

An Eco-feminist Approach to Reproductive Oppression

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ABSTRACT

Although there are established international measures to ensure women have access to standard levels of healthcare, those standards are relative to the accessibility within each respective nation and there currently exists no impetus to heighten the quality of that standard of care on a global level. This is particularly evident in those places commonly referred to as the “developing world”. There are cultural ideologies and norms within the vast majority of developed nations which demonstrate a pervasive desire to seek control of resources and allocate them based on an understood value assigned to the recipient, rather than recipient need; a value which is often, if not always, determined by ability to create profit. Within this profit-centered structure there cannot be any genuine resolve to provide the best possible health care to the most possible people.

As a result of that framework, discussions position health as a commodity in limited supply and unfruitfully focus on the demand rather than the supply. However, demand for healthcare will persevere as long as humankind continues to exist and that demand will grow as the population does. This lens has shaped our global discussions of “overpopulation.” That is to say that an economic model aiming to ration healthcare will necessarily treat the source of the demand, in this case women, as objects to be controlled.

This paper applies an eco-feminist lens to analyze ways in which international treaties have failed to function at their highest level, and how those failures impact women’s reproductive rights at large. It includes a discursive and doctrinal analysis, intentionally highlighting our legal, academic, and existing human rights documents’ framing of these issues. Its conclusion unites these concepts to note where and how eco-feminist theories could bridge the gaps in the existing academia and advocacy - or entirely restructure the roads.

INTRODUCTION

Although there are established international measures to ensure women have access to standard levels of healthcare, those standards are relative to the accessibility within each respective nation and there currently exists no impetus to heighten the quality of that standard of care on a global level. This is particularly evident in those places commonly referred to as the “developing world.” There are cultural ideologies and norms within the vast majority of developed nations which demonstrate a pervasive desire to seek control of resources and allocate them based on an understood value assigned to the recipient, rather than recipient need; a value which is often, if not always, determined by ability to create profit. Within this profit-centered structure, there cannot

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OVERPOPULATION DISCOURSE

“Eve is black, primitive and pregnant, and her reproduction is the Original Sin.”¹

This bold and shocking statement by Betsy Hartman sums up the way population research and policy tend to be framed. In general, the dialogue notes that resources are finite, then notes the growing populations in non-western and underdeveloped nations, and begins to analyze the “other” as an issue. Of course, when we dehumanize a society, minimizing entire groups into the problems we perceive them to create for us, it becomes easy to reference them as overbreeding animals to be culled – a population to be controlled for the benefit of the whole.

What is being said?

There have been countless news segments shown, policies written, marches organized, organizations formed, funding spent and articles written about the dreaded “population dilemma.” Each of these focuses on how the western world or America can address the concerns of growing populations within our borders as well as globally. Often the issue is framed as an immediate and

¹ Betsy Hartmann, *Liberal Ends, Illiberal Means: National Security, ‘Environmental Conflict’ and the Making of the Cairo Consensus* 13 *Indian Journal Gender Studies* 195, 199 (2006).

necessary one that encourages “fertility assistance”² for the “underprivileged...within the United States and abroad.”³ As recently as this year, a moderator, discussion leader and academic went so far as to suggest that it is the duty of the poor and underprivileged to stop reproducing in order to save our planet.⁴ This framing explicitly blames fertility for several world issues⁵, stating that we must have fewer births or more deaths⁶. This dramatic Malthusian response to crisis creates a false dichotomy of choice, which is presented as valid with the exhibition of several statistics that manufacture relationships between the harm to the planet, failing national stability, and high population or high rates of population growth. In these perspectives, world leaders and academicians even go so far as to criticize the efforts of nations throughout the global south to stabilize economics or better qualities of life by pointing to their growing population as the obvious and ignored sources of every national ill.⁷

There are a few participants in the discourse, however, who readily understand that this is not the reality, particularly given the repeated reports of disproportionate carbon emissions from the West. Though most tend to ignore or not look for facts regarding the amount of consumption in relation to the population of nations in the western world, some are not quite so intellectually dishonest. Perhaps these voices being underheard is because those who do research within that vein are generally not invited to the table for discussions of overpopulation and population control.

² “Fertility assistance” read: birth control access; tubal ligation; any forms of slowing down or ceasing reproduction from education to lowering sperm count. See e.g. Frank W. Notestein, Dudley Kirk, and Sheldon Segal, *The Problem of Population Control*, in *The Population Dilemma* 125, 134-136 (Phillip M. Hauser ed., 1963).

³ Phillip M. Hauser, *Introduction and Overview to The Population Dilemma*, at 3 (Phillip M. Hauser ed., 1963).

⁴ Thotiana Tankikova (@_unpeachy), Twitter (Sep 23, 2019, 1:10 AM), https://twitter.com/_unpeachy/status/1176015981262659584

⁵ See, e.g., Harold F. Dorn, *World Population Growth*, in *The Population Dilemma*, supra note 3 at 7, 14, 15; Arguments presented as “Malthusianism” in by Irene B. Taeuber, *Population Growth in Underdeveloped Areas*, in *The Population Dilemma*, supra note 3 at 45; Notestein, Kirk, and Segal, supra note 2 at 130; *The Final Report of the Twenty Third American Assembly*, in *The Population Dilemma*, supra note 2 at 179 – 180; To be clear, these are citations to several articles which state overpopulation is to blame for the crippling fear of horrendous poverty and lack of education and resources to come. Very little is said about the negative impact of “overpopulation” today.

⁶ See, e.g. Frank Lorimer, *Issues of Population Policy*, in *The Population Dilemma*, supra note 3 at 144; Taeuber, supra note 4 at 31.

⁷ Hauser, supra note 3, at 3

However, those voices are often overlooked in these conversations, as they tend to be shunned or not taken seriously – or treated as faux academicians with a communist agenda.⁸ Regardless of whatever may cause this gap in understanding, there was one voice in particular mentioned within Hauser’s anthology that did mention the concerns of disproportionate western consumption while also pointing to the concerns of overpopulation.⁹ This article specifically states that there needs to be movement in both directions for there to be legitimate progress. Unfortunately, in indicating that resource allocation was one valid place to begin seeking a solution, he still (intentionally or not) concentrated fault of this dilemma on poor women of color. Many seem to be unimpressed with the idea of redistribution of resources even on extraordinarily small scales because of nationalistic sentiments. Some go so far to say that, not only does the world does not function as a unit, but that it cannot and it should not¹⁰. This argument extends to speak on the issues of the “available resources, skills, and knowledge to meet needs” without critiquing whether or not there are paths around the barriers of different needs by nation.¹¹

Although each contribution to this discourse has its own perspective ranging from immigration policies to industrialization, to sterilization, they all seem to carry the same underlying tones. This tone is one which insinuates that there is a certain proper family type, and that family is small and deserving of the right to build a family. The idea of earning the right to build a family via some status or other category label based on placement in hierarchy (namely being Western, wealthy, white, or all of the prior) seems to be a concept so fundamentally understood and ingrained in the ways we think about organizing families, that it permeates the discourse with minimal challenge.¹²

⁸ On the off chance that they are allowed to remain in academia and aren’t ousted or blackballed as is the current trend. See, Suzy Hansen, 'The Era of People Like You is Over': How Turkey Purged Its Intellectuals, NY Times (Jul. 24 2019) <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/24/magazine/the-era-of-people-like-you-is-over-how-turkey-purged-its-intellectuals.html>

⁹ Joseph L. Fisher and Neal Potter, Resources in the United States and the World, in *The Population Dilemma*, supra note 3 at 95.

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Id.

¹² This is an assumption I read into the discourse by the lack of critique of the western/developed world, and also because of the constant criticisms of the low or undesirable economic state of nations with growing populations.

What are the harms?

Given that there are so few and far between interjections to push against these perceptions, it is prudent that this paper explicitly states: Beliefs that there are specific types of people who are acceptable to sterilize are harmful and unacceptable. This is not a set of concepts that exist in a vacuum, but rather an ideology that speaks to who we believe deserves to be alive and live a fulfilled life. We have very recent examples of how this impacts policy and how it harms the people on this planet that must not go ignored.

Because the discourse purports that there is a population crisis, there is a heightened sense of panic, fear, and urgency that tends to lead people away from facts and analysis and into specific reactionary movement. As mentioned above, the discourse surrounding this crisis indicates that there is a certain type of person who should exist, and in so saying, indicates that it is our duty to limit consumption by reproducing less of those undesirable people. The discourse additionally goes so far as to state, “the womb may prove to be more dangerous than the bomb.”¹³ This framing, which in no uncertain terms likens people with uteri to weapons of mass destruction, inherently requires that those people be regulated. In creating panic, it very cleverly shifts the burden of consumption and environmental harm from the West to populations who consume the least.

In the instance of Peru

The World Bank, in providing loan funds, routinely has explicitly contractual terms for dissemination of said funds with strict guidelines for overseeing and recording use of funds. This took place openly for decades across the global south. In the documentary *A Woman's Womb* a case study is explicitly explored, revealing the instances of program application within Peru.

In the case of the Peruvian government request for funds, there was a strict contingency, complete with required quota fulfillment, that there be a decline in population growth. Here, the growth of a population was equated not only with environmental destruction but also with instability and poverty. This requirement is problematic at its core and eugenicist in its application.

The Peruvian government, in complying with these terms, partnered with USAID in spending billions of dollars on a sterilization campaign. For peak efficiency, this campaign targeted the population with the highest rate of population growth. Unsurprisingly, as in most countries,

¹³ Pierre Hébert, *People by the Billions* (prod. Ornette Coleman, 1961)

this meant targeting poor agrarian field working women with next to no education. It was not relevant that these indigenous women were least likely to drain from government resources, or benefit from additionally loaned funds, or that they, in their hyper sustainable farm life, utilized the least of all environmental resources. What mattered was that they were a vulnerable population who could be convinced, or confused, or forcefully coerced into getting their tubes tied.

This campaign was extraordinarily effective. Over the span of merely five years, 300,000 women and 30,000 men were sterilized. Over 90% of those sterilized were poor, agrarian, illiterate Quechua indigenous people who lived directly off the land and had very little interaction with urban society.¹⁴ In presenting these results at environmental conferences internationally, the Peruvian government was applauded – lauded for their innovation. No one saw or acknowledged or cared to envision the suffering from women who were stripped of their bodily autonomy in exchange for a data point for capital. As extreme as this human rights violation seems, it is not uncommon and has not gone out of vogue.

In the instance of Afghanistan

In more recent years since the research on this paper has begun, there has been a bit of pushback and shaming culturally of these ideas. USAID, World Bank, and the World Health Organization, in spite of – or perhaps, because of – their sordid eugenicist past of actively violating the bodies of women of color around the globe through mass sterilization, their policies have changed noticeably since the 1990s.¹⁵ However, upon further analysis, it is clear that this policy shift is a veneer plastered over the same insidious agenda. Though, now, the World Bank and World Health Organization state they would never make such a contingency requirement for nations within the global south in need,¹⁶ we still find alarming echoes of past harm.

In the most recently available report on Afghanistan from 2017, we find that population growth is still of major concern. The language is coded, and the drafting is careful, but the intent is clear. The “Afghanistan to 2030” report in question was drafted for the specific focus of

¹⁴ Mathilde Damoiseil, *A Woman’s Womb* (prod. Tancrede Ramonet, 2010)

¹⁵ Mathilde Damoiseil, *A Woman’s Womb* (prod. Tancrede Ramonet, 2010); This documentary highlights several of the issues discussed in part II of this piece as well in showing the way the fear based policies functioned in practice.

¹⁶ Matthew Connelly, Historian, Columbia University - Interview

understanding funding needs or opportunities to create the context for loan funds needed and where they should be used.¹⁷ During the analysis of the report, we find that we see neither the terms “population growth” nor “growing population” mentioned, yet we do find other factors to consider in broader more acceptably named subcomponents. “Household Fragility” is mentioned – and in a small note the term is defined to include the size of the family and whether the family is growing. “Growing labour supply” is another newly framed term that equates nearly exactly to population growth. Lastly, this report also notes that 70% of this population, which has higher rates of “household fragility and growing labour supply,” is rural. This is particularly alarming because of the obviously targeted vulnerable agrarian groups in Peru and the world over.

ECO FEMINISM

“That feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed.”¹⁸

This quote may seem like a strangely new-age hippie way to perceive feminism, but the idea of women being connected with nature is certainly not new. Aspects of nature like nurturing and sustenance have usually been characterized as feminine things, even with things so simple as the term “Mother Earth.” Eco-feminism takes a step further in the analysis. Although eco-feminism is unique in its intentionally overlapping women’s issues with issues of nature, it is not a far cry from other theories that notice the connections between the environment and power structures of oppression. Social ecology (or eco-socialism)¹⁹ and anarchist ecology (eco-anarchism)²⁰ are also developed philosophies that run in a similar vein. Though this paper focuses on analyzing issues through the lens of eco-feminism, for the sake of clarity, it is important to note that there are points in which these theories overlap. Eco-feminism does not reference only one idea but rather a subset of several that have a particular focus in observing the treatment of nature. It is one ideology that does in fact challenge the ideas promoted by the perceived population dilemma. Though it seems to be one of the less popular feminist philosophies, it is directly applicable to issues of the gaps

¹⁷ World Bank, “Afghanistan to 2030 Priorities for Economic Development Under Fragility” Public Disclosure Pamphlet

¹⁸ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (1982); Nancy Levit & Robert R.M. Verchick, *Feminist Legal Theory: A Primer* 12, 31(2006).

¹⁹ See e.g. Jim Merkel, *Radical Simplicity: Small Footprints On A Finite Earth* 3-6 (2003); Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy Of Social Ecology* (1994);

²⁰ See e.g., Graham Purchase, *Anarchism And Ecology* (1997);

between the status quo and the realization of women's agency and human rights generally on the international level. However, before discussing how these theories in eco-feminist philosophy can be applied, a brief history and outlining of the theoretical framework is necessary for better understanding.

What is Eco-Feminism?

The history of the eco-feminist movement traces its advancement origins to the 1970s. More specifically, the idea and the term were first popularized in a 1974 piece written by Françoise D'Eaubonne entitled "Feminism or Death."²¹ Eco-Feminism is a theoretical framework that seeks to combine, re-examine, and augment both the Environmental and Feminist movements.²² The underlying idea is that the destruction of nature and the oppression of women are interconnected.²³ D'Eaubonne explains this idea by noting that most of what we acknowledge as patriarchy has been embedded in our societal systems and institutions because of men's demand for control and power. This meant that control of both the means of production (i.e., with regard to land and trade) along with the means of reproduction (i.e., girls, women, or more clearly: those with a uterus).²⁴ This version of eco-feminism goes on to include that men have felt the need to maintain control and power generally by maintaining hierarchies.

Modern definitions of eco-feminism have expounded with the latter in their approach, though still predicated on the treatment of nature, now asserts there are connections necessarily between the treatment of women, the poor, and people of color.²⁵ Some now even say that eco-feminism is an "umbrella term for a variety of different positions" of oppressive dominations of any marginalized person and that same domination seen in the treatment of nature.²⁶

²¹ Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Le féminisme ou la mort* [Feminism or death], in *New French Feminisms: A_N Anthology* 64, 66 (Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron ed., 1980); Carolyn Merchant, *Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory*, in *Reweaving The World: The Emergence Of Ecofeminism* 100, 100 (Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein ed., 1990).; Nancy Levit & Robert R.M. Verchick, *Feminist Legal Theory: A Primer* 12, 31 (2006).

²² *Our Changing Climate, Is Ecofeminism Still Relevant*, YouTube (Apr. 26, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBP0-XUe6bU>

²³ Levit & Verchick, *supra* note 1, at 31.

²⁴ D'Eaubonne, *supra* note 1, at 66.

²⁵ Karen J. Warren, *Introduction of Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, at xi (1997); Levit & Verchick *supra* note 1, at 31.

²⁶ Jyette Nhanenge, *Ecofeminism: Towards Integrating The Concerns Of Women, Poor People, And*

D'Eaubonne originally wrote her piece with a focus on this formulated system of oppression as being a “male System” and in some ways, seemed to decline the opportunity to further analyze the connection of that idea with the concepts of control and distribution of resources in an economic sense.²⁷ Her writing does note that the harm to Earth is specifically because of “profit motive.” However, she separates these ideas, explaining that the “profit motive” is structurally a part of the male System – an innate part of masculinity that she calls out as being an issue, rather than a separate system to be deconstructed.²⁸ Conflating masculinity with capitalism and therefore passing on the occasion to critique capitalism as it distinctly relates to women’s rights and harm to the environment did not stop others from deriving that intent from her writing. That imputed meaning along with the growing popularity of more inclusive forms of feminism²⁹ is likely part of why the term “eco-feminism” is now considered to be much broader.³⁰

How does Eco-Feminism work?

Though De’aubonne’s original explanation and this evolution of eco-feminism are rather recent, the concept is, perhaps obviously, not as recent as the 1970s. There has, throughout several societies and cultures, been an overarching concept of women being connected with earth and depictions of nature as feminine. Linguistically, we tend to feminize and heavily gender discussions of the environment. We have ideas of “Mother Earth” and “fertile” ground to be “plundered and sown.” Perhaps there is something biological in us that pushes us to make these comparisons, but because the language becomes quite hierarchical and, at times, violent, Eco-Feminism, in acting to reveal that connection, takes a beat to critique. Eco-feminism highlights

Nature Into Development 98, (2011).

²⁷ D’Eaubonne, *supra* note 1, at 66. Here she references and critiques the harms of the system in that it praises masculinity and men having power charging “complete responsibility of the male System, in so far as it is male (and not capitalist or socialist).”

²⁸ *Id.*; Elaine Marks & Isabelle de Courtivron, Introduction II of *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, at 25 (1980).

²⁹ See e.g., Verna Williams and Kristin Kalsem, *Social Justice Feminism* 18 *UCLA Women's L.J.* 131, 2010; Jyette Nhanenge, *Ecofeminism: Towards Integrating The Concerns Of Women, Poor People, And Nature Into Development* (2011).

³⁰ This figure is included in an effort to provide more clarity to the otherwise, even after several articles and lectures, somewhat nebulous concept of ecofeminism. Though the visual explains quite a bit, this figure is from 1997. I would argue that know there is far more overlap in all of these sections. Dorceta E. Taylor, *Women of Color, Environmental Justice, and Ecofeminism*, in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* 38, 65 (Karen J. Warren ed., 1997).

interconnectedness by acknowledging and challenging value hierarchical thinking and oppositional dualities.

Hierarchical thinking is the notion that cultures establish certain groups as inherently more valuable than other groups. For example, within much of the world, but especially within the West, we find that men are generally considered more valuable than women, who are more valued than animals, who are more valued than plants and physical nature. Oppositional dualism is the socio-cultural phenomenon of binary issues with poles, which are conflicting or otherwise adversarial opposites. We see this in the concepts of man vs. nature; logic vs. emotion; black vs. white; male vs. female. Much of our structure relies not only on difference but on differences that are greatly at odds with one another.

Within eco-feminism, both of these norms are harmful. Pushing against them, eco-feminism introduces more soft and unifying understandings of the world around us. There are two major methods used to apply eco-feminist theory in practice 1) Traditional disruption of hierarchies and oppositional dualities; 2) The method I posit: Asking the woman question, then asking the environment question.

First, in seeking to disrupt hierarchies, Eco-feminism turns to more complete views of interconnectedness in all things. Acknowledging our positionality as dependent upon that which we harm and dependent upon that which seems to harm us forces new perspective. If we begin to understand that we are humans who are part of a planet and not humans who control a separate entity of a planet, we perform a necessary ideological shift. We stop asking, “how can I exert power over this external thing” and begin to ask, “How can we work together to save ourselves”.

Another method requires a two-part inquiry. As many feminists know, “the woman question” calls for us to analyze situations with a lens that directs us to the experiences of women within a situation. In performing this analysis well, we engage in intersectional inquiry and simultaneously analyze the overlapping marginalization and identities of women. Eco-feminists, however, then follow up with an inquiry regarding how the environment is impacted. We may use the instance of Peru as an example.

What of the women in this situation? They are robbed of autonomy; they are violated by being given false information regarding a permanent medical procedure; they are poor, indigenous,

uneducated women without access to other resources or power to combat this harm; their culture is being eradicated and they are being made unable to continue their existence.

What of the environment in this situation? The only people working on, and farming on, and utilizing and protecting that land were those agrarian women. Without these women, and without these agrarian workers, indigenous populations will have to vacate the land to sustain their lives. The land will become more vulnerable to being expanded upon. Within context, we note that the government specifically requested billions of dollars for expansion. That land will likely be expanded upon, and for the first time be a piece of land on which there is production which will cause more consumption and environmental harm than any of the indigenous community ever could have.

Why is this a valuable interjection?

The use of an eco-feminist lens in developing specific policies has the clear potential to prevent tragedies and mass human rights violations. Eco-feminism can also be applied more broadly and halt our existing understanding of the “population dilemma” as it is currently presented. Eco-feminism, in conjunction with feminist socialism or feminist Marxism, would force a reframing of the issues. One article, in addressing this man-made dilemma fever, stated that there must be fewer births or more deaths to evade whatever perceived impending doom there might be should the population continue to grow at its same rate.³¹ This framing falsely creates a limited scope of options. By focusing only on the propensity of growing demand, the controlling discourse narrows the spectrum of possibilities and forces out several many solutions that take a much different perspective.

The eco-feminist approach can function to address this framing using the same specific policy methodology above as posited or using the initial analysis of hierarchy + duality. For example, the eco-feminist-socialist³² in making the hierarchy inquiry looks at the control of the means of production and critically analyzes the ownership of land and industry and resources. In making this inquiry, we find and highlight the similarities between those methods of control and the control exercised over women’s bodies and decisions. Next, we see the duality in looking at

³¹ Notestein, Kirk, and Segal, supra note 4 at 130

³² This is a mesh of my own artistic linguistic license and a desire for clarity and brevity.

“us vs. them” or, here, “those with uterus who must be controlled vs. the rest of us in need of those resources.” Of course, those who give birth are part of this planet and benefit from appropriate resource allocation. We must turn the hierarchy on its head and scramble the duality and discover methods of functioning cohesively.

Eco-feminism, in its first step, acknowledges the patterns of ownership and consumption. This approach forces us to review facts. Important ones in this instance are: The United States of America consuming 24% of the world’s resources while containing 5% of the world’s population.³³ The Western world as a whole has similar numbers, but generally declining and becoming less shameful.³⁴ Given this disparity in the amount of consumption per capita, it seems intellectually dishonest (and borders on absurd) to focus the concerns of environmental harm on a population dilemma unless those discussions of population control are centered on American soil. In doing this analysis we come to understand that there are more movable pieces than those that are actually in play.

These findings lead us to our understanding of breaking down dualities and creating a more holistic spectrum or interdependent structure to address environmental harm. The allocations of resources do not have to be set figures. We, within government and academia, have been treating resource allocation as a fixed variable. However, divestment, reallocation, and new structures of figures are an available option. They are, though, quite politically unpopular. Due to that unpopularity, we have hyper focused on population as the only thing that could alter in order to accommodate all life. However, given the previous statistics, it would seem that perhaps *only* a shift in allocation of resources or the amount of consumption would make any sort of meaningful change with or without population growth or decline.

The political unpopularity of this position is quite clear. Though some eco-feminists may rally and shout in fury and indicate that refusing to make any shift is a child-like refusal or the masculine pride of the “male System,” there is more here to critique. A consistent ideological roadblock is a ubiquitous societal belief that there is not enough pie for everyone. However, it

³³ Development Data Group Of The World Bank, World Development Indicators, (2008) available at <http://data.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/wdi08.pdf>

³⁴ Dorn, supra note 4 at 20

seems here that two people were given both halves. Eco-feminism seeks to shift ideology in helping us to all break away from that misunderstanding and realize that all of our survival is dependent upon our interdependency and communal capacity.

As we return to our analysis to observe the treatment of nature and control and observe the treatment of women and search for the connections therein, there are some plain patterns and solutions available. If there is a more widespread evenly handed or even moderately more proportional degree of resources given as they were needed, then we see that there is far more than enough for everyone to both consume and procreate sustainably. This challenges the dynamics of the masculine power structure – both the function of and the difficulty in Eco-Feminism. Suggesting that there be a shared value of all people is considered to be one of the feminine traits oppressed within the male system; a trait that is deemed weak and unfit because it does not produce profit or leverage power. This analysis brings us to the driving force of ecofeminism in which the promotion of celebrating, embracing, or even accepting valid ideals of nurture that are generally associated with feminism and then leads to the liberation of women. When that shift is successfully made, the concern no longer becomes population, and the political pressures naturally shift away from creators of life, and toward the creators of industry and obligations to mankind. The onus to sustain the world is placed where it belongs – on those who are actually destroying the planet, to begin with.

MOVING BEYOND THE STATUS QUO

Fortunately, there is already a stage set for the development of health equity as a solution. Though the process of eco-feminist activism will not by any means be simple, and perhaps not even necessarily the best or most accessible tool, there is space from which such activity could springboard. Here I will explore the specific example of health access and the health industry as this specifically relates to issues of population growth.

The international Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights calls for states to recognize the right of access to the “highest attainable standard” of health.³⁵ The Universal

³⁵ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted 16 Dec. 1966, G.A. Res. 2200 (XXI), U.N. GAOR, 21st Sess., art. 12, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3 (entered into force 3 Jan. 1976).

Declaration of Human Rights also at several points recognizes not only rights to preservation of health³⁶ and rights to the benefits of scientific discoveries³⁷ but also acknowledges a duty to society³⁸ and a duty to maintain social welfare.^{39 & 40}

If the language of these treaties were to be taken at their face value, applications of these expectations are not necessarily limited to national borders. That is to say: the highest level of health attainable should not only be uniform throughout different regions of India – but should also not be different from India to the United Kingdom. If these treaties are read to develop a network of interdependency in which nations rely on one another for development of health solutions, we are able to address many issues at once, not the list of which is concerns of consumption and of population growth. By providing information, education, and access to voluntary family planning tools, any issues of the objective numbers of population growth begin to dissolve. Secondly, in sharing in the development of resources, resource allocation begins to shift and the fear of over crowdedness and not having enough to go around begins to undo itself naturally.

Of course, not every nation is a signatory, and of course, there are no built-in penalties for non-compliance or rewards other than positive global recognition for active participation. But emphasizing our opportunities to function as global citizens and partnering with one another and developing a system of required participation is perhaps one effective starting point.

CONCLUSION

David Harvey once stated:

“All debate about eco scarcity, natural limits, overpopulation, and sustainability, is a debate about the preservation of a particular social order rather than a debate about the

³⁶ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted 10 Dec. 1948, G.A. Res. 217A (III), U.N. GAOR, 3d Sess., art. 11, U.N. Doc. A/RES/3/217A (1948).

³⁷ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted 10 Dec. 1948, G.A. Res. 217A (III), U.N. GAOR, 3d Sess., art. 13, U.N. Doc. A/RES/3/217A (1948).

³⁸ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted 10 Dec. 1948, G.A. Res. 217A (III), U.N. GAOR, 3d Sess., art. 29, U.N. Doc. A/RES/3/217A (1948).

³⁹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted 10 Dec. 1948, G.A. Res. 217A (III), U.N. GAOR, 3d Sess., art. 35, U.N. Doc. A/RES/3/217A (1948).

⁴⁰ There are several other provisions applicable to certain regions; however, though not explicitly stated, the focus of this research mostly revolved around instances in Peru and India.

preservation of nature”⁴¹ and that to proceed according to maintaining that social order “is to accept that we have no alternative except to live under a regime of endless capital accumulation and economic growth, no matter... the consequences”.⁴²

Eco-feminism interrupts that debate to challenge the social order and attempts to protect our planet in the process. The science and research repeatedly remind us that an immediate change is necessary for our survival. Our stagnancy is due only to the comfort of wealthy folks in the West who refuse to shift from that comfortable position. Eco-feminism is one tool of the many necessary to begin prodding people away from entitlement and into accountability and respect of obligation.

Many other steps must be taken, most of which fall under the umbrella of eco-feminist action. The international human rights community – specifically individual Western nations – must begin to invest in a paradigm shift. Through academia, media, sponsored research, new organizations, information must enter the marketplace of ideas in order to efficiently dispel the myth of the fixed pie⁴³ of resources. Once we begin to tell this newly understood truth, perhaps we will be better equipped or at least slightly less reluctant to examine the status quo.

This paper has presented several suggestions for actions that may be taken to apply eco-feminist ideology. Some of these include: Investing into paradigm shifts; Reframing understandings of treaties to expand beyond borders; Drafting penalties and rewards into treaties to create accountability. It is important to note that eco-feminism may also exist within our individual daily lives and praxes. When we choose to recycle, or compost, or carpool we are actively engaging in making the environment our business. When we have discussions about fair treatment of women and note their environmental surroundings, we are participating in the paradigm shift. Without doing the other honorable work of proposing legislation and sitting in conventions, and active political disruption, we still have the choice to be good eco-feminists just be caring with our hands, feet, dollars, and actions.

As a matter of practical academia, conjoined research and theories are necessary. Our

⁴¹ David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, & The Geography of Divergence*, 148 (1997)

⁴² David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 56 (2007)

⁴³ Bazerman, Max H. "The Mind of the Negotiator: The Mythical Fixed Pie." *Negotiation* 1, no. 1 (November 2003). (newsletter.); This term is used to describe the fact that there are always more solutions within the given situation that others are not willing to examine because they do not want to give from what they already have. This is within the context of negotiations and being able to reach settlement, but I believe that the same concept applies.

planet is dying. Too often, funding for research, or space at conferences or physical space within published journals requires tough decisions. We are required to choose: Feminism *or* Environmental Science? Race issues *or* Women's Issues? International Policy *or* Domestic Policy? Eco-feminism is a theory which requires a thorough analysis of all things at once and works not to leave anything important behind. The Eco-Feminist interjection forces our lenses to continue a distilling process to provide the purest result that addresses overall harm. It utilizes the tools across humanities, social sciences, and hard sciences, to bring us an option to save ourselves – protecting ourselves from both human rights violations and planetary destruction. By more academicians introducing the possibility of disciplinary interdependency, we may answer more questions than we previously thought possible.
