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Memories in Vein

— A Reflection on a 10-day Residential Training in Applied Deep Ecology —

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All I could see from the window was clouds. Finishing ten days of training in deep ecology at Whidbey Island, I was in an airplane on my way home to San Francisco. The endless white cloud underneath resembled a snow covered field. To my eyes, it seemed like magnified human skin. On the way up to Seattle, the clear weather allowed me to see the Cascade Range that cut vertically through the state of Oregon and Washington. From the airplane, the range looked exactly like the spine of a huge mammal. The landscape and meteorological phenomena reminded me that we, humans, were made out of the earth; we have the same curves and dents as the Earth does: There is no one part in our body that consists of a straight line, and so is the Earth. Straight lines that we see on this planet are all man-made. The Oregon forest that had been cut like check-patterns came to my mind. Seeing the straight line that divided the clear-cut and the remaining woods from the air hurt me.

Buddhist and ecophilosopher, Joanna Macy states;

I used to think that I ended with my skin, that everything within the skin was me and everything outside the skin was not. But now... what I am, as systems theorists have helped me see, is a "flow-through." I am a flow-through of matter, energy, and information, which is transformed in turn by my own experiences and intentions. (1991. p.12)

As Macy says, the atmosphere is our skin, and the oxygen-giving rainforest is our external lung. We are made out of the earth, and we

are part of the life cycle that is taking place on this planet. Everything is connected, so by polluting the air and water, cutting ancient forests, we are killing ourselves. Employing this perspective of deep ecology and understanding its notion of identification with a non-human world is not so difficult for me. What has been troubling me in the framework of deep ecology is the unacknowledged gap between "identification with the rest of nature" and "identification with other peoples." The economic wealth of the North has been undermining the well-being of people in the South, and yet, it seems that for us, those who are in highly industrialized nations, it is much more difficult to identify ourselves with those in the South than with the rainforest and endangered species. President of Earth Island Institute and director of the Urban Habitat Program, Carl Anthony challenges deep ecology's notion of identification by asking, "Why is it easy for these people (deep ecologists) to think like mountains and not be able to think like people of color?" (1995. p.273). Why is that?

In this paper, I am supposed to write how I am going to apply the philosophy and movement of deep ecology to my academic work or/and my future occupation. However, in this point, it seems more appropriate for me to clarify what I want to take from the philosophy of deep ecology and what I would like to see in the deep ecology movement with an assessment of what I haven't found in its theory and practice. In this point, my knowledge of deep ecology is still limited. Yet, with this limitation, I will search my avenue into a commitment to ecology. With my current interest in making meaningful connections between "identification with a non-human world" and "identification with other peoples," I will utilize this paper as a means to explore the issue of identification in the framework of deep ecology.

In the training in Chinook, although I enjoyed the company of all the people and even made a few good friends, I could not help feeling that I was missing something. Maybe I was looking for someone like myself who saw the deep ecology movement from a marginal perspective and tried to find the missing pieces so that the movement would be more complete. In the training, there were only a handful of "people of color." That might account for the reason why I felt that way. But I think that what I missed there was a deeper and more specific connection with people, based on the mutual acknowledgment of each other's differences. When discussing our connections with a non-human world,

we, "humans," tend to categorize ourselves as a homogeneous, united group, and the differences among people tend to get flattened. Even though deep ecology is often considered as a white upper/middle class movement, the differences among activists, participants, and practitioners are quite evident. We are different in terms of our ways of identifying ourselves with the rest of nature, and the way in which we practice ecology. Each one of us has unique stories of how we have been dissociated from a non-human world, and each of our ancestors had distinct stories of how they had been uprooted from their land.

Through the development of modern industrialization, urbanization occurred, and people began to move to cities to be wage labors. "Nature" has become industrial resources that have been controlled and exploited through colonization and sequential wars, and so have been human "resources." The established global economy has prevented indigenous peoples from maintaining their land-based self-sufficient ecological life style. This is perhaps the most frequently told story of humans' separation from the land and alienation from the natural world. But this meta-story doesn't necessarily reflect stories of "yours," "mine," "hers," "his," "ours," and "theirs." The processes in which we have removed ourselves from the rest of nature and how we have lost our embodied, ecological wisdom are much more complex and diverse than these commonly told "separation" stories. Everyone has different personal, social, cultural, and historical background that affects the way she/he is now.

The way in which I identify myself with the rest of nature has a lot to do with my childhood. I was a physically weak child whose regular visit to pediatricians kept my mother busy and worried. My bronchi gave me constant coughs and fever. Through a series of attacks of bronchitis, I learned how to breathe without disturbing my lungs. Because of these conditions, as a child, I could not engage in physical activities with full enthusiasm, I could not run around outside, but in my own quiet way, I explored high-grass fields and bamboo woods in my neighborhood. Some people climb rocky mountains and swim long distance in the ocean. For them, "nature" may be something to challenge. For me, the natural world has been a place of solitude, silence, and unconditional acceptance. And as a child, I saw these neighborhood fields and woods being transformed into the flat land and then buildings. Recovering from post war depression, the Japanese

economy was accelerating its growth during the 60's. The transformation of my neighborhood taking place right in front of my eyes stunned me. I lost a place to be alone and feel safe. As an extremely introverted child, I was never good at approaching and talking to people, but losing my emotional refuge, I was pushed into the human-social world.

Being in a mountain and surrounded by woods makes me feel home. It is important for me to have such a feeling of being part of nature. My mother does not feel this way, and that relates to how she grew up and what was going on in the country when she was a young girl. During World War II, the city of Nagoya where my mother lived was heavily bombed by the B-29. Since staying in the city was dangerous and food was scarce there, my grandparents sent their children to the country side where their relatives lived. All the siblings were sent to different locations in order not to be a big burden to those relatives. In the country side, "nature" was rich in green. But my mother was too lonely to appreciate that beauty. Most of all, she wasn't free from the constant fear of being killed by bombs. Even there, people had to be careful not to miss the siren that warned of the approaching enemy bombing attacks. In between those fearful moments, people collected edible leaks, plants, and insects. For my mother, and in the similar way for my father too, "nature" meant a place of survival and of traumatic memories of the war.

When the war was ended, my parents, like other children and adults, were baptized by DDT. American GIs brought DDT as an antiseptic. In school, children in their underwear stood in line, being sprayed by the white powder from their heads to toes. The war was over, and there were no more flea bites to deal with. From there on, to my mother as a young girl and my father as a young boy, "nature" was furthering away from their skin. The war was over. The powered boys and girls hoped that the "sanitation" would improve their miserable conditions and erase the traces of the nightmares of the war.

My parents' childhood experiences still overcast their ways of relating to a non-human world. "Being in nature" inevitably reminds my parents of their war experiences which they wanted to forget. Now, coming to their old age, they seem to be more willing to talk about their experiences. That might change their perception of "nature," or maybe that is too much to expect. Their disassociation with the rest of nature may take a long time to be healed. Till his recent retirement, for my

father "work" was all his life was about. In his retirement, he has trouble getting used to life without a work schedule. Like many Japanese of his age, my father worked as a part of an "industrial growth society" that has been killing the planet as well as the souls of many people. Last year alone, in Japan 22,000 people committed suicide. Reasons for giving up their lives vary. But one very sure thing is that something is definitely wrong in that society. The society based on an industrial growth model has destroyed not only the "external" natural world, but also nature within people.

These are stories of my family and country, and other people have different stories of their relation to the land. I remember an Afro-American woman whom I met in a nature-writing workshop. In a group sharing, she read her piece of writing in which she excavated the reason why she was afraid of the wilderness. She grew up and has lived in cities all her life. In her writing, she put herself into the shoes of her grandmother who was from, and never went back to, the American southern states. Seeing the landscape of the South from her grandmother's eyes, in her writing, she vividly illustrated the image of a lynched man's body hanging from a tree. Through that writing, she gained an understanding of why she could not relate to the natural world. The intergenerational ecological wounds were acknowledged by her.

Several weeks later, she told me that she joined a trip to do a vision quest in which she spent two days and two nights by herself without food out in a mountain area. When I asked of her experience of the trip, she shared a story of her encounter with a squirrel. When she quietly sat under a tree with her blank mind, one squirrel ran up to her. She noticed a zooming movement, but did not know what it was until it touched her knee. And then, she jumped. The squirrel went away. She said, "Maybe the squirrel mistook me as part of the tree." Maybe, she temporarily became part of the tree. She said that she felt that she might be the one who would break the family pattern and change the intergenerational disconnection from "nature." I agreed with her.

In an interview with ecopsychologist, Theodore Roszak, Carl Anthony cites *Black Rage* by William Grimmer and Price Cobs as "an example of being uprooted simply because the level of hostility is so great that you have to keep moving" (1995, p.266). Regarding a character in *Beloved*, Sethe, he states, "She can't let herself remember the beauty of the

plantation she escaped from because it is drenched in memories of slavery. She wakes up from nightmares wondering if hell might not also be a pretty place" (p.266). I wonder about Vietnam veterans who experienced hell in dense green jungles. I wonder how they remember and feel about the rainforest which many of us tried to protect from further industrial exploitation. I wonder if they are afraid of the wilderness like my parents and my Afro-American friend.

Responding to Anthony, Roszak argues:

Or there's another assumption that is frequently made: that we have lost our sense of place in the modern world almost voluntarily, because of career opportunities or the generally footloose character of industrial society. Once again, this overlooks the fact that some people have lost their place in the world for much more obvious and brutal reasons. (pp.266-267)

The black people were removed from their land and sent to foreign continents as slaves. Native Americans were forced to give up their sacred land where they connect with their ancestors. Many farmers have been driven away from their farms because of competitive conglomerates that efficiently do mechanized agricultural business. On-going Wars and terrorism all over the globe are restlessly generating more refugees and immigrants who no longer have a place called "home." Oliva M. Espin, who escaped from Cuba due to a political turn-over by Fidel Castro in 1959, states regarding her experiences of being uprooted and her first trip back to Cuba in twenty-three years:

[M]y trip to Cuba made me realize that for years I had felt as if *my memories had had no geography*. But that, in fact, what I remembered had actually happened in *a definite physical space that continues to exist in reality and not only in my memory*. That Cuba exists beyond what I think or feel or remember about her. This realization, which may seem all too obvious, was the more powerful because *before my return I never knew that I felt as if Cuba did not have a real existence beyond my memory*. (1992. p.16. emphasis original)

Can a person be able to identify herself with "nature" when her memories "have no geography"? I think that even when one feels her/his self being uprooted from the land and has a sense of loss, it is quite possible to feel home in the natural surroundings that are new to her/him. I remember my camping trip in Mt. Shasta. There, I felt that

the woods and mountains accepted me who was pondering about her cross-cultural identity and loss of a sense of belongingness. On the other hand, I believe that it is important to acknowledge how each of us has been removed from "nature." We need to reclaim our past and reconcile with the loss of connection with the rest of nature in order to stop perpetuating human alienation from a non-human world. In that manner, we can cultivate our compassion for those who have lost their places for "much more obvious and brutal reasons."

I believe that it is crucial for deep ecology to address both the diversity of the biosphere and the diversity in human societies in order to become a more encompassing and fully global movement. Anne Naess' "ecological self" is a beautiful concept that rejuvenates our connections with a non-human world and gives us hope for future as well as a deeper insight into our current selfhood. At the same time, it tends to imply an ahistorical, acultural, and apolitical selfhood. For me, it is crucial to seek the interconnection between our ecological self and our cultural/historical/social self. Otherwise, we keep believing our ecological self to be something "pure" and "mystical" and continue differentiating it from our ordinary and mundane "everyday-self."

Naess' "ecological self" goes beyond identification with humankind. Naess argues that through the process of identification with "nature," individuals establish the sense of the expanded self. According to him (1988), we tend to confuse the self with the narrow ego, therefore, we underestimate ourselves, and yet, "Human nature is such that with sufficient all-sided maturity cannot avoid 'identifying' ourselves with all living beings" (p.20). In his words:

Traditionally the maturity of the self develops through three stages -from ego to social self, and from social self to metaphysical self. In this conception of the process, nature our home, our immediate environment, where we belong as children, and our identification with living human beings- is largely ignored. (Ibid.) The concept of an ecological self focuses on this largely ignored area of "self-realization through identification." Naess asserts that through an "inescapable" process of identification with the non-human, the self is widened and deepened. To him, self-realization means "the realization of the comprehensive Self, not the cultivation of the ego" (1984. p.259), which resonates with Jung's "individuation" and Maslow's "self-actualization."

Naess (1973) rejects the man-in-environmental image in favor of "the relational, total-field image," and views organisms as "knots in the biospherical net or fields of intrinsic relations" (p.95). He emphasizes "an understanding from within" through identification (1979. 1985). Naess thinks that if we develop a wide, expansive, or field-like sense of self, then we will naturally protect the natural environment since a shift of identification releases us from the prison cell of the ego, and then, the narrow self-love would be transformed into more encompassing compassion for all beings.

Naess argues that identification with "nature" is inescapable. I question how true that can be. Is an ecological self universal? In other words, is an ecological self equally attainable for all the people on the globe? For some people, identification with "nature" is much harder because of their collective memories of the natural environment. What prevents the emergence of an ecological self is not only the narrow ego, but also culturally and historically constructed part of self. Without this understanding of our selfhood, we may not be able to improve our ability to identify with other people whose cultural and historical experiences are different from ours.

According to Naess, identification with "nature," evokes an expanded sense of self, reminding us that we are a flow of energy. Identification with the atmosphere, hydrosphere, and geosphere helps us to see that we are part of a planetary cycle of life. Identification with specific species of the biosphere evokes compassion for the suffering of the non-humans. Knowing what we, humans, have done to other members of the biosphere hurts us. Recognizing what humans have done to each other is even more painful: A strong feeling of guilt and shame overwhelms us, and the temptation to justify the ugly history that lies between us is great. We, people in industrialized countries, wish to forget that past and move forward towards the vision of a "life sustaining society" as a human species. Yet, without the examination of human history, the gulf between identification with a non-human world and identification with other humans will remain wide open, and deep ecology cannot be deep enough to touch and evoke many people's ecological selves.

There are qualitative differences between identification with "nature" and identification with other people. Identification with a non-human world does not threaten our commonly understood boundaries of self as much as identification with others does. Buddhist and feminist, Anne C.

Klein (1995) claims that it is important to see how experiences of an expanded self through the interconnectedness and compassion, described as deeply empowering in traditional Buddhist practices, can be disempowering for women in Western contexts. For women, as a collective group, who recently came to acknowledge our own desires and to find our authentic voices, the notion of identification (especially, with the dominant group) can be threatening, and the same thing can be said about the selfhood of other "minority" groups. For those who have been socially oppressed, some kind of assertiveness that allows them to establish a grounded sense of having their own selves is equally important to (or more important than) experiencing an expanded sense of self.

Through identification with "nature," we try to listen to and understand the voice of the non-humans that has not been respected for so long. How can we do the same in "identification with other people" that involves more of power relationships? A question of who wants to identify with whom and why should be addressed in "identification with people." The oppressed may want to identify themselves with the dominant group in order to climb up the social ladder or merely be acceptable in society. On the other hand, generally speaking, people who enjoy socio-economic privileges do not want to identify themselves with "the other." For instance, the upper/middle class people are afraid of relating themselves to the human misery of the homeless.

While having an identity often means the possession of a clear cut self-definition, actual identification with "nature" and other people causes confusion over previously defined self-boundaries. As Naess argues, the emergence of an ecological self evokes a sense of the interconnectedness and helps us reorient ourselves as a part of nature. Recognizing that our identities are not as static as what we believe makes us feel vulnerable. In a similar way, seeing the similarity among people shakes our narrowly defined self. We tend to think of "race" as an absolutely clear category. It is not. Many black people have European ancestries. There have been many intermarriages between Native Americans and non-natives. The notion of the homogeneous Japanese is a myth: there are many Chinese and Koreans who have lived in Japan for generations, and often issues of mixed-blood are dismissed. Each nation has its bio-politics and its government policies that reinforce the common belief in "pure race / blood."

So is "nature." Nature has been seen as something pure and untouched by humans . In reality, the natural environment is changed by its interaction with humans and other species, and the reverse is true, too: we alter ourselves through adapting to the changing environment. The notion of "nature" as primitive and untouched and "culture" as development and civilization is pervasive, and that has kept us from seeing "nature" in urban areas and doing deep ecology in cities. I think that culture should be seen as people's ways of relating to the rest of nature, instead of as distinct human civil achievement.

Another view of culture is something exotic that only indigenous peoples and ethnic groups possess. In this view, we project our earth-based identity onto others without exploring our own indigeneity that exists within ourselves. Reowning our indigenous self through investigation of personal, family, and ancestral histories makes us aware of the fact that we are a flow-through of time as well as matter, energy, and information. We inherit all the wisdom not only from our human ancestors, but also from species that existed before us and learned how to adapt to the ever changing environment in order to cooperatively live in it. In this sense, we all must have indigenous wisdom from the past, and that has to be passed onto all the future beings.

In the words of developmental/ humanistic psychologist, Eric H. Erikson (1964):

[T]he danger of any period of large-scale uprooting and transmigration is that exterior crises will, in too many individuals and generations, upset the hierarchy of developmental crises and their built-in correctives; and [... make us] lose those roots that must be planted firmly in meaningful life cycles. (p.96)

We need to rediscover our own indigenous integrity and ecologically rooted self and generate an ecologically sound culture of which values, Ethics, and aesthetics are in unity with the rest of nature. I hope to see deep ecology to be part of this creation of a renewed earthy culture that respects and honors people's distinctive and unique experiences. "Deep ecology is not a unified movement," says Ken Otter (lecture on July 12, 1996). I think that it is healthy for the movement to have diverse approaches to common goals. On the other hand, the movement does not consist of fully diverse voices, and the philosophy does not reflect concerns of people in so-called underdeveloped countries as well as "disposed" people in urban cities of industrial nations.

One of the characteristics of deep ecology that distinguish itself from previous environmental movements, such as the resource conservation movement, the wilderness preservation movement, and moral extensionism, is its non-anthropocentric standpoint. However, ecofeminists have been pointing out the tendency of deep ecology to be androcentric, and advocates of anti-environmental racism have been voicing concerns over the ethnocentric posture of deep ecology. I think that those arguments have valid points, and I wish to make a change in this condition by bringing narratives into the movement and the philosophy of deep ecology. Through our personal and cultural narratives in which we acknowledge our unique histories of separation from a non-human world, I hope, we can find our way back to being in harmony with the rest of the planetary community and reconnect with other people with great respect for each other's unique and distinctive struggle.

The original meaning of the word "individual" is to be indivisible. In fact, we are indivisible since, as Naess describes, we are "knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations." In order to renew this notion of being indivisible, we need to know from where we came from and how we have become what we are now. Identifying ourselves with "nature" and other people does not mean that we have to be something else or someone else other than what we are. The true identification is based on the deep understanding of ourselves with which we can resonate with the non-humans as well as fellow humans. I hope deep ecology to be a movement in which we can increase our resonance with others who have different life history and cultural background as well as with other species and the rest of nature that remind us of the existence of the unbreakable interconnectedness of life that weaves through all the beings on Earth.

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