the final point of a age old petro-masculine mentality where all environmental issues have aggregated since industrialisation begun.
Let me explain!

My ideology, the lens through which I perceive all this – is **ecofeminism**.
Ecofeminism is not a dogma and doesn't claim to take over other views.
It is a way of looking at things happening, an approach and an analysis of power.
It is not restricted to what only women are or have been prone to. The use of "women" and feminism is purely historically based, not biological. No single man in this room needs to take what I now is going to say personally!

On the contrary ecofeminism says that the ultimate patriarchy destroys both men, women, children, animals, whole societies, our vulnerable democracy, the living Nature and all healthy environments. As well as the relations among all these actors.
Ultimately it has now reached the whole climate.

This has put us in a situation where water/rain does not come at all, or if it comes, it is on the wrong places, in the wrong amount or on the wrong times.
Those who have been seeing this and acting most strongly locally against it, happens not seldom to be - women.

Violence and suppression in all forms is needless to say, still a reality for so many women along the world.

Ecofeminism claims that through history women have been naturalised and nature feminised. Both areas have all through history been controlled and dominated by a patriarchal society. Still today countries most hostile to women often happen to simultaneously be the most conflict struck, most oil dependent, arid, with least level of education and most environmentally destroyed
Men in those settings usually *own* the land and women works for them *on* it, to put it very shortly. Oxfam has found that men globally owns 50% more than women and the world 22 richest men owns more together than all women in Africa..

And every year some hundred environmentalists are deliberately killed in the world upon orders from mining companies, oligarchs and security companies, most of them females. 2016 the Honduran environmentalist and leader of indigenous people, Berta Caceres and all her sister friends was brutally killed.

Brazil, as we heard of earlier this morning, has long time been counted as one of the most dangerous countries in the world for women to live in. President Bolsonaro not only openly defies all efforts to save the Amazonas, but also prompt counteracts what he calls "genus ideology" as well as the rights for indigenous people. The situation hurts especially the indigenous women and they have to endure threats and exclusion as well as physical violence.

In 2015, 41-year-old Brazilian woman Maria Leonice Tupari formed the network AGIR (*Association of Warrior Women of Rondônia*), an organisation that brings together 54 ethnic groups from the rainforest districts. She says that the movement was created with the aim of giving women a voice, not only within their communities but also at municipal, regional, national and even international level.

"We no longer wanted to be left out of decision-making regarding our territories. Our representatives never invited us."

These women have gained strength: more than 1000 women from over 27 various Brazil territories now take part in decision making and shows up at meetings where they are not primarily invited. Male chauvinistic attitudes remain, and women are often still seen as a threat, but certain breakthroughs are already visible.

"We are not a threat. What we want is to advance together," says Leonice.

Decisions that concerns land use, access to health care, food safety and small scale enterprise for handicrafts.

"All of us, men and women alike, greatly suffer the impacts of the mining and forestry industries on the indigenous territories. But we as women are even more affected because most of the time it is the men who make the decisions and don't always inform us of what is going on, and by the time we find out, the repercussions are already there.

For instance, there is the issue of prostitution within the communities and the destruction of the forest has had an impact on women earning their living through handicraft, as they are finding it increasingly difficult to source the materials they require from the deforested areas. The rivers are contaminated and we are also the ones who go out to fetch the water. Violence is also on the rise as gold panning usually leads to alcohol and drug consumption, which in turn gives rise to violence against women."

Why do I talk so much about this?

Because in these few quotas we catch a number of social implications that concerns Women, Nature, Climate and Democracy simultaneously and equally, and reveals how it all sticks so tightly together.

The men in the area do not suffer as much, since they are in charge and they also actively exclude women from having a say. The whole global climate suffers from deforestation of Amazonas as we have already learned this morning. This is all as historic as ever, but the environmental and climate impacts are relatively new on the scene.

This AGIR network is not an odd or exclusive thing, but only one randomly selected example of how women continuously and for decades have been acting, analysing and talking stance for equality, environment as well as for democratic and social justice.

In one blow.

This synthesis is exactly what ECOFEMINISM stands for. It is in itself basically a **social, civil society** movement and it aims for caretaking and acts spontaneously for sustainability for all living beings. Also for men.

Right NOW my personal trust in parliamentary ways of global change to combat climate change is considerably lowered.

First and foremost because democracy in these past ten years has been worldwide eroding, and are not more growing as when I was younger.

Fascist, nationalist and even racist and conservative regimes such as Bolsonaro's are worldwide gaining power in too many countries too rapidly.

As active for more than 30 years in Swedish politics at all levels I have seen a big change even in Swedish overall politics in the past ten years. From being proud of our collective achievements in many relevant areas and not least my own party's contributions, I today doubt if politics and those formal structures we have built alone can help counteracting the Climate change at all.

Why?

Especially after the big UN climate meeting here in Copenhagen in 2009, I lost much of my previous faith in what politicians can achieve: A total fiasco for the whole world to watch, where elected people intentionally spoiled the future for us all.

I still have hope for democracy, though, but I also notice how extremely dependent these collective formal channels for decision making are, to both the pressure from the **civil society** and how sensitive to **opinion makers** they are.

What happened between the 2009 fiasco and the 2015 Paris-agreement, is namely that the public opinion for combatting climate change has risen considerably and mainstream media has finally been fully alerted.

And then our Greta happened. One devoted free young person. Her shivering words in the UN assembly will be long time remembered: "*your fairy tales of eternal economic growth*"

Positive on the EU level are two recent things:

that the investment bank of EU, EIB

now actually have stopped all investments in fossil industries - that is huge!

From over 13 billion Euros last year to zero!

And that EU has proclaimed a **climate emergency!**

Hopefully this headline will be filled with numerous effective measures as well...

On the UN level, I must admit that the **global Paris agreement on climate from 2015** was a historical global milestone. If not a total success, it was at least a huge step forward! We now FINALLY got a plan with goals for the world to follow!!

At home, my Green party since 30 years: Swedish *Miljöpartiet*, struggled for many years to alert the country for the climate threat, but since ten years it has been putting more energy to reach formal legitimized governmental power. And when it finally reached it in 2010 - partly failed, partly gained.

Losses as I see it, are that the party's own profile as a **peoples movement** has gradually deteriorated, but to the political green victories we have achieved are clearly that our parliament 2017 accepted a major **Climate framework** for the country, consisting of **climate goals**, a **climate law** and a **climate advisory council**. Not later than 2045 Sweden shall not emit any Green house gases to the at all.

The full list of political gain would look something like this:

- Lessened CO2 emissions through state support program for municipalities
- Regulation for less forest area to be cut down
- More funds to natural reserves and national parks
- Restructuring of marshlands
- Program for saving of bees
- Funds for environmental supervision at relevant authorities
- Protection of scarce types of biotopes
- Increased funds for protecting the Baltic sea
- Funds for safeguarding water sources
- New programme for cleaner cities
- Climate records for new building of houses
- Funds for helping industries to get more climate smart
- Charge stations for electric cars
- More biogas filling stations
- New support for electrifying trucks, machines, tractors
- Bonus for buying environmental friendly car
- More train connections all over the country
- Night trains to Europe plus more daily connections to European capitals
- More commodities being sent by ship, than on trucks
- Subsidies for installation of private solar cells
- Tax on plastic bags
- Tax on burning waste

But for our four green ministers sitting in a coalition government, which also relies on two other external liberal parties on crucial questions, substantially hampers their range of freedom. For example this week I searched for a clear stance against the oil company *Preem* from our government including the greens. Question is if they now will give their consent for *Preem* to open a mega size oil refinery in Lysekil on the west coast. If it will be granted, my country's contribution to GHG-emissions would *rise* with 3 % and *Preemraff* will become Sweden's largest single climate polluter entity.

There in Lysekil the civil society are at place with demonstrations. Their main parole is: "NO CLIMATE CHANGE –BUT SYSTEM CHANGE!"

On the EU level I lack many things, along side with Sweden. One example:
Every fourth person in Africa still goes hungry, whatever achievements the former UN Millennium goals of halved global hunger ever reached.
But Sweden and EU are both sending contributions to develop projects for *Bayer Monsanto* and *Chem China-Syngenta* there. Promoting their agrobusiness monopoly of hybrid seeds and crops that requires specifically their pesticides and synthetic fertilizers!
These companies are destroying all of self-sufficiency in the local settings, makes the small farmers drown in debts and more over – destroying the fertile soil and hence survival for many generations to come.

From Iraq, Iran to Lebanon and Sudan, from Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia to Chile, and in many other parts, people are on the streets against neoliberal reforms, authoritarian regimes and exploitation of humans and nature. This shows, that the current economic and social system, one of the main causes of climate change, is currently questioned by a big part of societies, especially in the Global South.

Conclusions:

Established political power structures are too weak on climate, even in democratic countries and even in north Europe! And even with partly good intentions.

But the commercial world on the other hand is still strong and still overwhelmingly rich, and mostly do not act at all for the best of us all.

As Vandana Shiva, the Indian super ecofeminist puts it:

“One big problem is that we have been giving big companies a lot of rights but no obligations”

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Commercial companies are nevertheless not totally hopeless or ignorant, at least not all of them:

Some of them sees the future economic benefits by starting to supply us with environmental and climate friendly products and services, as an act of mere capitalistic intelligence.

Some few have even genuine ambitions for climate and environment, such as the Norwegian company that claimed to have found a way to melt down all kinds of plastic waste to one workable mass for recycling.

Nevertheless nor “Green capitalism” in the sense of state sanctioned and promoted green washing, nor totally unleashed capitalism with its “Market solutions”, provides any solutions at all to the total ecosystem and climate disaster that is just around the corner.

Conclusion: private enterprise can never bear that responsibility of fighting climate change. They may though be allowed to make their contribution within frames and even be supported with sanctions or subsidies if their production helps us to overcome thresholds, if it is necessary for the public good.

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My *main* answer to the question asked for at this conference will therefor be

- **System change now!**

And my preferred system changers would be

1: decentralised ownership of energy sources such as biogas plants, small scale solar and Wind power plants

2: reduction of normal weekly working hours

3: Biggest social change of all, though, would be full gender equality.

But the *endurable* system changers always come from below. From civil societies' claims. Only from there can the formal politicians be pushed and thereafter by them - the mighty corporations.

I am nowadays totally convinced that Civil movements will prove to be the ones taking the lead in combating climate change!

This puts back a lot of responsibility on ordinary, private, civil people.

For mobilising, for life style change, for claiming their direct influence on decisions.

Just like Maria Leonida in Amazonas and Berta Cáceres in Honduras did.

Changing life style also means taking back basic production. At home as well as in factories. Reduce consumerism. Do you remember that *the World Overshoot day* in 2019 occurred on the 29:e July? On that day the stock natural resources of the planet were already consumed for that years quota.

We all need to now:

- **Refuse** to buy so much /crap/,
- **Reuse** what can be reused,
- **Recycle** as many materials as possible,
- **Repair** what can be repaired and
- **Reduce** the amount of virgin and overshoot recourses.

This, my friends is nothing less than the art of keeping a household, whether small or nation-big. Same as the primarily female task for five thousand years!

So start buying less stuff!

Start growing your own food, locally in communities or privately in your gardens or backyards, as well as nation wise. Do not let your country solely rely on import food! We can easily counteract the big chemical agrobusiness by supporting female farmers in southern Africa and their natural right to grow their own seeds to exchange, save, sell their seeds .

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But it must also be a change that rests upon inner, mental, spiritual, cognitive an ethical changes, as well as upon a close connection to civil society, social movements and to some extent – progressive companies. One vital branch among ecofeminists deal a lot with spiritual matters in the direction of honouring, devotion and seek connection with the Sacred in Nature, the sacred in our selves and the sacred relation between male and female forces to create new life and sacred children.

The founder of *World Resources Institute*, Gus Speth, says that he thought the biggest environmental problems on the globe were destruction of ecosystems, climate and loss of biological diversity. But now he realises he is wrong.

The biggest environmental problems are **selfishness, greed and apathy**.

For addressing this, he says, no more research is required, but a cultural and mental transformation. "*And we scientists don't know how to do that...*"

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ecofeminist economist Hazel Henderson's model of what Economy is,
is a very useful tool!
(Discussion)

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These days, when also good and democratic established structures are falling apart in front of our eyes, the need for an **integrated view** on how effective and legitimate parliamentary power must rest upon a explicit connection towards for example the climate activist movement, the female global networks that now emerges like mushrooms, and even to those progressive enterprises and companies that do seek, let alone viable, but also needed solutions.

As a final remark I'd like to again go back to the original question of this whole seminar: *If the way to combat climate warming is better done by green capitalism or by system change?"*

This is a dualistic polarized way to put it.

Either- or as the famous Danish philosopher Kirkegaard once put it.

Now the most interesting twist to ecofeminism is not that it forces us intelligent and conscious people to detect the parallelism between oppression of Nature and oppression of women, but to understand that it stems from the same way of thinking.

And the far most overused method in dominance and control-thinking is: - dualistic.

Either- or.

Never a third alternative, sterile as black or white.

Whenever choices are put up in a bipolar way – beware!

This is what all through history have created controversies, polarisation, dichotomies and wars.

Always look for the third alternative and find the **INCLUSIVE WAY**.

Or humanity will forever end up in endless conflicts and polarities among separated group interests.

The climate safe future is inclusive, tolerant and synthesising.