

**The Development of an Intersectional Methodology for a Social
Constructionist Ecofeminism**

By

Stephanie Louise Lucas

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Theology and Religious Studies

College of Arts and Law

University of Birmingham

July 2023

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Abstract

The fundamental claim of ecofeminist theory is that there are connections between the oppressions of women and nature. With climate change causing ever increasing concern, and feminism having moved into a fourth wave, ecofeminism offers important insights into injustices across both human and nonhuman spheres. However, there have been significant criticisms posed to ecofeminist work, notably that it tends towards essentialism in its categorisation of 'woman' and 'nature'. Whilst social constructionist ecofeminists, like Val Plumwood, have sought to develop ecofeminist theory to not fall foul of these problems, with contemporary ecofeminists such as Greta Gaard noting the value of intersectional ideas within ecofeminist theory, intersectionality as an approach for overcoming essentialism has not yet been embedded in ecofeminist thought in a way that is structural and explicit. I propose that centring intersectionality disrupts essentialised categorisation by highlighting the complex interplay between privileged and oppressed identity categories. Therefore, this thesis seeks to contribute to this shift away from essentialism in ecofeminist literature by developing a novel intersectional methodology for ecofeminist theory. The method employed throughout the research project was within the political and theoretical traditions of surveying literature, and this enabled a collecting of research which highlighted that applications of intersectionality in feminism have tended not to include the nonhuman within their scope, whilst ecofeminism possesses the architecture to address these intersections. The project was centred on methodology-building, and subsequent methodology-testing through an exploration of feminised proteins. This intersectional methodology, designed for ecofeminist theory, is applied

to the case study of the egg and dairy industries to respond to their related intersecting injustices. I suggest that an intersectional methodology allows us to understand the complexity of oppression in a way that leads to recommendations of praxis that can more successfully ameliorate these oppressions.

Acknowledgements

My first thanks go to my lead supervisor, Dr. Jeremy Kidwell, without whom my eyes would not have been opened to academic discourses that have fundamentally shaped this project. I went from not having heard of ecofeminism upon starting my PhD to changing my entire project so that it could better reflect the passion I now felt for the field. Your positivity and enthusiasm have been a source of inspiration to me throughout this process and I feel very fortunate to have had your unwavering support throughout the past six years. I am also very thankful for my co-supervisor, Dr. Emma Foster. I was so excited when I read an article with 'ecofeminism' in the title that had been authored by someone at Birmingham and I will be forever grateful that you were not only happy to join the project but that you have also taken such an active role since. Your interest, insight, and constructive feedback have been essential in bringing this thesis to the stage of submission. To both of you, thank you, I am so grateful to have been able to work with you.

I also would like to thank my mum and my dad for their continuous support throughout this project. I would not have been able to complete this paper if it had not been for their generosity in allowing their adult-child to continue to live in their home for much longer than planned. Thank you for listening to conference paper rehearsals, never making me feel that I was going on too much with my PhD-talk, and for giving the best advice in the stressful times. You might be the only people who are happier than me that this thesis is completed!

To my husband, Sam, thank you for remaining assured of my ability to do this, even when my own confidence was wavering. You have been my partner throughout this; engaging in debates to help me think through some of the trickier topics and giving me pep talks when I have needed them. I am certain the imposter syndrome would have gotten the better of me without your endless support.

This thesis was copy edited for conventions of language, spelling, and grammar by the PhD Proofreaders company.

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Introduction

Ecofeminist theory appears to have enjoyed somewhat of a renaissance in recent years¹ as its fundamental claim that there is something that links women and the environment continues to be relevant to feminist enquiries. This resurgence has seen key criticisms of ecofeminist theory, notably that it is essentialist, being addressed and as such the theory has developed into more critical veins.² I intend to build on this shift away from essentialism in ecofeminist theorising by more explicitly exploring the potential benefits of employing an intersectional methodology. There is already a recognition in the literature that ecofeminist theorising engages with intersectional ideas,³ and there is some suggestion that ecofeminist theory might benefit from centring intersectionality more explicitly.⁴ This suggestion seems reasonable given that ecofeminist theory has developed from a recognition that the oppressions of gender and the environment intersect.

¹ Susan Buckingham, 'Ecofeminism', *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition)*, ed. by James D. Wright (London, UK: Elsevier, 2015), pp. 845-850 (p. 845). Heather Eaton, 'Ecofeminist Theologies in the Age of Climate Crisis', *Feminist Theology*, 29.3 (2021), 209-219 (p. 209).

² Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism: Ecocritical Theory and Practice* (London: Lexington Books, 2017).

³ Gaard acknowledges that 'ecofeminism's focus benefited from the intersectional theories of Black feminists' in *Critical Ecofeminism*, 4. Joanna Wilson and Sherilyn MacGregor in a review of Gaard's *Critical Ecofeminism* consider her to be giving 'a reflective account of ecofeminism's evolution as an *intersectional framework*', emphasis my own. Joanna Wilson and Sherilyn MacGregor, 'New Ecofeminisms: Matters of Life and/or Death', *Hypatia*, 34.3 (2019), 852-857 (p. 854).

⁴ This seems to be the position taken by A.E. Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', *Ethics & the Environment*, 22.1 (2017), 63-87. Gaard can also be seen to support ecofeminism's continued alignment with intersectionality in her claim that 'the dialectical interplay between progressive intersectional... [activism and theory] continues' in *Critical Ecofeminism*, 185.

This research aims to develop an intersectional methodology for social constructionist ecofeminism and explore the benefits of that methodology by applying it to the issue of the egg and dairy industries in the USA and UK. I believe that an intersectional methodology could be a substantial aid to consolidating the shift towards anti-essentialism that has been part of ecofeminist thought in recent years.⁵ Centring complex understandings of identity and oppression would help limit the essentialist conceptions of ‘women’ and ‘nature’ that critics have attributed to past iterations of ecofeminist theory. Though the extent of essentialism in ecofeminist theory may well have been overstated,⁶ the weight given to this criticism has been significant⁷ and so building methods to explicitly limit essentialism in ecofeminist theory could be a significant contribution to building on this literature. To achieve this aim, this thesis will evaluate the criticisms against ecofeminism and build a defence based primarily on the development of an intersectional methodology that will then be applied to a social injustice to test how a more complex approach to identity categories and intersecting oppressions can build on the shift to a more critical ecofeminism.

This chapter will serve as an introduction to the thesis by briefly outlining the developments in ecofeminist theory since its inception in the 1970s. This will be

⁵ This shift is documented in Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xv-xvi.

⁶ Chaone Mallory, ‘What’s in A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, or Gender and the Environment): Or “Why Ecofeminism Need Not be Ecofeminine – but so What If it Is?”’, *Ethics & the Environment*, 23.2 (2018), 11-35; and, Emma Foster, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited: Critical Insights on Contemporary Environmental Governance’, *Feminist Theory*, 22.2 (2021), 190-205 (p. 195).

⁷ Greta Gaard, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism’, *Feminist Formation*, 23.2 (2011), 26-53 (p. 39); Buckingham, ‘Ecofeminism’, 845; and Niamh Moore, ‘Eco/feminist Genealogies: Renewing Promises and New Possibilities’, in *Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism*, ed. by Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 19-37 (p. 20).

followed by identifying the gap in the scholarship that justifies the case for integrating intersectionality, and an account of the research aims, objectives, and questions. This will help to highlight the significance of the research for the field of ecofeminism. There are also points of clarification regarding key words and terminology used in the thesis, as well as clarity on my own position as a researcher and how this might impact the findings of the project. Finally, I will provide an outline of the thesis structure to demonstrate how the research aims will be achieved.

The Research Context

The term ecofeminism (*ecoféminisme*) was first coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in the 1970s.⁸ The intention was to convey the argument that gender-based oppression and oppression of the environment are intrinsically connected in a way that links the aims of both feminism and ecology. Despite receiving credit for the apt naming of this field, it has been suggested that it is a simplification to suggest that *Le Féminisme ou La Mort* was the first text to engage with ecofeminist ideas. It is believed that d'Eaubonne's book was not translated into English until 1994;⁹ despite this being a potential barrier to influencing English-speaking scholars, the use of the term ecofeminism can be seen in English texts soon after d'Eaubonne's initial publication. For example, Mary Daly was using d'Eaubonne's work explicitly to influence her 1978 book *Gyn/Ecology*.¹⁰ Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen suggest that the fact that this term ecofeminism quickly became so popular, despite language barriers,

⁸ Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Le Féminisme ou La Mort* (Paris: Pierre Horay, 1974).

⁹ Moore, 'Eco/feminist Genealogies', 26.

¹⁰ Ibid., 26.

is evidence that the underlying concept that women and environment are oppressed by the patriarchy was one that had already been convincingly identified.¹¹ In other words, it seems that the term ecofeminism presented old facts in a new and effective format that appealed to relevant researchers and activists. Therefore, we need not place too much emphasis on d'Eaubonne as *the* seminal ecofeminist, but we can instead infer from how quickly the term was assented to that its meaning had already been observed both in academia and in grassroots activism.¹²

Ecofeminism as a discourse started developing in the late 1970s and into the 1980s. This included the diverse works of Mary Daly,¹³ Rosemary Radford Ruether,¹⁴ Starhawk,¹⁵ Charlene Spretnak,¹⁶ Susan Griffin,¹⁷ Andrée Collard,¹⁸ and Carolyn Merchant.¹⁹ The ecofeminist movement received substantial criticism in the 1990s, largely due to a perception that ecofeminism was fundamentally essentialist in its definition of 'woman'.²⁰ Despite this, significant work continued to be produced such

¹¹ Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen, 'Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health', *Society and Nature*, 2.1 (1993), 1-35 (p. 1).

¹² Moore, 'Eco/feminist Genealogies', 29.

¹³ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

¹⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

¹⁵ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, 20th Anniversary edn. (New York: Harper Collins, 1999).

¹⁶ Charlene Spretnak, *The Politics of Women's Spirituality* (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1982).

¹⁷ Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

¹⁸ Andrée Collard with Joyce Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild: Man's Violence Against Animals and the Earth* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989).

¹⁹ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, & the Death of Nature* (London: Wildwood House, 1982).

²⁰ The essentialist critique and its impact are documented in Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited'; Mallory, 'What's In A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, Or Gender and the Environment)', 22-24; Chaone Mallory, 'The Spiritual

as *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* by Val Plumwood,²¹ *Ecofeminism* by Karen Warren,²² and more by authors like Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva,²³ Ariel Salleh,²⁴ Carol Adams,²⁵ Mary Mellor,²⁶ Noël Sturgeon,²⁷ Marti Kheel²⁸ and Sallie McFague.²⁹ Twenty-first century ecofeminists have centralised a more critical and intersectional approach which can be seen in the work of Greta Gaard,³⁰ Chris Cuomo,³¹ Chaone Mallory,³² Sherilyn MacGregor,³³ patrice jones,³⁴ Laura Wright,³⁵ and Joanna Flavell.³⁶ This critical form of ecofeminism seeks to consolidate the shift towards anti-essentialism made by some forms of ecofeminism in the 1990s.

is Political: Gender, Spirituality, and Essentialism in Forest Defense', *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 4.1 (2010), 48-72.

²¹ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

²² *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, ed. by Karen Warren (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997).

²³ Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books, 1993).

²⁴ Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx, and the Postmodern* (London, UK: Zed Books, 1997).

²⁵ Carol Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat– 25th Anniversary Edition: A Feminist Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

²⁶ Mary Mellor, *Feminism and Ecology* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

²⁷ Noël Sturgeon, *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory, and Political Action* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

²⁸ Marti Kheel, 'Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology: Reflections on Identity and Difference', in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. by Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), pp. 128-137.

²⁹ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

³⁰ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*.

³¹ Chris Cuomo, *Feminism and Ecological Communities: An Ethic of Flourishing* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

³² Mallory, 'What's in A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, Or Gender and the Environment)'.

³³ *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment*, ed. by Sherilyn MacGregor, (London, Routledge: 2017).

³⁴ patrice jones, 'Roosters, Hawks and Dawgs: Toward an Inclusive, Embodied Eco/feminist Psychology', *Feminism and Psychology*, 20.3 (2010), 365-380.

³⁵ Laura Wright, 'Vegan Studies as Ecofeminist Intervention', *2020 Ecocriticism in Europe and Beyond*, 11.2 (2020), 101-108.

³⁶ Joanna Flavell, *Mainstreaming Gender in Global Climate Governance: Women and Gender Constituency in UNFCCC* (New York: Routledge, 2023).

Since its inception ecofeminism has taken many different forms. They are all united by the shared belief that there is *something* connecting women and nature that has been used to oppress both. Their differences are found in their articulation of what characterises this connection between women and nature. Before I explore the different branches of ecofeminism that have traditionally been defined by how they make the woman–nature connection, it is first important to recognise the problems with suggesting that there are fixed and static categories at all. I agree with the position that often the rigid categorisation in ecofeminist works feels ‘more than partially contrived’³⁷ and is ‘somewhat misleading’³⁸ because it does not reflect the fluidity between the categories. It can mask the important caveats made by ecofeminist writers that shows they are not working from a wholly essentialist perspective.³⁹ Having said this, I do rely on acknowledging that there are different branches of ecofeminism throughout this thesis. However, I do so not because I believe that there are strict separations between different types but instead because it ‘can be useful for the purpose of communicating about different nodes in ecofeminist theory and practice’,⁴⁰ and because these taxonomies remain significant in much of the literature on ecofeminism⁴¹ (and particularly relevant where others have criticised it). Thus, this

³⁷ Elizabeth Carlassare, ‘Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism: Allies in Resistance’, *Ethics & the Environment*, 5.1 (2000), 89-106 (p. 91).

³⁸ Foster, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited’, 196.

³⁹ As Foster argues, even those affinity ecofeminists who are frequently criticised for essentialism, ‘when read carefully, shy away from essentially linking characteristics to gendered bodies in an empirical sense’ in Foster, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited’, 195. I will explore this response further in Chapter Two.

⁴⁰ Carlassare, ‘Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism’, 91.

⁴¹ Notably MacGregor’s edited volume explicitly rejects the usefulness of typology in ecofeminism and instead seeks ‘to identify the main threads that are woven together to make the field’s rich tapestry’ rather than pigeon-hole ecofeminist writings. Sherilyn MacGregor, ‘Gender and environment: An Introduction’, in *Routledge Handbook of Gender*

thesis does little to tackle the problems with that taxonomy, however I intend for this to serve as a caveat for the limits of categories used.

Ecofeminists, like Mary Mellor, have identified several different branches within ecofeminism. I will focus on Mellor's articulation of affinity ecofeminism and social constructionist ecofeminism.⁴² Affinity ecofeminists are those writers who 'see women as having a bodily or cultural affinity with the natural world through their woman-ness as mothers, life-givers, nurturers, carers'.⁴³ This affinity between women and nature can be based on a perceived 'physiological or spiritual' ⁴⁴ relationship. Affinity ecofeminists appear to claim that there is some essential way in which women are closer to nature than men. Ecofeminists who declare this affinity to be of a physiological form often rely on the reproductive qualities or embodied experiences of women. For example, Andrée Collard is named by Mellor as an affinity ecofeminist as she suggests that the relationship is caused by women's 'common identity as mothers "whether or not she personally experiences biological mothering"'.⁴⁵ Also, Susan Griffin argued that 'we know ourselves to be made from this earth. We know this earth

and Environment ed. by Sherilyn MacGregor (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 1-24 (p. 7). However, I continue to use taxonomy in my articulation of ecofeminism as I consider it useful in understanding and responding to the critiques of ecofeminism.

⁴² Mary Mellor, 'Feminism and Environmental Ethics: A Materialist Perspective', *Ethics & the Environment*, 5.1 (2000), 107-123. Mellor also proposes that there is an additional category: material ecofeminism. While there are some subtle differences, Mellor's work sits most neatly with my categorisation of social constructionism, particularly because my understanding of social constructionist ecofeminism includes socialist ecofeminism which is particularly close to articulations of material ecofeminism.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁵ Andrée Collard cited in Mellor, 'Feminism and Environmental Ethics', 109.

is made from our bodies'.⁴⁶ In other words, there is a physical way in which our bodies and the Earth are one, so that we cannot separate ourselves from the concept of nature because we are a physical part of it. The woman, 'by virtue of their child-bearing functions',⁴⁷ has a more embodied experience than her male counterpart. This awareness of her own embodiment makes her more aware of her surroundings and her reproductive capacity makes her more empathetic to the nurturing, life-giving capacities of nature. In this sense, ecofeminists who recognise a physiological affinity between women and nature appear to suggest that women have a unique relationship with the natural world.

Those ecofeminists who articulate the affinity between women and nature as spiritual have been particularly criticised. Indeed it is arguable that affinity ecofeminism on the basis of a spiritual connection is the branch with which ecofeminism has become most heavily (and negatively) associated.⁴⁸ These ecofeminists, such as Carol Christ,⁴⁹ Charlene Spretnak,⁵⁰ and Starhawk, draw on Goddess and Pagan spiritualities which see the Earth as 'alive and all of life [a]s sacred and interconnected'.⁵¹ This branch of ecofeminism tends to criticise 'conventional religions'

⁴⁶ Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 226.

⁴⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Ecofeminist Philosophy, Theology, and Ethics: A Comparative View', in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*, ed. by Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), pp. 77-96 (p. 79).

⁴⁸ Carlassare, 'Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism', 91.

⁴⁹ Carol Christ, 'Why Women Need the Goddess', in *Ecology*, ed. by Carolyn Merchant (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1994), pp. 309-321.

⁵⁰ Charlene Spretnak, 'The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics', in *Ecology*, ed. by Carolyn Merchant (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1994), pp. 299-308.

⁵¹ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 6.

for their transcendent, masculine God;⁵² they argue that drawing on feminine energy (like the Goddess) makes women better placed to have an intimate and caring relationship with the Earth. Women have 'life-giving and holistic reproductive and spiritual capacities' that equip them with 'an ability to care for and protect the earth from rapacious natural resource extraction'.⁵³ Thus, the connection between women and nature in this branch of ecofeminism is found in a shared feminine energy. Women are in a spiritual sense closer to nature than most men.

Social constructionist ecofeminists⁵⁴ refer to the branch of ecofeminism where philosophical or cultural 'structures have created and/or sustained the hierarchical dualism of male-female'⁵⁵ as well as many other overlapping and mutually reinforcing dualisms. This means that 'women's association with nature is not explained by women's 'natural' affinity, but is socially constructed'.⁵⁶ The aim of the social constructionist ecofeminist 'is to transcend dualist society'.⁵⁷ I consider this branch to be the most appealing because it is arguably the least susceptible to the criticism of essentialism. It avoids this critique because these ecofeminists do not consider there to be any innate link between women and nature. Instead, women and nature have been linked through 'historical patterns of social relations (capitalism, industrialism,

⁵² Foster, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 193.

⁵³ Charis Thompson, 'Back to Nature? Resurrecting Ecofeminism after Poststructuralist and Third-Wave Feminisms', *Isis*, 97.3 (2006), 505-512 (p. 506).

⁵⁴ I am taking the view of Carlassare that socialist ecofeminism 'is a social constructionist position' in 'Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism', 93. This is because socialist ecofeminists agree with the foundational claim in social constructionist ecofeminism that categories are constructed rather than fundamental.

⁵⁵ Mellor, 'Feminism and Environmental Ethics', 111.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵⁷ Mary Mellor, 'New Woman, New Earth – Setting the Agenda', *Organization & Environment*, 10.3 (1997), 296-308 (p. 304).

scientism, patriarchal religion)'.⁵⁸ It is my view that this branch of ecofeminism is better positioned to explain how further intersectional oppressions connect with the oppressions of women and nature. Whilst affinity ecofeminism might be able to explain the linked oppressions of women and nature, it becomes less clear how race, sexuality, class, and disability are related to the oppressions of women and the natural world as they do not have the same innate/material connection to explain these categories of oppression and their interrelations. Social constructionist ecofeminists, like Plumwood, can explain how hierarchical dualisms, that have been constructed socially and discursively, map on to each other to create a highly complex, interrelated system of oppression.

Like many areas of feminist research, ecofeminism received significant criticism for presenting an essentialised notion of 'woman'.⁵⁹ I will consider this criticism in more detail in Chapter Two but, given its impact to perspectives on ecofeminism, it is worth noting here. Essentialism in feminist studies refers to the thesis 'that there is some property (or properties) necessary to being a woman, like being nurturing, or being oppressed, or having a uterus'.⁶⁰ Critically, ecofeminists were seen to suggest that this certain property necessary to all women was something that also connected them to nature in some fundamental way. Gaard argues that ecofeminism has been portrayed as essentialist due to a focus 'on the celebration of goddess spirituality and the critique of patriarchy advanced in cultural ecofeminism'.⁶¹ However, since the 1990s,

⁵⁸ Ibid., 296.

⁵⁹ Mallory, 'The Spiritual is Political', 62.

⁶⁰ Charlotte Witt, 'Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory', *Philosophical Topics*, 23.2 (1995), 321-344 (p. 322).

⁶¹ Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 31.

ecofeminist theorists have sought ways ‘to strengthen and augment the theory’⁶² so that an ecofeminist analysis can be used to explore issues of social and environment justice without being essentialist. Despite the persistence of the ‘essentialist’ label,⁶³ it is possible for ecofeminists ‘to avoid essentialist traps’⁶⁴ by not relying on the idea that there is some universal property of ‘woman’ or of ‘nature’.

The research context helps to highlight two important foundational points for this thesis: 1) that despite significant criticism, ecofeminist theorising has continued into the 21st century with many scholars in the area suggesting that the theory holds value;⁶⁵ 2) that the essentialist critique is surmountable and ecofeminist theorists have worked to address the criticism by presenting oppressions as interwoven and constructed. It is from this context that this thesis can build upon the existing research to suggest novel ways of developing ecofeminist theory for the contemporary age in line with social constructionist ecofeminist insights with a commitment to anti-essentialism through intersectionality.

⁶² Ibid., 35.

⁶³ Ibid., 41.

⁶⁴ Wilson and MacGregor praise Gaard for achieving this through her queering of categories in their review, ‘New Ecofeminisms’, 856. Indeed, Gwen Hunnicutt suggests that ‘*most* environmental feminist scholars repudiate both essentialism and ethnocentrism’; emphasis my own, *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective: Intersections of Animal Oppression, Patriarchy and Domination of the Earth* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 14.

⁶⁵ Wilson and MacGregor say that ecofeminism is ‘an important area of scholarship whose time has come’ in ‘New Ecofeminisms’, 856; Foster argues that ‘ecofeminism despite its flaws, offers some very valuable insight’ in ‘Ecofeminism Revisited’, 196; Hunnicutt suggests that ecofeminism is now ‘making a recent comeback’, in *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective*, 14.

The Research Problem

The problem identified in this research project is that social constructionist ecofeminism has great potential as a theory with ‘critical and analytical force’,⁶⁶ however ecofeminist theory more generally has faced significant criticism for essentialism. Essentialism is ‘the thesis that certain of an objects’ properties are necessary to it’⁶⁷ and in feminism this presents as the idea that there are certain properties possessed by all women. Essentialism is rejected in feminist theory because the idea that there is any ‘single, shared property or properties that must be satisfied in order to count as a woman’⁶⁸ is problematic because it inevitably leaves some women out who do not share in the assumed common property. Ecofeminism currently appears to be ‘enjoying a resurgence through a new generation of academics seeking to develop and nuance ecofeminism from a sympathetic position’⁶⁹ following its drop in popularity in the late 1990s where ‘there was a sense of it having run out of steam’.⁷⁰ This resurgence in ecofeminist research also appears to mirror a social context where environmental concerns are weighing heavier on peoples’ minds⁷¹ and feminism is experiencing a ‘fourth wave’ with increased prominence on social media

⁶⁶ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 1.

⁶⁷ Witt, ‘Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory’, 321.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 322.

⁶⁹ Buckingham, ‘Ecofeminism’, 845.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 845.

⁷¹ Margaret Klein Salamon with Molly Gage, *Facing the Climate Emergency: How to Transform Yourself with Climate Truth* (Canada: New Society Publishers, 2020), pp.1-4.

and a greater focus on intersectionality.⁷² It is against this backdrop that the basic underlying principle of ecofeminism can be considered meaningful.

I propose that intersectionality could help to centre anti-essentialism in ecofeminist theory. Anti-essentialism is the rejection of ‘the existence of a generic Woman’.⁷³ Ecofeminist theorists have developed since the 1990s⁷⁴ to centralise anti-essentialism more significantly within their works to tackle this criticism, and I propose that intersectionality would help consolidate this move towards anti-essentialism. Intersectionality is the exploration of overlapping oppressions and highlights the limitations of a single-axis framework,⁷⁵ thus undermining the universalisation required to present a monolithic category of ‘woman’. My argument that an intersectional approach undermines essentialist thinking requires some defending and explanation. It has been convincingly argued that being intersectional is not synonymous with being anti-essentialist. In Devon Carbado and Cheryl Harris’ detailed paper on the distinction between the two concepts, intersectionality and anti-essentialism, they argue that ‘it is a mistake to frame intersectionality and anti-essentialism as one and the same thing’.⁷⁶ This is because intersectionality still uses identity categories that could be considered

⁷² Ealasaid Munro, ‘Feminism: A Fourth Wave?’ *Political Insight (Political Studies Association of the United Kingdom)*, 4.2 (2013), 22-25.

⁷³ Witt, ‘Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory’, 322.

⁷⁴ Charis Thompson and Sherilyn MacGregor argue that Carolyn Merchant was already criticising essentialist portrayals of the categories of ‘woman’ and ‘nature’ in the second edition of *The Death of Nature*, which was published in 1990 in ‘The Death of Nature: Foundations of Ecological Feminist Thought’ in *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment* ed. by Sherilyn MacGregor (London, Routledge: 2017), pp. 43-53.

⁷⁵ Kings, ‘Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism’, 63.

⁷⁶ Devon W. Carbado and Cheryl I. Harris, ‘Intersectionality at 30: Mapping the Margins of Anti-Essentialism, Intersectionality, and Dominance Theory’, *Harvard Law Review*, 132 (2019), 2193-2239 (p. 2200).

essentialist.⁷⁷ For example, intersectionality was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to analyse the oppression faced by Black women, yet there's a danger of treating all Black women as if they are a monolithic category, which could be essentialist. Thus, being intersectional should not be conflated with being anti-essentialist. However, it could then be argued that anti-essentialism requires the rejection of any categories.⁷⁸ As I will argue in Chapter Three, reference to categories is still useful because they still have material impacts on marginalised and oppressed groups. Therefore, I also do not take anti-essentialism to have to involve the denial of *any* category use. If essentialism is criticised for making "universalist" claims about women',⁷⁹ and it is not reasonable to reject the use of categories all together, then it is sufficiently anti-essentialist to problematise and avoid universalist claims in any category.

Intersectionality helps the researcher to capture the ways multiple forms of discrimination blend and interact in such a way that the idea that there could be some essential property of 'woman' is clearly incoherent as peoples' identities are more complex than being part of one group. Not only this, but intersectionality allows those multiple paths to be explored; meaning that rather than simply avoiding universalism, intersectionality also works to analyse the places of overlap between categories in a way that directly addresses essentialist claims. As such, centring intersectionality within ecofeminist theory appears to be a natural progression for maintaining anti-essentialism.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 2204.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 2205.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 2199.

Many feminist scholars have recognised the importance of committing to anti-essentialism⁸⁰ in order for feminist theory to develop critically. Some ecofeminists, like A.E. Kings and Gwen Hunnicutt, have also recognised that intersectionality offers a potentially more robust way of thinking about intersecting oppressions,⁸¹ however, there is not a widely agreed upon method for how this could be integrated into ecofeminist research. It seems that ecofeminism requires methodological tools that could help researchers avoid essentialism where possible. To date, the most significant gap in the literature is that intersectionality has been hinted at within social constructionist ecofeminism but the potential benefits from integrating intersectionality more formally have not been thoroughly explored. As stated above, employing intersectionality is not necessarily incompatible with being essentialist⁸² and so it cannot be that ecofeminist theorists simply employ intersectional ideas and assumes that the problem of essentialism has been overcome. However, I propose that by centralising intersectionality as a methodology, theorists may be better placed to minimise essentialism as they would be disrupting essentialist grouping with a more complex way of thinking about identity and experience.

Social constructionist ecofeminists, like Plumwood, agree that there are damaging dualisms that link women with nature. These dualisms are hierarchical so that man/woman and reason/nature present men as superior to women, reason as

⁸⁰ Tina Grillo, 'Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master's House', *Berkley Women's Law Journal*, 10 (1995), 16-30.

⁸¹ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', and Gwen Hunnicutt, *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective: Intersections of Animal Oppression, Patriarchy and Domination of the Earth* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

⁸² Carbado and Harris, 'Intersectionality at 30', 2200 and Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 82.

superior to nature, and, due to the interconnected logic of domination, men as linked to reason and women as linked to nature.⁸³ This central tenet of ecofeminism uncovers that an intersectional-style of thinking is already present in the theory. Indeed, even the name 'ecofeminism' implies researchers are thinking in ways that bring together different categories of oppression. As ecofeminism has grown, researchers like Gaard have analysed how these dualisms are reinforced by further oppressive dualistic couplings, such as heteronormative/queer, white/black, upper to middle-class/working class, human/animal, reason/emotion.⁸⁴ These linked dualisms map on to each other to reinforce privileges and oppressions. Ecofeminism has been using intersectional thinking before intersectionality as a concept was coined.⁸⁵ Yet, it is only recently that ecofeminist work has begun to explicitly take an intersectional approach.⁸⁶ I welcome this move in ecofeminist research as it allows a more critical vein of theory to develop that is more holistic in its approach. However, researchers have not formalised this intersectional approach into a methodology for ecofeminism. Intersectionality as a methodology for ecofeminism could be immensely valuable in guiding the researcher to think critically about their use of categories in analysis. Ecofeminism has been heavily criticised for not always recognising privileges within oppressed categories (e.g., treating 'women' as a unified oppressed group when some women benefit from privileges such as being white, middle-class, heterosexual, cis-gendered, able-bodied, and neurotypical). Developing an intersectional methodology to frame ecofeminist

⁸³ Plumwood's work is of particular note here due to her detailed analysis of Cartesian dualism. Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, pp. 104-119.

⁸⁴ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*.

⁸⁵ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 70; and Wilson and MacGregor, 'New Ecofeminisms', 856.

⁸⁶ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 72.

ways of thinking about dualism and identity could be one way of combating essentialism and embracing complexity. Essentialism leads to the perceptions that there are groups and entities within the same group share properties, whilst intersectionality disrupts grouping by showing that peoples' identities are more complex than being part of one group, giving space to explore those multiple paths.

The Research Aims

The aim of this thesis is to develop an intersectional methodology that can be used to develop social constructionist ecofeminist theory so that it can be applied to injustices.⁸⁷ This thesis will use the dairy and egg industries in the USA and UK as a case study to test the suitability and function of these methodological tools and highlight the benefits of centring intersectionality within ecofeminist thought. Consequently, my research objectives are to 1) openly engage with the criticisms ecofeminism has faced by evaluating their impact on ecofeminist theory; 2) to contribute to the defence of critical ecofeminism by developing an intersectional methodology; and 3) to test this method by applying it to a relevant case study.

Thus, the overarching research questions are based on the suggestion that ecofeminism offers a useful lens for analysing oppression:

- How can the shift away from essentialism in ecofeminism be consolidated?
- Can intersectionality be moulded into a pragmatic methodology for ecofeminist theory?

⁸⁷ It is worth clarifying that I intend for this methodology and theory to be applicable to injustices across both human and nonhuman spheres.

- Finally, how does an intersectional methodology shed light on the rearing of animals for the production of feminized proteins?

In order to conduct this research, I will draw on research predominantly from within ecofeminist theory. However, I will also explore how intersectional methodologies or methodological tools have developed in related theories of oppression to draw inspiration of how this might function in ecofeminism. I will also use examples from activist engagement in feminism and animal liberation and examples of sexism and speciesism to highlight links that can be made across these oppression categories. Using real-life examples is a common method in social constructionist ecofeminist analyses in order to justify claims that oppressions are connected. My aim is to demonstrate that intersectional methodological tools can help to avoid essentialism when identifying these connections between dominated groups. By considering accepted methodological tools in related areas and adapting these to aid ecofeminist enquiries, I will be well positioned to make the argument that intersectionality should be explicitly centralised in ecofeminist theory.

The Significance of the Research

This thesis provides an original contribution to the field of ecofeminism by developing tools for an intersectional methodology with the aim of aiding ecofeminist research to be more explicitly and thoroughly intersectional. Although the need for a more robust way of thinking intersectionally within ecofeminism has been

acknowledged in the work of ecofeminists such as Kings and Hunnicutt,⁸⁸ they have not themselves proposed ways of incorporating intersectionality as a method. Thus, this project differs from their work as it develops and tests the applicability of an intersectional methodology for ecofeminism. This is a valuable contribution to the field because, as I argued above, it offers an opportunity for ecofeminism to consolidate its developments towards anti-essentialism as intersectionality's disruption of universalised categories functions as a counter to essentialism that is transferable to other projects. Moreover, one of the key contributions made by integrating an intersectional approach with ecofeminism is the recognition that nonhuman animals need to be included amongst the axes of multiple discriminations analysed. This is further highlighted by the case study I have selected to test the applicability of the method as sexism and speciesism link to the ways feminized proteins are exploited. In attempting to provide answers to the research questions set out, this project has found that the use of intersectionality as a methodology is a relatively new development and requires further work. I have proposed a preliminary methodology, but this could be distilled through constructive interdisciplinary conversations.

This thesis is significant as it represents further contribution to the resurgence of interest in ecofeminism. Although it is certainly true that ecofeminism is enjoying a renewed popularity in academic discourse,⁸⁹ this interest should not be overstated. There is still 'scant literature that has sought to defend ecofeminism'⁹⁰ and so this

⁸⁸ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism' and Hunnicutt, *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective*.

⁸⁹ Buckingham, 'Ecofeminism', 845.

⁹⁰ Foster, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 192.

thesis can help to fill this gap in the literature by lending further defence to ecofeminism against the criticisms that led to a lull in ecofeminist research until recently.

Additionally, in Chapter Four, I apply the theory of ecofeminism alongside the developed intersectional methodology to the issue of the egg and dairy industries to test the value of incorporating intersectionality more rigorously in ecofeminist theory and to demonstrate the need to include nonhuman animals in intersectional analyses. This was to highlight the benefits of the proposed methodology and to be able to offer practical suggestions for alleviating oppression. The developing of an intersectional methodology within ecofeminism is novel and thus requires testing to see whether an intersectional methodology can offer an analysis that is well-situated to limit essentialism and critically build upon social constructionist ecofeminist theory. Furthermore, this case study contributes to a noted gap in ecofeminist literature in regard to modern animal agriculture;⁹¹ and I will argue that, despite recognition of the double-oppression female farm animals experience due to the harvesting of their ‘feminized proteins’,⁹² there has been limited ecofeminist analysis of eggs, whilst milk has received relatively significant attention by ecofeminist writings.⁹³ Moreover, this case study serves as a relevant example of the ways sexism and speciesism link to

⁹¹ Val Plumwood, ‘Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature: A Critical Feminist Eco-Socialist Analysis’, *Ethics & the Environment*, 5.2 (2000), 285-322 (p. 288).

⁹² I will explain the routes of this terminology and its importance to this thesis in the proceeding sub-section, ‘Clarifications’.

⁹³ For example, Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*; and, Greta Gaard, ‘Towards A Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies’, *American Quarterly*, 65.3 (2013), 595-618.

exploit female nonhuman animals to help emphasise the need to include nonhuman animals in intersectional approaches.

Improved consumer understanding of the negative impacts of the animal agriculture industry has been partly responsible for an increased uptake in veganism in Great Britain. A study commissioned by The Vegan Society, which analysed the popularity of veganism between 2014 and 2019, found that the number of vegans had quadrupled in this five-year period.⁹⁴ That there is an increase in veganism, and not just vegetarianism, suggests that the consumer is increasingly aware that it is not just the killing of animals for meat that is an oppressive act. Instead, the choice to go vegan demonstrates a recognition that farming animals for their by-products is also an ethical problem. Moreover, it is reasonable to suggest that (alongside ethical concern for the nonhuman animals themselves and a growing attitude that a carnivorous diet may not be healthy for humans) consumers are more aware of the significant role the animal agriculture industry plays in greenhouse gas emissions. Thus, there is an increased number of vegans in Great Britain due to a recognition that there are several moral issues associated with the animal agriculture industry. Given this recent rise, it is poignant to consider the egg and dairy industries as a case study for intersectional oppression as it is a topical issue that is increasingly resonating with the wider public.

⁹⁴ *Worldwide Growth of Veganism* (n.d.)
<<https://www.vegansociety.com/news/media/statistics/worldwide>> [accessed 8 August 2022].

Clarifications

I am conscious of my decision in this thesis to refer to animals, other than humans, as nonhuman animals. I will be using this phrase because it is most prevalent in the literature I have been examining and because there is currently not a preferred alternative term. I do not believe that it is necessarily the most effective phrase for recognising the value of nonhuman animals and I certainly do not believe that it is effective as a radical reconceptualisation which I consider necessary to deconstructing the systems of power and value in dualism. Referring to all other animals as nonhuman animals sustains the 'us' and 'them' mentality. It is true that it encourages humans to recognise that they too are animals, yet it also continues to recognise *human* as something distinctive and unique from all other beings.⁹⁵ Animals continue to be defined against the human. Despite the problems with this terminology, after consideration I have decided to use it for practicality and consistency with the ecofeminist literature. This thesis is written with hope that there will in future be a less dualistic term that fully recognises the interdependency of human relationships with nonhuman animals. However, until then, nonhuman animals is a useful way of referring to animals who happen to not be a member of the *homo sapiens* species.

⁹⁵ A more detailed conversation about the different terminologies and the idea that allowing different terms to all be relevant as it helps to emphasise the complexity of the nonhuman world can be found in Catherine Price and Sophie Chao, 'Multispecies, More-Than-Human, Non-Human, Other-Than-Human: Reimagining Idioms of Animacy in an Age of Planetary Unmaking', *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 10.2 (2023), 177-193.

The term 'nature' has also been subject to debate in the related literature. Donna Haraway argues that our term 'nature' is a social construction.⁹⁶ Plumwood describes nature as 'a very broad and shifting category and has encompassed many different sorts of colonisation'.⁹⁷ Hunnicutt agrees, stating that 'nature is a social construction which is often crafted in such a way as to serve particular ideological interests'.⁹⁸ Haraway presents the term *natureculture* to demonstrate her belief that we should not draw a hyper-distinction between nature/culture.⁹⁹ Our culture helps to determine what we consider to be nature or natural, and thus they cannot be so easily separated. Thus, Haraway proposed that we should redefine nature to move away from essentialism. In this thesis, I avoid using the term 'nature' when referring to the Earth as I recognise the duality with which the term has been used and wish to separate my writing from this. Instead, I prefer the term *environment* as it may be better in emphasising the our existence as embodied.¹⁰⁰

Ecofeminism has been criticised for appearing to suggest that women are somehow closer to nature.¹⁰¹ This is because, as I will go on to highlight below, ecofeminists can portray women as closer to nature, whilst men are closer to culture, thereby essentialising women as having a unique experience of being more connected

⁹⁶ Donna Haraway, 'The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness', *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), pp. 91-198.

⁹⁷ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 1.

⁹⁸ Hunnicutt, *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective*, 23.

⁹⁹ Haraway, 'The Companion Species Manifesto', 108.

¹⁰⁰ This is the term also preferred by Hunnicutt for similar reasons. She considers it to be 'a more inclusive term' than other synonyms for the Earth. Hunnicutt, *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective*, 3.

¹⁰¹ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 2.

to nature. Additionally, it essentialises nature as feminine, fixed, and separate from (human) culture.¹⁰² The impact of ecofeminists valorising this connection in the past has led to modern ecofeminist texts beginning with ‘denials that ecofeminism relies on an essentialist, biologist, and male-exclusionary link between women and nature’.¹⁰³ There is a move in social constructionist ecofeminism to overtly reject the idea that women could be closer to nature because they recognise that ‘humanity itself is inseparable from nature as a whole’.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the idea that women are more a part of nature than men can be rejected as, without this essentialist connection, ecofeminism can emphasise that ‘the damage inflicted upon nature by humans invariably leads to harm being inflicted upon all humankind and not just women’.¹⁰⁵ This is further reason for my preference of the term ‘environment’ as it better highlights that all humans are situated within the world.

The term ‘nature’ has led to further problems in ecofeminist writings due to the extension of describing entities/behaviours as ‘natural’, or indeed ‘unnatural’ as highlighted by queer theory.¹⁰⁶ This refers to ‘behaviour that is automatic for a species. Such as swimming for whales, roosting for hens, and walking for humans’.¹⁰⁷ The problem with the term is that it paints a picture that certain behaviours or qualities are ‘essential’ to a group. When someone says that it is *natural* for a woman to want to be a mother, they depict mothering behaviours as a biologically inbuilt mode of being for

¹⁰² Sandilands, ‘Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer’, 29-30.

¹⁰³ Mallory, ‘The Spiritual is Political’, 69.

¹⁰⁴ Kings, ‘Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism’, 71.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 71.

¹⁰⁶ Greta Gaard, ‘Towards a Queer Ecofeminism’, *Hypatia*, 12.1 (1997), 114-137.

¹⁰⁷ Hunnicutt, *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective*, 23.

all women. Furthermore, what is considered natural by society has often been used to justify inequalities. In the case of mothering being seen as being natural for women, sexism has been justified as further 'conclusions [are drawn] that women's intellectual, social, and emotional functioning should be limited to nurturing and caregiving'.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, it is important for this project to be critical of language in ecofeminist theory that maintains essentialism given that my aim is to contribute to the consolidation of an anti-essentialist ecofeminist theory.

In the interest of full disclosure regarding my own worldview and the privileges I bring to this project, I am a middle-class, heterosexual, cis-gendered, non-disabled, neurotypical, white female. As a result, I approach this project from a position of great privilege. I have had negative experiences as a result of how people have responded to my gender, but I will never know what it is like to be excluded for my skin colour or to be ridiculed for my sexual orientation. I am aware that my privileges can act as 'powerful filters even in the presence of intersectional commitments',¹⁰⁹ I intend to be self-critical in my analysis and listen first before writing. As Judith Butler argued, all too often feminists end their list of -isms with a vague 'etc'.¹¹⁰ which is intended to include all omitted oppressions. Similarly, Yuval-Davis considers it to reveal an

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰⁹ Maneesha Deckha, 'Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory: Centralizing Race and Culture in Feminist Work on Nonhuman Animals', *Hypatia*, 27.3 (2012), 527-545 (p. 534).

¹¹⁰ Judith Butler cited in Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 69. However, as Helma Lutz states, Butler says that she is 'white, middle-class, heterosexual, etc. and that's it', demonstrating some hypocrisy in her demand that feminists write the list of oppressions in full. Helma Lutz, 'Intersectionality as Method', *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 2.1-2 (2015), 39-44 (pp. 40-41).

‘embarrassed “sign of exhaustion”’.¹¹¹ The exclusion of certain oppressions suggests that they are less important manifestations, and so the omission contributes further to the marginalisation of those subjugated by the oppressors. In my view, to omit certain oppressions uncovers privilege; certain oppressions are forgotten or only considered as an afterthought where the person has not been subject to this oppression. It should be considered a sign of privilege to be able to leave out the real oppressions that people face. Nobody experiencing the omitted oppression has the privilege of being able to ignore it. Each form of oppression will have specific implications individually, but this grows in complexity as they become layered and interwoven with one another. Thus, throughout this thesis, where relevant I will name each oppression that is currently present in ecofeminist theorising in order to avoid minimising the salience of each form of oppression and to recognise the responsibility that a researcher has to acknowledge multiple oppressions, especially for those who enjoy multiple privileges.

A final point of clarification to consider is the approach taken to activism and academic work in this thesis. Carol L. Glasser and Arpan Roy examined the limitations that exist in academic work as a result of a division between activism and the academy. One of the reasons cited for this division is that activism and academic work are seen almost as mutually exclusive. Being active against a certain injustice means that one cannot remain ‘objective’:

There is a privileging of "objectivity", the belief that the scholar should be impartial to the process and outcome of theory building and research.

¹¹¹ Yuval-Davis cited in Kings, ‘Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism’, 69.

Therefore it is often deemed unwise or inappropriate for people to study movements in which they are involved, for fear they will not be objective.¹¹²

I believe that this call for objectivity is unreasonable and potentially problematic.¹¹³ Everybody approaches research with a certain level of bias or preconceived ideas. In the issues of social justice where one group has been oppressed by another, this call for objectivity seems particularly absurd. To suggest that the oppressed group should remain silent on social issues in an academic setting, as they may approach the issue emotively, is to further silence these groups. Therefore, I do not consider my feminist activism to be a hinderance to this project. On the contrary, social justice issues *are* emotive issues. To try and artificially separate emotion from academic work in this area is further evidence of the pervasiveness of the cult of reason Plumwood analysed.¹¹⁴ Emotion does not need to be seen as mutually exclusive and oppositional to reason. That they continue to be seen as hyperseparated is a result of the very dualist binaries that I am seeking to disrupt in this project.

¹¹² Carol L. Glasser and Arpan Roy, 'The Ivory Trap: Bridging the Gap between Activism and the Academy', *Counterpoints*, 448, *DEFINING Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation* (2014), 89-109 (p. 98).

¹¹³ Feminists like Sandra Harding have explored the problematic notion that knowledge claims can be made that are distinct from the subject's own view. Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge: Thinking from Women's Lives* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).

¹¹⁴ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* and Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002).

The Research Limitations

There are some limitations to this project that are worth exploring from the outset. For example, I decided to limit the scope of this project to focus on the dairy and egg farming sector of the animal agriculture industry. This is the practice of rearing nonhuman animals for the products they make, i.e. milk and eggs, I will be using Carol Adams' term 'feminized proteins'¹¹⁵ to refer to these products. Adams argues that this is the term that 'should' be used because they describe a, 'protein that was produced by a female body'.¹¹⁶ By referring to these products as feminized proteins the exploitation of female animals is made explicit. This decision was made to help concentrate the focus of this project and should not be taken as a comment on the significance of other forms of animal agriculture as an oppressive practice.

A further decision has been to focus on these industries in the Western context. The milk produced by the female cow's body is the most popular type of nonhuman animal milk for consumption in the UK, and the Western world more generally. As this project is speaking to a Western context, I will therefore focus on the dairy industry's use of cows for the production of milk. Many other nonhuman animals are used to produce dairy products around the world, including buffalo, sheep, goats, and camels.¹¹⁷ It may be interesting to further expand this analysis to consider these alternative nonhuman animal sources of milk for human consumption, especially as

¹¹⁵ A term coined by Carol Adams in reference to the dairy and egg products that only female animals can farmed for, thus adding an additional layer of oppression to female nonhuman animals.

¹¹⁶ Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 21.

¹¹⁷ FAO, *Gateway to Dairy Production and Products: Milk Composition* (n.d.) < <https://www.fao.org/dairy-production-products/products/milk-composition/en/>> [accessed 15 February 2023].

traditional attitudes towards milk may differ from culture to culture. However, this was outside the scope of this project due to the fact I am speaking from and to a Western context. This also highlights a further limitation in the generalisability of my findings. I do not intend for the conclusions I reach in regard to the case study to be considered applicable to contexts outside of the Western context that has been analysed. Ecofeminism has been criticised for its Western-centrism and with my experience and identity as white British, alongside the scope being limited to the USA and UK, this thesis does little to actively challenge this particular criticism. In this thesis, I hope to highlight, despite my own identity and the scope of this project, that there is the potential for ecofeminist theory to respond to the Western-centric criticism. However, it has not been the primary aim and so I would welcome further research that deals more explicitly with this criticism.

A more practical limitation of the thesis has been a result of limited resources. During some of the more formative working periods of this thesis, my research was impacted by local and national lockdowns as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, my ability to access resources was limited due to library closures and then further limited by my inability to travel to the university during local lockdowns given my significant distance from the university. Consequently, the pandemic had a significant impact on my access to books that were not made available in e-format. I am sure that I have come across titles that seemed promising in terms of their relevance to my thesis but I was unable to access them within the time and budgetary restrictions of this project.

An Overview of the Thesis

Chapter One will take the form of a literature review. I will examine selected seminal pieces of literature that have criticised dualist hierarchies. This literature review will focus predominantly on the seminal social/ist ecofeminist texts written by Carolyn Merchant and Val Plumwood. I will distinguish their ecofeminism from other theories that have criticised dualistic attitudes to human/nonhuman, such as poststructuralist and post-humanist studies. I will suggest that comparing ecofeminist theory with these alternative critiques of dualism highlights one of the most appealing aspects of ecofeminist theory; namely, its scope for analysing oppressions across both human and nonhuman spheres. The aim of this chapter will be to highlight the synergies that can be drawn between ecofeminism and intersectionality and emphasise ecofeminist theory's implicitly intersectional aspects. This will help to outline the case for the benefits of a more explicit intersectional approach to ecofeminist theory.

In Chapter Two, I will consider three criticisms that have led to ecofeminism having a negative reputation. These criticisms are that ecofeminism has been anti-academic, Western-centric, and essentialist. By exploring each of these criticisms in detail, I intend to take seriously the problems that are identified in different forms of ecofeminism. However, my hypothesis is that ecofeminism as a theory has been unduly rejected on the basis of criticisms that are most problematic in relation to its affinity branches. If ecofeminism can be effectively adapted to grow from where it has been criticised, without compromising its fundamental beliefs, then I believe this is a cause worth exploring. The essential ideas of ecofeminism clearly still ring true for

many as other scholars have used terms such as “ecological feminism” (Warren 1991,1994), “feminist environmentalism” (Heller 1999; King 1989), “critical feminist eco-socialism” (Plumwood 2002)¹¹⁸ to distance themselves from the scorned term ‘ecofeminism’. I will conclude that it is still useful to use ecofeminism as a framework for understanding complex intersectional oppressions and to map out methods of overcoming them.

Chapter Three examines what intersectionality is and considers why developing intersectional methodological tools could be beneficial for ecofeminist theory. I propose testing two intersectional methodological tools (listening, problematising the oppressor) whilst considering praxis to be a natural product of employing an intersectional methodology. I argue that, in employing these tools and being directed towards praxis, a more critical form of social constructionist ecofeminism may develop that builds on the work done to defend ecofeminism from criticisms – particularly that of essentialism.

In Chapter Four I use the egg and dairy industries in the UK and USA as a case study to apply a critical ecofeminist theory using the intersectional methodology developed in the previous chapter. This case study has been selected because it is an example of a thoroughly gender-based violence and so is a fruitful area to consider in an intersectional ecofeminist analysis. I argue that by centralising listening and problematising the oppressor this analysis builds upon a move towards anti-essentialism and uncovers some examples of intersecting oppressions that have not

¹¹⁸ Gaard, Greta, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism’, *Feminist Formation*, 23.2 (2011), 26-53 (p. 27).

been fully explored in previous ecofeminist writings (especially in relation to hens). This analysis of oppression is driven towards praxis. Thus, in Chapter Five, I will examine veganism and social media activism as actions that can be taken to ease the intersecting oppressions identified in the preceding chapter. That theory informs practice is an important element of research into social injustices as there should be practical avenues to explore as a result of theoretical insights into oppression. I have chosen to focus on individual action here as a further limiting of scope. Although I recognise that this requires justification, given the greater blame held by corporations and the burden placed on individual peoples, I have made this decision to focus on the empowering idea of personal change and freeing oneself from the dualistic binaries and concepts culture teaches. Additionally, the intersectional methodology that is proposed centres the individual and the complexity of identity categories on individuals, so individual praxis felt like a natural product. I believe this can work in harmony with more radical calls to institutional and systematic change.

I will reach a conclusion to summarise the claims that have been made throughout this thesis. In doing so, I will be able to highlight the contribution this thesis has made to the field of intersectionality and ecofeminist theory and give examples of interesting pathways to suggest further research based on these claims.

Criticising Dualism

This exceptional combination of political acumen and radical vulnerability marks Val Plumwood as one of the most brilliant environmental thinkers of our time – Patsy Hellen¹¹⁹

*What, then, is the influence of *The Death of Nature*? It is, simply, enormous! – Karen Warren¹²⁰*

This project ultimately intends to develop an intersectional methodology suitable for ecofeminist theory, the applicability of which will be assessed by applying the methodology to an ecofeminist analysis of the egg and dairy industries. The significance of developing an intersectional methodology is made clearer by understanding how ecofeminism has criticised the dualistic hierarchies in Western society. Philosophical dualism is the separation of two related concepts in a way that presents them as opposites rather than related terms; for example, human/animal, man/woman, mind/body would all be common types of dualism in the Western model. In splitting the concepts apart, their differences are emphasised to suggest that a human is something radically different from an animal, a man is a human radically different from a woman, and the mind is a radically different substance from the body. Social constructionist ecofeminists argue that this distinction is deepened by the hierarchy that is applied to it; the human, man, and mind is superior to the animal, woman, and body. Karen Warren characterises these dualisms by their “up-down”

¹¹⁹ Patsy Hellen, ‘Review: Reviewed Work(s): *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* by Val Plumwood’, *Ethics & the Environment*, 7.2 (2002), 181-184 (p. 181).

¹²⁰ Karen J Warren, ‘The Legacy of Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature*’, *Organization & Environment*, 11.2 (1998), 186-188 (p. 188).

thinking' in that they consider 'what is "up"' to be more valuable than 'what is "down"'.¹²¹ Most importantly, in regard to this project, many feminists, including ecofeminists, further argue that the dualist pairings map on to one another so that those in the superior categories become associated with one another, whilst the inferior categories also become conceptually connected.¹²² This means that the woman is seen as closer to the nonhuman animal and less rational than the man, and it is the rational man who becomes the model for human. Ecofeminists have shown that this hyperseparation and oppositional structure justifies power structures that are damaging to those at the bottom of each hierarchal dualist pairing, and indeed (perhaps more discreetly) damaging to those at top of the dualist pairings too. However, despite this engagement with intersectional ideas, few ecofeminist theories acknowledge explicitly that this is an intersectional relationship;¹²³ fewer still engage in interdisciplinary conversations with intersectional scholarship to explore the benefits of employing intersectionality within ecofeminism.

The aims of this chapter are to identify areas of prior research in ecofeminism and contemporary critical animal studies and posthumanism, to show the value of social constructionist ecofeminist theory as well as its limits. I will demonstrate the ways in which social/ist ecofeminists, in particular Merchant and Plumwood, have paved the way for a potentially intersectional ecofeminism. Their work, although distinct in approach, highlights the complex dualisms that underpin and connect

¹²¹ Karen Warren, 'The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism', *Environmental Ethics*, 12.2 (1990), 125-146 (p. 128).

¹²² Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 29.

¹²³ Though there are exceptions to this and a growing recognition in more recent work. For example, Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* and MacGregor, 'Gender and environment'.

multiple oppressions; as such their analyses make possible a more intersectional approach to the links between dualisms. While not explicitly referring to intersectionality, and whilst working within their own parameters (which will be discussed below), these two theorists are indicative of the synergies that can be drawn between ecofeminism and intersectionality.

To achieve this, I will consider some selected relevant scholars in ecofeminism, post-humanism, and post-structuralism who have criticised dualism. These scholarly fields have been chosen because they each connect the human with the nonhuman as a pivotal part of their rejection of dualism. I will mainly focus on the work of Carolyn Merchant¹²⁴ and Val Plumwood¹²⁵ as seminal researchers in ecofeminism, Donna Haraway¹²⁶ as a post-humanist 'bridge' between ecofeminism and critical animal studies, in comparison with Giorgio Agamben¹²⁷ and Jacques Derrida¹²⁸ as influential academics in post-humanism and post-structuralism. I have selected these areas of the research with a significant focus on ecofeminism because it is the theoretical framework within which I position this project. Evaluating some of the most significant work in these field will help to demonstrate that ecofeminism has not developed in a vacuum but has been influenced by, and influenced, work in parallel fields. Post-humanist studies and critical animal studies have criticised dualisms more specifically

¹²⁴ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*.

¹²⁵ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*.

¹²⁶ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

¹²⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. by Kevin Attell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

¹²⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal that Therefore I Am', *Critical Inquiry*, trans. by David Wills, 28.2 (2002), 369-418.

for its artificial separation between the human and nonhuman animal. I suggest that this comparison with alternative criticisms of dualism highlights one of the most appealing aspects of ecofeminist theory, which is its capacity for an intersectional analysis that can analyse oppressions across human and nonhuman spheres. In the proceeding chapters, I will defend my use of ecofeminist theory and I will propose a methodology centred on intersectionality which will help emphasise this benefit of ecofeminist theory.

This chapter will be structured around different aspects of critiquing dualism that are found in the seminal works of the scholars I have selected. I will consider; the approaches; analyses of key thinkers; identifications of the power of language, and; suggestions of interdependency. I have selected these four themes as they provide significant scope for both highlighting the development of the criticisms of dualism and comparing the different theories I am considering. In examining the approaches taken to deconstructing dualism, I will show how Merchant and Plumwood's approaches were seminal in developing social constructionist ecofeminism, whilst suggesting that ecofeminist theory could benefit from a more explicitly intersectional approach in order to bring an additional layer of complexity to the categories through the analysis of multiple axes of oppression. By examining how Merchant and Plumwood's rigorous engagement with key figures in dualism helped to justify their claims that dualistic hierarchies map onto each other, I will highlight how this implicitly intersectional recognition could be more explicitly explored in ecofeminist theory. Then I will explore Merchant's analysis of language to indicate that, although she might be seen as giving preferential treatment to the Mothering metaphor in nature, this provides further

support for the intersectional approach suggested by this project as intersectionality could help to complicate the categories used. Additionally, Plumwood's, and later Gaard's, work uses language that is intersectional, and I suggest that this gives further reason to believe that there is synergy between ecofeminist theory and intersectionality that could be made more explicit. This recognition of synergy is deepened by the section that considers interdependency as an anti-hierarchical tool used by Plumwood that has significant points of similarity with an intersectional approach to dualist hierarchies.

These theorists demonstrate that dualist hierarchies support and sustain one another, which is implicitly intersectional. Yet they have not centred their approaches around intersectionality and doing so could direct ecofeminist theory towards a greater appreciation for the complexity of analysing privileges and oppressions across human and nonhuman spheres. This chapter does not intend to cover all branches of ecofeminism, post-humanism, and poststructuralism; this would be far beyond its scope. Rather I intend to provide a discussion on how these certain seminal critics of dualisms have convincingly interrogated dualistic hierarchies and the logic of domination, whilst indicating that a shortcoming of the current literature is the underdeveloped commitment to consistently analysing the complexity of different axes of discrimination that are crucial to environmental and social (in)justice, which an intersectional approach would help to address.

Approaches to Deconstructing Dualism

Merchant criticises dualist hierarchies by employing a historical methodology that focuses on the accelerated technological and social changes of the Scientific Revolution. By taking a broad historical method, Merchant produces a genealogy to explain how the Scientific Revolution marked a changing point for Western society's relationship with Earth. To do this she explores the developments and influence of dualisms with a particular focus on the figures of 'Francis Bacon, William Harvey, René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes and Isaac Newton'.¹²⁹ Merchant's methodology allows her to re-evaluate the veneration these figures have received for their contributions to science and 'human progress' by considering how these philosophies changed perceptions of the environment. The Scientific Revolution has been perceived favourably by modern scientists as it is often considered the spark for technological and epistemological 'progress', leading the way towards modern society. However, Merchant interrogates that interpretation of this era of change by employing 'the egalitarianism of ecology and women's movement'.¹³⁰ Merchant maintains that it was the conceptualisation of the Earth as mechanical rather than organic, of a cold unruly mistress rather than 'benevolent, nurturer, mother, and provider',¹³¹ which permitted the activities that can be considered the 'roots of our current environmental dilemma'.¹³² Her approach allows her to demonstrate that we can look to interpret history in a new light, one which will illuminate those who have been marginalised in

¹²⁹ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, xvii.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, xix.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³² *Ibid.*, xvii.

our history books (for Merchant this is predominantly women and nature), and that will help us understand and take command of the present.¹³³

This approach is part of what made Merchant's contribution unique. It was 'unprecedented'¹³⁴ to link the oppression of women and nature with each other *and* with technological advances. Merchant sustains this connection through her historical methodology by recognising a cultural shift in the perception of 'nature' because of the Scientific Revolution. Sara Khalil suggests that this methodology laid the foundation for Haraway to later develop this recognition of how technology and perceptions of nature are linked.¹³⁵ Haraway is able to build on Merchant's work using the identified relationship between the perception of nature and technology to progress in various directions. Haraway achieves this through her suggestion that cyborgs disrupt dualistic perceptions of culture and nature.¹³⁶ The cyborg represents the conjoining of the natural and the cultural so that they cannot be viewed in contrast, but instead as working harmoniously together. Merchant's historical methodology lends to a more descriptive narrative of the progress and change of ideas. Therefore, Merchant demonstrated why technological developments compounded the culture/nature dualism in a way that negatively impacted how we perceive women and nature; Haraway, working from this rejection, suggests a new normative theory of conceptualising how nature and technology relate. Thus, Merchant's approach can be

¹³³ Ibid., xvi.

¹³⁴ Warren, 'The Legacy of Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature*', 186.

¹³⁵ Sara Abdelsabour Rady Khalil, *Ecofeminism and the Deconstruction of Dualisms: Theorising Contemporary American Women's Writing*, Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/12929/>, 29.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 29.

seen as having a significant impact on the development of dualist critiques for later scholars as she sets a basis that traces the conceptual connections between different oppressed groups. Merchant's work can be used to descriptively highlight the synergies between ecofeminism and intersectionality, and I intend to work from this to present a more normative analysis of dualism than Merchant by focusing on the practical impacts of an intersectional analysis of dualist oppressions in Chapter Four. The benefit of developing a more normative analysis is that it will help direct the analysis towards praxis and enable application to social injustices.

Merchant has also engaged in an interdisciplinary analysis, drawing from the sciences, social sciences, and humanities, through the application of ecology and feminism. These relatively modern fields can be applied to give a new perspective on the past,¹³⁷ one that encourages, even demands, a revision of our outlook on the Scientific Revolution but also provides us with the tools to change our priorities. Merchant argues through the book that although some humans have reaped the benefits of the Scientific Revolution, the negative impact it has had on women has not been acknowledged. To be specific, 'Merchant argued persuasively for a view that subsequently became one of the two core tenets of ecofeminism: that the domination of women and the domination of nature are structurally linked'.¹³⁸ Merchant's book is a seminal piece of ecofeminist work because the imposed link between women and nature received a rigorous examination.

¹³⁷ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, xvi.

¹³⁸ Thompson, 'Back to Nature? Resurrecting Ecofeminism after Poststructuralist and Third-Wave Feminisms', 508.

Equally, it is important to note that there are some limitations to employing a historical methodology to demonstrate that the domination of women and nature are linked. Merchant is attempting to reconstruct the past through a lens of scientific history that is inevitably selective in the sources used. Peter Pesic criticises Merchant's work for this reason and suggests that the sources explored by Merchant 'need to be examined with special care to test the fidelity of their insights in terms of historical accuracy'.¹³⁹ A genealogical methodology regarding changes to complex intersectional attitudes is perhaps likely to make some generalisations or miss some nuance in attitudes. Indeed, Pesic criticises Merchant's portrayal of Bacon as justifying the domination of nature through analogies with the domination of witches whilst there are other areas of Bacon's work where he suggests that 'most narrations of witchcraft... [are] "superstitious"'.¹⁴⁰ Thus, although Merchant's historical methodology has had significant influences on Haraway's work and ecofeminist research, it is important to recognise that a historical methodology is vulnerable to the criticism that sources have been interpreted and selected so that a more generalised view of changing/progressing views and attitudes is identified that does not necessarily reflect the nuance that existed. Merchant's historical methodology can inform the methodological decisions of this thesis by highlighting the importance of working towards being non-selective and allowing the complexity and nuance of linked privileges and oppressions to be considered by being open and receptive in collecting

¹³⁹ Peter Pesic, 'Proteus Rebound: Reconsidering the "Torture of Nature"', *Isis*, 99. 2 (2008), 304-317 (p. 305).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 310.

research; in my view, this could be achieved by a more explicitly intersectional approach.

As well as interpreting selected sources in such a way that is favourable to the analysis, there are also important parts of scientific history that are absent perhaps because they provide an alternative narrative on perceptions of nature. Donald Worster identifies one such absent aspect in Merchant's analysis. He argues that Darwin's evolutionary biology provided 'another organic metaphor'¹⁴¹ in the image of 'the evolving tree of life'.¹⁴² Worster proposes that this perception of nature is at odds with the technological perception that is lingering, according to Merchant's proposal. Darwin offers an interpretation of nature that is 'alive, messy, disorderly, unplanned, and seemingly chaotic'¹⁴³ rather than as a mechanistic object. Arguably this criticism of Merchant is limited as Merchant stops her historical analysis at the end of the Scientific Revolution, and so Darwin was outside of the scope of her project. However, Merchant does suggest that the Scientific Revolution is responsible for the lasting perception of a mechanical perspective of nature.¹⁴⁴ Worster suggests that Merchant's analysis is incomplete because she problematises scientific research when the solution to our mechanistic perception of nature could equally be found within science.¹⁴⁵ This criticism is made more poignant by the fact that Merchant does consider the impact of Darwin's theory of evolution in relation to it supporting the

¹⁴¹ Donald Worster, 'Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* at 25 years', *Environmental History*, 10.4 (2005), 809-812 (p. 811).

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 811.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 811.

¹⁴⁴ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 290.

¹⁴⁵ Worster, 'Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* at 25 years', 811.

position that women are less rational, and more emotional, than their male counterparts.¹⁴⁶ Thereby suggesting that the scope is widened where it affirms the thesis narrative. It is unreasonable to expect a historical methodology to cover every nuance of perception, however in problematising historical scientific discoveries and language it perhaps becomes more difficult to see the complexities of historical influence on the modern day.

Again, Merchant's methodology has been seminal in tracing connections between women and nature with the advancements in science and technology to highlight how this progress justified the intensified control of a feminized nature. However, an intersectional methodology could be better placed to embrace nuance in explaining apparently contradictory narratives; in Chapter Three, I will suggest that an apt tool for an intersectional methodology is listening and in Chapter Four I will show how this tool helps to listen to the different ways 'natural' can be used to have both positive and negative connotations. These seemingly contradictory narratives, once analysed from an intersectional approach, can be better understood as consistent with the logic of domination. Consequently, this limitation of Merchant's methodology can help to inform the methodologies used within ecofeminism to tackle these nuances.

Unlike Merchant, Plumwood is not so explicit about her methodology in her seminal work, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. In the introduction to her book, Plumwood reveals her overarching aim 'is to help develop an environmental feminism that can be termed a critical ecological feminism'¹⁴⁷ grounded in what we could

¹⁴⁶ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 162-3.

¹⁴⁷ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 1.

consider to be closer to an intersectional feminism that considers gender, race, and class. Therefore, Plumwood's method could also be described as supported by an interdisciplinary focus with the aim to advance a model that can adequately address domination across human and nonhuman plains. The model that she constructs to identify the dominating force is termed 'the master model'. This refers to a group of people who benefit at the expense of others who are not considered part of the group. Plumwood defines the master model as a 'white, largely male elite'¹⁴⁸ who dominate those considered to be 'other'. Importantly, Plumwood notes that this dominating power cannot be considered to assume a 'masculine identity pure and simple';¹⁴⁹ the dominating power is constructed by a number of exclusions and opposites that have a complex interplay which would be lost in such an oversimplification. The naming of the master model and the explanation Plumwood gives for how it functions to sustain oppression is, in my view, one of the most valuable contributions her work has made to establishing ecofeminist theory. It is a powerful image that works well to explain how dualisms map on to one another, and I suggest it further highlights the synergies present between ecofeminism and intersectionality. This piece of analysis has been widely well received. Its praise has been sung by Bruce Bratley and Rob Krueger who argue that it should be 'a central consideration for anyone undertaking research on the Left'.¹⁵⁰ It is therefore worth exploring in further detail as an influential approach to social constructionist ecofeminism.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 42.

¹⁵⁰ Bruce Bratley and Rob Krueger, 'Review: Reviewed Work(s): *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* by Val Plumwood', *Economic Geography*, 72.4 (1996), 476-478 (p. 477).

The master model is constructed and sustained in five ways.¹⁵¹ These are 1) Backgrounding: this is when the master depends upon and uses others whilst considering themselves independent, for example the master will at once live in and be surrounded by their environment whilst also considering oneself to be definitively separate and distinct from it. The fact that we rely upon nature for our own existence is conveniently ignored and it is this 'denied dependency on a subordinate other'¹⁵² which Plumwood believes characterises dualism. 2) Radical exclusion: this is to emphasise the differences between dualist pairings and to minimise similarities. Radical exclusion makes it easier to perceive related things as 'other'. An example of this would be how humans consider themselves to be totally separate from the 'animal', despite sharing similarities, by focusing on perceived differences such as a lack of reason or language in nonhuman animals. Seeing 'the animal' as so distinctively 'other' to the human is yet another way in which humans can conceptually distance themselves from the natural world and from their fellow creatures. 3) Incorporation: the master's qualities can be seen as the benchmark of the human; others fall short of 'full humanity' if they do not possess these qualities. For example, if reason is seen as a key master quality, then this becomes part of the benchmark for the human, allowing anyone who is perceived as irrational or overly emotional to be seen as sub-human. This was an important part of colonialist practice which saw Western colonisers perceiving tribal communities as being sub-human due to a belief that they were primitive and barbaric.¹⁵³ 4) Instrumentalism: those who are other from

¹⁵¹ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xxiv.

¹⁵² Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 41.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 107.

the master only exist for the master's use. This can be seen clearly in the way both nature and nonhuman animals are exploited for human gain. There is no intrinsic value perceived in the environment or in nonhuman animals, they are only valued in so far as they can assist the livelihood of humans. 5) Homogenization: this is where the 'dominated class of others is seen as uniform and undifferentiated'.¹⁵⁴ By treating both the dominating and subordinated class as homogenized groups, a binary is produced that makes it easier to commit to a dualist perspective as differences within the groups that might challenge such strict divisions are ignored. This is clearly seen in the dualism between human and nonhuman animals; the significant differences between a whale and a bee are completely ignored by categorising them both as 'animal'; and the significant similarities between humans and nonhuman animals, such as the relationship between humans and apes, is conveniently undermined by homogenization which makes it easier to continue to view humans as superior to nonhuman animals. Thus, Plumwood's approach is constructionist in that she seeks to deconstruct binaries by exposing their arbitrary character. Plumwood's analysis of the master model remains one of the most detailed expositions of how dualistic thinking is sustained that I have come across in my research.

However, Plumwood mentions that more exclusions are involved in this model yet does not elaborate on what these further exclusions would include. I believe it is worth covering how the model is constructed more extensively and explicitly to understand a greater breadth of domination. In my view, a working definition of the

¹⁵⁴ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xxiv.

master model is one that represents middle to upper class, heterosexual, cis-gendered, non-disabled,¹⁵⁵ neuro-typical, white,¹⁵⁶ male elites. The fuller extent of intersectional oppressions is missed by omitting a range of privileged identity categories. Although white and male people have a significant amount of privilege, experiences of being male and white will differ for somebody who does not meet the extended master model criteria. Consider, for example, someone who is white and identifies as female yet is mis-gendered by others for outwardly appearing to fit constructions of the male sex; although they may appear to superficially fit Plumwood's truncated master model they are in fact amongst those excluded from and dominated by it. Intersectional ecofeminist work would benefit from extending the model's criteria because it better represents the extent of oppressive forces, and it is possible to obtain a wider view on how one can experience both privilege and oppression through the qualities they have that match the model or where they fall short. Thus, ecofeminist theory appears to benefit from a more explicitly intersectional approach as it would provide a greater appreciation for the complexity in analysing different axes of oppression.

I propose that Plumwood's master model is an essential starting-point from which ecofeminism could be developed into a more explicitly intersectional critical theory. It serves as a reminder that individuals can simultaneously be oppressor and

¹⁵⁵ This seems to be the preferred term by many people with disabilities so will be the one that I use. I am also using it here to identify mental disabilities, as the Master Model would only include those without physical and/or mental disabilities.

¹⁵⁶ This list of the Master Model must be read critically, with an understanding of further intersections that affect people's experience of domination and subordination. It might be relevant to include more privileged identity categories as research continues.

oppressed; it resists homogenising the oppressor and allows a deeper analysis of what it means to benefit from privilege whilst also being subject to prejudice, discrimination, and oppression at the hands of the master model. Moreover, it serves as a reminder that the patriarchy is not maintained by men alone. White women benefit from participating in the whiteness of the master model, for example. When white women do not assess the privileges they have, which are granted by the same model that oppresses them, they fail to recognise their complicity in the oppression of people of colour. Thus, we benefit from being as clear as possible on the number of privileges involved in the master model as this will elevate an analysis of their relationships with each other.

Some of the ideas involved in Plumwood's methodology in deconstructing with dualism have similarities with those Agamben draws upon. Agamben argues that the distinction drawn between humans and nonhuman animals creates a 'caesura',¹⁵⁷ both between humans and nonhumans and within humans. This way of thinking is reminiscent of Plumwood's recognition of the role of radical exclusion and incorporation in creating and sustaining dualisms. By examining the immediacy of the simultaneous opposition and likeness, Agamben finds what he deems 'the anthropological machine'.¹⁵⁸ He claims that this machine can only work when there is 'exclusion' of one group from the other – it needs to view animals in opposition to human.¹⁵⁹ This machine allows humans to scientifically recognise that they are a species within the group 'animals', whilst simultaneously solidifying a belief in human

¹⁵⁷ Agamben, *The Open*, 79.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

exceptionalism that makes man¹⁶⁰ so distinctive that he is beyond the animal. Furthermore, Agamben identifies that this caesura occurs within humans where we find that the anthropological machine permits the othering of marginalised groups through a process of animalisation.¹⁶¹ In this first caesura we remain in wilful ignorance of our own animality through a belief in human exceptionalism. Although there are similarities with Plumwood's characterisation of the master model, I find Agamben's analysis to be more limited than the one proposed by Plumwood. Agamben's focus on the dualism of man/animal (and his language would suggest *man*, rather than human) means that he is restricted in the scope of his argument. He is forced to suggest that it is only when we examine this separation between man and animal within the man that we will 'render inoperative the machine that governs our conception of man'.¹⁶² Plumwood's master model leaves room for more dualistic binaries to be explored and scrutinised than Agamben's methodology which begins and ends with one dualism and so does not recognise the importance of mapping across dualistic binaries. Thus, although Agamben's analysis is significant in helping to centralise species discrimination, which is so often ignored within intersectional studies, it does not open the same opportunity for incorporating an intersectional methodology that could help

¹⁶⁰ After some consideration, I have decided I will continue to use Agamben's gendered pronouns in order to truly reflect his writing. It is uncomfortable for me to do so as it appears to perpetuate the same dualist assumptions that have animalised women; however, it is important to recognise the limitations on his work for transgressing binaries when he sustains them in his language. I intend for this to feel uncomfortable so that we can understand the need for development in Agamben's work.

¹⁶¹ Agamben, *The Open*.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 92.

to extend our understanding of the relationships between multiple binaries like Plumwood's ecofeminist theory has.

Like Plumwood, Derrida seeks to deconstruct the dualist structures that have placed value on difference to produce hierarchy. He is known for developing philosophical deconstruction in the 1960s¹⁶³ and is perhaps *the* seminal figure in post-structuralism. Each philosopher's methodological framework will affect how they action the deconstruction of dualisms. Derrida's methodology of deconstruction suggests that there are two stages to deconstructing dualism: these are 1) inversion, and 2) deconstruction.¹⁶⁴ In an interview with Derrida conducted by Christie McDonald, McDonald restates Derrida's argument for these stages as such:

In the first phase a reversal would take place in which the opposed terms would be inverted. Thus woman, as a previously subordinate term, might become the dominant one in relation to man.¹⁶⁵

Reversal is, unsurprisingly, considered insufficient as a solution by many modern feminist theories because it fails to challenge the patriarchal structure of domination.¹⁶⁶

Plumwood recognises the limits of such reversal when she writes of the limitations of some radical feminist work that 'the feminism of uncritical reversal, is just as problematic as the feminism of uncritical equality'.¹⁶⁷ It is this second wave of

¹⁶³ Khalil, *Ecofeminism and the Deconstruction of Dualisms*, 20.

¹⁶⁴ Christie V. McDonald, 'Interview: Choreographies: Jacques Derrida and Christie McDonald', *Diacritics*, 12.2 (1982), 66-76 (p. 71).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁶⁶ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 28.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

feminism that Plumwood criticises for being ‘the feminism of uncritical equality’, and Plumwood cites Mary Wollstonecraft¹⁶⁸ and Simone de Beauvoir¹⁶⁹ as being two examples where feminists have uncritically sought for women to be included in the model, whilst ‘the model itself... is never brought into question’.¹⁷⁰ To explain ‘the feminism of uncritical reversal’ Plumwood turns to radical feminism and the stereotype of ecofeminism (which she admits ‘some ecofeminist writers do fall into’).¹⁷¹ The criticism that some ecofeminist work only achieves reversal will be considered in further detail in Chapter Two, but it is worth exploring here to understand the significance of Merchant and Plumwood’s methodologies. The problem with reversal, according to Plumwood, is that it rejects ‘the traditional inferiority of the feminine and of nature... without disturbing the further assumptions’¹⁷² that are made about dualistic binaries. Reversing dualisms ignores the fact that the characterisation of each identity ‘is not an independently constituted nature’.¹⁷³ Plumwood gives the example ‘that women’s “closeness with nature” is mainly a product of their powerlessness in and exclusion from culture’¹⁷⁴ and so the attempt to reverse the assumption that women and nature are inferior, without challenging the dualistic assumptions which have

¹⁶⁸ Plumwood examines Wollstonecraft’s argument that women should be raised to the status of man by being considered fully humans. However, the goal is that women will enjoy the same privileges as men by ‘affirming the ‘full humanity’ of women without challenging this model. Thus the model in fact becomes revered by women who want to be a part of the superior categories as they do not aim to criticise the nature of hierarchy itself. Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 25-29.

¹⁶⁹ Plumwood argues that Simone de Beauvoir’s feminism required that women are given space to fit ‘into the dominant model of the human’. Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 27.

¹⁷⁰ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 27.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁷² Ibid., 34.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 32.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 32.

defined those characteristics, 'will not provide a genuine liberatory alternative'.¹⁷⁵ This argument is also put forward by Janet Biehl in her oft-cited *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*; she argues that simply reclaiming the link between women and nature, in such a way that reverts to archaic imagery of Mother Nature, undoes the work of decades where feminists have rejected the idea that women are synonymous with nurturing and mothering.¹⁷⁶ Using Derrida's phases of deconstruction, this form of ecofeminism does not appear to reach the second stage of deconstruction: displacement and redefinition.

However, this criticism does not apply to the ecofeminism defended by Merchant and Plumwood. Merchant and Plumwood can be categorised as social constructionist ecofeminists. This means that the methodological approach they take to understanding dualism rejects the idea of an intrinsic link between women and nature. Rather this link is culturally, socially, and historically imposed. In other words, women and nature are connected by common ideologies that cause oppressive behaviours within a system to work to depress both. As a result, Merchant and Plumwood are better placed to work towards the second phase of removing dualisms. Thus, Plumwood's critique of reversal can be seen as supporting Derrida's analysis that the first 'phase' of rejecting dualism is insufficient and a more radical change in conception is necessary that not only rejects the assumption that 'women' and 'nature' are inferior, but also challenges the underlying dualistic assumptions.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 33.

¹⁷⁶ Janet Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 11.

¹⁷⁷ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 36.

Yet, Merchant has been criticised by Worster for, what he perceives to be, ambivalence ‘about the loss of that ancient animistic metaphor’.¹⁷⁸ Merchant does claim that her aim is ‘to examine the values associated with the images of women and nature as they relate to the formation of our modern world and their implications for our lives today’,¹⁷⁹ not to legitimise those values but to explore the impact of them. This is an essential clarification. It demonstrates that Merchant does not intend to present a reversal that would result in a rose-tinted analysis of the women–nature connection. Merchant is explicitly analysing the *value given* to these images rather than the value we *should give* to the metaphors. However, despite claiming to not desire the reinstitution of the Mother Nature metaphors,¹⁸⁰ Merchant compares them with the mechanistic metaphors in such a way that emphasises the damage permitted by the latter that had been constrained by the former. This implies that, although Merchant does not consider the pastoral image to be the solution to our conceptualisation of women and nature, her book might be guilty of a nostalgia for the shield this metaphor had provided for women and nature against the scientific ‘advancements’ and controlling forces of patriarchy. This would be problematic for Merchant’s analysis as it would fall into the essentialist critique that ecofeminism has faced, and which I will explore in Chapter Two, by emphasising the nurturing characters of women and nature. Furthermore, it would suggest that Merchant’s seminal work has not quite moved past the first phase of Derrida’s deconstruction.

¹⁷⁸ Worster, ‘Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature* at 25 years’, 810.

¹⁷⁹ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, xvii.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, xvii.

Thus, perhaps Merchant's methodology is limited in comparison to Plumwood's in that Merchant's approach does not enforce a way of thinking that moves past reversal.

If we appreciate that Derrida's phases were not supposed to be seen as entirely separate from one another, then perhaps we can read Merchant's work in a more positive light. Derrida envisages the relationship between these phases as having 'another structure'¹⁸¹ rather than necessarily a strict order. The movement from one to the other 'is marked less by conceptual determinations... than by a transformation'.¹⁸² Khalil suggests that Merchant was at the forefront of the shift in ecofeminism from phase one to phase two deconstruction. In other words, Merchant has set up the move from second-wave feminism to third-wave feminism's deconstructive aims due to her conceptualisation of 'nature'.¹⁸³ Merchant explicitly rejects a reversal of dualism *and* highlights the need for a new definition. Though not going so far as to give that new definition herself, Merchant made room for Haraway to posit an altogether abolition of the binary and redefine nature; 'nature is not a physical place to which we can go, nor a treasure to fence in or bank, nor an essence to be saved or violated'.¹⁸⁴ Whether or not Merchant can be considered guilty of 'ambivalence' towards the nurturing metaphors, as Worster suggests, depends upon whether the reader places greater emphasis on either the explicit rejection of replacing the mechanical image with the nurturing image as a solution or, the frequent comparisons demonstrating significant criticism of the mechanical imagery for sanctioning a domination that the nurturing

¹⁸¹ Derrida quoted in McDonald, 'Interview', 72.

¹⁸² Derrida quoted in McDonald, 'Interview', 72.

¹⁸³ Khalil, *Ecofeminism and the Deconstruction of Dualisms*, 29.

¹⁸⁴ Donna Haraway, 'The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others', *The Haraway Reader* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2004), pp. 63-124 (p. 65).

imagery prevented. However, what Khalil successfully demonstrates is that Merchant's analysis of the woman–nature connection built a foundation for the post-structuralist feminism of Haraway which is certainly not reliant on the reversal of hierarchy.¹⁸⁵

Ultimately it is right to be critical of reversal methods as they are insufficient for change, but it is equally important to appreciate the role this controversial step of reversal plays as a necessary aspect of achieving the second phase. Without the work of earlier feminists, there would not have been the intellectual space to envisage different ways of conceptualising dualism. Although it may be right to critique the limitations of this earlier feminist work, then, there is also reason to be sympathetic to the necessity of these works in producing the intellectual space to explore new ideas in the literature.

The approaches employed within this body of literature have been significant in identifying the nature of the connection between women and nature; they have explained how these dualistic hierarchies have been maintained; and they have successfully criticised the dualistic hierarchies the Western society accepts. However, there are gaps that present themselves in an analysis of these approaches. In Merchant's case, the historical methodology can be criticised for being selective in material and so not showing the full range of nuance. Most importantly, it is also possible that Merchant's analysis is too sympathetic to essentialist portrayals of Mother Nature that potentially undermine her ardent rejection of essentialising either

¹⁸⁵ Khalil, *Ecofeminism and the Deconstruction of Dualisms*, 30.

the 'woman' or 'nature' category. Plumwood's deconstructive methodology of exploring the master model as the creator and maintainer of dualist hierarchies is a significant step, as is her demand for a redefining of these dualisms rather than mere reversal. However, here too there are ways to move forward from these realisations with a more explicitly extended understanding of what constitutes the master model. I propose that integrating intersectionality into approaches to ecofeminist theory would bring a layer of complexity that is helpful in fully analysing the impact of the master model across complex and different axes of oppression that would highlight the compelling recognition in ecofeminism that oppressions intersect across human and nonhuman spheres.

Engaging with the Key Figures of Dualism

Merchant believes that a historical analysis of human relationships with nature will emphasise the need to re-examine the perceptions of revered enlightenment figures such as 'Francis Bacon, William Harvey, René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes and Isaac Newton'.¹⁸⁶ According to Merchant, these men were at the forefront of a reconceptualisation of nature that confirmed that man could dominate the natural world. Before the Scientific Revolution there was 'the metaphor of the earth as a nurturing mother';¹⁸⁷ this was swapped for 'images of mastery and domination'.¹⁸⁸ It is these men, Merchant believes, who are responsible for the shift in perception. What remains common throughout the shift is nature's association with the female. Although

¹⁸⁶ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, xvii.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

the ancient association of nature with mother prevented man from abusing 'her', the identification of female with passive 'nevertheless allowed for the possibility of its use and manipulation'.¹⁸⁹ When that association shifted to an unruly and vindictive woman, as opposed to mother, the association that prevented 'her' abuse was removed; yet the continuity provided by the female terminology tapped into the potential to view nature as passive that had been consistently in place.

Francis Bacon was an influential figure in England during the time of the Scientific Revolution and is hailed for his commitment to the empirical method and reason. His philosophy supported the othering of the natural world and the view that exploitation of it is acceptable in the name of scientific progress. Carolyn Merchant in the book *The Death of Nature* examines his role in detail, particularly the way in which he used the feminisation of nature as a way of solidifying patriarchal control over the natural world. In aid of this, Bacon presented nature as a female who was hiding her secrets from mankind who would only hand the truths over by being 'controlled and dissected'.¹⁹⁰ This contrasts with the image of nature as 'a benevolent, nurturer, mother and provider'¹⁹¹ that had been prevalent in the preceding periods. Now instead of seeing nature as a beneficent female, she is now to be 'bound into service' and made a 'slave', put 'in constraint' and 'molded' by the mechanical arts.¹⁹² The nature—female connection has remained, but it has now been twisted to a relationship of control.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 189.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁹² Ibid., 169.

Despite being one of the most influential themes of Merchant's book, the 'analysis of Francis Bacon's description of the search of natural knowledge in terms of a physically coercive relationship between male inquirer and female nature, expressed in metaphors of marital discipline, inquisition and rape',¹⁹³ is also one of the most frequently criticised aspects of *The Death of Nature*, according to Katherine Park. One element of the charge against Merchant's analysis is that Merchant appears to over-emphasise, to the exclusion of similar pre-existing historical perceptions of nature, the role of Bacon. It cannot be said that Bacon changed a once unanimous perception of nature as Gaia or Mother; a feminisation of nature that brought with it a degree of respect and honour. Nature as uncontrollable and volatile can be seen to run alongside the more nurturing understanding long before Bacon's philosophies. It is arguable that the God's power over Tehom (Gen 1:2), the deep and formless waters, and the Leviathan (Ps.74:12-17), the sea monster, present a supreme male image controlling and subduing the Earth's uncontrollable and volatile waters. Furthermore, in Exodus 14, God comes to human aid by parting the Red Sea for Moses and his people and allowing the Egyptians to drown as they attempt to cross in pursuit. In these cases, God is shown to control an uncontrollable nature and secures the safety of humans. These biblical narratives do not appear to conform to Merchant's analysis of the conceptualisation of nature as 'Mother' in pre-Bacon world.

¹⁹³ Katherine Park, 'Women, Gender, and Utopia: *The Death of Nature* and the Historiography of Early Modern Science', *Isis*, 97.3 (2006), 487-495 (p. 488).

Pertinent to this discussion is Daly's famous suggestion that 'if God is male, then male is God'¹⁹⁴ to indicate that this biblical imagery can reinforce patriarchal belief systems. Presenting God in masculine language ultimately leads to men being perceived as being closer to God. If God is being shown to bend nature to his will and for the benefit of his people, then permission is granted for men to follow his lead. For this reason, it is arguable that Merchant underplays a pre-established prevalent perception that nature was free for man to manipulate. I do believe that Merchant has largely ignored that there was pre-existing sanction for men to control nature, however, what I believe Merchant does in *The Death of Nature* to significantly separate Bacon from what had come before, is demonstrate how Bacon used the subordination of women *alongside* the subordination of nature to strengthen the patriarchal domination of both, which is why I consider Merchant's work to be implicitly intersectional. As Karen Warren says, 'Merchant is not claiming that there were no domination metaphors before the scientific revolution'.¹⁹⁵ Rather, she is arguing that none employed the female metaphor in such a way that could condone the manipulation of nature for the advancement of science. Therefore, although I can understand why some might argue Merchant places a perhaps overstated amount of blame in Bacon's lap, this must be read within the historical methodology and scientific context from which Merchant was writing.

¹⁹⁴ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 19.

¹⁹⁵ Karen J Warren, 'The Legacy of Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature*', *Organization & Environment*, 11.2 (1998), 186-188 (p. 186).

Furthermore, the analysis of Bacon's work in relation to the witch trials may require further evaluation. Merchant argues that the witch trials that were sweeping Europe seemed to have 'influenced Bacon's philosophy and literary style'.¹⁹⁶ The analogies he uses to describe relationships and interactions with nature as a female who can be 'tortured through mechanical interventions' are not so far removed from 'the interrogations of the witch trials and the mechanical devices used to torture witches'.¹⁹⁷ These comparisons are laid out by Merchant to emphasise how they contribute to justifying control:

The interrogation of witches as symbol for the interrogation of nature, the courtroom as model for its inquisition, and torture through mechanical devices as a tool for the subjugation of disorder were fundamental to the scientific method as power.¹⁹⁸

The connection indicates that provocative women and the natural world were both seen as subjects worthy of torture in similar ways. Rosemary-Claire Collard and Jessica Dempsey suggest an additional layer of feminist Marxist analysis through the recognition that the women who were tried as witches were often mistrusted due to their manipulation of reproduction.¹⁹⁹ The witch hunts were a form of preventing women from taking control of their own, and other women's, reproductive systems as

¹⁹⁶ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 168.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 168.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 172.

¹⁹⁹ This would include acts of abortion, contraception, and midwifery. Rosemary-Claire Collard and Jessica Dempsey, 'Accumulation by Difference-Making: An Anthropocene Story, Starring Witches', *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 25.9 (2018), 1349-1364 (p. 1355).

‘witches were often tried for “preventing conception”’;²⁰⁰ or they ‘did not reproduce’²⁰¹ themselves; or they performed midwifery roles.²⁰² Collard and Dempsey suggest that witches were targets because this knowledge about reproduction was perceived as ‘an obstacle to the gendered division of labour’.²⁰³ In other words, by taking some sort of control over reproduction as females, they were resisting the capitalist social pushes for reproductive work to be ‘naturalized as women’s work’.²⁰⁴ Thus, the witch trials were a way of solidifying the categorisation of women to the reproductive (as opposed to productive) social realm and acted ‘as a ‘campaign of terror’ to force them to submit to their new ‘useful’ social functions and degraded social identities.’²⁰⁵ Witches could be burnt alive for their attempts to control female reproduction, thereby overcoming their perceived protests against the categorisation of women with reproductive labour.

This analysis could present another axis on which to understand Merchant’s exploration of Bacon’s use of the witch trials. Merchant suggests that Bacon was able to justify the control of nature by using language reminiscent of the witch trials; perhaps this did not simply link nature and women in the sense that both could be controlled, but it also helped to solidify the mapping of the production/reproduction dualism. Collard and Dempsey’s analysis suggests that the production/reproduction dualism was perceived as threatened by witches. As both women and nature are connected by culture in part due to their reproductive capacities, the defiance of the witch in

²⁰⁰ They might be accused of performing abortions. *Ibid.*, 1355.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1355.

²⁰² Gaard, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited’, 28.

²⁰³ Collard and Dempsey, ‘Accumulation by Difference-Making’, 1355.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 1353.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 1355.

manipulating reproduction was doubly destructive as it could also undermine the connection of women with nature and consequently their connection with reproduction rather than production. Thus, Merchant's view is supported by the additional layer to this metaphor. It is fair to say that through shared reproductive labour, nature could be seen as feminized. However, it is also true that Bacon's language of interrogating nature as witches have been interrogated shows the firm position that women and nature would remain in the inferior category of reproduction so that nature may be controlled as an unruly witch, as opposed to a nurturing mother.

However, Collard and Dempsey make an important point that we should not over-emphasise the impact of the witch trials in justifying the division between the productive/reproductive dualism. In doing so we ignore the impact 'the slave trade, colonisation and the Columbian exchange'²⁰⁶ had on these dualisms which Collard and Dempsey suggest are 'central to the Anthropocene'.²⁰⁷ For this reason, Merchant could be accused of concentrating on the experiences of white European women and thus not providing an intersectional understanding of how the perception of nature and race changed within this era. This is one of the reasons why I believe ecofeminism provides a more useful, inclusive, and robust theoretical lens when combined with an intersectional approach.

Unlike Merchant, Plumwood evaluates how important philosophical figures have influenced the West's dualistic thinking. Plumwood focuses on Plato and Descartes, who are revered as the founding fathers of rationalism. Plumwood does

²⁰⁶ Collard and Dempsey, 'Accumulation by Difference-Making', 1350.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 1349.

not map a shift in language as Merchant has. Instead, she argues that the philosophies that have been so influential to Western conceptions of difference in society has become permeated with dangerous dualisms. This has been underscored by the development of similar philosophical beliefs regarding our earthly existence and death in Christianity as the prominent religion in the Western world. When engaging with the work and influence of Plato's dualism, Plumwood titles her chapter 'Plato and the philosophy of death'. This title intends to emphasise the importance Plato places on there being an other-worldly existence after death. There are similarities here between the 'Platonic and Christian systems',²⁰⁸ in that both present the purpose of our existence to be outside of our physical existence on this Earth. We live in this world as a steppingstone to our true purpose, which is a spiritual existence, so we need not be concerned that our bodies will decay.²⁰⁹ This philosophy does not recognise being embodied to be a necessary part of human existence, in fact it devalues our physical existence. The further consequence is to reject human dependency on the environment because it is clear there will be a superior, non-physical existence beyond this life, therefore we are not dependent on the Earth for our existence.

Plumwood suggests that the modern world has now rejected this idea that there is an other-worldly existence after death; however, it has not replaced this meaning or purpose of life within our embodied experience of the world. All suggested purposes 'are still based in the master's discontinuity from and opposition to nature'.²¹⁰ Plumwood proposes that we are confronted with a meaningless life in these modern

²⁰⁸ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 100.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

philosophies of death. To resolve this, we must look at life and death 'in ways which are both life- and nature-affirming and death-accepting'.²¹¹ Unlike the Platonic version of death being ultimate separation and alienation from the Earth, this new philosophy would visualise death as 'continuity' and 'connection with'²¹² the natural world. The West needs to reimagine a philosophy of death that sees life and death as intrinsically tied to our earthly existence.

More spiritual forms of ecofeminism could be seen as providing a solution to this problem of philosophies of death. For example, Starhawk suggests that the Goddess is 'a great force of regeneration acting through the cycles of birth, growth, death, and rebirth'²¹³ and to be a witch is to honour that cycle 'as the Goddess'.²¹⁴ Starhawk's spiritual form of ecofeminism places the Goddess firmly within this world in stark contrast to the patriarchal God who is distinctly separate from Earth, and the implications of this for environmental care are clear:

The model of the Goddess who is immanent in nature, fosters respect for the sacredness of all living things. The image of God as outside

²¹¹ Ibid., 102.

²¹² This is the kind of connection that Plumwood believes the Australian Aboriginal people have a philosophy of death that better articulates the end of life as a continuity of our existence with the earth. They consider their ancestors to be part of the land. Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 102.

²¹³ Starhawk, *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising* (Canada: New Society Publishers, 2002), 129.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 9.

nature [transcendent] has given us a rationale for our own destruction of the natural order and justified our plunder of the earth's resources.²¹⁵

This would achieve what Plumwood calls for in visualising death in connection with nature. There are further criticisms of these types of spiritual ecofeminism, which I will explore in the proceeding chapter, but it is worth acknowledging here why Plumwood does not consider Starhawk's ecofeminism to be a solution. Plumwood explicitly rejects the 'pantheism' of Starhawk because it anthropomorphises nature to raise it up to being human rather than 'escaping a dualistic and humancentred model',²¹⁶ In other words, this is not a solution because it does not work to deconstruct the dualistic hierarchies but instead reverses them.

Alternatively, it is arguable that Plumwood is too quick to suggest that the modern world has rejected the divine. Timothy Mahoney questions what it is exactly that Plumwood is claiming in the idea that 'modernity has dispensed with the other world'²¹⁷ because it certainly doesn't seem true that belief in an afterlife has disappeared. The sweeping claim implies total acceptance of secularisation, which is by no means an uncontroversial position.²¹⁸ As Mahoney argues, there are people in the West who hold 'a belief in a world which transcends nature' so we cannot 'dismiss

²¹⁵ Starhawk cited in Alleyn Diesel, 'Womanspirit', *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 19. Women and Difference (1993), 71-75 (p. 74).

²¹⁶ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 127.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 101.

²¹⁸ A couple of examples of the questioning of the secularisation narrative include: Joel Harrison, 'Secularisation Challenged', *Post-Liberal Religious Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) and Shai M. Dromi and Samuel D. Stabler, 'Good on Paper: Sociological Critique, Pragmatism, and Secularization Theory', *Theory and Society*, 48.2 (2019), 325-350.

these central Platonic claims as irrelevant to our contemporary situation'.²¹⁹ Transcendental claims appear to have persisted in a way that Plumwood denies in her analysis of the problem. However, whether or not Plumwood is right to claim that belief in an other-worldly existence is declining in the West is almost irrelevant. The more significant part of her analysis is the idea that this world is unimportant has remained part of the Western consciousness. It is not that Plumwood argues that Plato's philosophy is irrelevant but rather that the underlying dualism has stood the test of time even when people have stopped believing in the next life that originally sustained it. Plumwood's rejection of Starhawk's ecofeminist connection between death and the Goddess, and her belief in secularism, means that it is possible to consider Plumwood as a secular counterpoint to spiritual ecofeminism.

Plumwood's account is a wholly negative perspective on Plato's usefulness for ecology. Much like Merchant, Plumwood's work has disrupted positivist readings of particular philosophical and historical figures. Just as Bacon's followers want to praise him for his perceived technological advancements (without condemning him for those advancements' ecological impact), Plumwood's criticism of Plato's philosophy has been received as ungenerous. Some philosophers had seen 'Plato as providing an attractive environmental paradigm'²²⁰ whilst this is precisely what Plumwood rejects. However, the strength of Plumwood's analysis lies in the number of mapped dualisms that she considers, showing how Plato's writings justify the perception of nature as inferior and the denial of dependency. The argument is not solely that a transcendent

²¹⁹ Timothy A. Mahoney, 'Platonic Ecology: A Response to Plumwood's Critique of Plato', *Ethics & the Environment*, 2.1 (1997), 25-41 (p. 38).

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

world is superior but that 'the inferiorisation of nature in all these senses is strongly linked to the inferiorisation of women, slaves, and animals'.²²¹ Thus, giving examples where Plato seems to provide a more ecologically friendly image of the environment does not critically undermine Plumwood's argument as the interconnecting dualisms sustains inferiorisation even in instances of more positive language. In my view, the strength of Plumwood's analysis is in the linking and mapping of inferiorised categories of nature to show how hierarchies are sustained even in light of Plato's more positive descriptions of the environment. This is akin to an intersectional mapping that is being used to support and develop ecofeminist arguments.

Plumwood then turns to an analysis of Descartes' impact. It is Descartes' emphasis on the mind/body dualism which elevates rationalism even further as he seeks to distinguish mental activities from bodily activities entirely.²²² In Plumwood's view, Descartes deepens the hyperseparation between dualist categories in a way that is more extreme than the separation Plato had established. It removes the gradients of 'the rational and irrational parts of the soul', which had been present in Plato's work, and proposes that any area of irrationality is exclusively associated with the body.²²³ Additionally, Descartes was presenting a mechanistic image of animals and nature that was 'non-mindful, being mere stuff, mere matter, devoid of any characteristics of mind and thought'.²²⁴ Thus the mind/body dualism, which emphasised the superiority of consciousness and reason, mapped on to

²²¹ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 87.

²²² *Ibid.*, 115.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 112.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

human/animal and human/nature; thereby solidifying the superiority of the human and reason above animal and nature, which are seen as devoid of any mental activity. The strength of Plumwood's analysis is found in the clear explanation that Cartesian dualism is sustained by a hyperseparation that then justifies human power over the animal or nature because both are depicted as mechanical and so our treatment of them becomes amoral. Furthermore, Plumwood criticises the feminist perspective that this Cartesian division between mind/body negatively impacts women, because the feminine is associated with the body, and she notes that 'it is not only the feminine that is excluded'²²⁵ through the mapping of these dualisms. This recognition that has been established through Plumwood's reasoned explanation of the mapping of hyperseparated dualism leads the way to a more explicitly intersectional exploration of the oppressive impact of mapping dualisms.

Although focusing on key figures in dualism leaves ecofeminists open to criticism that they are overstating the influence of one person, or they are portraying a carefully selected version of that person to achieve their intended narrative, the focus on key dualistic figures has been an important aspect of the ecofeminist writings of Merchant and Plumwood. When these figures are considered collectively a picture emerges of how dualistic hierarchies have been accepted and supported within Western society. By understanding how dualistic hierarchies were mapped on to each other in the scientific and philosophical works of influential figures in the Western world, we are better placed to understand the intersectional oppressions faced as a

²²⁵ Ibid., 116-7.

result of belonging to multiple identity categories. This has not yet been fully explored in ecofeminism because the discursive connections have needed to be made first, but now ecofeminist theory could aim to develop in a way that critically engages with the intersectional impact of the dualistic thinking that has permeated through Western society.

The Power of Language

Merchant's assessment of feminism and ecology in the light of the Scientific Revolution is held up by an analysis of language and imagery. Her historical analysis of scientific work becomes almost a critical literary review in parts. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance Merchant places on language and the impact it has on our behaviours and relationships. In Merchant's view, it is the image of the Earth as mother that acted as a condemnation of exploitative human behaviour towards 'her'. If Earth is considered to be alive this puts a limit on the ethical uses of it. If Earth is then also conceptualised as a 'mother' then there is a metaphorical relationship implied – one of love and care.²²⁶ As Merchant says, 'one does not readily slay a mother'.²²⁷ Merchant argues that the way we describe the world 'presuppose[s] the normative'.²²⁸ This justifies her emphasis on the style of language used and, importantly, how it changes with society. How a society uses language tells us

²²⁶ Environmental philosophy has seen something of a return to this metaphor through James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis seems to rely on similar ideas in the portrayal of a feminised biosphere. This was introduced in James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, 'Atmospheric Homeostasis by and for the Biosphere: The Gaia Hypothesis', *Tellus*, 26 (1974), 2-9.

²²⁷ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 3.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

something about the culture of that society; so, if the language used to describe nature changes, then we must also accept that the cultural attitude towards nature changes.²²⁹

It is clear that the pastoral image of women and nature existed, but Merchant must also question whether 'such imagery actually function[ed] as a norm against improper use of earth?'²³⁰ To do this, Merchant gives examples where mining is condemned by employing explicitly female imagery in association with nature. For example,

not only did mining encourage the mortal sin of avarice, it was compared by Spenser to the second great sin, human lust. Digging into the matrices and pockets of earth for metals was like mining the female flesh for pleasure.²³¹

This demonstrates that the way we treated the Earth had strong moral associations that were intrinsically bound with its connection to the female. This is indicative of the strong arguments put forward for why the change in the depiction of nature from a mother to an unruly witch was significant in condoning the control of nature.

However, this narrative is why Merchant's work could be seen as essentialist in idolising an image of women as mothering and nurturing which has been, in some people's opinion,²³² equally oppressive to women. Although Merchant explicitly states

²²⁹ Ibid., 4.

²³⁰ Ibid., 29.

²³¹ Ibid., 39.

²³² Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 11.

that the association of women with nature as both are nurturers is not necessarily a good alternative to the focus on control and extracting secrets,²³³ it is possible that she is not as explicit in criticising the metaphors of the former connection as she does the latter. Without intending to, Merchant appears to present the nurturing connection through rose-tinted glasses because it is consistently used in contrast with the dominating structures that exist now. Perhaps saying that she does not promote the alternative is not sufficient in distancing herself from this camp. Although this is a limitation to her initial work, it emphasises the space in ecofeminist theory which this thesis seeks to address by centring intersectionality in part to help complicate an essentialised category of 'woman'. It should be recognised that this explicit move to intersectionality is only made possible because of the implicit intersectionality in seminal ecofeminist work, like that of Merchant.

Plumwood's closest analysis of language appears in a similar vein to Merchant's. Plumwood similarly argues that 'the metaphor of the machine has deeply penetrated our own conceptions of ourselves and our society'.²³⁴ However, in Plumwood's case, she suggests that this language is a relic of Descartes' approach to nonhuman animal bodies as machine-like.²³⁵ Just like Merchant, Plumwood appears to suggest that this language justifies the oppression over those perceived to be associated with 'body' rather than 'mind' due to the mapping of dualisms. She shines a light on the way that being associated with machines leads to 'the modern

²³³ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, xvii.

²³⁴ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 119.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

subject' losing both their identity 'as an organic' being and 'as a social being'.²³⁶ However, Plumwood focuses more on the rationality that is pervasive in Western culture because of the philosophical legacies of figures such as Plato and Descartes. This critique of the 'cult of reason' can be seen as a connecting strand between her earlier work, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* and *Environmental Culture*, which was published nearly a decade later. This does not mean that Plumwood ignores the power of language, but that her focus is more explicitly on how the dominant conception of reason 'has come to shape us all'.²³⁷

As both Merchant and Plumwood assign language a significant and influential role in how we conceptualise the world around us, it is no surprise that the language used by Merchant and Plumwood also receives scrutiny from readers. For example, Park questioned Merchant's uncritical acceptance and use of the term 'Scientific Revolution'. Park herself favours the term 'early modern science' to refer to the 16th–18th Century scientific works.²³⁸ Perhaps because to 'embrace' the idea that there was a Scientific Revolution seems to support the narrative that the scientific changes were progressive. Following Park's logic, a key limitation to Merchant's historical analysis is that it hasn't quite gone far enough in interrogating our perception of this period of discovery. However, Merchant defends her wording, arguing that 'the power of the dominant narratives of colonialism and imperialism that have helped to shape Western culture since the seventeenth century at the expense of nature, women, minorities,

²³⁶ Ibid., 119.

²³⁷ Ibid., 190.

²³⁸ Park, 'Women, Gender, and Utopia', 493, and Carolyn Merchant, 'The Scientific Revolution and *The Death of Nature*', *Isis*, 97.3 (2006), 513-533 (p. 517).

and indigenous peoples' ²³⁹ is only properly captured by the term 'Scientific Revolution'. To refer to the 16th–18th Centuries as a period of 'early modern science' does not reveal the true impact of the prevalent 'scientific narratives'.²⁴⁰ The moral value and positivist perception of what the Scientific Revolution stood for should change, but the naming is relevant to recognising its influence.

In relation to Plumwood's language, John Andrews suggests that Plumwood's focus on dualism as both 'hierarchal' or 'exclusionary' is deeply flawed.²⁴¹ Hierarchal dualism can be defined as a dualism where there is a superior and inferior concept where the inferior is considered less morally valuable than the inferior. Exclusionary dualism, on the other hand, excludes the inferior concept from any moral concern at all. Andrews claims that Plumwood targets the latter dualism but that attempts to suggest this term captures the dualism that has underlined Western thought are unsuccessful. He gives the male/female dualism as an example:

Women may have been inferiorised but they have not typically been excluded from moral status. They have been 'excluded' in the sense of being denied the same opportunities as men. But this is not the total moral exclusion of 'exclusionary dualism'.²⁴²

It is arguable that Andrews' criticism is limited as objectification, for example, cannot be considered as anything other than exclusionary dualism. Women are stripped of

²³⁹ Merchant, 'The Scientific Revolution and *The Death of Nature*, 518.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 518.

²⁴¹ John Andrews, 'Warren, Plumwood, a Rock and a Snake: Some Doubts about Critical Ecological Feminism', *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 13.2 (1996), 141-155 (p. 144).

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 144.

their being, thereby allowing them to be perceived as something outside of moral concern. However, Andrews' criticism does identify a potential problem with analysing individual dualisms. Male/female dualisms may well show that women have been excluded only in so far as women have not been able to take advantage of the opportunities men have available to them. However, an intersectional approach would demonstrate that 'female' is not an isolated category that leads to one specific hierarchal or exclusionary treatment. Age, race, sexuality, class, and neurodivergence, can also complicate the perceived moral status of the subject being objectified. Intersectionality equips the researcher with the tools to see that an analysis of individual dualisms cannot capture the complex realities of interaction in everyday life as I will argue in Chapter Three.

Similarly, Mahoney takes issue with Plumwood's suggestion that Plato's dualism between physical and non-physical involves a 'hyperseparation' between the two realms. Plato's concept of participation suggests that the realm of the senses 'partipate[s] in Forms'.²⁴³ Mahoney notes that this is unreciprocated as the Forms remain unchanged by the physical; however, he suggests that this proves that Plumwood has overstated their separation because 'if the two realms were "hyperseparated" or "maximally-distant" from one another there would be no interaction between them at all'.²⁴⁴ Whether or not this is a sufficient interaction to justify not considering the hierarchy in Plato's work between the Forms and the natural world as a hyperseparation is dependent on whether Mahoney's presumption that

²⁴³ Mahoney, 'Platonic Ecology', 27.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

hyperseparation requires 'no interaction' is fair. I think it is possibly not, given that there is a clear interaction between master and slave, yet Plumwood still believes hyperseparation is at play here.²⁴⁵ However, Mahoney has identified a need to delve deeper into what counts as a hyperseparation and how this affects different dualisms. I suggest that hyperseparation could be better understood through explicitly employing intersectionality to show that some recognition of interaction is not at odds with dualistic thought. Intersectionality emphasises that we exist within a complex web of life, so complex that it is reductive to perform an analysis of oppression on a single-axis. Thus, intersectionality emphasises *interplay* between privilege and oppression. As such hyperseparation in dualist thinking can be understood from an intersectional approach to be the attempt to minimise the existence or importance of that interplay between privilege and oppressed categories. Consequently, the interaction need not be denied entirely for hyperseparation to be achieved as intersectionality highlights how difficult treating some category as if it exists in a vacuum would be, even within dualist thinking.

Gaard's *Critical Ecofeminism* emphasises the importance of looking past linguistics and instead to the importance of listening. Gaard emphasises the importance of listening because we have focused on the human ability to communicate through language. Language has been seen as powerful whilst listening is seen as passive.²⁴⁶ Gaard proposes an alternative way of understanding language that encourages us to see that communication happens in more forms than simply

²⁴⁵ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 50.

²⁴⁶ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xvii.

verbal.²⁴⁷ The broadening of the scope of language is an essential move in ecofeminism to offer more ways of trying to listen to the nonhuman and, as I will argue in Chapter Three, it presents an important opportunity for an intersectional approach to include nonhuman animals that listen to nonverbal communications.

Influenced by Plumwood's ecofeminism, Gaard has worked towards developing a critical ecofeminism²⁴⁸ that seems to be implicitly supported by intersectional ideas; this can be most overtly seen in the integration of ideas from queer theory.²⁴⁹ Gaard even commends ecofeminists who have worked to produce 'diverse works exploring the intersectionalities of race, gender, and species'²⁵⁰ over the past decade, whilst criticising neighbouring discourses such as sustainability studies and environmental justice for being insufficiently intersectional.²⁵¹ Gaard praises ecofeminism for having 'an awareness of intersectionality' in comparison to other fields and yet she does not consider fully the potential benefits from more explicitly integrating intersectionality as a method for going about ecofeminist research. In my view, investigating how intersectionality might further crystalise the mapping of dualism in a way that can acknowledge the complexities at play in oppressive forces can help continue this movement towards a critical ecofeminist theory.

²⁴⁷ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 41.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, xiv.

²⁴⁹ Gaard, 'Towards a Queer Ecofeminism'.

²⁵⁰ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xvi.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 9, 19.

Interdependency

One of the main difficulties with addressing dualisms is finding ways to reject dualism that do not inadvertently reinforce dualism. As I discussed in the section 'Engaging with the Key Figures of Dualism', if ecofeminists support and try to reclaim the connection between women and nature in some fundamental way then we have not rejected the distinction and separation that exists in dualism. We have only reversed the power structure, which, as the discussion of Derrida's method of understanding treatments of dualism found, is insufficient for true change. Plumwood argues that there is 'ultimately no viable alternative'²⁵² to changing the way we conceptualise dualist terms so we must be critical in the way we approach issues of reversal. However, it seems to me that there is another convincing alternative to displacing where we perceive value found in the recognition of *interdependency*. Interdependency is the recognition that dualist categories, both conceptually and ontologically, are not actually hyperseparated from one another; in fact, they have a reciprocal relationship in that one cannot exist in the same way without the other. As such, interdependency is anti-hierarchal as it forces a recognition that the perceived 'superior' category is not greater than the inferior as their existence is predicated on the existence of the other. Plumwood's dualist model emphasises the links between all superior dualist concepts to be separate to all the linked inferior dualist concepts, thus highlighting how dualism ignores the relationships and dependencies across those boundaries. If dependency becomes the focus, as opposed to focusing on differences which has the potential to slip into reversal of dualist structure, then we

²⁵² Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 63.

can begin to remove value from our understanding of these relationships. This section will explore how the concept of interdependency, particularly in Plumwood's ecofeminism, appears to be another area of synergy between social constructionist ecofeminism and the intersectional approach that is developed in this thesis.

Haraway presents a version of interdependency which is focused on the relationship between humans and nonhumans. She argues that our interactions and relationships with nonhuman animals, 'where and when species meet',²⁵³ is the way in which humans become who they are. We are in constant relation with other beings. Haraway opens her book *When Species Meet* by observing that only 10% of cells in the human body house human genomes and the remaining 90% contain other genomes from organisms such as fungi and bacteria;²⁵⁴ even when we do not realise it we are only as we are because we '*become with many*'.²⁵⁵ As we begin to understand the interdependency we have on nonhuman animals we can start to recognise them as 'companion species' who respond to us and become with us. In this way Haraway goes further than Derrida in demonstrating that the artificial distinction between the human and the nonhuman consequently prevent all species from learning 'how to flourish together in difference'.²⁵⁶ Derrida rejects a philosophy that focuses only on the differences between humans and nonhuman animals to create 'a single indivisible limit' as we can acknowledge differences without constructing a finite line; however, Haraway's thesis allows us to begin to celebrate

²⁵³ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 19.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 291.

this difference through appreciating the web of reciprocating relationships across companion species. Thus, coming closer to understanding what the breaking of this artificial boundary looks like.

To demonstrate how human–animal interdependency changes our perspective, Haraway expands upon the idea of ‘becoming with’ by stating that ‘once “we” have met, we can never be “the same” again’ because we grow with the interactions we have with other animals.²⁵⁷ For this reason, Haraway’s philosophy requires us to learn about ourselves and other creatures in a continuous cycle of ‘becoming with’ whilst accepting that there will never be complete harmony. Again, Haraway’s work seems to offer more direction towards a re-conception of ‘human’ and ‘animal’. Therefore, instead of drawing attention to human exceptionalism, there is space to turn our attention towards the connections between humans and other animals. Haraway asks that we appreciate the reciprocal nature of the relationship between humans and other animals that allows us to learn from our companion species and ‘flourish together in difference without the telos of final peace’²⁵⁸ whilst being ‘bonded in significant otherness’.²⁵⁹

Haraway provides a thorough account of what interdependency looks like with nonhuman animals. However, I suggest that Plumwood’s ecofeminist account is preferable for this project because Plumwood considers how interdependency human interactions as well as with the nonhuman. Plumwood gives the example of how a

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 287.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 391.

²⁵⁹ Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 16.

master depends upon the slave 'for fulfilment of his needs',²⁶⁰ thereby depending upon the slave in a practical sense. To further this, it is also true that a master depends on the slave conceptually if he is to be referred to as a master; one cannot be a master if another is not a slave. This means that the relationship of dependency is seen as a constant threat to the master as 'it subtly challenges his dominance'.²⁶¹ This refusal to accept dependency, according to Plumwood, has been the downfall of the current economic and political landscape because the 'Rational Economy' fails to see that is dependent upon anything outside of itself.²⁶² Gaard considers this in reference to sustainability and justice. She uses the work of feminist economists to demonstrate how economy has viewed 'man' 'as a separate, autonomous, detached, competitive and primarily self-interested individual'.²⁶³ This conception of the economic ideal is naturally detrimental to the environment and other animals as we are seen as totally distinct from 'others' as well as having the right to use them in whatever way best progresses the economy. This further emphasises how detrimental the dualist perspective is for those it oppresses; but, in the long-term, it is also clearly detrimental to the oppressor as the failure to recognise one's dependency on the natural world whilst exploiting its finite resources for economic progress means that eventually the natural world will not be able to support the lifestyle of the oppressor.²⁶⁴ Focusing on

²⁶⁰ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 49.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 49. Dominance is challenged by recognition of dependency because it removes the false belief that man is an autonomous, independent being.

²⁶² Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 194.

²⁶³ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 20.

²⁶⁴ Jason Moore, 'Nature in the Limits to Capital (and Vice Versa)', *Radical Philosophy*, 193 (2015), 9-19. This is also starting to be recognised within the UK government following documents such as Partha Dasgupta, *The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review* (London: HM Treasury).

dependency in human relationships with Earth and its inhabitants would directly attack the 'Rational Economy' which is, rather irrationally, an unsustainable model.

Plumwood uses the term 'earth others' as a way of rejecting hyperseparation particularly between the human and nonhuman.²⁶⁵ Rather than focusing on the nonhuman as an 'instrumental and mechanistic system',²⁶⁶ using the term 'earth other' helps to highlight the intentionality of the nonhuman which in turn 'opens up... the joys, challenges and perplexities of the interplay and exchange between'²⁶⁷ humans and 'earth others'. This shows how hyperseparation can be challenged by the anti-hierarchical thinking of interdependency because, by using the term 'earth others', there is greater space to recognise the interactions and reciprocal relationships at play. However, Andrews argues Plumwood has not justified the argument that 'earth others' should be treated as morally equal to humans. In other words, the anti-hierarchical position has not been successfully defended; Plumwood has presumed that moral equality is true off the back of the critique of dualism. Andrews goes on to ask a set of questions about whether mammals are morally equal to birds, and so on, finally reaching the question 'do rocks count morally?'.²⁶⁸ He concludes that 'Perhaps mammals can be oppressed, but rocks cannot'.²⁶⁹ He seems to be appealing to a common sense view that of course rocks cannot be morally equal to 'living' beings and

²⁶⁵ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 137.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁶⁸ Andrews, 'Warren, Plumwood, a Rock and a Snake', 147.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

so we should not be able to use a collective term of 'earth others' because this term obscures the intuition that not all 'earth others' are morally equal.

However, Andrews has equally not justified why rocks would be outside of moral concern. If we turn to the work of Gaard, who has built upon the critical ecofeminist model of Plumwood that Andrews is criticising, we see that it is not a universal assumption that rocks are unworthy of moral concern. Gaard writes about a canoeing trip in which Gaard has a type of communication with rocks:

The rocks *showed themselves to me*: as I watched, the *rocks flowed*...

What the rocks had shown me was their history, their story, their becoming. The idea of these rocks as inert and motionless was as laughable as if someone had seen me sitting there after lunch, and concluded that I would spend eternity, sitting.²⁷⁰

Andrews' belief that rocks are not morally worthy is not a limitation of the concept of interdependency in ecofeminist theory. Andrews has argued that we should ask intuitive questions about the hierarchy of moral concern, but these questions that Andrews considers to be so pertinent in environmental philosophy are precisely those that ecofeminism discards because such concerns ignore 'the earth other as a potential intentional subject'.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xxi.

²⁷¹ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 137.

Plumwood equally rejects the ‘denial of difference’²⁷² which can occur in some liberation and environmental movements because of the employment of ‘moral extensionism’. Plumwood defines moral extensionism as aiming ‘to extend moral consideration to earth others on the basis of and in proportion to their similarities to humans, the capacity for “higher mental states”, their abilities to be right-holders, and so on’.²⁷³ She rejects this as it fails to recognise and respect ‘the intrinsic value of the other’.²⁷⁴ To only extend care to the nonhuman in so far that the nonhuman resembles the human does not significantly undermine dualistic hierarchical thinking; rather it is ‘the subtle form of the erasure of otherness’.²⁷⁵ Interdependency is, therefore, not achieved by ignoring the differences that exist within and between earth others as this would maintain the hierarchical relationship that characterises dualism; in that difference is denied so that earth others can be seen as morally valuable by emphasising how they are similar to the human (master). Moral extensionism fails to cross the boundaries set by previously accepted dualisms and so is not the kind of radical change in conception that is required to deconstruct the dualist system.

That interdependency is distinct from the denial of difference is another point of similarity with intersectional approaches. Kimberlé Crenshaw developed intersectionality to reject the single-axis analysis of the oppressions of ‘black people’ and ‘women’ because it left Black women ‘in the empty space between’.²⁷⁶ I suggest

²⁷² The title of Plumwood’s 7th chapter is ‘Deep Ecology and the Denial of Difference’. Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 165-189.

²⁷³ Ibid., 160-1.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 161.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 172.

²⁷⁶ Kimberlé Crenshaw cited in Jennifer C. Nash, ‘Rethinking Intersectionality’, *Feminist Review*, 89 (2008), 1-15 (p. 2).

that this represents a similar rejection of the denial of difference as single-axis analyses can result in a minimising of the differences that exist within the category; to treat 'women' as a monolithic category with the assumption that all women have the same experiences of gender-based oppression is to deny the differences that exist within that category that will impact lived experiences. As I will explore in Chapter Three, taking an intersectional approach requires appreciating the complexity that exists in the interplay within and between categories which can help to undermine the hyperseparation proposed by dualism in that it respects difference.

This focus on interdependency in Plumwood's ecofeminist theory has implicit links to intersectional approaches due to its approach to hyperseparation. Intersectionality recognises that identities and experiences are not formed independently of context. Instead, it should be an 'approach that is grounded in lived experiences and that captures the complexities of *interdependent* social locations'.²⁷⁷ Intersectional scholarship explicitly rejects 'oppressions as independent strands of inequality and, rather, views these vectors of inequality as overlapping and interacting'.²⁷⁸ Ecofeminist theory is currently missing a clear route to radically changing dualisms that is not simply reversal; I suggest that intersectionality can offer an alternative route. By highlighting dependency, the logic of domination could be more fundamentally undermined than by suggestions of reversal. Equally, an

²⁷⁷ Emphasis my own. Olena Hankivsky and Renee Cormier, 'Intersectionality and Public Policy: Some Lessons from Existing Models', *Political Research Quarterly*, 64 (2011), 217-229 (p. 218).

²⁷⁸ Heather Hillsburg, 'Towards a Methodology of Intersectionality: An Axiom-Based Approach', *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice*, 36.1 (2013), 3-11 (p. 3).

intersectional approach to ecofeminist theory opens space for intersectionality to include the nonhuman as part of the interrelated axes of oppression.

Conclusion

The works of Plumwood and Merchant have been hugely influential in ecofeminist literature. Despite the criticism ecofeminism faced in the 1980s and 1990s, ecofeminism has been able to continue by building on the strong foundations of these scholars. This can be seen particularly in the work of Greta Gaard, who explicitly cites Plumwood as the influence for her critical ecofeminism. Chaone Mallory and Chris Cuomo have also been at the forefront of developing critical ecofeminism in recent years. For ecofeminism to successfully move forward as a theory, developing from its seminal works and growing from the criticism it has faced, it requires a methodology that can emphasise one of the most attractive aspects of ecofeminism when compared with alternative criticisms of dualism. In my view, this is its intersectional nature and scope in its ability to analyse oppressions across human *and* nonhuman spheres. The methods used by Merchant and Plumwood were valuable in forming ecofeminism theory as they were highlighting links between dualist oppressions that had not been explored before. Ecofeminist work that is premised on Merchant, Plumwood, and Gaard's insights can now be developed with an intersectional approach to develop and explore those insights for a practical application.

Merchant and Plumwood's focus on the intersection of oppression between nature and woman is akin to an intersectional analysis. However, neither scholar explicitly associates themselves with this as a method. Both ecofeminist writers are

clear that the domination of women and nature extends to other theories of domination. Plumwood writes that 'feminism has undergone major conflict, transformation and enrichments as a result of its encounters with other forms of domination'²⁷⁹ and including nature would further improve feminist understandings of power hierarchies. I believe that together Plumwood and Merchant have presented a convincing case for showing 'the importance of nature as the missing piece in this [extended feminist] framework';²⁸⁰ however their theories are not explicitly directed by an intersectional methodology. This thesis therefore aims to provide an intersectional methodology that is grounded in the rejection of dualist hierarchies presented in ecofeminist discourse in order to develop and extend on the implicit intersectionality in their theory, and better grasp the multiple, complex oppressions that result in environmental and social injustice.

²⁷⁹ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 1.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

Ecofeminism: A Defence

I certainly can attest to numerous occasions when, in presenting my work in academic feminist contexts, I was assumed to be making “essentialist” and therefore useless arguments just because I was writing about ‘ecofeminism’. – Noel Sturgeon²⁸¹

In response to the self-posed question ‘What’s Wrong with Ecofeminism’, Lucy Sargisson answers ‘where to begin? Ecofeminism is essentialist, biologist and it lacks political efficacy. Ecofeminism is inconsistent, intellectually regressive and it lacks rigour. Ecofeminism is the fluffy face of feminism’.²⁸² The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that, despite relentless criticisms, such as Sargisson’s, that have tarnished the term ‘ecofeminism’, I believe, alongside several other scholars in the field, that ecofeminism remains a useful and indispensable philosophical line of analysis.²⁸³ Many ecofeminist theorists have developed a more critical line of theory in response to these criticisms²⁸⁴ and there is the possibility for ecofeminist theory to

²⁸¹ Noel Sturgeon quoted in Mallory, ‘What’s in A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, Or Gender and the Environment)’, 14.

²⁸² Lucy Sargisson, ‘What’s Wrong with Ecofeminism’, *Environmental Politics*, 10.1 (2001), 52-64 (p. 52).

²⁸³ Foster, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited’, 196; Mallory, ‘What’s In A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, Or Gender and the Environment)’, 29. Sherilyn MacGregor, ‘Only Resist: Feminist Ecological Citizenship and the Post-politics of Climate Change’, *Hypatia*, 29.3 (2014), 617-633 (p. 630).

²⁸⁴ Gaard has been a significant ecofeminist figure in developing this critical ecofeminism. In her book, *Critical Ecofeminism*, Gaard writes that ‘ecofeminism’s continued vitality is indebted, in part. To its ability to have integrated and benefited from the critiques off essentialism and eurocentrism’ (p. xv). She argues that critical ecofeminism can develop with interdisciplinary perspectives and ‘the practice of attentive listening’ which I will explore more thoroughly in the proceeding chapter. Gaard is clear that this critical ecofeminism is thanks to ‘Val Plumwood’s legacy’ (p. xxiii). Plumwood’s critical ecofeminism called ‘the dualistic construction of both gender identity and human identity into question’ and called for

continue to consolidate this approach. I will examine two minor criticisms and one major criticism that have been posed to ecofeminist work; namely, that it is anti-intellectual, Western-centric, and essentialist. The perception that ecofeminism is anti-intellectual, I argue, comes predominantly from its association with spirituality, which is seen to be irrational. The criticism of Western-centrism states that ecofeminism has been written by westerners and focused on this context whilst assuming that it is equally applicable to other cultures. The major, and arguably the most powerful, criticism against ecofeminism, and indeed many other forms of feminist theory, is that it essentialises 'woman' to present a universal image of female experience that is reductive, erasing multiple experiences of being a woman by portraying problematic gender relations as natural and necessary.

This chapter will be an exploration of the histories of these three criticisms against ecofeminism and an argument that ecofeminist theory has the architecture to respond to these criticisms. It is equally important to note that some criticisms have exercised an unwarranted amount of influence over the way ecofeminism has been perceived and led to a failure to recognise where ecofeminists have been explicitly anti-essentialist. These criticisms can be relatively easily rebuked, or ecofeminism can at the very least be coherently adapted. Such criticisms caused an almost total demise of ecofeminism in the 1990s.²⁸⁵ Although ecofeminism has started to see a 'resurgence',²⁸⁶ if ecofeminism is to fully regain its position in academic literature both

the rejection of the master model, which is an important element of responding to essentialist critiques, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 36.

²⁸⁵ Buckingham, 'Ecofeminism', 845 and Moore, 'Eco/feminist Genealogies', 20.

²⁸⁶ Heather Eaton, 'Ecofeminist Theologies in the Age of Climate Crisis', *Feminist Theology*, 29.3 (2021), 209-219 (p. 209).

the valid and invalid criticisms must be thoroughly explored and responded to accordingly. I will offer defences on behalf of ecofeminism against these criticisms, employing the works of Greta Gaard, Chris Cuomo, and Chaone Mallory, amongst others, who have been at the forefront of defending and developing more critical forms of ecofeminism.

There are several similar strands of feminist ecology that have been developed to distance their work from ecofeminism, such as 'feminist environmentalism'²⁸⁷ and 'gender and the environment'.²⁸⁸ I will argue that although there are examples where these alternative terms have distinct goals from ecofeminism, often they are used simply as a way of distancing the writer from 'essentialist feminisms'²⁸⁹ found in ecofeminism. This can undermine the contributions of ecofeminism,²⁹⁰ and I propose that these terms are not as effective at communicating their purpose as a result. Ultimately the mission of defending ecofeminism *is* a valuable goal because the theory and its conclusions are still useful academic contributions.

Ecofeminism was a growing movement in the 1980s, one that had such force behind it that some believed it would become third-wave feminism.²⁹¹ The identification of a relationship between all forms of oppression that stem from

²⁸⁷ This is the position supported by Bina Agarwal in 'The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India', *Feminist Studies*, 18.1 (1992), 119-158 (p. 119).

²⁸⁸ An alternative name noted by Chaone Mallory whilst defending ecofeminism, Mallory, 'What's in A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, Or Gender and the Environment)', 16.

²⁸⁹ Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 27.

²⁹⁰ Mallory, 'What's in A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, or Gender and the Environment)', 28.

²⁹¹ Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 31.

patriarchal power, and that includes environmental concerns, was an exciting development in the convergence of feminism and environmentalism. By highlighting the interconnected nature of oppression, ecofeminists could then argue for a holistic response and, indeed, they wanted to inspire a response. Many ecofeminist theorists in the 1980s were 'far more concerned with activism than scholarship',²⁹² with their works reading 'more like manifestos, recruiting women to the cause, than detailed pieces of empirically grounded scholarship'.²⁹³ The aim was to actively work towards radically different way of perceiving Others.²⁹⁴ In doing so, the way we treat the environment, nonhuman animals and marginalised groups would become more ethical and we could more fully recognise the relational nature of the human. It is for this reason that some ecofeminists have described some earlier ecofeminist work as strategic as it was situated 'in a specific historical and ideological context'.²⁹⁵ In summary, instead of seeing others as Other ecofeminists sought to inspire their readers and activists to value difference without seeing difference as value-laden.

However, the promise ecofeminism had appeared to offer was cut short, and by the end of the 1990s 'the output on ecofeminism had dropped significantly and there was a sense of it having run out of steam'.²⁹⁶ This rejection of ecofeminism can

²⁹² Foster, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 194.

²⁹³ Ibid., 194.

²⁹⁴ Chris Cuomo, 'On Ecofeminist Philosophy', *Ethics & the Environment*, 7.2 (2002), 1-11 (p. 5).

²⁹⁵ Elizabeth Carlassare, 'Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism: Allies in Resistance', *Ethics & the Environment*, 5.1 (2000), 89-106 (p. 99). The connection between women and nature that is proposed by affinity ecofeminists is also called strategic by Melissa Leach, 'Earth Mother Myths and Other Ecofeminist Fables: How a Strategic Notion Rose and Fell', *Development and Change*, 38.1 (2007), 67-85.

²⁹⁶ Buckingham, 'Ecofeminism', 845.

perhaps be explained in part by the portrayal of 'all ecofeminism as an exclusively essentialist equation of women with nature',²⁹⁷ and third-wave feminism saw feminist deconstruction (particularly of gender categories) take the foreground.²⁹⁸ It is within this context that the three criticisms I have identified could hold the weight and power to undermine ecofeminist theory as a whole.

In this chapter, I argue that the anti-academic criticism is flawed because it presents feminine spiritualities as irrational; it relies on dualistic binaries of reason/emotion; and it undermines the richness of the theory, most importantly its ability to address multiple axes of oppression. I then argue that the Western-centric criticism only considers self-proclaimed ecofeminist works, ignoring activism, and implies problematic expectations that scholarly work is not situated in context so that scholars transcend their embodied perspectives. I propose that this criticism is only relevant where ecofeminists have slipped into essentialism by universalising the Western experience, thus ignoring the complexity of intersecting identities. The final, and most crucial criticism, is that ecofeminism is essentialist.²⁹⁹ 'Essentialism, as we know by now, is a dreaded label in feminist theory that has been applied vigorously to mainstream Western feminist theory'³⁰⁰ and, in this case, argues that ecofeminists

²⁹⁷ Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 31.

²⁹⁸ Claire Snyder, 'What is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay', *Signs*, 34.1 (2008), 175-196 (p. 186).

²⁹⁹ The essentialist critique and its impact is documented in Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 27-41; Mallory, 'What's In A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, Or Gender and the Environment)', 22-24; Chaone Mallory, 'The Spiritual is Political: Gender, Spirituality, and Essentialism in Forest Defense', *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 4.1 (2010), 48-72.

³⁰⁰ Maneesha Deckha, 'Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory: Centralizing Race and Culture in Feminist Work on Nonhuman Animals', *Hypatia*, 27.3 (2012), 527-545 (p. 531).

appear to universalise the female experience by identifying women with nature in an attempt to reclaim a connection that is not necessarily universally felt by women and that was, and still is, oppressive to both. Further still, Bina Agarwal argues that ecofeminism treats 'woman' 'as a unitary category'³⁰¹ by failing to acknowledge the different plights faced by women of colour, poor women, 'and so on'.³⁰² However, I will argue, in line with other contemporary ecofeminist theorists, that not all ecofeminist writings suffer from this criticism.³⁰³ There has been a significant shift away from essentialism and I propose that ecofeminism could centre intersectionality more explicitly to consolidate this movement to anti-essentialism in practice as it is well-positioned to nuance universalised claims about identity categories as it disrupts monolithic categories by insisting on the complexities of identity. This will be further developed in the proceeding chapter as I propose consolidating this through an intersectional methodology.

As a final note on this issue, whilst attempting to research the supposed overwhelming critiques against ecofeminism I was surprised to find how difficult they were to find. Ecofeminism has become infamous for its essentialism and anti-rationalism in particular, yet sources for these arguments are few and far between. I searched key-words such as 'essentialism', 'ecofeminism', 'goddess worship', and

³⁰¹ Agarwal, 'The Gender and Environment Debate', 122.

³⁰² I've quoted this because I believe Agarwal undermines her own criticism by failing to list in more detail the categories of difference which can further affect a woman's domination. As I will argue in the proceeding chapter, it is important to properly acknowledge intersectional connections. Agarwal, 'The Gender and Environment Debate', 122.

³⁰³ MacGregor, 'Gender and environment', 4; Gaard's *Critical Ecofeminism* is praised by Wilson and MacGregor for showing that ecofeminism does not have to use essentialised categories of 'woman' in 'New Ecofeminisms', 856.

‘female spirituality’, repeatedly the results were ecofeminists, or sympathisers, defending ecofeminism against these alleged criticisms as opposed to primary literature establishing critiques. Instead, I searched the footnotes and references of the defences, assuming that they would have to have cited work that had criticised ecofeminism. However, yet again there is an astonishing lack of cited literature articulating a criticism of ecofeminism specifically.³⁰⁴ Where I have found extended criticisms, these authors rarely examine the specific works of any one ecofeminist at length. Generally, they do seem to criticise ecofeminist theory as a whole, rather than ecofeminists, and the categorisation I use throughout reflects this. Somebody who came to learn about ecofeminism in the 21st century would be forgiven for feeling confused about why ecofeminists were spending so much time defending themselves against criticisms that cannot be found. Indeed, Niamh Moore in her chapter ‘Eco/feminist Genealogies’ writes that she has been met with ‘a sense of puzzlement about why I still feel mired in a debate that others possibly perceive as anachronistic’.³⁰⁵

Could it be that ecofeminists had created a phantom criticism of their work? Given the prevalence of ecofeminists defending themselves and their work, I suggest not. There must have been something that caused the general feeling in the 1980s and 1990s that ecofeminism was flawed, but whatever it was that caused this has not

³⁰⁴ This may well be as a result of the context surrounding the demise of ecofeminism that has been noted above: that the third wave of feminism was deconstructionist and the movement against essentialist categories in this wave alongside a perception that ecofeminism was essentialist led to the rejection of the theory without need for several explicit and specific critiques.

³⁰⁵ Moore, ‘Eco/feminist Genealogies’, 20.

been articulated in great detail on paper. Perhaps instead it was responses at conferences and face-to-face discussions that caused ecofeminism to gain such a poor reputation. This is difficult to prove. Otherwise, what has been cited by ecofeminist's defenders is the rejection of explicitly ecofeminist papers at the peer-review stage. An unwillingness to publish ecofeminist work would suggest that ecofeminism was not considered a rigorously academic discourse by review panels. Sturgeon's own anecdotes support this interpretation:

there is an "establishment feminist backlash" against ecofeminism, resulting in a lack of ecofeminist writing in prominent feminist journals such as *Signs*, as well as the invisibility of ecofeminist theory in important academic feminist conferences and anthologies³⁰⁶

Therefore, although there are not many written critiques of ecofeminism as an academic line of enquiry, I do not doubt that a negative attitude was felt towards ecofeminist work. To dismiss the continued relevance of these criticisms to ecofeminist work today would be 'a failure to appreciate the damage caused by the critique of essentialism'.³⁰⁷ This chapter has been a necessary step in demonstrating the continued value of ecofeminist theory by first acknowledging and addressing the criticisms that contemporary ecofeminists have worked to move on from.

³⁰⁶ Noël Sturgeon, *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 167.

³⁰⁷ Moore, 'Eco/feminist Genealogies', 20.

Criticism and Response 1: Anti-academic

Is Ecofeminism Anti-academic?

The first criticism of ecofeminism to consider is that it is anti-academic. This criticism is characterised by the belief that ecofeminists reject important tropes of academic writing, or that the theory itself is irrational. The reasons used to support this criticism can be split into three areas which I will explore in turn,

1. Ecofeminism is often associated with spiritualities that involve Goddess worship or have Pagan-like influences,
2. Ecofeminism rejects the reign and superiority of reason, and
3. Ecofeminism is incoherent.

All three angles attempt to undermine ecofeminism by demonstrating that it is not rigorously academic and so should not be supported. Biehl sums up criticisms 1 and 3 in the introduction to her book *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*:

Ecofeminism has also become a force for irrationalism, most obviously in its embrace of goddess worship, its glorification of the early Neolithic, and its emphasis on metaphors and myths. It has also become irrational in another sense: that is, by virtue of its own incoherence.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 2.

Criticism 2 can be seen in Baird Callicott's reference to ecofeminism as 'anti-theory, anti-science, and anti-reason',³⁰⁹ highlighting her belief that ecofeminism is an anti-academic discourse.

It is, however, the spiritual aspect of ecofeminism that appears to face the most criticism in this attack on ecofeminism's academic rigour. There are three ecofeminist writers who are most frequently cited as affinity ecofeminists who articulate the connection between women and nature to be a spiritual one: Starhawk, Spretnak, and Christ, though Starhawk is 'perhaps the best-known overtly, unapologetically spiritual ecofeminist'.³¹⁰ Starhawk suggests that referring to the Goddess supports the 'understanding that the earth is alive and all of life is sacred and interconnected'.³¹¹ Biehl notes that Spretnak:

regards the earth as a female deity, conceptualizes "the goddess" in terms of a veritable geography of women's biology. Spretnak's goddess has her "womblike caves," her "voluptuous contours and fertile plains," and "her flowing waters that give life, [and] her animal teachers"³¹²

³⁰⁹ Quoted in Trish Glazebrook, 'Karen Warren's Ecofeminism', *Ethics & the Environment*, 7.2 (2002), 12-26 (p. 20).

³¹⁰ Mallory, 'The Spiritual is Political', 58.

³¹¹ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 7.

³¹² Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 13.

Christ, influenced by Starhawk,³¹³ equally praises the revival of the Goddess and suggests that 'the earth is the body of the goddess'³¹⁴ and explicitly expresses an affinity between women and nature:

Those who are moved by images of the Goddess feel as strongly about Goddess' connection to nature as they do about her image as female: A sense of the connection of the female body to nature's powers of transformation and regeneration is affirmed.³¹⁵

Despite the breadth and diversity within ecofeminism as a field, 'ecofeminism is often associated exclusively with pagan spirituality, [and] goddess worship'.³¹⁶ Gaard argues that it was 'the celebration of goddess spirituality and the critique of patriarchy' that critics of ecofeminism focused on in their rejection of ecofeminism.³¹⁷ Joni Seager recognises that ecofeminism had become so negatively synonymous with spirituality that '*ecofeminism* was a word to define *against*' in order to maintain academic credibility because 'the spiritual side of ecofeminism was derided as mystical bunk, dangerously apolitical, and atheoretical'.³¹⁸

The belief that spiritual ecofeminism is apolitical has been voiced by Murray Bookchin and Rosemary Radford Ruether. Bookchin considered ecological feminism

³¹³ Carol Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 2.

³¹⁴ Ibid., xv.

³¹⁵ Ibid.9.

³¹⁶ Carlassare, 'Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism, 90.

³¹⁷ Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 31.

³¹⁸ Joni Seager, 'Rachel Carson Died of Breast Cancer: The Coming of Age of Feminist Environmentalism', *Signs*, 28.3 (2003), 945-972 (p. 948).

‘to be tainted by mysticism’.³¹⁹ Bookchin argues this mysticism prevents them from being able to challenge the hierarchical and capitalist systems that treat people and nonhumans as commodities. Rosemary Radford Ruether, a self-proclaimed ecofeminist, also criticises these more spiritual forms of ecofeminism for focusing on the mystical rather than the practical.³²⁰ Bookchin and Ruether’s criticism is in essence that spiritual ecofeminism is ineffective as a theory for change because it is more concerned with an ethereal energy than with real-worldly affairs. It is felt that spiritual ecofeminists fail to provide practical solutions to the real oppression that is faced.

In an interview, spiritual ecofeminist and wicca priestess Starhawk addressed several of the concerns that have been raised by scholars such as Biehl, Bookchin, and Ruether. Starhawk suggests that the argument that spiritual ecofeminism is less concerned with issues of social justice because the focus is instead on a nonphysical, spiritual realm demonstrates that these scholars ‘have simply not done their homework’.³²¹ Her most frequently cited work *The Spiral Dance* argues that the Goddess movement works ‘for all forms of justice: environmental, social, political, racial, gender, and economic’³²² and the truth of this can be seen in Starhawk’s claim that ‘Pagans and Witches have accrued a proud record of involvement in feminist issues, gay liberation, and antinuclear, antiwar, and environmental campaigns’.³²³ She

³¹⁹ Cited in Richard J. White and Erika Cudworth, ‘Taking It to the Streets: Challenging Systems of Domination from Below’, *Counterpoints*, 448 (2014), 202-219 (p. 212).

³²⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, ‘Preface’, in *Ecofeminism and Globalization: Exploring Culture, Context, and Religion*, ed. by Heather Eaton & Lois Ann Lorentzen (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), pp. vii–xi (p. x).

³²¹ Starhawk quoted in Marguerite Rigoglioso ‘Interview with Starhawk’, *Feminist Theology*, 13.2 (2005), 173-183 (p. 174).

³²² Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 6.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

acknowledges that not all Goddess worshippers have engaged with activism, but as she points out this would be an unfair standard to hold Paganism to when we do not expect political activism from more established branches of spirituality.³²⁴ Thus, I come to the same conclusion as Gaard that 'ecofeminist theory, spirituality, and practice have consistently been rooted in activism'³²⁵ and so Bookchin and Ruether's concern that spiritual ecofeminism will not lead to action seems unwarranted. Indeed, their criticisms seem to be counter to the position of many scholars who have surveyed the history of ecofeminism to find that the engagement with spiritual ideas was often a strategic decision to inspire action.³²⁶

However, the criticism of spiritual ecofeminism on account of its mysticism appears to be even less reasoned than the criticism that it's apolitical. Biehl's argument that 'ecofeminism has also become a force for irrationalism, most obviously in its embrace of goddess worship'³²⁷ is a good example of the apparent rejection of these affinity ecofeminists based on a perceived irrationality of their appeal to spirituality. It is unclear to me why one could not embrace Goddess worship whilst simultaneously producing work that is thoroughly academic; such a line of thinking implies that all religious study could be considered anti-academic. However, there are 'acceptable' forms of academic religious study. Indeed, Ruether identifies as a Catholic

³²⁴ Ibid., 8.

³²⁵ Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 38.

³²⁶ Phoebe Godfrey, 'Diane Wilson vs. Union Carbide: Ecofeminism and the Elitist Charge of "Essentialism"', *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 16.4 (2005), 37-56 (p. 43); in a more critical tone this argument is made in Leach, 'Earth Mother Myths and Other Ecofeminist Fables', 68.

³²⁷ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 2.

theologian³²⁸ and uses her religious beliefs to inform her ecofeminism rather than separating her feminist theologies from her environmental ethics,³²⁹ thus it cannot be that scholarship which embraces Goddess worship is anti-academic purely because it is of a religious nature.

It is unlikely that Biehl intended to reject Goddess worship just because it is less common and socially acceptable in the Western world than God worship. But if this is not what she intended to imply, then what is it about invoking a female deity that is less rational or academic than a male one? Biehl does not provide any justification for her suggestion that embracing goddess worship is irrational, which suggests that Biehl considers it intuitive. I believe this reliance on intuition unveils a bias towards patriarchal established religions, which suggests the criticism has no real root in concern for protecting what is considered academic work. If we can consider patriarchal religious beliefs as subjects worthy of academic study, I see no reason to reject matriarchal religious beliefs from academia. Starhawk also considers the bias against fringe spiritualities, whereby anybody who takes part in such spiritual groups is 'somehow self-indulgent or bad or dangerous or stupid'.³³⁰ Starhawk's perspective supports my analysis in arguing that these criticisms are based on a bias for patriarchal religious beliefs. She goes further, adding that in criticising the Goddess movement

³²⁸ Rosalind Hinton and Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'A Legacy of Inclusion: An Interview with Rosemary Radford Ruether', *CrossCurrents*, 52.1 (2002), 28-37.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

³³⁰ Starhawk quoted in Rigoglioso, 'Interview with Starhawk', 176.

these scholars are ‘ultimately serving the ends of a system’³³¹ that wants patriarchy to reign.

Moreover, people’s religious affiliations are changing significantly. The number of people in the UK who believe in “a personal God” roughly halved between 1961 and 2000’ whilst in that same time period ‘belief in a “spirit or life force” doubled’.³³² That so many people in the UK are choosing to believe in a life force whilst belief in a God appears to be in decline would suggest that we cannot dismiss alternative forms of religion and spirituality as irrelevant to academic study. Ecofeminism should not be dismissed as irrational due to spiritual ecofeminists’ focus on a feminine life force when such spiritual beliefs are growing in popularity. Thus, a critique based on a perceived irrationality in appealing to spirituality is not a valid argument, and I am opposed to the narrow definition of academia that such an attack insists upon.

Additionally, I think we should be cautious of the context from which this criticism to ecofeminism comes, because of course there are major religions that do include a female religious symbol or power. Vandana Shiva argues that ecofeminism in India has the potential to restore ‘the feminine principle in nature and society’ because in Hinduism it is ‘Shakti or Prakti’, feminine principles, for ‘the “living force that supports life”’.³³³ Within Hinduism the religious principles that support a spiritual ecofeminism can be found. We could legitimately, as scholars have,³³⁴ level an

³³¹ Starhawk quoted in Rigoglioso, ‘Interview with Starhawk’, 176.

³³² Adam Dinham, *Religion and Belief Literacy: Reconnecting a Chain of Learning* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021), p. 92.

³³³ Kings, ‘Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism’, 74.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

essentialist critique to Shiva here and question what we mean by a 'feminine' principle, however a criticism based solely on irrationality of female spirituality is problematic. Academics who find a distaste for ecofeminism in the popularity of the female Goddess/spirituality trope inadvertently imply a rejection of religions outside of the Abrahamic tradition based on a perceived irrationality of Goddess worship that is itself guilty of Western-centrism.³³⁵

The rejection of spiritual ecofeminism on the basis that Goddess worship is essentialist and anti-intellectual uncovers both a patriarchal basis and a commitment to secularism in many forms of academic ecology. This rejection can also be seen in how scientists have responded to the Gaia hypothesis. Katherine Young and Paul Nathanson write that people have been drawn to James Lovelock's employment of the Greek goddess Gaia to highlight that the Earth is a 'unified and living organism' but that they have found claims that this is 'a *conscious* organism' more controversial.³³⁶ Marcia Bjonerud considers how the Gaia hypothesis has been 'bitterly opposed' within scientific circles,³³⁷ similarly citing one of the reasons for this opposition to be dissatisfaction with the idea of the Earth being conscious, as Bjonerud demonstrates that the organic metaphor displaces the mechanic one preferred by science since the Scientific Revolution.³³⁸ Young and Nathanson then suggest that

³³⁵ Though it is important to note that some criticisms of spiritual ecofeminism accuse the movement of appropriating Eastern religious traditions. I will consider this criticism in more detail later in this chapter when I explore the argument that ecofeminism is Western-centric.

³³⁶ Katherine K. Young and Paul Nathanson, *Sanctifying Misandry: Goddess Ideology and the Fall of Man* (Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), p. 171.

³³⁷ Marcia Bjonerud, 'Gaia: Gender and Scientific Representations of the Earth', *NWSA Journal*, 9.3 (1997), 89-106 (p. 89).

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

‘most controversial of all... is the idea that this conscious organism is a *divine* one’.³³⁹ Indeed, ‘Lovelock emphatically denies that Gaia has a “spiritual” dimension’,³⁴⁰ and it seems that his relationship with the metaphor was fairly ambiguous. But I would suggest that it is not *most* controversial because Gaia is a divine consciousness; it is most controversial because it is a *feminine* divine consciousness.³⁴¹ Indeed, Lovelock has admitted ‘that the selection of a *female* from ancient myth as the embodiment of the hypothesis has not hastened its acceptance by the scientific mainstream’.³⁴² I find Bjonerud’s argument that there has been a ‘tacit, perhaps even unconscious, rejection of the subversive symbolism of Gaia’³⁴³ convincing for these reasons. Ultimately, the reactions to the idea of Gaia help to demonstrate that there is a reluctance within ecology to incorporate a spiritual element to their understanding of the environment, and I believe that this is exasperated with patriarchal bias when associations are made with a feminine divinity.

Warren argues that spiritual ecofeminism works as a tool ‘to heal from the wounds patriarchy has inflicted on women and nature’.³⁴⁴ This seems to be a fair reading of the ecofeminism proposed by Christ and Starhawk as Christ acknowledges

³³⁹ Young and Nathanson, *Sanctifying Misandry*, 171.

³⁴⁰ Ellen Cronan Rose, ‘The Good Mother: From Gaia to Gilead’, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 12.1 (1991), 77-97 (p. 84).

³⁴¹ This is what seems to be implied in Ellen Cronan Rose’s claim that ‘we would be well advised to find a nongendered, nonanthropomorphic way to represent nature’ as the female imagery of Gaia and other Mother Earth metaphors will not help us find practical solutions to the climate crisis. Rose, ‘The Good Mother’, 91. Furthermore, the rejection of ecofeminist spiritualities is supported by Young and Nathanson due to the perception that their goddess ideology is a form of misandry, which suggests that they are opposed to the feminine aspect of Gaia too. Young and Nathanson, *Sanctifying Misandry*, 182.

³⁴² Emphasis my own. Bjonerud, ‘Gaia’, 91.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁴⁴ Glazebrook, ‘Karen Warren’s Ecofeminism’, 19.

that ‘in our culture, *Goddess* is a powerful transformative metaphor’³⁴⁵ and cites Starhawk’s argument that invoking the Goddess as a way of challenging ‘male control’.³⁴⁶ Where women have found themselves marginalised by the dominant religions, they may find solace in the safety of a feminine spiritual space. Mallory concludes ‘that the underlying reasons for the rejection of ecofeminism have more to do with the challenge ecofeminism poses to androcentric and anthropocentric power than on its putative “irrationality”’.³⁴⁷ Therefore, there is a desire for a spirituality that is not based on patriarchal power systems and has not contributed to the oppression of women, and a spiritual ecofeminism that supports religious movements like Paganism, Goddess worship, and witchcraft offers this alternative space.

This is not to say that the affinity ecofeminist works proposed by Starhawk, Spretnak, and Christ are immune from valid criticism. As I will explore in the essentialism section of this chapter, the scholars do at times legitimately suffer from presenting an uncritical, universal image of the feminine. However, the idea that spiritual ecofeminism is anti-academic by the very nature that it is spiritual is reductive and unjustified. Further still, as I argued at the beginning of this section, some scholars appear to conflate spiritual ecofeminism with all branches of ecofeminism so that ecofeminist theory as a whole could be rejected as anti-academic.³⁴⁸ This is problematic because it misrepresents ecofeminism and means that many of the criticisms of ‘ecofeminism’ ultimately suffer from a straw man fallacy where they have

³⁴⁵ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 24.

³⁴⁶ Starhawk cited in Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 24.

³⁴⁷ Mallory, ‘The Spiritual is Political’, 69.

³⁴⁸ Godfrey suggests that ‘Biehl and Seager end up essentializing ecofeminism itself’ for this reason. Godfrey, ‘Diane Wilson vs. Union Carbide’, 43.

misrepresented the theory in a way that appears to make it easier to dismiss. The rejection of ecofeminism on the basis that Goddess worship is anti-academic seems unjust on two accounts: 1) the argument that Goddess worship is irrational is problematic as it uncovers a patriarchal (and possibly Western) bias; and 2) even if it were, not all branches of ecofeminism have spiritual affiliations and so ecofeminism as a field should not be wholly rejected.

Much of the reasoning for ecofeminism being deemed 'a force for irrationalism'³⁴⁹ or 'anti-intellectual'³⁵⁰ is tied up with the perception of ecofeminist theory as associated with spirituality. However, it is possible that social constructionist ecofeminist theories could be considered irrational in their rejection of the reason/emotion dualism. Callicott's statement that ecofeminism is 'anti-theory, anti-science, anti-reason'³⁵¹ implies a disdain for ecofeminist's problematising of positivist scientific histories of 'development', as well as the rejection of the 'cult of reason' (the former was discussed in relation to Merchant and the later in relation to Plumwood's work in the previous chapter). However, considering these arguments to be anti-reason is a misinterpretation of their position.

For example, as I argued in the preceding chapter, Plumwood is not rejecting reason. Rather she suggests that a particular negative type of rationality has been permitted to reign, one which reinforces dualist hierarchies and encourages exploitation. This might be considered anti-reason in so far as reason is considered

³⁴⁹ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 2.

³⁵⁰ This is one of the ways Gaard characterises the criticisms posed to ecofeminism in 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 32.

³⁵¹ Quoted in Glazebrook, 'Karen Warren's Ecofeminism', 20.

essential to intellectual thought; however, Plumwood rejects a cult of reason that is not self-reflective, self-critical, or even particularly rational. It is possible that the framing of ecofeminist theory as anti-rational is a misinterpretation of this ecofeminist charge against reason as a total rejection of reason.

Similarly, Glazebrook, in her analysis of Warren, argues that spiritual ecofeminists are rejected because they focus so heavily on care, nurturing and emotion, all of which are hyperseparated from reason in dualistic thought; 'spiritualities are a way to show that emotions need not be reduced to the denigrated side of the reason/emotion dichotomy'.³⁵² Therefore, perhaps the charge that ecofeminism is anti-academic on account of it being anti-reason is still tied up with the affinity ecofeminists. However, I suggest that to argue that ecofeminism is anti-academic based on its positivist understanding of care and nurturing³⁵³ relies on a continued adherence to the reason/emotion dualism which has been rigorously criticised by ecofeminist works, and most notably by Plumwood.³⁵⁴ Ecofeminists reject the narrow sense of 'rationality' that sees emotion as something counter to reason. It is a poor measure of ecofeminism's success to criticise it on the basis of it failing to adhere to a concept it has found to be problematic.

³⁵² Glazebrook, 'Karen Warren's Ecofeminism', 20.

³⁵³ Having said this, as was explored in Chapter One' it is still important that we avoid narratives of reversal that simply change the weighting in dualist hierarchies rather than deconstructing the dualist binary.

³⁵⁴ Plumwood sets this critique up in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* and develops this critique further in Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002).

Additionally, the format of some ecofeminist texts might be considered anti-academic. There is discomfort in the fact that 'ecofeminist texts disrupt academic expectations in terms of form and style'.³⁵⁵ Alison Jaggar criticises Daly and Griffin's writing styles for being 'invariably poetic and allusive rather than literal and exact'.³⁵⁶ Additionally, several ecofeminist works have noted the use of poetry within spiritual ecofeminism more broadly.³⁵⁷ However, the disruption to the traditional academic expectations is not without purpose. In subverting academic expectations, ecofeminists announce their rejection of the cult of reason.³⁵⁸ To emphasise, the rejection of the cult of reason is not a rejection of reason itself, but rather a rejection of the dualistic and narrow perception of reason that Western society encourages. As Elizabeth Carlassare argues, rejecting affinity ecofeminists on their subversion of the traditional academic writing style could be seen as 'privileg[ing] certain positions and discursive practices within ecofeminism over others'.³⁵⁹ Additionally these poetic styles are often seen as working towards bridging a 'division between theory and activism'³⁶⁰ or seen as 'a conscious strategy'³⁶¹ to try and encourage political action against oppression. Thus, it is arguable that criticising ecofeminism as anti-academic on account of affinity branches using poetic writing styles is to ignore, first, the work

³⁵⁵ Sargisson, 'What's Wrong with Ecofeminism', 57.

³⁵⁶ Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), p. 95.

³⁵⁷ For example, Foster, *Ecofeminism Revisited*, 195 and Carlassare, 'Destabilizing the Criticism of Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse', 52.

³⁵⁸ Foster, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 195.

³⁵⁹ Carlassare, 'Destabilizing the Criticism of Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse', 60.

³⁶⁰ Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 29.

³⁶¹ Carlassare, 'Destabilizing the Criticism of Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse', 59.

that has been done to show emotion is not counter to reason and, second, the valid reasons for employing this mode of writing.

The final strand of the anti-academic criticism to consider is Biehl's claim that ecofeminism has been made irrational 'by virtue of its own incoherence',³⁶² which I consider to have been successfully overcome by Carlassare who reinterprets this criticism 'as a sign of the movement's richness and vitality'.³⁶³ As many ecofeminist scholars have argued, it would be wrong 'to reduce ecofeminism to a position that glorifies motherhood and celebrates feminist witchcraft'³⁶⁴ when in reality the field of ecofeminism boasts scholars that hold a variety of positions on the woman–nature connection. Ecofeminism is a wide study that includes within it many subcategories. All ecofeminists share a belief that there is a patriarchal system that has oppressed women also oppresses the environment in a comparable manner. How they go about demonstrating this, however, does differ and at times does conflict. However, Carlassare suggests that 'most ecofeminists do not strive to arrive at a unified, coherent, epistemological position'³⁶⁵ because often the different branches are 'strategic'³⁶⁶ having developed out of a 'specific historical and ideological context',³⁶⁷ which also influenced their writing style as identified above. Moreover, it is the

³⁶² Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 2.

³⁶³ Carlassare, 'Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism', 103.

³⁶⁴ This quote is from White and Cudworth, 'Taking It to the Streets', 212. However, the sentiment is shared in Carlassare, who says 'it is not unusual for all of ecofeminism to be subsumed under cultural ecofeminism and dismissed by its materialist feminist critics' in 'Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism', 99. I also quoted elements of Christ, Gaard, and Seager earlier in this section that express the same sentiment that all ecofeminism is reduced to its spiritual affinity versions.

³⁶⁵ Carlassare, 'Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism', 100.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

openness to different perspectives within the same goal of understanding the link between gender and the environment that makes an ecofeminist analysis so valuable. Thus, we do not have to see the diversity within ecofeminism as a negative aspect of the theory but instead embrace it as strategy and/or a sign of the fruitful diversity it permits.

Perhaps more concerning for this project is the suggestion from Paula DiPerna that ecofeminism's 'holistic' approach renders it 'meaningless'.³⁶⁸ In trying to achieve an all-encompassing intersectional theory that rejects *all* forms of oppression, ecofeminism loses its effectiveness and meaningfulness by not being able to focus on anything, thereby rendering it incoherent. I will explore the benefits of intersectionality in more detail in the proceeding chapter, but this criticism could be a deeper concern for this project given that this thesis aims to integrate intersectionality. My case for an intersectional methodology in ecofeminism relies on a belief that bringing multiple, complex discriminations into stark relief is a valuable method of analysis, and a recognition that ecofeminism is primed with the potential for this kind of analysis because of its ability to capture gender, species, and environmental inter-relationships.

However, I believe that DiPerna's criticism is unsuccessful in undermining ecofeminism or the intersectional insights it makes. As Gaard argues, to say that ecofeminism is 'meaningless' because of holism 'leads to the understanding that "meaning" is predicated on exclusion'.³⁶⁹ By this, I take Gaard to mean that DiPerna

³⁶⁸ Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 34.

³⁶⁹ Greta Gaard, 'Misunderstanding Ecofeminism', *Z Papers*, 3.1 (1994), 20-24 (p. 24).

is considering a theory to only be meaningful if it has an exclusionary focus so that there are concerns in its periphery that are not considered relevant to its analysis. However, in the case of feminism, this would 'involve an implicit acceptance of racism, sexism, classism, speciesism, naturalism – all of which are systems of hierarchy and domination'³⁷⁰ – because to address all of these would be too holistic. Alongside Gaard, I argue that the meaningfulness of feminist theories comes from their ability to oppose 'systems of hierarchy which authorize oppression'³⁷¹ rather from the exclusion of certain oppressions that are deemed less salient. Ecofeminism has a framework that enables it to bring speciesism and ecological oppressions into the conversation, rather than being meaningless holism. This is a valuable contribution to understandings of intersectionality as being able to tackle oppressions across human and nonhuman relationships.

Can Ecofeminism Be Defended?

I believe that ecofeminism is able to defend itself against the anti-academic critique. Criticising ecofeminism for being anti-academic uncovers the very biases in academia and society which ecofeminism seeks to reject. To consider ecofeminism irrational because some ecofeminists believe in and support Goddess worship should tell us more about how patriarchal religions occupy a position of authority in Western culture than it does about the weaknesses of ecofeminism. There seems to be something specific about feminists appealing to female spiritualities as a way of overtly overcoming patriarchal restraints that is uncomfortable for other scholars. Additionally,

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 24.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 24.

arguing that ecofeminism is anti-intellectual on the basis of its rejection of reason and focus on emotion ignores the work that has been done to show that reason and emotion are not mutually exclusive. Instead, it demonstrates ecofeminists' commitment to undermining dualist assumptions and uncritical applications of 'reason', including reason/emotion (and I will examine the value of considering the non-rational when 'listening' in Chapter Three). Finally, that ecofeminism is incoherent is not reason to reject the theory. The diversity it enjoys has been an important part of the theory's development and has been instrumental in centring activism (this ecofeminist strategy is one I will utilise in considering the outcome of an intersectional ecofeminist analysis to be 'praxis' in Chapter Three).

As Starhawk argues, there must be a way in which feminist theorists could 'practice more solidarity'.³⁷² She is quick to clarify that this does not mean refraining from criticism altogether. Rather, ensuring that the ways we critique each other 'are constructive and are about furthering the work and the goals of the people you're critiquing',³⁷³ as opposed to a total rejection. Carlassare equally argues that the motivation for dismissing affinity ecofeminism has been 'to privilege social/ist ecofeminism' and the perception that it is "irrational" implies that the goal of ecofeminism is the development of a unified theory of oppression'.³⁷⁴ The division that has been made between affinity ecofeminism and social constructionist ecofeminists, whereby the latter criticise the former and try to distance themselves so as not to be tainted by the criticism that ecofeminism is irrational, seems to ignore the key common

³⁷² Starhawk quoted in Rigoglioso, 'Interview with Starhawk', 183.

³⁷³ Starhawk quoted in Rigoglioso, 'Interview with Starhawk', 183.

³⁷⁴ Carlassare, 'Destabilizing the Criticism of Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse', 61.

goal of all branches of ecofeminism, which is to inspire action³⁷⁵ to address oppressive structures across the human and nonhuman.

Criticism and Response 2: Western-centric

Is Ecofeminism Western-centric?

The second criticism that ecofeminists need to address is the argument that the research conducted in ecofeminism has been through a predominantly Western-centric lens. Western-centrism is the prioritising and focusing on the experiences and cultures of Westerners over those outside of this context. It can involve ignoring indigenous experiences in favour of emphasising the position of the coloniser. It is arguable that the discussion taking place in the ecofeminism literature 'is a very Western conversation'³⁷⁶ and 'ecofeminists themselves have interrogated ecofeminist theory for universalising Western dualistic thought'.³⁷⁷ If ecofeminism is guilty of Western-centrism then there would be significant work required to decolonise the field. Many ecofeminists have been from or lived in Europe, America, or Australia and so the consequent writings certainly have a bias towards the Western context. Furthermore, the critique of dualism often refers only to European philosophy and figures³⁷⁸ which does not necessarily reflect the beliefs and patriarchal systems in other cultures. The consequential problem is that ecofeminism falls short of truly

³⁷⁵ This is one of the reasons that I consider praxis to be an important outcome of my intersectional methodology for ecofeminist theory.

³⁷⁶ Rita M. Gross, 'Buddhism and Ecofeminism: Untangling the Threads of Buddhist Ecology and Western Thought', *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 24.2 (2011), 17-32 (p. 25).

³⁷⁷ Grace Y. Kao, 'The Universal Versus the Particular in Ecofeminist Ethics', *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 38.4 (2010), 616-637 (p. 632).

³⁷⁸ For example, Merchant focuses on Bacon and Plumwood does focus on Plato and Descartes.

including all marginalised peoples. In fact, it could be said to contribute to the marginalisation of people outside of the privileged West by failing to consider the experiences of others. It is most significantly a problem for ecofeminists who have attempted to make universalist claims based on an analysis of Western ideas. Thus, the problem of Western-centrism is intimately connected to the problem of essentialism which will be analysed in the next subsection.

Furthermore, the legacy of Cartesian dualism in the West that ecofeminists have heavily criticised cannot necessarily be said to be at the root of oppressions in other societies. Plumwood focuses on the role of the Western philosophers Plato and Descartes to identify the root of damaging dualistic hierarchies. Also, in Merchant, the Western scientific advancements by figure like Bacon are at the centre of the analysis. Though a postcolonial analysis must understand the impact that importing these philosophies might have had on colonised peoples, focusing only on the impact of the West 'prevents us from seeing other forms of oppression in the Global South, particularly institutionalised and structural discrimination';³⁷⁹ Kings gives the example of the caste system in India which is 'likely to have had a significant role in the creation of current systems of domination' that have led to "'Third World" environmental degradation'.³⁸⁰ In its current form, ecofeminism has not extended its analysis to consider other cultural sources of domination. This is a demonstration of the Western-centrism in ecofeminism because it has remained concerned with analysing European

³⁷⁹ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 76.

³⁸⁰ Ibid, 76.

systems of oppression that are not necessarily transferable to alternative systems of oppression.

The connection between ecofeminism and feminist-vegetarianism, as demonstrated in the works of Adams³⁸¹ could also be seen as contributing to the Western-centrism and elitism of ecofeminism. The call to universal vegetarianism or veganism³⁸² is seen as Western-centric because it ignores the ways that some indigenous cultures rely on meat-eating to live.³⁸³ Related, though significantly different, it has also been charged with elitism as nutritious vegan diets are considered a privilege of white wealthy Westerners who can afford expensive meat alternatives and supplements.³⁸⁴ I will explore this particular criticism and its solutions in more detail in Chapter Five but it is worth mentioning here as it contributes to the Western-centric criticism levelled at ecofeminist theory.

Although there are aspects of the Western-centric criticism of ecofeminism that are important and should be carefully developed away from (such as universalisation), I do not think that Western-centrism in the case of ecofeminism needs to be a debilitating criticism. This is because: 1) Western-centrism is not a fundamental part of ecofeminist theory and the criticism obscures movements that are non-Western

³⁸¹ Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* and 'Ecofeminism and the Eating of Animals'.

³⁸² Or ontological veganism as it is called by Plumwood in Plumwood, 'Animals and Ecology'. Not all calls to veganism are Western-centric but universal calls that undermine the important cultural differences in meat-eating practices could be considered Western-centric.

³⁸³ Deckha, 'Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory', 534.

³⁸⁴ Ibid, 534.

where women have been at the forefront of environmental organising;³⁸⁵ 2) criticising ecofeminism on the basis of Western-centrism implies a desire for transcendent theorising, which is not a reasonable expectation; and 3) where ecofeminist theory has been Western-centric, we can still argue that it present a valid angle of analysis provided it does not seek to universalise its claims/conclusions.

In regards to the first response, that Western-centrism is not fundamental to ecofeminist theory, Gaard argues that our narrative surrounding the development of ecofeminism as a theory 'can be skewed to privilege popular standpoints', more explicitly that these standpoints are 'Euro-Western intellectual developments'.³⁸⁶ Gaard encourages a critical ecofeminism that recognises the contribution of perspectives from other cultures that, though 'not named "ecofeminist"',³⁸⁷ are in fact similar in their analyses and findings. Gaard argues that ecofeminism has been able to survive the criticism of Western-centrism because of 'recent international essays, special issues of journals, and full-length studies in political theory and eco-criticism'.³⁸⁸ These papers have considered 'intersections of race, nation, gender, and species'³⁸⁹ that brings a diversity to ecofeminism that had been missing in its infancy (if you only consider those self-proclaimed ecofeminist works). Equally, Grace Y. Kao defends ecofeminist theory on the basis that 'ecofeminism as a movement does not stand or fall on just one way to conceptualise the relationship between women and

³⁸⁵ The Green Belt Movement in Kenya and the Chipco movement in India are some examples of this. Usha Roopnarian, 'Citizens of the Environment', *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 40 (1999), 75-78 (p. 75).

³⁸⁶ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xiv.

³⁸⁷ Ibid, xiv.

³⁸⁸ Ibid, xvi.

³⁸⁹ Ibid, xvi.

nature'.³⁹⁰ Thus, that ecofeminist theories have generally developed from 'Western influence[s] is not invariably to denigrate it'³⁹¹ as it is conceivable that other branches of ecofeminist theory could develop other ways of understanding oppression. Taking this into account, alongside the growing interest in intersectional studies, it seems far from the truth that ecofeminist work is destined to fall to the Western-centric critique. This paper does not have the scope to analyse the systems of oppression outside of the Western context, but by acknowledging that we cannot universalise the analysis of Western dualisms, we can point towards an ecofeminism that considers non-Western philosophies and their impacts on oppression or, indeed, emancipation. That ecofeminism has been Western-centric in its analysis does not prevent it from developing and moving away from Western-centrism so that it can be a valuable lens of analysis outside of Western literature.

Additionally, the critique of ecofeminism that it is Western-centric is arguably guilty of prioritising academic written work over activist traditions in the Global South that could be defined as ecofeminist. For example, Bolivia has adopted the indigenous concept of *vivir bien* as public policy since 2005,³⁹² which translates to 'living well'. This has been described as a 'cosmovision'³⁹³ and means to live in harmony people and earth by recognising our interdependency. With links to the Bartolina Sisa

³⁹⁰ Kao, 'The Universal Versus the Particular in Ecofeminist Ethics', 621.

³⁹¹ Ibid, 621.

³⁹² Karen Bell, *Living Well in Bolivia – The Way Forward for Sustainable Development?*, online video recording, YouTube, 27 September 2019, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wraDL52-i4E&t=654s>> [accessed 16 December 2023].

³⁹³ Karen Bell, *What Does Vivir Bien Mean?*, online video recording, YouTube, 4 November 2018, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PIUYC-wjEZg&t=3s>> [accessed 16 December 2023].

Federation, 'a women-only organization created in the early 1980s',³⁹⁴ *vivir bien* has promoted gender equity and decolonisation with 'indigenous native women... taking part in Municipal Courts and Departmental Assemblies'.³⁹⁵ The socialist policy has an ultimate goal of the 'eradication of poverty' and great steps towards this have been achieved with 'absolute poverty levels in Bolivia' falling 'from 59.6% in 2005 to 38.6% in 2015'.³⁹⁶ The interviews conducted by Karen Bell that have been cited here highlight the interconnections between the social movements to improve equality of people in Bolivia and the care for natural resources and the environment. Additionally, the Chipko movement has frequently been noted by ecofeminists as having shared beliefs with ecofeminism.³⁹⁷ The Chipko movement originates in India where 'villagers in the Gharwall hills [worked] to save village forests from logging for commercial, rather than subsistence, use'.³⁹⁸ Shiva suggested that the women in the Chipko movement were working to reclaim 'the feminine principle' through their environmental efforts.³⁹⁹ Although there is a lack of academic work, there are examples of praxis in the Global South, such as in Bolivia and India, that have strong ties to ecofeminist concerns.

³⁹⁴ Stéphanie Rousseau, 'Indigenous and Feminist Movements at the Constituent Assembly in Bolivia: Locating the Representation of Indigenous Women', *Latin American Studies Association*, 46.2 (2011), 5-28 (p. 16).

³⁹⁵ Quote from 'Maribel Santamaría Mamani in, Bell, *Living Well in Bolivia – The Way Forward for Sustainable Development?*

³⁹⁶ Bell, *Living Well in Bolivia – The Way Forward for Sustainable Development?*

³⁹⁷ Noël Sturgeon provides a detailed account of the ecofeminists who have referred to the Chipko movement as an ecofeminist movement, as well as a critique of where this has racially essentialised women in India, in the book *Ecofeminist Natures: Race Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp 124-128.

³⁹⁸ Ibid, 127.

³⁹⁹ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development in India* (London: Zed Press, 1989).

Additionally, the Western-centric criticism is limited because it is unclear what its ideal positioning is. Criticising ecofeminist theory on the basis that much of it has been produced within a Western context seems to imply that we should be aiming for 'a "view from nowhere";'⁴⁰⁰ one that is a 'perfect enumeration of subject positions'.⁴⁰¹ This aim is problematic in itself. We are embodied and consequently are materially situated. This criticism seems akin to asking scholars to transcend their embodied natures to be able to integrate all thoughts across all contexts, and this itself seems to contradict the ecofeminists' emphasis on the human as embodied and within rather than separate from their environment. I can appreciate how problems arise from the assumption that the Western position is a universal position, as this leads to essentialism which will be discussed more below; however, problematising Western-centrism can lead to an unrealistic request that research be conducted outside of context.

A key problem, then, is not that ecofeminism has only been written by Western authors because ecofeminist-like activism and theory has appeared in non-Western contexts, but that some Western ecofeminist writers have written from the Western perspective *and* universalised it; it is the presumption that the Western experience is the norm that is the problem. The problem of universalisation will be tackled in more detail in the essentialism section as this is where the problems of Western-centrism and essentialism merge. However, it is worth noting here that this universalisation of the Western experience is not a flaw found in all ecofeminist theorising.

⁴⁰⁰ Sandilands, 'Mother Earth, The Cyborg, and the Queer', 23.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid, 23.

Some ecofeminist writings can be defended against this criticism. Plumwood writes from a postcolonialist perspective that is rigorous in rejecting the application of Western thought on to other cultures.⁴⁰² She is clear that the connection she makes between women and nature's oppressions is only relevant to 'the particular form that it takes in the western context'.⁴⁰³ Therefore, although it is true that she focuses on the influence of Western philosophers in regards to dualism, this is not problematic as she does not universalise their impact. Gaard encourages ecofeminism to be a philosophy that 'listens'. This listening will be picked up again in the next chapter and explored in more detail, but by this Gaard means for ecofeminism to refrain from speaking for other cultures, as Western patriarchal societies have done for so long. Instead, ecofeminists should actively listen to indigenous peoples and to the people from cultures they are referring to. The work of ecofeminists such as Plumwood and Gaard demonstrates that Western-centrism is not absolute in ecofeminism, indeed they show that it is possible for ecofeminist theory to work against Western-centrism. In their work, there are frequent referrals to indigenous cultures that have a more embodied relationship with their environment. This can be seen in the development of Plumwood's work 'in conversation with specific indigenous thinkers, such as Native American writer Carol Lee Sanchez and Australian Aboriginal philosopher Bill Neidjie'.⁴⁰⁴ The work of Plumwood and Gaard stand in contrast to this view that ecofeminism universalises a Western view and so shows that ecofeminist theory need not be Western-centric.

⁴⁰² Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 181.

⁴⁰³ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 11.

⁴⁰⁴ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 181.

A more difficult line of defence is to argue that due to the global nature of the problems identified in ecofeminist theory, there are certain aspects of the analysis that are important to consider in a global sense. Karen Warren argues that ecological problems are globalised problems. Therefore, the destruction of forests, pollution, contamination of oceans, etc. are all 'feminist issues because understanding them helps one to understand the plight of women cross-culturally'.⁴⁰⁵ The problem in ecology, according to Warren, has been its distinctive lack of feminist insight. There has been a male bias in policies that make invisible the labour of women in land labours.⁴⁰⁶ Warren tries to keep central the belief that we should allow differences so as to not eradicate important dissimilarities in the 'unity of sameness'.⁴⁰⁷ Ecofeminist theory can have something valuable to add to conversations about global environmental problems by emphasising the importance of a lens which can properly account for the gendered impact of the climate crisis. Additionally, Kao argues that it is possible to make some justification for the universalisation of 'Western thought and norms' provided it is explicit that this universalisation is not predicated on a belief that 'all Western paradigms represent timeless truths'.⁴⁰⁸ Instead, a certain type of universalisation can recognise that 'Western society has been and is still in the process of being projected upon the world'.⁴⁰⁹ Thus, although there are undoubtedly cases of uncritical universalisation in ecofeminist theory's history, it is possible that recognising how globalisation and continued colonisation have a material impact on

⁴⁰⁵ Glazebrook, 'Karen Warren's Ecofeminism', 16.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid, 17.

⁴⁰⁷ Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What it is and Why it Matters* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 99.

⁴⁰⁸ Kao, 'The Universal Versus the Particular in Ecofeminist Ethics', 620.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, 620.

previously (or currently) colonised countries allows ecofeminist theory to present a critical analysis on Western influence.

In my view, this criticism does not justify the rejection of ecofeminist theory. One way for ecofeminist theorists to avoid slipping into Western-centrism is ‘to present their theoretical analyses in more context-specific ways’⁴¹⁰ to highlight that they’re influenced by and speaking to a specific context that may not necessarily relate to other contexts. Kao quotes Heather Eaton who has been successful in identifying this context by explicitly saying ‘her *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies* [can be seen] as representing nothing other than “Euro-western cultural analyses, and even then only in a limited way”’.⁴¹¹ Thus, this criticism is valid, but it should not have a significant negative impact on the continued development of contextual ecofeminist theory.

Can Ecofeminism Be Defended?

Unfortunately, the extent to which *this* project can actively contribute to overcoming this critique is limited; I am white and British and using this analysis to speak to the United Kingdom’s situation. I recognise that this might be a limitation in how far my work can defend ecofeminism against this criticism. What is important to discern is whether ecofeminism works outside of a European/Western context. If it can, then this criticism needs to be taken on board, but rather than considering it necessary to reject ecofeminism for being compiled generally of white, Western women, there should be greater acknowledgement and centralising of the work that

⁴¹⁰ Ibid, 620.

⁴¹¹ Citing Heather Eaton in Kao, ‘The Universal Versus the Particular in Ecofeminist Ethics’, 620.

has been done to include women from different ethnic backgrounds in the conversation.

Shiva, the most well-known Indian ecofeminist,⁴¹² explicitly applies ecofeminism to the lives of women in the Global South. Although this is the use of ecofeminism outside of a European context and so might seem a good place for ecofeminism's defence, Shiva's work has been subject to much criticism on account of it not being sufficiently intersectional and still presenting an essentialist view of women.⁴¹³ Kings points out that 'Shiva ignored the vastly differing experiences of women from other backgrounds'⁴¹⁴ by analysing the particular context of rural Indian women and assuming that this spoke to the experiences of all women in the Global South.⁴¹⁵ Kings also argues that Shiva does not use ecofeminism to analyse the oppressive forces from within the societies she analyses. For example, the caste system must be said to have an oppressive effect on women in India which, as Agarwal points out, predated colonialism.⁴¹⁶ Yet Shiva does not consider these internal systems of domination. What becomes clear from considering the weaknesses in Shiva's work is that it would also not be sufficient to uncritically apply ecofeminism to different cultures to overcome this criticism. Whilst Shiva's analysis does not appropriately consider the differing experiences of women in the Global South, the existence of additional literature on ecofeminism outside of the Western-

⁴¹² Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 74.

⁴¹³ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism'; Agarwal, 'The Gender and the Environment Debate', 124-126.

⁴¹⁴ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 75.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, 75.

⁴¹⁶ Agarwal, 'The Gender and the Environment Debate', 126.

centric context should not be ignored because it does not perfectly capture the nuances of all experiences in the Global South. Rather, we should recognise that Shiva's work demonstrates that the body of ecofeminist literature can be added to in such a way that non-Western-centric perspectives are included. We can simultaneously argue that this further indicates the criticism of Western-centrism is not cause for rejection of the whole field of ecofeminism, whilst also acknowledging that these analyses need to go further to understand the differences in the female experiences Shiva has captured. Ecofeminism can adapt by truly committing to its intersectional foundations and leaving room to analyse all forms of oppression that affect the lives of the oppressed.

Therefore, ecofeminism has the theoretical framework to respond to these criticisms. Kings is right to call for a re-centring of the intersectional promise of ecofeminism.⁴¹⁷ In doing so, ecofeminists will be pushed to consider the different pressures on women and how they manifest against different identities in different contexts. So, although this criticism is valid against some forms of ecofeminism, ecofeminism has the capacity to learn from this criticism and commit to an intersectional analysis that can move past Western-centrism without compromising any of its fundamental beliefs. In fact, in becoming more inclusive, ecofeminism would better deliver on its promise to reject the systematic nature of linked oppression.

Criticism and Response 3: Essentialism

⁴¹⁷ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism'.

What Is Essentialism and How Do Ecofeminists Suffer from It?

To be essentialist is to view an entity as having certain characteristics that are *essential* to its identity.⁴¹⁸ In the case of feminism, this criticism is the act of viewing women as having certain characteristics that are *essential* to being a woman. These characteristics are assumed to be universally possessed by all women. This is problematic because 'there is no single, shared property or properties that must be satisfied in order to count as a woman'⁴¹⁹ and, the suggestion that there is, 'is challenged by a variety of differently situated women' which shows that "'women" were a rather more diverse lot than first theorized'.⁴²⁰ Ecofeminism is not the only branch of feminist theory to be critiqued for presenting an archetype 'of a generic Woman';⁴²¹ indeed one of the ways the shift from second to third-wave feminism is characterised is by the third-wave's rejection of this homogenous approach to gender categories.⁴²² As Gaard argues, these 'third-wave feminisms portrayed all ecofeminism as an exclusively essentialist equation of women with nature'.⁴²³ The impact of this argument on the academic perception of ecofeminism has been significant and as a result many ecofeminist texts are still apologist in structure.⁴²⁴

The charge of essentialism made against ecofeminist works is often grounded in the connection that is made between women and nature. How this relationship is

⁴¹⁸ Witt, 'Anti-essentialism in Feminist Theory', 321.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, 322.

⁴²⁰ Catriona Sandilands, 'Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer: Ecofeminism and (More) Questions of Identity', *NWSA Journal*, 9.3 (1997), 18-40 (p. 25).

⁴²¹ Witt, 'Anti-essentialism in Feminist Theory', 322.

⁴²² Claire Snyder, 'What is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay', *Signs*, 34.1 (2008), 175-196 (p. 186).

⁴²³ Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 31.

⁴²⁴ Mallory, 'The Spiritual is Political', 69.

framed is dependent upon which ecofeminist you are reading,⁴²⁵ but it is foundational to ecofeminism that there is some link between women and nature. As I explored in the introduction to this chapter, affinity ecofeminists may express this link through a biological connection.⁴²⁶ Daly and Collard both associate men with destruction and death, whilst women and nature are linked by this biological fact of their reproductive capacities. This is considered essentialist by critics like Biehl⁴²⁷ and Sargisson⁴²⁸ because it relies on a biological 'reality' that *all* women are reproductive and nurturing. Other affinity ecofeminists, like Starhawk,⁴²⁹ present this connection as a spiritual link. Nature is presented as a female Goddess or a feminine spirituality that women are better able to connect with than men. This is considered essentialist by critics for suggesting that a special spiritual relationship with nature is something all women have/seek, but also because the idea of a 'feminine' spirituality fails to interrogate gender categories by assuming that there is something 'feminine' beyond social constructions.

Gaard argues that the essentialist critique is more relevant to these affinity branches of ecofeminism, but ecofeminism has been made synonymous with these branches thereby 'discrediting ecofeminism's diversity of arguments'.⁴³⁰ Melissa Leach even articulates the distinction between how ecofeminists make the woman–nature connection as either 'taking an essentialist position' as affinity ecofeminists do,

⁴²⁵ By this I mean whether the author falls under the category of affinity or social constructionist ecofeminism.

⁴²⁶ Daly, *Gyn/Ecology* and Collard with Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild*.

⁴²⁷ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 11.

⁴²⁸ Sargisson, 'What's Wrong with Ecofeminism', 63.

⁴²⁹ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*.

⁴³⁰ Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 31.

or seeing the connection as 'a social or ideological construct' as social constructionist ecofeminists do.⁴³¹ In her language, Leach nods to the general consensus that affinity ecofeminists are inevitably essentialist whilst social constructionist ecofeminists *could* avoid essentialism. Social constructionist ecofeminism is less vulnerable to the essentialist critique because it does not make any intrinsic claims about women or nature, it only uses how these ideas have been constructed socially, discursively, and/or historically. However, it should be noted that 'women's connections to nature are not necessarily essentialist any more than claims to "social construction" are necessarily antiessentialist'.⁴³² Carlassare, though self-identifying as a social ecofeminist,⁴³³ argued this point in the 1990s by identifying 'social/ist ecofeminists' interest in women's bodies as a site of power struggle'.⁴³⁴ So despite the recognition that 'woman' is a socially and discursively constructed, historically situated category, social constructionist ecofeminists do often assume 'a historically continuous, simple, essentialized notion of a "woman"'⁴³⁵ that undermines the consistency of their anti-essentialist position. Although many social constructionist ecofeminists are vocal in their rejection of affinity branches because of this perceived essentialism, it is true that 'the rejection of essentialism in theory does not necessarily produce the rejection of essentialism in practice'.⁴³⁶ Thus, although there are examples of social

⁴³¹ Melissa Leach, 'Earth Mother Myths and Other Ecofeminist Fables: How a Strategic Notion Rose and Fell', *Development and Change*, 38.1 (2007), 67-85 (p. 70).

⁴³² Sandilands, 'Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer', 29.

⁴³³ Elizabeth Carlassare, 'Destabilizing the Criticism of Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse', *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 5.3 (1994), 50-66 (p. 54).

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴³⁵ Carlassare, 'Destabilizing the Criticism of Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse', 64.

⁴³⁶ Sandilands, 'Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer', 27.

constructionist ecofeminist work that do avoid the essentialist critique, it is not sufficient to claim that social constructionist ecofeminism is *de facto* anti-essentialist.

As well as some branches of ecofeminism falling foul to gender essentialism, there is also the critique that naturalising the link between women and nature implies an inevitable relationship which equally essentialises 'nature'. Ecofeminists who do this draw on ideologies of nature where nature is rendered immutable to justify a static view of both 'woman' and 'nature'⁴³⁷ that cannot account for difference. I will consider how 'nature' is an ambivalent category in Chapter Four in more detail, but it is worth considering here how universalising nature in a way that disguises this ambivalence helps to justify a universalised notion of woman.⁴³⁸ This kind of immutable, inevitable connection between women and nature prevents an intersectional analysis because it assumes that *all* women could share any characteristic: the differences between women of different races, religions, classes, sexualities, and those with disabilities (whether physical or mental) are undermined by the essentialist claims critics believed that ecofeminism was making. However, as Catriona Sandilands argues, there is a 'growing awareness that neither "woman" nor "nature" is stable'⁴³⁹ within ecofeminist theory.

⁴³⁷ This is the essentialism that Agarwal claims 'flies in the face of wide-ranging evidence that concepts of nature, culture, gender, and so, are historically and socially constructed and vary within cultures and time periods'; in 'The Gender and Environment Debate', 123.

⁴³⁸ It is on this basis that Catriona Sandilands argues for a queering of both 'woman' and 'nature' so that any link between them can be seen as a kind of parody rather than the basis for an immutable link; in 'Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer: Ecofeminism and (more) Questions of Identity'.

⁴³⁹ Sandilands, 'Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer', 33.

The relationship between women and nature, and the perceived essentialism it entails, is a problematic belief for a few reasons:

- It suggests saving the environment is a more female endeavour, therefore placing the burden on women to solve the crisis.
- It emphasises the reproductive, nurturing characteristics of women to create a link between women and nature which is outdated and misogynistic.
- It ignores important differences between cultures and ethnicities to present a 'universal Woman', which links to the second major criticism of ecofeminism pertaining to the Western-centric nature of ecofeminist research explored above.

I will deal with each aspect of ecofeminist essentialism in turn by explaining the problem that has been posed, considering examples of this form of essentialism in practice, and exploring how ecofeminism can be defended. Ultimately, I will argue that ecofeminism already has the architecture to consider the intricacies of intersectionality, but it fails to make use of this when it makes universalised claims about 'woman' and 'nature'.

A Female Burden

Biehl argues that one of the common themes in ecofeminist essays is that women 'are unique in their ability to appreciate humanity's "interconnectedness" with the natural world'.⁴⁴⁰ This is because affinity ecofeminists suggest that, on account of

⁴⁴⁰ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 2.

their reproductive capacities, women are more nurturing than men; or, in the case of spiritual affinities being drawn, women are closer to nature because nature is a female Goddess or feminine power. Thus, affinity ecofeminists claim that women share something with nature that connects them in a fundamental way. The implication of this intrinsic, special connection is that it appears women are better positioned than men to look after and respond to the Earth's needs. As some ecofeminists are accused of depicting women as being 'at-one' with nature⁴⁴¹, it is assumed that women feel nature's exploitation more keenly than men. This would mean that the climate crisis would be best addressed by women due to their stronger connection to nature and, due to the 'universalising [of] women's experiences', we would also expect 'that all women feel a commitment to protecting the planet'⁴⁴² and so be more ecologically-motivated than their male counterparts. Thus, essentialism in ecofeminism places a burden on women that is not wanted by all, nor do they all deserve, based on claims about 'female' intuition towards nature that is not a universal experience. Ecofeminism assumes a universal closeness that entails a universal natural inclination to resolve the climate crisis. Moreover, this female burden feels particularly problematic as it appears to 'limit their sphere of activity',⁴⁴³ gives women additional tasks that

⁴⁴¹ This accusation is commented on in Joni Seager, 'Rachel Carson Died of Breast Cancer: The Coming of Age of Feminist Environmentalism', *Signs*, 28.3 (2003), 945-972; and Thompson, 'Back to Nature? Resurrecting Ecofeminism after Poststructuralist and Third-Wave Feminisms'.

⁴⁴² Foster, 'Ecofeminism Revisited' 196

⁴⁴³ Carlassare, 'Destabilizing the Criticism of Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse', 53.

increases their workload and, in many cases, presents responsibilities that they have the least ability to affect.⁴⁴⁴

Chaone Mallory cites a conversation with Honeybee, a forest defence activist and self-proclaimed ecofeminist, who said 'women are more able to tune into intuition. Women are better at tapping into feeling a connection',⁴⁴⁵ in both claims Honeybee makes she distinguishes that there is a capacity women have that makes them closer to nature than men. In the foreword to *Rape of the Wild*, Daly writes that the book explains 'the *oneness* of women's struggle to save our Selves and to save the planet',⁴⁴⁶ whilst Collard writes that 'women's experience with oppression and abuse, as well as their experience of mothering, can make them more sensitive to the oppression and abuse of nature, as well as being situated to remedy it'.⁴⁴⁷ Daly and Collard both do not seem to problematise their category of 'woman' and present this empathy felt for the planet as a universal experience.

While some ecofeminists, like Honeybee, Daly, and Collard, contribute to the gendering of ecological activism, it is already the case that men are less likely than their female counterparts to outwardly demonstrate concern for the environment.⁴⁴⁸ Aaron Brough and others suggested that there is a feminized stereotype of ecological

⁴⁴⁴ Melissa Leach, 'Earth Mother Myths and Other Ecofeminist Fables: How a Strategic Notion Rose and Fell', *Development and Change*, 38.1 (2007), 67-85 (p. 72).

⁴⁴⁵ Honeybee quoted in Chaone Mallory, 'The Spiritual is Political: Gender, Spirituality, and Essentialism in Forest Defense', *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 4.1 (2010), 48-72 (p. 49).

⁴⁴⁶ Emphasis my own. Mary Daly, 'Foreword' in *Rape of the Wild*, ix.

⁴⁴⁷ Collard with Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild*, 138.

⁴⁴⁸ Karen Bell notes that 'women have traditionally been the leaders and activists in the environmental justice movement' in 'Bread and Roses: A Gender Perspective on Environmental Justice and Public Health', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 13.10 (2016), 1005 <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph13101005>, p.4.

living that leads to a perception that actions related to environmental care are 'feminine'.⁴⁴⁹ This is strengthened by studies that have suggested that men are less likely to engage in environmentally friendly actions, such as recycling, as they worry it will be perceived as a sign that they are gay.⁴⁵⁰ That ecologically orientated actions could reveal a person's sexuality is, of course, absurd. Therefore, something more complex is at play here to justify this connection. I propose that this is an example of complicated dualist mapping between man/woman, human/nature, reason/emotion and heterosexual/homosexual dualisms, which supports Plumwood's master model analysis explored in the previous chapter. According to these dualist constructions, an emotional reaction to care for nature feminises the man and, therefore, contributes to a perception of him as homosexual. Carol Adams explores this type of problematic gendering in her book *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, in which she suggests that vegetarianism is socially considered a more feminine lifestyle choice. Adams believes that patriarchal society associates vegetables as 'women's food' whilst men are associated with meat-eating which is also considered the 'superior food'.⁴⁵¹ Therefore, the perceived emasculation of men due to actions that demonstrate care or emotion towards the nonhuman is a trope that ecofeminists have criticised before.

Social constructionist ecofeminists, like Plumwood, argue that dualist conceptions are at the root of oppression and therefore should be at the very least be

⁴⁴⁹ Aaron R. Brough, and others, 'Is Eco-Friendly Unmanly? The Green-Feminine Stereotypes and its Effect on Sustainable Consumption', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43.4 (2016), 567-582.

⁴⁵⁰ Janet Swim, Ashley J. Gillis, Kaitlynn J. Hamaty, 'Gender Bending and Gender Conformity: The Social Consequences of Engaging in Feminine and Masculine Pro-Environmental Behaviors', *Sex Roles*, 82.5-6 (2020), 363-385.

⁴⁵¹ Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 27, 53.

challenged and, more often than not, totally rejected. Rather than feeding into this cultural perception of environmentalism as the female responsibility, this kind of dualist mapping that sustains oppressions is rejected. Thus, the existence of these stereotypes indicates the necessity of ecofeminism to reform the way climate action is perceived as a gendered kind of activism.⁴⁵² Ecofeminism has the theoretical framework to aid our understanding of how activism has been gendered; the association of environmentalism with the female is socially constructed as a result of the intricate mapping of dualist hierarchies. Importantly, ecofeminist theory also emphasises praxis that can push towards changing these perceptions which I will explore more in Chapters Three and Five.

As well as the analysis provided above, we can consider the philosophical correlation between burdens of responsibility and blame. The connection between women and nature, whether an individual ecofeminist considers this to be spiritual, biologically determined or socially constructed, does not imply an elevated duty of environmentalism from women that is not required of men due to our understanding of the term 'responsibility'. Once I consider someone to be blameworthy for something

⁴⁵² Equally, ecofeminists have rejected the gendering of activism where masculine or sexist ideas are advertised, such as in movements like PETA. The sexism in their advertising is criticised because it is not well suited to really solving environmental problems as it does not tackle the complex inter-relationship between sexism and speciesism. I will discuss some examples of PETA being guilty of this in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, but it is worth noting here that ecofeminists equally reject the gendering of environmentalism that is more connected to masculinity. Some examples include Carol Adams, 'Why Feminist-Vegan Now?', *Feminism & Psychology*, 20.3 (2010), 302-325; and, Constance Russell and Keri Semenko, 'Twenty One: We Take 'Cow' as a Compliment: Fattening Humane Environmental Social Justice Education', *Challenging Weight-Based Oppression Through Critical Education*, 467 (2016), 211-220.

I also consider them to be morally responsible for that same action.⁴⁵³ Ecofeminist accounts tend to lie the blame of the ecological crisis with patriarchal and capitalist powers.⁴⁵⁴ This demonstrates that even if an ecofeminist does suggest that there is a special relationship between nature and women, it is not true that ecofeminism implies or encourages a greater ecological responsibility to women.

From the social constructionist ecofeminist perspective, the relationship between women and the environment has been a patriarchal tool to oppress both and justify their exploitation. Therefore, there is no innate reason why women should have a greater responsibility to solve the problems of climate change than men. However, even though this connection between women and nature is changeable, the oppressions are acutely felt. Agarwal argues that the claim that women are closer is a construction of 'patriarchal thought' that is utilised to justify the oppression of both and this means that 'women have a particular stake in ending the domination of nature'.⁴⁵⁵ This means that women's role in society of caring for the planet has more to do with their perception within society than any essential connection.⁴⁵⁶ This means that, even where a connection between women and nature is made that recognises the more

⁴⁵³ J.C.C. Smart, 'Free-Will, Praise and Blame', *Mind*, 70.279 (1961), 291-306.

⁴⁵⁴ As Bell notes, it is arguable that men have not been so involved with environmental justice because 'they have a more vested interest in the economic and political institutions responsible for environmental harm', 'Bread and Roses', 4. However, women have been complicit in environmental harm within patriarchal systems, so this is not a blanket blame of men either. Patriarchal powers are more complex than being a purely male domination. This was well explained by Plumwood's master model which was explored in Chapter One.

⁴⁵⁵ Agarwal, 'The Gender and Environment Debate', 120.

⁴⁵⁶ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 76.

active role women have commonly taken over their male counterparts in climate action, it need not be an essentialist connection.

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated by ecological scientists that women are amongst those who will suffer the worst impacts of the climate crisis,⁴⁵⁷ indicating that women do indeed have a vested interest in protecting nature as their livelihoods more immediately depend on it in a way that their male counterparts cannot always share. It is an inescapable fact that women and others 'at the margins of society' will experience 'these effects earliest and to the harshest degree'⁴⁵⁸ because climate change 'is a risk multiplier, impacting on populations that are already disadvantaged'.⁴⁵⁹ Therefore, it is possible that ecofeminism is recognising that what happens to the Earth can at least be said to have a more immediate impact on the livelihoods of women in a way that is not so true for men. Recognising the disproportionate impact the abuse of the environment will have on women might explain why environmental movements feel gendered: because women are affected, they 'also become more aware of this abuse'.⁴⁶⁰ Additionally, Karen Bell argues that women are perhaps more engaged in environmental justice because it is easier for 'those who are not well represented in the current structures of power' to identify its flaws and seek to change it.⁴⁶¹ This does not suggest that there is something fundamental about 'women' that makes them more ecologically concerned; instead 'it

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁵⁹ Bell, 'Bread and Roses', 5.

⁴⁶⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Ecofeminist Philosophy, Theology, and Ethics: A Comparative View', in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*, eds. Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), pp. 77-94 (p. 79).

⁴⁶¹ Bell, 'Bread and Roses', 4.

is a matter of their experience in their particular social location, not due to a different “nature” than males’.⁴⁶²

However, this is an area where I feel an explicit engagement with intersectionality would help the analysis. This is because approaching the issue of women’s connection with nature in an intersectional manner would highlight that the distribution of environmental harms will not be felt evenly by all people, regardless of gender. Low-income communities are likely to be some of the most harshly hit,⁴⁶³ and this does not preclude men. Thus, even in material position, there is not a vested interest felt only by women. Most importantly, ecofeminists recognise that within

the merged destinies of women and nature is the idea that humanity itself is inseparable from nature as a whole and as such, the damage inflicted upon nature by human invariably leads to harm being inflicted upon all humankind and not just women.⁴⁶⁴

Ecofeminism demonstrates to us that ecological activism is not solely a female burden, there is no responsibility imposed on women beyond others because we are all embodied and rely upon our environment for our survival.

⁴⁶² Ruether, ‘Ecofeminist Philosophy, Theology, and Ethics’, 79.

⁴⁶³ Robert Engelman, ‘Population, Climate Change, and Women’s Lives’, *WorldWatch Report #183* (Washington, D.C.: WorldWatch Institute, 2010); Joern Birkmann and others, ‘Chapter Eight: Poverty, Livelihoods and Sustainable Development’ in *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp.1171-1274.

⁴⁶⁴ Kings, ‘Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism’, 71.

Therefore, despite this criticism being levelled at affinity ecofeminists in particular, it fails to provide a convincing argument that ecofeminist essentialism results in a burden being placed on women to solve the climate crisis. As Trish Glazebrook argues, 'the ecofeminist claim is not that women have a privilege on care, while men are inherently aggressive and destructive'.⁴⁶⁵ This is precisely the kind of dualism that ecofeminists seek to reject. Centring intersectionality could help to highlight some of the complexities in talking about women's material position in relation to the climate crisis to further nuance this relationship.

Emphasis on Reproduction

Ecofeminist's critics have often focused on the essentialism caused by ecofeminism placing too much emphasis on women's reproductive capacity. Biehl suggests that one of the central problems with ecofeminist writings is that 'they tend to give acceptance to those male-created images that define women as primarily biological beings'.⁴⁶⁶ Moreover, this assumed universal 'biological makeup' of women has linked to the conceptualisation of women as 'innately more "caring" and "nurturing" than men',⁴⁶⁷ which compounds the 'female burden' problem that was explored above. Bina Agarwal considers the biological connection to be particularly problematic because to identify a biological connection is to assume 'some notion of a female "essence" which is unchangeable and irreducible'⁴⁶⁸ as it naturalises the

⁴⁶⁵ Trish Glazebrook, 'Karen Warren's Ecofeminism', *Ethics & the Environment*, 7.2 (2002), 12-26 (p. 20).

⁴⁶⁶ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 11.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁶⁸ Agarwal, 'The Gender and Environment Debate', 123.

connection. Yet to suggest there is some universal underlying female “essence” that connects women with nature is to reject the ‘wide-ranging evidence that concepts of nature, culture, gender, and so on, are historically and socially constructed and vary within cultures and time periods’.⁴⁶⁹

Affinity ecofeminism of the biological persuasion can be thought to originate in the ‘work of Mary Daly... especially in her book *Gyn/Ecology*’,⁴⁷⁰ in which Daly argues that the connection between women and nature is biological; that women are born closer to nature than men. Ecofeminists who make this biological connection between women and nature often suggest that this connection is true ‘by virtue of their [women’s] child-bearing functions’.⁴⁷¹ Their reproductive labour grants women a sense of embodiment that men do not have; this embodiment means that women ‘are more attune to the rhythms of nature’.⁴⁷² This can be justifiably criticised for essentialising ‘woman’ and creating a barrier of who can be considered a woman. Daly’s argument is steeped in transphobia⁴⁷³ because it logically follows that people who are ascribed the gender male at birth, ‘even those who are gender queer or trans’,⁴⁷⁴ are seen as fundamentally Other from ‘woman’ because they are not born with this proposed biological connection with the natural world. This understanding of ‘woman’ as a biological reality creates a binary that perpetuates the discrimination against non-

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 123.

⁴⁷⁰ Sarat Colling, Sean Parson, and Alessandro Arrigoni, ‘Until All Are Free: Total Liberation through Revolutionary Decolonization, Groundless Solidarity, and a Relationship Framework’, *Counterpoints*, 448 (2014), 51-73 (p. 55).

⁴⁷¹ Ruether, ‘Ecofeminist Philosophy, Theology, and Ethics’, 79.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 79.

⁴⁷³ Colling, et. al, ‘Until All Are Free’, 55.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 55.

binary and transfolk as *something* Other. Additionally cis-women that choose to remain child-free are regarded as acting in opposition to their biological destiny. Collard tries to distance herself from this unappealing consequence by stating:

nothing links the human animal and nature so profoundly as woman's reproductive system which enables her to share the experience of bringing forth and nourishing life with the rest of the living world. *Whether or not she personally experiences biological mothering*, it is in this that woman is most truly a child of nature⁴⁷⁵

However, it feels unconvincing to claim that the capacity alone could produce the same affinity as the act of mothering when the reproduction connection is valorised in this way. Thus, affinity ecofeminism, which suggests that women and nature are fundamentally linked on a biological level, suffers greatly from the essentialist critique because it assumes 'woman' has one, universal, biological reality. It is clear that this element of the essentialist argument is compelling as presenting all women as reproductive is reductive and exclusionary.

Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance* is arguably guilty of the marginalisation of queer people as a result of a biological and spiritual affinity towards the woman–nature connection. For example, her experience of more female-focused spiritualities led her to believe that her body and the natural world were intimately linked by their sanctity:

⁴⁷⁵ Emphasis is not my own. Collard with Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild*, 106.

Now my body, in all its femaleness, its breasts, its vulva, womb, and menstrual flow was sacred. The wild power of nature, the intense pleasure of sexual intimacy, took center stage as paths to the sacred instead of being denied, denigrated, or seen as peripheral.⁴⁷⁶

The link between her body and the natural world is identified by their being ‘paths to the sacred’ and, like other ecofeminists, Starhawk is making this claim of their value in comparison with the devaluing that patriarchal systems have offered. There is, however, reason to see this as an essentialist claim. What is it about Starhawk’s body as she describes it that makes it female? There are women without these body parts, and there are people with these body parts who do not identify as women.

However, more recently Starhawk has recognised this as a limitation of the book and sought to correct it. She argues that the question of ‘What is femaleness? What is maleness?’ is a scary one because it addresses a deep-rooted conditioning that we ‘experience our gender in culturally determined ways’ and that understanding influences our self-perception.⁴⁷⁷ However it is an essential question to ask because it has become clear ‘the definitions are no longer working. They are oppressive to women and confining to men’.⁴⁷⁸ Starhawk is clear that she no longer associates with the binary thinking that was initially present in the book:

In the 1989 introduction, I wrote extensively about my shift away from a polarized view of the world as a dance of “female” and “male” qualities

⁴⁷⁶ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 14.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

and energies, and toward a much more inclusive view of gender and energy... it is still the major change I would make in this book.⁴⁷⁹

Although it seems accurate to suggest the gendered essentialism was a feature of Starhawk's earlier articulations, it seems as though there is little recognition from her critics of the movements away from this she has made. Starhawk is sympathetic to this criticism and, although we should highlight the limits of this book because of the essentialist language used, there should be a recognition that scholars are situated in particular contexts and that ecofeminism as a theory is not static; scholars can develop and refine their position as Starhawk has done.

Critics like Agarwal are justified in their concern that biological ecofeminism, which does see reproduction and nurturing as a biological reality of women, makes an essentialist connection. If ecofeminism is claiming that *all* women can be defined by their biological capacity for reproduction and their emotional capacity for nurturing, which then connects them to nature, then this is problematic. Affinity ecofeminists do at times also emphasise the spiritual power of life-giving,⁴⁸⁰ connecting both women and nature, which essentialises women by suggesting that all women find power in their reproductive capacity. However, this suggestion that reproduction is empowering to women falls apart upon intersectional analysis. It is not always the case that reproduction is a source of spiritual power for women, and it can rather be an example of power imbalance, 'as much reproductive and caring labor is outsourced from

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁸⁰ Thompson, 'Back to Nature?', 506.

privileged men and women to women of color, immigrants, and low-income women',⁴⁸¹ illustrating that experiences of female reproduction differ depending on the individual's context.⁴⁸² Additionally, linking female reproduction with nature fails to include infertile women, women without female reproductive organs, women without traditionally maternal instincts, women who are exploited for their reproductive capacities, and people with reproductive organs who are not women. An intersectional analysis of women's experiences with reproduction shows that monolithic categories of 'woman' with the essential property of reproduction are exclusionary. With this in mind, it is important to determine whether ecofeminism can say anything positive about the experiences that many women have of their reproductive bodies or whether this discussion is inevitably doomed to slide into essentialism.

There has been a long history of feminists vehemently rejecting this 'psycho-biological' reduction of the female as an innately reproductive, nurturing human.⁴⁸³ Grace Y Kao argues that we have been 'repeatedly warned that the social practice and ethical ideal of feminine nurturing can be problematic in patriarchal contexts when

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 507.

⁴⁸² There has been a lot of work done in feminist studies that complicates claims that surrogacy is necessarily oppressive, such as Carmel Shalev, *Birth Power: The Case for Surrogacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) and more recently Daniela Bandelli, 'Feminism and Gestational Surrogacy. Theoretical Reconsideration in the Name of the Child and the Woman', *Italian Sociological Review*, 9.3 (2019), 345-361. But equally there is still a recognition that some surrogate uses are problematic for relying on oppressive frameworks, for example Sharmila Rudrappa and Caitlyn Collins, 'Altruistic Agencies and Compassionate Consumers: Moral Framing of Transnational Surrogacy', *Gender and Society*, 29.6 (2015), 937-959, and Serene J. Khader, 'Intersectionality and the Ethics of Transnational Commercial Surrogacy', *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics*, 6.1 (2013), 68-90.

⁴⁸³ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 11.

attempting to move women out of subordinate positions'.⁴⁸⁴ This 'care ethic' naturalises the idea that women are better suited to the role of carer and so fails to liberate women. Yet ecofeminists are seemingly content 'to confine women to the same regressive social definitions from which feminists have fought hard and long to emancipate women'.⁴⁸⁵ Sargisson concludes that ecofeminism 'is regressive – pulling us back towards the models of femininity constructed by the canons of western political thought and theology'.⁴⁸⁶ Biehl and Sargisson are reacting to what they consider to be the undoing of decades of feminist activism which has fought against the traditional pigeon-holing of women to the private sphere. Although Biehl finds the ecofeminists such as Susan Griffin⁴⁸⁷ and Charlene Spretnak⁴⁸⁸ particularly off-putting due to their explicit arguments that women are ecological beings as a result of their special reproductive relationship shared with nature, Biehl believes that 'it has been a keystone of most ecofeminist writings that women and "nature" have been "associated" by virtue of being "other" to Western culture',⁴⁸⁹ and therefore the vast majority of ecofeminist writings suffer from this critique to varying extents.

However, unlike Agarwal, the essentialist nature of biological ecofeminism does not appear to be Biehl's main concern. Instead Biehl focuses on the counterintuitive nature of reinforcing a stereotype that has been so detrimental to the position of women in society. Affinity ecofeminists who have been considered guilty of this could

⁴⁸⁴ Kao, 'The Universal Versus the Particular in Ecofeminist Ethics', 623.

⁴⁸⁵ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 3.

⁴⁸⁶ Sargisson, 'What's Wrong with Ecofeminism', 63.

⁴⁸⁷ Griffin, *Woman and Nature*.

⁴⁸⁸ Spretnak, 'The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics'.

⁴⁸⁹ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 14.

argue that they are simply reclaiming a trope that *is* part of the female experience and has unfortunately been tainted by the way patriarchal powers have controlled women. They might argue that in spite of the negative history this image has, it is not a negative image in itself by indicating how it can be reversed to demonstrate that this connection with the natural world is a powerful one and demonstrates that the reproductive/sexual biology of women is not something to despise,⁴⁹⁰ but rather to admire. Biehl retorts that such narratives of reversal do not acknowledge the radical change that is necessary in order to reject dualist boundaries,⁴⁹¹ in this case the reversal is from viewing reproductive labours as lesser to considering them at least as valuable as productive labours. This corroborates with Plumwood's argument, which was explored in the preceding chapter, that reversal only means that we include more in the top tier of oppressors, not that we remove the framework of oppression all together. A feminism 'which affirms women as "nurturant"' and celebrates their life-giving powers in a way which confirms their immersion in nature'⁴⁹² fails to tackle the exclusionary essence of dualism and continues to compare 'masculine' and 'female' qualities. Therefore, as Biehl suggests, it would not be sufficient for ecofeminists to simply request that reproductive labour rises to the status of productive labour, or perhaps even overtakes it, because this would legitimise dualism rather than reject it, which is counter to the social constructionist ecofeminist project proposed by Plumwood.

⁴⁹⁰ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 10.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁹² Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 31.

Biehl is firmly against the idea that reclaiming past methods of oppression is a worthy cause. She argues that this is peculiarly ecofeminist goal that has no place in successful liberation. She claims:

blacks, for example, do not organize themselves against racism by using the metaphors of “laziness” and “shiftlessness” that were long used to buttress racism, but somehow these ecofeminists seem to think that comparably regressive metaphors can be liberating for women.⁴⁹³

Biehl appears to have chosen deliberately unlikely metaphors previously employed against Black people that are not comparable with women re-appropriating the nature connection. A more comparable example would be the way in which Black people have been animalised – connecting them to an Other in patriarchal conception in a similar way to how women are connected to Other in nature. If we take this more comparable metaphor Biehl’s point is void because there are movements in Black animal studies to embrace this connection. For example, Marjorie Spiegel argues that ‘comparing the suffering of animals to the suffering of blacks (or any other oppressed group) is offensive only to the speciesist’⁴⁹⁴ because they have a negative perception of nonhuman animals. Thus, ‘to deny our similarities to animals is to deny and undermine our power’.⁴⁹⁵ Additionally, Bénédicte Boisseron argues for a focus on ‘interspecies alliances’ where Black people can ‘turn a racial slur into gold, or social

⁴⁹³ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 17.

⁴⁹⁴ Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (Michigan: Heretic, 1988), p. 31.

⁴⁹⁵ Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison*, 31.

currency, by making it a sign of racial empowerment'⁴⁹⁶ The argument being that if we reject the perception of nonhuman animals as something negative then an association with them is also not negative (beyond the obvious intent from its speaker to offend). Sunaura Taylor does a similar analysis for disability studies using Taylor's personal experience of being referred to as a 'monkey' or 'dog' to interrogate an intersection at the negative perception of both nonhuman animals and disabled people.⁴⁹⁷ Taylor ultimately concludes that comparing the oppressions of nonhuman animals and disabled people, though different in many ways, have similarities that could benefit both animal studies and disability studies.⁴⁹⁸ Therefore, Biehl's argument against reclaiming offensive or oppressive language is based on an assumption that reclaiming language is always an undesirable endeavour, whilst the above analysis suggests that there is a precedent for reclaiming words as an empowering and liberating enterprise for oppressed groups.

An uncritical reversal of gender stereotypes would be damaging, as opposed to helpful, and this is something that is overtly recognised in much ecofeminist literature.⁴⁹⁹ However, like the movements in race and disability studies, I do not think that the recognition of a connection between women and nature necessarily manifests

⁴⁹⁶ Bénédictte Boisseron, 'Is the Animal the New Black?', *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), pp. 1-36 (p. 36).

⁴⁹⁷ Sunaura Taylor, 'Beasts of Burden: Disability Studies and Animal Rights', *Qui Parle*, 19.2 (2011), 191-222 (p. 192).

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁴⁹⁹ Merchant states in the preface of *The Death of Nature* 'it is not the purpose of this analysis to reinstate nature as the mother of humankind nor to advocate that women reassume the role of nurturer dictated by that historical identity' (p. xvii); and it is certainly clear in Plumwood's work that reversal is not sufficient, though *Feminism and the Master of Nature* was published after Biehl's *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*.

as a simple reversal of the status quo. Chaone Mallory provides a reasonable defence of ecofeminism on this issue:

If one says that “women” are like “nature” in that both provide a source of life and nurturance that become exploited, degraded, unacknowledged, and oppressed by white supremacist anthropocentric capitalist patriarchy and asks for a reclaiming of traditional “female” or “feminine” values and practices in order to protect women, natural beings and entities, and dependent Others, is this really insufficiently critical of the ways that this is a historically and socially-constructed connection?’⁵⁰⁰

In other words, it is an important part of women and nature’s character that they are reproductive *because* it has been a target for patriarchal exploitation; ecofeminists are not being uncritical in attempts to reclaim, rather they are using the characteristics of oppression as a means of protecting both women and nature. Reclaiming those characteristics is not feeding into the patriarchal model, it is demanding that these will not be reasons to oppress again. The way I understand Mallory is that the connection that ecofeminism makes between nature and women is a critical analysis of that which the patriarchy has imposed. Therefore, the second aspect of essentialism does not undermine ecofeminists’ understanding of the connection between women and nature,

⁵⁰⁰ Mallory, ‘What’s In A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, Or Gender and the Environment)’, 26.

provided we focus on this connection as a social construct as opposed to a biological reality.

I do sympathise with the goal of affinity ecofeminism on this account. There are clear essentialist claims about women's reproductive biology that need to be worked through, but there are also weaknesses in Biehl's criticism that potentially unveil an internalised misogyny against reproductive labour. Biehl is openly appalled by ecofeminism's eagerness to co-opt 'feminine' terms that feminists have worked so hard to disassociate from. Biehl claims that 'ecofeminists are ... quite right to stress that women should not despise their own reproductive and sexual biology'⁵⁰¹ and yet she is firmly against a movement directing women towards respecting reproductive labour. The problem for ecofeminism comes when we try to universalise the experience of being a reproductive body to all women. However, there is nothing clearly problematic with questioning the construction of 'femininity' as negative. There is nothing inherently 'bad' about a woman being reproductive and nurturing and recognising that society's construct of 'nature' shares these characteristics, provided we can acknowledge that it is also not 'bad' that not all women share this experience. The potential benefit of ecofeminism is that it can highlight how dualism has negatively affected the way we perceive reproductive labour. I believe that ecofeminism can analyse the historical and perceived connection of woman/nature through reproduction whilst simultaneously rejecting the idea that these perceived reproductive qualities are 'lower' than more traditionally male ones, all without falling victim to the

⁵⁰¹ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 10.

critique of essentialism. Instead, the valuing of (some) women's reproductive capacity need not be seen as a simple reversal or as biological determinism. It is enough to recognise the significance of the socially constructed reproductive/nurturing connection between women and nature alongside a re-evaluation of its value to make a valid point about how both women and nature have been exploited.

This goal can be helped by emphasising the complexity of nature. Much of the above analysis rejecting the idea that women cannot be defined by a biological affinity with nature rests on the assumption that 'nature' is a consistent category; that category is one of a 'reified, victimized, epistemically transparent and passive entity'.⁵⁰² However, 'nature', like 'woman', is not a monolithic category. Sandilands suggests it is 'an active and unpredictable character'⁵⁰³ which means that:

If "women" are connected through statements of women's biological essence to a "nature" that is radically unstable, then queering "nature" can be expanded to embrace the failure of "woman" as a (heterosexualized) coherent identity. If "nature" is connected through feminization to a "woman" that is not coherent, then the gendering of nature calls attention to its own unrepresentability.⁵⁰⁴

Nature is not a stable category and so any identity category that is connected to it is equally emphasised as unstable; thus, linking women to nature in a way that emphasises reproductive capacity need not be essentialist if nature is not

⁵⁰² Sandilands, 'Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer', 31.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 35.

essentialised as reproductive. For example, nature is not a purely life-giving force and recognising the instability of the category 'nature'⁵⁰⁵ is one way to emphasise that linking women with nature does not necessarily present women as a monolithic category either.

Affinity ecofeminists who emphasise reproduction as a biologically determined quality of both women and nature essentialise both. This essentialism marginalises women who do not share in the reproductive capacity; people who do have the reproductive capacity but are not women; women who do not feel liberated by their reproductive potential; and it essentialises nature as a passive, nurturing character. I have argued that recognising reproduction as positive need not be seen as a reversal and can instead be considered a reclaiming of a socially constructed idea of women that has been used to oppress them. However, I have argued that this reclaiming must acknowledge that reproduction is not a biological necessity that is essential to all women. Queering the category of nature could be one way to emphasise the instability of 'nature' as reproductive, and in association this queers the category of 'women' too. I suggest that the intersectional methodology that will be proposed in the proceeding chapter will be a further way of building on this recognition that reproduction cannot be seen as an essential property of 'women' and 'nature'. I argue this because intersectionality analyses complex inter-relational identities in such a way that rejects the restrictive identities proposed in the kinds of monolithic categories that have been

⁵⁰⁵ The recognition that 'Nature' functions as a construction that we can put 'on a pedestal' when really it refers to nothing tangible and doing so is 'a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration', is noted in Timothy Morton *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007).

used to sustain a connection between women and nature based on reproductive capacity. The idea that there is an essential reproductive property of women or nature cannot be sustained in an intersectional analysis because it disrupts such monolithic groupings.

The Universal Woman

Ecofeminists have been criticised for presenting ‘women’ as a universal category through their connection between women and nature. It is argued that ecofeminists seem to suggest that *all* women possess a shared quality or property. Sargisson argues that this means that ecofeminist work is simply ‘replacing deep ecological sexism with ecofeminist deep essentialism’.⁵⁰⁶ Affinity ecofeminists have been criticised on this account for presenting an immutable or eternal ‘female nature’⁵⁰⁷ through either a biological link between *all* women, or a spiritual connection to nature experienced by *all*. However, unlike much of the criticisms I have explored above, social constructionist ecofeminists have been criticised for slipping into this universalism too despite not characterising the connection between women and nature as innate or inevitable. Leach argues that even social(ist) ecofeminists ‘have tended to portray it [the woman–nature connection] as a universal connection, or at least one spanning such wide cultural sweeps as to be universal’.⁵⁰⁸ Biehl similarly argues that there is a connection made, even by social constructionist ecofeminists, between the women ‘of 1990s Western culture’ with women ‘in the Neolithic’⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁶ Sargisson, ‘What’s Wrong with Ecofeminism’, 63.

⁵⁰⁷ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 26.

⁵⁰⁸ Leach, ‘Earth Mother Myths and Other Ecofeminist Fables’, 70.

⁵⁰⁹ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 26.

through their 'carringness',⁵¹⁰ which suggests that there has been a persistent 'woman' throughout history.

The universalisation of 'woman' is problematic because it is a narrow definition of womanhood which is inevitably exclusory. This universalisation is not dissimilar to the universalisation seen in the master model, which was explored in Chapter One. The master model creates an image that to be 'human' is to be a white, middle-class, heterosexual, cis-gendered, non-disabled man; equally, the essentialist ecofeminist version, which we can call it the 'women's model', creates an image that to be a woman is, at the very least, to fit Western categories of the female. A women's model does not achieve the radical changes ecofeminism claims to desire as this essentialism of women continues to marginalise the Other, suggesting that they fall short of being 'woman' by not fitting into Western ecofeminist conceptions of universal womanhood. Therefore, by arguing that there are some properties universally shared by all women, some ecofeminists are guilty of supporting an essentialist view of the woman that is exclusionary.

Thus, it is arguable that some ecofeminists have treated women as a universal category when the reality is very different, for example there are women in privileged positions who have contributed to the oppression of other women.⁵¹¹ The universalisation of reproductive capacity as an essential property of women that is proposed by some affinity ecofeminists has been explored in more detail in the section 'Emphasis on Reproduction' where it was argued that to see reproductive biology as

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁵¹¹ Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 31.

something that can connect all women troublingly ignores the way that reproduction has sometimes highlighted hierarchal differences between women as opposed to their connection.⁵¹² Beyond this particular issue, it is dangerous to ignore the differences between women that stem from queer, racial, and class identities because doing so ignores the privilege enjoyed by middle-class Western women. That ecofeminists at times make universal claims that represent such a small section of women is problematic; however, I will argue that ecofeminist theory does not rely upon a universal perception of women and that there have been movements in ecofeminism since the 1990s to limit this universalisation.

To avoid the criticism of essentialism based on a universalisation of categories, ecofeminists should commit to including all marginalised people and develop to appreciate the complexity of categories. This is possible as ecofeminism provides a theoretical framework which can capture multiple interacting privileges and oppressions, however when ecofeminists universalise categories of 'woman' or 'nature', the theory falls short of this potential. Many ecofeminists have sought to develop ecofeminism in this way. For example, Charis Thompson and Sherilyn MacGregor point out that Merchant was criticising the idea of universal, immutable categories of 'woman' in 1990;⁵¹³ Mellor's materialism recognises the complexities and interplay of privilege and oppression within an individual's identity and

⁵¹² In a corresponding footnote, it was acknowledged that this is not an uncontroversial claim. Some feminists have argued that surrogacy can be a liberatory experience and it is an assumption to consider it oppressive. There is tension in the literature that I do not have the capacity to explore here.

⁵¹³ Charis Thompson and Sherilyn MacGregor, 'The Death of Nature' in *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment* ed. by Sherilyn MacGregor (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 43-53.

experience;⁵¹⁴ Gaard's integration of queer theory has helped to show the diversity in and across the category 'woman',⁵¹⁵ and has suggested that queer theorists' analysis of ecology 'can be further developed through the intersectional feminist lenses of gender, age, ability, and species'.⁵¹⁶ Consequently it is a simplification of the field of ecofeminism to suggest that all ecofeminists are guilty of presenting a universal category of woman as much work has been done to develop ecofeminism away from this kind of essentialism.

I propose that intersectionality would be a welcome integration into ecofeminist theory to help avoid universalisation. As I seek to demonstrate in the proceeding chapter, intersectional forms of analysis are becoming increasingly popular, and their necessity within feminism 'to recognize the complexity of discrimination and identity'⁵¹⁷ has been solidified. As A.E. Kings has argued, ecofeminists have failed to tap into the promise of intersectionality within ecofeminism,⁵¹⁸ but this need not be the case. It is possible to centre intersectionality more explicitly within ecofeminist theory. Essentialism involves a universalisation and naturalising of certain qualities/properties which are seen to be essential to a particular group. However, this cannot be sustained when intersectionality is effectively employed. This is because intersectionality insists that identities are more complex than this and so universal claims are problematic. Ecofeminist theory has the potential to include those who are marginalised by

⁵¹⁴ Mellor, 'Feminism and Environmental Ethics', 113.

⁵¹⁵ Gaard, 'Toward a Queer Ecofeminism', *Hypatia*, 12.1 (1997), 114-137.

⁵¹⁶ Gaard, 'Queering Environmental Justice Through an Intersectional Lens', *American Journal of Public Health*, 112.1 (2022), 57-58 (p. 57).

⁵¹⁷ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 67.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

committing to a complex multiple-axes approach to complicate identities like ‘woman’ and ‘nature’ so that they are not universally applied.

As ecofeminism moves forward with this criticism by accepting where it is valid and learning from it, ecofeminists must be conscious of rejecting an essentialist perception of women that comes from and revolves around a false belief in a unitary ‘woman’ category. I have argued that affinity ecofeminists are most vulnerable to this criticism, but social constructionists are not immune to it. Despite not making intrinsic, universal claims about the nature of women, social constructionist ecofeminists can still be guilty of ignoring important cultural differences in their evaluation of constructing the female.⁵¹⁹ Therefore, social constructionist ecofeminists could continue to develop from the critique. There have been movements towards this, most evident in Gaard’s integration of queer theory which helps to undermine universal claims of ‘womanhood’.⁵²⁰ However, I will argue in the next chapter that an intersectional methodology could build on this disruption of universal categories.

Can Ecofeminism Recover from Essentialism?

For affinity ecofeminists who determine a biological connection, it seems likely that it will always be subject to essentialism because it relies upon the identification of something physical about all women that connects women to nature. Currently, spiritual ecofeminism is perhaps the most heavily criticised for essentialism. This is

⁵¹⁹ Leach, ‘Earth Mother Myths and Other Ecofeminist Fables’, 70; and Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 26.

⁵²⁰ Gaard, ‘Toward a Queer Ecofeminism’. This has the further benefit of disrupting essentialist views of nature as if the ‘woman’ category is queered then its connection with nature cannot be sustained with a unitary perception of nature either.

due to the use of gendered categories to explain a spiritual connection and the implication that all women experience a special relationship with nature. I am not convinced that spiritual ecofeminism will always be subject to this criticism. I wonder whether there is an alternative way of voicing a spiritual ecofeminism that would not fall prey to such arguments. Mallory's essay 'The Spiritual is Political' hints towards a possible reconciliation between ecofeminists and expressions of female spiritualities given its popularity in activism outside of academic study.⁵²¹ For the moment, spiritual ecofeminism remains the embarrassing distant relation to 'true' ecofeminism. Yet the existence of a life-affirming, earth-affirming spirituality with more nuanced understandings of what is 'feminine'⁵²² would not necessarily fall prey to the criticism of essentialism. This suggests that the almost total rejection of spiritual ecofeminism is based on more than a perceived essentialism, as I have already suggested within the response to the anti-academic criticism of ecofeminism.

On the other hand, much work has already been done within social constructionist ecofeminist circles to overcome the essentialist critique and develop ecofeminist theory in such a way that it does not present a universal woman–nature connection that imposes a female burden of environmentalism or is based on reproductive capacity.⁵²³ However, there is a danger that in responding to the essentialist critique, ecofeminists resort to a problematic alternative of presenting the connection as purely cultural or symbolic. The move to deconstruction in the third-

⁵²¹ Mallory, 'The Spiritual is Political', 61.

⁵²² Ibid., 69.

⁵²³ As I have noted in this chapter, Plumwood and Gaard have been significant ecofeminist figures in this development of a critical ecofeminism that is able to respond to these critiques.

wave of feminism led 'some feminist critics of ecofeminism... to indicate that women-nature connections are ultimately only cultural or symbolic'⁵²⁴ on account of 'woman' being a social construct. For example, Biehl argues that these ecofeminists rely on 'regressive metaphors',⁵²⁵ that they agree are the product of patriarchal binaries and yet use because they still consider them effective in communicating the connection between women and nature. Sandilands argues that there are some ecofeminists who 'argue that the woman-nature connection is to be completely rejected as a totalized patriarchal falsehood'.⁵²⁶ Similarly, Agarwal notes that social constructionist ecofeminists risk establishing a link that exists 'solely in ideology'.⁵²⁷ The problem with this is it lacks a more substantial connection, and thus ignores 'the (interrelated) material sources of the dominance (based on economic advantage and political power)'.⁵²⁸ Consequently, although affinity ecofeminists have been criticised for essentialism in using the gendered terms 'woman' and 'feminine' as biological realities based on sex, social constructionist ecofeminists must be careful to not go so far in the opposite direction so as to make the woman-nature connection purely symbolic. A careful balance must be struck where ecofeminists seek to explore the constructed links between femininity and nature that have contributed to oppression, whilst also refraining from making immaterial claims about their conceptual connection.

⁵²⁴ Cuomo, 'On Ecofeminist Philosophy', 7.

⁵²⁵ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 17.

⁵²⁶ Sandilands, 'Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer', 34.

⁵²⁷ Agarwal, 'The Gender and Environment Debate', 122.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

In trying to overcome the essentialist critique in ecofeminism there is a 'danger that the baby has been thrown out with the bathwater'.⁵²⁹ In other words, it might be that we move from the rejection of affinity ecofeminism as essentialist to a situation where no meaningful claims about gender and the environment can be made so that environmental work is 'gender-blind'.⁵³⁰ If the link between women and nature is consistently reduced to something that is purely symbolic then the important insights made in ecofeminist analyses regarding the oppression of both can also be considered symbolic rather than real. This equally feels unsatisfactory because we end up with a feminism that is 'postmodern and poststructuralist' but is also 'human-centered (anthropocentric)',⁵³¹ or an environmentalism which 'remains ignorant to issues of gender'.⁵³² Both options fail to respect the contributions that have been made by many social constructionist ecofeminists to recognise that the entrenched nature of these constructions have a powerful material impact on both women and nature.

Agarwal cites Merchant as being 'alone' in tracing 'the links in concrete terms, historically'.⁵³³ However, I would argue that there are many social constructionist ecofeminists who do not leave the link as a purely conceptual one. Mellor develops a materialist analysis 'derived from ecofeminism'⁵³⁴ which she starts 'from sex/gender dualism as a relation of (re)production'.⁵³⁵ The benefit of this analysis is that it

⁵²⁹ Leach, 'Earth Mother Myths and Other Ecofeminist Fables', 68.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵³¹ Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 32. Also argued by Mallory, 'What's in A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, Or Gender and the Environment)', 26.

⁵³² Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 73.

⁵³³ Agarwal, 'The Gender and Environment Debate', 122.

⁵³⁴ Mellor, 'Feminism and Environmental Ethics', 110.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

becomes clear that the link between woman–nature is not simply ‘an accident of historical association’,⁵³⁶ nor is it a result of some essential property of women or nature. Instead it is based on the material conditions of women (and humans more generally) in relation to nature. This allows the social constructionist ecofeminist to call for change that is ‘material and institutional’.⁵³⁷ Thus, the response to essentialism should not be to reject the ecofeminist insight that there is an important constructed connection made between women and nature that impacts both.

An alternative response to the essentialism problem in ecofeminism that has been somewhat successful is the interrogation of the motivations and significance of an essentialist critique itself. Mallory takes this line of response by using Carlassare’s argument that essentialist critiques are employed as ‘policing’ of ecofeminism⁵³⁸ and Bonnie Mann’s argument ‘that the charge of essentialism in this century as well as the last still functions to silence certain feminisms’.⁵³⁹ Mallory questions why an essentialist criticism is considered such an overwhelming criticism that it can render a whole field of academic enquiry invalid. For example, the connected criticism of essentialism against spiritualities seems to have a disproportionate voice and effect when used against female spirituality than it does against masculine spiritualities. We need to question why the essentialism of female spirituality can undermine a whole field of enquiry when the essentialism in male spiritualities does not. We might know

⁵³⁶ Mellor, ‘Feminism and Environmental Ethics’, 112.

⁵³⁷ Carlassare, ‘Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism’, 93.

⁵³⁸ Mallory, ‘What’s in A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, Or Gender and the Environment)’, 22; and Mallory, ‘The Spiritual is Political’, 63.

⁵³⁹ Mallory, ‘What’s in A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, Or Gender and the Environment)’, 22-3.

that the Christian God is technically genderless, but in practice the way *He* is spoken of is gendered. I am not trying to justify gendered essentialism; however, I do think that the disparate effects these criticisms have on patriarchal and matriarchal spiritualities and theories suggests that there is something deeper behind the total rejection of ecofeminism based on essentialist spirituality (as discussed at some length above). As Cuomo suggests, 'when so much energy apparently must be put toward arguing for the basic legitimacy of feminism and feminist methodologies, there is less energy available for the positive projects of feminist philosophy'.⁵⁴⁰ I think it is unlikely that the essentialist critique is simply a distraction from a feminist project as it does have merits as a critique; however, I think it is valid to question how much time they should be expected to spend justifying their position at the expense of actually developing their feminism to be more inclusive, more productive, and more directed towards activism.

Alternatively, essentialism within ecofeminism could be considered a 'political strategy – simplifying the message and encouraging support'.⁵⁴¹ It could be that 'strategic value'⁵⁴² is to be found in some affinity ecofeminist works where essentialism is employed because it is 'politically useful' for some ecofeminists, like Griffin.⁵⁴³ Sandilands in particular seeks to build on the strategy argument made by Carlassare by praising her for making possible 'the realization that discussions of women's connections to nature are not necessarily essentialist any more than claims to "social

⁵⁴⁰ Cuomo, 'On Ecofeminist Philosophy', 8.

⁵⁴¹ Foster, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 196.

⁵⁴² Mallory, 'The Spiritual is Political', 61.

⁵⁴³ Sandilands, 'Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer', 27.

construction" are necessarily antiessentialist in an ecofeminist political strategy'.⁵⁴⁴ Sandilands suggests that this means ecofeminists can be seen as not only employing essentialism as a strategy but as 'performative parody'⁵⁴⁵ or 'performative affinity'⁵⁴⁶ by recognising that the categories of 'woman' and 'nature' are both unstable. By queering both categories, 'the ecofeminist assertion that women and nature are somehow "connected" can then become an ironic statement of joint subversion'.⁵⁴⁷ This allows ecofeminist talk of the woman–nature connection to avoid essentialism because the use of the two categories together only works to further highlight the limits of the categories used.

As I have argued within the exploration of essentialism above, the work of queering ecofeminism has also been developed in Gaard's work.⁵⁴⁸ Gaard argued that heterosexism is an integral part of our understanding of the domination of nature, yet it had not been, until 1997, evaluated or integrated in ecofeminism.⁵⁴⁹ Ecofeminism is based on the premise that all forms of oppression are intimately connected to one another, in such a way that tackling just one manifestation will never result in radical change. Instead, 'liberation efforts must be aimed at dismantling the system itself'.⁵⁵⁰ Yet by failing to interrogate the heterosexual/queer dualism, ecofeminism has not

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁴⁸ Despite criticising ecofeminism for being 'grounded on binary difference', Timothy Morton praises both Sandiland and Gaard's for the work they have done to bring queer theory into environmentalism: Timothy Morton, 'Guest Column: Queer Ecology', *PMLA*, 125.2 (2010), 273-282 (p. 273-4).

⁵⁴⁹ Gaard, 'Towards a Queer Ecofeminism', 115.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 117.

reached its intersectional potential and thus has not satisfactorily identified the web of oppressions. Even in social constructionist ecofeminist work this dualist pairing is often missing. As Gaard argues, 'appeals to nature have often been used to justify social norms, to the detriment of women, nature, queers and persons of color',⁵⁵¹ thus a queer ecofeminism would be informed by queer studies and ecofeminism demonstrating that liberation of one will not be successful without the liberation of all. What Gaard achieves in this paper is a clear understanding that although ecofeminism has failed to include queer people in the past, it can develop in conversation with queer studies, just as it has with animal liberation and ecological studies.

This has been an integral step in developing ecofeminism away from essentialism and I propose that it could be further consolidated with an integration of intersectionality. This is because intersectionality helps to undermine essentialist categories as it emphasises the complexity of identity through an analysis of the interaction between privileged and oppressed categories, highlighting the fact that no one category can be satisfactory in capturing the myriad of experiences. I further suggest that intersectionality can help to strengthen Sandiland's movement towards parody; although intersectionality does use categories which are themselves admittedly limited, it does so in a way that reinforces their limitation. The multiple-axes analysis uses categories in such a way that not only highlights the shortcoming of monolithic essentialist identities, but also subtly undermines the categories all together by emphasising the diversity of experience within and across identity categories.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 129.

The next chapter on intersectionality will be crucial to solidifying my defence of ecofeminism against this criticism of essentialism. Intersectional analysis has the 'ability to address a central theoretical and practical concern shared by eco/feminist scholars – namely, of the differences between women'⁵⁵² – when the ways in which intersectional identities exist is truly grasped it is near impossible to build a universalised image of women. As I will argue, intersectional oppressions are complex, not only do they depend upon how the individual identifies or how others identify the individual, but also on the cultural context they are in. A whole-heartedly intersectional study must, then, refrain from making claims about the female experience because it is clear that there is no 'one' female experience. Far from being a destructive criticism of ecofeminism, essentialism functions as a vital reminder to ecofeminists to re-centre the intersectional framework of ecofeminism.

Why Alternative Terms are not Satisfactory

The question remains that given the incessant criticisms of ecofeminism, which have been so influential in it becoming disfavoured, why is the term 'ecofeminism' one worth saving? Perhaps 'ecofeminism' has become too loaded by its criticisms that to continue to use it is counterproductive and instead we should find alternative terms that do not come with the same intellectual baggage. Biehl, one of ecofeminism's most vocal critics having previously identified as an ecofeminist herself, says for 'my part, the very word *ecofeminism* has by now become so tainted by its various irrationalisms that I no longer consider this a promising project'.⁵⁵³ Sturgeon suggested that others

⁵⁵² Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 66.

⁵⁵³ Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, 5.

who were still sympathetic to ecofeminist ideas sought ‘a new descriptor’ that was ‘bound up with a desire to create a term which was purified of any taint of essentialism’.⁵⁵⁴ Similarly, Gaard suggests that those ‘feminists working on the intersections of feminism and the environment thought it better to rename their approach to distinguish it from essentialist feminisms’⁵⁵⁵ which was now assumed in the name ‘ecofeminism’.

In the advent of my thesis, I considered using alternative terms such as ‘feminist environmentalism’ or ‘gender and the environment’. The former was supported by Agarwal as she argued feminist environmentalism offers a greater recognition of the material realities and impacts of women’s interactions with nature, that is, additionally, more attuned to the intersections of class, race, and ethnicity.⁵⁵⁶ The latter ‘shared a number of core ideas, centring around a conceptualization of gender–environment relations as embedded in dynamic social and political relations, and an emphasis on particular contexts rather than universalisms and essentialisms’.⁵⁵⁷ Leach argues that the literature in this area was more focused on highlighting the instability of gender categories which also did more to include men in the analysis.⁵⁵⁸ Wilson and MacGregor suggest that ‘recent contributions’ to ecofeminist theory situate their work within the broader ‘interdisciplinary and intersectional “gender and environment” field’.⁵⁵⁹ MacGregor further identifies the link between ‘gender and environment’ and

⁵⁵⁴ Moore, ‘Eco/feminist Genealogies’, 21.

⁵⁵⁵ Gaard, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited’, 27.

⁵⁵⁶ Agarwal, ‘The Gender and Environment Debate’, 127.

⁵⁵⁷ Leach, ‘Earth Mother Myths and Other Ecofeminist Fables’, 74.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁵⁹ Wilson and MacGregor, ‘New Ecofeminisms’, 852.

‘ecofeminism’ in explaining the rationale for the naming of her edited volume: “the choice of “gender and environment” is deliberately broad, no doubt too broad, neutral, and bland for those who feel strongly about using the banner of “ecofeminism””.⁵⁶⁰ However, ultimately I chose to work with ecofeminism because, although these alternatives do now have slightly different aims than ecofeminism, they originate from a ‘fear of contamination-by-association’⁵⁶¹ as a result of ecofeminism’s essentialism critique. As I have shown, ecofeminists have worked towards developing ecofeminism away from essentialism and I believe that centring intersectionality could further aid this goal. As such, alternative terms are not necessary if ecofeminism can address the original concerns.

Although I agree with Gaard that many of these alternative terms developed, in part, as divergent fields from ecofeminism, they do sometimes imply genuine alternative political standpoints. For example, Agarwal prefers the term ‘feminist environmentalism’,⁵⁶² which she distinguishes from ecofeminism as she believes it emphasises that ‘the link between women and the environment can be seen as structured by a given gender and class (/caste/race) organization of production, reproduction, and distribution’.⁵⁶³ Thus, Agarwal sees feminist environmentalism as being able to tackle material and conceptual divisions based on gender as well as relationships with the environment and its resources.⁵⁶⁴ Additionally the term gender and the environment offers a wider scope than ecofeminism by explicitly recognising

⁵⁶⁰ MacGregor, ‘Gender and Environment’, 2.

⁵⁶¹ Gaard, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited’, 27.

⁵⁶² Agarwal, ‘The Gender and Environment Debate’, 119.

⁵⁶³ Agarwal, ‘The Gender and Environment Debate’, 127.

⁵⁶⁴ Agarwal, ‘The Gender and Environment Debate’, 127.

that all genders are impacted by environmental changes. As MacGregor understands it, the field of gender and the environment, though broad, is connected in its 'analysis that social oppression and environmental exploitation are inextricably linked to fundamental social constructs that have co-evolved with patriarchal capitalist-colonial power relations'.⁵⁶⁵ Additionally, the term gender and the environment 'unmasks the political elements behind gender issues'⁵⁶⁶ so that it might be better positioned to engage with power structures to impact policy.

Another term I considered was 'critical feminist-animal studies'. I found this to be unsatisfactory as this terminology can easily further marginalise the environment. This is problematic because there needs to be recognition of the oppression of the environment that can then also make a pathway for changing that relationship into a more equal and interdependent connection. Critical feminist animal studies is limited to analysing the condition of human and nonhuman animals;⁵⁶⁷ ecofeminism has no such limit. Ecofeminists have been left feeling that other studies in ecology do not offer the same intersectional analysis or motivation for action that ecofeminism can:

Neither sustainability studies nor environmental justice offer a framework for recognizing the linked environmental injustices variously harming nonhuman animals, indigenous people, and wealth communities, a silence that suggests intersecting sustainability's middle-class appeal

⁵⁶⁵ MacGregor, 'Gender and Environment', 2.

⁵⁶⁶ Eiman Zein-Elabdin, 'Development, Gender, and the Environment: Theoretical or Contextual Link? Toward an Institutional Analysis of Gender', *Journal of Economic Issues*, 30.4 (1996), 929-947 (941).

⁵⁶⁷ Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 127.

and environmental justice's analysis of race and class with a critical, anticolonial ecofeminist perspective may be both more descriptive and more effective in mobilizing wider cross-sections of activists.⁵⁶⁸

Perhaps a more viable alternative would be the elongated version of 'ecofeminism', namely 'ecological feminism'.⁵⁶⁹ However, I find this new name to be amongst the most redundant. Expanding 'ecofeminism' to 'ecological feminism' merely indicates to me the effectiveness of the original term in communicating the basic principle of the theory; it highlights a reluctance to abandon the promises of 'ecofeminism' with a desire not to be associated with an academically exiled term. There is not a substantial change or development in this rebranding.

There is also a movement in favour of the term ecowomanism.⁵⁷⁰ Of all the alternative terms that have been proposed I think this is the most viable; womanism was coined by Alice Walker to create space in feminism that explicitly considers the experiences of Black women. Thus, within the name is a recognition of intersectionality⁵⁷¹ that I do not believe is captured by other alternative terms to ecofeminism. I have chosen not to use the term 'ecowomanism' in part because I am mindful to avoid appropriation, but also because the parameters of ecowomanism are beyond the scope of this project. Melaine L. Harris, a key proponent of ecowomanism suggests that 'ecowomanism is critical reflection and contemplation on environmental

⁵⁶⁸ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 14-5.

⁵⁶⁹ Karen Warren, 'Ecological Feminism', *Hypatia*, 12.2, 125-146.

⁵⁷⁰ Melaine L. Harris, 'Ecowomanism: Black Women, Religion, and the Environment', *The Black Scholar*, 46.3 (2017), 27-39.

⁵⁷¹ The language of intersectionality is explicitly used in Melanie L. Harris, 'Ecowomanism: An Introduction', *Worldviews*, 20.1 (2016), 5-14 (p. 6).

justice from the perspectives of women of African descent'.⁵⁷² I am not speaking from this perspective, nor can I claim to be centralising this perspective. However, my choosing to not use the term should not indicate a distancing from womanism. I am in full support of the purposes and aims of womanism. I recognise the need for a term that does not carry the baggage that 'feminism' does, namely that it is historically elitist and is premised on the experiences of white women.

There has also been a movement in ecofeminism to re-name the theory to indicate more immediately its intersectional nature.⁵⁷³ However, Kings, perhaps surprisingly as an advocate for re-centring intersectionality within ecofeminism, 'find[s] the move to rename the discipline completely unnecessary'.⁵⁷⁴ Kings does not explain why she sees it as superfluous, but from the arguments posed in their paper, I believe that we share similar reasons for this belief. An intersectional type of analysis has always been at the heart of ecofeminism by the very style of comparing the oppressions of, at the very least, women and nature. Kings is clear that not all ecofeminist work has been intersectional,⁵⁷⁵ however the benefits of an explicitly intersectional methodology in ecofeminism are significant. As I have suggested in the responses to the criticisms of essentialism and Western-centrism,⁵⁷⁶ intersectionality in ecofeminism holds a potential path to consolidating some of the solutions proposed

⁵⁷² Ibid., 6.

⁵⁷³ Joanna Flavell seems to prefer the term intersectional ecofeminism in *Mainstreaming Gender in Global Climate Governance: Women and Gender Constituency in the UNFCCC* (New York: Routledge, 2023).

⁵⁷⁴ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 82.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 72.

⁵⁷⁶ Intersectionality was not suggested as a tool to overcome the criticism that ecofeminism is irrational due to its association with spirituality. This is because this criticism was found to be largely misguided as opposed to being a legitimate problem with ecofeminist theory.

to the problems ecofeminism has encountered. As ‘ecofeminism and intersectionality are both theories in-progress and as such should not be viewed as a static method of theorizing, but rather one which continues to adapt’⁵⁷⁷ and it should be given the intellectual space to do so in conversation with its criticisms, as opposed to being cast aside with the assumption that ecofeminism could never overcome the criticisms it has faced. Many ecofeminists have made strides forward to respond to and develop from these criticisms and with continued consolidation of this approach the term ‘ecofeminism’ and its theoretical and practical goals are still valuable.

As Mallory argues, ‘if one agrees that the oppression of women, people of color, the poor, and others are conceptually and materially linked to the degradation of the planet, and one wants to end this, then why not gladly, boldly, proudly claim to be an ecofeminist?’.⁵⁷⁸ To reject the term ecofeminism is to ignore the important contributions that have been made by ecofeminists in the interdisciplinary fields it is associated with.⁵⁷⁹ Gaard rigorously examined the history of ecofeminism in the paper ‘Ecofeminism Revisited’ to make this point that being ‘cognizant of its rich and prescient history’ of studying the intersection of gender and the environment (and more) is important to future work in this area.⁵⁸⁰ Most importantly, ecofeminism has the theoretical framework necessary to engage in an intersectional analysis that could help it to further consolidate its development away from the criticisms that have been

⁵⁷⁷ Kings, ‘Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism’, 82.

⁵⁷⁸ Mallory, ‘What’s in A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, Or Gender and the Environment)’, 29.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁸⁰ Gaard, ‘Ecofeminism Revisited’, 44.

explored in this chapter, in which case it is worth working with the term rather than renaming the approach.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have explored the criticisms against ecofeminism that it is anti-academic, Western-centric, and essentialist. I have argued that the anti-academic criticism functions from a patriarchal standpoint that is biased against feminine spirituality and emotive writing. I then argued that the Western-centric critique is most problematic where ecofeminist writers have universalised the Western experience in their analysis. However, generally the criticism is problematic because it ignores the important contributions of ecofeminists (theorists and activists) outside of the West and it does not make clear what the alternative ideal context is for writers from the West. It is acceptable for a researcher to be influenced by one's context provided they do not assume their analysis to be universally applicable. Finally, I argued that essentialism has been part of some examples of ecofeminist writing,⁵⁸¹ however, I have also argued that there has been significant work to revive ecofeminism for the contemporary era by moving it away from essentialism. The strand that has been present throughout my exploration of these three criticisms is ecofeminism's ability to address oppression across multiple axes.⁵⁸²

⁵⁸¹ I have particularly noted affinity ecofeminists like Daly, Collard, Griffin, and Starhawk as being guilty of essentialism in points in their works.

⁵⁸² This is why I argued that ecofeminism should not be seen as anti-academic on account of it being incoherent; why Western-centrism is not an inevitable flaw of ecofeminist theorising because it is able to address specific contexts and not universalise this; and why I argued that essentialism can be avoided by emphasising the complexities of privileged and oppressed identity categories so that universalising any property in a group becomes almost laughable.

As ecofeminism has developed, there have been successful shifts away from essentialism. The incorporation of queer theory, as Gaard has done, has been an important move in this direction; this has created an ecofeminist theory where the connection between women and nature recognises the complexity and diversity of categories. Additionally, centring intersectionality in ecofeminist research would involve a direct rejection that there is such a thing as the universal woman. Intersectionality, as I will argue in the next chapter, requires that the multiple, diverse experiences of women are recognised by how their experience of gender and sex is impacted by their experiences of race, wealth, sexuality, physical and mental ability.

This chapter and previous chapters have indicated that social constructionist ecofeminism includes a readiness for intersectional engagement, and this helps this branch avoid making universal claims about 'women' because it does not identify an inevitable connection between women and nature. However, as Sandilands and Carlassare have noted, social constructionism does not automatically ensure essentialism is avoided.⁵⁸³ Although there has been a shift away from essentialist categories in social constructionist ecofeminist work, there is space to consolidate this shift through centring this intersectional potential in a way that helps to avoid the essentialist critique.

⁵⁸³ Sandilands, 'Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer', 32 and Elizabeth Carlassare, 'Destabilizing the Criticism of Essentialism in Ecofeminist Discourse', *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 5.3 (1994), 50-66.

The Complex Intersections of Oppression

A critical theory's intense focus on oppression can sometimes be as debilitating as it is illuminating, because it can make the world seem like an unmitigated disaster. – Chris Cuomo⁵⁸⁴

Historically, feminism has been prone to prioritising the experiences and oppressions of middle-class white women.⁵⁸⁵ At best, the inequalities faced by white women have, mistakenly, been considered universal and, at worst, the very existence of women of colour has been implicitly denied in much of feminism's history. As bell hooks writes, many white feminist circles 'were primarily interested in making feminism a forum for the expression of their own self-centred needs and desires. Not once did they entertain the possibility that their concerns might not represent the concerns of oppressed women'.⁵⁸⁶ Feminism was being developed by middle-class white women who 'had little knowledge of or concern for the problems of lower class and poor women',⁵⁸⁷ or women of colour. When feminists referred to 'women' it was silently, perhaps unconsciously, prefixed with 'white'. Tina Grillo argues that white women consider themselves to be 'raceless' rather than white, and so, subconsciously, consider themselves to be the prototype for woman and women of colour to be deviations of the norm.⁵⁸⁸ As a result, Black women have felt that they must choose

⁵⁸⁴ Cuomo, 'On Ecofeminist Philosophy', 6.

⁵⁸⁵ Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), p. 4.

⁵⁸⁶ bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism*, 2nd edn. (New York and UK: Routledge, 2015), p. 190.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁵⁸⁸ Tina Grillo, 'Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master's House', *Berkley Women's Law Journal*, 10 (1995), 16-30 (p. 20).

between identifying as a woman or identifying as Black, because feminism had not provided room for the recognition that oppressions based on race and sex could be connected and ultimately reinforce one another. Black women are oppressed on (at least)⁵⁸⁹ two accounts, namely their race and gender, but these oppressions are not isolated; they interconnect and reinforce one another in complex ways.

Kimberlé Crenshaw first coined the term intersectionality ‘as a metaphorical and conceptual tool used to highlight the inability of a single-axis framework to capture the lived experiences of black women’.⁵⁹⁰ Crenshaw was making space for the way that categories of ‘Black’ and ‘woman’ cross over to impact the experience of and legal treatment of Black women, where before Black women had existed ‘in the empty space between’.⁵⁹¹ As Olena Hankivsky and Renee Cormier suggest, it has been essential in demonstrating that ‘focusing on single markers [such as gender] leads to a false classification of people that simply does not reflect lived realities’.⁵⁹² In this way, the development of the concept of intersectionality put the historical focus in feminist scholarship on the existence of gendered oppression under a critical spot-light. Intersectionality has now become an important part of any feminist analysis. Indeed, it has become increasingly mainstream outside of academic circles and in feminist activism. This was demonstrated in Crenshaw’s more recent paper, co-written with

⁵⁸⁹ Black women can also be working-class, members of the LGBTQ+ community, disabled people and/or neurodiversities. In other words, they may well be oppressed on more than two accounts.

⁵⁹⁰ Kings, ‘Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism’, 63.

⁵⁹¹ Kimberlé Crenshaw cited in Jennifer C. Nash, ‘Rethinking Intersectionality’, *Feminist Review*, 89 (2008), 1-15 (p. 2).

⁵⁹² Olena Hankivsky and Renee Cormier, ‘Intersectionality and Public Policy: Some Lessons from Existing Models’, *Political Research Quarterly*, 64 (2011), 217-229 (p. 218).

Sumi Cho and Leslie McCall, 'Towards a Field of Intersectionality Studies'. The paper highlights how intersectionality has seeped into several different areas of academia helping to clarify 'intersectionality's capacities'.⁵⁹³ Its place within feminist research appears to be solidified. Sociologist Kathy Davis claimed that 'any scholar who neglects difference runs the risk of having her work viewed as theoretically misguided, politically irrelevant, or simply fantastical'.⁵⁹⁴ A scholarly consensus is emerging that exclusive focus on the experiences of one universal group of women will always be limited in its application. The meaning of intersectionality has also expanded beyond Crenshaw's initial use to now express a multitude of overlapping oppressions, such as oppression based on class, sexuality, religion, and ableism. However, despite its popularity, using intersectionality as an explicit methodological tool is a fairly recent development. Given its novelty, scholarly accounting of how intersectionality might be used as a methodological framework may, by extension, support and strengthen the ecofeminist mission.

If intersectionality can be developed into a theoretical and methodological tool, this could also enable other scholars in social constructionist ecofeminism to engage with intersectional approaches in their work, addressing some of the challenges highlighted by bell hooks. It has been a key aspect of ecofeminist research to consider oppressions across multiple axes; most commonly that of the environment and women. However, acknowledgements by ecofeminists such as Plumwood and

⁵⁹³ Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, 'Towards a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Application, and Praxis', *Signs*, 38.4 (2013), 785-810 (p. 788).

⁵⁹⁴ Kathy Davis, 'Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on what Makes a Feminist Theory Successful', *Feminist Theory*, 9.1 (2008), 67-85 (p. 68).

Merchant that intersectional oppressions might affect identity and experiences is, nonetheless, not equal to centring ecofeminist research around an intersectional methodology. As A.E. Kings, Joanna Wilson and Sherilyn MacGregor highlight, ecofeminists had engaged implicitly with intersecting identities before the term 'intersectionality' had been coined.⁵⁹⁵ For example, Mary Daly was concerned with the ways that 'class intersected with women's experiences of discrimination'⁵⁹⁶ in 1978, 11 years before Crenshaw coined intersectionality as a 'metaphorical and conceptual tool'.⁵⁹⁷ This implicit intersectional engagement exists as a result of the core ecofeminist belief that patriarchal oppression is the source of, at the very least, an intersecting domination of women *and* the environment. Although different strands of ecofeminism differ on how to understand this linked oppression,⁵⁹⁸ all streams of ecofeminism are fundamentally linked by their reliance on intersectional understanding of oppression. As a result of this pre-existing understanding, ecofeminists have the opportunity to critically engage with intersecting disciplines in a way that can offer new and important insights into the role of oppression on people's lives, the nonhuman and the nature of oppression in society.

Despite employing intersectional ideas before they were so labelled, the promise of intersectionality has not always been fully realised in ecofeminist literature around the issue of race. As mentioned above, ecofeminists have been guilty of presenting

⁵⁹⁵ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 72 and Wilson and MacGregor, 'New Ecofeminisms', 852.

⁵⁹⁶ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 72.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁹⁸ These differences have been further explored in the preceding chapter.

an image of white women as the universal group for 'women'.⁵⁹⁹ The reality of oppression is that within that imagined coherent group some women contribute to the oppressions of others, others will not consider their gender to be the main source of their oppression, and further still there are people who are marginalised by the continuation of binary male/female gender categories. Thus, as Kings argues, overstating the implicit engagement with intersectionality in ecofeminist work risks undermining the 'important often original theoretical and practical contributions, which intersectionality has made to academia'.⁶⁰⁰ Ecofeminism has significant potential for more explicitly centring intersectionality, which would both benefit the production of knowledge of ecofeminist analysis and limit the efficacy of the essentialist critique. As I argued in the introduction, intersectionality helps to centre anti-essentialism by disrupting universalised, essentialist groupings by exploring that peoples' identities are more complex than being part of just one group.

The purpose of this chapter is to first explore what intersectionality is and put forward a case for the conceptualising of intersectionality as a methodology; secondly, to consider what that methodology would look like for ecofeminist research; and thirdly, to propose a methodology that will provide suitable ways of thinking intersectionally about ecofeminist issues. Despite its popularity, 'there is a paucity of academic work on intersectionality from a methodological perspective',⁶⁰¹ meaning that there is a 'lack

⁵⁹⁹ I am referring here to the essentialist criticism explored in the previous chapter. Some ecofeminist work has been guilty of essentialism in presenting an idea of all women as nurturing or close to nature.

⁶⁰⁰ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 72.

⁶⁰¹ Tina Goethals and others, 'Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research: Inclusion, Reflexivity, and Anti-Essentialism', *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 2.1-2 (2015), 75-94 (p. 78).

of clearly defined intersectional methodology'.⁶⁰² Scholars have suggested that intersectionality 'does not have any methods associated with it or that it can draw upon'.⁶⁰³ This chapter works as a contribution to the scholarly work that has supported the idea of intersectionality being utilised as a methodology. Although methodologies typically offer an approach to research that imposes structure, it is important to recognise that one of the key appeals of intersectionality is its flexibility.⁶⁰⁴ In this section, I will develop an intersectional methodology for ecofeminist theory that imposes some structure to the concept to make it practical as a principle tenet of my research design. However, I see this imposition of some structure to be temporary and a starting point from which other studies can adapt. Therefore, the methodology that is outlined is not intended to be a rigid framework as I consider it important to maintain the malleability that intersectionality is renowned for, whilst recognising the practical benefits of a framework for studying oppressions.

Using the methodological work that has already developed in related fields,⁶⁰⁵ I suggest a way of structuring an intersectional methodology that is discipline specific for ecofeminism. Ecofeminism, as highlighted in the previous chapter, is a diverse field and so the methodology proposed may not be relevant to all branches and forms of

⁶⁰² Nash, 'Rethinking Intersectionality', 4.

⁶⁰³ Phoenix and Pattynama quoted in Hankivsky and Cormier, 'Intersectionality and Public Policy', 219.

⁶⁰⁴ Davis, 'Intersectionality as Buzzword', 79.

⁶⁰⁵ This will include: Leslie McCall, 'The Complexity of Intersectionality', *Signs*, 30.3 (2005), 1771-1800; Aryan Karimi, 'The Role of Intimate Relationship Status, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Doing Fieldwork among Sexual-Racial Minority Refugees: An Intersectional Methodology', *Sociological Inquiry*, 90.4 (2020), 971-992; and, the work that is possibly most influential to my methodology, Goethals, et. al. 'Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research.

ecofeminist research. However, I propose this methodology as a starting point for ecofeminist researchers from which it can continue to develop. The methodology proposed involves three main pillars; listening, the problematising of the oppressor, and praxis that provides a direction towards a normative goal. The choice to develop a discipline-specific intersectional methodology was intended to help maintain the flexibility of intersectionality. This discipline-specific approach allows for the intersectional methodology to be adaptable between disciplines (thus offering malleability), whilst on a practical level providing some structure to the otherwise almost infinite scope of intersectionality. For example, the methodology developed here will seek to address some of the concerns academics have voiced, including should it be applied at the individual or institutional scale?⁶⁰⁶ To both? How many oppressions should intersectionality consider?⁶⁰⁷ Are some oppressions more acutely felt than others, thereby suggesting they should be at the centre of intersectional analysis?⁶⁰⁸ It is unclear where to draw the line with an intersectional analysis, and consequently it is thought to lack 'clarity as a theoretical tool'.⁶⁰⁹ My work in this chapter will seek to provide at least some clarity in relation to these ambiguities with the intention that research into intersectional methodologies may continue to develop.

I will argue that ecofeminism benefits from an intersectional approach; when both theories are explicitly used concurrently, ecofeminism can be seen as a device for highlighting how all intersectional oppressions link together and have been sustained

⁶⁰⁶ Lutz, 'Intersectionality as Method', 40.

⁶⁰⁷ Davis, 'Intersectionality as Buzzword', 75.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶⁰⁹ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 69.

by patriarchy. I see ecofeminism as the glue that binds the understanding that all these intersections are connected. In this way, I propose that ecofeminism provides solidity to an otherwise abstract concept of connection, and through which intersectionality can be examined and applied to normative problems. Moreover, ecofeminism can extend intersectionality by visibilising concerns for the nonhuman that can often get lost in intersectional feminism.⁶¹⁰ Intersectional feminism, as it is currently formed, does not have the scope for appreciating the intersections of the patriarchal treatment of the environment and nonhuman animals. Ecofeminism provides room for these oppressions to be analysed alongside the oppressions of humans, thereby remaining true to the unofficial motto of intersectionality that there cannot be liberation of one without liberation of all. For these reasons, I believe that intersectionality can benefit from the influence of ecofeminism by providing a clear justification for suggesting oppression is connected at the source and in ensuring that the oppression of nonhumans can be considered.

Having said this, the popularity of intersectionality has led to a feeling that it is *the* answer to essentialism and questions of how to frame difference. With this in mind, it is important to be reminded that ‘intersectionality does not offer a complete and infallible solution to the issues of difference’,⁶¹¹ as I argued in my introduction.⁶¹² Intersectionality studies is a field that is in the midst of maturing and so its potential and goals should not be overstated. It is not necessarily a solution to any and all

⁶¹⁰ Flavell, *Mainstreaming Gender in Global Climate Governance*, 47.

⁶¹¹ Kings, ‘Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism’, 82.

⁶¹² This argument was made using the essay by Carbado and Harris, ‘Intersectionality at 30’, in which they make key distinctions between anti-essentialism and intersectionality.

problems that arise when analysing difference. As Kings suggests, what intersectionality can do is:

offer a way to interrogate our assumptions and epistemological positioning before undertaking research, while also taking into account the mutually shaping nature of social categories, the multi-levelled structures of power, and their influence on identity and discrimination.⁶¹³

As I have suggested, intersectionality, then, can help to avoid essentialism because it reminds researchers of the complexity of identity and the interconnected nature of oppressions and privilege, which is counter to essentialist groupings based on assumed universal properties. However, it should be recognised that evoking intersectionality's name is not equal to being anti-essentialist. Ecofeminist research will need to remain vigilant and not just rely on an intersectional methodology to successfully overcome the criticisms it has faced.

The final purpose of this chapter is to justify limiting the intersections that will be analysed later in this project. I remain committed in my agreement with Butler and Yuval Davis that the use of 'etc' represents a problem in truly intersectional work.⁶¹⁴ However, deliberately limiting the field of view in a particular analysis can be beneficial. In intersectional analyses, pretending or attempting to be comprehensive will obscure the inevitability of leaving people out and, as such, contribute to their marginalisation, even within spaces that should be safe and inclusive. Limiting the scope is a

⁶¹³ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 82.

⁶¹⁴ This was discussed in the 'Introduction' of this thesis.

purposeful analytic decision to help structure and solidify intersectional research that need not undermine the salience of all forms of oppression. I will be limiting the scope of my own intersectional analysis to the discrimination of women, people of colour, working-class people, the environment, and nonhuman animals. This project leaves room for an extension of ecofeminism alongside more disciplines and critical studies in future ecofeminist works. I would invite further ecofeminist work that rigorously includes alternative forms of oppression that have not been considered in application during this survey.

What is Intersectionality?

Intersectionality is predominantly the act of analysing the spaces in which multiple oppressions meet and interconnect. MacKinnon visualises this as a 'Venn diagram' and sees intersectionality as exploring 'the points of overlap where convergence has been neglected'.⁶¹⁵ It is an essential part of intersectionality that the spaces it explores have often been left undertheorised or ignored by researchers who have analysed single-axis oppression. Additionally, like Ann Garry, I see intersectionality as not being solely about oppression, it is necessarily also an analysis of privilege. I believe it is important to stress that intersectionality is about more than simple oppressed intersecting identities. Although a person on an individual level experiences intersectional oppression by belonging to two or more oppressed categories, this is not the full extent of intersectionality as a concept. Some intersectional scholars imply that 'intersectionality is reserved for people who embody

⁶¹⁵ Catharine A. MacKinnon, 'Intersectionality as Method: A Note', *Signs*, 38.4 (2013), 1019-1030 (p. 1020).

marginalized subject positions',⁶¹⁶ and so intersectionality is something that analyses oppression and the oppressed. However, oppression and privilege 'do not act independently from one another',⁶¹⁷ our experiences and identities are much more complex than being pure victim or pure oppressor. It should be recognised that 'all subjectivities are characterized by the interplay of race, sex, gender, class, and other identity markers'.⁶¹⁸ For example, although intersectionality has focused on the oppression of Black women, it has not always analysed the privileges of white people which in turn can lead to white people seeing themselves as race-less. It can be considered more pressing from a practical perspective to analyse oppressions because there are explicitly negatively impacting people. However, without consideration of the intersections of privilege, we risk missing an essential part of the narrative of oppression. Therefore, intersectionality should be thought to include an understanding of how oppressions and privileges interact with one another both structurally and in the multi-faceted identities of people.⁶¹⁹

This is the definition of intersectionality that I use throughout this project; however, questions regarding the definition of concepts in philosophical areas of enquiry are rarely straightforward, and intersectionality is no exception to this general rule. Intersectionality has become an incredibly popular mode of research in the past few decades yet, as Nina Lykke notes, 'the consensus regarding the importance of

⁶¹⁶ Hillsburg, 'Towards a Methodology of Intersectionality', 3.

⁶¹⁷ Ann Garry 'Intersectionality, Metaphors and the Multiplicity of Gender', *Hypatia*, 26.4 (2011), 826-850 (p. 827).

⁶¹⁸ Hillsburg, 'Towards a Methodology of Intersectionality', 3.

⁶¹⁹ This inclusion of privilege in the understanding of intersectionality is convincingly argued in Nash, 'Rethinking Intersectionality', 12; Grillo, 'Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality', 18-19; Garry 'Intersectionality, Metaphors and the Multiplicity of Gender', 827.

intersectionality does not mean that feminist theorists are in agreement about how to define and approach this issue'.⁶²⁰ Intersectionality is notoriously difficult to define, yet there is a general consensus to a vague idea of what counts as intersectional research. As Patricia Hill Collins suggests in her article 'Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas', it is easier to feel assured that one has read an intersectional paper than it is to identify the 'standards' by which a paper meets intersectional criteria.⁶²¹ Davis similarly states that 'as a concept, intersectionality is, without a doubt, ambiguous and openended'.⁶²² Despite both Collins and Davis framing this as a problem, they are both also wary of developing a rigid definition that could hinder the efficacy of intersectionality as a theoretical framework in critical analyses. Collins is clear that she is 'not trying to prematurely tame intersectionality's unruliness by imposing an imperial definition',⁶²³ and Davis believes 'it is precisely because intersectionality is so imperfect – ambiguous and openended – that it has been so productive for contemporary feminist scholarship'.⁶²⁴ Although many scholars agree that more structure would be beneficial to intersectionality, there is much disagreement about what form that structure should take, what it would look like, and how to impose a structure without contradicting the nature of the concept.

I propose that there is a fine balancing act required, between flexibility and structure, in considering how intersectionality might develop. Intersectionality

⁶²⁰ Nina Lykke, *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (New York and UK: Routledge, 2010), p. 50.

⁶²¹ Patricia Hill Collins, 'Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41 (2015), 1-20 (p. 2).

⁶²² Davis, 'Intersectionality as Buzzword', 77.

⁶²³ Collins, 'Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas', 3.

⁶²⁴ Davis, 'Intersectionality as Buzzword', 77.

‘promises an almost universal applicability, useful for understanding and analysing any social practice, any individual or group experience, any structural arrangement, and any cultural configuration’.⁶²⁵ The universality of intersectionality and the wide reach of its application is precisely what makes the theory, in equal parts, appealing and complicated. The breadth of its reach makes it challenging to distil, yet without clearer structure it is easier for its purposes and impact to be misunderstood. It is important to maintain this useful flexibility and avoid rigidity; however, on a practical level, a framework for intersectionality could help to provide some definition boundaries that allow intersectional thinking to be effective within a research design. As Davis says, intersectionality will not fulfil its potential until it has ‘a definition, a set of clearly demarcated parameters, and a methodology which would eliminate any confusion among researchers concerning how, where, and when it should be applied’.⁶²⁶ I suggest that one way to walk the tight-rope between flexibility and structure is to allow for intersectionality to be mouldable between disciplines. This would mean that intersectionality as a concept can maintain its flexibility, whilst imposing a framework on intersectionality within specific disciplines could be used as a starting point to help respond to some of the concerns intersectional scholars have; such as, how should we use intersectionality in our research and for what purpose? Should intersectionality be more concerned with individual identities or the power dynamics of society?⁶²⁷ How many intersections should be analysed for a particular piece of work to be considered

⁶²⁵ Ibid., 72.

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 78.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 75.

intersectional?⁶²⁸ The potential of intersectionality within different research designs could be more effectively highlighted by providing some sense of definitional boundaries to the concept of intersectionality, yet a sense of flexibility can be maintained.

Many different analogies have been proposed to provide clarity on what intersectionality 'looks' like. Given the complexity of the notion it is helpful to be able to imagine what is meant. This has been provided by many academics; as Kings lists,

intersectionality has been described as a complexity (McCall 2005), a continuum (Mehrotra 2010), a lens (MacGregor 2010), a paradigm (Winker & Degele 2011 and Hulko 2009), an axis or axes (Yuval Davis 2006), a crossroads with a roundabout (Garry 2011), a critical praxis (Hill Collins 2015)⁶²⁹

Kings prefers the analogy of a spider's web.⁶³⁰ As Kings argues 'the prolificacy of the metaphors used to describe intersectionality point to its complexity as a concept, which can be difficult to illustrate in non-metaphorical terms'.⁶³¹ With so many metaphors to choose from, it is clear that the complexity of intersectionality can be understood in many different ways. For the sake of this research, I prefer the image of snowflakes to explain intersectionality.⁶³² Snowflakes are known for having complicated and intricate

⁶²⁸ Nash, 'Rethinking Intersectionality', 5.

⁶²⁹ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 65.

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 65.

⁶³¹ Ibid., 65.

⁶³² It's worth noting that Kings and myself, both of whom are considering intersectionality in relation to ecofeminism, have been drawn to 'natural' metaphors when conceiving of intersectionality whilst many other intersectionality scholars have followed Crenshaw's

designs, with many branches meeting in the middle. They are also thought to be unique, so that no other snowflake has the same design as the next. And, once the snowflakes settle and build they create a heavy snow cover. Similarly, intersectionality considers how the different branches of oppression join to affect a person's identity and recognise that each person's experiences are individual and dependent upon which oppressive forces are working against the person, and which privileges they may enjoy. Finally, these experiences and personal identities build together to highlight a smothering institutionalised system of privilege and oppression. The benefit of this analogy is it allows us to recognise the impact of oppression at *both* the macro and micro level. The snowflake's individual complexity and its different branches representing the micro level of how oppression manifests in an individual; equally when each snowflake comes into contact with the others and builds up, there is the opportunity to consider the macro level where oppressions weigh heavily in a way that is systematic and institutionalised. As I will argue in the first tool of intersectional methodologies, it is important that intersectionality is able to deal with both the individual and societal levels of oppression even if an individual piece of research chooses to focus on one over the other. In my view, using metaphors, such as the snowflake I have proposed, offers some clarity on what intersectionality is because it is a concept that evades easy articulation through words alone.

traffic-based, and therefore man-made one. I think there are some benefits to taking a more artificial metaphor in that this could help to emphasise that oppressions are not a result of some innate power structure that was embedded in the 'natural order'. Instead, they are systems that are created and sustained by humans. However, I want to focus on the complexity of connecting categories that people might identify with and, for me, the snowflake analogy can capture this complexity more than a crossroads or junction could.

Alternatively, Ann Garry argues that the use of external metaphors and symbols to understand intersectionality as a concept is limited. Garry suggests that intersectionality is a metaphorical concept⁶³³ and so attempts to clarify it through further imagery only work to show how ineffective such imagery is in fully articulating the complexity of the concept. She concludes that it is 'difficult to find visual images that both capture all the features of intersectionality and are simple enough to help explain the concept';⁶³⁴ therefore, intersectionality should be recognised as a metaphor in and of itself and any other analogy will fail to capture all aspects of the concept in the same way. Garry is, I think, right to be wary of how useful all these metaphors are in explaining the concept. Particularly as there is such a plethora of ones to choose from, all with differing levels of completeness. However, Garry expects too much of the metaphors for intersectionality. Metaphors are never intended to explain all aspects of a concept. Instead, the purpose of such imagery is to go some way to explaining complex and difficult areas in a way that allows visualisation. We use metaphors to help us understand complex concepts in terms of things that we do understand. This is never equal to, nor does it intend to be equal to, a full philosophical analysis to find the real definition of the concept. There is the opportunity to find some clarity in picturing intersectionality, provided we do not expect these metaphors to provide a complete analysis of what 'intersectionality' is. Therefore, Garry is placing more weight on the completeness of analogies than is reasonable and inevitably finds that they fall short.

⁶³³ Garry, 'Intersectionality, Metaphors and the Multiplicity of Gender', 831.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 833.

Why Develop an Intersectional Methodology?

The ambiguity of ‘intersectionality’ has meant that it has taken many forms, and not all scholars believe that translating intersectionality into a methodology is the right way of doing intersectional work. Some researchers have preferred to conceive of intersectionality as a theory;⁶³⁵ others consider it to be an analytic framework;⁶³⁶ whilst still others see it as a heuristic device in the way Crenshaw had initially intended.⁶³⁷ In other words, it is not inevitable that intersectionality would be structured into a methodology. Indeed, beyond just choosing alternative ways of conceptualising intersectionality, some scholars have been vocal in rejecting the idea that it could be a methodology at all. Garry is one of these scholars who remains sceptical of the capacity of intersectionality to be a methodology, saying ‘although I hesitate to use the word “methodology” because its meaning varies widely across and within disciplines, I doubt that intersectionality is one’.⁶³⁸ Instead Garry argues that intersectionality has more functionality as a ‘method checker’ than a method in its own right.⁶³⁹ This is because Garry does not consider intersectionality to contain the structure of analysis itself, but rather it provides a sense of ‘what kinds of analysis’ might be useful’.⁶⁴⁰ In Garry’s view, scholars who consider intersectionality to be a method are stretching the idea beyond its remit.

⁶³⁵ Cho, et. al., ‘Towards a Field of Intersectionality Studies’.

⁶³⁶ Garry, ‘Intersectionality, Metaphors and the Multiplicity of Gender’, 830.

⁶³⁷ Kathy Davis, ‘Who Owns Intersectionality? Some Reflections on Feminist Debates on How Theories Travel’, *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 27.2 (2020), 113-127 (p. 114).

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, 830.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, 830.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 830.

Similarly, Davis believes that forcing intersectionality into a rigid methodology would weaken the appeal of intersectionality, which comes largely from its flexibility.⁶⁴¹ In Davis' article 'Intersectionality as Buzzword', Davis is intrigued by the ways that intersectionality has been able to experience such popularity and success in the mainstream as well as in academic circles, despite the vagueness of the idea. Davis' choice to consider intersectionality as a 'buzzword' implies a feeling that intersectionality lacks depth and is a transient phase in feminism, that will eventually reach its expiry date. Due to Davis' connection of intersectionality as having 'all the makings of a buzzword, which can easily capture the interest of the generalists',⁶⁴² I take Davis to be making a negative claim about intersectionality. She seems to suggest that the mainstream success of intersectionality has happened despite unresolved academic baggage. By using the word 'buzzword' to describe the role of intersectionality in some contexts, Davis presents a possibility that intersectionality is not a rigorous line of academic enquiry, instead it is a popular feminist catchphrase to indicate a certain level of awareness to the limitations of considering gender as the sole form of oppression that some might perceive as just jargon. Davis ultimately rejects the idea that intersectionality is *just* a buzzword; nevertheless, her suggestion that intersectionality could be viewed as jargon is worrying. I argue that to avoid this term being undermined as a passing phase, intersectional researchers should endeavour to consider the benefits that could be reaped from developing intersectionality into a methodology. In my view, there are benefits to developing

⁶⁴¹ Davis, 'Intersectionality as Buzzword', 79.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, 75.

discipline-specific intersectional methodologies as these could help to deal with some of the genuine concerns regarding the ambiguous nature of aspects of the theory whilst making intersectionality more functional within a research design. Discipline-specific intersectional methodologies could be applied rigorously and, with some structure that makes applying intersectionality more practical, researchers could better align intersectionality with academic expectations; thereby releasing it from its 'buzzword' connotations.

However, this is not the argument Davis makes. In Davis' view, it is precisely because intersectionality is so complex, without 'specific parameters',⁶⁴³ that it can inspire creativity in feminist theory and allow academics to consider how intersectionality might impact *any* line of feminist research. In Davis' view, then, attempting to build a constrained intersectional methodology is not a desirable endeavour as a tight methodology would undermine its attractiveness. Indeed, it could seem counter-intuitive to the nature of intersectionality to set boundaries when its aims are often to reject boundaries, or see past them, in favour of inclusivity. To some extent I think Davis is right. Undoubtedly intersectionality would not have experienced this initial widespread success if it were not for the flexibility it allows feminist theorists. The flexibility means that intersectionality can be applied to a wide range of relevant areas so that it engages more people, hence achieving popularity through its large audience. Moreover, the complexity of intersectionality is one of the key reasons for its success as a concept because the complexity of the idea resonates with the

⁶⁴³ Ibid., 77.

complexity of people's lives and identities. Thus, there is a complexity fundamental to intersectionality that makes structuring it in any meaningful way difficult.

Yet, I am reluctant to agree with Davis wholeheartedly as I do not consider the imposition of some structure and the continued appreciation for complexity and inclusivity to be mutually exclusive. Along these lines, McCall offers reason to believe that there is value in developing intersectionality as a methodology and argues that these methodologies do aim 'to satisfy the demand for complexity' whilst simultaneously seeking to 'manage complexity, if for no other reason than to attain intelligibility'.⁶⁴⁴ Although I agree with Davis that intersectionality is not compatible with a rigid and limited methodology envisioned for universal application, this should not prevent academics from developing an intersectional methodology that can appreciate complexity whilst providing structure that makes intersectionality more comprehensible, as McCall suggests. As appealing and intriguing as its elusive nature has been, it is this nature which has also left 'confusion among researchers concerning how, where, and when it should be applied'.⁶⁴⁵ Therefore, one of the reasons that intersectionality should be conceptualised as a methodology is that intersectionality would benefit from a framework that can at least work as a starting point, from which other studies may adapt, but that offers some practical parameters within a research design. Without guidelines on how it is to be used, it is inevitable that intersectionality will fall short of its promise to consider intersectional oppressions in a useful and practical way.

⁶⁴⁴ McCall, 'The Complexity of Intersectionality', 1772.

⁶⁴⁵ Davis, 'Intersectionality as Buzzword', 78.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that the foundation of intersectionality is in Black feminist studies. In its infancy, the concept was not intended for application beyond the analysis of the oppressions Black women faced, which cannot be addressed by looking at racism and sexism separately, or even by simply adding these oppressions together. By conceptualising intersectionality as a methodology, it is better placed to expand 'beyond'⁶⁴⁶ its beginnings in this specific field and provide a way of thinking about all intersecting oppressions. Nash argues that Black women's experiences are also changed by other identities, and intersectionality not being able to address these is one of 'the shortcomings of intersectionality'.⁶⁴⁷ It should be part of the development of intersectionality that researchers consider other intersectional identities to deepen our understanding of dominant forces and inequality. The aim of this argument is not to make Black women disappear in intersectional research, as Nikol Alexander-Floyd warns against,⁶⁴⁸ but to make other covert oppressions overt. If the goal of intersectionality is 'to expose and dismantle dominant systems oppression' it requires a methodology that can permit a broader analysis as it will not achieve this aim by only focusing on one intersectional group.

Consider, for example, Kings' argument that a woman in India may well experience oppression that is primarily caused by her caste as opposed to her gender. Kings suggests that previous ecofeminist analyses, which start from an intersectional understanding of oppression, have failed to go beyond a gender focus that 'severely

⁶⁴⁶ Brittney Cooper, 'Intersectionality', *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. by Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 385-406 (p. 400).

⁶⁴⁷ Nash, 'Rethinking Intersectionality', 9.

⁶⁴⁸ Cited in Cooper, 'Intersectionality', 404.

limits our understanding of the other multiple intersecting factors'.⁶⁴⁹ Helma Lutz considers this type of analysis to be guilty of 'cherish[ing] a master category of oppression'.⁶⁵⁰ If ecofeminism could more strictly incorporate intersectional methodologies, rather than acknowledging intersectional oppression as a stepping stone, then these kinds of shortcomings would be less possible, as a methodology would go some way to strengthen the applications of intersectionality.

By developing intersectionality as a methodology the areas of 'confusion among researchers concerning how, where, and when it should be applied'⁶⁵¹ would be minimised. Lutz considers one of the benefits of seeing intersectionality as method is that it allows us to refrain from homogenising categories in our analysis. Interestingly, Lutz is specifically concerned by the homogenisation of privileged groups where there are intricacies of identity 'within and between' categories of 'gender, class, and race'.⁶⁵² An example would be that, with ecofeminism as theory, we can use Plumwood's master model to understand the links between oppressions and oppressors; but without intersectionality as a methodology the treatment of those categories could easily become uncritical and essentialised. This is because there is less pull to consider the interconnected nature of dominating forces with oppressed identities without a methodology that demands full complexity. In light of the previous chapter, it is clear that this is an appealing offer for ecofeminism to develop beyond its criticisms.

⁶⁴⁹ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 81.

⁶⁵⁰ Lutz, 'Intersectionality as Method', 43.

⁶⁵¹ Davis, 'Intersectionality as Buzzword', 78.

⁶⁵² Lutz, 'Intersectionality as Method', 43.

Additionally, conceptualising intersectionality as a methodology is appealing because it can leave room for both creativity and structure. There need not be one uniform methodology for all disciplines seeking to use intersectionality. It is possible for intersectional methodologies to look and work differently in different fields. Indeed, in one paper written alongside Sumi Cho and Leslie McCall, Crenshaw, who coined the term intersectionality, indicates that ‘we do not understand intersectionality’s use or objectives to be realized only through a full-fledged grand theory or a standardized methodology’.⁶⁵³ It is possible to seek an intersectional methodology that can provide substantial structure and rigour to one’s own line of inquiry ‘without demanding greater unity across the growing diversity of fields that constitute the study of intersectionality’.⁶⁵⁴ Provided this is done with an awareness of the key elements of intersectionality without diluting them due to pre-existing methodological assumptions,⁶⁵⁵ then intersectionality can maintain its flexibility between fields whilst becoming a more effective and comprehensible tool for analysis within them.

Although Garry is right to say that intersectionality does not currently have the tools to aid the structure of an analysis in the way we might expect a methodology to be equipped with, this does not mean that it must remain that way. As time has passed, and research has continued, those gaps in the methodological designs of intersectionality have been, and are being, explored.⁶⁵⁶ The below sections seek to

⁶⁵³ Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, ‘Towards a Field of Intersectionality Studies’, 789.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 792.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., 793.

⁶⁵⁶ This has been seen in the methodological discussions in McCall, ‘The Complexity of Intersectionality’; Karimi, ‘The Role of Intimate Relationship Status, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Doing Fieldwork among Sexual-Racial Minority Refugees’; Goethals, et. al. ‘Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research.’

address one of the key aims of this thesis, which is to contribute to the literature on intersectional methodological tools (that Garry notes is sparse) by developing an intersectional methodology that is appropriate for ecofeminist analysis.

What Would an Intersectional Methodology Look Like?

Heather Hillsburg suggests that intersectionality is so ambiguous and complex that it is almost impossible to identify what an intersectional methodology should look like.⁶⁵⁷ Instead, Hillsburg opts for a *via negativa* approach – exploring what an intersectional methodology *is not* due to the impossibility of saying what it *is*. In addressing what the intersectional researcher ‘must avoid as they conduct intersectional research’,⁶⁵⁸ Hillsburg believes we gain better insight into the complexity of intersecting identities. I am sceptical of the benefit of this type of approach. Intersectionality is complex and ambiguous, but it is not entirely ineffable. It is a relatively recent phenomena for intersectional researchers to consider what intersectionality looks like as a methodology, and there are valuable suggestions being made that help to present positive suggestions of what an intersectional methodology looks like.

For example, in an oft cited paper, Leslie McCall delineates between three intersectional methodologies she perceived emerging in intersectional women’s studies. Each of these methodological approaches as she perceives them are focused on understanding complexity in intersectional research. It is a difficult balancing act,

⁶⁵⁷ Hillsburg, ‘Towards a Methodology of Intersectionality’, 4.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

as McCall notes, to successfully ‘satisfy the demand for complexity’ whilst simultaneously ‘manag[ing] complexity, if for no other reason than to attain intelligibility’.⁶⁵⁹ Exploring the complexity of how different identity categories meet, reinforce one another, manifest, and link is not easy to articulate sensibly. However, that there is difficulty expressing these connections is further reason to consider the use of a well-developed intersectional methodology essential to creating practical research.

The three approaches identified by McCall are as follows. The first, anticategorical complexity, is:

based on a methodology that deconstructs analytical categories. Social life is considered too irreducibly complex – overflowing with multiple and fluid determinations of both subjects and structures – to make fixed categories anything but simplifying social fictions that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences.⁶⁶⁰

In other words, the categories that have been traditionally used are too simplistic to be valid in intersectional analyses. If we use categories to analyse oppression when those categories do not exist in any kind of meaningful sense, then we are not producing valuable knowledge. They do not truly reflect the lived experiences of people thought to be members of such categories and so should ultimately be rejected. McCall sees this methodological approach as the one that is most able to

⁶⁵⁹ McCall, ‘The Complexity of Intersectionality’, 1772.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1773.

satisfy 'the demand for complexity'.⁶⁶¹ Although I agree with McCall's assessment of anticategorical approaches, and it may be true that categories are a simplification of how people self-identify, in practice, they are categories which the oppressor uses to make sense of where to bestow privilege and where to enact oppression. Thus, even though beings are more than fixed categories, they are affected by the categories others perceive. We are not currently in a position to reject categories whilst they continue to have such a tangible impact on peoples' lives and experiences.

The second identified methodological approach is intracategorical complexity. This approach 'acknowledges the stable and even durable relationships that social categories represent at any given point in time, though it also maintains a critical stance toward categories'.⁶⁶² One of the ways to identify whether an author is taking an intracategorical approach is to see whether there is a 'focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection'.⁶⁶³ An intracategorical methodological approach would seek to use examples of lived experiences from communities of multiply oppressed people as a way 'of demonstrating the inadequacy of categories'.⁶⁶⁴ Nina Lykke suggests that this is the type of intersectional analysis that 'Crenshaw calls for' in regards 'to understanding the complexity of the situation of women of color'.⁶⁶⁵ Jennifer Nash explores 'the use of black women as

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 1773.

⁶⁶² Ibid., 1774.

⁶⁶³ Ibid., 1774.

⁶⁶⁴ Nash, 'Rethinking Intersectionality', 5.

⁶⁶⁵ Lykke, *Feminist Studies*, 71.

prototypical intersectional subjects’⁶⁶⁶ who have been used in intersectional research to demonstrate the inferiority of the categories ‘Black’ and ‘woman’. Nash is particularly critical of this method of intersectional research because reducing Black women to ‘Black’ ‘women’ inevitably ‘demonstrates the shortcomings of intersectionality to capture the sheer diversity of actual experiences of women’.⁶⁶⁷ Theories that assume total oppression of Black women through using them as these ‘prototypical intersectional subjects’ are unable ‘to attend to variations within Black women’s experiences that afford some Black women greater privilege, autonomy, and freedom’.⁶⁶⁸ The use of the ‘Black woman’ could be problematic for this form of intersectionality, as it is presenting an essentialist idea of ‘the oppressed Black woman’ which is reductionist.

Alternatively, Aryan Karimi explicitly supports the intracategorical approach outlined by McCall.⁶⁶⁹ This is because Karimi does not believe that intracategorical needs to be limited to two intersections. In fact the goal of Karimi’s paper is to ‘take intersectional methodology beyond intersectionality’s traditional application to race and gender in studies of women of color’⁶⁷⁰ and to include further categories to get a more complex picture of individuals’ lives. Intracategorical complexities are best suited to intersectional research that wishes to speak to specific circumstances and contexts. This way intracategorical research projects, such as the one conducted by

⁶⁶⁶ Nash, ‘Rethinking Intersectionality’, 5.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁶⁹ Karimi, ‘The Role of Intimate Relationship Status, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Doing Fieldwork among Sexual-Racial Minority Refugees’, 972.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 973.

Karimi, would avoid Nash's critique that intracategorical complexities create superficial and one-dimensional stereotypes of the oppressed. When including multiple axes of oppression that are tied to a precise context, intracategorical approaches can go beyond being an essentialist portrayal and instead be valuable ways of tapping into specific experiences and identities.

The final methodological approach, and the one that McCall herself favours though it is the lesser used,⁶⁷¹ is intercategorical complexities. This methodological approach:

requires that scholars provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions.⁶⁷²

Intercategorical approaches recognise that social groups have been constructed in a way that sustains inequality, and it is the inequality that arises from these that should be the focus of analysis. It is a comparative approach that focuses on the relationships between different oppressed groups, particularly regarding their experiences of oppression. This is what Nash considers a 'strategic' use of categories.⁶⁷³ It is strategic in that it employs these categories to explore inequalities whilst simultaneously remaining self-critical of how effective the use of categories can be. Intercategorical approaches provide an appreciation for the relationships of oppression between different groups that can help to understand

⁶⁷¹ McCall, 'The Complexity of Intersectionality', 1773.

⁶⁷² Ibid., 1773.

⁶⁷³ Nash, 'Rethinking Intersectionality', 6.

the dynamics of oppressor and oppressed as well as shining light on the myriad of ways oppression can present itself in peoples' lives.

Davis suggests that this critical use of categories is one of the leading reasons for the popularity of intersectionality. Intersectionality provided a 'novel twist'⁶⁷⁴ that combined the aims of poststructuralist feminists and critical feminist theory. Poststructuralist feminists wanted to 'abandon categorical thinking altogether' whereas critical feminists use categories such as gender, race, and class in order to analyse the 'material consequences of these categories'.⁶⁷⁵ Intersectionality uses the material impact of categories alongside a movement towards deconstructing them, thereby marrying two branches of feminist theorising that previously had been in conflict.⁶⁷⁶ It achieves this by using the categories to analyse the real, lived oppressions of people who have been assigned categories whilst simultaneously demonstrating how artificial these dualistic binaries are.

As I have indicated through my discussion of McCall's three methodological approaches, there is space to allow intersectionality the flexibility it requires by developing intersectional methodologies that are specifically established alongside the theory being applied. It depends on what knowledge is being sought and the aims of the individual research project which format of intersectional methodology is going to be most appropriate. The position most suited to my own research project is the intercategorical approach. This is warranted because we are not at a stage in practice

⁶⁷⁴ Davis, 'Intersectionality as Buzzword', 72.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., 73.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., 74.

or in ecofeminist research where an anticategorical approach would be successful. The reality is that, even though categories are indeed too simplistic and unrelatable, the social impacts and continued oppressions of people are based on these simple and unrelatable categories. The employment of categories in writing is not yet a work of fiction because those categories have real tangible impacts on people's lives. Thus, it is important to consider the maturity of discourse when considering whether to employ an intercategorical or anticategorical intersectional style. Furthermore, the intercategorical angle, which emphasises categories as socially constructed to maintain oppression and privilege, is appealing to social constructionist ecofeminist research. Intercategorical intersectionality supports the social constructionist ecofeminist claim that the connection between women and the environment is one of conception rather than biological or spiritual reality. I see intercategorical methodological approaches in intersectionality as necessary to properly recognising the continued impact of categories in a way that anticategorical approaches are more likely to push to the side-lines. I also do not consider the intracategorical complexity methodological approach to be useful to this particular thesis because I will not be applying intersectionality to such a specific context, whereby intracategorical approaches would be relevant. Intracategorical approaches provide in-depth analyses of one specific group, which can be helpful in research that has a very limited focus. However, I find the breadth of intercategorical complexities to be more pertinent to this particular project (though this need not be the case in all ecofeminist research). Therefore, like McCall, Nash, and Davis I favour the intercategorical approach for the

purposes of this thesis, which does not have such a specific focus group as intracategorical intersectionality would require.

If ecofeminists are going to deploy an intersectional methodology, there are interesting ways to consider achieving this in terms of whether the context requires an analysis of oppression at the micro or macro scale. A micro analysis would look at the impact of being an individual with an intersectional identity and it is important to understanding the practical impacts of oppression. A macro analysis would consider the overarching, institutional, naturalised systems of oppression and this is essential to understanding how oppressions are connected to each other. The macro then is possibly more effective in informing how one might go about liberating all Others from this oppressive system, whereas the micro helps us understand the lived experiences of Others. Scholars sceptical of the usefulness of intersectionality have found this to be one of the areas of ambiguity in the term 'intersectionality' as it currently stands. For example, Lisa Downing criticises intersectionality for losing sight of the individual and the fact it forces women into categories that means their individual needs are lost.⁶⁷⁷ Therefore, Downing seems to suggest that macro styles of intersectionality are guilty of homogenisation. Whereas Rekia Jibrin and Sara Salem, who emphasise the importance of analysing structural forms of oppression, argue that intersectional feminism has tried to avoid the past mistakes of homogenising all women by going 'to the other extreme of focusing on individual experience *at the expense* of simultaneously analyzing how structures condition

⁶⁷⁷ Lisa Downing, 'The Body Politic: Gender, The Right Wing and 'Identity Category Violations'', *French Cultural Studies*, 29.4 (2018), 367-377 (p. 375-6).

experiences in both universal and particular ways'.⁶⁷⁸ In my view, there is no reason why intersectional scholars need see this as an 'either/or' problem. Indeed, limiting intersectionality to one or the other 'risks ignoring inequalities resulting from other levels of social structures',⁶⁷⁹ which would consequently severely limit the reach of intersectional analyses. This is why I felt that my analogy of intersectionality as a snowflake was apt as it helped to capture both the micro and macro aspects of intersectionality as a concept. Furthermore, they co-exist, because the fundamental aims are the same; to drive greater insight and understanding of an oppression that can lead to such oppression being minimised through greater understanding of the underlying drivers. Therefore, intersectionality is an open-ended research tool for exploring both micro and macro-oppressions. Though any one piece of research may focus predominantly on one rather than the other, intersectionality as a concept should not be restricted in this way.

Another issue that intersectionality faces is the question of how many intersections must be analysed in order for the research to be considered 'intersectional'. I remain committed in my agreement with Butler and Yuval Davis⁶⁸⁰ that the use of 'etc' represents a problem in truly intersectional work. However, deliberately limiting the field of view in a particular analysis can be beneficial. In intersectional analyses pretending to be comprehensive, rather than acknowledging the limits of the research project, will obscure certain oppressions and discriminations

⁶⁷⁸ Rekia Jibrin and Sara Salem, 'Revisiting Intersectionality: Reflections on Theory and Praxis', *Transcripts: An Interdisciplinary Journal in the Humanities and Sciences*, 5 (2015), 7-24 (p. 12).

⁶⁷⁹ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 68.

⁶⁸⁰ This was discussed in the 'Introduction' to this thesis.

that could contribute to their marginalisation even within spaces that should be safe and inclusive. As Hancock has argued ‘intersectional analysis is not based on an unlimited number of categories’.⁶⁸¹ Instead he believes the context of the analysis is what should drive the analysis of relevant intersectional categories. Therefore, I do not believe that to be intersectional requires one to conduct a full analysis of all possible intersections. Limiting the number of intersections of focus is something separate from the use of ‘etc’ as limiting the scope is a purposeful analytic decision to help structure and solidify intersectional research that need not undermine the salience of all forms of oppression. By deliberately focusing scholars can seek to better analyse those specific identities, whilst acknowledging the need for further scholarly work on identities not explored. Whilst a reduction in listing has no perceivable benefit beyond saving time and words, it is relevant to note that Crenshaw, who coined the term ‘intersectionality’, initially focused on the intersection between only two categories: women and blackness. Thus, when analysing an intersectional oppression two or more categories would, in theory, be sufficient. However, which categories and the number of intersections should be influenced by the research context to ensure the most relevant intersections are explored.

In essence, an intersectional methodology looks different in different contexts. There cannot be a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to intersectional methodologies because this would restrict the complexities of intersectional research and limit the epistemological rewards for conducting intersectional

⁶⁸¹ Hancock quoted in Karimi, ‘The Role of Intimate Relationship Status, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Doing Fieldwork among Sexual-Racial Minority Refugees’, 975.

analyses. With this acknowledgement, I aim to present an intersectional methodology that is formatted to be applied to social constructionist ecofeminist research where the research context is not as specifically outlined as would be required of an intracategorical approach.

Developing an Intersectional Methodology for Ecofeminism

Given the broadness of intersectionality, it is helpful to find a way to make intersectional methodologies specific to the discipline for which they are being used. In this case I seek to develop a discipline-specific intersectional approach for ecofeminism. The benefit of an explicit intersectional methodology for ecofeminism might be challenged on the basis that if ecofeminists are already recognising their work as intersectional,⁶⁸² then there's no obvious gain from centring intersectionality. Indeed, many have argued that intersectional ideas have been present in ecofeminist research before the term intersectionality had been coined.⁶⁸³ However, overstating the intersectional ideas in early ecofeminist work 'risks reducing the important often original theoretical and practical contributions, which intersectionality has made to academia'.⁶⁸⁴ Additionally, I would argue it limits our ability to recognise how ecofeminists could further harness intersectionality and its 'potential to highlight and trouble the issues associated with homogenisation based on single-axis identity markers such as "women"'.⁶⁸⁵ The claims of pre-existing intersectionality in

⁶⁸² In the previous chapter, I noted that contemporary scholars such as Gaard and MacGregor are explicitly using the language of intersectionality in their works.

⁶⁸³ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 72 and Wilson and MacGregor, 'New Ecofeminism', 856.

⁶⁸⁴ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 72.

⁶⁸⁵ Flavell, *Mainstreaming Gender in Global Climate Governance*, 49.

ecofeminism make it sound as if ecofeminism has already done the work it needs to do on this front. However, I propose that ecofeminist theory should welcome further engagement with intersectionality as a methodology as this would help place ‘the job of politicizing these limits [of identity] at the very core of its project’⁶⁸⁶ by making disrupting homogenised categories an integral part of an ecofeminist approach.

To develop an intersectional methodology for a specific discipline is beneficial in that it gives intersectionality the ‘critical framework’⁶⁸⁷ that academic scholarship seeks in individual works, whilst still allowing a level of flexibility between disciplines that makes intersectionality so popular. This discipline-specific approach was used by Tina Goethals et al. in their development of an intersectional methodology to be applied within critical disability studies. They identify three key methodological tools required for ‘critical and intersectional disability studies research’ and these are ‘inclusive, reflexive, and anti-essentialist’.⁶⁸⁸ They are clear that this should ‘not represent a unified or one-size-fits-all solution to conduct intersectional research’.⁶⁸⁹ Instead it is intended as a way to solidify intersectionality within disability research.⁶⁹⁰ Like Goethals et al., I believe that there are significant benefits to developing a discipline-specific intersectional methodology. Intersectionality is too flexible and ambiguous to provide a methodological framework to suit all disciplines.

⁶⁸⁶ Sandilands, ‘Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer’, 19.

⁶⁸⁷ Flavell, *Mainstreaming Gender in Global Climate Governance*, 49.

⁶⁸⁸ Goethals and others, ‘Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research’, 76.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

The aim of this section is to make a similar contribution as Goethals et al. have done for critical disability studies, but I am building an intersectional methodology that is discipline-specific to ecofeminism. I think the methodology developed by Goethals et al. resonates somewhat with the methodological requirements of ecofeminism in my view; and, in order for intersectionality to develop, it is important to continue to be open to the findings of other disciplines. Moreover, in order to develop a discipline-specific intersectional methodology for ecofeminism it is useful to garner inspiration from how this has been achieved in related fields. Particularly for ecofeminism, incorporating Goethals et al.'s emphasis on anti-essentialism as a methodological tool could benefit ecofeminist theory as a defence against critics – as explored in the previous chapter. Anti-essentialism in intersectionality ensures that we do not 'assume that all members of a single social group share similar experiences, perspectives, and needs';⁶⁹¹ we recognise that an individual's identity is much more complex than isolated analyses on singular oppressions can allow. Thus, I agree with Goethals et al., that there cannot be a blanket approach to intersectional methodology across disciplinary boundaries. However, all contributions to developing methodological tools to understanding intersectionality can be looked at for inspiration and influence whilst we continue to work through the murkiness of what it means to 'do' intersectionality.

Following the discipline-embedded approach of Goethals et al., for this project, I have identified two main heuristic tools and a practical outcome that form an intersectional methodology that, in this case, helps to direct critical ecofeminist

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., 86.

research; these are (1) listening, (2) problematising the oppressor, with (3) praxis as a natural outcome of an intersectional approach.⁶⁹² I have grounded these in the areas of shared value across both these intellectual communities of intersectionality and ecofeminism. I will argue that these two tools and praxis as a product of intersectional thinking can be sharpened in such a way to develop an intersectional methodology.

My thinking around these three pillars emerged from constructive reflection over the course of the project. In early drafts, I began to work with Goethals et al. who had presented anti-essentialism as one of three pillars.⁶⁹³ I first adopted this pillar as I felt it would help achieve the aim of limiting essentialism in ecofeminism. However, I found that anti-essentialism worked better as the ultimate goal of using an intersectional methodology than a pillar itself for my purposes. So instead, I looked for areas of synergy across ecofeminism and intersectionality to develop the pillars. I found that listening to the Other is a common theme across both, with a particular emphasis in Gaard's *Critical Ecofeminism*. It seemed to me that this listening could be effective in minimising generalisations if employed effectively and encouraged the reflexivity that features as a pillar of Goethals et al.'s paper.⁶⁹⁴ I also found that there had been a recent movement in intersectionality, by scholars such as Nash⁶⁹⁵ and

⁶⁹² These tools, and praxis as a product, have been drawn from the research I have conducted in the fields of intersectionality and ecofeminism. I have found these three concepts to be areas of synergy between the two fields, and consequently felt that they would work to help provide a framework that is discipline specific because they are already implicit in some relevant research designs. In this section, I will explore each tool and praxis and indicate where I have found the crossovers in my research that have allowed me to pose these as tools and outcomes.

⁶⁹³ Goethals et al., 'Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research', 86.

⁶⁹⁴ Goethals et al., 'Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research', 82.

⁶⁹⁵ Nash, 'Rethinking Intersectionality'.

Garry,⁶⁹⁶ to recognise that all individuals are intersectional, not just marginalised individuals. I saw this as a synergy with Plumwood's Master Model and the extension of this model that I suggested in Chapter One. The pillar of problematising the oppressor developed as a tool to emphasise the complexity of oppressive forces and the connected nature of oppressions. This helps to avoid essentialism of the oppressor and oppressed, whilst also uniting oppressed groups with a common cause. This fed into the final pillar of praxis. My reflection on praxis arose from engagement with several sources, such as Adams⁶⁹⁷ and Collins,⁶⁹⁸ where I found that it was an important aspect of both ecofeminism and intersectionality as both share the belief that researching the oppressions should inspire action. I had initially included praxis as a tool in my methodology but on applying the methodology in Chapter Four it seemed that praxis had a different tone. The hope and the call to action felt different to the preceding tools. Consequently, I started to think of praxis as a product of this intersectional methodology rather than a tool in itself.

It is important to note that although I am proposing a new way of structuring intersectionality as a methodology for ecofeminism,⁶⁹⁹ I am not claiming that this methodology will be suitable for all forms of ecofeminism, which is itself a diverse discipline, nor am I suggesting that this methodology will have solved the

⁶⁹⁶ Garry 'Intersectionality, Metaphors and the Multiplicity of Gender'.

⁶⁹⁷ Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast*, 75-6.

⁶⁹⁸ Collins, 'Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas', 16.

⁶⁹⁹ For example, in the previous section of this chapter, I outlined my intention to situate this methodology within the intercategorical approach as outlined by McCall. However, it is equally possible that a different ecofeminist research project would be better suited to an intracategorical approach if it has a restricted intersectional focus. This could mean that this intersectional methodology would need to be adapted to suit that research design.

methodological issues that intersectionality is subject to. As the research on intersectional methodologies is currently so sparse, I intend for this to be seen as a contribution to a developing area that requires further consideration to build a robust intersectional methodology for ecofeminist research, as opposed to a final solution to the question of how to make intersectionality into a fully functioning methodology. This is a novel area and as such I am testing the parameters of a methodology for a social constructionist ecofeminism with the anticipation and expectation that there will be changes required for the methodology to continue to develop. The complex interplay of intersectional oppressions can be difficult to understand, but ecofeminism can act as a glue that binds together the different branches through the central strand of the master model.⁷⁰⁰ Intersectionality is able to support research into analyses of ecofeminist concerns which, by their nature, usually straddle multiple oppression categories. With a clearer methodological platform for argumentation, intersectionality could help to structure ecofeminist ideas and queries.

Listening

In the early developmental stages of the methodological tool of listening, I felt it was broadly clear what was meant by listening; being open and aware of communication. However, articulating this meaning and identifying its parameters more precisely is made easier by engaging with affect theory, listening ecologies, and discourse analysis. For the purposes of this methodology, listening is defined as an active process of openly receiving different types of communication in a manner that

⁷⁰⁰ The master model was proposed by Plumwood and has been explored in more detail in Chapter One of this thesis.

is sincere and reserves judgement. This definition has been influenced by the definition of listening provided by Valentin Schaefer and Angeline Tillmanns. They define listening 'as more than passive reception of information, but a conscious effort to listen receptively, without judgement or internal commentary'.⁷⁰¹ In this context, 'active process' is used to contrast this definition of listening with passively hearing. To be open to different types of communication encourages researchers to avoid focusing only on what is being communicated through language; I consider it to be an essential tenet of an intersectional methodological tool for ecofeminist research that communication includes non-linguistic and emotional forces.⁷⁰² Finally, to listen sincerely and reserve judgement is to allow the information received to falsify assumptions⁷⁰³ that have been made, and to allow for a level of complexity and multiplicity that would be limited if personal agendas are imposed upon the communication. As a methodological tool, this process of listening is significant for how research is a) collected, as it encourages the researcher to remain open-minded to relevant lines of enquiry that are uncovered through listening; and b) analysed, such that information communicated is interpreted with an awareness that we are unlikely to fully understand what is being communicated (particularly across species boundaries) and with sincere attempts to avoid misrepresenting the information that has been processed. Listening is not the same as understanding. Researchers may

⁷⁰¹ Valentin Schaefer and Angeline Tillmanns, 'Listening to Ecosystems: Ecological Restoration and the Uniqueness of a Place', *Ecological Restoration*, 33.1 (2015), 3-9 (p. 4).

⁷⁰² The inclusion of non-linguistic and emotional forces will be explored in relation to affect theory in this section.

⁷⁰³ Schaefer and Tillmanns, 'Listening to Ecosystems', 5.

still not fully comprehend the communication even where they have collected this in an open-minded manner.

Listening has historically been undervalued. This is because 'speaking is associated with power, knowledge, and dominance, while listening is associated with subordination'.⁷⁰⁴ Speaking is a characteristic that signals superiority. In part this is because it has been considered one of the defining traits of the human in contrast to the nonhuman animal. Jacques Derrida argues that the animal's lack of language is an essential part of our subjugation of them as we assume their lack of language is equivalent to an inability to respond.⁷⁰⁵ In Derrida's famous interaction with his cat, he argues that 'philosophy perhaps forgets' that when he looks at the cat, the cat looks back at him; 'they have taken no account of the fact that an animal could, facing them, look at them, clothed or naked, and in a word, without a word, *address them*'.⁷⁰⁶ Donna Haraway makes a similar point stemming from playing with her dog Cayenne that instead of 'looking for some single defining difference' in language, we should recognise that in these moments we 'are in rich and largely uncharted, material-semiotic, flesh-to-flesh, and face-to-face connection with a host of significant others'.⁷⁰⁷ Humans have felt justified in not listening to nonhuman animals because of the assumption that, without language, these animals can have nothing to say. However, listening indicates that language barriers do not impede the possibility of

⁷⁰⁴ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xvii.

⁷⁰⁵ Derrida, 'The Animal That Therefore I Am', 382.

⁷⁰⁶ Emphasis is not my own. Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 382.

⁷⁰⁷ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 23.

valuable inter-species communication. Listening as a methodological tool encourages the researcher to reject the idea that a lack of language is a lack of communication.

Affect theory will be used to help further crystalise how listening can occur across nonhuman lines due to its focus on non-linguistic and emotional communications. Affect theory is an approach to ‘embodied life that emphasizes the role of non-linguistic and non- or paracognitive forces’;⁷⁰⁸ Donovan O. Schaefer suggests that using affect theory means exploring ‘how bodies are impelled by forces other than language and Reason’.⁷⁰⁹ In Chapter Two, I considered the criticism that ecofeminist theory is anti-intellectual, or anti-rational, and found that thinking in ways that are counter to the ‘cult of reason’ is not equal to being anti-rational. The use of affect theory, which considers the non-rational and non-linguistic forces to be important modes of communication, in the development of listening is a continuation of my position that criticisms based on the idea of ecofeminist theory being anti-rational have an overly narrow view on reason. The view that bodies are impacted by more than language, something distinct from reason, is significant to my understanding of listening. We could interpret the idea that the researcher listens in a way that is open to different types of communication as the researcher being open to affects. Importantly, ‘affect is relational’,⁷¹⁰ meaning that bodies are impacted by their meetings with other bodies. Andrew Hewitt is clear that ‘bodies’ simply refers to physical substances,⁷¹¹ highlighting that it is not solely human

⁷⁰⁸ Donovan O. Schaefer, *The Evolution of Affect Theory: The Humanities, the Sciences, and the Study of Power* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 1.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷¹⁰ Andrew Hewitt, ‘Hardy and Affect Theory’, *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, 35 (2019), 110-127 (p. 113).

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

bodies that affect and are affected ‘but the widest possible range of entities’⁷¹² are part of this relational affecting.⁷¹³ This is an effective way of conceptualising our interactions with the nonhuman in such a way that encourages listening to affects as we recognise the ‘entangled’⁷¹⁴ nature of bodies. Finally, due to the inter-relationality of affect, affect theorists argue that affect theory is a ‘theory of power’.⁷¹⁵ This is because affect is a way of ‘thinking about how power interfaces with bodies’⁷¹⁶ and, because affect is constant, it is ‘always humming through the immanent field of power relations’.⁷¹⁷ Thus, in being open to different forms of communication, including affect, listening would be an apt tool for analysing intersectional oppressions, especially in analysing oppressions across the human and nonhuman, as it is concerned with tracing power relations and is sensitive to communicating with those who are non-verbal or are silenced.

Thus, affect theory can aid in several areas of developing an intersectional tool of listening designed for critical ecofeminist theory: it can a) explain how communication could occur non-verbally across species boundaries and b) it provides an account of the non-rational politics of power relations which could deepen an intersectional analysis. In a critical ecofeminism, it is possible to be inclusive and

⁷¹² Ibid., 113.

⁷¹³ It has been argued that using affect theory in ecology helps to emphasise the interconnected relationships ‘that exist everywhere’ which could in turn challenge binary thinking about humans and nature. Neera M. Singh, ‘Introduction: Affective Ecologies and Conservation’, *Conservation & Society*, 16.1 (2018), 1-7 (p. 1).

⁷¹⁴ Donvoan O. Schaefer, ‘You Don’t Know what Pain is: Affect, the Lifeworld, and Animal Ethics’, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 30.1 (2017), 15-29 (p. 23).

⁷¹⁵ Schaefer, *The Evolution of Affect Theory*, 1 and Hewitt, ‘Hardy and Affect Theory’, 112.

⁷¹⁶ Schaefer, *The Evolution of Affect Theory*, 6.

⁷¹⁷ Schaefer, *The Evolution of Affect Theory*, 64.

expand who or what we are listening to in our analysis. This means that listening is more than processing spoken words. Intersectionality has so far focused predominantly on human experiences and ignores the oppression of the nonhuman world. However, with a methodological tool of 'listening' that has been influenced by affect theory, intersectionality becomes more open to the full variety of oppression and more suited for application within a critical ecofeminist theory.

Further to this, listening ecologies can help to develop what it means to listen to our environment. To listen to the environment is to adopt 'a certain mindset that is more open to an intuitive appreciation of feedbacks and complex community interactions'⁷¹⁸ and the benefits of engaging in this kind of deep listening is that it 'has the potential to reduce unforeseen ecological consequences by improving our understanding of the range of complexities involved in a given ecosystem type'.⁷¹⁹ This type of listening seems present in the introduction to Gaard's *Critical Ecofeminism*, where Gaard gives a personal anecdote involving rocks which I explored in Chapter One to show how ecofeminist theory includes the nonhuman in moral concern. Gaard can be thought of as 'listening' to the rocks to see 'their history, their story, their becoming'.⁷²⁰ In doing so, Gaard finds the notion that rocks are static laughable, and suggests 'Euro-Americans need to take a longer view to recognize the animacy of our earth companions'.⁷²¹ Gaard's realisation again demonstrates the value of what listening ecologies call deep listening because it shows that listening

⁷¹⁸ Schaefer and Tillmanns, 'Listening to Ecosystems', 4.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁷²⁰ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xxi.

⁷²¹ Ibid., xxi.

has the 'ability to reveal new information that breaks down previous assumptions'.⁷²² The tool of listening, as I have defined it, includes the idea that we should reserve judgement and allow our assumptions to be falsified by what we have heard, as Gaard does in her encounter with the rocks. Thus, I have developed listening as an intersectional tool for critical ecofeminism from the existing literature in both intersectionality and ecofeminism whilst explicitly drawing on affect theory and listening ecologies to sharpen the tool and demonstrate that listening can be entirely non-verbal, and researchers should be open to responding to alternative forms of communication.

It is important to note the potential limitations of listening to appreciate its parameters. As I have already indicated, listening does not inevitably lead to understanding. For example, using pain as a case study, Schaefer notes that we cannot have a 'meaningful comprehension' of someone's pain just because we are told they are in pain.⁷²³ This is because pain is a private experience that is immediately introspectively accessible to the subject of the pain, but imperceptible to the onlooker. There is therefore a gap between the affect as it is experienced and the interpretation of the affect from the outsider, which indicates the possibility of misinterpretation and misunderstanding. Consequently, listening as a methodological tool for critical ecofeminism should not be conflated with understanding. However, this equally does not negate the possibility of achieving some understanding. Schaefer suggests that affect theory can help to build 'new strategies' for understanding better those affects

⁷²² Schaefer and Tillmanns, 'Listening to Ecosystems', 5.

⁷²³ Schaefer, 'You Don't Know What Pain Is', 17.

which are invisible but that bind us to one another and the world around us.⁷²⁴ Additionally, Haraway argues that ‘to claim not to be able to communicate with and to know one another and other critters, however imperfectly, is a denial of mortal entanglements (the open)’.⁷²⁵ This suggests that fully understanding the communication is not a necessary condition of successful listening. Thus, when Gaard refers to Josephine Donovan’s quote, ‘we should not kill, eat, torture, and exploit animals because they do not want to be so treated, and we know that. If we listen, we can hear them’,⁷²⁶ we can approach the quote with nuance. We can argue that our attempts to understand what the nonhuman is communicating might be more complicated than Donovan suggests whilst simultaneously agreeing that listening to non-linguistic and emotional forces will get us close to understanding what is being communicated. We should listen with the expectation that we will not fully understand what is being communicated across and within species boundaries.

I have explored what listening means and how it can be done in the context of the nonhuman, so I will now turn to what listening means across human identity categories. Feminist theory has often explored the silencing of women as a trope of oppression.⁷²⁷ Daly argues that, when women refuse to be silenced, they are ‘living in existential courage’ because silencing has been so central to patriarchal domination that overcoming this ‘is an extreme act’.⁷²⁸ The master model does not want to be

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁷²⁵ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 226.

⁷²⁶ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xvii.

⁷²⁷ Heather Savigny, ‘Silence’, *Cultural Sexism: The Politics of Feminist Rage in the #metoo Era* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020), pp. 81-94.

⁷²⁸ Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 21.

challenged and so silencing women, and other marginalised groups, is an easier way of maintaining oppression. As Starhawk says, 'we should never let fear silence us – or we do the oppressor's work for them'. Listening is an antidote for silencing. By listening to the experiences of oppressed peoples we actively reject the oppressive tool of silencing. Therefore, although listening might not sound like a revolutionary tool, it is more powerful than it first appears.

Listening has a prominent place both in ecofeminist research and intersectional analyses. Gaard proposes that ecofeminism could become more critical 'through the practice of attentive listening'.⁷²⁹ This means we should 'advise white allies to listen to people of color, straight and queer allies to listen to transgender activists, and male feminist allies to listen to women'.⁷³⁰ Critical ecofeminism, as proposed by Gaard, has a process of involving multiple voices by which it becomes more complex. Equally, Kings cites Mari Matsuda when arguing that 'intersectionality is about asking the other questions'⁷³¹ as this allows the individual to fully express the complexity of their lived experience. Implicit in the belief we should be asking questions is the understanding that listening is important; asking questions with no regard for the answer is a pointless endeavour. Tina Grillo is clear that 'we need to be careful to listen to the concrete, lived experiences of those who are less privileged'.⁷³² Listening is a practice that straddles both ecofeminist theory and intersectionality, thereby making it a pertinent tool to make up part of an intersectional methodology for ecofeminism.

⁷²⁹ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xvi.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁷³¹ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 64.

⁷³² Grillo, 'Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality', 29.

To extend the proposed tool, I also believe that listening can be understood reflectively. Researchers should be intimately aware of the identity and experiences they approach the project with, as Goethals et al. recognised through an explicit methodological tool of ‘reflexivity’⁷³³ when developing their intersectional methodology for critical disability studies. This can be done by listening to one’s own biases, assumptions, and positioning throughout the research process with the aim of being aware of how this impacts the project. In this way, the methodological tool of ‘listening’ has similarities with ‘siting’ and ‘sighting’, a tool employed by Barad and Haraway,⁷³⁴ and similarities with the act of positioning oneself when doing feminist research more generally.⁷³⁵ Siting ensures that the academic/researcher is aware of their own context from which they approach the research, and ‘sighting’ ensures that this process is made clear to the reader:

The methodological principle of “siting” urges the researcher subject to reflect on her or his embeddedness in a fabric of multiple, intersecting and

⁷³³ Goethals et. al, ‘Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research’, 82.

⁷³⁴ Lykke, *Feminist Studies*, 152.

⁷³⁵ Carol Cohn is praised for using a ‘feminist methodology [that] never leaves out her own subjectivity or story’ in Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True, ‘Feminist Methodologies for International Relations’, in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, ed. by Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1-16 (p. 11). Additionally, in *Feminist Methodologies* there is an explicit connection made between doing intersectionality and the researcher explicitly recognising their own ‘embodied, situated, and intersectional identities’, which highlights the importance of declaring one’s own positionality when doing feminist research. Constance DuPuis, and others, ‘Introduction: Feminism as Method: Navigating Theory and Practice’ in *Feminist Methodologies: Experiments, Collaborations and Reflections*, ed. by Wendy Harcourt and others (Switzerland: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2022), pp. 1-20 (p. 8).

mobile standpoints and to analyse how the implicated (power) relations position and define her or him in relation to the research project.⁷³⁶

In aid of this, I disclosed my own context in regard to my intersectional identity in the Introduction of this project. This was done with the motivation to be open about the power and privileges I bring to this project. Siting and sighting should 'be understood as complex'⁷³⁷ because our situation has the biggest impact on our perception of the world and influences how we conceptualise reality. It is also complex because it is an ongoing and open-ended process because our intersectional identities are not static.⁷³⁸ Moreover, the methodology of the research does not exist independently of the researcher and their research subject, and so how the research is processed is influenced by the context of the researcher. Therefore, when engaging in intersectional methodologies it is essential that the researcher is both reflexive in listening to themselves and transparent on their own intersectional identities. This will allow both readers and the researcher to understand the process by which the research has been constructed and again adds another essential layer of complexity to the framework.

⁷³⁶ Lykke, *Feminist Studies*, 152.

⁷³⁷ Ibid., 153.

⁷³⁸ Cohn demonstrates this in her chapter in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*. She writes that 'some of my own identity markers had changed' when she came to do her research on 'gender in the military' because she 'was still a white middle-class woman, but now in the categories of "middle-aged" and "mother" and she reflects on how these changing identities impacted how she was received. Carol Cohn, 'Motives and Methods: Using Multi-Sited Ethnography to Study US National Security Discourses', in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, ed. by Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 91-107 (pp. 97-8).

Moreover, the inclusion of the nonhuman is a helpful element of the practice of reflexive listening I have suggested. The oppression of the nonhuman highlights how our own identities are made up of oppressor/oppressed identities simultaneously, as nowhere else can we so widely see intersecting oppressor identities more acutely than in our interactions with the nonhuman. All humans have benefited from the simple fact of being human in the human/nature human/nonhuman dualisms, and so this is an intersection that methodological tools should leave space for analysing.

It has been shown that listening as an intersectional methodological tool is a process that involves being open to communications from the nonhuman, other humans, and oneself. However, it remains to explicitly show how listening is a suitable methodological tool to developing a more intersectional critical ecofeminist theory. One of the key reasons that listening is such a helpful methodological tool to this end is that to listen means to encourage anti-essentialism. In the preceding chapter, the impact of the criticism of essentialism on ecofeminist theory was explored and I propose that, by using the intersectional tool of listening, ecofeminist theory could be helped to develop away from essentialism. Grillo sees intersectionality as dependent upon anti-essentialism, and Goethals et al. emphasised the importance of anti-essentialism in their intersectional methodology for critical disability studies by making it an explicit methodological tool.⁷³⁹ Essentialist claims are those that generalise the experiences of all people in one category based on the experiences of a sub-section of that group. Of course, 'our own experience is our touchstone, [but] we must be

⁷³⁹ Grillo, 'Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality' and Goethals, et. al. 'Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research'.

careful about generalizing from that experience'.⁷⁴⁰ Rather than stereotyping, listening allows a wider range of voices and perspectives to be considered. In turn, allowing us to get closer to the individual experience, the process of listening is likely to expose the non-generalisability of characteristics and therefore undermine any essence attributed to a group of beings, such as women or nonhumans. All individuals experience their own intersecting identities, however, performing analysis at the individual level is impossible from an intercategory intersectional approach because of the resource and time required to perform such a large volume of analyses. Conversely, essentialising people allows us to perform analyses quickly whilst ignoring key individual experiences. Listening allows us to get a more accurate and relevant analysis of people's experiences. Ecofeminism could benefit from such active listening as oversimplifications of what is meant by 'woman' or 'nature' can be held with suspicion as it quickly becomes clear that one person's experience of a specific oppression is not necessarily universal. Therefore, the critical ecofeminist emphasis on listening can and should be included within an intersectional methodology.

Although this methodology has been built to fit into the intercategory approach, as defined by McCall, this tool would be equally effective for intracategory approaches. In the intracategory approach, where the researcher considers individuals with a specific set of intersections in a specific context to assess their impact, it is clear that listening would mean conducting interviews and refraining from 'polic[ing] the parameters of intersecting identities', as Hillsburg argues.⁷⁴¹ By this,

⁷⁴⁰ Grillo, 'Anti-Essentialism and Intersectionality', 28.

⁷⁴¹ Hillsburg, 'Towards a Methodology of Intersectionality', 7.

Hillsburg means that the interviewer should try to avoid making predetermined assumptions about how their interviewee identifies and how this impacts their life. Entering the conversation with preconceptions will bring about different results than if the interviewer listens and is directed by their interviewee. It takes more patience and more empathy to listen without an agenda to mould the interview to the intended purpose. The fact that listening as a methodological tool would be relevant across different intersectional approaches that McCall has identified suggests that it is a tool that firmly supports the aims of intersectional research.

I position this tool of listening alongside discourse analysis; however, it has important differences that warrants the use of a different term. Discourse analysis has been defined as ‘the study of language in use’.⁷⁴² This means, rather than focusing only on texts, discourse analysis will consider how the context impacts the meaning of the language used and how language shapes and is shaped by society, ideology, culture, and politics.⁷⁴³ Critical discourse analysis in particular is associated with the ‘unearthing the intricate relationship between power, dominance and social inequality in different social groups’.⁷⁴⁴ This form of analysis has significant similarities with the listening I propose which also focuses on social injustices and seeks to deconstruct the meaning of communication within a given context. Additionally, there have also

⁷⁴² James Paul Gee and Michael Handford, ‘Introduction’ in *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. by James Paul Gee and Michael Handford (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp.1-7 (p. 1).

⁷⁴³ Gee and Handford, ‘Introduction’, 5; Ken Hyland and Brian Paltridge, ‘Introduction’ in *Continuum Companion to Discourse Analysis*, ed. by Ken Hyland and Brian Paltridge (London: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2011), pp. 1-6, (p. 1).

⁷⁴⁴ Thao Lê and Quynh Lê, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis: An Overview’ in *Critical Discourse Analysis: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. by Thao Lê, Quynh Lê, and Megan Short (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009), pp. 3-16 (p. 14).

been movements to recognise other forms of communication other than language, for example Barbara Johnstone suggests ‘media such as photography, clothing, music, architecture, and dance can be meaningful, too, and discourse analysts often need to think about connections between language and other modes of semiosis or meaningmaking’.⁷⁴⁵ However, the examples of other suitable subjects of discourse analysis as listed by Johnstone are human-made.⁷⁴⁶ In its current form, discourse analysis alone is fairly anthropocentric as it analyses ‘*human* language and communication’⁷⁴⁷ and considers the ‘profound consequences for *peoples*’ lives’.⁷⁴⁸ Thus, although the application of listening as a methodological tool will have notable similarities to discourse analysis in places where human power hierarchies are the focus, it is important that listening has the scope to analyse nonhuman communication where discourse analysis does not.

As a methodological tool, listening has been influenced by and is related to affect theory, listening ecologies, and discourse analysis. This influence from related approaches helps to appreciate the different ways of listening. Although this thesis focuses predominantly on text, the tool of listening I propose is more flexible than this and has the potential to be used in fieldwork so that listening can be applied more practically and in engagement with the nonhuman. This is a potential limitation of this

⁷⁴⁵ Barbara Johnstone, *Discourse Analysis*, 3rd edn. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), xvii.

⁷⁴⁶ Song and dance can of course be seen in the nonhuman world too, however given the continued use of anthropocentric language in much discourse analysis that I explore in this paragraph, I think it is fair to assume that Johnstone is not referring to birdsong or the honeybees’ dance, for example, in this quotation.

⁷⁴⁷ Emphasis my own. Johnstone, *Discourse Analysis*, xviii.

⁷⁴⁸ Emphasis my own. Gee and Handford, ‘Introduction’, 5

thesis that will be discussed in the Conclusion and is reason to support the idea that listening as a tool requires further investigation to hone. However, in the proceeding chapter I will try to emphasise through my application how listening works alongside discourse analysis and how it can help to consider affects of both linguistic and non-linguistic communications. This is done with the recognition that a more practical application of listening to nonverbal communications would have been a welcome sharpening of this tool.

Listening means appreciating the complexity of intersectional identities by seeking out research conducted by those situated within the intersections being analysed or remaining open to and aware of potential divergences. Listening also means not closing oneself off to any perspectives too prematurely by being alert to potential comparisons or consequences in manifestations of oppression. As a methodological tool, it would ask the researcher to remain open to alternative voices and points of view in the research process. In this way, this tool respects the open-ended nature of intersectionality and the individuals the oppressions affect. I believe that by establishing a methodological tool of 'listening' we can simultaneously encourage the complicated aspects of intersectionality that 'stimulates our creativity'⁷⁴⁹ whilst also providing some focus and clarity to an intersectional analysis.

Problematizing the Oppressor

Listening as a methodological tool highlights the sheer diversity of identities and experiences of oppression. This helps us to see that 'everything about each

⁷⁴⁹ Davis 'Intersectionality as Buzzword', 79.

expression of oppression is unique', however it also helps to emphasise that 'oppression as a dominating force is not'.⁷⁵⁰ In other words, ultimately all forms of oppression have the same common root, even though they materialise in different forms. Recognising the full complexity of the oppressor works as a methodological tool for intersectionality when applied to ecofeminism for three main reasons: 1) This helps to highlight and understand how all forms of oppression are ultimately connected which gives us a better insight into how they are sustained; 2) This forces the researcher to refrain from simplifying the complexity of oppression; and 3) If a common oppressor is identified, no matter how complex that identity may be, it provides a point of unity across oppressions which could help to mobilise and direct action in an intersectional world.

The key element of ecofeminism that is shared by all ecofeminists (and as discussed in the previous chapter, there are not many elements that connect all ecofeminists) is that women and the environment are oppressed in similar ways by a common oppressor. Indeed, the opening line of Merchant's *The Death of Nature* is 'women and nature have an age-old association'⁷⁵¹ indicating the importance of identifying the connection to persevere with a cross-mapping analysis. Moreover, Rosemary Radford Ruether states that 'women must see that there is no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationship continues to be one of domination'.⁷⁵² Despite the clear connection

⁷⁵⁰ Carol L. Glasser and Arpan Roy, 'The Ivory Trap: Bridging the Gap between Activism and the Academy', *Counterpoints*, 448, *DEFINING Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation* (2014), 89-109 (p. 106).

⁷⁵¹ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, xv.

⁷⁵² Rosemary Radford Ruether quoted in Glazebrook, 'Karen Warren's Ecofeminism', 13.

between the treatment and conceptualisation of women and the environment, it is not the case that ecofeminists always articulate exactly how they are connected or by what common root.⁷⁵³ That patriarchy is the cause is often implicit in the analysis due to its feminist origins; however, few ecofeminists spend much time analysing *how* patriarchy connects all these oppressions or what relationship it might have with other structures that uphold privilege, such as colonialism or capitalism.

Plumwood is an exception to this general trend due to her analysis of the 'master model', as examined in Chapter One. In Plumwood's ecofeminism the acknowledgement of common oppression goes beyond the ecofeminist minimum mapping of environment and gender and is caused by, in Plumwood's view 'a white, largely male elite'⁷⁵⁴ (namely, the master model). In her discussions, we find recognition that the dominating power is as complex as the intersectional dominations themselves. It has been constructed through exclusions and opposites in dualistic pairings creating a complex interplay in the nature of the dominator. Plumwood makes an important point that we should not simplify the nature of that oppressor. The common oppressor's identity must be 'more complex' in order to avoid 'the mistakes of a reductionist programme such as Marxism which treats one form of domination as central'⁷⁵⁵ and all other manifestations of oppression as consequent forms that will naturally end once the seminal form has been successfully tackled. Rather than seeing any one form of domination as most salient and so requiring our focus, Plumwood's idea of the master model allows us to recognise that tackling one form of oppression

⁷⁵³ Glazebrook, 'Karen Warren's Ecofeminism', 13.

⁷⁵⁴ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 23.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

cannot, on its own, overcome any other oppression. Whilst if we acknowledge the interconnected nature of the oppressions through their common cause, we are better positioned to address the root. This lends further support to the inclusion of intersectional privilege in defining intersectionality because it can be difficult to know whether a white, middle-class man is privileged due to his gender, race, or class in any given context, so problematising the oppressor recognises that privilege comes from a complex combination of institutionalised structures of privilege (such as patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism) rather than an isolated privileged category.

If we simplify the nature of the oppressor, we inadvertently simplify the nature of the oppressed. As Trish Glazebrook puts it:

the ecofeminist claim that environmental issues are feminist issues should be stronger than the insight that Western environmentally destructive practices have always taken place in the context of patriarchy. That may be true, but women also participate in patriarchy and its oppressive practices.⁷⁵⁶

For this reason, we cannot place sole blame on an exclusively masculine patriarchy for the destruction of the environment. Women are not exempt from being oppressors merely because they are oppressed on the basis of their gender. Ignoring that patriarchy has provided more privileges for some than for others covers up the true nature of patriarchy. Simone de Beauvoir used a quote from Jean Paul Sartre to make

⁷⁵⁶ Glazebrook, 'Karen Warren's Ecofeminism', 14.

the point that women are 'half victims, half accomplices'.⁷⁵⁷ Although we must note that some women are greater accomplices than victims (and vice versa), what de Beauvoir's statement demonstrates is that women cannot be seen as unproblematic victims of patriarchy. A middle-class British woman who buys new clothes, which are made by an unfairly waged Bangladeshi woman using unsustainable resources before being shipped overseas to the UK, participates in the oppression of women, the environment, and the poor, all of which is maintained by dominating structures, like patriarchy. Therefore, we cannot simplify the causer of oppression because oppression can be carried out by people who are, themselves, oppressed. By ensuring that an ecofeminist intersectional methodology involves a tool of problematising the oppressor, ecofeminism can ensure that it does not fall down this pitfall of domination scholarship and would be better placed to inspire praxis that is more effective in an intersectional world.

The complexity of intersectionality is further stressed by the focus on intersections in power dynamics which reject essentialism. By recognising that some women can 'under certain circumstances, also make use of the privileged aspects of their identity'⁷⁵⁸ there is a less essentialised view of women. Being a woman is not so simply a sign of union and shared domination, because not all women are purely *subjects* of domination. Other aspects of identity such as race, class, sexual orientation, disability, and neurodiversities all impact the position of the individual. Plumwood's clarification that we cannot see the oppressor's identity as masculine

⁷⁵⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (London: Vintage Books, 2011), p. 143.

⁷⁵⁸ Lutz, 'Intersectionality as Method', 42.

‘pure and simple’ because of the complexity in oppression demonstrates that there is a concern in ecofeminism that we oversimplify power dynamics for ease or perhaps, less generously, as a result of ignorance. Yet we know that power relationships are not as simple as ‘man dominates woman’ or ‘man dominates nature’ because ‘women do not necessarily treat other women as sisters or the earth as mother; women are capable of conflict, of domination’.⁷⁵⁹ Thus it is essential to creating a truly intersectional ecofeminist research paper that in trying to identify a root cause of oppression, there is recognition that oppressor and oppressed exist together within intersectional identities because privilege is part of intersectionality.

Part of problematising the oppressor when centring intersectionality within ecofeminism must include an explicit recognition that the oppressor is not purely oppressing humans. Ecofeminism insists that we recognise that ‘human domination of nature wears a garment cut from the same cloth as intra-human domination’;⁷⁶⁰ this image of the domination being ‘cut from the same cloth’ is apt because it leaves room for the manifestations of oppression to take different shapes, whilst recognising that they come from the same place. Moreover, it is a clear metaphor linking the oppression of nonhumans to other forms of oppression – something that is often lacking in other intersectional feminist theory. It demonstrates that a single-lensed focus on domination in the human world will not resolve domination to the nonhuman. Whilst the nonhuman is oppressed the common oppressor can devalue those it connects with the nonhuman. This explains why it is not sufficient to deal with intra-human

⁷⁵⁹ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 9.

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

domination as something separate and different from the domination of nature by humans. Without recognising that the oppressor functions in the nonhuman sphere, neither human nor nonhuman oppression can be properly addressed in practice. Thus, this problematising of the oppressor tool encourages a way of thinking about privileged categories that asks humans to consider their 'species-privilege'⁷⁶¹ to integrate the nonhuman into intersectional thinking.

It is helpful here to refer to Plumwood's master model as outlined in Chapter One. Without the mapping of dualist hierarchies on to one another, in a way that sustains the connections across the dominating group and equally connects the oppressed, it is difficult to see what would connect all these different forms of oppression. It would be difficult to understand what was similar about the exploitation of women and the manipulation of the environment if we do not consider both oppressions to fundamentally originate from the same source. It is clear in ecofeminist analyses that identifying the common oppressor is essential to successfully deal with domination. This idea is highlighted well in reference to climate change in Gaard's citation of Naomi Klein:

climate change has been most widely discussed as a scientific problem requiring technological and scientific solutions without substantially transforming ideologies and economies of domination, exploitation and colonialism: this misrepresentation of climate change root causes is one

⁷⁶¹ 'Species-privilege' is a term used by Mallory as an explanation for why mainstream feminist theories have ignored ecofeminism as they do not want to confront the reality of their privilege. Mallory, 'What's in A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, Or Gender and the Environment)', 26.

part of the problem, misdirecting those who ground climate change solutions on incomplete analyses (cf Klein, 2014).⁷⁶²

A complete intersectional, ecofeminist analysis of any climate change problem must then use the methodological tool of establishing a complex common oppressor. By spending time on this initial part of the research, we can then work to change the narrative around climate change and encourage the necessary ideological changes that do not come from purely scientific suggestions because such suggestions do not recognise the underlying power dynamics that have justified human abuse of the environment.

A further benefit to incorporating problematising the oppressor as a methodological tool is that it helps lead to praxis as a product of an intersectional approach. There is reason to believe that clarifying where the oppression is rooted and identifying a common cause across those who are oppressed creates a springboard for unified activism. Indeed, Leigh Brownhill and Terisa E. Turner consider ecofeminism's 'propensity for building the kind of "unity in diversity" that wins peoples' struggles'⁷⁶³ to be one of the most significant aspects of ecofeminism. Rather than seeing liberation as something specific to one group, all people in each dominated group could share the same ultimate goal of 'dethroning' the oppressor. Brownhill and Turner suggest that:

⁷⁶² Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 125.

⁷⁶³ Leigh Brownhill and Terisa E. Turner, 'Ecofeminist Ways, Ecosocialist Means: Life in the Post-capitalist Future', *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 31.1 (2020), 1-14.

Social movements and union campaigns of women at the bottom of the hierarchy of labor power are uniquely situated to enact the unity of the exploited class, across genders and ethnicities, and to thereby encompass and represent the experiences, needs, demands, and rights of all, in other words, to express the general class interest.⁷⁶⁴

Intersectionality has the potential to further highlight that there is a common ground across oppressions, despite the myriad of differences in the oppressions themselves. If we allow for complexity in understanding the oppressor, and understand the theoretical hyperseparation and hierarchical conceptualisations, intersectional methodologies have the potential to create a substantial feeling of ‘unity in diversity’ which could inspire action.

Looking forward to the outcome of praxis, it becomes clear that we cannot be on a one-track mission to liberate one type of oppression. You cannot be feminist without at the same time being anti-racist, for example, because, whilst the reign of the master model continues, all oppressions will exist. If the common source of oppression remains, then there is still work to be done. For these reasons, I believe that grounding the analysis in identifying a common oppressor is an effective methodological tool for ecofeminist intersectional methodologies. This is one of the ways that ecofeminism and intersectionality can be thought of as working harmoniously to build a more structured method.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., 6.

Praxis

Praxis is a term that has frequently been used to describe the practice of working towards liberation. It is a method that became heavily associated with the Latin American liberation theology movement that developed in the 1960s and 1970s to develop a theology of liberation for the poor.⁷⁶⁵ For Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the principal developers of liberation theology, praxis is ‘concrete behavior, of deeds, of action’⁷⁶⁶ to live in ‘solidarity with the poor, with those who suffer misery and injustice’ and ‘to protest against it and struggle to abolish it’.⁷⁶⁷ Most significantly, Gutierrez argues that ‘theology as a critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word does not replace the functions of theology,... rather it presupposes and needs them’.⁷⁶⁸ Liberation theology holds that the Catholic Church has emphasised right belief (orthodoxy) over right practice (‘orthopraxis’), when in reality they should exist in a ‘circular relationship’⁷⁶⁹ whereby they inform one another. In the same way, praxis in this methodology does not replace the theoretical necessity of ecofeminism and the intersectional tools proposed, instead praxis works in a hermeneutical circle with them.

I am inclined to believe that all intersectional work should ultimately be directed towards liberation. This is in part because focusing one’s research on oppression without sight of a solution or course of action is ‘debilitating’, to use the phrasing of this chapter’s introductory quote. It is also because, in identifying oppression, there

⁷⁶⁵ William Cosgrave, ‘The Theology of Liberation’, *The Furrow*, 37.8 (1986), 506-516 (p. 506, 508).

⁷⁶⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 8.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xxxiu.

should be an accompanying desire to change the status quo. I am not satisfied with explanations of oppression that do not at least provide some sense of practice even if practical processes remain, for the time being, unreasonable. That praxis should be considered a product of the methodological tools detailed above is apt given that 'intersectionality is also often conceptualized in a verb form rather than as a noun'.⁷⁷⁰ This suggests that to 'do intersectionality' is to allow intersectional research and principles to inform one's practice. Furthermore, Collins considers intersectionality to be characterised by critical praxis: 'Intersectionality is not simply a field of study to be mastered or an analytical strategy for understanding; rather, intersectionality as critical praxis sheds light on the doing of social justice work'.⁷⁷¹ Furthermore, using Gutierrez's understanding of praxis where praxis involves living in 'solidarity with the poor',⁷⁷² we can consider praxis to necessarily involve the kind of active listening to the oppressed that I have suggested as a methodological tool above. In this way, praxis is almost a natural outcome of intersectionality as a methodology. Thus, although praxis is the final part of an intersectional methodology, it is certainly not the least.

The popularity of intersectionality as a concept has extended beyond the academic discourse and is a dynamic part of feminist activism. This suggests that one of the appealing aspects of intersectionality is that it has clear links to activism. Both in its earliest articulations and in its subsequent travels, praxis has been a key

⁷⁷⁰ Lykke, *Feminist Studies*, 51.

⁷⁷¹ Collins, 'Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas', 16.

⁷⁷² Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 172.

site of intersectional critique and intervention'.⁷⁷³ Nancy Naples identifies Dorothy Smith's work as being particularly useful as an intersectional methodology due to her 'focus on reflection, action and accountability'.⁷⁷⁴ Naples argues that this type of methodology will properly appreciate how activism interacts with epistemic gains, whilst purely 'theoretical approaches' lose this practical edge in research.⁷⁷⁵ Additionally, Collins thought of intersectionality as a 'critical praxis'⁷⁷⁶ in that intersectionality can provide the theory to aid people's practices to bring about a more equal society. There is a strong connection between the theoretical and the practical when we look at the history of intersectional study and it appears that feminists have responded so well to intersectionality as a concept due to 'their belief in its radical potential to alter social practices'.⁷⁷⁷ This is a link that, I believe, should be nurtured, and encouraged within ecofeminist work.

However, Collins believes that 'critical praxis remains underemphasized within intersectionality as a field of study'.⁷⁷⁸ One of the possibilities for this underemphasis that Collins explores is that scholars in 'these areas valorize studying or writing/ about intersectionality over practicing it'.⁷⁷⁹ One of the key reasons that this is a detrimental attitude to achieving liberation is that 'most academic work will not reach ordinary people in a manner that can lead to radical or even incremental change due in large

⁷⁷³ Cho, et. al., 'Towards a Field of Intersectionality Studies', 786.

⁷⁷⁴ Nancy Naples, 'Teaching Intersectionality Intersectionally', *Intersectional Feminist Journal of Politics*, 11.4 (2009), 566-577 (p. 573).

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid., 574.

⁷⁷⁶ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 64.

⁷⁷⁷ McCall, 'The Complexity of Intersectionality', 1777.

⁷⁷⁸ Collins, 'Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas', 16.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., 16-7.

part to the confines of academia'.⁷⁸⁰ Carol L. Glasser and Arpan Roy argue that even when research does filter through to others outside of academia, it too often 'remains locked in our ivory towers and inaccessible to a general audience'.⁷⁸¹ Thus, by seeing praxis as a product of an intersectional methodology, the full potential of intersectionality could be better realised by emphasising the importance of right practice alongside right belief.

Equally, ecofeminism has also long been associated with activism, as Kings states, 'ecofeminism is a continually evolving academic/activist tradition'.⁷⁸² The natural inclination of ecofeminism as identifying areas of oppression is to suggest practical movements to liberate those who are oppressed.⁷⁸³ This means that often the authors of ecofeminist work allow it to impact their political and ethical movements. Having said this, there are points of tension between ecofeminists who identify primarily as academic and those who are 'activist ecofeminists: the tension between the political and the scholarly'.⁷⁸⁴ This tension has been magnified by the criticisms directed towards ecofeminism on account of its spiritual branches. Academic ecofeminists have tried to distance themselves from the inclusion of the Goddess, which has been criticised for essentialism and being anti-academic,⁷⁸⁵ whilst the

⁷⁸⁰ Glasser and Roy, 'The Ivory Trap', 95.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., 95.

⁷⁸² Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 82.

⁷⁸³ Indeed as I have indicated in Chapter Two, some scholars have seen the firm connection between women and nature made by some ecofeminists to have been a strategic position taken to encourage practical action. Godfrey, 'Diane Wilson vs. Union Carbide, 43; Mallory, 'The Spiritual is Political, 61; and Carlassare, 'Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism', 100.

⁷⁸⁴ Mallory, 'The Spiritual is Political', 61.

⁷⁸⁵ These criticisms were considered in detail in the preceding chapter.

female spirituality has been widely embraced by activist ecofeminist,⁷⁸⁶ or, as noted in the previous chapter, it could even be seen as a strategic method of encouraging praxis.⁷⁸⁷ Therefore, ecofeminism is currently experiencing a disconnect between its theory and activist strands. The distrust between activists and academics has been well document. For example, hooks refers to the relationship as a ‘tug-of-war’.⁷⁸⁸ Activists are sceptical of academics who have experienced a ‘bourgeois privilege’; leading activists to becoming ‘fiercely anti-intellectual’.⁷⁸⁹ Whereas academics do not engage with activism as they focus on ‘developing ideas’⁷⁹⁰ in theory rather than engaging in praxis.

Praxis as a natural outcome of what it means to do intersectionality within ecofeminism can further the aim of gaining new knowledge by finding more common ground between the academic and activist strands of ecofeminism. If academic ecofeminists are encouraged to explicitly use an intersectional methodology that is intrinsically directed towards praxis, then even despite spiritual differences, academic and activist ecofeminists could be united in their commitment to liberate. Gaard acknowledges this:

An intersectional ecological-feminist approach frames these issues in such a way that people can recognize common cause across the

⁷⁸⁶ Mallory, ‘The Spiritual is Political’.

⁷⁸⁷ Leach, ‘Earth Mother Myths and Other Ecofeminist Fables’.

⁷⁸⁸ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2014), p. 113.

⁷⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

boundaries of race, class, gender, sexuality, species, age, ability, nation
– and affords a basis for engaged theory, education, and activism.⁷⁹¹

Gaard's argument is that by centring ecofeminism around an intersectional framework, it will be easier to notice the crossovers between causes. Therefore, despite differences within ecofeminism, using intersectionality as a methodology and ecofeminism as the theory will provide a strong foundation for praxis across multiple axes.

Another benefit of ensuring the outcome of an intersectional methodology is praxis, is that it can prevent the conversation from becoming too abstract. One of the problems that intersectionality faces when being moulded into a methodology is that it is considered vague⁷⁹² and metaphorical. It appears to require a rigid framework in order 'to grasp the complex realities it was initially intended to address'.⁷⁹³ I suggest that directing intersectional methodologies towards a solution provides a necessary grounding in reality and a sense of pragmatism that would otherwise be missing from intersectional theorising. This is what I will seek to achieve in Chapter Five where, after having employed my intersection tools to an ecofeminist analysis of the egg and dairy industries, I will present practices that are achievable and informed by the realities of the intersecting oppressions explored in Chapter Four.

Intersectional research should engage with, inspire, and support activism. In the same way, activists should be grounded in theory to ensure that their good intentions

⁷⁹¹ Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited', 43.

⁷⁹² Davis, 'Intersectionality as Buzzword', 69.

⁷⁹³ Ibid., 69.

do not become misdirected. Plumwood recognised the necessity that theory sparks activism when she said:

In this period of crisis, time taken for the development of theory seems a luxury indeed. But if we do not understand the development and the defects in the western story of reason and nature, we may remain trapped within it or settle for one of its new versions.⁷⁹⁴

Activism that is not informed by theory can be more dangerous than merely failing to tackle oppression successfully. At its worst it can work to reinforce the very hierarchal dualist structures that it seeks to undermine. Plumwood's observations seem right to me; without analysing and understanding the way oppressions intersect (which is achieved through theorising) acting against oppressions as they appear will not break the cult of reason⁷⁹⁵ or the master model's domination. For example, Plumwood criticises Adams' ecofeminist analyses of the oppression of the nonhuman which lead to universal judgements that veganism should be adopted.⁷⁹⁶ The praxis suggested because of the case study in Chapter Four similarly reject Adams' position for not being sufficiently informed by intersectional thinking. Universal calls to veganism are examples of activism, but I would argue that they are not successful examples of praxis, because they have not been supported by a theory that recognises the matrix oppression. As a result, their activism is

⁷⁹⁴ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 6.

⁷⁹⁵ This is an idea Plumwood considers and a fuller discussion of the idea is present in Chapter One of this thesis.

⁷⁹⁶ Plumwood, 'Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature', 287.

limited within the oppressive system rather than overcoming systematic oppressions.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) campaigns provide further examples of activism that have not been informed by intersectional theory. Their infamous, now ended, campaign against the fur industry could appear to be tackling the oppression of nonhuman animals being used as fashionable commodities rather than seeing them as intrinsically valuable. However, this campaign has gained negative attention as it was seen to be reinforcing sexism by using images of naked female celebrities with the tag line 'I'd rather go naked than wear fur'.⁷⁹⁷ Another surprising campaign angle was used to promote vegetarianism by PETA. One of their billboards pictured 'a cartoon image of a fat woman in a bikini on a beach with the tagline, "Save the Whales. Lose the Blubber: Go Vegetarian".⁷⁹⁸ As Constance Russell and Keri Semenko argue, this campaign is 'powerful in demonstrating the intersection of sizeism, sexism, and speciesism'.⁷⁹⁹ In the name of nonhuman animal liberation, PETA has time and time again reinforced other forms of oppression in its quest to overcome the oppression of nonhuman animals. Praxis as an outcome for intersectional methods demonstrates that this kind of tunnel-vision activism is not sufficient for liberation.

⁷⁹⁷ Maneesha Deckha, 'Disturbing Images: Peta and the Feminist Ethics of Animal Advocacy', *Ethics & the Environment*, 13.2 (2008), 35-76 (p. 37).

⁷⁹⁸ Constance Russell and Keri Semenko, 'Twenty One: We Take 'Cow' as a Compliment: Fattening Humane Environmental, Social Justice Education', *Challenging Weight-Based Oppression Through Critical Education*, 467 (2016), 211-220 (p. 216).

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

Therefore, praxis is an essential product for an intersectional methodology because intersectional theorising highlights the problematic world we live in, but unless it is directed towards praxis, it does nothing to change it; and, equally, activism that is not supported by theory can inadvertently support the systematic and intersectional nature of oppression. Intersectionality should be designed towards praxis because it is well placed to inform practice. The theorising step is essential, even if it seems indulgent against the backdrop of relentless Australian bushfires⁸⁰⁰ and Greek wildfires,⁸⁰¹ COVID-19's impact on the populations' most vulnerable and its triggering of anti-Chinese behaviours/sentiment,⁸⁰² and the court ruling in Pakistan that men may marry girls after they have had their first period;⁸⁰³ but it is essential because it helps us to better understand *how* to change the narrative.

Although there is not the scope within this project to provide a full and clear set of practical suggestions to move past the examples of oppression explored, I will suggest some that may more immediately help to alleviate oppression because this project is, at its heart, a project that seeks to mobilise and encourage change. For praxis to be fully successful, this common root cause needs to be addressed

⁸⁰⁰ BBC, 'Australia Fires: A Visual Guide to the Bushfire Crisis', 31 January 2020 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-australia-50951043>> [accessed 4 December 2022].

⁸⁰¹ BBC, 'Greece Wildfires: Hundreds More Evacuated as Uncontrolled Fires Rage' 8 August 2021 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-58138614>> [accessed 4 December 2022].

⁸⁰² Perhaps best highlighted through President Donald Trump's decision to call Covid-19 the 'Chinese virus'. He defended his choice of words due to its origins in Wuhan, China. However, in calling the virus 'Chinese' he Others it and blames a race of people for what became a global pandemic.

⁸⁰³ Patricia Hill Collins, 'Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41 (2015), 1-20 (p. 5).

as outlined in the above section as well as in problematising the oppressor. However, addressing this is challenging as there are times where the immediacy of the problem requires urgent attention. I have struggled with the realisation that there are few modes of practice that will successfully address multiple oppressions in one fell swoop. However, praxis has transformational potential as it provides room for hope whilst we consider the practical avenues that can make more immediate positive changes. It is critical to ensure that the praxis taken to solve the immediate need has considered the root cause, such that the praxis does not itself aggravate the root cause. Through an ecofeminist theory we see how this praxis could help to transform the dualistic binaries that have sustained oppressions across human and nonhuman spheres.

Conclusion

Feminism has not been exempt from being racist, classist, ableist, homophobic, transphobic, and speciesist. This is highlighted by the dominant brand of 'white feminism' that has left so many women feeling excluded for so many decades.⁸⁰⁴ Ecofeminists must engage with the intersectional nature of these – isms; all feminist work should be actively against all manifestations of oppression or else it fails to truly be for all women. Intersectionality has been essential to developing the feminist movement and ensuring it is inclusive to all. Feminism had taken for granted that being a woman was the main source of oppression against women, however, by integrating the findings of other disciplines focused on

⁸⁰⁴ hooks, *Ain't I a woman?*, 190.

domination, we are better positioned to understand that oppression is not one-dimensional. Furthermore, I believe that ecofeminism can be helpful in broadening the reach of intersectional feminism to encourage the inclusion of oppressed nonhumans. Currently discussions in intersectional feminism have made huge steps forward in creating a more inclusive space for humans, however they have generally not made the connections between the oppressions of women and nonhuman animals and/or the environment that characterise ecofeminism. I argue this would be a valuable contribution to intersectionality in identifying connections between all oppressions. It appears to me to be a natural and welcome extension of intersectionality.

Whilst reading Goethals et al.'s paper on intersectionality in disability studies I was particularly struck by their limitation of the scope of their methodology:

It is important to point out that the approaches do not represent a unified way or one-size-fits-all solution to conduct intersectional research, instead they offer opportunities to demonstrate the different ways in which an intersectional perspective can be applied to disability studies research.⁸⁰⁵

I feel much the same about the structure of the methodology this chapter supports. Intersectionality can retain its flexible appeal by being allowed to take different methodological forms in different fields. I have recounted a way that intersectionality can inform, and be informed by, ecofeminism but this should not be taken as a way

⁸⁰⁵ Goethals and others, 'Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research', 77.

that all intersectional research should be applied. Intersectionality has a lot to offer various fields of research, and it is valuable that each field can centralise different aspects of intersectionality to best fit their primary concern. In this way, intersectionality can retain the charm of its complexity and open-ended nature whilst becoming sufficiently structured to function as a methodology within individual disciplines.

Although intersectionality shows significant promise in its ability to better ecofeminist theory, Brittney Cooper reminds us that ‘intersectionality does not deserve our religious devotion’.⁸⁰⁶ We should not expect more from it than is fair and it is important to recognise that it will not be able to give us an account of identity that is personal to everyone and this means that it is possible to still be susceptible to the criticism of essentialism. Thus, my intention has not been to resolve all ecofeminism’s problems simply with the development of an intersectional methodology. It is undoubtedly possible to be essentialist even with these steps having been taken, and so ecofeminists cannot rely on intersectionality as the answer to all criticisms. However, when it is properly appreciated, ‘as a conceptual and analytic tool for thinking about operations of power, intersectionality remains one of the most useful and expansive paradigms we have’.⁸⁰⁷ Provided ecofeminists recognise it is not the solution to all problems, applying an intersectional methodology can enhance ecofeminist enquiries.

⁸⁰⁶ Cooper, ‘Intersectionality’, 404.

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 405.

In my application of the problematising the oppressor tool in the proceeding chapter, I will more often focus on the victims of oppression than analysing the institutional structure. This is because I have had to make methodological choices within my thesis and one of these choices has been to place an emphasis on the individual subject. This emphasis continues into Chapter Five where I have also chosen to explore actions that are more individual choices than policy changes. This is not because I think this is necessarily the better way to analyse these oppressions, but there had to be choices made regarding the scope of the analysis.

I believe that all forms of oppression are fundamentally linked in a way that cross-reinforces biases and prejudice against all those whose identities map on to the characteristic considered secondary in dualist pairings. By acknowledging and appreciating how oppressions are linked to one another, we can recognise that discrimination does not exist in a vacuum but is instead informed by an interconnecting web of power dynamics. As these conceptual connections have physical repercussions in the treatment of those who are associated with the inferior of the dualist pairing, it is ultimately the aim of social constructionist ecofeminism to contribute to the dismantling of dualism. If one could remove the conceptual hyperseparation and value-laden perception of dualist pairings, then ultimately this would positively impact the treatment of people and the nonhuman who had been considered Other. However, this will not be achieved by only ever addressing one strand of domination at a time. For example, to write about ecology without considering how gender intersects fails to effectively tackle the systematic and linked nature of domination.

Ecofeminism is extended by an intersectional approach, and equally intersectionality as a methodology gains clarity when used in ecofeminism. One of the criticisms that intersectionality has faced is that it is so abstract as a concept that it is difficult to see its parameters; however, ecofeminist theory can provide a solid structure from which to begin intersectional analysis that helps to overcome this abstract critique. Ecofeminism provides the theoretical foundation to support the exploration of oppression and allows intersectionality to be examined and applied to normative problems. Moreover, much intersectional feminist research currently focuses on human oppressions, whereas ecofeminism offers the possibility of extending the analysis to areas of the nonhuman, which are currently marginalised in intersectionality. Ecofeminism provides the theory that identifies the links and similarities between human and the nonhuman and an intersectional methodology would aid the interrogation of those connections. Catharine A. MacKinnon wrote that 'method concerns the way one thinks, not what one thinks about, although they can be related'.⁸⁰⁸ Through the apparatus I have proposed for an intersectional methodology, I have sought to find a suitable way of thinking about ecofeminist issues. Ecofeminism presents the issues that need to be thought about, intersectionality as a methodology provides the way of thinking about them. Ultimately, an intersectional methodology in ecofeminism should be directed towards developing knowledge about oppressions and, most importantly, also gain insight into how to tackle those oppressions.

⁸⁰⁸ MacKinnon, 'Intersectionality as Method', 1019.

If oppressions intersect, both conceptually and how they affect identities/experiences, then an exclusive analysis of one manifestation will never be successful in liberation. No one form of liberation can be pursued in good faith without working towards the liberation of all because the underlying power structures justifying the targeted oppression would not be challenged. Indeed, hooks wrote ‘to be “feminist” in any authentic sense of the term is to want for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression’.⁸⁰⁹ Ecofeminist literature has much to gain from more strictly and explicitly employing an intersectional methodology, and I believe that forming a structured intersectional methodology becomes easier in conversation with ecofeminist theory due to its pre-existing tendency towards intersectionality. Thus, this chapter sought to demonstrate what an intersectional methodology looks like in development with ecofeminism, to apply it in an ecofeminist analysis of the egg and dairy industries in Chapter Four.

⁸⁰⁹ hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman?*, 195.

Applying an Intersectional Methodology to the Egg and Dairy Industries as a Case Study

Taken alone, each of these fields offers specific perspectives on knowledge while overlooking others. From a critical ecofeminist perspective, findings from these diverse perspectives can be brought together within a feminist framework that is grounded in awareness of the ecological necessity for gender justice across species, races, classes, and environments – Greta Gaard⁸¹⁰

In this chapter, I apply the intersectional methodology developed in the previous chapter alongside ecofeminist theory to the case study of the egg and dairy industries. I have selected this case study because it offers a potentially sharp example of gender-based violence against nonhuman animals and, as such, I believe an intersectional exploration could be insightful. The term gender-based violence is apt because it is a violence that impacts all members of the species. It is not violence reserved for the female; as I will explore later in this chapter, male chicks are often killed immediately in the egg industry and calves are removed from their mothers prematurely and will be slaughtered or live short, constrained lives in the veal industry. By exploring the practices of this industry and attitudes towards it, this chapter will identify how the egg and dairy industries are maintained by the intersectional oppressions across gender and nonhuman dualistic binaries, and how it encourages and reinforces connecting oppressions more broadly. The main purpose of this chapter is to use this case study, that offers a clear intersection of gender and the nonhuman as a starting point, to highlight the benefits of utilising the intersectional tool of listening (particularly in its non-linguistic forms given the nonhuman focus) and problematising the oppressor

⁸¹⁰ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 50.

(particularly as this allows for connections in the logic of domination to be made across seemingly different iterations of domination). As an intercategory analysis,⁸¹¹ I will compare experiences and draw parallels between the different experiences within and across the intersectional scope I have outlined. Ultimately, I intend for this analysis to highlight how centralising intersectionality as a methodology within ecofeminist theory helps to overcome some of the problems associated with essentialism that were discussed in Chapter Two as the intersectional approach allows me to pluralise our account of oppression and be explicit about where binary categories have led to ideologies that are capable of being deployed in a myriad of ways for the same end of oppressing.⁸¹²

Ecofeminist theorists have, according to Gaard, historically ‘failed to locate animals as central to any discussions of ethics involving women and nature.’⁸¹³ Similarly, Adams argues that ecofeminist writings have made ecofeminism ‘inadequate because it fails to give consistent conceptual place to the domination of animals as a significant aspect of the domination of nature’.⁸¹⁴ However, this gap in

⁸¹¹ The term intercategory analysis was explored in the previous chapter and is a term McCall developed to help delineate between different types of intersectional study. Intercategory analyses use traditional categories of privilege and oppression to analyse inequality, yet the analysis uses these categories tentatively – recognising that categories are limited and reductive.

⁸¹² Some of the binary categories I will interrogate through the lens of intersectionality include ‘nature’ which has arguably been essentialised within ecofeminist writings, as well as ‘healthy’. In this way, the intersectional methodology I propose will contribute to the development of ecofeminism as firmly anti-essentialist.

⁸¹³ Greta Gaard (ed.), ‘Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature’. *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals and Nature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), pp. 1-12 (p. 6).

⁸¹⁴ Carol Adams, ‘Ecofeminism and the Eating of Animals’, *Hypatia*, 6.1 (1991), 125-145 (p.125).

the literature has increasingly been addressed in ecofeminism⁸¹⁵ so that the oppression of nonhuman animals has now been solidified as important and relevant to ecofeminist analyses. Furthermore, ecofeminism is fundamentally interdisciplinary in nature. As such, one of the key benefits of employing this theory is that it enables related theorising in adjacent disciplines to be drawn upon and learnt from. As such, I will be in conversation with the work of scholars in animal liberation to complement the discussion of ecofeminism and feminized proteins.

Adams and Gaard have named female farm animals as doubly oppressed in the animal agriculture industry. This is because as well as being farmed for their meat, they can also be exploited for their reproductive produce, or ‘feminized proteins’. Feminized protein is a term coined by Adams, who argues that ‘milk and eggs should be called *feminized protein*’ because they are protein sources that are ‘produced by a female body’.⁸¹⁶ Using the term feminized proteins helps to emphasise the intersection between gender and nonhuman animal oppression where specifically female nonhuman animal bodies are exploited for human gain. Andrée Collard similarly criticised human interference with cows and chickens to control the reproductive processes of these nonhuman animals that keep them alive whilst ‘the mother in her

⁸¹⁵ Indeed, even before the Adams’ *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, there was Collard’s *Rape of the Wild* which was an ecofeminist analysis that placed a significant emphasis on the exploitation of nonhuman animals, particularly in animal experimentation: Collard with Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild*. In more recent years there have been several ecofeminist works addressing the place of nonhuman animals: Hunnicutt, *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective*; Plumwood, ‘Animals and Ecology: Towards a Better Integration’. *Eye of the Crocodile*, ed. by Lorraine Shannon (Canberra: Australian National University, 2012), pp. 77-90; *Sister Species: Women, Animals and Social Justice*, ed. by Lisa Kemmerer (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

⁸¹⁶ Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 21.

has been killed'.⁸¹⁷ The sexualised nature of this exploitation is a prime example of the ways that speciesism and sexism interact and contribute both to the specific oppressions of those creatures with this intersecting identity and to the continued oppressions of women and nonhuman animals more broadly.

The production of animal products can be recognised as a direct exploitation of nonhuman animals. There are several branches of animal ethics which argue that at least some forms of animal agriculture oppress nonhuman animals. For example, utilitarian Peter Singer popularised the term 'speciesism' to highlight that we discriminate against nonhuman animals on the superficial basis that they are not members of the human species. Singer's argument against the practice of speciesism is founded on the idea that because animals are sentient their interests should be considered.⁸¹⁸ Despite recognising the significant influence of Singer's arguments for raising awareness of the plight of nonhuman animals in the agriculture industry,⁸¹⁹ Tom Regan finds Singer's utilitarian focus on interests to be inadequate as an argument for vegetarianism. This is because Singer's utilitarian approach means that it is conceivable that the preference of a person to eat meat could outweigh the suffering caused to the animal. Thus, an argument based on the interests of humans to eat food they enjoy compared to the nonhuman animals' interests to avoid pain does not necessarily support the argument for vegetarianism as convincingly as

⁸¹⁷ Collard with Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild*, 110.

⁸¹⁸ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 40th anniversary edn. (London: The Bodley Head, 2015).

⁸¹⁹ Tom Regan, 'Utilitarianism, Vegetarianism, and Animal Rights', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 9.4 (1980), 305-324 (p. 308).

Singer appears to suggest.⁸²⁰ Regan,⁸²¹ along with other academics like Andrew Linzey,² led animal rights theorising and argued that we can extend rights talk to nonhuman animals and consequently understand they are intrinsically valuable beings. It would therefore be wrong to treat them as only instrumentally valuable, as we do when we deny them their rights. More recently, the broad field of critical animal studies (CAS) has developed as an interdisciplinary and intersectional field to address some of the limitations of animal rights theory. These limitations include being insufficiently intersectional, and so at times the animal rights rhetoric ignores the oppressions of other groups to focus solely on the nonhuman animal.⁸²² CAS seeks total liberation by emphasising praxis directed theory.⁸²³ Critical animal studies scholars, such as Dawne McCance,⁸²⁴ Nik Taylor and Richard Twine⁸²⁵ argue that, in practice, the liberation of nonhuman animals requires increased uptake of a vegetarian/vegan diet and undertaking a cruelty-free lifestyle.

I will also be considering how oppression of the nonhuman animal in the egg and dairy industries intersects with the domination of the environment. Animal agriculture has widely been recognised as a direct oppression of nonhuman

⁸²⁰ Ibid.

⁸²¹ Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (California: University of California, 1983).

⁸²² Anthony J. Novella II and others, 'Introduction: The Emergence of Critical Animal Studies: The Rise of Intersectional Animal Liberation', *Counterpoints*, 448 (2014), xix-xxxvi (p. xx).

⁸²³ Andrew Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animal* (London: SPCK, 1987).

⁸²⁴ Dawne McCance, *Critical Animal Studies: An Introduction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013).

⁸²⁵ Nik Taylor and Richard Twine, ed., *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies: From the Margins to the Centre* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

animals,⁸²⁶ but it is a more recent development for the impact of animal agriculture practices to be recognised as an environmental issue. *Livestock's Long Shadow*,⁸²⁷ a report released by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), has become widely cited as a comprehensive study on animal agriculture's detrimental and significant impact on the environment. The suggestion in their later paper, *Tackling Climate Change through Livestock*, that the emissions produced by the animal agriculture industry 'represent 14.5 percent of all human-induced emissions using the most recent IPCC estimates for total anthropogenic emissions',⁸²⁸ implies that the animal agriculture industry is a significant contributor to climate change. It is worth noting that this report considers the impacts of the animal agriculture as an industry, whilst this case study is focused solely on the branches of egg and dairy farming. However, the insights into the damage of animal agriculture as a whole give some indication of the contributing impact of the dairy and egg industries on the environment.

The farming of milk and eggs can therefore be considered an example of the oppression of nonhuman animals and the environment. I employ critical ecofeminist theory to also argue that the continuation of this industry highlights and sustains

⁸²⁶ This has been demonstrated in the work of Ruth Harrison, *Animal Machines: The New Factory Farming Industry* (London: Vincent Stuart Ltd., 1964) and in the impact of the Brambell Report, F.W.R. Brambell (Chairman) *Report of the Technical Committee to Enquiry into the Welfare of Animals Kept Under Intensive Livestock Husbandry Systems*, (London: H.M.S.O, 1965).

⁸²⁷ Henning Steinfield, *Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2006).

⁸²⁸ P.J. Gerber and others, *Tackling Climate Change through Livestock: A Global Assessment of Emissions and Mitigation Opportunities* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2013), 15.

gendered oppressions. The alternative theories in animal liberation noted above do not have this same ability to focus on the gendered intersection. Thus, ecofeminism is a fruitful area for intersectional consideration as there are multiple axes on which to draw and intersectional methodology can help centre this. The violence experienced by dairy cows, who are 'forcibly impregnated, dispossessed of their children, and then painfully robbed of the milk produced by their bodies for those children',⁸²⁹ is a violence that is fundamentally gendered. I will also show that the exploitation of laying hens has been largely ignored as a gendered violence, but it too is the 'sexist exploitation of female reproductive capacities to produce consumer goods'.⁸³⁰ If we continue to justify the exploitation of the nonhuman female body, then our language and culture can more easily justify the exploitation of the human female body (and vice versa).

From this interdisciplinary body of literature, I have been able to categorise my findings and analysis into three themes. I was drawn to these themes because they allow me to cover both the societal perceptions of the egg and dairy industries as well as realities of the industries and their treatment of nonhuman animals. The first of these themes is attitudes to feminized proteins; in this sub-section I consider how society views milk and eggs and their production by human and nonhuman females. The intersectional tools of listening and problematising the oppressor will help to uncover how social ideas towards feminized proteins are affected by ambivalence and ideology; it is this ambivalence and ideology that helps to sustain and justify

⁸²⁹ pattrice jones, 'Fighting Cocks: Ecofeminism Versus Sexualised Violence', in *Sister Species: Women, Animals and Social Justice*, ed. by Lisa Kemmerer. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011), pp. 45-56 (p. 53).

⁸³⁰ Ibid., 53.

intersecting oppressions. The second theme is regarding intensive farming conditions in which I consider how violence is used to silence the oppressed. The intersectional tools of listening and problematising the oppressor will highlight how the denial of subjectivity helps to sustain oppressions across the human and nonhuman. The final theme is the killing of nonhuman animals; whilst of course this is more obvious in the wider animal agriculture industry, my research has shown that death is not reserved for the meat industry alone and such analysis is relevant to the egg and dairy industries. The intersectional tools of listening and problematising the oppressor will develop the analysis determined by the second theme, namely that there is a necessary denial of subjectivity. The final intersectional tool of praxis shall be the focus for the proceeding chapter and will be informed by the analysis produced in this chapter.

To analyse each theme, I will use the first two of the intersectional methodological tools I developed for a critical ecofeminist theory in the preceding chapter. The intersectional tool of listening has helped me to analyse the issue in a way that exposes the links between oppressions within this particular case study. It has also allowed me to uncover underlying patterns of oppression within and across gender, the nonhuman animal, and environmental boundaries. As a result of this deployment of an intersectional ecofeminism, I will emphasise the important role of attending to non-linguistic, emotional communications. The tool of problematising the oppressor encourages me to recognise the complexity of oppressive forces and their effects on the egg and dairy industries as well as intersecting oppressions. I will emphasise how using these tools has led to new ways of conceptualising in this area

and I demonstrate how this could be a significant finding in propelling ecofeminism away from essentialism and supporting the theory in its move towards a more critical era. I believe that, by explicitly incorporating an intersectional methodology, ecofeminist theory will be able to more critically engage with once monolithic categories to demonstrate the ambivalence of identity categories and highlight the complexity of oppressive forces in a way that is better placed to centre anti-essentialism.⁸³¹

A Brief Outline of the Egg and Dairy Industries

In the UK, intensive farming refers to animal farming where the farm has the ‘more than: (i) 40,000 places for poultry; (ii) 2,000 places for production pigs (over 30kg); or (iii) 750 places for sows’.⁸³² In 2017, *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* reported that the number of intensive farms have ‘increased by a quarter in the last six years’.⁸³³ This report indicates that the movement towards more intensive farming methods is continuing despite growing concerns surrounding welfare standards on such farms. Farming laws govern the conditions under which livestock may be kept

⁸³¹ As I argued in the introduction, intersectionality offers a potential way of being anti-essentialist. This is because essentialism relies on making groups based on the assumption that there is a shared property (or properties) that all entities belonging to that group possess; whereas, intersectionality, disrupts grouping by highlighting the complexity of peoples’ identities which is counter to the idea that people can be placed in universalised groups.

⁸³² Environment Agency, *Understanding the Meaning of Regulated Facility: Appendix 3 – Interpretation of Intensive Farming Installations* (Bristol: Environment Agency, 2015) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/964488/LIT_6530.pdf> [accessed 18 June 23], 6.

⁸³³ Madlen Davies and Andrew Walsley, ‘The Rise of the “Megafarm”: How British Meat is Made’ *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, 17 July 2017 <<https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-07-17/megafarms-uk-intensive-farming-meat>> [accessed 14 July 2020].

and how the farm animals are treated. However, debate surrounding whether these laws are sufficiently stringent to protect the welfare of livestock continues. For example, the RSPCA note that although ‘the use of non-cage systems [i.e. barn and free-range hens] is continually increasing... about half of the hens in the UK are still kept in battery cages’.⁸³⁴ The legal conditions for laying hens in battery cages, as decided by European legislation in 2012, meant that ‘in total, there is less usable space than an A4 sheet of paper per hen, and a maximum of nearly 17 birds per square meter’.⁸³⁵ The RSPCA consequently rejects the use of cage systems⁸³⁶ for laying hens as they consider these conditions to be detrimental to the welfare of the birds.

Cows tend to enjoy slightly more freedoms than their poultry counterparts. Cows are often reared outdoors for at least part of the year,⁸³⁷ whilst laying hens in intensive farms are contained to their cages, with only free-range (or organic) hens being granted ‘continuous daytime access’⁸³⁸ to outdoor space. This might imply that it is less immoral to consume dairy products over eggs as cows have had more of an opportunity to mimic their instinctive lifestyle. Indeed, ‘battery eggs are now being phased out in several countries as the public have become increasingly aware of the

⁸³⁴ Alexander Caminda, ‘The Welfare of Laying Hens’, *RSPCA* (2018) <https://www.rspca.org.uk/documents/1494939/7712578/Laying+hens+Information+Sheet_August+2018.pdf/9587893b-64b5-ee56-73b9-6b82a1081340?t=1553271755453> [accessed 6 July 2022], 1-5 (p. 1).

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸³⁷ John Avizienius, ‘The Welfare of Dairy Cows’, *RSPCA* (2017) <https://www.rspca.org.uk/documents/1494939/7712578/Dairy+Cow+Information+Sheet_Feb+2017.pdf/6919964d-09aa-c007-7a59-5c743c870c8a?t=1553271692677> [accessed 6 July 2022], 1-7 (p. 2).

⁸³⁸ Caminda, ‘The Welfare of Laying Hens’, 3.

cruelty involved in battery farms',⁸³⁹ with the EU banning battery cages in 2012.⁸⁴⁰ Caged hens now live in "enriched" or "furnished" battery cages, and provide 9% more usable area compared to the previously used conventional barren battery cages'.⁸⁴¹ UK shops have also responded to consumer attitudes against intensive egg farming with Morrisons,⁸⁴² Marks & Spencer, and the Co-Op⁸⁴³ committing to selling only free-range eggs. However, even when cows are farmed, they are subjected to 'branding, castration and dehorning',⁸⁴⁴ all of which cause a great amount of pain to the animals. There are also welfare concerns such as lameness, which is thought to affect 'around a quarter to one third of cows in UK dairy herds',⁸⁴⁵ and mastitis, which is the inflammation of the udder and 'over the course of a year, there will be around 40-60 cases of clinical mastitis for every 100 dairy cows in a herd'.⁸⁴⁶ So even if they are not constrained to cages, they are subject to painful experiences. Thus, there are wellbeing concerns to be addressed regarding the mass farming of nonhuman animals across species.

⁸³⁹ Eleanora Gullone, 'Why Eating Animals Is Not Good for Us', *Journal of Animal Ethics*, 7.1 (2017), 31-62 (p. 35).

⁸⁴⁰ Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, *UK Unites to Stamp Out Battery Cages* (6 December 2011) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-unites-to-stamp-out-battery-cages>> [accessed 5 July 2022].

⁸⁴¹ Caminda, 'The Welfare of Laying Hens', 2.

⁸⁴² Sabrina Barr, 'Morrisons becomes 'first major supermarket' to go free range, ending sale of caged eggs', *The Independent* (19 February 2020) <<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/food-and-drink/morrisons-supermarket-eggs-caged-free-range-chickens-hens-a9343841.html>> [accessed 6 July 2022].

⁸⁴³ RSPCA Assured, *Free Rand Eggs* (n.d.) <<https://www.rspcaassured.org.uk/rspca-assured-products/free-range-eggs/>> [accessed 5 July 2022].

⁸⁴⁴ Clough, *On Animals*, 52.

⁸⁴⁵ Avizienius, 'The Welfare of Dairy Cows', 4.

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

Attitudes to Feminized Proteins

This section explores social attitudes towards dairy and eggs with the aim of uncovering the intersecting underlying oppressions that inform these attitudes. My analysis will focus on the intersections between the attitudes towards feminized proteins produced by the female nonhuman animals and the related reproductive procedures of the female body. Dairy and egg products are derived from ‘the gendered reproductive labour of female animals’ and ‘the industry covets, appropriates, and commodifies’⁸⁴⁷ the potential of the nonhuman female body to (re)produce for profit. This analysis will use the intersectional methodological tools of listening and problematising the oppressor developed in the previous chapter to demonstrate that there is a theme of ambivalence in descriptions of feminized proteins that leads to powerful emotional affects. Additionally, the perceptions of feminized proteins are equally impacted by ideologies which are used to justify oppressions of different groups. Thus, the intersectional methodology will help to uncover the instability of categories given the use of ambivalence and ideology to socially construct systemic oppressive attitudes.

My position towards unstable categories requires some explanation as overly stable categories can also be a tool of oppression. I have argued in Chapter One, using Plumwood,⁸⁴⁸ that the rigidity of dualistic binaries is in part what causes and maintains oppression. So, the claim that instable categories can also be problematic

⁸⁴⁷ Maneesha Deckha, ‘Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory: Centralizing Race and Culture in Feminist Work on Nonhuman Animals’, *Hypatia*, 27.3 (2012), 527-545 (p. 532).

⁸⁴⁸ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 23.

as they can support different ideologies of oppression is limiting because if categories should neither be rigid nor ambivalent what should they be? My response is that dualist categories are nouns, whether 'natural' and 'healthy' are adjectives. Perhaps the problem is that when groups are treated as rigid categories, they are Othered and adjectives are used to maintain that Othering. The adjectives require instability to be able to act as chameleons that can maintain oppression depending on how they are applied. By emphasising the ambivalence of the adjectives used to oppress different groups, I can further disrupt the rigidness on which the dualist binaries are built as it shows these binaries are sustained by unstable language that is used deliberately to maintain the oppression.

Listening to Attitudes to Feminized Proteins and Problematizing the Oppressor

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there is a theme of ambivalence in descriptions of feminized proteins that leads to powerful emotional affects. Additionally, the perceptions of feminized proteins are equally impacted by ideologies which are used to justify oppressions of different groups. Thus, the intersectional methodology will help to uncover the instability of categories given the use of ambivalence and ideology to socially construct systemic oppressive attitudes.

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⁸⁵⁰ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 23.

Listening to Descriptions of ‘Milk as Natural’

Female mammal bodies are typically able to produce milk, and lactation is usually indicative that the animal is in a postnatal stage. The milk provides nutrients for their offspring to support their growth in early life. There is a lot of ‘social baggage’ connected to milk that influences our perception of the liquid, whether it be from a human or nonhuman body. Therefore, how society perceives milk, and attitudes towards the liquid, are an interesting point of analysis for uncovering societal biases and oppressive forces. One such perception is that milk is a natural foodstuff. DuPuis highlights this in the title of their book, *Nature’s Perfect Food*, and Miriam Labbok acknowledges that breastfeeding is ‘often assumed to be a “natural” and therefore easy and instinctual practice’.⁸⁵¹ In both cases, the employment of the word ‘nature’ is heavily value-laden and in this section I will argue that the term ‘nature’ has enjoyed an ambivalence that makes it easier to use the concept to evoke emotions and reactions, and oppress Others. Moreover, I suggest that using an intersectional methodology of listening and problematising the oppressor helps to uncover this ambivalence in a pluralised account of the oppressor and thus minimises some of the conceptual effects of this term.

When the term ‘natural’ is used to describe an entity or action then its accompanying affect is for it to be ‘considered organic, inborn, and therefore largely beyond our ability to change’.⁸⁵² Although cow’s milk is a naturally occurring food, in

⁸⁵¹ Miriam Labbok, ‘Breastfeeding in Public Health: What is Needed for Policy and Program Action?’, in *Beyond Health, Beyond Choice: Breastfeeding Constraints and Realities*, ed. by Paige Hall Smith, Bernice L. Hausman, Miriam Labbok (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2012), pp.36-50 (p. 38).

⁸⁵² Hunnicutt, *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective*. 23.

reality the production of cow's milk involves a high level of intervention, both to produce it according to demand and to make the milk safe for human consumption, which blurs the definition of this product as 'natural'. By seeing cow's milk as natural we conceptualise their milk as inevitable rather than a result of an infinitely suspended reproductive process which, in the case of dairy farms, has been enforced. Without the enforced impregnation of cows, 'fresh cow's milk is largely unavailable for more than part of a year (March to November)'.⁸⁵³ Female cows, like female humans, only produce milk after pregnancy as milk's primary biological function is to feed the young. To overcome this, female nonhuman animals must be, as much as possible, kept in a perpetual state of post-pregnancy to be profitable on a dairy farm. This is achieved through artificial insemination or forced intercourse. The human interference in this process undermines the intended connotations of 'natural' as it becomes clear that milk is not a purely biological process which is allowed the time and space to run its course.

It is significant to note that the similarities between enforced pregnancies, that are part of the farmed female cow's experience, and the experiences of human victims of sexual abuse are acknowledged by those enforcing the impregnation of dairy cows. The 'apparatus used to hold female cows immobile so that they can be artificially inseminated' is commonly referred to as a 'rape rack'.⁸⁵⁴ The normalisation of this phrasing 'places in plain sight the interconnections between the male control of women's bodies and the monopolization of the bodies of female farmed animals'.⁸⁵⁵

⁸⁵³ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 50.

⁸⁵⁴ Clough, *On Animals*, 66.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

Adams would argue that in using terminology associated with the sexual violence women experience to explain the experiences of dairy cows we make survivors of sexual violence the 'absent referent'. Adams coined the term 'absent referent'⁸⁵⁶ to employ when we use language that comes from the violence inflicted upon one group to describe the experiences of another, without fully recognising the source of the language. For example, Adams is critical of employing language that 'evokes rape as a metaphor for violence against animals'⁸⁵⁷ because it makes victims of sexual assault the 'absent referent' and so continues to marginalise the lived experiences of raped women. Thus, in perceiving milk as a natural product we are, at best, ignoring the sexual violence experienced by female animals, thereby further marginalising human victims of sexual violence; at worst, we are conceptually condoning sexual violence as part of an 'organic, inborn'⁸⁵⁸ process.

Moreover, as has already been noted, there is an intervention process that makes milk safe for human consumption. Milk, in its unpasteurised state, poses a health danger to humans which emphasises 'the otherness of nature'.⁸⁵⁹ As DuPuis notes, the narrative of how milk came to be safe for human consumption is one 'of progress, perfection, and power'.⁸⁶⁰ Scientific advancements meant that 'not only was

⁸⁵⁶ Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 66. Collard similarly cites the experiments on monkeys led by Harry and Margaret Harlow in which the apparatus used to impregnate the monkeys was 'dubbed 'the rape rack', it seems that this use of language invoking sexual violence is not only used within the animal agriculture industry. Collard with Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild*, 127.

⁸⁵⁷ Hunnicutt, *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective*, 77.

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁵⁹ DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food*, 107.

⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

the cow domesticated, the bacteria in her milk was now under control'.⁸⁶¹ However, as Merchant argued in her seminal book, scientific progress has come at the expense of perceiving and treating the natural world as something that can be manipulated for the good of humankind. Merchant notes that this manipulation is made easier when the environment is feminized as it degrades its status along with the female.⁸⁶² In this particular example of science manipulating the natural world in the name of progress, the nonhuman animal who is dominated is female and the product produced is heavily associated with the female. Thus, the pasteurisation process of milk represents yet another example of human domination over nature, where the socially constructed connections link this domination to the domination of the female. Thus, what is being communicated in the description of milk as 'natural' involves intense emotional affects that go beyond what is typically understood by the word natural to further trace intersecting power dynamics. In this case study, the oppression of the nonhuman animal as a milk-producer intersects with the oppression of the environment and to the dualistic binary of male/female as the production and consumption of milk is further evidence of human's manipulation of a feminized nonhuman for their own gain.

The perception of cows and milk as something humans can manipulate and exploit can be heard in our language and colloquialisms. Gaard points out that 'in vernacular English, to "milk" something is to take it for everything you can get'.⁸⁶³ Gaard's argument is that our language uncovers an implicit understanding that we are using cows' reproductive systems for all they are worth. Gaard's exploration of

⁸⁶¹ Ibid., 107.

⁸⁶² Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 169.

⁸⁶³ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 52.

language could be extended to the colloquial business phrase ‘cash cow’. A cash cow refers to a venture that will continuously produce substantially more profit than the cost of the venture. A cash cow is a business venture that takes minimal effort and is easy for the businessperson; this makes light of the emotional and physical toll the dairy industry has on cows’ bodies as our taking from them may be easy for us, but it is a painful experience for them. Once we listen to our choice of words in these phrases,⁸⁶⁴ we become aware of an implicit understanding that we are utilising cows in an egregiously exploitative way for our own gain. Ecofeminists have demonstrated the impact and influence of our language on how we conceptualise and justify the world around us. Gwen Hunnicutt draws on the work of Adams to argue that ‘when humans use animal metaphors to illustrate their own human experience, animals are also made into absent referents’.⁸⁶⁵ Similarly to the argument that using the language of rape to explain the experience of cows on dairy farms marginalises the experiences of sexual assault survivors, when we use metaphorical language like ‘to milk’ or ‘cash cow’ to highlight human gain, we fail to acknowledge the ways cows have been harmed and exploited. The terms ‘cash cow’ and ‘to milk’ uncover how cows are objectified and monetised when we take the time to listen to their use in our language.

As is the case with cow’s milk, the ambivalence of the word ‘natural’ has had conflicting connotations and consequences in breastfeeding advocacy campaigns. On

⁸⁶⁴ This is an example of why listening as a methodological tool has been situated alongside discourse analysis. The analysis of the meaning of language and its impact is important here and follows a similar line of analysis to discourse analysis. However, it remains clear that listening is in some ways importantly distinct from listening as whereas discourse analysis tends to focus on the ‘consequences for *peoples*’ lives’, this tool of listening considers the consequences for the nonhuman also. Gee and Handford, ‘Introduction’, 5.

⁸⁶⁵ Hunnicutt, *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective*, 77.

the one hand, it is understandable that breastfeeding advocacy groups would use the word 'natural' as this 'commonly evokes a sense of purity, safety and superiority to things that are cast as "unnatural"'.⁸⁶⁶ This helps to also imply the health benefits of breastmilk that will be discussed in the next sub-section. Moreover, the narrative that breastfeeding is natural can help to overpower perceptions that breastfeeding is a subversion of the heterosexual masculine view that breasts are primarily for male sexual appetite.⁸⁶⁷ Emphasising that breastfeeding is natural legitimises alternative functions of breasts that are biologically valid,⁸⁶⁸ which may de-sexualise the act of breastfeeding and allow women to feel more comfortable breastfeeding in public.⁸⁶⁹ Overall, this use of language can affect perceptions of breastfeeding, leaving 'women feeling empowered by "natural" processes'.⁸⁷⁰

Problematising the Oppressor by Exploring 'Milk as Natural'

On the other hand, there are more problematic ways to interpret the use of the word 'natural' in breastfeeding discourse. One interpretation of 'natural' is to consider that all women have an 'inherent capacity'⁸⁷¹ to breastfeed, or that it is an 'instinctual or innate'⁸⁷² process for female bodies. In suggesting that breastmilk production is

⁸⁶⁶ Jessica Martucci and Anne Barnhill, 'Examining the Use of 'Natural' in Breastfeeding Promotion', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 44.9 (2018), 615-620 (p. 617).

⁸⁶⁷ Paige Hall Smith, 'Breastfeeding Promotion through Gender Equity', *Beyond Health, Beyond Choice: Breastfeeding Constraints and Realities*, ed. by Paige Hall Smith, Bernice L. Hausman, Miriam Labbok (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2012), pp. 25-35 (p. 33).

⁸⁶⁸ Martucci and Barnhill, 'Examining the Use of 'Natural' in Breastfeeding Promotion', 615.

⁸⁶⁹ Glenda Wall, 'Moral Constructions of Motherhood in Breastfeeding Discourse', *Gender and Society*, 15.4 (2001), 592-610 (p. 598).

⁸⁷⁰ Martucci and Barnhill, 'Examining the Use of 'Natural' in Breastfeeding Promotion', 615.

⁸⁷¹ Wall, 'Moral Constructions of Motherhood in Breastfeeding Discourse', 597.

⁸⁷² Martucci and Barnhill, 'Examining the Use of 'Natural' in Breastfeeding Promotion', 616.

‘natural’ for women, we promote the perspective that women are maternal, caregivers, and nurturers.⁸⁷³ Glenda Wall notes the emotional difficulties created by the perception that breastfeeding is an innate capacity of the female body; she cites reports from women that are unable to breastfeed who feel ‘as though their bodies have failed and as though they have failed as mothers in a fundamental way’.⁸⁷⁴ For those who are unable to breastfeed, despite wanting to, they might feel they have failed and feel shame/guilt⁸⁷⁵ associated with their use of formula as an alternative. In this case, people believe, because of the emotional ideas being communicated by the term ‘natural’, that their bodies are working against them. This in turn causes negative emotions as they look at their bodies through a lens of frustration.

The idea that breastfeeding is natural for *women* is also problematic because it further marginalises non-binary people and transgender men who may be able to produce milk but who are not women, as well as transgender women who are women but do not produce milk. The experiences of non-binary people, as well as transgender men and women are erased through this essentialised portrayal of breastfeeding. For transgender and non-binary people, the perception that breastfeeding is natural for women can lead to gender dysphoria and decisions to avoid chestfeeding to protect the mental health of the parent.⁸⁷⁶ Therefore, linking breastmilk to nature has a

⁸⁷³ Wall, ‘Moral Constructions of Motherhood in Breastfeeding Discourse’, 599.

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid., 598.

⁸⁷⁵ Erin N. Taylor and Lora Ebert Wallace, ‘For Shame: Feminism, Breastfeeding Advocacy, and Maternal Guilt’, *Hypatia*, 27.1 (2012), 76-98 (p. 77).

⁸⁷⁶ La Leche League, *Transgender & Non-Binary Parents* (n.d) < [268](https://www.llli.org/breastfeeding-info/transgender-non-binary-parents/#:~:text=Trans%20men%2C%20trans%20women%2C%20and,of%20those%20nursing%20adopted%20babies.> [accessed 22 August 2022].</p>
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significant impact on sustaining problematic essentialist portraits of motherhood and parenthood. This is an example of how bodies are impacted by more than language and it is only by listening to the emotional forces at play that we can come closer to understanding what impact 'natural' has on people. An intersectional methodology is beneficial as, by problematising the oppressor, this analysis highlights the way that attempting to address sexism by desexualising breasts in calling breastfeeding 'natural' is insufficiently intersectional as it maintains oppression across gendered categories.

Furthermore, it is arguable that the employment of the word 'natural' can be seen through a different intersectional lens when considering the racial implications it can have in describing breastfeeding. Wall highlights the perception that in the context of breastfeeding, 'non-white and working-class women, are closer to nature and more in touch with their natural functions than are others'.⁸⁷⁷ Equally, Dowling notes that breastfeeding has been 'identified... with so-called primitive cultures',⁸⁷⁸ whereas so-called civilised cultures have made scientific advancements to create man-made formula as an alternative to breastmilk. It is arguable that 'where science and modernity are prized, this association [between breastfeeding and nature] may be vilified'.⁸⁷⁹ As dualisms map on to each other, connections between breastfeeding and nature have in turn naturalised indigenous peoples and other races. This connection has deepened oppressive associations between other races and nature by seeing

⁸⁷⁷ Wall, 'Moral Constructions of Motherhood in Breastfeeding Discourse', 593.

⁸⁷⁸ Dowling and others, 'Breastfeeding in Public', 253.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., 253.

breastfeeding as 'primitive' in comparison with the progressive alternatives that science can offer.

On the basis of the details explored above, I would argue that labelling cow's milk and human milk as 'natural' is deeply problematic. The use of the word 'nature' as a descriptive is deceptive as it connotes ease and presents an essentialised portrait of milk as pure and good in contrast to that which is 'unnatural'. The overwhelmingly positive connotations that are associated with 'natural' in this context is perhaps surprising from an ecofeminist perspective. In Plumwood's articulation of dualistic structures that were explored in Chapter One, nature appears on the inferior side of the contrasting pairs in opposition to socially constructed notions of 'culture', 'reason', 'mind', 'human', and 'civilised'.⁸⁸⁰ She notes that the relationship between dualisms is one of hierarchy where the lower groups are 'systematically and pervasively constructed as inferior'.⁸⁸¹ This could be interpreted to mean that anything associated with nature is conceived of in a way that contributes to the perception that both are inferior. Indeed, in many cases, we see other marginalised groups being linked with nature in order to separate them from culture and reason.⁸⁸² This connection further justifies the domination of the group as their inferior status becomes solidified by association with other inferior categories.

However, in the case of milk, this association with nature has not led to a negative mapping. Both cow's milk and breastmilk are thought of as natural and often

⁸⁸⁰ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 43.

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁸⁸² Gaard, 'Toward a Queer Ecofeminism', 116-7.

this idea that they are 'natural' leads, at least superficially, to the idea that they are good, or even right, to consume. There appears to be a myriad of ways in which nature can be employed to encourage an emotional response which cannot be captured through a consideration of dualistic structures alone. The conflict between 'nature' being an inferior conception and being a positive descriptor of milk indicates that the word 'natural' has an ambivalence, or, as Laura Fitzwater Gonzales, an 'elasticity'⁸⁸³ that allows it to take on both positive and negative connotations depending on the context.

To better understand this conflict, it is prudent to turn to a similar line of enquiry in queer theory and ecofeminism. Gaard argues that homosexuality has, unlike other marginalised categories, historically been 'devalued for being "against nature"'.⁸⁸⁴ This suggests that homosexuals have been considered inferior to heterosexuals due to the view that they are deviating from what is 'natural'. Thus, there is a similarity here of 'natural' having positive connotations rather than being seen as something hyperseparated from the master model. Because social constructionist ecofeminists argue that dualist hierarchies map on to each other, it seems conflicting to say that milk is positively received by consumers who consider it to be a natural product and to say that homosexuals have been marginalised due to their perceived subversion of what is natural. However, Gaard argues, 'it is precisely such contradictions that

⁸⁸³ Laura Fitzwater Gonzales, 'Framing Breastfeeding as "Natural": Implications for Mothers' Identities', in *Breastfeeding and Culture: Discourses and Representations*, ed. by Anne Marie Short (Canada: Demeter Press, 2018), pp. 209-222 (p. 209).

⁸⁸⁴ Gaard, 'Toward a Queer Ecofeminism', 119.

characterize oppressive structures’;⁸⁸⁵ arguably it simply is an inconsistency within the master model where cognitive dissonance allows the master to see being close to nature as a negative quality, whilst what is natural is positively perceived if it maintains the logic of domination. An alternative explanation is that manipulating and dominating nature/natural does not necessarily have to come from a place of seeing nature as ‘bad’. Indeed, Merchant warned that turning to more ‘positive’ conceptions of nature as Mother does not lead to the end of her exploitation.⁸⁸⁶ When ‘natural’ is used as a positive, it is inevitably only perceived as good in so far as it is instrumentally valuable to humans, or the master. When milk is marketed as ‘nature’s perfect food’, the idea that it is from nature takes on positive connotations because it is where we can see nature benefiting humans. Equally, when heterosexuality is presented as natural, the perceived inevitability of nature is instrumentally valuable to the master who seeks to undermine the validity of LGBTQ+ identities. This highlights the importance of problematising the oppressor and not treating the root of oppression as homogenous given the myriad of ways of oppression is realised. Therefore, that milk or heterosexuality is perceived as natural does not necessarily overturn the validity of the ecofeminist analysis that groups are undermined by their association with nature as the complexity of the oppressor results in ‘natural’ being used as a shifting ideology.

We often assume that we have a unified and clear concept of nature when, in fact, this is not the case. The above analysis has demonstrated that ‘nature’ is an

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid., 119. This is not the only argument that Gaard puts forward to explain the conflict. She also considers how sexualities are socially constructed, like the idea of ‘nature’. Nature is socially constructed as ‘the dominant paradigm of heterosexuality’ and then queer people are ‘urged to comply with’ this perception of what is nature.

⁸⁸⁶ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, xvii.

ideology that we can employ in different ways to help achieve a normative goal.⁸⁸⁷ The ideology of nature is not fixed as this would limit its effectiveness. An intersectional approach that emphasises listening and problematising the oppressor can help to highlight how ‘nature’ is being employed to further oppression. The approach I have suggested is effective because listening encourages an attitude of remaining open-minded and aware of connected issues (thus preventing a narrow view on one occasion of nature being employed that does not identify contradicting uses). Listening to affects demonstrates that when we talk about milk as natural, the impact is not necessarily to communicate ‘at a rational level’.⁸⁸⁸ We do not assume that the word ‘natural’ is being fully understood in the context it is being used. Instead, listening to affects shows that there is an intense emotion attached to ‘natural’ which can be deployed in communication to influence beliefs about milk and marginalised groups. Additionally, problematising the oppressor helps to show that there is no simple, unified oppressor. The oppressor is constructed by the logic of domination present in the master model but that is constructed with intersecting identity categories too. This recognition that the oppressor is not simple allows for a recognition that ideologies can be used in many ways to achieve oppression; ‘natural’ can maintain an ambivalence rather than having one meaning. It is in this sense that ‘natural’ can simultaneously be used to confirm superiority or marginalise depending on how the word is employed as well as who by.

⁸⁸⁷ Listening as a tool has been developed alongside discourse analysis so where human language is analysed, my arguments are akin to a discourse analysis. However, later in the chapter I will engage more with non-linguistic communications that require my broader tool of listening.

⁸⁸⁸ Hewitt, ‘Hardy and Affect Theory’, 113.

Problematizing the Oppressor by Exploring ‘Milk as Healthy’

Another similarity between attitudes towards cow’s milk and breastmilk is the widespread perception that they are nutritionally beneficial for human consumption (specifically and exclusively infant human consumption in the case of breastmilk). Listening to the uses of ‘healthy’ in discussions about milk uncovers that, like ‘natural’, the term has been used as an ideology to contribute to oppressions. The tool of problematizing the oppressor highlights the complexity of the use of this term and helps to avoid essentialist claims connected to milk that ignore this complexity. Cow’s milk has enjoyed positive associations with promoting strong bones and growth due to the calcium found in milk. Andrea Wiley links this strong connection between milk and calcium to advertising messages that ‘intended to lead people to believe that milk is the best or only way to get sufficient calcium’.⁸⁸⁹ The vitamins and minerals in cow’s milk alongside studies conducted by nutritionist researchers such as Elmer V. McCollum,⁸⁹⁰ J.B. Orr,⁸⁹¹ and Gerald Leighton and Mabel Clark,⁸⁹² led to a belief that there is a ‘special relationship between cow’s milk and child growth’.⁸⁹³ Indeed cow’s milk, in the Western world, has been heralded as ‘nature’s perfect food’⁸⁹⁴ due to the health benefits that have become synonymous with the product.

⁸⁸⁹ Andrea S. Wiley, ‘Transforming Milk in a Global Economy’, *American Anthropologist*, 109.4 (2007), 666-677 (p. 671).

⁸⁹⁰ Elmer V. McCollum, *A History of Nutrition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).

⁸⁹¹ J.B. Orr, ‘Milk Consumption and the Growth of School-Children’, *Lancet*, 1 (1928), 202-203.

⁸⁹² Gerald Leighton and Mabel L. Clark, ‘Milk Consumption and the Growth of School-Children’, *Lancet*, 213.5520 (1929), 40-43.

⁸⁹³ Wiley, ‘Transforming Milk in a Global Economy’, 672.

⁸⁹⁴ E. Melaine DuPuis, *Nature’s Perfect Food: How Milk Became America’s Drink* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

However, more recently, claims of the health benefits of cow's milk have come under scrutiny. Gaard points out the irony of seeing cow's milk as healthy when it has been a far from 'perfect' food for humans for most of our history; 'until its sterilization and pasteurization in the 1920s milk was one of the major public health issues of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries'.⁸⁹⁵ In order for humans to reap any benefits from cow's milk, the milk must first be manipulated through scientific methods and without this it could have negative health consequences, which seems to be at odds with the societal impression that it is both natural and healthy. Moreover, some have argued that the benefits of cow's milk, even once pasteurised, also appear to have been exaggerated. Wiley notes that 'the data on which claims are based are surprisingly scant',⁸⁹⁶ suggesting there is little empirical reason to believe that there is a significant causal connection between the consumption of milk and the height a child grows.

As well as questioning the validity of the health claims made, some researchers have also considered whether there is a more sinister undertone to these claims. Mélanie DuPuis suggests that the claims about milk's health benefits are racially encoded.⁸⁹⁷ Gaard uses DuPuis' argument to show that the narrative around milk 'embodies "the politics of American identity over the last 150 years"'⁸⁹⁸ as DuPuis claims there is a link between 'the perfect whiteness of this food and the white bodies genetically capable of digesting it'.⁸⁹⁹ Gaard adds to this that by creating terms for

⁸⁹⁵ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 50.

⁸⁹⁶ Wiley, 'Transforming Milk in a Global Economy', 673.

⁸⁹⁷ DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food*, 11.

⁸⁹⁸ DuPuis quoted in Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 50-1.

⁸⁹⁹ DuPuis quoted in Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 51.

people who cannot so easily digest lactose, such as '*lactose impersistence* and *lactose maldigesters*'. The dairy industry has 'effectively pathologize[d] nonwhite populations'.⁹⁰⁰ Influenced by the work of Wiley and DuPuis, Gaard explores the more explicit racism that has been present in claims about milk where the promotion of the product is directly tied to idea of white 'virility',⁹⁰¹ 'high development'⁹⁰² and the promotion during World War II that milk is 'white ammunition'.⁹⁰³ Gaard makes the case that ecofeminism can bring together 'diverse perspectives... that is grounded in awareness of the ecological necessity for gender justice across species, races, classes, and environments'.⁹⁰⁴

When universal claims are made about the health benefits there is a privileging of the Western cultures where dairy consumption has been the norm, whilst other cultures are seen as a deviations from that norm. Thus, not only are the claims that milk is a 'perfect' food questionable, but the perpetuation of the idea that it is healthy is also an example of how white privilege creates bias in how milk has been perceived. By problematising the oppressor, the analysis of oppression becomes more complex and this is another example of where the benefits of using intersectional methodological tools becomes clear. This is not just an example of the human/nonhuman dualistic binary, but it also mapped on to the white/Black dualistic binary; this complexity indicates that attitudes to milk are not purely influenced by human privileges over the nonhuman, but white privilege is also active as an

⁹⁰⁰ Emphasis not my own. Gaard, 'Towards A Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies', 608.

⁹⁰¹ Wiley cited in Gaard, 'Towards A Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies', 608.

⁹⁰² DuPuis cited in Gaard, 'Towards A Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies', 608.

⁹⁰³ Wiley cited in Gaard, 'Towards A Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies', 609.

⁹⁰⁴ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 52.

intersection affecting the inflated perception of the nutritional benefits of consuming cow's milk. The racialised undertones to attitudes towards cow's milk as a perfect food has meant that cows continue to be exploited for their feminized proteins with little regard for how this impacts the cow. The oppression of the nonhuman is conceptually justified by the need for the white coloniser to consume the 'perfect' white liquid.

Breastfeeding is also considered to have multiple health benefits for babies, so much so that 'WHO recommends mothers worldwide to exclusively breastfeed infants for the child's first six months' and then continue breastfeeding alongside other foodstuffs until 2 years old.⁹⁰⁵ The research to support the health benefits of breastfeeding infants appears to have been widely accepted by health organisations.⁹⁰⁶ This is in contrast to cow's milk which, as explained above, is experiencing lower acceptance of its health benefits in recent years.⁹⁰⁷ However, choices around whether or not to breastfeed are limited by wider discourses or structural barriers, so that the number of parents who choose to breastfeed exclusively for the first 6 months, as the WHO recommends, is lower than might be expected. Moreover, the statistics differ significantly across different racial and income categories. Gaard cites the study conducted by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2010 which found that:

⁹⁰⁵ World Health Organization, *Exclusive breastfeeding for six months best for babies everywhere* (2011) < <https://www.who.int/news/item/15-01-2011-exclusive-breastfeeding-for-six-months-best-for-babies-everywhere> > [accessed 8 August 2022].

⁹⁰⁶ Unicef provide links to research supporting their claim that breastfeeding should be encouraged and supported. Unicef, *Research on Supporting Breastfeeding* (n.d.) < <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/news-and-research/baby-friendly-research/research-supporting-breastfeeding/supporting-breastfeeding-research/> > [accessed 22 August 2022].

⁹⁰⁷ Wiley, 'Transforming Milk in a Global Economy', 673.

educated middle-class Asian/Pacific Islander mothers breastfeeding at the highest rates (52%) at six months, followed by Hispanic mothers (45%), Euro-American mothers (43%), then American Indian mothers (37%) and African-American mothers (26%).⁹⁰⁸

In a more recent paper, the CDC did state that ‘national estimates of breastfeeding initiation and duration have consistently improved among Black and white infants over the past decade’,⁹⁰⁹ however they noted that disparity has continued between Black and white infants and breastfeeding rates. There are several potential reasons for this disparity that the CDC notes, such as Black women⁹¹⁰ having a ‘lack of knowledge about breastfeeding; lack of peer, family, and social support; insufficient education and support from health care settings; and concerns about navigating breastfeeding and employment’.⁹¹¹ The CDC summarises that in order to address the disparity between the choices made by white women and Black women in breastfeeding, the primary focus must be to remove barriers that currently exist to minimise the disparity between breastfeeding in different racial groups.⁹¹² Gaard suggests that these figures are due

⁹⁰⁸ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 54.

⁹⁰⁹ Erica H. Anstey and others, ‘Racial and Geographic Differences in Breastfeeding – United States, 2011-2015’, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 66.27 (2017), 723-727 (p. 724).

⁹¹⁰ Whilst I am avoiding using gendered terms to refer to breastfeeding and menstruation, where I do use gendered terms in parts of this chapter it will be for one of two reasons. 1) this language reflects the gendered language of the research/study I’m referencing; 2) I am referring to how these physical bodily processes have been socially constructed as feminine in a way that is oppressive or marginalises women. In this particular case, 1) is the reason for this use of gendered language.

⁹¹¹ Jennifer L. Beauregard and others, ‘Racial Disparities in Breastfeeding Initiation and Duration Among U.S. Infants Born in 2015’, *MMWR Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report*, 68.34 (2019), 745–748 (p. 747).

⁹¹² Anstey, et. al. ‘Racial and Geographic Differences in Breastfeeding’, 727.

to the continued effects of ‘histories of racism and colonialism in the United States’ where Black women were used to help raise the slave owner’s white children and so were prevented from breastfeeding their own.⁹¹³

It is important to note that other ethnic minorities do have a higher breastfeeding rate than Euro-Americans according to the data collected by the CDC. The CDC argues that the barriers faced by Black women are disproportionate to other groups. However, the report does not suggest why these barriers are more significant for Black women. Perhaps Gaard’s evaluation fills in some of the gaps here by acknowledging the impact of slavery and child-care histories on African Americans’ breastfeeding today. Without more fully understanding what causes barriers to be more prominent for one minority ethnic group, it is more difficult to understand how to address them so that the choice to breastfeed or not is available to parents. Listening to the data means also trying to hear what is not being communicated and it seems that more research is needed to explain these differences across ethnic minorities in the USA.

Additionally, in contrast to the data from the USA, several studies in the UK have indicated that Black women are the most likely of any ethnic group to breastfeed for longer periods of time. Deon A. Simpson and others name ‘being Black, Asian, Mixed, or other ethnicities’ as being a significant factor in making a mother more likely to be breastfeeding at 6 weeks, and they note that this is a typical finding of

⁹¹³ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 54. To substantiate this claim Gaard cites Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); and Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge, MA: South End, 2005).

breastfeeding studies in the UK.⁹¹⁴ This could be taken to suggest that the barriers Black breastfeeders face in the USA are not so prominent in the UK context. This suggests that the barriers in the USA need to be addressed as institutionalised racial barriers so that Black people have greater freedom to decide to breastfeed. The focus should be placed on dealing with barriers as there is a potential to further marginalise Black mothers as a result of these studies. The recognition of the health benefits of breastfeeding alongside a recognition that in the USA Black mothers are statistically less likely to meet the breastfeeding guidelines than any other racial group could lead to shaming and the reproduction of negative racialised stereotypes around feminized proteins. Therefore, it is important that further research be done to more specifically identify how choices regarding whether or not to breastfeed are limited by wider discourses and structural barriers to breastfeeding.

Intersectional methodological tools can be used to help understand what is significant about the racialisation of milk alongside claims about health. The promotion of cow's milk as 'healthy' has been argued to have racist undertones, according to Gaard, Wiley, and DuPuis. Equally, the promotion of breastfeeding as 'healthy' in the USA has not addressed the racial disparities that exist between white and Black breastfeeding rates. It is in listening to the use of the descriptive 'healthy' that it is seen across intersections to cover up the experiences of minority ethnic groups. The, often, nonwhite groups who struggle to digest dairy are unheard in the claims that cow's milk

⁹¹⁴ Deon A. Simpson, and others, 'Trends and Inequalities in Breastfeeding Continuation from 1 to 6 weeks: Findings from Six Population-Based British Cohorts, 1985-2010', *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 76 (2022), 671-679 (p. 75).

is healthy; and the barriers disproportionately affecting Black women from breastfeeding are trivialised by the view that, regardless, breastfeeding is the right thing to do for the infant. Having said this, problematising the oppressor ensures that any essentialist claims about how race affects breastfeeding are viewed with scepticism. The UK data are a reminder that health professionals need to look at their country's context to assess what policies and changes could be made to encourage breastfeeding across all racial groups. It may be that there are more significant impacts on mothers' breastfeeding rates, such as education,⁹¹⁵ class,⁹¹⁶ and age.⁹¹⁷ The oppressor must be problematised to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the differences between people who breastfeed according to the guidance and the drivers of this disparity. It is arguable that racism is involved in the exploitation of feminized proteins in the dairy industry, and a parallel analysis of racial oppressions and breastfeeding in humans demonstrates the ways these oppressions cross human and nonhuman binaries.

Ultimately, describing milk as 'healthy' is a type of communication that goes beyond relaying rational information about nutrition, and instead produces an intense emotional response in the receiver. It becomes a normative claim that consumption of milk is good or right. Just like in the use of the word 'natural', 'healthy' affects the listener in a way that goes beyond what is captured in the literal meaning of the word.

⁹¹⁵ Valeria Skafida, 'The Relative Importance of Social Class and Maternal Education for Breast-Feeding Initiation', *Public Health Nutrition*, 12.12 (2009), 2285–92.

⁹¹⁶ Yvonne J. Kelly and Richard G. Watt, 'Breast-feeding initiation and exclusive duration at 6 months by social class--results from the Millennium Cohort Study', *Public Health Nutrition*, 8.4 (2005), 417–21.

⁹¹⁷ Laura L. Oakley and others, 'Factors Associated with Breastfeeding in England: An Analysis by Primary Care Trust', *BMJ Open*, 3 (2013), 1–11 (p. 9).

In this way, 'healthy' also becomes an ideology. That there are racial differences in the digestion of milk and in breastfeeding is made irrelevant and trivialised by the word 'healthy'. An intersectional methodology within ecofeminist theory can help to highlight how 'healthy' is being employed to justify intersectional oppressions through the marginalisation of cows, the privileging of white bodies, and the creation of guilt with the aim of policing marginalised bodies.

Listening to 'Disgust' in Response to Reproductive Processes

The analysis of our attitudes towards eggs is a less well-researched area of feminized proteins within ecofeminism.⁹¹⁸ In the literature I have surveyed there is no explanation for this disparity. I considered that it could be due to more obvious maternal imagery socially associated with bovines than with birds which might cause ecofeminists to see an explicit link on which to analyse gender and nonhuman animal oppression. However, after some thought, this does not seem to be a fair reason. We use terms such as 'mother hen' to refer to particularly caring and maternal people; imagery of a bird (storks) is associated with pregnancy and childbirth; when a woman wants to become pregnant or have children, we call her 'broody'; and when a person is pregnant and prepares the home for the infant, we call this 'nesting' whilst referring to children who leave the family home as 'leaving the nest'. Thus, it seems that we do conceptualise birds in similar maternal ways as we do cows. Perhaps then it is due to seeing a *stronger* or more significant link with bovines as they too are mammals. However, to under-analyse the intersections of gender and hens seems to be a

⁹¹⁸ There is some consideration of the chickens and the control of their reproductive systems in Collard with Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild*, 110.

continuation of a dualistic hierarchy whereby mammals are deemed more morally considerable than other species due to their similarities with humans. This is a continuation of the human/animal dualism and the construction of nature as a hierarchy where human animals are at the top of the food chain; these dualistic hierarchies are what ecofeminism is seeking to deconstruct. It is a continuation because it simply raises the status of certain animals which are perceived as closer to the human whilst leaving other nonhuman animals as inferior. Thus, I consider the lack of attention given to eggs and hens to be an under-explored area in current ecofeminist analyses of the animal agriculture industry. I propose that it is by employing the intersectional tool of listening that I have been able to recognise the silence in the research on this issue and begin to offer analyses of intersections that help to provide an account of oppressive attitudes across egg producing bodies.

One common vegan argument against eating hen's eggs is that it is equivalent to eating a 'chicken period'.⁹¹⁹ Eggs that humans purchase from the shop are unfertilised eggs that, had they been fertilised, would have produced a chick; and when a person menstruates the lining of their womb, which had been thickening, sheds because the released egg was not fertilised. PETA suggests that eating a chicken period is something so unbelievable that it is 'like a scene out of *The Exorcist* or a Halloween prank gone wrong'. Their poster displays a picture of blood-stained underwear in a pan with the tagline 'Don't eat eggs. Period'. where the word 'period'

⁹¹⁹ PETA has an article dedicated to this argument. PETA, *Would You Eat a Chicken Period?* (n.d.) <<https://www.peta.org/features/eat-chickens-period/>> [accessed 12 August 2022].

is highlighted by red font.⁹²⁰ Labelling the hen's egg a 'chicken period', likening its consumption to a horror movie, and using the non-linguistic image of blood-stained underwear is presumably intended to horrify the eater and make the egg unappetizing. Even if the idea of eating a period seems to be quasi-cannibalistic, I would posit that this reliance on the 'grossness' of a period in this vegan marketing is another demonstration of the sexism that sometimes exists in animal ethics (and seems engrained in PETA's culture).

Periods have been subject to a certain level of ambivalence in Western culture. On the one hand menstruation has been a means of seeing women as unclean,⁹²¹ unholy,⁹²² shameful.⁹²³ Anna Fedele notes that in some interpretations, it is argued that menstruation has been seen as a constant reminder that it was Eve who sinned first and led Adam to also commit the original sin.⁹²⁴ One of the punishments bestowed upon Eve from God was that he 'will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children' (Genesis 3:16). Thus, period blood, which is so often combined with painful cramps and other unwanted symptoms, is tainted with shame and a lack of holiness as it represents the punishment God bestowed on Eve

⁹²⁰ Ibid.

⁹²¹ 'The desire to keep menstruation secret is often paired with an attitude that menstruation is dirty and disgusting'. Deborah Schooler, L. Monique Ward, Ann Merriwether, and Allison S. Caruthers, 'Cycles of Shame: Menstrual Shame, Body Shame, and Sexual Decision-Making', *The Journal of Sex Research*, 42.4 (2005), 324-334 (p. 324).

⁹²² William E. Phipps, 'The Menstrual Taboo in the Judeo-Christian Tradition', *Journal of Religion and Health*, 19.4 (1980), 298-303.

⁹²³ 'Many girls report shame about being seen with a menstrual product or, worse yet, about bleeding through clothing, and some adolescent girls report that they are embarrassed simply by the fact that they menstruate'. Schooler, et. al, 'Cycles of Shame', 324.

⁹²⁴ Anna Fedele, 'Reversing Eve's Curse: Mary Magdalene, Mother Earth and the Creative Ritualization of Menstruation', *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 28.2 (2014), 23-36 (p. 25).

(and consequently people with wombs) for committing the first sin. Fedele references Françoise Héritier's reflections on the philosophy of Aristotle to argue that it is the uncontrollable nature of menstruation, in contrast with the controllable nature of male bleeding, which aided the perception that women were inferior to men as they are unable to control their own bodily functions.⁹²⁵ Despite the ambiguities in affects associated with menstruation, Fedele argues that periods' negative association 'still has a powerful grip on the bodily self-perceptions of women in Western societies'.⁹²⁶ Menstruation is such a prevalent cultural taboo that it has legitimised keeping women at the margins of society in many ways; for instance, poor young women have been absent from school because of 'period poverty'.⁹²⁷ This marketing campaign for veganism relied upon arousing these cultural feelings of disgust towards menstruation, and, by extension, people who menstruate.

On the other hand, periods are positively associated with fertility⁹²⁸ and femininity.⁹²⁹ This creates an interesting dichotomy in Western culture where, although periods are conceptualised as disgusting, it is equally true that periods are conceptualised as an essential aspect to being called a 'woman'. Indeed, Caroline Walker Bynum has argued that 'all human exudings' in Medieval times were thought of as a kind of bleeding.⁹³⁰ This meant that menstrual blood was, conceptually, not so

⁹²⁵ Fedele, 'Reversing Eve's Curse', 30.

⁹²⁶ Ibid., 33.

⁹²⁷ *Period Poverty* (n.d) <<https://periodpoverty.uk/>> [accessed 3 January 2023].

⁹²⁸ Fedele, 'Reversing Eve's Curse', 30.

⁹²⁹ Katie Ann Hasson, 'Not a "Real" Period? Social and Material Constructions of Menstruation', *Gender and Society*, 30.6 (2016), 958-983 (p. 977).

⁹³⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 113-4.

far removed from the blood shed by Christ on the cross and so historically Christianity has not always led to negative perceptions of menstruation as a curse from Eve. The ambivalence in attitudes towards menstruation across cultures and histories has led some researchers to argue that menstruation cannot be targeted as a universal reason for the subordination of women in society.⁹³¹

Problematising the Oppressor through ‘Disgust’ in Response to Reproductive Processes

To add complexity, these positive affects may also marginalise people who do not have periods due to being transgender, non-binary or infertile. Dan Goodley and others reference the comments made on social media by J.K. Rowling in which she suggests there is a morally relevant distinction between cis-gender women and transgender women as sparking a high-profile debate ‘between Trans activists and TERFS’⁹³² (TERF is an abbreviation for trans-exclusionary radical feminist). The argument most frequently relied upon is that sex is a “biological” or material reality⁹³³ whilst gender is purely a social construction; this distinction is thought to be fair due to belief in ‘narrow, exclusionary and naturalised category of woman evidenced by the presence of reproductive potential, feminism embodiment and XX chromosomes’.⁹³⁴ As transgender women do not have ovaries or wombs they do not menstruate, so a

⁹³¹ Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

⁹³² Dan Goodley, Rebecca Lawthorn, Kirsty Liddiard, and Katherine Runswick-Cole, ‘Key Concerns for Critical Disability Studies’, *The International Journal of Disability and Social Justice*, 1.1 (2021), 27-49 (p. 36).

⁹³³ R. Pearce, S. Erikainen, and B. Vincent quoted in Goodley, et. al., ‘Key concerns for Critical Disability Studies’, 36.

⁹³⁴ Goodley, et. al., ‘Key concerns for Critical Disability Studies’, 36.

TERF might argue that, although a person's gender may be changeable, transgender women are still importantly different from 'biological' women on the basis of reproductive potential.

It is somewhat ironic that menstruation should simultaneously arouse feelings of disgust when associated with women, but also a lack of menstruation can defeminise and be used to legitimise movements to keep transgender women out of female 'safe' spaces. This ambivalence has similarities with the prior discussion surrounding the word 'natural'; in both cases, employing the preceding chapter's intersectional tool of listening has uncovered that positive *and* negative affects are aroused depending on the context. Moreover, by listening to the emotional forces at play we uncover ambiguities that allow power dynamics to be reinforced in different directions. In this case, discussions of menstruation can either horrify and subjugate, or they can valorise and subjugate. Additionally, problematising the oppressor emphasises that, even though many women may feel marginalised as a result of menstruating, they are not purely victims of this cultural taboo. If they contribute to the marginalisation of people who do not menstruate then, as I argued Chapter One, they are partaking in the master model's exclusory attitude and hyperseparating in a way that will maintain dualisms.

On the basis of my analysis above, I would like to argue that vegan marketing should not employ and reinforce cultural disgust towards the female reproductive process. The oppression of hens in debeaking⁹³⁵ them and forcing them to produce

⁹³⁵ The process of debeaking will be discussed in further detail in the section 'Intensive Farm Conditions'.

eggs at a higher rate than they would without human intervention whilst in confined living conditions should be horrifying in itself;⁹³⁶ there is no need to rely on misogynistic narratives surrounding periods to make this point. By employing the intersectional tools of listening and problematising the oppressor critical ecofeminism can highlight why this form of advertising is harmful and misunderstands the nature of liberation from oppression. Referring to an egg as a ‘chicken period’ in the hope of arousing a feeling of disgust does nothing to challenge the marginalisation that affects people who menstruate (and, indeed, people who do not). The intersectional methodology being employed in this analysis shines a light on the way that female nonhuman animals cannot be liberated from their oppressive circumstances by using a prejudice that continues to oppress people with wombs and transgender women. Thus, practical actions that focus on the liberation of one oppressed group whilst simultaneously sustaining the oppression of the other is insufficiently intersectional and potentially harmful to all involved. This is why the principle of praxis underpins the suggested intersectional methodology so that the theory can inform practice.

It is in being open to what is being communicated non-linguistically that we can see disgust consistently evoked in relation to feminized proteins. This is not only the case in eggs and menstruation, but is equally true of breastmilk, especially with reference to the consumption of breastmilk by a non-infant. Gaard cites Robert Sietsema who argues that ‘it feels like cannibalism’ to consume products made by human breast milk.⁹³⁷ The reason Sietsema gives for this feeling is that ‘women are

⁹³⁶ I will consider the living conditions of female nonhuman animals in more detail in the following sub-section.

⁹³⁷ Robert Sietsema quoted in Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 55.

not farm animals... There is nothing “ethical” about milking humans’.⁹³⁸ However, Gaard criticises this perspective for failing to overcome ‘the human/animal divide’.⁹³⁹ To emphasise that there is something unethical about treating women like cows suggests that either we understand that the way we treat cows is problematic, or it suggests that cows are perceived as so below humans in moral consideration that although it would be wrong to treat a woman like a cow, there’s nothing wrong with milking cows. Through an ecofeminist lens which tries to deconstruct these dualistic binaries, we should try to reject the idea that humans are superior to nonhumans. Thus, milking humans is not necessarily morally different to the milking of cows. If we find that the milking of a body for profit and consumption is unethical in one case because it instrumentalises the subject, then we should find the same action morally problematic regardless of whether the subject being milked is human or nonhuman. That the feelings of disgust are felt so strongly for one but not for the other demonstrates the ambivalence that exists in attitudes towards feminized proteins.

In Chapter Three, I drew on affect theory to help crystalise what is meant by listening in my methodological tools. Affect theory allows me to use ecofeminist ideas to capture modes of ethical reasoning that are not captured in more ‘traditional’ methods; in this case drawing on affect theory in my understanding of listening allows me to highlight themes of affection and disgust that exist in our communication about reproductive processes. What I have found is that there is an interesting ambivalence towards feminized proteins in that they can arouse feelings of disgust for menstruation,

⁹³⁸ Robert Sietsema quoted in Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 55.

⁹³⁹ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 56.

whilst equally seeing it as an affirmation of ‘womanhood’ to justify exclusions from that identity category. An intersectional analysis helps to demonstrate that using feelings of disgust in an attempt to liberate one group whilst simultaneously contributing to the marginalisation of another is insufficiently intersectional. That these feelings of disgust are able to dissipate in order to contribute to the marginalisation of others uncovers that ambivalence is being used as an oppressive tool.

Listening to Profit and Embodied Labour

Another arena for ecofeminist analysis regarding hens and gender is how the female body is (ab)used for consumer benefit and profit. Female bodies have historically been a place of embodied labour that is grossly undervalued in a society which values the productive over the reproductive. Merchant’s seminal work explores how women’s roles in production ‘were decreasing under early capitalism’⁹⁴⁰ as, what had been subsistence, family operations,⁹⁴¹ became wealthier and employed ‘more servants and day labourers’.⁹⁴² Women in poorer families were limited in their ability to find work with sufficient pay as they were often busy being the primary caregivers for children.⁹⁴³ Thus, women’s productive roles were minimised during the rise of capitalism. Simultaneously, the reproductive role of female bodies was being emphasised in science in a way that justified perceptions of women as passive and men as active.⁹⁴⁴ In the 19th century Darwinian theory was being used to justify the

⁹⁴⁰ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 155.

⁹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁹⁴² *Ibid.*, 151.

⁹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

idea that ‘women’s reproductive function required that more energy be directed toward pregnancy and maternity, hence less was available for the higher functions associated with learning and reasoning’.⁹⁴⁵ What Merchant’s analysis shows us is that the productive/reproductive dualism helped to sustain the reductionist attitude that women were passive, irrational, and maternal. This equally allowed for reproduction to be undervalued by the emerging and developing capitalist system as it was seen in contrast to production – the male-dominated and more valuable domain.

However, in the case of farming nonhuman female animals we see that reproduction *becomes* production⁹⁴⁶ but that this does not have a positive impact on attitudes to feminized proteins or the nonhuman animals that produce them. Female animals play a pivotal role in increasing production through their reproductive systems. However, in the case of feminized proteins, this is done in a way that is highly intrusive and exploits the female nonhuman animal by using technology and science. Indeed, farms have used methods like selective breeding to ensure its female animals are as (re)productive as possible. Similarly, Merchant had pointed out that it was the social construction of nature as associated with the female that allowed Bacon to argue ‘she’ should ‘be controlled and dissected’ so that what are perceived as nature’s reproductive capacities can be exploited as ‘natural resources’⁹⁴⁷ that can ‘be

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid., 163.

⁹⁴⁶ Maria Mies uses Elizabeth Fisher’s arguments to suggest that ‘the domestication – and particularly the *breeding* – of animals’ became ‘a new mode of production’, thus lending support to my position that reproduction is a productive labour. Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, 3rd edn. (London: Zed Books, 2014), p. 63.

⁹⁴⁷ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 189.

extracted for economic advance'.⁹⁴⁸ In problematising the oppressor, an intersectional link can be emphasised between productive/reproductive, human/animal, male/female, culture/nature, and upper-class/working-class as each category on the inferior side becomes associated with the reproductive. Additionally, when capitalist societies value the female reproductive capacity in so far as it creates more workers and so increases production, this recognition does not improve the perception of reproduction.⁹⁴⁹ I believe that in each of these cases the role reproduction plays in production is undervalued because production is seen as a goal in and of itself whilst reproduction is seen as a means to the further end of economic gain.

The violence against female bodies in the egg industry presents intersectional links between productive/reproductive, human/animal, and male/female in particular. Laying hens have been bred to produce larger and larger eggs to satisfy consumer demands. However, laying these larger eggs has causes prolapses⁹⁵⁰ in hens whose

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid., 165.

⁹⁴⁹ This point regarding the trivialisation of women's role in social reproduction within capitalism has been discussed at length in Marxist/Socialist feminist work. For example, Silvia Federici argues that reproductive labour 'is the foundation of every economic and political system, and that the immense amount of paid and unpaid domestic work done by women is what keeps the world moving'. Yet, 'this work, at least as it has been constituted in capitalism', is undervalued. Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, 2nd edn. (Oakland: PM Press, 2020) < <https://r2.vlereader.com/EpubReader?ean=1781629638072#>> [accessed on 24 June 2023]. It is also argued in, Rosemary-Claire Collard and Jessica Dempsey, 'Accumulation by Difference-Making: An Anthropocene Story, Starring Witches', *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 25.9 (2018), 1349-1364 (p. 1353). Similarly, Mies argues that the witch hunts had 'the effect of establishing the superiority of male productivity over female productivity' to show how women's reproduction is still perceived as lower than male productivity even where women's reproduction aids the capitalist agenda. Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 70.

⁹⁵⁰ Lisa Kemmerer, 'Appendix: Factory Farming and Females', in *Sister Species: Women, Animals and Social Justice*, ed. by Lisa Kremmer (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011), pp. 173-185, (p. 179).

bodies cannot cope with the physical toll of laying these eggs. Breeding hens to produce large and extra-large eggs for consumers is a form of violence against them as doing so causes them pain and death.⁹⁵¹ One potential intersecting example involving female bodies is found in pornography. There are examples in ‘mainstream’ pornography where the penetrated individual has an anal prolapse as their anal passage has been loosened due to anal intercourse so that it can be pushed out. This event has been sexualised and fetishized, as highlighted by the naming of the phenomenon (‘rosebudding’).⁹⁵² Laying hens experience prolapses as they are forced to keep producing eggs that are larger than their bodies have capacity to safely lay to satisfy human consumption patterns. Similarly, subjects of pornography experience prolapse to satisfy (mostly) male audience’s sexual appetites.

It is important to be cautious about overstating the similarities between the experiences of laying hens and the experiences of women in the pornography industry. Carrie Hamilton has criticised Adams for conflating the violence against nonhuman animals and the experiences of women in sex work.⁹⁵³ When Adams makes claims of sexual violence against women she often uses examples from pornography or the sex

⁹⁵¹ Richard M. Fulton, ‘Causes of Normal Mortality in Commercial Egg-Laying Chickens’, *Avian Diseases*, 61.3 (2017), 289-295 (p. 290).

⁹⁵² I heard of ‘rosebudding’ during a conference in 2018 on the theme ‘Religion and Rape Culture’. The paper was titled “‘The Evil Sirens’: Evangelical Christian Culture, Pornography and the Perpetuation of Rape Culture’. Although the paper does not seem to have been published, I have found a blog post that includes a video of the conference paper to cite here. Natalie Collins, “‘The Evil Sirens’: Evangelical Christian Culture, Pornography and the Perpetuation of Rape Culture’, 23 August 2018, *The Shiloh Project: Rape Culture, Religion and the Bible*, <https://www.shilohproject.blog/the-evil-sirens-evangelical-christian-culture-pornography-and-the-perpetuation-of-rape-culture/> [accessed 27 July 2022].

⁹⁵³ Carrie Hamilton, ‘sex, work, meat: the feminist politics of veganism’, *Feminist Review*, 11 (2016), 112-129.

industry more broadly to highlight how women are animalised through the violence against them which is akin to 'butchering' or uses tools associated with controlling nonhuman animals.⁹⁵⁴ Using the arguments of Mirha-Soleil Ross, Hamilton argues that Adams' comparison between the violence against nonhuman animals and experiences of women in the sex industry is disanalogous. A strong comparison should not be drawn because there is a lack of nuance in comparing 'adult women working in the sex trade' who have consented to that work 'and non-consenting animals murdered by the meat industry',⁹⁵⁵ allowing the differing levels of agency to be obscured. I would suggest that Adams has been insufficiently intersectional because the comparisons she has drawn have not been informed by listening in a sincere and non-judgemental manner to the motivations women might have to enter sex work. Not all performers in pornography have been forced into the industry, activists have worked hard to diversify discussions about why women get into sex work,⁹⁵⁶ and by treating them as pure victims enduring sexualised violence we ignore their autonomy. Laying hens, in contrast, have been bred with the purpose of producing eggs for human consumption; they have lacked autonomy and agency in getting to this position (though I will consider Haraway's arguments in regard to autonomy and collaboration below). Thus, although there is a comparison to be made between how literal or sexual consumption affects female bodies, it is problematic to make this connection without listening to the nuances.

⁹⁵⁴ Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 68, 72, 88-9.

⁹⁵⁵ Vaughn quoted in Hamilton, 'sex, work, meat', 124.

⁹⁵⁶ Heather Berg, 'Working for Love, Loving for Work: Discourses of Labor in Feminist Sex-Work Activism', *Feminist Studies*, 40.3 (2014), 693-721 (p. 709).

With this caveat in place, it is still valuable to carefully analyse the prolapses in laying hens and women in the pornographic industry from an intersectional ecofeminist perspective without conflating the events. Although the woman may have freely chosen to take part in the pornography industry, it is an industry that is shaped by male desires within a patriarchal culture. The changing of a female body through sex so that the anal passage can be displaced for sexual gratification of the observer is an example of male dominance over a female; it reinforces a mapped dualism of male/female, subject/object, dominant/subordinate. Consequently, we can recognise that someone has made a conscious and free decision to partake in pornography that involves rosebudding whilst simultaneously recognising that the fetishization of this event is an example of the male desire to dominate the female body. Thus, although there are differing levels of agency across these examples, both are examples of violence against a female body which is objectified for the consumer's gain and so can be analysed as an intersection of oppression on this level.

Not only have the comparisons between nonhuman animals and female humans sometimes obscured important differences, but there have also been comparisons made between nonhuman animals and the working class that could be considered harmful. There is a perception of dairy cows as a 'selfless and self-sacrificing mother' so much so that the 'female bovine [comes] to symbolize maternal nature: mindless, patient, slow-moving, lactating'.⁹⁵⁷ Gaard argues that this perception of the cow leads consumers to believe that the cow is working *with* us to produce milk,

⁹⁵⁷ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 66.

thus we are free to take the milk because this is the reason it has been produced. This perception equally impacts perceptions of mothers who become animalised by this connection. Both the cow mother and the human mother are instrumentalised so that their needs are perceived as less important than others, and further still that the females are content with, and complicit in, their instrumentalization. Gaard is particularly critical of Haraway's language of 'working animals in the food and fibre industries' as Gaard considers this to contribute to the perception that 'dairy cows [are] collaborating with the dairy producer';⁹⁵⁸ this language supports the idea that the cow is content with being used for milk. Gaard highlights how problematic this language of 'working animals' is because it suggests an element of willingness and ability to leave⁹⁵⁹ which of course is not an option for dairy cows.

Although I agree with Gaard that Haraway's language of 'working animals' is not helpful in the sphere of the dairy industry, this is not to say that the concept of a collaborative relationship between humans and nonhumans is impossible. Haraway unravels this concept of working animals in her book *When Species Meet*. In her analysis of dogs as workers, Haraway is explicit that 'they [dogs] are not human slaves or wage laborers, and it would be a serious mistake to theorize their labour within those frameworks'.⁹⁶⁰ However, Haraway also argues that instrumental relationships between the human and nonhuman are not necessarily to be condemned as the root of nonhuman oppression,⁹⁶¹ and indeed instrumentalism is part of what it is to 'become

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁶⁰ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 71, 74.

⁹⁶¹ Ibid., 62.

with' other creatures.⁹⁶² Thus, when referring to working animals Haraway is not conflating the position of the nonhuman animal with the autonomy we might attribute to human workers; however, she equally does not see value in refraining from the use of nonhuman animals in work altogether. Interspecies collaboration, in this view, is possible and should not be rejected in the right contexts. What we could say in the case of dairy cows, is that the use of the nonhuman animal is 'unidirectional... [and] ruled by practices of calculation and self-sure of hierarchy',⁹⁶³ these are the features of an oppressive instrumentalism according to Haraway. It is arguable then, that although we can talk of working animals in relationships that have some sense of reciprocity, the 'work' performed by cows in the dairy industry fails to truly treat the cow as a 'working subject' but instead the cow becomes a 'worked object'.⁹⁶⁴ Therefore, Haraway's interpretation of working animals would not appear to be a description suited to talking about the relationship between dairy cows and dairy producers.

Additionally, the conceptualisation of farmed animals as workers is further evidence of the mapping of oppressions. In Plumwood's configuration of dualism and the master model, she argues that the superior halves of the dualism map on to one

⁹⁶² This complexity in interspecies relationships is explored in interesting ways in some extinction studies work such as that by Thom Van Dooren in relation to Whooping Cranes. Van Dooren notes that conservation of Whooping Cranes has involved their artificial insemination and captivity. He suggests that the 'intense care and hope' shown is 'equally a story of violence and coercion' but that 'these are not mutually exclusive stories'. This adds layers of complexity to the ideas that interspecies relationships are simple and pure. Thom Van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 91.

⁹⁶³ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 71.

⁹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

another so that we associate human with man, reason, white, etc. whilst associating all inferior halves of dualism with each other. By using this language of workers, the nonhuman animals are anthropomorphised in a way that contributes to their oppression because they are linked to another marginalised and oppressed group within the master model. The exploitation of the farmed nonhuman animal's reproduction process and the killing of the nonhuman animal for food become part of their 'job description'. Additionally, working-class people become animalised through this connection. This mapping contributes to the oppression of the working-class by viewing them as sub-human and thus as Other. Their exploitation is conceptually justified by this link as the workers become less worthy of moral consideration in the eyes of the master. I believe that in calling nonhuman animals on farms 'working animals', we would fail to address the intersecting oppressions of nonhuman animals or working-class peoples. This is because this language reinforces, rather than disrupts, the hierarchical dualisms which ecofeminism is seeking to remove. Furthermore, by using language that obscures important differences in experience, it is more difficult to listen to how the nonhuman animal and the working-class experience differ as the language propels the researcher to listen for similarities and so it becomes easier to slip into essentialism. As a result, the attitude that nonhuman animals in the dairy and egg industries are 'working animals' is insufficiently critical of intersectional oppressions and animalises working-class peoples whilst justifying the instrumental use of nonhuman animals for human gain.

When analysing the capitalist attitudes to feminized proteins, namely that they are a source of profit, listening has been useful in how the information has been

collected. It is by being open-minded to possible relevant lines of enquiry that I have been able to draw upon intersecting experiences of hens and women in pornography that I have not seen explored in other applications of ecofeminist theory. Moreover, listening as an intersectional methodological tool has contributed to how the information has been analysed. By listening I have hoped to avoid, as far as possible, essentialist depictions of women and sex work and to recognise the similarities in the oppressions of the working class and nonhuman farmed animals, whilst also appreciating where there might be some limitations of those similarities. Moreover, employing an intersectional methodology with an aim to problematise the oppressor has helped to highlight how capitalist ideologies of production link to patriarchy to sustain a negative perception, and instrumental valuation, of reproduction that connects the oppressions of reproducing bodies.

Listening to the Nonhuman in Intensive Farming Conditions and Problematising the Oppressor in Relation to Violence

Plumwood accused ecofeminists of failing to analyse factory farm practices and instead focusing ‘a disproportionate amount of attention’ on hunting, despite the fact that it is factory farming rather than hunting which ‘accounts for the overwhelming majority of animal deaths and an even higher proportion of extreme animal suffering’.⁹⁶⁵ As a result, she claimed that ‘ecofeminism has so far developed little debate and internal diversity on this issue [of intensive farming]’.⁹⁶⁶ Indeed, Adams,

⁹⁶⁵ Plumwood, ‘Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature’, 288.

⁹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 288.

who was one of the ecofeminists Plumwood names as guilty of this omission,⁹⁶⁷ has since accepted that factory farmed animals have been made conspicuous by their absence in ecofeminism.⁹⁶⁸ Adams suggested that the reason for this gap might be due to the observation that these nonhuman animals have been so dominated by humans, being bred purely for production and consumption, that they have been conceptually and practically removed from nature and thus removed from ecofeminist concerns. In Adams' view this explains why ecofeminists have 'failed to reclaim farm animals from this oppressive system';⁹⁶⁹ thus the domain of factory farming has been seen as distinct from conversations about the domination of nature. Although Plumwood's paper was published over 20 years ago, this gap in the literature is still perceptible, which suggests that ecofeminism has not rectified this oversight.⁹⁷⁰ In more explicitly employing an intersectional methodology for ecofeminism, it is harder to ignore the plight of nonhuman animals in the animal agriculture industry because their distance from nature does not undermine their conceptual connection to it, and thus nonhuman farm animals could benefit from this methodology.

Some ecofeminists have not centred farming as an intersectional concern because their focus has been on the more overtly gendered modes of killing animals (i.e., hunting). Adams, and other ecofeminists, appeal to history to indicate that the

⁹⁶⁷ Ibid., 288. There are some exceptions to this rule from even before Plumwood's paper was published. One of the earlier examples of ecofeminist theory being applied to issues of animal agriculture includes Collard with Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild*.

⁹⁶⁸ Carol Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals* (New York: Continuum, 1994), p. 82-3.

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid., 82-3.

⁹⁷⁰ Hunnicutt's book *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective* is a notable exception to this general rule as she explores violence against nonhuman animals in many captive contexts, including the animal agriculture industry.

way humans prepare and eat food is gendered.⁹⁷¹ They consider this to be rooted in the archetypal male hunter and female gatherer relationship, thought to have characterised the prehistoric means of finding food. Thus, as modern-day hunting appears to sustain this 'gendered hunting/gathering dualism',⁹⁷² it appeals to ecofeminist analyses perhaps more obviously than factory farming. However, Plumwood rejects that the focus on hunter/gatherer is because it is assuming the universality of gendered roles in indigenous societies when the reality is that there is great variety in how indigenous peoples have obtained food that does not fit this gendered binary. Plumwood gives the example of modern day Australian Aboriginal women who kill animals as part of their preparation of food.⁹⁷³ Indeed, the accuracy of the idea that hunter/gatherer roles were gender-based is being challenged within anthropology.⁹⁷⁴ By suggesting that women are gatherers and men are hunters, these ecofeminists ignore evidence outside of the traditional narrative and present an essentialist depiction of women as gatherers that does not reflect the experiences of all women.⁹⁷⁵

⁹⁷¹ Plumwood, 'Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature'.

⁹⁷² Ibid., 288.

⁹⁷³ Ibid., 287-8.

⁹⁷⁴ Some examples of this discussion can be found in *The Conversation*. For example, Annemieke Milks, 'Did Prehistoric Women Hunt? New Research Suggests So', *The Conversation*, 4 November 2020 <<https://theconversation.com/did-prehistoric-women-hunt-new-research-suggests-so-149477>> [accessed 18 June 2023]; and, Raven Garvey, 'Man, the Hunter'? Archaeologists' Assumptions about Gender Roles in Past Humans Ignore an Icky but Potentially Crucial Part of Original "Paleo Diet", *The Conversation*, 30 May 2023 <<https://theconversation.com/man-the-hunter-archaeologists-assumptions-about-gender-roles-in-past-humans-ignore-an-icky-but-potentially-crucial-part-of-original-paleo-diet-204772>> [accessed 18 June 2023].

⁹⁷⁵ Plumwood, 'Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature', 288.

Furthermore, as Plumwood points out, factory farming is responsible for a larger number of nonhuman animal deaths as well as causing extreme suffering for the farmed animals.⁹⁷⁶ Although hunting is also an example of nonhuman animal suffering and death, it is perhaps more pressing to analyse intensive farming practices from an ecofeminist perspective given the normalisation of this violence and extent of this oppression. There is a significant gap in ecofeminist work as it has led to intensive farming being under analysed despite posing a significant problem for our relationship with the nonhuman animal and the intersecting oppressions. Furthermore, its marginalisation as an issue represents the Western-centrism and essentialism for which ecofeminism has been so heavily criticised (as discussed in Chapter Two). Thus, this subsection aims to provide an intersectional analysis of intensive farming by employing my proposed intersectional ecofeminist tools of listening and problematising the oppressor. The tool of listening helps to deploy intersectionality by remaining open to different forms of communication about the experiences of nonhuman animals in the intensive egg and dairy industries, and to being open-minded about how these experiences intersect with the oppressions of gender and the environment. The tool of problematising the oppressor helps to think about the intersections in such a way that respects the complexities of identity categories and aims to limit essentialist claims about the experiences of entire groups.

Welfare concerns of these farmed nonhuman animals should extend to their mental wellbeing as well as the more obvious physical health impacts of industrialised

⁹⁷⁶ Ibid., 288.

agriculture. For milk to be produced at the rate that it is, and as efficiently as possible, the mother cow has her calf taken from her within hours of birth. There is evidence that this separation is distressing for both mother and calf, preventing biological patterns of behaviour, such as 'licking, sniffing, nursing, calling, and biobehavioral synchrony'.⁹⁷⁷ Gaard emphasises this through an anecdotal story of a dairy cow who was pregnant again after several births and suffering separations. She went away to give birth and brought back her calf, however, the farmers realised that she was not producing expected milk yields. They investigated to find that she had secretly given birth to twins and hidden one who she was continuing to wean. This fascinating story demonstrates that this cow had used her memory of previous births to anticipate the outcome of this one. She had then demonstrated resistance by hiding her calf. This is a level of intelligence and emotional connection that humans do not often acknowledge in cows. Listening to non-linguistic communications from dairy cows could support a more intersectional approach that encourages people to break down their assumptions about cows' subjectivity.

Despite the distress these separations of mother and calf cause 'few human mothers who breastfeed their infants use this embodied experience as an avenue for empathizing with other mammal mothers'.⁹⁷⁸ Gaard encourages mothers to consider the similarities between human and nonhuman experiences of motherhood to understand and care about the ways female animals are treated in the animal agriculture industry. I propose that by employing the methodological tool of

⁹⁷⁷ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 64.

⁹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

problematizing the oppressor, critical ecofeminist theory could emphasise to mothers their own contribution to oppressive forces. Those who consume dairy from intensive farms might be able to see themselves as complicit in the oppressive behaviours that deny the mother cow and calf their relationship. In emphasising the shared experiences between many female bodies (human and nonhuman) empathy can be encouraged at the intersection. In this way, centralising intersectionality as a methodology in critical ecofeminist theory can help to encourage recognition of where one's own actions have contributed to oppressive forces.

Furthermore, due to selective breeding the amount of milk a cow can produce has increased and 'more than doubled between 1955 and 2005 in many countries'.⁹⁷⁹ This, alongside the production of milk throughout all seasons, are examples of how humans have manipulated the world around them to suit their purposes; they are further examples of humans' 'triumph over nature'⁹⁸⁰ for their own gain. Here we can see the continued relevance of Merchants' *The Death of Nature* and how nonhuman animals are situated in the extension of this narrative. However, this breeding has taken place with little concern for the cows' bodies and health. Alongside the increased milk productivity has come 'increased prevalence of infertility, mastitis and lameness in dairy cattle'.⁹⁸¹ Furthermore, 'approximately 80% of culling is involuntary' in the UK and USA because the cows have become unfit for production.⁹⁸² Farms have carelessly bred dairy cows to live shorter and more painful lives in the quest to

⁹⁷⁹ Clough, *On Animals*, 52.

⁹⁸⁰ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 50.

⁹⁸¹ Clough, *On Animals*, 52.

⁹⁸² A.J.F. Webster and S.W. Peterson, 'Sustaining Fitness and Welfare in the Dairy Cow', *Proceedings of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production*, 60 (2000), 207-213 (p. 207).

increase their production capacity and in the name of progress. The welfare of the cows is not of concern until it negatively impacts production.

As suggested in the brief outline of these industries, as well as intensive farming involving cramped living conditions for the farm animals, these farms also practice violence against farm animal bodies as a matter of course. The UK government guidelines prohibit the mutilation of birds,⁹⁸³ however they provide a list of ‘procedures to *manage* your birds’⁹⁸⁴ which are permitted. Included in this list is beak trimming, which ‘is carried out to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism in poultry flocks’.⁹⁸⁵ The aggression exhibited by these behaviours in birds implies that the farmed animals are dissatisfied with a lack of stimulation. Organic hens, who have had significantly more space than those in intensive units, generally do not undergo beak trimming.⁹⁸⁶ That hens do not act violently in these ways when in different settings suggests that their violence in farms is a result of being denied their natural diets and time outside.

What is striking about the practice of beak trimming is that the practice does not seek to avoid or address the aggressive tendencies displayed by the animals. These actions do nothing to change the underlying cause of violence. They may prevent the harm of other animals, but it is certainly not addressing *why* the animals

⁹⁸³ Department for Environment, Food, & Rural Affairs, *Poultry: Welfare Recommendations* (5 July 2019) < <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/poultry-on-farm-welfare/poultry-welfare-recommendations#mutilating-poultry> > [accessed 6 July 2022].

⁹⁸⁴ Emphasis my own. Department for Environment, Food, & Rural Affairs, *Poultry*.

⁹⁸⁵ Department for Environment, Food, & Rural Affairs, *Poultry*

⁹⁸⁶ Beak trimming is banned by the Soil Association. Soil Association, *Organic vs. Free-range – What’s the Differences?* (n.d) <<https://www.soilassociation.org/organic-living/what-is-organic/organic-eggs/>> [accessed 6 July 2022]. However, EU-organic laws permit it if there is a problem with the flock, so different organic labels may have different practices.

act in this way. This demonstrates a lack of care for the animals, whose actions could be interpreted as a cry of boredom and frustration if humans were open to listening. If their wellbeing were a real concern then the mitigating steps, such as providing more space per animal and a more varied diet, would be taken as opposed to solely adaptation techniques (particularly as these adaptation techniques involve mutilation). Instead, aggression is avoided not out of a primary concern for the farmed animals' livelihoods, but rather because these animals are property that will lose any productive value if they contract an infection from wounds or die prematurely. Social/ist ecofeminism can consider the intensive farming industry to be an institutionalised oppression of nonhuman animals, which is justified by the mapping of the subject/object dualism on to the human/animal and man/woman dualisms.⁹⁸⁷ Nonhuman farm animals are considered 'object' and so unable to communicate, thereby giving humans no reason to listen to them. Their maltreatment is conceptualised as amoral, this mapping ignores their agency and intentionality. This is where the methodological tool of listening is clearly relevant and extendable to nonhuman animals. We have been refusing to listen, and techniques like beak trimming are a means of silencing nonhuman animals from communicating their distress.

⁹⁸⁷ The way that these nonhuman animals are treated as property resonates with the way women have traditionally been deemed the property of their fathers and then their husbands and how their labour was controlled by men also. Mies writes that women 'are not the owners of their own bodies or of the earth, but they co-operate with their bodies and with the earth in order "to let grow and to make grow"'. Mies explicitly links the 'sexual coercion' female animals face with the way that women 'became part of the movable property; they became chattels'. Thus, the mapping of these dualisms is further supported by socialist feminist insights. Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 56 and 63.

A social constructionist ecofeminism can also help to shed light on how the master's silencing of women could reinforce the silencing of nonhuman animals, and vice versa. Plumwood argues that the cult of rationality, that has been prevalent in Western culture, creates a dualism between reason/emotion. This is then mapped onto man/woman, so that men become associated with reason and women with emotion. Importantly, emotion is also considered lesser than reason because of the hierarchy that characterises oppressive dualisms.⁹⁸⁸ This connection 'where women are biologically and epistemologically conceived of as emotional' ultimately 'serves to negate, marginalize and silence their claims and contributions to knowledge'.⁹⁸⁹ When women do speak their voice can be more quickly dismissed or undermined because of this enduring connection between women and emotion where both are perceived as inferior. We may then consider the damage the reason/emotion dualism has done to the Western perception of the nonhuman animal. Humans have traditionally been defined in contrast to the nonhuman animal by our capacity to reason, which is presumed to be lacking in other animals.⁹⁹⁰ Therefore, the human/animal dualism, like the man/woman dualism, maps onto the reason/emotion dualism. This contributes to the marginalisation of nonhuman animals who are considered to lack reason and thus be lesser than humans. Simultaneously the connection between women and animals made by the mapping of emotion animalizes women. Women can be dehumanised through their perceived closeness to the irrationality of other animals, and this

⁹⁸⁸ These relationships and hierarchies are all examined in more detail in Chapter One.

⁹⁸⁹ Heather Savigny, *Cultural Sexism: The Politics of Feminist Rage in the #metoo Era* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020), 88.

⁹⁹⁰ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 107-8.

contributes to their further silencing. It becomes clear that the reason/emotion dualism conceptually connecting women and animals has been used to dismiss the voices of both. This dismissal has allowed intensive farming, which fundamentally ignores the agency and intentionality of nonhuman animals, to thrive.

Furthermore, the silencing of nonhuman animals in the animal agriculture industry often involves a violent act against their bodies to remove their ability to demonstrate their distress, beak trimming being a relevant example from the egg industry.⁹⁹¹ The silencing of women has at times similarly manifested as the cutting of body parts. Female genital mutilation, for example, has silenced women who are victims of the practice from speaking out about their experience 'for fear of being ostracized from their communities'.⁹⁹² Mariya Taher argues that silence permits the practice to continue;⁹⁹³ it becomes a cycle of violence against women's bodies where victims feel unable to speak about their experience, and so few people speak out against the practice, and so the practice is able to continue and silence more women. However, the silencing of women need not always involve the actual mutilation of the body but is instead achieved through other forms of violence or even the omnipresent threat of violence. Heather Savigny claims that 'history is grounded in rape and male sexual violence against women'⁹⁹⁴ and women are silenced by this because 'rape is a process not only of physical control, but a political means of enforcing a system of

⁹⁹¹ There are other examples outside of the egg and dairy industries, such as tail docking in pigs which is performed for similar reasons to beak trimming.

⁹⁹² Mariya Taher, 'Sahiyo Stories: Shattering the Silence on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting', *Violence Against Women*, 26.14 (2020), pp. 1760-1770 (p. 3).

⁹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁹⁴ Savigny, *Cultural Sexism*, 111.

control over women through fear of physical control'.⁹⁹⁵ Therefore, women, like nonhuman animals, are silenced through violence against their bodies – whether it be actual or potential.

The threat of rape, the act of rape, and other forms of sexually motivated violence, silence women. These act as a form of control over women's bodies. As well as being silenced by their abuser, survivors of sexual assault have been silenced by others in wider society who do not listen to their experiences. It is generally accepted that a large proportion of sexual assaults go unreported. Rape Crisis reports that only 1 in 6 women who have been raped report the assault, similarly only 1 in 5 men who have been raped report the assault, in England and Wales.⁹⁹⁶ One common reason cited by survivors for not reporting the assault and seeking to bring perpetrators of the assault to justice is the belief that the police will be unable to help them.⁹⁹⁷ In the UN Women UK survey it was similarly found that a key reason women who experienced sexual harassment did not report the incident was because they 'didn't think reporting it would help'.⁹⁹⁸ These studies suggest that women have remained silent following sexual assault or harassment largely because they do not believe that reporting it will have a positive outcome for themselves. Unfortunately, this silencing of women who

⁹⁹⁵ Ibid., 111.

⁹⁹⁶ *Statistics About Sexual Violence and Abuse* (n.d.) <<https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-informed/statistics-sexual-violence/>> [accessed 4 August 2022].

⁹⁹⁷ Rape Crisis cites this as being a reason in 38% of cases of unreported rape. *Statistics About Sexual Violence and Abuse*.

⁹⁹⁸ 45% of women who had experienced sexual harassment in public spaces cited this as the reason for not reporting. *Prevalence and Reporting of Sexual Harassment in UK Public Space: A Report by the APPG for UN Women* (2021) <https://www.unwomenuk.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/APPG-UN-Women-Sexual-Harassment-Report_Updated.pdf> [accessed 3 January 2023], 1-28 (p. 6).

have experienced assault or harassment is sustained by statements such as those made by Chief Constable Sara Thornton in 2018. She asked that the police ‘focus their resources on burglary and violent crime, rather than logging hate crimes against women’.⁹⁹⁹

What is particularly poignant about the Chief Constable’s statement is that, whilst feminists have been talking about the objectification of women for decades,¹⁰⁰⁰ here we find women’s safety ranks below *actual* objects when those objects are possessions wrongfully taken from an owner. That burglary of objects is considered a more pressing matter than hate crimes against subjects should be read as a damning indictment of the priorities of the UK’s criminal system. This is not far removed from the capitalist priorities demonstrated in intensive farming. Just as the hens and cows are harmed in order to preserve capital, women may continue to be harmed in order to better protect private property. In both cases the well-being of sentient subjects is secondary to the accumulation and maintenance of wealth. This lends further support to Plumwood’s master model whereby those on the inferior side of dualist pairings are perceived as only instrumentally valuable as far as they aid the desires of the superior. Furthermore, this perception of inferior categories as only instrumentally valuable has been successfully identified in ecofeminist theory in regard to human relationships with the environment. Human use of the environment is characterised by dualisms which

⁹⁹⁹ Savigny, *Cultural Sexism*, 121.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Catherine Mackinnon and Andrea Dworkin are feminist scholars who are heavily associated with the idea of ‘objectification’. Both consider pornography to have a crucial role in the objectification of women and see this objectification as negative. Martha Nussbaum has posed an alternative narrative that objectification need not necessarily be a negative experience in all contexts. Martha C Nussbaum, ‘Objectification’, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 24.4 (1995), 249-291.

present nature as Other. Because of this perception of nature as Other we can deny our dependency on our environment,¹⁰⁰¹ which allows us to continue to exploit nature at a rate that endangers human (and nonhuman) life. Social constructions of nature have presented the environment as 'object' and, like Merchant, Plumwood is critical of this mechanistic objectification of nature that has taken place. Plumwood argues that conceptualising the environment as mechanical 'involves the stripping of teleology, agency and intentionality from the body and nature'.¹⁰⁰² Thus, using an intersectional methodology indicates that, just like in the objectification of women and the nonhuman animal, it is justifiable to exploit the environment in order to benefit the human and increase wealth. Employing the tool of problematising the oppressor also acts a reminder that analysing this intersection between the objectification of females and the environment, that women are not pure victims of the master model. Women can contribute to the oppressions of the nonhuman by treating the environment as instrumentally valuable, and thus be simultaneously oppressed by and beneficiary of the subject/object dualism. It is perhaps by emphasising these intersections of oppression that people might become aware of how their actions are complicit in subjugating Others.

A woman who has experienced a hate crime reading or listening to the Chief Constable's statement may not feel that their voice will be heard if she speaks. It is a public belittling of the gender-based violence women experience and a request, not actually that hate crimes stop, but that there would not be so many reported to log.

¹⁰⁰¹ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 191.

¹⁰⁰² Ibid., 125.

The onus lies with women not to report their experience of hate crimes as it is implied that they are wasting precious police resources. Ultimately, in both examples of nonhuman animal and gender-based cases, violence and violent language is permitted against nonhuman animal and female bodies. The voices and desires of both are further marginalised by being made silent through the violence. Moreover, it is further reason to be committed to the importance of problematising the oppressor. In this case the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police was a woman who was contributing to the silencing of woman. Therefore, we cannot simplify the oppressor as purely 'male', women in positions of power do not always fight for the interests of *all* women. Thornton's statement contributes to the silencing of victims and, in that silence, power dynamics that permit oppression can be maintained.

Finally, by applying the methodological tool of listening in this intersectional analysis, the importance of considering how wealth intersects with violence against women becomes clear. Women in poverty are statistically more vulnerable than their wealthier counterparts to experience domestic violence and abuse in the UK.¹⁰⁰³ This means that when we talk about violence against women's bodies as a way of silencing women, we must recognise that this disproportionately impacts poor women. Fran Bennett and Mary Daly suggest some reasons why there is a significant connection between women being in poverty experiencing domestic violence and abuse.¹⁰⁰⁴ For example, women in poverty might be financially dependent on their abuser, they may

¹⁰⁰³ Sara Scott and Sally McManus, *Hidden Hurt: Violence, Abuse and Disadvantage* (UK: Agenda, 2016), 4.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Fran Bennett and Mary Daly, *Poverty through a Gender Lens: Evidence and Policy Review on Gender and Poverty* (Oxford, UK: University of Oxford, 2014), p. 56.

not have promising employment prospects due to the gendered expectations that the women care for offspring, and even in the cases where the women have received wages or benefits there is a gendered expectation that these be used for the family.¹⁰⁰⁵ This is one example of how an individual's intersecting identities can reinforce and compound oppression. Class and gender are inseparable in the analysis because both categories are intrinsically linked to these women's' vulnerability to experience domestic violence and abuse, and their lack of mobility which would enable them to escape their circumstances. Eldin Fahmy, Emma Williamson and Christina Pantazis emphasise that 'socioeconomic inequalities' intersect with 'patriarchal norms' in such a way 'that poverty heightens women's existing vulnerability to DVA arising from patriarchal social relations'.¹⁰⁰⁶ This demonstrates that the violence against poor women's bodies is systemic and systematic in a capitalist patriarchal society. To listen to the violence experienced by female bodies is to recognise that the experience is not a united one. The category of 'woman' is not a unified category and the complex intersecting identities a woman might have impact how vulnerable she is. Therefore, to talk about violence against women without recognising that this violence disproportionately impacts poorer women would be a failure to listen and thus a limitation to the considerations of violence against female bodies.

By focusing on the intensive farming of nonhuman animals we can see interdisciplinary concerns arise. In farming nonhuman animals using intensive methods, the human desire for power is uncovered as the nonhuman animal is

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid., 56.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Eldin Fahmy, Emma Williamson and Christina Pantazis, *Evidence and Policy Review: Domestic Violence and Poverty* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016).

controlled and exploited for profit. This control is also a domination of the environment more broadly because this farming contributes to climate change. For example, the 'local environment movement' is equally as concerned with intensive farming as the animal rights activists because intensive farms have caused water pollution in surrounding areas.¹⁰⁰⁷ Like Plumwood, Hunnicutt cites that 'waterways are polluted with animal waste' in the areas surrounding factory farms. Additionally Hunnicutt emphasises that 'about 14.5% of GHG emissions is attributed to livestock production'.¹⁰⁰⁸ These interdisciplinary concerns demonstrate the damaging impact that intensive farming has on the environment. Thus, the violence against nonhuman animal bodies in factory farming is also violence against the environment. Plumwood argues that the environmental impacts of intensive farming would be better addressed if there was greater emphasis on making 'connections between the animal movements and other eco-social justice movements'.¹⁰⁰⁹ In other words, it is important to listen to where intersectional concerns arise because being aware of linked interests can better direct and rouse praxis.

This analysis of intensive farming conditions has shown that the subject/object dualism, which maps on to human/animal, reason/nature, and men/women dualisms, is an essential part of the master model's silencing of nonhuman animals in the egg and dairy industries and women who have experienced sexual assault or harassment. In this context, exploring how these intersectional oppressions present themselves in different situations helps to highlight how the violence done to nonhuman animals and

¹⁰⁰⁷ Plumwood, 'Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature', 290.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Hunnicutt, *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective*, 88.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Plumwood, 'Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature', 289.

the violence done to women, particularly women in poverty, has a shared underlying objective of silencing. It becomes clear through such intersectional explorations like this that silencing is a key element of oppression, thus listening can be an antidote. Whilst thinking about the intensive farming conditions in the egg and dairy industries, listening has helped to emphasise the denial of subjectivity that occurs in the oppression of nonhuman animals and in intersecting experiences. This is why the methodological tool of listening, which connects intersectional methodology with critical ecofeminism, is more radical than it might first appear. The benefit of analysing these findings by employing listening as a methodological tool is that it has allowed the research to remain open to different forms of communication that would possibly be lost due to objectification and to be receptive to the intersectional links that can be made across oppressive categories using ecofeminist theory.

Listening to the Killing Animals

When I first limited the scope to concentrate on the dairy and egg industries, I expected that this would preclude me from being able to talk about the deaths caused by the animal agriculture industry more broadly. During my research, I quickly found that this was not the case. Although dairy cows and laying hens are not considered to be premium breeds for meat, there are occasions where this preference is overlooked. As the nonhuman animal's production of feminized protein slows down, so that they are no longer economically profitable as a feminized protein producer, they may face slaughter for consumption. For example, the RSPCA notes that after 'about 72 weeks... [laying] hens will be transported for slaughter/killing and the meat can be used

in products such as soups, pastes, and pet foods'.¹⁰¹⁰ Additionally, Lisa Kemmerer notes that whilst some people become vegetarian because they disagree with the slaughtering of nonhuman animals, they still consume dairy products because of a misconception that this does not involve killing. However, in reality, the dairy industry partakes in what could be considered a form of androicide, as male 'calves and their mothers are slaughtered for human consumption at a young age' in the dairy industry¹⁰¹¹ and male chicks are killed in the egg industry. As Clough notes, when one explores the egg and dairy industries it becomes apparent that 'all commercial production of milk and eggs involves the slaughter of farmed animals'.¹⁰¹² Male nonhuman animals are not exempt from this fate; as I will explore there is a systematic androicide of male farm animals in these industries. However, Adams sees female nonhuman animals as doubly oppressed; as well as facing the same end as their male counterparts in the meat industry, they may spend their lives having their reproductive systems used and abused for human consumption. I will argue that, like in the intensive farming conditions section, listening will emphasise that there is a denial of subjectivity which is central to sustaining oppression and problematising the oppressor will highlight how male bodies are also subjugated by the dominating force.

It is worth considering whether or not it is possible to kill a nonhuman animal for human consumption whilst simultaneously respecting the value of that being. We may first consider *how* the nonhuman animals are killed for meat. An argument could be made that some methods of killing are more ethical than others. In large-scale

¹⁰¹⁰ Caminda, 'The Welfare of Laying Hens', 2.

¹⁰¹¹ Kemmerer, 'Appendix', 74.

¹⁰¹² Clough, *On Animals*, 86.

abattoirs, chickens are hung upside down by their legs and dunked into an 'electrical water bath, intended to stun them'.¹⁰¹³ Once they are, supposedly, stunned the chickens have their necks cut. This is thought to be the most ethical way of mass killing birds because the stun should prevent them from being conscious during their butchering. However, the stunning is not always as effective as one might hope,¹⁰¹⁴ meaning that some chickens are conscious when they are killed. It seems fair to assume that this would be a distressing and incredibly painful final minutes for these chickens. As well as some methods of slaughter being considered distressing for cows, it has also been argued that cows become distressed when travelling and so if the abattoir is a distance from the farm the cow has been raised on, there will be additional stress for the nonhuman animal before being slaughtered.¹⁰¹⁵ The way these animals are killed is with maximum efficiency in mind, which is unsurprising given that they are generally being killed as a result of no longer efficiently producing feminized proteins. There appears to be a denial of subjectivity in the process of these killings as the nonhuman animal is treated as an object that must either (re)produce for profit or their body becomes profit. If it is possible to kill a nonhuman animal for human consumption whilst simultaneously respecting the value of that being, slaughterhouses and abattoirs are far from achieving this ideal given the violence involved in these deaths.

¹⁰¹³ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰¹⁴ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰¹⁵ J.C. Petherick, 'Animal Welfare Issues Associated with Extensive Livestock Production: The Northern Australian Beef Cattle Industry', *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 92.3 (2005), 211-34 (p. 225-6).

Inefficient laying hens and dairy cows are killed in the industrial animal agriculture industry. Sometimes they are killed for their meat, sometimes they are killed simply to avoid the costs of keeping the animal alive when its production of feminized proteins has slowed to a point that the nonhuman animal is no longer economically attractive. It seems that these killings uncover the instrumentalism that characterises humans' dualistic relationship with the nonhuman.¹⁰¹⁶ Once the nonhuman animal loses its economic value to the human master the farm animal is killed because the master does not perceive the creature as having any value independent of the master's own desires. Although killings of inefficient laying hens and dairy cows is overtly instrumentalising the nonhuman animals, we can further question whether it is possible to imagine any killing of a nonhuman animal for food that avoids instrumentalism. Adams points out that even in the cases where the animal has had an enjoyable life, unlike the ones listed in the intensive farming section, 'the animal does not become flesh food without being violently deprived of his or her life'.¹⁰¹⁷ For this reason, she would argue that it is not sufficient to demand the raising of welfare standards for nonhuman animals in intensive conditions; the killing of nonhuman animals for human use can only ever be considered oppressive by nature of its using the nonhuman animal for human gain and, thus, is morally wrong. However, Adams' argument is not a unanimously accepted position within the field of ecofeminism. There are many ecofeminists who reject the absolutizing of moral laws,

¹⁰¹⁶ Instrumentalism was a key feature of the Master Model, as identified by Plumwood. The nonhuman is perceived as having no intrinsic value, but only having value in so far as they satisfy the master's needs.

¹⁰¹⁷ Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast*, 158.

for example Adams argues that ecofeminists like Karen Warren have been reluctant to make blanket statements about killing because ecofeminist analysis is necessarily rooted in context.¹⁰¹⁸ I will discuss the implications of this further in the sub-section on praxis, however, it is important to highlight that, in order to adhere to the methodological tools of listening and problematising the oppressor, it is essential that we acknowledge that contexts change moral conditions. Thus, I believe that using an intersectional methodology leads to the rejection of making absolute statements for universal application.

Slaughter is not the only method of killing used by the egg industry. There are common practices in the factory farming egg industry which continue to be used despite inevitably leading to the death of hens. There is a practice called ‘forced molt’, which farmers use to increase egg production following periods of decline. This practice involves starving the hens and keeping them ‘in total darkness for as long as eighteen days’.¹⁰¹⁹ This procedure causes such a shock to the hens’ bodies that it induces ‘another egg cycle’;¹⁰²⁰ however, it also can kill ‘5-10 percent of the hens’.¹⁰²¹ This number of deaths is inconsequential in the eyes of the farmer because of the profits available through another round of egg production.¹⁰²² Practices like forced molt highlight that the nonhuman animals are not seen as subjects who are morally

¹⁰¹⁸ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰¹⁹ Kemmerer, ‘Appendix’, 178.

¹⁰²⁰ Ibid., 178.

¹⁰²¹ Ibid., 178.

¹⁰²² Ibid., 178.

considerable beings. Their perceived worth from within the master model comes purely from what financial benefits they can bring humans.

The killing of nonhuman animals has been used by women as a metaphor to describe their experiences of sexualised violence. A woman might say that she feels like a piece of meat, for example, and feminists have used the language of 'butchering' to describe female experiences of violence.¹⁰²³ Adams questions what it is about sexually motivated violence that approximates being treated like a killed animal and decides that it is due to fact that in both cases the woman and the nonhuman animal is subject 'to implemental violence'.¹⁰²⁴ In the case of the woman who has been raped, 'the penis is the implemental violation', and in order for nonhuman animals to be eaten they experience implemental violence at the hand of a sharp knife. Therefore, the woman's experience of violence is akin in some ways to the nonhuman animal's experience of violence. They are similar because in both forms of violence there is an essential stage the oppressor must take of objectification of the nonhuman or female body¹⁰²⁵ and because these acts of violence are an attempt for the attacker to achieve total domination over the victims. However, Adams argues that when we use language of butchering and meat to describe violence against women, we fail to truly appreciate that the violence being appropriated is first against nonhuman bodies. When people experience violence or maltreatment and describe themselves as feeling 'like a piece

¹⁰²³ Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 22.

¹⁰²⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁰²⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

of meat', listening to our language exposes our understanding that to be treated as nonhuman animals have been treated is less than how a subject should be treated.

Problematizing the Oppressor through Male Killings

For an intersectional analysis which problematizes the oppressor it is worth also considering the negative impact our desire for feminized proteins has on male animals. In the global egg industry, 'approximately 7 billion day-old male layer chicks per year' are culled.¹⁰²⁶ They are most frequently killed by maceration ('being cut into pieces by fast moving blades') which 'is judged the method that inflicts least suffering'.¹⁰²⁷ This culling is commonplace because, for the egg industry, male chicks serve little purpose. Few may be kept for fertilisation or sold as food for other animals, but otherwise the chicks would require time and money if they were to be kept alive and they would provide no monetary benefit. As theologian David Clough notes, this 'systematic culling is clearly not necessary as such but is necessary only to produce eggs at a particular price point'.¹⁰²⁸ This is a clear example of how nonhuman animals are viewed as valuable only in so far as they serve human interests. Humans have no need for these male chicks and so their life is considered to hold no value.

Clough argues that in order to understand why it is wrong to cull male chicks in this manner 'we need a moral account that is teleological: able to give an account of

¹⁰²⁶ M-E. Krautwald-Junghanns and others, 'Current Approaches to Avoid the Culling of Day-Old Male Chicks in the Layer Industry, with Special Reference to Spectroscopic Methods', *Animal Well-Being and Behavior*, 97.3 (2018), 749-757 (p. 755).

¹⁰²⁷ Clough, *On Animals*, 42.

¹⁰²⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

what the lives of these chicks are for, as Christian theology can'.¹⁰²⁹ Clough makes excellent intersectional arguments in different areas of animal ethics, including how it intersects with class and race. However, in this case I find that his solution does not go far enough to drastically change the way we perceive animal others. A teleological ethic focused on what 'chicks are for' does not go beyond seeing them as instrumentally valuable. Plumwood demonstrates that it is the inferior dualist categories that are consistently seen as only instrumentally valuable whilst the superior categories have intrinsic worth. If we continue to view male chicks as valuable in how far they can flourish, either as creatures of God as Clough suggests or in correlation with their natural inclinations, then we have not radically restructured this dualism. I would argue that Plumwood's account of valuing intentionality is better placed to value chicks without reinforcing the problematic instrumental characteristics of dualism. Plumwood's goal of recognising intentionality in the nonhuman is to recognise mindlike features that undermine the hyperseparation of the human from the nonhuman. The idea that intentionality is not just a feature of the human mind leave us open to 'to potentially rich forms of interaction and relationships which have an ethical dimension'.¹⁰³⁰ Therefore, by recognising nonhuman animals 'as organised intentional and goal-directed beings which value their own lives and strive to preserve them'¹⁰³¹ then we can conceptualise these male chicks as having more than an instrumental value and reject the egg industry's treatment of intentional beings.

¹⁰²⁹ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰³⁰ Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 181.

¹⁰³¹ Ibid., 149.

Male dairy cows have a similar experience to male chicks as ‘farmers have often seen it as economically unattractive to raise male dairy calves, so that it has been routine to shoot them at birth’.¹⁰³² Having said this, more recently dairy farmers in the UK have moved towards rearing or selling these male calves so that they can be later killed and sold as ‘rose veal’.¹⁰³³ Traditional methods of rearing veal in small cages have been banned in the UK, but the male calf will be killed ‘at six to eight months’ to be sold as veal. In many places outside of the UK, male dairy cows face a more unpleasant fate ‘where they are confined in crates so tight they cannot move, and fed an iron-deficient diet until they are slaughtered at fourteen to seventeen weeks of age’.¹⁰³⁴ The milk substitute they are fed is lacking in iron and fibre deliberately so that the veal meat appears ‘anemic, light-colored’ when cooked.¹⁰³⁵ Without the dairy industry, the veal industry would not exist in the same way, it ‘was created to take advantage of an abundant supply of unwanted male calves’.¹⁰³⁶ The opportunity to make greater profits and cause prolonged suffering for consumer pleasure was cultivated and seized by the industry.

The tools of listening and problematising the oppressor have demonstrated that we cannot ignore the plight of male animals in the industry. The treatment of male nonhuman animals within the egg and dairy industries unveils the complexities of the oppressor as it is clear that the dominating force does not protect male bodies from subjugation. The treatment of male animals in the egg and dairy industries can

¹⁰³² Clough, *On Animals*, 53.

¹⁰³³ Clough, *On Animals*, 53.

¹⁰³⁴ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 57.

¹⁰³⁵ Kemmerer, ‘Appendix’, 174.

¹⁰³⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

highlight the importance of the tool of problematising the oppressor in that it highlights again that women are not pure victims of the master model. Those people who buy eggs and dairy are inadvertently supporting a system that practices violence against male bodies systematically. However, there is perhaps a moral argument to be made, through listening to the experiences that are part of the female farm animal's experience, that death is preferable to the short lives of dairy cows and laying hens that consist of exploitation and violence.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to test the proposed intersectional methodology from the preceding chapter for ecofeminist theory. The novelty of this methodology means that there is undoubtedly further work required to fine-tune its application. However, my goal here has been to demonstrate that foregrounding intersectionality when using ecofeminist theory can have benefits both in terms of opening new avenues to examine intersecting oppressions and in limiting essentialism.

I have applied the tools of the methodology to the case of the egg and dairy industries. When thinking about attitudes to feminized proteins, listening has emphasised the way that ideologies are used to enable different applications to deepen oppression. An intersectional methodology that listens at the points of overlap in experience can help to identify where this ambivalence has led to ideologies which do not need to be consistent because they are effectively justifying oppressions. Regarding the intensive farming conditions and killing of nonhuman animals in the egg and dairy industry, listening helped to focus on non-linguistic communication to

explore denied subjectivity across intersecting oppressions. Additionally, problematising the oppressor has emphasised that, even where oppressions manifest in very different ways and are uniquely experienced by any individual, there is a connecting logic of domination. A force that is sustained by ideologies that present ideas like nature and subjectivity as if they are solid categories, but listening has shown that the oppressor is maintained by using these ideologies to serve a political function. Furthermore, being informed by this tool has helped highlight where victims of oppression take part in the oppression of Others. This complexity of oppression helps to highlight that liberation of one oppressed group cannot come at the expense of another, because this would not overcome the logic of the dominating force.

I propose that the employment of ecofeminist theory has been enhanced by the centring of an intersectional methodology. It has meant that anti-essentialism has been at the forefront of how each oppression is thought about. By thinking in a way that listens and problematises the oppressor, the complexity of identity is more evident, and this limits essentialist claims about 'women' and 'nature' as a unified category that ecofeminist theorists have been guilty of in the past. The absence of explicit intersectionality in ecofeminist theory has meant that binary categories have been used despite their ambivalence. By making intersectionality central within ecofeminist theory, I believe that we can allow these categories to take on a greater fluidity because intersectionality asks the researcher to recognise the complexity of oppression. In making intersectionality central to how I have thought about this case study, I believe I have been able to make more explicit how ideologies have been

formed and sustained due to ambivalent meanings. This allows a fuller recognition of the constructed essence of oppression.

Hope and Praxis

I used to think that if people learned about environmental justice and climate change that knowledge and awareness would lead them to also work towards social transformation. I am no longer confident that this is a reliable assumption¹⁰³⁷ - Elaine Nogueira-Godsey

As I examined in Chapter Three, it is crucial that an intersectional analysis displays a commitment to practical action. Where possible, the reader should not be left with a feeling of hopelessness but with a reasonable sense of purpose and direction. Praxis is at the heart of ecofeminist theory;¹⁰³⁸ ecofeminists consider themselves to be ‘both street-fighters and philosophers’¹⁰³⁹ and the language of praxis has been used explicitly by some ecofeminists, such as Adams, to emphasise that ‘ecofeminism reflects a praxis-based ethics’.¹⁰⁴⁰ Ecofeminists appear to consider there to be a causation link between truly believing injustices need to be addressed and actively addressing them. Indeed, Adams goes on to say that ‘one’s actions reveal one’s beliefs’,¹⁰⁴¹ demonstrating that the belief that injustice is wrong should be strong enough to give one the courage of their convictions. Despite this emphasis on action

¹⁰³⁷ Elaine Nogueira-Godsey, ‘Towards a Decological Praxis’, *Decolonial Horizons*, 5 (2019), 73-98 (p. 77).

¹⁰³⁸ Indeed, ecofeminism is not alone in this. There are many fields that blur the distinctions between academic and activist work. For example, feminism has historically been a movement, not only a theoretical activity: Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 3. Additionally, critical animal studies is focused on building a relationship between activism and academia: Nik Taylor and Richard Twine (eds.), ‘Introduction: Locating the “Critical” in Critical Animal Studies’ in *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies: From the Margins to the Centre* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1-16 (p. 12).

¹⁰³⁹ Ariel Salleh, ‘Foreword’, in *Ecofeminism*, ed. by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (London and New York: Zed Books, 2014), ix-xii (p. ix).

¹⁰⁴⁰ Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast*, 75-6.

¹⁰⁴¹ *Ibid*, 75-6.

in ecofeminism, the current literature is not always clear on *how* we can make changes, it just recognises that change is necessary. Therefore, 'although ecofeminists promote praxis, there is still much debate regarding acceptable means of resistance'.¹⁰⁴² I aim to provide possible avenues for action, particularly in relation to the egg and dairy industries. As such, this chapter represents the practical product of the methodology set out in Chapter Three.

Within Chapter Four, I laid the theoretical groundwork for the modes of action that I will propose here. I argued that the egg and dairy industries have oppressed nonhuman animals, but there were also a number of pertinent ways that the oppression in these industries intersects with the oppression of other marginalised groups. In this way, an intersectional methodology sharpened the sense of context. Building on this, I would like to consider what steps can, and should, be taken to address the identified oppressor and oppressions. It is essential that critical ecofeminist praxis is consistently informed by the intersectional analysis that should be central to its methodology; a failure to do so may lead the individual to focus on one axis of oppression and inadvertently contribute to oppressions on other accounts.¹⁰⁴³

This chapter will focus on giving practical suggestions that begin with the individual.¹⁰⁴⁴ The focus on the individual requires some justification as there is

¹⁰⁴² Jennifer Grubbs and Michael Loadenthal, 'From the Classroom to the Slaughterhouse: Animal Liberation by Any Means Necessary' *Counterpoints*, 448 (2014), 179-201 (p. 188).

¹⁰⁴³ This was further explored in Chapter Two when I set out the final outcome of the intersectional methodology.

¹⁰⁴⁴ As I explained in the concluding section of Chapter Three, I have made some choices to limit the scope of my thesis and one of these has been the focus on the individual in both

disagreement in the literature regarding whether individuals, governing bodies or corporations should take on the burden of responsibility for change. Although this project does not have the scope to go into the intricacies of this debate, I acknowledge that there can be benefits to focusing on larger social bodies, such as the opportunity for faster change to mass-scale oppressions and avoiding burdening the marginalised with the further request that they be at the frontline of implementing change, despite the cost and time burden.¹⁰⁴⁵ However, focusing on the individual includes ‘a commitment to the emancipation of the mind from the master model’¹⁰⁴⁶ and helps shift how individuals think away from hierarchical dualism by encouraging a ‘willing[ness] to think independently and to share their knowledge and thinking’.¹⁰⁴⁷ Additionally, intersectionality has a core focus on individuals’ experiences and identities, thus it resonates more strongly with praxis that is also aligned to individual actions. Another benefit of personal praxis is it affirms ‘that individuals can change’,¹⁰⁴⁸ which, like Adams, I find to be an empowering statement. What I am proposing in this section on praxis are ‘bottom-up strategies of resistance’¹⁰⁴⁹ against industrialised animal agriculture with the aim of contributing to a radically different conceptualisation of dualisms. It is my intention that this is read as complimentary of, and not mutually exclusive to, more systematic changes to an institutionalised system of oppression.

problematising the oppressor and in praxis. As I will argue again here, this is not because I think this is a preferred form of analysis over analysing structural injustices, there are benefits to either analysis, however it has been necessary to make choices regarding scope.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Bell, ‘Bread and Roses’, 5.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Nogueira-Godsey, ‘Towards a Decological Praxis’, 91.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Bell, ‘Bread and Roses’, 13.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Adams, ‘Ecofeminism and the Eating of Animals’, 140.

¹⁰⁴⁹ White and Cudworth, ‘Taking It to the Streets’, 217.

Suggestions for Change

The first order of praxis is, for those who are in a position of economic privilege, to practice veganism. Veganism is adhering to a diet that does not include meat or other animal products such as feminized proteins, and it is choosing not to purchase items that have used nonhuman animals in the process of their making. This is a critical and immediate form of praxis a person could take to address all aspects of the intersectional analysis explored. Being vegan, in the Western context, is a radical action in the sense that it rejects the phallocentric narrative that is intrinsically tied to Western meat-eating. Indeed, in 'A Queer Vegan Manifesto' veganism is considered an act of 'daring to be deviant'¹⁰⁵⁰ precisely because it is at odds with societal norms, especially in its rejection of both gendered and sexual expectations. Critical feminist vegan theory shows that being vegan is an act of animal liberation and feminism simultaneously with the belief that 'to remove meat is to threaten the structure of the larger patriarchal culture'.¹⁰⁵¹ It is also 'way of resisting heteronormativity' as it challenges 'heterosexual norms and practices' by deviating from the norm.¹⁰⁵² Meat-eating is 'tied to the rhetorical as well as the actual reproduction of heterosexual norms' so that a male vegan in particular acts a disruption to 'the discourse on male sexuality and gender'.¹⁰⁵³ Therefore, it would immediately remove a certain manifestation of

¹⁰⁵⁰ Rasmus R. Simonsen, 'A Queer Vegan Manifesto', *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, 10.3 (2012), 51-81 (p. 74).

¹⁰⁵¹ Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 16.

¹⁰⁵² Simonsen, 'A Queer Vegan Manifesto', 55.

¹⁰⁵³ *Ibid.*, 55. Simonsen uses the work of Adams and Erica Cudworth to establish the links between meat-eating and masculinity and, whilst acknowledging that 'effeminacy... cannot unequivocally be grouped with homosexuality' (p. 53), Simonsen argues there is a stigma attached to male vegans for not acting in masculine ways and they are therefore classed as deviants.

oppression from nonhuman animals and, more discreetly, it would undermine a narrative that sustains patriarchal and heteronormative dualisms.

Indeed, in ecofeminist works written by Adams and Gaard there is already a widespread call to veganism. This is also the case in critical animal studies literature where praxis is a pillar of the field. Richard White and Erika Cudworth suggest that:

the most immediate and direct way to act on a street-level is for individuals to strive to make the necessary lifestyle changes where nonhuman animals are concerned... Embracing veganism is a huge step in that direction¹⁰⁵⁴

There is a precedent in both ecofeminist literature and the neighbouring discourses to suggest that veganism is effective, necessary, and realistic. Having said this, the preceding intersectional analysis demonstrates that this cannot be a universal conscription. Indeed, insisting on a universal adoption of veganism could be counter to the idea of veganism if, like Rasmus R. Simonsen, we 'emphasize the queerness of veganism'.¹⁰⁵⁵ The suggestion of veganism must be nuanced to recognise the complexities of an intersectional analysis focused on the consumption of nonhuman animal products.

There is reason to be cautious of blanket calls to veganism. Praxis is, by definition, action informed by theory; this critical ecofeminist theory centred on an intersectional methodology has emphasised complexity through the tools of listening and problematising the oppressor. When determining praxis, we should be guided by

¹⁰⁵⁴ White and Cudworth, 'Taking It to the Streets', 215.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Simonsen, 'A Queer Vegan Manifesto', 65.

what we have heard and the layers of complexity that make up the identity of oppressors. Plumwood argues that many ecofeminist scholars have argued in favour of vegetarianism¹⁰⁵⁶ and this is problematic as ‘the leading forms of vegetarian theory, including the feminist ones, have been far less successful in dealing with their own biases of ethnicity, gender, and class’.¹⁰⁵⁷ In other words, vegetarian theories have not been sufficiently intersectional and they have been uncritically applied by ecofeminists, and other theorists. Not all people are in the position to go vegan or vegetarian due to the cost of a balanced and varied diet; the time involved in preparing meals; availability of these foods in working-class communities; and their cultural traditions and lifestyle. This means that the call to veganism cannot be taken as a universal recommendation.

It can be an expensive decision to switch to a vegan lifestyle. A litre of milk costs 48 pence per litre, whilst the cheapest available plant-based milk that is fortified with B12 and calcium is 59 pence per litre.¹⁰⁵⁸ Moreover, the cheapest beef mince at the same supermarket costs £3.10 per kilogram, whilst the cheapest vegan mince alternative costs £6.25 per kilogram.¹⁰⁵⁹ Lower income households are currently priced out of being able to afford vegan substitutes.¹⁰⁶⁰ There cannot be an

¹⁰⁵⁶ Like Adams, it appears that Plumwood at times uses vegetarianism to describe a person who does not eat nonhuman animals or their products. In this project I have differentiated between vegetarians (who avoid nonhuman animal meat, but who may choose to eat dairy and eggs), and vegans (who avoid all nonhuman animal products).

¹⁰⁵⁷ Plumwood, ‘Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature’, 286.

¹⁰⁵⁸ According to Tesco Groceries’ website at the time of writing (18/08/2020).

¹⁰⁵⁹ According to Tesco Groceries’ website at the time of writing (18/08/2020).

¹⁰⁶⁰ For a clear comparison I have compared like-for-like products here. However, there are cheaper vegan foods that are not direct meat substitutes. For example, lentils and beans are sources of protein that are not as expensive as meat or meat-substitutes. This then becomes an issue of knowledge (how to prepare these foods) and time (it can be more time-

expectation of working-class people and families to eat vegetarian/vegan diets if doing so would almost double the price of their weekly shop. Therefore, this project cannot support the praxis of veganism without differentiation. By problematising the oppressor, it is evident that lower income households may have barriers to minimising their oppression of nonhuman animals due to the power imbalances they experience that are sustained by a capitalist patriarchal society.

Further still, there is no reason to believe that veganism has to be universally applicable to be a successful practice. Indeed, for Simonsen, it is necessary that veganism maintain its 'queerness' in that it refuses to 'carry on, or reproduce, the social order of anthro/heteronormativity'.¹⁰⁶¹ Moreover, the very concept of veganism appears to rely upon meat-eating; 'in other words, the concept of veganism supports and preserves meat-eating in a discursive system of difference'.¹⁰⁶² Difference is thus emphasised in the concept of veganism to such an extent that it is not surprising that a call to universal veganism seems unappealing. Under this view of veganism, Gaard's call for vegetarian ecofeminists 'to build or strengthen alliances with women activists in the environmental justice movements'¹⁰⁶³ is made more possible, as is her suggestion that there is more 'to be done to keep race, class, and species at the

consuming to cook from scratch). Thus, although pricing might not be as significant an issue as it appears here, there are still problems with vegan food that are barriers for some people.

¹⁰⁶¹ Simonsen, 'A Queer Vegan Manifesto', 65.

¹⁰⁶² Ibid., 72.

¹⁰⁶³ This is particularly noteworthy as there has been tension between environmental movements and animal liberation movements that are in part due to their lack of agreement on the issue of veganism. Greta Gaard, 'Vegetarian Ecofeminism: A Review Essay', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 23.3 (2002), 117-146 (p. 141).

foreground of ecofeminist discourse'.¹⁰⁶⁴ If we can appreciate the value of difference rather than try to make absolutist claims, then the ability for this praxis to be informed by intersectional disciplinary conversations is greatly increased.

However, Adams does make a call to universal veganism, or ontological veganism as Plumwood calls it. Plumwood notes that ontological veganism fails to truly tackle dualist notions as it places humans in a separate ethical category to the natural world and in this way 'remains subtly human-centred'.¹⁰⁶⁵ We know that predation is a part of life for carnivores and omnivores, and yet we set ourselves above and excluded from this when we ascribe to ontological veganism. However, this is precisely the problem in Adams' account of veganism. She denies that humans are omnivorous. Simonsen, though respectful of Adams' work in developing this field, identifies Adams' claims 'that the human body is essentially vegetarian'¹⁰⁶⁶ to be problematic. Adams supports this claim by focusing on the idea that humans have a 'radically distinct' way of preparing meat than nonhuman animals. Adams makes claims about the uniqueness of human meat-eating by appealing to the idea that nonhuman animals who are carnivorous 'kill and consume their prey themselves... There is no absent referent'.¹⁰⁶⁷ However, this is not strictly true, vultures, for example eat the carcasses left over by other animals. Furthermore, as Simonsen argues this observation is not solid grounds for the rejection of meat-eating as human behaviour.¹⁰⁶⁸ Yet Adams uses arguments like this to go beyond a normative call to

¹⁰⁶⁴ Ibid., 140.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Plumwood, 'Animals and Ecology', 79.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Simonsen, 'A Queer Vegan Manifesto', 67.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 77.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Simonsen, 'A Queer Vegan Manifesto', 67.

veganism by suggesting that veganism ‘corresponds to a biological fact of the human body’¹⁰⁶⁹ and ‘the essentializing thrust of her [Adams’] language... [is] striking’.¹⁰⁷⁰ This lends further support to the importance of an intersectional methodology to limit essentialism; by examining the intersecting oppressions that justify and sustain the oppressions of nonhuman animals in the animal agriculture industry Adams’ support for ontological veganism cannot be defended on the basis that it is both essentialist and insufficiently intersectional.

One of Plumwood’s most impactful arguments against calls for veganism is that ecofeminists who argue for veganism too frequently fail to challenge dualistic structures. Rather than challenging the human supremacy over the nonhuman, ecofeminist vegans have tended to raise nonhuman animals up to the level of humans so that both are seen as inedible. However, as Plumwood points out this does not have the same consequences as ‘seeing humans as themselves subject to the conditions and narratives of ecological life’¹⁰⁷¹ and so continues to alienate humans from their environment. Thus, the dualistic hierarchal structures remain, the goal posts are simply shifted. Moreover, ontological veganism ‘positions humans outside and above the food chain, not as part of the feast in a chain or reciprocity but as external manipulators and masters of it’.¹⁰⁷² This means that humans within veganism continue to be considered beings who cannot be eaten by other beings. Even in death, Plumwood explains, we go to the great lengths of making and buying solid wooden

¹⁰⁶⁹ Ibid., 69.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Ibid., 69.

¹⁰⁷¹ Plumwood, ‘Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature’, 293.

¹⁰⁷² Ibid., 294.

coffins so that we can resist 'giving something back, even to the worms and the land that nurtured us'.¹⁰⁷³ This failure of ontological veganism in ecofeminism to situate humans within the food chain is continuing the dualistic hyperseparation that helps to characterise the master model. It is a hyperseparation between conscious beings and the nonconscious, between those that are moral agents and moral patients,¹⁰⁷⁴ between those that are inedible and sacred and that which is edible and profane. Thus, a blanket call to veganism does not exhaust the requirements of praxis because this type of veganism does not challenge the underlying logic of domination and so dualism is maintained rather than deconstructed.

The intersectional analysis I propose provides further challenges to the view that humans are inedible. I agree with Plumwood that we tend to view nonhuman animals as edible (and we also consider the products of their reproductive systems as edible), whilst we view humans as inedible, thereby maintaining a value distinction between humans and nonhumans as we see ourselves as transcending the food chain. I suggest that breastfeeding could be proposed as a potential area of commonality between the human and nonhuman that could be an antidote for this conceptualisation of valued difference. People who produce breastmilk do make part of themselves edible to feed babies. Perhaps, then, it is not quite true that humans are never conceptualised as edible. Having said this, some people do react with horror upon public displays of this edibility. Their disgust is demonstrated through the cultural

¹⁰⁷³ Ibid., 294.

¹⁰⁷⁴ The idea that there are moral patients who are unable to make moral decisions because they do not possess the faculties that would allow them to form decisions, whilst moral agents have this capacity to make moral decisions, was developed by Regan in *The Case for Animal Rights*.

taboos and barriers to public feeding. However, breastfeeding could act as a starting point for changing the perception of humans as inedible beings. This could be where we find an opportunity to deconstruct the human/animal dualism. Breastfeeding is an example of a person being in some sense edible, without this edibility leading to the woman being 'a site of domination, degradation, and exclusion',¹⁰⁷⁵ which is how ontological vegans have considered the edibility of animals. Gaard has argued that it is unfortunate that 'few human mothers who breastfeed their infants use this embodied experience as an avenue for empathizing with other mammal mothers',¹⁰⁷⁶ but by using an intersectional methodology within ecofeminism these affinities are highlighted and directly help to combat dualistic hierarchies that sustain a human/animal divide.

Another form of praxis in response to the intersecting issues raised by the above discussion is awareness raising. This can effectively be done through social media; a tool that should not be underestimated in activism. The trending hashtags for Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, over the past decade, have brought awareness and engagement with these important movements. Social media provides a fast way of sharing information and, when used effectively, can be a form of education. One reason to engage with this praxis is that, although academia can involve, or be a form of, revolutionary activism,¹⁰⁷⁷ scholarly articles do not tend to reach beyond the academy, whilst social media is much more accessible to wider groups. Carol L. Gasser and Arpan Roy identify several aspects of academic research

¹⁰⁷⁵ Plumwood, 'Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature', 295.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 66.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Ian Maxey, 'Beyond Boundaries? Activism, Academic, Reflexivity and Research', *The Royal Geographical Society*, 31.3 (1999), 199-208.

that help to maintain the gap between activism and academic work. One of these is that academic work that could help direct praxis is not accessible for ‘ordinary people’.¹⁰⁷⁸ They cite A. Breeze Harper as an example of an academic who is actively working in opposition to this trend. As well as producing academic work, Harper runs a blog for her Sistah Vegan project which helps ‘reach a wider audience’.¹⁰⁷⁹ Moreover, there are arguably barriers in place that prevent some marginalised groups from accessing higher education.¹⁰⁸⁰ Therefore, some people who are most affected by the issues raised in intersectional ecofeminist research will be unlikely to access books and articles published behind paywalls or hidden behind academic jargon. In a social media age, activism that takes the form of social media posts can be effective in quickly and accessibly bringing attention to social issues.

Yet many have looked down upon social media as a tool for activism. Emma Craddock’s research suggests that there is an ideal activist; this is ‘the “authentic” activist who has the required lived experience to possess the authority to speak about certain topics’ and not only talks but takes direct action, which is considered ‘the

¹⁰⁷⁸ In quotations as what is meant by ordinary people is not clear. Glasser and Roy, ‘The Ivory Trap’, 95.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Glasser and Roy, ‘The Ivory Trap’, 97.

¹⁰⁸⁰ In the UK, white working-class males are amongst the least likely to go to university. Neon, *New Report Shows Differences in White Working Class Students Going too University by Higher Education Provider* (2019) <<https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/news/new-report-shows-differences-in-white-working-class-students-going-to-university-by-higher-education-provider/>> [accessed 29 January 2023]. Other reports praise the increased diversity in UK university admissions, however, the drop-out rate for Black and working-class students is higher so that ‘the retention gap between the most advantaged and disadvantaged students has widened’. Kathryn Petrie and Nigel Keohane, *On Course for Success? Student Retention at University* (London: Social Market Foundation, 2017) <<http://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/UPP-final-report.pdf>> [accessed 29 January 2023], 1-40 (p. 6).

pinnacle of “real” activism’.¹⁰⁸¹ This authentic activism is conceptualised in contrast to activism that is online, or ‘slactivism’ as it is flippantly called. Craddock argues that this is an unhelpful distinction, as both forms of online and offline activism are related and support one another ‘rather than conflict’.¹⁰⁸² Additionally, the perception that online activism is ‘all talk and no action’ is too dismissive of the importance of raising public awareness. Therefore, using social media to raise awareness of the intersecting oppressions discussed should be seen as complementary to offline activism and a valid form of praxis.

Additionally, social media is considered to be a feminine domain as its consumers are predominantly (young) women.¹⁰⁸³ Frankie Rogan has argued that social media represents an important political space for these young women. This is because there are ‘concerns around safety for girls and young women in political spaces [that] are often compounded by feelings of silencing and dismissal’;¹⁰⁸⁴ consequently, young women may feel excluded from ‘traditional political space’.¹⁰⁸⁵ These women may find some public spaces more difficult to access as a result of sexism, whilst ‘the internet and social media provides access to spaces that are not always adult and male dominated’.¹⁰⁸⁶ Social media then is a significant tool in mobilising young women in

¹⁰⁸¹ Emma Craddock, *Living Against Austerity: A Feminist Investigation of Doing Activism and Being Activist* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020), p. 16.

¹⁰⁸² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰⁸³ Frankie Rogan, *Digital Femininities: The Gendered Construction of Cultural and Political Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2023), p. 7.

¹⁰⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁰⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁰⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

particular as it is more accessible and avoids the troubles of negotiating the sexism that can plague public political spaces.

What types of activism, and who counts as an activist, has been debated beyond these concerns regarding the value of social media activism. In recent literature, it has been acknowledged that traditionally valuable activism was thought to be driven by reason in contrast to emotionally driven activism, which was considered to be less valuable.¹⁰⁸⁷ However, as Craddock argues, this preference for rational activism 'reflects this remaining connotation of emotion as irrational and an illegitimate area of study'.¹⁰⁸⁸ By observing this from an ecofeminist theoretical framework, this hierarchy in activism is further evidence of the prevalence of the cult of reason Plumwood identifies. Emotions constitute a significant part of activism and, if we try to ignore the impact of emotions, we will miss part of what inspires people to act. Therefore, praxis in response to oppressions can be emotional and this should not be seen as mutually exclusive with it being rational. Indeed, praxis in the form of awareness raising about the oppressions within and connected to the egg and dairy industries that is overtly emotional can be seen as a direct rejection of the cult of reason and thus be an ecofeminist stance in itself.

The praxis that has been suggested in this section is largely directed at individuals, and one of the limitations with this approach is that it 'implies that individual consumers are singularly to blame for what really is the irresponsible activity of

¹⁰⁸⁷ Craddock, *Living Against Austerity*, 7-8.

¹⁰⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

industry and government regulations’.¹⁰⁸⁹ I have sat somewhat uncomfortably with this decision because I believe that the onus lies most heavily upon industry and government to make policy changes that will dramatically change the oppressive structures in society. Furthermore, I fundamentally believe that ecofeminism calls for the liberation of all from dualist binaries. This is a belief that demands a radical upheaval of the value-laden nature of the conceptualisation of categories. However, whilst reaching towards that hope of a future that can fulfil this more radical praxis, I have intended to suggest more immediate ways of relieving the manifestation of oppression in the egg and dairy industries as a particular case study. In doing so, I hope to show that we have the ability ‘to make changes within our own minds’ so that we may better work with others to achieve these more radical goals.¹⁰⁹⁰

What I am proposing in this section on praxis then are ‘bottom-up strategies of resistance’.¹⁰⁹¹ Although the blame and onus of response does not generally lie with individual people, it is through the actions of collectives that more structural change might occur. Additionally, it is important, as Richard White and Erika Cudworth note, that ‘the individual take(s) pro-active steps to avoid “fuel(ing) the fires of other injustices”’.¹⁰⁹² Although the individual may not be directly responsible for the injustices associated with the egg and dairy industries and the connected oppressions explored in this thesis, there are ways to minimise one’s involvement in indirectly

¹⁰⁸⁹ Hunnicutt, *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective*, 78-9.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Karen Bell, *Working-Class Environmentalism: An Agenda for a Just and Fair Transition to Sustainability* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 232, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-29519-6>> [accessed 12 June 2023].

¹⁰⁹¹ White and Cudworth, ‘Taking It to the Streets’, 217.

¹⁰⁹² *Ibid.*, 215. Includes a quote from Kemmerer, 2011, 4.

oppressing others and contributing to injustice. This should not undermine the importance of organisations making significant changes to their practice, but instead emphasises the impact individuals could have on alleviating oppression. People and nonhumans are suffering now so it is important to alleviate that suffering where possible. The actions that I have listed destabilise the phallogentric society we live in. These individual acts of rebellion are unsettling and do alter the effects of domination and so are worthwhile. To truly change the logic of domination will take more time and more creative movements.

Conclusion

Praxis must be theory-based, and I have sought to ensure that my suggested routes of practical action do not ignore the intersections that have been identified through the theoretical analysis in Chapter Four. Revolutionary praxis would perhaps be more successful in fully deconstructing dualist systems; however, I have chosen to suggest individual praxis here. In looking towards liberation from oppression, it is possible to leave room for multiplicity. There is room for hope of significant change whilst we consider the practical avenues that can make more immediate positive changes. Through an ecofeminist theory we catch little glimpses of the revolution that could break us away from the conceptual restraints of dualism, however we must also work within the constraints of our embodied nature, which requires an easing of oppression now.

I have been able to provide suggestions on what this research calls without making blanket calls to veganism, which would ignore the insights of the intersectional

analysis that pre-exists the praxis. The intersectional methodology that was applied to the issue of the egg and dairy industries has also highlighted a potential way of conceptualising the human as embodied and disrupt the conceptual hyperseparation that distinguishes some nonhuman animals that are edible from all humans that are regarded as inedible. I have also supported the movement towards social media activism as a way of reaching beyond academia. Raising awareness is important in highlighting these intersectional concerns and showing that oppressions do not exist in a vacuum.

These actions could help unite people across different social movements and lead to activism that is strengthened by its unity. This does not necessarily have to be unity in how they challenge the master model; as Plumwood has argued ‘an appropriate tension and dynamic interchange between moderate and radical elements’¹⁰⁹³ is more effective in reaching goals. However, having ‘unity in diversity’¹⁰⁹⁴ by having a unified aim in tackling the oppressor could ‘have a powerful impact’¹⁰⁹⁵ but this would have to be grounded in recognising the interconnected nature of oppression.

Such unity across social movements could only first be achieved with successful awareness raising across oppressions. The praxis discussed in this chapter is an important way of cultivating solidarity across difference because it is ‘all ecocriticisms shared commitment to praxis’ that brings hope that we may ‘move

¹⁰⁹³ Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 127.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Brownhill and Turner, ‘Ecofeminist Ways, Ecosocialist Means’, 6.

¹⁰⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

forward as a community'.¹⁰⁹⁶ A strategy that unites different approaches across the communities of ecocriticism and feminism could help to address the intersecting oppressions they identify.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Greta Gaard, 'New Directions for Ecofeminism: Toward a More Feminist Ecocriticism', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 17.4 (2010), 643-665 (p. 659).

Moving Forward: Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this thesis has been twofold: first, to understand how ecofeminist theory can be developed using an intersectional methodology that would contribute to the move towards anti-essentialism; secondly, analysing the egg and dairy industries using a social constructionist ecofeminism with an intersectional methodology, to test the capacity of intersectionality in analysing (non)human oppressions and provide suggestions of practical avenues to overcome these oppressions.

This chapter will conclude the research by addressing the research questions and explaining how they have been answered throughout this thesis. I will discuss the significance and implications of these findings both in terms of how it contributes to the academic field of ecofeminism and for practical actions. The limitations of this research project will also be explored, alongside suggestions for further research questions that could prove valuable to investigate.

Consolidating and Reflecting

This thesis aimed to develop an intersectional methodology for social constructionist ecofeminism and test the efficacy of that methodology by applying it to the issue of the egg and dairy industries in the USA and UK. To address this aim, I asked three key research questions which were:

- How can the shift away from essentialism in ecofeminism be consolidated?

- Can intersectionality be moulded into a pragmatic methodology for ecofeminist theory?
- Finally, how does an intersectional methodology shed light on the rearing of animals for the production of feminized proteins?

In response to these questions, first, this thesis has found that there are compelling reasons to consider ecofeminism a valuable theory that developed more nuanced and critical iterations to address its essentialist critiques. However, it was suggested that the underlying intersectional commitments of social constructionist ecofeminism could help build on this shift. This is because essentialism is predicated on the assumption that certain properties could be necessary and natural to a universalised group, whilst intersectionality disrupts groupings by emphasising the complex relationship between privilege and oppression in identity categories. Secondly, there is little precedent for moulding intersectionality into a methodology, despite recognition that doing so might be beneficial.¹⁰⁹⁷ This research found that there is the potential for intersectionality to be moulded into a methodology that supports the key beliefs in ecofeminist theory and helps it to firmly centre an anti-essentialist position. This focus could further help to support the findings in response to question one posed by this thesis. Importantly, it was suggested that, by taking an intersectional approach in ecofeminist theory, the nonhuman animals could be included as part of an analysis of intersecting oppressions. However, it is also recognised that more work would be needed to

¹⁰⁹⁷ Lutz, 'Intersectionality as Method'; Hillsburg, 'Towards a Methodology of Intersectionality'; and Goethals and others, 'Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research'.

crystallise and refine the tools that are suggested here. Finally, it was found that employing a critical social constructionist ecofeminist theory that has an intersectional methodology helped to uncover complex interconnecting oppressions in the egg and dairy industries. The highly gendered issue of feminized proteins has frequently led to essentialist language about 'women' that could be minimised by taking a complex approach in listening and problematising the oppressor. This also led to unique lines of enquiry in relation to eggs in particular, which have often been somewhat overlooked in ecofeminist analyses.

This has been achieved by carefully addressing the research objectives in the structuring of this thesis. Each chapter has worked towards fulfilling the aims of the research project, and it is worth summarising the key findings of the thesis here to demonstrate how these research questions have been answered. Chapter One functioned as a literature review and analysed some of the seminal literature in ecofeminism and the way that dualist hierarchies have been criticised within ecofeminism and in neighbouring fields. The key finding in this chapter was that there are implicit intersectional ideas present within the rejection of dualism in ecofeminist theory, however there is a gap in the field; namely that the implicit intersectionality has not been centralised to explore how an intersectional analysis could help limit essentialist groupings by highlighting the complexity of privileged and oppressed identity categories.

Chapter Two sought to defend ecofeminism against the three main critiques that have historically been levelled at ecofeminists' works: anti-intellectualism,

Western-centrism and essentialism. It was found that whilst there are some valid points made within the latter two arguments, none of these weaken the foundation of ecofeminism. It was argued that the detrimental impact of these criticisms has been overstated and that ecofeminist theorists have worked to address these criticisms. However, it was suggested that reframing ecofeminism around intersectionality could help to consolidate the anti-essentialist approach that social constructionist ecofeminists, like Plumwood, have worked towards.

Chapter Three suggested an intersectional methodology that could help develop a critical ecofeminist theory. I formed two tools for an intersectional methodology that could be applied in ecofeminist analyses and suggested that a natural outcome of these tools would be to consider praxis. These tools ask researchers to make listening and problematising the oppressor central to their analyses and as informers of praxis. Then I suggested that an important, but difficult, aspect of intersectionality is that it will always be complex. This took some working through as methodologies often try to simplify and create clear structures, which would not be suitable for an intersectional methodology. Ultimately, I sought to maintain flexibility in the methodology I have developed by considering it discipline-specific and as merely a starting point for other intersectional analyses, with room for it to be adapted accordingly.

Chapter Four saw the application of the defended theoretical framework of ecofeminism, combined with the intersectional methodology, to the issue of the egg and dairy industries. Three key issues arose in relation to feminized proteins: 1) social

attitudes to feminized proteins; 2) intensive farming conditions; 3) killing nonhuman animals. Each subsection was organised around the pillars of listening and problematising the oppressor as methodological tools for analysis. This meant considering different forms of intersecting oppressions experienced by nonhuman animals in animal agriculture, whilst also considering multiple voices on gender, race, class, and sexuality. This chapter considered the benefits of these tools by applying them to the issue of feminized proteins to show how an appreciation of the complexity of intersecting privileged and oppressed identity categories helps to limit essentialism in an analysis that has often led to essentialist claims about gender.¹⁰⁹⁸ It was also suggested that the intersectional methodology helped to analyse the interlinked oppressions associated with egg production, which has been under-researched in ecofeminist theory in comparison to milk production.

Chapter Five focused on the suggested product of an intersectional methodology; namely, praxis. A case was presented for two suggestions on practice that could be taken as a result of the preceding analysis. The most impactful immediate action an individual could take is to become vegan. However, in contrast to some existing ecofeminist theories,¹⁰⁹⁹ it was found that committing to an intersectional methodology led to a more nuanced recommendation on who was included in this call to veganism. Additionally, a case was presented for awareness raising of the intersecting oppressions through social media. The effectiveness of social media has sometimes been ignored in academia, but it was argued that this

¹⁰⁹⁸ Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* and Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast*.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Most notably Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*.

praxis could work towards uniting people across different social justice movements by highlighting the intersecting nature of oppression.¹¹⁰⁰ It was noted that a critical ecofeminism truly calls for a total deconstruction of dualist hierarchical structures so that we can re-evaluate difference. However, it was suggested that such revolutionary praxis would require more time and significant momentum, thus it is also important to make changes *within* the system which can more quickly alleviate the immediate harm caused by industrial animal agriculture and its interconnecting oppressions.

The Research Contribution

The key contribution of this thesis has been the development and presentation of a new intersectional methodology that has been specifically designed to support the epistemological and normative enquiries of a critical ecofeminist theory. The methodology presented in this thesis contributes by providing a suggested way of centralising these intersectional ideas and develop ecofeminism into a more critical vein of theory. The research problem then, is that a gap exists in current ecofeminist literature where ecofeminist sympathisers have recognised the importance of anti-essentialism and suggested intersectional ideas¹¹⁰¹ in addressing essentialism, yet there has not been an examination of what integrating intersectionality explicitly in ecofeminist theory might look like. To become more critical, ecofeminist theorists have made movements to commit to anti-essentialism, and it has been the position of this research that centring an intersectional methodology could help to consolidate this as

¹¹⁰⁰ Brownhill and Turner, 'Ecofeminist Ways, Ecosocialist Means', 6.

¹¹⁰¹ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism'; Hunnicutt, *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective*; and Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*.

it would encourage a more complex way of thinking about identity and experience that problematises essentialist groupings.

A further contribution of this thesis can be found within the application of the proposed methodology to the issue of the egg and dairy industries. The testing of this methodology could help to highlight aspects that need further clarification, which could be of benefit to further developments of intersectional methodologies. The application has also demonstrated that listening and problematising the oppressor can help to limit essentialist language around gender in particular. Feminized proteins, as a subject of analysis, can lead to biological claims about 'women' that have been limited by listening to intersecting problems that arise in queer analysis. However, the surrounding literature is heavily gendered, which may have limited the impact of this contribution. Furthermore, despite feminized proteins being a popular case study for analysis in ecofeminism, with Adams,¹¹⁰² Gaard,¹¹⁰³ and Plumwood¹¹⁰⁴ all having produced work on the issue, the analysis of eggs is limited. This research has contributed to ecofeminist theory by presenting an analysis of the intersecting oppressions in relation to eggs that could help address this gap in the literature.

The findings in this thesis have challenged some of the essentialist conclusions reached by Adams, namely that a universal call to veganism is appropriate in response to the oppressions of the animal agriculture industry. This has simultaneously supported the position of Plumwood that greater nuance is required to truly disrupt

¹¹⁰² Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*.

¹¹⁰³ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*.

¹¹⁰⁴ Plumwood, 'Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature'.

anthropocentric dualist hierarchies ¹¹⁰⁵ and has emphasised the importance of appreciating the complex socio-economic situations of people, which are barriers to choosing veganism.

This research project has proposed a defence of ecofeminism that remains sympathetic to its origins, whilst acknowledging and trying to overcome notable weaknesses. There is potential value in a critical ecofeminist theory in its ability to articulate connections with the nonhuman that have otherwise been ignored in many alternative feminist discourses. Equally intersectionality has infiltrated popular discourse, but there is a lack of consideration of how these intersections relate to the nonhuman. The integration of intersectionality with ecofeminism is a mutually beneficial exercise as it could help acknowledge the significance of oppressive intersections across human and nonhuman binaries.

Implications

A significant part of this research project has been providing some insight into what the ethical ramifications are of intersecting oppressions associated with the egg and dairy industries. Most immediately, this project has suggested that a natural implication is to adopt a vegan lifestyle where possible. This is a decision that once made can successfully tackle the manifestation of the intersections considered in this project. This practical implication is not taken lightly as it directly contradicts the vegan-praxis put forward by Adams, who made up a significant part of my argument for

¹¹⁰⁵ Plumwood, 'Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature', 293-4.

veganism as a practical implication. However, not calling for universal veganism is a necessary divergence from Adams, and a closer relation to Plumwood, due to a commitment to appreciating the complexities of an intersectional analysis.

A further suggestion is that people get involved in awareness raising that is intersectional in nature. These movements can put pressure on the governing bodies and corporations who have the resources and power to make significant changes that would alleviate oppressions. The intersectional focus can also aid in emphasising common cause across different social justice movements. This could also help avoid problems that have occurred where a social movement's pure focus on one manifestation of oppression leads to the reinforcing of another oppression.¹¹⁰⁶

There are also academic implications for ecofeminist theory. Ecofeminist work still frequently appears to be of a defensive nature.¹¹⁰⁷ This is because it is still necessary to show where ecofeminist literature has sought to revive ecofeminism for a contemporary age. This thesis has presented a novel methodology in aid of this development, and an implication of this suggestion is that ecofeminists could consider the merits and potential shortcomings of more explicitly integrating intersectionality into the theory.

¹¹⁰⁶ I examined some of examples of this in Chapter Three, including PETA campaigns.

¹¹⁰⁷ Chaone Mallory, 'What's in A Name? In Defense of Ecofeminism (Not Ecological Feminisms, Feminist Ecology, Or Gender and the Environment); Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited'; and, Thompson, 'Back to Nature? Resurrecting Ecofeminism after Poststructuralist and Third-Wave Feminisms'.

Limitations

In the interest of being transparent and listening reflexively, as my methodological tools would encourage me to do, I was not vegetarian or vegan when I began this project. I do not think that I came to this project with the intention of demonstrating the moral responsibility some people have to choose a vegan lifestyle. However, I am also aware that the middle-class upbringing and lifestyle I have has meant that the choice to buy vegan alternatives is available to me and not counter to my cultural position. I have tried to limit researcher bias in my recognition that veganism cannot be a universal calling, however it would be amiss to not consider the privilege I have come to this project with as a potential limitation of its relevance beyond this context.

An important limitation to consider is the novelty of intersectional methodologies. Although intersectionality has been an accepted term since 1989,¹¹⁰⁸ the development of intersectionality into a methodology is relatively new.¹¹⁰⁹ Consequently, there were limited examples of intersectional methodologies to help inform the development of the one presented in this thesis. Thus, the intersectional methodology proposed here can only be considered a working proposal. More research is needed to refine what an intersectional methodology should look like¹¹¹⁰ to further develop an intersectional methodology for critical ecofeminist theory.

¹¹⁰⁸ Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', 63.

¹¹⁰⁹ Lutz, 'Intersectionality as Method'; Hillsburg, 'Towards a Methodology of Intersectionality'; and Tina Goethals, and others, 'Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research'.

¹¹¹⁰ Hillsburg, 'Towards a Methodology of Intersectionality', 4.

A further limitation has been the textual focus of this thesis. The tool of listening, which was proposed in Chapter Three, was deliberately developed to enable listening to different forms of communication that are non-linguistic. However, this thesis has predominantly dealt with text in applying the methodology. Consequently, a limitation is that listening has not been practically applied through fieldwork that would involve going out and listening to the nonhuman in a more active way. This has been a further barrier in the honing of listening as a methodological tool, which would benefit from the contribution of research that was more fieldwork centred.

A further, more circumstantial, limitation is that I have developed and written the majority of this thesis during the 2020 and 2021 national and regional lockdowns that were aimed to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. This has limited my ability to access resources due to library closures and bans on travel between areas.¹¹¹¹ These factors have made certain parts of my research more difficult than anticipated. I am aware that there may have been books published during this period that would have been fruitful to consider in my analysis that unfortunately I could not access.

Recommended Further Research Areas

The appeal of work based on an intersectional methodology is that there is always room to alter the scope and to engage in conversation with other disciplines. I explicitly limited this project to considering the egg and dairy industries, but it would be equally rewarding to structure the analysis around an alternative case that

¹¹¹¹ I live over 80 miles away from the University and so would not have been permitted to make this journey even when libraries were open.

highlights intersectional oppression. There are important discussions to be had on how race and colonialism intersect with animal agriculture, for example, that were outside the scope of this particular project. Alternative case studies were also considered in the advent of this project, such as biodiversity and ocean systems. I became most drawn to the egg and dairy industries because of the wealth of scholarship in the area and the fact that I felt I had pre-existing knowledge in this area, which would make me better able to highlight the benefits of engaging with that scholarship using an intersectional ecofeminist theory. Although the restriction to one case study certainly limits the reach of this particular project, it should not itself be seen as a limit of an intersectional ecofeminist analysis. Indeed, as Kathy Davis suggests, the 'imperfect' nature of intersectionality in that it is 'openended' and lacks 'specific parameters' is part of its charm.¹¹¹² Additionally, applying the proposed methodology and theory to alternative case studies would help to further test the methodology and potentially develop more effective intersectional methodologies for critical ecofeminist theory.

I also believe that there is more to be said in defence of spiritual ecofeminism. The development of a spiritual ecofeminism that is committed to anti-essentialism, not Western-centric, and rejects the anti-academic critique, is theoretically possible. As I have been focused on developing a defence of social constructionist ecofeminism, this has not been amongst the aims of this particular project. However, I do have sympathy for the aims and purposes of spiritual ecofeminism. Namely, that it creates a space for people who do not feel safe in patriarchal religious movements and that it

¹¹¹² Davis, 'Intersectionality as Buzzword', 77.

encourages people to reconnect with the natural world whilst viewing nature as intrinsically valuable. Spiritual ecofeminism has been particularly popular in non-academic, activist-centred circles. This suggests that there is something about spiritual ecofeminism that has appealed to people despite it having a negative academic reputation. It is significant that feminists have been able to connect with the spiritual side of ecofeminism and for this reason it deserves further analysis.

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