



**Research within the frame of "Gender & Environment"-
A Look at the Debate in Germany**

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1. First a few comments on the title "*Gender and Environment*"

Research on "Gender & Environment" in Germany (see Schultz/Weller 1995) is a feminist approach, that combines questions of the feminist debates with questions and perspectives, which are developed in the technical and natural science-based environmental research. It is an interdisciplinary approach. The environmental research in Germany mostly elaborates perspectives in respect to specific environmental problems, as for example the "waste problem" or the "climate-and-energy problem" or the problem of biodiversity etc. In the last decade there was developed a broader environmental approach in Germany under the question of a general reduction of chemical substances and material flows (de-materialisation and de-chemicalisation). A research on "gender & environment" in this environmental field tries to combine the questions of "de-chemicalisation" with questions about gender-relations and the power of women.

A basic category in this analysis is the term "shaping power of women" (Gestaltungsmacht von Frauen), which means the power in creating and shaping everyday life as well the power in creating and shaping new technologies and environmental effects. In this sense, the term "shaping power of women" rises the perspective of an empowerment of women in the field of economic-technological future planning and development.

My colleague Ines Weller, a feminist chemist, elucidated this perspective of a technological empowerment by rising some questions on the shaping power of women through an ecological perspective of a de-chemicalization. How can an *empowerment* of women and the perspective of de-chemicalization be brought together? She illustrated this perspective on an example: What does the shaping power of women actually look like in respect to a cotton t-shirt, a t-shirt which, as Ines Weller showed at a workshop with the theme "Global Household" (Weller 1993) is up to one-third chemical substances (according to weight), despite the label that says "100% cotton"? Which different groups of women, having different access to work, to technological planning and to consumption, must be seen in this example, in which – according to the environmental approach of life cycle assessment – the production of raw material, the pre-production, production, marketing and use of the product emerges different environmental effects? Which women in third world countries participate as producers in the global textile chain? How are they involved, and under which

working conditions? What opportunities women have as housewives and consumers in the first-world countries? How can the shaping power of women as consumers as well as workers, as lab technicians and scientists be expanded so that they have an influence in production and can contribute to a de-chemicalization of textile products?

In 1995, Ines Weller and I published an anthology with the title "Gender and Environment: Ecology and the Shaping Power of Women." It contained contributions from a workshop, where feminists in the social and natural sciences attempted to outline this field in terms of feminist environmental research. The term "shaping power of women" was discussed at this workshop as a perspective, that broadens the empowerment concept of the international women's movement in the field of technical design. How do women, in contrast to men, influence technical design? What opportunities for influence do which women have, and which men? Which opportunities for influence are falsely promised to women while adjusting real power structures? Can they, for example, really use the promised "consumer power" to decrease ecological problems? I illustrated these questions by means of the waste problems, which have dominated the ecological discussions in Germany in the early nineties (Schultz 1995). Ines Weller linked questions about de-chemicalisation and technological empowerment of women with the call for basic assumptions of chemistry as science: is the use of chemistry, as in the former example shown, to be criticized from a feminist perspective or shouldn't feminist criticism already start with the basic assumptions of chemistry? Which assumptions in the chemical laboratory make its context-abstract application possible? And why is there such a great dispute over biology in the feminist theory, but hardly any in chemistry?

Why do we speak about "Gender & Environment", but not about "Gender & Nature"?

We purposely did not choose the term "women and nature" for the workshop, nor for its focal points for research, which we developed in the Institute for Social-Ecological Research (ISOE). *Nature*, as shown particularly by feminist research, is a basic gender-moralizing category of civic modern thinking. Through the dichotomy of nature and culture, this thinking structured a world-view of hierarchical gendered social spaces in which women were associated with nature. It was a thinking of the world as an evolutionary process of species on the top of which was positioned "man" and his cultural development. Today, however, this hierarchical bipolar thinking has become ambiguous. There are new, postmodern social models of thinking, which now determine the discourses on development. These models no longer

refer to the old normative view of nature but nevertheless are constructing gendered social spaces, too, mainly by new models of segregating geo-political spaces. Our understanding of nature has decisively changed.

Today, nature is associated with a picture of the survival of the planet earth (see Schultz 1997). The extra terrestrial Sputnik-view on the "blue planet" shows a picture, in which nature is understood in terms of scientific definitions of pollutants ("The blue planet is becoming grey, the blue planet is dying"). Scientifically this image of nature is defined through "too many" material flows and energy conversions, which are seen as destruction of the ecological balance. This is the main picture of thinking nature as "environment". Beside this, any reversion to the modern, moralized concept of nature is, from a feminist point of view, particularly doubtful. This is why we chose the term "environment" instead of the moralized category "nature."

Why do we use the term "Gender"?

A connection to the international feminist Gender Studies was a first reason to use the term *gender*. Furthermore, Ines Weller explained the word in terms of a societal structure category, which has both: a society-structuring and an individualizing function. The latter she explained: "by using the term 'gender,' our paper refers to the discussions of gender as a structural category of everyday behavior (which is to be understood in context of a DOING gender and includes the everyday in the so-called reproduction as well as in the so-called production sphere). In the concept of a 'DOING gender,' gender is (understood) as a personal attribute, which, on the one hand, is brought as a precondition in every situation, but is continually re-manufactured (re-constituted) on the other hand (compare Pokora 1994). *Gender* is herewith not to be understood as gender rolls, rather, as Pokora formulated, a "complex bundle of dispositions for perception, thinking and behavior for self-presentation and interaction modes" (Weller 1995:33)

Thinking the simultaneity of nature-society-relations: Gender is a basic category of societal relations to nature

The gender-term is used for these beginnings of a feminist environmental research exclusively in a societal theoretical-structural manner. The expression serves, in the sense of Regina Becker-Schmidt's clarification of terminology, for the further development of Women's Studies as well as that of Gender Studies and Studies of Gender-based Societal Arrangements. Gender is a structural category of *societal relations*, which once again must be understood for its relationality and irreversible simultaneity with nature. With this understanding, nature will be comprehen-

ded as the basis of society and not, as in the sociological understanding of society, as something pre-conditional and excluded from society. In our institute we formulated the term *societal relations to nature* to express this understanding of society-nature-simultaneity (Jahn 1991). By this we mean that society-nature-relations are not to be understood as purely socially determined nor, in the end, as exclusively naturally determined. Nature is not a society-free space, as created by modern thinking in its historical view, which positioned nature BEFORE cultural development. Nor is nature a societal free space as formed by the natural sciences' definition of ecology. This ecological thinking of societal-free spaces can be found in the "ecological" proposals for conservation zones till today (see Wächter, 1996, for a feminist critique). Consequently, we do not speak of an ecological crisis, but rather of a global societal crisis, in which political, economical, social, ecological and gender-political crisis factors are inseparably bound together (Schultz 1997). To assume a nearness of women to nature is problematic

The structural understanding of *gender*, which is applied to such views of crisis of societal relations to nature, does not assume women to have a uniform identity. If we proceed from heterogeneous, varied women with very different "bundles of dispositions for perception, thinking and behavior," then we cannot impose a uniform identity on *the* women. Women's politics is therefore not identity politics. If, however, all women are equally granted an identity as the furnishings of their inner being- an identity which is based on a special "nearness to nature" - then they will be forced into a unit of homogeneous subjects. A uniform construction >woman< is manufactured out of very different subjects with very varied identity mixes.

This criticism applies foremost to a specific direction in eco-feminism, whose most well known representatives are Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies (Mies/Shiva 1995). Vandana Shiva visualizes a nearness to nature as spiritual equipment of women. Maria Mies sees it as a result of historical developments, in which women, because of her birthing capabilities, are particularly bound with nature. Through the insinuation of this special nearness to nature, these eco-feminists construct "an abstract being, woman, beyond historical and cultural differences" (Wichterich 1995:112). They fail to reflect, however, that "the women" are implicitly assumed to have a particular capability and responsibility to rescue nature.

An understanding of gender as DOING GENDER, on the other hand, grasps explicitly the diversity of women and also the perspective of overcoming and crossing over bipolar gender-assumptions, as it was developed in the Transsexual and Queer Studies and in the Deconstruc-

tive Feminism of Judith Butler. Ines Weller described the subsequent paradox, in which Women's Studies and politics move without being based on identity. She cites a suitable quotation from E. Löchel (1994), "how is it possible to soften the category gender in thinking and at the same time conduct politics on the fundamentals of this category?" (Weller 1995:34). An understanding of "Doing Gender" can solve this problem by thinking future in a structural historical way, in which women are NO LONGER defined exclusively through sex-gender-assumptions.

Recognizing diversity and differences between women is basic for a global sight.

Since the fourth World Women's Conference in Peking, 1995, where the gathered NGO-Arena women discussed the effects of globalization processes from different perspectives, the catch words "cross-boarder" and "cross-cultural" organizing stand for the insight that women's politics can only be successful when the global *diversity and differences between women* are recognized. In view of the political principles of respecting the diversity of women, the visualization of women's particular nearness to nature seems to be a helpless attempt to achieve *political capabilities* through essential foundations of women's beings. The Indian feminist Corinne Kumar-D'Souza confronts this "paradigm of uniformity" with a necessary "paradigm of diversity." She speaks of an "unexpected connection, which becomes possible through a dialogue under the paradigm of diversity" (cited by Ruf 1998:77).

2. Feminist environmental research in Germany

The feminist environmental research in Germany has up to this point developed only a few approaches in which regional and national-state specific analyses can be bound with global feminist analyses. This is understandable considering that the goal of these analyses is to intervene in local, regional or state politics. As is documented in the anthology "Environmental Problems are not Gender Neutral" (Buchen u.a. 1994), feminist approaches in the scientific disciplines of traffic research, city research, technical environmental protection, waste research and feminist research on reduction of chemical substances and material flows (all which could be grouped with the research "Gender & Environment) show that economically critical methods in combination with the perspective of an *empowerment* of women determine theoretical approaches.

Crisis in reproduction work: feminist city-planning

The connection between production work and reproduction work is thereby an important point of reference. Above all, the approach to

"crisis in reproduction work" developed by Bock, Heeg and Rodenstein has strongly influenced the theoretical discussion in feminist environmental research. In the frame of feminist space planning and city research, their approach illustrates the critical nature of reproduction work in face of modernized lifestyles and changed expectations of life (Bock /Heeg/ Rodenstein 1993). Within the outlines of feminist traffic research, Ute Beik and Meike Spitzner, for example, have built on this approach to work out typical coping strategies in the reproductive work crisis with the background of central alternative possibilities in the planning of female biographies. In the end, these possibilities lie on a combination of not having children, reproduction work, income salary and its replacement by purchased services. They demonstrated, that there are only three overreaching adaptation strategies for the personal, temporal and spatial (des-) integration of reproduction work and income work and that this represents one of the causes (which is ignored in the technical oriented traffic research) of the emergence and increase of transport in our society (Beik/Spitzner 1995).

Feminization of environmental responsibility: feminist waste research
 Within the feminist waste and consume research, Monika Weiland and I have worked out a tendency for *feminization of responsibility for the environment* as an allusion to the dominating discourses on responsibility in the ecological debates at the beginning of the nineties (Schultz/Weiland 1991). It is to be understood that official politics as well as the technically limited environmental research for the development of strategies to minimize waste systematically fall back on unpaid reproduction work. With the unspoken insinuation that women have a greater affinity for the environment and nature, women are thereby expected (as are all feminized household providers) to put in more work, engagement and extra strain in order to cope with the everyday. Furthermore, this extra work is planned in with no knowledge of the every day coping strategies of women. Nor is the everyday knowledge of women used for the development of new environmental technologies, as with waste management systems. Women's work is assumed and remains unseen, but is now strategically planned in on another level in the reconfiguration, what was hitherto a public range of services. Ultimately, the assumption of a greater nearness of women to nature functions as a pattern of legitimization for a "feminization of responsibility for the environment."

Tendency of privatization of public services: energy, waste and – in the future - water supplies

In this regard, this privatization of households as part of the hitherto public services is a systematic component of the privatization tendency,

which is interpreted as a prominent feature of a world-wide structural adaptation politics in neo-liberal market laws (v. Braunmühl 1988; Schultz 1994; Lachemann 1998; Young 1998). Complete fields of public services are being torn down and changed into "efficient" private enterprises with the argument of a financial necessity to adapt in the. Besides waste management, this effects energy supplies, water supplies, the cleaning of streets and public places, lawn maintenance and waste management services, all of which were up to now in the public hand, a part of the state-communal supply economy. *The privatization of hitherto state-communal public services goes hand in hand with household privatization, which demands new forms of household management and overtime chiefly from women in family households.* "Feminization of responsibility for the environment," as seen in the example of privatization of waste management, is therefore only the backside of similar tendencies in Southern countries, which were also marked with the term "feminization of responsibility for the environment" by Christa Wichterich.

Such a view of the reconfiguration of waste management grasps the systematic character of the coordination between technical innovations and changes in the economical structure, as they started to develop in feminist globalization research. Systematically taking women's work into account requires another awareness of the problems of the so-called waste problem and further consideration of its yet-to-be-discovered possibilities for improvement in technical environmental research and its preferred technical solutions: the entanglement of technical improvements with social and economical changes will become clear, social-economical improvements will be reflected in their dependency on technological solutions. In this sight women's work means not only an increase in the housework of women, but also the decisively greater burden of more transport work caused by a larger pressure to coordinate care work and income work. The question of the shaping power of women refers to the *empowerment* of women, which, on the one hand, reflects the gender-related power structures in families, communities as well as in communal, regional and civil society contexts, but on the other hand, directly aims at a broadening of possibilities for influence and the exertion of power of women in the economical-technical structures (technological citizenship, see Schultz 1998). This theorizing of technical-economical power and reflections of a *technological empowerment* seem to me to be a novelty of the German debate on "Gender & Environment."

3. *Some arguments about Josepa Bru y Bistuer's analysis of three paradigms from a German perspective:*

With these insight in German research about Gender & Environment I would like to close with an important argumentation about the differentiation of the three paradigms, as explained by Josepa Bru y Bistuer:

1. The paradigm of ecological efficiency
2. The paradigm of environmental fair justice
3. The paradigm of a post-ethnic, androcentric environmental research.

Perhaps the environmental discussions take on a particular form here in Germany because of participants who do not exist in Spain and Latin America. Besides Greenpeace, we also have the *Union for the Protection of the Environment and Nature of Germany* (BUND), which stems from the German ecological movement of the '70's. This union is associated internationally with "Friends of the Earth," especially in England and the Scandinavian countries. Regarding Josepa Bru y Bistuer's mentioned first and second paradigms "environmental fair justice" and "ecological efficiency", I want to explain some arguments about the study "Sustainable Germany," working on behalf of the BUND and the Catholic development organization MISEREOR (BUND/MISEREOR 1996). This study combined in a certain way the first and the second paradigm that Josepa Bru worked out. The study was executed by the Wuppertal Institute of Climate and Energy. It gave important impulses for discussion in Germany by combining the two paradigms in new ways. It was the task of the study to a) to clarify what are Perspectives of ecological efficiency, which should be expressed in terms of environmental goals of German politics, and b) to wake appreciation for the theme of *international* environmental justice. I would like mention beforehand that this study was very successful in the media and, in my opinion, truly brought, for a short moment at least, the German public's attention to the North-South perspective and the environmental problem and the perspective of a lasting development.

Feminist Critique on the study "Sustainable Germany"

The study was successful partially because of a reversion to the concept of an "environmental space", developed in Holland, which shows the amount of used goods of a country by visualizing it in terms of geopolitical space. So the dutch study showed the extent to which Holland falls back on the "space" in Third World countries in order to, for example, satisfy its demand for oranges. The German study, too, succeeded in politicizing the sustainability perspective because it dealt with principles of a fair North-South exchange, which shouldn't be

based on an ever-growing use of materials, misuse of nature and expansion of goods.

Feminists have criticized this study with different arguments that women, gender relations and unequal power relations are not addressed in the study. Neither the structural significance of reproduction work nor the mention of, for example, children can be found. Reproduction work is moralized in an unacceptable manner, in that it is normatively subordinated under a principle of sufficiency (principle of self-contentment), which was pushed to the side as a complement to eco-efficiency. The study is lacking empirical research results from the social sciences and results of feminist research. That is in short one form of feminist critique on this study. (For those interested in the theme sustainability and feminism, I recommend the anthology by Weller/ Hoffmann/ Hofmeister 1999, which documents a series of lectures at the University of Berlin about this theme).

Although I am not able to go into the controversy kindled by feminists (with the help of the study) about the relevance of a sustainable development, I would like to defend the study's intended approach against the publicly expressed criticism, coming primarily from me (Schultz 1996). I believe, that a concretisation of natural science-based perspectives (concerning the reduction of chemical substances and material flows for example) are important for all research on "Gender & Environment", too. Namely, the combination of a more eco-efficient perspective with an environmental fair justice perspective can sharpen the sensibility to questions on global dimensions. From a feminist perspective, these questions, which direct the program to greater knowledge, take precedence over the *empowerment of women*. To make my point absolutely clear, this means I don't believe it is meaningful to develop a generalizing criticism against "paradigms of the eco-efficiency" without at the same time defining what specifically is not guiding orientation in the eco-efficient perspective.

The setting up of natural science-based "rules", which dominates the international sustainability debate, as for example the rule, a regeneration ability of ecological area systems or the earth as a whole system must be established, must be analyzed from a feminist perspective. As questionable as the "concrete" calculations on the limits of what the earth can carry or the natural sciences' assumptions about the warming of the earth's atmosphere may be, I still consider those perspectives to be indispensable in feminist environmental research, too. Feminists need global ecological guidance-orientating perspectives, too. But they must be connected with the perspective of empowerment of women. Surely other "rules" will come out, but more than a general critique is necessary. Knowledge is not absolute, but rather a process of argumenta-

tion, in which assumptions in knowledge are updated and also refuted. Up to now, feminists have not participated in this "inter-natural sciences' debate." Research on *Gender & Environment* should use the foothold the feminist research in the social sciences has in overcoming technical narrowing of many eco-efficient approaches. This research should also apply feminist criticism in the natural sciences to criticism on eco-efficient basic assumptions, but it should make clear on which level and with which assumptions in the natural sciences the argumentation is based.

In conclusion one example:

In the beginning of the 90's, there were massive protests against plans for mass waste dump in Germany. And so it came, for example, to the "March of the 30,000" (people) in the Swabian Alps in 1993, because a mass waste dump was planned there. I find, in the meantime, these civil-societal protests against waste dumps, in which women, according to my experience, participate in the planning and are very active, to be completely ambivalent. For one thing, the protest against smaller grounds is usually very limited to the "cleaning upkeep" of its own region. The problem is, that the planning of a waste dump in the neighbour region will not provoke protest of these "anti-dump-activists", because it affects not directly their nearest interests (this is my experience as a "waste expert," which is repeatedly requested by anti-trash-initiatives in support of their local campaigns). There is to be seen a lack of an INTERREGIONAL political will in waste-campaigns, as, for example, the Bavarian waste initiatives in the beginning of the 90's expressed. This initiative, in which women dominated (the same women, which were organized in the so-called anti-nuclear women's groups after the accident in Tchernobyl, as I found out in interviews) asserted a nationwide referendum about political instruments of PROVIDING (not only recycling) waste. The theme of waste is an annoyance in Germany, because no one really knows what happens to the separated and collected waste. But this incapacitation (unbelievable in a civil societal regard) is, at least up to now, tolerated. Thirdly- and I want to emphasize this point- an argumentation concerning the technical circumstances of the waste dumps is usually missing. In the mentioned example of resistance against a mass dump in the Swabian Alps, the state government of Baden-Württemberg would have been willing in to build a waste-burning system instead of the mass dump. This system would be grounded on a new technology (with a specific air-turning pipe, that does not produce dangerous chemical substances as dioxines for example, because of what the waste burning technology was criticized by anti-waste initiatives. This solution failed in face of the resistance of the citizens' initiative, which fundamentally argued

against burning systems in accordance with the solution of the 80's, "dumping is better than burning." This argumentation was once justified. In the meantime, however, as even alternative experts showed (experts of the German Öko-Institut), it has lost this generalizing authority to new technical developments. I have not the technological competence to comment here on whether this assessment was correct or not. I continue to criticize the German system of private economy-household waste management, with its mass waste disposal systems, because of its inherent lack of transparency and citizen's participation. More importantly, this example should clarify basic questions which I believe are central to the feminist environmental research:

- Can the feminist theorem from the "experts of the everyday life" with their orientation towards "merits from the private sphere" also be applied as an orientation model for the dealing of the eco-technical and techno-economical structures of a "technological empowerment"?
- Could it be much more an issue of the new specification of the interface between "everyday knowledge" and "technical knowledge of the experts"?
- Could there be a lack of feminist technical experts, who understand the functions of technical mass systems and can thus criticize the mass systems and, together with "experts of the everyday life" and "experts in economy" develop technical-economical alternatives?

At the Women's World Conference in Peking, 1995, feminists criticized the feminist modesty in the theorization of the private and subsistence with the slogan, "women should be thinking bigger on the big issues" (Indai Lourdes Sajor). In the meantime, approaches to a feminist theorization of macro-economy are available (Cagatay/ Elson/ Grown, ed. 1995). In my opinion, we are still missing a combination of feminist macro-economy and technical criticism with an empowerment-perspective which aims for the "middle level" of regional and national-state intervention. The "data, which come from the experiences in the reproduction sphere" is not enough for a "Gender & Environment" study.

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