Beyond the nature/culture divide: corporeality, hybridity and feminist geographies of the environment

Amy Trauger, The Pennsylvania State University, akt122@psu.edu

Introduction

Clare[1] always wanted a farming kind of life. She had always gardened, but after the death of her first husband, she decided to buy a farm. She married again and she and her husband, Mark, now own a farm on the Allegheny Front in Central Pennsylvania. The high elevation, steep-slopes and relatively poor and fragile soils of their farm are not well suited to raising large livestock or most crops, but they have found that rotationally grazing[2] market lambs, and growing "pick-your-own"[3] blueberries works well for the farm economy and environment and their busy lives. She considers herself a partner in the farm operation, but she often makes decisions about the "pick-your-own" blueberries and lambing labor, because she is "around the farm" more than her husband. She wishes consumers were more aware of buying locally grown foods, and finds the quality of life for the family associated with farming to be very important. Her philosophy about farming and sustainability includes not harming the land, working lightly on the land and "working with what the land tells you."

Clare articulates well what many in the sustainable agriculture movement feel to be attractive and important about their vocation. Elements of quality of life for herself, her family and her community intersect with respect for nature. What is also not unusual about sustainable agriculturalists like Clare, but remarkable in this era of environmental and genetic manipulation, is the degree to which Clare and Mark have adapted their farm operation to the quality of their farmland, to the point of articulating this as though it was an ongoing conversation. I initially interviewed Clare because I was curious about why women such as herself were drawn to sustainable agriculture as a vocation in increasingly greater numbers, while agriculture as a sector of the economy continues to decline. This particular interview gave me food for thought on both the question of how she was enabled or constrained in her relationship to nature by practicing sustainable agriculture, and also on the broader question of how Clare's life experiences can inform a feminist geography of gender and nature.

Literature on women and the environment often invoke a feminine land ethic through discourses of care, motherhood and nurturing (Plumwood, 1993, Warren, 1997). Others use frameworks of patriarchy and political economy to argue that women are marginalized from positions of power over nature (Seager, 1993) and/or are placed in positions where environmental conservation is the only option for sustaining their livelihoods (Agarwal, 1992). These perspectives locate women's agency either in a self-effacing and non-instrumentalizing self (the nurturing mother), or in a marginalized and relatively agency-less object of patriarchal and capitalist relations (the helpless victim). While this characterization of the ecofeminist debates is rather simplified, I use it to illustrate the point that neither pole of this debate, explain very well what Clare herself has articulated about her attraction to sustainable agriculture, or the environmental ethic that she shares with her husband regarding their farm, their family and the community.

Clare recognizes her instrumental use of the land, because she relies on land for her livelihood. She also recognizes that her own well being as a farmer is embedded in the land and thus is motivated to keep her soil and pastures healthy. This "ethic of care" (Gilligan, 1982) that she demonstrates is located at an intersection of utility, financial interest, and moral obligations toward home, family and community, and is reflected in material practices that are motivated by a utilitarian perspective towards land as well as altruistic concerns for community and family, and structured by larger political and

economic forces. Clare articulates her own agency as a farmer within these sets of parameters, while fully recognizing that the land that she farms also constrains and enables her choices. The choice to graze market lambs was made because larger livestock would ultimately degrade the thin soils, and the choice to have a pick-your-own operation was partially motivated by the scenic location of the farm, which would attract return customers. To degrade the soil would mean a loss of a profitable and sustainable livelihood, and to not capitalize on all the qualities of the farm would limit their farm income. Thus, Clare, with her husband, articulates a complex environmental ethic that bears very little resemblance to a nurturing mother or a helpless victim.

In what follows, I argue that the visions of women in this debate arise out of the use of a dichotomous division between nature and culture that breeds essentialism in many ecofeminist, and particularly cultural ecofeminist, discourses[4]. My objective in this paper is to take aim at particular discourses within ecofeminism that fail to adequately explain women's relationship to nature because they rely on reified notions of both women and nature. Explanations for women's behavior are often sought in the "nature" of women as a category, as if the answers to these questions lie in something essential to them. There is a need to move beyond these limiting parameters, to stop asking "why women" and start asking "how women" are using their experiences and articulations to inform politics, material practices and discourses for a better world and a more sustainable future. Clare's experiences as a farmer, and those of women like her, can inform a discussion about the theoretical and ethical foundations for a vision of social and environmental justice vision in sustainable agriculture, as well as a post-structuralist feminist geography of gender and nature.

The paper proceeds as follows. I begin with an outline of ecofeminist theory and the problems the nature/culture dualism poses for theorizing about women and the environment. Following this, I discuss post-structuralist interventions in the nature/culture dualism by incorporating recent feminist theorizing with actor-network theory. Lastly, I discuss Whatmore's conceptualization of a "relational ethics" based on corporeality and hybridity to show how Clare's relationship to her farmland illustrates a social and environmental justice vision in sustainable agriculture, and informs a post-structuralist feminist geography of the environment.

Feminism and Farm Women

According to the feminist glossary of human geography, "the aim of feminism as a political movement is to dismantle and challenge the inequalities between men and women" (McDowell, 1999: 88). Generally, it is well accepted that the political project of feminism is the liberation of women from oppressive patriarchal relations and conditions. Feminism has not taken root in the agricultural areas of the United States despite the persistence of patriarchal inheritance customs, gendered divisions of labor and limited political, economic and social resources for women in rural communities. These conditions are a result of various socio-economic changes in post World War II rural America, that are described in the following.

After World War II, technological innovations promoted by the military industrial complex expanded into the agricultural sector, and an aggressive advertising campaign was launched to encourage farmers to discard their "old-fashioned" labor-intensive practices for capital-intensive, mechanized farming. New ideologies for farmers emerged from this campaign and were distributed by the land grant university extension services. The ultimate goal was the mechanization of the farm, and it was intended to elevate farmers from the working class to the middle class, and hence creating a new class of consumers, by removing much of the physical labor involved with farming. This transformation was also supposed to take place in the farmhouse.

> In this ideology, farmers became businessmen who managed farms with brains and technology rather than working their farms with brawn. Farm women became professional homemakers relieved of the "drudgery" of farm labor by new home technology (Neth, 1995: 215).

Implicit in this ideology are certain assumptions about masculinity and femininity. For men, masculinity was defined in terms of how mechanized the farm and farmhouse became, which ultimately reflected how much "leisure" the farm couple could enjoy. The removal of women from productive roles in the farm operation further identified them with reproductive and domestic roles, turning the "farmwife" into a "housewife" and created a feminine identity disassociated from the "drudgery" of farm work. The mechanization of the entire farm, from chicken house to kitchen, not only affirmed the quality of the farmer himself, but created a masculine identity based on being "professional" and efficient as a farmer (Neth, 1995).

> By measuring manhood in terms of capital-intensive farm practices and womanhood in terms of cultural uplift defined by new standards of consumption, [extension] professionals assured that only those who practiced capital-intensive agriculture could meet these standards…A man's respect for a woman, measured by her leisure, helped denote manhood and womanhood. Thus the removal of women from production marked both the respectable woman and the professional farmer (Neth, 1995: 216).

Extension agents, agricultural professionals, appliance makers and implement dealers advertised these new identities along with their products in farm publications. Jellison (1993) cites several articles and advertisements in a popular farming magazine in the 1940s (*Wallace's Farmer)* that illustrate the campaign to convert farm women from producers to consumers. Appliance makers suggested that farm women should modernize the kitchen in order to save time and labor. However, the advertisement carried a message about what a farm woman should do and look like in her newly modernized kitchen. A particularly telling photograph shows a woman dressed up, made-up, baking cookies and talking on the phone. The only clue that this scene takes place on a farm, is a barn in the background, barely visible through the kitchen window. This shift parallels the changes in women's roles throughout the developed world and across urban and rural space, as women were expected to participate in an idealized family structure in which women maintained the quality of the domestic sphere for their working husbands (Mackenzie and Rose, 1983).

The material realities of farm women's lives rarely reached such levels of consumption and leisure, and many farm women resisted such gender identities, but these expectations about successful farm men and women became the norm in farm life in the post World War II era. Since the 1980's however, American agriculture is in a period of economic crisis, characterized by falling commodity prices, spiraling overproduction and surpluses (Goodman and Redclift, 1991). Continuously falling prices for farm commodities due to technological innovations and surpluses, rising interest rates and the loss of the Soviet market in 1980 contributed to a widespread farm crisis, with thousands of family farmers declaring bankruptcy (Dudley, 2000). Conventional agriculture today is dominated by a few vertically integrated firms (such as Monsanto, Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland) that control everything the production of genetically engineered seed to the storage, transport, processing and marketing of finished food products. These firms contract with farmers for the facilities and labor for producing the raw food product, and so transfer all the risks of production and labor responsibilities onto the family farm, under the logic of "why own the farm when you can own the farmer?"(Grey, 2000: 145).

The family farm household and the consumer household have seen none of profits of this efficiency and vertical integration, however. Since 1984, real consumer food prices have increased by almost 3 percent, while producer prices for the same foods have decreased by 35 percent (Farmer's Union, 2000). During the Farm Crisis of the 1980's, "an estimated 200,000-300,000 commercial farmers were forced to default on their loans…[and] between 1984 and 1988, 10 percent of all outstanding farm loans were in default, and more agricultural banks failed in 1987 than in any year since the Great Depression" (Dudley, 2000: 13). 1987 saw the "highest annual bankruptcy rate recorded, eclipsing the previous high in 1925" (ERS, 2001). Not only is this a significant loss of livelihood for farmers, but the quality of life for farmers who "survived" the Farm Crisis has also declined. Dudley, writes: "…over half (60 percent) of all farm families require the wages of off-farm jobs to make ends meet," and this income composes nearly half of all farm income (6). The jobs available in rural areas are largely low-waged and low-skilled and women and minorities disproportionately hold these jobs (ERS, 2000).

The picture of life in rural and agricultural communities is rather bleak, particularly for women, and one might wonder why large scale political protests have not happened, or why farm women do not embrace feminism as a political movement which might improve their lives. The answer to this partially lies within farm women's relationship to the farm economy and culture, which is often characterized by relations of kinship and marriage (Sachs, 1996). Thus, farm women's politics have often stressed "saving the family farm" and working within the family unit to make farming a viable and sustainable way of life (Haney and Miller, 1991; Carbert, 1995; Hunter, 1990, 2000; Shiva, 2000), rather than addressing their positions within a patriarchal capitalist society. It is up to debate whether these politics can be considered "feminist", or how ethical it is to assign feminist politics to those who do not self-identify as such (Card, 1999; Porter, 1999).

What is fairly straightforward however, is recent cross-disciplinary work that suggests that women may be engaging in a different sort of resistance by participating to a greater degree as owner/operators in sustainable agriculture than with conventional agriculture (Schmitt, 1994; Lyson et al, 1995; Liepins, 1995, 1998a, 1998b; Wells, 1998; Bjornhaug, 1999; Burton, Rigby and Young, 1999; Delind and Ferguson, 1999; Shiva, 1999; Peter et al, 2000; Sachs et al, 2002, Trauger, forthcoming). Understanding that such a relationship exists, however, does not explain why women from very different backgrounds engage with sustainability. For example, some may practice sustainability from reasons informed by perceptions of a "friendlier" environment for women as farmers, a more politically welcoming environment for "out" lesbians, increased profitability for small farms, a rural and agricultural lifestyle that doesn't require large outputs of capital, or all of the above.

The complex and contradictory motivations women have for engaging with sustainable agriculture cannot be adequately explained through ecofeminist theorizing, because there is clearly more at stake for farm women than merely nurturing children or protecting nature. Furthermore, some versions of ecofeminism assume that a cross-cultural connection to nature motivates women to adopt environmentally friendly practices. This assumption perpetuates the idea that women constitute a coherent category of analysis and neglects differences in race, class, ethnicity and sexuality (Mohanty, 1991; Nesmith and Radcliffe, 1993; DeLind and Ferguson, 1999; Reed, 2000). Perhaps equally important, but more overlooked is the ecofeminist embrace of a particular conception of nature that obscures alternative forms of women's relationship to the environment. In the following section I will review ecofeminist theory and articulate a different starting point for a feminist geographical inquiry into women-nature connections.

The Place of Women and Nature in Feminist Geographies of the Environment

Ecofeminism has been a primary theoretical influence on the development of feminist geographies of the environment (WGSG, 1997; Moeckli and Braun, 2001). Ecofeminists argue that women and nature experience a shared oppression within systems of power in Western patriarchal culture, and particularly those shaped through capitalist processes (Merchant, 1981; Shiva, 1989; Seager, 1993, Plumwood, 1993, Mies and Shiva; 1994). While ecofeminists disagree on whether the connection between women and nature is a result of a natural or socially constructed process, they agree that women and nature have been historically linked and consequently mutually devalued, and that the liberation of women is contingent upon or coincident with the liberation of nature (Daly, 1978; Griffin, 1978; Merchant, 1983). One articulation of this argument largely revolves around the idea that women's ability to reproduce and their social or "natural" responsibilities toward children make them vulnerable to environmental degradation and place them in a unique political position to defend and protect nature (King, 1983, Mies and Shiva, 1993, Mellor, 1997).

Reed (2000) refers to this as "maternal explanations", which she argues is connected to the feminist tendency to "study marginalized groups" and "progressive politics". "The feminist preoccupation with women's marginalization has led to a predetermination of what constitutes progressive politics and women's appropriate place within them" (365). Even ecofeminist work that avoids biologically deterministic models suggests "women's social location as mothers and caregivers transcends boundaries of race, ethnicity and class to favour environmental protection" (366). Even ecofeminists who do not subscribe to models

of mothering social locations, still articulate womanhood, femininity and "women" as a coherent category with particular, knowable and universal characteristics which lend themselves to environmentalism (New, 1996).

Feminist environmentalism (Agarwal, 1992) reflects a conceptual shift away from ecofeminism and suggests that the relationship between women and nature is not pregiven, but rather it is structured by larger social and material process and cultural practices. Similar to this position is socialist feminist perspectives on women's relationship to the environment. Women's social position within systems of production and reproduction informs women's consciousness of the environment. An overarching capitalist patriarchy structures the positions of both women and nature (Seager, 1993). These conceptual frameworks are discussed in the section on gender and environment in feminist geography as laid out by the Women in Geography Study Group (1997). Feminist political ecology has since become an important framework for feminist geographers of the environment.

Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari (1996) work within the feminist political ecology tradition, which they argue, "rejects dualistic constructs of gender and environment in favor of multiplicity and diversity" (287) in the use of theory and in practice. Feminist political ecology

> ...brings into a single framework a feminist perspective combined with analysis of ecological, economic and political power relations. It does not simply add gender to class, ethnicity, race and other social variables as axes of power in investigating the politics of resource access and control of environmental decision-making...Instead the perspective of feminist political ecology builds on analyses of identity and difference, and of pluralities of meaning in relation to the multiplicity of sites of environmental struggle and change (287).

While this approach to the study of women and the environment emphasize diversity and politics among women and the politics and agency of nature, it still assumes *a priori* the existence of stable categories of men and women and of nature and culture.

The separation between nature and culture, as many ecofeminists have noted, lies at the root of these nonsustainable and patriarchal systems (Merchant, 1981; Seager, 1993; Plumwood, 1993). While I agree with this assessment, I think, however, that the problem for ecofeminist theorizing about women and the environment lies not so much in the separation of nature and culture in patriarchal cultures, but rather in the separation of nature from culture in ecofeminist theory itself. This separation becomes apparent in the tendency for ecofeminists to be confident that we know what we are talking about when we invoke "nature" or the environment, or when we refer to "women" as a universal category.

This ontological separation of nature from culture in much of ecological feminism perpetuates two problems for theorizing about women and the environment. Both are connected to the use of the environment and women as analytical categories that exist, always already available for eco-feminist theorizing prior to analysis. First, the focus on 'women', or even gender difference, automatically renders 'women' as a natural or social constructed category opposite that of men, and this binary opposition becomes based on some essential properties. It becomes very easy at this point to conclude that these essential properties, whether social or natural, have something to do with caring and nurturing. Secondly, because of this positioning, what constitutes ecofeminist political action around the environment is often pre-determined as a pro-environment position prior to analysis. The "nature" that is invoked in these accounts is a nature in need of saving, which doesn't account for the ways in which discourses around the environment vary, and more importantly, assumes a nature in need of "culture". In the ecofeminist case, it is a nature that needs to be rescued from men's culture by women's culture.

This strategy cannot account for the multiple and contradictory ways in which women's lives are constructed around their relationship with nature, as illustrated in Reed's example of the jobs-versus-trees debate. Insisting that women universally have the rights and responsibilities for taking care of the earth assumes that there really is something that

binds women together, and one of those things is a need or obligation to nurture the earth. Furthermore, these discourses remove all agency from 'nature' and reinforce subject/object dualisms with the nature/culture binary. This analytical strategy cannot account for the ways in which nature shapes the choices and enables the opportunities for women in particular places at particular times. Finally, the analytical strategy that focuses on women as a knowable group and nature as a knowable object risks reinforcing so many of the dualisms that feminists of all stripes have struggled to undermine, such as nature/culture, men/women, subject/object, self/other.

My point is not to debunk politics or beliefs that affirm a connection between women and nature because I feel this connection has the potential for subversive political positions, rather my point is to illustrate that uncritical assumptions about nature and women as categories of analysis lead to conclusions that do not necessarily enhance or improve women's position in society, which is a stated goal of feminism (Seager, 1993). Frameworks that critically evaluate categories of analysis and their material manifestations provide starting points for examining the structures and discourses that marginalize both men and women. To accomplish this, I suggest the rather simplistic semantic technique of "turning the question" from "why women" have a given relationship to nature to "how particular women" have constructed their relationships to nature in particular places at particular times. This process requires that we recognize how women and nature are socially and *mutually* constructed categories, so we must first at least partially deconstruct the category of women and the nature/culture dualism.

Sex/Gender and Nature/Culture in Feminist Theory

The stability of the sex/gender and nature/culture binaries has been challenged by post-structuralist, post-colonialist and postmodern social theorists. Denise Riley (1988) enters this debate by arguing that the category of 'women' must be considered not as a category that is ontologically pre-given, rather, women as a group should be considered as "…historically, discursively constructed, and always relatively to other categories that change; 'women' is a volatile collectivity in which female persons can be very differently positioned…" (Riley, 1988:1-2). Butler (1990) extends this analysis to assert that the categories of both sex and gender, not just 'women' as a group, are also socially constructed categories relative to other categories. This approach opposes previous versions of feminist theory that asserted that gender is the social construction of the biological and anatomical sex characteristics, as asserted by Simone deBeauvoir (1949):

> One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine (267).

In deBeauvoir's (1949) analysis, what cannot be attributed to nature, must be attributed to culture.

While criticism of the dualistic thinking of a sex/gender binary in mainstream feminism developed in the late 1980s, no overt critique of the nature/culture dualism surfaced. Rather, the focus was on reconfiguring the relationship between sex and gender. Rubin (1975) identified that the sex/gender system is the "locus of the oppression of women, of sexual minorities and of certain aspects of human personality within individuals" (159). She argues the sex/gender system is "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (159). Thus, women's biological attributes in the form of their sexuality and fertility can be transformed into commodities that satisfy the needs of patriarchal society. For Rubin, gender identity is seen as "a product of the social relations of sexuality" (179), while sex is the "biological raw material" (165).

Rubin's sex/gender system was criticized for universalizing gender differences across cultures. Scott (1988) challenged this understanding of sex and gender by arguing,

> It follows then that gender is the social organization of sexual difference. But this does not mean that gender reflects or implements fixed or natural

> physical differences between women and men; rather gender is the knowledge that establishes meanings for bodily differences. These meanings vary across cultures, social groups, and time since nothing about the body, including women's reproductive organs, determines nothing univocally how social divisions will be shaped (2).

While Nicholson (1994) agrees with this analysis, she objects to the idea that sex can be interpreted independent of culture. She argued that Rubin's understanding of the sex/gender system posited that "sex provided the site upon which gender was thought to be constructed" (81), and as such, sex becomes a kind of "coatrack" "upon which differing cultural artifacts, specifically those of personality and behavior, are thrown or superimposed" (81).

> Thinking of sex as independent of gender is the idea that distinctions of nature, at some basic level, ground or manifest themselves in human identity. I label this common idea *biological foundationalism*. In relation to the male/female distinction, it expresses itself in the claim that distinctions of nature, at some basic level, manifest themselves in or ground sex identity, a cross-culturally common set of criteria for distinguishing between women and men (82).

Nicholson argues that the sexed body is already interpreted as having a gender, thus sex is seen to be subsumable under gender.

> In short, we need to understand social variations in the male/female distainctions as related to differences that go 'all the way down," that is, as tied not just to the limited phenomena many of us associate with gender...but also to culturally various understandings of the body and to what it means to be a woman or a man (83)

While Nicholson deconstructs the relationship between sex and gender, she does not substantially tackle the underlying issue of the separation of nature from culture. She essentially removes "nature" from the picture and argues that biological differences are irrelevant, and that they themselves are always and already culturally interpreted. Thus, in her logic nature is subsumed by culture, just as sex is subsumed by gender.

The critique of nature/culture distinctions emerged within the context of feminism criticism of post-colonial and post-structural theorizing around sex and gender. Butler (1990) asserted that both sex and gender are socially constructed, and that neither have their basis in biology. She refutes the independence of sex from gender by arguing that,

> When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one (10).

When gender becomes independent of sex, it then becomes meaningless, but rather than return to previous theoretical understandings of sex and gender, Butler argues,

> (g)ender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex (a juridical conception): gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established (11).

For Butler, both sex and gender are discursively constructed, and the apparatus for their production is the "heterosexual matrix," a "regulatory fiction" that requires the existence of two sexes. Mohanty (1991), in reference to the construction of the "Third World Women" as "a powerless group prior to the analysis in question" (59) echoes this sentiment.

> The problem with this analytic strategy...is that it assumes men and women are already constituted as sexual-political subjects prior to their entry into the arena of social relations...The crucial point that is forgotten is that women

> are produced through these very relations as well as being implicated in forming these relations (59).

Thus, from the scale of the body to the scale of the global, women must be considered not as a category that is ontologically pre-given. Rather, women as a group should be considered as "historically, discursively constructed, and always relatively to other categories that change" (Riley, 1988: 1-2)

The analysis of binaries undertaken by these theorists allows for a new understanding of both the source of women's oppression and the transformative process toward liberation. These ideas inspire an understanding of how women as a category of analysis are co-produced through their relationships to other categories in particular contexts, and how women's political agency is co-produced in relationship to other categories, such as nature. Like Butler (1990) with sex and gender, Haraway (1991) argues that both nature and culture are discursively constructed and should not be considered ontologically pre-given categories that can inform the "other" half of the dialectic. She writes,

> The political and explanatory power of the 'social' category of gender depends upon historicizing the categories of sex, flesh, body, biology, race and nature in such a way that the binary, universalizing opposition that spawned the concept of the sex/gender system at a particular time and place in feminist theory implodes into articulated, differentiated, accountable, located and consequential theories of embodiment, where nature is no longer imagined and enacted as a resource to culture or sex to gender (148).

Thus, for Haraway, nature when used to define culture, is always already defined as something that culture is not. In the work of these theorists, sex/gender and nature/culture become unstable binaries whose construction depends not on their opposition to some other stable category, but rather, they become imbued with meaning through their co-production. In the context of Haraway's "cyborg" feminism, the boundaries between human/machine are disrupted, and thus, other dualisms, such as nature/culture. This approach encourages the comprehension of the world through "the changing, moving, complex *web of our interactions*, in light of the language, power structures, natural environments (internal and external), and beliefs that weave it in time (Hubbard and Lowe, 1979: 116, cited in Haraway, 1991: 76, emphasis added).

Furthering this logic, Latour (1993) writes, "*the very notion of culture is an artifact created by bracketing Nature off.* Cultures – different or universal – do not exist, any more than Nature does. There are only natures-cultures" (104, original emphasis). For Latour, nature and culture are not separate categories, rather together they describe the seamless web of reality, being and knowing the world. He argues that the more modern thought separates these categories (or what Latour refers to as purification) the more they proliferate. The more we deny the interconnection of nature with culture, the more we allow the interconnections to happen (or what Latour refers to as hybridization). For example the assumption that the ozone layer (in the realm of nature) has nothing to do with refrigerators (in the realm of culture) has produced ecological problem of global proportions. Thus, nature and culture are seen as socially produced categories that describe different aspects of the same thing. Following from this logic, agency in ANT is conceptualized not as power exercised by individuals, but rather "in terms of heterogeneous *collective* associations" (Goodman, 1999: 25) and as "an emergent property of networks or collectives" (26). As such, non-human entities, such as nature, have the capacity to act. The underlying logic and politics are to understand the world as not arising from only nature, or only culture, but rather to see the world as "hybrid", or composed of both in equal or unequal measure.

While ANT approaches have made significant advances with respect to the social-nature ontology, ANT has been criticized for giving too much agency to nonhuman nature at the expense of people (Vandenberghe, 2002) and for lacking a coherent normative position with regard to social justice (Murdoch, 1997; Castree, 2002), and thus is a bit theoretically impoverished without a consideration of the ethical reasons for and implications of extending agency to nature.

Beyond the Nature/Culture Divide: Corporeality and Hybridity

Ecofeminism has long recognized the danger of separating nature and culture, and has also been one of few advocates for the extension of agency to non-human nature (Haraway, 1991). The vehicles for the extension of agency beyond human nature are typically either the rubric of "rights," such as animal rights (Mellor, 1997), or through the feminist "ethic of care" (Gilligan, 1982; Plumwood, 1993; Warren, 1997). The framework of rights is problematic because it carries the freight of the "autonomous self" as well as the "masculine conceit" of the "rights bearing citizen" (Whatmore, 2002:149). The "ethic of care", while cautiously extending agency to nature, reinforces the nature/culture dualism, and in many ways belies its own ethic by presupposing that nature is the object of care, not a mutual participant. Additionally, as argued by Whatmore, these accounts assume an ontological separation of nature from culture. "Even amidst the talk of intersubjectivity, embodiment and embeddedness, these accounts tend to treat the 'human' and 'non-human'..." as objects in "...separate worlds in need of some kind of remedial re-connection" (Whatmore, 2002: 158).

Whatmore (2002) argues that a different sort of ethics, one that "places corporeality and hybridity at its heart" (162) is necessary "for the elaboration of a more relational understanding of ethical considerability and conduct" (152) that is centered on "...a notion of difference-in-relation, as inter-subjectivily constituted in the context of practical or lived configurations of self and community" (153) and a "corporeal immersion of humankind in the biosphere" (157). Feminists have employed the idea of corporeality to illustrate how the "lived experience" in a female body is crucial to understanding women's physical and social lives (Grosz, 1987). While the emphasis on the body flirts with essentialist notions of women's experiences, the corporeal experience emphasizes understanding how living in a sexed body is implicated in interpretations of the self and the subject. Hybridity, a term borrowed from genetic science, has been used by feminists, and others, to disrupt dualisms, such as black/white, self/other, human/machine, nature/culture, and to suggest approaches to theory and politics that reflect the multiple and complex sources of identity and relationships (Duncan, 1996; Haraway, 1991)

Whatmore's (2003) use of these terms directs us towards an understanding of the importance of the bodily and non-human natures in the production and consumption of food. Going beyond "you are what you eat", Whatmore suggests that process of growing and consuming food involves a set of experiences that are necessarily both corporeal and hybrid.

> The skills and (dis)comforts of growing, provisioning, cooking and eating have long accommodated and intensified the wayward energies of wastes and additives circulating in water soils and in the flesh; and the bacterial mutations and viral infections that traffic between life and death. The rhythms and motions of these inter-corporeal practices configure spaces of connectivity between more-than-human life words...(162).

The acts of growing and eating food, (particularly in the context of food scares, such as Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy), remind us of our vulnerabilities as embodied humans, and our embeddedness in nonhuman nature. This intimacy invokes a critical need to evaluate our ethical practices with regard to non-human nature. Whatmore suggests a

> relational understanding and a ethical considerability and affect...to shift from a discursive to a performative register which emphasizes the importance of corporeality and hybridity as modes of conduct for (re)assembling the spatial praxis of ethics in more than human terms (147).

Whatmore (2003) calls for an environmental ethics that extends "ethical considerability beyond the unified (and always) human subject" (166) through recognition of the hybridity of (human) bodily natures and non-human nature. Extending the ethical community to non-human nature has the affect of "releasing the spatial imaginaries of ethical community from both the geo-metrics of universalism and...they disturb the territorializations of self, kinship, neighbourhood and nation" (167). The practice of such ethical discourse allows for the establishment of new relations between humans and non-human nature that include extending agency to nature and an ontological unity of nature and culture.

Whatmore (2003) raises the specter of the "Mad Cow", and the startling disclosures of the industrial agricultural practices that render cows carnivores and cannibals and calves the vampires of slaughtered cattle. While this example is particularly illustrative and effective as a rhetorical strategy, the more mundane practices of blueberry production and rotational grazing of market lambs also can serve as excellent examples of Whatmore's hybridity and corporeality in a different context. I return to the example Clare provides to illustrate how sustainable agriculture exemplifies a hybrid world of nature and society mediated in and through the corporeal process of consumption.

Clare and her husband, Mark, have made a commitment to growing food for a local market in an environmentally responsible manner. While it is possible (and perhaps more logical) to rehearse the growing practices that emphasize the corporeality and hybridity of sustainable agriculture practices, I turn instead to the act of consumption of food produced in such a manner. Wendell Berry reminds us of the political and ethic dimensions of consumption with this statement: "Eaters, that is, must understand that eating takes place inescapably in the world, that it is inescapably an agricultural act, and that how we eat determines, to a considerable extent, how the world is used" (1990: 50).

Customers at Clare's farm are not just consuming fruit or meat, they are also consuming "sustainability" in their choice to support farmers of locally grown food produced in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner, and in this way are shaping "how the world is used". They consume not only raw materials in the form of energy and nutrients, they also consume a way of life that takes seriously issues of justice for human and non-human nature. The allegedly apolitical act of eating (re)creates a bodily existence in the consumer that is composed of both nature and society, and becomes a politically subversive act embedded in relations of social and environmental justice.

Conclusions

Attempts to understand the place of nature in social theory has long been fraught with imperialist discourses, silences and exclusions and essentialist understandings of individuals and groups. In many cases these difficulties have arisen from the mis-placement of nature as a natural or socially constructed entity that exists in pre-determined, uni-dimensional and oppositional relationships to culture. Recent work in post-structuralist theory has illustrated the importance of nature to society without resorting to "cultural" explanations, by understanding the world as both "nature" and "culture". Whatmore's (2003) articulation of relational ethics can be applied to both conceptualizing a social and environmental justice vision for sustainable agriculture, and a feminist geographical theory of gender and nature. The concepts of hybridity and corporeality position such a theory in the world of "ideas" as well as the world of material practice, without resorting to essentialist understandings of women's bodies and biology. Corporeality and hybidity are not hinged upon anything specific to women, rather as concepts they relate to women's lived experiences, or "how particular women" have made sense of their environments.

Formulating a feminist geographical approach to women and the environment using the concepts of corporeality and hybridity accomplishes two things. First, it gently loosens the grip of ecofeminist discourse on the bodies of women, which proves to be potentially both beneficial and detrimental, and echoes long standing debates about the importance of 'women' as a category of analysis to feminism. While it is potentially beneficial to destabilize the universalizing discourses around 'women' as a category, not having women as a socially or naturally constructed entity to ground a theory on, (eco)feminism risks losing it's normative and political basis, that is improving the lives of women. Shaking 'women' loose from ecofeminist discourses also destabilizes universal meanings of 'gender' and 'nature' and as such, the importance of places and human-environment interactions (hallmarks of geography) become an overriding priority. Understanding how women construct their identities in relationship to their environment, and how the environment enables or constrains women's choices cannot be accomplished without grounding in the specificities of place and space.

The approach to a feminist geography of the environment that I have outlined and proposed here requires a number of things. First, it requires that feminist geography interrogate the coherency of women as a category of analysis. Post-structuralist and post-colonialist theory has made significant headway in illustrating how 'women' is not a universal category because of cross-cultural differences. Destabilizing the ecofeminist reliance on 'women' as a universal category goes a long way towards removing essentialist discourses from our theory. Clare represents one point in a broad spectrum of identity among women, and while I use her experiences to illustrate an argument in this paper, she hardly represents the totality of women's experiences, which is precisely the point. Her relationship with the environment and her community has evolved over time and in a particular place, and as such illustrates well the co-evolution of her identity and her environmental ethics.

Second, taking seriously the disruption of the nature/culture dualism requires that we extend some form of agency to nature and recognize that nature, while we may strategically invoke it as a separate entity, cannot be considered a passive object or simply a variable in analysis. As Clare has demonstrated, listening to 'what the land tells' her is an important part of her way of knowing as a farmer. She demonstrates a willingness to "listen" to the land, to invoke it as an entity with agency, but not because of concern for the land because she is a caregiver for her family and her community. Rather, her environmental ethic arises from a strategic and utilitarian motivation to maintain the healthy and profitability and sustainability of her land and farm. Recognizing the agency of her land and farm is an essential element of her successful farming practice. The understanding that both 'women' and 'nature' are not universal categories always already available for theorizing, throws the onus on investigating how these categories are *mutually* constructed in particular places at particular times, as illustrated by Whatmore's (2003) "relational ethic".

The use of a relational ethic can also be applied to contextualizing the social and environmental justice discourses of sustainable agriculture. Environmental justice, in conjunction with social and economic justice is a stated goal of sustainable agriculture (Allen, 1993), and some discourses of sustainable agriculture consider "nature" to have its own agency and rights. Furthermore, farmers involved with sustainable agriculture see their relationship with nature as one of cooperation rather than the relationship of domination or control characteristic of conventional agriculture (Peter et al, 1998). Perhaps the view of sustainable agriculturalists reflects a "relational ethic" that recognizes agriculture as a collective enterprise between nature and themselves, and within which nature emerges as an entity with agency. Corporeality and hybridity emerges from this ethic not only in the form of choosing environmentally friendly practices to ensure the sustainability of the farm, but also in the form of the consumption of sustainably produced food, which provides both a metabolic return to the consumer, and a participation in a social movement committed to social and environmental justice.

Clare's relationship with the land on her farm is one that recognizes both the utilitarian aspects of the steep slopes and poor soils, but also one that recognizes her well being as a farmer is premised on the well being of her land. In addition, her reasoning for occupying her particular market niche incorporates a concern for the health of the people in her community as well as an understanding of what the market will bear. Thus, her motivations and practices as a woman farmer in sustainable agriculture cannot be contextualized as arising out of a single motivation of "care" that she alone possesses because of her position as a mother and a woman. Contextualizing Clare's material practices and discourses in sustainable agriculture within the framework of Whatmore's "relational ethic" can help to inform a feminist understanding of women's relationships to the environment, which can broaden the discourse to understanding the structures of power that simultaneously marginalize and enable women and nature in particular ways at particular times.

Acknowledgements
I owe a debt of gratitude to the farmers who have provided such a provocative case study for this subject, and to Jo Sharp, Kath Browne and Deborah Thien for providing the forum for a discussion on feminist geography, and to Jane Moeckli for her insightful comments on numerous drafts of this paper.

References

ALLEN, PATRICIA (Ed) (1993) *Food for the Future: conditions and contradictions of sustainability* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc).

BERRY, WENDELL (1990) The Pleasures of Eating. In *Our sustainable table*. Ed. Robert Clark (San Francisco: North Point Press).

BJORNHAUG, HILDE (1999) Production and distribution of organic food in Norway, Paper Presented at the XVIII Congress of the European Society for Rural Sociology, Lund, Sweden.

BUTLER, JUDITH (1999) *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge).

CARBERT, LOUISE (1995) *Agrarian Feminism: The Politics of Ontario Farm Women* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

CARD, CLAUDIA (1999) Ed. *On Feminist Ethics and Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas).

CASTREE, NOEL (2002). False antitheses? Marxism, nature and actor-networks. *Antipode,* 34, pp. 111-146.

DALY, MARY (1978) *Beyond God the Father* (London: The Women's Press).

DeBEAUVOIR, SIMONE (1989) *The Second Sex* (1949). (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc).

DUDELY, KATHRYN (2000). *Debt and Dispossession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

ERS (ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE) (2001) Structural and Financial Characteristics of U.S. Farms: 2001 Family Farm Report. ERS Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 768.

ERS (ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE) (2000). Rural Conditions and Trends: Socioeconomic Conditions: Volume 11, Number 2, December 2000.

FARMER'S UNION (2000) Agribusiness Fact Sheet. (The Farmer's Union).

GILLIGAN, CAROL. 1982. *In a different voice.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

GOODMAN, DAVID AND REDCLIFT, MICHAEL (1991) *Refashioning Nature: Food, Ecology and Culture*. (London: Routledge).

GOODMAN, DAVID (1999). Agro-food studies in the 'Age of Ecology': nature, corporeality, bio-politics, *Sociologia Ruralis,* 39, pp. 17-38.

GREY, MARK (2000) The industrial food stream and its alternatives in the United States: an introduction, *Human Organization,* 59, pp. 143-150.

GRIFFIN, SUSAN (1978) *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper and Row).

GROSZ, ELIZABETH (1997) "Inscriptions and Body Maps: Representations and the Corporeal". In *Space, Gender, Knowledge.* Eds. Linda McDowell and Joanne Sharp. (New York: John Wiley and Sons).

HANEY, W. and MILLER, L. (1991) U.S. Farm Women, Politics and policy, *Journal of Rural Studies,* 7, pp. 115-121.

HARAWAY, DONNA (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: the Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books).

HARVEY, DAVID (1996) *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers).

HUBBARD, R. and LOWE, M. (1979) Genes and Gender, in: *Pitfalls in Research on Sex and Gender* (Staten Island: Gordian Press).

HUNTER, DIANNA (1990). *Breaking Hard Ground: Stories of the Minnesota Farm Advocates* (Duluth, Minnesota: Holy Cow Press).

HUNTER, DIANNA (2000) *Rising Up, Plowing Down* (Center on Women and Public Policy Case Study Program. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs: University of Minnesota).

JELLISON, K (1993) *Entitled to power : farm women and technology, 1913-1963.* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press).

KING, YNESTRA (1993) *Feminism and Ecology ?*

LATOUR, BRUNO (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

LIEPINS, RUTH (1995) Women in agriculture: advocates for a gendered sustainable agriculture *Australian Geographer*, 26, pp. 118-126.

LIEPINS, RUTH (1998a) The gendering of farming and agricultural politics: a matter of

discourse and power, *Australian Geographer*, 29, pp. 371-388.

LIEPINS, RUTH (1998b) "Women of broad vision": nature and gender in the environmental activism of Australia's 'Women in Agriculture' movement, *Environment and Planning A*, 30, pp. 1179-1196.

LYSON, T.A., GILLESPIE, G.W., & HILCHEY, D. (1995) Farmer's markets and the local community: bridging the formal and informal economy, *American Journal of Alternative Agriculture,* 10, pp.108-113.

MACKENZIE, SUZANNE & ROSE, DAMARIS (1983) Industrial change, the domestic economy and home life, in: J. ANDERSON, S. DUNCAN, R. HUDSON (Eds) *Redundant Spaces in Cities and Regions?* pp. 155-200 (London, Academic Press Inc.)

McDOWELL, LINDA (1999) Feminism, in: LINDA McDOWELL & JOANNE SHARP (Eds), *A Feminist Glossary of Human Geography* (London: Arnold).

MERCHANT, CAROLYN (1981) Earthcare: women and the environmental movement, *Environment.* 23(5) 6-13, 38-40.

MERCHANT, CAROLYN (1983) *The Death of Nature* (New York: Harper and Row).

MELLOR, MARY (1990) *Breaking the Boundaries: Towards a Green Socialism* (London: Virago).

MELLOR, MARY (1997) *Feminism and Ecology* U.K.: Polity Press.

MIES, M. & SHIVA, V. (1994) *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books).

MOECKLI, JANE & BRAUN, BRUCE (2001) Gendered natures: feminism, politics and social nature. in: NOEL CASTREE AND BRUCE BRAUN (Eds),.Social Nature: Theory, Practice and Politics, (Oxford: Blackwell).

MOHANTY, C. T. (1991). Under western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. in: CHANDRA TALPADE MOHANTY, ANN RUSSO, & LOURDES TORRES (Eds), *Third World women and the politics of feminism,* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press).

MURDOCH, JONATHAN (1997) Inhuman/nonhuman/human. *Environment and Planning D*: *Society and Space,* 15, pp. 731-756.

NETH, MARY (1995) *Preserving the family farm : women, community and the foundations of agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore, Johns Jopkins University Press).

NEW, CAROLINE (1996) Man Bad, Woman Good? Essentialisms and Ecofeminisms. *New Left Review,* 216, 79-93.

NESMITH, C & RADCLIFFE, S. (1993) Remapping Mother Earth: a geopolitical perspective on environmental feminisms. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 11, 379-394.

PETER, G., BELL, MICHAEL, JARNAGIN, SUSAN & BAUER, DONNA (2000) Coming back across the fence: masculinity and the transition to sustainable agriculture, *Rural Sociology*, 65 pp. 215-233.

PLUMWOOD, VAL (1993) *Feminism and the Domination of Nature* (London: Routledge).

PORTER, ELISABETH (1999) *Feminist Perspectives on Ethics* (London: Longman).

REED, MAUREEN (2000) Taking Stands: a feminist perspective on 'other' women's activism in forestry communities of northern Vancouver Island, *Gender, Place and Culture,* 7, pp. 363-387.

RILEY, DENISE (1988) *Am I that Name?: Feminism and the Category of Women in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota).

RITCHIE, MARK (2003). Local Food Systems, Local Decisions: In Search of True Security. Opening Keynote address to the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture Annual Conference. (State College, Pennsylvania)

SCHMITT, MATHILDE (1994) Women farmers and the influence of ecofeminism on the greening of German agriculture, in: WHATMORE, SARAH, MARSDEN, TERRY & LOWE, PHILIP (Eds) *Gender and Rurality*, pp. 102-116 (London: David Fulton Publishers).

SEAGER, JONI (1993) *Earth Follies* (New York: Routledge).

SHIVA, VANDANA (1989) *Staying Alive: Women Ecology and Development* (London: Zed Books).

SHIVA, VANDANA (1999) Monocultures, monopolies, myths and the masculinization of agriculture, *Development*, 42, pp. 35-38.

SHIVA, VANDANA (2000) *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press).

SWYNGEDOUW, ERIC (1999) Modernity and hybridity: nature, *regeneracionismo,* and the production of the Spanish Waterscape, 1890-1930, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* 89, pp. 443-465.

TRAUGER, AMY Forthcoming. "Because they can do the work": women farmers in sustainable agriculture. *Gender, Place and Culture.*

VANDERBERGHE, FREDERIC (2002) Reconstructing humants: a humanist critique of actant-network theory, *Theory, Culture and Society,* 19, pp. 51-67.

WARREN, KAREN (Ed) (1997) Ecofeminism : women, culture, nature (Bloomington : Indiana University Press)

WELLS, B (1998) Creating a public space for women in US agriculture: empowerment, organization and social change, *Sociologia Ruralis,* 28, pp. 371-390.

WHATMORE, SARAH (2002) *Hybrid Geographies: Natures, Cultures, Spaces* (London: Sage Publications).

WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (1987) *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Notes

1. All respondent names are pseudonyms.

2. Rotational grazing is a farming practice associated with sustainable agriculture that allows farmers to minimize processed feed inputs, and allows livestock to follow a more "natural" diet, as well as manage pastures through grazing at the peak period of grass productivity.

3. It should be mentioned that the attraction of "pick-your-own" operations to farmers is not limited to reducing picking and marketing labor costs, it also constitutes a form of agricultural/eco-tourism for urban consumers. Clare's and Mark's farm is especially scenic, given its mountain-top location, and this is an added incentive for return customers who live in the valleys below.

4. Cultural ecofeminists have long been charged with committing the essentialist sin by many feminist theorists, but New (1996) argues that social ecofeminists (following Mellor, 1990) also find themselves using their own versions of essentialism.