

10-30-2012

Detoxifying Narratives: Feminism, Ecology, and Patriarchal Capitalist Development in the Works of Contemporary American Women Writers

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DETOXIFYING NARRATIVES: FEMINISM, ECOLOGY, AND PATRIARCHAL
CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT IN THE WORKS OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN
WOMEN WRITERS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2012

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Title: Detoxifying Narratives: Feminism, Ecology, and Patriarchal Capitalist Development in the Works of Contemporary American Women Writers

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This dissertation presents an ecofeminist reading of works written in the American continent to reveal how these offer counter-hegemonic narratives to the sterilizing discourse brought about by the dominant forms of patriarchal capitalist development that may initially have started in the Third World within a colonial context. The ideology of these structures is closely accompanied by the discourse of hygiene that is forced on women in the house, on their spaces of labor, and their epistemic spaces. It is also forced on the environment and society in general by extending the use of the nature / culture divide to “clean” the world of racial and sexual minorities and by imposing the “clean” discourse to police them. Because dominant structures of development have elevated the role of culture and the positive associations with it like man, whiteness, cleanliness, heteronormativity, the repercussions of this discourse have meant that women, black people, and queers have been deemed as “unnatural” and “unclean.”

I use the concept of hygiene both literally and metaphorically to denote the use of the concept ideologically as tropes of hygiene tend to marginalize knowledge that does not conform to the standards of patriarchal capitalist development. In this sense, I consider patriarchal capitalist development a metaphor for colonialism, and I argue that there is an inevitable postcolonial condition in the Global North that can be traced in the novels I discuss. Therefore, I

propose that there is potential in discussing works written in the Americas from a postcolonial perspective.

By grounding my discussion in a materialist postcolonial ecofeminist framework, I argue that literature written in the Americas by the selected women writers can be read as a critique of dominant narratives of development. These works show a concern for gender and class issues, environmental justice issues that intersect with discrimination against race and sexual orientation, as well as issues related to the Global South.