

# Women and the Environment; New Actors in the Transformation of the Global Order

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## Abstract

Centuries of male-centered dominance in political thought and International Relations have systematically excluded both women and nature from the sphere of political agency. Yet contemporary developments suggest that women and the environment are increasingly becoming consequential forces in the redefinition of the global order. Ecofeminism, one of the central strands of third-wave feminist theory, foregrounds the structural interconnectedness between the subordination of women and the domination of nature, offering a critical framework through which these transformations can be understood. This article examines how ecofeminism accounts for the emergence of women and the environment as actors in the reshaping of the global order, and what implications this perspective carries for the field of International Relations. Drawing on a qualitative-normative methodology and the approach of political philosophy, the study critically engages with ecofeminist concepts, propositions, and theoretical foundations in relation to international relations scholarship. The findings suggest that by challenging the epistemological premises of modernity and prevailing development discourses, ecofeminism not only broadens the conventional understanding of “actor” in International Relations but also invites a fundamental rethinking of core concepts such as power, security, and sustainable development. Within this framework, women and the environment emerge as norm-generating forces that play an increasingly significant role in shaping a transforming global order. The article concludes by briefly reflecting on the relevance of ecofeminist debates to the Iranian context, with particular attention to the intersections of gender, environmental crisis, and political participation in contemporary Iran.

## Introduction

The discipline of International Relations is conventionally dated to 1919, when the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics was established at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. Following the Second World War, however, the field developed primarily within the United States and came to be in-

creasingly shaped by the positivist and behavioral frameworks associated with American political science. Grounded in the prevailing assumption that social problems are amenable to scientific resolution, the historical, legal, and normative dimensions of the discipline were progressively marginalized, as International Relations scholarship gravitated toward social-scientific modes of inquiry. Methods borrowed from economics were deployed to identify the laws and regularities governing international behavior, particularly in relation to conflict and war. By the 1970s, as economics consolidated its status as the most formally rigorous of the social sciences, its methodological influence on International Relations deepened considerably. Rational choice theory and game-theoretic models came to be widely regarded as indispensable tools for analyzing state behavior and inter-state interaction under specified assumptions (Nagar, 2016).

The field of International Relations encompasses a range of well-established theoretical traditions, including realism, liberalism, critical theory, and constructivism. Among the more recent additions to this landscape is feminism which is a critical paradigm that introduces a fundamental rupture into mainstream IR discourse by contending that the history of global political thought has been overwhelmingly authored by men, and that philosophy, mythology, religion, and science have been constituted through masculine narratives. Feminist scholars advocate for the rights of women and, by interrogating the foundations of masculinist rationality, seek to reintegrate into political life the half of the population that has long been excluded from the public sphere. From a feminist standpoint, this exclusion has operated across multiple domains as education, economics, society, and politics alike. Historically, women have been consigned to the private realm of the household, child-rearing, and marriage, constructed as the “second sex” and effectively rendered non-citizens (Dobson, 2006: 53). Women’s presence in formal politics has remained marginal, and even in the twenty-first century, their role in policymaking and institutional leadership is strikingly limited. The relegation of women to the private sphere and their constitution as inherently unequal subjects whose rights must be secured through sustained struggle. That represents one of the most consequential silences in modern political history, a silence that feminist scholarship has directly and persistently challenged.

International politics, too, remains a distinctly masculine domain: a world of diplomats, soldiers, government officials, and international representatives overwhelmingly composed of men, in which women exercise minimal influence over the direction of foreign policy. In the United States in 1987, for instance, women held fewer than five percent of senior foreign service positions, and fewer than four percent of executive roles within the Department of Defense. Yet women’s underrepresentation in senior governmental positions is compounded further at the level of international politics, where the widespread belief, held by men and women alike, that military service and strategic policymaking are inherently unsuited to women continues to operate as a structural barrier. Attributes such as capability, autonomy, rationality, and decisiveness are culturally coded as masculine, and these qualities are regarded as prerequisite for effective engagement in foreign policy and national defense. The protection of the nation, and of women and children within it, is correspondingly framed as a masculine obligation, such that even women with substantive foreign policy experience are frequently deemed inadequate on the grounds of presumed emotionality and an alleged incapacity to bear the weight of major defence decisions (Nagar, 2016).

Feminist approaches in International Relations introduce gender as a fundamental analytical category for examining governance at the international level. Nevertheless, the impact of feminist analysis on

actual international policymaking has remained limited, and its insights have frequently been dismissed or ignored by policymakers. Women's contributions to the creation and maintenance of international norms and institutions tend to be treated as unremarkable, rendered invisible precisely by being naturalized (True, 2001; Tickner, 1992).

Feminist scholars argue that this marginalization reflects the entrenched assumption that formal politics is an exclusively masculine domain, and that the confrontation and resolution of international problems is the proper province of men alone. Consequently, the actors and decision-makers of foreign policy are overwhelmingly conceived – and constructed – as male (Enloe, 1993).

Among the most influential feminist voices in International Relations is J. Ann Tickner, who has argued forcefully for the inclusion of women in international studies and demonstrated that the international system, as currently structured and apprehended through a masculine lens, rests on a systematically incomplete vision of political reality. She underscores the necessity of a female epistemological standpoint, one capable of conceptualizing an alternative world order, and calls for the establishment of a feminist epistemology within the discipline. This reorientation would not only broaden women's access to International Relations as a field of inquiry but would also enrich prevailing understandings of global politics. In advancing this agenda, Tickner seeks to dismantle the structural barriers to women's participation in both politics and political analysis, without subordinating feminist concerns to the so-called "hard" realities privileged by mainstream IR.

Drawing on ecofeminist theory, this article critically engages with the hegemony of patriarchal realist perspectives within International Relations, while also offering a rigorous and systematic account of political ecology as a feminist strand with direct implications for global politics. Ecofeminists highlight the structural connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature, and foreground women's central roles in caregiving, social reproduction, and community sustenance demonstrating that the burdens of environmental degradation fall disproportionately on women. Women's meaningful participation in international relations therefore extends beyond its peace-building dimensions: it sharpens attention to ecological concerns and advances objectives such as the negotiation of international environmental agreements, the inclusion of women in multilateral forums, the protection of female migrants and refugees, and the expansion of educational and research opportunities. These debates acquire particular urgency in the context of contemporary Iran, where mounting environmental crises, including water scarcity, desertification, air pollution, and broad ecological deterioration, intersect in complex ways with questions of gender, social justice, and political agency. Iranian women have been visibly active in environmental movements, local ecological initiatives, and civil society organizing, while Iranian feminist scholarship has advanced substantive critiques of prevailing development models, sustainability frameworks, and patriarchal structures. Examining ecofeminism within the framework of International Relations thus offers the prospect of a more grounded and contextually sensitive understanding of the relationship between gender, environment, and global politics in the Iranian setting

### Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The present study is structured within a qualitative and normative approach and is grounded in Leo Strauss's political philosophy methodology. In contrast to the dominant positivist and scientific methods in international relations, this approach emphasizes a return to the fundamental questions

of political philosophy, the critique of the epistemological foundations of modern science, and the restoration of ethics and norms in political analysis. From Strauss's perspective, the crisis of modern political thought arises from the dominance of scientism, value relativism, and instrumental rationality, which have stripped politics of meaning, moral purpose, and inquiry into the "good" (Strauss, 1953; Strauss, 1988).

Straussian methodology, through its critique of scientism, particularly in the social sciences and international relations, demonstrates that reducing politics to a set of empirical data, managerial techniques, and power calculations leads to the exclusion of normative, ethical, and human dimensions of politics. Strauss views modern science as incapable of responding to the deep crises of modernity due to its claim of value neutrality and its severance from classical political philosophy (Strauss, 1959). Within this framework, the present study adopts a normative approach that prioritizes conceptual analysis, critical interpretation of theoretical texts, and philosophical re-examination of concepts such as power, security, development, and nature, rather than empirical hypothesis testing.

The theoretical framework of the article rests on the assumption that dominant theories of international relations—particularly realism and liberalism—are manifestations of modern political thought which, through their emphasis on instrumental rationality, state-centrism, and the primacy of hard security, have contributed to the exclusion of ethics, gender, and the environment from political analysis. From a Straussian perspective, this condition is the result of the rupture between political philosophy and political science and the abandonment of fundamental normative questions (Strauss, 1953). In this study, feminism and political ecology are understood as marginalized voices within the modern epistemic order that expose the ethical and philosophical deficiencies of political modernity.

The Straussian methodology employed in this article, with its defense of ethics, norms, and the philosophical reconstruction of modernity, provides a theoretical foundation for linking political philosophy, feminism, and political ecology. By emphasizing the importance of classical political philosophy, Strauss calls for a renewed focus on justice, the common good, and moral responsibility in politics (Strauss, 1988). This approach allows environmental crises and the structural exclusion of women from global politics to be analysed not merely as technical or managerial problems, but as ethical and epistemological consequences of the modern order.

Accordingly, the theoretical framework of the present research, grounded in a normative-interpretive method inspired by Straussian political philosophy, seeks to move International Relations beyond empirical and technocratic analysis and to redefine it in relation to gender justice, environmental ethics, and sustainability. Within this framework, political ecology and ecofeminism are understood not merely as critical approaches, but as part of a broader project of ethical and philosophical rethinking of politics in the modern world—a project that enables a simultaneous critique of dominant masculine rationality, the exclusion of women from the political sphere, and environmental degradation

### 1. Feminism and the Reconsideration of Politics in International Relations

Realism, as one of the most foundational theories of international relations, emphasizes the role of nation-states, the anarchic structure of the international system, the balance of power, and diplomacy. Since 1945, particularly in the United States, this theory has become one of the most influential analytical frameworks in international relations. Nevertheless, from a feminist perspective, realism has been subject to serious criticism. Within realist logic, the international system is portrayed as a realm

in which states, in order to ensure their survival and security, are compelled to rely on the principle of self-help and the accumulation of power. The enhancement of one state's security capabilities is perceived as a threat by others, thereby increasing tensions among states—a process that ultimately leads to balance-of-power politics and, under acute conditions, to conflict.

In contrast, liberalism adopts a more optimistic view of the international system, challenging realism by emphasizing cooperation, international institutions, and interdependence; however, these critiques are not always methodologically persuasive (Lascurin and Villafuerte, 2016). Despite the dominant position of realism in the history of international relations, many of its assumptions fail to reflect the complex and dynamic transformations of the contemporary international system. This theory primarily focuses on formal equality, while issues such as access to healthcare, literacy, retirement, unemployment benefits, and other dimensions of social policy constitute some of the most significant concerns of feminist policymaking. Feminist theory formally entered the field of International Relations in the 1980s. Similar to other areas of the social sciences, feminist scholars of International Relations argued that the discipline is shaped by instrumental logic and male-cantered rationality. They raised fundamental questions, including whether the predominance of men among global foreign policy leaders matters, why women have been so extensively marginalized in foreign and military policy domains, and why state foreign policies are often legitimized through hegemonic masculine traits, while wars are predominantly led and executed by men.

These critical questions have rarely been raised within traditional foreign policy frameworks, as many of them are not considered amenable to articulation or verification within the positivist epistemology and methodology of the social sciences (Negar, 2016). Although numerous scholarly works in International Relations have been published since the 1980s, feminism has attracted limited attention within foreign policy studies. In cases where feminist scholars have raised classical liberal-feminist questions, even the theoretical foundations of foreign policy have been challenged. The question “Where are the women?” constitutes one of the most central feminist inquiries in this field.

First, feminist researchers have sought to make visible the presence of women and their roles in international relations, particularly in the supplementary processes of foreign policy. Second, feminists alongside other critical theorists have expanded the scope of the discipline, thereby marginalizing the exclusive focus on traditional foreign policy studies (Negar, 2016).

### **1-1. Epistemological Critique of Realism and Liberalism from a Feminist Perspective**

From an epistemological standpoint, feminist scholars examine the nature of knowledge, the positionality of knowers, and the politics of gendered consciousness in international relations. Despite their considerable internal diversity, virtually all feminist approaches share a common orienting objective: identifying the structural sources of inequality, discrimination, and oppression against women, and elaborating strategies to overcome them (Tickner, 1992). Within the dominant epistemology of International Relations, the recognition of women as producers of knowledge and political consciousness has been systematically foreclosed.

Feminists argue that realism reproduces a masculine mode of knowing the world, ultimately encoding male dominance as the primary object of political consciousness (True, 2001). Enloe (1991), in her analysis of diplomacy, identifies the role of diplomats' spouses as integral to the cultivation of “informal relations” – relations that enable male diplomats to advance their diplomatic objectives and sustain



trust among men in volatile environments. She observes that informal male-to-male negotiations conducted in private settings, facilitated by the presence of women, are more likely to produce successful outcomes.

Enloe argues that incorporating women's lived experiences into international politics yields a more accurate account of how policies are actually implemented. From the standpoint of feminist epistemology, three principal orientations can be identified. First, modern science must recognize and foreground the valuable forms of knowledge embedded in women's practices, thereby acknowledging their contributions to the formation of human civilization. Second, cultural-radical feminism positions women as agents of knowledge and originators of new theoretical frameworks, treating women's experiences as a foundation upon which more critical and transformative theories of international relations can be constructed. Third, socialist and postmodern feminisms offer distinct but related perspectives: socialist feminists argue that women's social positions are shaped by structures of economic production and domestic reproduction, and therefore emphasize women's multiple and intersecting roles in explaining their social conditions (Tickner, 1992). Postmodern feminists, by contrast, critique this framework on the grounds that privileging the experiences of "white women" risks reproducing the very binaries – between self and other, center and margin – that feminism seeks to dismantle within patriarchal discourse.

**Within this framework, feminist approaches have opened new and generative horizons in the study of international relations. They demonstrate that comprehending the international system need not be confined to the conventional frameworks of liberalism and realism, and that gender analysis offers a productive lens through which these theories can be critically reinterpreted. Even realism, with its deeply embedded gendered assumptions, has in recent years become the object of sustained feminist scrutiny.** Within this context, the further development of International Relations theory necessitates genuine engagement with feminist epistemological questions and a substantive reconsideration of core concepts such as power, security, and agency. Crucially, the relationship between feminism and International Relations extends beyond the theoretical plane; it is bound up with broader disputes over the nature of knowledge, academic legitimacy, and disciplinary power namely disputes that continue to shape contemporary debates in the field.

### **1-2. Masculine Rationality, Power, and the Exclusion of Women in Global Politics**

In the course of deconstructing International Relations theory, feminist scholars argue that its foundational categories have largely been defined by men and structured around the female/male binary – a dichotomy in which women are cast as the "other" against which the dominant norm is constituted. From a feminist perspective, this gendered role assignment has been continuously reproduced to exclude women from the public and political spheres. Yet despite this entrenched historical marginalization, emerging international movements and new forms of political agency are actively contesting and redefining this condition (Grant and Newland, 1991; Tickner, 1992).

Adopting a gendered analytical approach, feminist scholars deconstruct the dominant order of International Relations into its social constituents and then reconstruct it through a feminist reading. Tickner argues that International Relations has historically been saturated by masculine hegemony; nevertheless, even a growing number of male scholars now acknowledge the necessity of fundamental change in the political realm. Because the naming of state behavior and the production of knowledge

in International Relations have been grounded almost exclusively in male experience, an extensive range of human experiences, namely experiences that could have opened new analytical horizons, have been systematically excluded. Accordingly, feminism in International Relations is not a matter of simply adding women to the study of global politics; it demands a profound reconsideration of the theoretical foundations of the discipline itself (Tickner, 1992).

Political science literature in the 1970s and 1980s devoted considerable attention to women's lives and their roles in economic development, particularly in the Global South. These studies provided an important foundation for linking peace, justice, and development, and contributed to the emergence of the "Women in Development" paradigm. This approach demonstrated that masculine biases embedded in development processes generate ineffective projects and inadequate policymaking. Its primary aim was the empowerment of women through their meaningful participation in development-related decisions affecting their own lives, a recognition that women are not external to development but positioned at its very center (Lascurin and Villafuerte, 2016).

Alongside the rise of development discourse, the concept of sustainable development, and particularly its environmental dimension, gained increasing prominence. The dominance of masculine instrumental rationality in scientific knowledge and state institutions has not only marginalized women but has also produced extensive environmental degradation, enacting a logic that treats nature itself as an object of exploitation and control (True, 2001). In this context, ecofeminist critiques seek to dismantle the organizational structures shaped by masculine bias and to advance sustainable alternatives grounded in women's autonomy and local self-reliance in relation to ecosystems (Tickner, 1992). Research also indicates that securing women's basic rights carries positive implications for peace and security within United Nations operations, as women's participation allows a broader range of voices to be heard in peace processes. Since 1945, increased female participation has measurably enhanced the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations (Nagar, 2016).

Feminist scholars in International Relations have expanded the concept of security well beyond the boundaries of the nation-state to encompass its social and gendered dimensions. From this perspective, war and conflict are generated within patriarchal nationalist frameworks, and their deeper roots lie in masculine myths of militarism. Feminists also foreground the suffering borne by women and children through death, injury, sexual violence, and displacement, as well as the indispensable roles women play in peacebuilding (Youngs, 2004).

Zalewski argues that gender differences have been deliberately institutionalized within the security sphere. The construction of war as an essentially masculine activity, and the image of the male soldier as its archetypal subject, reflect and reinforce a patriarchal order. The traditional exclusion of women from combat has not been designed to protect them but to preserve male privilege and authority. Myths surrounding masculinity and femininity, whether consciously enacted or unconsciously reproduced, contribute to the intensification and perpetuation of armed conflict (Zalewski, 1995).

Tickner further argues that because women are disproportionately among the first economic casualties of crisis conditions, they are positioned to offer distinctive insights into the relationship between militarism and structural violence. Feminist theory must therefore challenge the foundational concepts of International Relations, that is to say power, sovereignty, security, which are deeply entangled with constructions of masculinity. Reconsidering these concepts from a feminist standpoint enables their reformulation in ways capable of addressing the diverse and intersecting forms of insecurity that

characterize the contemporary world (Tickner, 1992). Feminist scholars broadly advocate for a more inclusive and expansive definition of security applicable to all human beings. Within this framework, Tickner (1992) and Peterson (1992) have illuminated the fundamental tension between state-centred national security projects and the imperatives of global human security. Human rights violations, military threats, structural economic inequalities at both national and international levels, and environmental degradation are all understood as major sources of insecurity and human suffering. Feminist scholars also draw attention to the structural violence produced by gender inequality, arguing that women's systemic insecurity operates simultaneously at national and international scales (Peterson, 1992).

Notwithstanding the expansion of feminist approaches, a number of significant criticisms have been levelled at their application within International Relations. Among these are doubts regarding their practical efficacy, as well as concerns about essentialism and the risk of reifying a fixed, homogeneous conception of "woman" (Tickner, 1992). It has also been emphasized that Western feminist experiences cannot be straightforwardly transposed onto other societies, given that gender relations are profoundly shaped by cultural and regional specificity. Context-sensitive and localized analyses must therefore be central to any engagement between feminism and International Relations.

A further criticism concerns the conceptual conflation of "gender" and "sex." Gender is a socially constructed category pertaining to power, policy, and social structure, whereas sex refers to biological difference. In some studies, however, gender has been implicitly reduced to "woman," producing a reductionist coding that narrows feminism's contribution to International Relations into a simplistic sex/gender distinction and obscures its theoretical depth. This conflation has at times generated a framework that centers primarily on women's victimization, at the expense of more complex and structural analyses (Lascurin and Villafuerte, 2016).

## 2. Political Ecology and Ecofeminism: Extending Feminism to the Realm of Nature

The convergence of ecology and feminism has given rise to a social theory and political movement that challenges gender relations, social organization, economic systems, scientific paradigms, and the positioning of humanity within the biosphere. According to Spretnak (1988), ecofeminists engage a wide spectrum of concerns, from reproductive technologies and development in the Global South to toxic contamination and the construction of alternative economic and political models. King (1989) similarly conceptualizes political ecology as a potentially global movement grounded in democratic participation, pluralism, and resistance to all forms of domination.

The novelty of this movement, the breadth of its thematic concerns, and the diversity of its intellectual contributors have generated considerable ambiguity surrounding the definition and scope of political ecology. Broadly construed, this theoretical framework analyses multiple and interlocking forms of domination, particularly the oppression of women and the exploitation of the environment, and seeks to employ ecological and feminist principles as the foundation for political organization and modes of life premised on social justice and environmental sustainability. Across all its internal variants, political ecology is united by its commitment to linking individual, social, and environmental concerns through integrated, multi-centered political action (Warren, 1990).

The term "ecofeminism" was first introduced in 1974 by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne, in the context of the women's movement and the defence of the Earth. The numerous definitions sub-



sequently proposed share a common emphasis on the connection between women and the environment, treating their experiences of oppression and exploitation as structurally analogous. Warren (1996) describes ecofeminism as an umbrella concept encompassing socialist, cultural, radical, and ecological variants, all of which stress the relationship between the domination of women and the domination of nature.

Feminism has not, however, been the sole intellectual force shaping political ecology. Social ecology movements, women's spirituality movements, and critical theory associated with the Frankfurt School have each contributed to its development. Grounded in ecofeminist principles, a structural link is posited between the oppression of women, the marginalization of other subordinate groups, and the exploitation of non-human nature. Elucidating these relationships and identifying emancipatory possibilities for both women and the natural world constitute the philosophical core of ecofeminism (Davoudi-Muqaddam and Gholipour, 2016).

Many ecologists and feminist theorists have argued that what is required is simultaneously an ecological feminism and a feminist ecology. Despite political ecology's considerable internal diversity, its shared premise remains the recognition of the symbolic and mutually reinforcing character of domination over women and domination over nature.

From an ecofeminist perspective, the relationship between women and nature has deep historical roots, sustained across culture, language, and history. This connection was reinvigorated by the social movements of the 1960s, particularly the women's liberation movement and the nascent ecological movement, and became especially visible with the establishment of Earth Day in 1970. Both movements foreground egalitarian values and call for a fundamental redefinition of humanity's relationship with nature and with social structures (Merchant, 1989). The feminine principle, understood as a reflection of women's distinctive relational orientation toward nature, has been conceptualized as a guarantor of care and ecological attentiveness. Western colonialism, however, fundamentally transformed this relationship by reducing nature to a passive resource for extraction, generating environmental destruction and legitimizing harmful technologies (Enayat and Fathizadeh, 2009).

Political ecology did not fully consolidate as an academic discourse until the late 1980s, when its geographical reach became evident across the United States, Canada, north-western Europe, India, and Australia (Twine, 2001). As both a theoretical framework and a practical orientation, political ecology seeks to connect feminist analysis with the urgency of ecological crisis. Within this discourse, nature and women are both constituted as objects of domination under the modern project, and environmental degradation is understood as a logical extension of patriarchal systems and instrumental rationality (Sandilands, 1999; Moshirzadeh, 2004).

### **2-1. The Epistemology of Political Ecology and the Status of Women**

From an epistemological standpoint, political ecology establishes a meaningful connection between women and nature. Women disproportionately bear the greatest burdens of environmental crises and ecological degradation, a reality that has drawn attention to them as conscious actors and environmental experts. Within this framework, it is argued that women, compared to men, possess deeper ecological knowledge due to their direct engagement with subsistence practices and natural resources (Lorentzen, 2002).

Some theorists explain that in rural regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, activities such as gar-

dening and agricultural production are predominantly undertaken by women, leading to the formation of extensive knowledge of natural processes. In contrast, “maldevelopment” grounded in masculine logic perceives nature merely as a potential commodity within the market economy, whereas indigenous women emphasize the preservation and protection of natural resources to ensure the well-being of future generations. Consequently, women are seen as instinctively assigning higher priority to environmental protection (Beal, 2011).

Furthermore, essentialist perspectives argue that women exhibit greater empathy toward nature, which in turn facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the natural environment. However, women’s epistemological advantage is not rooted in biological differences but rather in a historically, socially, and gendered relationship with nature (Twine, 2001).

Women’s environmental concerns often stem from their lived experiences within the private and domestic spheres. The environment becomes a political issue when it threatens the security of home and family. From this perspective, the private sphere acquires political significance for women, and politics manifests itself in their everyday practices. Although women generally express greater concern for environmental issues than men, their participation in collective environmental action tends to be lower (Sandilands, 1999). Research also indicates that the involvement of ecofeminist women scholars in the production of theoretical texts—particularly in countries such as the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, Australia and the United States—has remained limited (Twine, T.R., 2001).

The concept of “maternal environmentalism” represents one way in which women, as a group with specific social relations, articulate their environmental concerns. In contrast, some analysts suggest that women’s environmental engagement is primarily a response to immediate threats to children and future generations, driven more by short-term interests than by commitment to abstract ethical, aesthetic, or ecological principles.

Nevertheless, the dominant theory in ecofeminism emphasizes the structural similarities between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. The prefix “eco” in feminism refers to the concept of “home”, the Earth as a shared home, whose connection to everyday human life has been shaped largely through women’s experiences. Within this framework, political ecology, as both a theory and a social movement, demonstrates a broad capacity to respond to social and environmental issues and embodies a dynamic, creative, and integrative character (Sandilands, 1999).

Although voices within political ecology are diverse, their shared axis lies in recognizing and affirming the link between domination over nature and domination over women. In patriarchal societies, culture and rationality are constructed as masculine traits, set in opposition to nature and emotion, which are coded as feminine, thereby producing unequal valuations between these binaries. In contrast, proponents of political ecology seek to generate forms of awareness that transcend such gendered dichotomies and emphasize biological, cultural, and social diversity (Karen, 1996).

## 2-2. Political Ecology in International Politics

To date, approximately 280 international and regional treaties and agreements related to environmental protection have been adopted, of which around 70 conventions and protocols possess global scope. The inaugural United Nations conference on the human environment, known as the Stockholm Conference, was convened in 1972, followed by the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, both of which represent

landmark moments in the history of international environmental politics.

Among the key instruments in this evolving legal architecture are the Ramsar Convention (1971), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (1973), the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer (1985), the Basel Convention (1989), the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), the Convention to Combat Desertification (1994), the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (2000), and numerous related agreements that together constitute the legal framework for global environmental governance.

Given the inherently transboundary nature of environmental problems, the imperative to connect women-led ecological movements and ecofeminism in particular with the formal structures of International Relations has become increasingly apparent. Accelerating global environmental degradation has heightened public awareness, and women, by virtue of their roles in household management and daily subsistence, have frequently been among the first to experience the tangible consequences of ecological crisis. This lived proximity to environmental harm has positioned women as informed actors and consequential voices in environmental affairs.

Some feminist scholars argue that, because women are more severely affected by pollution and environmental degradation than men, environmental issues are inherently gendered in their impacts. Rising toxic emissions, intensifying greenhouse effects, climate change, and environmental contamination exert direct pressures on women's lives – particularly those of rural and agricultural women – and pose serious threats to their health, including elevated incidence of certain cancers with gender-specific dimensions (Moshirzadeh, 2004: 422).

Throughout the history of political ecology, women have played active and visible roles in protesting environmental destruction at the global level: from opposition to deforestation in the Himalayas and forest degradation in Ecuador, to resistance against desertification in Kenya and the expansion of genetically modified crops. In Iran, environmental challenges including water scarcity, drought, desertification, air pollution, and the degradation of wetlands have generated forms of environmental activism in which women have assumed important roles. Iranian women activists, local organizations, and civil society groups have participated in campaigns for water protection, sustainable agriculture, and environmental awareness. These developments illustrate that environmental politics in Iran cannot be disentangled from broader questions of gender, social participation, and sustainable development. From an ecofeminist perspective, the Iranian case demonstrates how environmental crisis may catalyze the emergence of new forms of social and political agency among women. The protection of foundational environmental resources, namely water, soil, and biodiversity, constitutes one of the central commitments of the ecofeminist movement.

As a critical philosophy and social movement, political ecology interrogates the effectiveness of prevailing state-centered and institution-based environmental governance frameworks and foregrounds the role of grassroots movements, particularly women's movements, in achieving meaningful ecological protection. It maintains that global ecological sustainability is attainable only through the economic, social, and political empowerment of women. Accordingly, contemporary political ecology places its primary emphasis not on theoretical elaboration alone but on women's effective activism within political and environmental arenas.

Although women's roles in International Relations have historically been marginal and the field has remained predominantly male-dominated, the urgency of environmental crisis and women's deeper re-

lational engagement with the natural world underscores the pressing need to redefine these roles. By challenging the dominant paradigms of realism and liberalism, political ecology exposes the incapacity of these frameworks to deliver sustainable development and adequate environmental protection. In their place, political ecology through the integration of thought and action foregrounds ecological restoration and women's active participation in public life, treating peace, freedom, good governance, and sustainability not as optional aspirations but as outcomes that are contingent upon embracing this transformative approach.

### **2-3. Ecofeminism, Environmental Crisis, and Women's Activism in Iran**

Contemporary environmental crises in Iran have progressively transformed ecological deterioration into an urgent social and political concern. Challenges including water scarcity, desertification, air pollution, deforestation, soil erosion, and the drying of wetlands and lakes have generated wide-ranging debates about sustainable development, environmental governance, and social justice. Among the most pressing of these, the ecological crisis of Lake Urmia, recurring dust storms across western and southern Iran, and chronic urban air pollution have vividly illustrated the interconnectedness of environmental degradation and human security in the Iranian context. These developments make clear that environmental challenges in Iran cannot be understood merely as technical or managerial failures; they must also be analysed in relation to the broader political, economic, and social structures that shape them.

Within this context, Iranian women have increasingly engaged in environmental activism, local ecological movements, and civil society initiatives oriented toward sustainability and public welfare. Although environmental activism in Iran operates under complex political and institutional constraints, women's participation in environmental campaigns, community-based initiatives, and public awareness efforts has expanded considerably in recent years. From an ecofeminist perspective, this growing participation reflects the emergence of new forms of social and political agency through which women engage with questions of environmental protection, sustainable livelihoods, and local ecological knowledge. Environmental activism in this context functions not only as a response to ecological crisis but as a form of civic engagement deeply connected to broader concerns of gender justice and social responsibility.

Ecofeminist analysis is particularly pertinent to the Iranian context because environmental degradation often affects women disproportionately, especially in relation to household management, access to water, family health, food security, and rural livelihoods. Research conducted in Iran suggests that women generally display greater environmental concern and stronger support for environmentally responsible behavior, including energy conservation, waste management, and sustainable consumption (Hosseinneshad, 2017). These patterns should not be interpreted through a lens of biological essentialism; rather, they emerge from women's socially situated experiences and their historically gendered interactions with everyday environmental conditions.

At the theoretical level, the Iranian case also highlights the limitations of universalizing Western feminist frameworks across non-Western contexts. Iranian feminism has developed within specific cultural, religious, and political conditions that differ substantially from liberal feminist trajectories in Europe and North America. Consequently, the relationship between feminism, environmentalism, and political participation in Iran reflects localized dynamics shaped by questions of development,

state policy, civil society, and cultural identity. From the perspective of International Relations, these dynamics demonstrate that environmental politics and gender politics are increasingly and irreversibly intertwined within contemporary global and regional debates over sustainability, governance, and human security.

### **Feminism in International Relations and Political Ecology: A Normative Reconsideration of Global Politics**

Feminism in International Relations and women's political ecology can be understood as two complementary dimensions of a single theoretical project aimed at the normative reconsideration of global politics. By subjecting dominant rationalities and patriarchal power structures to sustained critique, feminism creates a space in which global politics is apprehended not merely as a domain of competing interests and security calculations, but as a terrain of ethical, social, and environmental contestation. Women's political ecology extends this analytical horizon by demonstrating that the same logic of domination responsible for the exclusion of women from politics has also reduced nature and the environment to instrumental concerns at the margins of political life. From this perspective, environmental questions are not an external addendum to International Relations analysis but represent a deepening and completion of the feminist critique of modern politics.

Within this framework, ecofeminism by foregrounding the connection between women's lived experiences and environmental crisis enables the substantive redefinition of concepts such as power, security, and development. This reorientation resonates with Leo Strauss's political philosophy, which subjects scientism and instrumental rationality to rigorous critique and calls for the restoration of ethics, virtue, and normative reasoning to the center of political life (Strauss, 1953; Strauss, 1964). Women's political ecology, as a theoretical extension of feminism in International Relations, thus offers a horizon within which global politics can be reimagined on the basis of ethical responsibility toward both humanity and the natural world.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study suggest that contemporary environmental crises cannot be adequately understood as the product of policy failure, insufficient international cooperation, or institutional inefficiency alone. Rather, these crises are rooted in the epistemological, normative, and ethical foundations of modern politics itself. The dominant frameworks of International Relations, realism and liberalism in particular, by privileging instrumental rationality, hard security, economic growth, and material interests, have systematically marginalized the gendered, ethical, and environmental dimensions of political life. This marginalization has not only generated theoretical blind spots in the comprehension of environmental complexity but has also, in practice, reproduced structures of domination that reduce nature to an exploitable resource and women to peripheral actors. The environmental crisis must therefore be understood as part of a deeper crisis of political modernity, one in which the rupture between politics and ethics has eroded the capacity for sustainable and just engagement with global challenges.

Feminist approaches in International Relations, by exposing the gendered character of concepts such as power, security, development, and rationality, open a new critical horizon for global politics and reveal that what is presented as "neutral" or "objective" knowledge is, in fact, constituted through un-



equal relations of power. Building on this foundation, ecofeminism and women's political ecology lay bare the structural link between the domination of nature and the domination of women, arguing that environmental degradation and persistent gender inequality are products of a single logic of control, exploitation, and instrumentalization. These approaches reconstitute the environment not as a technical or managerial matter but as a profoundly political, ethical, and social concern, one intimately bound up with bodies, livelihoods, care, and social reproduction.

From the standpoint of political philosophy, ecofeminist analysis finds resonance with Strauss's critique of modernity, particularly in its insistence on the ethical crisis of modern politics, the hegemony of scientism, and the suppression of fundamental questions concerning the good, justice, and the ends of political life. Within this framework, women's political ecology represents a project of ethical reconstruction – one that, by amplifying marginalized voices, contesting purely instrumental values, and rethinking the relationship between humanity, nature, and power, makes possible the articulation of an alternative vision of global politics. This alternative conceives politics not merely as a competitive, security-driven arena but as a space for ethical responsibility, care, and sustainability on a planetary scale.

The Iranian context further illustrates that ecofeminist perspectives cannot be reduced to Western feminist experiences alone. In contemporary Iran, environmental crisis intersects with gender justice, civil society participation, and sustainable development in ways distinctively shaped by cultural, political, and social conditions. The growing engagement of Iranian women in environmental activism reflects the emergence of new forms of political agency that simultaneously challenge ecological degradation and gendered exclusion from public life. The Iranian case thereby underscores the importance of contextually sensitive and locally grounded approaches within feminist International Relations theory.

This article ultimately argues that the realization of sustainable peace, meaningful development, and good governance at the global level is unachievable without simultaneous and serious commitment to gender justice and environmental protection. Women's political ecology opens both a theoretical and practical horizon for global politics, one in which nature is no longer instrumentalized, ethics is restored to the center of political life, and women are recognized not as marginal participants but as indispensable agents in shaping the political and ecological future of the world.

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