Mary Wollstonecraft and Environmental Use

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Mary Wollstonecraft's status as one of the founding figures within feminism has long been secured. Her contribution to the tradition of *eco*-feminism, which explores the intersection of gender and environmental oppression and concerns, is however still being explored. Yet the link here is clear– Wollstonecraft's work is central to feminism, as she is one of the first authors to fight to imagine and achieve equality for women and her *Vindications of the Rights of Woman* was one of the first texts to examine the political, social and economic reasons for women's sub-ordinate position within society. Wollstonecraft demanded of her fellow radicals that, if 'men contend for their freedom and to be allowed to judge for themselves respecting their own happiness, it be not inconsistent and unjust to subjugate women' (Wollstonecraft, 1989d*:* 67). And she is also concerned with humanity's relationship with the natural world and particularly with animals. Authors such as Barbara K. Seeber, Christine Kenyon-Jones, Sharon Ruston, Ros Hauge, Margarita Carretero González and Karen Green have all explored these twin aspects of Wollstonecraft's work and pointed out her awareness of the way the two concerns work together. As Seeber notes she 'clearly articulate[d] a connection between the human-nature dualism and other social hierachies and thus anticipates one of the central insights of contemporary eco-feminism' (Seeber, 2014: 173).

The increasing scholarly awareness of Wollstonecraft's work on what we would now call eco-feminism is to be welcomed. The development of a 'green canon', to quote Dobson and Meyer, or the environmental engagement with canonical texts is essential in rooting and grounding environmental political theory (Dobson, 1993; Meyer; 2008 and see Wilson 2016 and Dodsworth 2015 for a further defence of this approach). Furthermore, as Plumwood notes 'feminism and environmentalism have also challenged one another and come into conflict' (Plumwood, 2007: 51). This conflict is 'fruitful' (Ibid.: 51) and has produced an eco-feminism that is rich in variety and critical of the assumptions of both schools. Seeking to go back to the early development of environmentalism and feminism can however help by showing their initial, mutual, development and through identifying shared ground from which to move forward. This reengagement is also essential for Wollstonecraft scholarship as it draws attention to previously over-looked aspects of her political thought (such as her argument that the hierarchy between humans and animals is related to and reinforces gender hierarchy) and her works (with further engagement with the oft-overlooked early text *Original Stories from Real Life*).

This discussion of Wollstonecraft's engagement with the intersection of gender and environmental ethics and concerns has however not yet paid enough attention to her arguments relating to the use of the environment. As this paper will show, Wollstonecraft repeatedly called for natural resources to be *used*, for labour and ownership of the earth, and for both men and women to be able to participate in this. As Susan James has pointed out Wollstonecraft's political philosophy is grounded in lived experience (James, 2013 and see also Halldenius, 2015: 9). Her work on natural resources reflects, as it starts from the recognition of the human embodiment within the natural world and the dependencies that result. Following Helldenius, this is not an exploration of the role of nature as a concept within her work (Helldenius, 2015) but is instead about the physical materiality of the natural world as Wollstonecraft understood it, and the political implications, particularly for

gender that result. Indeed my point is that the material role of nature in Wollstonecraft's thought needs to be brought to the fore.

As the first section will show, Wollstonecraft saw the natural world is seen as a space for escape and freedom, enabling the development of both individuals and politics. But, as the second and third sections show, Wollstonecraft is equally concerned with specific resources which are cultivated and developed. Her criticism of property is based upon a concern for the distribution of natural resources and the ability of all society to access what they need, transform them and retain the proceeds and therefore survive and develop. And in doing so she provides an understanding of resource use and labour that is not based on exploitation but recognises the necessity of using the natural world. And I argue that the developing eco-feminist approach to Wollstonecraft needs to engage with these arguments. For not only do they provide a fuller, more rounded picture of how Wollstonecraft understood both the role of the natural in human life and in the political sphere, and how this impacted women, but also of the necessity of the use of the environment. Eco-feminism has clearly identified the link between the exploitation of women and of the natural world – what Wollstonecraft's work offers is means of thinking through what an alternative form of use might look like.

The Natural World as Freedom

The first way of using nature that Wollstonecraft highlights is that of using the 'untouched' natural world, such as the wild, 'sublime', nature of the Yorkshire Moors, or the Scandinavian landscapes described in the *Letters*, which appears to be untouched by human activity. This 'natural world' is said to be essential to both political progress and human development, particularly for women, because it ensures and represents freedom. This is not the 'productive' use of the environment that creates transforms natural resources to either meet human needs or to be used for profit. But it is still a means of using the environment, of recognising how the natural world is essential for human action and existence.

With regard to political development, natural spaces perform two roles in Wollstonecraft's work: they are a place of escape from political oppression and they act as a guide to a 'better' politics.

Time and again within Wollstonecraft's work we see that nature acts a place and source of escape from political oppression. Through spending time with nature, individuals could be free of the corrupting effects of society and could instead discover their true selves and a real, as opposed to artificial, sensibility. The natural world provides a means of refreshing individuals, providing an escape to something true and real away from the corruption of society. So in *Maria or: The Wrongs of Women* for example, Maria is renewed and sustained by the breeze coming into her cell (Wollstonecraft, 1989f: 95-96) and the sight of nature through a carriage window makes her forget the misery of the unequal marriage she is trapped in: 'the first scent of the wild flowers from the heath thrilled through my veins, awakening every sense to pleasure' (Ibid.: 143) In *Mary* the young heroine flees from her patriarchal family to the moors: 'when her mother frowned or her friend looked cool, she would steal away to this retirement, where human foot seldom trod – (to) gaze on the sea, observe the grey clouds or listen to the wind' (Wollstonecraft, 1989a: 15) and Mary declares 'that great part of her comfort must arise from viewing the smiling face of nature' (Ibid.: 54).

Wollstonecraft herself sought comfort in the beauties of Scandinavia after the developing horrors of the French Revolution meant she could no longer believe so assuredly in progress, as evidenced in the *Letters*. The natural world is free from unfair hierarchies and the unnecessary oppression of one person (or gender) by another and makes no demands that people be other than as they are, that they play an artificial role and stunt their true selves. The natural landscapes thus provide an escape from the rigid and stratified political society, which was particularly welcome for women. As Halldenius points out for Wollstonecraft 'the function of nature is explicitly to stand as a counterpoint to the artifice of social manners and institutions that serve in the upkeep of privileges and hierarchies' (Halldenius, 2015: 80).

The explicit contrast of this counter-point provided not only a space to breathe and release, but also the impetus for political change that would create a society that was a better match for nature. Gary Kelly makes this point when he notes that Wollstonecraft saw in the environment 'as the standard for constructing a state that will in turn construct mankind according to nature' (Kelly, 1992: 190). By highlighting how artificial societal hierarchies were, the natural world undercut them. With no monarchs or aristocrats in nature, no dependence of one group on another it showed an alternative way of being. Kelly also emphasises that Wollstonecraft saw nature as a teacher freely available to all, and one that provided a proof of God's presence that all could share in, thus promoting true feeling equally among every member of society (Ibid.: 76 and see also Halldenius, 2015). This interpretation of the role that nature can play is present in both Wollstonecraft's first work and her last, for Maria notes 'an enthusiastic fondness for the varying charms of nature is the first sentiment I recollect... the first consciousness of pleasure that employed and formed my imagination' Wollstonecraft, 1989f.: 123). A love of nature therefore initially teaches morality and develops the 'finer feelings' in children and denotes these qualities in adults; as demonstrated by the example of Lady Sly who, we are told in *Original Stories*, cannot appreciate the natural world because she is a liar with 'little soul' (Wollstonecraft, 1989b.: 385) and Mary's brutish father for, though 'nature, with lavish hand, had scattered beauties around; the master with brute unconscious gaze, passed them by unobserved' (Wollstonecraft, 1989a: 7). Access to nature is therefore imperative, for it helps develop our virtues and emotional sensibility which will in turn enable us to care for other people (Seeber, 2014; Halldenius, 2015). 'Nature is hereby incorporated in her divinely sanctioned revolutionary project' (Kelly, 1992: 190) as Wollstonecraft recognised that it provided a space freed from political oppression and showed that an alternative model is possible.

This political development is also matched by her understanding of the role that nature plays in ensuring the development of each person. Engagement with, and an appreciation of, the natural world enables each person to develop their sense of self and their physical and mental capabilities. Halldenius addresses this point when she discusses the 'ways in which nature features in [Wollstonecraft's] account of moral agency and freedom' (Halldenius, 2015: 77). She focuses on the role that nature plays in providing a source of escape, as discussed above, but also on the way nature is said by Wollstonecraft to provide moral knowledge (Ibid.: 78 – 87). This reinforces Kelly's point that for Wollstonecraft nature teaches 'true' virtues, with 'nature assigned a role both philosophical and religious in the construction of the individual' (Kelly, 1992: 189). Halldenius and Kelly are right here but their analysis does not follow Wollstonecraft's point to its end. For in order to construct citizens that are according to nature, to paraphrase Kelly, Wollstonecraft suggested an educational programme which drew heavily on the natural world. Wollstonecraft does believe that nature is a source of moral knowledge and growth and therefore incorporates it into her plan for

education, particularly for girls. She emphasises the importance of the environment for true human development and the growth of virtues such as independence and self-sufficiency. If children are confined indoors, she notes then:

> 'the pure animal spirits, which make both mind and body shoot out and unfold the tender blossoms of hope, are turned sour, and vented in vain wishes and pert repinings that contract the faculties and spoil the temper; else they mount to the brain and sharpening the understanding before it gains proportional strength, produce that pitiful cunning which disgracefully characterises the female mind' (Wollstonecraft, 1989d: 236).

In an earlier passage the link to the natural world is explicitly made 'throughout the whole animal kingdom every young creature requires almost continual exercise and the infancy of children, confirmable to this intimation, should be passed in harmless gambols that exercise the feet and the hands' (Ibid.: 110 and this tactic reflects that identified in Rushton, 2008). Throughout *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* she notes that women are kept physically weak by their denial of access to the natural world 'for girls are more restrained and cowed than boys' (Wollstonecraft, 1989d: 235). She notes that women are both forbidden to roam freely and also that weakness in women is praised and esteemed so that they are encouraged to deny their strength and develop physical weakness instead. Wollstonecraft points out that 'to preserve personal beauty, women's glory! the limbs and faculties are cramped worse than Chinese bands and the sedentary life whence they are condemned to live, whilst boys frolic in the open air, weakens the muscles' (Ibid.: 110-111). Allowing *all* children, male and female to 'frolic in the open air' and spend time in the natural world would strengthen their bodies so that they can have greater physical freedom in later life.

In addition to physical dependence, the denial of access to the outside world creates a mental dependence for 'the child is not left a moment to its own direction, particularly a girl and thus rendered dependent' (Ibid.: 110). Wollstonecraft points out that confining children, especially young girls who are kept indoors or to sedate gravel paths, teaches them dependence and servility, which in turn poisons society as a whole. But, by spending time with nature, individuals could be free of the corrupting effects of society and could instead discover their true selves and a real, as opposed to false artificial, sensibility. As a result, her plan of education for both sexes involves physical activity held outdoors and a focus on learning about the natural world. This approach to education reflects that which is set out in her earlier work on education, particularly *Original Stories* in which the idealised tutor, Mrs Mason, takes her charges out of the classroom into the countryside, illustrating her lessons with examples drawn from the natural world (Wollstonecraft, 1989b).

The advantages of such a system are shown by the example of the heroine of her semi-autobiographical first novel spends her childhood on the moor: 'She would gaze on the moon, and ramble through the gloomy path, observing the various shapes the clouds assumed, and listen to the sea that was not far distant. The wandering spirits which she imagined inhabited every part of nature, were her constant friends and confidants' (Wollstonecraft, 1989a:11). This allowed the young heroine to grow into 'a genius', that is an independent woman, apart from the corruptions of society and free from the supposedly 'natural' feminine weaknesses that Wollstonecraft argues women are taught from birth (see Kelly, 1992: 50 and Halldenius, 2015 for a similar analysis of the role of nature in the novel). By providing comfort and companion, the natural world prevents the heroine from growing dependent on others, which is particularly crucial for women who are left dependent on men through the law and so need to fight to develop their own energies.

(Wollstonecraft's last novel makes a similar point to her first as Maria notes that although her mother was too 'indolent' to raise her children 'but the healthy breeze of a neighbouring heath, on which we bounded at pleasure, volatilized the humours' that might have resulted from such upbringing (Wollstonecraft, 1989f: 124-125).) In her proposed plans for education Wollstonecraft seeks to counter the prevailing tradition that saw girls denied access to the natural world and so restore their physical and mental strength and independence that only the engagement with the wild landscapes could provide.

The role of the natural world in ensuring the development of free citizens, of each gender in Wollstonecraft's work is one example of the way she believed people could and should use the natural world. It is also the aspect that has been hitherto most considered by eco-feminist engagement with Wollstonecraft, though I hope I have added to that work thorough the link with education. But I want now to take this point about use of nature further. The previous section explored how the natural world *as a whole* is used within Wollstonecraft's work. Now I wish to focus on how *specific* natural resources are considered, to move from the 'wild' sublime landscapes and animals to the developed and cultivated resources such as fields. These resources are more obviously finite and bounded, they can be enclosed and fenced off so that people can be locked out of them in a way the moors or mountains of Scandinavia cannot be. But they are just as essential to the survival and flourishing of individual men and women and society as a whole and this potential 'shutting out' means that the claims of access and use are sharpened.

This draws together the work on Wollstonecraft's examination of property. There is a burgeoning literature here, but curiously the link to the natural world is not made, despite the fact that it is natural resources that are frequently the subject of property, the good/object that is owned. As a result this aspect of Wollstonecraft's work has not been considered by the growing eco-feminist exploration. Yet there is much here in what Wollstonecraft says regarding the intersection of gender, resources and ownership.

Opposition to Ownership and Use of Natural Resources

Firstly Wollstonecraft's objection to how natural resources were possessed, distributed and used within her society must be shown.[1] Helldenius points out that 'asking whether or not Wollstonecraft approved of property per se is to ask the wrong kind of question' (Helldenius, 2015: 118). Wollstonecraft approved of certain kinds of property, but not of others, with this distinction being based on how that property is acquired and what the subject of that property is. The importance of labour and natural resources lie at the heart of her distinction, with the intersection of the two having clear relevance for environmentalists and eco-feminists in particular.

The form of property that Wollstonecraft defends and approves of is that which is earned through labour, whether it be through wages or through labouring upon natural resources to create

[1] Wollstonecraft is writing during a period of increasing mercantile development and the growth of commerce – this is not the predominantly land-based economy that we see in Locke and indeed she shares the worries regarding the growth of markets in 'luxury' goods that other republican thinkers do (though as Halldenius rightly points out she does not share their equivocation of wage labour and slavery). Yet there is still a substantial amount of landed property and transactions in resources during this period and the fact that much of Wollstonecraft's attack on property is focused on this specific *type* is telling of the importance that she places on the distribution of and access to natural resources.

necessary goods for use or sale - 'the only security of property that nature authorises and reason sanctions is the right a man has to enjoy the acquisitions which his talents and industry have acquired' (Wollstonecraft, 1989c: 24). This form of property limited what could be acquired to that which the individual could produce, and promoted independence and virtue in the worker and so throughout the body politic. Yet she saw that the society she lived in placed more value upon inherited property, the goods and lands that were passed down from father to eldest son to create vast estates that their owner never laboured upon and gained through chance of birth rather than merit:

> 'Security of property! Behold in a few words the definition of English liberty. And to this selfish principle every nobler one is sacrificed… But softly – it is only the property of the rich that is secure; the man that lives by the sweat of his brow has no asylum from oppression; the strong man may enter, when was the castle of the poor sacred?' (Wollstonecraft, 1989b: 15).

As a result, the 'institution of *landed* property is said by Wollstonecraft to be contrary to liberty, 'the birthright of man'' (Kelly, 1992: 97, emphasis added), and is described as 'the demon of property [that] has ever been at hand to encroach on the sacred rights of man, and to fence round with awful pomp laws that war with justice' (Wollstonecraft, 1989c: 9). But *why* is this form of property a 'demon' that 'encroach on the sacred rights of man'? What is it about inherited property, particularly with regard to land and environmental resources that Wollstonecraft opposes? Excessive property in natural resources is said to have two negative effects. The first is that it corrupts both its owners and society as a whole. By valuing property that was achieved through accident of birth rather than sacrifice and independence: 'flow(s) as from a poisoned fountain, most of the evils and vices which render this world such a dreary scene... one class presses upon another; for all are aiming to procure respect on account of their property: and property, once gained, will procure the respect due only to talents and virtues' (Wollstonecraft, 1989d: 211). She thus despises the aristocracy, who she frequently describes as 'habitually idle' and yet still own vast amounts of property (Ibid.: 211). This disconnect between their activity and their holdings infuriates Wollstonecraft, who sees it as reward for no effort, which in turn withers away strength and virtue. Gary Kelly summarises Wollstonecraft's though as representing a hatred of 'the court', with its empty show and preference for the middle class who work for their subsistence (Kelly, 1992) – this is a fair reading of Wollstonecraft's thought (though Conniff is right to point out the limitations of such, Conniff, 1999: 316). Yet what Kelly doesn't develop is the idea that the 'court' is maintained by its wealth, which is dependent on a system that allows excessive ownership of resources and is capable of such decedent luxury because they do not labour upon such resources themselves. Halldenius also reflects this point regarding the middle-class who Wollstonecraft believed to be in the ideal state for they were not ideal and yet could support themselves. As she notes for Wollstonecraft 'the problem and the challenge [of property] lie also in the status that people attach to wealth and to the public display of it' (Halldenius, 2015: 112). Halldenius touches on the recognition that distinction is based on inherited property vs property that is gained through labour (Ibid.: 113). But again the link to the fact that this is property in natural resources is not stressed. And the fact that the monopolisation of environmental resources is the basis of a larger system that seeks to privilege some at the expense of the majority is also not explored.

Wollstonecraft recognised that the corruption of the aristocracy through land ownership was particularly problematic in regard to its effects on women, who are locked out of this ownership of these resources through inheritance laws and traded in marriage in order to create and preserve

these vast estates. Wollstonecraft speaks passionately about the evils of marriages contracted for the sake of inheritance and landed property – for example in *Mary: A Fiction* the heroine is forced to be married against her will to her cousin whom she despises in order to preserve the family inheritance and lands (Wollstonecraft, 1992a). As a result, 'she took on the 'gothic pile' of hereditary property, which, when passed down from father to son, reinforced the material dependence and political irrelevance' of women (Gunther-Canada, 2001: 79). Abolishing the system of primogeniture and aristocratic ownership of land in general will therefore benefit all members of society and women in particular, because it will cut off a source of despotical power.

Landed property gives such power because all require natural resources to survive, thus leading those who possess such resources immense influence. This influence, Wollstonecraft argues corrupts their nature, stifles their virtues and thus spreads this weakness throughout society, as water 'from a poisoned fountain' would flow throughout the body politic (Wollstonecraft, 2004: 175). A fairer distribution of land, accomplished only by respecting the rights of labour will therefore benefit not only benefit those currently without the resources they need, but will improve public morality and the situation of the current landowners. Ironically enough, giving up their excessive land will free them by making them independent from others and ending their parasitical existence. And women need no longer be traded and pushed into marriage in service of this system. The ownership of natural resources and how it is inherited is just as toxic for British politics today as it was when Wollstonecraft wrote – environmentalists still need to fight this battle, both in Britain and globally.

The second reason why Wollstonecraft attacked this form of property was because by separating ownership of natural resources from labour upon resources, it became possible to own resources without using them, thus allowing for resources to be 'wasted'. With no means of calling powerful land-owners to account, they could use their resources as they wished with no reference to the needs of others or of society as a whole. And, because they have been corrupted, Wollstonecraft held that they chose to use their environmental resources to support selfish pleasures, whereas others starve or fail to thrive for lack of them. This point is set out in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men,* in her critique of the use of land for hunting and raising game birds. Seeber notes Wollstonecraft's disapproval of these practices stating that she 'protests the Game Laws that restrict shooting to the land-owning class in *Vindication of the Rights of Men* [and] her depictions of rural sports in general are negative' (Seeber, 2014: 181). Seeber links this to a concern for animal suffering that is in turn related to the suffering and abuse of women. It is true that this prominent theme within Wollstonecraft's work but her argument against keeping game birds is based upon the use of the land, in using natural resources to support idle pleasures rather that productive work that would enable others to survive. She later expands upon this point:

> 'The rich man builds a house; art and taste give it the highest finish. His gardens are planted and the trees grow to recreate the fancy of the planter… But if, instead of sweeping pleasure grounds, obelisks, temples and elegant cottages as objects for the eye, the heart was allowed to beat true to nature, decent farms would be scattered all over the estate and plenty smile around.' (Wollstonecraft, 1989c: 56).

And by refusing to consider the preservation of others, by locking up the land and using resources to achieve pleasure and aesthetic appearance, the aristocracy is threatening not just the individuals but the body politic as a whole. The selfishness inherent in acquiring natural resources and wasting them in this way runs utterly counter to the republican ideal of 'public obligation' to the needs of all,

which motivates much of Wollstonecraft's work (Taylor, 2003, see also Jones, 2002; Coffee, 2013 and Halldenius, 2015).

This aspect of Wollstonecraft's work may appear problematical for contemporary eco-feminists. Whilst no-one within that tradition would support the withholding of access to the environmental resources needed to survive and thrive, nor the monopolisation of that which all need to survive which creates such vast inequalities, the idea that unused resources are 'wasted' is problematic. There are two responses here. The first is a recognition of the different understandings of environmental sustainability, a warning that the link between past political thinkers and current environmentalism is not always a comfortable one. But I think the second response is a stronger one, which is to say that Wollstonecraft challenges us to think seriously about *why* we want to ensure access to natural resources for all and the purpose of this - what form of environmental use would be best for all in the body and global politic. And she particularly requires us to think about how women fit into this, how their bodies and labour are used to maintain this current system and their ability to make decisions regarding it**.**

Alternative Use of Natural Resources

Wollstonecraft's opposition to the way in which natural resources were possessed, distributed and owned within her own society has been clearly set out, with the ramifications for the treatment of women highlighted. I argue that eco-feminists seeking to engage with Wollstonecraft need to focus/explore this critique of ownership of resources both when thinking about more equitable distributions, about what the role of natural resources is and should be in society and how the barriers to women's freedom can be identified and dismantled. But Wollstonecraft goes further than identifying the inequalities within her society and the cause of women's oppression. She proposes 'a revolution' (Wollstonecraft, 2004: 60) and sketches out an alternative model of labour and ownership, as this section will now show.

Firstly it must be made clear that Wollstonecraft argued for the continuing use of natural resources. While her commitment to overcoming animal-human hierarchies, particularly as a means of preventing hierarchical oppression in general is true and a key part of her work, as Seeber and Carretero González, among others, point out, she recognises that natural resources must be laboured upon and developed if people are to survive, especially due to 'the increasing population of the earth' (Wollstonecraft, 1989e: 288). She feared that the amount of land currently being cultivated would not be able to support such growth, creating the potential for 'universal famine' (Ibid.: 295). However rather than arguing for a limit to population, Wollstonecraft instead suggested that more resources be developed and cultivated (as seen in the felling of the trees described in the *Letters*) in order to provide for all. This was reflected in her challenge 'why are huge forests still allowed to stretch out with idle pomp and all the indolence of Easter grandeur?' and her wish that 'the ground would not lie fallow' (Wollstonecraft, 1989c: 57 and 24) and would instead be opened up to labour, for 'the world requires the hand of men to perfect it… [to] tend to its improvement' (Wollstonecraft 1989e: 288). As O'Brien notes that Wollstonecraft is 'on the side of progress, imagining forests cut down and more population, despite her deep appreciation of nature' (O'Brien, 2012). This idea appears to tie to the tension within Wollstonecraft's work between a desire for development and a desire for the 'wild nature' that contributes to human and political development. However, undeveloped nature is still viewed as promoting progress and preservation – this is a

change in form, not in function, albeit a change one Wollstonecraft maintains reservations over. Linking progress with destruction is contrary to all understandings of environmental ethics. I have no wish to try and smooth over this aspect of Wollstonecraft's work in the service of my main aim but I do want to suggest that her understanding of progress is based on improvements in human development, the increase of virtue and relief of suffering, rather than development and advancement for its own sake.

Not only would this use of the environment secure enough for all (Wollstonecraft, 1989e: 288 and 295; Wollstonecraft. 1989c: 24) but through the action of labouring upon natural resources individuals would themselves grow. As Virginia Sapiro points out: 'Wollstonecraft asserts that pain and misfortune often serve as experience from which human beings can learn' (Sapiro, 1992: 50 and see also 49). Through the struggle of labouring upon resources, individuals would themselves gain in experience and virtue. Wollstonecraft's republican beliefs are also at work here. She describes how owning and labouring upon resources could ensure freedom and independence, preventing individuals from being dominated by others and allowing them to make their own choices: 'Why might not the industrious peasant be allowed to steal a farm from the heath? ... Domination blasts all these prospects; virtue can only flourish among equals' (Wollstonecraft, 1989b: 57). By providing for themselves the 'industrious peasant' can survive independently of others and thus be their equal. Being able to keep what is made, exclusive of others, is essential to this equality, as it ensures a permanent source of preservation and prevent individuals from being dominated by others. The republican emphasis on self-government is also present here. Secure access to a source of preservation and the constant effort and decision making required for labour will enable individuals to better govern themselves and resist the influence of others. Allowing individuals to own and labour upon natural resources would therefore 'render the poor happier in this world without depriving them of the consolation… in the next' (Wollstonecraft, 1989b: 55). Labouring upon environmental resources therefore preserves and enhances the virtues of independence and self-sufficiency (Wollstonecraft, 1989b: 15, Wollstonecraft, 1989d: 212 and also Taylor, 2003: 229).

Wollstonecraft's work also contains sketches of alternative patterns of ownership for natural resources, based on labour and ensuring the preservation of all is possible and on their own terms. As quoted above, she wishes for the wasted pleasure gardens of the rich to be put to better use: 'But if, instead of sweeping pleasure grounds, obelisks, temples and elegant cottages as objects for the eye, the heart was allowed to beat true to nature, decent farms would be scattered all over the estate and plenty smile around… Why cannot large estates be divided into small farms? These dwellings would indeed grace our land' (Wollstonecraft 1989c: 56-57 and see also her description of Scandinavian farmhouses in Wollstonecraft, 1989e). This reading runs counter to Taylor's belief that Wollstonecraft opposes the 'narrow landowning ideal of republicanism [in favour of] a far more egalitarian concept' (Taylor, 2003: 227). On this evidence, Wollstonecraft is closer to this ideal than Taylor suggests. Certainly Wollstonecraft's ideas regarding the value of independent self-sufficiency brought about by land-ownership, to both the individual and the whole are, at least, influenced by, if not taken from, the republican tradition. And by extending her critique of power relations to the family *within* the farm-house, Wollstonecraft leaves no corner for domination to flourish and breaks down the assumptions regarding the gender of the citizen.

In the passage from the *Vindication* quoted above, this instruction was followed by Wollstonecraft noting that 'instead of the poor being subject to the griping hand of an avaricious steward, they would be watched over with fatherly solicitude by the man whose duty and pleasure it was to guard their happiness' (Wollstonecraft, 1989c: 56). This is an appeal for the land-owner to remember his public obligation and what is needed for the greater good of all. However, if they were to open up the land to use, and permit the tenants to labour upon it, without the aristocracy giving up their property would this critique be answered? On one hand, this would still allow the aristocracy to continue to dominate the poor, in the republican sense of being able to reverse this decision. And Wollstonecraft's stress on the importance of independence through labour runs utterly counter to this, as does her 'hope for the disappearance of monarchy and inherited distinctions' (Jones, 2002: 43). Yet her praise for 'the man whose duty and pleasure it was to guard their happiness', who was the presumed audience of the text, combined with the fact she makes no call for the direct reclamation of resources, qualifies this view.

This claim is supported by Gary Kelly, who has argued that, though the 'critique of landed property is the core of the Vindications political economy.... But Wollstonecraft's emphasis is less on landed property than on the social evils arising from it' (Kelly, 1992: 95 and see again Halldenius, 2015: 112 - 113). Thus by reforming the aristocracy, and reminding them of their obligation to all, the 'social evils' are lessened and the immediate preservation of the poor would be secured, as they would be able to live upon the land and possess their results of their labour. But there would still be the guidance needed as they adjusted to independence and the gradual change in the system of land usage. This section of text therefore applies Wollstonecraft's view on social change specifically to the changes need to ensure that all members of society can access the resources they need and fulfil their rights to labour and to the environment upon which their labour, their preservation and their virtue depends.

In considering the alternative forms of use of natural resources Wollstonecraft sets out, this section seems to have done more to emphasise why her work is *not* compatible with eco-feminism. True the point regarding virtue seems to tie to the idea that engagement with the natural world creates a greater awareness of its use and can make individuals more connected to the land and each other. But her emphasis on use of resources and the qualification regarding under what conditions the poor are to own their resources seems too contrary. As said above I do not want to ignore these contradictions, but in the larger point that animates these points, regarding how humanity and society is to advance and progress, is one that is worth bearing in mind as we seek to bring about a transformation in politics and behaviour.

Conclusion

This paper has, I hope, shown the complexity and breadth of Wollstonecraft's engagement with the relationship between people and the natural word upon which they depend. Wollstonecraft shows how we need to use a range of natural resources, from the 'wild' natural world for escape from oppression and the development of our capabilities, to the need to own and labour upon specific resources if we are to independently ensure our survival. In considering these points Wollstonecraft is also keenly alert to the ways in which gender oppression intersects with the relationship with the natural world, as seen in her awareness of the physical and mental harm done

to women by their restricted access to the natural world, and her critique of the way women are traded to support a system of landed property.

An eco-feminism that is based on Wollstonecraft's work would therefore start from the recognition of the ways in which all need to use their environment. From developing our individual capabilities, to escaping from oppression to creating a society in which all can access and own the resources they need, such an account would focus on ensuring that men and women could both equally use their environment. Such use would be both physical and mental, developing their virtue and better nature whilst enabling all to live free from domination as they could secure their own survival independently of others (albeit eventually). A concern for the domination of animals would be present here – Wollstonecraft can never support cruelty or misuse of power – but the emphasis is on securing the flourishing of all which necessitates the use of the natural world. This develops the account of Wollstonecraft as rejecting the human-natural dualism. In recognising how humanity required the environment, and in so many ways, she complicates the presumption that humans are 'above' or 'outside' of nature, but the requirement of use remains. Her criticism of how natural resources were used in her society (such as the denial of access to women and the monopolisation of land for the use of sport and luxuries) and suggested alternatives of education, focus on promoting labour for all and increasing ownership and access that is linked to labour opens the way for an eco-feminism that combines the required use of the environment with equality for both genders and seeks to reduce exploitation. That this may look very different from the eco-feminist or environmental ethics that we have developed should be a cause to explore our assumptions further, rather than disengage with Wollstonecraft.

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