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Exploring the distance between ecofeminism and Women in Mining (WIM)

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A B S T R A C T

While there is existing work on the relationship between gender and mining in strands of environmental studies and resource studies, this paper moves away from generic feminist analyses of the environment and gender. Turning to ecofeminism, I argue that most debates that borrow from ecofeminism do not go beyond the maternalistic perspective that mining is anti-woman and thus anti-ecofeminist. This paper speaks to the gap in the literature by examining a specific group of gendered actors under the lens of ecofeminism, that is, women involved in the Women in Mining (WIM) movement. WIM represents a liberal feminism demand for equal opportunities for women in the otherwise heavily male-dominated and highly masculinised mining industry. However, in its current iteration WIM has not located its work within the discourse of ecofeminism, nor have its predominantly white, middleclass key stakeholders identified themselves as ecofeminists. As such, the complex intersectionalities of race, poverty, gender, age, class, and ideo-geographies are often neglected. In response, this paper queries, can ecofeminism and WIM enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship, and what might the impacts be for both sides of such a relationship? This paper begins with a summary of how the epistemological lens of ecofeminism can offer new understandings of and activism in the mining industry more generally. The next two sections present conceptual dialogues regarding how ecofeminism can challenge and reshape hegemonic practices and perspectives of WIM in its current iteration; and vice versa, how WIM can inform and enrich our understandings and applications of ecofeminism. In closing, the paper reflects on the apparent populist rhetoric of the two schools as incompatible partners.

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1. Introduction

In liberal democratic societies such as Australia and Canada, women have been recognised as a distinct category of people who do not have equal access to employment opportunities in the mining industry (see, for example, Queensland Resources Council, 2012; Women in Mining Canada, 2010). This recognition exists because of a much broader acceptance of the inequalities faced by women in the workplace, and because of a general political and social acceptance of the rights of women to participate in all industries and at all levels throughout the workforce. In mining specifically, it has been the motivator for the development and progression of a distinct Women in Mining (WIM) movement which has been visible in the industry since the mid-1990s. WIM is represented at the national level by organisations such as WIMNet (Australia), WIM Canada, and WIMSA (South Africa). Within each country there are also WIM networks or chapters at state, city, and provincial levels. Internationally, WIM is represented by the International Women in Mining Organisation; however, there is no

formal connection between the various groups and no single manifesto for the aims of the movement they represent.

I use the term "movement" to describe the work being done to secure more equitable opportunities for women in the mining industry in these developed countries, but recognise that the use of such a term is risky. WIM is not a counter-culture movement as progressive or culture-changing as the movements that have focused on gay liberation, civil rights for black people, or even the women's movement. It certainly cannot be described as a wave of "oppressed people moving to liberate themselves from the oppressor's grip *and* from the internalised perception of self as victim which the oppressed bound to the oppressor" (Collard, 1989, p. 97; emphasis in the original). Given that many WIM organisations are funded and/or supported by the same mining companies they ask to accept more women into their workplaces, WIM is also certainly not a radical movement in any sense. Rather, it is a distinctly liberal feminist movement which has specific relevance to discussions about women and gender in mining in neoliberal, democratic societies.

In this article, I consider what it means to rethink the position of WIM through an ecofeminist lens. Can ecofeminism and WIM

enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship, and what might the impacts be for both sides of such a relationship? Situated at the intersection of Gender Studies and Cultural Studies, this paper draws on archival research into scholarly and public literature on ecofeminism and industry work focusing on mining, as well as corporate and statutory reports on the WIM movement. I first offer a summary of what ecofeminism might have to say about mining beyond the conclusion/assumption that mining is bad for women. For the main part of this article, I focus on the possibility of a relationship between ecofeminism and WIM. Elmhirst and Resurreccion (2008) identify that "Arguments have been made for more context-specific and historically nuanced understandings of the relationship of specific groups of women with specific environmental resources [. . .]" (p. 7). My analysis takes the women who directly represent and who are indirectly represented by WIM as a specific group of women. It takes mined non-renewable resources as the specific environmental resources. It considers what WIM (a non-ecofeminist aligned movement) might learn from ecofeminism (which has ignored the specific interests of WIM), and vice versa.

2. The case for an ecofeminist interest in mining

Ecofeminism has been described as "the marriage of feminism and the radical ecology movement" (Hamad, 2013, p. 11). It aspires to build "new gender relations between women and men and between humans and nature" (Merchant, 1990, p. 100). It exists as a diverse academic discourse (Carlassare, 1994, p. 52; Phillips, 2014, 434–444 pp.) and as a "practical movement for social change arising from the struggles of women to sustain themselves, their families, and their communities in the face of maldevelopment[1] and environmental degradation" (Murphy, 1997, p. 49). Since its emergence in the 1970s, or even earlier (Diamond and Orenstein, 1990, p. ix; Gaard, 2011, p. 27), ecofeminism (*ecofeminisme*), has sought to offer a feminist response to the destruction of the environment as this destruction is seen to represent and impact on the continuing oppression of women (Carlassare, 1994, p. 51; Collard, 1989, p. 137; Warren, 2000, p. 21). More specifically, while ecofeminism primarily challenges the "oppression of nature" (Moore, 2008, p. 288), it is engaged in intersectionality and deeply intertwined with challenging other oppressions such as "sexism, racism, and homophobia" (p. 287).

Among all this concern for both women and the environment, we nevertheless find a gap in the literature by ecofeminist theorists in the relationship between gender and mining, and particularly in regard to how this relationship impacts on women who (seek to) work in the mining industry in liberal democratic countries. Existing works in related fields reviewed below include environmental science, where gender has not been a focus; gender and resources, which has focused more on forests, animals, and agriculture than on mining; and gender and mining, which has not adopted ecofeminist perspectives.

In their criticism of how environmental social scientists have ignored the issue of gender, Banerjee and Bell (2007) lament that "ecofeminism has been given surprisingly little emphasis in environmental social science" (p. 4). They show that the terms "sex", "gender", or "feminism" appear in only 3.9% of citations for articles in five of the top journals in environmental science between 1980 and 2005. A search of the terms "ecofeminism" and "mining" in the entire database for the same journal in which their

article was published—*Society and natural resources: An international journal*—produces only one article.[2] A closer reading of this article reveals that it does not in fact include the term "mining" in its abstract, keywords or main body; and is actually concerned with the subject of deforestation. A much broader search for the same terms via the online database available through the University for New South Wales brings up only three citations[3] which comprise two articles[4] and one doctoral dissertation.[5]

Researchers have certainly explored the link between gender and resources (Das, 2011; Jacobs, 2014; Kameri-Mbote, 2007; Li, 2009; Loots, 2007; Lunb and Panda, 1994; Radel, 2012). Not all this research refers specifically to "ecofeminism". Despite this, given the interests of the authors in exploring the rights of women to have better access to resources, we could argue their writings assume an ecofeminist position. In this body of work, however, the term "resources" refers to items which provide daily sustenance for humans (e.g., food and water). Some ecofeminists also understand resources to include forests, animals, and agriculture (Agarwal, 1994; Buckingham-Hatfield, 2000; Resurreccion and Elmhirst, 2008; Rocheleau et al., 1996a, 1996b; Warren, 2000). A definition of "resources" more relevant to the mining industry, and explorations of the relationship between women and mined resources, are noticeably absent. Indeed, the referencing of such resources and mining specifically in ecofeminist literature is scant and fleeting (Collard, 1989, p. 145; Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. xxix, 44, 100; Rocheleau et al., 1996b, p. 293).

Women (and men) have engaged in campaigns against mining operations in ways which might be seen to deploy/employ ecofeminist idea(l)s (Gaard, 2011, p. 31; Merchant, 1980, p. 66; Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 3, 246; Rocheleau et al., 1996b, p. 14). Ecofeminists have also expressed concern about the impacts on women and on the environment of hazardous (nuclear) waste and chemicals (Collard, 1989, 138–141 pp.; Diamond and Orenstein, 1990, p. x; Merchant, 1990, p. 102). They have argued that "the natural world has been thought of as a *resource*" and that "it has been exploited without regard for the life that it supports" (Plant, 1990, p. 155 ; emphasis in the original). In the first chapter of her seminal ecofeminist work *The death of nature*, Merchant (1980) offers an informative account of dominant attitudes towards the mining of minerals in history. Since then and within ecofeminist research, however, there has been no attempt to analysis the practice of resource extraction—"mining"—in a way which does justice to the diversity and importance of ideas about the relationship between gender and the environment which have emerged and are otherwise important in this same discourse.

There has been, for example, no consideration of how "woman" or "environment" are constructed in and through mining. There has been no discussion about how mining works as a "double-edge sword" which can provide both development and destruction (Bridge, 2004, p. 225). There is no evident interest in rereading mining in a way that might destabilise the dominance of masculinity (in mining) which elsewhere has been identified as helping sustain the practices of global neoliberalism which strengthen gender inequities (Radcliffe, 2006, p. 525). Salleh

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[1] Shiva (1990) defines "maldevelopment" as "a new source of male/female inequality" (p. 192) and "the violation of the integrity of a living, interconnected world" which is "simultaneously at the root of injustice, exploitation, inequality, and violence" (p. 193).

[2] The article is "Women and community forestry in Nepal: Expectations and realities" by Irene Tinker (1994).

[3] The scarcity of research which explores ecofeminism and mining is backed up by additional searches in the databases of the University of Western Australia and the University of Utrecht which show 6 and 1entries respectively.

[4] "Negotiating gender: Experience from Western Australian Mining Industry" by Silvia Lozeva and Dora Marinova (2010) and "Protecting the botanic garden: Seward, Darwin, and Coalbrookdale" by Donna Coffey (2002).

[5] "Nature's women: Ecofeminist reflections on Jabiluka" by Monika Nugent (UNSW, 2002).

(2014) suggests that "Ecofeminism is the only political framework [. . .] that can spell out the historical links between neoliberal capital, militarism, corporate science, worker alienation, domestic violence, reproductive technologies, sex tourism, child molestation, neocolonialism, Islamaphobia, extractivism, nuclear weapons, industrial toxics, land and water grabs, deforestation, genetic engineering, climate change, and the myth of modern progress" (p. ix). If ecofeminism can do all this, this makes it a particularly useful framework for exploring the links—cultural as well as historical—between mining and gender.

The subject of gender in mining is, however, starting to attract significant attention outside traditionally ecofeminist frameworks. Publications on this topic have uncovered histories of men or women working in mining (Burton 2014; Diamond, 2011; Evans, 2005; Klubock, 1996; Mercier and Gier, 2009; Murray, 2009). They reveal the mining industry's interest in exploring the employability of women (Australian Government Office for Women and Minerals Council of Australia, 2007; Canadian Mining Industry Human Resources Council, 2008; Queensland Resources Council, 2012; WIM Canada, 2010). This now multi-disciplinary body of knowledge also includes research on the impacts of mining on women in local communities (Lahiri-Dutt, 2006; OXFAM, 2009; Sharma and Rees, 2007), the status of femininity and feminism in mining (Laplonge, 2014a; Mayes and Pini, 2010), the role that gender plays in training in this industry (Andersson and Abrahamsson, 2007; Laplonge, 2012; Somerville, 2005), the relationship between gender and safety (Albury and Laplonge, 2013; Laplonge, 2011a, 2014b), and the impacts of gender in fly-in-fly-out communities (Clifford, 2009; Lozeva and Marinova, 2010).

An ecofeminist interest in mining could further this work by drawing on a range of ideas about gender and the environment that have already been raised and discussed within its own discipline. It could consider if and how cultural understandings of gender have helped introduce into mining a "managerial ethos, which holds efficiency of production [. . .] above the health of community life" (Spretnak, 1990, p. 10). It could develop new ways of imagining the use of technology, resurrect "ecologically sound traditional technologies" which have been used by indigenous peoples and women in the past (Shiva, 1990, p. 199), or even help create new technologies so that mining can be carried out in ways that do not support "dominator societies" (Eisler, 1990 p. 32). It could explore how mining might be done differently within a philosophy that "embraces intuition, an ethic of caring, and weblike human/nature relationships" (Merchant, 1990, p. 101), and consider whether the mining industry's current interest in "sustainability" is evidence of the emergence of such an ethics or simply a corporate buzzword which masks the involvement of this industry in "the colonial structure of the so-called market economy" (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 60). It could extend Merchant's (1980) earlier question about "how environmental quality was affected by the transition from peasant control of natural resources for the purpose of subsistence to capitalist control for the purpose of profit" (p. 43) to explore the different impacts on women between artisanal practices of mining and those carried out by large corporations. Ecofeminist links to spirituality might also be useful in helping mining companies pay more attention to the impacts of their business beyond the profitable piles of productivity that are readily visible on many mine sites and which locate this industry within the modern patriarchal economy (Shiva, 1990, p. 192); or to explore transformational ways of reacting to mining outside the dominant political arena (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 18). Any or all such work could impact the approach taken by the WIM movement. In fact, as my analysis of this movement in the next section reveals, the level of such impact could be quite radical.

3. Ecofeminist challenges to WIM

The WIM movement represents the liberal feminist demand for equal opportunities for women in the mining industry. It occupies a powerful voice within this industry in regards to offering guidance and advice to mining companies on how to respond to the "problem" of gender. It is, however, currently separated from feminist analyses of the environment and gender. In its work it does not draw on or reference recent feminist accounts of gender or thinking about gender outside the stable man/woman gender order (Laplonge, 2016, 2014a). Instead, its primary aim is to push for more women to be allowed to work in an otherwise heavily male-dominated and highly masculinised industry.

In its current ideo-political climate, WIM has not located its work within the discourse of ecofeminism. Those involved in running the networks which represent this movement do not publicly identify themselves as ecofeminists. The term "ecofeminist" does not appear in any of the reports that have been issued to discuss the status of women in the mining industry. This is not simply a matter of women who work in mining not being aware of the discipline of ecofeminism which may not enjoy wide public visibility outside the academy and environmental activism. To the contrary, there exists an evident fear of any identification with feminism and feminist ideas among those who head up WIM (Laplonge, 2014a; p. 49) and among women who work in leadership positions in mining (Mayes and Pini, 2010). Martin (2004) summarises second-wave feminism as follows: "Feminist critiques of political liberalism marked an overall shift in the language that feminists used, moving from arguments for equality and inclusion within the polity to an emphasis on the existence of patriarchal oppression and women's liberation" (p. 17). WIM emerges historically after the introduction of second-wave feminist ideas into the culture; yet, its almost exclusive focus on seeking equality for women without questioning the masculinist structures of the mining industry suggests it is anything but a contemporary feminist movement. It has arguably made the necessary prefix of "feminist' redundant prematurely (Warren, 2000, p. 93), whereas ecofeminism has instead called for a union of feminist and environmental politics (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2008, p. 306). The outcome of the elision of (eco)feminist ideas in WIM is that a lot of the research and resulting recommendations to mining companies on how to address issues of gender (re)creates an identity for all women as passive, maternal, and in need of paternalistic protection and support (Laplonge, 2014a; pp. 59–66).

As an example, we can consider how 'woman' is constructed within the work and discourse of the WIM movement. Mortimer-Sandilands posits that an ecofeminist undertaking of the "wider gender politics of the region" (2008, p. 305), specifically the "intersecting dynamics of gender and nature [. . .] in concrete and situated places and times" (2008, p. 307), will allow for more nuanced understandings of women. The WIM movement does not seek such an undertaking in its bid to bring more women into the mining industry. Its purpose is not to destabilise this industry through challenging its anti-feminist and anti-feminine norms. Further, Merchant (1990) argues, "Any analysis that makes women's essence and qualities special ties them to a biological destiny that thwarts the possibility of [their] liberation" (p. 102). The WIM movement does not attempt to liberate women into mining through challenging essentialist notions of what women are. Claims that women are naturally safer than men and that women will naturally tame the hyper-masculine culture of mine sites (Heber, 2013; Smith, 2013) promote a role for women in mining which does little to challenge the dominant belief that all men are strong and rough in opposition to all women who are gentle and nurturing (Laplonge, 2011b), or what has been called a "maternal peace politics" (Moore, 2008, p. 295). Ecofeminist

challenges to the essentialising of woman provide WIM with the opportunity to explore, critique, and correct the construction of woman within their own discourse. A distance from ecofeminism, however, means that the "woman" of the WIM movement remains the same kind of woman who suffers under (and is excluded from) the existing patriarchal system of mining.

This does not mean that an ecofeminist look at WIM could not continue to consider the oppression and/or position of *the* "woman" in and through mining. We can continue to use the term "woman" even as we may see this to be a term which is (re) produced within a dualistic system of categorising bodies which is patriarchal, heteronormative, and reliant on the subordination of a feminised nature by a masculinised human rationality. The use of unifying categories—like "woman"—has, after all, been identified as an appropriate practice of "strategic essentialism" (Warren, 2000, p. 91), and as employing "necessary fictions" (Weeks, 1999, p. 14) or temporary interventionist tactics (Fuss, 1989, p. 32) to help create better lives for people today. According to Twine (2001):

> Disregarding these [categories] could lead to something of a theoretical impasse, inspired by an endlessly particularizing postmodernism. As long as it is borne in mind that the meanings attached to such categories are not unproblematic or static representations and that a sophisticated degree of reflexivity accompanies their formulation, then such categories can be useful [. . .]." (p. 47)

We can therefore continue to talk about the "woman" in WIM, but we must do so in a way which simultaneously seeks to question the very construction of this "woman" as natural and pre-existing. With an awareness of how our descriptions of the struggles of women often recreate the very meanings of man and woman which are responsible for these struggles to begin with (Nightingale, 2006, p. 170), WIM should recognise how "woman" is constructed in the research that is carried out to explore the experiences of women who work in the mining industry. It should recognise that while "woman" is grammatically singular, it is in fact the combined term for a plurality of experiences and bodies.

There is also a demand for ecofeminism to be concerned with intersections of class and race (Twine, 2001, p. 32). Something that is significantly lacking in the singularised work of WIM, however, is analysis of the differences in experiences of women of colour. The claim that women are underrepresented in mining today—a claim that WIM reports often make—is factually inaccurate if we factor in the number of women who work in artisanal mining—usually small-scale, subsistence-based, and independent of official mining companies—the majority of whom are non-white (Hinton et al., 2003, p. 163) and hail from under-privileged lower classes of ideo-geographies. In the numerous reports on WIM, however, it is only ever gender that matters. The "woman" of WIM is deemed to be without race and class—and so all women are seen to be the same. This focus on the gender of women alone hides the different barriers to employment and the different workplace issues faced by women of colour. It denies the participation of white women in systems of gender and racial oppression (King, 1990, p. 113; Zimmerman, 1990, p. 145), and the stealing of resources located on land that is otherwise claimed and/or owned by indigenous communities (Merchant, 2003, 164–165 pp.; Razak, 1990, p. 166). It also ignores significant feminist work which explores the importance of race as a contributing, if not overriding, factor in inequalities in developing countries (Brú and Cabo, 2004, p. 216; Martin, 2004, p. 22).

Mining has also been recognised as an industry that has traditionally offered employment to the poor (Merchant, 1980, p. 178). Even within the mining industry today there is recognition of the need to ensure that poor women specifically benefit from the development of mining operations in their communities particularly when these operations exist in developing nations (Rio Tinto, 2009). The WIM movement, however, ignores the complex relationships between race, poverty, and gender, not to mention also age, class, and geographical location—all of which are elsewhere seen as necessary in discussions about women and their relationship with the environment (Jackson, 1993, p. 401). Its primary interest is in helping white/whitened, middle-class(d) women to gain access to the high salaries that the mining industry currently pays to many men. The elision of any focus on these intersections in the discourse of WIM helps this discourse to ignore/dismiss an ecofeminist "recognition of connections between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women"—two "forms of domination" that "are bound up with class exploitation, racism, and colonialism and neo-colonialism" (Murphy, 1997, 49–50 pp.).

In reality, therefore, WIM is not a strictly speaking women's movement at all; it does not seek to change the lives of *all* women. Instead, it is only concerned with allowing some women to benefit from working alongside a group of already privileged and elite men to the exclusion of all other women (and men) (Plumwood, 1993, 27–31 pp.). Mies and Shiva (2014) argue that the failure of urban, middle-class women to see any connection between their own liberation and that of different women is the result of a "capitalist patriarchy" that "structurally dichotomises reality" and creates hierarchies of oppression (p. 5). The failure of WIM to make links between their positions as women who work in mining and the positions of women affected by mining provides evidence to support this claim.

4. WIM challenges to ecofeminism

A two-way relationship between ecofeminism and WIM is important if any such relationship is to exist at all. After all, ecofeminism is not without its critics both from within and outside the discipline. Specific criticisms have addressed the making of the problem of environmental destruction "personal and familial instead of political and systemic" (Alaimo, 1994); the marginalisation of the poor and (therefore) the majority of the world's women in pro-environment politics and practices (Leach, 2007, p. 72); the contradictory insistence that it is the poor, the indigenous, and women who naturally can or who have to save the environment (Bauhardt, 2013, p. 364; Buckingham-Hatfield, 2000); Thomas-Slayer et al., 1996, p. 291; Twine, 2001, p. 34); the continuing othering of woman as victim (Jackson, 1993); glorifying non-Western and/or indigenous cultures (Banerjee and Bell, 2007, p. 8–10; Eisler, 1990; Jackson, 1995, 129–131 pp.; Kao, 2010, 626–628 pp.; Leach, 2007, p. 76; Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 11); adopting a Eurocentric and Western view of the relationship between gender and the environment (Kao, 2010); and engaging in mysticism or un-scientific spirituality (Banerjee and Bell, 2007, p. 5, 8k9; Biehl, 1991, pp. 37–48; Jackson, 1995, 136–138 pp.; Warren, 2000, p. 194). There is also then a debate within ecofeminism which is common to many issues relating to sex, gender, and sexuality—whether ecofeminism preferences or presents an essentialist or constructionist view (see, Alaimo, 2008; Buckingham, 2004; Plumwood, 1993; Mortimer-Sandilands, 2008). Ecofeminism as a discipline and as a discourse is therefore also in the practice of learning. Warren (2000) summarises this disunity by explaining that:

> All ecofeminist agree that there are important connections between the unjustified dominations of women and nature, but they disagree about both the nature of those connections and whether some of the connections are potentially liberating or grounds for reinforcing harmful stereotypes about women. (p. 21)

Ecofeminism, therefore, is a conversation about women and the environment, but it is not a conclusion about women and the environment.

The risk in any ecofeminist discussion about mining and gender, however, is that we might conclude (from the start) that all women are always negatively impacted by the (masculinised) practice of mining. This would be a false and inaccurate conclusion. As Radcliffe (2006) points out in her analysis of the role of gender in development practices: "The ongoing power of masculinist interpretations of nation, territory and space condition women's mobility and relationship with the land in ways that are not reducible to stories about rampant global capitalism nor 'traditional' property systems" (p. 527). Women participate in and support social practices and systems which have negative impacts on the environment, and they do so in ways which proves that not all women are more caring or more nurturing than men (Plumwood, 1993, p. 9). The impacts of mining may not be universally beneficial or equally distributed, but "considerable material gains are made" by *some* women through mining which helps to produce energy, heat, better healthcare, and easier living conditions (Buckingham-Hatfield, 2000, p. 7). Women in rural areas benefit from the connectivity to major urban centres that often results from the opening up of a mine site (Thomas-Slayer et al., 1996, p. 293). Jackson (1995) acknowledges that the employment practices of multinational corporations in the "Third World" are based on economics—employing women who are the cheapest to employ. However, by providing employment opportunities to women, these corporations also provide the social context in which women's positions in society and in the household can change.

Radel (2009) argues that "ecofeminist interventions opened a political space for the participation of women in sustainable development and in environmental conservation as experts, instead of as villains or victims" (p. 333). There are women who happily work in mining. There are women who are leading the call for more women to do this kind of work and to experience these same benefits—the women who head up the WIM networks most obviously. Do we now define these women as non-women because they are failing to adopt an (ecofeminist) connection to the earth which is assumed to be more appropriately feminine because it is anti-mining? Do they become the non-citizens of the ecofeminist movement because they have failed "*to know or imagine* a particular conception of what green 'good life' would entail" (Gabrielson and Parady, 2010, p. 375; emphasis in the original)? Do they become the other "other"—which has been tasked with taking the place of and speaking on behalf of the "other" (Plant, 1990, p. 156)—which ecofeminism will not represent? The WIM movement has produced knowledge about (white, middleclass) women's experiences in mining and much of this is documented in the many reports into women in mining that are now available. This knowledge could feed into existing ecofeminist work on women and resources. It could further help diversify what we mean by "woman" when we consider the relationship of women and the mined/mine-able environment. We could see women who work in mining as experts in a way which complies with ecofeminist calls for better use of subjective knowledge when discussing the environment (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 39; Staeheli and Kofman, 2004, p. 4)—an approach that furthers the work that has been done to incorporate feminist approaches into "reformulations of hegemonic environmental management models" (Brú and Cabo, 2004, p. 222).

The alignment of woman with nature is something else that has been controversial within ecofeminist discourse (see Jackson, 1993, 392–397 pp.; Nightingale, 2006, p. 165–167; Stoddart and Tindall, 2011; Warren, 2000, 52–54 pp.). Some argue for a natural connection—that all women have more in common with nature than all men, and that this makes women better suited to manage environmental issues (Brú and Cabo, 2004, p. 221). Others argue that this connection of woman to nature even within ecofeminist writing is historically and culturally connected to the elevation of man outside nature, and into the realms of superior intellect (Leach, 2007; Merchant, 1990, 101–102 pp.; Mortimer-Sandilands, 2008); or that it comes from experiences of women as mothers or as people who have shown to be more interested than men in environmental issues (Stoddart and Tindall, 2011, p. 344–345). Plumwood (1993) insists that this relationship has proven particularly uncomplimentary to women (p. 19); but the use of this alignment by ecofeminists has also allowed for a strategic elevation of femininity as it seeks to battle against practices of masculinity which are destroying the earth. As a "mobilization tool" (Stoddart and Tindall, 2011, p. 346), it has also allowed for explorations of the multiple ways in which women, more so than men, are the real victims of environmental degradation (Brú and Cabo, 2004, p. 211). Warren (2000) identifies nature as a feminist issue because an understanding of nature helps us to understand the "oppression, subordination, or domination of women" too. "Nature is a feminist issue" is what she promotes as the "slogan of ecofeminism" (p. 1). Leach argues that the assumption of a natural affinity of women with nature may have been "swimming with a tide" and suggests that it may be "time for a new round of concerted engagement with the changed world of environment and development policy which attempts to put gender back in the picture on more politicized terms (p. 82).

WIM may not have the same 'intimate knowledge of their ecosystems' as women who rely on such knowledge for basic survival (Nightingale, 2006, p. 168). Their knowledge of the environment and its resources is more closely connected to that of privileged men in liberal democratic societies than other women whose knowledge about such matter is "gained from their role as subsistence providers of the households" (p. 168). Further empirical research which explores how women who work in mining think about the environment may offer ecofeminism new and challenging ways of thinking about the relationship between gender and the environment; and I am currently completing this research. When we ask women who work in mining to share their understanding of the relationship between gender and the environment, however, we have to accept that we might discover that not all these women—and therefore not all women—express an attitude towards the environment that is consistent with ecofeminist thinking. If this turns out to be the case, these women should not be viewed as victims who are incapable of recognising their own exploitation (Stoddart and Tindall, 2011, p. 356–357). Instead, they should be seen to offer genuine responses which can help ecofeminists understand further the diversity of relationships that exists between women and the environment, and challenge evidence within some ecofeminist writing of a desire to idealise women (Jackson, 1993, p. 391).

5. An impossible union?

If "our relationship with nature is intertwined with our experiences of gender" (Radel, 2009, p. 334), we cannot exclude the practice of mining from the ecofeminist debate. Mining is part of our relationship with nature—a relationship that exists regardless of whether we approve of mining or not. We engage in the task of extracting resources from the earth, or protesting against mining operations, or creating technologies for mining, or even investigating what it means to "mine" as gendered beings and bodies. We also become gendered beings and perform our genders in and through the practice of mining. The result of my thinking about the possibility of a relationship between ecofeminism and WIM is, however, not just an awareness of what is being missed by the failure of the two to communicate, but also an understanding of

why these two areas of thought/practice which share an interest in gender and the environment have so far maintained a mutually beneficial distance from each other. A relationship between ecofeminism and WIM offers so much in terms of what this could do to rework the broader impacts of gender on mining and vice versa; and I have hinted at such possibilities throughout this article as avenues for further thinking and research. Unfortunately, the two—ecofeminism and WIM—are currently very much incompatible bedfellows.

A key issue for WIM, for example, is employment equity for women in the mining industry. In contrast, ecofeminism has been identified as being able to "attract women who feel left behind by what they perceive as a feminist movement that is only concerned with women achieving 'successful careers'" (Alaimo, 1994, p. 143). Ecofeminism is similar to the "debate specifically within organization studies which has exposed how masculine rationality still dominated and thus genders organizational realities such that the feminine is rendered subordinate and of less significance" (Phillips, 2014, p. 445). The WIM movement, however, does not seek to question existing masculine structures of systems or practices within mining. It pushes for an independence for individual women which is dependent on otherwise male-dominated mining companies allowing women to work alongside men and to earn the same as men. It is concerned with giving some women equal opportunities to experience successful careers in mining without challenging this industry's understanding of gender or masculinised practices of working. It seeks change by demanding that a few women be allowed to fit into the existing system, so that these few women too, like men are already assumed to be, can become "*fully human*" (Plumwood, 1993, p. 27; emphasis in the original). It is, in Merchant's terms, a liberal feminist take on feminist environmentalism because it works to allow and encourage women to "participate in natural resources and environmental sciences" (1990, p. 104).

The WIM movement offers an example of how gender has been brought into the arena of resource management in a way which sees gender lose its "critical and politicized edge, having been institutionalised into a series of tools and techniques that are far removed from the transformatory potential of gender as a feminist concept" (Elmhirst, 2011, p. 130). Unlike the environmental movement which Connell (1990) argued allows men a chance to explore feminist ideas without having to go directly through or to feminism, the WIM movement does not encourage men in mining to reflect on their practices or constructions of masculinity. It also misses out on an opportunity to achieve its desired outcome of gender equality in mining by failing to appreciate fully how such an outcome requires changes in existing practices of masculinity. Because it currently fails to consider feminist interpretations of gender, it is unlikely to impact significantly on the lives of women broadly or the masculine culture of the mining industry specifically. Because it also currently fails to consider ecological issues in its remit, the success of this movement is determined simply by getting more women into mining, the outcome of which would be traditionally liberal feminist in practice, but which might "result in the dominant society increasing the damage done to nature, as more women would have access to a lifestyle which [already] places a burden on nature (Buckingham-Hatfield, 2000, p. 33). The women's movement and environmental movement, when working together, demand transformation not just so that a few more women can benefit, but so that the entire human constructed systems of gender and environmental management can be changed (Warren, 2000, p. xiii). This might prove to be too much for WIM and for the mining industry—both of which currently seek no (eco)feminist changes in the construction of woman or the gendered practice of mining.

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