# Environmental Politics and Ecofeminist Philosophy as the Gendering of Nature: A Case Study of Niger Delta of Nigeria

**By**

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**Abstract**

The problem of environmental degradation has led to industrial pollution, oil spillage, gas flaring, depletion of the ozone layer, extinction of species, health hazards such as respiratory diseases, human rights, emergence of social movements, women's rights, and feminist movement. Environment politics and ecofeminist philosophy hinges on the oppression of women and nature. Ecofeminist philosophy is an offshoot of feminist movement and it attempts to address the dreadful conditions of the environment. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy is aimed at ensuring environmental sustainability. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy showcases that there are the interactive forces between human beings and nonhuman beings. The objective of this paper is to reveal that environmental sustainability has become a global phenomenon that demand international cooperation through the formulation of ethical principles, standards, and regulations. Climate change and global warming are becoming a threat to humanity and if necessary steps are not being taken humanity would be doomed by the unpalatable consequences of the depletion of the ozone layer, earthquakes, food insecurity, ultraviolet radiation, hunger, respiratory diseases, and displacement of people from their homes due to over flooding. This paper adopts analytical framework and hermeneutical methodology in discussing the nexus of environmental politics, ecofeminist philosophy and environmental issues bordering on Niger Delta of Nigeria. This paper concludes that environmental degradation is caused by human negligence. This paper recommends that international cooperation is needed through ethical standards and regulations to mitigate against the gross violation of environmental laws on deforestation, oil spillage, gas emission and industrial pollution.

**Keywords: Ecofeminist Philosophy, Environmental Degradation, Environmental Politics, Niger Delta, Dreadful Conditions**

## 1.1 Introduction

The problem of environmental degradation has led to industrial pollution, oil spillage, gas flaring or emission, depletion of the ozone layer, extinction of species, health hazards such as respiratory diseases, human rights, emergence of social movements, women's rights, deforestation, overpopulation, industrialization, urbanization, the use of combustible engines,

automobile vehicles and fossil fuels. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy hinges on the dynamic interplay between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature. Ecofeminist philosophy is an offshoot of feminist movement and it attempts to address the dreadful conditions of the environment. The philosophical presuppositions of environmental politics and ecological environment is aimed at ensuring environmental sustainability. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy showcases the interactive forces between human beings and non-human beings. The objective of this paper is to reveal that the contemporary issues surrounding natural sustainability are global phenomenon that demand international cooperation through the formulation of ethical principles, standards, and regulations to check the excesses of various countries of the world to make the natural environment a better and conducive place for all human beings to live in.

Furthermore, climate change and global warming are becoming a threat to humanity and if necessary steps are not being taken humanity would be doomed by the unpalatable consequences of the depletion of the ozone layer, earthquakes, food insecurity, ultraviolet radiation, hunger, respiratory diseases and displacement of people from their homes due to over flooding. This paper examines the interconnection between environmental politics, ecofeminist philosophy and ethical perspective bordering on Niger Delta of Nigeria.

Ecofeminist philosophy is fundamentally inspired by attributing gender perceptions to the natural environment. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy are simply conceptual frameworks that are aimed at gendering the natural environment and "human-centered ethics". According to John Burr and Milton Goldinger (2008, 226), a human-centered ethics can be the basis of powerful arguments for what we may call "environmental values". The solution to the problems of the dreadful conditions of the environment demands international cooperation by all countries of the world to reduce the usage of gas emission and combustible engines. This paper is divided into four sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two focuses on the conceptual framework of environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy. Section three is anchored on the interconnections between environmental politics, ecofeminist philosophy and ethical perspective on Niger Delta of Nigeria. Section four hinges on the conclusion and recommendations. This paper concludes that environmental degradation is caused by human negligence. This paper recommends that international cooperation is needed through ethical standards and regulations to mitigate against the gross violation of environmental laws on deforestation, oil spillage, gas emission, and industrial pollution.

**1.2 Conceptual Framework of Environmental Politics and Ecofeminist Philosophy.**

Environmental politics revolves around ecofeminist philosophy. In other words, environmental politics encompasses the conceptual framework of ecofeminist philosophy. However, ecofeminist philosophy as a new social philosophy has attracted the scholarly attention of various environmental ethicists in contemporary times. The notion of environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy has become a call for the safety of the ecological environment. Ecofeminist philosophy as a new social movement is fundamentally inspired by attributing gender qualities to the natural environment. The abuse of the natural environment has resulted in the destruction of the ozone layer, lack of natural sustainability and the dreadful conditions of the environment. The challenges confronting the dreadful

conditions of the environment have led to the pervasiveness of the planet earth. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy reveals the potential dangers of the dreadful conditions of the ecosystem and its negative consequences on the contemporary world. It has dawned on us that the dreadful conditions of the environment are as real as human existence. The dreadful conditions of the environment reflect in a kind of global catastrophe.

Moreover, this theoretical discourse is a reflection in certain conceptual frameworks such as ecofeminism, environmentalism, ecologism and ecological feminism. Ecofeminism has become part and parcel of environmental ethics. Environmental ethics has critical importance in guaranteeing the need for environmental sustainability. A proper nature and understanding of these concepts demands that the concepts of environmentalism, ecologism and feminism are interrelated concepts. Ecofeminism is a social movement that stretches across the borderlines of environmental ethics. There is an inextricable nexus between ethical regulation by the international community and the protection of the natural environment. The oppression of nature by human negligence could only be solved by ethical principles, standards and regulations by international cooperation. Put differently, ethics plays a pivotal role in the safeguarding the natural environment. For Chigbo Ekwealo (2012, 1-2), ethics is the systematic study of the fundamental principle of morality. As a study, it is a critical examination of values with a view to having qualitative way of living and conduct. Accordingly, Anthony Echekwube (2005, 29), argues that ethics is the branch of philosophy that studies the actions of the human person relative to right or wrong. On the other hand, ethics refers to certain moral guidelines, rules, regulations on how we ought to treat other people including the natural environment. In addition to the foregoing, ecological feminism and environmental sustainability revolves around ethical principles, standards and regulations by international cooperation.

Moreover, some contemporary challenges confronting the dreadful conditions of the environment include urbanization, overpopulation, industrialization and deforestation. Some of the resultant effects of the dreadful conditions of the environment include violence, human rights abuses, industrial pollution, over flooding, food shortages, water shortages, excessive and lethal solar radiation or ultraviolet rays, and extinction of species. The solution to the dreadful conditions of the environment should be intensified by international cooperation to reduce the usage of gas emission and combustible engines. In addition to the foregoing, caution ought to be taken by the international community to understand the potential dangers on the dreadful conditions of the environment. According to John Hoffman and Paul Graham (2009, 365-366), at a certain point in the process of life-forms will be threatened due to the problem of the dreadful conditions of the environment apart from global warming, there are other specific environmental issues such as resource depletion, localised pollution, decline in species and nuclear war. Accordingly, John Hoffman and Paul Graham (2009, 366) argued that environmental crisis does raise interesting question about the relationship between science and politics. Ecologists are critical of scientific rationality, and yet employ scientific evidence to support their arguments. For Leon Baradat (2008, 281), "nature as a whole is central, and the value of all things is measured by their contributions to the natural environment. Accordingly, if humans threaten nature, they reduce their own validity and worth. According to Leon Baradat (2008, 266-277), "Industrial Revolution, the fount of modern

political ideologies, has, for the first time in history, made it possible for humans to improve their material lives on a vast scale, but at the same time to so influence the natural environment as to actually threaten human existence itself. Humans should see themselves as only a part of nature, constituents of a universe that is composed of numerous interactive forces and interdependent beings, both living and non-living.

Furthermore, human beings, plants, animals and non-living beings are actually confronted by the negative consequences of the dreadful conditions of the environment. The ethical implications of natural sustainability on human existence demand the need for an assessment of ecological feminist movement. Human existence has been confronted by certain environmental crises caused by human deliberate choices and actions. Ecofeminist philosophy is a subdivision of the feminist movement that emphasizes the emancipation of women in a male-dominated world and the need for environmental sustainability. Ecofeminist philosophy supports the need for natural sustainability of the Mother-Earth. Ecofeminist philosophy draws its inspiration and motivation from the concept of gender and sexism. Ecofeminist philosophy analyzes the parasitic relationships between human beings and the natural environment. The term 'ecofeminism' remains one of the contemporary issues environmental politics is currently discussing.

Nonetheless, ecofeminist philosophy asserts a feminist perspective on environmental sustainability that calls for an egalitarian, collaborative, and emancipated global society in which there is no one group dominating the other group. In contemporary times, there are several variants of ecofeminist movements, with varying theoretical approaches and analyses, including liberal ecofeminism, spiritual/cultural ecofeminism, and social/socialist ecofeminism (or materialist ecofeminism). The various interpretations of ecofeminist philosophies are applied to social movement, women protection of the environment, political thought, global justice, religion, contemporary feminism, and ecofeminist literature. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy as a social movement explores the interconnections between women, nature, culture, economy, religion, politics, literature and iconography. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy addresses the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. These parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women reflects in the practical demonstration in seeing women and nature as property of men, seeing men as the dominant ones in terms of culture and women as the custodians of nature, and how men dominate women and nature in a male-dominated world. In addition to the foregoing, ecofeminist philosophy emphasizes that both women and nature must be valued by a male-dominated world. Though, the scope of ecofeminist philosophy has been championed and popularized by an American ecofeminist Charlene Spretnak who offers ecofeminist philosophy in the areas of politics, history religion, and environmental ethics.

Moreover, the interconnection between women and the natural environment has become some of the issues the contemporary world is grappling with in terms of respect for women's rights and respect for nature. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy is undertaken for various reasons such as; to explore and understand the different dynamics and cultural perspectives on the natural environment. It is, however worth noting that humanity cannot do without the natural environment and we must protect, preserve and conserve the natural environment before humanity would be plunged into total destruction through the

emergence of climate change and global warming. The contemporary issues of climate change and global warming seem to be a child's play or a joke to many people but in reality it has become a global concern that must be taken very seriously by various countries across the world. In addition to the foregoing, the protection and preservation of the planet earth by human existence is critical in guaranteeing the need for environmental sustainability.

Furthermore, human beings need the natural environment for their sustenance and continued survival. They need to till the soil for farming, they need to explore the aquatic environment for fishing and they need to fetch fire woods for cooking but all these must be guarded jealously to avert global catastrophes. The discourse on environmental politics, ecofeminist philosophy and environmental sustainability has cut across all borders and it has become a global phenomenon. A more comprehensive nature and understanding of the natural environment and the need for its environmental sustainability is reflected in ethical considerations, standards, regulations and principles that must be guided by an emancipated global society. The cultural diversity concerning ecofeminist philosophy and environmental sustainability ought to be harmonized by international cooperation. However, various countries all over the world must regularly organize international summit by coming up with ethical standards and regulations that will guard against fragrant violation of international environmental laws regarding the protection and preservation of the natural environment. We ought to protect and preserve the natural environment from human negligence and carelessness.

Nevertheless, the theoretical perspective on environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy revolves around socio-political, humanistic, ethical, existential, metaphysical implications of the natural environment. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy critically examines the dynamic role of women in terms of protecting and preserving the natural environment. In addition to the foregoing, the ethical implications of the dreadful conditions of the environment has become an alarming proportion and hence there is the need for the sustenance of the natural environment. Put differently, the obvious facts inherent in environmental sustainability across the world calls for a comprehensive understanding of the practical demonstration of ecofeminist philosophy. The ideological template of environment politics and ecofeminist philosophy lends credence to the various defenses on environmental ethics by contemporary thinkers. Worthy of note is that human beings cannot do without the natural environment because the environmental community gives meaning and purpose to them. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy helps us to deeply appreciate the cultural diversity and various opinions of environmental ethicists on the need for the preservation and the conservation of the natural environment. It is, however worth noting that conservatism as a political ideology has critical importance with regards to contemporary issues concerning the preservation and conservation of the natural environment. For John Hoffman and Paul Graham (2009, 197), etymology can be misleading. However, conservatism is a derivative of 'conservation' and 'preservation'. However, contemporary issues concerning the preservation and conservation of the natural environment has a moral imperative; and it is timely because the modern world is at crossroads due to the challenges of the dreadful conditions of the environment. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy fosters a cross-cultural understanding, enhancement of empathy and to facilitate an effective interactive forces between human beings and nonhuman beings.

Moreover, environmental politics revolves around a feminist ideological philosophy and ecofeminist philosophy relates to the fields of political philosophy, ethics, religion, sociology, and metaphysics. For instance, the metaphysics of the environment is a unique one because it borders on the God-talk and His relationship with man. When God created the world, He permits man to make good use of the natural environment. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy ranges from the fundamental question for individual self-realization and environmentalism revolves around the idea of the God-question. For Pantaleon Iroegbu (1995, 95-96), the God-question is an inevitable question. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy reflects in gendering nature. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy explores the interconnection between women and nature. There is a dynamic interplay between human beings and the environment. A theoretical stance on the natural environment reveals an ethical imperative and moral duty because human beings solely depend on the natural environment for their purposefulness and meaningfulness. However, environmental politics is aimed at discussing the ethical implications of ecofeminist philosophy and environmental sustainability. Human existence has been confronted by certain existential burden due to human deliberate choices and actions. This theoretical discourse is fundamental in alleviating the environmental challenges facing the contemporary world and to assert that natural sustainability is an integral part of human lived experiences. Ecofeminist philosophy has attracted the scholarly attention of contemporary thinkers. For instance, Chaone Mallory (2018, 11) examines early critiques of ecofeminism, including those usefully articulated by pathfinding ecofeminist philosopher Victoria Davion, and argues that concerns over essentialist tendencies in ecofeminism are misplaced. On the other hand, Chaone Mallory (2018, 11-12) holds that the term "ecofeminism" performs theoretically and politically useful work by allowing us to think of feminism and environmentalism together
Worthy of note is that Mark Stoddart and David Tindall (2011, 3) draw upon two waves of interviews with environmental movement members in British Columbia and Canada, in order to examine participants' various interpretations of the relationship between gender and environmental politics. On the other hand, Mark Stoddart and David Tindall (2011, 3-4) argued that:

> Four claims emerge from this analysis. First, our results support the notion that there is an affinity between environmental politics and feminism. Second, despite recent critiques of eco-materialism and the dual subjugation of nature and women within ecofeminism, these discourses remain useful as interpretive resources for research participants. Third, while eco-materialism is a recurrent theme, it appears to be declining in relative importance as a discursive resource. Finally, notions of hegemonic masculinity are becoming more salient as an interpretive framework. While the first two claims emphasize continuity in participants' interpretive framework, the latter findings describe shifts in participants' understandings of gender and environmental politics.

Worthy of note is that Denise Reaume (1992, 4) argues that a similar argument is levelled at Catharine MacKinnon's analysis of law. Catharine MacKinnon's stipulative account of the features of the legal definition of equality leaves much to be desired. Only by refusing fully to acknowledge the extent to which women's situation has changed and her theory's inability to explain this change. On the other hand, Kandel Yogmaya (2022, 3), explores the language of eco-feminist philosophy and its intersection with the works of early 20th-century feminist

writers Buck and Cather. Ecofeminist philosophy is a branch of feminist movement that examines the interconnections between women and nature, emphasizing the ways both nature and women are treated by patriarchal society or male-dominated world. However, we need to have a pedagogical timeline on how we value women's rights and respect for nature in order to guarantee what Alan Thomas (2006, 294) calls the comprehensive conceptions of the good in the liberal political world.

Furthermore, ecofeminist philosophy seeks to emphasize the interconnectedness between the oppression of women and oppression of nature; and all creatures through caring for the earth as well as other oppressed groups in the contemporary world. For Jamie Thompson (2017, 2), the concept of patriarchy or any concept in which one group dominates another is inseparable from the function of human kind's domination of nature. This domination of nature has led to the current ecological crisis humanity faces. Accordingly, Jamie Thompson (2017, 1-2), further heightened his theoretical presuppositions by arguing that women can ultimately provide and lead the movement to solve this ecological crisis through the growing social movement of ecofeminist philosophy. Women innately have stronger connection to the earth than men which is why they are the only people who can lead the movement of earth healing. In the ecofeminist philosophy, individuals recognize and reject Western dualistic thinking that the earth, and all things physical, is separate from the earth.

Worthy of note is that Chris Cuomo (2002, 12) argues that in the heat of a historical movement when the interwoven nature of imperialism, ecological degradation, exploitation of workers, racism, and women's oppression is painfully obvious to many ecofeminist philosophy appears to be gaining momentum or popularity. As Karen Warren (2000) illustrates, a key theoretical insight of ecological feminism is captured by the phrase "it's all connected." In more precise terminology, ecofeminist stresses the exhaustive theoretical analysis to which human realities are embedded in ecological realities, and the fact that we are all composed of physical and conceptual connections and relationships with the Mother-Earth. Ecofeminist philosophy makes strong normative assumptions about those interconnections, and they find present ecological and social relationships to be far more morally troubling than "we" modern thinkers tend to acknowledge.

Furthermore, the natural environment is part and parcel of human lived experiences. Environmentalism reveals a form of a social movement that emphasizes the preserving and conserving the natural environment for generations yet to come. The conception of ecological environment can be combined with many different ideological constructions such as liberalism, conservatism, socialism, Marxism and democracy. Ecofeminist philosophy emphasizes the roles women played in social activism with regards to environmental sustainability. Ecofeminist philosophy is an offshoot of the feminist movement and it cuts across women of different races, class and cultural backgrounds in the modern world. Ecofeminist philosophy raises the interconnections of gender, race, sexism, class, and environmental ethics. Based on this theoretical subscription, John Hoffman and Paul Graham (2009, 496) assert that environmentalism is a movement which highlights the critical importance of preserving and conserving the earth's natural resources and guaranteeing a fair of those resources for future generations.

Nevertheless, environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy hinges on women's rights. However, women worked in concerted effort to protect and preserve the ecosystem for the normative possibility of environmental sustainability with regards to food security, clean air and affordable water supply. These concerted efforts of women depended largely on new social movements and developments in environmental movement. Environmental politics and ecofeminist philosophy has been greatly influenced by some prominent writers such as the nonviolent philosophy of Henry David Thoreau, the land ethics of Aldo Leopold, and others such as John Muir and Rachel Carson. For instance, Aldo Leopold was the first to have a philosophical theorizing on land ethics. Aldo Leopold's land ethics emphasizes the nature and understanding of the interrelationships between humans and non-humans (animals, plants, land, air, water) as parts of the ecological community.

### 1.3 Environmental Politics, Ecofeminist Philosophy and Ethical Perspective on Niger Delta of Nigeria

The challenges of the dreadful conditions of the environment in Niger Delta of Nigeria has led to some contemporary issues such as "resource control" and violent eruption. The problematic of environmental degradation such as environmental pollution caused by oil spillage has led to the pervasiveness of violent eruption and the emergence of some Niger Delta groups such as the Ijaw Youth Movement, Urhobo Youth Movement, Itsekiri Youth Movement and Isoko Youth Movement. For instance, oil spillage remains one of the fundamental challenges confronting environmental sustainability in the Niger Delta region. For Henry Ekiyor (2007, 55), oil spillage in the Niger Delta is a by-product of oil exploration in that region. The dreadful conditions of the environment have led to certain fundamental problems such as unemployment, marginalization, and environmental degradation due to oil spillage and gas flaring. P. E Nmah (2009, 171) argues that:

> The issues involved in the Niger Delta conflict include the control of natural resources, unemployment, underdevelopment, environmental degradation by oil spillage and gas flaring, corruption among the Nigerian politicians especially the politicians from Niger Delta region coupled with series of redefinition of rights to land following land reforms by various governments to the extent that there are confusions regarding what the standards are culminating in pressures and contestations over land and between groups, especially when the aboriginal right to land is put into question.

Worthy of note is that P. E Nmah (2009, 171-172), argues that the issues in the Niger Delta borders on national security, the issue of physical infrastructure, social infrastructure, unemployment, and the perception and reality of marginalization by the federal government of Nigeria. Some of the multinational companies such as Shell, Mobil, and Chevron were multinational companies or foreign producers of oil in the Niger Delta and they are the minority and they are in partnership with the federal government of Nigeria and the movement for the survival of the Ogoni people (MOSOP). It is, however, worth noting that the environmental challenges confronting the Niger Delta are very complex issues and one of the issues that is most fundamental to the Niger Delta borders on the issue of endemic corruption within the multinational oil companies and their partners such as the federal government of Nigeria and the local communities where they operate. The various ethnic groups are not also left out from this menacing drumbeat of corruption in the Niger Delta region. As rightly observed by P. E Nmah (2009, 172), the Niger Delta issue is complex. They are not issues one can solve overnight. However, the Niger Delta issue borders on socio-

economic and political depravity. Based on this theoretical subscription, P.E Nmah (2009, 172), argues that the Niger Delta has been deprived and dehumanized.

Nevertheless, P. E Nmah (2009, 172), further heightened his philosophical presupposition, by asserting that the resource control entails economic development, shelter, food, water, soil, petroleum, tools, and other natural resources associated with the land. Whatever, therefore, that threatens Niger Delta natural resources, which are the people's sources of livelihood threatens their spiritual existence. It threatens everything they are socially, politically, culturally, economically, morally, psychologically as well as their spiritual nature. Environmental degradation brings to the foreground the environmental challenges of over flooding, extinction of species and health hazards as a result of gas flaring and oil spillage in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Unfortunately, environmental degradation as a result of gas flaring and oil spillage has led to the untimely deaths of many people in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. However, the common good has eluded the people of the Niger Delta due to marginalization of the Niger Delta by the federal government of Nigeria. For Innocent Asouzu (2004, 387), the common good as the transcendent anthropological foundation of human action finds expressions in those authentic goods and services we share in common. Accordingly, Innocent Asouzu (2004, 382) argues that there is no shared common destiny with regards to the common good as basic anthropological constant in African traditional societies. Unfortunately, thousands of people in the Niger Delta of Nigeria live in squalor and abject poverty. Finally, the world will be able to maintain balance if nature is guarded against all sorts of human carelessness and negligence or recklessness.

**1.4 Conclusion and Recommendations**

So far, this paper examines the nexus of environmental politics, ecofeminist philosophy and ethical perspective on Niger Delta of Nigeria and concludes that environmental degradation is caused by human negligence and that international cooperation is needed through ethical standards and regulations to mitigate against the gross violation of international environmental laws on deforestation, oil spillage, gas emission, and industrial pollution. However, some of the causes of environmental degradation are industrial pollution, deforestation, overpopulation, industrialization, urbanization, the use of combustible engines, automobile vehicles and fossil fuels. This paper, therefore, recommends that various countries should employ forest guards to forestall deforestation. There should be strong international cooperation through regular international agreement to check the gross violation of environmental laws. Legal sanctions should have been meted out to multinational companies that tend to violate the natural environment through gas flaring and oil spillage. Adequate compensations should be given to those people whose rights to ownership of land has been violated. The eruption of conflicts due to violation of land ethics should be resolved through peaceful and meaningful dialogue. Human beings should imbibe the culture of respecting nature. There should be reverence for the ecological environment because the natural environment gives meaning and purpose to man.

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