

Liaison or Liability: *Weaving Spirituality into Ecofeminist Politics*

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ABSTRACT

Can ecological-feminist spirituality and political praxis be a liberatory alliance? This article explores the question by noting existing contributions and vulnerabilities, and suggesting key elements for future directions of spirituality and political ecofeminism in a global context.

RÉSUMÉ

Une spiritualité fondée à la fois sur l'écologie et le féminisme peut-elle constituer une alliance libératrice avec la praxis de la politique? Cet article fait l'examen de cette question en notant les contributions et les vulnérabilités de cette alliance, et en suggérant les éléments-clés pour les orientations futures d'une spiritualité et d'un écoféminisme politique dans un contexte global.

INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminists have been at the forefront in the reinterpreting, creating and advancing a spirituality which joins the feminist and ecological movements. As a feminist theologian and activist, concerned primarily with the linkages among feminism, religion and the ecological crisis, I consider whether it is possible for spirituality to be a coherent, meaningful and beneficial element in ecofeminist perspectives oriented to global transformation. In combining ecofeminism, political liberatory theory and praxis, and spirituality, this article identifies key contributions that spirituality can make to ecofeminism, some possible vulnerabilities, and four necessary elements of a **political ecofeminist spirituality**.

DEFINING ECOFEMINISM AND ECOFEMINIST SPIRITUALITIES

Ecological feminism has matured as a discourse over the past decade and is now a notable movement, representing the convergence of two of the most important contemporary movements—ecology and feminism. An encompassing definition is useful because the term is expanding and signifying a wide range of activities and analyses. Ecofeminism, like feminism or ecology, is a heterogeneous discourse and has distinguishable strands¹. Feminist theories, arising out of liberal, cultural, social, socialist, radical and postmodern critiques, reflect differently on the relationship between women and the natural world, and between misogyny and the ecological crisis. Nonetheless, a basic definition endures: ecological feminism is the

study of and the resistance to the associated exploitation and subjugation of women and the earth.

Since its emergence in the 1970's, ecofeminism has become an international movement, an interdisciplinary discourse within academia, a historical and cultural critique, and a vision for the future. Ecofeminism is both theory² and activism³. Theoretically, much of ecofeminism is rooted in Eurowestern philosophical and political analyses, exposes the logic of domination which permeates the cultural tenets of and contributes to social and ecological oppression. In addition to reflective and political activities, ecofeminists publish in diverse disciplines. Activists have initiated local and global actions and been instrumental in organizing resistance movements against the destruction of the natural world. Ecofeminists reveal the relationship between ecological stress and human health, challenge militarism, confront the global economic order and implications of the World Trade Organization (formally GATT), and expose the players in ecological disasters (Exxon, Bhopal, Chernobyl, Gulf War, mega-dams and rainforest destruction).⁴

Some ecofeminists embrace spirituality. These spiritualities are understood here to mean those perspectives, both mainstream and alternative, which unite feminist and ecological concerns within a religious and/or spiritual framework.⁵ There are streams of ecofeminist spiritualities in some reinterpretations of Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity and Ba'Hai.⁶ Versions of ecological and feminist spiritualities exist within some Wiccan and Goddess traditions, in paganism (literally meaning "of the

country" but currently meaning earth-based spirituality), and in hosts of New Age expressions.⁷ Although most ecofeminist spiritualities are Eurowestern, they are emerging in other parts of the world.⁸

Depending on the belief system, assumptions, experiences, goals and levels of awareness, the analysis of the relationship between women and the natural world differs, as does the need to engage in actions resisting the oppression of women or ecological destruction. Weaving differing spiritualities into the ecofeminist tapestry has created an uneven fabric. Insights have enriched and vulnerabilities have weakened ecofeminist politics. In an attempt to identify key elements of a political ecofeminist spirituality, I first discuss contributions that spirituality has and can make to ecofeminism.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF ECOLOGICAL - FEMINIST SPIRITUALITIES.

Three of the most salient contributions that those interested in the intersection of ecology, feminism and spirituality have made include: the spiritual sensitivity to the earth, the shift from a sense of transcendence to immanence, and the reintegration of the sacred and secular dimensions of private and political life.

The first is the advancement of a spiritual sensitivity towards the earth, which is most needed in this time of ecological devastation.⁹ Ecofeminist spiritualities are rich with wisdom and teachings aimed at amplifying the subtle perceptions of the integration of life on earth. Within this context, the earth is perceived of and experienced as sacred. Interconnectedness, webs of relations,

interdependence, mutually enhancing patterns of existence, and the subjectivity of life itself are all terms commonly used to reach beyond the mechanistic, technical, objectivist and disconnected culture.¹⁰ Such a religious or spiritual sensitivity is both a primeval and a contemporary awareness. In many cases, the mainstream religious traditions ignore the part of their heritage that fosters a deep sensitivity towards the natural world, a reverence of the process of life, and an awareness of the immensity and magnificence of the universe.¹¹ Ecofeminists in this vein have moved out of the confines of patriarchal religious systems which continue to endorse and promote misogyny and a disregard for the earth. They are reclaiming the earth as a realm of the Sacred (Divine, Holy), and in myriad ways are searching for alternative perspectives of the Divine to assist with a re-enchantment with the earth. This means reinterpreting existing traditions, reclaiming submerged or forgotten traditions, and creating new rituals and conventions acquired from many sources.

A second contribution is a moving away from transcendence, and a returning to an awareness of the immanence of the Divine. In many religious traditions, and especially in Christianity, the focus has been on transcendence: on the beyond, the mystery, the above and not the below, on the unfamiliar, the Other, and on a different or next life. The profound alienation from the Sacred that Eurowestern cultures have fostered can be redressed with a receptiveness of the immanent presence of the Sacred. In returning to the realm of the immanent, the Sacred is sensed as present, dwelling among and within us, as here and now, as familiar, and as accessible. It becomes possible to be intimate,

once again, with a sense of the Divine within all life, to honour the presence of trees and caterpillars, and to resist the wanton destruction of such magnificence. Further, the sense of the Sacred in all life is being reclaimed by the people, not the institutions—which also challenges and changes religious authority, and disregards the hierarchical, authoritarian and limiting religious systems which keep people at immature stages of spiritual development. This is a necessary step in rekindling a living spirituality as well as in developing a communal responsibility for the religious realms.¹²

A third contribution is the reintegration of the sacred and secular dimensions of private and political life. In recent Eurowestern history, religion/spirituality has been privatized into a set of personal beliefs considered to be outside of the political, social and economic realm. Such a system has been beneficial to both the religious institutions and the state. Although both politics and religion have used the influence of the other when advantageous, the notion of a dissociation has kept many people from connecting their religious/spiritual commitments to their political and economic practices. Yet, spirituality is something deep, rich and genuinely life-giving which promotes an awareness of what is happening *in our midst*. It leads us to be more—rather than less—engaged with life, and to resist that which oppresses.

Throughout history there have been assorted unions between the sacred and secular, with questionable liberatory effects. These new forms of spirituality,¹³ including ecofeminist ones, neither advocate explicitly a

division between religion and political and social life, nor do they unite in a fundamentalist fashion.¹⁴ These new spiritualities are creative, fluid, full of promise and not easily categorized. They are potentially fertile, but could lose their liberatory possibilities, and either die off or become middle-class spiritual pastimes for weekends.

These three contributions reveal the insights from those ecological and feminist voices which are reclaiming the Sacred and the spiritual in response to the growing global crisis. Yet, these renewed forms of spirituality are not invulnerable.

VULNERABILITIES

There are three vulnerabilities which compromise whether spiritualities are germane to ecofeminist projects. These are political apathy, a non-critical understanding of the relationship between religion and spirituality, and a need to domesticate the Sacred.

The first is a portrayal of political apathy, or an apolitical undercurrent in some ecofeminist spiritualities.¹⁵ Apart from uneasy or unclear theoretical alliances with essentialism,¹⁶ reductionism and/or exclusivism, such spiritualities are criticized for ignoring social, cultural and historical contexts and conditioning; differences of class, culture and race among women; the need to understand structures of domination such as industrialism, militarism and male consciousness¹⁷; and, differences among illusion, rationality and myth.¹⁸ Ecofeminist spiritualities are feared to be ineffective if it is assumed that political transformation is primarily an internal personal process and an individual change of consciousness. Within

the spectrum of ecofeminism that addresses spirituality, there is evidence of this portrayal.¹⁹ These attributes do not lead to political commitments, hence they should not be considered liberatory. However, there is a reciprocal problem with those activists who reject the spiritual dimension. Although developing a religious sensitivity towards the earth can seem to be a luxurious pastime to those who are working in the trenches of resisting patriarchal domination, it is not always the case.²⁰

Another illustration of an apolitical undercurrent is a lack of awareness of the severity of the global ecological crisis; not only in terms of the escalation of human suffering from ecological ruin, but also of the devastation of non-human life and the destruction of the basic life-support systems of the planet. Therefore while some only worship the Goddess or Mother Earth in a ceremony in a sacred grove, the United Nations declares another five thousand environmental refugees, France and China resume nuclear testing, and Canada permits the ongoing massacre of black bears. To be committed to an ecofeminist spirituality by chanting "we are one with the earth" does not replace activism, nor does it substitute for the arduous deconstruction and reconstruction of cultural ideologies.²¹

A second vulnerability within the weave of ecofeminism and spirituality is a non-critical understanding of the relationship between religion and spirituality. A familiar stance is to be anti-religious and yet spiritual. However, not only is it naive to make this claim, but it is also incorrect in terms of comprehending what constitutes religions. While the distinction usually means an

opposition to the institutional dimension of religions, spirituality is not divorced from religion. Religions are born from spiritual experiences and insights, and take shape in distinctive cultures with particular symbol systems. They are the form and vehicle of spiritualities. Spirituality is not a disconnected plane of existence outside of culture, time and space. While an intense spiritual experience defies language, it also moves to expression; that is, it takes cultural forms within specific times, places, cultural ideologies and rituals which are meaningful for those people in that context. The insistence on divorcing spirituality from religion leaves ecofeminist spiritualities vulnerable to feebleness or fundamentalism, because without a critical understanding of the relationship between religion and spirituality, there is no emancipation.²² This split also forces uncritical appraisals of the insights from existing religious traditions, and while the current hegemonic religious expressions are increasingly inadequate and fundamentalist, they have complex histories. It is naive to abandon the insights of the tapestry of world religions.

A further difficulty arising out of this division in the relationship between religion and spirituality is the truncation of the Sacred. Although the dearth of accessible and meaningful spiritual expressions and communities is the impetus to search for past and present connections among the Sacred, the spirit, life-challenges, and indeed all of life itself, it is necessary to be cognisant of what we are regarding as "spiritual." The fact is that spirituality cannot be ordered, nor chosen the way one chooses a laundry detergent. Questions need to be raised about the

indiscriminate use of ancient traditions. Many ecofeminists are resurrecting antiquated Goddess traditions or engaging in indigenous ceremonies and rituals: chants, smudges, sweet grass and sage, dance, drum, vision quests and pipes. Reflection is needed on the implications of taking these symbols and practices out of their specific context, and transporting remnants of traditions from ancient cultures to completely different circumstances. One cannot move spiritualities from their cultural context, outside the rituals and ceremonies which contain them, and "do them at home." Spirituality divorced from political commitment, as the initial vulnerability suggests, leaves it in a disconnected predicament and void of transformative potential. Further, the pirating of spirituality from other cultures is consumerist and forms a hazardous mixture with the unwanted baggage in our own culture.²³ An uncritical acceptance of spirituality, without seeking to clarify what a particular spirituality means in its origin and purpose, can leave the experience and expressions void of liberatory potential because spirituality can be anything, and can sprawl into a state of meaninglessness.

A third vulnerability present within some ecofeminist spiritualities is a need to tame and domesticate the Sacred. In an attempt to heal the gaping wound between ourselves and the natural world, to remedy the hierarchical dualisms and logic of domination embedded in the divisions between nature and culture, and to find the Sacred within this breach, many draw upon metaphors of the earth as mother, sister, lover or home. While all of these terms offer reassurance, they are still problematic for women.²⁴ The fact that

ecofeminists propose such metaphors indicates a need to tame and domesticate, perhaps even to subdue, the natural world. To use metaphors which imply a soft, kind, receptive, healing, warm and loving entity is partial at best. At worst, it fosters a utopian, romantic, and imaginary natural world, and hence mars the liberatory potential of any spirituality. To domesticate nature, as these terms insinuate, is to ignore the fact that the natural world not only is untamable but often unknowable and incomprehensibly sophisticated. There is something mysterious, compelling to be sure, alive and ever-changing, yet truly enigmatic about nature. The natural world is not always familiar. It is strange, frightening and alluring, but it is ultimately private to itself.²⁵ Further, to see the natural world as consistently benevolent to humans is not a useful or even accurate representation of human-earth relationships.²⁶ Thus, it will not assist ecofeminism in becoming a legitimate advocate for the natural world, nor will it provide a sound base for either ecological theory or praxis.²⁷

In addition, the taming of the Sacred is pretentious. Rather than claiming reliable knowledge about the Sacred, it is more often that one discovers the Sacred, which then becomes a mysterious and compelling reality. Spirituality matures into a living dimension of our experience, and the Sacred becomes an ultimate reality, yet one that is intuited through every life form, that speaks in the wind, water, fire. It is alive, commands respect, and will not be tamed. Reverence is an appropriate response to an experience of the Sacred, including a reverence for the modes of Divine presence that we encounter with the earth and all the life community. To experience "awe"

is to intuit the Sacred dimension of reality.

CONDITIONS FOR A POLITICAL ECOLOGICAL-FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY.

In light of the discussion of both the contributions and vulnerabilities at the intersection of ecology, feminism and spirituality, the following is a proposal of four elements necessary for a **political ecofeminist spirituality**. The incorporation of these elements would strengthen the emergence of a liberatory and transformative spirituality.

1) Such a spirituality must be political; that is, ecofeminists who have leanings towards spirituality, even if they are more suited to contemplation than activism, need to be politically aware. As Plumwood's work suggests, critical ecofeminist theory needs to be developed in consultation with other theories of emancipation, and ecofeminist spiritualities cannot be a flight to some other-worldly utopia.²⁸ Liberation theologies, for example, can be a great ally to the development of a political ecofeminist spirituality.²⁹

2) Such a spirituality must be ecological; that is, we need to understand the magnitude of the *ecological* crisis itself.³⁰ At issue is not only a crisis of the dominant ideology, or of how the ecological crisis is affecting humanity. In spite of the fact that the ecological crisis is caused by complex social and economic constructs, many ecological problems will not be remedied by redressing social ills. The ecological crisis cannot be measured only in human terms. Only when we grasp the depth of the crisis of the earth will we be able to find adequate responses.

3) Such a spirituality must be feminist; that is, we need to take seriously the global

feminist critiques and agendas, and be in solidarity with the efforts of local and global women and environment movements. A distinction between women's spirituality and feminist spirituality is made in theology and should be made for ecofeminist spirituality as well. To reclaim the **feminine** face of the Divine may or may not be a **feminist** or **ecofeminist** project.³¹

4) Such a spirituality must be genuine, that is we need to appreciate that spirituality mediates a relationship with the Sacred. This, of course, is difficult to discern. Movements which promote wholeness and personal well-being speak of the benefits of spirituality often only in terms of success, money, health and good relationships.³² However, mystics throughout history have suggested that authentic spiritual experiences open one's eyes, heart and mind to the wonders of the earth, to an intense awareness of the genius of life, of its magnificence and, in our time, of its vulnerability. Spirituality is a path upon which one encounters the Sacred, in an I - Thou relationship; it is an encounter with the living and Sacred Great Mystery, which has a thousand names and faces.

A political ecofeminist spirituality transcends solitary pursuits, and leads one out of the grove and into the troubled world and the difficult work of transformation. It necessarily leads one from an individualistic perspective into the struggles for peace, justice, ecological integrity, and well-being for all life, because it proceeds from an awareness that all of life is of the Sacred. Certainly solitude and silence are necessary. Although the energies released through rituals contribute to the healing and transforming of the world, it is not exclusively or predominantly for the

majority. It is the World Trade Organization, the Intellectual Property Rights, the structural adjustment programs, militarism, the deforestation projects, the mega-dams—and all the ideological constructs which support these pathologies—which need to be resisted and transformed.

There are tremendous insights that a political ecofeminist spirituality which embodies the above-mentioned elements could bring to the project of global transformation. The horizon for ecofeminist spiritualities is both personal and cosmic, encompassing the experiences of a sacred totality, and a reverence for the grand project of life. While I applaud the efforts in ecofeminist spirituality, we also must be vigilant and aware of the theoretical dimension of our practices. The links among ecology, political feminism and spirituality are powerful. It behooves us to think and act critically, in order to be effective, just, and able to resist the destruction and celebrate the magnificence of life, in honour of the Sacred.

The spiritual dimension of human experience is the most profound and powerful. The psychic energies activated when one engages life at this level are the richest experiences of human life and awareness. They are needed urgently in order to have the capacity to respond creatively to the magnitude of the crisis we are in. To be spiritually alive today is to suffer with the rampant destruction of life. This crisis is as much religious/spiritual as it is anything else.

ENDNOTES

1. For example, see Carolyn Merchant, Radical Ecology: The Search

- for a Livable World (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 182-210.
2. For an overview of ecofeminism, see Carolyn Merchant, Earthcare: Women and the Environment (New York: Routledge, 1995); Karen Warren, ed., Ecological Feminism (New York, Routledge, 1994); Carol Adams, ed., Ecofeminism and the Sacred. (New York, Continuum, 1993); Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein, eds., Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism (San Francisco: The Sierra Club, 1990); Judith Plant, ed., Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1989); Greta Gaard, ed., Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature. (Philadelphia: Temple U. P., 1993); Susan Griffin, Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her. (New York: Harper and Row, 1978); Patricia Hynes, The Recurring Silent Spring (New York: Pergamon Press, 1989); Merchant, Radical Ecology; Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, Ecofeminism (London: Zed, 1993); Joni Seager, Earth Follies: Coming to Feminist Terms with the Environmental Crisis (New York: Routledge, 1993). For the extensive work in ecofeminist philosophy, see Val Plumwood, Feminism and the Mastery of Nature (London: Routledge, 1993); Karen Warren in Environmental Ethics (Vol. 12, Summer 1990; Vol. 9, Spring 1987); Hypatia: Special Issue on Ecological-Feminism (Vol. 6, no. 1, Spring 1991)
 3. Activism, or praxis, in this sense refers to the many initiatives by women, on local and international levels, to resist further ecological destruction. See Wendy Harcourt, ed. Feminist Perspectives on Sustainable Development (London: Zed Books, 1994); Rosi Braidotti, et al., Women, the Environment and Sustainable Development: Towards a Theoretical Synthesis (London: Zed Books, 1994); Filomina Chioma Steady, ed., Women and Children First: Environment, Poverty and Sustainable Development (Rochester, VM: Schenkman Books, 1993); Gita Sen and Carol Grown, Development Crisis and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987); Shiva and Mies, Ecofeminism; Shiva, Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development (London: Zed Books, 1988); Irene Dankelman and Joan Davidson, Women and Environment in the Third World (London: Earthscan Publications, 1988); WEDO: Women, Environment and Development Organization (New York: quarterly publications). Praxis also refers to the lobbying work from women around the world for these issues to be considered at major United Nations conferences such as UNCED, June, 1992, Brazil; Population and Development, Cairo, September, 1994; and The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, September, 1995.

4. Numerous works exist in this vein and are increasingly so. Some ecofeminist have moved from the intricate theoretical analysis and debates into the realm of political struggle. Of note are works by Mies and Shiva, Ecofeminism; Seager, Earth Follies; Mary Mellor, Breaking the Boundaries: Towards a Feminist Green Socialism (London: Virago Press, 1992); The Women's Action Agenda '21, (Pre UNCED Miami Conference, Nov. 1991).
5. Spiritualities not included in this discussion are those which are women-centred but neither feminist nor ecological, or others which are ecological but not feminist.
6. For an overview and critique of ecofeminist spiritualities see Heather Eaton, "Earth Patterns: Feminism, Ecology and Religion," Vox Feminarum: The Canadian Journal of Feminist Spirituality (Vol. 1, No. 2, Sept. 1996), p. 7-18; _____, "Ecofeminist Spiritualities: Seeking the Wild or the Sacred?" Alternatives (Vol. 21, no. 2, 1995), p. 29-31. See also Rosemary Radford Ruether, Women Healing Earth: Third World Women in Ecology, Feminism and Religion (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996); _____, New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation (New York: Seabury Press, 1975); _____, Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing (San Francisco: Harper, 1992); Eleanor Rae, Women, Earth, the Divine (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994); Anne Primavesi, From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); Adams, ed., Ecofeminism and the Sacred; Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979); _____, Weaving the Vision: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989); Plant, ed., Healing the Wounds; Diamond and Orenstein, eds., Reweaving the World; Charlene Spretnak "Gaian Spirituality," Woman of Power 20 (Spring 1991), p. 12; Starhawk, The Spiral Dance (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).
7. See works by Christ in Christ and Plaskow, eds., Womanspirit Rising and in Weaving the Vision; Charlene Spretnak, "Toward an Ecofeminist Spirituality," in Healing the Wounds, ed., Plant, p. 127-133.
8. For example see Con-spirando: Revista Latinoamericana de Ecofeminismo, Espiritualidad Y Teologia, a Chilean journal, publishing quarterly for over five years, publishing articles from the South; Ruether, Women Healing Earth; "Insights from Ecofeminism,"

- in Ecotheology: Voices from South and North, ed. David Hallman (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), p. 156-206.
9. While it is questionable as to whose consciousness is being changed, the ecofeminist contributions in the realm of spirituality join with numerous other projects which are attempting to deconstruct and reconstruct the cultural tenets that have led to this severe crisis. For example, see Leonardo Boff, Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995); Theodore Rosak, The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology (New York: Touchstone, 1992); Gregory Bateson, Sacred Unity: Further Steps to An Ecology of Mind (New York: Harper Collins, 1991); David Bohm and Mark Edwards, Changing Consciousness: Exploring the Hidden Sources of the Social, Political and Environmental Crisis Facing Our World (San Francisco: Harper, 1991); Sandra Harding, Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking From Women's Lives (Ithaca: Cornell U. P., 1991); Murray Bookchin, Remaking Society (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989); Thomas Berry, Dream of the Earth (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988); David Ray Griffin, The Reenchantment of Science: Postmodern Proposals (Albany: State U. Of New York P., 1988).
 10. Susan Griffin, "Split Culture," Revision (Vol. 9, Winter/Spring, 1987), p. 18-23.
 11. For example see Dieter Hessel, ed., Theology for Earth Community (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996); David Kinsley, Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross Cultural Perspective (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995); Hallman, ed., Ecotheology; Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, eds., Worldviews and Ecology (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1993); Steven Rockefeller and John Elder, eds., Spirit and Nature: Why the Environmental Crisis is a Religious Issue. An Interfaith Dialogue (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Charlene Spretnak, States of Grace: The Recovery of Meaning in the Postmodern Age (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).
 12. There are layers of concerns in any uncritical, romanticized acceptance of spirituality, including the fact that what is understood to be spiritual is being spread so thin as to be meaningless at times. Yet, even with the uncritical acceptance of spirituality," which itself is problematic for both individuals and movements, the fact remains that neither the established institutions nor the resurgence of right-wing fundamentalism monopolize spiritual expressions.
 13. The term "new spiritualities" can be misleading because many of these voices and movements emerge from,

or are led and supported by members of the familiar religious traditions (Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Ba'Hai) who exist in tension with the hegemonic leadership of their tradition.

14. In North America one only has to reflect on the number of political platforms which join regressive economic policies with "religious and family values," which usually translates into the white-middle class male-dominated household wherein women's place is in the home with children, and men form and control the economic and cultural ideologies. It is a reinforcement of the hierarchical dualisms which feminists have been resisting, ex. nature/culture, private/public, personal/political, etc. This is also a profoundly anti-earth political posture.
15. For example, Irene Javors writes of confronting beggars [sic] in New York, and interprets their existence as "the Goddess in the metropolis dancing amidst the concrete and the garbage, embracing us all." Irene Javors, "Goddess in the Metropolis: Reflections in the Sacred in an Urban Setting," in Reweaving the World, eds., Orenstein and Diamond, p. 214. Braidotti et al, in Women, the Environment and Sustainable Development, p. 164. reflect on the above sentence in the following manner: "A beautiful sentence, but the problem in her analysis is that race,

class, and gender disappear completely. Women's concern with ecofeminism is linked to the sex of the great mythical goddesses. The gap between the spiritual encounters of these white, Western, middle-class writers and the struggles of poor women in the South is enormous. ...Issues at stake here are concerns such as deforestation, structural adjustment, fertility control, toxic gas leaks and irrigation." Joni Seager also associates ecofeminism and its spiritual expressions to be an apolitical, essentialist and self-nurturing unliberatory movement which is not focused on the factual manifestations of the ecological crisis. See Seager, Earth Follies, p.236-252.

16. Ecofeminism had been criticized for the essentialism which is assumed to permeate the discourse. While essentialism is present in some earlier works, ecofeminism is not an essentialist project. Janet Biehl's book, Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991) is a misrepresentation of ecofeminism. While she is critical of ecofeminism, her sources are few and not representative. Biehl's views have been challenged; see Douglas Buege, "Rethinking Again: A Defense of Ecofeminist Philosophy," in Ecological Feminism, ed., Warren,

- p.42-63; Val Plumwood, "The Atavism of Flighty Females: review of Finding Our Way," in The Ecologist 22(Jan/Feb., 1992), p.36; and Greta Gaard, "Rethinking EcofeministPolitics," review of Finding Our Way, Biehl, in Women and Environments 13 (Spring 1992), p. 21-2. The criticism is extended to Mary Mellor's and Joni Seager's interpretations of ecofeminist spiritualities, in their works: Mellor, Breaking the Boundaries; Seager, Earth Follies. Seager used Biehl's book as a basic reference. Subsequent works associate ecofeminism only with essentialism. For example, see Murphy, Rationality and Nature:A Sociological Inquiry into a Changing Relationship (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994) p. 184-192; Laura Westra, An Environmental Proposal for Ethics: The Principle of Integrity (Lanham, MA:Roman & Littlefield, 1994), p. 161-170. Such authors refer to but are not familiar with ecofeminism and their definitions should be negated.
17. Seager, Earth Follies, p. 249.
18. Biehl, Finding Our Way.
19. For examples see articles on spirituality in Plant, ed., Healing the Wounds; Diamond and Orenstein, ed., Reweaving the World; and Adams, ed., Ecofeminism and the Sacred. Not all articles can be criticized for these weaknesses. Also at a Feminist Spirituality conference (Finders Keepers, London, Ont., May 26-28, 1995), which was attended by over 700 women, it was assumed, as evidenced in the language and rituals, that all women are aware of being spiritually connected to the earth.This is a grossly uncritical assumption, and indicates the appeal of ecofeminist spirituality, the early stage of maturation at a popular level, and the gap between individual spirituality and political engagement.
20. It is unfortunate when ecofeminists fostering spirituality are considered to be reflecting from a privileged and ignorant position; at times this causes ecofeminism to lose integrity in the global arena.Criticism has been levied against white, well-educated women in whom ignorance is assumed, although this is not always accurate. For example Spretnak and Starhawk have been longterm political, ecological and feminist activists and for whom spirituality is central.
21. Deborah Slicer, "Anti-intellectualism and Environmentalism: A Dangerous Couple"(The Twenty-Second Annual Richard Baker Philosophy Colloquium on Ecofeminist Perspectives, University of Dayton, Ohio, March 30, 1995), unpublished paper, p. 32.
22. There are numerous popular books which promote this split between

- religion and spirituality. The result is often the promotion of a disconnected, other-worldly, apolitical and individualistic spirituality, which has not proven to be liberatory.
23. For example, Seager comments that for people from Eurowestern cultures, Mother Earth is a deceptive paradigm, as well as being disingenuous for a "spiritually hollow, urban, technical, male, euro-bureaucracy, to adopt mother imagery." The most ubiquitous icon is that of the earth from space with the caption "Love Your Mother." Yet, as Seager continues; "The earth is not our mother. There is no warm, nurturing, anthropomorphized earth that will take care of us if only we treat her nicely. The complex, emotion-laden, conflict-laden, quasi-sexual, quasi-dependent mother relationship, (especially between men and their mothers), is not an effective metaphor for environmental change." Using the allegory of Mother Earth obfuscates relationships of and the distribution of power. It makes it impossible to sort out who is controlling what, and who is responsible for what, in the ecological crisis. Although Mother Earth may be an effective metaphor for rejuvenating a contemporary woman-centred spirituality movement for some women, it is not a constructive political organizing tool for the West and does not contribute to a political ecofeminist spirituality: Earth Follies, p.219.
 24. For a discussion of the issues in finding a voice for nature see Catriona Sandilands, "Political Animals: The Paradox of Ecofeminist Politics," The Trumpeter 11, no. 4 (Fall 1994), p. 167.
 25. Sandilands writes, "the only way to prevent the authoritarian colonization of the wild specificity is to create space within ecofeminism for *strangeness*," (italics hers), "Political Animals," p. 167.
 26. It is the case that human relationships to the natural world are a mixture of support, risk, adventure and death. The evolution of life on earth suggests that there is an ultimate benevolence to the intricate project of life, but not to individual life, or even to individual species.
 27. Deborah Slicer described an incident which communicates part of my concern, when she discovered how to howl with coyotes, who responded with a cacophony of voices. She writes, "I was talking wild, and the wild talked back. But in fact, I was talking nonsense. I stopped. ...And the coyotes went back into the forests to take up forms of life that were utterly incomprehensible to me." Slicer, "Anti-intellectualism and Environmentalism: A Dangerous Couple," p. 34.

28. Plumwood, Feminism and the Mastery of Nature.
29. For example, see Heather Eaton, "Ecofeminist Theology," in Theology for Earth Community, ed., Hessel, p. 77-92
30. The ecological crisis concerns other species besides humans, and a recent United Nation's report suggests that between 150 and 200 species become extinct every day. "We're Killing the Planet Even Faster than Feared: U.N." (The Toronto Star, April 20, 1996). John Livingston states that the present period of mass extinction is comparable to those 65, 94, 213 and 248 million years ago. See Rogue Primate: An Exploration of Human Domestication (Toronto: Key Porter, 1994), p. 1. To consider the ecological crisis in terms of the increases in human illnesses is wholly inadequate.
31. For example see Rae, Women, Earth the Divine. See also the conference program for "Voices of Hope: Echoes of Women's Spirituality," (University of Victoria, B.C.: May 15-19, 1996). This multifaith conference on women's spirituality explored the "feminine" dimension of spirituality, but did not engaged explicitly with any developed feminist critiques. An interesting example of anti-intellectualism in the women's spirituality movement was evident in a conference on "Female Spirituality" (York University, Toronto: March 1996), where it was decided not to consider presentations on methodology or critique, but only those which offered a "positive perspective," (personal correspondence from academic conference coordinator, October 1995).
32. For example see Peter Newman, "A Spiritual Link in the Workplace," Maclean's Magazine (106, no. 15, 1993), p. 28. See also the proceedings from two conferences connecting spirituality and business: "It's About Time" First Annual Conference on Spirituality and Business (Mazatlán, Mexico: Nov. 11-18, 1995); "Human Spirituality in the Workplace and its Relationship to Responsible Environmental Decision-Making", Symposium on Ecological Risk Assessment (Corvallis, Oregon: Nov. 15-16, 1994). In these examples spirituality is divorced explicitly from religion and suggests that personal well-being is the ultimate goal, thus one becomes a more effective person in the workplace. Social and ecological ethics which challenge the status quo are absent.