Teaching to Care for Land as Home: Thinking beyond the Anthropocene in environmental education

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Peer review: This article has been subject to a double-blind peer review process.

Abstract

Can a feminist, justice-oriented approach to environmental care function through the concept of the Anthropocene? This article argues that by foregrounding girlhood and young women's experiences, an ecofeminist approach to environmental education benefits the outdoor education field and environmentalist action alike. The argument is based on ethnographic research from 2018 at Cottonwood Gulch—an outdoor education program based in New Mexico, USA. It focuses on an all-girls group and the relationships they created with wildlife and wild spaces throughout their time in the outdoors immersion program. The article explores how an ecofeminist approach to the girls' education strengthened their responsible relationships with environments. Cottonwood Gulch created a sense of home in the landscapes it explored, and it encouraged intimacy between participants and between participants and wildlife. Through this approach the girls came to know 'land as home' and to understand caretaking as central to ecological responsibility and environmentalism. The article explores the entanglement of environmentalism and feminism discussed through ecofeminist approaches and problematizes the Anthropocene through this lens. It asks us to look beyond the concept of the Anthropocene and instead take up understanding of the Capitalocene, allowing ecofeminist thought and work to inspire a justice-oriented approach to environmentalism and environmental education.

Keywords: Capitalocenee Anthropocene; environmental education; outdoor education; climate change; ethnography

Introduction

In an age of devastating environmental collapse, the approaches we take to our relationships with the species that share the earth with human beings might genuinely decide the fate of our planet. Further, how we understand what this age of collapse *is*, how we identify the problem, shapes the ways in which we understand our current environmental relationships and our approaches to healing them. In recent years, the concept of the *Anthropocene* has been a popular way of conceptualizing our current era, yet the term is problematically rooted in the assumption that our current crisis is the fault of *all* of humanity, as the sweeping generalization inherent in the prefix *Anthropo* suggests. In this contribution to the conversation around the *Anthropocene*, I explore some of the limitations of the term. Drawing on ecofeminist literature, I suggest, instead, a move towards an alternative that Moore (**2017a**), has labelled the *Capitalocene*. Specifically, I explore the liberatory possibilities of ecofeminist teaching in outdoor education and posit that teaching a relationship to 'land as home' (**Kimmerer, 2013**) allows for a future that moves beyond the Anthropocene and allows for healing.

Throughout this contribution I ask: How can we move beyond the limitations of Anthropocene thinking and towards the possibilities of enacting our relationships with land as home? The impact and popularity the Anthropocene has had makes this an important issue for scholars who are looking to understand and combat our current environmental crisis as it allows us to see a path forward through environmental justice. I ask as well: How can an outdoor education program enact ecofeminist politics to teach a relationship to the land as home? The ways in which we form relationships with the land are taught—either culturally transmitted or formally, such as in outdoor education. Education is one area in which future generations can be taught a more sustainable, interconnected relationship to their environments and so is crucial for a culture change that dismantles the ecocidal practices of capitalism. I explore these questions through a look at ethnographic research I conducted at the outdoor education program, Cottonwood Gulch, in 2018. I engaged in participant observation working as a staff member for the Turquoise Trail all-girls trek group. I observed the ways the participants in the program learned to change their relational practices both with each other and the non-humans they shared the Southwest with. I also conducted interviews both with the program participants and other staff members to dig into the processes of both teaching and relearning ethical multispecies relations. My research led me to the conclusion that thinking through the Anthropocene is not sufficient for imagining the possibilities of a healed environmental future. It is the justice-oriented ecofeminist approach to

combating the Capitalocene that allows for an understanding of our relationship to the land as home.

Cottonwood Gulch and the Turquoise Trail

The Turquoise Trail trek group had just reached the end of the hike to the ruins Keet Seel, a strenuous 17-mile round-trip hike which we completed in one day. I brought up the rear of this group of young women who, already exhausted, were now climbing the steepest incline of the hike yet. They struggled to find their footing in the dry, rocky dust and often pulled themselves forward with their hands to steady themselves and to give their tired legs a brief rest. At this point their water bottles were mostly empty and although we approached evening, the Arizona sun weighed heavily on us all. After endless words of encouragement from staff members, the group finally made it to the top and one by one we pulled ourselves onto the welcome flat ground of the plateau that awaited us. Despite their sweat and heavy breathing, the young faces looking back at me glowed as I joined them at the top. They had accomplished many feats that summer, but this would be their main point of pride. The feeling that came with this moment is a common one in outdoor education—the feeling of strength and accomplishment 'out in nature'. That feeling was common at this program, Cottonwood Gulch, too. There were countless moments of pride and accomplishment during my time there. Yet, to get at the core of Cottonwood Gulch one must go beyond those clear, shining moments. At Cottonwood Gulch, the approach to the environment was to create a sense of *home* in the American Southwest and it is this approach that created the conditions for ecofeminist teaching. The way that Turquoise Trail was run, and the lessons learned in collaboration with the Southwestern landscape and its beings allowed these young women to build healthy, strengthening relationships that made them feel capable in the wild context—that made them feel that they belonged in nature and helped them form a healthy relationship with it.

Cottonwood Gulch was founded by a carpenter and teacher from Indianapolis, named Hillis Howie, in 1926. That year, Route 66 had been paved and Howie began to fear that the introduction of the 'modern world' would ruin the wild spirit of the Southwest he loved. In order to share the Southwest with America's youth before it disappeared, as he saw it, he banded together a group of boys on the first ever Prairie Trek, an expedition which would eventually evolve into Cottonwood Gulch. This first Prairie Trek continued as an all-boys group for almost a decade until 1934 when an all-girls trek called Turquoise Trail was added to explore the Southwest parallel to the boys. That year also brought a home for the program when Howie purchased a 440-acre ranch to use as Basecamp in Thoreau, a small town in the Northwest corner of New Mexico. The

program still takes place in the Southwest, based out of the original Basecamp, and now explores the Four-Corners region of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado. The 'on the road' mentality of the original Prairie Trek stuck and is a vital part of the Cottonwood Gulch experience. Organizers and staff at Cottonwood Gulch made sure to distinguish the organization from other outdoor education programs. The Gulch's director at the time of my research told me that while many outdoor education programs strive to 'grow great kids', the goal of the Gulch was first and foremost about showing and teaching children about the Southwest. While Howie's fear of the Southwest 'disappearing' may no longer be relevant, the goal of the organization has stayed largely the same.

Turquoise Trail (TT) was started in 1934, likely at the suggestions of Hillis's wife, Elizabeth Howie. Preceded only by the Girl Scouts of America, which was founded in 1912 (**Girl Scouts, n.d.**), the idea of an all-girls group expedition into the 'Wild West' was unprecedented at the time. The girls left Indianapolis for the desert in Model Ts dressed in ankle length skirts and, 'just like the boys, but better' (**Cottonwood Gulch, n.d.**), hiked and camped through the mountains and canyons of the West. My group in the summer of 2018 included our group leader, Tori, our cook, Taylor, myself, and nine young women between the ages of 14 and 17 living through their period of adolescence.

As this article will show, the Gulch is exemplary of how foregrounding girlhood and young women's contributions and experiences benefit outdoor education and environmentalist teaching by teaching how to care for the land as home. By foregrounding girlhood and young women's experiences, the example of the Turquoise Trail highlights the importance of looking at the specific relationships within an ecosystem, and that different forms of interacting with an environment have different effects—those relationships that go against the values of capitalism and resist the Capitalocene are more generative and offer up better opportunities for environmental healing—highlighting the shortcomings of the Anthropocene.

Towards the Capitalocene

Although the separation of nature and culture was central throughout the history of anthropology as a discipline, in more recent, post-symbolic anthropology, the stark nature/culture dichotomy has broken down. There are several moments I could point to which inspired this shift, but most relevant in the context of this special issue of *Exchanges,* is the introduction to anthropology of the concept of the *Anthropocene.* Defined originally by geologists, the Anthropocene is the epoch in which humans are 'the most important force shaping the Earth' (**Latour, 2017: 250**). The Anthropocene makes clear that the human relationship with the Earth is

one of enormous impact, to the point that it is impossible to draw a line between where humans end (not only ourselves but our plastics, technologies, chemicals, etc.) and the Earth begins.

Writing almost ten years before scholars named this epoch the Anthropocene, Donna Haraway (**2003**) coined the term *natureculture*s in *The Companion Species Manifesto* and used the term as a feminist perspective on the possibilities of more-than-human care and companionship which played a crucial role in the breakdown of the nature/culture dichotomy in the social sciences. *Natureculture* rejects the nature/culture dichotomy, however some Anthropocene scholars (Latour, most notably) critique the term as suggesting an implosion of two separate sides. Latour argues that the power of the nature/culture dichotomy is such that people often interpret the Anthropocene as a reconciliation of the two (**Latour, 2017: 258**). He states that more than a reconciliation of opposites, the Anthropocene circumvents the dividing line entirely (**Ibid: 262**).

However, the Anthropocene concept itself has been accused of a similar problem. Critics of the term point out that the use of the prefix 'Anthropo' groups all of humanity together as the main actors in our current crisis. By suggesting that all of humanity is equally responsible, 'Anthropocene' puts humanity on one side of a conflict and nature on the other. As Malm and Hornborg (**2014: 65**) point out, proponents of the Anthropocene may argue that from the standpoint of the biosphere, what matters is that ecological catastrophe originates from *within* the human species 'and so a species-based term for the new geological epoch is warranted'. However, blaming climate change on humanity in general suggests that the problem must exist in the properties of our species. 'Anything less,' they state, 'would make it a geology of some smaller entity, perhaps some subset of *Homo sapiens*' (**Ibid: 63**). This is why the generalization of the 'Anthropo' to discuss this era is troublesome. It suggests that the destruction of ecosystems and our environments is part of our human nature and thus ecological crisis as a 'natural inevitability' (**Ibid, 2014: 66**). This generalization does not hold up. As Di Chiro points out:

> *In contrast to the Anthropocene's labelling humans as the controllers and tormentors of non-human nature, indigenous theories of the interdependence of humans and the environment produce structures of organization integrating political, societal, cultural, religious, and familial institutions that tie together humans and multiple living, non-living, and spiritual beings, and natural interdependent collectives, including forested areas, species habitats, and water cycles.* (**Di Chiro, 2017: 497**)

Thinking with the diversity within human experience as opposed to melding it together into a general panhumanism is crucial. As Malm and Hornborg (**2014: 63**) state, 'the physical mixing of nature and society does not warrant the abandonment of their *analytical* distinction. Rather, precisely this increasing recognition of the potency of social relations of power to transform the very conditions of human existence should justify a more profound engagement with social and cultural theory'. By failing to respect the complexities of power, history, and responsibility within the 'Anthropo', the Anthropocene falls into the dichotomy it was working to avoid and 'fits easily within a conventional description —and analytic logic—that separates humanity from the web of life' (**Moore, 2017a: 595**). While the Anthropocene's strength lies in the unification of humans and the earth system within a singular narrative, its weakness lies within the *way* in which it unifies the two (**Moore, 2017b: 238**) and its inability to resolve the human/nature dualism in favour of a new synthesis (**Ibid: 239**).

One alternative to the Anthropocene is Timothy Ingold's explanation of the whole-organism-in-its-environment, seeing the organism plus its environment to be 'one indivisible totality' (**Ingold, 2000: 19**). He also explains that this system 'is not a bounded entity but a *process* in real time: a process, that is, of growth or development' (**Ibid: 20**). In his explanation of the whole-organism-in-its-environment, Ingold breaks down the nature/culture dichotomy; in understanding humans as organisms, humans become inseparable from their environment, and one cannot exist without the other. In contrast to the Anthropocene, it is not a joining of two separate things, but a recognition of an ecosystem as one ever-changing and co-constituting process of life which includes human social, historical, and political contexts. By understanding the environment, or whole-organism-in-its-environment, as a process, Ingold places focus on the actions of individuals involved.

This move away from environment as object and towards the process and creation of environment-making, transcending the 'historical limits co-produced by humans and the rest of nature' (**Moore, 2017b: 267**) is crucial. It allows us to see ourselves, humans, as whole-organisms-in-our-environments and to trouble the form of our relationships with said environments. More specifically, it allows us to consider human constructs such as capitalism as part of nature (**Moore, 2017a: 595**). The origins of our ecological crisis do not lie within human nature, not 'the *Anthropos*: humanity as an undifferentiated whole' (**Ibid**) but within a capitalist system which requires a process of relationships 'dependent on finding and coproducing Cheap Natures' (**Ibid**). Moore offers the *Capitalocene* as an alternative to *Anthropocene* thinking, shifting the perspective away from the 'age of the human' as the root of ecological collapse and towards the 'age of capital' (**Ibid: 597**). The Capitalocene highlights capitalism, in

which commodity production and exchange depend on the exploitation of both human and non-human natures (**Ibid: 606**), as the root of the crisis, aligning itself with eco-feminist thinking which holds justice and emancipation for human and non-humans as inseparable. Our processes of relationship with each other, our approaches to and treatment of other humans as well as other species, determine our environments' health.

At Cottonwood Gulch, although concepts such as *Anthropocene* or *Capitalocene* were never explicitly discussed with children, the way programs were designed, and the way staff taught the children about their relationship with the Earth prepared them for a care-filled life. Cottonwood Gulch went beyond Anthropocene thinking through teaching its participants that if 'humans are the most important force shaping the Earth' (**Latour, 2017: 250**), then the *way* they shaped it mattered. It taught them to shape it through a relationship to the land that was home-centred. The land-as-home mentality at Cottonwood Gulch prepared children to shift away from a capitalist extractive relationship with the environment and to understand themselves as part of the Earth, not apart from it.

Ecofeminism at Cottonwood Gulch

Most leadership roles at Cottonwood Gulch were held by women including, at the time of my research, the lead coordinator of the program. Although complex gender dynamics *did* exist at the Gulch, a feminist approach to teaching, learning, and relationships between individuals was central to the culture of the program. It is often assumed that outdoor education always provides a level playing field between men and women (**Gray, 2016: 26**), however while outdoor education can help develop a sense of empowerment and physical and psychological wellbeing for young women (**Ibid**) the *way* in which that empowerment often manifests can also be harmful. This is especially true in terms of the 'masculine' or 'feminine' traits that outdoor education leaders are expected to embody. There is no one way to define 'masculine' or 'feminine' traits, since the masculine and feminine are not, as Butler argues, dispositions but accomplishments (**Butler, 1995: 168**). However, we can still define traits as masculine or feminine based on how they have been encouraged in, and expected of, people *as* masculine or feminine in order to accomplish societal expectations. Moving forward, I will label those *traditionally masculine* or *traditionally feminine* traits while fully acknowledging that there is nothing inherent about them, and that the tradition to which they call back is indeed specific to time and place. Davies et al. include on their list of traditionally masculine leadership traits: 'autonomy, competitiveness, strength, determination, authoritarianism, domination, independence, assertiveness, and control' (**Davies et al., 2019: 220**) while traditionally feminine leadership is seen as 'democratic, collaborative,

interpersonally oriented, emotionally expressive, mediating, less action-oriented, and non-aggressive' (**Ibid**). Because, as Bond and Rose's (**2019**) research on outdoor education shows, the traditionally 'masculine' traits are those seen as most useful or important in an outdoor setting, women often have to take them up in order to be acknowledged as competent leaders.

This was not the case at Cottonwood Gulch. Women leaders there often took a more ecofeminist approach to their leadership styles, and hence much of the theory I am using here is based in ecofeminist thinking. This approach to environmentalism and feminism became most prevalent in the 1990s, its main premise being that 'the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature' (**Gaard, 1995: 1**). From an ecofeminist standpoint, justice for one is not possible without justice for all and, most relevant for our purposes here, attempts to liberate women will also encourage the liberation of nature and vice versa. One cannot properly account for the domination of nature without accounting for other forms of oppression (**Plumwood, 2012: 1**).

Central to the arguments of the ecofeminists I cite here is the nature/culture dichotomy. These theorists argue that this dualism is rooted in patriarchal thought, and they instead locate humans *within* nature (**Gaard, 1995: 6**) and interconnected with all life (**Ibid: 1**). This is an important distinction when it comes to approaches to environmentalism. Environmental ethics that maintain the separation between humanity and nature tend to operate on the basis of *rights* or *justice* while interconnected, ecofeminist approaches operate on a basis of *responsibilities* or *care* (**Ibid: 2**). An approach to one's environment based on responsibility to it instead of rights to it is also a central idea in much Indigenous law with each species holding gifts that also determine their responsibilities to the earth (**Kimmerer, 2013: 173**). An ethic of rights as opposed to responsibilities allows for the lone hero approach to relating to nature which is prevalent in approaches to outdoor education based in traditional ideas of masculinity. As much ecofeminist thinking shows, this approach is detrimental to women who wish to succeed in a professional outdoor context. Further, ecofeminists see the disconnected sense of self as the root of the ecological crisis (**Ibid**). But this basis of interconnection should not be confused with the problematic *holistic paradigm* which purports that we are all one and which denies differences between beings (**Plumwood, 2012: 6**). Overcoming the nature/culture dualism requires holding space for both continuity and difference, acknowledging nature as neither discontinuous from human beings nor an extension of human beings (**Ibid**). Acknowledging interconnection allows for an ideology that

goes beyond a vision of ecology as pure competition, what Heller points to as 'internalized capitalism' (**Heller, 1995: 231**), where only the strongest survive to the detriment of all others.

The nature/culture dichotomy does more than separate humans from nature; it also separates women from men. In her 1974 chapter, *Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?*, Sherry Ortner explains the equation of men with culture and the perception of women as being more rooted in nature (**Ortner, 1974: 73**). Further, she equates the notion of culture with human consciousness or, as she states, 'the products of human consciousness (i.e., systems of thought and technology), by means of which humanity attempts to assert control over nature' (**Ibid: 72**). This attention to control is key. As patriarchal power has sought to control non-human nature, it has also controlled any groups of humans associated with nature. Thus, as Plumwood (**2012: 4**) points out, 'racism, colonialism, and sexism have drawn their conceptual strength from casting sexual, racial and ethnic difference as closer to the animal and the body construed as a sphere of inferiority, as a lesser form of humanity lacking the full measure of rationality of culture'. The oppression is simultaneous.

In the case of women, the feminization of nature and the naturalization of women has served as justification for the simultaneous domination of both (**Gaard, 1995: 5**). Ortner (**1974: 71**) takes the secondary status of women as a universal given, and though one might argue that much has changed since she was writing in 1974, given that feminine-associated leadership qualities continue to be valued less in outdoor education, we can see that this perspective remains relevant. In the context of outdoor education, if women are perceived as being more rooted in nature, then why aren't their leadership styles valued in that context? Ortner **(Ibid: 80)** explains that when work is 'lower-level' (i.e., closer to the home) it is associated with women, but when the same work is professionalized and done in the public sphere it is associated with men. While nature in general might be feminized, professional work in that context, as in the example of outdoor education, is still seen as masculine.

In the late 1800s, Ellen Swallow coined the term *ecology* to describe the intimate relationship between a person and their home environment (**Heller, 1995: 233**). This original view of ecology neither romanticized a separate nature nor reduced it to an expendable resource, but as a science that cared for an intertwined social and ecological ecosystem (**Ibid: 234**). This home ecology rejects the romantic wilderness ideal and instead focuses on the 'wildness in our own backyards' (**Cronon, 1996: 22**). It expresses a love of nature through active care for social eco-communities (**Heller, 1995: 234**). This does not mean that women should be expected to become the environmental movement's 'janitorial martyrs' (**Ibid: 233**).

Instead, this approach to ecosystems that has been associated with the feminine, the labour of care, should be the base of the entire movement.

This approach does not fit within Anthropocene thinking. As Di Chiro (**2017: 489**) states, 'the Anthropocene retells the masculinist origin/self-birthing story that inevitably culminates in *Man* as the master creation, the Master of the Universe, and now its destroyer, and possibly, its saviour'. Considering that 82% of the original Anthropocene Working Group were men, the majority from Global North countries (**Ibid: 488**), it is not surprising that the concept holds many problematic patriarchal approaches to environment that '[reinforce] individualistic approaches to environmental and climate responsiveness, which stereotypically [cast] women in the roles of either vulnerable climate victims or hardy climate heroes' (**Ibid: 489**). The Anthropocene's generalization of humanity as the root of environmental catastrophe does not leave room for the collaborative actions taken by environmental justice and feminist scholars which envision 'a more robust perspective of the 'collective we' [that put forward] new policies and practices for just, sustainable, and genuinely resilient communities' (**Ibid**). Di Chiro offers the Idle No More movement as an example of how a forceful critique of the 'climate-destroying, exploitative, and extractivist mind-set of modern industrial society' (**Di Chiro: 497**) does not require a framing of the problem as human vs. nature. Instead, it sees the 'hetero-patriarchal, genocidal, and ecocidal industrial worldview that lies at the heart of settler colonialism' (**Ibid**) as a major cause of climate crisis and roots their activism in an 'interconnected eco-politics grounded in multi-species relationality' (**Ibid**). If, instead of the Anthropocene, we frame the problem through the lens of the Capitalocene, it shifts from our existence on Earth as humans to a changeable system of power. We can, then, come to understand our power to change this system and resist the Capitalocene. Relearning our process of relationship to nature through a resistance to capitalism and extractivist mentalities makes overcoming ecological crisis possible.

In her book *Braiding Sweetgrass,* Robbin Wall Kimmerer outlines this relational transition exactly. She describes various ways that humans can approach their relationships to the land, beginning with *land as capital* (**Kimmerer, 2013: 329**) and ending with *land as home* (**Ibid: 340**). She describes *land as home* as a space where all those who share it take care of one another. When humans learn to truly care for the land, they can treat it as home, but they must also learn to feel the space as home in order to truly care for it.

The idea of *home* precisely illustrates the children's experiences at Cottonwood Gulch as home and points to a specific kind of caring. María Puig de la Bellacasa's *Matters of Care* (**2017**), looks at care ecologically

between species and even between kingdoms. The care she explores in the book takes many forms and has many different effects. As she states in her introduction: 'To care can feel good; it can also feel awful. It can do good; it can oppress' (**Bellacasa, 2017: 1**). I choose to focus on Cottonwood Gulch's pedagogy of creating home because while caring is inextricably entangled with homemaking, not all forms of care or acts of caring create home. At the Gulch, children were taught *how* to care in a way that would create a sense of land as home. By rejecting the patriarchy at the root of the human/nature dichotomy, the relationships practiced at the Gulch, the Turquoise Trail group in particular, were liberatory for all involved. Looking at the participants experiences in the program through the lens of resistance to the Capitalocene allows us to see a possibility beyond it.

Creating Home on the Turquoise Trail

Towards the end of the summer, after having spent the better part of two months as a group, TT set out to climb Mount Tukuhnikivatz, a peak of the La Sal Mountains not far from Moab, Utah. This is a difficult peak, and an endeavour only the older groups pursue. Mountain climbing is also one of the activities that often comes with patriarchal, imperialist language attached. One sets out to 'conquer a mountain'; the goal of summitting is associated with competition with and domination of the mountain itself. TT certainly worked hard as we made our way up to the peak of Mount Tukuhnikivatz. We often hiked in silence, focusing on our breathing, and at the end of each day it was a struggle to get the girls to set up their tarps properly in their exhaustion. But despite the level of difficulty and our hard work, nothing about our climb up Mount Tukuhnikivatz was a conquest.

Each morning on the mountain we would take down the bear bags we had hung from a high branch away from camp, eat our breakfast granola or oatmeal, and pack up our tarps and bags, making sure to leave very little trace of our stay behind. But once the group was packed, instead of hitting the trail right away, the girls would wander off to gather some of the wildflowers that stretched over the mountainside in purple, yellow, and white as far as we could see. When they returned with handfuls of stems and petals they would sit in a circle and spend the next little while braiding the flowers into each other's hair. As Kimmerer puts it, 'There is such tenderness in braiding the hair of someone you love. Kindness and something more flow between the braider and the braided, the two connected by the cord of the plait' (**Kimmerer, 2013: 5**). They started each day with this tenderness. It was tenderness towards one another but also towards the mountain itself. They braided the beauty of the land into themselves with care and love for both. This time staff allowed the girls for braiding was crucial. If the only goal of the climb had been to reach the top of the mountain it wouldn't have been permitted, as the braiding took a

good hour of cool morning air out of hiking time. But the goal was not to conquer the mountain. The goal was to get to know the mountain. In each hour staff allowed for this ritual of love and care, the land began to feel more like home.

When the braiding was done, we put our packs on and continued up the mountain, the girls now feeling part-mountain themselves. As Tori led, I brought up the rear of the group admiring the beauty of the flowers and braids as the girls carried their heavy packs for 20 miles a day in the desert heat. These girls were strong. Being in a context with other girls and women staff allowed the prettiness and the ruggedness to be compatible, and this feeling stuck. I interviewed a staff member named Camille who had herself been a trekker at Cottonwood Gulch for many years before she worked there. For her, it was important that her femininity and outdoor experience go hand in hand. She told me:

> *I always say that my favourite way to paint myself kind of in a word picture is a rock climber wearing nail polish. And that's my thing. I love the femininity in a rugged and strong context. I've backpacked for like two weeks [this summer] and I wore my necklaces, my earrings, and my rings the whole time and it's very much a part of who I am. But I also love the fact that I've got wide shoulders and strong legs and that's kind of, I don't know, that's one of my favourite things about myself.* (**Field Interview, July 15, 2018**)

Being able to express themselves and their femininity in whatever way they wanted to, allowed the girls to feel at home on the land. Camille told me that participating in TT made her feel like she belonged outdoors. Not only that, but *all of her* belonged outdoors. There was no need to perform masculinity to be seen as proficient in that environment. The prettiness itself played an important role, as my conversation with Camille illustrated. But the flowers and braids were more than prettiness alone. The tenderness and care that filled the time the girls took to braid created an intimacy between themselves and with the mountain. The image that sticks out in my memory of the sweet brilliance of the wildflowers in their hair as they carried their heavy packs up the mountain is not one of contrast. It was their support of one another and the support they received from the mountain that provided the strength that allowed them to climb. Moments of intimacy and care such as the braiding were crucial to building that support.

Of all the beings TT became acquainted with that summer, the group developed the deepest affection with the quaking aspen. The groves of aspens that peppered the mountains provided us with shelter from the Utah sun and seemed to stretch on as we hiked, giving us time to get to know them. When the terrain got steep, we would hold onto their trunks

to pull ourselves up and when we let go our hands would be painted with the white powder the aspens shed, old bark cells giving way so that the sunlight could reach the new. When we reached out to them for support, we brought them with us, carrying the cells of the forest on our own skin as we climbed. We would either leave the powder there on our hands like climbing chalk or brush it off on our clothes and ending up covered in quaking aspen.

The trees supported us in other ways as well. Aspen leaves are attached to their branches by a thin stem, flatter and thinner than many other species. The flexible stem allows for the leaves to dance when the wind comes through, and their pale undersides reflect the sunshine, making the whole forest sparkle. The wind in those leaves makes a sound like rushing water. On one particularly steep stretch through the aspens, the wind picked up and sent its glitter and rustle through the canopy. One of the TT girls turned to me and through her tired, sweaty grin she said, 'It sounds like they're cheering us on!'. We hiked the rest of the trail that day to the sound of the aspen's applause.

Not all of TT's excursions were as strenuous as Mount Tukuhnikivatz. Tori had planned two backpacking trips for the summer. Mount Tukuhnikivatz was the second, more challenging one. The first was a hike along the Gila River in New Mexico, a long, winding route that was relatively flat and with the added pleasure of walking along the water the entire time. It was during this easier trip that Tori planned to teach the TT girls to love and care for the spaces they were in so that they would be able to do the same during the more challenging backpack. There was plenty to love along the Gila, including a natural hot spring where we spent the better part of one afternoon. But the moments when the girls showed the most love and care were the mundane ones.

One evening, after we had all eaten our beans and rice from our stainless-steel cups, the staff members cleaned up around the campsite while the girls took the dirty dishes to the riverbank for washing. We had taught them how to use sand to scrub the dried-on bits before washing in water. This method, combined with the simple meals eaten out of the dishes, meant there was no soap needed and the water could stay clean. I found a forgotten spoon on the ground and when I brought it to them, I found them talking quietly and laughing with each other as they washed. The scene was intimate, and I decided to wash the spoon where I was and not intrude in their conversation. They seemed to be enjoying their time and space away from staff. I was struck by how classic of an image it was. How many other ethnographic descriptions exist of women talking privately amongst themselves while washing in a river? But beyond the classic

nature of the scene, two things stuck out to me—who it was they were washing for, and how this labour connected them to the space.

What was special about this instance was that they were doing washing entirely for themselves. They were washing only their own dishes and the pots that had cooked the food they ate. They were not washing up for boys and men who were off doing other things, this work was for them. This fact gave the labour different meaning. There was no resentment attached to the fact that it had to be done, and since they were able to take their time and enjoy the water while they were doing it, they could see the value in the work and the beauty of the care they were enacting. They were caring for themselves by cleaning their things, caring for each other through intimate conversation, and caring for the river by using cleaning practices that would not harm it.

The domesticity of the labour also worked to mould our campsite into a home space. Because of its proximity to the hot spring, we had decided to maintain our camp there for a few days and hike out from there in different directions each day. This allowed the group to build more intimacy with the space. The girls went back to the same spot on the river each time they did the washing, they strung ropes between trees to hang wet clothes, and they ingeniously tied all their tarps together into one large piece so that they could all sleep together in the same shelter. They learned the spots in the river where the most frogs could be found, and it was in that spot that the group had some of its best campfire conversations. The engagement with the Gila River was not about how far the group could hike along it, but about the time taken to get to know it, to feel at home along its banks and in the water itself.

The way that the staff and children at Cottonwood Gulch built home for themselves there mirrored the way that the Gulch itself had created home in the Southwest. One theme that staff consistently repeated to me during interviews was that the Gulch was non-reproducible. Unlike programs like Outward Bound, which runs trips and excursions all over the world, staff members told me that Cottonwood Gulch could not exist anywhere other than where it was in New Mexico. The philosophy and structure perhaps could be reproduced or used as a model for other programs, but they would not be Cottonwood Gulch. Being the Gulch meant being intimately connected to the land it was on, nurturing relationships with local Diné families that went back generations, and being rooted, ultimately, in Hillis Howie's love for the beauty of the American Southwest, specifically. Cottonwood Gulch had made its home there, and both children and staff were expected to do the same. Having the best experience possible at the Gulch depended on building a sense of home there. This was true both at Basecamp and on the road. So, the qualities associated with

homemaking—caring, nurturance, love, patience, and so on—were the qualities most valued and encouraged by staff. It is, of course, no coincidence that these qualities associated with homemaking are also those that have been associated with femininity. That is what made the Gulch's feminism so particular. Yes, the girls learned to be tough. I watched TT climb mountains, dig a truck out of a ditch, and bushwhack through thorny brush. These things were celebrated, but not at the expense of the more 'feminine qualities'. The same went for the boys. They were encouraged to test their strength throughout their experience there, but also their nurturing qualities. The scene I described of the girls washing up in the river was mirrored by the all-boys group. The boys also learned how to gently care for the plants on the farm. The feminism at the Gulch was about empowerment, yes. But it was not only about empowering young women in their physical strength and in their technical skills, though it did that. It was about empowering young people of all genders to create home in the spaces they were in, to care for and love the Southwest.

However, there is significant room for improvement in terms of who is encouraged to make home in the Southwestern outdoors at the Gulch. It is crucial that I recognize that only one of the girls on TT trek in the summer of 2018 identified as a person of colour, and none of them identified as Black. In fact, there were only two Black trekkers at Cottonwood Gulch that summer and only one Black staff member. I can only speculate on the reasons for this. However, Finney (**2014: 4**) explains that economic disparity and limited access to resources can be a major factor in determining Black people's participation in outdoor experiences. While the price of a summer at Cottonwood Gulch was certainly an inhibiting factor to many families/children, the program's marketing tactics and materials, intergenerational legacies and connections, and lack of diversity in staffing may also have contributed to a majority white participant demographic. The lack of diversity at the Gulch was a problem not only because children from all backgrounds deserve enriching experiences like it, but because of the message an almost entirely white outdoor education space communicates. As Finney states: 'Racialization and representation are not passive processes; they also have the power to determine who actually participates in environment-related activities and who does not; which voices are heard in environmental debates and which are not' (**Ibid: 3**). I have argued throughout that Cottonwood Gulch's approach to its environmental programming was an ecofeminist one. However, ecofeminism requires an account of racial oppression as well and, as Plumwood (**2012: 1**) puts it, 'an adequate account of the domination of nature must draw widely on accounts of other forms of oppression and has an important integrating role'.

Most of the children who spent their summers there were not from the Southwest. So perhaps encouraging them to create home there when at the end of the summer they would go back to their own corners of the world was misguided. However, I find their learning at the Gulch to be in line with what Kimmerer (**2013: 213**) calls 'becoming Indigenous'. After all, while many of the children at the Gulch were not from the Southwest, those of us who are the descendants of colonizers are not Indigenous to the places we live either. When Kimmerer speaks of 'becoming Indigenous' she is not suggesting claiming a cultural or ethnic identity that is not your own, but instead she is opening up the possibility of creating a home in a place in which you are as dedicated to it as it is to you. The way the Gulch taught the children to make home in the Southwest helped them to learn how to 'become Indigenous' to a place—a skill they will hopefully carry with them to their own spaces, and truly create home there.

Although perhaps not explicitly, Cottonwood Gulch's approach to both environment and its participants was an ecofeminist one deeply rooted in pursuing a world beyond the Capitalocene. The central tenet of ecofeminism is that any attempt to liberate women must equally attempt to liberate nature (**Gaard, 1995: 1**) and it was clear that within Cottonwood Gulch's teaching the two were connected. It was an understanding of the environment as a space of care—where each being, including human beings, is intimately entangled with every other—that allowed the qualities associated with the feminine to be valued and encouraged in conjunction with physical strength, technical skill, etc. In valuing feminized qualities in both girls and boys, the Gulch taught an environmental ethic that would allow its participants to connect to their spaces, to love them, and to care for them, embodying ecofeminist philosophies. Understanding a world beyond the Capitalocene means understanding that the Earth's problems are coming from within, but it also means understanding that the solutions must, as well. They can no longer be based in the paternalistic separation typical of conservation's past. By teaching to care for the land as home, Cottonwood Gulch taught participants how to heal the Earth by truly being a part of it. As Kimmerer so eloquently explains, 'Knowing that you love the earth changes you, activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the earth loves you in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street to a sacred bond' (**Kimmerer, 2013: 125**). It is this sacred bond, creating a sense of land as 'home,' that Cottonwood Gulch's ecofeminist approach hoped to instil in those who spent time there.

By my last night at Cottonwood Gulch the weather had cooled. The nights were chilly, and I often slept layered in sweatshirts in my sleeping bag. But seeing that it was my last night I decided to 'sleep out', away from the protection of my tent and directly under the stars. Tired, I fell asleep fast,

but I woke up not long after. I am not sure what woke me, but when my eyes opened the sky above me was falling. As I would find out the next morning, I had awoken to the peak of the Perseid Meteor shower and the gift of 100 meteors crossing the sky above me every minute. I stayed awake as long as I could, but as I drifted to sleep again, I thanked that place for its spectacular goodbye. My time there had taught me that Perseid could exist completely separately from me but also be there for me personally. I fell asleep filled with love for the desert around me, and in the sky above me I could see it loving me back. That, as the Gulch taught me and so many others, was what it could feel like to have a relationship with land as home.

Conclusion

This research conducted at Cottonwood Gulch is one excellent example of successful ecofeminist teaching. The practices used at the Gulch stand in contrast to the assumptions of innate human destructiveness proposed by the Anthropocene and show a possibility beyond. Through a discussion on the limitations and insufficiencies of Anthropocene thinking, this article has suggested a conceptualization of our era as the Capitalocene instead. This is not simply a matter of semantics. The implication that all humans are responsible for ecological collapse pushes our thinking dangerously close to a nihilistic acceptance that the current state of our planet is, while unfortunate, unavoidable. Thinking with the Capitalocene instead places credit for the crisis where it is due and in so doing allows for a chance at dismantling the system that is to blame. My research at Cottonwood Gulch showed the possibilities of an ecofeminist approach that teaches a relationship to land as home to children. Teaching this relationship to future generations is important, but considering the immediacy of the issue, this shift in perspective must be learned by those with the power to enact change now, as well. We can and must all relearn our environmental relationships in a way that combats the Capitalocene and provides a chance to move beyond it.

Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks go to the summer 2018 staff and trekkers at Cottonwood Gulch, in particular the young women who participated in the Turquoise Trail Trek and my colleagues on the trek, Tori and Taylor. The openness with which you shared your thoughts and experiences with me allowed me to dig much more deeply into the intersection of feminism and environmentalism and made me a better researcher. I am also thankful to the Dine Nation and all of the inhabitants of the four-corners region for caring for that space and helping it to thrive.

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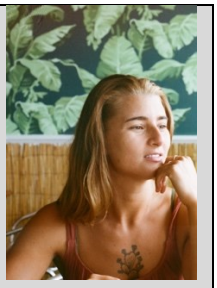

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To cite this article:

Melian-Morse, A., 2023. Teaching to Care for Land as Home: Thinking beyond the Anthropocene in environmental education. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 10(2), 144-162. Available at: https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v10i2.969.