

Serving Nature or Serving through Nature?

Oppression and Essentialism in the Ecofeminist Debate

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Title: **Serving Nature or Serving through Nature?
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Submitted: 16th May 2018

Word Count: 5042

Pages: 23

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to address, through a review of the available literature, issues regarding Essentialism within the Ecofeminist debate. This will be executed in the first instance by outlining Ecofeminism, its origins and core aims. The main focus of this work is the debate within Ecofeminist thought surrounding the relationship between 'women' and 'nature', therefore the two main schools of thought on this matter will be explored; that of Affinity Ecofeminism, sometimes referred to within this paper as Essentialism, and that of Social Constructivism. Following this will be a critique of Affinity Ecofeminism, through a Social Constructivist lens, with reference to Anthropological theory. This will constitute the bulk of the paper. The concluding paragraph will be a summation of the arguments and points raised within the body of this work.

The main stance of this paper is that Affinity Ecofeminism, through conscripting to a notion that women are necessarily closer to nature than men, reinforces the dualisms at the heart of oppression. This, in turn, feeds into the patriarchal ideology that views women and the non-human as passive agents, and becomes justification for the subjugation and destruction of the environment. In simple terms, viewing women as closer to nature within Ecofeminist thought serves only to reinforce that which it seeks to tackle. In this work, both sides of the debate will be outlined, with reference to relevant literature, and ultimately critiqued. The main influence on this argument is the work of Carolyn Merchant (1990, 2006), and so the bulk of critique will be taken from this in relation to Social Constructivist

theory. Ultimately, this paper will attempt to assess whether Essentialist notions of the woman/nature relationship serves to further the Ecofeminist agenda, or in actuality, impedes it. Concepts that will be explored in this process include; embodiment, embeddedness, Ecofeminist spirituality, subversion, dualisms, definitions of nature and wilderness, agency, and the non-human.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism views women and nature as both oppressed and dominated by the patriarchy, and argue that women suffer foremost from environmental damage (Mellor, 1997, p.1). Sexism and environmental degradation are viewed as parallel modes of domination (Warren, 1994). Established to address women's experiences and interests within the largely 'malestream' Green movements (Mellor, 1997, p.128), Ecofeminism brings together elements of feminism and ecological thought, utilising each to challenge the other. Taking the focus of the Green movements from wildlife preservation to consider the immediate problems of women, human health and habitat, Ecofeminism likewise seeks to ensure that feminism does not neglect the individual experiences of women in relation to their environment, rejecting notions of a universal 'shared' female experience of life. Indeed, it is recognised that there is no universal human experience, that factors such as gender, class, race and economic situations effect existence.

The bold aim of Ecofeminism is to recreate a humanity in harmony with its ecosystem (Mellor, 1997), as the natural world and humanity are viewed as connected and interdependent. It is argued that humans exist not only historically and socially, but also biologically and ecologically (Mellor, 1997, p.68), and that awareness of ourselves as biological beings could aid in reconstructing our social reality and work towards

reassessing destructive behaviours (Hawkins, 1998) . Therefore, humans are organisms within an ecosystem and “all living organisms must be seen in relation to their natural environment” (Mellor, 1997, p.1). This presence of the human within the ecosystem is termed embeddedness. The needs of embodiment (sustenance, shelter), must be met in the immediate ecosystem. These two interconnected terms, embeddedness and embodiment, are integral to understanding the affinity between human existence and the environment, and what this means for women. In the context of gender inequalities, the consequences of embodiment and embeddedness entail differing relationships between women and nature, dependent on social and natural context (Mellor, 1997, p.69). For Mellor (1997, p.68), women “represent the dilemma of human embodiment in a sexed and gendered world”. Women have, throughout history, had restricted roles within society based on the grounds of their biology. From upper-middle class women being considered frail, the requirements of motherhood denying access to further roles (Ehrenreich and English in Mellor, 1997, p.72), or working class women tied to nature to justify their hard labour (Mellor, 1997, p.72).

Above has been provided a rough outline of the core principles of Ecofeminist thought. However, there exists many factions within Ecofeminism, with divisions born of notions assuming an 'affinity' between woman and nature, with some arguing from a Social Constructivist stance, and others from a spiritual one. Indeed, Mallory (2010, p.50) states that “nowhere is ecofeminism more fraught and fractured than over the question of spirituality”.

Two Schools of Thought; Affinity Ecofeminism

The focus of this paper is the debate within Ecofeminism surrounding the 'alliance'

between women and nature. This debate centres on two main schools of thought; Affinity Ecofeminism and Social Constructivist theory. The first, Affinity Feminism, is based in spirituality, and views women as having an “elemental connection to nature” (Mellor, 1997, p.6). It is often referred to as Essentialism, as it assumes that there is a universal female 'essence' that can be identified and found in nature. Such a connection views women as possessing “a 'special' connection to nature that men do not, or that women have privileged epistemological access to an enchanted, material earth, or that women's reproductive bodies possess an ontological continuity with nature that surpasses that of men's” (Mallory, 2010, p.51). Here it is not power divisions that are deemed as the issue, but rather male domination or maleness itself that is the “cause of ecological destruction and oppressive behaviour” (Mellor, 1997, p.6). Foundational texts by Plant (1989) and Diamond and Orenstein (1990) saw a potential for earth to be healed by “a reclaiming of purported ancient value systems, religions, and practices that find liberatory power in the historic, symbolic, and material associations” of women and nature (Mallory, 2010, p.51). Ecofeminist Spirituality is, in many ways, a reaction to the mainstream male-dominated Western religions. It is described as Earth based, not heaven directed, and celebrates the spiritual nature of the physical world and women's bodies, providing a female image of spirituality (Mellor, 1997, p.53). Advocates argue that feminist spirituality is vital as it addresses four main issues; the image and language of God as male, the division of body and soul, reclaiming women's spirituality and history, and to create new theology and rituals (Christ and Plaskow in Mellor, 1997, p.52). Mellor (1997, p.52) states of the importance of spirituality: “Feminists arguing for a distinctive women's spirituality claim that it will provide a basis for women's empowerment outside of patriarchal control.” This frames Affinity Ecofeminism, through spirituality, as subversion through reclamation. Firstly, the reclaiming of spirituality and the female body, and secondly by the reclaiming of an

'affinity' between woman and nature.

Dualisms

Whereas the importance of subversion in terms of gender cannot be denied, it can also be argued that such acts further serve to reinforce that which they challenge, by presenting them as the standard, such as in Butler's (1988) performativity theory. Butler (1988) views gender as constituted of a series of acts, which through replication produce a mode of belief that such acts are 'natural'. Yanagisako and Delaney (1995, p.114) refer to this as "justification through reference to nature". However, it must be noted that Butler (1988) views the value of subversion as lying in its ability to highlight the constructed nature of, in the specific case of her work, gender. In terms of Affinity Ecofeminism, however, the subversion of the alliance between women and nature, from one that justifies oppression to one that is a source of empowerment, does not act as a means to highlight the constructed nature of such a relationship. In actuality, emphasis is placed on the 'natural' element of this affinity. It can be argued that by rejecting masculinity as an issue in and of itself, Affinity Ecofeminism is merely repeating and reinforcing patriarchal patterns. What is reinforced here is the notion that women are inherently linked to nature, which feeds into dualistic notions. If women represent nature, then what follows is that men represent culture. This puts women outside of the sphere of culture and society, and necessarily labels them as 'other'. As has been argued previously in this paper, this thereby becomes a justification for oppression. As Mellor (1997, p.72) states, "women have found themselves subordinated" through this alliance. This supposed connection to nature and its connotations can be compared to that of colonizers, who also used their 'superior culture' to justify exploitation (Mellor, 1997, p.72).

Dualisms are hierarchical divisions created in patriarchal society that hold one unit as possessing more value than another. Not only do they uphold one as more meaningful than another, but in creating a dichotomy between units, emphasize a notion that 'others' one from the other. For example, the male/female dualism not only places men above women but also separates humans along gender divisions. Macnaghten and Urry (1998, p.7) assert that such dichotomisation has deficiencies; such as having "led to exceptional levels of exploitation and degradation of land and landscapes and of other animal species". Further to this, Hawkins (1998) asserts that the dualistic structures present in Western culture amplify a "radical discontinuity" between humans and non-humans. This "gendered reason/nature contrast" is at the heart of Western thought, and what is created is a myriad of dualisms; culture/nature, mind/body, male/female, subject/object (Hawkins, 1998). These hierarchical dualisms reinforce the view challenged by Ecofeminism that places humans above and outside of nature and places higher value on culture and the masculine. Howell (in Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.127) agrees that there exists a bias in Western philosophy that separates humans from animals. Similarly to Mellor (1997), Howell (1996, p.127) asserts that such distinctions are grounded in moral superiority and are strengthened by Cartesian separations of body and mind in which "humans are superior to animals, mind is superior to body". Here again we see value placed on the culturally determined. Further to this, it is contended that the mind and mental processes are upheld as male qualities, to be associated with the masculine, and bodily and emotional matters as female qualities (Howell in Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.127). This asserts that a dichotomy exists between the cultural and natural, the mind being cultural and the body natural, and that these have gendered connotations. In a similar vein to Hawkins (1998), Howell (1996, p.127) suggests that considering ourselves as part of, rather than separate to nature, could help in understanding ourselves and our relationship

with the environment.

However, it must be noted that Descola (Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.82) asserts that the universality of such dichotomies should not be assumed. While these dualisms are “central dogmas of western scholarship” (Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.2), there exists many groups of peoples over the world that lack such dualistic splits between humans and non-humans. For them, humans are a part of nature; no distinctions are made between themselves and other living things (Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.82). Indeed, animals are often discussed with traits reserved elsewhere for humans (Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.82). Perhaps an amplifying of the existence of such conceptions should be the main focus of Ecology. What is challenged here are the “entrenched” biological and anthropological traditions which consider nature and society separately (Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.2).

Definitions of Nature

By confronting western dualisms, Ecofeminists hope to change the female experience of society. (Mellor, 1997, p.69). Ecofeminists see dualisms as deeply problematic, as at its very core, it creates hierarchical divisions. Indeed, the existence of these dualisms is seen as the current threat to the natural world, as they become a means for exploitation (Mellor, 1997, p.69). These dualisms influence representations of women and nature, as “nature cast in the female gender” (Merchant, 2006, p.514). Within the literature there are two representations of nature, and through association women, that are worth noting; nature as passive, and the concept of wilderness. As will be outlined, though they entail different definitions, both provide means for the justification of dominance. Firstly, nature as passive allows for the domination by “science, technology and capitalist production” (Merchant,

2006, p.514). Within this context, nature lacks agency. It is deemed secondary to culture, through the dualistic splitting that places emphasis on the human over the non-human, and justifies its degradation. The second concept of nature is that of 'wilderness'. Wilderness is seen as defined by patriarchy as land that is preserved and kept separate from society, "perfect nature" (Vance, 1997, p.62). Therefore, wilderness is defined by the absence of human beings. This suggests that nature is at its best when not in contact with humans (Vance, 1997, p.62). This is problematic for Ecofeminism, as it creates a separation of human and environment, and feeds into dualistic hierarchies. It places higher value on wilderness as areas kept separate from human existence. This separateness, though often heralded as an advance of the Green cause, is an illusion; it is constructed by humans through absence. Ecofeminists such as Devall and Sessions call for nature to be allowed self-determinism (Vance, 1997, p.66).

Similarly, in a study of 'wilderness' and how it is conceptualized in hunting in North-Western Europe, Bertrand Hell (in Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.215) also identifies a demarcation between wilderness and humans, termed the 'wild' and the 'domestic'. Identifying differing notions on hunting, for example, hunting as harvesting, or as population control, Hell finds a common notion that views the wild as something in need of confining within strict limits (1996, p.215). The term 'wild' itself is often used to denote that which is not human, it is a word with animalistic connotations. Hell (1996, p.206) also asserts that hunting, as an act of dominance over the non-human, is linked to masculinity. Hunting is viewed as a calling, biologically determined by the presence or lack of 'black blood' and 'fever' (Hell in Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.209). The presence of these indicates a disposition to kill, and therefore identifies a hunter. Women are not deemed to be able to possess black blood, and are therefore excluded from hunting, something which

Hell (1996, p.210) asserts is a “social reality confirmed by statistical data”. Therefore, hunting, as an activity that is male dominated and is framed as culture controlling nature, views the relationship between gender and nature as biologically determined.

Through the above examples it can be seen that definitions of nature are constructed. Indeed, Descola (1996, p.83), argues that nature is assumed to be a transcultural and transhistoric domain of reality. However it is asserted that the case is in fact the opposite, conceptions of nature are socially constructed, and culturally and historically determined (Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.82). Conceptions of nature are ideologies, and are constructed to suit particular agendas at certain times. Therefore, whether nature is passive or wild, both concepts have been generated by patriarchal dualisms and share a sense of 'othering' nature (Vance, 1997, p.62). These definitions are necessarily ideological, and are culturally and historically determined (Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.83). Even nature and environmentalist writers have an ideology to project, overemphasising the “Otherness” of nature; “its wilderness, its mystery, and thus its capacity to provoke cultural renewal” (Yanagisako and Delaney, 1995, p.115). Yanagisako and Delaney (1995, p.114) further assert that “nature is molded and melded into a reflection of human cultural concerns”.

These definitions frame nature in conflict with humans, as helpless to suffer at the hands of man. Is it helpful for Ecofeminism itself to further notions of 'passive' nature? By framing nature as something that needs saving, specifically by women, it can be argued that Ecofeminism is further feeding into a patriarchal ideology that views women and nature as lacking self-determinism. While attempting to subvert harmful notions of biological determinism, conceptions of an affinity between women and nature provide a departure

point for considerations of gender and environment in which historical and social context cannot be overlooked. This will be further considered later within this paper.

Agency of the non-human

As Macnaghten and Urry (1998, p.7) state; “there is no simple entity which we can designate as 'nature' which is to be regarded as waiting to be subject to enlightened human masters”. Wrapped up in these arguments is the concept of agency. Hawkins (1998) asserts that the agency and subjectivity within nature highlights the human potential for the dominance and oppression of non-human others. As mentioned above, Ecofeminists have called for nature to be allowed self-determinism. Though nature is subject to degradation at the hands of the patriarchy, and it is framed as passive or in need of confinement, be that from humans for natures sake or not, is it fair to assume that the non-human possesses little or no agency? Surely by advocating that we, the humans, should grant nature self-determinism, assumptions are cast as to the role of humanity as a gate keeper for nature. Is this assumption not naive? Humans are subject to the power of nature, by our very existence within the ecosystem. We are effected just as much, if not more so, by natural disasters. Levene in Bennett (2010, p.2) states that humans “do not even command the imperium, nature, of which they are a part”. Therefore, to assume a lack of agency in nature could be to assume a more heightened role for the human. Bennett (2010, p. xvi) frames this in terms of narcissism, stating that a need exists to “counter the narcissistic reflex of human language and thought”, and that emphasis must be placed on “the agentic contributions of nonhuman forces”, which are seen to not only operate in nature, but on the human body and human artifacts also. Links can be seen between this and Latour's (2005) Actor-network theory, which also views non-humans as possessing agency. Indeed, it is asserted that non-humans possess the same level of

agency as humans. Within Actor-network theory, everything within the natural and social world is seen to participate in ever-evolving networks of relationship. These networks are constituted of everything within the social and natural world; from humans to animals and even objects. All are seen to possess the same ability to effect social reality, all are equally important, as social forces are not a force unto their own but are a result of these dense networks. Here there exists no distinctions between the social and natural worlds, all exist together and share equal agency. This does not, of course, take into account the power divisions that foster oppression within patriarchal society. However, what is stressed here is the ability for non-humans to have as big an input into social reality as human.

Further to this, Bennett (2010, p. xvi) calls for a cultivation of anthropomorphism, to bolster notions that agency exists in nonhuman nature and to “counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world”. Such considerations challenge the belief that nature exists passively and is to be shaped by humans, be that in terms of environmental degradation or wilderness conservation. What is asserted here is what Ecofeminism supposes to recognise; that humans and non-humans exist in tandem in the same ecosystem, as Bennett (2010, p.2) summates “every nonhuman body shares with every human body a cognitive nature”. It is further asserted that all things exist and exert a will to exist (Bennett, 2010, p.2). If it is assumed that humans possess agency, then so too does nature. Similarly, Kohn (2013, p.1) argues that encounters with non-human beings “force us to recognise the fact that seeing, representing, and perhaps knowing, even thinking, are not exclusively human affairs”. Assuming that humans alone possess such abilities feeds into dualistic notions that place culture above nature.

Conversely, Yanagisako and Delaney (1995, p.115) argue that animals, when in contact

with humans, brought into the “orbit of human family”, become labeled as domestic. In contrast to Kohn (2013), this contact is not seen as granting agency to the non-human, rather that they are “shaped by yet escape the cultural models of agency” (Yanagisako and Delaney, 1995, p.115). In these cases, domestic animals are seen to exemplify the tension between cultural and natural definitions of nature. This again places humans and non-humans in separate spheres, even when they are inhabiting the same space. Allowing agency to be a strictly human trait serves to continue the framing of that which is non-human as 'passive' and furthering justification of its domination, and others nature and non-human animals, putting distance between two classifications of beings which should be considered as one under the banner of nature.

Above has been highlighted the ways in which nature possesses agency. Is it helpful to deny the existence of such agency? It cannot be argued that humans have not degraded the environment and impacted negatively on the non-human, but treating nature as simply passive goes some way to misunderstand it. What is vital here is to consider the context of such framing. As mentioned previously, definitions of nature are inherently ideological (Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.83), the key to understanding them lies in their historical and cultural context. Macnaghten and Urry (1998, p.7) assert that nature has been “degraded into a realm of unfreedom and hostility that needed to be subdued and controlled”. It has been highlighted previously within this paper how the processes of defining nature as wild or domestic (Hell in Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.215) are ideologies (Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.83) which have served to facilitate its domination.

Two Schools of Thought; Social Constuctivist Theory

This emphasis on historical and social construction relates to the second main school of thought surrounding the 'alliance' between woman and nature, that of Social Constructivist theory. This provides the lens through which a critique of essentialist Affinity Ecofeminist notions can be approached. The bulk of the criticism below comes from Merchant (1989) in her work *The Death of Nature*, which is often considered a foundational text for Ecofeminism (Thompson, 2006). Previous to this, Ecofeminism was charged with being marred by an essentialist identification of women's relationship to nature (Thompson, 2006). Merchant (1989), through her in-depth explorations of the social contexts of this relationship, highlighted the historical processes by which women's biology has been othered in association with nature (Thompson, 2006).

The ways in which humans have met the needs of embodiment and embeddedness throughout history has entailed differing relations with, and conceptions of, nature. Merchant (1989, p.1) declares that "human beings have lived in daily, immediate, organic relation with the natural order for their sustenance", and that early human societies in particular existed organically, as part of nature, and developed conceptions that viewed the earth as "a kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind" (Merchant, 1989, p.2). These early conceptions saw nature as "a nurturing mother" (Merchant, 1989, p.2). Such notions ensured a harmony with environment, providing protective means with ethical connotations, "as long as the earth was considered to be alive and sensitive, it could be considered a breach of human ethical behavior to carry out destructive acts against it" (Merchant, 1989, p.3). However, another image of nature as female also existed, that of a "wild and uncontrollable nature" responsible for destruction and violence (Merchant, 1989, p.2). These conceptions were both identified with the female and were "projections of human perceptions onto the external world" (Merchant, 1989, p.2), or in

simpler terms, social constructions. These constructions, as mentioned above, served certain material needs. According to Merchant (1989, p.2), as the Scientific Revolution continued to grow, nurturing mother metaphors receded and increasing emphasis was placed on the violent, disordered conception of nature. Such conceptions led to notions of a need for power over nature, which worked in tandem with mechanisation to dominate. Indeed, Macnaghten and Delaney (1998, p.7) highlight that there exists a “belief that human progress should be measured and evaluated in terms of the domination of nature”. Nature became framed as irrational, disordered, and the need to control it more vital. This provided a means by which to control women by association, “disorderly woman, like chaotic nature, needed to be controlled” (Merchant, 1989, p.127). From this is born an association that sees the feminine as organic and passive, and the masculine as mechanic and dominating. Therefore man becomes the possessor of power, power over women and nature. Altering conceptions of nature served as “cultural sanctions for the denudation of nature” (Merchant, 1989, p.2). This image linked to commercialism and industrialisation, and served as a justification for the mining and deforestation necessary in the process.

As can be seen, these social constructions served to aid the oppression and exploitation of women and the environment. Indeed, Descola (Descola and Palsson, 1996, p.83) states such definitions (or conceptions) of nature are ideological, steeped in social and historical context. In order to understand the connotations of the supposed affinity between woman and nature, this context must be examined and understood. As Merchant (1989, p.4) asserts, “when language changes, a culture is also changing in important ways. By examining changes in descriptions of nature we can then perceive something of the changes in cultural values”. Definitions of nature are directly related to the material needs of patriarchal society. It can be argued then, that by asserting this affinity between woman

and nature, Affinity Ecofeminists are ignoring the social and historical contexts of such notions. As has been mentioned previously within this paper, such attempts at subversion strengthen the assumed 'natural' standard, and feed into patriarchal dualisms. As Merchant (1989, p.127) states, "because women's physiological functions of reproduction, nurture, and childrearing are viewed as closer to nature, their social role is lower on the cultural scale than that of male". Though subversion can highlight the constructed nature of such associations, they exist in a patriarchal society with entrenched hierarchical dualistic structures. This context should not be overlooked by Affinity Ecofeminists. Indeed, Gruen (in Gaard, 1993, p.61) advocates a deeper examination of this connection and the ways in which it "sustains the constructed reality of patriarchal society" in order to better "reconstruct thought and action in a more balanced, less destructive way". By understanding the source of these constructions, Ecofeminists could break down such assumptions and lay bare the ways in which they have impacted on and justified the oppression of women and environmental degradation. In Gruen's own words (in Gaard, 1993, p.61): "this connection is not to be understood as a 'natural' connection - one that suggests that women and animals are essentially similar - but rather a constructed connection that has been created by the patriarchy as means of oppression".

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to address issues regarding charges of Essentialism in Ecofeminism. This was executed through a review of available literature which considered both factions involved in the debate. The argument put forth is that the creation of dualisms in patriarchal society have aided the exploitation of women and nature (Macnaghten and Urry, 1998) through distancing humans and non-humans (Hawkins, 1998), creating a hierarchy that asserts the superiority of humans above animals and

culture above nature and culture is therefore framed as a male domain (Howell in Descola and Palsson, 1996). However, Descola (in Descola and Palsson, 1996) asserts that it would be a mistake to slip into a Eurocentric view that all societies across the globe adhere to this dichotomy. Some peoples see no barrier between that which is human and that which is non-human. Indeed, it is asserted that such beliefs should be subject to greater consideration in the west (Hawkins, 1998, Howell in Descola and Palsson, 1996). A key part of deconstructing the essentialist conception of the affinity between woman and nature lies in definitions of nature and their constructed reality. Definitions of nature display how nature is framed and how this is used to justify domination. Nature as passive (Merchant, 2006) and as wilderness (Vance, 1997) both share a split between human and non-human, and serve to justify intervention, even if that be through absence. Hell (in Descola and Palsson, 1996) asserts how hunting is a necessarily male activity, as power exerted over nature. These definitions are all constructed (Merchant, 1989), serving ideologies (Descola and Palsson, 1996) that reflect (patriarchal) human cultural concerns (Yanagisako and Delaney, 1995). Within the Social Constructivist argument, Merchant (1989) highlights the historical processes responsible for the constructed affinity between woman and nature and how these have served as cultural sanctions with links to biology. Such definitions have led Ecofeminists to call for nature to be allowed self-determinism (Vance, 1997), however, it is argued that such calls feed into false assumptions that the non-human world lacks agency. This is deemed by Bennett (2010) to be human narcissism. As is highlighted by Latour's (2005) Actor-network theory, all humans and non-humans share the same level of agency and contribute to social reality equally, though this has its criticisms.

It has been argued within this work that notions of an essential female connection between

the female and nature is damaging, be it within Affinity Ecofeminism or as part of patriarchal dogma. Despite this, Mallory (2010, p.52) sees some basic value in Affinity Ecofeminist views. It is argued that despite the consensus within the academic sphere to reject essentialist spiritual notions, some Ecofeminists and activists find value in the rituals and symbols that frame earth as a living being who is “responsive, sacred, and divine”. Its power is seen as lying in its ability to counter the patriarchal values that justify environmental destruction. However, this would assert that it is a strictly male objective to degrade the earth, and that it is the inherent 'job' of women to 'fix' it. Pinning blame entirely on masculinity also serves to ignore the myriad of intersecting oppressions present in patriarchal society. Perhaps less emphasis on maleness itself as a cause of oppression and degradation, and more on the historical and social contexts that foster an affinity between women and nature would yield greater progress for the cause of Ecofeminism. Such essentialist views are simplistic at best, and at worst further patriarchal dualist notions. Criticisms of Affinity concepts have been utilised to undermine and discount Ecofeminism as a whole, by association it is labelled “politically regressive” (Mallory, 2010, p.50). Therefore, it is the argument of this paper that such Essentialist notions strengthen that which Ecofeminism seeks to tackle, and indeed, creates negative preconceptions of a discipline that possesses the power to draw attention to the parallel struggles of woman and the environment.

Word Count: 5042

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