

WOMAN & THE LAND

By Linda Marina

While doing the readings on the land, I was struck by imagery that could have just as easily been used to describe woman. For example, when Thoreau spoke of “cutting down the forest and all large trees, simply deform the landscape, and make it tamer and cheap”(qtd. Nash 37) images of woman reconfiguring her body to conform to a “Madison Avenue” ideal through regiments of diet and exercise were called to mind. When George Perkins Marsh disparagingly used the metaphor “womb” (Nash 41) to say that “(man) is not born of her (land) (qtd. Nash), but lower forms of life are,” the ideas of misogynist Greek philosophers were recalled. Then when Swain (Nash 120) talked about *grazers still abusing and exploiting the unregulated public domain*, the connection between woman and the land was again felt, from the perspective of a female raised within the framework of Western culture. Repeatedly, I kept feeling that these authors, and still others could have been describing woman just as easily as the land. That mental connection caused me to wonder whether the relationship between woman and the land went deeper. Is society’s treatment of the land necessarily indicative of how it treats woman?

In responding to this question, Western culture’s treatment of woman and the land will be compared to that of the Iroquois, a matriarchal culture known for having a symbiotic relationship with nature. This comparison will be made through the examination of the creation myth/religion, ethic/values and society.

Iroquois Creation Myth

One widely accepted version of the Iroquois creation myth involves a female creatrix known as Sky Woman, her twin children, who represent good and evil, and the Giant Tortoise, a sacred symbol of the earth. The myth begins with a pregnant Sky Woman, who was believed to have fallen from the sky. The Giant Tortoise carried her on his back until she found a permanent place to live. Toad presented Sky Woman with a pinch of earth which, when placed on Tortoise's back, grew into land. (Leeming 130-131)

Meanwhile, Sky woman's children were born. The good one, Ha-wen-ne-yu, the "Great Spirit", was endowed with creative powers. He was said to adapt the elements to meet the needs of man. The bad twin, Ha-ne-go-ate-ge, who killed his mother, Sky Woman (she was later buried in the earth) by deliberately emerging from her side, is said to have created all the monsters, venom and discord of the world. (Morgan 147-148)

“ From the buried goddess (Sky Woman) came all the fruits and vegetables of the earth. From then on, life was a struggle between the good and the bad brothers. The good one made the streams. The bad one rapids to impede the streams. The good one made useful animals. The bad one dangerous animals.” (148)

Implications of the Iroquois Creation Story

Sky Woman's role as the creatrix and provider of all fruits and vegetables, may have set the stage for the favorable treatment of women in the Iroquois society. Sky Woman has real power, and as we shall see later on in this paper, so do Iroquois women. Sky Woman's work is honored, as is the work of the Iroquois woman.

The imagery surrounding the Iroquois creation story alludes to a reverence of the land as well as of woman. Indians had an affinity for sacred places, especially where they lived, where their myths took place, where their heroes walked and where their ancestors were buried. (Vecsey 25) Sky Woman's burial in the Earth would suggest, then, that the Iroquois regarded the Earth's entirety as a sacred place. This might explain why the Great Tortoise, a symbol of the Earth, is regarded as a sacred totem by the Iroquois.

The Iroquois " Mother Earth " spirituality and respect for creation is further evidenced by their reverence for what they call their lesser spirits, spirits who followed the " Great Spirit" and, who had a definite connection with the Earth. These spirits are He no, Ga-oh and De-o-ha-ko. (Morgan 149-153) He no, the climate controller, was responsible for the rain, sustenance of plant life, thunderbolts as well as being the avenger of evil deeds (He no, incidentally, was thought to have once lived in a cave under the Niagara Falls). Ga-oh was the spirit of the winds; a surprisingly benevolent presence who was always mindful of the will of the " Great Spirit."

Finally, there was De-oha-ko, the trilogy of the three inseparable sisters who took on beautiful female forms. The trilogy which meant " Our life, Our supporters" to the Iroquois people, was comprised of special plants which were regarded as being gifts from a feminine spiritual force in the Mother Earth of the distant past. The Spirit of Corn, the Spirit of Bean and the Spirit of Squash formed the De-oha-ko trilogy. (152-153) The triad was of particular import to the Iroquois , who were at the forefront of

agriculture among the Indian people.

Iroquois Religious Festivals

The Iroquois religious festivals not only reflected the important role that agriculture and nature had in their society, but also revealed the importance female participants had in these activities. This may be attributed to Sky Woman's connection described earlier or to the fact that women's work revolved around planting and other agricultural activities, or because woman and earth's fecundity were seen as being interrelated. Carolyn Merchant suggests in her "Death of Nature" "*that women's physiological functions of reproduction, nurture and child rearing are viewed closer to nature*"(144) which may explain, in part, the strong reverence which the Iroquois have for the land and woman.

Six annual festivals were held which demonstrated the affinity which the Iroquois had with the land, and the reverence which they held towards woman: The Maple Festival; Planting Festival; Strawberry Festival; Green Corn Festival; Harvest Festival; New Year's Festival. Each of these festivals, with the exception of the Planting Festival (which was the invocation to the Great Spirit to bless the seed) and the New Year's Festival (which was a combination jubilee-sacrificial party) were thanksgivings to the Earth. (Morgan 175-176) Two of the festivals, the Green Corn and the harvest, paid tribute to "Our Supporters", the three sisters of Corn, Squash and Bean; the former for the ripening and the latter for their harvest. *Not only did the Iroquois woman have an equal voice with her male counterpart in the management of these festivals, her role extended to the selection of the tribe's religious practitioners, half of whom were women.*

Iroquois Totemic System and the Land

The close connection that the Iroquois had with the land is further evidenced in its totemic system. The Iroquois, like most Native Americans, enjoyed a totemic (classification) system when drawing relationships between humans and the rest of the world. This system allowed them to exploit their environment as well as the participants in it. (Vecsey 18) “ Through a naming process does all it can to imitate the world around it”, (18) but each clan name connects the clan and the clan’s activities to the Earth. For example, a clan bearing the name of a bear would endeavor to become like the bear. During the winter months, the clan would follow the example of the hibernating bear and stay close to home. Then, in the warmer months, the clan would hunt whenever and wherever the bear did. The clan would also enact specific rituals associated with honoring, mimicking and even influencing the bear. (Vecsey 18)

Like the Iroquois, the Western creation myth and the supporting religious beliefs indicate a woman-land interconnection. However, the way in which woman and the land are presented in the Western creation myth differs considerably from that of the Iroquois. At face value, for example, the difference can be viewed in how the traditions are passed down. The Iroquois tradition is oral while the Western tradition is written. Yet beyond how the message is communicated is the message itself. Western culture’s attitudes concerning woman and the land can be viewed in the following passages from Genesis, the biblical creation story of the West.

Passages from Western Culture’s Creation Story

My research into the creation myths of both the Iroquois and Western cultures

demonstrates a link between how woman and the land are viewed. However, while an interconnection between the land and woman is suggested in both cultures, the Iroquois account depicts woman and the land more favorably than that of the Western culture.

In the Iroquois creation myth, the bad twin, Ha-ne-go-ate-ge, emerged from his mother's side, while in Genesis 2.21 Eve, the person blamed for mankind's banishment from Eden, is created from Adam's rib. Then it is Eve's transgression of eating the forbidden fruit, the fruit that would allow one to discern good from evil, which results not only in mankind's fall from paradise but also rationalizes the hardships entailed in life. In Genesis 3.16 God becomes the first male to punish Eve with pain while at the same time giving man a carte blanche to rule over her. To woman God is purported to have said:

“ I shall give you great labour in childbearing; with labour you shall bear children. You will desire your husband, but he will also be your master.” (Gen3:16)

It should be noted that in an earlier passage of Genesis(Gen1:28), God blessed man and told him to subdue and be masters of the Earth.

Unlike the Iroquois creation myth which was described earlier, all of the protagonists in the Bible's creation passages, with the exception of the licentious Satan, who makes his biblical debut, not in the form of a man but as a snake, are male. There is no counterpart to the Iroquois Sky Woman in Genesis. God, the all powerful and all knowing is also all male. While a raucous male twin is held responsible for creating the world's woes in the Iroquois tradition, it is the first woman of Genesis, Eve, who brings the West to its knees by defying God, the father. Unlike Sky Woman , who is a creatrix and a goddess revered by the Iroquois, Eve is portrayed as

being cunning; a scourge responsible for the banishment of mankind from paradise, for the pain associated with child bearing and life's hardships.

Implications of Western Culture's Creation Myth

Eve's "transgression" is what is customarily used to rationalize the submission and subjugation of women and their children to men. (Brown 105) Eve's legacy, albeit woman's, of domination by Adam, albeit man, is reinforced and repeated throughout the Bible and Western culture. Furthermore, the story of Adam and Eve reminds woman of the dire consequences of disobeying God or any male authority of the ruling male priesthood. (Eisner 101)

Western Religion and Woman

While Judaism emphasized the need to avoid sin, which was associated with interaction with women, and for man to guard against his "inborn evil tendencies inherited from Adam (Stevenson 70-71), Christianity went further in its denigration of women. St. Jerome, a reformed womanizer (Tannahill 141) and one of the *great thinkers of early Christianity* referred to women as being "these poultices of lust". (148) Jerome added, "What can (a woman) expect from heaven when, in supplication, she lifts up a face that its creator wouldn't recognize." (148) Another early Christian thinker, Tertullian, believed that every seductive woman was a threat to man's salvation. "Every natural beauty", Tertullian wrote, "ought to be obliterated by concealment and neglect, since it is dangerous to those who look upon it." (148)

Western Religion & Woman's Role

Unlike the Iroquois woman who actively participated in matters of religion, the

Western woman's purported innate inferiority prohibited such activity in Christianity. Only men could be priests and represent Christ in the Christian community as they were thought to represent the image of Christ completely. (Ruether 32) Even Christianity's Martin Luther, the great hero of reformation, who in essence risked his life to challenge the papacy of Rome, offers these words concerning woman:

“ The wife was made subject to man by the Law which was given after sin...The rule remains with the husband and the wife is compelled to obey him by God's command. He rules the home and the state, wages war, defends his possessions, tills the soil, plants, builds etc. The woman, on the other hand, is like a nail driven into the wall. She sits at home...”(Ruether 33)

The one saving grace about Luther is that he believed that man and woman were initially created equal. It was only after Eve disobeyed God that woman became man's inferior.

Ruether goes on to describe the Puritan view of marriage, which, while acknowledging the need for physical and spiritual compatibility between husband and wife, admonishes woman to submit to the will of her husband, who was in fact, supposed to take care of her. The Puritans felt that the hierarchy of the home, “ Me Tarzan, you Jane” mentality mirrored the original order of creation. (33)

Even in the *enlightened* 1990's, the southern Baptists go back to their biblical roots, to the apostle Paul, who established the rules for godly family relationships by stating:

“ Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting to the Lord” by essentially reiterating the same passage in advising a woman to “ submit graciously to her husband's leadership”. (Newsweek, June 22, 1998, p69).

Western Religion & the Land

The God of the West not only commanded man to rule over woman,

He also gave man the privilege of inheriting the Earth. Instead of revering the Earth and its inhabitants, of believing that souls abounded throughout creation the way the Iroquois did (Vecsey 19), Western man believed the world to be mute; only humans spoke and where anything and everything non-human (or not Western) was devalued. (37)

In Genesis 1:28, Western man was given a divine mandate, an official order if you will, to “bear fruit and be many and fill the earth and subdue it! Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the heavens, and all living things that crawl upon the earth! And Western man made sure he heeded the words of *his* creator upon coming to America.

In contrast to the Iroquois, who enjoyed an almost bitter sweet, give and take relationship with the land, Western man displayed no such affection. (Vecsey 32) Some of the early Christian settlers reacted to the American wilderness in much the same way that a five year old would; As a haunted house: a frightening wilderness, howling with all sorts of evil and horrible creatures, or as a great big candy store, with all kinds of goodies, much of which he could sell at a profit to his civilized capitalist friends back in Europe. (Vecsey 32)

When describing America’s riches, white colonists often used the language of imperialism: A *virgin* territory possessing unlimited resources that will never run out. They viewed the trees and the land, as symbolized by their mighty ax, as something to chop down and use. (33) Furthermore, the exploitation of America’s “natural resources” a term coined in the 1500’s which essentially promoted the *rape* of the frontier, fueled the growth of European technology and wealth. European technological development needed America’s raw materials, since Europe’s resources, most notably timber, became, over time, depleted. (Merchant 63)

While the Iroquois and Western man viewed the earth's bounty as treasures, the Iroquois cared for the earth, while Western man *misused, neglected or abused* land. The difference in the two attitudes is reflected in the following:

“ The White people never cared for the land or deer or bear. When we Indians kill meat, we eat it all up. When we dig roots we make little holes. When we build houses, we burn grass for grasshoppers, we don't ruin things. We shake down acorns and pine nuts. We don't chop down trees. We only use dead wood. But the White people plow up the ground, pull down the trees, kill everything. The tree says, ' Don't. I am sore. Don't hurt me.' But they chop it down and cut it up. The spirit of the land hates them. The Indians never hurt anything, but the White people destroy all.” (Vecsey 33)

Western Attitudes Toward Woman & the Land

While Eve is associated with evil, the wilderness of New England was thought by the Puritans to be a place of sin and degeneracy. Because of their close association with nature, Indians were viewed as pagan, heathens and savages requiring domination like the rest of nature. (37) Just as it was up to the Puritans to control their wives, it was up to them to also subdue the land around them and to civilize and if necessary, destroy the Indian. By cultivating and exploiting the land and its people, in creating a New Canaan, the Puritans were expanding the Christian empire and all that the values and ethics embodied therein. (33)

Ethics/Values

The ethics/values of the Iroquois and Western cultures also reflect the connection between the land and woman as well as illustrating the schism between these two societies. Like religion, ethics serve as the underpinnings of a society. (Noon 21) However, found in a religion is the justification for an ethic. Found in an ethic is the justification governing the actions and existence of a society.

Ethics are a part of the rubric of society. . They serve to restrict and co-ordinate an individual's freedom so that a society's goals can be attained. Whether religion preceded ethics is really of little consequence; a society, like a good lawyer, will find a precedent, a rationalization for its conduct, in its ethics. For example, *women's subservience to her husband* is supported in Genesis 3:16. With this in mind, let us examine the ethics which underscore the Iroquois and Western culture's treatment of the land and woman.

Iroquois People

The Iroquois were an egalitarian people. Men and women were held in esteem for their unique roles. Their communal, matriarchal lifestyle may have contributed to the mutual respect of men and women.

“ In a communal society, there is no obeisance of men to other men by virtue of their superior wealth, rank and power; by the same token, there is no subordination of women to the “superior” male sex. On the contrary, the influence of women upon men was far more pronounced than the influence of men upon women.” (Reed 156)

A tyrannical order in which men dominated women did not characterize the Iroquois way of life. Even decisions related to activities performed exclusively by the males, such as waging war, were decided collectively by men and women. (155)

“ All the members of an Iroquois gens were personally free, and they were bound to defend each other's freedom; they were equal in privileges and in personal rights, the sachem and chiefs claiming no superiority ; and they were a brotherhood bound together by ties of kin. Liberty, equality, fraternity, though never formulated, were cardinal principles of the gens.” (qtd. Reed 154-155)

A hunter-gatherer, warrior-agrarian society with expansionist, manifest destiny tendencies, the Iroquois depended on nature, harmonious living amongst themselves and

upon the other Indian tribes who they conquered, for their survival. (Morgan 8)
Consequently, the following values figured prominently in their culture.

Values Associated with the Role of the Iroquois Male

The Iroquois male valued the hunter's life. (53) This passion drove him in search of more challenging hunting grounds whenever an existing field became too thickly populated and the pickings too easy. (54) When the Iroquois emerged victorious in warfare, which was often the case as they were fierce warriors, the conquered territories became part of their hunting ground while simultaneously expanding the mighty Iroquois Confederacy. Yet, the male activities of the hunt and warfare were recognized as being destructive in nature as well as being the actualized or realized values of society, rather than the idealized values, which were associated with female activities. (Noon 23)

Values Associated with the Role of the Iroquois Female

While the man hunted and battled, the female farmed, gathered berries and other indigenous plants; engaged in activities such as animal husbandry, the care of children ; and did whatever else that was needed to sustain her culture.. The Iroquois believed that the female's interest in growing and caring for plants, animals and children corresponded to the fecundity of the earth, " Our Mother". Their care of children, the preparation of food, and the maintenance of family life in general represented this principle in humankind. (Noon 23) The *virtues* encouraged by *feminine* activity: peace and health of

mind and body, were the values idealized by the Iroquois society. Since the men were always out fighting or hunting, the Iroquois may have also recognized the work of the female and the ethics associated with that work, as being vital to the nurturing, sustenance and vitality of the tribe.

The Iroquois woman was also a proficient horticulturist, farmer and botanist. (Speck 39) Her efforts resulted in the cultivation of 15 to 17 distinct varieties of maize, 60 varieties of beans, 12 beverages and even a maple sap sweetener. Her knowledge of plants that were used for medicinal purposes was extensive. As the Iroquois were *agriculturists first and foremost, with their agricultural* “ activities at the center of their social and ceremonial life which deeply affected their mythological ideas,” (qtd Parker 41) it follows that because the female was so directly involved in the agricultural activities(even a pregnant woman walked on a planted field to promote its fecundity), she was afforded high esteem. (40)

“ Iroquois women controlled the factors of agricultural production, for they had a right in the land which they cultivated, and in the implements and the seeds. Iroquois agricultural activities, which yielded bountiful harvests, were highly organized under female leadership. Most importantly, Iroquois women maintained the right to distribute and dispense all food, even that procured by men. Through their control of the economic organization of the tribe, Iroquois matrons were able to make available or withhold food for meetings of the Council and for war parties, for the observance of religious festivals and for the daily meals of the household. These economic realities were institutionalized in the matrons’ power to nominate Council Elders and to influence Council decisions... The powerful position of the Iroquois women was the result of their control of the economic organization of the tribe. “ (Reiter 250-251)

Iroquois Ethics & the Land

The Iroquois ethics revealed the bittersweet relationship that was enjoyed with the land. The Iroquois needed the land to hunt, to farm, to gather berries, to live and to play, while at the same time recognizing that they were of the land as opposed

to being one with the land. *The Iroquois longed for a more intimate relationship with the land, but instead settled for one of reciprocity: the land takes care of them and the Iroquois takes care of the land.* (Vecsey 22)

It was mentioned earlier that the Iroquois believed that non human entities, such as the animals which they hunted, contained souls. This belief may have presented the Iroquois with a dilemma. On the one hand, he would rationalize his primal drive of the hunt by believing that non-humans made deals with humans for their mutual benefit (a “ contract” of sorts) Then later on he would apologize to his non-human family for bringing him home for dinner!(23)

Known for simple living in the spirit of gratitude, the Iroquois, like most Indians, killed, harvested and picked only what they needed from nature’s bounty. They associated “dis-ease” with the killing of too many animals, believing that such afflictions were brought about because animals retaliated for their slaughter. (Vecsey 22) Consequently, when a balance existed in hunting and other “ exploitive acts against nature, her bounty flowed to them, allowing them to live an orderly lifestyle as their basic needs were more than adequately met. (23) Yet, the Iroquois remained unaffected by the concept of gain. The Iroquois prayers to the “ Great Spirit” were those of thanks, rather than of supplication. (Noon 22) As mentioned earlier, four of the six religious festivals were thanksgivings!

Iroquois Ethics & the Relationship Between Woman & the Land

The ethics of the Iroquois revealed a remarkable reverence for the land, for the people towards one another as well as a link between the land and woman. The

activities of both the male and female embodied reverence, respect and gratitude towards the land, “Great Spirit” and the lesser spirits as well as towards each other. While the creation myth paid homage to the female creatrix and her creation, the ethics of the Iroquois provided a blueprint for the lives of those living peacefully amongst themselves in this highly organized, egalitarian, matriarchal, hunter-agrarian society.

Western Culture

In direct contrast to the Iroquois’ egalitarian society is the hierarchy of power found in the Western, patriarchal, capitalistic society. Like the Iroquois, the ethics of Western man is embodied in how woman and the land are treated. However, while the communal lifestyle of the matriarchal Iroquois may have fostered mutual esteem and dependency between males and females, albeit all members of their egalitarian society, the individuality of the Western patriarchy did the exact opposite: it relegated the female, her work and even her biology to that of a male.

Furthermore, while both the Iroquois and Western man seemed to associate women with the wilderness; ie, untamed nature, the hunter –gatherer agriculturist Iroquois honored and revered this relationship. Western man, on the other hand, used this relationship to justify the exploitation of the land, and of woman. The Western view was that the land and woman were created to serve man and that each required civilization’s shaping to meet man’s needs. This was evidenced by the actions and embodied in the ethics of Western Culture.

Western Culture Compared to that of the Iroquois

The female’s influence over the male and society existed in the Iroquois

culture, but was notably absent in the Western culture. The deference of the Iroquois male towards the Iroquois female perplexed the early white settlers whose attitudes were shaped by patriarchy. The Iroquois did not understand why women were held in contempt by the European settlers and the European settlers were miffed by the respect that the “savage hunters and warriors (Iroquois) had towards women.” (Reed 157) This point is illustrated in the following quotes. The first one is that of a missionary, J.F. Lafitau, who expresses it from the viewpoint of a patriarch:

“Nothing is more real than this superiority of the women. It is in the women that properly consists the nation, the nobility of blood, the genealogical tree, the order of generations, the preservation of families. It is in them that all real authority resides: the country, the fields, and all of the crops belong to them. They are the soul of the councils, the arbiters of war and peace.” (qtd. Reed 158)

In direct contrast to the above, is an appeal made to the patriarchal rulers by “Good Peter”, the chosen orator of the Iroquois in their negotiations with Governor Clinton:

“Brothers! Our ancestors considered it a great offense to reject the counsels of their women, particularly of the female Governesses. They are the esteemed mistresses of the soil. Who, said our forefathers, brings us into being? Who cultivates our lands, kindles our fathers, and boils our pots, but our women? Our women, Brother, say they are apprehensive...They entreat that the veneration of our ancestors in favor of the women. Be not despised; the Great Spirit made them. The female Governesses beg leave to speak with the freedom allowed women and agreeable to the spirit of our ancestors. They entreat the Great Chief to put forth his strength and to preserve them in peace. For they are the life of the nation.” (qtd. Reed 158)

The aforementioned demonstrates the reverence which the Iroquois has towards woman and her work as well as how the Western attitude differs from that of the Iroquois.

Origins of Western Thought Concerning Woman & the Land

Besides the Bible, which has already been discussed, where did the Western ideas concerning woman and the land originate? The source can be

traced to the works of the great thinkers of ancient Greece: Democritus, Pythagorus, Plato and Aristotle (Eisler 112) who in turn influenced these 16th and 17th century philosophers: Bacon, Descartes, Newton and Galileo. (Sale 16) The common thread amongst all of these thinkers is their desire to disassociate God from nature. The following examines the ideas of the ancient Greeks and those of the later day European thinkers- most notably Bacon- and the impact each had in shaping Western attitudes held towards the land and woman.

The Ancient Greeks and their Ideas Concerning the Land

The pre-Socratic philosophers of the 3rd and 4th centuries B.C.E., Democritus, Pythagorus and Plato felt that the world and all of nature was associated with ungodliness. Some went further by suggesting that nature and nature's functions- even procreation- were unclean, requiring purification. (Eisler1) Perhaps the following theories were an attempt to simplify, albeit understand nature in terms of what was deemed pure and what was deemed impure.

Democritus & the Land

Democritus was an atomist (Eliot 234) who sought to explain all of nature's phenomena in terms of being a dichotomy between full and empty, ie. space and atoms. He preceded Pythagorus, who postulated that the soul was otherworldly, a fallen divinity that was separate from the body. Pythagoras, a believer in reincarnation, was always trying to purify himself from this earthly world so that he would not have to reincarnate into it again. (Eliot 236)

Pythagoras & the Land

As much as Pythagoras seemed not to like the Earth, he spent a great deal of time trying to understand it by reducing the Earth to numbers. (Durant 165) Pythagoras went on to expand upon Democritus's idea of matter and non matter by adding that the world order was determined by ratios. Plato promoted Pythagoras's ideas in his "Timaeus" where he likened Nature as a goddess who was subservient to a male God. (Merchant, p10)

Plato & the Body

Plato's support of Pythagoras's reincarnation beliefs in "Phaedra", where he stated that philosophy is the study of death, an exercise in the disentanglement of the soul from the body. Plato's remark in "Cratylus" that the word body (soma) was derived from tomb(sema). The belief that the body is the tomb of the soul may have influenced the great biologist and thinker, Aristotle and his views concerning women.

Aristotle & Woman

Aristotle, unlike the preSocratic philosophers, was not a dualist as he believed that form and matter existed in objects. He did not believe there was a division between body and soul. Aristotle associated maleness with activity and passivity with femaleness. He went on to use that belief as a justification for male rule over the household. Later on, Bacon would incorporate these ideas about men and women into his mechanist philosophy.

Aristotle felt that woman was an incomplete and mutilated male and credited the male for being the real cause for offspring. (Reuter 32) Power and motion were supposedly caused by male semen, while the female menstrual blood provided the nutrients. (Merchant 13) Aristotle also believed that the child was the seed of the father

and the mother was merely a vessel. (Stevenson 30) According to Aristotle, every male seed produced an image of its maker, a male. But, from time to time the “lower principle gained aberrant dominance”-a ‘misbegotten male’ or female, was born.

Aristotle taught that the female was intrinsically inferior to the male, making her a natural slave. And as a natural slave, it was her nature to be an obedient servant in all things to her (husband/father) and masters. (Ruether 32) Incredibly, this view persisted until the discovery of the microscope a hundred years later. (Stevenson 31)

The Ancient Greeks & the Relationship Between Woman & Land

While the ideas of Aristotle may have influenced those relating to women, generation, as well as the hierarchical view of woman being inferior, the Pythagorean/Platonic concept of the soul as immortal and otherworldly, essentially foreign to the hostile physical world, has profoundly influenced Western man’s view towards nature.

Modern Day Philosophers: Bacon & the Land

The advent of mechanization during the 16th and 17th centuries brought with it thinking that justified the new scientific order. Bacon’s doctrine of the dominion of nature exemplified the mechanical philosophy which characterized this period of time. (Merchant 192)

“ In the mechanical world, order was redefined to mean predictable behavior of each part within a rationally determined system of laws, while power derived from active and immediate intervention in a secularized world. Order and power constitute control. Rational control over nature, society, and the self was achieved by redefining reality through the new machine metaphor.”
(qtd.Merchant 193)

Bacon’s widely acclaimed “ New Atlantis” served the dual purpose of

sanctioning man's right over nature and expounding the virtues of hierarchy and patriarchy. It was in the “New Atlantis” where Bacon unveiled his vision of a mechanistic utopia, one which ignores the consequences towards man or towards man's environment. (186) *Bacon seemed to view man as the producer of good, and nature as the creator of bad,* when he remarked:

“ For now the Earth produces nothing without our labor and our sweat, but deadly and venomous...nor are the elements less kind to us: many the seas destroy with raging tempests, and the horrid monsters devour: the air making war against us with thunder, lightening with storms; and with a crowd of pestilential diseases, the heavens conspire our ruin.” (qtd. Merchant 186)

Bacon's treatise, which was strongly influenced by the neo-Platonic thinkers, paved the way for growth of capitalism during the 17th century. (Merchant 177), the technocratic movement of the 1920's and 1930's (186) as well as rationalizing the unabated exploitation and control of nature as well as the subjugation of woman.

With the philosophy of mechanization came acts of exploitation. Sales states in “Dwellers of the Land” that America was viewed by Europeans as being nothing more than a depository of jewels, inhabited by unwanted populations. In pursuit of gold and other natural treasures, the land was denuded despite the human environmental cost. (17) The riches of America as well as the expropriation of land and labor, were used to fuel the technological revolution which was occurring in Europe. (Reuter 21) Colonialism brought with it the application of science to technological control over nature. (21)

Imagery & the Woman – Land Connection

The metaphors used to describe nature during the 17th century by Bacon and

others had definite feminine connotations. Bacon used the word “*harlot*” when talking about matter. (Merchant 171) The Royal Society of London stated, when discussing the technological discoveries of printing, gunpowder, etc., as being able to “ help us think about the secrets still locked up in *nature’s bosom.*” (169) ‘ *They do not, like the old, merely exert a gentle guidance over nature’s course; they have power to control and subdue her, to shake her at her foundations.*”(172) *Under the mechanical arts, nature betrays her secrets more fully...than when in enjoyment of her natural liberty.* (172)

Philosophy of Mechanization & Woman

Not only did the use of the plough in agriculture result in a gender shift in agricultural production; woman gather food and garden and men employ an animal driven plough for food production, land now belonged to the male head of household. As such, land was inherited through the male line, rather than from the communal, land holding matrilineal descent which characterized the hunter-gatherer communities like the Iroquois. (Martinez & Voorhees 276-332)

Stevenson points out that *while Western man’s inventions may have reduced the amount of physical labor required by women, they might have also served to displace woman from occupations which they previously enjoyed.* Pottery, for example, was woman’s work until the pottery wheel was invented. Stevenson believes that as men took over jobs once held by women, societies became more and more patriarchal. (50) And so the schism between the domestic work of women for family use and the social production for the exchange of work of men widened. (Reiter 231)

While land and its resources were being exploited, so was the labor of men and

women. However, because men often were found working together, they could conceivably do something to change their situation. A woman, on the other hand, was often left to rely on her own devices as she was working at home, alone, without wages(231), under the authority of her husband. Interestingly, *even when women did work outside of the home, industrial capitalism found a cheap source of labor; their wages were considerably lower than those earned by men.* (232)

Unlike the Iroquois women, whose work was woven into the fabric of her culture, Western women's work outside of the home was tenuous at best. When the white man was available to fill a job, the white man got the job. When the white man went to war and left a job vacancy, woman worked at the job. However, in contrast to the Iroquois woman, the job was the white woman's only until the white man came back to reclaim it. (Stevenson 281)

Mechanization & Its Impact on Woman & the Land

The philosophy of mechanization, the big gun fueling capitalism and colonialism's exploitation of the land and of women, helped rationalize the separation and subordination of the land and woman to the needs and wants of the mechanical man. Land(nature) was exploited for its goods. Woman's labor was exploited to serve man. The needs of the glorious capitalist machine preempted the needs of nature and may have contributed to the denigration of the land and woman in Western society.

Society

In an attempt to determine whether a relationship exists between the land and woman, the focus thus far has been on the religious beliefs and ethics of the Iroquois

and Western man. . In this segment of the paper, the societies of these divergent peoples will be examined to assess whether a relationship between land and woman exists. The institutional structures of both cultures will be presented in the following.

Iroquois Society

The Iroquois was thought to best exemplify the character of the Indian. Even their institutions served as a paradigm for all Indians. “ *to the Iroquois, by common consent, has been assigned the highest position among the Indian races of the continent, living in the hunter state. In legislature, in eloquence, in fortitude and in military sagacity they had no equals.* (Morgan 51-52) A brief overview of Iroquois institutions will first be presented, and then followed by the role of the Iroquois woman in them.

Clans, League and Sachems

Earlier it was mentioned how the clans and their totems reflected the Indians reverence for the land. This held true for the Iroquois, whose clan totems included: wolf, turtle, bear, snipe, hawk, heron and eel. (Tooker 47)

The League of the Iroquois was comprised of five nations: Seneca, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga and Cayuga. (Later, in 1715 the Tuscororas join). The League was formed around 1450 to “ effectively resist the pressure of contiguous nations.” (Morgan 7) Da-ga-no-we-da and Hiawatha , who both believed that there was “ strength in numbers” were said to be the founders of the League as well as its first lawgivers.

Fifty *sachemships*(divisions) were created at the time of the League’s inception: Seneca received 8; Mohawk received 9; Oneida received 9; Oondaga received 14; and Cayuga received 10. Tribes were comprised of clans and clan families. Each *sachemship* was governed by a *sachem*, in whom was vested the supreme powers of the confederacy.

(Morgan 59)

The Matriarchal Society of the Iroquois

Females in Iroquois society can best be understood in terms of the positions they held in their families, clans, tribes, sachemships, nation and league. (Tooker 464)

Iroquois women owned land and personal property. Upon death, property inheritance was matrilineal; passed on from mother to daughter. As demonstrated in the following, Iroquois women were active participants in the inner workings of their family, their clan and their tribe.

Iroquois Family & Woman

Iroquois families are known as the *ohwachira* or *uterine* family as lineage blood is traced through the mother. A clan is comprised of one or more *ohwachira*. One or more clans comprise a sisterhood or *phratry* of clans. *Two phratries* comprise a tribe. Two or three tribes constitute a *phatry* of tribes. Finally there is the league, which is comprised of two sisterhoods or two *phratries* of tribes. (Tooker 530)

The oldest woman of an *ohwachira* is often its matron, who usually is adept at sorcery. (530) She acts as the moderator, who presides over the *ohwachira*, unless an age related or otherwise known infirmity incapacitates her. The rights of the *ohwachira* are as follows:

- 1.Right to a clan name
- 2.Right to inheriting property from deceased members
- 3.Right to participate in the councils of the *ohwachira*
- 4.Right to adopt an alien through the advise of the presiding matron of it (530)

Titles of chiefship belong to the mothers of the *ohwachira*. The most important

law of the *ohwachira* was thought to center around the trusteeship of the chiefship titles.

“ A basic rule of the constitution of the league of the Iroquois provides in the case of the extinction of an *ohwachira* owning the chiefship titles, that for the preservation of this title, it shall be placed in trust with a sister of the *ohwachira* of the same clan, if such there be, during the pleasure of the council of the league.”(531)

Iroquois Clan & Woman

The government of the clan was dominated by women and reflects the economic interests of women. The clan's matriarch or chief attained her rank because of her age and her membership in chiefly lineage. The *go yani*, as she was called, selected clan officials; coordinated the economic activity of the female clan members; decided whether captives should be adopted; and monitored the behavior of clan chiefs.

There was also a titular male clan chief, *ho yani*, who was chosen by either the matriarch of the clan or, in conference with the women of the clan. Some of the functions of the clan government were land allotment; supervision of field labor; maintenance of wampum treasury and the settling of disputes.

The following list of clan rights includes the rights of all the clan members. In some cases the power implicit in these rights, especially for women, will be evidenced.

1. Right to a distinctive name
2. Representation by 1 or more chiefs in the tribal council
3. An equitable share in the communal property of the tribe
4. Right to have nominations for the clan chief and subchief confirmed
5. Right to the protection of the tribe of which it is a constituent member
6. Right to passing titles of chief and subchief through heredity(matrilineal)
7. Right to engage in religious ceremonies
8. Right of men and women to meet in council
9. Right to use certain names of persons
10. Right to adopt aliens
11. Right to a common burial ground
12. Right of mothers of the constituent *ohwachira* to nominate candidates for chief and subchief
13. Right of mothers to impeach and dispose of their chiefs and subchiefs

14. Right to participate in religious rites, ceremonies and public ceremonies of a tribe. (53)

Iroquois Society & the Land

Land and how the land was used also gave way to specific rights. There were rights which applied to the tribe, to the clan and to the *ohwachira*. The rights of the tribal use of land related to how the land's bounty could be used for feasting at tribal councils and at ceremonies. (Noon p.34)

Land used by the *ohwachira* was comprised of separate units or plots, which were passed down from mother to daughter. Females worked the clan plots, which were considered to be hers, primarily through farming.. As a matter of fact, the farming lands were the only lands recognized as being Indian territories by the European settlers. (Noon 22, 23)

Land Control & the Iroquois Woman

The rights to personal property were aligned with the economic activities of the sexes. As such, women owned the articles used for farming and caring for the children and men owned the implements used for hunting and fighting. Women's control of the land and its bounty extended beyond the realm of farming; it also included distribution of the land's bounty. The " mutual aid society"- an organization of Iroquois women who distributed food that was harvested and game that was hunted- was comprised of women from the entire village who worked under the matron of the dominant family.

Society & the Relationship Between the Iroquois Woman &the Land

The rights enjoyed by the Iroquois women and the power vested in them in controlling the land and the land's bounty suggests a strong woman-land connection. Not only did Iroquois women use the land that they farmed, they also wielded

power over the main economic livelihood of agriculture. Unlike their European sisters, Iroquois women had the power to control their own destiny. Power was not only afforded to them by their community; it was also guaranteed and protected by their government.

Western Society

Let us now turn our attention to the relationship that existed between the land and woman in Western society, which again, is quite different than that of the Iroquois society. It will be demonstrated that not only was the land and the land's resources viewed as "mercantile commodities" (Cronon, p. 20) and were treated as "isolated and extractable units" (Cronon, p. 21), women and their children as well as their property, were viewed as nothing more than chattel; resources to be used. (Ruether 31)

Western Society & the Land

Carolyn Merchant goes to great lengths in the "Death of Nature" to discuss the land and its use by Western culture as well describing the hierarchies and underlying philosophies supporting these structures. Merchant describes the relationship between the peasants and the land in pre-modern agricultural Europe as being communal and ecologically balanced (42). This later gave way to a hierarchical structure of landlord domination which was less communal and less ecologically balanced. (Merchant 44)

There was much infighting between the peasant and the lord under the hierarchical structure of landlord domination. At issue was the control of common resources such as fuel and water. (The fiefdom which existed could be likened to the control which modern day utility companies exercise over natural resources.) When the bubonic plague, "Black Death" struck, populations throughout Europe were drastically

reduced. The resulting labor shortage had the effect of increasing the peasant's worth.

The peasant's elevated status not only changed the relationship between the lord and peasant, it also gave rise to a change in the relationship between man and the land. . As was the case before landlord domination, .ecological balances between people and the land were more readily sustained under collective farming and self-regulation. The rise of capitalism(Merchant 49)and the ever increasing need for fuel and land use for the creation of cities had the effect of once again relegating the farmer and the farmer's work to a new master: the capitalist market.

Rapid expansion and growth in Europe, which was the result of new markets fueled by inventions, more goods and greater productivity as well as by the exploitation of the natural resources of the Americas, was all made possible and supported by the infrastructures of Western society. These infrastructures were founded on the principles of patriarchy and hierarchy. The incredible contrast between the Iroquois and the Western culture, particularly in America's formative years, is quite evident in the family and governmental structure of these two societies.

Western Society: Family Structure & Woman's Role

While the European form of government did not find a home in America, the family structure and the attitudes were most definitely imported. The legacy of Caroline Norton, an English mother who left her husband because he would beat her, and was permitted to beat her since a wife was afforded no protection under British law, found a home in America's " Founding Father's" omission of laws protecting the rights of women.

When Carolyn Norton ran off with her three children, trying to escape from her husband, she owned nothing and could earn nothing . As a published writer, even the profits garnered from her books legally belonged to her husband. To further complicate matters, Carolyn had no right to her children. These injustices spurred Caroline on to fight for the reform of laws pertaining to women and children. She was successful, too, as evidenced by the laws that were passed which were targeted to stop the societal sanctioning of cruelty towards women. A revision to the *Matrimonial Causes Act* sought to end the injustice described in the following:

“ Under the laws before 1869, a man was entitled to great physical control over his wife. Wife beating was winked at, and a man could confine his wife to their home to make her obedient. If she left him, he was entitled to bring her back by force, if necessary. Through a court decree for what was called ‘ restitution of conjugal rights’ a man could present his wife with the choice of returning to his home or going to jail.” (Stevens 257)

Western Society’s Property Rights & Women

Like her English sister, but worlds apart from that of the Iroquois, when the American woman married she owned nothing, not even the clothes on her back. As a matter of fact, not only could she not own property, she was property; owned by the man- her husband- who purchased her when she landed on the dock and stepped foot on the free new world. (Stevens 262) As demonstrated earlier, the Bible supported this subordinate position as did the ethics of Aristotle, Bacon and everyone else who felt that woman was inferior and incapable of rational thought processes. The treatment of the Western woman in America was essentially a carbon copy of what was occurring in England.

Religious Participation & Western Woman

While the Iroquois women were involved in their clan’s religious

ceremonies, early American women were (with the exception of the Quaker women, who enjoyed religious parity with men)forced to comply with the words of St Paul:

“ Let your women keep silent in the churches for it is not permitted unto them to speak”
(263)

As noted earlier in **Philosophy of Mechanization & Woman(p. 21)**

under the section **Ethics & Values**, when American women did work outside the home, usually in a factory, the wages were abysmally low- a week’s wages equaled a man’s pay for a day- and her hours were long: fourteen. (Stevenson 264) The market place inequity extended to the household, where a woman was expected to give all of her wages to her husband. It didn’t matter if her husband was a drunk or a poor father either; her money was his money and not vise versa. (Stevenson 265)

If the woman sought to divorce her husband, he was legally entitled to be the sole guardian of his children, irrespective of what kind of father he was. So no matter where a woman was or what she was doing, she did not have the same rights as a man: She could not talk in church; her marketplace salary was comparatively low; she had to belly up to her lord and master husband. These inequities were amidst the backdrop of three revolutions: The American, the French and the Industrial, which did absolutely nothing to enhance the lives of women. (Stevenson 266)

Western Woman & Government

While there may be a similarity between the relationship Iroquois nations had to the Iroquois League and that which the American states had with the Union, there is no parallel in woman’s role in the governments of these two societies. (Morgan 58) Despite the pleadings of Abigail Adams to her husband, John Adams, one of the authors of the

U.S. Constitution, women and their rights were omitted from this important document.

Here is an excerpt of Abigail Adam's famous letter, "*Remember the Ladies.*"

"...I long to hear that you have declared an independency- and by the way, in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would *Remember the Ladies*, and be more generous and favorable to them...Do not put such unlimited powers into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies we are determined to form a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice or Representation."
(Stevenson 265)

Instead of immediately vying for government representation, women looked to the home front and the problem caused by slavery. White women wanted slavery abolished, in part because their husband's sexual relations with black female slaves embarrassed all of the women in the household. (Stevenson 266)

"*It is not the slave who alone suffers...but the wronged and dishonored wife and daughters who are deeply injured and weep in secret places.*"

A female slave was often bred to produce babies with a sexual partner and was whipped if she did not produce children for her master. (Stevenson 266) The promise of children meant able bodied young farm hands, children who were put to work when they were six or eight years old.

To further their abolitionist cause, an American delegation headed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, Quaker women, who voyaged to the *World Wide Anti Slavery Convention* in London. These Quaker women were denied, however, the right to vote by the men attending the convention. This action may have unwittingly been the impetus for the women's rights movement because shortly thereafter, these same Quaker women, long with three others, held their first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls. (Stevenson 268)

Western Women & Voting Rights

Unlike the Iroquois women who had a strong voice in the selection and removal of the tribal leaders, American women were denied the right to vote up until 1919. (In England, the right to vote became a reality for *women over the age of thirty* a year earlier in 1918. Notably, Englishmen could vote at age 21). It was through the intelligent ,creative and courageous efforts of Stanton, Mott and the other “ mothers of feminism” that the woman’s vote became a reality.

Present Day Western Society & the Land

Unlike their turn of the century forbearers, today’s turn of the millennium post feminists seem distracted by careers, wardrobes and appearances and too focused on sex. Flooded by women’s magazines which lack political focus and critical thinking, these daughters and girls of feminism have become enslaved by “ style” and the notion that “ sex is life”. (The New Republic37-38) While this version of reality may undermine deeper, more problematic women’s issues, it may, however, do a great deal to promote capitalism’s cause. As Germaine Greer so fittingly states: “ *sex is the lubricant of the consumer economy.*”

Ecofeminist Irene Diamond distinguishes amongst the various factions of feminism; the social-those who seem to equate a woman’s ability to control her body with equality; the liberal feminist-those concerned about equality, yet who do not reduce politics to sexual issues(Diamond 39) and finally, the ecofeminist, who, like the Iroquois, believes that women can take their place in the world without treating the world as if it existed for the taking.

Diamond seems to feel that some of the modern day feminists are in fact

expounding the values which have contributed to the control and exploitation of the Earth and of woman. Rather than seeing the earth and woman as one, these feminists have unwittingly bought into the system which has in effect poisoned the earth and controlled their bodies.

“ In the contemporary world language of controlling our bodies does not necessarily challenge masculine power and can easily become a principle of regulation which sustains that power.” (88)

Diamond goes on to say that the conception and birth of a healthy child on a thoroughly poisoned planet will be so unlikely that, at some point, technologically produced babies will become commonplace. (97)

Present Day Western Society & the Land

The poisoning of the land can be tragically evidenced in the land of Akwasasne. Akwasasne, the land of the Iroquois nation of the Mohawk, was once described as a natural wonderland; well watered and thickly forested , with rich soil that allowed farming to flourish. Unfortunately, Akwasasne has since become an environmental hell; a metaphor for environmental degradation. Today, environmental pathologies are finding turtles (the Giant Tortoise figured prominently in their creation myth), that qualify as toxic waste. (Parker 171)

“ To the Mohawk...it appeared that if turtles were being sickened by pollutants, it might indicate that the very underpinnings of the earth were coming apart. Now, at Akwasasne, the turtles had assumed a new status as being the harbinger of death by pollution. “ (185)

Capitalism replaced sustaining rivers where the Mohawks traditionally offered thanksgiving prayers, with gambling and smuggling, along with a proposed incinerator and dump for medical waste. (171) The Mohawk’s traditional economy, which was based on hunting, fishing and agriculture, has been poisoned out of existence.

(174)

In 1990, Ward Stone, a wildlife pathologist for the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation was quoted, as saying that Akwesasne is the “worst place in the world to be a duck.” Stone is also responsible for compiling the following statistics which illustrate the magnitude and gravity of the problem at Akwesasne:

1. More than 500 environmental contaminants have been measured in the autopsies of the wildlife in and near Akwesasne.
2. In 1960, the decline of cattle from 200 to 500 was attributable to fluoride poisoning.
3. In 1978 fluoride emissions from Reynold’s Metal factory weakened the bone of fish and cattle.
4. In 1985, the NY State Department of Conservation caught female turtles that contained 835 parts/million PCB’s(2 parts/ million is considered edible).
5. In 1985, a shrew with a PCB level of 11,522 was found. That was the highest PCB level found in any living creature!
6. In 1987, a male turtle was caught that had 3,067 PCB’s.
7. Onondaga lake is so polluted that its fish are inedible!

In just two generations, Akwesasne, the land where the partridge drums, has become a toxic dumping ground. (171) Ecofeminists such as Carolyn Merchant and Rosemary Ruether warn that unless the social styles of Western civilization change from being governed by the beliefs of a patriarchal religion and the ethics implicit in hierarchal dualism, our environment will not be sustained. Ruether and Merchant implore us to embrace ways that bring us to the ethical values of love, justice and care of the earth (Ruether 22); to adopt simpler lifestyles which pollute less, recycle more, use energy more efficiently so that people and nature survive. (Merchant 295)

Conclusion

A relationship between woman and the land exists and it goes beyond mere words. Religion and ethics, the underpinnings of society, provide the reason or justification for society's attitudes and actions towards woman and the land. This was evident in the matriarchal egalitarian society of the Iroquois, whose reverence of the land and respect for woman was implicit in their creation myth, in their religious beliefs and in the ethics which governed their behavior and attitudes towards work and towards each other. It was shown again in Western civilization, a culture whose religious and philosophical beliefs made possible the subjugation of woman and the exploitation of the land, which in turn fueled the expansion of the capitalistic machine. Stevenson makes the point that "until women have equality, the world will continue to deteriorate environmentally and not be at peace." (Stevenson 319) Perhaps it is through expanding our own minds and deepening our own awareness to acknowledge, understand and revere the relationship between woman and the land, and by embracing this relationship with love instead of fearing it with disdain, that we, as a civilization will truly grow.

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