

## CULTURAL ECOFEMINISM AND CRITICS

### *Stereotypes of motherhood, etc.*

#### **Basic points in cultural ecofeminism:**

##### *1. Natural feminine qualities*

- women, because of their biological and psychological nature, are naturally nurturing, intuitive, sensitive, in touch with emotions, contextual (versus abstract)
- these qualities are healthier than their opposites in terms of social interaction

##### *2. Connection to the earth*

- women's biology of cycles, procreation, and lactation, gives them a special connection to the earth; women "parallel" and act as nature does
- these gives women a unique ability to commune with and intuit nature

##### *3. Earth is "womanly": Mother earth*

#### *Aspects: women are naturally:*

- procreative
- nurturing
- protective
- intuitive (versus alienation of masculine rationality)
- emotional sensitivity and attunement (versus lack of these in masculine)
- bodily sensitivity and attunement (versus lack of these)
- in touch with mortality (versus attempts to transcend)
- contextual (versus abstractness of masculine)
- concrete (versus transcendence)
- spontaneous (versus intentionality)
- power-with (versus domination and power-over)
- cooperative (versus competition)

#### The stereotype involves

- description (e.g., of motherhood)
- valorizing it as an "ideal" that has a particular kind and high degree of value

#### **Criticisms of ecofeminist "essentialism"**

##### *1. False representation of reality*

- not universal (versus universal): some women aren't like this: women's experience is more diverse {and so is men's}; in some places nature is very "unfeminine"
- limited (versus comprehensive & complete): women can have these qualities but others (including "masculine" ones, e.g., rationality) as well: women's experience is broader & richer {and so is men's}; usually nature has these qualities but others as well (e.g., indifference and destructiveness and competitiveness)
- socially constructed (versus natural or essential)
- contradictory (versus consistent): woman as lover (highly sexual, sexuality as attractive)

versus mother (sexuality diminished and seen as threatening)

## 2. *Harmful consequences*

- limiting: constrains women to certain types of behavior and attitudes
- alienating {?}: women who don't fulfill the stereotype can seem "unnatural" or "undeveloped"
- inevitably devaluing at social level: even if some women take this as valuing womanness, society is so entrenched in patriarchy that the general result will be to use it to devalue
- involves destructive aspects: self-sacrifice, lack of strong self
- contradictory: if ideal is fulfilled one is valued (as mother) but also devalued (as only a mother)
- hierarchical: values women over men
- exclusionary: implies that men lack a full connection to earth and to reproduction and nurturing

## 3. *Other*

- one can raise the value of so-called "feminine" qualities without making them natural to one sex

## ***Possible response***

1. One should not simply disregard women's distinctive biology and psychology, even though women experience it in various ways and degrees, and men can manifest "feminine" traits.
2. The negative aspects of the stereotype (e.g., self-destructive self-sacrifice) can be eliminated.
3. These attitudes and images (e.g., earth as mother) can be useful in building personal and social value of these qualities.
4. Just because current patriarchal society misuses the stereotype and devalue "feminine" qualities does not mean that individuals (both women and men) have to or all societies have to. The ideal may be not to ignore the connections but to correct them (both as descriptions and in terms of value).
5. To reject these associations out of hand is to reject other & earlier cultures where "female" qualities are valued. In a sense, this is cultural chauvinism.