## **10. Genderforschungstag am ZFG - Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung der Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg am 04.12.2020**

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*‘Save Mother Earth’. Between the Feminisation of Nature, Gendering of Bodies, and*

*Toxic Masculinity*

*‘Save Mother Earth’*. A claim as short as it seems simple at first glance. It is a term frequently used in early ecofeminism and is picked up by freshly founded climate change groups like *Fridays for Future* (*FFF*) and *Extinction Rebellion* (*XR*) who warn about the planet’s and humanity’s endangered future. The term ‘Mother Earth’ feminises *nature* and vice versa. The intention behind the symbolic image is to emphasise the strengths of the earth as life-giving and nurturing and entails an equation with women, who are often associated with similar traits. However, this metaphor has its downsides. Firstly, the equation of land and female bodies has happened to be a powerful strategy to legitimise e.g. colonialism; secondly, this emphasis can reinforce the *own* oppression and support structural differences; and it lastly forges women as well as the earth to controllable instances, especially when they do not act in the way society expects them to. The consequences of this long-lasting connection of *nature* and women within ecological thoughts are profound as shown with the example of the young, female *FFF* leaders. While they define themselves as climate activists and not as women, they are perceived by society, politicians and media sole on their bodies. *Gendering* is a powerful tool which leads to patronising behaviour, accusations of *FFF*-activists being used by their parents or climate groups, and a general devaluation of women’s actions. Most striking, female activists are targeted by toxic masculinity when they pursue their climate agenda and act as bodies *out of place*.

The methodological approach in my master’s dissertation included an analysis of the self-perception of *XR* and *FFF* with their websites, manifestos and in news articles in regards to their use of the feminisation of nature and the naturalisation of gender. In a second step, I set their (differing) positions in dialogue with critical theories and concepts like the myth of development, (eco) feminism, and the nature-discourse. My intention was to find out which discourses *XR* and *FFF* touch and if they are aware of the nature-culture divide. Does ecofeminism’s heritage influence the manifestos and agenda of contemporary environmentalism especially considering the high significance of gender on climate (in)justice?

The usage of the term ‘Mother Earth’ is popular with climate activists and groups because of its symbolic character. But it is more than that, it is an expression of the far-reaching and powerful arms of capitalistic, patriarchal, and racist structures, which have naturalised the oppression of women, PoC, children, Indigenous People and *Queers* for a long time. The equation of ‘white’ men with culture and the mind entails way more than a theoretical power. However, while *XR*-activists are criticising those structures it is impossible to ignore that their very own actions follow a homogenising agenda which is not only gender- but also colour-blind. Using the figure of rape of ‘Mother Earth’ at protests and in speeches expresses unawareness or ignorance towards its conflicting connotations – either way, it reinforces powerful discriminating structures. It seems to be impossible to separate the *nature*- discourse from environmental activism, however, when it is used, the historical and social implications should be more considered. Concerns about ‘The Earth’ should be detached from the long-lasting structures which connect women\* and PoC with nature. Otherwise, the fight for the future, certainly for young female activists such as Great Thunberg who is faced with toxic masculinity, will fail. The reason would not be the death of the earth but because environmental thoughts are retaining the self-fulfilling cycle of oppressions.

KURZBIOGRAPHIE (100 Wörter)

Merle Büter, geb. 1988, ist Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin am Fachgebiet *Gender und Globalisierung* an der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin (in Elternzeitvertretung) und bereitet gerade ihre Promotion vor. Studium der Geschlechterstudien und Geschichte an der Carl-von-Ossietzky-Universität Oldenburg, der Freien Universität Berlin und Södertörn Universiät in Stockholm. Im vergangenen Jahr schloss sie ein zweites Masterstudium im Studiengang „Gender, Sexuality and Culture“ an der Universität Manchester mit der Masterarbeit *‘Save Mother Earth’. Between the feminisation of nature, gendering of bodies, and toxic masculinity* ab. Publikationen u.a.: „Toleranz, Verbot, Akzeptanz. Zur Geschichte des Frauenfußballs“, *Ariadne. Forum für Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte (*69), Kassel 2016, S. 26-33.

SCHLAGWORTE

Ökologie, Feminismus, Körper, Natur, Kultur