

(PP1)

## **Women and the climate crisis:**

### **- Can the Ecofeminist view be part of the solution?**

*The month of May 2019 was the warmest ever measured in human history.  
The melting of Greenland's glaciers has never been so fast as it was previous summer.  
Simultaneously the worst forest fires are occurring everywhere - even in Greenland!  
The climate researchers say we now have a **climate emergency situation**, and we need to act NOW.*

*I say that the current climate crisis is nothing less than the final point of an age old petro-masculine mentality where all environmental issues since industrialisation begun now have aggregated. Let me explain!*

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I who says this is a former politician from Sweden, now retired. I have been a lifelong activist but also a normal citizen, with normal jobs, appointments and employment all through my life.

One of the most useful lenses through which I perceive the world, is **ecofeminism**. It is not a dogma and doesn't claim to be superior to other views, beliefs or ideologies. It is simply a way of looking at things, an approach for activism and an analysis of power distribution.

It is not restricted to what only women are or have been prone to. The use of "women" and "feminism" here is purely historically based, not biologically. Hence - no man in this cyber space needs to take what I am saying, personally!

On the contrary **Ecofeminism says** that the ultimate patriarchy destroys both men, women, children. Not to mention animals, local communities, 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 global climate, our collective survival as well as all life forms.

All this due to a way of perceiving the whole world in a dualistic, polarised way.

This has put us in a situation where water/rain does not come at all, or if it comes, it is in the wrong places, in the wrong amount or in the wrong time. Unpredictably too much or too little...

Those who have been experiencing this most severely on the ground, and also not seldom most strongly acting locally against it, happens to be - women.

Furthermore, we all know that Violence and Structural Suppression in all forms still is an everyday reality for so many women around the world.

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**Ecofeminism** claims that through history women have been naturalised and nature feminised. Both have for some five thousand years been seen as Objects and therefore controlled and dominated by a global patriarchal order of gender inequality.

Still today countries who are most hostile to women, often happen to be the most conflict struck, most oil dependent or oil producing, most arid, with the lowest level of public education and most environmentally destroyed. Ruled by explicit macho ideals of concurrence, competition, violence and weapons.

(I won't mention any names here, but let's just consider what had happen to me tomorrow, if this webbinar had been broadcasted in, let's say Saudi Arabia ...)

In those settings, men usually *own* the land and women work for them *on* it, to put it very shortly.

Oxfam has found that globally men own 50% more assets than women do, and that the world 22 richest men together owns more than *all* women in Africa do.

Up till now, nothing has really threatened this basic power imbalance between the sexes.

Furthermore, some hundred environmentalists in the world are every year deliberately killed upon orders from mining companies, oligarchs and security companies. Most of these victims are females.

To pick but one example: in Honduras in 2016 the environmentalist and leader of indigenous people, *Berta Caceres* and all her sister friends were brutally killed by a Honduran company, "**Desa**". She had been fighting them since 2010, since the Honduran Congress passed a law that awarded contracts to a group of private companies, including Desa, to build dozens of hydroelectric dams throughout the country. Four of the approved dams were along the territory inhabited by the indigenous Lenca people, Berta's people.

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, with his mainly military cabinet, not only openly defies all efforts to save the rainforests in Amazonas, but also promptly counteracts what he calls "genus ideology", as well as the rights for indigenous people. This kind of male chauvinistic, macho and petro-masculine politics of course hurts indigenous women in particular and they have to endure threats and democratic exclusion, as well as physical violence.

In 2015, a 41-year-old Brazilian woman: *Maria Leonice Tupari*, formed the network AGIR (*Association of Warrior Women of Rondônia*), that brings together 54 ethnic groups from the rainforest districts. 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.

**Quote:**

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

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

*Decisions that concern 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.”*

Male chauvinistic attitudes remain in the area and women are often still seen as a threat. The men do not suffer as much, since they are in charge and they actively exclude women from having a say.

These women have nevertheless 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.

Also, the whole global climate suffers from this deforestation of Amazonas, (as we have already leaned here this morning. )

Why do I talk so much about these examples?

Because in these quotas we catch a number of implications on what concerns Women, Nature, Locals, Climate and Democracy simultaneously. They reveal how it all sticks so tightly together.

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, their local economy, 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** movement with no formal structure.

It aims of caring and acting spontaneously for sustainability for all living beings, preserving the natural habitats, resources and means for survival. Also for men.

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As active for more than 30 years in Swedish politics at all levels, from inside and outside, I have seen a big change in our 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?

First and foremost because democracy in the past ten year has been worldwide eroding, and cannot anymore be considered as growing, as it was 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.

But it was especially after the big UN climate meeting in *Copenhagen in 2009*, that I lost so 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.

On the other hand, I must admit that UN though managed to establish the **global Paris agreement on climate from 2015**.

If not a total success, it was at least a huge step forward and a historical global milestone. We now as human family finally got a common plan with climate goals for the world to follow!

One must also notice how extremely dependent these official and formal systems are for their decision makers. Both towards the pressure from the **civil society** and at the same time how sensitive they are to all kinds of **opinion makers**.

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

Also, our dear *Greta* happened. One devoted free person. A young woman. A Jeanne d' Arc for climate justice. Her shivering words in the UN assembly will be long time remembered: "...*your fairy tales of eternal economic growth*"

My Green parliamentary party Swedish *Miljöpartiet*, were quite alone struggling for many years to alert the country for the climate threat. But since about ten years it seems to have

put more energy into reaching formal legitimized governmental power. And when it finally reached there in 2014 – they partly failed, partly gained.

First and foremost our parliament 2017 accepted a major **Climate framework** for the country, consisting of **climate goals**, a **climate law** and a **Climate advisory council**, all suggested and presented by us Greens.

Not later than 2045 Sweden shall not emit any Greenhouse gases GHG, to the atmosphere at all.

But - biggest failure, as I see it, is that the party's traditional profile and social base as a people's green movement gradually deteriorated.

On the other hand, the political green victories achieved in government are substantial:

The full list of other green political gains would look something like this:

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- 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 transportation**, than on trucks
- Subsidies for installation of private **solar cells**
- Tax on **plastic bags** and on **burning waste**

But our five green ministers are sitting in a *coalition* government, which in turn relies on two external liberal parties upon budget issues. Hence, their freedom is substantially hampered in realising all their green wishes. They simply cannot pursue everything that is in our party's program ...

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As a sad illustration of this dilemma, we saw last year when also the Green party were in a major battle with the huge oil company *Preem*.

The latter wanted to establish a paramount oil refinery, which would have risen Swedish GHG-emissions with 3 % country wise and make *Preemraff* into Sweden's largest single climate polluter.

In the small town of Lysekil on the west coast, civil activists, Green Peace and others, were at place for half a year protesting with towards the end - massive demonstrations.

But as part of government the Green politicians could only act beneath the surface. The green ministers managed to establish various regulations aiming to both curb the planned productions emissions and to forbid the whole establishment.

Ultimately the oil company itself shut down the plans, mostly due to the loud protests while the Green party's contribution in the situation was very shadowed. They almost appeared to have been passive, weak and aimless.

All in all, this gave a clear illustration on how system change *within the system* barely can be done. How limited the purely political and legal solutions are on the climate threat.

The main parole among the protesters against *Preemraff* was:  
**"NO CLIMATE CHANGE – BUT SYSTEM CHANGE!"**

Likewise *my* main answer to the question asked at this conference, is:

- **System-change, now!**

Alongside with Sweden Green's relative failures to push the government, two important positive and quite recent decisions on the EU-level have nevertheless been taken;  
*The European Investment Bank*, EIB, now actually have stopped all investments in fossils industries. That is huge!

From over 13 billion Euros last measure, down now to zero!  
(But China has not ...)

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

Hopefully this alarmistic wording also soon will be filled with numerous effective measures as well...

But I also criticise many things on the EU level. For example:

knowing that every forth person in Africa still goes hungry, whatever achievements the former UN Millennium goals of halved global hunger ever reached, both Sweden and EU are instead sending subsidies to *Bayer- Monsanto* and *Chem China-Syngenta!* These companies are there to promote their own way of agrobusiness. Projects for total monopoly of their hybrid seeds and crops to farmers, which also requires specifically *their* trademarked 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.

BUT: -because diligent people always will act constructively wherever they are, I still have some, but fading hope, for current political, supposedly democratic systems such as parliaments, EU and UN.

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Allow me now to start drawing my seven conclusions.

**1: Established political power systems are still too weak and limited in really manage climate issues,**

due to various mechanisms touched upon above. Even in democratic countries, even here in north Europe and even despite their own - sometimes good - intentions.

(I say this with great grief and regrets.)

**Conclusion 2: Private enterprise can never bear or replace the public responsibility of combat climate change.**

The commercial companies are still strong and still overwhelmingly rich, but mostly don't act for the best of us all.

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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”*

Not all commercial companies are totally evil though, or hopelessly ignorant.

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

Some few have even got 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.

Companies like them should be allowed to make their contribution within given frames, and even be supported with sanctions or subsidies if their production helps us to overcome thresholds or have products found to be necessary for the public good.

Nevertheless nor “Green capitalism” in the sense of state sanctioned and promoted green washing, nor totally unleashed capitalism with its “market solutions”, provides a long-lasting solution to the total ecosystem and climate disaster that is just around the corner.

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**Conclusion 3: General political major reforms are also needed**

Climate change contains minimum two parts: cutting of emissions and adapting to hampered conditions. Therefore certain *social* reforms are also needed to accompany direct climate related measures!

My three preferred ones are:

\* Decentralised ownership of sustainable local energy, such as small-scale biogas-,

solar and wind power plants.

- \* Reduction of normal working hours combined with a Basic Income reform
- \* Gender budgeting at all levels

**Conclusion 4: Civil movements, people in the streets with raised awareness, will INSTEAD prove to be the leading force in combating climate change!**

For mobilising, awareness rising, opinion making, lifestyle change and claiming their direct influence on decisions.

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

Just like what is currently happening in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Sudan, Ecuador, Bolivia, Hong Kong, Colombia, Chile, Myanmar, Belarus and in many other parts of the world.

People now are alert and on the streets against neoliberal measures, authoritarian regimes and exploitation of humans, women and nature.

This is where true DEMOCRACY stems from!

This in turn puts back a lot of responsibility on ordinary, private, civil people  
- us as individuals.

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**Conclusion 5: Changing of lifestyle**

This also means taking back power over basic production, at home as well as in factories. Reduce consumerism. Make things ourselves.

*The World Overshoot day* in 2020 occurred already on the 22:nd of August! On that day the stock natural resources of the planet were already consumed for that year's quota.

Disastrous ...

Therefore, we all now need to:

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

This, my friends is nothing less than the art of keeping a household, whether small, nation-big or worldwide. Same as the primarily female task has always been!

“Eco-“ as in economics and ecology means HOUSE, in ancient Greek. Householding.

- So, buy 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!
- Counteract the big chemical agrobusiness by supporting female farmers in Africa and their natural right to their own seeds.
- Seek local self-sufficiency in energy and fuel supply, just as the *Transition Towns* movement urges.
- Limit your movements and transports, just as we have been used to during the Corona pandemic.

**6<sup>th</sup> conclusion: Biggest change of all would be full gender equality and end of petro-masculin attitudes!**

Because *endurable* system changes always come from below and from the inside of people. From what people actually reacts to, claims and believes in. Only from there can the formal politicians be pushed. Thereafter these may be able to push mighty corporations.

A durable system change must rest upon functional democracy, close connection to civil society and activist movements. To some extent also to progressive companies – but foremost rest upon an **inner, mental, spiritual, cognitive an ethical change!**

One vital branch among ecofeminists deals with such spiritual matters in the sense of honouring, devotion and seeking connection with the sacred in Nature, the sacred space inside us and all the sacred relations between male and female forces to create new solutions, new life and sacred children.

The founder of *World Resources Institute*, Gus Speth surprisingly says the biggest environmental problems on the globe are not destruction of ecosystems, climate and loss of biological diversity!? Instead, he now realises that 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.

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The ecofeminist economist **Hazel Henderson has created a model** of what Economy truly is.

It is a very useful tool for both politicians, civil society activists and entrepreneurs, which clearly shows what fields in society are dependent on which, and what gives us true values. (Namely **Nature** and the **Civil societies' mutual Trust!**)

Furthermore her “economic cake” shows how the female involvement declines with more of economic capitalistic organisation towards the top.

On the very surface, the shining “icing layer”, rests the male dominated hyper-economic sphere of global traders and stock market players. They benefit from all other's collected efforts and is gnawing on them.

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Finally, I'll have to make a remark on the wording of the underlying question for this whole seminar: "*green capitalism or system change?*"

This is in itself a dualistic and polarized way to put it.

An "*Either- or*" choice, as the famous Danish philosopher Kirkegaard once said.

The most interesting twist to ecofeminism is namely not that it forces us (intelligent and conscious people, as we are) to detect the parallelism between oppression of Nature and oppression of Women.

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But to understand that it all stems from a ***polarised way of thinking.***

The overused method in dominance and control-based systems is always dualistic.

Based on saying *Either - or*. Built on exclusion.

Never looking for a third alternative but forcing our concepts far away from plenitude and bounty to a sterile ground that only contains black or white categories.

No shades of Grey or Green ...

Whenever choices of this bipolar kind are put up – beware!

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

Instead: always look for the third alternative and find the INCLUSIVE WAY.

- Men, women *and* children.
- Politics, corporations *and* civil society.
- Head, hart *and* hands
- Moderate green capitalism, personal responsibility *and* system change

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

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**Conclusion 7: A human and climate safe, deep system change must therefore be**

Inclusive

Democratic

Solidaric

Manyfold

Synthesising

&

Gender- / equal.

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How to combat Climate Warming – Green Capitalism or System Change?  
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*/Lotta Hedström*