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Redefining Domestic Violence: An Earth-Eco-Socialist Consideration

Abstract

Among the many issues being addressed by the global community, the outcry against domestic violence is at the forefront. This is so because it is viewed as a demeaning and deteriorating phenomenon. Within the confines of our society, domestic violence often involves violence against women and children and, in some cases, men. As such, it has been described as a severe issue with significant consequences for the victims. One of the many reasons for the crusade against domestic violence is its association with injustice, whereby the victims are denied freedom from abuse. However, in a world where agitations for inclusive environmental consideration persist, the domestic violence framework falls short of environmental obligation. While children, women, and men are recognized as part of our domestic environment, non-animals and non-humans are also part of the domestic environment. Still, they are not included in the framework of domestic violence. This paper, through an earth-eco-socialist approach, aims to expose the belongingness of the environment (including non-humans and non-animals) as part of our domestic environment and argues that they should also be cared for in terms of domestic violation. It emphasizes the necessity to view domestic violence against children and, by extension, men as being partially geared towards, if not extended to the domestic natural environment. In conclusion, this paper argues that domestic violence is not only inflicted on humans (women, men, and children) but also on the environment, which is integral to a violence-free domestic environment, and thus essential to be included in the framework of domestic violence. In light of this research, conceptual clarification, critical analysis, and a comparative study are employed.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Earth-eco-socialism, Environment,

Introduction

Domestic violence, a significant concern within our society, is at the forefront of activism due to its demonization by the global community and its established inhumanity. At present, it is among the many issues being addressed by the global community. Within the confines of our society, domestic violence often involves violence against women and children (Wilt & Olson, 1996; Englander, 2007; Gearhart et al., 2018; Walker-Descartes et al., 2021), and in some cases, men (Kolbe & Büttner, 2020). As such, it has been described as a severe issue with significant consequences for the victims. One of the many reasons for the crusade against domestic violence is its association with injustice, whereby the victims are denied freedom from abuse. It is regarded as a manifestation that hinders societal progress and communal harmony. However, by definitional analysis, domestic violence is not limited to the confined of humans alone, for violence can be defined as any act that violates the peace, freedoms, and well-being of individuals or groups (Ray, 2023), including animals, as highlighted by Peter Singer's advocacy for animal rights (Singer, & Tse, 2023), and to other lives in the environment. Domestic violence on the other hand refers to a consistent pattern of behavior within a relationship aimed at gaining or maintaining power and control over an intimate partner (Ubillos-Landa et al., 2020; Carlisle et al., 2020). This behavior includes various types of abuse: physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and economic. It can take place in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships, affecting individuals of any age, race, socioeconomic status, or gender.

However, the fight against domestic violence often centers on human victims. It neglects non-human entities, creating an incomplete framework even when the other non-human and non-animal entities suffer from domestic violence. This approach resembles Martin Luther King Jr.'s quote, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (Sen, 2017: 261). If the fight against domestic violence addresses only part of the domestic environment and excludes other parts, it perpetuates a form of injustice domestically, despite the ongoing struggle against it, particularly for children, women, and men. Thus, it is in this vein that this paper considers introducing the Earth-Eco-Socialist perspective to broaden the understanding of domestic violence. By integrating the environment's health into the framework, we aim to highlight the interconnectedness of all entities within the domestic sphere. This approach not only addresses

the violations faced by human victims but also extends protection to the non-human and non-animal entities that suffer from environmental degradation and harm. By doing so, we strive to create a more comprehensive and just framework that recognises the rights and well-being of all components of our ecosystem.

Firstly, this paper shall conceptualize domestic violence, which involves defining and exploring the meaning of domestic violence and discussing its possible effects. Secondly, we shall look at domestic violence within the environment and those done to the environment itself. Thirdly, Earth-Eco-Socialism and Environmental Preservation will be discussed, exploring how this framework integrates ecological and social principles to address environmental challenges, promote sustainable development, and advocate for protecting both human and non-human entities within the ecosystem. Lastly, Expanding the Framework of Domestic Violence: An Earth-Eco-Socialist Approach will be examined, emphasising the need to recognise the environment as a victim of domestic violence and advocating for policies that address environmental harm at both local and global levels.

The Concept of Domestic Violence

In recent times, the concept of domestic violence has been engaged with by different scholars, whereby different experiences, perspectives, and regional contexts have influenced their definitions of domestic violence. This has made it, or rather narrowed it, to be context-based. However, irrespective of it being context-based, most literature by scholars on domestic violence is directed towards identifying it as the kind, perpetuated towards women. Considering recent studies, it has also absorbed violence against children and, by extension, men in some recorded cases.

The concept of domestic violence is traditionally conceived to be human-based, primarily against women. It defines domestic violence as a systematic pattern of power and control exerted by one partner over another within an intimate relationship (Carlisle et al., 2020). In the expression of Hussain & Bashir (2018), domestic violence is averred to be gender-based, positing that it poses a significant sociological challenge, highlighting how women often find themselves in traditional roles marked by discrimination, suppression, and inequality. This conception frames domestic violence as gender-based. As expressed in the work of Gearhart et al. (2018), domestic violence

is often considered synonymous with intimate partner violence (IPV), and in the words of Englander (2007), sometimes equated with wife beating. This kind of violence is understood to manifest within the domestic environment (home), most notably occurring between individuals in intimate relationships. In a report by Carlisle et al. (2020), domestic violence is identified as encompassing more subtle forms such as mental or emotional abuse, financial abuse, verbal abuse, and even controlling behavior. It portrays domestic violence not only as physical abuse but also as involving other forms of implications related to socio-economic supremacy factors. This definition did however transcend beyond being confined within genderization, if properly analysed.

Domestic violence, as a manifestation within the domestic environment, has over time been widely conceived as a serious public health problem, with numerous reports highlighting its damaging effects on the well-being of people within our domestic environment. According to Wilt & Olson (1996), domestic violence is defined as acts that involve physical assaults against women by their former or current intimate partners. This definition identifies domestic violence as acts that inflict suffering on the female gender, which in some cases involves deprivation of liberty and human rights violations. In this context, domestic violence is defined as being feminine-based. It views domestic violence as encompassing various forms of abuse, including physical, economic, sexual, emotional, and psychological. These forms of abuse are contextualized within relationships where one partner seeks to dominate and assert authority over the other. This gendered perspective highlights how domestic violence is not merely isolated incidents of conflict, but a systematic issue rooted in unequal power dynamics and societal norms. Thus, domestic violence in its human contextualization is recognized as a pattern of behaviors aimed at exerting power and control over intimate partners or household members (Carlisle et al., 2020), manifesting in different forms of abuse that impact the well-being and autonomy of those affected. However, despite the various definitions of domestic violence put forth by various scholars, there is a common thread that defines domestic violence as a phenomenon occurring within the domestic sphere, often perpetrated by individuals in positions of power and control over those they consider subordinate. In this sense, domestic violence can be understood as a pattern of behavior aimed at gaining or maintaining power and control over

one's intimate partner household members, or even other entities perceived to be of lower identity.

Domestic violence, if viewed, is the combination of two independent words: "domestic" and "violence." "Domestic" means the immediate environment of man, the friendly area, the friendly zone where man has his relations. It pertains to the household or family, encompassing activities, environments, and relationships that take place within the private sphere of the home. Violence," on the other hand, refers to some form of abuse, harm, or aggression, whether intentional as some would have it, or rather unintentional due to some sort of unawareness (Ray, 2023). Thus, domestic violence can be interpreted literally as a form of violence exerted within the domestic neighborhood. This interpretation explains why domestic violence has expanded beyond just affecting women and has absorbed into its framework, space for children, evident in the work of Walker-Descartes et al. (2021), and men, evident in the work of Kolbe, & Büttner (2020), as they too face some form of violence in the domestic environment. It is in this vein that we will further explain how domestic violence has been extended to nature indirectly by some scholars in the coming sections.

Domestic Violence Within and To the Environment

Defining the environment and the entities within it is a complex task, as it can be viewed from various lenses and perspectives. This complexity can result in some definitions lacking the necessary features that a comprehensive definition should include. According to Encyclopedia Britannica (2014, cited in Ojomo, 2024), the environment is defined as the complex physical, chemical, and biotic factors whose actions influence an organism or an ecological community and determine its form and survival. The environment is argued to include the atmosphere (the layer of gases surrounding the Earth), the lithosphere (the Earth's solid outer shell), the hydrosphere (all of the Earth's water bodies), and the biosphere (the regions of the Earth occupied by living organisms) (Ojomo, 2024b). In the expression of Nwanne (2013, cited in Ojomo, 2024), the environment is referred to as the natural endowment and those provided by humans in their efforts to make life more comfortable. This interpretation implies that anything that affects or influences human existence, such as water, air, lands, buildings, and other human-made structures, is part of the environment. This explains why Rawat and Mishra (2021) define

the environment as the basic life support system of humanity, which is an essential part of existence.

Haven briefly explained what the environment means, we can then thus delve into discussing the domestic violence within, and to the environment.

When we talk of domestic violence, we are referring to violence in its original, rather than conventional meaning which connotes violence against humans, particularly women and children. We mean the violence explained as a systematic pattern of power and control exerted by one partner over another, which could involve a husband and wife, a boss and the apprentice, or even a man and the environment they govern, representing the superior and the inferior (See Ubillos-Landa et al., 2020 & Carlisle et al., 2020). In essence, the environment could also face some kind of violence from humans since humans are mostly considered to be superior to every other entity, be it living or non-living. However, we are faced with the question of why we draw a relation between domestic violence and the environment when most parts of the environment do not have feelings or experience the violence inflicted upon them.

To answer the above, we draw from Peter Singer's argument on animal rights. He argues for the rights of animals based on their ability to feel pain, meaning they can suffer from the actions inflicted upon them by humans. If animals can suffer, they should have rights similar to humans—not to vote or participate in elections, but the right to live and be free from unnecessary and illegal violence from humans, who are believed to be superior to them (Singer, 1975); although, in this context, we are not focusing on the aspect of pain but on the result of pain about the environment. As regards the power exerted on the environment which if melted on living things would be considered violence, it is more like a state of uncomfortability, a state of paranoia, leading to unusual reactions or trauma, which could be violent to prevent such violence from reoccurring in the future. From a global perspective, global warming and climate change have ravaged human society, with unusual weather patterns being attributed to the abuse of the environment and the ecosystem (Huang et. al., 2020).

Thus, it becomes evident that both the harm inflicted on humans and on the domestic natural environment is interconnected and equally detrimental. When the domestic environment—where

people live and interact daily, including the quality of the air we breathe, the sources of our water, our green spaces, and overall environmental well-being—is compromised through pollution, toxic waste disposal, deforestation, or any form of environmental degradation, it constitutes a direct attack on the health and safety of the community (See Harris 2016, & Karon, 2020). Environmental harm should therefore be viewed as a form of domestic violence because it endangers the health systems of the community, much like how violence threatens the well-being of women and children. For instance, consider air pollution within residential areas. This can lead to illnesses or respiratory issues, particularly in children and the elderly, who are more vulnerable to such conditions. Although this may be seen from an anthropocentric perspective, it is crucial to recognize that the survival of both the environment and humans is deeply interrelated and interdependent. The harm caused by pollution is akin to the physical abuse experienced in domestic violence cases, where the victim suffers direct harm from the actions of another. In this sense, the environment suffers from human actions driven by a sense of superiority, leading to its degradation (See Huang et. al., 2020 & Ukaogo et al., 2020). Also, the availability of water sources in the environment, when contaminated, can result in severe health issues, which in turn disproportionately affect women and children, who are often the primary caregivers and water collectors in many communities (See Madhav et al., 2020, Sonone et al., & Ahmed et al., 2022). This demonstrates how, when the domestic environment is violated, it becomes a site of violence, mirroring the dynamics of traditional domestic abuse.

This comparison raises the question: just as domestic violence laws are designed to protect the most vulnerable members of society—women, children, and in some cases, men—shouldn't government policies also encompass the environment as part of our community, thereby protecting it from degradation? Such policies should include regulations on pollution, waste management, land use, and the preservation of green spaces within residential areas. Ensuring a safe and healthy environment would shield it from the harmful effects of environmental violence.

In affirming the above, within the framework of domestic violence, we have scholars who have indirectly related domestic violence not only to humans but also to non-humans and non-animals. Caroline Merchant, for instance, in her eco-feminist movement, explores the connections between the domination of nature and that of women. Although she didn't categorically define domestic violence as being related to nature, she indirectly compared the fragility of women and

that of nature (Merchant, 1983). She expressed a stance on the dual oppression of women and nature, and thus argues for the framework of domestic violence to include protecting the rights and liberty of nature through recognizing the interconnectedness of these forms of oppression, suggesting that the exploitation and oppression of women in a domestic manner are parallel to the harm inflicted on nature. Furthermore, we have Vandana Shiva who highlights the interconnected issues of environmental degradation and systemic violence, emphasizing the need to protect our environment from further harm (Shiva, 2016). She exposes the necessity to resist systemic violence brought into the domestic sphere and identifies resistance against domestic violence as essential for the protection of nature. Also, there is Arne Naess, known for his work on deep ecology, who argues for humans to see the intrinsic value of all living beings and the necessity to respect nature. While Naess (2017) does not explicitly emphasize domestic violence, his principles for the protection of nature indirectly point to the need for domestic protection of nature, aligning with the fight against domestic violence.

Thus, it is arguable that domestic violence is as well melted down the environment including non-humans and non-animals as much as it is melted down on humans, for from the above, it is deducible that the environment also suffers from the domestic actions

Earth-Eco-Socialism and Environmental Preservation

The journey toward preserving the Earth's ecological system has deep historical roots, particularly evident in the practices of the indigenous peoples of various communities. The knowledge of the indigenous peoples demonstrates sustainable environmental practices that include humans, their families, and other organisms within the ecosystem, ensuring that their survival is not tampered with (Rawat, & Mishra, 2021). Apart from ancient approaches to environmental preservation, which inherently emphasize the human connection to the Earth's overall well-being, we have also had modern models and mediums that also prioritize preserving the Earth's health conditions.

Modern environmental preservation efforts began gaining traction with Rachel Carson's book "Silent Spring," published in 1962, which raised public awareness about the dangers of pesticide use on Earth. Carson highlighted the harmful implications of chemical compositions on the

environment, stressing that damaging the Earth would ultimately impact human survival (Kaur, 2024). In the 1980s, the concept of sustainable development gained popularity. The Brundtland Report, published by the United Nations in 1987, defined sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Hajian, & Kashani 2021). This concept emphasized the sustainable use of Earth's resources to ensure future generations could also benefit. Moving into the 2000s, the focus shifted to climate change, whereby the Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, came into effect in 2005 (Kim, Tanaka, & Matsuoka, 2020), marking a significant step toward mitigating climate change and promoting environmental sustainability. In the 2010s and beyond, numerous global movements and agreements, such as the Paris Agreement in 2015, aimed to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius (Meinshausen et al., 2022). This period saw a concerted effort to balance environmental preservation with social and economic goals.

There have also been theories championed by numerous scholars, advocating for the preservation of Earth and nature as a whole, through campaigns for broader environmental conservation efforts; Peter Singer on Animal Ethics in his book *Animal Liberation* (1975), arguing for ethical consideration of animals based on their capacity to suffer, Ecocentrism by Aldo Leopold in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), emphasizing the intrinsic value of ecosystems, and Biocentrism by Paul Taylor in *Respect for Nature* (1986), extending moral consideration to all living organisms to name a few. Hence, it is evident that centuries ago, philosophers began articulating these concerns, and today, the earth-eco-socialist approach encompasses and synthesizes these diverse environmental positions, placing a central emphasis on the shared element of Earth and its ecological systems. One prominent advocate and by virtue the author of the idea of Earth-eco-socialism is P.A. Ojomo.

Earth-eco-socialism, as propounded by Ojomo (2019), focuses on the need to accelerate development and social progress based on two principles. Firstly, it considers confronting social and economic problems, and secondly, it is geared towards arresting or rather, mitigating environmental crises through laws enacted by the state. However, even with its political orientation, it is more of a moral framework that advances the virtue of the collective good and mutual benefits of humans about the environment and nature as a whole. In other words, Earth

eco-socialism, as pioneered by Ojomo (2019), tries to expand the moral framework that houses human interests beyond that confinement and embraces the recognition and respect for the Earth and ecological preservation. Ojomo (2024a) and Ojomo (2024b) further explored the development of Earth-eco-socialism in addressing various environmental, political, social, and sustainability issues. Earth-eco-socialism, she argues, integrates ecological and socialist principles to tackle both environmental challenges and social injustices. This framework recognizes that ecology entails the interrelationships among organisms and their environment, emphasizing cooperation and mutual benefit—an ethos historically observed among ancient indigenous societies. Earth-eco socialism expands on this approach by exposing the need to prioritize Earth's preservation over human desires and interests. It argues against human actions driven solely by selfishness or immediate gratification, which can lead to destructive consequences for the Earth's systems. Instead, it advocates viewing Earth and its ecological components as integral parts of a community deserving recognition and respect, akin to how individuals are protected under the law.

Expanding the Framework of Domestic Violence: An Earth-Eco-Socialist Approach

Domestic violence against the environment can be as impactful as domestic violence against women and children. It starts small but contributes to larger global environmental crises. If not attended to, the detrimental effects on the environment will mirror the societal impact of domestic violence on humans. Therefore, addressing domestic violence against the environment just as the fight against exerting it against women, children, and men is crucial, to prevent its escalation into larger environmental crises, and as well from adding to existing environmental crises.

According to Ojomo (2024b), Earth-eco-socialism advocates for effective land management, flexible environmental laws, and comprehensive environmental education to address both domestic and global environmental degradation. This holistic perspective aims to understand and mitigate Earth's processes, stressing the importance of social justice that includes all species—humans, non-human animals, and plants. It -through advocating for a moral framework that prioritizes the well-being of all species-, addresses the limitations of traditional eco-socialism and calls for a societal shift towards an eco-centric and egalitarian system.

However, there is traditional eco-socialism but has a deficiency in emphasising the communitarian pattern of our context. While traditional eco-socialism focuses on human social justice and environmental sustainability within the context of opposing capitalism (Albritton, 2019), Earth eco-socialism further expands the framework by including a broader respect for the Earth and all its ecological components (Ojomo, 2019). This approach emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature and the need to prioritize ecological preservation over human desires and interests. Traditional eco-socialism advocates for public ownership and democratic control of resources, emphasizing the balance between social, economic, and environmental needs. In contrast, Earth eco-socialism places a strong emphasis on integrating indigenous knowledge and perspectives, viewing humans, plants, animals, and non-living elements as interconnected parts of the environment. This, with the context of our paper, earth-eco-socialism captures the context of our position

However, on the inclusion of the environment within the framework of domestic violence, we may be faced with the question of why domestic violence if the global community is taking steps to ensure environmental sustainability through cleaner energy, and reducing oil spillages among many others.

Be it as it may, there's no denying the fact that while the global community is taking steps to promote environmental sustainability through cleaner energy and other approaches, these initiatives often do not directly address domestic pollution and local activities that contribute to the broader global environmental crisis. Domestic violence to the environment includes actions like blocking drainage systems, improper disposal of waste, burning trash on the streets, and other actions that deplete the nutrients of the soil and harm the health of the Earth. However, much of the literature focuses on the activities of multinational companies and larger firms evident in the work of Ojomo (2019), Little, Sheppard, & Hulme (2021), and Singh et al. (2020), yet there is insufficient emphasis on local communities, whose small-scale actions and negligence in preserving the health of the Earth and their ecology contribute significantly to this global crisis. Thus, just as the global community fights for the interests of women, men, and children on an international scale —by advocating for women's inclusion in decision-making processes, ensuring their voices are heard, and taking global action against the maltreatment of women, men, and children— but still extends this fight at the local level against domestic

violence, it is in this same vein we argue that this analogy be extended to environmental sustainability as well, for the survival of humanity as well depends on it, making environmental sustainability at both the international scale and domestic level sacrosanct.

Hence, we argue that Earth-eco-socialism, which advocates for effective land management, flexible environmental laws, and comprehensive education, that addresses both domestic and global actions against the environment, should be embraced. This framework considers the Earth and the ecology as integral parts of what should be protected alongside human beings. It provides a robust rationale for including domestic violence against the environment in the broader framework of domestic violence. By doing so, when we discuss domestic violence—whether against women, children, or men—we also acknowledge the environment as a potential victim of domestic violence. This holistic approach can help mitigate local environmental harm and contribute to global sustainability efforts.

Conclusion

Consequently, having explored what domestic violence is and how it relates to the environment within domestic neighborhoods, we can see how Earth-eco-socialism theory could help expand our understanding of why the environment should be included as a victim in discussions of domestic violence. We conclude by affirming that recognising the vulnerability of the environment within the framework of domestic violence is necessary. If this inclusion is ensured and attained, it will contribute significantly to the global fight against environmental pollution and degradation. Hence, we argue that domestic violence against the environment should be included in the broader framework of domestic violence. Local authorities need to identify and address acts that harm the local environment, as these are detrimental to the well-being of communities. Incorporating environmental protection into the fight against domestic violence, local communities can contribute to the global fight against environmental crises because success at the local level, in terms of preventing environmental degradation, can cumulatively lead to global success in environmental sustainability.

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