

THE OTHER FLORIDAS: ECOFEMINIST BIOREGIONALISM AND POST-RURAL WHITE IDENTITY POLITICS IN THE FACEBOOK ERA



JOHN MORAN

DOCTORAL CANDIDATE, STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Florida is a crucible for environmental politics: once in the vanguard of environmental protection, in the 2010s, the state was a leader in the Tea Party dismantling of environmental protection. While the state's largest oyster population collapsed and cyanobacteria choked rivers, the Scott Administration brought the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to its regulatory low point.

Based on sixteen months of fieldwork between 2014 and 2017 in public education settings, this oral history project examines ecological nativism among settlers in "the Other Florida," a region of the Florida Panhandle that missed the state's twentieth-century population boom. In the twenty-first, it was remade by sustainable development discourse as a prized site of salable cultural and ecological heritage. The "ecological natives" were oysterfolk, mullet fisherman, and others in a demographic category steeped in political fantasy, rural whites. This dissertation describes two movements that both latched onto the ecologies of the Other Florida as the same fodder for very different visions of place-based identity: ecofeminist bioregionalism and post-rural white identity politics.

Nature memoirists combined ecofeminism, with its critique of western "Man" exploiting and objectifying people and ecologies alike, with bioregionalism, a movement to build national identities around watersheds. Its decolonizing potential has been overlooked because of lack of attention to women's contributions to environmentalism. Considering the status of the Apalachicola River in water management, this dissertation also finds multiple ontologies among settlers, as for some white settlers the Apalachicola is a living whole imbued with life force.

"Post-rural" refuses to take rural white populations as a priori and instead attends to how during suburbanization, identity markers associated with white rurality remained and were politically mobilized to oppose regulation of the resource frontier by outsiders invested in real estate. Post-rural white identity politics was spread through Facebook, an addictive product whose behavior-modifying feedback loops were designed to amplify inflammatory content for profit. Facebook was also used to promote mullet, a "trash fish," as a quasi-ethnic object for expressing a minoritized "white trash" identity laden with Christian symbolism.

The dissertation concludes with consideration of the figure of "Man," which ecofeminists criticize, as central to the advent of anthropos as a biogeochemical force. Might a queer anthropocene inaugurate Man's end?

TUESDAY, MAY 21ST, 11:00AM, BUILDING 50, ROOM 51A