

FEMINIST ENCOUNTERS

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OF CRITICAL STUDIES
IN CULTURE AND POLITICS

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CHIEF EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

FEMINIST ENCOUNTERS: A JOURNAL OF CRITICAL STUDIES IN CULTURE AND POLITICS

Founded in 2017, *Feminist Encounters* is a journal committed to argument and debate, in the tradition of historical feminist movements.

In the wake of the growing rise of the Right across the world, openly neo-fascist national sentiments, and rising conservative populism, we feminists all over the world are needing to remobilise our energies to protect and advance gender rights.

Feminist Encounters provides a forum for feminist theorists, scholars, and activists to communicate with each other, to better educate ourselves on international issues and thus promote more global understanding, and to enhance our critical tools for fighting for human rights.

Feminism is an intellectual apparatus, a political agenda, and a programme for social change. Critical analysis of how gender discourses produce cultural identities and social practices within diverse lived realities is key to this change. We need to think more sharply in order to strategise well: as the discourses of conservatism renew and invigorate themselves, so we as feminist scholars need to be refining our amazonic swords in order not just to respond effectively but also to innovate our own ideas for equality and social justice.

We are, of course, committed to intersectionality, a vital lens through which to see the contours of race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, age/ability, and explore how gendered scripts get lived, and filtered through these specificities of cultural organisation. Lived experience is never codified in terms of gender alone, and so our research will always be sensitive to the nexus of lived oppressions.

The journal has a large editorial board and journal team, consisting of over forty scholars in twenty countries. This is deliberately inclusive in order that we can promote diversity and engage with different concerns from across the world. Our aim is not to simply talk to ourselves, reconfirming our localised assumptions, but to generate feminist encounters across regions, even if this is sometimes uncomfortable. Globalisation has been a triumph of neoliberalism, but digital technologies have also flattened and reduced the distance between us in dramatic ways, so that now we can talk to each other with unanticipated ease.

This new access to each others' voices has also brought challenges to the way we think and do things, so that being a feminist today might be quite a different prospect to a person living in China, Iran, Norway, South Africa or the UK. Second Wave Feminism used the idea of 'sisterhood' to invoke solidarity between women. I've always rather liked Andrea Dworkin's claim, though, that: "Feminism is a political practice of fighting male supremacy in behalf of women as a class, including all the women you don't like, including all the women you don't want to be around, including all the women who used to be your best friends whom you don't want anything to do with anymore." The notion of sisterhood was challenged by Black feminists in the 1980s as being too conceptually white, thus bell hooks' trenchant critique that: "the idea of 'common oppression' was a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality". In the 1990s and 2000s it has been fair to say that feminist theory and Feminist Studies since have engaged more intentionally and deliberately with intersectionality - though Jennifer Baumgardner did caution us that: "Sisterhood was never about everybody agreeing".

For our journal, sisterhood must expand and embrace our transgender allies and our men friends, reminding us that sibling relationships are rarely straightforward or inevitably blessed by golden moments of total affinity. Thus, **Feminist Encounters** welcomes the opportunity for new kinds of international discussions in the spirit of collaboration and critical intellectual enquiry. We hope for productive agreement and disagreement, and the shared struggle of fighting gender oppression, with our minds, hearts, and bodies, as the times demand.

**Sally R Munt, University of Sussex
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GENDER AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

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Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue of *Feminist Encounters* on ‘Gender and the Anthropocene’

Amanda Gouws ^{1*}, Deirdre Byrne ^{2*}, Azille Coetzee ³

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This special issue of *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* is motivated by the need to craft a gendered, and specifically intersectional feminist, response to the Anthropocene. The term was coined in 2000 by scientists Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer to signal the growing agreement among scientists that the impact of humanity on the earth’s condition and prospects could no longer be ignored. The term has been criticised by Brannen (2018), Haraway (2015) and others, but it has passed into popular discourse as a term that encapsulates the irreversibility of human actions on our planetary home.

Why, though, **gender** and the Anthropocene? Here, the etymological roots of the term are worth investigating: ‘Anthropos’ refers to a prototypical ‘human being’, who — as we have learned from gender theory — is always sexed as male and gendered as masculine. Hegemonic masculinity has led human beings to treat the non-human natural world with disdain and as a ‘standing reserve’ to be exploited in the same way as women have always been oppressed by patriarchy. In many patriarchal religions, nature is given to man for his dominion, pleasure and benefit in the same way as women were (cf. Merchant, King, Gaard). The connection between the oppression and exploitation of women, and the oppression and exploitation of nature, is at the heart of ecofeminist theory, and also underpins many of the scholarly explorations in this special issue.

Several prominent theorists of gender and feminism have written about the intersections between gender and the Anthropocene. For example, Claire Colebrook reminds us that there is no singular Anthropocene, but many, when she asks ‘whose Anthropocene?’ (2019: 10, original emphasis). She answers her own question with ‘An Anthropocene feminism [...] might ask for whom this stratum becomes definitive of *the human*’ (2019: 10, original emphasis). Questions such as these lead her to speculate about who would benefit, who would be able to speak, if there were no Anthropocene, and to conclude that ‘We have Always been Post-Anthropocene’ in living in a world where ‘who speaks’ and ‘who gains’ is inflected by gender, class, race, ethnicity, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, religion, language and other markers of differential social power (see also Braidotti, 2019).

When Colebrook urges us to ask for whom this stratum becomes definitive of the human, she poses a question that reveals the linkage not only between environmental destruction and gender violence, but also the ways in which the gendered processes that cause environmental degradation are connected to the violence of colonialism that introduced the extractive processes and land dispossession of capitalism.

Scholars like Davis and Todd (2017) locate the start date of the Anthropocene at the beginning of colonialism and settler-colonialism, thereby bringing the racist technologies of extractive capitalism in connection with the environmental destruction of the epoch. Kathryn Yusoff strikingly writes that ‘[t]he racial categorization of Blackness shares its natality with mining the New World, as does the material impetus for colonialism in the first instance’ (Yusoff, 2019). Accordingly, the destruction of indigenous populations, cultures and ways of life is directly linked to human impact on the non-human environment, in so far as the racialised human / non-human distinction is historically relational to a discourse of settler-colonial rights and the concomitant material practices of extraction (Yusoff, 2019). Curley and Lister use the term ‘Capitalocene’ to link environmental change to the extinction that was wrought in the name of developing of the modern world system and its freedoms (Curley and Lister, 2020). Colonialism is a political and philosophical practice that is destructive of environments, creating unsustainable development and destroying indigenous lands, making it the social and political project that created the conditions for climate change while the extractive capacities of capitalism led to forced assimilation, violent displacement and

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genocide (Cuyler and Lister, 2020: 258). Scholars such as Sylvia Wynter (1997), Alexander Weheliye (2014), and Katherine McKittrick (2006) explore the ways in which these racialised processes are all deeply gendered, in so far as the human / non-human distinction central to colonial domination and capitalist extraction is always already rooted in and maintained through gender normativities.

Starke, Schlunke and Edmonds (2018) refer to the consequences of colonial violence as making the familiar unfamiliar or introducing the 'uncanny' (drawing on Homi Bhabha's notion) in the following way: 'We recognise that deep genealogies of colonial violence have driven aspects of the Anthropocene, disordering worlds in a process that has made the familiar unfamiliar, and thus unhomely, out of place and outside accepted orders of time'. Hecht (2018) situates the African continent as pertinent to the Anthropocene by thinking through its scalar effects and what it means for Africa that was the epicentre of colonial practice, experimentation and slave provisioning. This recasts the notion of human control to human responsibility, putting the importance of politics or governments' willingness to confront states of exception that create bare life (cf. Agamben, 1998) for millions of people.

Violence (environmental, gendered, racial, ethnic) is therefore integral to the biopolitics of the Anthropocene. Although the making of the modern world and the capitalist pursuit of 'progress' justify excessive violence that can be described as spectacular (such as the biopolitically-engineered elimination that was common practice under colonialism), the Anthropocene also metes out violence, which inhabits routine practices and spaces of life in the form of gradual degradations of the environment that test people's perseverance, endurance and often allows only for precarious survival (which Elizabeth Povinelli calls the 'anthropology of ordinary suffering') (Povinelli, Colebrook and Yusoff, 2017). These debilitating violences that blur the division between life and death, or what Rob Nixon refers to as 'slow violence' (Nixon, 2011), can also be traced back to Foucault's notion of 'making live and letting die' (Povinelli, et al, 2017: 170).

The COVID-19 pandemic was a stark reminder of the place of violence in the Anthropocene. Claire Colebrook (2020) makes the important link between slow violence, the pandemic, and what she calls 'fast violence'. As she puts it: 'To say that the 2020 pandemic coincided with the spectacle of racial violence is accurate only if one thinks about coincidence less as a chance event and more as the way in which the speeds of violence are always racialised and always fast and slow at the same time'. While the pandemic rages across the USA at breakneck speed, in a way that attests to the worst political mismanagement, the death of George Floyd in racialised police brutality spoke of the slow violence of racial inequality and social exclusion that normalise racial violence. The fast and slow death (nearly nine minutes) of George Floyd highlights processes that can be traced back to slavery and colonisation. The point that Colebrook makes is that the speed with which this zoonotic virus spread exposed the social exclusion and marginalisation of millions of people on whose bodies violence is exercised continually in specifically gendered ways, in conditions of social and political marginalisation and environmental and climate degradation, that make zoonotic viruses possible in the first place.

In this Special Issue, we present feminist and queer theorisations of the Anthropocene that contribute to the untangling of the complex web of violent racialised/gendered subjugations and extractive technologies that continue to function in the making and maintenance of the modern capitalist world. This collection of articles shows how gender-blind and anti-intersectional or single-axis analyses cannot account for the differential impact of violence, social exclusion or even death on men, women and queer communities, as well as the differential impact of the Anthropocene on the global North and the global South.

The first article in this Special Issue is the text of the keynote lecture that Fiona Probyn-Rapsey delivered at 'Gender and the Anthropocene', a conference of the South African Association of Gender Studies that took place in Stellenbosch, South Africa, in September 2018. In this talk, Probyn-Rapsey explores the naming of the Anthropocene and how it works to obscure long histories of knowledge and resistance embedded in marginalised archives. This sets the tone for the rest of the Issue where the Anthropocene is theorised and problematised from within selected marginalised archives.

In her article 'Reducing Women to Bare Life: Sexual Violence in South Africa', Amanda Gouws traces the contours of sexual violence in South Africa back to its (settler) colonial roots, showing how slavery and colonisation contributed to creating conditions for gender based violence that extends to current day South Africa. Drawing on Agamben's theory of the state of exception and bare life, she exposes the continuities with colonial sexual violence that creates a state of exception for women in South Africa through the abandonment by law on the side of state agencies (police and the criminal justice system) that are supposed to enforce the law. Using the rape trial of the former South African President, Jacob Zuma, as well as lesbian rape and killings, she illustrates how violence strips women of state protection that creates conditions for the necropolitics of intimate femicide.

In her article 'Searching for Ethical Hope: Ideas on what Feminist Debates on the Anthropocene Can Offer Theorisation of Gender and Violence' Jane Bennett makes us pause to think about the ampersand in 'gender & violence' and asks why there is limited head-on engagement with rape in the Anthropocene. Writing in a beautiful poetic style that belies the degrading realities of violence, she engages with the poetry of Yvette Christiansë and Donna Haraway's cyborg. She takes us on a tour of what it means to develop a curriculum on Gender & Violence

engaging embodied violence originating from colonial violence, encapsulated and curated by the Slave Lodge in Cape Town. Her article exposes the vulnerability of both the earth and the human body in the age of the Anthropocene, as well as making a plea for what has been erased or disappeared to be included in the archive of human memory – knowledge of the other that came to us through colonisation, slavery, and dehumanisation. Here the work of radical black intellectual, Sylvia Wynter, who theorises the history of the modern world from the perspective of plantation slavery, is engaged. Despite the realities of the ampersand (gender & violence) Bennett believes that, as she puts it: ‘Close attunement to fragments of archive, imaginative insight, and genealogy may transform the concave impact of violence into legible, uncontainable, hopeful humanity.’

In ‘Othering Mushrooms: Migratism and its Racist Entanglements in the Brexit Campaign’ Lenka Vráblíková examines the media discourses surrounding the Brexit campaign through an analytical lens that she constructs by drawing on Sara Ahmed’s conceptualisation of ‘othering’ as an embodied process and exploring the ambivalent position that mushrooms occupy in the cultural imagination. In an imaginative and thoughtful article, Vráblíková makes an argument for understanding the disgust and fear that mushrooms evoke in certain cultures, and the fascination and wonder they elicit in others, not as exclusive binaries, but as critically entangled and mutually constitutive cultural positions. In a fascinating analysis, Vráblíková looks at how a call for strict regulation of mushroom picking in British woodland coincided with the Brexit campaign and was covered concomitantly in the British Press. Vráblíková shows how situating a discourse of othering in ‘nature’ justifies and naturalises such othering and how it intensifies a fantasy of an idealised community that rests on the representation of the community’s presence as being in crisis. She concludes that research into environmental histories is vital for the critical interrogation of the recent re-emergence of right-wing populism in contemporary global politics.

Several of the contributors to this issue use literature as lens to address the intersection of gender with the Anthropocene. Some of the authors have explored the planetary from feminist perspectives, as Allison Mackey does in her article, ‘Reproduction beyond Hu/man Extinction: Detoxifying Care in Latin American Anthropocene Fictions’, where she explores a new fictional sub-genre called ‘cli-fi’ or climate fiction. The speculative cli-fi texts by Anacristina Rossi and Samantha Schweblin that she explores address the question of reproduction, and its obverse, extinction, in a post-Anthropocene world where environmental disaster has already taken place. Mackey shares Colebrook’s understanding that the Anthropocene also means extinction and that this, too, has gendered implications, especially for women.

Deirdre Byrne has also chosen to explore literary representations of the Anthropocene in her article ‘Water in the Anthropocene: Perspectives on Poetry by South African Women’, which homes in on water: one of the most important elements for continued organic life. Water is a recurring and powerful theme in poetry by South African women, but, as Byrne discovers, there is no awareness of its impending scarcity or the concomitant environmental degradation in the Anthropocene. Rather, water is better conceptualised as a multifaceted, entangled relationship (Jepson et al. 2017: 14).

Terry Westby-Nunn’s exploration of Rachel Zadok’s *Sister-Sister* in “‘The Road Never Ends’’: Ecofeminism and Magical Realism in Rachel Zadok’s *Sister-Sister*”, also focuses on a relationship, but this time the spotlight falls on the connection between twin sisters. The novel, as well as Westby-Nunn’s exploration of it, juxtaposes the stark ‘road’ and the natural world in both its flourishing and its despoliation. Zadok’s magical realism allows her to examine the ‘becomings-woman’ of indigenous South African culture as well as the fictional twin girls.

Delia Rabie explores a different depiction of the natural world in her article, ‘The Wild *Volksmoeder* in the Forest: An Analysis of the Human-Nonhuman Relationship in *Dreamforest* (2003)’, where she explores representations of the Tsitsikamma Forest on South Africa’s Garden Route. This forest, said to be home to the legendary Knysna elephants, also shelters families of woodcutters, who eke out a bare living by chopping wood. *Dreamforest* tells the story of the daughter of one of these families and, as Rabie shows, the entanglement between the arboreal and the feminine is powerfully represented.

Lastly, in ‘Becoming (Musical) Woman’, Cecilia Ferm Almqvist starts from the idea that the Anthropocene requires us to recognise that we are all participants in the ‘becoming world’ and explores the question of gender inequality in our contemporary modes of being and becoming with music. She looks at dominant streaming companies such as Spotify, who are driven by the patriarchal, capitalist forces that characterise the Anthropocene and therefore easily contribute to the maintenance of oppressive gender norms and patterns. Through interviews with female-identified women of various ages, analysed with reference to Rosi Braidotti’s feminist thought, Almqvist works to locate in such platforms possibilities for complex and adventurous entanglements through which female-defined users can access opportunities for becoming expanding sexual selves, beyond the confines of prescribed gender identities.

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Feminist Protest and the Anthropocene

(Keynote Lecture Presented at the 'Gender and the Anthropocene' Conference, Stellenbosch, September 2018)

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***Preamble:** Thanks to Deirdre, Amanda and Azille for inviting me to this conference – Gender and the Anthropocene. This is my first time in South Africa, a country that has always loomed large in my political imagination. Like a lot of Australians, when I was young, I spent a lot of time thinking about race relations in South Africa, rather than looking at race relations in my own country! (I was obsessed by campaigns to secure Nelson Mandela's release.) While my PhD focused on South African and Australian literature, I have not really spent much time writing or thinking about South Africa since then, so I am very much looking forward to being better informed by listening, learning and participating at this conference.*

Most of my research over the last few years has been focused on projects that are beyond what Sandra Swart describes as the 'holy trinity of gender, race and class' – and focused more on gender, race and species, so in this talk I'll be invoking that research and the fields of both Animal Studies and ecofeminist thinking, both of which are highly relevant to questions about how to live in the Anthropocene. Jan Zalasiewicz, member of the Anthropocene Working Group, describes the Anthropocene thus:

Our research suggests changes to the Earth have resulted in strata that are distinctive and rich in geological detail through including such things as artificial radionuclides, plastics, fly ash, metals such as aluminium, pesticides and concrete. (University of Leicester, 2017)

Measured by elements and objects in geological strata, the Anthropocene names the destructive nature of human impact on the planet. As a name or a label, the Anthropocene also measures other impacts of the epistemological kind. Noel Castree (2014: 230) observes that the term's usefulness lies in its being 'a politically savvy way of presenting to non-scientists the sheer magnitude of global biophysical change'. It was a way for scientists to get traction and attention for the effects of human induced planetary change. As a way of 'sharpening the focus' (Castree, 2014: 230) on human responsibility for planetary damage, one would have to conclude that it's been a success, with its proliferation across the sciences, humanities, media and popular culture. When my teenage daughter heard the term she described it as 'cool' because it seems to point the finger back at 'us' as future dinosaurs and meteorites all rolled into one.

When Castree calls Crutzen and Stoermer 'politically savvy' for coining the term, he is implying that they knew precisely what the term would do – it was designed to provoke, shock us into action. But the problem with shock is that it is not a reliable platform for political projects. The reaction and disorientation that comes with shock has to be followed up with some sort of reassurance, hope and a plan for action. We know this as feminist and critical race teachers. I'm thinking of times when I've introduced students to the idea that racism and sexism are structures: not just events, not just 'bad speech' but a habitus too. It's not uncommon for students to encounter this idea with something like shock – making them feel paralysed by complicity and overcome with a feeling of being stuck – until they connect to an archive of feminist and anti-racist work that reassures us that life can be re-imagined, re-organised. This is vaguely analogous with what the proponents of the 'Anthropocene' have done; shocked with the realisation that climate change and extinction is now our habitus, not a weather event or an accident to be overcome. The difference is, though, that their offer of reassurance and hope for the future is not very reassuring.

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Their source of hope for surviving the Anthropocene lies not with a lifeline of feminist and anti-racist work against exploitations of various kinds, but with an image of a western male pioneer who, after apparently heeding Gandhi's message on greed, takes the lead on behalf of all humans yet again:

First, we must learn to grow in different ways than with our current hyper-consumption. What we now call economic 'growth' amounts too often to a Great Recession for the web of life we depend on. Gandhi pointed out that 'the Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed.' To accommodate the current Western lifestyle for 9 billion people, we'd need several more planets. With countries worldwide striving to attain the 'American Way of Life,' citizens of the West should redefine it — and pioneer a modest, renewable, mindful, and less material lifestyle. That includes, first and foremost, cutting the consumption of industrially produced meat and changing from private vehicles to public transport. (Crutzen and Schwagerl, 2011)

There is much in this to applaud; the shift in emphasis from growth as consumption to growth as mindfulness, a call to cut industrialised animal agriculture and private car use. It is politically savvy in the sense that it points the finger at the west, but it follows up with a handshake, not by displacing privilege but reinstalling it:

To master this huge shift, we must change the way we perceive ourselves and our role in the world. Students in school are still taught that we are living in the Holocene, an era that began roughly 12,000 years ago at the end of the last Ice Age. But teaching students that we are living in the Anthropocene, the Age of Men, could be of great help. Rather than representing yet another sign of human hubris, this name change would stress the enormity of humanity's responsibility as stewards of the Earth. It would highlight the immense power of our intellect and our creativity, and the opportunities they offer for shaping the future. (Crutzen and Schwagerl, 2011)

I don't get the sense from reading this that the 'west' loses its social license to take the lead given its leading role in producing the problem. It is an example of the slippage between bigness and greatness that Stacey Alaimo has identified in Anthropocene discussions: 'the hand-wringing confessions of human culpability appear coated with a veneer of species pride' (2017: 90). When the scientists refer to the Anthropocene as the 'Age of Men' there is no irony. They are not calling for a workshop on toxic and or white hegemonic masculinity – the type of masculinity that is responsible for more of the world's meat consumption, travel, real estate, deforestation than any other type of masculinity. They do not mean 'Age of Men' in the way that Val Plumwood referred to the 'Empire of Men' (1997) to describe the ways in which masculinised forms of 'reason' install a hyperseparation between multiple binaries, precipitating the current planetary crisis. By 'Age of Men' they seem to mean something like patriarchal comfort food, untroubled by centuries of feminist and anti-racist activism and scholarship.

Because the Anthropocene is shocking—and here I am referring back to the way it names humans as geological agents on a planetary scale—it has produced revelations of loss and disorientation in humanities and social science thinkers too, as in these three examples:

As the crisis gathered momentum in the last few years, I realized that all my readings in theories of globalization, Marxist analysis of capital, subaltern studies, and postcolonial criticism over the last twenty-five years, while enormously useful in studying globalization, had not really prepared me for making sense of this planetary conjunction within which humanity finds itself today. (Dipesh Chakrabarty, 2009: 199)

(...) ourselves lacking a reference point. When we think big we discover a hole in our psychological universe. There is no way of measuring anything anymore, since there is nowhere 'outside' this universe from which to take an impartial measurement. (Timothy Morton, 2010: 31)

(...) we do not have a developed analysis of the political innovations that have to be made if our aspirations to limit global warming are to become real. It is a strange and indefensible absence. (Anthony Giddens, 2009: 4)

All three exhibit a shock of comprehension, or lack of comprehension and ill-preparedness to imagine the bigness (Morton), and the gaps and absences of knowledge (Chakrabarty and Giddens) that come with the Anthropocene. What is interesting about this revelation is that it reminds me, again, going back to the classroom where I was talking about introducing students to structures of racism and sexism, that there are some reactions that take up more space than others. There will be the shock of students who realise that their lives have been shaped by unearned privilege; there will also be the shock of students who have observed this unearned privilege possessed by others all their lives – and they are not at all shocked by its being a structure. Similarly, when it comes

to the Anthropocene we can see that some are more shocked than others, with greater access to transmit that shock as a collective state. Claire Colebrook makes this point pithily:

My goodness, who would have thought that centuries of slavery, violence, kleptocracy, plundering and liberation of some humans at the expense of others – who would have thought that was a destructive indictment of ‘the human’? Who could possibly have imagined that our species was destructive of its milieu without the definitive evidence of the geological record? (2017: 18)

At the risk of sounding unsympathetic to the newly shocked, I think the examples from Morton, Chakrabarty and Giddens show that we need to be wary of the ‘politically savvy’ use of shock. Shock can, as Chris Cuomo has argued, produce a kind of fatalism – *‘it’s all over now’* (2017a, original emphasis). Secondly, it overlooks the fact that this might not be shocking at all to everyone and thirdly, shock can prematurely reinstall power structures based on familiarity and comfort. These three elements can appear simultaneously and are connected.

The first reaction to the Anthropocene (that of fatalism) is something that Chris Cuomo sees in the concept itself. Cuomo argues that in declaring the Holocene dead, we are also mobilising an ethical switch; we no longer focus on campaigning for social change, fighting for forests, for animal rights and welfare, for responsibilities towards the Earth, because the Anthropocene has declared this window of opportunity now closed and we just have to get on with sustainability; sustaining what we have, rather than changing what we’re doing (Cuomo, 2017a; 2017b).

The second point, that shocked reactions to the Anthropocene overlook the fact that others have known all along, is a long and complex one and I think we will probably be able to spend much more time on this at the conference. Women have long been at the forefront of the environmental movement and Indigenous people have consistently framed decolonisation in terms of ecology, land and identity. Women and Indigenous peoples are least likely to be shocked by the Anthropocene but also least likely to be cited *because* of the Anthropocene.

Indigenous responses to climate change are never simply about isolated technological fixes, but rather they include decolonising epistemologies, and epistemologies of decolonisation. Bruce Pascoe’s *Dark Emus* (2014) is a good example of Indigenous arguments for ecological decolonisation. He makes the point that pastoralism (in particular sheep and cattle) formed a major plank of colonial dispossession and the fiction of *terra nullius*, or ‘empty land’. Pastoralism filled the ‘empty’ and by so doing destroyed Indigenous cultivation practices that sustained communities. In 1992, the High Court overturned the doctrine of *terra nullius* and declared that pastoral leases did not extinguish native title. Not surprisingly, pastoralism remains one of the clearest expressions of settler colonial occupation, saturated as it is with sentimentality, national identity and all, conducted through the everyday violence of animal agriculture (Boyde, 2013). The sorts of Indigenous epistemologies of sustainability that Bruce Pascoe is calling for thus does not only work against ‘poor farming practices’ with the wrong hard-footed animals, it works against a settler colonial worldview.

In the Canadian context, Billy Ray Belcourt argues that settler colonialism needs speciesism (particularly expressed through animal agriculture) to justify its occupation. He writes: ‘it is my contention that speciesism intersects with the logic of genocide to secure a capitalist project of animal agriculture that requires the disappearance of Indigenous bodies from the land’ (2015: 5). In other words, Indigenous scholars such as Pascoe and Belcourt tell a more complicated story about the geological agency expressed by humans – that it is not all humans, nor all practices that are equally responsible for the crisis. Bruce Pascoe does not express any shock or surprise either at the degradation that he is describing; it is an intimate part of colonisation. Pascoe states that, if anything, the ‘older’ practices of managing country are going to be necessary for the future. While on the subject of western scholars ‘discovering’ the value of Indigenous knowledges of country, Kim Tallbear makes the point that when western scholars ‘discover’ alternatives to instrumentalist relationships with nonhumans, they need to be aware that ‘Indigenous people have never forgotten that nonhumans are agential beings engaged in social relations that profoundly shape human lives’ (2014: 234). Again, this is a good reminder to calibrate the ‘shock’ of the Anthropocene against the knowledge of Others. If we get too caught up in the shock then we miss the opportunity to listen. Many have already had an inkling of the bad news, had lived with the bad news, experienced the bad news and are now sitting back watching, with maybe a wry smile, at why, in this supposed ‘Age of Men’, the men seem so disoriented and lost.

Val Plumwood also foresaw that the ‘empire of men’ would drive an ecological catastrophe. Her archive is ecofeminist and environmental philosophy. She argues that the west’s hyperseparation (from nature) was bound up with our overinvestment in binary thinking (nature/culture, man/woman, etc). This hyperseparation fuelled an investment in detachment: detachment from acknowledging our interdependence with ecologies and nonhuman animals. This meant we had no sense of ecological vulnerability and without that we would hurtle headlong into ecological crisis (1997: 2002). Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (1993) make a similar point, but they are even more explicit about disputing any claim of innocence when it comes to knowing what was/is going on.

So, given these different standpoints — shock on the one hand and recognition on the other — we might benefit from speculating what has produced this state of affairs where a renowned sociologist, historian and literary scholar claim that there are vacuums of knowledge, while other archives are full of predictions, plans and ideas. One way to understand this is to consider whether the Anthropocene is an epistemological accelerator of blind spots — whatever blind spot you went into the Anthropocene with is scaled up alongside the planet. In response to Anthony Giddens's claim of an absence of political analysis of the crisis, Sherrilyn MacGregor makes the important point that far from their being 'no politics of climate change' as Giddens suggests, 'many of us who have been working on environmental political issues for a lot longer than he has would beg to differ with his assessment' (2009a: 144; see also MacGregor, 2009b).

Responses to the Anthropocene do not necessarily change shape because they are re-imagined as 'big': indeed the bigness may get in the way of examining what archives, tools and thinking are already available. Giddens, Morton and Chakrabarty may have a big archive, but they do not necessarily always have a useful one; an archive that highlights the contributions of Others to the 'crisis' in which they put themselves and their intellectual histories right at the center. As we can see, this supposed 'absence' of knowledge, or disorientation and ill-preparedness does not lead to intellectual humility or lack of certainty. When Chakrabarty (2009: 220) says

We humans never experience ourselves as a species. We can only intellectually comprehend or infer the existence of the human species but never experience it as such. There could be no phenomenology of us as a species (...)

we should probably take it that he means, *I know this while also knowing that all that I know has not prepared me well for saying such things with certainty*. Because how are we to be convinced that he and the others know what they are talking about if they have not in fact cited anyone with different expertise on the matter?

So, I've already briefly outlined how Indigenous scholars position Indigenous epistemologies as key to the current crises by linking colonisation and ecological domination and, in the case of Belcourt, making the case that racism and speciesism are fundamentally both expressions of anthropocentrism. I have also briefly outlined how ecofeminists have also been flagging these issues for decades too. The sort of dynamic that I am describing here reminds me of a book written by Henry Reynolds called *Why Weren't We Told?* (2000), an account of the whitewashing of Australia's violent frontier history. A reviewer responded by wondering whether this book should be more aptly referred to by white readers as 'why didn't we listen?' (Nicoll, 2001). After all, Aboriginal people had been talking and writing about the frontier for a long time. Both Reynolds and Nicoll frame the question of responsibility differently. The title of the book appealed to white complicity as *almost* excusable by virtue of ignorance and that was the problem: after all, ignorance comes close to indifference and both are cultivated, actively, and not necessarily perniciously. Ignorance and indifference, feigned or real, make the scholar an authority of the 'big reveal', the big statement, the big book. But it relegates other subjects to the margins as mere onlookers.

So, a certain scholarly practice of confusing one's own ill-preparedness and smallness for everyone else's is at fault in some of these approaches to the Anthropocene. Chakrabarty's claim that we can never experience being a species is an example. As I said, he is very certain about this, even though warning us that his archive ill prepares him for such a statement. The reason that Chakrabarty does not want to 'go there', to think of humans as a species, is related to two concerns: one is biological determinism (where historical dialectics risk being reduced to merely biological forces), and the second fear is of biologised racism. Species thinking conjures up eugenics, genocide and ethnic cleansing, and the hierarchical arrangements of the family of 'man' that energised and sustained imperial projects. There is also a reluctance within feminist scholarship to engage with 'species thinking' because of its links with racism and biological essentialism. Think of Simone de Beauvoir's work in *The Second Sex* and how the concept of 'species' is shorthand there for the biological entrapment of all women. Trapped in immanence, in mere biological reproduction of the species, women, and in particular she refers to 'nomadic women', were dominated by men. Here Beauvoir simultaneously positions non-white women and animal counterparts as all that should be transcended, all who cannot take risks, and states that they cannot imagine themselves into the future: they *merely* reproduce the species. She expresses a fear of non-whites and animals at the same time. This is why we should 'go there' because, as her work demonstrates, there is something there that needs unpacking — something that otherwise might lie buried in feminist archives because feminism keeps a lid on its blind spots too. Feminism also has a history of denying its own reliance on racism to elevate the status of women, meaning white women. This has been a blind spot keenly observed, and analysed by Indigenous feminists (for more information on the Australian context see Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

Feminism should be well placed to take on many of the challenges that the Anthropocene presents. It can draw attention to the exclusionary logic of the way the Anthropocene is framed scientifically; it can call out mansplaining on a planetary scale; it can highlight poor citation practices, shrunken canons, wilful ignorance of feminist and Indigenous scholarship and it can criticise scholars who confuse their own ignorance of data with the absence of data.

But feminism is going to have to do more than call out sexism and racism: it will also have to engage with the question of species and address Anthropocentrism, not least because the Anthropocene and anthropocentrism are very closely related (Probyn-Rapsey, 2018).

Maneesha Deckha's work on establishing the animal movement as a woman's movement, points to a presumptive anthropocentrism within feminism (2006) and she finds a 'general failure' (2013: 50), amongst theorists of intersectionality to acknowledge species difference. She argues that there are no logical impediments to including species as another axis of social difference alongside gender, race and class (2006: 5). She argues that the case 'has already been made by ecofeminists and other Animal Studies scholars who have demonstrated the interconnectedness of sexism, racism, colonialism, etc. with oppression against animals' (2013: 61). Claire Kim's *Dangerous Crossings: Race, species and nature in a multicultural age* (2015) also elaborates on a 'multi-optic' method for Animal Studies, moving us away from focusing on single issues (such as gender only or race only) towards intersectional approaches that highlight how different taxonomies, including species, 'energise' each other.

I agree with Deckha that there are no logical impediments, but there are illogical and affective impediments (2006: 6), and this is where looking more closely at the nature and culture of anthropocentrism is helpful. To me this is a crucial tactic for critiquing the Anthropocene and its portents. We need a more robust concept of anthropocentrism. Val Plumwood helps here. She makes a distinction between human-centredness and human self-centredness, the latter being anthropocentrism of the sort that requires political redress. Lori Gruen also makes a crucial distinction between 'inevitable anthropocentrism' and 'arrogant anthropocentrism'. Inevitable anthropocentrism is related to the fact that one is human, with human perspectives that do not cancel out the possibility that we can also learn to appreciate and understand the perspectives of others (2015: 24). Plumwood says that we are 'inevitably rooted in human experience in the world, and humans experience the world differently from other species' (2002: 132). An example of this might be that, without machines, we cannot breathe underwater for very long, see certain things (such as ultraviolet light), and that by comparison with dogs we have a very poor sense of smell, sight and inadequate fur to keep us warm. These bodily and sensory differences root us in a 'human experience' that we cannot avoid and which frames our perceptions. But anthropocentrism is most useful when it is framed as a political problem that can be addressed rather than as something that is, in any simple way, inevitable. By comparing it with racism and sexism, Plumwood calls out anthropocentrism as a 'moral and political failing' (2002: 133; see also Probyn-Rapsey 2018).

The other illogical way that species has been refused by feminism, and by other political movements in the Left more broadly, is because caring for animals has been largely seen as a bit 'crazy', disconnected from more important 'human' political projects and therefore possibly a threat to them. Lori Gruen and I tackle this issue in a recent book called *Animaladies* (2018), which examines the ways in which the perception of an interest in species other than humans is routinely depicted as 'crazy'. It is clear that if we are going to imagine better ways of sharing the planet with other creatures, then this history of women having *crazy* relationships with animals, particularly as their advocates, is going to be another one of those important resources. But as we have seen, the Anthropocene accelerates blind spots as well as the likelihood of reaching for the intellectual comfort food of canons. In order to resist this narrowing of debate, it is important to take up positions that risk being unintelligible to that narrowing.

But this can trigger a sort of autoimmune reaction: pathologising human-animal relationships blocks empathy towards animals because the characterisation of animal advocacy as mad, 'crazy', and feminised, distracts attention from broader social dis-order regarding human exploitation of animal life. Often advocates are themselves identified as mad, as damaged, much like Sara Ahmed's brilliant Feminist Killjoy (*Living a Feminist Life*, 2017), where the woman *who identifies the problem becomes the problem*.

Animaladies contains a number of really interesting case studies that examine how feminist protests are themselves characterised as animaladies; dysfunctional, mad, and insubstantial. Examples include the important work done by animal sanctuaries to rescue and sustain the lives of agricultural animals in a context where such animals are seen as mere capital, property, or alive only in order to become meat. In my chapter I look at crazy cat ladies, why they are so ubiquitous right now in popular culture and how they are built upon histories of disparaging women and animals, and serve as a distraction for the much bigger problem of industrialised animal hoarding, the ubiquitous but invisibilised factory farm. Nekeisha Alayna Alexis (2018) looks at the ways in which pro-slavery narratives of the Southern US share similar logic to the 'happy meat' organic farmers who 'reluctantly' have to exploit their animals. There is also a chapter by artist and academic Yvette Watt (2018) on the 'Duck Lake Project' that she designed and instigated with a group of animal activists. In protest against the start of duck hunting season, Yvette Watt and a group of untrained dancers mounted a floating pontoon on the edge of a lake designated by the government as a hunting zone, and performed Swan Lake. They attracted media, scared the ducks and countless protected native species in order to save their lives. They attracted political support, raised money and attracted the ire of men in army fatigues armed with their guns. And in doing so, they raised important questions about just who is the 'mad' one in the context of all the violence. Perhaps it's time for all of us to dance madly to disarm; perhaps this is what the Anthropocene is asking of us. And with this example I'll conclude, as a way of inviting further

conversation about the importance of long histories embedded in marginalised archives, archives of knowledge about tactics, strategies and responsibilities.

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Reducing Women to Bare Life: Sexual Violence in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates rape through the lens of biopolitics, using Agamben's notion of a state of exception and bare life. I will argue that there needs to be a closer look at the neglected sexual and gender dimensions of biopolitics in settler colonial societies, and specifically at the continuities of sexual violence of the settler colony with high levels sexual violence in present day South Africa. Women in post-colonial South Africa are included in a state of exception giving rise to bare life through the abandonment by the law and state agencies that have to implement the law. I end by considering the possibilities of resistance against bare life¹.

Keywords: South Africa, sexual violence, biopolitics, Agamben, bare life

INTRODUCTION

In July 2002 nine-month-old baby Tsepang was raped by her mother's boyfriend in a township in the Northern Cape². She survived. In February 2013 the 17-year-old Anene Booysen was found gang raped, disembowelled with her stomach slit open on a construction site in rural Bredasdorp³. She died in hospital. On Valentine's Day 2013 29-year-old Reeva Steenkamp, a model, was shot through a bathroom door and killed by her boyfriend, feted Paralympic athlete, Oscar Pistorius in Pretoria⁴. In July 2013 26-year-old Duduzile Zozo, a lesbian woman, was found half naked and dead with a toilet brush rammed into her vagina in Thokoza, near Johannesburg⁵. In December 2019 Uyinene Mrwetyana, a 19-year-old student went to pick up a parcel at a post office in Cape Town close to closing time. Inside she was raped and killed by a post office worker, her body moved and burned in an area outside Cape Town⁶. On 30 March 2020, 75-year-old Genzeni Zuma was raped and killed near Pietermaritzburg by men posing as soldiers doing sanitising under lock down for the COVID-19 pandemic⁷.

What these six rapes and/or femicides⁸ demonstrate are their widespread occurrence and normalisation in South Africa over time. These rapes occurred in different localities in the country, both urban and rural. The

¹ The author wants to thank Louise du Toit, Azille Coetzee and anonymous reviewers for helpful suggestions on earlier drafts of the article. This article is published in the Special Issue on the Anthropocene. Theorising (sexual) violence in the Anthropocene makes an important link with the continuation of practices of dispossession and genocide of colonisation. See for example Davis and Todd (2017).

² For more information see "Baby Rape Sparks Outrage" [<https://abcnews.go.com/WNT/story?id=130199&page=1>] (Accessed 13 November 2020)

³ For more information see 'South African Anene Booysen Rapist Jailed for Life' [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-24768817>] (Accessed 13 November 2020)

⁴ 'Oscar Pistorius Jail Term for Killing Reeva Steenkamp More than Doubled' [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-42107701>] (Accessed 13 November 2020)

⁵ For more information see 'South Africa: Duduzile Zozo Murdered in Anti-Gay Hate Crime' [<https://www.pri.org/stories/2013-07-02/south-africa-duduzile-zozo-murdered-anti-gay-hate-crime>] (Accessed 13 November 2020)

⁶ For more information see 'The Death of Uyinene Mrwetyana and the Rise of South Africa's "Am I Next"? Movement' [<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-death-of-uyinene-mrwetyana-and-the-rise-of-south-africas-aminext-movement>] (Accessed 13 November 2020)

⁷ For more information see 'Granny, 75, allegedly Rape and Murdered by Men Posing as Soldiers' – MEC [<https://www.news24.com/news24/SouthAfrica/News/granny-75-raped-and-murdered-allegedly-by-men-posing-as-soldiers-mec-20200330>] (Accessed 13 November 2020)

⁸ See for example, Nechama Brodie's *Femicide in South Africa* (Cape Town: Kwela (2020)), documenting femicide.

victims were of different ages, different classes and of different race groups. All the rapes were brutal resulting in death and/or the maiming of the bodies⁹.

No category of women in South Africa is excluded from being potential victims, but some women are more vulnerable than others, depending on the intersectionalities of race, class and sexuality. Geography plays an important role in the construction of vulnerability of women. Densely populated semi-permanent structures in African townships are less safe than middle-class neighbourhoods where most white women, for example, reside. It is, however, the case that most rapes and femicides are perpetrated by people known to the victims (StatsSA Report, 2000).

There is a relationship between the normalisation of sexual violence and the inaction of the state to deal with it. As a consequence of this normalisation often only the most gruesome incidents of sexual violence get reported in the media, usually involving the maiming of the body or resulting in intimate femicide. Other incidents only become statistics. The South African Police Services (SAPS) rape statistics for reported rapes for 2019/2020 is 42,289 and for sexual assault 7,749 (Department of Police, 2020). South Africa can therefore be considered a rape-prone society. A rape prone society has been defined as:

(a) society (...) in which the incidence of rape is reported by observers to be high, or rape is excused as a ceremonial expression of masculinity, or it is an act by which men are allowed to punish or threaten women (Sanday, 1996: 192).

All three of these factors apply to South Africa. Rape in rape-prone societies is not abnormal or anomalous, since it is part of the everyday systemic subversion of women's sexual subjectivity that is a devastating injury to women's psyche (Du Toit, 2009: 66).

Comparisons of the Victims of Crime Survey Report for 1997 with police data showed that on average 73 rapes occurred per 100 000 women 18 years or older. Among all the cases reported to court (47.6%) only one fifth (19.8%) resulted in a conviction, while 45.6% were withdrawn before the cases were completed and 32% accounted for unsolved cases. While these statistics are old conditions have continued to deteriorate rather than improve, for example in 1998 convictions dropped to 8.9%. (StatsSA, 2000: 2, 23)¹⁰. The same report shows that South Africa in 1996 had the highest number of reported rape cases of selected countries. These 20 countries include countries not at war, but with have high levels of conflict, *inter alia* the USA, Argentina, Venezuela, Chile, Colombia and Uganda. A more recent report on crime against women also shows that 250 out of 100 000 women were victims of sexual violence, of which 80% reported offences were rape, one of the highest statistics in the world (StatsSA, 2018).

While the rape statistics are staggering, the statistics for intimate femicide are equally stark. According to the World Health Organization the femicide rate in South Africa is 12.1 out of 100 000 women. This is five times higher than the global average of 2.6 (Head, 2019). A study measuring a propensity for sexual violence with a sample of 1,368 men of all population groups shows that over 43.3% reported that they sexually assaulted women partners in the previous ten years with regular frequency (Abrahams, Jewkes, Laubsher and Hoffman, 2006).

Contracting HIV/Aids through sexual intercourse (and specifically rape) compounds sexual violence in South Africa with women being more vulnerable to contracting the disease. An April 2020 *Avert Report* showed that in South Africa in 2018, 140,000 women and 86,000 men became HIV positive. In the same year, 4.7 million women were living with HIV compared to 2.8 million men. The prevalence of HIV is four times greater among young women than young men (Avert Report, 2020).

Sexual violence is aggravated by the complicity of members of the South African Police Services in rape. A Report of the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) (2013) indicates that at that point there were 150 cases pending against members of the police for sexual assault and rape. Many women are raped in police custody. On 19 October 2019 the police Ombud¹¹ also warned members of the police service not to turn victims of sexual violence away from police stations. It happens regularly that members of the police service refuse to take statements from rape victims, especially if they seem intoxicated or not 'well dressed' (read the rape myth – 'she was asking for it') (Cloete, 2019).

⁹ After the baby Tsepang rape case the visibility of child rape increased to the extent that it was labelled a national crisis, with no less than 58 child rape cases a day (Posel, 2005: 246). So unprotected did women feel that one woman designed and produced chastity belts for girl babies and younger girls. For women she produced a 'rape condom' that looked like a tampon, but was hollow inside. The inner wall of the tampon is lined with small hooks. When the perpetrator inserts a penis into a vagina of someone wearing a rape condom, the inner sheath, which is armed and wired, attaches itself to the penis through the small hooks. The condom could only be removed by a doctor (Nuttall, 2004). A subsequent discussion in the media feared that by using this contraption more women would get killed.

¹⁰ See Artz and Smythe (2007) for an analysis of rape case attrition.

¹¹ In South Africa the gender neutral terms 'Ombud' is used instead of Ombudsman.

This article investigates sexual violence through the lens of biopolitics, using Agamben's notion of a state of exception and bare life. I will argue that there needs to be a closer look at the neglected sexual and gender dimensions of biopolitics in settler colonial societies, and specifically at the continuities of sexual violence in the settler colonial society of South Africa with present day sexual violence. I will argue that women in post-colonial South Africa are exposed to very high levels of sexual violence through their abandonment by the law and state agencies which are supposed to implement the law. I end by considering the possibilities of resistance against bare life.

AGAMBEN'S STATE OF EXCEPTION AND BARE LIFE

In *Homo Sacer* (1998) Agamben draws on the theories of Aristotle and Hannah Arendt to explain biological existence, or life in general (*zoe*) and specific political life (*bios*) – the difference between mere life and a life of political significance. Bare life that arises from a state of exception or a state of indistinction that is neither *zoe* or *bios*, but a life stripped of political significance that exposes those who reside there (the *homines sacri*) to spectacular violence. Bare life's relation to politics is dual – exclusion from the *polis*, but at the same time inclusion through exclusion where life is still recognised, but stripped of political significance, and secondly, unlimited exposure to violation that does not count as crime. (Agamben, 1998: 72). The *homo sacer* is the target of the sovereign's violence that exceeds the force of law, but it is also authorised by that law (Ziarek, 2008: 90). Politics in late modernity is about the establishment of a borderline that creates a space that is deprived of the protection of law (Lemke, 2005: 5). The exclusion that results in bare life is necessary in order to understand the good life because the *polis* requires an unacknowledged Other, the *homo sacer*, against which to measure the good life (Reddy, 2016: 37-38).

In Agamben's theory the inclusion of bare life within the *polis* emerges in modern democracies. It is the hidden incorporation of bare life into the political realm and the structure of citizenship (Ziarek, 2008: 91). For Agamben the main characteristic of modern biopolitics is the state of exception in which there is a generalised suspension of the law. Unlike Foucault's view that modern politics is biopolitics because of technologies of control that create governmentalities to regulate entire populations, in late modernity, for Agamben, the state of exception is the rule (Pratt, 2005: 1053).¹² In this sense, Agamben is not concerned with regulation but rather with the suspension of the law.

The state of exception and the politics of death (thanatopolitics), or what Mbembe calls necropolitics was most visible in what Agamben (1998:166) calls 'the camp' in references to Nazi concentration camps. 'The camp' is the state of exception where the sovereign has the right to exercise death, where the rule of law is suspended, and becomes permanent spatial arrangements that exist continually outside of the normal state of law (Mbembe, 2003: 13). The sovereign has the power to also condemn people to death within life, or to a living death.

The sovereign (the state in modern politics) has the power to condemn to bare life certain categories of people through their exclusion from the protection of the law (Pratt, 2005: 1054). This makes it difficult to see whether these people are inside or outside the juridical order. The blurring of biological and political life created conditions of modern biopower (Pratt, 2005: 1056; Ziarek, 2008: 91). Because the contradiction of inclusion/exclusion is at the heart of democracy in late modernity we live in close contact with categories of excluded people who have been abandoned by the law, such as refugees, asylum seekers, the homeless and destitute.

Ziarek (2008: 93) argues that Agamben refrains from explorations of rape as sexual political violence because it would complicate his concept of bare life that is always defined in relation to death and not sexual violation. For Ziarek bare life is implicated in gendered, sexist, colonial and racist configurations of the political (Ziarek, 2008: 89). Pratt (2005), as well as Sanchez (2004), Smith (2010) and Savarese (2010) engage the genderblind nature of Agamben's theory. One of the main criticisms is that he develops the notion of legal abandonment by equating it with political and biological life, or the public sphere of the city and the private sphere of the home (Pratt, 2005: 1055). Feminist theorising of the public/private divide shows how issues that are depoliticised are relegated to the private sphere and that the politics of inclusion and exclusion work very differently across genders. What type of political significance women can access relates back to how they can enter the political sphere from the private sphere. Therefore, the political distribution of power across gendered beings takes the form of the public/private divide, thereby hiding how women's lives, as well as sexual activities, are depoliticised, privatised and political life is masculinised. Viewed in this way, the public/private divide in modern democracies may be one of the most central instruments for excluding from political significance and abandoning from legal protection everyone designated feminine and thus private.

¹² Agamben has been critiqued for collapsing *zoe* and *bios* into the same zone of indistinction. Lemke (2005) argues that for Agamben bare life is a catastrophic endpoint where he collapses the exception into the rule, while Foucault attempted to show how biopolitics through the regulation of bodies normalised an intimate relationship between life and death.

By applying Agamben's notion of 'the camp' and 'bare life' to sexual violence on campuses in the USA, Collins and Dunn (2018) show how women students are excluded from the protection of law when it comes to sexual harassment and rape. They emphasise how the law reinforces the patriarchal structure that regulates the ordering of relationships between men and women. This situation becomes compounded when gender identities and behaviour do not conform to state sanctioned institutionalised hetero-patriarchal gender norms that are embedded in law (Collins and Dunn, 2018: 374; Smart, 1989). Their application to the Brock Turner¹³ college rape shows how the law abandons women students, through the very lenient sentence Turner got for raping an unconscious woman student, leaving her partly dressed and unconscious in an ally next to a dumpster. Pratt (2005) and Collins and Dunn (2018: 376) confirm through their research that there is a relationship between the relegation to bare life and the way gender relationships, under patriarchy, are constructed to prioritise race and heterosexuality that most often benefit white men. (Turner is distinguished as a white heterosexual male).

I now turn to applying the state of exception and bare life to settler colonial states where race, gender and sexuality are at the centre of the biopolitics that creates conditions for the abandonment by law.

THE SETTLER-COLONIAL DIMENSION OF BIOPOLITICS

Apart from their gender blindness, neither Agamben nor Foucault theorised the biopolitics of colonialism, specifically settler colonialism (Puar, 2017). By merely viewing settler colonialism – the type of colonialism that displaces or eliminates Indigenous populations by establishing settlers as the new rulers - as a variant of colonialism we miss the important difference that in settler colonialism biopower is the product and process of colonial work (Morgensen, 2011: 55). It is the origin of measures to control and regulate populations through condemning some to bare life in a state of exception that became a condition of biopower in modern societies. This explains the continuation of colonialism even after its assumed demise (Morgensen, 2011: 59). What characterises settler colonialism is the 'logic of elimination' (Patrick Wolfe's concept, in Morgensen, 2011) through deadly violence. Indigenous populations had to fight extermination in forms of genocide and its coupling with displacement. Biopower, therefore, originated in settler colonies rather than being the externalisation of racialisation from Europe, normally viewed as the exception.

Settler colonial societies were faced with a conundrum of how to govern Indigenous people that survived elimination. In order to rule Indigenous populations through distinctive modes of governing settler colonists incorporated these populations into the body politic of the settler nation state. In South Africa, settler colonial relations produced an interdependency between settlers and Indigenous peoples, through patriarchal alliances with traditional leaders. This type of inclusion made Indigenous peoples into subjects living under customary law, rather than citizens, exposing them to the whims of traditional leaders who were and still are deeply patriarchal (see Mamdani, 1996).

Processes of colonisation and settlement are also deeply gendered. Morgensen by (2012: 2-7), drawing on Ann Stoler's work shows that race, gender and national power arose in colonial states. The gender/sexuality nexus is intrinsic to processes of colonisation of Indigenous peoples. Western constructions of gender and sexuality become naturalised so that the perception is formed that there is a natural sex and gender order underneath the violence that colonialism produces. What post-colonial feminists have shown is that:

... heteropatriarchal colonialism has sexualised indigenous lands and peoples as violable, subjugated Indigenous kin ties as perverse, attacked familial ties and traditional gender roles, and all to transform indigenous peoples for assimilation within or excision from the political and economic structures of white settler societies (Morgensen, 2012: 4).

Gender and sexuality, just as race, were produced and mobilised in what Stoler (2010) calls 'the intimacies of empire' through the regulation of women's sexuality, their reproduction, marriage and genealogy. The power of regulation was institutionalised and embodied through sexual violence. Settler colonialism introduced Western heteropatriarchy and the binary sex/gender system on foreign lands, indigenising the logics of Western sexuality as universal (Morgensen, 2012: 13). It forced Indigenous peoples to conform this logic of sexuality and eliminated their own histories and relations of sexuality (see for example Oyeronke, 1996).

The South African settler colonial state embodied both the violent logic of elimination and displacement as well as including Indigenous peoples into the settler nation through Western law. As Reddy (2017: 88) argues that from the first days of colonial conquest violence was meted out to local communities, thus confirming that they

¹³ Sam Levin, 'Brock Turner Laughed after Bystanders Stopped the Stanford Sexual Assault, Files Show' [<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/aug/26/brock-turner-stanford-sexual-assault-victim-testimony-laug#:~:text=The%2020%2Dyear%2Dold%20was,dumpster%20on%2018%20January%202015>]. (Accessed 24 January 2021).

are the *homines sacri* who do not have any political significance, other than to be on the receiving end of attempts to civilise and modernise them. In the process their communities were destroyed through land dispossession and migrant labour, reducing them to bare life. Enveloped by racist attitudes and used as cheap labour by racial capitalism, they were incorporated into colonial relations of domination.

In the case of South Africa there is the dual burden of having been a site of slavery and a settler colonial society at the same time. The biopolitics of slavery, theorised by Mbembe (2003) and Weheliye (2014), as well as settler colonial racism and violence apply to South Africa. Gqola (2015: 40) in an analysis of slavery in the settler colonial state of South Africa argues that slave women's sexuality was treated and dishonoured through rape, their bodies being property of slave owners, preventing control over their own sexuality. Sexual control by slave masters was violent and rape was routine. This type of violence was part of the founding violence of the colony.

Slave societies gave birth to stereotypes about slave and Indigenous women – that they are hypersexual and impossible to satiate, constructing them as legally impossible to rape. Even when freed, slaves could be raped without repercussions. Through the treatment of slave women as objects of sexual violation rape became institutionalised (Gqola, 2015: 43). Male slaves were viewed as also having ravenous sexual appetites and therefore as a danger to white women, who could be raped. For settler colonised societies the biopolitics of control of Indigenous women's sexuality was of utmost importance to prevent miscegenation, varying from regulating their fertility to pathologising their sexuality or studying it, or displaying and dissecting their genitalia as in the case of Saartjie Baartman¹⁴, even though the rape of Indigenous women by white men was not controlled. Sexuality therefore became an important way in which the colonial Otherness was constructed (Gqola, 2015: 44). As Gqola (2015: 38) astutely remarks, 'race was made through rape in very direct, deliberate and indirect ways (...)'. Gqola's work shows that the biopolitics of race and gender in settler colonial societies bears a direct relationship to how women's sexuality was regulated through violence (see also Baderoon, 2015).

The colonial wounds of subjugation also carry the psychological injury of rape on the collective level because of its impact on the individual level. As Du Toit (2009: 79) argues rape destroys one's sense of self in relation to one's world, it also destroys one's sense of one's relations with others in relation to one's world (what she calls 'loss of voice') and in relation to oneself (what she calls 'loss of rage'). It can be considered a living death or the work of necropolitics, because of Indigenous and slave women's powerlessness to eradicate the consequences of their sexual violation.

Below I will illustrate how settler colonial continuities of sexual violence create bare life for women in present day South Africa through the abandonment by law through the state agencies (police and the criminal justice system) that are supposed to implement the law. I will use the rape trial of the former President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma and lesbian rape and killings as illustrations.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ABANDONMENT BY LAW IN POST-COLONIAL SOUTH AFRICA

The statistics provided at the beginning of this article to sketch the context of gender-based violence in South Africa is an indication of the prevalence and normalisation of sexual violence. Drawing on the work of Pratt (2005) I will show that a state of exception is created for women as they are abandoned by the same laws that include them in the body politic. For Agamben abandonment is not the same as exclusion. It is an active, relational process where those who are abandoned remains in a relationship with sovereign power (the state). This relationship means inclusion through exclusion (Pratt, 2005: 1054).

This contradiction of being included but also excluded is maintained through the regulation and maintenance of individual bodies. These are the ones who are considered impure, ageing, foreign, disorderly and contagious – the ones who are costly to society, or the ones who are deemed irresponsible in regulating their own lives and health and discipline their bodies as neo-liberal citizenship requires through notions of self-care. These categories of people are deeply raced and gendered. Moreover, geographies form part of how certain people or categories of people are reduced to bare life (Pratt, 2005: 1055). Certain geographies are more exposed to violence where it becomes normalised in these places (e.g. places where sex work takes place – see Sanchez, 2004 and Savarese, 2010), or where people live, for example in informal settlements near waste dumps and industrial sites, associating them with squalor, illness and death. People's lives in these spaces are often led into borderlands where the illegitimate status of citizenship determines their movement and the social and economic value of their lives. What needs to be considered before we even consider the patriarchal nature of law is its 'absent presence' because of the high rates of lawlessness in South Africa, where the rule of law means little or law is flouted. When the law is not

¹⁴ Saartjie Baartman was a Khoi woman who was enslaved and taken to Europe in the early 1800s to be put on public display so that viewers could look at her genitalia [<https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/sara-saartjie-baartman>] (accessed 5 October 2020).

enforced people will draw on cultural constructions of sexuality to justify their behaviour. In post-(settler)colonial South Africa the colonial construction of culture is often drawn on to justify violence in the form of a cultural defence (see Gouws, 2014). The rape trial of Jacob Zuma is a good example of this, when he claimed that there was a cultural obligation on him to satisfy an aroused women.

THE ZUMA RAPE TRIAL

The era under Jacob Zuma's presidency showed the continuities with settler colonial impositions of narrative frames of African culture and tradition that were produced as pacts between colonial governors and traditional leaders. As Robins (2008: 422) points out the performance of African masculinity by Zuma (during his rape trial) was not that different from the ideas about Zuluness and customary law produced by the British colonial governor Shepstone (1877-1893).

While many theories attempt to explain the high levels of sexual violence in contemporary South Africa (see Du Toit, 2014; Buiten and Naidoo, 2016) there is a link between settler colonialism and the construction of masculinity during the colonial period, apartheid and post-apartheid that is now framed as a crisis in masculinity as a consequence of sexual violence. Ratele (2014: 137) points out how historically inferiorised traditions (often a consequence of colonial power's codification of indigenous oral traditions into law) are incorporated into the post-apartheid foundational law framework, opening up claims for recognition by new political powers. Even colonial and apartheid language was incorporated, such as the use of the word 'tribe' (Ratele, 2014: 136). This recognition ultimately determines what is to be regarded as tradition. Through an array of laws (for example the Communal Land Rights Act and the (rejected) Traditional Courts Bill) that retribalise post-apartheid communities, law makers managed to, as Ratele (2014: 138-139) puts it:

[U]nintentionally affirm what might be called racialised, tribalistic masculinity and (hetero) sexism among blacks in rural areas. In retribalizing black life, all men are made out to be (...) rampant, warrior-like heterosexuals, and all African women as willing, submissive sexual objects of the men of the tribe.

There is a relationship between the colonial construction of tradition/culture and violent masculinities, through which violence and war talk are celebrated (Gqola, 2015: 152). Gqola argues that constructions of manhood post-apartheid are for many the claim for adult agency in the face of colonial and Apartheid infantilisation (adult men being called boys and women girls) and emasculation. As she states:

While this emasculation discourse challenges the infantilization that Black men suffer in racist white regimes, this claim to recover from emasculation very often requires the performance of hypermasculinity that women are expected to support as part of enabling these men to attain manhood (Gqola, 2015: 156-157).

But, as Baaz and Stern (2013) in their studies of rape in war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo point out, sexual violence through the enactment or performance of hypermasculinity cannot produce masculinity. Every rape becomes an act to prove masculinity, yet in order to prove it, rape needs to be continuously re-enacted. As they surmise (Baaz and Stern, 2013: 28) '[R]ape serves as a performative act that functions to reconstitute [men's] masculinity – yet simultaneously symbolises their ultimate inability to do so.' Hence, rape continues unabatedly.

The rape trial of Jacob Zuma in 2005/2006 who was South Africa's president from 2007 to 2017 is a good illustration of the continuities of colonial violence and cultural constructions of masculinity and the complicity of sovereign power in sexual violence. Zuma was the vice-president of South Africa at the time of the trial. The outcome of this case strengthened the impression that men are entitled to rape with impunity. The Zuma rape trial inflicted the worst kind of secondary victimisation possible on a rape survivor. She was stoned on her way to court. People (many who were women) outside the court sang 'burn the bitch' while burning her photograph. Inside the court she was stigmatised as a 'serial rape accuser' who did not understand the difference between consent and non-consent. Her evidence was not viewed as reliable after her sexual history was introduced (in similar vein as Smart (1989) has argued about rape trials that disqualify women's experiences). Neither Zuma nor the male judge acted to stop the victim's or feminist supporters' victimisation. Zuma was acquitted for a 'lack' of evidence and went on to become the President of South Africa. The complainant had to flee the country for her own safety, and for all intents and purposes lost her citizenship, to be reduced to bare life in another country (see Hassim, 2009; Tlhabi, 2017). When you leave a country in self-imposed exile you leave behind the rights and privileges of citizenship, such as the protection of the law. In a country where you are not a citizen or do not have permanent residence you may not have the protection of the law, access to health and psychological care, or access to a job and housing. The probability is high that someone in conditions like that may end up destitute. Zuma, on the other hand, flaunted his sexual exploits in the public sphere with virtually no repercussions for his political career; on

the contrary it gained him political support. The trial allowed him to flaunt his sexual potency, but also his potency as a political leader. What this trial also did was to emphasise Moffett's (2006) point that rape is rewritten as a story of race (and culture), not of gender – the story of a powerful black man who was 'framed' for rape.

The gendered organisation of power held by traditional leaders is pervasive and the rigid legal rules that were constructed led to the control of land, cattle, women and children through the reinforcement of patriarchal rules (Gouws, 2014: 42). Zuma exploited these constructions of culture and tradition during his rape trial. He firstly constructed himself as a Zulu warrior. As Suttner (2009: 231) points out the warrior tradition entails heroic acts and the condoning of rape and abuse of women, very often ending in forced marriage. (Zuma offered to pay the bride price for his victim so that she could become his wife.) Forced marriage to a woman from another tribe was considered a victory in war. The warrior tradition allows for noble deeds, but also for the abuse of women. The leadership of Zuma presented violent masculinities, engaging war talk and threats. He arrived, for example, at the court singing a struggle song 'Bring Me My Machine Gun' (*'Umsbini Wam'*). As Suttner (2009: 229) puts it '[S]inging about machine guns was itself at one level a manifestation of male power over women, a symbolic representation of the power of the gun – a phallic symbol'. The song re-enacted rape because the word *umsbini* is widely used as a euphemism for the penis in some African communities.

The white judge entered into a patriarchal pact with Zuma during which he (the judge) bought into the cultural stereotypes of what a raped woman should do and how she should act, and notions of male desire. He reprimanded Zuma like a father would, calling him 'my son'. Zuma addressed him as *'nkeosi – yenkantolo'* – king of the court. The protection of extended family as part of African tradition drawn on by the victim, who viewed Zuma as her uncle (*malume*), was ignored by the judge (Suttner, 2009: 229). As Robins (2008: 423) points out the tradition/modern binary used was politically highly productive because it created conditions in which the cultural defence used by Zuma went unchallenged. For example, Zuma said that not satisfying an aroused woman would be akin to rape in his culture. He talked about her vagina as 'her father's kraal' (cattle pen), that he entered without a coat (condom), but according to Zuma the situation could be rectified if he paid *lobola* (the bride price) to the victim and then she could become his wife, reinforcing notion of sexual entitlement in which women have no say. Zuma was applauded by Zulu traditional leaders (chiefs) wearing only loin cloths, sitting in the front row of the court. Why this strategy was so effective, according to Robins (2008: 422), is that in post-colonial societies reified notions of African culture carry considerable clout in courts and on the streets¹⁵. The mutual patriarchal understanding between Zuma and Judge van der Merwe 'revealed how lingering colonial legacies of racial paternalism continued to discursively link sex, gender and race in post-apartheid South Africa' (Robins, 2008: 416).

Zuma used the colonial understandings of warrior masculinity of bravery and conquest to justify non-consensual sex, while the white judge affirmed this understanding of Zulu culture, rather than drawing on a human rights culture and a constitution that is supposed to protect women from violence. Zuma supporters, both men and women, performed violent masculinities outside the court through the violence inflicted on the victim, while wearing T-shirts emblazoned with words like '100% Zulu boy' (Zuma) or 'Zuma rape me!'. How the law abandoned the victim is clear in the way it trivialised and disqualified the victim's experiences on the individual level, but on a collective level it indicated to women that reporting rape or going through a rape trial is the worst possible thing to do.

LESBIAN KILLINGS

The violent processes of colonialism that impose heterosexuality are still employed in current postcolonial contexts to stabilise racialised and gendered hierarchies (Muholi, 2004: 123). As Judge (2018: 51) remarks '[T]he violent ordering of sexualities, integral to colonial and apartheid ideologies, produce a set of historical conditions in which contemporary formations of homophobia-related violence are to be located'. This invalidates gender and sexual non-conformity up unto this day. It also explains why lesbian rape is disproportionately inflicted on black lesbian women. Drawing on Agamben's notion of bare life, Gunkel (2010: 60-61) refers to the work of Perinelli who uses the notion of 'exclusive inclusion' arguing that hegemonic masculinity discursively pushes non-conforming masculinities to the margins. In the settler colony of South Africa, white men were distinguished as the centre, and white women were included to reproduce the white nation in the centre, even though their position was constructed as belonging in the private sphere. White lesbian women could remove themselves from this female domesticity, but lost their position in the centre, leading them to become part of exclusive inclusion. Homosexuality (under apartheid) therefore was constructed as white and male, and black men and women and white lesbian women were pushed to the margins. The notion of being gay as (un)African (the idea that African people have never been homosexual, was also defended by Zuma) and only arose in post-apartheid South Africa

¹⁵ Many South African men view Zuma as the epitome of successful masculinity that socially excluded men could emulate – being the Head of State, with only a primary school education and having four wives when he became president.

in order to support notions of an 'authentic' African culture, as was so well illustrated with the Zuma rape trial (Gunkel, 2010: 70). This myth is often used to justify violence against lesbian women also called 'corrective or curative' rape.

Corrective rape is performed by men who believe that they can 'cure' lesbian women from nonconforming sexual identities. These acts of violence also spill over onto other women who have to be taught a lesson, such as the daughters of lesbian women. The statistics for lesbian rape is very high in South Africa. In 2011 it was estimated at 500 per year and in a study done 86% of lesbian women in the Western Cape said they live in fear. Only a fraction of cases of lesbian rape is prosecuted. By 2011 there was only one conviction in 31 cases of lesbian rape and murder. Lesbian women in general do not report rape, because they fear that when their identities become known they will be further victimised, also by the police (Di Silvio, 2011). As Judge's (2018) very important study of the rape of black lesbians in South Africa has shown that even talking about 'lesbian rape' constitutes the rape of lesbians as a separate class of rape 'obscuring how all rapes are disciplining acts that fulfil a corrective function in service of heteropatriarchal policing of gender and sexuality' (Judge, 2018: 68). This heteropatriarchal policing retards responses to all rape, as Di Silvio's (2011) discussion of the *Carmichele vs the Minister of Safety and Security* rape case shows. The judgment in this case has clearly instructed the government on how to meet its obligations toward women to prevent sexual violence. While the judgement in this case was delivered in 2000 the government is still in breach of developing policies that would meet the requirements set out in the judgment.

This case for Di Silvio puts a positive duty in relation to constitutional rights on the government to protect women from all forms of violence and for political leaders to demonstrate real leadership to tackle corrective rape¹⁶. As Di Silvio (2011: 1473) puts it: 'The real violence of corrective rape, then is that despite South Africa's legal success in protecting gay rights and its promise of a post-apartheid South Africa that values human rights, the government has not done enough to stop corrective rape'. Di Silvio (2011) shows that there is a legal precedent in the *Carmichele* case that puts an obligation on the state to do more to protect women from violence. This case revolutionised the common law and updated the duties government owes its citizens.

Alix Carmichele was brutally raped and nearly killed by an awaiting trial rapist who raped and attempted to murder a woman. He was released on his own recognisance, even though he was considered dangerous. Carmichele then sued the state for damages. The Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal ruled that there was no wrongful action by the state. The Constitutional Court, however, overturned the ruling on grounds that the Constitution protects 'dignity, equality and freedom' and that the police have a general duty to protect the most vulnerable in society (Di Silvio, 2011: 1483). The ruling was revolutionary because it allows the state to find remedies for corrective rape (Di Silvio, 2011: 1484). The ruling also sets a precedent that sexual violence is not a private matter, but that women are entitled to protection by public officials. It makes clear that the government must bear the burden of protecting women from corrective rape, but despite this remedy has failed dismally to do so. It also imposes duties on the police to protect women, by improve police training, standardising procedures for investigating a rape complaint, creating reporting systems for victims of anti-gay crimes and specialised women-led sexual assault units, awareness raising programmes and guidelines to address service provider discrimination, provide shelters and adequate housing, support initiatives for abused women and public education programmes (Di Silvio (2011: 1512).

Di Silvio (2011) points out the continuities with apartheid violence where there were continuous threats of rape for (black) women who were detained and the sexual abuse of women by security forces was common. One of the reasons was that the apartheid police force was used to protect white people from black people, not to protect black communities from crime (Di Silvio, 2011: 1476). The Group Areas Act (that prevented white people and black people from living in the same areas) relegated many black people to areas which were lawless, isolated and impoverished with no protection from the police. Here women were without legal protection and subjected to male oppression (Di Silvio, 2011: 1476). Police allowed violence in black townships to go unchecked. Regardless of sexual violence that created a state of exception for women the state remains in breach of its duties as set out in the *Carmichele* case.

What drew attention to the legacies of colonialism and sexual violence was student resistance that came to a head on all the campuses of South African tertiary institutions in 2015, called the # campaigns to directly protest colonial legacies. These campaigns were *inter alia* an indictment of political transition that included black people into the liberal democratic project and Western law, without really changing conditions of unfreedom. As Gibson

¹⁶ The author was a commissioner for the South African Commission for Gender Equality and during my term in office a complaint was made at the commission by the mother of a murdered lesbian daughter in Nyanga, a township close to Cape Town, alleging that the police refused to investigate her daughter's murder. In my investigation into this matter, I was obstructed by the station commissioner at Nyanga police station and the detectives on the case. The detective work was sloppy, there was a disinterest to follow up on leads and a general tardiness. Having had the power to call a public hearing, I did so. All kinds of promises were extracted from the police during the hearing. A year later when my term ended there was still no progress in the case.

(2011: 48) remarks: 'In the situation where the legacies of colonialism – economic, social, cultural and psychological – are bracketed off, we can find only the limited liberation of 'enfranchised slaves', or bare life.

RESISTANCE AGAINST BARE LIFE

Agamben's theory of the state of exception and bare life paints a bleak picture that may have us believe that escaping from exclusion and abandonment by law is impossible. Ziarek (2008: 89; 2102) asks the question whether bare life can be mobilised by emancipatory movements. If we rely only on the understanding of bare life as a life stripped of political significance, as a form of life of unlimited exposure to violation that does not count as a crime, will we expect resistance? Where the politicisation of bare life, however, occurs as Reddy (2015) argues about extraordinary politics in South Africa, mobilisation of *homines sacri* is possible¹⁷. Baishya (2012: 140) calls this the agency that occurs in zones of darkness outside the limits of normalised regimes of law and order.

The #campaigns started around black students' expressions of feeling excluded and alienated from white (what they called colonial) institutional cultures at universities, where they did not see their values and culture reflected. Their alienation was reinforced by numerous colonial symbols (such as the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on the campus of the University of Cape Town that started the #RhodesMustFall campaign). Even though students were united around fighting colonial legacies women were not exempt from sexual violence by their male allies. In 2016 #EndRapeCulture started to draw attention to how sexual harassment and rape create conditions through which women students are neglected by university managements and abandoned by the law.

In the #EndRapeCulture campaign women students expressed the simultaneity of oppressions. As Mohanty (1991: 10) has remarked, that is something that is fundamental to the experience of social and political marginality and how the relationality/intersectionality of race, gender and sexuality is conditioned under colonial circumstances and extended to the present. It was simultaneously a rejection of colonial patriarchy as well as embracing intersectional feminism (race, gender, sexuality and class, etc.) to locate themselves in a matrix of domination (the way in which different identities expose women differently to sexual violence). At Rhodes University the 'RU Reference List' featured the names of 11 men accused of rape that the university did not want to act against until due process has taken its course, triggering country wide protests against rape culture on university campuses. It confirmed Collins and Dunn's (2018) argument that campuses are spaces of exception where women students experience bare life because of the abandonment (neglect) by the law.

Many women who participated in the #EndRapeCulture campaigns did so topless, bearing their breasts. This action references long standing traditions of African women disrobing to show their anger and distress with social, economic or political conditions (see Gouws, 2017, 2018). Universities were exposed for being complicit in concealing sexual violence or for not acting against perpetrators. What #EndRapeCulture critically engaged was the normalisation of rape culture (practices, perceptions and attitudes that normalise sexual violence) in South Africa, of which universities are microcosms. But more than that it showed the entanglement of race and gender in sexual violence in post-colonial societies. When black women students (many of them feminists) started calling out black male students for sexual violence the focus shifted to critique of black men. Hassim (2014: 218) makes the important point that a feminist critique of patriarchal power is perceived as complicity in the reproduction of the 'colonial collective subconscious', because it is perceived as opening up the black male body to the white gaze.

What #EndRapeCulture showed was that even though sexual violence may create bare life for women they do not passively have to accept it. In the state of exception produced through sexual violence in South Africa it was the new understandings of colonial framings among African women students that created a resignification of the body through its undressing in the context of violence reducing them to bare life. Naked protests can be the expression of the status of speechless bare life – an unconditional acceptance of that designation (as in the case of the Meitei women in Manipur who stood silent and naked in front of an army barracks of soldiers who raped and killed a woman) (Tyler, 2013: 215). This resonates with Weheliye's (2014) notion of racialisation in conditions of bare life reducing black people to mere flesh (the *habeas viscus*) through violence and dehumanisation.

Or women bearing their breasts can also be viewed as a refusal to be treated as mere flesh for men to rape (Tyler, 2013: 215). It engenders a certain defiance of the sovereign's inaction that reduces them to bare life. It also introduces the corporeal into the political space that challenges the notion of abandoned bodies in bare life that can be used and dispossessed through the neglect of the sovereign (Baishya, 2012: 139). Naminata (2019: 6) who specifically investigates women's disrobing as an African tradition argues that looking through a lens of biopolitics makes sense in an era that is characterised by what is considered the futility of agency and resistance against tyrannical regimes of power. For her agency needs to be interpreted in relation to constraint. She argues that her concept of naked agency (disrobing) expands Agamben's 'naked life' (she prefers this term instead of bare life). As she states:

¹⁷ For an interpretation of constant protest by the poor and socially excluded in South Africa see Brown (2015).

The openness and the nakedness of positions of emancipation and constraint reflect more accurately the unstable political subjectivity that has developed within current sociopolitical arrangements, in which the state of exception (...) and the widespread sense of perishability are now normalized (Naminata, 2019: 6).

In the case of naked agency, both a sense of desperation and power are operative. Naked protests can be confrontational, defiant, shame-inducing or acts of powerlessness, but whatever they signify they show that women, even in a state of exception, is not without agency or mere passive victims of the state's abandonment or neglect.

Protest against sexual violence in South Africa has escalated beyond university campuses. In 2017 #TotalShutDown mobilised women across the country to bring the country to a standstill so that the state had to take note of its own inaction against sexual violence. In 2019 more than 5,000 people protested in front of parliament and many more across the country to express their outrage about Uyinene Mrwetyana's death. They protested until the President came out of parliament to address them, also promising a National Strategic Plan on Gender Based Violence, a National Council on Gender Based Violence and funding for interventions. While the state of exception makes every woman in South Africa a potential target of sexual violence it does not necessarily reduce them to voicelessness on a collective level¹⁸.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have applied Agamben's theory of the state of exception and bare life to the very high incidence of sexual violence in South Africa. I have argued that present day sexual violence can be traced back to the founding violence of settler colonialism that constructed women's sexuality and men's masculinity in conditions of violence. Women's sexuality in settler colonies was regulated through biopolitics that rendered them into the state of exception and bare life through rape and a lack of control over their own sexuality. In the post-colonial democratic state women were included into the body politic, but still live in a state of exception because the sovereign neglects the implementation of the laws that included them and through which they should be protected from violence, thus bringing about the law's abandonment. Through very high levels of rape and intimate femicide women are exposed to the necropolitics of bare life, or state of exception that renders them outside the juridical order.

I, however, also argue that women have shown that it is not impossible to resist bare life through the #EndRapeCulture Campaign and #TotalShutDown in South Africa that demand accountability from the sovereign state to implement its own laws and provide women protection from violence. Bare life in relation to sexual violence is therefore not a totalising condition without hope.

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¹⁸ Reddy (2016: 38) applying Agamben's theory of the *homo sacer* to South Africa, argues that the lives of the majority of South Africans are precarious without political significance. These conditions lead to what he calls extraordinary politics of daily protests, conflict and violence through which the *homo sacer* demands political significance (Reddy, 2016: 70). South Africans therefore show that it is possible to resist bare life.

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Searching for Ethical Hope: Ideas on what Feminist Debates on the Anthropocene can offer Theorisations of Gender and Violence

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews some contemporary responses by feminists such as Haraway and Braidotti to the invitations offered by the concept of the Anthropocene to reimagine the human and the violent. Finding the need to think more closely about questions of race and rape, in these responses, the article turns to the theory of Sylvia Wynter and the poetry of Yvette Christiansë for a rich enough language. The article then moves to the consideration of how to use such a language in the understanding of a particular ampersand - the & of gender and violence. The article is shaped as an exercise to trying to think, across contradictions and myriad accountabilities.

Keywords: race, Anthropocene, Slavery, feminist theory, gender and violence

Es la desaparición

Es la violación

From 'Un violador en tu camino', *Las Tesis*, Rita Segato
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSHUS2lebOY>)

Do not hear what others say — / that we are sad creatures / clad in uniforms of loss: /
blue skirts that bruise / the heels of those who are living / but are dead. We live, we live
'Spoken, a message home', Yvette Christiansë (2009: 29)

Our debt to those who are already dead and those not yet born cannot be disentangled from who we are
(Karen Barad, 2010: 266)

BEGINNING WITH THE AMPERSAND

& alive&kicking, dead&gone, dolce&gabbana, brandy&coke, night&day, down&out. What intrigues is the way in which the sign's loop denies conjuncture; there is no possibility that the ends will meet. A powerful term — nonetheless — this **and** is deployed consciously as yoke or hypothesis, or more usually, unthinkingly as a sloppy compound or conventional assumption: mr&mrs, mother&child. As someone who is sceptical of assumptions, and wary (like a nervous pony edging through acacia trees) of words, I tend to shy away from easy efforts to conjoin concepts with entities, to want examination of the political work done by an 'and', a 'but', an 'or'. As early as 1988, Elizabeth Spelman, a feminist philosopher, writes of 'the ampersand problem in feminist thought' (Spelman, 1988: 1). She explores some contemporary (white) US-based feminist debates' tendency to engage the challenges of 'gender *and* race' by using the 'and' to slough off the material and socio-cultural influences of racism in the lives of black women. The ampersand, she argues, allows white feminisms to imagine dynamics of exploitative 'gendering' potentially unlinked to 'race' (where there is an ampersand, there sits — semiotically — permission to *disconnect*), and in the process to disappear the meaning of black women's historical and contemporary lives in feminist work (Spelman, 1988).

Spelman is surrounded, in this moment, by many other women of colour theorists in the North, simultaneously critiquing the discourses swiftly becoming known as 'second-wave feminism,' an appellation from its outset

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ignorant of (to adapt Paula Giddings's phrase) 'when and where [black women] enter' (Giddings, 1984). Her focus on the ampersand, however, as one of the linguistic technologies of collusion with analyses of gender that erase the centrality of race from theorisation, strikes me as a useful point of entry. I have spent most of my life, one way and another, attempting to come to grips with not simply 'gender^{and}race' but with another (allied) ampersand: gender & violence. I am lucky enough both to have survived sexual violences, and much more importantly, to have worked for some thirty-five years amongst feminists and queer activists and writers who (in multiple forms of work) have tackled, with ferocity and enormous 'smarts', the normalisations of sexual assault in its myriad and ever-evolving shapes.

The complexity of the ampersand in 'gender and violence' cannot, however, be underestimated: does it gesture towards utter synchrony, or to a set of causes and effects? (Bennett, 2014). That complexity lives alongside another. Given the (for the most part) segregation of feminist debate from other theorisations of the socio-political issues, my thinking/being through tangles of gender&violence also negotiates with both academic and popular epistemological trends. Once upon a time, one of these in the South African space was a robust Marxism; more recently, thinking about issues of socio-political justice has been galvanised by the concept of decoloniality as a framework for analysis and action. In terrains akin to those of my own research, such as environmental humanities, critical anthropology and psychology, the notion of the Anthropocene has become valuable in posing innovative questions about the meaning of 'being human' in a world traumatised not only by (overt and covert) war between peoples, but by inescapably geological, climatological, and 'non-human' damage. To imagine the ampersand of gender&violence in the twenty-first century, I argue, is to fight for longstanding feminist insight into certain versions of trauma within the scope of debate that is willing to centre planetary damage in its theorisation of the past and the future (Barad, 2010).

In this article, I trace three different zones in which I have been inspired and tutored in the task of finding a language to theorise gender '&' violence. Although this is a life-task, my particular need to do this with integrity, and in conversation with other feminists, arises in a commitment to *teaching* about 'gender & violence' in a national context with extremely high levels of gender-based violence and a contemporary context inflected by the legacies of colonial and apartheid violences. The article seeks to highlight concepts (theoretical, poetic, and spatial) that have offered me hope in thinking about whether it is possible pedagogically to engage representations of 'the disappeared': those enslaved, those whose humanity, systemic racisms and sexism may have sought to erase, those at a distance and those closer to hand, some of whom work with me, as students.

The first section of the article begins with an exploration of recent discussions about the concept of the Anthropocene among some leading feminist writers, and notes the almost complete absence of deep engagement with experiences one might term 'rape'. I speculate a little about this occlusion, and then look for interlocutors who can help me understand how theories of 'a man-made epoch, and its exigencies' could more critically help me unpack my own dilemmas about the way the ampersand works to yoke the terms 'gender' and 'violence'. Because my work, or part of my work, is tethered to projects of teaching at a university in South Africa, I come at this dilemma practically. Which theoretical allies can I find to support ethical entry points into pedagogic design that recognises the critical vulnerability of the earth while simultaneously foregrounding forms of specifically gendered forms of violence: work that is vital to activist feminist strategies? Whose twenty-first-century voices seem capable of allowing me to 're-see,' re-listen with and to knowledges of (for example) rape, domestic violence, or sexual harassment whose roots extend back into decades of rich research, but which have not substantively shifted the grounds which require us to theorise these forms of violation: living within patriarchal worlds?

The second section chooses the work of a South African feminist critic, writer and poet, Yvette Christiansë, as opening one portal for rethinking an approach to languaging ethical recognition of the concerns raised by feminist writers on the Anthropocene, especially those taken up not only by recent conversations amongst Haraway (2015), Barad (2010), Colebrook (2017) and others, but also those raised earlier by the Jamaican theorist, Sylvia Wynter. Taking seriously Christiansë's work in *Imprendebora* (2009, at the University of Cape Town, collection of poems rooted in the possibility of hearing those 'liberated Africans' whose histories have been largely forgotten) allows us to argue that disappearance itself is never totalising. Close attunement to fragments of archive, imaginative insight, and genealogy may transform the concave impact of violence into legible, uncontainable, hopeful humanity.

Holding onto Christiansë's language, I then contextualise some of the dilemmas and the imaginative and intellectual conundrums involved in the design of a graduate seminar on Gender & Violence that I have convened for several years. This is the third section, and argues that the work of designing a pathway for dedicated and invested communication ('teaching') summoned through the ampersand of 'gender' **and** 'violence' demands relationships with theorists and writers who trust feminism's fearlessness in the face of seemingly overwhelming erasure.

‘THE RETURN OF “MAN”...?’ (COLEBROOK, 2017: 5)

After the notion of the Anthropocene as a geologically significant epoch received formal scientific recognition, in 2019, an article in the US magazine *The Atlantic* poured scorn on its hubris:

The idea of the Anthropocene is an interesting thought experiment. For those invested in the stratigraphic arcana of this infinitesimal moment in time, it serves as a useful catalog of our junk. But it can also serve to inflate humanity’s legacy on an ever-churning planet that will quickly destroy—or conceal forever—even our most awesome creations. (Brannen 2019)

Through the narrow prism of a disciplinarily bounded zone — geology — and surrounded by the paleoproterozoic rock formations of the Langeberg in the Western Cape, I have some sympathy for Peter Brannen’s call-out. What, after Foucault’s definitive ‘death of man’ (not to mention Aimé Césaire’s call for a new and marvellous human being grounded not in colonial subjectivity but in the sources from which that man had alienated himself (Césaire, 1969)), does it mean to find ourselves negotiating an idea that re-inscribes, at its core, the mark of the human (writing the earth itself)?

The tension between two political (and philosophical) temptations animated by the notion of the ‘Anthropocene’ is difficult. On the one hand, we have the invitation to theorise planetary being as an assemblage (in the Deleuzian sense), metamorphotic influences in which the distinction between ‘plant,’ ‘human,’ ‘stone,’ and ‘animal’ dissolves and reconfigures in illuminating ways. On the other, the recognition of violence, located within ‘human agency’ (not in the agencies of stalagmite or fish), as the *meaning* of that agency (it is human violence which separates the Anthropocene from earlier eras) forces thought away from the pleasure of dissolving ‘human’ as category back into implacable wrestling with pain, damage, loss, and grief.

Feminist theorisations of ‘the human’ are integral to the core project of understanding the politics of genders and sexualities within the world as ‘environment’. Ever since the late 1980s, some writers have worked tirelessly to centre the meaning of ‘nature’ as a gendered project, in which patriarchal and capitalist interests have feminised the environment as a route to its objectification and control. Sometimes corralled as ‘ecofeminists’, these writers can be grouped into different interests; Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan, for example, link violence against women to patriarchal abuse of animals, of ‘nature,’ and include pornography within the panoply of patriarchal weaponry (Adams and Donovan, 1995). Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies situate their ecofeminist theory much more centrally within a critique of capitalism, as ‘maldevelopment’ (Mies and Shiva, 1993: 132). Shiva is especially clear that colonially-driven capitalism deployed the Western gender binary in its organisation of ‘export-oriented’ agriculture in India and in much of Africa, and simultaneously confronts Western science as a form of knowledge-making whose binaries split ‘human’ and ‘nature’ (animals and plant life) in ways that render the former ‘rational’ and the rest to be rendered meaningful under subjugation, a position shared by ‘women-humans’. It is this critique of Western science as a critical weapon of patriarchal epistemology which forms the theoretical ground for later post-humanist feminist scholarship on the Anthropocene (Warren, 2009).

Åsberg, in 2017, takes off on a feisty note with the recognition that an earlier generation of feminists had already deconstructed patriarchal deployment of the term ‘nature’: *‘And it (feminist posthumanism) presents a Riot Girl/Tank Girl type of sly smile to moralistic statements such as “it’s not natural.” It never was, we never were. Now what?’* (Åsberg, 2017: 187, original emphasis). She synthesises discussions among contemporary Northern feminists on the recognition of the posthuman as a theoretical notion from which to tackle the anthropogenic claim of ‘human’ as constitutive of ‘nature’. Noting Barad’s interest in ‘posthuman performativity’ (Barad, 2010: 176) as a route to explore the disappearance of any fixed separation between ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ and simultaneously invoking both Haraway’s ‘combustive precursor figure’, the cyborg (Åsberg, 2017: 187), and Halberstam and Livingston’s (1995) conviction that any vestigial faith in the concept of a singular ‘human’ had been eradicated within the recognition of the transformative simultaneities of queer, alien, and human, Åsberg concludes:

(...) in all its variety, feminist posthumanities (...) encircle a postdisciplinary premise on which to rethink human nature, and consequently in the Anthropocene context practice the humanities, *otherwise*. (Åsberg, 2017: 200, original emphasis)

An ordinary issue is missing from this lexically somewhat overburdened argument: while we puzzle, polysyllabically, at the blur of a binary (human/non-human), is there any value in retaining critique of the term ‘man?’ For the ecofeminists of the 1970s and 1980s (whose work continues in multiple forms of activism and research), ‘man’ connoted those upon whom Western scientific patriarchy conferred rationality, the right to control in the best interests of a ‘universal humanity’, and access to ‘women’s’ bodies. The debates of posthumanist feminism are less interested in the meanings of ‘man’ and ‘woman’, and concentrate more deeply on what it means to think ‘the earth’ beyond a preoccupation with human being.

A key influence on my thinking comes from Sylvia Wynter, who has since the 1970s worked at, and with, the imperative to reimagine ‘knowledge’, after what she terms the ‘over-representation’ of Man is exposed as merely the symbolic deployment of liberal humanism. Wynter argues that the descriptive statement which writes ‘Man’ involves his fundamentally flawed constitution *as* human (Wynter, 2000). In many pieces, she unravels the fragile configuration of Western patriarchal and religious discourse in imagining a Man, whose ‘other’ functions as projective space for those enslaved, colonised, exploited, and ‘de-humanised.’ In a review of a collection of essays inspired by Wynter’s work, edited by Katherine McKittrick, Rodriguez reminds us that Wynter’s roots are Jamaican, and as a radical Black intellectual, she writes to ‘reinterpret the history of the modern world from the perspective of the plantation system of the ex-slave archipelago of the Americas’ (Rodriguez, 2015: 8). Wynter’s call reminds us not to lose our suspicious attunement to the term ‘man’ which simultaneously demands that we never forget his political agenda even as we commit to debates which arise from his irrelevance.

Wynter’s and Rodriguez’s starting with the ‘plantation’ holds my attention. In 2014, the Centre for Twenty-First-Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee convened a colloquium of feminist scholars to work together at the opportunity offered by the concept of the Anthropocene: ‘What does feminism have to say about the Anthropocene? [and] how does the concept of the Anthropocene impact feminism?’ (Grusin, 2017: 4). Haraway’s early theorisation of the interlock between life named as ‘human’, the technological, the natural and the social undergirds the essays of the eight authors whose writing comes together in *Anthropocene Feminism* (Haraway, 1985). Their approaches range widely, but all reject the idea that ‘human’ as a climatological force carries any salience except in terms of an invitation to re-engage science in the name of what Braidotti calls ‘zoë-’conscious recognition of the imperative to decentre humanism (Braidotti, 2017).

Braidotti’s demand to centre the dynamics, and value, of *zoë* (life-force) rehearses Buddhist ideas of sentient being and she urges feminism to welcome the wrestle with ‘philosophies of radical immanence, vital materialism, and the *feminist politics of locations*’ (2017: 45, emphasis added). A year after this colloquium and others with similar agendas, Haraway published a piece in *Environmental Humanities* in which she suggests that scholarship that decentres the human must recognise the conditions under which notions of the organic or the non-human have become indistinguishable from processes of capital and extractivism. In a footnote to her article playing with power of reification, ‘Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: The making of Kin,’ she explains:

[T]he participants collectively generated the name Plantationocene for the devastating transformation of diverse kinds of human-tended farms, pastures, and forests into extractive and enclosed plantations, relying on slave labor and other forms of exploited, alienated, and usually spatially transported labor. (Haraway, 2015: 1616)

In the *Ethnos* piece that also explores the conversation of these participants, the texture of the discussion is glossed:

Noboru (Ishikawa): To me, plantations are just the slavery of plants.
Anna (Tsing)—I agree.
Donna (Haraway)—And microbes. (Haraway, 2015)

As Davis et al. (2019: 5) point out: ‘Human labor [sic] receives brief attention’.

I find something deeply disturbing in scholarship that claims its roots in feminism that can describe plantations as ‘just the slavery of plants’. If the Anthropocene functions as an invitation to push the envelope of what can be understood or imagined (chthulucenic — past/present/futures) as earth, when and how did terrains of labour, through which millions became enslaved and racialised as ‘outside the human’ become about plants? It could be argued that I was wilfully misunderstanding, that in Haraway’s deep sea-diving to discover possible language, she is as alert to the histories of race and racism as is critical, that in this piece stimulated by riffs around the Anthropocene, she is simply ‘doing something else for the time being.’ I am not sure; I read the work, a few years after it was published, and alongside Davis et al., I am uneasy: how is it possible to have a ‘feminist’ conversation with the Anthropocene, where the work of decentring its claim to Cenozoic salience for ‘the human’ disappears the humans captured on plantations?

The way Davis et al., respond is with a review of philosophical and (broadly) sociological work debates on the notion of the Anthropocene, which centre questions of colonialism, race, and in particular, slavery. Invoking Vergès (2015), who writes of the ‘racial Capitalocene’ as a way of thinking through plantation-processes as simultaneously human *and* organic/plant-centred, the authors note:

(...) dissatisf(action) with theorizations of the Plantationocene that minimize the ways in which racial politics structure plantation life (both human and nonhuman). Such approaches limit a more nuanced and grounded understanding of the ways that the plantation inflicts socioecological violence as it simultaneously prompts differentiated, multifaceted, and relational ways of being. (Davis et al., 2019; 15)

So I find myself wanting to park Haraway, a brilliant scholar from whom I learn, as I try for engagement with the options opened by feminist theory to recalibrate the influence of the ‘human’ towards what Barad terms ‘the hauntological’: ‘the thing that represents the demise of something also signals its continuation in a different form’ (Barad, 2010: 276). Haraway’s ‘Chthulucene’ desires a holographic vision of earth as ‘past, present, and to come’ (Haraway, 2015: 34), a version of ‘compost’ from which re-worlding could be imagined. A feminist discussion, sparked by the popularity of the concept, cannot be content with historical claims to feminist indictment of human (men’s) environmental brutalities (such as offered by the earlier work of Vandana Shiva) nor with new theoretical horizons around the language of possible being. A **feminist** discussion has to start, following Wynter perhaps, with an exploration of human violence which ‘re-appears’ the meaning of the disappeared, a meaning capable of holding the slavery of people in a move that will also embrace the slavery of plants.

‘THIS IS THE SOUND OF A HORIZON HELD OPEN/WHEN A BODY IS LAID DOWN’ (CHRISTIANSË, 2009: 26)

Yvette Christiansë, a black feminist poet and theorist, wrote her first collection of poetry, *Castaway*, in 1999, and introduced me to language that was capable of ascension, by which I mean language that is supple, fragile, bitter, and strong-willed enough to conjure living bodies from the dead, especially the violently disappeared dead, those barely known, numbers and names in a ledger, or those dear to one family, alone, one grandmother’s enslaved ancestry. The collation of poems trace, through fragments, the spool of reclamation urged by the life of ‘Finnie,’ Christiansë’s grandmother. ‘Finnie’s’ people are those who were, after Britain’s Abolition Act of 1807, ‘liberated’ from slavery into historical and physical limbo (and continued brutality) in settings as diverse as the Seychelles, Brazil, Cuba, and the island of St Helena. Christiansë writes of the collection that its creation deliberately argues with history: ‘this argument was staged in personal terms in that I had wanted to bring to the fore a voice for which there is no discursive place in any formal history’ (Christiansë, 2006: 303). This voice (her grandmother’s) is never offered speech across the collation of discarded hints of lives, images, sounds of St Helena, so that she (‘Finnie’) escapes any appropriation and yet signifies as umbilical c(h)ord for the poet herself.

In my search for a language capable of summoning violent disappearance, in the crucible of the expansion of Anthropocene to Plantationocene, I turn to Christiansë for two reasons. Firstly, I am captured by Avital Ronell’s evocation of poetic work: ‘poetic courage consists in embracing the terrible lassitude of mind’s enfeeblement’ (Ronell, 2014: 6), where courage wraps around the incapacities of the intellectual to glimpse another path. Secondly, in reading Christiansë, I am offered a geographical route — as she writes an imagery of a ‘return’ (from enslavement, to the island, to herself, born at the tip of Africa), perhaps I can hold on, after listening to Northern feminist visionaries, and find my way back to my beleaguered home.

Christiansë’s second collection, *Imprendebora*, ten years later, in 2009, is named for one of the ships that carried people into slavery. It was apprehended en route, and the figures in the hold were taken to St Helena, to be indentured, rendered ‘free’ of slavery into nowhere, a tiny island, shackled not by irons, but, primarily, by asema. Cartographically held (as in a cupped palm) by the Atlantic and the Indian, and collated through epitaphs of the transitional (‘Scraps,’ ‘Winds,’ ‘Rust’), the poems summon time, water, insects, stone, bodies living and not, and foliage as avatars. The collection opens through the (perhaps) whispering (the font is italicised) of a ‘Liberated African woman, who had the night previous, hung herself to the tree in Rupert’s Valley’ (Christiansë, 2009: 9) (and, perhaps it is *her* voice; perhaps it is a voice simply in juxtaposition with that newspaper account): ‘a spider pulling stone together makes/ more noise than a spirit leaving a body’ (Christiansë, 2009: 9). What does the spirit leaving the body sound like: ‘the spider spinning its web goes carefully/ around the moon caught swinging in a tree’ (Christiansë, 2009: 9). Who swung in the tree? How will the spider dare, tiny movements, alert to disaster?

The poems begin to spin, titles alone carefully tracing co-ordinates: ‘abundance’, ‘the lives we lose,’ ‘caught’, ‘in this place’, ‘there is no rest’, ‘no rest at all’, ‘rocks and stones’. Acutely sensitive to lurking violation, ‘The laughter of birds can break a knuckle’, and to the way being of/on earth hurts, ‘The boughs of trees/ some say, chafe most’, the poems (I work here with those in the first theme, entitled ‘Scraps’) interrogate the already-said, and directly address assumptions of the anthropomorphic:

Do not liken the wind
To our inhalations and exhalations
Do not say the sound of the ocean
is the ocean whispering
Or shouting our names’
(‘The Shattering of the Vessels’, Christiansë, 2009: 40)

Christiansë's language here (refusing a 'tilted world,' the one in which black women's bodies, reported as '*felo-de-se*' [killing of the self], appear as news items) insists on disrupting familiar relations (metaphoric or otherwise) between the human and the environment. As 'the shattering the vessels' is summoned—an energy beyond the anthropomorphic or panoptic – voices are lucid: 'we have been waiting for her/ we have been singing her name/ here in the tall branches' (Christiansë, 2009: 40). In the branches, which allowed one woman to transition from death to spiritual immanence, we hear the song of an invitation to re-worlding which can, 'carefully', honour the (black)(disappeared)(woman's) philosophical power.

The final poem in the collection speaks with some of the names in a register, documenting the arrival of men and women 'released' from slavery by a British ship, the *Columbine*, policing slavery in 'Katembe' (the seas named as the Indian Ocean), in the early 1800s onto the shores of the Seychelles. In an interview with Shaun de Waal in 2009, Christiansë is reported to have said, 'I was so shocked, so moved by that register, (...) the horrors of what it meant to be a "liberated African". The ironies of that name' (2009). The poem's grasp of 'shock' surges into the bare registry identifications ('345 Male Samuel. Age 4. Stature 3-3/Mother's name Neammhoo? Neammorhoo?') (Christiansë, 2009: 83) to blast away at the calligraphic pinning-to-paper of holographically complex, emotional, and fragile life:

'They have no idea/ who I am, and who I am/ is a parcel I keep/ tight in my throat/ like seeds in many layers/ against bad weather' (Christiansë, 2009: 87).

I would be honoured to write more deeply about Christiansë's intense poetic integrity as the writing insists that language can access genealogies of the disappeared, and that a shattered world is not not-a-world. Here, though, a small reflection on *Imprendebora* facilitates a closer relationship to Wynter's insistence that the politics of race must infuse any representation of modes of being, against and beyond 'Man'. It allows me to think more deeply than binaries, and to trust that what cannot be discerned (save disappearance, save scraps, save wind) may nonetheless both demand attention and permit an epistemic pathway into language. While the notion of the Anthropocene gives new language to feminist wrestling with the violences of 'man,' Christiansë's poetry suggests how to trace Haraway's 'Chthulucene': the world past/present/to come.

SPEAKING OF GENDER & VIOLENCE

The final section of the article returns to its animating question: how to understand the ampersand in 'gender & violence,' so that contemporary and historical contexts in which this ampersand becomes generative are not too overwhelming for speech. It seems to me ethically essential that to stimulate knowledge-sharing entails a commitment to a future, to a version of a horizon, to possibility. For the past few years, in my formal location in the School of African and Gender Studies, Anthropology and Linguistics at the University of Cape Town, I have designed a curriculum for postgraduate students entitled 'Gender and Violence.' It's an elective course, and offered an opportunity to 'think,' in an environment (mostly) free of any immediate crisis of physical, sexual or emotional assault (far away from the norms of South African streets, homes, institutions, bars, religious spaces, sports arenas, or plain old post offices). Most syllabi in 'gender studies' — the transdisciplinary terrain in which I am placed — ignore sustained engagement, say over months, with the fact that what is called 'gender-based violence' constitutes a ubiquitous and living pulse of toxic surveillance. I am currently researching whether this could be multi-determined. The terrain is demanding in and of itself, and requires engagement with questions of the economy, politics, cultural studies, and history *inter alia*. Where and how to situate 'violence' here is a taxing issue. Perhaps more importantly, 'gender studies' works extremely hard at the edges of theorisation of and contribution to activism that seeks to shift the grounds on which the politics of gender and sexualities construct injustice. So, 'we' spend a lot of time with questions of power and organisation, of strategy, of emotion (joy, anger, fear), and of healing (in different forms: epistemic, but also social/individual). In addition, in any one zone, there are likely to be very few 'gender studies professors,' who don't have our own battles to wage against attacks on our intellectual, and political, credibility.

The necessity of a serious opportunity for young postgraduates to think, and write, about 'gender & violence' arose from two imperatives. The first was the intensity of experiences in which being 'gendered' had led to being violated, in the room (so to speak); in work that attempts to 'walk the talk,' side-lining these experiences as zones of theory constituted stupidity. Secondly, and as the above sections have suggested, the era in which I have worked from the 1980s until the early twentieth century has seen rigorous black feminist theory on the rejection of Man (*pace* Wynter, and in interlocation with others), and simultaneously a sweeping rise in the recognition of human violences whose effects 're-work' the earth: the Anthropocene. I believe that twenty-first-century 'teaching' (in tiny, alienated, university-bound rooms) has to support the work of thinking about violence, and for me, I began in an obvious way: **gender and violence**.

What I want to reflect upon here is not the ways in which the course (offered from 2012 on, in changing forms) was realised live. The actual dynamics (physical, aural, textual and psychological) which flow between approximately 24 very diverse people, whose only contact with one another at that hour, in that space, involves agendas whose roots are too fragile to map, are indescribable. I will not try, here, to invoke them. Instead, I explore the questions that arose for me as I choreographed (perhaps too ambitious a word) a curriculum, which would allow safe-enough, collective, out-loud (and not out-loud) thinking about the ampersand. In which ways could the juxtaposition of those terms conjure the recognition of power? How was it possible to represent such juxtaposition? What *forms* of strategic energy could flow from an interrogation that we knew what we were talking about when we said, ‘rape,’ ‘extractivism,’ or ‘transgender justice’? How could contemporary language on the Anthropocene revision ‘humanity’? What voices are able to give texture to serious intellectual work that refuses the potentially totalising impact of man-made violence? How was it possible to hope?

‘STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE’ (HARAWAY, 2016)

The first problem to be introduced is of course the one epistemologically lodged into an understanding of ‘gender.’ For decades, rooted in a liberal feminism, ‘gender’ evoked a politico-social force that thrived on categorisation according to a binary: ‘man’/ ‘woman.’ In the name of this approach, some important work on ideas of ‘equality’ and ‘equity’ occurred, especially linked to ideas about party-political representation of people in various hierarchical tiers of government (Hassim, 2006). In some circles, the notion of ‘gender’ as primarily responsible for an individuated legal, and familial, subject nominalised as ‘woman’ galvanised poetry, policy, and interrogation of consciousness itself. There was never a moment, within the development of this idea of ‘woman’ unchallenged by its homogenisation, and wherever the singularising term found traction (often, in African contexts, in post-independence legal reform movements strongly influenced by notions of Western subjectivity in their debates on ‘new’ rights), challenges arose about the deployment of a concept which seemed immune to questions of difference. Many challenges, especially in the United States of America and South Africa, drew on the recognition of racialisation and racism to point out the fragility of ‘woman’ as any all-compassing version of an oppressed constituency (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983; Hill Collins, 1990; Lewis, 1991). This, in turn, I argue, led to a consistent tension in South Africa between scholars who use additive listings (‘gender, race, class, sexuality, and...’ following a Bill of Rights grammar) and scholars who advocate for less liberal discernment of the fluidity and menace of power deployed against the interests of being. ‘Intersectionality’ became popular as an idea which could do this work, especially in the name of colonially-based racism, attracting radical rejection of the ways in which liberal notions of ‘womanhood’ were useful. When it comes to ‘gender and violence,’ however, demands for intersectionality as political theory capable of narrating embodied violence has not been strong enough to displace a by now deeply rooted connection between ‘gender’ and ‘violence.’ That connection is causal, and assumes that a binary allocates roles and vulnerabilities. ‘And’ confers distance between the terms, where ‘violence’ is *primarily caused for ‘women’ by ‘men’, through the conditions of their mutual being/ becoming gendered.* #MenAreTrash, a hashtag which emerged on Twitter and Facebook in 2016 as a rallying call against rape gets inflected by race/class in much social media and academic discourse, but still, #MenAreTrash remains a popular, dichotomizing, call.

How does such a use of the ampersand (a use which has effected enormous change in what it is possible to know concerning sexual violence and harassment) sit alongside another reading? Attunement to queer interrogations of ‘gender’, arising from different contexts, locates the process of gendering not simply as a politics but essentially AS a violence. In the Preface to *Reclaiming Afrikan*, Zethu Matebeni glosses both Butler’s “‘queer’ as the present never fully owned’ (Butler, 1993: 49) and Halberstam and Livingston’s desire to wrestle queer theory away from white-dominated Northern debates (Halberstam and Livingston, 2014), as they claim the ‘K’ in Afrika as the sign of their own erasure, in African contexts, about the meaning of being human. The violence of continual deletion as ‘human’ — ‘that you can be both seen and unseen is private and in public spaces is central to queer’ (Matebeni and Pereira, 2014: 4) — is embedded in the concept of gender itself as a route towards recognition as human being. Here, the ampersand becomes the copula: **gender is violence.**

‘RAPE IS A LANGUAGE’ (GQOLA, 2015: 17)

If the first problem for someone thinking through the gender & violence ampersand, as a route to conversations about Man, the earth, and humanity, is the logical capriciousness of the sign (signalling ‘flow’/ signalling ‘essence’), the second is even more slippery. ‘*Es la desaparición; Es la violación*’ — ‘*it’s disappearance, it’s rape*’ — are the lines chanted in a wildly popular protest feminist performance about sexual violence, originating in Chile in 2019, and spreading rapidly for months throughout the world (it was chanted in Kolkata, in early 2020 protests calling out the government’s violations of women’s rights; it was chanted in New York, outside Harvey Weinstein’s trial, in

February 2020). The discursive conundrum facing autobiographical narratives of experiences in which the & is implicated (say, in one logic: the rape of a woman; say in another: the public humiliation of a transgender person) is oxymoronic. To be a plausible narrator (one whose tale can be tolerated as 'likely'), you have to be pre-scripted into a version of innocence as human in order to be credible (Gqola, 2015). It is extremely difficult simultaneously to tell an autobiographical narrative of being raped and retain credibility: the experience itself (that you were careless or ill-attuned enough to have 'it' happen to you) is enough to strip you of your credibility. The wariness with which the sentence, 'I have been raped,' is described as much in studies of police officers' responses to the request to lay a charge (Smythe, 2015) as in the assumption that someone who has experienced rape can — and should — be deeply heard only by those trained to do this: counsellors, healers, psychologists. A question I frequently ask in training workshops I run (with others) on strategising against rape is: 'What happens for you when a friend tells you they have been raped?'. Responses acknowledge the moments of 'freeze,' of the sense that their interlocutor has introduced material which forms an immediate barrier between the two of them, which requires arduous and intricate engagement; the friend has, momentarily, moved 'outside' familiarity and the fiction of easy communication.

In thinking about the logic of the & in gender&violence, the first challenge was to accommodate algorithms which do not align with one another. The second is the strength of hegemonic discourses, in which questions of gender interlaced with the meaning of violence arise, and are capable of the erasure of the 'I' as 'survivor'. These challenges make extraordinary demands on anyone who believes that violence, 'humanised,' experienced as a form of obliteration by many, skewered through the malevolence of gender/race, requires address, and, indeed, pedagogically oriented address, address formal and serious enough to offer a qualification as a scholar.

Holding firmly onto Christiansë's 'O' at the centre of 'Finnie's' mouth, in *Castaway* (Christiansë, 1999), and with Wynter's encouragement to centre responsibility for the disappearance of people at the feet of race-based capitalism (Wynter, 2000), I refused to give up my quest to 'teach' the ampersand, as a feminist, within a world ravaged by human extractivisms.

'UNCERTAINTY, UNRESOLVABLE NARRATIVES, AND CONTRADICTION' (FUENTES, 2016: 12)

Marisa Fuentes, feminist historiographer, published *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved women, violence and the archive*, in 2016. It is a book which refuses to settle with the absences in the colonial archives of Barbados, one of the Caribbean islands, heavily populated by both enslaved and 'freed' black women, in the eighteenth century. Her dilemma resonated (at an angle) for me with my own (and is the starting point for much black and decolonial theory): what is the work of reading the disappeared? Fuentes begins the book with a colonial relic: an advertisement promising reward for the return of a woman ('Jane') who had escaped her slavery, who is 'short,' and whose body bears the scars of branding and beating. There is no more available text about 'Jane,' and Fuentes turns her mind, and all her senses, to a tentative, imagined-yet-possible, representation of a late eighteenth-century Bridgetown in order to discover 'the fugitive.' Reading against the grain of other colonial fragments concerning different enslaved women's stories, working with maps of eighteenth-century Bridgewater and logs of shipping vessels coming in and out of the port, permitting the possibility of sound and smell to infuse the experience someone 'lost' off the record, Fuentes weaves in and out of record, analogy, representations of space, and imagination to suggest a fleeing figure: 'walking along the carenage, Jane would smell the seawater, mixed with the sour and dank smell of too many people in too small an area' (Fuentes, 2016: 25).

Taking guidance from Fuentes' attention to what-can-still-be-seen, I find a way to begin.

The university in which I teach is situated in Cape Town, South Africa, whose growth as a city is completely embedded in narratives of enslaved people, trafficked into what began as a small settlement, from 1658 onwards under the auspices of the Dutch East India Company. The majority came from families in Indonesia, Madagascar, India, Mozambique and South-East Asia. The city itself, in 2020, is readily recognisable as having been built around the project of development through enslaved people's labour: aside from the physical ruins of the dominating seventeenth-century Dutch-affiliated Castle and the physical layout of the central city, Cape Town is home to over five million people who can trace direct genealogical routes into enslaved ancestry. Language, cuisine, and religion (Islam, in particular) colour the environment with the memory of enslavement in ways that define the city, but as scholars such as Worden and South point out, the 1994 transition to 'democracy' did not take this heritage seriously as a route towards re-naming, memorialising and re-thinking the urban space (Worden, 2009; North, 2017). It took the concerted activism of small political groups to begin shifting the meaning of public pre-1994 histories to include (and be challenged by) the nearly three centuries of intersections between land, agriculture, labour and enslavement at the Cape.

A decision was made to contribute to the recognition of slavery as fundamental to African historiography at the Cape, by transforming one of the oldest buildings (erected in 1697) in the city centre into a museum, to be

dedicated to holding the enslaved in the present. The building, now known as the 'Slave Lodge' and managed by the Iziko group of museums, attempts to transform a site designed originally to house enslaved people (which later became a government office, a post office, and even for a while a Supreme Court) into a place which can evoke and teach. In 2020, it remains a strange, disconnected hodge-podge of artefacts, installations, art pieces, and visual materials, attempting to remind the viewer both of the global scale of (ongoing) slaveries and of the specifics of Cape-located lives: a shackle, an ancient anchor, and — almost unbelievably — images of gravestone plates of Jan van Riebeeck and his wife. North describes the museum as 'a space that aims to portray a range of South African human rights abuses, and depict a nation that has overcome a challenging past. In this sense, the discourse of national reconciliation' (North, 2017: 213) and although he notes that the museum's limitations are both frustrating and well-known to Iziko staff, it is worth noting that the most recent addition to the museum is dedicated to the reclamation of the San Joae, a drowned slaving vessel, discovered in 2015.

The problematic of the 'Slave Lodge' holds, for me, the themes that confound the gender&violence ampersand: the impossibility of representation, the wrestle between 'slavery is violence' and 'those enslaved became subjected to a vast range of violences, arising from the processes of slavery'; and the need to work epistemologically from the recognition of the disappeared. It holds, too, a physical insistence on the notion of the enslaved people's labour (the Plantationocene?) as inextricable/inextractable from questions on the formations of the earth.

The heart of the curriculum design for 'Gender And Violence' lies with the mess of the Iziko 'Slave Lodge,' outside the university's walls, in a space where we are invited as learners, but enter (often) as great-great-grandchildren, strangers, awkwardly intergenerational, carrying 'IDs' (as university members) which wrench us all into fake liberal uniformity. Before we visit, we read about the archive, the challenge of 'curating the disappeared,' and we discuss Fuentes's conviction that we are not severed from the past, despite its trauma and despite the attraction of amnesia for some (my classes hold people with diverse backgrounds, and they hold me, too).

Given the minute care taken by the Dutch East India Company (the VOC) to document the processes of human, administrative and trade flows around the Cape, the colonial archives (also in the middle of the city) stretch back to 1651 (a letter from Jan van Riebeeck), and comprise millions of pages. There is no archival record of written records created by those who were enslaved, and several feminist historians have explored women 'slaves' lives through what Yvette Abrahams in 'Was Eva Raped?' calls 'speculative' work (Abrahams, 1996: 4) and Gabeba Baderoon suggests as the 'ambiguous visibility' of the contemporary researcher (Baderoon, 2009). There is something completely astonishing (to a feminist) in the curation of the 'Slave Lodge'. For many decades, as is noted by Worden (2009), and the Museum's own website, the lodge was open, for several hours every night, as a 'brothel,' or — more accurately — as a house of acceptable sexual assault. Enslaved women (a least one of whom, the website is quick to note, had chosen sexual liaisons with the men who visited) were forced to experience what can only be described as regular rape. There is nowhere in the lodge itself, where this all-defining reality is memorialised as serious and at the core of what it must have meant for enslaved women. In 2018, the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy taskforce (SWEAT), an NGO in Cape Town, supported an advocacy-installation ('I am what I am,' created by Lynn Adams) in the entrance hall of the lodge, but that lasted for only a few weeks.

Shattering as this is, an invitation to 'see' enslavement while obscuring rape signifies powerfully for me that gap in the ampersand: gender & violence. The sign suggesting conjuncture hints, instead, if traced attentively, to the idea that the ends don't meet: they cannot meet as currently configured. Unless, and until, the representation of black women's experiences — enslaved, on plantations, on Cape farms, in motherhood, under sexual assault, as simultaneously everything (the resource for ensuring life, which includes joy, and livelihoods, which include organic growth) and nothing (the disappeared) — informs all theorisation (Chthulucenically), there can be no hint of humanity.

CONCLUSION

Theorisation of being through the anthropocenic gaze invites us to recognise that the shape of the earth constitutes always a profoundly micro-political relation to the discernment of 'human' and 'non-human'. We (as 'human') can see only the most limited profiles of 'the earth,' given our highly differentiated, silo-informed, and frequently self-centred epistemological options. While, within middle-class circuits of access to 'information, it is possible to be bombarded by 'facts about the earth' coloured by panopticon hubris, the reality is that access to deep and complex languages around the meaning of 'being human,' rooted as we are, in and with 'earth,' is extremely challenging.

One of the areas in which I have found this to be most true comes from a lifelong engagement with the effort to grasp the meaning of the ampersand in the phrase 'gender & violence.' One challenge arises in the exploration of the meaning of the term 'violence' for beginning to grasp the impact of anthropocenic economies: the temptation is to re-invoke the term 'rape' to describe the ways in which extravisms currently radically damage and traumatise natural and material synergies (air, water, 'non-human' growth and fertilities).

In this article, I have tried to hold myself accountable to the silences I have found within many contemporary Northern feminist responses to what the critiques of the notion of the Anthropocene can offer theorisation of violence. These silences strike me as critically involved with the violences experienced by those ‘disappeared’ within the growth of capitalism: enslaved people, black people, black women. I may exaggerate the scale of this occlusion, but I found it resonant enough to turn through the work of Sylvia Wynter to the poetry of Yvette Christiansë in a search for an ethical language in term to speak about gender and violence with young, (often) South African students.

Curriculum design constitutes a form of ‘theorywork’ which is frequently invisible within the parameters of ‘research.’ I would argue, nonetheless, that the design insists on finding ethical relationships with a panoply of feminist thinkers, in differing genres (where poetry is as much of a resource as formal theory), and a starting point which one can trust to link ancestry to contemporary context, and to hold grief, rage, and vision together. This is especially the case when the interlocutors with which one shares a design, as a map for new languages, are young, brilliant in maverick ways, mostly dispossessed of land (they are black South Africans), and often survivors of sexual violence. Feminist engagements with the notion of the Anthropocene have pulled us into futures where recognition of the earth’s vulnerability must be assumed as critical. At the same time, the ampersand linking ‘gender’ to ‘violence’, in myriad and often conflictual ways, does not allow language rooted only in the ‘posthuman.’ This article suggests that Wynter’s suspicion of ‘man’ remains valuable, that Christiansë’s evocations of fragmented embodiment as knowledge implacably centre enslaved black women’s theories on violence, and that this helps me block a stage from which I am sufficiently, although anxious, willing to try for speech.

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Othering Mushrooms: Migratism and its racist entanglements in the Brexit campaign

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ABSTRACT

Mushrooms have long occupied a highly ambivalent position in the cultural imagination, inciting disgust and fear, as well as wonder and fascination. Neither plants, nor animals, they grow up unexpectedly but also in regular lines or circles. Some of them are medicinal and edible, whereas others are toxic or even poisonous. Sometimes they are both. Employing the ambivalence of mushrooms as an analytic lens, this article interrogates the processes of othering through which certain bodies are more susceptible to be othered than other bodies. Mobilising Sara Ahmed's analytic framework on othering as an embodied process, this transnational ecofeminist intervention provides an insight into how forests, mushrooms and their foragers have been deployed in the Brexit campaign's migratism and explores its racist entanglements. The article argues that research into social and environmental histories of how meaning is constructed and embodied in human and non-human bodies and the places they inhabit is vital for contesting the re-emergence of the right-wing populism that, in Europe, is exemplified by events such as Brexit.

Keywords: Brexit, feminist ethnomycology, embodied othering, migratism/racism/antisemitism, media & communication

INTRODUCTION

Mushrooms have long occupied a highly ambivalent position in the cultural imagination, inciting disgust and fear, as well as wonder and fascination. Neither plants, nor animals, they grow up unexpectedly but also in regular lines and circles. Some of them are medicinal and edible, whereas others are toxic or even poisonous; sometimes they are both. Ethnomycology – a branch of study which 'explores various uses, beliefs, and practices connected with fungi and mushrooms that exist in different cultures' (Yamin-Pasternak, 2011: 213) – argues, that the ambivalence in attitudes towards these organisms is a result of their diverse ecology, unbounded biology and highly variable biodiversity, combined with the limited knowledge humans have about them.¹ This ambivalence has elicited extreme and polarised sentiments, leading Valentina and Gordon Wasson (1957), the founders of ethnomycology, to describe cultures that embrace and esteem mushrooms – such as the Slavic culture from which both Valentina and I come from – as 'mycophilic', and those that disdain them – such as the Anglo-Saxon culture, the culture of her husband Gordon, as 'mycophobic'.

Contributing to the recent scholarship conducted with fungi to study key socio-cultural and environmental phenomena such as migration, precarity and ecological emergency (Bahng, 2017; Sheldrake, 2020; Tsing, 2015), I propose examining mycophobia and mycophilia not as exclusive binaries but as critically entangled and mutually constitutive cultural positions. I deploy the ambivalence of mushrooms in cultural imagination to the analysis of visual and textual elements of media discourse to examine how forests, mushrooms and their foragers have figured as tropes of othering in the Brexit campaign's migratism and to explore its racist entanglements. The examination draws from two strands of scholarship. The first is the work that has examined how forests and mushrooms have figured in the discursive and material formations of nation-belonging in modern Europe that also has been enabled and implemented across the world through colonialism (Rose, 2008; Schama, 1996; Tsing, 2005; 2015). The second involves the critical theorisations of race and racism. I draw from scholars who conceptualise migratism – 'the

¹ Although it is estimated that there are between 2.2 and 3.8 million species of fungi – which is six times more than plants and twice as many as animals – only about 6 percent of fungi species have been described so far (Sheldrake, 2020: 16).

discrimination based on the ascription of migration' (Tudor, 2017: 23–24) – as different from but intimately linked with racism, and who examine their interlacing particularly in relation to Brexit (Bhabra, 2017; Virdee and McGeever, 2018).²

I conceptualise 'othering' as a complex set of differentiating temporal and spatial bodily encounters along the established binary trope native/alien and its correlates human/non-human, citizen/foreigner, male/female civilised/primitive, Global North/South and West/East. This conceptualisation draws from the work of feminist (and) postcolonial scholars who have theorised othering as a contextual, contradictory and fluid process (Bhabha, 1983; hooks, 1992), and particularly Sara Ahmed's theorisation articulated in *Strange Encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality* (2000). Focusing on how 'othering' operates in relation to embodiment and community, Ahmed postulates that subjectivities are embodied as a result of a singular lived experience formed by a complex set of differentiating temporal and spatial encounters with bodily others and the world. To critically examine the configurations of a mode of encountering that has dominated the world since the beginning of European colonial modernity, and that has benefited those who have been associated with white, masculine, heterosexual, cisgender and non-disabled bodies dwelling in the Global North and/or West at the expense of those who have not, Ahmed coined a notion 'stranger fetishism' (2000: 3–6). In this mode, the subjectivities of the beneficiaries are established through bodily encounters that produce a figure of a particular kind of others Ahmed calls 'strangers' (2000: 29–30). The process of estranging consists in differentiations between various kinds of others that rely on already established metonymic associations that position certain others as already read and recognised as strange, and by detaching these bodily others from social histories that have determined their figuration in the first place (Ahmed, 2000: 56). According to Ahmed's analysis, both expulsion and incorporation are tools that feed from and reproduce fetishism through which strangeness is made intrinsic to the bodies of these particular others. Whereas the former figures strangers as dangerous – informing criminal prevention discourses or neighbourhood watch programmes (2000: 21–38) – the latter interprets their difference as beneficial and thus welcomes it – an approach that characterises multiculturalism and cultural diversity discourses (2000: 95–113). Finally, Ahmed (2000: 6) postulates that it is not only the boundaries of individual bodies that are constituted, reinforced and legitimated through stranger fetishism but also the 'we' and 'them' of their communities and spaces they inhabit such as the streets, neighbourhoods, and nation states, as well as epistemic communities.

Developing from Ahmed and other scholars mentioned above, I argue that research into social and environmental histories of how meaning is constructed and embodied in human and non-human bodies and the places they inhabit is vital for ensuring the success of the efforts to contest the recent re-emergence of the right-wing populism that, in Europe, is exemplified by events such as Brexit. The analysis proceeds through a case study – a newspaper article 'Eastern European mushroom mobs: New Forest is stripped bare by fungi rustlers' (Perring, 2015) published in *The Daily Express*, one of the British national middle-market tabloid newspapers that played a key role in supporting the Brexit campaign. In the following section, I closely examine the techniques of othering deployed in the newspaper article. The next section shows how its discourse on forests, mushrooms and their forages echoes a myth of greenwood freedom that has been instrumental to the formation of English nationalism and that has been narrated in England and later in the United Kingdom (UK) since the Middle Ages. The second part of the article unpacks the racist entanglements of the Brexit campaign's migratism. Drawing particularly from Gurminder K. Bhabra's work (2017), I first argue that the racialised discourse on belonging mobilised in the Brexit campaign has been intrinsically bound to the past and present legacies of British Empire and the European colonial modernity more broadly. The next section develops this point by showing how forests, mushrooms and their foragers have been deployed in European antisemitic discourses, namely a Nazi propaganda book *Der Giftpilz [The Toadstool]* published by *Der Stürmer* in 1938, and the history and taxonomy of a mushroom species *Auricularia auricula* that, in many European languages, is known as 'Judas' ear', and in English by its even more troubling rendering 'Jew's ear'.

² As Alyosxa Tudor (2018: 1057) argues, 'equating racialisation with migratisation carries the risk of whitening understandings of migration and/or reinforcing already whitened understandings of nation and Europeanness'. In my examination of belonging, I use 'migratism' (Tudor, 2017) and 'othering' (Ahmed, 2000) instead of other analytical terms such as xenophobia. In addition to naming 'the discrimination based on the ascription of migration' (Tudor, 2017: 23–34), 'migratism' also indicates the privileged position a figure of a migrant have obtained in popular and scholarly discourses since the 1990s (Ahmed, 2000: 80–86). To explain further, I use 'othering' to analytically capture the complexity of the processes of 'stranger fetishism' (Ahmed, 2000: 3–6), and specifically the intertwining of migratisation, racialisation and gendering with the polarised sentiments towards mushrooms.

MUSHROOM FORAGING, THE BREXIT CAMPAIGN'S MIGRATISM AND *THE DAILY EXPRESS*

Brexit is the name for the withdrawal of the UK from European Union (EU), which was decided in British national referendum on 23 June 2016, with the result of 51.9% of voters voting in favour of leaving the EU (McGuire, 2019: 257). The Brexit campaign begun to enter the public domain in early 2015. A key point has been stark opposition to immigration presented as a means of reinstating the sovereignty of the British people depicted as being under siege. As Bhambra (2017) and others have shown (Virdee and McGeever, 2018), racist English nationalism – which is bound to the past and present legacies of the British Empire – was central to the Brexit campaign. This was also and perhaps most explicitly revealed in the 'Breaking Point' poster of Eurosceptic, right-wing populist UK Independent Party (UKIP),³ which depicted Syrian refugees at the borders of another EU member state, Slovenia, with a subheading 'We must break free of the EU and take back control' (Virdee and McGeever, 2018: 1807–8).

British media, and especially the tabloid press, were instrumental in the fabrication and dissemination of this message (McGuire, 2019). Coincidentally with the Brexit campaign, another topic appeared in many national newspapers – a call for the strict regulation of mushroom picking in British woodland (see McKie, 2016). *The Daily Express*, a tabloid newspaper aligned with UKIP and the right-wing fractions of the Conservative Party, managed to contribute to both debates in one piece. In an article with a headline 'Eastern European mushroom mobs: New Forest is stripped bare by fungi rustlers' (Perring, 2015), a reporter informed the British public that '[r]angers patrolling the New Forest are on high alert amid fears black market gangs – many thought to be Eastern Europeans – [who] are stripping the beauty spots of its edible mushrooms'. 'Experts', the reporter continued, 'have warned the gangs could even kill because pickers who don't know the different species are likely to take deadly toadstools and other poisonous fungi in mistake for edible and safe mushrooms'. A spokesman of New Forest Association Brian Tarnoff 'blasted it' as an 'unacceptable theft' that was 'spoiling the Forest's autumn beauty and harming wildlife' (Tarnoff quoted in Perring, 2015). They added that

every year vans full of unskilled labourers descend upon the Forest and indiscriminately strip our woodlands of every bit of fungi they encounter (...) leaving nothing for families on a day's outing in the forest who want a few mushrooms as a mealtime treat.

The reporter further speculated that 'these gangs are thought to include cheap labour in the form of EU immigrants' and brought a testimony by farmer Sara Cadbury who also confirmed that 'the Forest is being exploited and trashed'. Finally, the readers were informed that New Forest was not the only site where the gangs operated but that other forests were also endangered. The article concluded with a demand for clearer policy and strict regulation that would put total ban on mushroom removal.

As the above quotations testify, the newspaper article employs language of othering that is reminiscent of racist and classist condemnations of Irish and Romany Travellers that has a long tradition in UK media (Conboy, 2006) and which – in the aftermath of the so called 'War on Terror' and 'Migration Crisis' – has been used particularly in relation to Muslim communities (Virdee and McGeever, 2018: 1807). In terms of Ahmed's analytical framework, the article employs rhetorical tropes of othering that define what she calls 'stranger danger' discourses (2000: 21–37). For instance, the intruders are already known and recognised as the origin of the danger. That the 'mushroom mobs' are 'Eastern Europeans' – a vague and homogenising term used in the UK in disparaging manner to name people from Central and Eastern Europe as well as a synonym specifically for Polish people – is presented as a given and a common knowledge which the reporter shares with those she has interviewed for her article as well as her readers. Their knowability is a result of one of the normalised 'ways of sensing' strangers (Ahmed 2000: 29) that, in British current cultural and political context, has relied on a chain of metonymies unfolding in the following direction: unskilled and cheap labour – EU immigrants – engaging in illegal activities – Eastern Europeans – harm.

The newspaper article mobilises further tropes of othering to portray the danger these intruders represent. The language used to depict their activities invokes a sinister and violent attack whilst expressions such as 'full vans descend every year' or using a plural form of words that already invoke great numbers, such as 'gangs' or 'mobs'—which furthermore imply violence or criminal and 'out of control' behaviour—portray the mushroom pickers as being too many, as being overabundant. Additionally, other characters are invoked in order to create the demarcation between 'them' and 'us' and to portray not only the intruders' danger but also the endangered 'we', the 'we' of 'the ordinary men and women' *The Daily Express* claims to represent (Buckledee, 2011: 61), thus invoking a fantasy of community based upon shared socio-economic status, culture and ethnicity (Conboy, 2006: 94–95).

³ UKIP is a continuation of the Anti-Federalist League founded in 1991. The Party reached its greatest success in the mid-2010s when it gained two seats in the British Parliament and became a British political party with the most seats in the European Parliament. The withdrawal of the UK from the EU has been its focus from the start.

These characters include representatives of the civil society, ordinary citizens as well as authorities, whose policing and surveillance is called upon by the very presence and actions of the intruders.

Importantly, British families are named as those who are impoverished by the commercial mushroom pickers. Families, as Ahmed argues, play a significant role in ‘stranger danger’ discourses (2000: 32–37). Standing for ‘women and children’ (Ahmed, 2000: 31), such invocation feeds on and reinforces white heteropatriarchy, employing its fundamental aspect, the compulsory binary gender divide of complementary opposites, where masculinity is portrayed as strong, active and potent and thus as able to attack or protect, and femininity as passive, weak and vulnerable, and thus attackable and in need of protection. In addition to the invocation of families, the feminine coding of the bodies that are portrayed as endangered is achieved by other metonymic associations that are attached to traditionally defined white femininity such as ‘beauty’, here employed in relation to nature (‘the forest’s autumn beauty’) which, as the newspaper article argues, the intruders ‘strip off’ and ‘spoil’. The binary gender division – employed as a metaphor – is thus yet another vehicle for the demarcation between ‘us’ and ‘them’, a demarcation which, reversely, reinforces and legitimises white heteropatriarchy. Finally, the mention of families also helps to complexify the article’s affective charge. According to Ahmed’s reading of racism as a politics of hatred, ‘a politics that directs hatred towards others (that creates others as objects to be hated as well as feared) often presents itself as a politics of love’ (2013: 227). By portraying themselves as acting out of love, that is to say love for their families, communities, nation or, as in this case, also forests and their wildlife, including edible mushrooms, the newspaper article constitutes ‘normal’ British citizens – the nature-loving, Anglo-Saxon, white, heterosexual, middle class, cisgender subjects – and portrays the citizens as those who are endangered and thus in need of protection, whilst justifying their fear and hatred of immigrants.

This is achieved through verbal as well as visual means. The two accompanying photographs (Figure 1 and Figure 2) are generic stock images that depict mushrooms growing in their habitat or recently picked and placed in the basket. Importantly however, the images are framed so the face of the person who picked them is not visible. Missing a head, the mushroom forager is depersonalised which erases the singularity of an individual and blends it with a figuration of a monolithic group (of strangers), thus enabling stereotyping and the feeling of hate, as it helps defer empathy, compassion as well as guilt. Despite such depersonalisation, it is nonetheless suggested, from the forager’s hands, that they are an adult man with light skin. The assignability of masculine gender to the figure of the dangerous stranger develops and complements the coding of the endangered bodies as feminine invoked in the newspaper article as discussed above.

Another trope of othering that is employed in the photographs, and is central to both of their compositions, is a knife which the faceless light-skinned person coded as masculine holds in their hand. To be sure, a knife – along walking shoes, raincoat, basket, or cloth bag – is among the equipment that is commonly used for mushroom picking. The knife is used for cleaning of the mushrooms, the removal of debris such as soil and needles and for



Figure 1. A Photograph accompanying *The Daily Express*' article 'Eastern European mushroom mobs: New Forest is stripped bare by fungi rustlers' (Perring, 2015). Photo Credit: Solent News and Photo Agency.



Figure 2. A Photograph accompanying *The Daily Express*' article 'Eastern European mushroom mobs: New Forest is stripped bare by fungi rustlers' (Perring, 2015). Photo Credit: Solent News and Photo Agency.

carving away the soiled stalk and inedible parts. Another reason that mushroom pickers use knives for foraging is because it helps separate the fruit body (what we usually call mushroom) from the hyphae, the long, individual pieces that comprise a mycelium (a 'root system' which forms the main body of the mushroom), without disturbing or damaging the hyphae, and thus supporting its further growth. As argued, the generic stock images have been carefully constructed to match the content of the article. In these images, a knife therefore does not invoke techniques of careful harvesting but a harmful attack. In one of the photographs (**Figure 2**), the knife is positioned in the direction of a mushroom that has just been cut. In the other photograph (**Figure 1**), while one hand protectively grabs onto the basket full with mushrooms, the other holds a knife with its blade directed towards the viewer, suggesting that the potential victim of the stabbing is the reader of *The Daily Express*. The two images thus effectively convey the newspaper article's key message: it is not only British forests and edible mushrooms that are threatened by the invasion of gangs from Eastern Europe, but also the nation and its people. The United Kingdom – this at once material and fantasised entity – is taken hostage by the immigrants.

ENGLISH NATIONALISM IN THE SHADOW OF THE NEW FOREST

Employing similar techniques to those Ahmed identified in criminal prevention discourses and neighbourhood watch programmes (2000: 21–38), 'Eastern European mushroom mobs' incites the fantasy of the idealised community and the demarcation of outsiders. It represents a discourse of survival, where the communities of those posited as normal citizens and their spaces are represented as being in crisis. Such representation of the here and now enables the idealisation of what is assumed to be absent: a fantasy of the community and its spaces as valuable and innocent. As Ahmed (2000: 27) argues, this investment plays a significant role in the preservation of the unequal social order. It binds the protection of property and maintenance of social privilege and, simultaneously, conceals the social histories of conflict, exploitation and violence that have instituted them. This time, however, the site in crisis is not an urban space but a forest. I argue that encounters which do not take place only in human-specific contexts but involve sites that are usually considered to be outside of culture and history – and forests and their wildlife in particular – significantly amplify certain aspects of othering.

It can be argued that – through analogy – the context of what is considered to be ‘nature’ helps detach those who are subjected to othering from their social histories, and to fortify the metonymic associations that constitute their figuration. In other words, in the proximity of ‘nature’ it is easy to make othering look ‘natural’ – to represent otherness as an inherent quality, to normalise it and to justify othering as morally right. However, in addition to this general point, I put forward the following argument: locating a narrative of othering within the forest intensifies the fundamental aspect of othering, the sharing of a fantasy of an idealised ‘we’ which rests on the representation of community’s presence as being in crisis.

The intensification of othering within the forest is due to the position forests have occupied in the cultural imagination of European colonial modernity and particularly in the formation of British nation state and its correlate, English nationalism. As *Forest: The shadow of civilization* (Harrison, 1993) testifies, forests have been understood as standing for an ‘outside’ (the Latin origin of the word ‘forest’ - *foris* - translates as ‘outside’) that constitutes the ‘inside’ of sociality and continues to haunt it. However, as anthropologists and historians of forests (Rackham, 2006; Schama, 1996; Tsing, 2005) have demonstrated, such an idea has its origin in a particular social and historical context – forests’ outsideness is made possible by *making* them, both materially and discursively, wild and empty spaces of asocial nature. Only through oppressive practices – such as the evictions of peasants and the enclosures of woodland and other commons for the use of national élites – has the formation of European modernity and the regimes that define it, such as capitalism, imperial colonialism, nationalism, racism and heteropatriarchy, been made possible. In relation to the British context specifically, the UK’s current woodland is far from being a residue of an original primeval wildwood. As Oliver Rackham (2006: 85) argues, English woods – in contrast to woodland in other parts of Europe such as Scotland, Poland or Germany – have been busy social and commercial sites especially since at least the Roman period (40–410 AD). In the UK, the name ‘Forest’ furthermore, has not signified a particular topography but administration – the legal demarcation of royal gaming reserves. Through decrees, this administration was ‘imposed on large areas of the English countryside (...) that were not wooded at all, and which included tracts of pasture, meadow, cultivated farmland, and even towns (Schama, 1996: 144). Ironically enough, this new forest regime has not been initiated by the English royalty but Normans, commencing with the foundation of the New Forest by William the Conqueror around 1079. As Simon Schama (1996: 140) argues, the competition over privileges and power to exploit the woodland between the different propertied élites, namely the royalty, nobility, and the church – triggered by this new forest regime – gave rise to a myth about ‘ravaging Norman despotism annihilating whole villages and parishes to create private hunting reserves of the New Forest’. This myth was then foundational to yet another widely popular and still influential myth specific to English folklore – a myth of greenwood freedom and pre-feudal reciprocal social order that had allegedly taken place prior to Norman invasion, narrated since the Middle Ages through the figure of a heroic outlaw.

As follows from Schama’s analysis, forests have not only been significant in English folklore and popular culture but have been entangled in the formation of the British nation-state and national belonging. Furthermore, this entanglement has not been only material or administrative but has, from the very start, involved the working of fantasy and imagination. Imagined as ‘a shadow of civilization’, English forests have been made to reflect a fantasy of the idealised ‘we’ of the nation through the demarcation of outsiders; a fantasy that has also been foundational to English nationalism – a fantasy of a defiance against ruling elites associated with foreignness.

My reading of *The Daily Express* newspaper article shows how this entanglement that links othering, nation-belonging, forests, mushrooms, and their foragers, continues to unfold in the context of the Brexit campaign. As argued earlier, it is not only the British forests and their wildlife that are presented as valuable and innocent and currently under attack by immigrants from Eastern Europe. The object of the nostalgia is also that which the forests and its wildlife are meant to ‘shadow’ – the nation and its people. The nationalist anti-immigration rhetoric mobilised in ‘Eastern European mushroom mobs’ thus can be interpreted as echoing the myth which has accompanied the foundation of the New Forest, and as contributing to the shared fantasy that has been circulating in England and later in the UK since the Middle Ages – the idealisation of the time before the invasion of (Norman) intruders. The Brexit campaign can be considered the most visible and effective recent mobilization of this fantasy. Addressed through the discourse on forests, mushrooms and their foragers constructed in *The Daily Express*, Brexit could – indeed – be seen to provide a solution to the problem raised in ‘Eastern European mushroom mobs’, although it is not the solution the newspaper article called for – instead of mushroom picking, what Brexit promises to ‘ban’ are the immigrants. Yet, according to environment review reports (Jennings, 2017), as a result of the termination of EU natural habitats conservation and wild species protection policies as well as investment and subsidies, Brexit is likely to bring new problems for British natural conservation sites and their wildlife. As the statement issued by Brian Tarnoff, the spokesperson of the New Forest Association, puts it (2016), ‘[h]owever we feel about the Brexit referendum, its aftermath has introduced a vast array of uncertainty, including many elements key to the future of the Forest’.

BREXIT, THE EU, AND THE RACIALISED LEGACIES OF EUROPEAN IMPERIAL COLONIALISM

The yearning for an idealised culturally and ethnically homogenous nation and its great past, however, does not define only the current political climate of the UK. As we witness the re-emergence of the right-wing populism across the world, anti-immigration narratives – such as the one constructed in ‘Eastern European mushroom mobs’ – together with racism, homophobia, transphobia, classism and sexism have, unfortunately, come to define the mainstream political vocabulary (Virdee and McGeever, 2018: 1802). In the UK it might, among many, be ‘Eastern Europeans’ who are at the receiving end of the anti-immigration outcry. ‘At home’, however, those who are figured as ‘strangers’ and feared as dangerous in the UK become the ‘normal citizens’ in need of protection from other others figured as dangerous strangers.⁴ The way othering operates – and benefits those who have been associated with white, masculine, heterosexual, cisgender and non-disabled bodies in the Global North and/or West at the expense of those who have not – is contextual, contradictory and fluid.

I therefore want to make clear that the intention of my contribution is not to reiterate the claim to victimhood and innocence of white Central and Eastern Europeans as has often been done in an attempt to negotiate the complex and complicit relationship with European colonial modernity (Tlostanova, 2014) also revealed within the context of Brexit (Emejulu, 2016). Especially after the end of socialism, in Central and Eastern European countries where the majority of the population has not been coded as racially, religiously or civilisationally absolutely differently from ‘core Europeans’, nationalism and the unspoken insistence on whiteness have become the most effective means of asserting Europeanness (Imre, 2005: 82). Furthermore, as Akwugo Emejulu (2016) rightly points out, the hostility, exploitation and violence which white immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe have experienced in the UK before and after Brexit unfortunately do not guarantee any imperative to dismantle racial hierarchy and racism.

Similarly, neither do I want to join the scolding of *The Daily Express* or its readers in a way it has predominantly been done in other – more liberal – mainstream British media, such as *The Guardian* or BBC news. Continuing the framing that has governed the mainstream antiracist and pro-immigration discourses in Europe since the end of the Second World War, they tend to produce individualising and psychologising accounts that frame migratism and racism as an interpersonal prejudice of flawed individuals or groups whose beliefs are incompatible with ‘European’ values (Lentin, 2004). In relation to Brexit specifically, as Bhambra (2017) has shown, such interpretation feeds into the argumentation of populist right-wing politicians who have claimed that the reasons for the opposition to immigration were merely economic, constructing the ‘white working class’ – whose grievances have for decades been allegedly ignored by liberal cosmopolitan elites – as the principal victim. However, as Bhambra further argues (2017), despite the appeal and seeming explanatory power of this discourse uncritically adopted across political elites, the mainstream media as well as scholarship, the centrality of race and racism to Brexit campaign is undeniable. Furthermore, although the present racism in the UK is intrinsically bound to English nationalism and its correlate, the longing for the British Imperial project, it is however not idiosyncratic. It feeds on and further reinforces the racial hierarchy that has defined the European colonial modernity and its political structures – the nation state, liberal democracy as well as supranational formations such as the EU, which especially after the joining of Central and Eastern European countries in 2004 became the ‘Fortress Europe’ that aggressively implements structural heteropatriarchal migratism, racism and classism on populations across its borders (Gržnić, 2014: 129).

Instances of othering such as the one produced by Brexit campaign’s racist migratism therefore demand an intellectual and political response that would be different from simply taking a ‘pro-immigration’ and/or pro-EU stance. As follows from the work of Ahmed (2000: 9–10) and Bhambra (2017), a response which would enable to contest the material, discursive and fantasised structures that produce and naturalise othering needs to begin with the understanding that gendering racialisation – understood not as a continuous line but as a series of discontinuous encounters – have been a central principle of European colonial modernity that continues to configure our present.

To contribute to this endeavour from within scholarship with fungi, in the rest of the article, I will briefly discuss two instances of ‘othering mushrooms’ in European modern history. The first example is a Nazi antisemitic propaganda *Der Giftpilz* (1938) which, as Mary Mills argues, represents ‘the most extreme anti-Semitism imaginable’ (1999). To critically examine its techniques of othering, the following section includes copies of two illustrations

⁴ For instance, in 2018 communal elections in the Czech town Most, a party called Open Townhall based their campaign on a racist slogan ‘disinfection is not enough to exterminate these vermin’, which referenced Nazi antisemitic propaganda, and where vermin referred to Roma people (see romea.cz, 2018). Similarly, dehumanising language that compares immigrants to ‘swarms’ and ‘cockroaches’ has been used during the Brexit campaign (see Mcquire, 2019).



Figure 3. The cover of the antisemitic German children's book *Der Giftpilz* (1938). United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1069698>

and a few direct quotations. The second example involves examining the antisemitic underpinnings of the history and taxonomy of a mushroom species, *Auricularia auricula* which has been known in many European languages as the 'Ear of Judas' and in English under its even more problematic rendering 'Jew's Ear'.

ANTISEMITIC ENTANGLEMENTS: OTHERING MUSHROOMS IN NAZI PROPAGANDA AND THE HISTORY AND TAXONOMY OF *AURICULARIA AURICULA*

The antisemitic propaganda children's picture book *Der Giftpilz* ('the poisonous mushroom' or 'toadstool' in English translation) was first published by the publisher of the antisemitic tabloid *Der Stürmer* in Nazi Germany in 1938 (Goutam, 2014: 1019) and was recently republished by alt-right and neo-Nazi groups in countries such as the United States (Rose, 2008) and Czechia (Režňáková, 2020).⁵ As Mills (1999) argues, the purpose of the book was not only to incite fear and hate but also activate engagement in the persecution of Jews, paving the way and explicitly calling for the 'Final Solution' in the extermination of Jewish population.

The publication relies on the dehumanisation of Jews through a comparison with poisonous mushrooms. To create the image of an impossible and phobic object that threatens to poison and destroy individuals as well as nations, the publication employs techniques of othering through verbal as well as visual means. A caricature of a Jewish man as toadstool that features on the book's cover (Figure 3) includes the Star of David at the bottom of the mushroom's stem and exaggerates features that are crude stereotypes of Jewish appearance such as a crooked face, thick lips, a large bent nose, and a beard. The red of the beard could also be read as pointing to the alleged connection between Jews and another demonised group in Nazi Germany, the communists, as well as an indication of the mushroom's toxicity. The beard forms a ring on the mushroom's stem which is characteristic for *amanitas*, a genus that includes some of the most known toxic mushrooms. The caricature invokes two *amanitas* in particular – *Amanita phalloides*, in English called the death cap, and *Amanita muscaria*, known as the fly agaric. Finally, that the mushroom is poisonous is also suggested by the expression in man's face that demonstrates the effects of the malignant poisoning he is supposed to cause to the bodies of others.

Following the theme of poisonous mushrooms, the book thematises a key and distinct feature of modern antisemitism – the obsession with the ability to identify a Jewish person. As Alana Lentin (2004: 58–60) argues, '[m]odern antisemitism was born not from the great difference between groups but rather from the threat of absence of difference' which was a result of 'Jews' relative integration into bourgeois society' and 'the imposition of increasingly narrow definitions of belonging' in European nation states. The theme of correct identification is developed throughout the whole book. It opens with a story set up during mushroom picking in the forest (Figure 4), where a mother teaches her son, through a comparison between edible and poisonous mushrooms, the difference between good and bad people (the bad ones being Jews). The publication also lists the allegedly Jewish features, most of which define the stereotypes of Jews that endure to this day. For instance, in addition to

⁵ All citations from the English translation of *Der Giftpilz* used in this article are accessible at the online *German Propaganda Archive* of Calvin University, (see German Propaganda Archive n.d.).



Figure 4. A page from the antisemitic German children's book *Der Giftpilz* (1938). The text reads: 'Just as it is often very difficult to tell the poisonous from the edible mushrooms, it is often very difficult to recognise Jews as thieves and criminals ...'. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1069700>

the distinct shape of a nose, the list also includes 'filthy protruding large ears'. Additionally, *Der Giftpilz* charges Jews with various crimes, creating a phantasmatic and contradictory image of key agents of capitalism (as bankers and usurers) as well as those who threaten the capitalist status quo (as socialists and communists). Jews are also portrayed as those who molest, kidnap, and sexually abuse children, women and torment animals, whilst simultaneously being infantilised and reduced to animality and thus denied their humanity. The book also employs religious antisemitism, charging Jews with the killing of the Jesus Christ, and reviving and manipulating the medieval image of a Jew as an incarnation of the Devil.

Finally, some of the rhetorical tropes of othering encountered in 'Eastern European mushroom mobs', although in a much more amplified and explicit manner, are employed in *Der Giftpilz*. This includes the invocation of the overabundance of those identified as intruders which, in this case, is constructed through an analogy with poisonous mushrooms: 'Just as poisonous mushrooms spring up everywhere, so the Jew is found in every country in the world' claims the Nazi antisemitic propaganda. As Neil MacMaster argues (2001: 92), the association between Jews and mushrooms that connects both to the danger of decadence, degeneration and disease, became common in the nineteenth century through 'images or metaphors of the Jews as a monstrous fungus, a parasitic growth that fed upon the healthy body of the host society, finally reducing it to an emaciated and sickly shell'. Furthermore, Lentin argues that the fear of 'Jews being everywhere' is linked to a key feature of modern antisemitism mentioned above, the obsession with being able to identify a Jewish person. The invocation of overabundance in the sense of quantity ('being too many') as well as boundlessness ('being all over the world') implies a threat of intruders attacking and overwhelming the nation in large numbers from the outside, as well as the danger of the nation's destruction from the inside through anti-national sentiments such as cosmopolitanism (MacMaster, 2001: 92–93; Lentin, 2004: 60–62). The protection of children's innocence and purity, which *The Daily Express* newspaper article invokes only through a brief comment about families, is however central to *Der Giftpilz* and fulfils two distinct functions. Firstly, 'German children' function as a 'site' through which the border between the 'we' of the community and the feared and hated intruders is established. Secondly, it aims to build determination to actively participate in the persecution and extermination of Jews in its primary audience, the German children themselves.

That the medium which conveys such extreme antisemitism is a children's picture book should come as no surprise. As decolonial feminist philosopher Rozena Maart (2014: 8–11) argues, the global white hegemonic culture relies on the reproduction of racism in fairy tales told to children about the native and the indigenous as a villain, hiding in the depths of woods, ready to kill and destroy their family. In relation to fairy tales specific to Europe, Rozena Maart's analysis shows how othering operates in relation to the figure of a witch. She contends that the



Figure 5. *Auricularia auricula-judae* (Family *Auriculariaceae*) on dead branch. (2016). Wikipedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Echt_judasoor_\(Auricularia_auricula-judae\)_Familie_Auriculariaceae_op_een_dode_tak_03.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Echt_judasoor_(Auricularia_auricula-judae)_Familie_Auriculariaceae_op_een_dode_tak_03.jpg)

representation of witches is not only a result of heteropatriarchal gendering that demonises and brutalises proletariat and peasant adult and older women but is also racialised – the witch is a representation of a Jewish woman, characterised as dark and physically deformed, with crooked features. As Rozena Maart (2014: 19) further postulates, the treatment of Jewish people has been reminiscent of the way other ‘othered’ groups such as Travellers, Roma, Black, Asian, Indigenous (such as Sámi in the Nordic region) and other ethnic minorities have been treated in European colonial modernity. To invoke Ahmed’s framework again, this has also proceeded through forging bodily metonymic associations between these groups, which, in *Der Giftpilz*, is enacted through the comparison between the hair of Jewish and African people (see also Lentin, 2004: 50). However, as Rozena Maart in accordance with other scholars postulates (2014: 19), racism – as well as its particular form as antisemitism – are global phenomena that predicate the rise of Nazism in central Europe in the 1930s and conceptualise gendering racialisation as an organisational principal of European colonial modernity that is written not only into state structures and practices but also into common sense, folk knowledge and modern science.

My second example, which involves the history and taxonomy of a species of mushroom of a Latin name *Auricularia auricula* – a joint creation of European folk and scientific nomenclature – illustrates this point. This mushroom, in English known under various names such as ‘Jelly Ear’ or ‘Wood Ear’ is a widely distributed pinkish-brown to dark brown mushroom distinctive for its ear-like shape (Figure 5). Depending on age and water content, its texture varies from that of a slimy gelatine, an elastic with soft velvety surface, to a tough wrinkled rubber that becomes hard and brittle when old or dried. *Auricularia auricula* grows in stem-less clusters on dead and living wood, especially elder. It can be found throughout out all seasons in temperate and sub-tropical regions worldwide especially in damp and shaded areas. The reason why Jelly Ears are so prolific is also because of their host, the elder tree, which can be found almost everywhere, and is sometimes itself considered an invasive alien species (Antonsich, 2020). Elder grows on the edges of fields and woods, even in cities and towns where it is traditionally cut back. *Auricularia auricula* is edible and has also been used in medicine. It is popular in Asia, especially in China, where it is called 黑木耳 [*Hei mu er*], ‘black wood ears’ in translation.⁶ In Europe, however, this mushroom is neither sought-after by mushroom foragers nor is it widely consumed.

⁶ I am grateful to Bing Wang and Yelin Zhao for clarifying the nomenclature of *Auricularia Auricula* in Mandarin.

As ethnomycologist David W. Rose (2008: 13) argues, in Europe, *Auricularia auricula* has been widely recognised as a distinctive mushroom species at least since the sixteenth century. It has appeared under its Latin medieval name *auricula Judae* which in translation means ‘Ear of Judas’, a name which the scientific nomenclature also adopted in the nineteenth century. This name still features in some of the current mycology books (as *Auricularia auricula-judae*) and matches the vernacular name in most European languages (*Ucho Jidášovo* in Czech, *Oreille de Judas* in French, *Das Judasohr* in German, or *Juudaksenkorva* in Finnish), including English, where the mushroom is not called ‘Judas’ ear’ but ‘Jew’s ear’. Most commonly, mycology literature maintains that the name ‘Judas’ ear’ is derived from the belief that Judas Iscariot, after betraying Jesus Christ, hanged himself from an elder tree, and treats the shift from ‘Judas’ Ear’ to ‘Jew’s Ear’ as a mistranslation. However, Rose’s (2008: 13–14) detailed philological analysis shows how the names ‘Judas’ ear’ and ‘Jew’s ear’, which both have been in circulation already in the sixteenth century, are a result of widespread antisemitism characteristic of European medieval folk knowledge as well as of another system of knowledge which appeared with modernity – scientific taxonomy and systemics predicated upon the Linnaean binominal system of classification and hierarchisation of life forms (Money, 2013).

Drawing from the previous analyses and following on from Ahmed’s conceptualisation of othering as an embodied process, I want to add a further point to Rose’s philological analysis. After a brief encounter with *Der Giftpilz*, which includes among the alleged characteristic features of Jewish people ‘filthy protruding large ears’ and complains about the overabundance of Jews through the analogy with poisonous mushrooms, as well as Rozena Maart’s analysis of witches as a representation of Jewish women characterised as dark and with physically deformed crooked features who hide in the depth of the woods, it is evident that the roots, or perhaps more accurately – *hyphae* – of the antisemitism of the history and taxonomy of *Auricularia Auricula* is not only linguistic or discursive but also bodily. This is however not to argue that the otherness is found *on* or *in* Jewish bodies – or the bodies of certain mushrooms – as if these bodies and the way they inhabit spaces were the origin of this otherness. For instance, consider the antisemitic association between mushrooms, overabundance, and Jewish people, which is central to *Der Giftpilz* and the naming of *Auricularia auricula* as Judas’ Ear/Jew’s Ear, and how it is echoed in the othering of the Brexit campaign. Here the overabundance – as a sign of the danger and potential harm – is distributed differently. Whereas the sense of ‘being too many’ is assigned to those positioned as intruders, that is to say to immigrants and especially those who are not white, the sense of ‘being all over the world’ – the charge of anti-nationalist sentiments such as cosmopolitanism – is raised also against the liberal elites that are cast as the enemy of ‘ordinary people’ (here meaning ‘the white working class’). Within the context of the Brexit campaign, this racially coded, nationalist anti-élite sentiment was perhaps most visibly expressed by the Tory Party Prime Minister Theresa May in a speech delivered after the EU Referendum vote (Pitcher, 2019: 2494) where May insisted that ‘if you believe you’re a citizen of the world, you’re a citizen of nowhere’.

CONCLUSION

In *Strange Encounters* (2000), Ahmed provides a theorisation of a mode of embodying subjectivities that has dominated the world since the beginning of European colonial modernity, and that has benefited those who have been associated with white, masculine, heterosexual, cisgender and non-disabled bodies in the Global North and/or West at the expense of those who have not. Mobilising this theorisation, the analyses presented in this article show how this mode of othering embodied subjectivities is thoroughly dependent not only on human-centred cultural and historical contexts, but also on what is traditionally considered to be situated outside of them, such as geology, climate, and biodiversity. As the above analyses further demonstrates, research with fungi that specifically takes the polarised sentiments towards these organisms not as exclusive binaries but as critically entangled and mutually constitutive cultural positions, becomes a particularly potent means to study how otherness is constructed and embodied in human and non-human bodies and the places they inhabit. This also holds particularly for the interrogation of phenomena such as right-wing populism, which has re-emerged across the world and that in Europe is exemplified by events such as Brexit, and where the extreme polarisation of a binary native/alien dichotomy has become the underlying logic.

Although othering proceeds along the established binaries such as native/alien and its correlates human/non-human, citizen/foreigner, male/female, civilised/primitive, Global North/South and West/East, the way it proceeds is neither uniform nor clear-cut. As showed with my analysis of how overabundance – as a sign of danger and potential harm – has figured in *The Daily Express* newspaper article ‘Eastern European mushroom mobs,’ the antisemitic Nazi propaganda children’s picture book *Der Giftpilz*, and the history and taxonomy of a mushroom species *Auricularia auricula*, overabundance is distributed differently across the various bodies of humans and non-humans in these three instances of ‘othering mushrooms’. The way in which a knife figures in the photographs that accompany *The Daily Express* newspaper article discussed in the first section of my contribution can serve as another example. Here a knife does not invoke techniques of careful harvesting which foragers use to pick

mushrooms without disturbing or damaging the fungus' hyphae but as a harmful attack. As I argued previously, the way othering operates is contextual, complex, and fluid; sometimes it is even contradictory.

The specific contribution which my examination of how mushrooms have been deployed as a means of othering within the context of the Brexit campaign can be summarised as follows. Firstly, the close analysis of *The Daily Express's* article 'Eastern European mushroom mobs' demonstrates how it draws from and further reinforces white heteropatriarchy. Situating a narrative of othering within what is considered to be 'nature' amplifies certain aspects of this process. On the one hand, the proximity of nature makes othering look natural, it helps to represent otherness as an inherent quality, to normalise othering and justify it as morally right. On the other hand, locating a narrative within a forest and its wildlife intensifies a fantasy of an idealised community that rests on the representation of community's presence as being in crisis. This is, as I demonstrate, due to the position forests have occupied in the cultural imagination of European colonial modernity, and particularly in the UK.

This article also demonstrates how research into social and environmental histories – and the histories of forests and their wildlife in particular – is vital for the critical interrogation of the recent re-emergence of the right-wing populism, exemplified by Brexit. In relation to forests and the role they have played in the formation of English nationalism that is bound to the past and present legacies of British Empire, I show how the Brexit campaign can be considered to be the most visible and effective recent mobilisation of a myth of greenwood freedom that has been circulating in England and later in the UK since the Middle Ages. In relation to European colonial modernity and the gendering racialisation which is its central organising principal, I show how the Brexit campaign emerges from and reinforces European antisemitic discourse. More specifically, I show that it mobilises tropes of othering that are reminiscent of antisemitism that has underpinned European folk knowledge as well as modern science. However, more disturbingly, my analysis of the tropes of othering mobilised in 'The Eastern European mushroom mobs' also shows that it is reminiscent of othering techniques deployed in *Der Giftpilz* – a publication which aimed not only to incite fear and hate but also activate engagement in the persecution and extermination of Jewish populations. This supports and develops work by scholars (such as McGuire, 2019) who have called attention to the similarities between the rhetoric used in the Brexit campaign and that of Nazi propaganda. As argued above, a response which would enable to contest the material, discursive and fantasised structures that produce and naturalise othering would need to include the understanding that gendering racialisation has been a central principle of European colonial modernity that continues to configure our present. In this article, I try to contribute to this project by following mushrooms.

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Reproduction Beyond Hu/Man Extinction: Detoxifying Care in Latin American Anthropocene Fictions

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ABSTRACT

Anxieties around failed parenting are linked to humanity's failed stewardship of the planet in many recent Anthropocene narratives, yet the figure of the biological human child, as *the* signifier of futurity draws attention to the difficulty of imagining the future in non-heteronormative, non-Western, and non-anthropocentric terms. Reproduction is nothing if not a replication of self, of forms of life that are like us. In order to recuperate an alternative model of care from its anthropocentric lineage, I examine how Anacristina Rossi's feminist sci-fi story 'Abel' and Samantha Schwebelin's gothic horror novella *Distancia de Rescate* (2014) perform radical critiques of the idea of reproductive bodies, while at the same time opening out to signal non-binary possibilities of life, offering species-level critique while at the same time remaining rooted in local geographies. These stories embrace the negative implications of Anthropocene thinking, challenging, reflecting, and perpetuating anxieties around sexual difference and the possibility of human extinction, without relying on essentialised mandates about femininity, childbearing and care giving. They engage with what Claire Colebrook calls 'figural extinction' as a way to signal the possibility of moving away from historically toxic androcentric, capitalist and anthropocentric visions of care, and toward an ethic of non/human connection.

Keywords: Anthropocene narratives, feminist posthumanism, materialist eco-criticism, gender and extinction, Latin American eco-fiction

[T]he event that will ultimately precipitate human extinction is not its radical openness to dissolution but its suicidal self-enclosure, its self-bounded integrity that will allow it only to imagine its own world from its own imaginative horizon.
Claire Colebrook, 'Sexual Indifference' (n.p.)

I thought of Noah but then I laughed, this wasn't Genesis, it was climate change.
Anacristina Rossi, 'Abel' (n.p.)

In this article, I examine how 'failed' human reproduction is figured in order to engage with 'the disastrous planetary consequences of our species and the violent rule of sovereign Anthropos' (Braidotti, 2013: 10) in contemporary examples of Latin American Anthropocene fictions: Anacristina Rossi's short story 'Abel,' and Samantha Schwebelin's novella *Distancia de Rescate*.¹ Comparing them alongside posthumanist, feminist materialist

¹ I borrow Adam Trexler's useful term 'Anthropocene fictions' in order to describe these works, understanding it not only in a temporal sense (i.e. texts published since the turn of the millennium), but also to signal a certain (self-) awareness in such narratives about anthropogenic impacts on the environment. Focusing specifically on the novel, Trexler's central aim is to establish 'how climate change and all its *things* have changed the capacities of recent literature' (2015: 13). In other words, Anthropocene fictions are not only *about* the Anthropocene, but they are also *of* the Anthropocene.

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and material ecocritical thinkers, I analyse how these narratives figure reproduction without generation as a rethinking of relations of body and production, as well as commenting on post-human futures. Pinpointing the way both texts posit non-human nature as an ‘agential force that actively participates in the material-discursive configuration of the world with far-reaching political, ethical, and ecological implications,’ I aim to participate in a critical project that expands the ‘horizons of Latin American environmental critique by engaging with texts not often included in ecocritical debates’ (Coleman, 2016: 697). I emphasise how they perform a radical critique of the anthropocentric priority of reproductive bodies in the contemporary moment, and open out to embrace non-binary understandings of multispecies becoming(s). As Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann put it, this ‘includes the vital materiality of life, experiences of nonhuman entities, and our bodily intra-actions with all forms of material agency as effective actors’ (2012: 88). This revaluation sparks a suspension of anthropocentric concepts as the acts of sex, reproduction and traditional notions of care are put into question in ways that move beyond Cartesian logics, and toward what Karen Barad (2003) calls ‘intra-active’ relations, where the presumed primacy of the human is undermined.

Simply put, to engage in childrearing is to participate in reproducing the future of humanity. Yet US congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s Instagram post last year, in which she asks whether, since ‘there’s a scientific consensus that the lives of children are going to be very difficult (...) is it still ok to have children?’ meshes with the recent formation of voluntary anti-procreation organisations (*BirthStrike*, for example) for men and women who have decided not to have children in response to climate change, in a ‘radical acknowledgment’ of how this looming existential threat is already ‘altering the way we imagine our future’ (Hunt, 2019: n.p.). This anxiety about having children in the face of ‘climate breakdown and civilization collapse’ (Hunt, 2019: n.p.) also resonates in a long list of Anthropocene fictions that have been emerging in the Anglosphere in recent years. In an increasing proliferation of stories featuring eviscerated family units, abandoned children, pregnancy and child rearing in a time of climate collapse, a sense of impending doom around the notion of failed parenting is increasingly linked to humanity’s failed stewardship of the planet.² Adeline Johns-Putra identifies how the presumption in such narratives is that, in order to counter humanity’s ‘collective hubris,’ the only ‘way forward’ for humanity relies on a notion of care for the environment that is understood largely in terms of inter-generational culpability (2014: 128). Narrative concerns focused on the ‘figure of the child,’ as a ‘primal subject of protection, shelter, and guardianship,’ resonate with ‘contemporary anxieties about whether we are doing enough to protect, shelter, and safeguard that for which we are responsible’ (Johns-Putra, 2016: 523). As the Greta Thunberg and the ‘Fridays for Future’ phenomenon have made clear, inter-generational reckonings of guilt for the ruined world that our children have inherited has become a crucial part of the narratives we tell ourselves about (the very possibility of) futurity.

As Lee Edelman pointed out in his seminal book *No Future*, ‘we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the Child’ (2004: 11). Yet as Edelman’s critique of ‘reproductive futurism’ elucidates, the normative figure of the biological human child, as signifier of futurity *par excellence*, not only draws attention to the difficulty of imagining the future in non-heteronormative and non-Western terms, but it also speaks to the gendered and essentialist ways that reproductive care is inevitably associated with (mother) nature.³ Moreover, what is being mourned in many post-apocalyptic or ‘Cli-Fi’ (climate fiction) imaginings of the end of the world is, as Johns-Putra suggests, ‘the loss of human rather than nonhuman nature’ (2016: 521). Cultural theorist Claire Colebrook points out how contemporary anxieties around the ‘extinction of sexual difference — both sexuality’s necessary relation to extinction and the possibility of sexual difference itself becoming extinct’ — have ‘seemed to provoke a return or retreat to the figure of the sexual couple’ in popular culture (2012: 168). Judging from much of the cultural production of the last few years, even though ‘many species already reproduce without dual sexual reproduction, or via sexual reproduction that does not generate distinct sexes’ (Colebrook, 2012: 168), it seems that our very notion of the future hinges solely on the sexual reproduction of the human species.

Reproduction is nothing if not a replication of self, of forms of life that are *like* us. Trapped within normative logics of self-replication even as we endlessly imagine our own end in a myriad of generic forms, we remain unable to valorise forms of life that are radically not like us; we are unable to get our heads around our kinship with, and

² Anxieties around the (im)possibility of parenting in the Anthropocene reverberate in novels such as *Weather* (2020) by Jenny Offill; *Sealed* (2017) by Naomi Booth; *The End We Start From* (2017) by Megan Hunter; *Clade* (2015) by James Bradley; *The New Wilderness* (2020) by Diane Cook; *The World Without Us* (2015) by Mireille Juchau; *The History of Bees* (2015) by Maja Lunde; *Gold, Fame, Citrus* (2015) by Claire Vaye Watkins; *Heroes of the Frontier* (2016) by Dave Eggers; *The Bear* by Andrew Krivak (2020), and — particularly scathingly — in Lydia Millet’s *The Children’s Bible* (2020).

³ Films such as Darren Aaronofsky’s *Mother!* (2017) riff on gendered representations of ‘Mother Earth,’ transforming her from a living mother into a passive female body. In a long list of science fiction films, the retributive agency of the earth is represented as ‘revenge’ — the earth is a capricious and withholding figure who is indifferent to the well-being of her ‘children,’ and whose vengeful actions are represented as ‘the product of emotion, the result of poorly-constrained female subjectivity, crying out for the rationalized discipline historically associated with occidental notions of maleness’ (Mitchell, 2015: n.p.).

existential dependence on, forms of life that are other, or more, than ‘human.’ But what would it look like to understand reproduction and relations of care in *posthuman* terms? Here I am understanding posthumanism in Rosi Braidotti’s sense, as a non-reductive critique of humanism and of anthropocentrism, premised ultimately on multiplicity, where a non-universal ‘we’ is assumed (2013: 9). Similarly, Karen Barad (2003: 808) suggests that posthumanism ‘marks an account that calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of “human” and “nonhuman,” examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized’. The underlying goal of posthumanist thinking is to shift the epistemological plane from an anthropocentric position that presumes the hegemony of the ‘human’ (read: self-enclosed, male subject, subsuming everything else under his embodied logocentric being) to a much more fluid, immanent plane of relationality, where the human is merely one *relatum* among many. In this repositioning, all things (including ‘us’) gain ontological reality in a relation of radical equality where an outside or superior position (like *Anthropos*) is no longer tenable.

In order to recuperate an alternative model of care from its anthropocentric lineage, in the rest of this article I will explore how the stories I have chosen to focus on forefront sexual difference and reproduction in order to launch a species-level critique, while at the same time remaining rooted in local geographies. Rossi and Schwebelin challenge, reflect, and perpetuate anxieties around sexual difference and the possibility of human extinction without relying on essentialised mandates about femininity, childbearing and care giving. In each text, the safety of the family unit — ostensibly a space of protection — proves to be a dangerous illusion that is literally, as well as figuratively, toxic for the protagonists. More or less hinting at alternatives to normative visions of kinship, each of these narratives highlights the possibility of an ecocentric ethics of care, understood as what Johns-Putra (2016: 129) calls ‘a feeling — translated into an ethos — of concern for a consideration of the needs of others, whether human or non-human’. In this way, normative anthropocentric models of care are pushed out of the spotlight, so that an ethics of care can be instead be examined within a multispecies frame.

Neither Rossi nor Schwebelin offers a hopeful, recuperative or techno-optimistic ending for their reader. In fact, I suggest that both of these narratives seem to be welcoming reproductive failure and the *end* of humanity — or at least, the end of a certain version of humanity. Engaging with the idea of ‘ends’ by registering contemporary environmental anxieties, they at the same time avoid reproducing ‘ecophobic’ (Estok, 2009) or ‘necro-futurist’ (Canavan, 2014) endings. Instead, they set the tone for dwelling with what Merola (2018: 32) calls ‘Anthropocene anxiety,’ an uneasy *mélange* of melancholy, anger, and resignation that amounts to an ‘avowal of the eco-unpleasant’. Embracing the negative implications of Anthropocene thinking instead of falling back on a requisite hopefulness, they call for a kind of dethroning of *Anthropos*, echoing Donna Haraway’s call to ‘make kin not babies!’ (2015: 162).

Anacristina Rossi pushes the idea of extinction to the limit by setting her short story ‘Abel’ in the very center of Central America *after* the end of the world.⁴ One of Costa Rica’s most important writers, Rossi is best known for her ‘ecofeminist testimony’ novel, *La Loca de Gandoca*, which ‘counters the logic of patriarchal domination with an ethnic and environmental ethic that considers new forms of relation among human and nonhuman subjects’ (Kearns, 2016: 98). In stark contrast of the rich biodiversity portrayed in *La Loca de Gandoca*, the premise of Rossi’s short story ‘Abel’ takes the contemporary climate crisis to its logical conclusion, pushing humanity to the limit of extinction. Oscillating between first- and third-person narration, the story recounts the experiences of a young woman who is one of the only surviving members of the human species. Through a narrative reconstruction of Lalia’s memory, the story of a catastrophic, yet slow, apocalypse unfolds: an uncannily familiar history of shifting imperial powers, a series of climate catastrophes, species extinctions, human adaptations, and a long line of failed techno-scientific fixes, culminates in the end of oxygen and hence the end of virtually all biological life on the planet. Lalia and her family had been living in a research station on the Panama Canal, but unlike her scientist parents, her sister and apparently all other humans on earth, she is the only one who has inexplicably been able to adapt biologically to shifting conditions: she absorbs water through her increasingly porous, amphibian-like skin and is able to survive by eating the buds of a single type of flower that has also adapted to thrive without oxygen.

Lalia witnesses everyone and everything around her die, including the asphyxiated earthworms that she unearths while burying her family. After biding her time at the top of a volcano to allow for the smell from the defunct organic matter to dissipate, Lalia decides to make her way to what was once the capital city, in order to see if she can find any other living ‘being’ (interestingly, she does not say *human* being). Surveying the ruined and half-submerged city, she is shocked to encounter another human survivor: her own brother. Abel has returned to the

⁴ The first in a series of three short stories about a young female protagonist called Lalia, this story was published in a 2013 anthology of Costa Rican science fiction called *Lunas en Vez de Sombras y Otros Relatos de Ciencia Ficción*. I was unable to obtain a copy of this book but the author was kind enough to send me an (unpaginated) PDF of the story, as well as her other two stories, of which only the last one, ‘*La Esperada*,’ has page numbers. All translations are my own.

southern hemisphere, by way of the Bering Strait, after studying the arctic permafrost.⁵ Far from a joyous family reunion, there is a dark undertone to this reencounter, and Lalia recounts in the first person her immediate sense of dread. When her older brother marvels at how she has grown into an attractive young woman, Lalia becomes nauseous. For the first time, she resorts to taking one of the antidepressant pills distributed amongst the population to stave off mass panic at the end of the world. Eager to remove herself from her brother, Lalia barricades herself in the bedroom of a derelict hotel where they are sheltering for the night. In the darkness, she hears someone attempting to enter her room. ‘This was bigger than climate change,’ she says, convinced that her brother was going to ‘force her to reproduce with him.’ Before sunrise, Lalia takes a knife from the hotel kitchen and slits her brother’s throat while he sleeps, as if he were, as she puts it, an ‘animal.’ Even though this fratricidal act provokes intense feelings of disgust (it causes her to ‘vomit and vomit’), Lalia still insists that she would never reproduce with her brother, ‘not even if that was the only way for humanity to continue.’ The story ends — somewhat abruptly — with Lalia deliberately *choosing extinction* by killing her only possible reproductive partner.

Lalia’s decision to commit fratricide can also be interpreted as a kind of species suicide since, as Haraway (2007: 18) points out: “‘woman’s’ putative self-defining responsibility to ‘the species,’ as this singular and typological female is reduced to her reproductive function’. Even though she is the sole member of what has become an endangered species, Lalia refuses to give in to ‘Western norms of the reproductive imperative for women’ by challenging the presumption that ‘all organisms can and should be made to exercise their reproductive capacities in order to resist extinction’ (Mitchell, 2015: n.p.). Instead of instigating a new lineage of post-apocalyptic begetting in order to repopulate the earth, Lalia offers a gendered twist on the biblical Abel’s brother, Cain, by refusing to take part in the reproduction of patriarchal models of human society: as far as she can tell, the human lineage will end with her own extinction. The ultimate ‘feminist killjoy’ (to borrow Sara Ahmed’s term (2017)), Lalia radically refuses to participate in human futurity if it means the replication of *status quo* gender and kinship relations.

Lalia’s story does not end there, however: two more short stories, entitled ‘*La Incompleta*’ (2015) and ‘*La Esperada*’ (2019), deepen and complicate Rossi’s preoccupation with extinction, reproduction and female agency, and what this means for the protagonist as well as for the future of humanity. ‘*La Incompleta*’ opens where ‘Abel’ leaves off: Lalia has just killed her own best hope for familial (and species) continuation while sea levels and global temperatures continue to rise. Feeling a sense of ‘loneliness but not repentance,’ Lalia decides to travel further south, this time to higher ground in Colombia in order to continue her search for other living beings. Here she finds two other survivors, Tami and Argos, and the three of them eventually form a kinship unit of sorts. Lalia is bewildered by the intense sexual attraction she begins to feel towards Argos, and she describes this as an entirely physical desire to ‘sleep with him, have children with him.’ Argos shows no interest in her sexual advances, however, telling her that they ‘are not viable’ in a reproductive sense. Lalia discovers that Tami and Argos are in fact ‘parthogenic mutants,’ male survivors who have biologically adapted to reproduce asexually. Interestingly, they still consider themselves to be male, but their penises are ‘useless flaps, a reminiscence.’ They explain that they are in the midst of an accelerated process of evolving from *homo sapiens sapiens* (a species that has proven to be cruel, self-interested and ultimately suicidal) into ‘something more compassionate and intelligent.’ Lalia calls this new species *homo sapiens discriminans*. Their asexual reproductive episodes have yet to result in viable descendants, however, and Tami describes his experiences of failed reproduction in monstrous terms, referring to his ‘products’ instead of babies or even offspring. Lalia is quick to point out to them that the feelings that they describe — nausea, physical pain, emotional ambivalence — merely echo what women have experienced in childbirth for millennia. Claiming that he would rather die than go through that kind of pain again, Tami ingests artificial male hormones to stave off the reproductive episodes, and ultimately attempts suicide to permanently escape the ordeal. Despite Lalia’s sexual advances toward him, Argos decides to venture off on his own, telling her, ‘[y]ou have desire, but I don’t know if you are equipped for reproduction,’ and ‘if I see anyone like you, I will let you know,’ which suggests that he is unable to conceive of physical desire or reproduction beyond a model of replication through the dyad of sexual difference.

As Postema (2008: 122) notes in his reading of *La Loca de Gandoca*, in many of Rossi’s stories, ‘male characters often adhere to the political power structures that maintain their authority’. Both Tami’s and Argos’ rejection of the possibility of alternative modes of species reproduction shows that even though these men claim to have ‘evolved,’ they are still incapable of envisioning or accepting a radical shift in sexual relations. Tami is unwilling to take on the pain of reproduction, while Argos is unable to enjoy an intimate relationship with Lalia without its being for reproductive purposes. Lalia empathises with Tami, recognising a parallel between his refusal to reproduce against his will and her murder of her brother, but at the same time she demonstrates a trust in nature that he does not share: against Tami’s claim that ‘nature is experimenting with me and it has no right,’ Lalia thinks that nature ‘knows’ what it is doing by forcing a benevolent posthuman (that is, a post-*homo sapiens sapiens*) to

⁵ It is significant that Rossi sets her story in the equatorial Americas: in contrast to the popular notion that human populations of the Americas came from the north, and across the Bering Strait, her human survivors move in a southward fashion, inviting a recovery of Indigenous knowledge systems that have been submerged, dominated, erased and/or overwritten.

reproduce. She tells Tami that she will care for him and his ‘products’ as if they were her own family, but he is unwilling to participate in this alternative kinship scenario. Following Tami’s botched suicide attempt and his subsequent plea for a mercy killing, Lalia runs away from his mutilated but still living form: even though she has no regrets about killing her own brother, Lalia demonstrates an outright refusal to kill this potentially *post*-human form of life.

In the final story, entitled ‘*La Esperada*,’ Lalia meets and falls in love with an Indigenous scientist called Andrés, who exhibits similar physical adaptations to the post-apocalyptic environment that Lalia has developed. He has been waiting for her arrival, he tells her, and they immediately engage in an intensely physical relationship. Even though Lalia has until now been convinced that she does not have a future in a reproductive sense, Andrés insists on their futurity as an underwater reproductive dyad: ‘you and me and the sea,’ he tells her (Rossi, 2019: 110). In a reversal of the Darwinian evolutionary narrative, in this story the future of humanity involves a return to the ‘immense affinity’ (Rossi, 2019: 118) of the ocean. However, despite his alignment with Indigenous worldviews, it quickly becomes apparent that Andrés is also a figure who remains aligned with power structures that maintain male authority. During their accelerated transformation into aquatic beings, Andrés begins tying Lalia up with rope so that she does not jump into the water prematurely and drown. When he eventually does untie her, Lalia notes wryly that it is because he has become too weak himself and not because she has asked him to do so (Rossi, 2019: 121). His reproduction of a violent act against a woman for ‘her own good’—and perhaps more importantly, for the ‘good’ of species futurity—effectively crushes Lalia’s libido: ‘it was too much violence,’ she says (Rossi, 2019: 120). Before their physical transformation is complete, the honeymoon between Andrés and Lalia comes to an end, and when Andrés’ scientific calculations fail and he suffocates before he is able to transition to the watery environment, Lalia expresses indifference: ‘he will die and I will leave him alone, and this species that we were, whatever it is called, won’t be able to reproduce’ (Rossi, 2019: 122). She does not feel ‘sadness,’ but instead wonders: ‘who am I now? What was I turning into?’ When she discovers that Andrés is unconscious but still alive she simply wonders whether, after their transformation into ‘unrecognizable creatures’ of the sea, they would still be a ‘matable pair,’ or whether ‘she was going to return to the beginning of evolution’ and ‘end up as a bacteria or archaea’ (Rossi, 2019: 122-123).

From her fratricidal refusal to reproduce the patriarchal *status quo*, to her refusal to kill Tami in order to welcome the possibly of posthuman life forms, to her indifference toward the possibility of species futurity with Andrés, Lalia’s actions consistently resonate with Colebrook’s idea of ‘sexual indifference’—that is, ‘the thought of production and “life” that does not take the form of the bounded organism reproducing itself through relation to its complement other’ (2012: 167). Lalia’s embracing of a sexually *indifferent* reproductive future also resonates with Elizabeth Grosz’s (2008: 46) call for feminist re-appropriations of Darwin in order to develop a ‘more politicized, radical, and far-reaching feminist understanding of matter, nature, biology, time, and becoming.’ Colebrook (2008: 74) suggests that the Darwinian model of life is ‘immediately radical,’ since it precludes ‘biological determinism’ and confronts ‘thought with the challenge to live up to the potentials for newness’. To be sure, the very concept of ‘species’ makes it ‘appear as if sexual reproduction is the ‘best’ means of sustaining the existence of a life form,’ when in fact ‘earthly life forms actually engage in myriad forms of reproduction’ and, ‘in Darwinian terms, all species that manage to survive are equally successful’ (Hird in Mitchell, 2015: n.p.). By displacing the primacy of sexual reproduction, space can be made for visions of futurity that move beyond ‘our culture of rampant pronatalism,’ and toward ‘new possibilities that are neither hopeful nor nihilistic, but that take into account a sense of ongoingness through queering family structures and polyparenting’ (Colebrook and Caroline, 2016: n.p.). These are precisely the kind of alternative kinship relations that Lalia herself attempts to imagine with Tami and his reproductive ‘products.’

Submerged underwater in the final paragraph of the story, Lalia’s last conscious thoughts are to wonder whether the sense of ‘oneness’ with the ocean that she feels is the result of physical adaptations, or whether it is merely the ‘death trance’ chemicals in her oxygen-starved brain tricking her into feeling Freud’s oceanic ‘infinite love’ in the final moments before death (Rossi, 2013: 123). The very last line of the story reads: ‘We stopped thinking. Or, we stopped existing’ (Rossi, 2013: 123). That is, Lalia and Andrés have either stopped thinking (and, at least in a Cartesian vein, have therefore stopped being human, having mutated into something no longer fully human), or they have died and stopped existing altogether, which would also preclude their reproductive future as a species. Given anthropocentric anxieties around reproduction and sexual (in)difference—‘the lures and laziness that the sexual dyad as a figure has offered for thinking’ (Colebrook, 2012: 167)—in the end it makes little difference. Whether one ceases to exist or merely ceases to exist as human, the end result is still a kind of human extinction.

Rossi’s narrative engagement with human ends can be understood in terms of what Colebrook calls the ‘thought experiment of extinction’ (2014: 27), as a way to challenge gendered and hetero-normative conceptions of ‘humanity,’ and ‘transform social norms and power structures that enforce inequalities of gender, sexuality, race and species’ (Mitchell, 2015: n.p.). Rossi’s feminist sci-fi stories engage with extinction in order to perform a radical critique of reproduction, while at the same time opening out to embrace non-binary possibilities of life. Taken

together, the narrative arc of all three stories shows Lalia's body becoming increasingly 'marked with corporeal vestiges of humanity's nonhuman origins,' conjuring a simultaneously forward- and backward-facing subversion of 'teleological humanist discourses,' and evoking a 'new concept of humanity as undergoing a constant process of reconfiguration' (Coleman, 2016: 696). As Jane Bennett (2010: 121) suggests:

One can invoke bacteria colonies in human elbows to show how human subjects are themselves nonhuman, alien, outside vital materiality. One can note that the human immune system depends on parasitic helminth worms for its proper functioning or cite other instances of our cyborgization to show how human agency is always an assemblage of microbes, animals, plants, metals, chemicals, word-sounds, and the like.

As Rosi Braidotti suggests, '[f]ar from marking the rejection, extinction or the impoverishment of the human,' sitting with a discomfiting vision of human extinction as a thought experiment might be 'a way of reconstituting the human' and re- 'negotiate who "we" are' (2019: 39). Instead of interpreting Rossi's speculative engagement with human extinction as a misanthropic death wish for humanity, perhaps we might see it as a 'disanthropocentric' (Cohen, 2015: 9) making way for visions of another kind.

As Jeffrey Cohen suggests, a 'not indifferent, not misanthropic, but *disanthropocentric*' dethroning of the human has the potential to make 'stories centered upon the human wobble, their trajectories veer' (2015: 25). This wobbliness is experienced in a particularly acute and discomfiting way in Samantha Schwebelin's eco-horror novella, *Distancia de Rescate*.⁶ The novella invites multiple readings: it is at once a psychological thriller about the ambivalent relationship between mothers and their young children; it is a supernatural story about the transmigration of souls; and it is a gothic, anti-pastoral example of what Gisela Heffes identifies as the 'rural turn' to non-urban spaces in Argentine novels of the second decade of the twenty-first century. This is a dynamic that reverses the modern mechanism where 'urban spaces constituted the key locus for rebuffing and cleansing the 'barbarity' deeply rooted in rural territories,' by drawing attention to the fact that 'the rural landscape is no longer untamed; rather, it has become (...) anthropogenically intervened, trimmed, exploited, and domesticated' (Heffes, 2019: 55-56). In other words, this novel unsettles reader expectations by transforming the green and idyllic space of the Argentine countryside into a twenty-first century agro-toxic nightmare.⁷

The narrative of *Distancia de Rescate* is structured as an unbroken dialogue between two voices, the first belonging to a woman (Amanda) who is immobile and confined to a hospital bed, and the second voice to a young boy (David), who kneels beside her and forces her to recount a series of recent events. Amanda does not seem to understand why she is unable to move, and David explains that, 'It's the worms. You have to be patient and wait. And while we wait, we have to find the exact moment when the worms come into being.' David's voice is insistent, claiming that 'It's very important, it's very important for us all' as he coaxes Amanda to piece together her memories carefully because: 'the exact point [of when the worms come into being] is in one detail, you have to be observant.' In this story, far from being an indicator of healthy, oxygenated, re/productive soil, the 'worms' that David refers to are of another sort altogether.

The text's central metaphor for care can be found in Amanda's preoccupation with what she calls 'rescue distance,' which is a constantly shifting calculation of how long it would take her to reach her daughter, Nina, in the event of an emergency. Amanda imagines herself attached to Nina by an invisible string or thread, which shortens or lengthens depending on the perceived immediacy of danger. Amanda reflects, 'I need to get ahead of anything that might happen,' and wonders, 'why do mothers do this?' As Ana María Mutis (2020: 44) notes: 'threads that tense, break, shorten or disappear lurk in the story as ominous symbols of the fragile bond that ties a mother to her child'. However, a mother's instinct to shelter her child at all costs is clearly not longer sufficient: as the narrative unfolds, we discover that David's mother, Carla, has also failed to protect her child from harm. Six years earlier, after her husband's stallion dies after drinking toxic water from a stream, Carla is horrified to realise that her toddler David has somehow been poisoned by the same water. Desperate for a solution in the absence of an adequate public health care system, Carla takes David to a community healer, who splits his spirit and migrates part of it to a healthy body, allowing part of an unknown spirit to enter David's body. After the procedure David is different: he survives, but he is cold and somehow empty, and he exhibits strange, repetitive behaviour. His skin

⁶ Published in 2014, this novel was translated into English as *Fever Dream* and was nominated for the 2017 Man Booker International Prize. Samantha Schwebelin herself was chosen by *Granta* magazine as one of the best Spanish-speaking writers under the age of thirty-five. Translations of the 2015 (non-paginated) Kindle edition are my own.

⁷ I do not use the word 'nightmare' lightly here. *The New Yorker* reviewer, Lia Tolentino, described the novella as a 'sick thrill,' that is 'brilliantly structured and frightening' and 'belongs to the category of short, impressionistic novels best consumed in a single sitting' (and I would challenge anyone to try and *not* to read this story in a single sitting). Given the proliferation of ecological horror narratives provoking similarly 'visceral reactions' in recent years, we might begin to ask ourselves whether horror might be emerging as *the* genre for the Anthropocene.

is covered in almost imperceptible blemishes and, according to Carla, he is no longer her son but has become a ‘monster.’

Mutis reads *Distancia de Rescate* through its adherence to conventions of gothic fiction in order to elucidate the novel’s ability to ‘give visibility to invisible threats’ (2020: 41). This occurs primarily through the figuration of the ‘child monster that, through its connection to the eco-zombie, materializes the alienation that results from tampering with the environment’ (Mutis, 2020: 55-51). The monstrous doublings resulting from the transmigrated souls of (interchangeable) children not only transforms the ‘familiar into the uncanny to an intimate extreme,’ but it also functions as a ‘metaphor for pollution,’ since the ‘uncontrolled propagation of agrochemical poisons’ is likened to ‘the dispersion of souls invading foreign bodies’ (Mutis, 2020: 42). The figure of the child offers a ‘human scale to slow violence’s temporal scale’ (Cecire in Mutis, 2020: 50). In this way, the novel is able to evoke Nixon’s ‘slow violence’ of environmental contamination, as effects that are dispersed over long periods of time, are not visible or newsworthy and are thus often not understood as violence *per se*.

Schweblin envisions an utter failure of maternal as well as societal care: as reviewer Manuel Allasino (2018: np) suggests, the novel ‘follows a dizzying fatality always asking the same question: Is there any apocalypse other than personal?’ (my translation). By the end of the story, Amanda is presumably dead, Carla has inexplicably disappeared, and their children (or what is left of them) are each placed in the ineffectual hands of their oblivious and — at least until the very last paragraphs — largely absent fathers. The tragic failure of Amanda and Carla to be able to protect their own children from harm says something crucial about the cultural link between practices of mothering and practices of ecological care. Mutis (2020: 43) suggests that employing the ‘figure of the missing child’ is not only a way ‘to make the slow violence of agrochemical pollution visible and urgent,’ but that it is also a way to ‘politicize motherhood in order to advance an ecological message.’⁸ However, as Cate Sandilands (in Mitchell, 2015: n.p.) warns, essentialised notions of motherhood and care as a means of protecting future generations ‘constrain women’s political action to the private sphere of the family and inter-human interactions,’ which in turn constrains ‘women’s sense of ethico-political agency in the face of the multi-species phenomenon (...) that is extinction’. Indeed, paralysed within her panicked space of maternal preoccupation, Amanda loses all capacity for meaningful action. The text’s representation of these mothers’ desperate yet ultimately futile efforts to protect their own children from danger reveals the misplaced nature of placing blame for failures of care in the *private* realm of the family, instead of explicitly identifying the very *public* risks to their well-being. In the case of this novel, this involves a catastrophic combination of agro-pharmaceutical regimes, late capitalist models of production, and a dangerous lack of public health protections. Repeatedly emphasising that the stakes are ‘important for us all,’ David tells Amanda that none of what has happened to him is his mother’s fault: ‘it is about something much worse,’ he says. But the novella does not reveal what this something worse is. The entire narrative revolves around the impossibility of representation, the ‘difficulty of saying the unsayable,’ and just as Amanda is figuratively ‘tied to a narrative that reaches no conclusion’ (Mutis, 2020: 41), she is also literally trapped in her hospital bed — not to mention within her poisoned body — and unable to advance. Resonating with what Buell calls ‘toxic discourse’ Schweblin’s novella underscores the idea that ‘bodies ravaged by diseases (...) are also incapable of reproducing, hence aborting the idea of a future’ (Heffes, 2019: 70).

The tendency to interpret this text primarily through a lens focused on fraught mother-child relations in the novel risks making us, as readers, guilty of David’s repeated accusation of Amanda, that we are missing out on what is ‘really important.’ In this way, the story drags our anthropocentric tunnel-vision into the light of day by highlighting the problem of our only being able to *really care* about *caring for* that which is ‘like’ us. This is why I think it is useful to contrast the procreational models of maternal care in the novella to the kind of trans- or inter-species model of care that is modelled by David (and to a lesser extent, by Nina/David) at the end. In the transmigration of their souls both children are no longer the individual offspring of Amanda and Carla, but have transformed into something else, something *plural*, hybrid, something more-than-human. After his transformation, David begins to kill, mourn and bury the poisoned and moribund animals that seek him out. The model of care that he embodies is simply unintelligible to his mother, who is utterly horrified when he begins to help ‘push’ these dying creatures over the threshold into death, starting with ducks, but moving on to dogs, horses, and eventually Amanda herself. In his intimate kinship with these suffering souls, who are caught—as he himself is—between the living and the dead, David becomes a monster to his mother. But even so, this careful (or *care-full*) act of ‘pushing’ demonstrates David’s more-than-human level of compassion.

⁸ The politicisation of maternal loss is something that is familiar in the context of Argentina: the emergence of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, as a response to the rupture of maternal and kinship bonds that occurred during the Military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983, ‘inserted the figure of the mother in the Argentine political sphere while modifying the place of enunciation of maternal discourse’ (Domnigues in Mutis, 2020: 44). To be sure, in this novel, the notion that the child’s soul is somehow ‘elsewhere’ but ‘refuses to vanish completely shares with the *desaparecidos* its present absence and the uncertainty of its fate’ (Mutis, 2020: 45).

Juxtaposed to the imagined ‘strings’ of Amanda’s rescue distance, in one of the final and most heartbreaking scenes of the novella we become aware of Nina/David’s desperate attempts to literally hold their kinship networks (figured through the trope of family photographs) together with kitchen twine. In her study of ‘speculative ethics in more than human life worlds,’ Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017: 67) suggests that ‘nothing holds together without relations of care’. David’s solidarity with non-human animals illustrates a concern for the earth and all of the life forms that inhabit it. For Colebrook (2009: 250), ‘only by thinking intensities beyond the human can we begin to live ethically’, while Haraway (2003: 299) reminds us that, ‘[a]ctors, as well as actants, come in many and wonderful forms,’ and “reproduction”—or less inaccurately, the generation of novel forms—need not be imagined in the stodgy bipolar terms of hominids’. Taking a cue from David’s more-than-human perspective, it might be possible to think about ‘making kin’ with monsters.

In his review of the novel, Carlos Pardo (2015) suggests that *Distancia de Rescate* invites us to re-think our ‘imaginary of danger’ because, by creating a subtle parallel between the planting of GMO soy crops and parental fears of physical and mental deformation of their offspring, the ‘rescue distance’ of the novella transforms into the vulnerable space of care for ‘bourgeois humanism,’ which involves ‘a familiarity with a world that has already been lost’ (my translation). To this I would add: *even though we do not yet realise the extent to which what has been, and what is now in the process of being, is lost*. Colebrook (2014: 26) suggests: ‘the positing of the Anthropocene era relies on looking at our own world and imagining it as it will be when it has become past’. Tom Cohen (2016: 23) notes that even the very term Anthropocene already implies a kind of ‘too-lateness,’ since ‘it can only anticipate or legitimize itself from a future recognition of it, after a disappearance it implies is accomplished’. Such temporal anxieties permeate *Distancia de Rescate* as well as Rossi’s short stories: Lalia continually laments ‘the usual theme, too late! It’s always too late,’ while Amanda is literally already as good as dead when David urges her to tie up the loose strings of her story. Amanda remains suspended in her narration, unable to move forward or backward, and David tells her: ‘The important thing has already happened: what follows are the consequences.’ ‘Why do we continue the story then?’ asks Amanda. ‘Because you still do not understand,’ he tells her. Like Lalia, Amanda is given a pill and told to take a nap. The narrative ends without her ever being able to make the connection between her death and the ‘exact point’ when the worms emerge, just as the narrative never directly mentions the real horrors that underpin it — that is, the indiscriminate use of agrochemicals on GMO crops that is poisoning children in rural Argentina.⁹ Much like the zombie-like children with unexplained toxic deformities that populate Schweblin’s novella, the ecological horrors can only ever haunt the margins of the narrative, never explicitly named. In this way, Schweblin holds up a funhouse mirror so that her readers might catch a terrifying (if fleeting and distorted) glimpse of the contemporary condition by placing us, as readers, into the baffled and desperate position of the protagonist. Like Amanda, we are never fully able to put the fragments of the story back together. At one point, one of the mothers in the story muses, ‘the fears that move us are not the ones that we should actually be afraid of.’ Also like Amanda, we as readers remain largely unable to understand the full extent of species loss and environmental destruction that we have brought upon ourselves, and thus we are easily manipulated into caring deeply about matters that *seem* important, but that in fact merely distract us from caring about the things which are really ‘important for us all,’ as David’s more-than-human ethics of care would suggest.

Ultimately, neither *Distancia de Rescate* nor ‘Abel’ shies away from unhappy endings in the interest of narrative closure: on the contrary, ambiguous and potentially discomfiting, they invite readers to rethink questions of ethical responsibility by embracing the specifically *negative* potential in Anthropocene fictions. Schweblin’s monstrously double, non-individuated children and Rossi’s porously amphibious and no-longer-fully-human narrator resonate with Stacy Alaimo’s (2018: 435-436) theory of ‘trans-corporeality,’ which ‘means that all creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic, material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them,’ and thus contesting ‘the master subject of Western humanist individualism, who imagines himself as transcendent, disembodied and removed from the world he surveys’. In the case of Schweblin’s children, these trans-corporeal processes are, quite literally, fatal, but each of these stories hints at the possibility of another kind of relationship between humans and their world. This relationship might be understood through Karen Barad’s sense of ‘intra-action,’ where things are not ordained in a subject-object relationship (where one subsumes the other) but, instead, are open to action among things through relationality and ontological equality. As Haraway (2003: 298) suggests, ‘nature is made, but not entirely by humans; it is a co-construction among humans and non-humans’.

Haraway (2003: 327) also reminds us that it is ‘not a ‘happy ending’ we need, but a non-ending. That is why none of the narratives of masculinist, patriarchal apocalypses will do’. I have suggested that Rossi and Schweblin’s open-ended narrative engagements with human ‘ends’ can help us to keep Braidotti’s (2013: 86) question — ‘who is this ‘we’ whose humanity is at stake?’— at the forefront of our minds. As Serenella Iovino (2018: 115) suggests,

⁹ As Mutis (2020: 39) points out: ‘the nightmare of ecocide that the novel depicts can be traced back to 1996, the year Monsanto’s genetically modified soy was approved in Argentina as an integral part of a new model of agriculture,’ spiking the ‘production of transgenic soy and, consequently, the use of glyphosate’.

in ‘our ‘post-geological’ epoch — call it Anthropocene, Plantationocene or Capitalocene’—the idea of decentring Anthropos ‘means to literally swerve our priorities, liberating the world’s bodily natures from the discursive — and material — delusions of human-centred narratives’. The ‘mark of posthumanism,’ suggests Sheryl Vint (2007: 175), rests in an ‘openness to change and newness, to becoming other and giving up on old categories when they no longer serve rather than defending them against inevitable change’. Contemplating the demise of *homo sapiens* forces one to think about what other kinds of life forms might evolve from, or instead of, ‘humanity’ as we know it’ (Mitchell, 2015: n.p.). Thus, Rossi’s highlighting of figural human extinction and Schweblin’s more-than-human model of care can be read as invitations to imagine new and ‘nonexploitative’ forms of human and non-human ‘togetherness’ (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 240) in a move toward what Braidotti (2013: 81) calls a ‘planetary geo-centered perspective’. Providing an imaginative space beyond the logic of hu/man exceptionalism, these narratives invite readers to understand that somewhere between the temporal ‘too lateness’ of Anthropogenic culpability, and the ‘not yet-ness’ of possible futures, there may still be spaces for alternative narratives of care and futurity to emerge.

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Water in the Anthropocene: Perspectives on Poetry by South African Women

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ABSTRACT

Cape Town's drought (2015-2017) focused attention on humans' dependency on water and the irreversibility of environmental degradation in South Africa in the Anthropocene. Water is symbolically linked to femininity as fluid, connected to the moon and tides, generative and sustaining. This article explores South African women poets' diverse responses to water, focusing on Allison Claire Hoskins, Toni Stuart, Koleka Putuma, Wilma Stockenström and Gabeba Baderoon. Feminist psychoanalysis, feminist new materialism and decolonial theory are brought to bear in the analysis. The audio-visual poems by Hoskins and Stuart feature water as an irresistible force of change and retribution. Similarly, Putuma's celebrated poem 'Water' accuses colonisers of using water to facilitate their agenda. She pleads for water to be restored as a site of memory for black people. Stockenström's (2007) *The Wisdom of Water* draws on traditional nature poetry. She represents water as filled with life, giving life, and deeply connected to women. Gabeba Baderoon is the only poet to write about the environmental degradation brought about by climate change. The article concludes that the poets' diverse strategies in their representation of water intersect in their portrayal of it as symbol and medium of connection.

Keywords: South African women's poetry, water in poetry, multimodal poetry, decolonising poetry, water as relationship

INTRODUCTION

Water is polyvalent and multifaceted, playing numerous roles in the Earth's biosphere, in social existence and in human culture. Carbon-based life on Earth is dependent on the simple compound of oxygen and hydrogen that dissolves nutrients, so that they can pass from the environment into the organism, and removes waste products. Water is similarly necessary for social and economic development: most cities are built near large freshwater sources, which supply the population's needs for sanitation, drinking and cooking, and offer convenient transport routes. Water holds gendered implications for human socio-economic existence and for symbolic communication. Water is associated with household and family socio-economic security. Across cultures, women bear most of the responsibility to provide water for families to drink, eat and use for cleaning. This is due to women's socially assigned nurturing roles and stereotypes that relegate household labour to 'women's work'. Water also holds metaphysical associations with the spiritual and the sacred. Many rivers are venerated as life-giving and life-saving deities and as the source of life. In view of its myriad resonances, Wendy Jepson et al. (2017: 14) comment that 'By reconceptualizing water as a relationship, we are better able to incorporate the interconnectedness of water rights and water responsibilities as core to water security'. Jepson et al. provide an apt focus for my article, which analyses the representation of water in poetry by South African women. I explore poetry from Wilma Stockenström's *The Wisdom of Water*, as well as from Koleka Putuma's celebrated *Collective Amnesia*, Gabeba Baderoon's *The History of Intimacy*, Joan Metelerkamp's *Making Way* (2020) and audio-visual poetry such as Toni Stuart's 'Krotoa Eva speaks: a cape jazz poem in three movements'¹ (2018) and Allison Claire Hoskins' 'We are Coming for Everything' (2018).

Many South African women poets, whose gender is associated with water in myth, symbolism and popular media, write about water. This is not to suggest that male poets cannot or do not write about water: to take only one example, Pieter Odendaal's 2018 collection of poetry, *asof geen berge ooit hier gewoon het nie* ('as though no

¹ I am following the poet's capitalisation here.

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mountains ever lived here'),² includes poems about the ocean, rain and the river that runs through his home town of Stellenbosch. The first poem in the collection, 'die aand toe die see gesing het' ('the evening when the sea sang')³ features an epigraph from Putuma's 'Water', signalling his awareness of poetry by women. Similarly, I do not wish to claim that there is a single aesthetic that women poets use when writing about water: rather, I foreground the diversity of creative strategies that they employ. Surprisingly, most women poets do not write directly about environmental degradation, a theme that appears, of all the poems I discuss in this article, only in Baderoon's writing. Nevertheless, by paying attention to the representation of water as relationship, the connection between all planetary life can be illumined and shed light on our shared predicament in the Anthropocene.

Defining the Anthropocene and situating poetry in relation to it is tricky. Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer (2000) proposed the term as a replacement for 'Holocene'. The term signals scientists' growing realisation that humans' impact on the geo-biological systems that make up the Earth could no longer be ignored or reversed. Nevertheless, some theorists have chosen to use other terms: possibly the greatest proliferation is in Donna Haraway's article 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin' (2015). Haraway proposes a plurality of terms in recognition of the rapid changes and diverse phenomena that are being seen in the current era. None of Haraway's list of terms has gained much traction besides the Anthropocene, possibly because it mobilises the realisation that human actions have caused climate change and environmental degradation. Nevertheless, the concept of the Anthropocene encodes tensions and inequalities. Climate change does not affect men and women equally; women are overwhelmingly responsible for food and water security, so environmental damage impacts on them in greater measure. There are also class inequalities: whilst the planet sustains and nourishes all its life-forms, those with greater resources at their disposal tend to use them to the detriment and even exclusion of those who have less. Finally, even the idea that we are in an era where humans have had a decisive impact on the earth's condition and prospects cannot be taken for granted: some thinkers question and even deny it. Most scientists accept the terminology, though, and with it, the notion of environmental degradation caused by human intervention. This is clearly seen in the condition of the planet's water resources, as Vandana Shiva (2015: 23) observes:

Disregard for the limits of nature's hydrological cycle meant that rivers could be drained and polluted by mining waste. Disregard for the natural rights of others meant that people were denied access to water, and regimes of unequal and nonsustainable water use and water-wasteful agriculture spread ...

In the light of water's protean, mutable nature and the multiple ways it has been perceived and represented in art and culture, I draw on three different theoretical approaches to gender and water: feminist psychoanalysis, feminist new materialism and decolonial theory. Feminist psychoanalytic theory, represented by the work of Julia Kristeva, illuminates the connections between women and water through an understanding of women's bodies as 'leaky' and prone to discharge fluids such as blood, milk and tears. Kristeva (1985: 143) perceptively notes that 'milk and tears have in common (...) that both are metaphors of non-language, of a 'semiotic' that does not coincide with linguistic communication'. The Kristevan semiotic is the pre-linguistic realm inhabited by the subject before individuation and before insertion into the symbolic. Fluids that issue from a woman's body (blood, milk and tears) are venerated, even fetishised, in many cultures, as Melissa Meyer (2005: 2) observes:

Mary Douglas [in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*] argued that 'the powers and dangers credited to social structures' were transposed onto the body, as a symbol of society. Cognitive psychologists showed how bodily orifices tend to be perceived as vulnerable, marginal zones that symbolize the boundaries between internal purity and external danger. Humans invested substances that transgressed these boundaries, such as blood, semen, saliva, tears, urine and feces, with powerful properties.

Women's bodies are strongly associated with blood (via menstruation); milk (signalling their capacity for motherhood); and tears (physiological signs of emotion). Their psyches are perceived as mutable because they are supposedly more susceptible to emotion than men. Women tend to be perceived as physiologically and psychologically fluid and watery. Poetic representations attest to this association.

Feminist new materialism, deriving largely from the work of Karen Barad (2003; 2007), contributes valuable insights into creative knowledges of water by refocusing attention on the material and relational aspects of existence (cf. Parikka, 2015: 49). Barad argues that representationalism has privileged discourse at the expense of matter and that an understanding of phenomena as performative, entangled, agential and material can help to remedy this disproportionate emphasis. Although poetry is strongly dependent on discourse, there are, following Barad, different levels of objectifying and essentialising the nonhuman natural world in the genre. Poetry that emphasises

² I am following the poet's capitalisation here.

³ All translations from Afrikaans are my own.

the importance of relational ontology and ethics, and that does not reify the observer as privileged possessor and creator of knowledge, is easier to read from a new materialist perspective. Of particular relevance for my argument here is Stacy Alaimo's discussion (2008: 302), in her provocatively titled article, 'Ecofeminism without Nature? Questioning the Relation between Feminism and Environmentalism' of the dangers of essentialising or backgrounding 'nature.' She warns that

(...) nature (...) can no longer serve as the ground of essentialism, because it is no longer the repository of unchanging truths or determining substances but is itself an active, transforming, signifying, material force.

This is an apt reminder that poems about water are not about a substantial entity, but a phenomenon (or phenomena) in the process of becoming, which co-constitutes observers, poets and other human users.

Water evokes particularly painful experiences in African history as the medium of the Middle Passage across the ocean from Africa to the Americas, which took between 9 and 11 million Africans forcibly into slavery. In addition, European colonisers (mainly from Britain and The Netherlands) were borne by water to Africa. Upon arrival, they relegated the people whom they found living in Africa to less-than-human status. Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007: 245-246) explains this in epistemological terms:

The very relationship between colonizer and colonized provided a new model to understand the relationship between the soul or mind and the body; and likewise, modern articulations of the mind/body are used as models to conceive the colonizer/colonized relation, as well as the relation between man and woman, particularly the woman of color.

The humanity of the colonised ('particularly the woman of color [sic]') is discursively, ideologically and legally negated by coloniality. This leads to Franz Fanon's provocative announcement in *Black Skin, White Masks* that 'the black is not a man' (1986: 11). Undoing the negation of the humanity of the colonised that is at the heart of coloniality, Maldonado-Torres (2007: 261) suggests, requires:

(...) a confrontation with the racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies that were put in place or strengthened by European modernity as it colonized and enslaved populations through the world.

Other decolonial theorists have written about the necessity of 'delinking' from the logic of coloniality, including the hierarchy of human/nonhuman, European centre/colonial periphery, and others in order to bring to the fore 'other epistemologies, other principles of knowing and understanding and, consequently, other economy, other politics, other ethics' (Mignolo, 2007: 453). Ramón Grosfoguel (2006: 168 and 170) argues that decolonisation entails moving 'the locus of enunciation' from the situation of the coloniser to that of the colonised. The insights provided by these thinkers enable me to approach poetry by Hoskins, Stuart and Putuma as skilful and multimodal delinking from Eurocentric thinking, particularly about black people's relationships with the natural world. Seen as a recurring and significant theme, water serves, in these poems, to interweave and connect social and creative constructions, personal and political concerns, colonial and decolonial epistemologies.

'SPOKEN WORD' VERSUS 'PUBLISHED POETRY' IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa has a vibrant spoken word poetry scene, which has witnessed artists such as Toni Stuart, Malika Ndlovu, Bella Cox, Allison Claire Hoskins and Vangile Gantsho curating, choreographing and performing poems about water, among other themes.⁴ The spoken word scene is separate, politically and affectively, from poetry publication, with overtones of colonial and racial discrimination between spoken word ('stage') and published ('page') poets. Poetry publishing in the country is fraught with racial and class inequalities, as poets who possess financial resources — often, white poets — are able to fund the publication of collections that are assumed to have only a small readership. Exploring this racial differential, Raphael d'Abdon (2018: 50) asserts that the distinction between 'performance poets' and 'published poets' 'continues to consider black poetry as having a lesser literary value while situating it on the margins of a lettered world configured by largely Eurocentric views'. D'Abdon rightly exposes white, neo-colonial literary critics' distinction between 'spoken word' and 'published' poetry. Published poetry, often written by white poets, receives accolades and is prescribed for study, while spoken word poetry is celebrated by popular audiences at mass gatherings, is not always recorded or publicised, and does not receive the attention of the country's literary elite. In poetic praxis, though, there is often an overlap between

⁴ See, for example, Malika Ndlovu's performance on Kenyan streaming service Paza Sauti (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFZSTVmDUcU>), which begins 'I return to the water / I return to the sea / We return to our mother / Return with me' (2020).

spoken word and published poetry, with many poets using both modes, so that there is no difference between performance poetry and poetry *per se*. In fact, the audio-visual poems discussed in this article draw on a wider range of semiotic strategies than are available to poetry that is available only in published form. The multimodal affordances of spoken word poetry, including body language, visual imagery, musical accompaniment, voice and intonation, furnish a depth of meaning that is often not accessible via the page.

Allison Claire Hoskins' poem 'We are Coming for Everything' (2018) announces that 'we' black people are 'coming' to take back what has been taken away by colonialism. Colonisers are figured in the poem as 'wicked hands' that 'break erase dictate' and have taken away the very selfhood of black people. Significantly, Hoskins invokes the power of water in the poem's opening stanza, which threatens:

we are coming for everything
we are coming for the rivers streams ocean seas
drainwater boreholes
we crack open the skies with our drumming
chanting rain making dancing
we are water spirits
how dare you deny us the very source that birthed us?

Black people, joining forces to take back the source and energy that sustains life, are likened to the irresistible power of water both to connect and to change. The 'water spirits' of the sixth line are nurturing and comforting, promising to sustain life, but they are also vengeful. They draw on a wealth of indigenous knowledge about *inkanyamba*, the snake in the sky or tornado, which can wreak havoc in anger at being separated from its partner (Wood, 2000).

In a similar vein to Hoskins, Toni Stuart's audio-visual poem, 'Krotoa Eva's Suite: a cape jazz poem in three movements' (2018) decolonises South African history by surfacing the life of a woman who played a central role in the early colonial project. Krotoa was her Khoi name, but she was renamed 'Eva' when she was taken into slavery in the home of Jan van Riebeeck, the first Governor of the Cape of Good Hope. Krotoa Eva served as a translator in Dutch, Khoi and Portuguese and married a Dutch settler, but was later disowned by Khoi and Dutch alike; she died alone, aged 39, on Robben Island. Her life is both extraordinary and emblematic of settlers' disregard of indigenous people and knowledges. Throughout Stuart's poem, Krotoa Eva is repeatedly transmuted into an elemental force, often a watery one. The poem opens with the haunting line: 'My tears fell down the flanks of Devil's Peak'. Images of sunlight on an estuary filled with reeds accompany several of the early sections as Krotoa Eva speaks of her dual identity. As she comes to realise the enormity of what has been done to her, she speaks a powerful 'riff' articulating her desire to be away from warring forces and men's desire for her adolescent body. The sea's might can carve a tunnel through her psychological scars to create peace: 'I wanted to break the cage of bone and flesh / smash it like wave on rock', so that she can reach 'the other part of me / where silence lives'. In a metatextual moment later in the poem, Krotoa Eva threatens:

I am the silent water burning in every woman of this land
I am the spent wave receding emptying the shore becoming ocean again
Beware my return
A woman's voice is the fulcrum of war⁵

These lines are spoken against a backdrop of a wave breaking over distant rocks and pooling on the beach. Their multimodal effect is to position Krotoa Eva, and with her, all the silenced histories of oppression and violence perpetrated against indigenous South Africans, as an irresistible, watery force of change.

KOLEKA PUTUMA: DECOLONISING THE OCEAN

In 2016, Cape Town poet Koleka Putuma released a YouTube video of her poem 'Water'. The video, edited and directed by Ecuadorian film-maker José Cardoso, shows Putuma on a rocky coast, with the sound of waves in the background, reciting her poem. The printed version of the poem forms part of Putuma's debut collection, *Collective Amnesia*, which has enjoyed record success, having been translated into six languages and having sold more than 5000 copies. The video ensures that 'Water' exploits multiple modalities – visual, graphic, sonic, gestural and aural – to convey the use of water in coloniality's oppression of South African black people. The use of multimodality (cf. Kress, 2010; Stein, 2008) is a decolonial move, opposing the privileging of the printed word in

⁵ There is no manuscript of this poem, so line breaks are my own.

Eurocentric culture. Bibi Burger (2020: 24) draws on Meg Samuelson's work on the ocean in South African culture to arrive at a layered understanding of the way the ocean functions in recent poetry:

The ocean as metaphor for suppressed histories overlaps with the representation of the ocean as the literal site of historical events (...). The ocean as metaphor for suppressed histories also seeps into the spiritual meaning accorded to the ocean, given the centrality of ancestors in some Southern African cosmologies.

While I agree that Putuma's 'Water' draws on the ocean 'as metaphor for suppressed histories', I find the poem's focus on race to be more specific than Burger allows for. 'Us' (blacks) and 'you' (whites) are opposed by virtue of our histories, identities and racial situations (Putuma, 2017: 96-100). The poem reverses the 'dialectical antagonism between whiteness and wildness' (De Kock, 2006: 197), which Leon de Kock sees as a central justification for racist South African cultural production. In 'Water', Putuma exposes the irrationality and barbarism of white culture, including its cruelty to indigenous black South Africans and its heteropatriarchal, white male deities. The poem performs what Christina Sharpe (2016: 18) calls 'wake work': 'a mode of inhabiting and rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives'. 'Water' ruptures the colonial episteme by using the ocean as a symbol for moving the locus of enunciation from the (Christian) European metropole to the situation of a queer black womxn in South Africa. As the poem progresses, the video shifts locations to a white building, which is revealed as a church, panelled and furnished in dark wood, where the speaker whispers her reservations about the Christian religion:

For all we know,
the disciples could have been queer,
the Holy Trinity some weird, twisted love triangle,
and the Holy Ghost transgender.
But you will only choose to understand the scriptures that suit your agenda.
(Putuma 2017: 98-99)

Significantly, Putuma's decolonial re/visioning takes the form of imagining the male figures around 'blue-eyed and blond-haired Jesus' (2017: 98) as gendered differently from the official account: a move that keeps gender at the centre of the poem's 'wake work'. From the interior of the church, the setting shifts to a busy street in the highly colonial centre of Cape Town, amid the daily throng of people going about their daily business, where Putuma closes the poem by confronting the audience with the reality of black people dying in South Africa:

Another one (who looks like me) died today.
Another one (who looks like me) was murdered today.

May that be the conversation at the table
and we can all thereafter wash this bitter meal with amnesia.

And go for a swim after that.
Just for fun.
Just for fun.

(Putuma, 2017: 100)

These lines resonate with multiple ironies: 'the table' recalls the Last Supper in Christian tradition, the 'bitter meal' recalls South African history where (as Putuma notes) black people were required to serve whites' food; and 'amnesia' alludes to the suppression of colonial histories, aside from its resonance with the title of the collection. The poem has disrupted the episteme of twenty-first-century South Africa, and no reader who has followed its trajectory will regard swimming as 'fun'. In this way it achieves numerous creative and ideological goals: by re-visioning the ocean, Putuma also revises racial and gender power relations in the country that she inhabits. Yet, unlike Stuart, she does not depict the ocean or water as agentive: its role in the poem is to connect black people to their colonial histories, rather than to change or create anything.

WILMA STOCKENSTRÖM'S *THE WISDOM OF WATER*

Wilma Stockenström's collection, *The Wisdom of Water* (2007), consists of a selection of her poems, translated into English. The title of the volume may be read as anthropomorphising water, but it also holds the possibility of an 'Other' consciousness, greater than the individual, and encodes an impulse towards 'remaking the world

materially and relationally' (Hickey-Moodey and Page, 2015: 12). Tim Huisamen writes in the volume's Foreword that Stockenström's poetry articulates 'a longing to mix with that which is greater' (Stockenström, 2007: 13). This is a standard description of a common poetic response to the dialectic between self and universe. Huisamen's comment reads Stockenström within the constructivist tradition as a poet writing about something or writing on a theme, a notion that places the poet in the position of a knowing self, commanding and disseminating knowledge about the theme or object of poetic enquiry. Instead of reading Stockenström's poetry in this way, I perceive a less human-centred approach and a less stable knowing self in her poetry. The mutability of water, its capacity to infiltrate cracks and to cross boundaries, allows Stockenström to exploit the entanglement of the human and non-human and to create the world around her – a world founded on water and water use – as co-emergent with the human. A new materialist reading of her poetry coincides with Kristeva's (1998: 29) understanding of poetic language as an apt vehicle for exploring the function of significance because 'To describe the signifying operation of poetic language is to describe the mechanism of conjunction within a potential infinity'. This formulation sees all poetry as constituted through conjunction with a greater whole, strongly recalling Huisamen's description of Stockenström's writing, but avoids the apparatus of poet, prosody and theme that characterises his views.

It would be typical of presumptuous anthropocentric thinking to use poetry to speak for water, or imaginatively ventriloquise the voice of the element. Likewise, speaking about water could fall into the trap of quasi-objectivity, which relies, again, on belief in the exceptionalism of the scientist. My view is that Stockenström's poetry about water, in the words of Vietnamese film-maker Trinh T. Minh-Ha (Chen 1992: 87), 'speaks nearby' natural elements such as water. 'Speaking nearby' is a halfway position between 'speaking for' and 'speaking to.' It neither co-opts nor ventriloquises the subject: it is 'a speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place' (Chen 1992: 87). By 'speaking nearby' water, Stockenström avoids Castro-Gomez's (cited in Grosfoguel, 2006: 168) 'point zero': the illusion that the perceiving self is nowhere and that perception is perfectly objective and omniscient. The final lines of 'The Sea Speaks' (Stockenström, 2007: 18) are:

And as I comb the wind from my hair,
my gulls scanning the coastline,
how unshakably I know, how
I don't want to know, how arbitrary
and vain I refuse to acknowledge
my bound closedness with you, land.

Here Grosfoguel's 'locus of enunciation' has clearly moved from the place of the supposedly objective (read white and Western) male self. But where has it shifted to? Who is the poem's speaking 'I'? Is this the poet? Is she ventriloquising or channelling the ocean? It is possible to understand the poem as another example of a Westernised subject appropriating the subjectivity of an/Other in a colonial manner. Stockenström's audacity in imaginatively placing herself in the position of the sea is complex. The image of the sea 'comb[ing] the wind from my hair' transforms the anthropomorphic Western myths of mermaids combing their hair in submarine palaces. The sea in Stockenström's poem is a woman, but not a human one: her hair and arms span continents and her eyes ('my gulls') are separate from her physical being. This modifies the poet's subjectivity by assuming a speaking position that is at least half mythic.

The voice in 'The Sea Speaks' does not objectify the sea, but tries to understand it. It comes close to the ocean, but insists on the difference between the water and the human, thus speaking nearby. The sea is imagined as wrestling with its ambiguously dependent relationship with the land. The sea knows 'unshakably' but refuse[s] to acknowledge' its 'bound closedness' with the land. Water and land, two elements that appear to be mutually exclusive, are shown, in a neat reversal of opposition, to be 'bound' to one another. The sea's denial of its existence as interwoven with solid land, while simultaneously knowing it 'unshakably', is characteristic of Stockenström's poetic of muddling and muddying boundaries.

In 'Koichab's Water,' Stockenström again genders water as feminine. Koichab is a stream in the Namib Desert — one of the driest places on earth — which runs dry in the dunes. Water is enormously precious in these circumstances, and Stockenström's speaker uses it reverentially, recognising that it is 'Seven thousand years'⁶ accumulated softness' (2007: 37). The poem remarks on the irony of using water for domestic purposes

(...) for the daily
chore of washing nylons and drip-dry things;
Then to the kitchen to move pots and pans about
and pour water on sticky crusts.

⁶ Aquifers in Namibia are estimated to be 'tens of thousands of years' old (Christelis and Struckmeier, 2011: 11).

The poem's final stanza bears witness to the many social uses of water:

with its matchless whiteness to purify
and refresh and humbly become part
of brandy and water, of waste, and sewage:
a woman of noble disposition
giving herself, simply, without asking.

Despite Andries Bezuidenhout's (2009) belief that the poem is 'cynical', these lines encode powerful reverence for the element's life-giving qualities. At the same time, the poem foregrounds the degrading aspects of human-nature interactions (cf. Landwehr 1987: 45). In a posthumanist vein, the stanza upends human-centred philosophies and human exceptionalism by celebrating the water's 'matchless whiteness'⁷ and 'noble disposition' over the humans who thoughtlessly use it for degraded human processes. Stockenström's act of gendering the water as 'a woman' links this element to the traditionally female qualities of nurturing, mutability and self-sacrifice, while also implicitly recognising that women take on most of the quotidian chores in households.

A later poem, 'Evaporating' (Stockenström, 2007: 38), reflects on water as constitutive of selfhood. As the poet/speaker ages, her body loses water and becomes 'more brittle.' This contrasts with her childhood when

I was such a juicy child!
Fully eighty percent water
arranged around a skeleton
equipped with hinges, fancy that,
so that I could walk the earth,
could touch filled with wonder
others composed like me: water
water water water and.

The poem articulates a deep recognition of the centrality of water and social connection in human experience. As a child, the poet/speaker 'could touch (...) / others composed like me' of mostly water, with a small amount of other chemicals represented by 'and' at the end of the poem. 'Evaporating' does not bemoan the ageing process: rather, it celebrates the watery embodiment that links humans and non-human nature. Stockenström's poetry articulates a relational ontology, with water as a connecting medium, and 'Evaporating,' like other poems in *The Wisdom of Water*, insist on the entanglement of human and material. The companion poem, 'River Tidings,' which follows 'Evaporating,' metaphorically presents the poet/speaker's life as a river. Upon reaching the estuary that will flow into the sea, she feels that she has reached home and is able to

(...) mix myself with my bigger self,
identifying with what I am,
a tiding singing from beginning to end,
a song of the water well written.

(Stockenström, 2007: 39)

These lines contain several paradoxes, which cluster around the dialectic between the 'self' and the 'bigger self'. The individual self loses its contours in the 'bigger self,' and subjectivity is dissolved. The sea is an archetype of Kristeva's 'potential infinity', which contains infinite potential for signifying actions. The self in 'River Tidings' is not a unitary, Modernist-style self, which would most likely be male. This would not sit well with Stockenström's feminist aesthetic, based on an understanding of the self as always under erasure, mutable, porous and flowing. 'Tiding' in the poem's penultimate line combines the meanings of the tides of the ocean and the word's archaic meaning as news. The poem's innovation is to represent the poet/speaker as destined to 'mix myself with my bigger self' (Stockenström, 2007: 39) instead of a unitary Modernist subject. She ebbs and flows together with the sea's movement in a ceaseless process of becoming. The poem harks back to 'Evaporating', where Stockenström foregrounds life's dependency on and imbrication with water. In 'River Tidings,' though, the self is a musical movement, ebbing and flowing. In this way the poem avoids the humanist vision of 'Man (...)' as "the measure of all things" (Braidotti, 2013: 13) and creates an understanding of the human as part of a 'bigger self' that is unmistakably ecological. The lyrically described stages followed by Stockenström's watery 'self' in 'River Tidings' are reminiscent of water activist Vandana Shiva's (2008: 500) poetic description of the water cycle:

⁷ This is less a racial reference than a comment on the water's purity, although the town of Lüderitz, which is supplied with water by this aquifer, was named after German colonists.

The water cycle is the process through which water recycles itself. Water can never run out as long as it is allowed to recycle itself. As long as the forests evaporate the water, [it] moves up into the clouds, forms precipitation, falls as snow, falls as rain, comes back to the ground, the ground welcomes those raindrops, welcomes the snow and in that welcoming, recharges the aquifers, realizes the rivers. That perennial reach out of water is the water cycle, the most efficient way of renewing water resources on the planet.

Shiva cautions, however, that misusing water can limit the supply of fresh water to the point where – despite water’s capacity to give itself ‘simply, without asking’ (Stockenström, 2007: 37) – the water cycle may be compromised and human communities run out of water. Although Stockenström does not share Shiva’s activist agenda, her recognition of water as a ‘bigger self’ gestures towards a posthumanist relativising of human exceptionalism, insisting on humanity as part of a larger system and co-emergent with nonhuman nature.

A more recent poem by Pieter Odendaal (2018: 36), ‘eersterivier’ (‘first river’) concludes with the lines:

*hoor die rivier die rivier was eerste hier
sy dra die stories van geslagte
ons verledes skuim oor klippe
ons is altyd onderweg
eendag keer ons terug see toe
dan herinner ons die golwe
aan die swaartekrag wat alle strome
laat vervloei tot rivier*

hoor die rivier die rivier was eerste hier

(hear the river the river was here first
she carries generations’ stories
our pasts foam over stones
we are always in process
one day we will return to the sea
then we will remind the waves
of the gravity that brings all streams
into rivers

hear the river the river was here first)

Odendaal’s poem shares numerous themes and strategies with Stockenström’s ‘River Tidings’ and ‘The Sea Speaks’. Both poets use the female pronoun to refer to bodies of water, and – more importantly – they both deploy the ocean as a symbol for death and dissolution of individuality. Discrete human subjects, Stockenström and Odendaal suggest, proceed in an almost circular motion, returning to what was ‘here first’: water.

The poem ‘River-Bank Musings’ (Stockenström, 2007: 69) depicts thought as carried by water in the same way as ‘River Tidings’ figures the self as water:

Wonder, my own self, carries
a thought like a leaf on a pool.

The river-mouth grins wide
and water sunlight-sweet flows into the seas,
to the sky, choppy and jubilant.

All that way the thought goes.

Here, again, Stockenström depicts the ocean as a larger, and equally sentient, version of the self. The faculty of ‘wonder’ is seen here as a watery form of transport for thinking and substitutes for the traditional unitary knowing subject. The pool of wonder, in turn, is overshadowed by ‘the seas’ with their elemental freight of sunlight, water and sky. These material aspects of nonhuman nature are far from being a mere backdrop for the poet’s reflections. Stockenström does not reflect much at all as a mirror would, despite one of her collections being titled *Spiëel van Water* (*Mirror of Water*, 1973). The surface on which her poetic images appear is far from being as smooth and unobtrusive as a mirror. Her aesthetic is closer to diffraction than to reflection in its insistence on differences rather than on sameness (cf. Barad, 2007: 71). Her consistent gendering of water as female and women as watery

allows her to articulate a sophisticated feminist poetic response to this element that fits in well with calls, inspired by the Anthropocene, for human values and human beings to be decentred in favour of nonhuman nature.

OF WATER AND LOVE: GABEBA BADEROON

Gabeba Baderoon divides her time between the two continents of Africa and North America. Born in South Africa, she holds an academic position at Pennsylvania State University. On a visit to her country of origin, she experienced the ravages of the three-year drought that almost reduced Cape Town to a desert. Her poem 'Not-You' (Baderoon, 2018: 61) brings together the ecological and personal aspects of water in a drought:

Living in Cape Town in a three-year drought, I read
of people on other continents trapped
in a prison of rain, how it bends
them down with its opacity and scale,
and amid my compassion is envy
for what they are drowning in.
I think poetry is the flood
for the not-you I've prepared for
from the start.

The drought lasted from 2015-2017 and was part of a devastating El Niño phenomenon caused by human actions, which have brought about climate change, population growth and other damaging environmental effects. It brought environmental degradation in the Anthropocene into sharp focus. Decision-makers in the city and the province investigated a range of solutions, including desalinating ocean water, evacuating parts of the city, throttling the water supply for agriculture and imposing harsh fines on heavy water users. These measures, together with smaller initiatives like 'dirty shirt challenges' in corporate environments to see who could wear their work shirts for the longest time before washing them, highlight what Jepson et al. (2017: 2) call 'the hydro-social relation', which is their term for the interaction of water and human beings. Baderoon describes how she⁸ reads of people on other continents (such as, perhaps, the other continent where she lives) 'trapped / in a prison of rain'. This may refer to the South Asian floods in 2017, which affected an estimated 45 million people, as the monsoon season brought unprecedented rainfall and widespread destruction of property, homes, lives and livelihoods. The 'prison of rain' captures how too much rain can limit people's movements and activities in the same way as Cape Town's drought impinged on social existence. The Anthropocene marks the irreversibility of human impacts on natural systems, but extreme weather systems also have irreversible effects on human beings. The 'scale' of the floods highlights the might of water and the drama of meteorological unpredictability. Baderoon highlights the entanglement of the social with the personal when she writes of her 'envy' for 'what they are drowning in' and a wish that some of the bounty of water in South Asia could be experienced in Cape Town.

The last three lines of the poem turn away from the alarming events of the Anthropocene and towards the personal resonances of water. Baderoon metaphorically equates poetry with a flood that will, in some imagined future, rescue her if she should lose her partner. This flood will possess the same dangerous 'opacity and scale' as its meteorological counterparts; and like them, it will wash away distinctions, returning the poet to Kristeva's undifferentiated pre-linguistic semiotic *chora*, which Johanne Prud'homme and Lyne Légaré (2006) describe as 'an infinite potential for creating signifying movements', an apt description of poetic language. Baderoon's 'flood' of poetry will, despite its capacity for destroying the structures of the psyche, bring rescue, nurturing and generation after emotional deprivation. The oppositions in these lines — drought/flood; abundance/loss; communal/personal — reinforce the polysemy of water as well as its importance in a variety of contexts.

CONCLUSION

Water is a recurrent trope in Southern African art and literature, where its deployment becomes more urgent because of its scarcity in the sub-continent. Artists, theorists and authors frequently gender water as female: a reciprocal connection, since women are often depicted as watery. This article has examined representations of water in poetry by contemporary South African women poets: Allison Claire Hoskins, Toni Stuart, Koleka Putuma, Wilma Stockenström and Gabeba Baderoon. Their poetry about water illustrates the intriguing diversity of artistic responses to water. While some poets (Stuart, Stockenström and Baderoon) portray water as agentive in its intra-

⁸ The correspondences between Baderoon's biography and her poetry are close enough to warrant identifying the speaker in the poems as the poet herself.

actions with human and nonhuman nature, others (Hoskins and Putuma) do not. Hoskins, Stuart and Putuma use water to symbolise the suppressed historical links between indigenous Africans and nature, as well as the transgenerational pain and trauma of colonisation. Although we are living in an era — the Anthropocene — that has brought unprecedented environmental change and degradation, surprisingly, only Baderoon engages with climate change in her poetry about water. Stockenström's poetry, written along the lines of traditional nature poetry, creatively and diffractively entangles her self and womanhood with water. She accords recognition to the water cycle and its crucial role in human affairs, but also perceives agency and materiality in water and especially the ocean. Carefully avoiding anthropomorphising the sea, she 'speaks nearby' (Chen, 1992: 87), stressing the co-constitution and co-emergence of human and oceanic being. Water as relationship (Jepson et al., 2017) features strongly in all the poems I have examined here. It connects history to the present; human beings to nonhuman nature; and it links aspects of the psyche to one another. As fresh water becomes scarcer and more highly valued in the Anthropocene, we can expect to see more poems exploring the valences of this protean and constantly self-renewing element.

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‘The Road Never Ends’: Ecofeminism and Magical Realism in Rachel Zadok’s *Sister-Sister*

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ABSTRACT

Ecofeminism is an interdisciplinary movement that analyses power imbalances and examines the intersectional impacts neoliberalism has on humanity and the planet. Cultural artefacts (literature, films, artworks, etcetera) play an important role in raising awareness of ecofeminist concerns. Evaluating Rachel Zadok’s magical realist novel *Sister-Sister* (2013) through an ecofeminist lens exposes how the social and ecological ills of the Anthropocene are a result of a systemic neoliberal marginalisation of the planet and the poor. The novel depicts the trauma inflicted on those living in poverty, revealing how poverty spreads its tentacles through the lives of those it affects. Set in an alternative South Africa where drought has blighted rural villages, *Sister-Sister* demonstrates how environmental degradation has a disproportionately negative impact on the poorest in society. The novel addresses sexual violence and rape, raising the urgent matter of how society fails girls; girls growing up in economically deprived environments tend to be especially vulnerable to sexual predation. The paper finds resonances between magical realism and ecofeminism. As both are processes of resistance – ecofeminism resists oppressive toxic power and magical realism contests reality – the analysis highlights how magical realist devices are an effective means of communicating crucial ecofeminist concerns.

Keywords: South Africa, ecofeminism, neoliberalism, magical realism, Rachel Zadok

INTRODUCTION

Rachel Zadok’s dystopian *Sister-Sister* (2013) was short-listed for the Herman Charles Bosman Prize and the University of Johannesburg Prize. This complex, experimental, magical realist novel has been described by Christopher Hope as ‘[a]n extraordinary blend of parable, passion and poetry; it’s not often a novel of such originality comes around’ (*Sister-Sister* cover endorsement). The novel is set in an alternative South Africa and has a lyrical, dream-like quality, and yet beneath its lyricism, it is a savage tale that explores the compound ways in which the Anthropocene is impacting on both the human and nonhuman ecosystems. Zadok’s work is an exploration of a planet in crisis, a society in crisis, and ultimately a family in crisis. The novel delves into the complexities of sibling rivalry — in this case between the twins Sindi and Thuli — and explores the sisters’ quest for separation and selfhood in a traumatised society. On an ecofeminist level, *Sister-Sister* examines how, in a fractured society, where the earth is victimised, underprivileged children too are vulnerable.

Colonisation and decolonisation are important concepts in the novel, and one of the most important symbols of colonialism Zadok explores is the road: it is a metaphor for capitalist greed, homelessness, and grief. The title of this article: ‘The road never ends’ (Zadok, 2013a: 297) is inspired by the twins’ symbolic journey along the Ring Road. The gloomy concrete highway operates, first, as ecofeminist commentary (as discussed later). Second, the layered, sometimes dislocated way the road finds expression in the text is a feature of the magical realist storytelling in the novel, and Zadok’s exploration of the road reveals the power of the interplay between ecofeminism and magical realism. After the dream prologue, the twins’ story opens on the road: ‘I stand at the edge of an overpass as another bleak dawn spills over the city stretched out below. Office blocks rise into the leaden sky like a jawful of giant’s teeth’ (Zadok, 2013a: 13). This apocalyptic, evocative opening immerses us in the twins’ journey on the Ring Road: a road that circles in on itself, never ending, much like the horror of the capitalist systemic abuse that

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blights the lives of the poorest. The road functions too as an inspiration for this article: the road map as a motif conceptually links the disparate strands of my discussion together.

The road map of my article is as follows: I will outline the theoretical perspectives of ecofeminism and magical realism and discuss how Zadok's novel successfully engages with ecofeminist concerns through employing magical realist devices. The discussion will explore Zadok's witnessing of the trauma inflicted on those who live in poverty, and by association her exploration of how the South African social system has failed girls who live in economically deprived environments. Ecofeminist concerns come into play in this discussion of trauma and the systemic abuse of children, and this analysis will also consider how patriarchal ideals of overtly sexualised female body shapes, clothing, and behaviours are foisted on girls from an early age. From here, I move on to examine Zadok's depiction of environmental abuse, and how — when addressing the impact on humans — the Anthropocene has the greatest impact on the poorest in society.

Ecofeminism broadly examines the repercussions patriarchal neoliberal capitalism is having on the planet and its inhabitants. It is an intersectional theory and activist movement, assessing how oppression operates not only on the environment and women, but also on those marginalised by the toxic neoliberal global hegemony.¹ Colleen Mack-Canty (2004: 169) notes that although the term ecofeminism is generally credited to Françoise d'Eaubonne (1974), some ecofeminists (Gaard, 1998; Salleh, 1991), suggest the word ecofeminism appeared sporadically before 1974. D'Eaubonne's work was pivotal in the intersectional linking of the market economy of patriarchal capitalism to what the market deemed as resources to be exploited, for instance, the environment and women's bodies: the environment for food, mining, and so on; and women's bodies in terms of domestic and reproductive labour. Intersectional ecofeminism links this resource exploitation across many other oppressions too: the exploitation of the poor for cheap labour, and the exploitation of the resources of colonised nations, to name only two. As many ecofeminists point out, the movement is not essentialist: it does not presume a special link between women and nature: '[s]ince all life is nature, neither gender of human beings can be closer than the other to "nature"' (Gates, 1996: 13). There are many ecofeminisms: 'many trends coexist within ecofeminism, going from spiritual ecofeminism, Marxist-oriented ecofeminist analysis of work, cyborg ecofeminism, animal rights ecofeminism, and many more' (Casselot, 2016: 76). Given these many strands of ecofeminism, for the purpose of this analysis, Greta Gaard's definition of ecofeminism has been employed:

Drawing on the insights of ecology, feminism, and socialism, ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. Its theoretical base is a sense of self most commonly expressed by women and various other nondominant groups — a self that is interconnected with all life. (Gaard, 1993: 1)

My analysis of Zadok's *Sister-Sister* (2013) draws on this understanding of ecofeminism; the oppressions of race, class, gender, species and nature are central concerns of the novel.

Sister-Sister exhibits magical realist elements, and so, it is worth briefly engaging with the slippery concept of magical realism. Many theorists (Hart and Ouyang, 2005; Gaylard, 2005; Faris, 2002) point out that there is an inherent conflict in the term 'magical realism', which prepares readers for a stimulating, contradictory experience where the 'real' and the 'magical' (which incorporates the fantastic, the uncanny, the absurd and the fabulous) fray. It is a celebration of the unexpected: it undermines forms of literary realism while, at the same time, upholding many of realism's modes in order to create a 'contested space' for the reader. This contested space makes magical realism an imaginative literary form that is attractive to many postcolonial writers, as postcolonial realities are themselves contested spaces. Gerald Gaylard notes that magical realism emerges in postcolonial literature as an 'imaginative' intervention — a site of resistance — which is a reaction to the disillusionment of socio-political realities. He writes:

The emphasis upon the imagination in contemporary cultural production from Africa has occurred primarily because desperate situations, both past and present, have demanded imaginative solutions, but

¹ For the purposes of this paper, Gabriele Griffin's definition of neoliberalism in *A Dictionary of Gender Studies* (2017) will be employed: '[a] political theory that arose in the nineteenth century and had a resurgence from the late 1970s onwards. Neoliberalism promotes individual freedom, self-determination, and choice through an emphasis on minimal government involvement, free trade, the free market, and promotion of the private sector rather than the public sector. Neoliberalism is associated with the gradual decline of the welfare state, the privatisation of public-sector industries and services, and the marketisation of services. This disadvantages women who benefit significantly from public services and welfare provision. Neoliberalism is also associated with the rise in audit culture where following due process is regarded as more important than the outcomes of any process. Feminists such as Aihwa Ong regard neoliberalism as a technology of governance'.

also because writers have felt freer than they did whilst under the yoke of imperial domination. (Gaylard, 2005: 4)

Since ecofeminism contests patriarchal and capitalist power, and magical realism also resists hegemonic narratives, it is not surprising that ecofeminism and magical realism find comfort in each other. In *Sister-Sister*, Zadok constructs a successful alternative South Africa by employing magical realist strategies, and further uses magical realism to create an unstable narrative that exposes and explores the challenging ecofeminist issues of trauma, exploitation and rape. Ecofeminism and magical realism are potent literary allies.

Sister-Sister opens on an unnamed *sangoma*'s dreams: she returns to 'KwaNogqaza Falls, just as she did on the night of her initiation ceremony, twenty-five years before' (Zadok, 2013a: 9).² The dream is filled with striking environmental imagery and mythology. The *inkanyamba*, a serpent well known in Zulu spiritual culture, pulls the *sangoma* into the water and commands her to dig.³ She does so, and finds two pebbles. Later the dream takes her to a shore where two chicks eat maggots from a dead gull's body; the seawater disappears and the natural world around the *sangoma* withers: 'The trees in the coastal forest sicken, dropping leaves until they are nothing more than splintered grey trunk and branch. The world dies as the chicks grow fat on their dinner of maggots' (Zadok, 2013a: 9). The *sangoma* notices a scab on one of the round stones in her hand, and begins to pick at it; as she does so the stone bleeds, and the crying of a baby is heard:

The stone shudders and rolls away from her prying finger towards its twin. They merge, becoming one. She contemplates the single stone in her hand, but before she can glean meaning, it splits in two and her palm begins to bleed. (Zadok, 2013a: 9-10)

The *sangoma* is woken from the dream by her daughter, Sizane, who tells her the baby is coming. Later we learn that it is not one baby that has come, but two: the eponymous *Sister-Sister* twins.

Rich in symbolism, much of the novel's dream prologue imagery evokes the trauma inflicted on the Earth in the Anthropocene. From a plot perspective, the prologue is the prophetic driving force of the narrative: it is the spindle on which the story lurches and turns. When the reader, after following the disjointed, dreamy and nightmarish magical realist narrative of the novel, reaches the tragic conclusion, it becomes clear that interpretation is key. The *sangoma*'s interpretation of her dream wreaks havoc on the lives of those she believes it pertains to, and creates in its wake an inverted self-fulfilling prophecy.

Using Russian Formalism as a frame of analysis, the *fabula* of the tale centres on how this dream prophecy shatters the lives of the twins affected by it, and Zadok's *syuzhet* is accomplished in teasing out the story through her complex structuring of the dual narratives featuring each of the twins: Thulisile (Thuli) and Sindisiwe (Sindi).⁴ The dual narrative structure works as a puzzle and the fragmented, deconstructive strands chronicle the disintegration of the twins' initially close relationship. Set against the backdrop of the Anthropocene, this ecofeminist tale zooms in on a fracturing, sociopathic, patriarchal society, and centres on how the twins' passage into adulthood is tainted by the social and environmental ills that blight their lives.

After the dream prologue, the first narrative section is Thuli's, and the complexity of her ungrounded stream-of-consciousness chapters — magical realism in action — is a result in part of her being a spirit who trails her living twin, the homeless Sindi, as she wanders the edges of the Ring Road highway in Johannesburg. Shard by shard, Zadok reveals the tale behind what led to Thuli's death and why her spirit is compelled to remain with Sindi. The Sindi sections use a third-person narrator. Zadok's choice of different narrative perspectives for each twin disrupts mainstream literary conventions, and is — like both ecofeminism and magical realism — a challenge to the status quo. The first-person narrator in the Thuli sections enmeshes the reader with her fluid, shifting spirit perspective on the world. The third-person narrative in Sindi's sections follows a more disciplined linear structure, allowing the reader to grasp the narrative strands that were hinted at in Thuli's somewhat disorientating chapters.

There is a long tradition of the use of the trope of twins in literary narratives, and yet each author explores different aspects of society through this trope — twins 'do not provide a single key to contemporary culture but multiple entry points' (De Nooy, 2005: xiv). In *Sister-Sister* the rupturing of the relationship between Thuli and Sindi symbolises the disintegration of not only South Africa's social fabric, but also of the environment — and consequently planetary health. Identical twins are fascinating in that they share the same DNA; however, their individual life experiences create divergent realities and personalities. While Thuli and Sindi enjoy a special bond as twins, sharing everything initially ('they shared out the drumsticks and wings: one for me, one for you' (Zadok, 2013a: 15)), they are very different. Uncle Jabu points out when he meets the girls for the first time when they are eleven: 'Sizane, you gave your girls the wrong names. Thulisile means "quiet one" but she talks, talks, talks, and

² A *sangoma* is '(in southern Africa) a traditional healer or diviner' (Stevenson, 2015).

³ Felicity Wood describes the *inkanyamba* as a 'supernatural serpent: in this case, the snake in the sky — the *inkanyamba*, the tornado spirit' (172; italics in the original).

⁴ *Syuzhet* refers to how the plot unfolds: 'employment of narrative' (Görey, 2017: 6).

the other one has no tongue' (Zadok, 2013a: 86). Their Zulu names carry prophetic foreshadowing. Given that Thuli's spirit is sliced from her body by Sindi, and spirit-Thuli shadows her guilt-ridden living sister, Thuli is forced into silence by circumstance, thus fulfilling the signification of her name. Thuli's rape by Uncle Jabu is also instrumental in silencing her. As for Sindisiwe, Loon Man tells her: 'Your name means saved. Sindisiwe, it means saved. Did you know that?' (Zadok, 2013a: 31). Was Sindisiwe initially given the name after she was saved from her *sangoma* grandmother's soil smothering? If so, she was subsequently lost as her extended family's superstitious beliefs resulted in her fearing that she was soulless. The impact of Sindi's family's beliefs on her life (in particular, her *sangoma* grandmother's dream prophecy) cause her to commit the crime of using *sangoma muti* from Gogo Nkosi to slice Thuli's spirit from her.⁵ However, at the close of the novel, there is a measure of redemption, and 'Sins' is 'saved' by the Black Preacher and his disturbing hybrid One True Church, when they free Thuli's spirit from her link to Sindi. It is a barbed redemption for Sindi as the church has an obsession with young women's virginity and breeding, as Loon Man tells her: 'Saving good girls and keeping them pure so they can be the Mothers for the New Mankind' (Zadok, 2013a: 31). In this cult-like environment, 'pure' young women are nothing more than uterine receptacles for the Saviour's sperm; their destiny lies in being baby incubators. Throughout the novel, there is commentary on how girls are abused by those in power: Ma Wilma sells her virgins into sexual slavery and certain deadly Z3 infection; Z3 is eerily similar to HIV, and the myths surrounding both illnesses will be discussed further on in the article. While Sindi may have been saved from contracting Z3, her fate at the hands of the Believers of the One True Church is uncertain. What is certain is that patriarchal control over female bodies reigns, and girls in Zadok's novel are, from that perspective, nothing more than beings to be consumed sexually by men.

In writing a novel about Zulu girls, a story rooted in Zulu culture, Zadok, a white female writer, has taken a risk. It is vital that people from cultures that are under-represented in the media tell their own stories. Melissa Silverstein writes in an open letter, '[i]t is incumbent on white women to remember their privilege and to do the work with fellow white women to support women of color and work to end institutional systemic racism' (Silverstein, 2020). Arguably, Zadok's portrayal of the cultural and traumatic challenges faced by Zulu characters is an example of a white woman acknowledging the wounds of girls from another culture; the novel is a recognition of systemic racism and Zadok's attempt to understand the pain of another echoes a core facet of the ecofeminism being explored in this chapter: 'a self that is interconnected with all life' (Gaard, 1993: 1). The work provides an opportunity for healing: '[w]ith trauma forming a bridge between disparate historical experiences, so the argument goes, listening to the trauma of another can contribute to cross-cultural solidarity and to the creation of new forms of community' (Craps and Buelens, 2008: 2). Zadok has listened with empathy to the trauma another culture has endured and has responded with compassion. She does not shy away from difficult subjects, and the novel plays an important role in what Miki Flockemann — using a term taken from Kelly Oliver (2004: 80) — calls 'witness-bearing'. Flockemann (2010: 22) writes: 'while "witness-bearing" refers to the structure of subjectivity itself as it entails bearing witness to a truth about humanity — it presents "phenomenological or psychological truth" even if imagined'. This witness-bearing is seen throughout the novel through the ways in which the characters interact with the pain inflicted upon them, and via a wider examination of social ills plaguing South African society. Zadok witnesses the pain each twin goes through as they come of age. As the twins grow up, and apart, a measure of sibling rivalry is to be expected; however, the dysfunctional family dynamic ensures that their close bond is viciously torn asunder:

They'd fought before, but in the past their arguments were quickly forgotten. This was different. They'd never been divided before, never taken sides with someone else against each another, like Thuli had with Thembi. Now they barely spoke, communicating only through resentful glares full of blame and spite. Sindi didn't know how to cross the dark space between them, didn't know if she even wanted to. (Zadok, 2013a: 137-138)

When Thuli receives a single Christmas gift from Thembi, and Sindi receives nothing, Sindi's isolation and pain are cemented:

Then came Christmas, the worst Christmas ever. Mama didn't even get out of bed and there was nothing special to eat and no presents. No presents for her. Thembi gave Thuli a red plastic comb, and she stuck it in her hair and paraded around like a starring from TV. (Zadok, 2013a: 139)

Zadok draws the reader into the effect the neglect has on Sindi, enabling them to empathise with Sindi's predicament and to understand why Sindi chooses to seek out Gogo Nkosi's evil muti. Their poverty-stricken mother is too exhausted or depressed to notice that only one child gets a Christmas gift, and it is her negligence in not addressing this imbalance that leads to Sindi's deep feeling of exclusion: an exclusion which has terrible consequences.

⁵ *Muti* refers to 'South African traditional African medicine or magical charms' (Stevenson, 2015).

Ecofeminism honours this witnessing, as it explores the intersection of different kinds of trauma: ‘routinely ignored or dismissed in trauma research, the chronic psychic suffering produced by the structural violence of racial, gender, sexual, class, and other inequities has yet to be fully accounted for’ (Craps and Buelens, 2008: 3-4). In countries where social support is not adequately addressed by governments, children are severely victimised by poverty. As theorist Lawrence Buell states:

ecofeminists have been among the leaders in a broader initiative to push environmental criticism toward substantive engagement with issues of environmental welfare and equity of more pressing concern to the impoverished and socially marginalized: to landscapes of urbanization, racism, poverty, and toxification; and to the voices of witnesses and victims of environmental injustice. (Buell, 2005: 112)

Zadok also witnesses and explores injustices by recounting the disturbing belief, which gained some traction in South Africa, that raping a child will cure a man of HIV:

‘When the clinics closed, people had no one to turn to. Some say we must return to the old ways if we are to save ourselves. They say the only way ...’ Uncle trailed off. He could not look at them, his eyes shifting over their heads until he focused on a point high above them.

‘They say the only way is to sleep with a virgin,’ Mama’s voice was sharp. ‘Is that what they say, Jabu? That old lie? Nobody says that any more, people know better. Please, Jabu, tell me they don’t say that here.’ Uncle nodded.

‘And what does Mama say? Is she one of those?’

Uncle did not reply. (Zadok, 2013a: 110)

Rape, and bearing witness to the pain that rape causes, are important ecofeminist concerns, and Uncle’s raping Thuli in a misguided attempt to cure himself of Z3 echoes the views of ecofeminist theorist and activist Vandana Shiva (2014: 23):

I have repeatedly stressed that the rape of the Earth and rape of women are intimately linked — both metaphorically, in shaping world-views, and materially, in shaping women’s everyday lives. The deepening economic vulnerability of women makes them more vulnerable to all forms of violence, including sexual assault.

Thuli’s social and economic vulnerability is tragic: the eleven-year-old girl has no support structures to assist her after her rape. The shame of her rape becomes hers to bear. Even Sindi blames Thuli for the rape:

Eleven was how old she was, eleven years and five months. Eleven was the number of hotels she’d counted. Sindi lowered her hands. The grunting had stopped.

‘You’re a good girl, Thuli,’ she heard Uncle whisper, ‘a good girl to help your uncle.’

Sindi prayed that he would go, just go. She didn’t want to do bad things with Uncle like Thuli had, because she wasn’t like Thuli. Sindi didn’t bat her eyelashes or fetch beer for Auntie’s boyfriends or let anyone pat her on the bum. (Zadok, 2013a: 14, original emphasis)

Zadok examines how patriarchy is readily absorbed by women in her examination of how the female adults, in particular, shame Thuli for contracting Z3. When Sister Bongi, the district nurse, comes to the school, she asks Thuli about her menstrual cycle:

‘Mama doesn’t like to talk about stuff like that.’

[Sister Bongi says,] ‘Nobody wants to talk about sex or menstruation or pregnancy. It makes my job very difficult.’ (Zadok, 2013a: 280)

In a culture where shame and secrecy surround sex, even Sister Bongi is unable to escape patriarchal assumptions. When Thuli tests positive for Z3, Sister Bongi fails the child by projecting the shame on Thuli, rather than on a broken system:

[Sister Bongi] looks at me the same way Mama does when I’ve done something to disappoint her and I know I’ve failed. I want to ask her what the test is for, but the look on her face stops me.

‘Thulisile, I need to see your mother.’ She sticks a red star next to my name on the front of our folder.

‘I’m going to write her a letter and give it to your teacher. You must collect it tomorrow and take it home.’

‘I didn’t do anything.’

'No?' She narrows her eyes as if trying to see inside me. 'Just give the letter to your mother. It's very important.'

'Okay.'

'Okay, you can go.' (Zadok, 2013a: 282-283)

Later, their mother, Sizane, too blames Thuli for contracting Z3: "You little sluts," Mama slurred, her breath hot in Sindi's ear. That was what she'd been shouting, that they were sluts and had been allowed to run wild too long' (Zadok, 2013a: 249). Sizane is a struggling mother: she is moody, prone to aggression, and drinks with the next-door neighbour, 'Next-Door-Auntie' (who is something of a foster relative), while her twins watch soapies and other popular programmes on TV. These programmes mirror what the South African audiences are currently exposed to — *Generations* and *Idols* are referred to in particular — and the novel touches on how these popular cultural influences are being absorbed and reflected by young people: "Thuli shook her hips and stuck out her bum like she was on *Idols*' (Zadok, 2013a: 230). Zadok explores how popular culture sexualises children from a young age; sexual stereotyping is foisted on the youngest and most impressionable in society. Laurie Penny, a contemporary feminist author, writes:

The ways in which contemporary capitalism undermines women's bodies, from advertising to pornography to the structures of gendered labour and domestic conflict, are not private troubles with no bearing upon the wider world. They are necessary fetters in a superstructure of oppression that has become so fundamental to the experience of femininity that it is effectively invisible. (Penny, 2011: 2)

While notions of female sexuality are clearly transmitted to Thuli and Sindi through mass media, other forms of effective, accurate information dissemination are revealed as problematic. Thuli, a prepubescent girl, knows nothing of sex or menstruation, yet she knows how to wiggle her hips and flirt. Not only has her overworked, exhausted, spiritually lost mother failed her here, but so has the school system. It is evident that poverty spreads its tentacles throughout the lives it oppresses. It appears on many levels, in particular a poverty of knowledge and critical thinking, which compromises the ability of the twins to empower themselves effectively. Thuli is unable to communicate to any other adult that Uncle Jabu has raped her. In fairness, an ability to communicate about such an intimately traumatic event such as rape or molestation is not necessarily an issue related to poverty; personal responses to such trauma are multi-layered, and have also to do with how victims are treated in society. However, spreading information about what is sexual abuse, as well as an empathetic system, can do much to empower the most vulnerable of victims to speak out; the global #MeToo movement is currently making progress in destigmatising victims of sexual molestation and rape. How far this reaches into poorer, marginalised communities globally remains to be seen. Uncle Jabu's poverty means that he too is too caught up in mistaken ideas that derive from ignorance, such as the belief that having sex with a virgin can cure his Z3. It is clear Uncle Jabu's beliefs occur at the intersection of two realities: the beliefs he was born into — those of his *sangoma* mother — and the failure of the government clinics adequately to address the Z3 epidemic, which led to mass deaths. As Uncle Jabu says, 'You know, Sisi, seeing your neighbours waste away until there is nothing left makes a man desperate. This thing, it eats you from the inside, it makes even good people do bad things' (Zadok, 2013a: 109). When people are immersed in the grim reality of poverty, there are no winners. Schoolchildren are not properly informed about Z3:

Speculation began afresh, this time as to what it meant to be Z3. Somebody said Dora was Z3, but Dumisile said she was too fat to be Z3. 'Look at Mr. Edwards,' he said, holding up his index finger. 'Skinny-skinny.' (Zadok, 2013a: 124)

As a result of a failure of the current education system to address a pressing concern, neither of the twins is aware of how the Z3 disease is spread and how children are being targeted by desperate, dying men. South Africa currently has one of the highest HIV rates globally, and Zadok's novel depicts a disease that has claimed many lives and broken many families.⁶

Not only are lives and families broken in the novel: but so is the environment. In this magical realist alternative South Africa, climate change and drought (the effects of the Anthropocene) have made electric cars the norm: 'On the third day, we come to the fence of the Reading Car Yard. It used to be a golf course until the government bought the grounds and turned it into a scrap yard for all the petrol cars they seized on D-Day' (Zadok, 2013a: 39). The environmental degradation echoes throughout this ecofeminist tale: the drought and its associated horrors

⁶ The Southern Africa sub-region, in particular, experiences the most severe HIV epidemics in the world. Nine countries – Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe – have adult HIV prevalence rates of over 10 per cent. At an estimated 26.0 per cent, Swaziland has the highest HIV prevalence rate in the world, followed by Botswana (23.4 per cent) and Lesotho (23.3 per cent). With 5.6 million people living with HIV (17.3 per cent), South Africa is home to the world's largest epidemic. (UNICEF, 2018)

(famine, desertification, disease) impinge radically on the fates of the twins. Uncle Jabu leaves his drought-ravaged village, and it becomes clear that it is out of desperation for a cure for his deadly Z3 that he seeks his sister, Sizane, and importantly — disturbingly — the prepubescent twins in Johannesburg.

In this alternative landscape, we glimpse how the environmental degradation has impacted on familiar iconic South African locations. The Durban waterfront is gone: '[Uncle] showed us a place they used to call the Golden Mile before the water rose up and flooded the fancy hotels' (Zadok, 2013a: 67), and the monoculture sugar cane fields have been replaced by graves: 'Where once there must have been sugar cane, there were only graves' (Zadok, 2013a: 135-136). D-Day and its meaning for the lives of the poorest are reflected through the eyes of the most marginalised in society: poor children. The environmental catastrophe may be read through the lens of ecofeminism, as it has the greatest impact on those without access to financial power:

[Sizane says:] 'Yes, the drought, I expected the drought, but it's so quiet, so very quiet. Where is everyone?'

'Some people moved to the city to look for work, but most are gone.'

'Gone?'

'Yes, Sisi, gone. When the drought came it took the last of us, just like Mama said it would. They wanted to burn her house, after what she did.' He glanced at Sindi. 'They said she was a witch. They wanted to burn her.' (Zadok, 2013a: 108-109)

Zadok weaves environmental imagery through the story, and thus an ecofeminist reading is rooted, not only in the environmental disaster that underscores the narrative, but also in Zadok's powerful descriptive intensity:

It hardly rains any more. The cirrus clouds that wrinkle this faded sky are mean and meaningless. They leave the city to suffocate under the dust that creeps into everywhere, powdering our cheeks until we look like ghosts. With each passing season, circling this road, I feel how it sucks at our juice. We are being slow-baked, hardened like tar. In summer the heat plucks our flesh, stealing sweat and blood and tears; in winter the cold freeze-dries our bones. When we pee, if we pee at all, it splashes up onto our shoes. The soil doesn't want our water. There is nothing this earth wants from us, and we have nothing left to give. (Zadok, 2013a: 40)

Humans have 'nothing left to give' (Zadok, 2013a: 40) because they have selfishly taken it all. Thematically, the recurring motif of 'One for Me and One for You' (Zadok, 2013a: 13) highlights how each twin puts herself first, underscoring the more general selfishness inherent in humanity.

Humanity's moral ambiguity is a prominent concern for Zadok. She illustrates this through the depiction of workers who are victimised by the oppressive capitalist system:

Under the toll-plaza arches, the air stung. The woman who took the toll looked tired and poisoned, and Sindi felt listless just looking at her. The cold booth light washed the tones from her skin and turned the rims of her eyes to fluorescent strips. (Zadok, 2013a: 105)

This mindless labour and the effect it has on workers forced by economic circumstance to do menial jobs are encapsulated in Ynestra King's observation, which implies a link between environmental degradation and working conditions of the poorest:

Biological simplification, i.e., the wiping out of whole species, corresponds to reducing human diversity into faceless workers, or to the homogenization of taste and culture through mass consumer markets. Social life and natural life are literally simplified to the inorganic for the convenience of market society. (King, 1989: 20)

Zadok's writing about the ominous fried chicken of the market society, and the worker frying the chicken, also reflects this banal homogenisation of both animal products and labour:

Inside, stale spices and rancid oil assault my nostrils. A sunken-eyed woman stands over the fryer, her orange uniform darkened by grease. My stomach turns as I watch her lift a wire basket of chicken bits from the oil and empty the contents into a family-size bucket. (Zadok, 2013a: 312)

The natural world has been commodified and is exploitable, but humans too are commodities to be exploited by this economic system. Central to this system is the highway that threads its way through the novel.

A highway is a discombobulated space: first, highways are liminal spaces. We use roads and highways to travel from one place to the next, and as such they occupy a transitional interiority in our consciousness. The road is never the destination, since roads function as necessities of the journey; like airports and stations, they are a form

of non-place for most humans. The fact that the highway functions as a home for Sindi and spirit-Thuli has ecofeminist implications in revealing how crippled the social system is. In South Africa, highways are the main arterial routes through which capitalism transports its material goods, and '[t]he road is as much a unifying as a dystopian South African space and hence it offers a way to engage with the consequences and stresses of a developing country within a globalised world' (Van Huyssteen, 2017: 2). For the twins, the highway once represented a form of escape: 'We used to believe that the highway went somewhere, that over the horizon was escape, places we'd never been and thought we wanted to go' (Zadok, 2013a: 14). This romantic, idealised notion of a highway leading to a better place has been shattered, the fairy tale has been inverted: the twins finally went to Eston, and met a terrible fate at the hands of their superstitious rural family. Instead of their happy ending, the twins are stuck circling the highway, with no end in sight. Living on the edges of the concrete highway, they occupy a liminal state of being, excluded from the mainstream capitalist system, but watching others functioning in that system: 'I stare at the highway winding round the city, at the trucks that work seven days, all hours' (Zadok, 2013a: 39). Although the truckers are a pivotal part of the economic system, their working hours are abusive as the hungry beasts of overpopulation and consumerism need constantly to be fed. By rooting her tale in the story of a street child, Zadok allows her readers to empathise with the most marginalised in society. Much like the flowers blooming in the cracks, the twins are like seeds which have fallen through the societal cracks:

For Sindi, walking is better than standing still. When you walk, things change. Mama Moon slides from skinny sliver to bloated belly; as her baby grows, we circle the city. In summer, if it rains, sunflowers seed in cracks and sprout and bloom, and each time we pass, they've changed. The stems thicken, the petals brighten and the seed cluster grows blacker than a nest of hungry beaks. Then comes the day when nothing grows there any more, when all that's left of that yellow sun is a dried, brown husk. (Zadok, 2013a: 14)

As discussed at the beginning of this article, the road functions a magical realist device. Furthermore, with spirits and dream prophecies being treated as normal occurrences, the novel in this sphere exhibits magical realist elements:

[the] combination of realistic and fantastical narrative, together with the inclusion of different cultural traditions, means that magical realism reflects, in both its narrative mode and its cultural environment, the hybrid nature of much postcolonial society. (Faris, 2004: 1)

The *sangoma* dream prologue indicates an immersion in Zulu culture, and, along with the environment, children, the poor and women, Zulu culture finds itself under siege from external forces in Zadok's postcolonial narrative environment.⁷ In her discussion of the application of magical realism to a South African context, Paulina Grzęda suggests that:

magical realism proves specifically well-attuned to thematise the collision of any incompatible categories, be it the rational and the magical, the core and the periphery, the pre- and the post-capitalist, fact and fiction, as well as the past and the present. The narrative mode's contribution to the reclaiming of the freedom of the spirit equally manifests itself in its capacity to activate readers, re-situating them as interrogators rather than recipients of delivered truths. (Grzęda, 2013: 158)

Zadok's novel assesses various belief systems, asking its readers to interrogate what it means to believe. Importantly, I do not wish to collate magical realism with belief, but rather to unpick how Zadok has approached the issue of belief and woven magical realist elements into it to create the shifting, fluid world which the twins inhabit. In an interview, Zadok states that her 'fascination with belief systems and how they affect cultures and the individual ... is the probable source of *Sister-Sister*' (Zadok, 2013b). Given that belief systems inspired the novel, it is worth looking at the way magical thinking is brought into sharp focus in *Sister-Sister*.

The dream prophecy of the twins' *sangoma* grandmother underpins the narrative. Their grandmother believes that because Sindi survived the soil suffocation, the ancestors have punished them:

'Did I not tell you long ago that we must find them and appease the ancestors?'
Out the corners of her tear-blurred eyes, Sindi saw Uncle shake his head.
'You cannot blame these children for everything bad that has happened to us.'
'Don't be a fool. The blame does not lie with her, but with us for not listening to the amathongo. The dreams were clear. That this girl lives insults your forefathers.'

⁷ The external forces that have impacted on Zulu culture are historical colonialism (including apartheid with its homeland system and migrant labour policies), and the new global colonialism: neoliberal hegemony.

‘That is enough.’ He clenched Sindi’s shoulder so hard it hurt. ‘Think of the damage you have done this girl already. At your hand, she lost her voice.’
‘I have little breath left, Jabu, but I will not die falsely accused. The other one, the first-born, she speaks?’
Uncle nodded. ‘But you did not ...’ He looked down at Sindi and shook his head.
‘Soil did not steal her voice. She has no voice because she is empty. It is not our lips that speak, Jabu, but our souls. The ancestors tested us, and we failed, but you can set it right. There is still time for you to save yourself.’ (Zadok, 2013a: 131-132)

The drought and Z3 are not evils caused by the grandmother *sangoma*’s failure to heed the warnings of the *amathongo* (ancestors), but are caused by neoliberalism’s impact on the environment and the poor, coupled with problematic government policies with regards to treating Z3. D-Day for petrol cars was implemented because the drought had ravaged the land and petrol had been identified as a contributor:

That’s what the headline of the newspaper article said, the one Mama kept folded into the cover of her ID book: *The Dawn of a Fresh New Era*. It was D-Day, the last day of the petrol-car amnesty, when everyone was meant to change to electric. (Zadok, 2013a: 17, original emphasis)

However, as a magical realist narrative, Zadok’s novel questions reality and finds it skewed. After all, the *sangoma muti* Sindi uses to slice Thuli’s spirit from her body does indeed work: ‘Gogo Nkosi sighed. “The power of belief. What you believe becomes true”’ (Zadok, 2013a: 266). Reality blurs with magical thinking, in keeping with Gerald Gaylard’s views on magical realism in a postcolonial context:

It is in this conjunction, this mingling, this oxymoron, that the space and time for new possibilities is opened up. If nothing else, postcolonialism tends to be an inclusive form that reaches out. The spirit of postcolonialism opposes reduction and embraces complexity. Postcolonialism concretises the apparently impossible and etherealises the real so that there is no longer a neat distinction between the real and the magical. (Gaylard, 2005: 48)

Belief, and how it governs lives, are explored in Zadok’s novel. The One True Church also engages in its own version of magical thinking. We cannot assume that Grandmother’s *sangoma* beliefs are magical thinking and the Christianity of the One True Church is not. Shermer explains: ‘Worldwide, there are about 10,000 distinct religions, each one of which may be further subdivided and classified. Christians, for example, may be apportioned among about 34,000 different denominations’ (2011: 232); given these statistics it is evident that religion is not a singular experience. For people engaged in their spiritual beliefs, their god or gods or ancestors or spirit guides are real to them; each believer vehemently denies that his or her beliefs are magical thinking. According to Michael Shermer:

[A]lthough there is much cultural variation among different religious faiths, all have in common the belief in supernatural agents in the form of a godhead or spirits who have intention and interact with us in the world. There are three lines of evidence pointing to the conclusion that such beliefs are hardwired into our brains and behaviorally expressed in consistent patterns throughout history and culture. These evidentiary lines come from evolutionary theory, behavior genetics, and comparative world religions. (2011: 232)

The hybrid postcolonial nature of Zadok’s text offers up different belief systems and examines how they impact on the lives they affect, allowing the reader to explore what it means to believe:

Auntie said the Black Preacher was the devil. Mama said that Auntie thought anyone who wasn’t Catholic was the devil. Auntie countered that she’d met him once and got a shock when she touched his sleeve, which proved he was associated with dark and unnatural goings-on. Since then, Thuli had begged Auntie to take them to a meeting of Believers: she wanted to feel the dark and unnatural goings-on for herself. Auntie refused. ‘Stay away from those Believers,’ she warned. ‘They’re up to no good.’ (Zadok, 2013a: 95)

Auntie’s comments reveal the fault lines of subjectivity which underscore belief, and how believers tend to revere what they believe and denigrate what they do not.

While the novel questions the impact belief systems have in particular on the twins, lack of faith is also represented as problematic: ‘Mama settled into her chair, “and me, I don’t believe in that religious nonsense”’ (Zadok, 2013a: 299). Sizane’s spiritual dislocation finds solace in liquor: ‘Mama had stopped speaking to Sindi by then, unless her tongue was lubricated by alcohol, which made her cruel’ (Zadok, 2013a: 313). The novel does not attempt to answer the existential questions it poses with regard to belief and lack of belief; there are no answers, only the deep ambiguity of being. Caught at the intersection of conflicting beliefs — those of her rural family and

Nandi, as well as of Joe's One True Church — Sindi's patchwork beliefs, absorbed haphazardly from people immersed in their own magical thinking, are reflective of her spiritual confusion and reveal her postcolonial hybridity. This is indicative of the way in which cultures work upon each other, and in turn how magical realism works upon the reader:

Magical realism radically modifies and replenishes the dominant mode of realism in the West, challenging its basis of representation from within. That destabilization of a dominant form means that it has served as a particularly effective decolonizing agent. (Faris, 2004: 1)

Putting belief under the spotlight in *Sister-Sister*, Zadok is asking her readers to question their beliefs and how belief operates on the individual and society; in this way the novel attempts to decolonise belief.

In conclusion, it is evident that in Zadok's powerful *Sister-Sister* there is a synergy between magical realism and ecofeminism. Given that magical realism challenges how readers negotiate texts, and the ecofeminism in Zadok's novel is also challenging readers to assess the world they live in, there is an overlap. While the novel addresses important ecofeminist concerns, the lyrical, experimental magical realist style negotiates the fine balance between storytelling and what can be seen as a form of evangelism, rendering magical realism an important mode of exploration for ecofeminist novels. As the novel demonstrates, belief structures can be limiting, and in *Sister-Sister* the twins are not only at the mercy of sociopathic neoliberalism, but are also vulnerable to disturbing beliefs (for instance, the notion that having sex with a virgin will cure Z3). Ecofeminism struggles against patriarchal belief structures, and Zadok points out that religious beliefs can also be challenging to negotiate. The patriarchy of the One True Church, including its attitude to women's bodies, is deeply embedded in religious and cultural belief systems:

The reality is that men of all classes use and take for granted power over women within their class, workplace, political party, or family structure, even — or especially — when power in the public arena is denied to those men. This is evidenced by the fact that violence toward women is fairly universal in Patriarchal societies and does not differ significantly across class boundaries. (Gaard 1993, 21)⁸

Storytelling is a powerful way to ask people to rethink their societal programming, and this is what the twins' stories do for their readers: as Thuli observes, 'Joe Saviour once told me every life has a legend. Before a soul comes to earth, God seals a story inside it. To know your purpose, you need to unravel the mystery of that legend' (Zadok, 2013a: 17). Zadok's unlocking of the stories of Thuli and Sindi in the pages of *Sister-Sister* asks readers to assess to what extent their personal beliefs and biases are operating on their lives.

In a rare moment of redemptive relief, the novel's epilogue sees Thuli, freed from her wandering and attachment to Sindi, joining her dead father:

[Sindi] recognises the man, though there is no crease running through the centre of his face where Mama folded the photo. She watches Thuli step over the threshold. She calls her name, but Thuli does not look back; she closes the door behind her. (Zadok, 2013a: 315)

Is Thuli now freed from Sindi's grief? After all, Sindi has found Loveday, of whom spirit-Thuli says: 'My toes are tap-tapping when they finally come: the preacher, the watchman and the sister-thief. I hiss at her' (Zadok, 2013a: 216). Loveday — the homeless white teenager — and Sindi become surrogate sisters; there is a sense of a new beginning where colour and culture do not matter as Sindi shares her appropriately named Lifesaver sweets with Loveday, just as she had always done with Thuli: "'One for me,'" she says. "One for you"' (Zadok, 2013a: 316).

While the novel ends with Thuli's spirit freed and joining her dead father, Sindi's fate at the hands of the church is uncertain: 'magical realism shuns easy solutions, and in doing so, it counteracts the amnesia so often inculcated in transitional South Africa in the name of forgiveness and reconciliation' (Grzęda, 2013: 170). Through her poetically woven imagery and magical realist plotting, Zadok has crafted a deeply ecofeminist, dark, intense and harrowing coming-of-age tale of twins who find themselves in the Anthropocene, and as a result, at the mercy of a sociopathic society.

[Thuli says:] 'The road never ends.'
'It ends,' Joe says. 'Everything does.' (Zadok, 2013a: 297)

⁸ Here Gaard references Russell (1989).

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The Wild *Volksmoeder* in the Forest: An Analysis of the Human-Nonhuman Relationship in Dalene Matthee's *Dreamforest* (2003)

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ABSTRACT

South African novelist Dalene Matthee's last forest novel, *Dreamforest*, was published in 2003. This novel concludes her tetralogy of historical fiction novels focusing on the poor white timber community living in the Eastern Cape's tropical Knysna forest. Initially the representation of a human-nonhuman relationship in *Dreamforest* suggests a connection between the sexist and classist treatment of the protagonist, Karoliena, and the deforestation of the Knysna forest. When Karoliena rejects the town's prescript of Afrikaner nationalist volksmoeder identity, which South African theorist, Elsabé Brink (1990: 280), describes as an emulation of characteristics including a 'sense of religion, bravery, a love of freedom, the spirit of sacrifice, self-reliance, [and] housewifeliness', it is suggested that she opposes homogenous, monolithic racial and gender classifications. However, the reunion of Karoliena and Johannes at the end of the novel initiates Karoliena's acceptance of the volksmoeder identity, and by implication, her rejection of the forest. Her return to Johannes therefore suggests that the nonhuman is only ever an instrument in the poor white Afrikaans woman's search for identity and her feminist upliftment project(s). The following article analyses the depiction of this human-nonhuman relationship, primarily utilising Tiffany Willoughby-Herard's work in whiteness studies.

Keywords: Afrikaner nationalism, whiteness studies, volksmoeder, human-nonhuman relationship

INTRODUCTION

South African popular fiction novelist Dalene Matthee's last forest novel, *Dreamforest*, was published in 2003. This novel concludes her tetralogy of historical fiction novels focusing on the poor white timber community living in the Eastern Cape's Knysna forest.¹ Whilst the first novel in the series, *Circles in a Forest*, is set in British-ruled South Africa in the 1860s, *Dreamforest* tells the story of the last of the timber community's life in the forest before they were forcibly removed by South Africa's Union government in the early 1940s.

The protagonist of *Dreamforest*, Karoliena Kapp, is a poor white Afrikaans woman who marries a wealthy business owner from the town, Johannes Stander, in order to escape her poverty-stricken forest community. However, Karoliena soon realises that her identity is dependent on the forest and returns in order to become an elephant and a tree. This process of becoming nonhuman is narrated alongside Karoliena's attempt to save the (poor white) forest community. The representation of this human-nonhuman² relationship suggests a connection between the sexist and classist treatment experienced by Karoliena in the town and the deforestation of the Knysna forest. However, after the forest community is forcibly removed to a desolate town called Karatara, and the process of deforestation is deemed irreversible, Karoliena returns to Johannes, who has since been called to serve in the Second World War. Having lost an arm in battle, Johannes ventures into the forest to find peace upon his return from war. After Johannes spends four days alone in the forest, Karoliena finds and devotes herself to him.

Initially the novel seems to suggest that Karoliena's return to the forest is also a rejection of the town's prescript of an Afrikaner nationalist *volksmoeder* identity. The *volksmoeder* identity could be directly translated as 'mother of

¹ The tetralogy of forest novels consists of *Circles in a Forest* (1984); *Fiela's Child* (1985) *The Mulberry Forest* (1987) and *Dreamforest* (2003).

² I utilise the term 'nonhuman' in referring to any living being that is not human, albeit plant or animal, to deconstruct the binaries of human/animal and animal/plant. However, I do so consciously to follow the example of Marius Crous (2015) in acknowledging that humans are also always animals.

the nation', and South African theorist, Elsabé Brink (1990: 280), describes it as an emulation of characteristics including a 'sense of religion, bravery, a love of freedom, the spirit of sacrifice, self-reliance, [and] housewifeliness'. However, the reunion of Karoliena and Johannes at the end of the novel initiates what seems to be Karoliena's acceptance of this *volksmoeder* identity, and by implication, her rejection of the forest.

Re-reading the novel with the knowledge of Karoliena's return to Johannes allows for a new interpretation: one that suggests that a human-nonhuman relationship is possible only to the extent that the nonhuman is an instrument in the poor white Afrikaans woman's search for identity. Consequently, the nonhuman is presented as a tool in aid of what Tiffany Willoughby-Herard (2010) calls feminist upliftment project(s). In the following article I analyse the depiction of this human-nonhuman relationship in *Dreamforest* primarily using Willoughby-Herard's (2010, 2015) work in whiteness studies. I will first briefly outline the initial representation of a human-nonhuman relationship as is presented in the novel. To do this, I specifically refer to the use of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism in the novel,³ and make use of Bruns's (2007) theory on becoming nonhuman, and Berger's (2008) and Woodward's (2008) work on the animal gaze. The aim of this article is to show that Karoliena's loyalty to Johannes prohibits her loyalty to the nonhuman and prevents a connection between human and nonhuman. I do not argue that the novel subverts the notion that only men and indigenous communities can enter into a relationship with the nonhuman. Instead, in my view, it suggests that the white Afrikaans woman's relationship with the nonhuman is only possible when it aids her becoming an Afrikaner *volksmoeder*, in turn supporting the nationalist idea of the Afrikaner as an ancient tribe with a rightful claim to Africa.

THE HUMAN-NONHUMAN RELATIONSHIP IN *DREAMFOREST*

The connection between humans and nonhumans in *Dreamforest*, and the reconceptualisation of terms such as 'nature', 'human' and 'nonhuman', is in effect achieved with the use of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism. Initially, only the trees in the forest are likened to humans in *Dreamforest*. Karoliena states that the felled trees on the train wagon are 'bodies and limbs' (Matthee, 2003: 19). In another instance, Oldman Botha reminds Karoliena to ask the tree saplings to 'breathe properly' (Matthee, 2003: 199). Karoliena often speaks to the trees, imagining that they can hear her, but that they also have 'a spirit inside [them]' (Matthee, 2003: 253) and can see the human spirit. This use of anthropomorphism creates a connection between the physical bodies of humans and nonhumans, and in turn establishes a sense of understanding in the reader for the nonhuman.

Linda Vance (in Huggan, 2004: 718) advocates against the use of anthropomorphism, arguing that 'the goal is not to make us care more about [nature] because [it is] like us, but to care about [it] because [it is itself]'. In contrast to Vance, I agree with Marthinus Versfeld's (1985) argument stating that anthropomorphism is not only useful in attempting to establish a relationship with the nonhuman, but that it is also inevitable for humans to understand other animals in terms of themselves. However, the use of zoomorphism takes the subordination of western dichotomies between humans and nonhumans a step further than anthropomorphism.

Throughout *Dreamforest* various characters are likened to the nonhuman. Especially Oldman Botha is described as having 'two dark hawk eyes' (Matthee, 2003: 197) and having 'started to grow out of the forest floor from the seed of a tree' (Matthee, 2003: 70) rather than being born 'like other human beings' (Matthee, 2003: 70). What zoomorphism achieves that anthropomorphism perhaps does not, is the centring of the nonhuman. By using zoomorphism, Matthee avoids the anthropocentric view of anthropomorphism, and replaces it with biocentrism, wherein a connection between human and nonhuman is established, whilst the human/nonhuman hierarchy in western discourse is subverted.

Apart from anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, the foregrounding of the nonhuman gaze in the novel furthers the connection between humans and nonhumans, while also acknowledging the intrinsic value of the forest and the role of the nonhuman in the lives of the forest community. In her analysis of *Dreamforest*, Louw (2007: 9) refers to the opening page of the novel, where the gaze of both an elephant and a lourie bird⁴ is described:

There was an elephant watching her from the thicket. Somewhere above her (...) a lourie was gurgling and hissing to warn the elephant that there was a human walking along the sledpath [sic].

Louw (2007: 104) argues that the depiction of the animal gaze presents both human and nonhuman as 'completely "inhomogeneous", but yet relational'. Throughout *Dreamforest* the animal gaze is recorded, like in the stonechat's fearless 'pitch black eyes' (Matthee, 2003: 254) as it sits on Karoliena's hand. Woodward (2008: 1) reasons that the animal gaze is always a silent action which highlights both the unknowable state of the animal and its own

³ Anthropomorphism refers to the attribution of human characteristics to nonhumans, whilst zoomorphism refers to the attribution of animal characteristics to humans.

⁴ The Knysna lourie, or Knysna turaco, is a bird predominantly found in the coastal regions of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. The Knysna lourie has distinct green feathers with vibrant red colouring on its wings.

subjectivity. Furthermore, the animal gaze demands a response from the human that is being watched (Woodward, 2008: 1). In so doing, the animal gaze reconfigures the so-called natural order of humans governing over the nonhuman. Instead, the animal gaze places the person being watched in a reciprocal relationship with the nonhuman watching.

Similar to the connection that is established between humans and nonhumans through the animal gaze, Bruns (2007: 703) points out that the act of becoming animal (or becoming plant), is an act of

(...) deterritorialization in which a subject no longer occupies a realm of stability and identity but is instead folded imperceptibly into a movement.

By becoming both tree and elephant, Karoliena enters into a non-hierarchical relationship with the nonhuman. At first Karoliena morphs her body into a tree and becomes 'a human being concealed in a leafy refuge' (Matthee, 2003: 320) in which she, as 'human-tree' (Matthee, 2003: 322), is 'part of the forest [and] inside the forest' (Matthee, 2003: 322). Her situatedness both in the forest and as part of the forest establishes a connection between humans and nonhumans both physically and relationally.

Similarly, Karoliena also becomes an elephant by wearing the elephant shoes of the indigenous Outeniqua man, Abel Slinger. Whilst wearing the shoes, Karoliena 'felt as if the earth rose through the shoes and into her body' (Matthee, 2003: 504). In Dan Wylie's *Death and Compassion: The elephant in Southern African literature* (2018: 126), he states that elephants are often represented in literature as

(...) boundary-breakers, embodying a wildness that defies, and thereby critiques, the human propensity to improve such boundaries between geographical areas and species.

Karoliena's becoming-elephant signifies a similar break, especially a break in the boundary between humans and nonhumans. Her identity is now situated in connection to the nonhuman. She is a 'human-elephant' (Matthee, 2003: 506) who can assuredly state that she is 'Karoliena Kapp, an elephant cow who will never again be afraid of anything' (Matthee, 2003: 507).

It becomes clear then that a human-nonhuman relationship is portrayed and explored in Matthee's *Dreamforest*. Through the use of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, the portrayal of the animal gaze and the depiction of a nonhuman becoming, the novel challenges the essentialist binary classification of 'human', 'nature' and the 'nonhuman', while also subverting the notion that a human-nonhuman relationship is reserved for men and indigenous communities.

AFRIKANER NATIONALISM: THE VOLKSMOEDER AND THE NONHUMAN

Matthee's choice of milieu is very interesting in terms of her development of the human-nonhuman relationship. Apart from the work of Helmüth Luttig (the pseudonym of Johanna Wilhelmina Luttig) and Jan H. du Preez, Matthee's forest novels are, in context of the history of Afrikaans literature, the only Afrikaans literary texts that centre on the Knysna forest milieu (Kannemeyer, 2005: 626). Although the milieu in the forest novels is significant, Susan Meyer (2016) argues that the depiction of a human-nonhuman relationship in Afrikaans literature is traceable to the first wave of pastoral farm novels in the 1930s. Like Matthee's forest novels, the first wave of farm novels (or *plaasromans*) focus on the representation of the connection between (mostly poor) Afrikaners and the nonhuman. However, Hennie van Coller (2006: 99) draws our attention to the fact that the first wave of farm novels, depicting a nostalgic longing for pastoral living, can be read as a promotion of Afrikaner nationalism.

Van Coller (2006: 98) describes the landscape portrayed in the farm novels as idyllic, romantic and mythical, but also as patriarchal, historical and feudal. It is a space in which Afrikaners feel at home and in which they find meaning. In contrast to the Afrikaner, the English coloniser is portrayed as feeling alienated from this African landscape. This contrast between the English coloniser's alienation and the Afrikaner's 'belonging' to the African landscape is used to highlight the Afrikaner's entitlement to African land and to the African nonhuman (Van Coller, 2003: 50). According to Van Coller (2006: 99), this depiction of the Afrikaner's entitlement to the African landscape and, by implication to the nonhuman, is an ideology that supports Afrikaner nationalism.

Willoughby-Herard's (2015) work on whiteness studies focuses on the relationship between Afrikaner nationalism and specifically the poor white problem in South Africa. In her *Waste of a White Skin: The Carnegie Corporation and the racial logic of white vulnerability* (2015), she argues that Afrikaner identity is primarily a fabricated identity constructed with the goal of promoting white (Afrikaans) minority rule in Africa. One narrative used to construct this fabricated identity of the white Afrikaner, is the argument that Afrikaners are one of many ancient tribes in Africa (Willoughby-Herard, 2015: 5). This narrative of Afrikaners as an ancient tribe arises from the idea

of an Afrikaner space claimed by the Voortrekkers.⁵ This construes the African landscape as empty: ‘without people or time’ (Willoughby-Herard, 2015: 6). In essence, Willoughby-Herard (2015) argues that Afrikaner identity supposes a homogeneity between a group of people based on their claim on the African landscape. This narrative of the Afrikaner is perpetuated in Afrikaans farm novels, and, I would argue, in Matthee’s *Dreamforest*. By portraying the white Afrikaner as an ancient tribe in Africa with a rightful claim to the African landscape, Afrikaner nationalism and, by implication, homogenous, white Afrikaner rule, is perpetuated in *Dreamforest*.

In a similar way to the farm novels, Matthee’s first three forest novels depict the Afrikaner and English colonisers as binary opposites. The poor (white) Afrikaner is the protagonist of Matthee’s forest novels, whilst the English coloniser is depicted as the antagonist of the nonhuman, the Afrikaner and of the connection between the two.⁶ Since *Dreamforest* is set in a time after British colonisation but before apartheid (and despite it being set after the South African wars), the characterisation is not centred on the binary opposition of Afrikaans/English, but rather on the opposition of poor Afrikaner/rich Afrikaner. However, the processes linked to inheriting land, the portrayal of social hierarchy and the (non)depiction of the black Other,⁷ are present in both *Dreamforest* and, according to Van Coller (2003: 56) also in the first wave of farm novels.

The *volksmoeder* identity is central to this narrative of white Afrikaner minority rule over the African landscape. This identity includes a ‘sense of religion, bravery, a love of freedom, the spirit of sacrifice [and] housewifeliness’ (Brink, 1990: 280). In her analysis of the Afrikaans glossy magazine, *Sarie*, Christi van der Westhuizen (2018: 4) associates *volksmoeder* identity with ‘*ordentlikeheid*’, or, loosely translated, a sense of respectability. While Van der Westhuizen’s focus is on a post-apartheid society, her description of the *volksmoeder* is one which is relevant to pre-apartheid society and to the development of the *volksmoeder* figure in literature. Van der Westhuizen (2018: 4) argues that the *volksmoeder* is encapsulated by ‘specific forms of femininity, heterosexuality, whiteness and middle-classness’. As the mother of the white Afrikaner nation, it is the *volksmoeder*’s responsibility to uphold the standards of the community, and to birth and ensure the strength and honour of the future ruling men. Kruger (1991: 1) emphasises that Afrikaner women, and therefore the *volksmoeder*, feature solely as symbols in Afrikaner historiography, ‘inspiring, justifying and supporting the actions of the male agents of Afrikaner nationalism’. Afrikaner women, however, seldom feature as agents of Afrikaner nationalism themselves. Taking into account both Van der Westhuizen (2018) and Kruger’s (1991) analysis of *volksmoeder* identity, it is necessary to challenge the essentialist identity enforced on Afrikaner women during the critical formative years of apartheid, whilst also acknowledging these women as major role players in the formation of Afrikaner nationalism.

Willoughby-Herard (2007; 2010) takes into consideration both aforementioned aspects in her analysis of *volksmoeder* identity. She analyses how the Carnegie Commission, a commission employed to investigate white poverty in South Africa, played a crucial role in the formation of *volksmoeder* identity, and perpetuated *volksmoeder* ideals using eugenics in an era of scientific racism.⁸ Willoughby-Herard (2007) argues that the Carnegie

⁵ The Voortrekkers are those Afrikaners — roughly 17,000 people, according to Hermann Giliomee (2018: 46) — who joined the Great Trek to the interior of South Africa. The Great Trek refers to the movement of Dutch settlers (and, by implication, their slaves and workers) to the interior of southern Africa to escape British rule in the Cape Colony. The celebration of the centenary of the Great Trek started on 8 August 1938 with a re-enactment of the movement. Nine ox-wagons, starting in the Cape, journeyed to the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria. The Great Trek is often seen as the start of the Afrikaner-nation, whilst the centenary celebration is interpreted as a major role player in the development of Afrikaner nationalism. In *Dreamforest*, a few of the woodcutters are employed to make wooden spokes for the ox-wagons that would be used in the centenary, and the celebratory event as two ox-wagons pass through the town of Knysna is highlighted as absurd.

⁶ In *Fiela’s Child* the brown Afrikaans female, Fiela, and her adopted (white, Afrikaans) son, Benjamin, are both protagonists. While this forest novel complicates essentialist racial classifications, the novel can also be interpreted as a promotion of the ideology that only the Afrikaans-speaker can be the rightful owner of the African landscape, whilst the English colonist will always be the antagonist prohibiting this ownership.

⁷ Abel Slinger, an indigenous Outeniqua man, plays a relatively dominant role in the novel, but as I will discuss later in this article, the mystification with which he is presented contributes to essentialist binary classifications, and in effect to white monolithic rule.

⁸ The Carnegie Commission’s investigation into what was called the poor white problem in South Africa led to the publication of a series of reports. These reports were published as *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Report of the Carnegie Commission* (1932). Willoughby-Herard (2007; 2010) is critical of these reports and is here specifically referring to a chapter in volume V, ‘The mother and daughter of the poor family’, compiled by Maria Elizabeth Rothmann. Rothmann is today still upheld as a type of cultural heroine for her role in helping the Afrikaner out of poverty. As is suggested by Willoughby-Herard (2010), re-reading the chapter exposes some of the problematic beliefs underlying the Carnegie Commission’s investigation — beliefs which also formed the corner stone of Afrikaner nationalist narratives. One such example is Rothmann’s description of a *normal household*, which she describes as: ‘one which so moulds and influences the children that they in their turn will become the founders of homes which will be a benefit and not a burden to the state’ (Rothmann, 1932: 171). The report is riddled with Rothmann’s own (Afrikaner nationalist) beliefs on what is expected of Afrikaner mothers and daughters in households. The objective of Rothmann’s report was clear: educate mothers on raising a Christian, nationalist, wealthy Afrikaner nation.

Commission's investigation into white poverty in South Africa between 1927 and 1931, formed part of a nationalist historicisation. In order to investigate this nationalist agenda, Willoughby-Herard (2007) analyses the way the Carnegie Commission utilised various pathological techniques in an era of scientific racism to investigate white poverty. According to Willoughby-Herard (2007), the Carnegie Commission conceptualised poverty as either a genetic disease, or as a social tragedy. To justify their investigation into white poverty specifically, they used various tests to ascertain that poor white people were not genetically predisposed to poverty, as they argued black people were.

The negative and statistical characteristics of a predisposed group of people included:

their physical bodies, their genetic or hereditary structure, their physiognomy, their intellectual capacity, their approach to gender roles, their approach to child rearing, their approach to modes of production, their approach to migration or settlement, or their capacity for self-rule. (Willoughby-Herard, 2007: 488)

This form of scientific racism is a positivist and systematic approach through which a group of people's social and political status – regarded as subhuman – is naturalised through the mapping of physical bodies (Willoughby-Herard, 2007: 488). In addition to the negative and statistical characteristics ascribed to poor communities, the Carnegie Commission's solution to poverty included 'genetic monitoring, sterilization, mental testing, forced removals and detentions' (Willoughby-Herard, 2007: 485). The Carnegie Commission's approach to investigating and solving poverty therefore upheld the ideology of whiteness, by aiming to educate and isolate poor white communities from other indigenous communities in South Africa. In so doing the idea of white supremacy (and especially the Afrikaner's claim to the African landscape) was biologically justified.

A primary figure in the Carnegie Commission's investigation in South Africa is the famous Afrikaans author and researcher Maria Elizabeth Rothmann, also known as M.E.R. While she is famed as an advocate for women's rights, M.E.R is often criticised by modern feminists for upholding feminine stereotypes, such as those inherent in *volksmoeder* identity. In Willoughby-Herard's (2010: 83) analysis of M.E.R.'s report, *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family* (1932), she argues that M.E.R, like her fellow 'privileged, higher-status Afrikaner nationalist women', made poor white Afrikaans women into tools of Afrikaner nationalism. Willoughby-Herard (2010: 96) argues that this was accomplished by enforcing the *volksmoeder* identity through welfare projects. In order to benefit from the welfare projects headed by privileged Afrikaner nationalist women like M.E.R, poor white women had to accept the Afrikaner nationalist identity — that is the *volksmoeder* identity — presented to them. In the preface to her thesis, Kruger (1991: viii) also mentions that the Afrikaner nationalist women like M.E.R were 'confined by the structures of patriarchal Afrikaner society' and used the Afrikaner nationalist ideals as a platform to address female empowerment (Kruger, 1991: 10).⁹ While it is important to acknowledge the female empowerment that stemmed from these upliftment projects, it is also, as Willoughby-Herard (2010) argues, important to examine how this empowerment led to the disempowerment of women who did not, or could not, conform to the *volksmoeder* ideals.

Thys Human (2003: 24) points out that the relationship between Karoliena and Johannes in *Dreamforest* is portrayed against this background of the Carnegie Commission's investigation into the so-called poor white problem in South Africa, as well as against the background of urbanisation, the celebration of the Great Trek's centenary and the Second World War. While the mystification of the Knysna forest as a nonhuman entity is at the forefront of Matthee's tetralogy (Jooste and Senekal, 2016: 774), all four novels have a dualistic approach to the portrayal of the communities in the Knysna forest and town. As I have previously mentioned, *Circles in a Forest*, *Fiela's Child* and *The Mulberry Forest* are centred on the representation of power relations between British colonisers and poor white Afrikaners, while *Dreamforest* is centred on power relations between the forest community's poor Afrikaners and the town's middle-class Afrikaner community. The focus in *Dreamforest* is therefore on economic status rather than on colonial power. The love relationship between Karoliena and Johannes encapsulates the power relations between poor and middle-class Afrikaners, and is underpinned by the various processes underlying the succession of Afrikaner nationalism, like the Carnegie Commission's investigation into the so-called poor white communities of South Africa during the 1930s.

It is interesting to note the central role that the historical figure of M.E.R. plays in *Dreamforest* as the character Maria Rothman.¹⁰ Maria is portrayed as a key role player in the Carnegie Commission's research project into the poverty of the Knysna forest's timber community. Her visit to the forest is long anticipated by both Karoliena,

Matthee (2003: 188) quotes Rothmann verbatim in *Dreamforest* in what could be interpreted as an attempt to expose Afrikaner nationalist ideologies.

⁹ Kruger (1991: 10) is specifically referring to Mabel Malherbe, the editor of *Die Boerevrou*, a magazine dedicated to the struggles of rural Afrikaner women during 1919 and 1931, but throughout her thesis she argues for the acknowledgement that the participation of women in Afrikaner nationalist movements are (and were) political, feminist acts.

¹⁰ Note the difference in spelling of the surname 'Rothmann'. The historical figure is known as Maria Elizabeth Rothmann, whilst the character in *Dreamforest* is Maria Rothman. I have referred to the historical figure as M.E.R and to distinguish between the two, I will refer to the character in *Dreamforest* as 'Maria'.

after her return to the forest, and by the other forest women. Her visit is also accompanied by critique from Karoliena, who says that she

spoke book-words, the forest used forest-words, but the forest women had only poor words. (...) The one did not understand the other and she doubted if they ever would. (Matthee, 2003: 365)

In the novel Maria analyses, amongst others, the ways the forest community rear their children, and to what degree women can rule themselves. In her meeting with the forest women, Maria argues that ‘the well-being of a family rests on the shoulders of the mother’ (Matthee, 2003: 361). It is also the mother of the household who ‘determines the place of the family in the community’ (Matthee, 2003: 361). While Karoliena does not reject Maria’s *volksmoeder* ideology specifically, she does take it upon herself to help the forest community by, for example, finding and creating employment for her fellow community members, as well as providing food, milk and clothes to those in need.

Karoliena’s approach to the forest community occurs after her rejection of the *volksmoeder* ideals upheld by the town. Therefore her upliftment project in the forest seems ambiguous to the reader. Initially Karoliena rejects the forms of femininity, whiteness and middle-class identity presented to her by members of the town. During her first attempt to flee her poverty-stricken forest community, and prior to her marriage to Johannes, Karoliena is placed under the care of Miss Ann and Mrs Cuthbert by Johannes in a type of ‘finishing school so that (she) will adapt to (her) new environment with ease — and also adapt to life as (his) wife’ (Matthee, 2009: 135-136). The descriptions that follow her life in town are that of Miss Ann, Mrs Cuthbert and Johannes’ attempt to transform Karoliena into the embodiment of a so-called respectable lady, the forest being the embodiment of what is unrespectable: the nonhuman, the uncultivated, and the poor.

Van der Westhuizen (2018: 4) argues that Afrikaner women are required to ‘physically organise their bodies in accordance with certain prescriptions’, and this physical organisation is portrayed and criticised in *Dreamforest*. Under the care of Miss Ann, Mrs Cuthbert and Johannes, Karoliena is forced to transform her body physically in accordance to the *volksmoeder* prescriptions. She wears the dresses made by Mrs Cuthbert, cuts her hair according to Miss Ann’s specifications, and is scolded when she mingles with servants and members of the forest community. Karoliena realises that she has lost her identity only to become ‘someone who had been created by Miss Ann and Mrs Cuthbert’ (Matthee, 2009: 166). She rejects these ideals of the cultivated, respectable *volksmoeder* and flees to the forest.

Greg Garrard (2012: 66) argues that the nonhuman is often associated with the idea of a wilderness, which can be traced back to a Judeo-Christian tradition. On the one hand the wilderness symbolises a dangerous, godless space in which the nonhuman rules. With this notion, the nonhuman is viewed primarily as a commodity that should be tamed in service of humans. On the other hand, the wilderness symbolises a godly place where humans (but specifically men) can retreat into a primordial state and live in harmony with the nonhuman:

Wilderness is the natural, unfallen antithesis of an unnatural civilisation that has lost its soul. It is a place of freedom (for alienated urbanites) in which we can recover our true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial life. (Cronon, 1996: 80)

The connection between wilderness and the idea of primitive existence gives rise to multiple representations of people in the wilderness. The wilderness is often a place associated solely with masculinity (Garrard, 2012: 84). It is a place that women cannot access because of its connection to danger, economy and authenticity, rather than to traditional feminine traits of safety and domesticity (Garrard, 2012: 84). Where women are represented within a so-called wilderness, they are often presented as dangerous, wild witch figures. Other examples in popular culture of the wild, dangerous woman in the wilderness include the tales of ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs’, ‘Rapunzel’ and ‘Hansel and Gretel’. In Ewing’s (2013: 13) discussion of the wilderness in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the forest is described as ‘deviant, pathless, issueless, [and] terrifying’. Similarly, popular culture’s depiction of the wilderness inhabited by madwomen, witch figures and evil stepmothers is laden with negative connotations. Consequently, the madwoman, witch figure and evil stepmother are also depicted as deviant and terrifying. This archetypal depiction of what is called ‘monstrous-women’ living in a wild, untamed landscape is often analysed from a psychoanalytical perspective,¹¹ but I would argue, needs to be further analysed from an ecofeminist framework.

Besides being primarily an androcentric space, the wilderness is also associated with the idea of a primitive, indigenous community who has the ability to live in harmony with nature, while the modern western men do not. Garrard (2012: 135) calls this representation of the primordial community living in harmony with the nonhuman a form of ‘ideological mystification’ in which the relationship between nonhuman and indigenous communities is simplified and romanticised. In turn, this ideological mystification creates a dichotomy between the modern western Self and the primitive Other. The focus on a white Afrikaner female’s relationship with the nonhuman in

¹¹ See Birkh user-Oeri and von Franz’s *The Mother: Archetypal image in fairy tales* (1988).

a wilderness milieu challenges this notion that a human-nonhuman relationship and the wilderness as a place are primarily reserved for indigenous communities, but also suggests that the Afrikaner has a rightful claim to the African landscape as a supposedly ancient tribe.

Karoliena's return to the forest and her rejection of the town's desire to transform her into a *volksmoeder* suggests a rejection of the idea that a human-nonhuman relationship is reserved for men and indigenous communities. Similarly, the stereotypical representation of male and female characters is inverted. Although Johannes is portrayed as the masculine hero saving the tragic female victim (Karoliena) from the forest's inherent poverty and danger, her return to the forest signifies her as the heroine and the wilderness as a place that she can access. By returning to the forest after her marriage to Johannes, Karoliena rejects the stereotypical role of a *volksmoeder* and pioneer bride ascribed to her by Johannes and the town and reimagines her position in the traditionally masculine, indigenous wilderness. I hold that Karoliena returns to the forest because her identity is situated in connection with the nonhuman, rather than in the *volksmoeder* and thereby in Afrikaner nationalist culture. She is 'Karoliena Kapp from the forest' (Mathee, 2009: 165) not *from the town*, and it seems as if Karoliena, by returning to the forest, rejects the town's ridicule that she is a 'wild' woman from the forest who needs to be tamed.

Karoliena's return to the forest is further marked by her critique of the Carnegie Commission and Afrikaner nationalist ideals, such as those celebrated during the centenary of the Great Trek — perhaps the single most celebrated and important event in Afrikaner nationalist history. In one instance, Karoliena questions the retelling of the Great Trek. Willempie explains that the Great Trek consisted of Voortrekkers who

(...) moved away to look for a place where they could be free and happy, but all along the way they were killed by the people who were already living there. Consequently, they never reached the promised land. (Matthee, 2003: 511)

Karoliena critiques this narrative of the history of the Afrikaner, asking Willempie if he 'isn't mixing this up with a Bible story' (Mathee, 2009: 511). Miss Ann also states that she pities the Afrikaner, because they 'are celebrating the past while [they] know [they] have no future' (Mathee, 2009: 519). This critique of the Afrikaner, and of what Willoughby-Herard (2015: 6) calls the Afrikaner's 'imitation history', rejects Afrikaner nationalist identity, and by implication the *volksmoeder* ideal. Yet in contradiction with her critique of Afrikaner nationalist identity, Karoliena's return to the forest is marked by an acceptance of certain feminine prescripts, like that of a mothering nurse and caretaker.

The interpretation that Karoliena's return to the forest is an act of deviance against Afrikaner nationalism is overshadowed by descriptions of her undertaking a motherly role towards the poor white community. After rejecting the *volksmoeder* ideals prescribed by Miss Ann, Mrs Cuthbert and Johannes, Karoliena plays the forest community's nurse and caretaker — roles which could be argued are later promoted and upheld by the Carnegie Commission's Maria. Having secured (albeit limited) money through her marriage to Johannes, Karoliena becomes Maria's equal — 'the privileged higher-status white Afrikaner nationalist [woman]' (Willoughby-Herard, 2010: 966) — managing various welfare projects. Although she rejected the town's 'civilised' prescript, Karoliena becomes Maria's *volksmoeder*: the agent of welfare projects and the face of nationalist progress. She provides milk to Hestertjie Vermaak's baby; intervenes in Elmina Vlok's psychological distress; secures clothes for the school children and shoes for woodcutters and also houses widowed Susanna. This role as caretaker and nurse is identified by Van Coller (2003) as that of the *volksmoeder* in farm novels.

After her attempt to save the forest community inevitably fails due to their forced removal to Karatara, Karoliena returns to Johannes and the town. Whilst the majority of *Dreamforest* is initially read as a challenge against the essentialist binary classification of 'human', 'nature' and the 'nonhuman', as well as a challenge against traditional gender roles and Afrikaner nationalism, the return of Karoliena to the town and the emphasis on her devotion to Johannes is underpinned by her rejection of the forest. Taking this rejection of the forest into account, *Dreamforest* seems to suggest that the human-nonhuman relationship, and especially one between the Afrikaner female and the nonhuman, is only ever possible if the nonhuman is a tool in aid of the creation of the white Afrikaner's nationalist identity — here the *volksmoeder*.

Karoliena's return to the town and her devotion to Johannes is also marked by an acceptance of the *volksmoeder* ideals. Where Karoliena could previously not identify herself dressed in gowns made by Mrs Cuthbert in Miss Ann's mirror, she can, upon her return, identify herself in the mirror: 'it was *she* who looked back at her from the mirror. Unmistakably' (Mathee, 2009: 562). With this image of Karoliena's identity situated in the mirror — a metaphor for the town — it is suggested that she also situates her identity in the Afrikaner nationalist projects, now rejecting her identity as 'human-elephant' (Mathee, 2009: 506) or 'human-tree' (Mathee, 2009: 322).

Considering her identity as *volksmoeder* is established because of her loyalty to Johannes, the theme of making peace between neighbours, so characteristic of farm novels, is also worth considering in the forest novels. Karoliena's making peace with Johannes could be read as metonymic for her making peace with the town. Although she has dedicated herself to the town and to Johannes, she still frequents the forest community now

situated in Karatara. She looks after Miss Ann and Johannes's business but she also employs the forest community to make her clothes (Mathee, 2003: 583). Her loyalty towards her neighbours could, however, be read as an extension of the *volksmoeder* ideal. In town she embodies Maria's Afrikaner *volksmoeder*, who can adjust to a privileged life with ease, while also upholding welfare projects aiming to uplift the poor forest community in Karatara. Although she still supports the forest community, she is 'finished with the forest' (Mathee, 2003: 589). This declaration comes before Karoliena's final dedication to Johannes, where she commits her life to being his 'missing arm' (Mathee, 2003: 597) — a symbol of support. It is suggested then that Karoliena gives up her life in the forest in exchange for a new identity separated from poverty and the nonhuman.

When Karoliena's acceptance of the *volksmoeder* ideals are taken into account, further contradictions in the novel present themselves and challenge the initial idea that *Dreamforest* rejects stereotypical gender roles and a primarily androcentric human-nonhuman relationship. The centring of a female protagonist's relationship with the nonhuman in *Dreamforest* is undermined by the novel's emphasis on a dominant male figure aiding this connection. As in farm novels, *Dreamforest* also emphasises the role of the dominant father figure and therefore centres a male voice. Karoliena's biological father died when she was a child, and she laments the 'emptiness (he left) inside her. Like the place where a big tree had been cut down and a hole in the forest roof remained behind' (Mathee, 2009: 20). To an extent, the novel follows Karoliena's search for a father figure. Freek van Rooyen, her mother's second husband, was too 'stupid' (Mathee, 2009: 26) to be her father. Her current stepfather, Uncle Cornelius, 'did not become a father either' (Mathee, 2009: 27). Mister Fourcade, a botanist who acts as Karoliena's voice of reason throughout the novel, is, however, presented as a father figure. While the conversation is not recorded in the English translation of *Dreamforest*, in the Afrikaans novel, *Toorbos* (2003: 277), Karoliena admits to Mister Fourcade that he had been her 'pretend' father for many years.

Instead of being the dominant, patriarchal father that is so characteristic of the farm novels, Mister Fourcade is rather a 'shrewd old bushbuck with a human head' (Mathee, 2009: 112) showing her the secrets of forest plants and teaching her how to catch the rare Lotus Venus moths to sell for an income. It is because of his encouragement that Karoliena returns to Johannes. It is also Mister Fourcade that reprimands her for her 'clouded' judgment of black people who, she argues, 'do not mind being poor' (Mathee, 2009: 283). Mister Fourcade teaches her that the biggest economic and political problem is that of black poverty, not white poverty (Mathee, 2009: 283), and that black people indeed do mind being poor. Because of his influential role throughout the novel, it is safe to assume that Mister Fourcade fulfils a fatherly role in Karoliena's life.

Although he is not a dominant or patriarchal father figure, the portrayal of Mister Fourcade as a voice of reason and moral guide to Karoliena results in the foregrounding of the male voice. Instead of the portrayal of a white woman's independent relationship with the nonhuman, and her situatedness in a wilderness milieu, it is suggested that Karoliena, as a fragile, bewildered and ill-informed female protagonist, needs a masculine voice of reason to guide her both into a relationship with the nonhuman, and out of the wilderness.

Similar to Mister Fourcade, but perhaps more dominant and patriarchal, is Johannes. Johannes acts as a catalyst urging Karoliena to escape from the (wild, dangerous) forest. Throughout the novel Johannes begs Karoliena to 'get out of the forest' because she does not 'belong [t]here' (Mathee, 2009: 118). Taking into account that Karoliena also returns to Johannes and accepts the role of Afrikaner *volksmoeder*, this foregrounding of the male voice leads to the interpretation that the female protagonist is always dependent on a male figure to guide her relationship with the nonhuman, whilst also saving her from crippling situations, like the wilderness' supposed inherent poverty.

Besides Johannes and Mister Fourcade, Abel Slinger, an indigenous Outeniqua man living in the forest, also aids Karoliena's relationship with the nonhuman and is described in terms of extreme racial stereotypes. As the last descendant of the ancient Outeniqua tribe of the Knysna forest, Abel is portrayed as having wisdom and insight comparable to that of a traditional healer. His supposed transcendental, harmonious relationship with the nonhuman is reflected when he asks a river permission to cross and in his prediction of drought and flood seasons. However, his relationship with the nonhuman is not at the forefront of *Dreamforest*, but rather his aid to Karoliena's relationship with the nonhuman. Although the historical accuracy of the human-nonhuman relationship between the Outeniqua tribe and the forest is not under dispute in this article, the way in which this relationship is portrayed in *Dreamforest*, is. The focus in Mathee's novel is on how Abel's wisdom and insight of the forest and nonhuman, is solely to aid Karoliena's search for identity. This is especially evident in Abel's aiding Karoliena's nonhuman becoming.

At first Karoliena morphs her body into a tree and becomes 'a human being concealed in a leafy refuge' (Mathee, 2009: 320) in which she, as 'human-tree', is 'part of the forest [and] inside the forest' (Mathee, 2009: 322). Her situatedness both in the forest and as part of the forest establishes a connection between humans and nonhumans both physically and relationally. After her return to the forest, Karoliena becomes an elephant by wearing the elephant shoes given to her by Abel Slinger. Whilst wearing the shoes, Karoliena 'felt as if the earth rose through the shoes and into her body' (Mathee, 2009: 504). Wylie (2018: 126) argues that elephants are often represented in literature as

(...) boundary-breakers, embodying a wildness that defies, and thereby critiques, the human propensity to improve such boundaries between geographical areas and species.

Karoliena's becoming-elephant signifies a similar break, especially a break in the boundary between humans and nonhumans. Her identity is now situated in connection to the nonhuman. She is a 'human-elephant' (Mathee, 2009: 506) who can assuredly state that she is 'Karoliena Kapp, an elephant cow who will never again be afraid of anything' (Mathee, 2009: 507). However, considering that Karoliena later returns to the town and becomes the embodiment of the *volksmoeder* identity, this becoming-animal and becoming-plant suggests that the indigenous community and the nonhuman is only ever an aid to the white Afrikaner female's search for identity.

In Helize van Vuuren's chapter 'The bushman in our consciousness' (2016: 111) she points out that the portrayal of 'bushmen' in Afrikaans literature is often a subject of guilt and fascination. She argues that white Afrikaans authors utilise the bushman figure to highlight 'the imminent destruction and sealed fate of his language and his culture' (2016: 111). It seems then that Afrikaans literature has a tradition wherein the characterisation of an indigenous community is reduced to that of an instrument in aid of Afrikaner culture and Afrikaans as language. A similar characterisation exists in *Dreamforest*. Abel becomes a metaphor for an idealised lifestyle and of a harmonious connection with the nonhuman. Abel and his wife, Bella, are left behind in the forest when the white forest community is forcibly removed to Karatara. On the one hand, this signifies the racial discrimination of the Union government attempting to secure white hegemonic rule in Africa, but it also suggests that the white Afrikaner can never enter into a deep (ever-lasting) connection with the nonhuman, whilst the indigenous community can. It is through this metaphor that Abel becomes an object of fascination, instead of a complex individual with a personal history and connection with the nonhuman. It is also through this representation that the subversion in *Dreamforest* of the notion that a human-nonhuman relationship is reserved for men and indigenous communities, is undone.

Helize van Vuuren (in Van Biljon and Van Vuuren, 2003: 2) argues that the descriptions of the forest in *Dreamforest* involve a sense of mystification and romanticising related to magical realism. Whilst the use of magical realism to describe the forest and human-nonhuman relationships does pose the threat of an 'imperialist nostalgia' (Huggan, 2004: 704),¹² the portrayal of complex interspecial relationships and the acknowledgement of colonialism's impact on the nonhuman and on its relationship to humans in the novel challenges a simplified notion of human-nonhuman relationships. In *Dreamforest* the use of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, the depiction of the (nonhuman) animal gaze and a portrayal of becoming (nonhuman) animal and plant is initially interpreted as a strategy to establish an 'imaginative identification' (Wylie, 2018: 7) with nonhumans in readers.

Wylie (2018: 7) argues that the use of metaphors and other imagery, like the animal gaze and nonhuman becoming, enhances the emotional impact a text has on readers. By using these narrative strategies, the similarities between humans and nonhumans are highlighted. The mystification in *Dreamforest* initially achieves the same outcome — highlighting the similarities, and therefore establishing a connection between humans and nonhumans.

Whereas the aspects of magical realism are first used in the novel to describe the forest and expand the reader's imagination in terms of the nonhuman, in effect reconceptualising 'place', problematising the anthropocentric construct and reimagining the place of the human in nature, the magical realism used to describe Abel perpetuates the idea that only a primitive community can have a harmonious relationship with the nonhuman. It is also suggested that this connection between an indigenous man and the nonhuman can only ever serve the white Afrikaner female's search for identity. So too the foregrounding of the male voice, presented in this novel in the characters Mister Fourcade, Johannes and Abel, reinforces the idea that the wilderness is a masculine space which the white Afrikaner female can only access with the help of a guiding male voice.

CONCLUSION

It can be argued that the Dalene Matthee's last forest novel initially portrays a human-nonhuman relationship through the use of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, the depiction of nonhuman becoming, and the portrayal of the animal gaze. However, Karoliena's acceptance of the *volksmoeder* identity and her rejection of the forest do not allow the novel to challenge continuing imperialist modes of social and environmental dominance. Instead, her relationship with the nonhuman ends after her acceptance of the Afrikaner nationalism's *volksmoeder* identity. Through the centring of a male voice and the depiction of Abel Slinger, *Dreamforest* not only supports Afrikaner nationalist ideals, but suggests that a connection with the nonhuman is solely a masculine practice reserved primarily for (stereotyped) indigenous communities. Utilising Willoughby-Herard's work (2007; 2010; 2015) in

¹² Huggan (2004: 704) is referring here to the notion that the so-called 'wilderness' is an uninhabited space with no history or human-nonhuman relationship prior to colonisation. An imperialist nostalgia is 'a closet ideology the practitioners of which are given to mourn what they themselves have helped destroy'.

whiteness studies, I argued that the forest and the nonhuman portrayed in *Dreamforest* is solely reserved for the spiritual healing of white Afrikaners. Karoliëna's return to Johannes and her rejection of the forest therefore undoes the novel's own critique of Afrikaner nationalist narratives, as well as the novel's reimagination of essentialist binary classifications like 'human', 'nonhuman', 'nature' and 'wilderness'.

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‘Troubling’ Politics of Research on Young Sexual Practices in South African Contexts

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I reflect on the last few decades of research on young sexual practices in the post-apartheid context of South Africa. I am concerned here to critically interrogate this body of work and its political effects, much of it spurred on by a global industry of reproductive health and HIV that has proliferated in the context of the HIV pandemic and high rates of gender-based violence. Drawing on a postcolonial, transnational feminist lens the paper surfaces the problematic discourses that have been reproduced and reinscribed through this research and related policy and practice, foregrounding the way in which racist, classist, heteronormative and ageist discourses, which also serve to privilege global Northern, adultist and middle class, white moralities and normativities, have been bolstered. Arguing that these problematic politics of mainstream sexualities research are linked to the continued dominance of patriarchal, colonial logics of knowledge which are based on extractivism, representation and surveillance, the article concludes with some thoughts and possibilities for reimagining future scholarship on intersectional, transnational gender and sexual justice.

Keywords: young people, sexualities, South Africa, postcolonial transnational feminist critique

INTRODUCTION

This article draws on the now large body of work on sexual practices, particularly as directed at young people in the post-apartheid South African context. My primary project here is to think critically about the ideological and political impact of such research. I provide a critique of this body of work to argue how much of this body of work has served to reiterate and reinstate lines of power, authority and privilege endemic in colonialist, patriarchal scholarly traditions, while bolstering the racist, heteronormative, and other epistemological violences feminist and critical scholars had hoped to challenge. I read this research critically towards highlighting what we may learn about doing critical transnational, decolonial feminist research through an interrogation of contemporary research on young sexual practices in South Africa.

The last quarter of a century of research in South African (and arguably many global Southern) contexts speaks powerfully to transnational research, highlighting in particular the dangers and pitfalls of applying such gender research across diverse contexts in the light of continuing inequalities, at multiple levels, between different parts of the world (see also Hearn, Ratele and Shefer, 2017; Ishengoma, 2016; Shefer, Hearn and Ratele, 2015). This paper attempts to unpack the embeddedness of much of the research on young sexualities in South Africa in an epistemologically violent politics of knowledge. The article concludes by contributing some thoughts towards alternative possibilities for a critical feminist engagement, across diverse geopolitical contexts, that foregrounds a politics of reflexivity, care and relationality, drawing particular inspiration from the knowledges that emerge from the fruitful entanglements of decolonial, feminist and queer art, activism and scholarship.

This article begins by overviewing the terrain of the critique, which speaks also to a larger concern about injustices embedded in knowledge production and the university and how this has been further entrenched in contemporary neoliberal marketisation imperatives. I will draw primarily on South African experiences and contexts to employ transnational intersectional arguments about how dominant scholarship on young sexualities remains underpinned by and reproduces existing hegemonies of intersectional gender inequalities and divides which are located within colonial and patriarchal orthodoxies of scholarly epistemology, ontology and methodology. It is notable in this respect that feminist and decolonial scholarship have been engaged in a long and

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arduous project directed at dismantling hegemonic practices in higher education that continues to operate through patriarchal and colonial logics.

In South Africa, there has been an overlapping lengthy project to transform higher education which has been shaped by the hegemonies of Eurocentric traditions that are linked with centuries of settler colonisation and apartheid's system of racist, segregated, and unequal educational institutions. Recent years - following student activism spurred by the #fallist movements - have seen an accelerated focus and a mobilisation of decolonial and intersectional emphases in addressing social justice in higher education (see for example, Gouws, 2017; Hussen, 2018; Xaba, 2017). As a result of these shifts, those involved in local feminist scholarship in global contexts have stepped up their engagement with re-thinking and re-interpreting normative practices of research and pedagogy in the academy. Such efforts have frequently been located in interdisciplinary and transnational collaborations, and in recent years have seen a particular emphasis on collaborations across the terrains of scholarship, activism and art as one key component of re-making more just, equal and ethical practices in higher education (for example, Boonzaier and Van Niekerk, 2019; Braidotti, Bozalek, Shefer and Zembylas, 2018; Shefer, Hearn, Ratele and Boonzaier, 2018). This paper is located within this context of a proliferation of experimentation and creativity in the South African context of public and institutionalised education, with a particular focus on scholarship that is directed at gender and sexual justice. While specifically drawing on local experiences in South Africa, I hope to contribute to the larger international dialogue that is concerned with the critique of dominant global and local research that disturbs (post)colonial and current neoliberal capitalist, extractive, and controlling logics.

The paper thus draws on South African experiences and contexts to employ transnational intersectional arguments about how our work remains underpinned and continually reproduces existing hegemonies of intersectional gender inequalities and divides that are located within the colonial and patriarchal orthodoxies of scholarly epistemology, ontology and methodology. Arguing for the imperative of collaborations which challenge the Cartesian divide and associated binarisms inherent in the hegemonic institutionalised practices of patriarchal and colonial scholarship, the article then shares some of the recent examples of work in and outside the academy which can arguably contribute to rethinking feminist, queer and decolonial scholarship on sexualities and gender in general. Located in South Africa, the critiques raised are entangled within global power relations as will be illustrated, and raise issues that are central to a larger, collective decolonial intersectional feminist project that attempts to resist repeating the violences of normative research practices.

CONTEXTUALISING RESEARCH ON YOUNG SEXUALITIES IN SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Research on young sexualities in South Africa, as in many global Southern contexts, has over the last few decades proliferated within the context of the international emphases on HIV and gender-based violence. Much of this research, apparently directed at well-meaning global justice and public health goals, has tended to be located within a particular global politics and existing inequalities, often uncritically implicated in problematic political and ideological impact, both within the methodologies employed and in how such research is taken up in the public imaginary and policy and practice. Arguably, the bulk of this research and the policies and practices it fuels, has resulted in unintended consequences and practices that have often been implicated in the normative binarisms and the consequent violences it has intended to challenge. I take up these problematic consequences to argue that the effect of such research is largely a result of the hegemonic ontologies and epistemologies that underpin dominant research practices. I attempt to illustrate also how transnational (and transethnic/class/raced within particular nation-states) practices of research, and the politics of research and global relations of power and privilege that they are located in, are deeply co-implicated. I argue that it is not only a lack of rigorous attention and reflexivity but importantly also the neglect of careful and caring relational ontologies (for example, Tronto, 1993, 2013; Barad, 2007), that undermines any efforts to achieve an ethical, just, and non-representational transnational intersectional feminist research praxis.

GLOBAL SURVEILLANCE: NORTHERN INNOCENCE, PRIVILEGE AND PATRONAGE

Since the early 1990s, as South Africa has emerged out of apartheid, culminating in the new democracy of 1994, HIV as a global and local challenge became a national imperative together with the project of building a democratic state. Consequently, a large amount of international focus and funds were directed at southern Africa and other global southern contexts. In South Africa, the wave of funding and invitations for collaborative research was not unwelcomed, especially in the aftermath of the apartheid era isolation. As a consequence, a wide range of research was initiated that focused on sexual practices in South Africa, primarily through the lens of HIV and gender-based

violence (Vetten, 2018). Given that the epidemic was identified at this point as primarily heterosexual with its highest rates of infection among young people, much of the emphasis was on young people in poor communities and other 'risk groups' such as sex workers and migrant labourers (see for examples, Campbell, 2000; Dunkle, et al., 2007; Varga, 1997). A wide range of research projects, often fully or part-funded from North American or European money, were initiated by northern scholars, frequently drawing on the labour of local South African scholars and fieldworkers.

A number of key problematics are evident within this form of transnational collaboration. For one, it repeats a colonial model of existing privilege, power and resources being mobilised, underpinned by, and resulting in the promotion and reproduction of this very inequality. Thus, the moment of a northern scholar engaging in southern research can represent and reinsert northern privilege and power, building up and re-reifying privileged geopolitical knowledges at both an individual career level and also at a more symbolic level, when considering whose knowledge counts. While it can be argued that some South African scholars have benefitted by this focus and the influx of foreign funding to support such research, many northern scholars have also enhanced their careers through the representation of southern knowledge, reproducing a colonial model of the global south as 'fieldwork' and the global north as 'academic authority'.

Arguably, a form of global surveillance is also enmeshed in such scholarship and its subsequent implementation in policy and practice. Much of the scholarship was and continues to be located in the colonial era habits of extraction that speak to a regulation of the majority by those locating spaces of power and privilege, resulting in the deployment of authoritative knowledge to bolster regulatory and policing frameworks in South Africa. Such research has therefore been deployed in the service of the reproduction of global northern, western privileging, superiority and 'innocence' (Wekker, 2016). In this light it becomes evident that South African research on young people's sexualities bolsters a transnational global 'civilising' project characterised by (post)colonial exploitative relations between resourced and subjugated parts of the world. The intense focus on poor, Black and young South Africans and the knee-jerk association of these subjects with violence and patriarchy, fuels a narrative in which sexual violence, patriarchy and heteronormativity are seemingly exported out of the 'civilised', 'gender just' countries; this is what Grewal (2013) calls 'outsourcing' patriarchy, transposing it to those historically already subjugated and othered. Such discursive practices in the global and local imaginary is symbolic fodder for racist, colonial tropes of African sexualities that have also been unpacked in the analyses of local and global responses to HIV/AIDS and African sexualities in general (for example, Jungar and Oinas, 2004; Lewis, 2011; Patton, 1997). Further, the international concerns related to homophobic violence and 'hate crimes', that have also been prominent in sociological research, and the public and popular gaze on South Africa, are threaded through with homonationalist (Puar, 2007), and femonationalist (Farris, 2017) discourses. This interrogative surveillance similarly extends the 'civilised' and authoritative position of white, western, northern societies (for examples, Shefer, Hearn and Ratele, 2015; Jungar and Peltonen, 2015). Critical feminist postcolonial scholars have illustrated how such dynamics operate also within global northern countries whose scopophilia is redirected to the migrants, ethnic minorities and the poor and marginal within their own 'Dark Continent' - versus the hegemonic culture (for examples, Farahani and Thapar-Björkert, 2019; Jungar and Peltonen, 2016; Keskinen, 2009, 2012, 2014; Munt, 2007; Peltonen and Jungar, 2018). Thus, research on gender inequality and violence, as with popular and public representations of this, may be drawn on to bolster notions of global northern, western and white civility, advancement and supremacy, while 'othering' patriarchy and gender violences to those nations and communities already in subjugated geopolitical and ideological locations. HIV and the surveillance of sexualities in global Southern contexts has thus bolstered the colonial 'othering' and denigrating tropes of Black bodies and sexualities, indeed conflating HIV, gender and sexual injustice, and violence and illness with Black bodies (Flint and Hewitt, 2015; Settler and Engh, 2015).

At a global level, such research has fuelled the global imaginary of African violence, patriarchy and homophobia whilst casting those in more privileged nation-states as the civilising benefactors who face no troubles or injustices of their own, but are generously directing their efforts at the troubled 'others' who do face these problems. While clearly much of this emphasis is well-meaning, it also speaks to what Joan Tronto (1993; 2013) has called 'privileged irresponsibility' in which those in privileged, majority or dominant (geo)political positions fail to acknowledge their own exercise of power, thus maintaining their taken for granted positions of privilege, even when supposedly engaging in practices of care, such as researching towards gender justice. In the same way as Tronto argues that the burden of care globally falls on those who locally and globally subjugated at political, material and ideological levels, so too in the research terrain, in which privileged researchers engage a 'pass out', by not acknowledging how the 'troubles' of the global south are entangled with the privileges of the global north. Similarly, the individual careers of those in privileged positions are shaped by a 'privileged irresponsibility' which can be built into our very practices of scholarship. So, those in privileged positions, receive a 'pass out' of responsibility, rationalising their privilege through the narrative that those in less privileged positions will benefit by default from their position of privilege, using similar logic to the 'trickle down' theory of capitalism. Tronto (2013) elaborates how this privileged

irresponsibility can allow those already benefiting from their privileged geolocation in unequal power relations, whether locally or globally, to remain ignorant of their own role in maintaining and reproducing systems of inequality. Further, those 'who are privileged will continue to rationalise their position by maintaining that everybody is benefiting from it; wives benefit from their husband's being the primary breadwinners, domestic workers benefit from receiving a salary, no matter how paltry it is and so on' (Zembylas, Bozalek and Shefer, 2015: p. 207).

Researchers, always already privileged by their geopolitical, or class, or raced, or gendered location, can rationalise their work through a narrative that frequently reinforces the very othering they hope to challenge. This is of course not a new argument; now over 25 years ago Spivak's (1994: 93) ground-breaking work in which her famous remark about 'white men saving brown women from brown men' being key to colonial power dynamics, remains salient in the nuances of contemporary research conducted at transnational and transcultural local levels directed at HIV and young people's sexualities. In particular, these continued relations of patronage, that Tronto argues are a key component of privileged irresponsibility, mask the unequal power and continued violent appropriations of the lives and resources of peoples and parts of the world that remain subjugated and denigrated. Such practices of othering and denigration of certain parts and peoples of the world and certain are seldom interrogated, especially as they are repeated in scholarship that attempts to make a difference. An ethics of relationality, which acknowledges the entanglements of peoples and places, the entanglements of the privileges of some and the subjugation and marginalisation of others, is deeply lacking in dominant practices of research which remain oblivious to the damages they do and the symbolic (and actual, in some cases) violence that is set in motion.

THE REPRODUCTION OF RACED, CLASSED HETERONORMATIVITY AND NORMATIVE MORALITIES

A key concern in the research which reflects the lack of a critical feminist engagement in relation to sexualities research, is the realisation of the ways in which mainstream research on gender and sexuality in South Africa has served to reinstate stereotypic gender and sexual binaries. The reproduction of such normative discourses is also entangled within transnational and local raced and classed othering practices. Researchers have illustrated the way in which intersectional gender binarisms are reflected in the literature and the policies and practices which they serve, so that femininity, in particular poor, black, African young femininity is constructed as always vulnerable and violable (Boonzaier, 2017; Boonzaier and Kessi, 2018; Shefer, 2016, 2018a) and masculinity, particularly poor, black, African, young masculinity as inherently predatory and violating (Anderson, 2010; Bhana and Pattman, 2009; Pattman, 2007; Ratele, 2014).

For many local feminist scholars and activists, the imperative to address HIV was viewed as a potentially positive momentum intended to bring the feminist critique of heterosexuality to a more mainstream public forum. Thus, the widespread acknowledgement that the intersectional gendered dynamic of HIV infection of South Africa, identified as primarily heterosexual in these contexts, had to be key to both prevention and mitigation efforts, and was viewed as an opportunity to challenge normative gender and sexual practices and the violences that these engender. It has however becoming increasingly evident that, on the contrary, such research may be contributing to re-entrenching dominant discourses around gender and sexuality, deployed rather towards the preservation of binarisms of gender and heteronormativity within public terrains, such as sexuality education at school or in public advocacy directed at challenging HIV and/or gender inequalities (see for example, Shefer, 2016; Bhana, 2016). Research on young people's sexualities, and related policy and practice has tended to not only assume, but in many cases actively reinforce gender binarisms, and heteronormative gender performances in sexual intimacies. It has been widely argued that international research, particularly that based on the experiences of global southern countries, has tended to set up a deterministic picture of passive, submissive femininity vulnerable to an equally stereotyped hypersexual, macho masculinity (for examples, Bakare-Yusuf, 2003; Tamale, 2011). A growing body of work in local South African contexts has similarly raised such concerns about current South African research on young sexualities (for examples, Bhana and Anderson, 2013; Boonzaier and Kessi, 2018; Shefer, 2016).

Enmeshed in these reiterations of gender binarisms embedded in such research and its related practices, is the presentation of women as asexual victims to male hypersexual desires. African feminist researchers, such as McFadden (1992; 2003), have pointed out how HIV/AIDS responses in Africa have served to constrain further the spaces for women's sexual agency and a positive discourse on women's desire and pleasure. Rather, a punitive voice on young people's sexuality has been further entrenched through HIV prevention methods particularly evident in current sexuality education at school, where a gender binary and heteronormative approach to the teaching of HIV/AIDS and sexuality in general has been well documented (Macleod, 2009; Ngabaza and Shefer, 2019; Shefer, Macleod and Baxen, 2015; Bhana, Crewe and Aggleton, 2019). While sexuality education has been promoted as a way of challenging gender and sexual injustice in democratic South Africa, research has shown normative gender and sexual practices are reinscribed in the curriculum (Francis, 2017; Bhana, 2016; Bhana, Crewe

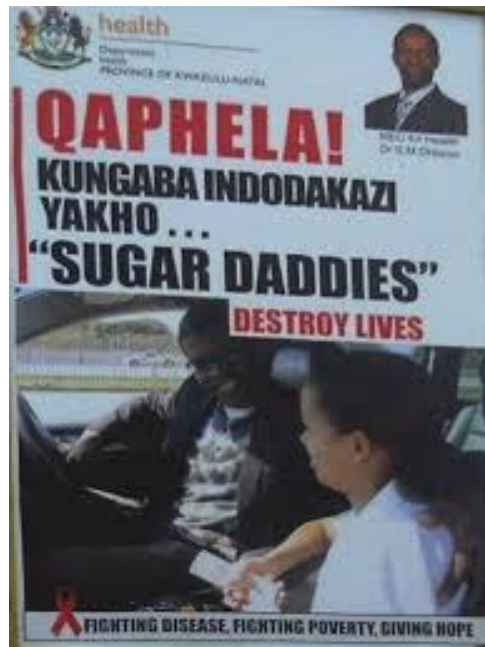


Figure 1. An example of raced and gendered stereotypes in HIV public education, Photo credit: unknown.

and Aggleton, 2019). Similarly, a growing body of research on sexuality education in South African schools, has increasingly illuminated the way in which HIV and GBV have been deployed towards governmentality over young people with respect gender, sexuality and dominant moralities (arguably shaped by northern, western, middle class framings) (for examples, Bhana, Crewe and Aggleton, 2019; Shefer, Macleod and Baxen, 2015). The reproduction and rationalisation of gender binarisms are shown to be reinforced through the dominant narrative of danger, disease and damage, in which young women in particular are set up as solely responsible for their own and their male partners' well-being (Macleod, Moodley and Saville-Young, 2015; Ngabaza, Shefer and Macleod, 2016), and for ensuring the performance of 'respectable femininity' (Van Wyk, 2015).

Notwithstanding the critique of the stereotypic picture of women as victims, the opposite research inclination is equally a problem. Feminist scholars have interrogated the attempts at flagging women as agentic, no matter their material and discursive subjugations; this binarism of agency versus victimhood continues to repeat transnational dynamics of patronage and euro-centricity, and dominant group privilege (Campbell and Mannell, 2016; Hemmings and Kabesh, 2013; Mahmood, 2001). Jungar and Oinas (2011: 255), unpack very carefully how both the impetus to assert women's agency or frame them as victims, similarly re-inscribes the privilege and authority of the researcher who has the power to name.

Heteronormativity and normative heterosexual family moralities have also insidiously driven key projects within contemporary public health research and educational interventions which are directed at young people. Much of the research and practice directed at young people has been shown to be underpinned by and focused on re-animating heterosexual normativity. For example, research tends to focus on heterosexual gender binary practices without explicitly acknowledging this, thus erasing diversity in sexual and gender desires and practices. The dominance of heteronormative and homophobic discourse and practices in school and higher educational contexts has been documented by local researchers (Francis, 2017; Bhana, 2014; Msibi, 2012). Such discourses seem ever-present in reports on how HIV and sexuality education are 'taught', threading in and through the assumption of heteronormativity, and idealised through the representation of heterosexual coupling and normative nuclear family formation as being the only imaginable sexual and intimacy outcome for young people.

As mentioned, gender stereotypes in the literature and their concomitant public effects are also typically enmeshed within racist and classist discourses, which gesture too to further challenges for transnational feminist projects. A popular media campaign, as evidenced in [Figure 1](#)¹, cautioned against transactional sex. Diverse versions of this message were posted in public spaces on large billboards for some years in the 2000s as part of the larger HIV/AIDS mass educational campaign. These provide an example of the way in which dominant discourses on gender, race, class and age are entangled with such educational interventions (see Brouard and Crewe, 2013; Shefer and Strebel, 2013).

¹ A reproduction of one example of these billboards is available online at <http://www.kznhealth.gov.za/sugardaddy.htm>. (Accessed 29 January 2021). For further examples of these images see <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/uploads/pageContent/4705/Shefer.pdf> for further examples, (Accessed 29 January 2021).

This government poster campaign and the general publicity around transactional sexual relationships warn young poor women against relationships with older, better-resourced men through images that reproduce intersectional raced and gendered stereotypes. Notably, billboards were only located in poor Black communities and portrayed a young, poor, Black woman in a markedly submissive, vulnerable pose in relation to a well-dressed, macho, predatory, older Black man. Notwithstanding the critical research towards a more nuanced picture of materiality and sexual intimacy in South African contexts (Hunter, 2010; Bhana and Pattman, 2009; Leclerc-Madlala, 2004), such public images reproduce stereotypical representations of femininity and female sexuality as submissive, passive and lacking in agency and of young (and older) men as inevitable perpetrators. Further, such images reiterate racist and classist tropes, and in particular the negative constructions of poor, Black men, assumed to be inherently violent and abusive, both in the research and in public and educational contexts (Bhana and Pattman, 2009; Pattman, 2007; Ratele, 2014).

One crude example of the impact of gender scholarship on this racist and sexist public imaginary was evident in the comments made following the publication of a research project in South Africa that found that one in three men admitted to rape (see Jewkes et al., 2010). Responses on a blog discussion linked to an international posting of this research project (Tay, 2010) illustrate the manipulative way in which the research findings were deployed towards racist and global 'othering' ends, both demonising Black South African men while also ridiculing feminist researchers:

You can always tell feminist statistics — they paint 'men' with a broad brush, but somehow never manage to get around to analyzing the racial makeup of the 'men' in question. One would think that would be an important piece of information for women who wanted to avoid being victimized, but apparently not.

Yeah, I got that too. Feminist statistics are often cooked to 'prove' pre-assumed conclusions. You wonder how many feminists supported the anti-apartheid movement. And now they can not face one of the outcomes of black majority rule. Perhaps they also can not face up to the reality that the best defense of women is with a white male patriarchal system. Like apartheid².

RETHINKING RESEARCH DIRECTED AT YOUNG PEOPLE'S SEXUALITIES

My project in this article was to unpack some of the challenges of contemporary research that is focused upon young sexual practices in South African contexts, and link this to a larger concern about challenging normative colonial and masculinist scholarly practices within the global practices of knowledge. I have attempted to expose some of the key problematic political effects of current emphases in research, in particular paying attention to how scholarship and the practices they inform have tended to reinstate and bolster gender binarisms, and be framed by racist, classist and ageist discourses, as well as to identify themes of geopolitical privilege in dominant nation-states and consequently identify patterns of global white, northern and western superiority in general. I have shown the troubling nature of transnational research on sexualities that may be implicated in the reproduction and reiteration of these very discourses and material inequalities that they aim to address.

Key to disrupting the problematic dynamics of current waves of research practice, such as that which takes place in schools and reappears in the public imaginary, demands of feminists a deeper engagement with reconceptualising academic 'business as usual'. I argue that this means developing a more cautious reflexivity about the politics of how we do our scholarship, and how it subsequently might or does get taken up in the public imaginary. This practice of conscious and cautious thoughtfulness means us going beyond reflexivity to engage with an ethics of care and relationality, so as to foreground, at all times, our entanglements with each other, across and beyond nation-states and indeed beyond the human. In our research this means seeking ever-inventive ways to disrupt the authority and the logic of surveillance and 'othering' that is built into the normative, colonial logics and practices of research.

In our research this would mean imagining, experimenting with and finding ways to do scholarly work that challenges the epistemic violence of the academy that scholarship on sexuality and gender has been shaped by, and motivate us instead to reflect 'on the ways in which this system can be interrupted through a self-conscious and deliberate set of pedagogies, methodologies, and tactics' (Nagar, 2013: 3). One terrain for such an interruption I

² These comments were made anonymously by readers of this news article posted in the *Los Angeles Times* (https://www.amren.com/news/2010/11/more_than_1_in/). (Accessed 11 May 2011). Notably the article is still available but the comments are no longer appended. I cite from the copy of a blog that I had made at the time. While now 10 years old, this example remains salient and the political impact of research, especially given continued and recalcifying global racism, is still hugely concerning.

argue, in line with Nagar and others, is the possibilities opened up through dialogue and collaborations between scholars, activists and artists. Thus, attempts to engage a collaboration across art, activism and scholarship seems a particularly fruitful avenue to pursue further, especially since such collaborations may serve to destabilise the dominant colonial, patriarchal logics of the academy in which bodies, affect and relationality are continuously denigrated and excluded in a long intellectual commitment to mind, rationality and individualism. In this respect scholars could work in dialogue with the proliferating mobilisations of alternative forms of scholarship and practice that cross and deconstruct boundaries of discipline, nation-state and mobilities.

The South African contemporary context of student and civil society activism that speaks to intersectional sexual and gender justice concerns within a decolonial project is a case in point which can offer a rich space for re-thinking feminist scholarship. As part of the student resistance to continued intersecting inequalities and exclusions which began in 2015 at South African universities, and constituted what has become known as the #fallist movement, decolonial, feminist and queer activism has been bolstered in this country (Gouws, 2016, 2017; Shefer, 2018a; Xaba, 2017). This has also been regenerative for global activism in higher education (for example, Omarjee, 2018). There are many current moments, actions and movements that represent this taking up of intersectional gender justice struggles in novel and creative ways, and that in particular draw on performative, artistic modes of engagement (Shefer, 2018b). Such engagements offer rich resources for a critical transnational intersectional feminist scholarship on gender and sexuality, as well as providing productive, inspiring and ethical ways of challenging hegemonic epistemic violent practices within higher education. Embodied, participatory and creative modalities in our pedagogical practices in the academy will also open up spaces for reimagining bodies, affect, materiality, in the clinical, cold and civilising academy where so many of us feel unsafe, non-belonging, excluded, and violated. They may also provide everyday utopian moments (Cooper, 2014) and everyday micro- and macro-resistances that can open the space for alternative imaginaries of intersectional gender and sexual justice and equality.

Such forms of scholarship that embrace and model the creative entanglements of art, activism and research can also transgress the normative logics of disembodied and dis-affected/ive scholarship in which the mind and rationality dominates. Through such embodied, affective ascholarly projects and situated knowledges - which resist extractivist methods in research - the foregrounding of a relational ontology, recognition, and an ethics of care, both materially and symbolically, is made possible. Thinking with activist-performance and performative-activism in our pedagogies and research, such as the activism and art of young South Africans in contemporary South Africa, can be a powerful way of transgressing and resisting the rigid normativities and symbolic violences of the academy, and colonial and patriarchal repetitions in our scholarship. Haraway (2016: 1) invites us to *not only* stay with the trouble, but to actively 'make trouble, to stir up a potent response to devastating events' while also creating safe spaces 'to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places'. Such an argument further speaks to the value of working and thinking with activism, performances, moments and spaces of creativity, agency and energy that can work with entangled 'troubles' and in doing so open up new imaginaries. Occasions that 'make trouble' such as the many current examples of inspiring, decolonial, feminist and queer art, performance and activism in current South Africa and further afield are rich resources in engaging 'new' tools for sexual and gender justice scholarship in transnational contexts. A critical transnational decolonial feminism that is concerned with engaging a different kind of scholarship that avoids the violences highlighted here in the area of young sexualities research has much to gain from making further collaborations with the rich archive of performative, artistic activism in South Africa. These should not be drawn on merely as 'data' to enhance individual careers in the neoliberal capitalist economy of higher education, but should be acknowledged as powerful and leading scholarship-activisms themselves, that speak to new imaginaries of gender and sexual justice. Such new epistemologies might constitute new critical tools for a transnational, intersectional feminist scholarship.

Embedded within rethinking our scholarship through relationality and an ethics of care is the importance of dislodging habits of colonial thinking and knowledge making—that feminists are *not* innocent of. Acknowledging that contemporary scholarship has been directed by what Queer Theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) has termed a *paranoid reading* which has privileged a particular kind of academic critique, frequently articulated as a masculinist engagement of seeking power, we must argue further for the importance of 'reparative readings' in rethinking of transnational feminist scholarship, in order to allow for the generation and acknowledgement of multiplicity, resistance, disruption of normative logics, and creativity. I have tried to show that much of the current research and practice has provided little space for acknowledging and/or studying resistances and counter-hegemonic practices in contemporary contexts, but rather has largely reproduced problematising and pathologising speculative lenses in which certain bodies, identities, practices and desires are under scrutiny and need to be controlled, regulated and/or erased. Sedgwick (2003) in her distinction between *paranoid* and *reparative* readings has argued that the dominance of deconstructive readings in critical scholarship may have silenced alternative readings. While Sedgwick (2003: 125) is not critical of paranoid readings, which she views as 'strong theory', she was concerned that the 'methodological centrality of suspicion to our current critical practice has involved a

concomitant privileging of the concept of paranoia' which 'systematically disallows any explicit recourse to reparative motives, no sooner to be articulated than subject to methodological uprooting' (Sedgwick, 2003: 144). Sedgwick's call for reparative readings is not by any means a call for an abandonment of critical or paranoid theory, but rather suggests a space for an appreciation of the motive of reparation in our work. While Sedgwick (2003: 150) does acknowledge the problematic 'vocabulary for articulating any reader's reparative motive toward a text or culture' which she claims has 'long been so sappy, anesthetising, defensive, anti-intellectual that it is no wonder few critics are willing to describe their acquaintance with such motives', she also flags the value of finding ways to attend to the 'reparative motives and positionalities' which 'undertakes a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks'.

In the academy, this would entail the necessity of finding ways to challenge the epistemic violence that scholarship on young sexualities and genders has been shaped by. Working across the Cartesian divide underpinning the (post)colonial, neoliberal academy (and larger public realms) in which body and affect have been othered and erased within normative practices of pedagogy and research, this article makes a case for the opening up of the possibilities offered by working across multiple locations of knowledge making that can resist the binarisms and their repetitive privileging of rationality over emotion/affect, the mind over embodied knowledges, intellectual over art and activist insights; research over pedagogy (amongst others.) It also means forging a disruption to the normative logic of everyday scholarship that is shaped by symbolic linearity and containment, enacted through a combative, individualist project of seeking power and authority in a brutally bounded terrain, what Kamler and Thompson (2006: 29) have called 'occupied territory ... with all the imminent danger that this metaphor implies—including possible ambushes, barbed wire fences, and unknown academics who patrol the boundaries of the already occupied territories'. Feminist scholars, notwithstanding their attempts at reflexivity, frequently repeat the very violences they seek to subvert, since we are all entangled in multiple and intersecting relations of power and privilege. I argue here for the importance of locating a critical transnational intersectional feminist project within the larger framework of an ethical, relational and reparative reconceptualisation of scholarship. It is increasingly imperative for a critical reflexivity to disturb what seems to be the inevitability of the co-option of our scholarship for oppressive and violent ends. At the same time, we need to continue working towards research and pedagogical practices that destabilise academic authority and its binary logics, and instead work with diverse knowledges that contribute to alternative and ethical imaginaries of intersectional, transnational feminist gender and sexual justice scholarship.

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The Implications of a Narrow Understanding of Gender-Based Violence

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ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence (GBV) has increasingly been recognised as a global issue. While initially focused primarily on men's violence against women (VAW), in response to extremely high rates of VAW globally, the definitions of GBV used by different governments and organisations have expanded to include violence against the LGBTQIA+ community, and sometimes violence against men. However, in practice, many organisations still apply narrow understandings of VAW. This article argues that the exclusive focus on VAW in GBV prevention efforts may in fact hinder their effectiveness, by excluding many groups who also experience GBV, often at higher rates than the cis-gendered women who are traditionally seen as its victims or survivors.¹ Thus, a narrow focus on VAW may result in the exclusion of violence against those in the LGBTQIA+ community from interventions, support, and legal and other protective mechanisms. Similarly, it may result in the exclusion of violence against and between men, despite the overwhelming societal heteropatriarchal pressure on them to enact and receive violence. With a particular focus on South Africa as a case study, this article posits that failing to address the full range of gendered violence may result in a failure to effectively address GBV at all.

Keywords: GBV, LGBTQIA+, masculinities, intersectional identities, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) is increasingly being recognised as a serious issue worldwide. As a result, a slew of legislation, policies, and intervention efforts have been implemented to try and address it. However, despite the development of increasingly inclusive definitions of GBV, this article argues that, in reality, the focus remains almost exclusively on men's violence against women (VAW) as the only recognised form of GBV.² South Africa is no exception. It is a country with relatively progressive and inclusive legislation: it has legalised gay and lesbian marriage, it allows transgender people to change their gender on their identity document, and it has a very broad and inclusive definition of rape and sexual violence, all of which will be discussed in more detail below. However, it is also a country with extremely high rates of all forms of violence, and particularly gender-based violence, as will also be outlined below. Thus, it is a context where efforts to effectively address all forms of GBV are arguably more urgent than others. However, the public discourse remains predominantly focused on VAW which, important though that is, excludes and others widespread forms of violence against minority communities.

The narrow focus on VAW in GBV intervention efforts results in the exclusion of violence against gender non-conforming (GNC) individuals, as well as others in the lesbian, gay, trans, queer, intersex, asexual (LGBTQIA+)

¹ There is some debate about the best term to use for those who have experienced GBV (see Thompson, 2000), with some preferring the term 'victim', others using 'survivor', and others perhaps preferring a different term altogether. There is insufficient space here to discuss the debate in detail, but I have attempted to use the term 'survivor' throughout, to highlight their agency in processing and managing their experience of violence. However, I acknowledge that this may not be applicable to all those who have experienced GBV.

² This article predominantly focuses on sexual violence and IPV when discussing GBV, largely because these are the forms of violence most commonly discussed in literature on the issue. However, the author acknowledges the very wide range of acts falling within this category of violence, as well as the lack of research and literature on such acts. These include verbal harassment, physical attacks by strangers, denial of access to health and education services (Dolan, 2014), legislated inequality, homelessness or being denied shelter (James et al., 2016), and lack of access to legal redress or justice (Crehan and McCleary-Sills, 2015).

community, and violence between men. A narrow application of the concept of GBV in prevention efforts may fail to address the full range of gendered violence, and therefore only be successful in preventing heteronormative and cis-gendered forms of GBV. This article argues that the applied definition of GBV should be expanded to be more inclusive, in order to effectively address the scourge of gendered violence in a matrix of gendered contexts, and gender inequality more broadly. It draws on existing literature to highlight the limitations of current understandings of GBV in practical interventions, as well as providing some examples of ways in which this can impact and harm groups in society in practice. The article begins with an overview of the development of increasingly inclusive definitions of GBV globally, before focusing in more depth on South Africa. The article then turns to the ways that intervention efforts apply the stated definitions of GBV, as well as outlining the implications that this may have in terms of efforts to end GBV.

DEFINITIONS

Initial policies to address GBV focused almost entirely on VAW, in order to highlight the likelihood of violence that many women and girls experience daily. Similarly, feminists and gender activists have long focused on VAW, to emphasise that it is specifically targeted at women, because they are women living in gender-unequal societies. The fact of women working, wearing short skirts, drinking alcohol, or being out of the home unsupervised is not what causes the violence, as suggested by recalcitrant rape myths. Rather, women's position in society, notwithstanding complex intersections with other forms of inequality, is what makes them more vulnerable to certain forms of violence, and is therefore a systemic issue which needs to be addressed at a systemic level, rather than suggesting that individual women need to simply change their behaviour in order to prevent violence. There are therefore strong reasons for organisations to focus on VAW as a priority.

While the original text of CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women) did not specifically mention GBV, the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation 19 (1992) defined GBV as 'violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately' (para. 6). This was underlined in General Recommendation 35 (2017), which used the term 'gender-based violence against women' throughout. Similarly, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (known as the Istanbul Convention, which came into force in 2014), and highlighted by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) as 'the benchmark for international legislation on tackling gender-based violence', focuses on 'gender-based violence against women' (EIGE, n.d.).

Some organisations specifically state that they use GBV and VAW interchangeably because the majority of victims are women and girls (EIGE, n.d.; Dolan, 2014). Many highlight the fact that gender inequality is so pervasive worldwide that women in all countries experience discrimination and violence because of their gender, and thus make up the majority of the survivors of GBV (IASC, 2015). It is true that women and girls bear a heavy burden of violence. Globally, it is estimated that 35% of women have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives (WHO, 2013). Along with this, more than a third of the women intentionally killed in 2017 were killed by their current or former intimate partner (UNODC, 2019).

However, increasingly there have been moves to broaden the definition of GBV to include all those who experience violence based on their gender. For example, in their fact sheet on homophobic and transphobic violence, the United Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR) notes that, '[a]ttacks on people because of their sexual orientation or gender identity are often driven by a desire to punish those seen as defying gender norms and are considered a form of gender-based violence' (n.d.: 1). Similarly, the Caribbean and Vulnerable Communities Coalition (CVC) and UNWomen note, 'GBV usually occurs when one does not meet stereotypical gender expectations, as well as when one is in a relationship with uneven power dynamics' (2016: 6-7). Further, 'gender based violence is rooted in structural inequalities based on gender norms that value men over women, masculinity over femininity, and heterosexuality over homosexuality and cisgender people over trans people' (2016: 7).

According to UNWomen (2013), the definition of GBV that is currently most commonly referenced in humanitarian settings is that adopted by the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) GBV Guidelines, which defines GBV as 'an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females' (IASC, 2015). This definition therefore includes violence against GNC individuals, as well as others in the LGBTQIA+ community, and violence between and against men and boys which is based on societal expectations of masculinities which encourage or enable violence by and against men. Organisational definitions of GBV have therefore become relatively more inclusive over time. The following section focuses on the situation in South Africa.

SOUTH AFRICA AND GBV

South Africa is a country which is heavily impacted by VAW, and by GBV more broadly. Based on statistics from previous years, more than 50 000 women are likely to be raped in the country this year (UNODC, n.d.), and a woman will be killed by her intimate partner every six hours, the highest rate ever recorded in the world (Mathews et al., 2004). In 2012, GenderLinks and the Medical Research Council (two South African NGOs) conducted a survey on the prevalence of VAW in four provinces (Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Limpopo). Between one third and three quarters of women in all four provinces reported experiencing some form of violence at least once in their lifetime, with Limpopo (77%) reporting the highest rates, followed by 51% in Gauteng, 45% in the Western Cape, and 36% in KwaZulu-Natal. In addition to this, men were asked whether they had ever committed some form of VAW. The numbers ranged from 35% in the Western Cape, to 41% in KwaZulu-Natal, 48% in Limpopo, and as high as 78% in Gauteng. As noted by the authors (2012: 6), the study ‘confirms the disturbingly high prevalence of violence against women in South Africa’. An earlier study by Jewkes et al. (2009) found that 27.6% of South African men reported having raped a woman, and of those, 46.3% had raped more than once.

Certainly, the country’s history, and current postcolonial and post-apartheid context play a role in these extremely high rates of violence (Breckenridge, 1998; Anderson, 1999/2000). Numerous authors have highlighted how the system of apartheid³ may have normalised extreme levels of violence (Morrell, 1998; Hamber, 2000). Along with this, both the apartheid state and the liberation groups struggling against apartheid were often characterised by gender inequality and violence, with little effort being made to achieve gender equality, as ‘gender was relatively unimportant in the context of race oppression’ (Morrell et al., 2012: 19). Potentially as a result of this, numerous writers have noted that South Africa displays a rape culture (Gqola, 2015), which normalises, condones, excuses, encourages or ignores rape (Flintoff, 2001), and which facilitates ‘continued tolerance of aggression toward women, and thus the occurrence of sexual violence’ (Aosved and Long, 2006: 481). Thus, South Africa is a context where it is arguably of even greater importance to address GBV as effectively as possible, given the extremely heavy burden that it places on the country.

Given this, it is perhaps surprising that South Africa’s legislation around GBV is relatively progressive and encompassing. For example, the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act declared that all forms of sexual penetration without consent, irrespective of gender, are considered rape; and the country officially recognised rape within a marriage as a crime in 1993. Along with this, the Domestic Violence Act includes same-sex couples under their definition of a domestic relationship. Despite this, official policy documents in the country have still tended to conflate VAW with GBV, such as in the White Paper on Safety and Security (2016), which only mentions GBV under the heading of ‘Violence Against Women’. Along with this, the South African government’s response to GBV has typically fallen under the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, rather than the Department of Justice, implying a narrower focus on VAW, rather than GBV more broadly. However, a recent draft of the National Strategic Plan (NSP) on GBV and Femicide advocates for a broader and more inclusive definition of GBV, which is worth quoting at length:

Current rhetoric around GBV is mostly focused on violence experienced by ciswomxn (womxn whose gender identity and sex at birth matches). LGBTQIA++ individuals may also experience GBV, particularly in contexts when this violence is targeted at someone on the basis of their gender identity or sexual orientation or being gender non-conforming and/or not practicing heterosexuality. Violence may also be used to feminize men, or undermine their masculinity, ensuring that they are not exempt from some forms of GBV (2019: 13).

The government’s development of an NSP for GBV was partly in response to consistent pressure from the Stop Gender Violence Campaign.⁴ The campaign published their own draft NSP in 2014, and in a 2017 policy brief, their first listed strategic priority was to expand the definition of GBV, noting that it should include all forms of harm perpetrated against ‘women, girls, men, boys, LGBTI person and other vulnerable groups (such as sex workers, refugees, prisoners, and HIV-positive people)’ (2017: 2). Thus, South African legislation and civil society policies are relatively broad and inclusive in their definition of GBV.

³ Apartheid was the racially discriminatory system in South Africa which was legally enforced from 1948 until the early 1990s. The population was divided into four racial groups (white, black, Indian, and ‘coloured’), and given separate education, employment, public amenities, living areas, and civil and human rights, with white people prioritised.

⁴ The Stop Gender Violence Campaign is made up of a group of South African civil society organisations which campaigned over a number of years to pressure the SA government to adopt an NSP to address GBV. For more information, see NSPGVB Campaign on Facebook.

APPLICATION

Despite increasing inclusivity in governmental and organisational definitions of GBV, in practice GBV is still mostly taken to mean solely VAW, and specifically sexual and domestic violence against women. This may mean that many of the interventions and protections designed to address and prevent GBV and provide support to survivors may be exclusionary. The first way this could arise is in legal terms, where the definitions that countries use of gender, sexual violence, and rape will impact on what acts are criminalised, and what legal protection is available. For example, while globally there has been a gradual broadening of rape definitions to use more gender-neutral terms, some countries maintain predominantly heteronormative definitions. Along with this, numerous countries still criminalise same-sex relationships and intercourse. On the African continent, the majority of countries criminalise same-sex sexual activity, often imposing prison terms, fines, or even the death penalty (such as in Nigeria, Mauritania, and Somalia), meaning that a survivor of same-sex rape will not be able to report it for fear that they will be arrested, imprisoned or even killed themselves (Kiss et al., 2020: 12). These cases would therefore be excluded from both local and global GBV statistics. Similarly, if countries do not recognise transgender persons' identities, or even criminalise them, then they will feel unable to report GBV, as they may face legal repercussions or even violence from the police (James et al., 2016).

Along with this, organisations working on GBV may still in practice focus on VAW, despite their own commitment to a broader definition of GBV. For example, one South African NGO (Sonke Gender Justice), which was one of the initial members in the Stop Gender Violence Campaign, and which works extensively with men to prevent GBV, notes on their website the activities undertaken by the Campaign. A primary action was a postcard campaign 'with individualised personal stories of women affected by GBV, which are posted to the Minister of Women' (Sonke Gender Justice, n.d.). Despite the campaign's stated strategic priority of expanding the definition of GBV, there are no corresponding postcard campaigns for LGBTQIA+ survivors, or for male survivors.

The narrow working definition of GBV also limits access to support and protection for survivors who do not fit the 'men's-violence-against-women' definition. For example, a common means to provide support to survivors of domestic violence are residential shelters (Ellsberg et al., 2015). Because of the above-mentioned high rates of IPV against women by men, many residential shelters are women-only, meaning that a male perpetrator will not be able to enter the shelter, and female survivors have some semblance of safety. However, this can exclude male survivors of IPV, for whom there are substantially fewer shelters available. Similarly, shelters may well exclude trans women, especially in countries where trans rights and identities are not recognised. Along with this, such shelters will be less helpful for survivors of female violence, such as women in abusive same-sex relationships, as their female abuser will also be able to enter the shelter (Naidu and Mkhize, 2005; Brown and Herman, 2015).

Focusing exclusively on VAW also means that many interventions intended to prevent and reduce GBV may exclude or ignore violence against the LGBTQIA+ community, and violence against men. Thus, even if such interventions are able to limit some specific forms of VAW, they may not succeed in addressing GBV and gender inequality more broadly. For example, masculinities-focused interventions are increasingly being implemented as a form of GBV prevention in numerous sites around the world, including in South Africa. Such programmes work predominantly with men, acknowledging that the vast majority of violent crime and GBV is perpetrated by men. As Jewkes, Flood and Lang note, these interventions are 'motivated by a desire to address the role of men in violence perpetration, and recognition that masculinity and gender-related social norms are implicated in violence' (2015:1580). These have shown some promise, with participants self-reporting improvements in relationships with partners and children, their use of violence, and safe sex practices (Pulerwitz et al., 2004; Bhandari, 2008; Traves-Kagan et al., 2020).

However, studies have shown that the implementing organisations generally maintain a narrow focus on VAW, rather than GBV more broadly. For example, Sonke Gender Justice, a South African NGO mentioned in the discussion of the Stop Gender Violence Campaign above, implements masculinities-focused interventions, which have been studied and evaluated by numerous authors, noted in this paragraph. Despite the organisation's stated broader definition of GBV, studies found that the interventions maintained a narrower VAW focus, with the result that participants are less likely to view violence against the LGBTQIA+ community as a form of GBV (Viitanen and Colvin, 2015; Graaff and Heinecken, 2017), and consequently do not necessarily see it as problematic. Similarly, there is little attention paid to violence against men, despite recognition within the interventions that men's use of violence is heavily gendered, and often expected of them because of dominant 'toxic' masculinities in their communities (Fleming et al. 2015). This is despite the fact that, 'there is substantial evidence that perpetrators of one type of physical violence are more likely to perpetrate other types of violence' (Fleming et al. 2015: 251). Thus, focusing on only one form of violence may result in interventions that do not effectively address any forms of GBV. This seems to be borne out by numerous recent studies. For example, Gibbs et al. (2020: 548) found that such interventions may result in only small positive changes in men's use of violence, while Christofides et al.

(2020) and Traves-Kagan et al. (2020) found no effect on participants' use of physical or sexual IPV and non-partner rape.

IMPLICATIONS

The following section outlines the reasons why the application of a narrow understanding of GBV is problematic. The first is that it risks implying that all women are at equal risk of violence, which ignores the multiple intersecting social identities that increase a woman's risk of GBV. Secondly, it may serve to exclude awareness of and attention to violence against and among those in the LGBTQIA+ community, as well as the numerous gendered forms of violence both between and against men. This section is broken up into those in the LGB community, those in the TQIA+ community, and men. However, it is important to note that there may be numerous overlaps between these identities.

Women as a Homogenous Group

A primary issue arising from the conflation of VAW with GBV is its focus on relatively traditional gender roles and gender binaries, predominantly focusing on (cisgender and heterosexual, or cis-het) men's violence against (cis-het) women, and portraying 'woman' as a monolithic identity, with the implication that all women are exposed to equal risk and experience of violence. This obscures the many intersecting identities which may overlap with a person's identity as a woman, and may hide or ignore how these can impact their risk of GBV. A woman's overlapping socio-cultural identities (such as being a Black woman, or a queer disabled woman, or a trans woman, or a migrant woman) will expose them to increased levels and risk of violence, as they are 'punished' both for being a woman, and for transgressing other societal norms or for being a member of marginal, othered communities.⁵ However, few studies 'employ an intersectional lens to recognize the multifaceted confluence of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation as unique risk factors for extreme violence' (Clark, Mays and Cochran, 2017: 2), which ignores how 'gender-based violence may affect some women to different degrees, or in different ways' (CEDAW, 2017: 5).

Some studies have highlighted the varying identities that may result in increased risk for women. For example, a 2018 study found that women with disabilities in low and middle-income countries experience two to four times the rate of IPV as non-disabled women (Dunkle et al., 2018). This may suggest that their societal precarity as a result of having a disability, and particularly the likelihood of their being dependent on a person who may also be their abuser, exacerbates their risk of violence. Thus, they are targeted not only because they are women, but also because they are women with disabilities. In a similar fashion, studies consistently show that women who are sex workers experience significantly higher rates of violence than women who are not sex workers, including exploitation, harassment, and physical and sexual violence, from managers, clients and police officers (CVC/UNWomen, 2016: 14; James et al., 2016; Evens et al., 2019). This may well be linked to their societal and legal precarity, especially in countries such as South Africa where sex work is still criminalised. As noted by CVC and UNWomen (2016: 13), female sex workers are put in a 'precarious situation when male clients use violence against them and refuse to practice safe sex', as there is limited legal protection for them. Thus, they are targeted for being women and for being in a legally precarious line of work with limited protection.

What is important to note from the above studies is that few, if any, were based on official statistics released by police or justice departments. Rather, these numbers were gathered by interest groups or researchers who focused on violence against specific groups, such as human rights groups, trans rights groups, sex worker support groups, and so on. Because of the block-identification of the category of 'women' in VAW, official statistics on GBV are typically not disaggregated by gender orientation or identity (Wells and Polders, 2006; UN OHCHR, n.d.), or by the numerous other identities that may increase a person's risk of experiencing GBV. Thus, there are limited records kept of whether a survivor is cis-het, lesbian, trans, a sex worker, disabled, or a refugee. This then limits the capacity for research to be done on how, when, and to what degree these different groups experience violence. While acknowledging that all women face the potential risk of GBV, this risk is by no means equally shared amongst women, and focusing on violence against women as a unitary or homogenous group risks oversimplifying the issue. It is not simply a matter of men exerting power over women, a power which patriarchal

⁵ CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 lists the following aspects which can increase a women's risk of GBV: ethnicity/race, indigenous or minority status, colour, socioeconomic status, caste, language, religion, belief, political opinion, national origin, marital status, maternity, parental status, age, urban or rural location, health status, disability, property ownership, being lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex, illiteracy, seeking asylum, being a refugee, internally displaced or stateless, widowhood, migration status, heading households, living with HIV/AIDS, being deprived of liberty, and being in prostitution, as well as trafficking in women, situations of armed conflict, geographical remoteness and the stigmatization of women who fight for their rights, including human rights defenders (2017: 4-5).

societies and misogynistic norms have enabled, but a much more nuanced situation involving multiple intersecting identities at all times.

LGB

Related to the problem of presenting all women as a homogenous group, is the GBV that those in the LGB community face. They may often be excluded from understandings and applications of GBV, despite the very obvious gendered basis of the violence. For example, an issue which is particularly widespread in South Africa is that of homophobic rape.⁶ Lesbian women, and particularly Black lesbian women who are more masculine-presenting or 'butch', are raped with the stated intention of altering their sexual orientation, or 'turning them straight'. This is an issue which is worryingly prevalent in South Africa, and was the subject of a Human Rights Watch report, titled *We'll Show You You're a Woman* (Nath, 2011). In these instances, 'Black lesbians in South Africa are raped, tortured and murdered because they refuse to conform to dominant heterosexual, patriarchal norms and values' (Maotoana et al., 2019: 13939). These women are raped because they are women, and because they are Black, and because they are not presenting 'correctly' as women because they are not heterosexual or because they dress in traditionally masculine clothing. Their sexual orientation therefore puts them at higher risk of GBV than if they were heterosexual, while their identity as Black women puts them at higher risk than if they were white.

As a further example, in a review of research on IPV and sexual abuse against LGBTQIA+ people in the USA, Brown and Herman reported that bisexual women were 'more than twice as likely to have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner than women in the general population' (2015: 9), but that '89.5% of bisexual women reported only male perpetrators of intimate partner violence, rape, and/or stalking' (2015: 11). Thus, bisexual women were at higher risk of IPV, but almost exclusively from their male partners, suggesting that not only are they experiencing 'normal' IPV, but that their perceived deviance from the norm of heterosexuality may trigger higher levels of violence than 'just' being a woman in an intimate relationship with a man.

Along with this, if the only focus in GBV prevention and support interventions is on male VAW, then IPV within queer relationships, or same-sex sexual violence, such as between two women or two men, will not be included. These forms of violence tend to get little attention. For example, IPV within lesbian relationships is heavily under-researched, with little recognition of it as an issue (Tallis et al., 2020). However, in a study of existing research on IPV against LGBT people, Brown and Herman found that lesbians had as high or higher life prevalence of IPV than the general US population (2015: 21). However, worryingly, women who had experienced same-sex IPV sometimes did not initially consider it to be IPV, citing beliefs that 'only men perpetrate violence and that what violent acts women do commit are not serious or as dangerous as those perpetrated by men' (2015: 17). Thus, the dominant understanding of GBV may deter survivors from seeking help because they do not believe that they 'qualify'.

Along with this, even in countries which recognise and legalise same-sex relationships, there may still be substantial stigma or violence aimed at these communities, such that survivors of same-sex violence may be reluctant to report it (Brown and Herman, 2015). For example, even though South Africa provides full recognition and legalisation of same-sex relationships, marriages, and adoption, in practice the LGBTQIA+ community still faces extreme levels of violence. Thus, as Crehan and McCleary-Sills (2015: 4) found, lesbian, bisexual and trans women 'can experience great difficulty in accessing justice or legal redress (...) many fear their report will not be taken seriously or the police will further abuse them'.

TIQA+

In a similar manner, the application of a narrow framing of GBV as meaning only violence against cis-het women risks excluding those who are gender non-confirming (GNC) or otherwise part of the TIQA+ community. Many definitions of GBV (e.g., UN OHCHR, n.d.; IASC, 2015; CVC and UNWomen, 2016) specifically note that this violence is perpetrated because of the survivor's gender or their non-compliance with perceived gender norms, and it is therefore hard to understand any form of violence against trans folk as being anything but gender-based. However, many countries are slow to recognise a person's gender identity (if they are willing to recognise trans identities at all), meaning that a trans person may be misgendered in police and media reports, and crime statistics. For example, while South Africa's laws allow a person to apply to alter their sex description on their identification documents (The Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act of 2003), it requires them to have undergone or be undergoing gender reassignment, either surgically or hormonally, and the waiting period is reported to be anything from one to seven years (Deyi et al., 2015). Thus, it may take many years for a person's legal documents to reflect their gender, if they meet the criteria to change it at all. This means that violence against a trans woman

⁶ While this is often termed 'corrective rape', this is a problematic framing of the crime, implying some form of 'correction' of someone's (incorrect) sexual orientation. The idea of sexual orientation as in need of 'correction' is inherently violent in itself. I therefore use the term 'homophobic rape', to specifically highlight the homophobia underlying the act (Anguita, 2012), and to remove any perceived justification for it.

may not be included in police reports and crime statistics as a case of GBV, because they may be misgendered as male, and therefore not be included in an understanding of violence against women. Yet this ignores the fact that much violence against trans women is perpetrated specifically because they do not meet societal gender norms and expectations, and should therefore be included in understandings and statistics of GBV.

While the fact of this exclusion from understandings of GBV is jarring enough, the extremely high rates of violence that trans women in particular experience makes it a cause for even greater concern. Across all intersecting identities, trans women are reported to experience higher rates of violence than almost any other group, no matter their racial/ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, or citizenship status (UN OHCHR, n.d.; Brown and Herman, 2015; Margalit, 2018; Rao et al., 2019). Findings from the 2015 US Transgender Survey (James et al., 2016) found that trans respondents experienced higher rates of almost every type of GBV. For example, 35% of respondents had experienced physical IPV (compared to 30% of the US adult population), while 24% had experienced severe physical IPV (compared to 18% of the US adult population) (2016: 198). Along with this, trans respondents' intersecting identities further increased their risk of violence. Trans respondents who had participated in sex work, who had experienced homelessness, or who had disabilities were more likely to have been sexually assaulted in their lifetime than respondents who did not have those identities (2016: 205). In a similar finding, Goldberg, Jadwin-Cakmak and Harper (2018: 22) noted that trans and GNC youth who had participated in sex work were much more likely to have experienced IPV than those who had not participated in sex work. Thus, trans folk experience a higher risk of all forms of gendered violence, as 'their societally unprivileged statuses attract violence not based on relationship issues, but rather social issues of racism, transphobia, [and] cultural gender roles' (Clark et al., 2017: 1-2).

Men

The final concern is that narrow framings of GBV exclude violence against and between men. As an important caveat, the author acknowledges that there is significant discomfort with the notion of including violence against (cis-het) men in understandings of GBV. While men undoubtedly experience extremely high rates of violence, as will be outlined below, this article is not implying that this violence is predominantly being perpetrated by women, those in the LGBTQIA+ community, or any other marginalised groups. Throughout all the statistics that will be discussed below, it is important to note that the vast majority of violence is perpetrated by men. The problem overwhelmingly remains men's use of violence. Similarly, this article does not argue for a shift in focus away from groups who are substantially more marginalised in society than cis-het men. However, this article does argue that violence between men (and the more-limited cases of violence against men by women) is strongly gendered, and in large part arises due to patriarchal and misogynistic expectations around men's use and experience of violence. In more practical terms, if those who perpetrate one form of violence are more likely to perpetrate others (Fleming et al., 2015: 251), there is also the risk that problematising only one form of gendered violence may at best result in very limited reductions in any form of violence. Thus, including violence between men in understandings of gendered violence may prove to be beneficial in preventing gender-based violence and gender inequality more broadly.

Given the societal expectation of violence in many versions of masculinities, or their contextual gender norms, arguably most forms of violence perpetrated by men are gendered to some extent. As Fleming et al. note, 'men's violence is not simply about dominance over women but can also be viewed as establishing hierarchies among men (...) [and] most violence perpetration by men has at its roots norms of masculinities' (2015: 251, 253). Thus, 'fighting between males for dominance is the most likely reason why males, more than females, die from violence' (Ratele, 2010: 21). It is important to note that not all masculinities will require violence, and that these masculinities are fluid and changeable, rather than static. Despite this, research has highlighted 'a physicality and violence in performances of hegemonic masculinities' (Shefer et al., 2015, s99). Similarly, a wide range of literature has highlighted how sexual and physical violence, aggression, and coercion are bound up with dominant ideas of what it is to be a man across diverse South African communities (see for example, Jewkes et al., 2009; Jewkes and Morrell, 2010; GenderLinks and MRC, 2012). Thus, while not all masculinities require violence, the extremely high levels of violence perpetrated by men in South Africa arguably suggest at least a lack of disapproval, and at most an active expectation, of violence from men. Men's use and experience of violence is therefore heavily gendered.

For example, it is almost exclusively men who are expected or conscripted to join armies and armed groups, ensuring that it is men who face militarised violence, while women and children are typically grouped together as 'innocents' or 'collateral damage' (Jones, 2000). The enforced link between masculinity and militarisation has been well-documented (e.g., Cock, 1991; Farr, 2002; Langa and Eagle, 2008; Cockburn, 2010; UN-IAWG, 2012),⁷ upholding the damaging heteronormative assumption that men are inherently violent, resulting in men and boys being sent to war and traumatised or killed because of their supposedly inherent violence, embodying their assumed

⁷ There is a significant body of literature which looks at further systems of collective, institutional and organised violence, which is beyond the scope of this paper. For more, see Elias and Rai, 2019; Hearn et al., 2020.

gender role. Framing this violence as inherent or biologically based may result in limited efforts to address it or reduce it. As Dolan asks (2014: 492-3),

why do we still fail to see that the militarization of men is an egregious form of GBV (...) not only because the products of militarization are highly represented among perpetrators of sexual violence (...) but also because in the course of becoming and being militarized, men themselves are victims of lethal doses of GBV.

In a related matter, while women undoubtedly experience certain forms of violence at extremely high rates, men experience other forms of violence, such as murder, at significantly higher rates than women. For example, 81% of homicide victims globally are male (UNODC, 2019), and according to Indxmundi (2019), South African men had one of the highest mortality rates in the world in 2017 (378.91/1000 male adults). Along with this, the WHO (2015) found that men in South Africa are almost five times as likely to be murdered as women (43.4/100 000 for men versus 9.6/100 000 for women). Studies conducted within South Africa have found similarly high rates of male homicide victimisation. For example, Swart, Seedat and Nel (2015) found that 81% of adolescent homicide victims in Johannesburg were male; while Ratele (2010: 20) found that urban young black men (aged 20 to 40) were up to nine times as likely to die from homicidal violence as black females in the same age group.

Along with this, although women and girls experience higher rates of sexual violence, men and boys do also experience sexual violence, at the hands of both women and other men (Fleming et al., 2015: 250; Nyoni and Warive, 2017; Kiss et al., 2020). However, the stigma against men who experience such violence is strong, due to the perceived shame and 'feminisation' of being a male survivor of sexual violence, meaning that reporting rates among men may be even lower than those of women (Margalit, 2018; Kiss et al., 2020). This shame highlights the extremely gendered nature of the crime, and the way in which, when it is perpetrated against men, it is also specifically because of their societal gender roles. Thus, as Fleming et al. point out (2015: 493),

By concentrating on females' subordinate status rather than the subordinate status of the feminine, it thus misses the vulnerabilities of gender non-conforming men (...) and limits itself to systematically reproduced gender inequality manifest within a (heterosexual) male-female binary. It also misses the vulnerability to violence of normative men in that it assumes that it is *subordinate* status in society that creates vulnerability to violence, and fails to see that the inverse logic can and does hold true. Higher social status can render men's subordination through sexual violence strategic.

Thus, excluding any form of violence against men from the applied understanding of GBV is problematic for a number of reasons. The first is that it excludes the fact that violence against gay, bisexual, GNC or trans men is extremely gendered, as it punishes them for deviating from the heterosexual 'norm'. The second is that it assumes that any form of violence against (cis-het) men is 'just' violence, rather than gender-based violence, and is simply an inherent fact, rather than something that can be researched or problematised or addressed. This may therefore limit the effectiveness of interventions which are attempting to prevent GBV through working with men. Thus, work on masculinities urgently needs to include a focus on violence between men.

CONCLUSION

GBV remains a serious concern globally, with few signs that it is abating. This suggests a need to find new ways to conceptualise and address the issue in order to reduce the rates of such violence. This article argues that a key way to do so is by broadening the applied definition of GBV, by expanding it beyond its current traditional focus on men's violence against women. There is no doubt that VAW is a serious issue around the world, as well as in South Africa, requiring attention and effort to be addressed. However, current interventions have had limited success in this regard, and this may be partly due to the narrow focus on VAW in GBV work. By not addressing heteropatriarchal gender norms, and not troubling gender binarisms, this narrow focus may ultimately prove ineffective in preventing violence.

As a first concern, focusing solely on violence against women risks implying that women are a unitary and homogenous group, all facing equal risk of and exposure to violence. However, as has been highlighted throughout this article, women face hugely varied levels of violence, depending on their intersecting identities. Trans women, disabled women, queer women, women of colour, and sex workers, among others, are at significantly higher risk of violence. Acknowledging and highlighting this, in research and in statistics collected about GBV, as well as pedagogical, policy and practical interventions, will enable policymakers, legal systems, and support groups to tailor responses to better address the needs of these marginalised groups.

Along with this, the heteronormative focus on male violence against females may result in the exclusion of violence against those in the LGBTQIA+ community. Official definitions of GBV often specifically highlight

violence against a person because of their gender role or non-conformity with gender norms; thus, violence against those in the LGBTQIA+ community will arguably almost always be gendered. However, the focus on VAW may exclude same-sex violence, violence against LGBTQIA+ men, and violence against trans women, who may be misgendered as men in countries which are slow or unwilling to recognise their gender. This may be especially true of GBV support interventions, which are typically geared to respond primarily to female survivors of male violence, meaning that they may be ill-suited to anyone who does not fall into this category. Restrictive legal contexts, which have a narrow definition of sexual violence, which criminalise same-sex relationships and sex, or which refuse to recognise transgender persons will likely exacerbate this issue.

Finally, restrictive understandings of GBV will likely exclude violence against and between men. As noted above, while including violence against cis-het men in definitions of GBV is often contentious, this article argues that, when viewed through the lens of the societal expectations underlying masculinities, much of the violence perpetrated both by and against men is gendered. As noted above, men who do not conform to heteronormative gender roles, such as LGBTQIA+ men, may be at high risk for GBV. Similarly, violence used against men often has the intention of emasculating, shaming or ‘feminising’ them, specifically because of the societal norms and gendered expectations arising in patriarchal societies. Along with this, if interventions to address and prevent GBV do not focus on men’s use of violence more broadly (including violence between men), then their effectiveness in addressing GBV will arguably be limited. This article therefore argues for the use of broader, more inclusive understandings of GBV in practice, which will hopefully be of use in improving interventions to address and prevent such violence in the future.

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Contextualising Feminist Global Justice Activism: A Case Study of the Gezi Park Protests

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ABSTRACT

Neoliberal globalisation has not affected everywhere equally. It has deepened the socio-economic inequalities and in some regions has stimulated conservative counter-movements, which affect women more than men. Feminists in the Global Justice Movement draw attention to such issues by highlighting the interrelated nature of patriarchy and the global economic order. In this way, they could incorporate gender justice claims into the wider agenda of the Global Justice Movement and increase their influence as a political actor. This article examines the Gezi Park protests in Turkey as an example of this particular type of feminist activism and contextualises it in local forms of collective action. Utilising Eschle and Maignashca's (2010) framework, this article explores how women experience unjust global patterns in local contexts and how oppressive patriarchal neoliberal structures at different levels speak to each other. In Turkey's context, neoliberal restructuring policies are accompanied by the promotion of religious, familial and heterosexual values along with the state's penetration into private space, which affects women disproportionately. Turkish feminists in the local Gezi Park protests responded to such regional and national contexts, whilst also defining power relations, injustices and demands in line with international frameworks of feminist anti-globalisation activism.

Keywords: globalisation, neoliberalisation, Gezi Park protests, feminist activism, Turkey

INTRODUCTION

By creating winners and losers between states and within states, globalisation has not affected all individuals or regions equally (Karns, Mingst and Stiles, 2015). In some regions and societies, it has heightened social justice issues and widened the hierarchical gap amongst civil and corporate actors. The problem is rooted in the current corporate characteristics of globalisation: it is narrowly obtained from a Western economic context and built upon the ideas of capitalism, market rationality, competitiveness, and individualism. Relatedly, international monetary institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) regard globalisation as predominantly a market phenomenon and advocate for the full adaptation of neoliberal economic models in national settings to preserve and extend the contemporary, globally dominant, economic system. In other words, globalisation is perceived as identical to neoliberalisation, which is applied in a top-down fashion by international organisations and multi-national corporations without giving attention to distinct historical and cultural processes in different parts of the world. This mentality ultimately deepens economic and political injustices by prioritising the interests of corporate actors at the expense of the needs, concerns and representation of ordinary citizens.

The Global Justice Movement addresses these issues and opposes the current neoliberal global order. Distinct movements gather and work together for creating a just and fair global system for the future. Feminists are amongst these actors. They explicitly draw attention to the ways in which neoliberal globalisation intensifies gender hierarchies. Distinct feminist groups from different social and economic contexts meet in the movement and learn about each other's problems through collaboration. By establishing networks and cooperating with other movements, they aim to incorporate their authentic concerns into the general agenda of the Movement and ensure that feminist visions of equality and justice are included in this greater fight against neoliberalism. They achieve this by establishing themselves as a crucial and coherent form of collective action (Eschle and Maignashca, 2010). In this way, they enhance their visibility and strengthen their agency. Such concerns, demands and goals also have been pursued in more recent protests: the so-called 'global wave' or the 'movements of the squares'.

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The 2013 Gezi Park protests in Turkey are a more recent manifestation of international feminist anti-globalisation activism. In May 2013, the Turkish government announced its plan to replace the Gezi Park, one of the few last green public spaces in central Istanbul, with an Ottomanist style shopping mall, as an extension of their urban gentrification projects. The brutality of the police force used against the small number of non-violent protestors, along with the aggressive stance of then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, triggered subsequent events which brought together various individuals and civil networks, such as students, environmentalists, feminists, LGBTI groups, religious and ethnic minorities, who are critical of the neoliberal policies of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Turkish feminist groups actively joined the protests opposing the neoliberal policies of the government that was characterised by paternalistic and patriarchal elements as well as tainted with Erdogan's masculine authoritarian political personality. Responding to regional and national issues, Turkish women also address similar issues found in the feminist anti-globalisation activism within the Global Justice Movement in terms of defining oppression mechanisms, power relations, goals, and demands.

Much work has been done to analyse the feminist concerns or the gendered dynamics of the Gezi Park protests. Scholars like Tekay and Ustun (2013) and Şimşek-Rathke (2016) mainly focus on the role of 'Gezi' in relation to the Turkish feminist movement and how Gezi benefited from the experiences of Turkish feminism. Similarly, Ünan (2014) emphasises the relation between Gezi and the wider Turkish LGBTI movement. Nahrwold and Bayhan (2013) stress the spatial dynamics of the gendered activism in the protests. Likewise, Baytok (2014) focuses on the way Turkish feminism had to integrate urban claims into their activism. There are also studies (Potuoğlu-Cook, 2015; Erhart, 2013; Arat, 2013) that showcase a relationship between Gezi, global capitalism and feminist matters; however, none of them explicitly analyses Gezi's feminist activism in the context of the wider political dynamics of the global feminist anti-globalisation activism. Bridging this analytical gap, this article suggests conceptualising Gezi's feminist activism in relation to the transnational feminist movement mobilised within the Global Justice Movement, and aims to address the gendered injustices resulting from neoliberalism.

This article discusses how feminist anti-globalisation activism integrates its vision into the broader agenda of social justice movements, and institutionalises gender equality and gender justice as vital goals in the struggles against oppressive neoliberal regimes. In this way, feminists become a more influential political actor. Secondly, the article suggests how to appropriate the Gezi Park protests as an extension or a more local or national reflection of the Global Justice Movement, and contextualises it within the larger political dynamics of the global feminist anti-globalisation activism. In this vein, the article aims to reveal how women experience oppressive patriarchal global patterns in local and national contexts and can mobilise against them. In the first part, the article elaborates on the literature about recent global protests against neoliberal globalisation, and their commonalities with the Global Justice Movement. The second part explains the characteristics of feminist anti-globalisation activism within the Global Justice Movement, using the framework of Eschle and Maignushca (2010) to investigate the features of this unique type of feminist activism in the 21st century. Applying this framework, the last part of this article analyses the feminist anti-globalisation activism in the Gezi Park protests and investigates how Turkish women encounter global issues in local frameworks. Although Turkish feminists respond to the local issues which resulted from neoliberal restructuring policies during the protests, they display similarities with the feminist anti-globalisation activism at the global level in terms of defining oppression mechanisms, concerns, goals and demands. In this way, they complement and build into each other. Methodologically, this article uses secondary data and material from the current literature on the Gezi Park protests that describes the form, character and activities of the Turkish feminist anti-globalisation activism during the protests.

It could be argued that the Gezi Park protests have failed to prompt a significant change in Turkish politics as there were no major changes in the subsequent national election and plebiscite results. Also, it can be said that Turkey has become a more polarised society after the pressure among the opposition groups has dramatically increased following the failed coup attempt in 2016 (Uluğ and Acar, 2018), and the regime change to the presidential system in 2018. Yet, the Gezi Park protests are an important milestone for Turkish feminism as its actors still use the memory of 'Gezi' as a reference point to strengthen their power and galvanise in their more recent political activism about environmental degradation, violence against women and labour issues in Turkey that result from neoliberalism (Goker, 2019). Relatedly, contemporary Turkish feminism internalises claims regarding anti-globalisation into its programme, based on experiences in Gezi, and therefore perpetuates the ideals of the feminist anti-globalisation action which are further mobilised within the Global Justice Movement.

HAS THE GLOBAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT COME TO AN END?

Some of the current academic literature (see Fernández-Savater et al, 2017; Kavada and Dimitriou, 2017; Kluitenberg, 2015) explicitly theorises the Gezi Park protests under the category of the so-called 'movements of squares' rather than emphasising the protests' wider relation to the Global Justice Movement. Such sources utilise Harvey (2012) and Lefebvre's (1996) notions of the right to the city. This right calls for the redistribution of urban

resources (including spatial ones) and the dismantling of regulatory logic and ethic of neoliberalism, as these result from the interventions of the global capitalist class in the urban sphere at the expense of restoring the truthful and meaningful representation and participation of ordinary citizens. Within this context, Kavada and Dimitriou (2017), Kluitenberg (2015) and Kaika and Karaliotas (2014) stress the spatial dynamics of these recent movements, the role of making or the production of alternative space (or reclaiming space), the centrality of space in the organisation, form, presence, and tactics of such movements and the significance of reclaiming public ownership of streets and squares, which highlights a general discontent of the representative politics and its interconnectedness with global capitalism.

The Gezi Park protests are also studied under the category of the ‘global wave’, which refers to the movements – such as anti-austerity or pro-democracy ones – that took place in public squares or significant national public centres in reaction to the global financial crisis in the late 2000s. There is much further debate on whether this so-called global wave should be seen as a continuation or a departure from the Global Justice Movement. Research of Daphi (2019), Giugni and Grasso (2019), and Flesher Fominaya (2017) outlines the common dynamics and argue for a continuation between the two global phenomena. First and foremost, both address the unjust structures derived from the global neoliberal economic structure along with its elites, and elucidate how they can deteriorate representative democracy. Della Porta (2012) claims participatory democracy deficits can result from the effects of global capitalist arrangements on domestic politics, such as no or fewer state interventions to mitigate the inequalities created by the market, the elitist conceptualisation of citizen participation, the heightened influence of lobbies and corporate interest groups on the domestic political arena, and deepening corruption. All these ideas display similarities with the master frame of critique pursued by the Global Justice Movement. Both movements call for equal participation, representation, and transparency. Secondly, they both pursue a great deal of cultural diversity in their rhetoric and a universalised standing on topics like human rights, peace and equality (Della Porta, 2012). They are both organised around post-material issues, which results in a common set of concerns and demands. Thirdly, they both engage in prefigurative action, in which alternative modes of economy, such as bartering and exchanging are adopted (Flesher Fominaya, 2020). Fourthly, there was a continuation of individual actors in the protests, or activist personnel. Global wave protests have definitely benefitted from the available activist networks and their experiences from the Global Justice Movement (Daphi, 2019).

As for the differences between the ‘global wave’ protests and the Global Justice Movement, there is a return from the transnational to the national and the local in the ‘global wave’ protests. In other words, there is return to the nation state as the chief provider and guarantor of true democracy. Della Porta (2012) argues there was some degree of transnational influence; however, the movements were mainly a built-in reaction to the state and ascribed more responsibility to the nation-state due to the divergences in the size, scope and timing of the financial crisis across countries. Additionally, there was minimal contact with the actors and activists in other countries. Secondly, space and its occupation become a crucial element of the global wave. While the Global Justice Movement’s most salient gathering and protests were transnationally organised in counter summits, the new global wave protests utilised occupying and reclaiming public places as an important tactical element (Flesher Fominaya, 2020). This feature resonates with the literature on the spatial dynamics of such movements that I have briefly mentioned above.

Despite the obvious differences, one can detect that the master frame of critique and the main goals, concerns and demands reflect a continuation between the Global Justice Movement and the global wave. In such an interconnected global social and economic context of today, it is very hard to separate these two from each other. Yet, presenting this debate is crucial to understanding the reason for the selection of Eschle and Maignushca’s (2010) framework to investigate the unique type of feminist activism in the Gezi Park protests. This framework was chosen because it acknowledges a continuation between the two. Most importantly, this framework provides the best theoretical characterisation of the global feminist anti-globalisation of the 21st century, which has flourished during the Global Justice Movement, and continues to be relevant in the ‘global wave’ protests.

GLOBAL FEMINIST ANTI-GLOBALISATION ACTIVISMS

Moghadam (2010) argues that transnational feminist activism arose in anti-neoliberal structural contexts during the 1990s; it intended to find out how globalisation affected different women around the globe and unite them, based on common issues and demands. Therefore, feminists have a strong presence in the Global Justice Movement, with their intention to produce a fair alternative global system that is built on gender justice and equality. They assert that ‘the current world system would not change without feminism and feminists cannot change the women’s lives unless we change the world’ (Moghadam, 2013: 163). They aim to integrate their authentic agenda and demands into the wider programme of the Global Justice Movement to seize more influence and power, as a distinct political aim (Eschle and Maignushca, 2010). They reveal connections between gender inequality and the global capitalist system and try to convince other actors in the movement of their claims and

critique of patriarchy. According to Eschle and Maiguashca (2010), feminist anti-globalisation activism is predominantly fighting against multiple systems of oppression (namely, patriarchy, globalised neoliberalism, and racism) in their five main subcategories, which are economic inequality, exclusion from decision-making, ecological degradation, control over women's bodies and gender-based violence. I shall now go on to discuss these five categories further.

Firstly, feminists who are engaged in this particular type of activism fight against economic inequalities. Neoliberal economic policies have deepened the inequalities and injustices for women in labour markets and exacerbated problematic global patterns in the feminisation of poverty, migration, and labour. Globalisation has normalised the exploitation of women's labour, in which women become cheap labour sources for core-capitalist countries. These countries shift their production sites to underdeveloped regions in order to exploit women of colour, who work longer hours for less money without union protection or social security (Enloe, 2004). Additionally, many countries are dependent on women to make up for neoliberal restructuring policies - such policies disrupt public services, in which women are expected to compensate for them through extending their unpaid labour into the household. Similarly, although neoliberalisation might have increased women's presence in the labour sector, their participation is not translated into a redistribution of domestic, household and child-care responsibilities (Moghadam, 2013). Even in the developed capitalist countries in the West, working women still make less money than men, work in less secure jobs and are still mainly responsible for domestic housework and childcare.

Secondly, feminists in the Global Justice Movement oppose the exclusion of women from decision-making mechanisms and demand women's greater participation in political systems. The global neoliberal order limits women's representation in national political systems at all levels via heightening ethnic, racial or class discrimination against women (Eschle and Maiguashca, 2010). Women have limited control over their lives since their decision-making power is replaced by masculinised global business and monetary actors, which are not concerned about representing women's interests and concerns accurately. Displacing political power from public to hegemonic economic institutions disfavours women more than men as history shows that in the absence of civil society networks, political parties that are bound by patriarchal norms are more likely to come into power and create laws that treat women as second-class citizens and limit their mobility (Moghadam, 2013). Within this context, neoliberal globalisation has enhanced gender-based discrimination and restricted women's representation in all policy areas.

Thirdly, feminists in the Global Justice Movement express their discontent about ecological degradation. Whilst neoliberal globalisation has triggered environmental damage all around the world, it has directly affected women due to restricting their access to productive resources like fuel, water, and food. Women and their relationship with the environment are vital for the wellbeing of the communities that they live in, especially in rural societies. Free-trade policies have led to the mass commodification of natural resources, which are key to the welfare and health of poor and marginalised livelihoods. Big companies have replaced the power of the indigenous women, who in the global south are traditionally responsible for the sustainability of the ecosystem to ensure the welfare of the next generations (Shiva, 2016). Within this context, feminist anti-globalisation activism has brought eco-feminist critiques to neoliberalism and has shown how ecological degradation, a consequence of global capitalism, is connected to gender inequalities.

Fourthly, feminists in the movements have protested against the enhanced desire to control women's bodies exacerbated by neoliberal globalisation. According to Eschle and Maiguashca (2010), this has mainly three dimensions: the increasing commodification of the female body, women's lack of control over their fertility, and widespread sexual harassment. Consumer culture, the backbone of the neoliberal economic system, has objectified women's bodies through allowing market actors to utilise gendered bodies in order to increase sales. The instrumentalisation of female body has normalised women's bodies into becoming tools for profit-making. Neoliberal globalisation has displaced women's control over fertility and restricted their reproductive rights. By promoting religious fundamentalism and social conservatism in some societies as counter-movements, neoliberalism eventually weakened women's power over decisions regarding their bodies and restricted women's access to abortion and contraception. Globalisation has fuelled sexual harassment by increasing the sexualised economies of prostitution, sex tourism and trafficking, which disrupts women's autonomy of their own bodies (Eschle and Maiguashca, 2010).

Lastly, feminist anti-globalisation activism calls for global peace and criticises violence against women in all of its forms (including war, domestic, gender-based and sexual violence). During the 1990s, transitional feminist networks have incorporated ideas against war and imperialism in their activism, calling for the end to all wars in order to create a better future for everyone. Additionally, the networks have revealed connections between violence, imperialism, and global capitalism. For example, the deregulation of markets and feminisation of labour have escalated gender-based violence in various ways. True (2010) discusses how neoliberalism has promoted the creation of black market economies that exploit women, like sex trafficking. Moreover, in deregulated trade zones, women work under inhumane conditions and are increasingly surveilled by employers. True argues that in

opposition to the common view, women's participation in the labour force has suffered a backlash and substantially increased domestic violence since it has challenged the traditional power assigned to males in the private spheres and thereby increased toxic masculinities. Relatedly, feminists in the Global Justice Movement respond to these issues and disclose ways in which neoliberal economic system have heightened violence against women worldwide.

These five subcategories identified by Eschle and Maiguashca constitute the general characteristics, concerns and goals of feminist anti-globalisation activism in the Global Justice Movement. This framework will be taken as a reference point for analysing the distinct context of Turkish feminist anti-globalisation activism in the Gezi Park protests. The next section discusses how Gezi's feminist activism displays similarities with the feminist anti-globalisation activism in the Global Justice Movement and thus shows how oppressive patriarchal structures at local, national and international levels interact with each other.

FEMINIST ANTI-GLOBALISATION ACTIVISM IN THE GEZI PARK PROTESTS

In May 2013, the Turkish government announced that as a part of urban transformation and gentrification projects they are planning to replace Gezi Park, one of the last few green public spaces in central Istanbul, with an Ottomanist style shopping mall. In the first few days after the announcement, a small number of environmentalists occupied the park and demonstrated in non-violent protests. In the following days, the police brutally attacked the protestors with tear gas and burned their tents at night. The brutal police force, in addition to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's aggressive and authoritarian tone, triggered the events and the protests spread to the rest of the country and continued for a month. These protests are collectively called the Gezi Park protests, the largest civil uprising in the history of Turkish politics.

The Gezi Park protests can be considered as a more recent manifestation of the Global Justice Movement. It was a 'movement of movements' and had no particular person and organisation acting as a leader. Instead, it was a collective process, in which ideas and common goals delivered collaborative leadership (Eslen-Ziya and Erhart, 2015). Distinct segments of the society came together and expressed their discontent against the neoliberal policies of the AKP government. Different groups like feminists, ethnic and religious minorities, environmentalists, leftists, and LGBTI individuals all met with each other in the protests and recognised their shared grievances resulting from AKP's Islamic neoliberal state, coupled with Erdogan's authoritarian masculinist leadership (Kurtulus Korkman and Acksoz, 2013). Consequently, the protests cannot be solely seen as environmental or urban movements. The environmental language used in the protests created a structure of opportunity, in which distinct groups could expand the agenda of the protests and communicate their political grievances and demands. Protestors took environmental values as a reference point to voice their critique against local and national regulations, which are driven by neoliberal economics. Hence, the protests expressed similar positions as the USA-based Occupy Wall Street, international anti-austerity protests and the World Social Forum, which all called for economic and social justice, democracy and fair representation for ordinary citizens.

The neoliberalisation of the Turkish economy has started in the 1980s with the eighth president of Turkey, Turgut Ozal. This economic transition has enhanced the power and presence of conservative political parties with Islamic characteristics in the national political arena. Such actors asserted that Turkey should become a part of the global capitalist system in order to achieve rapid economic growth nationally. Moreover, they believed that such integration would benefit Turkey tremendously in mitigating the effects of the 2001 economic crisis. In 2002, Erdogan and his party came into power within this crisis atmosphere, and immediately adopted the IMF's crisis management programs. Gürcan and Peker (2015) argue that such neoliberal restructuring policies are not adopted as the hegemonic international institutions prescribe them; instead, they are adjusted to geographical and cultural components in order to ensure a more successful political legitimisation. They assert that in Turkey's context, this process has promoted Islamic social interventionism, as the neoliberal restructuring policies relying on Islam and Neo-Ottomanism, to ensure their local/national ideological legitimacy and coherence. This transformation of the economy was and is supported by the Islamic and moralist control of the society (and lifestyles), as the government sought ways to replace secular and democratic values and spaces with Islamic and neo-Ottomanist cultural symbols (Gürcan and Peker, 2015). The transformation of Gezi Park, which is near Taksim Square and Istiklal Avenue, areas that accommodate many bars and nightclubs, is a reflection of this transformative cultural vision.

Women have played a vital role in such policies, in which the AKP eagerly stimulated heteronormative and patriarchal values for seizing cultural validity for this economic transformation. Turkish politics has become highly sexualised and moralised since the government could legitimise its coercive and conservative policies through promoting a gendered Muslim nationalism (Potuoğlu-Cook, 2015). This idealised vision of women has translated into higher rates of gender-based violence, femicides, female unemployment and increased all forms of oppression towards women, especially the ones from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Moreover, women's identities were systemically reduced to domestic gender roles and limited to the private sphere. As they were only allowed to exist in a conservative family sphere, the government replaced the State Ministry Responsible for Women and

Family with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011 (Aldıkactı Marshall, 2013). Mothers become an essential part of these structural adjustment policies as the government relied on them to give multiple births and thus secure the continuity of a cheap labour force, which would strengthen Turkey's standing in global markets (Erhart, 2013; Potuoğlu-Cook, 2015). They were also responsible for compensating for the cutbacks in public services and mitigating the austerity measures by the intensification of their unpaid domestic work in households (Potuoğlu-Cook, 2015). Women who reject conventional gender roles or make untraditional choices regarding their sexuality and reproductivity are stigmatised by the state as 'enemies of the nation' (Esen-Ziya and Erhart, 2015). For these reasons, there is a strong link between neoliberal economic restructuring and ideological patriarchy in Turkey under the AKP's rule.

Feminists confronted these problems in the Gezi Park protests and called instead for a post-patriarchal state that rejects the patriarchal protectionist, interventionist and regulatory logic of the modern state (Çınar, 2019), which has been deepened by the neoliberal transformation. In total, women constituted 51 percent of the participants in the protests (KONDA, 2013). Although many women participants were not connected directly with any political organisation and movement, İMECE Women's Solidarity Association, Yogurtcu Women Forum, Women's Initiative for Peace, the women's branch of Anti-Capitalist Muslims, and Socialist Feminist Collective can be listed as women's organisations that were present in the protests (Kaya, 2015). The protests created a political platform, in which feminists could communicate their concerns about patriarchy and its connection to neoliberalism. They introduced themselves to the other actors, which ultimately increased their influence and expanded the general cause and agenda of the protests. Gender equality was strategically identified as an essential goal for achieving economic and social justice. Within this context, this particular Turkish activism complements the global feminist anti-globalisation activism in terms of defining oppression mechanisms, power relations, injustices, goals, and demands. For demonstrating how Turkish women experience global neoliberal patriarchal patterns in local contexts, I will now utilise Eschle and Maiguashca's (2010) framework and apply their five subcategories of oppression resulting from global neoliberal order.

Economic Inequality

Although the Turkish economy is one of the fastest-growing economies globally, economic growth has not been shared equally between men and women; the proportion of female labour force participation is only 28 percent, which is far below the other OECD members average (International Civil Society Action Network, 2015). These numbers are compatible with the AKP's reconstruction of Turkish women, since the government systemically reduced women's agency to the private sphere with an intention of legitimising neoliberal restructuring. The government has refused to take women's economic potential into account and constructed them discursively solely as mothers, who are responsible for raising a religious and submissive youth (in other words, labour force) for strengthening the Turkish economy and its status in the global markets (Potuoğlu-Cook, 2015). Erdogan's advice to married couples is to have at least three children, his anti-abortion stance, and the reduction of childcare programs for working mothers have been accompanied by insufficient education for girls and labour reforms for women (Potuoğlu-Cook, 2015). Women were expected to compensate for the cuts in public spending and mitigate the austerity measures by enhancing their unpaid domestic work at home (Potuoğlu-Cook, 2015).

Although the government created new jobs via free trade policies, these jobs did not translate into welfare or security for working women. Instead, they become sources of cheap labour, whose work is being constantly exploited. Tekay and Ustun (2013) discuss how female workers have started to mobilise against these abusive conditions, for example in the women's strike in Antalya free trade zone, which also influenced many women strikes in the rest of Turkey, including those in the urban sectors such as the strike of the women personnel in Turkish Airlines (THY) in 2013. These women personnel demanded better wages and most importantly opposed the company's new regulations targeting women employee's bodies, namely the ban on red lipstick and nail polish, which were claimed to make them sexually appealing. As Tekay and Ustun continue, the THY strike was an important reflection of AKP's vision on women employment:

as it makes clear the government's vested interest is not in protecting women workers from the violations of capital, but in creating the conditions in which her body is primarily understood as the site of reproduction, and her labour is relegated to partial and flexible participation in the workforce. (Tekay and Ustun, 2013: 4)

The Gezi Park protests gave space for working-class women to express these issues and to call for equality in the workplace. For example, İMECE Women's Union, an active feminist organisation in the protests, demanded a meaningful labour reform and communicated it as an essential element of the cause of the protests. The organisation stated that:

Sovereign capitalist power is implementing neoliberal policies on a global scale. The results of the structural transformation of capitalism and neo-liberal policies have become more visible and tangible after the nineties in Turkey. The capitalist system that fed male dominance and used gendered relations for their own benefit also put the labour force, especially that of women, off the record in the production-exploitation relations. (Kaya, 2015: 22)

Sharing such concerns, poor working-class women and women working in urban service sectors came together in the protests and demanded gender equality in the workplace and economic justice for women.

Ecological Degradation and Exclusion from Decision-Making

During the protests, the feminists drew attention to the issues related to ecological degradation exacerbated by the neoliberalisation of the Turkish economy. These issues include but are not limited to the privatisation of natural resources, nuclear power plant projects in ecologically rich coastal towns, the destruction of agricultural lands, water lands and forests for the construction of mega developments and TOKI (a housing agency controlled by the state) projects. Therefore, the feminist activists called out the capitalist class, who were backed by the government. The activists further questioned the interventionist and technocratic logic of the government about environmental matters and demanded the restoration of ordinary citizens' power over natural resources. Such ideas about the environment, resources and public control were integral to the ways feminists defined freedom and real democracy. During the protests, Women's Initiative for Peace stated in their open letter to the government, 'peace can be realized only when there is democracy, when trees are not cut down and when parks stay as parks and water as water' (Kaya, 2015: 34). Feminists asserted that the government always acts alone when it comes to environmental matters and never ask the locals for opinion, nor is it transparent about its projects. The Turkish government firmly defines a hierarchical relationship between the state, public interest, and environmental matters, in which women who question the rationality of the state become stigmatised and left out of the policy processes. Hence, the most salient theme about ecological degradation and environmental issues in Gezi's feminist activism was interrelated to another major theme: their exclusion from decision making and how such exclusion affects gendered identities.

The systemic promotion of a gendered Muslim national identity led to the exclusion of women (especially ethnically and religiously different ones) from political decision-making (including environmental matters). The development policies both in urban and rural areas were applied in a top-down fashion as the government refused to include consultations with local populations and civil society organisations in the planning processes. Such policies ultimately heightened environmental and social crises, which disrupted the livelihoods of women from ethnic minorities via displacement, and hence constrained their access to both urban and rural sources such as land, water, clean air, and energy. Subsequently, they become more vulnerable to natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes. For all these reasons, ethnic women's movements had a strong presence in the Gezi Park protests. For example, the Kurdish women's movements (such as the Kurdish Saturday Mothers and the Women's Initiative for Peace) joined the protests not only to draw attention to political and military issues related to the Kurds (Yörük, 2014) but also to criticise the neoliberal development policies (namely, mega-scale development projects such as power stations, water dams and highways) in the South East of Turkey that excluded Kurds, especially women, from the decision making process.

Moreover, Potuoğlu-Cook (2015) shows that Romani women also participated in the Gezi protests, opposing urban transformation and gentrification projects. These projects evicted poor Romani women, who mainly work in informal sectors as musicians, belly dancers, and sex workers, from their historic living and working sites in central Istanbul (namely, Sulukule). Hence, their slogan in the protests was 'This revolt is the curse of the poor gypsy that you left without a home' (2015: 107). As Potuoğlu-Cook (2015) continues AKP radicalised and sexualised these lower-class groups by evicting them from central busy urban areas in order to reconstruct Istanbul along Islamic lines as an 'honourable' global city through gentrification projects.

The LGBTI community is another example of a displaced community that actively joined the protests. The LGBTI community and many sex workers also lost their neighbourhoods to gentrification and urban transformation projects and were expelled from their living and working sites in central Istanbul. Tarlabasi is one of these neighbourhoods, in which many trans sex workers used to work and live. Hence, the displaced trans-sex workers had a strong presence in the protests, and proudly embraced their sexuality and profession in their activism. For example, 'We, the prostitutes, are hundred percent sure that the politicians are not our kids!' is one of their major slogans (Erhart, 2013: 302). As Erhart (2013: 302) argues that by using this slogan,

[t]hey were trying to undermine the sexist assumption underlying the mentality against the profession and also criticized AKP's moralism by implying that what they do for a living is much more dignified than what the politicians do.

Furthermore, the protests created a substantial space for the LGBTI groups demanding better representation and more decision-making power in social and political platforms. This is because the protests changed the LGBTI individuals' relation with the Turkish Republic, challenged the traditional characteristics of national Turkish identity and exposed the integrated state violence towards queer citizens (Kramer, 2018). By taking issues related to neoliberalisation and environmental degradation as a reference point, the LGBTI community could express their more general concerns about their daily life, like the commission of hate crimes, violence, unemployment and discrimination to a wider audience and gain support for their visibility, representation and autonomy in public spaces and decision-making processes.

Lastly, some feminists joined the protests in order to express their discontent related to their exclusion from peace-making processes in the Kurdish, Cyprus and Syrian conflicts (International Civil Society Network Action, 2015). For example, during the protests, Women's Initiative for Peace demanded stopping the war in the Eastern Provinces, ending state violence against Kurdish women, and enabling women's equal participation in the peacemaking processes (Kaya, 2015). In this regard, Kurdish and Kemalist women stood in solidarity and called for peace at all levels of Turkish society. This was a historic turning point for the Turkish feminist movement as it became more inclusive; urban Kemalist and secular women overcame their prejudice of women from different ethnic and religious groups and embraced different radicalised identities in the movement (Canlı and Umul, 2015).

The Control Over Women's Bodies

The feminist activism in the Gezi Park protests demanded the full autonomy of women over their own bodies. As noted above, the AKP aimed to achieve ideological legitimacy for economic restructuring via creating policies on women's sexuality and fertility. Body politics was an essential element of AKP's political discourse, which aimed to morally control the society through women. A few days before the outbreak of the Gezi Park protests, AKP proposed to change the abortion law and suggested limiting women's access to abortion. Accordingly, women would need to get the consent of their male partners to have abortions in this new legal scheme. The AKP government has identified abortion as 'murder' and women, who get abortions, as 'murderers' because it relies on mothers to create an obedient workforce for the benefit of the Turkish economy (Erhart, 2013). Relatedly, Erdogan advised married couples to have at least three children for the sake of future generations. Caesarean births and abortion were labelled as 'secret plots' designed to stall Turkey's economic growth and its desire for a powerful position at the world stage (Eslen-Ziya and Erhart, 2015). Within this context, women were narrowly defined in terms of their reproductive agency, namely as mothers and wives, whose gendered bodies were utilised to support neoliberal restructuring.

Responding to this biopolitical mentality of the AKP, feminists in the protests organised the 'My Body, My Decision' campaign, in which they rejected the state intervention on their bodies and opposed to the proposed anti-abortion law. 'Resist Pregnant' is another campaign explicitly held by pregnant women in the protests (Kuras, 2015). This campaign was formed as a reaction to a Mullah sympathising with the AKP, who made a statement about the appropriate behaviours of pregnant women in public places (Tekay and Ustun, 2013). The following are slogans that are some examples that pregnant women used in the protests: 'We don't owe men or the state any children!', 'Family and the state are lies, we own our desires and our bodies!', 'We will give birth on the way to Gezi!' and 'You are not a family, you are a woman!' (Esen-Ziya and Erhart, 2015: 479). By using such slogans and images of their bodies (namely, bellies), pregnant women demanded full autonomy over their bodies via politicising their reproductive agency in the campaign.

Another demonstration in which women used their bodies was the Chain of Mothers. During the protests, the governor of Istanbul asked mothers to call their children (the protestors) home in order to protect them from the brutal police force in the park. Not surprisingly, through this call, the governor, who is a politician from the AKP, spoke to women as mothers, who in his perception have no role in the society other than taking care of their children (Tekay and Ustun, 2013). However, instead of calling them home, mothers joined their children in the park and protested with them. They created a body chain around the park and their children, to protect them from the police. Participating in the protests helped mothers recognise politicised ways of being a mother, attach new meanings to their traditional gender roles, and oppose the government's expectations from them.

Furthermore, feminists and the LGBTI activists attempted to transform the language used in the Gezi Park protests as a way to oppose AKP's body politics and to reclaim autonomy over their bodies. In general, the use of sexist and homophobic language and swear words are common in political movements in Turkey. This was also the case in the early days of the Gezi protests. However, the feminists and LGBTI groups created campaigns that specifically targeted banning the use of such language in the protests and designed workshops to teach how gender-neutral political language plays an important role in embracing everyone and accomplishing the cause of Gezi. These attempts were successful in terms of convincing other groups to adopt a non-discriminatory language. For example, Çarşı, a famous fan group constituted of Beşiktaş football club supporters, gave flowers to the LGBTI groups in the protests, and apologised for using sexist swear words in their slogans (Eslen-Ziya and Erhart, 2015).

These fan groups even participated in the Istanbul Gay Pride, which has coincided with the Gezi Park protests at Istiklal street and Taksim Square. An interview with a football fan (Ozbay and Soybakis, 2020: 44) indicates this transformative learning process:

I learned a lot from them and they made me think about my actions. I even participated in the Gay Pride event. Now, I know that feminists are not monsters. I am still your hetero football guy, but I have changed.

This was a clear moment of victory for the collective spirit of and gender activism in Gezi as hegemonic Turkish masculinity eroded to a certain extent and developed new tolerance to the presence of 'otherised' people like LGBTI individuals, vegans or ecologists, who are no longer seen as inferior (Ozbay and Soybakis, 2020)

Lastly, women in the protests used body performances or images to criticise the AKP's intervention in their bodies. Some of these images have become symbols of the Gezi Park protests. For example, the Woman in Red, (image of a young woman in a red summer dress standing in front of a police officer spraying pepper gas directly to her face) and Lady in Black (image of a young woman standing with open arms and trying to stop the water cannon vehicle on her own) illustrated politically active and fearless Turkish women, who reject traditional gender roles and utilise their bodies to convey political messages (Arat, 2013; Erkul, 2020; Kuras 2015; Tekay and Ustun, 2013). Women's bodies moved beyond being patriarchal objects and turned into political constructs. Relatedly, the protestors defined rebellious women as the most beautiful women and named them all as 'Miss Turkey 2013' (Erhart, 2013). These bodily images were used as counter representations of AKP's vision of female bodies' appropriate role and place in the society.

Violence

Lastly, feminists in the Gezi Park protests called for an ending to all forms of violence and for achieving peace in Turkish society. Gender-based violence has been intensified by AKP's adherence to transnationally shaped neoliberal economic policies (Arat, 2013). A report by International Civil Society Network Action (2015) indicates that gender-based violence, honour killings, and femicides have steadily increased over the years, and that 42 percent of women in Turkey have experienced domestic violence by a relative. The Ministry of Family and Social Policies is silent about these problems and fails to implement laws against domestic violence and protection mechanisms for the victims while its main focus is on preventing divorces (International Civil Society Network Action, 2015). Feminists in the protests not only revolted against the normalisation of such domestic and sexual violence but also criticised the state violence against women activists, who often experience police violence and harassment during custody. Unfortunately, some women experienced police abuse and harassment in the Gezi Park protests too. However, because of the solidarity of the protestors, the women were empowered to overcome shame and expose the police abuse publicly (Tekay and Ustun, 2013).

Some of the urban women's organisations in the protests like the Yogurtcu Women's Forum addressed violence in urban life and stated that women no longer want to be concerned about harassment and rape in the urban areas (Kaya, 2015). The neoliberal restructuring created moralised and gendered public spaces, in which women going out alone at night and wearing revealing clothes were shamed and stigmatised. When there was an incident of rape or harassment society blamed the women while justifying the actions of persecutors (Kaya, 2015). This mentality eventually exacerbated and normalised gender-based violence in public spaces. During the protests, Taksim square, which is unfortunately infamous for the sexual harassment of women in massive public gatherings like the New Year's Eve celebration (Kurtulus Korkman and Aciksoz, 2013), has been transformed into a harassment-free zone by the feminist and LGBTI organisations. Such organisations educated the protestors about the risks of being made a target of gender-based violence in large public gatherings and busy districts in central Istanbul.

Similarly, as noted above, another organisation called the Women's Initiative for Peace drew attention to the state violence against women in the Eastern provinces and expressed their concerns about forced migration, violence and rape in the Kurdish conflict (Kaya, 2015). These campaigns indicated that gender-based violence is a common theme in feminist activism in the Gezi Park protests as there is a clear correlation between the increase of gender-based violence and neoliberal restructuring under the rule of the AKP.

CONCLUSION

This article has reviewed the characteristics, concerns and goals of global feminist anti-globalisation activism in the Gezi Park Protests. By convincing other groups, Turkish feminists aim to make their protest movements more responsive to gender issues. In this way, they strengthen their agency and visibility as a political actor. I consider the Gezi Park protests to be a more recent manifestation of both the Global Justice Movement and global feminist anti-globalisation activisms. Feminist groups in the Gezi Park protests responded to local and national issues while

displaying similarities with this type of activism at the global level too, in terms of defining oppressive mechanisms, goals and demands. In this way, local and global feminist anti-globalisation activism complement and develop in relation to each other. I used Eschle and Maiguashca's (2010) framework to analyse feminist anti-globalisation activism in the protests, and to see how women experience global patterns in local contexts and mobilise against them.

The real effect of the Gezi Park protests on Turkish politics is contestable. It may be argued that the protests did not lead to a meaningful change as there were no major shifts in the national election and plebiscite results. The initial reaction of the government towards the Gezi Park protests was in organising 'Respect for National Will Meetings' as a counter-movement to claim back its power. In these meetings, the government proceeded to construct the Gezi Park protests as an anti-religious activity, a coup attempt and a dark international project against the establishment and the elite, as well as against the 'protector of representative democracy', the AKP, and its man of the people, Prime Minister Erdogan (Bilgic, 2018). Nonetheless, the government was concerned about the potential of these protests and wanted to ensure that something like 'Gezi' would never happen again. Hence, it has introduced the Internal Security Package in 2015, which broadened the authority and power of the police force (for instance, the police now have the right to open lethal fire on protestors), because in the eyes of the AKP, internal opposition is a major threat to the national security (Esen and Gumuscu, 2016).

Furthermore, many critical political events in the following years have contributed to stalling the positive effects of the Gezi Park protests. These events were, for example, the bombings in Suruc, Istanbul and Ankara between 2015 and 2016, frequent elections and plebiscites between 2015 and 2019, the destabilising effect of the reception of high numbers of Syrian refugees, and the end of the Kurdish Peace Process (Uluğ and Acar, 2018). Most importantly, the failed coup attempt in 2016 led to a state of emergency status and eventually into a regime change that has increased the state repression on dissidence (Uluğ and Acar, 2018). In 2017, the AKP won the constitutional referendum for changing Turkey's political regime from parliamentary democracy to the presidential system. The new constitution gives full political power over the parliament to Erdogan, the president. Today, Erdogan's social interventionist policies still continue to target women.

That said, the Gezi Park protests have been successful in terms of creating some positive long-term effects in Turkish politics. For example, some of the forums created in the protests evolved into neighbourhood solidarity groups like the Istanbul City Defense (a local organisation fighting against urban development projects in Istanbul (Fernández-Savater et al, 2017) or United June Movement (a political organisation that aims to perpetuate the spirit of Gezi) (Uluğ and Acar, 2018). Moreover, on the individual, group and societal level, 'Gezi' had a positive emotional outcome on the participants as they become more politically active and formed connections with previously excluded groups and gained empathy towards each other (Uluğ and Acar, 2018).

Such positive outcomes have also benefited Turkish feminist movements as a whole, as the protests brought greater influence for feminist networks through giving a better platform for feminists to exchange ideas with other activist groups. A 2018 newspaper interview conducted with the women activists who participated in 'Gezi' shows that the protests gave hope, morale, and self-esteem to feminists (Avsar, 2018). Within this context, they use the memory of Gezi Park as a reference point to strengthen their autonomy and identity as a legitimate oppositional actor in their more recent political protests over the environment, transphobia, violence against women or labour issues (Goker, 2019). Most importantly, Turkish feminism has integrated claims about anti-globalisation to its own agenda. Women who formed the Flormar strike (Birgün, 2019), women organisations Ekmek ve Gül (*Bread and Rose*) or Eşitlikçi Kadın Platformu (*Platform for Equality, Justice and Women*), joined the Ida Mountain Protests in 2019 and small local women's organisations that opposed to the Canal Istanbul Project in 2020 can be seen as positive examples for the continuation of the anti-globalisation stance of Turkish feminists during Gezi - which is built on the legacy of the feminist activism of the Global Justice Movement.

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Book Review

Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories: Feminist Conversations on War, Genocide and Political Violence

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Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories: Feminist Conversations on War, Genocide and Political Violence is an uncomfortable book to read, and I mean this in a very positive way. Questioning the 'given' is sometimes exciting, but it is unsettling; one needs to be open to the discomfort of critical thinking. This edited book invites the audience to question what is taken for granted in several fields including war studies, memory research and gender studies. In my view, affect studies can be added to the list as well. For me, the book shows the complexities and contradictions of silencing, it discusses the links between subjectivities and silence, unpacks several layers of silencing (and unsilencing), provides feminist self-reflections on silence, and questions the ways in which remembering, reminding and retheorising silences manifests.

Currently, much of non-feminist research produced in social sciences can recognise that 'gender is significant', but they generally cannot go further and provide a complex feminist analysis. Feminist perspectives have been intervening in such understandings and *Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories* is a great example of such an intervention. To illustrate, war studies does recognise that women are affected by war conditions, genocide studies does cover what happens to girls and women during genocide, and research on political violence does include some gendered forms of violence. However, this book does not only bring war, genocide and political violence studies together, but it does so by providing a complex feminist analysis from the intersections of these fields. In addition to presenting a set of nuanced feminist analyses to the analysis of war, genocide and political violence; the book includes a wide range of geo-political cases written through deploying feminist curiosity. Thus, it fits very well with 'The Feminist Imagination: Europe and Beyond' series and expands horizons for imagining a feminist past, present and future. In this sense, this book goes beyond recognising that gender (or commonly only 'women') is significant in analysing war, genocide and political violence, rather it shows how gender should be central from intersectional perspectives.

The book is about war, genocide and political violence; however, it is fair to claim that it is not simply a collection of book chapters on these topics, only focusing on different contexts and cases – a common trap for edited books. The chapters feel as if they talk to each other, especially through the theme of a 'politics of silence', a central problematisation of the book, investigated from feminist perspectives. The contributors of the book are well aware that the politics of silence is not limited to 'uncovering' the silence or only 'giving voice to those who

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are forgotten'. Overall, the book shows the complexities and contradictions of silencing, discusses the links between subjectivities and silence, unpacks several layers of silencing (and unsilencing), provides feminist self-reflections on silence, and questions the ways how remembering, reminding and retheorising silences lie manifest. In her foreword, Cynthia Enloe points out that telling and silences should not be considered dichotomously, but should be analysed by investigating 'selective tellings, accurate and inaccurate interpretations of those tellings, forgettings, misrememberings, and exploitations of stories told and stories buried' (p. xix).

The book has four main parts and four impressive commentaries before each part. In my opinion, the introduction chapter and first four commentaries are worth mentioning for their underlining of the problematisations of silence, and for guiding the reader on the upcoming chapters. The following questions are based on my way of reading the commentaries: How can the process of unsilencing be imagined through feminist research beyond binary categories of silence and voice, victim and perpetrator? Who is aiming to break what kind of silences, and with which motivations in feminist research (Andrea Petó, Commentary Part 1)? How can one think about multiple categories of women by analysing militarised subjectivities and silence from intersectional perspectives (Orna Sasson-Levy, Part II)? How is it possible to analyse not only what is said, written and shown, but also what is left out in significations of the category 'women' (Banu Karaca, Part III)? What are the ways to link memory, evidence and gender as a part of an 'unsilencing' project (Arlene Avakian, Part IV)? These are thought-provoking questions, significant for feminist research within and beyond the issues of war, genocide and political violence.

The first part of the book is named 'Sexual Violence: Silence, Narration, Resistance' and includes four impressive chapters in addition to the commentary. This part contains chapters from a range of geo-political contexts and historical periods during wars and military regimes. These include Germany (1941–1945), the Japanese occupation of British Asia (Second World War), Greece (1967–1974) and Turkey (1980–1983) along with all the specificities, articulations and complexities of sexual violence. The first chapter, written by Regina Mühlhäuser, starts with the issue of denial of sexual violence at the state level. Questioning the assumption that Nazi soldiers avoided rape due to the law on 'race defilement', the chapter does not only show that sexual violence was perpetrated by German soldiers against Jewish women, but also shows the complexities of rape and sexual violence through unpacking their practices of rape, and linking such forms of sexual violence to militarised masculinity and ethnic supremacy. Thus, it resists the denial and unsilencing of official and national memory. Felicia Yap, the author of the second chapter focuses on the narration of sexual violence in relation to silence and questions 'positionality' through analysing the similarities and differences of European and Asian women's narratives of rape and sexual violence in the Japanese occupied lands during Second World War. The chapter questions the relevance of the colonial setting upon silencing and narration.

In between silence and narration, sexual violence was perpetrated by the militarised state, and officially tolerated by it; the following two chapters, written by Katerina Stefatos and Bürge Abiral, show this using two case studies by investigating the gendered memories of politically active women during the Greek Military Dictatorship (chapter three) and Military Junta in Turkey (chapter four). These chapters evaluate the constructions of patriarchal, nationalist and militaristic states through following women within the leftist opposition. They unpack the hegemonic discourses on normative femininities within nationalist and militaristic settings against the narratives of marginalisation of leftist women's experiences through selective silencing. Both chapters ask significant questions about not only about practices of 'national remembering', but also they frame the critique with gendered leftist narratives and some non-intersectionalist feminist perspectives. Overall, the first part of the book reveals different forms of sexual violence, not only by breaking the silence of national, colonial and militaristic narratives, but also by showing the possibilities of feminist narrations in relation to the potential of resistance.

'Gendering Memories of War, Soldiering and Resistance' is the second part of the book, and it is also very strong in not only questioning the given, but also pushing the limits of feminist imagination in relation to women's militarised subjectivities and women in armed forces. Feminist historiography tended to look back to 'women' from the past that can evoke 'sympathy' to contemporary feminist eyes. This tendency is not unimportant, especially in relation to the criticism of the 'erasure' of women from the history; it allowed the challenging of gendered narratives and nationalistic claims. However, going beyond these cases that easily seem sympathetic, it is significant to enquire further: Whose silence is 'worth' criticising? How can feminist research engage with a politics of silence within the fields of operation of the armed forces? This part manages to ask these questions and to analyse women's subjectivities produced within the armed forces—a rather neglected topic. The first chapter authored by Weronika Grzebalska in this part focuses on women insurgents' experiences during Warsaw Uprising against the German occupation in 1944 and brings a feminist analysis of how their experiences were marginalised. In the following chapter, Gianluca Schiavo also focuses on armed forces, but with a specific interest in the female fascist soldiers who supported Mussolini's government and had an active part in the Italian Civil War. The chapter analyses veteran women's justification of their actions during the wartime with the claim of aiming to serve their country, not to support the fascist ideology.

The following chapter written by Setenay Nil Doğan also engages with militant women who were willing to join to the war, specifically seven Abkhazian women who lived through the diaspora in Turkey and later joined the war in Abkhazia. This chapter has a specific focus on the analysis of patriotism, motherhood and gendered military experience, with the emphasis on the different layers of lives of these women, their experience during the war, and reactions to them in the diaspora. In final chapter, Stephanie E. Yuhl focuses on the armed forces again, but with a focus on what happened to women after the war, through veteran women who joined the wars in Iraq and/or Afghanistan from the USA. Female soldiering and homecoming narratives are used in this chapter to analyse the multiple subjectivities of ‘American women veterans’. All four chapters in this part of the book are significant for showing the multiplicity of the insurgent, veteran and militant women from intersectional feminist perspectives. This effort is especially significant and timely because right-wing conservative ideologies are currently taking an interest in highlighting women in these contexts in order to reinstitutionalise gendered normativities.

The third part of the book, ‘Fictionalizing and Visualizing Gendered Memories’, turns to ‘unsettling accounts’ by thinking about collective memories and by complicating the category of ‘women as victims’. It starts with a chapter written by Sophie Milquet on representations of women’s experiences and specificities of women’s memories during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Looking to the layers of gendered silencing, it provides a nuanced analysis of the collective memory through the tension between silence and speech within resistance but not as a dichotomous tension, rather a dialectic one. The following chapter, with the authorship of Andrea Pető, focuses on Hungarian women who were complicit with the right-wing extremist politics and war during the post-World War II era, through visual representations. Unpacking the portrayal of female perpetrators and questioning what visual representations do to counter memories, the chapter contributes to a feminist questioning of fascist movements.

In the following chapter, Kornelia Slavova analyses the inter-ethnic wars in former Yugoslavia through the imaginary apparatus of films as successful feminist interventions that refuse silencing and go beyond the victimisation of women. Criticising Western-centric approaches to victimised representations of women, it looks for new possibilities of analysis that can reach beyond essentialist and ahistorical understandings of womanhood. The final chapter in this part, written by Marjaana Jauhola, discusses the political violence and governmentality evident in Aceh. Beyond linear and developmentalist discourses, it discusses silence as a strategy of resistance and a form of agency, that reflects the complexity of the politics of silence. I consider this part to be a strong contribution, due to its questioning of dichotomies, thinking beyond a ‘feminist common sense’, unpacking representations, and reimagining subjectivities through a set of methodologically interesting questionings with fiction and vision.

The final part of the book, entitled ‘Feminist Reimaginings’, has fewer chapters, yet is just as important. The first chapter is a very creative self-reflexive piece, focusing on the Armenian women who were directly affected by the 1915 genocide against Armenians, and questioning the relationship between text and context. In this chapter, the author Hourig Attarian claims that the ‘(re)imagining necessitates a listening to *silence*’ (p. 265) and raises impressive questions regarding how to listen to silence through looking to women’s narratives. The final chapter of the book, authored by Cynthia Cockburn, is also a piece of excellent self-reflexive work, based on the author’s ‘revisit’ of a project that was held in 1996 with three women’s organisations in Northern Ireland, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Israel/Palestine, each were founded due to the wars in the regions at that time. The chapter is not reporting upon what has changed since 1996, but asks instead powerful questions regarding common problems of research strategies when exploring memory work. This final part is a great end to the book, as it concerns the contributions and challenges of the research on war, genocide and political violence. In my view, it also answers some methodological questions and provides new ones that trigger feminist curiosity.

Overall, I consider this book a very good contribution in the fields of war/military studies, memory research and gender studies, as the editors intended. As the richness of the book’s parts shows, the geopolitical contexts are not simply taken as different case-studies, but there is a special emphasis on contextualisation, in relation to positionality. Moreover, throughout the book, there is a very wide range of materials used: oral testimonies, official documents, personal writings, court testimonies, novels, photographs, films, autobiography, family stories and previous research. Through this wide range of materials, the contributors are interested in criticising binaries, unpacking ahistorical and essentialist analysis, analysing constructions of femininities and drawing research strategies for the future research on these fields.

I can conclude by suggesting that in addition to war/military studies, memory research and gender studies, this book also might be of strong interest to the researchers working in affect studies, in relation to the book’s central problematisation of silence. Similar to silence (and in relation with it), there are some affective emphases that return as themes in nearly all of the chapters: shame, guilt, self-sacrificing, belonging, bravery, honour. The ways these are discussed shows that emotions are not simply a side effect of social and political events (a view affect studies would be critical of), but quite in the centre for forming a critical understanding of social and political constitutions, in war, genocide, political violence and beyond.

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Book Review

Culture Warlords: My Journey into the Dark Web of White Supremacy

Hope Kitts ^{1*}

Published: March 5, 2021

Book's Author: Talia Lavin

Publication Date: October 2020

Publisher: Hachette Books

Price (Hardcover): \$27/\$34 (CAD)

Number of Pages: 288 pp.

ISBN-13: 9780306846434

With *Culture Warlords* (2020), Lavin ventures down the rabbit hole of hatred, misogyny and bigotry to re-emerge with knowledge you never knew you did not want to know. Lavin, a prolific freelance writer based in New York, begins with what seems to be individual antifascist sabotage of right-wing online communities, and proceeds to encompass a collective and common project. Her work builds to reveal law enforcement's complicity with fascist organising and condemns major technology companies such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, and YouTube, which profit from underground international domestic terrorist networking. She clarifies the loose movement, known as Antifa, and aims to mobilise others to subvert fascist organising. She speaks to radicals, liberals and moderates alike – anyone who might defend hate speech on the basis of free speech, thus becoming complicit in the legacy of violence enacted in the name of the so-called pure, white race. Although focusing on white supremacy, she shows how misogyny intimately connects with ideologies promoting white supremacist violence.

Lavin works in the company of her feminist predecessors, radical activist scholars who articulated the intertwined relationship between racism and misogyny (Combahee River Collective, 1979; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1983; Lorde, 1984). These scholars theorised what bell hooks (2013) later names Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy: a matrix of intersecting, interdependent ideologies maintained to perpetuate social, political and economic global subjugation of the masses. Rather than illuminating the simultaneity of oppressive structures that target women and people of colour as her predecessors have, Lavin asks if the relationship could be causal, if misogyny can act as gateway to white supremacy or vice versa (p.112).

To enact her subterfuge, Lavin adopts multiple white identities in order to gain entry into the online underworld of white supremacists and antifeminists. To the uninitiated she reveals the tactics, lingo and psychology of a virtual universe where white supremacist misogynists thrive via platforms named Telegram, 8chan and WhiteDate. Notably, she virtually becomes 'AryanQueen:' a blonde (of course) neo-Nazi single looking for love with like-minded bigots. She exposes the pathos of those who are known as 'incels,' or involuntary celibates, i.e., men who lack experience with physical intimacy and through this lack of connection become bitter, spiteful, self-loathing misogynists. Like an Antifa siren off the shores of MAGA, she lures unsuspecting incels so that they might be forced to face in their public life – who they really are. Rather than avoiding the stereotypes of the evil seductress, the succubus, the author links seduction and war, and relishes her deceit, happily playing the role of Jezebel.

Like those before her (Chisholm, 1970; Davis, 1983), Lavin illustrates the connection between white supremacy and antifeminism through analysis of the logic of control – both of the female body as a breeding machine and the

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victimisation of women of colour as the fulfilment of non-reproductive sexual fantasy. White supremacists' obsession with racial purity functions to subjugate white women to their reproductive capacity, limited to reproducing with white men. Thus, a woman's purpose, worth, and morality are linked to their sympathy with and loyalty to white supremacist values. Women's subjection is justified in this ideology because their sympathy and loyalty cannot be guaranteed.

The author shows white supremacist ideology, defined by binary logic and opposed to the hybrid, cosmic consciousness, Anzaldúa (1987) articulates. Viewed solely as breeding machines, white women are excluded from sexual acts defined by pleasure and spared sadistic sexual objectification, at least ideologically. Lavin reveals the men courting her on WhiteDate as surprisingly polite and deferential, if not a little dismissive of her freedom to shop around, as it were. The notion of a woman as fully human—sexual, moral and intellectual—is absent from white supremacist ideology which perpetuates what W. E. B. DuBois called 'the damnation of women,' that women (particularly Black women) cannot be both mother and worker, let alone thinker (DuBois, 1920). Lavin shows that by this logic women are either vessels for breeding the white race, race traitors or lascivious sub-humans.

Though Lavin animates the either-or logic of white supremacist misogyny, the simplicity of binary logic confines her analysis. While she vividly shows how white supremacy and misogyny operate through a good vs. evil, Black vs. white, pure vs. impure and male vs. female evaluative system, she does little to theorise the complexity of these ideologies beyond the body. White supremacist ideology is characterised as embodied in white men, while antifascist ideology is characterised by women of colour. Lavin points out that 'most major Antifa crews in the United States are led by women' (p. 232). Granted, these may be common themes and majority demographics, but failing to disarticulate embodied identity from ideology oversimplifies the insidiousness of these belief systems.

The author does introduce one young woman prominent in the alt-right, but fails to provide an analysis of how and why a young woman could promulgate ideas contrary to her interests as a woman. While it is safe to say that most white supremacists are white men, white supremacist ideology does extend to women and people of colour. bell hooks (2013), for example, states that 'we have all been raised to embrace the logic of white supremacy (this includes people of colour),' and other scholars show how white supremacist ideology, including misogyny, variously and intersectionally permeates cultures not considered white (Hurtado and Sinha, 2016; Neal, 2013; Nieto-Phillips, 2008; Sales, 2002). Furthermore, women are a powerful demographic within the alt-Right; white women, for example, voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election (Jaffe, 2018).

Lavin misses—or at least does not elaborate on—the nuance of white supremacy and the existence of critical white identity embodied in, for example, the many white men who participate in Antifa organising (Kitts, 2018). What motivates these white men to resist the controlling ideologies that would give them power? What logic underlies the impetus of straight, white men to fight against other straight white men for the benefit of those who do not look like them? How do people of colour and women promote ideologies that shame and degrade their own identities? These questions, if considered by Lavin, would provide complexity and nuance to her project. By adopting white identities, both male and female, Lavin's correspondence is limited to her white male interlocutors.

The book may have been made more analytically complex had Lavin devised a way to share the discourse of white Antifa men, white supremacist women, and people of colour espousing white supremacist and misogynist ideology. Her portrayal of people in these communities, white and male as they are, does not reinforce the image they seek to maintain: that of the staunch, gun-toting, brave manly-man. Rather, it reveals them as shameful, snivelling cowards afraid of being revealed for who they really are. One white male, for example, pretends to be his own mother in an effort to persuade Lavin to reverse her intent to expose him publicly.

These vehement white supremacists are anything but fearless soldiers on the front lines of an imagined race war, as they would like us (and themselves) to believe. They have favourite recipes, hobbies and pets, points which serve to humanise rather than pigeonhole. This humanisation, however, is not intended to draw sympathy, but rather shows how their rhetoric 'makes their choices more abhorrent' (p. 85). We can't imagine these dangerous, hateful people as existing over there somewhere away from us, but perhaps as our neighbors next door. They are 'hiding in plain sight (...) working in warehouses and on farms, on army bases (...) construction sites' and law enforcement, not somehow concentrated and identifiable, but geographically scattered throughout liberal and conservative leaning locales (p. 82).

While it is sickening to read about the inner workings of putrid hearts filled with hatred and illogic, with specific examples to illustrate, Lavin reveals how infinitely more self-destructive and consuming it was to actually enter these worlds on a daily basis. Lavin throws herself into the fire, so that we might know just how destructive it can be, and emerges as a Phoenix with guidance for others who seek to defend their communities from fascist violence. Lavin's work sounds the alarm – the alarm that fascist ideology is not something of the past, was not squashed in the allied victory of World War 2, but thrives often undetected and emerges unpredictably in real, physical violence. As is, it is a threat to everyone and especially people of colour, women, non-binary people and people with disabilities. For this reason, the author implores her readers not to get comfortable, but to get involved.

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Book Review

Fugitive Life: The Queer Politics of the Prison State

Mary Jo Klinker ^{1*}

Published: March 5, 2021

Book's Author: Stephen Dillon
Publication Date: 2018
Publisher: Duke University Press
Price: \$24.95
Number of Pages: 198 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-8223-7082-6

In 1977, the George Jackson Brigade declared in a communiqué: 'If people want a better society, they can start by becoming active feminists, anti-racists, and anti-imperialists' (p. 2). This charge is the premise of Stephen Dillon's book *Fugitive Life: The queer politics of the prison state*. Comprised of four chapters, *Fugitive Life* is an examination of gendered and racialized state power, by exploring Black feminist writing. In this analysis, he exposes and critiques the neoliberal-carceral state, which he defines as 'the intimacy between the possession of life itself by the market under neoliberal economics and the exponential expansion of systems of racialized capture and caging under law-and-order politics' (p. 4). Throughout the book, Dillon analyses neoliberalism as a biopolitical project which governs society using carceral violence, a form of racial warfare. He ultimately imagines alternative temporalities from this violence by theorising the role of queer fugitivity.

Dillon's methodology utilises the disciplinary frameworks of literary criticism, feminist, queer, and ethnic studies. His critical intervention draws upon an archive of writings by the George Jackson Brigade, Angela Davis, Susan Choi, Assata Shakur, and the Weather Underground, arguing that 'knowledge produced by the prisoner exposes a truth about the United States that cannot be accessed from elsewhere' (p. 12). These underground sites of knowledge production 'acted as a temporal space that queered normative regimes of living, knowledge, and governance (...) the fugitive and the underground are formations that produced a conception of freedom founded on running away' (p. 24). The queer fugitive, a method located within activist writing and the underground, offers a site that disrupts these systems.

Differing from the freedom project of queer fugitives, Dillon also examines queer as a process of deeming some populations as disposable. In this interpretation, queerness is 'a method for comprehending how power produces racialized, gendered, and sexual difference as a proximity to suffering, subjection, and death' (p. 15). Neoliberalism dismantles the social welfare system, and through a rhetoric of personal responsibility, choice, and individuality, state-sanctioned premature death is obscured. The victims of structural oppression and violence are erased as non-normative or queer, to the state.

Chapter 1 examines the interlocking systems of neoliberal capitalism, carceral violence, and the state. Beginning with Milton Friedman's free market economic theories, Dillon highlights how individual liberty became central to expanding the U.S. prison system. These theories give rise to a 'temporality of violence' where prisons are central to a neoliberal utopia. As Dillon reveals, Goldwater and Nixon's 'Law and Order' politics argued that leftist movements threatened the nation's future, thereby bolstering mass incarceration state surveillance and policing.

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Chapter 2 examines ‘neoliberal freedom’ as an outcome the civil rights demands of the 1960s and 1970s. Disrupting the linear progression of this ‘steady march forward,’ he argues fugitivity provides a radical imagination toward the unknown. Through exploring the fugitive activists’ Susan Choi’s novel *American Woman* and Diana Block’s memoir *Arm the Spirit*, he theorises the underground as an alternative time and space. These texts offer a glimpse at the unrecorded history of the underground and present the radical vision of freedom as fugitivity. Chapter 3 begins with an analysis of Assata Shakur as a Black feminist fugitive, arguing that ‘the neoliberal state is the kinship shared between the free world and the prison—an affinity structured and produced by a gendered antiblackness inaugurated under chattel slavery. Technologies of antiblack, heteropatriarchal violence queer time’ (p. 85). In this chapter, Dillon offers an important analysis of the role of reform in reifying the state and reorganising institutions of slavery and imperialism. This replication of power structures occurs not only through the penal system but is mirrored in the economic market.

Entitled *Only the sun will bleach his bones quicker*, Chapter 4 builds from Audre Lorde’s poem ‘Power’ on police terror and white supremacy, in order to examine the epistemology of fugitivity through poetry. Here Dillon interrogates the way Black feminist poets explored the gendered and racialized state, as well as the terrain of desire. The chapter’s analysis starts with the 1971 Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) occupation of Weinstein Hall at New York University. Activists of the 1971 occupation sought to answer: ‘Pig power or gay power? Escape or capture?’ (p. 121).

A far call from the politics of STAR, contemporary queer liberalism undermines the radical potential of these previous projects by prioritising a homonormativity in line with imperialism, white supremacy, and neoliberalism. Echoing the controlling apparatus of a Foucauldian panopticon, homonormative limitations expose policing as both a practice of the carceral system, and ‘*Policing is the disciplining and management of desire*’ (p. 134). Concluding with the words of Audre Lorde’s ‘Uses of the Erotic,’ Dillon theorises the erotic and desire as a practice of fugitivity that undermines the neoliberal-carceral state.

Dillon’s lessons on fugitivity have important meaning following the summer 2020 uprisings against anti-Black state violence. What Dillon offers through archive is the incredible importance of the underground. Some of the most vital insurgent politics have been completed underground, as shown in his analysis of lesbian abolitionist Rita Bo Brown, a George Jackson Brigade member and captured fugitive. In his examination of Brown’s 1980s feminist politics, Dillon argues that a devastating impact of neoliberalism has been the undermining of collective movements and shift toward non-profitisation. As he argues through Brown’s work, this shift has produced a ‘leftist, neoliberal desire for inclusion and incorporation, as opposed to abolition and liberation’ (p. 151). Dillon’s use of archives to offer an alternative temporality of liberation provides valuable lessons for a return to communiqués in an era of social media. As trans legal scholar Dean Spade has examined in his recent work on mutual aid, visibility, celebrity and social media branding have harmed movements:

Social movements reproduce these hierarchies, valuing people who give speeches, negotiate with bosses and politicians, get published, get elected, and otherwise become visible as actors in ways that align with dominant hierarchies. Forms of celebrity similarly circulate within movements. It is glamorous to take a selfie with Angela Davis, but it is not glamorous to do weekly or monthly prison visits. The circulation of dominant hierarchies of valuation inside movement spaces shapes how people imagine what it means to participate in work for change, who they want to meet, and what they want to do and be seen doing. (Spade, 2020: 135-136)

In 2021, Stephen Dillon’s work is even more timely than its publication in 2018. His rich archive affords the reader a queer temporal dialectic to this moment, offering us a glimpse of the abolitionist horizon: ‘Rather than setting the limit of our radical imaginary at opposition to the conditions of genocidal warfare that make up the prison system, in camaraderie with the queer world-making of José Muñoz, we might figure abolition as a perpetual horizon, a “utopian hermeneutics.” Horizons guide and direct our work “but as they perpetually recede ahead of us, they also refuse to let us become complacent” (Abolition Collective, 2020: 4-5). If ‘prison and market (...) colonise the future’ (p. 28), Dillon’s fugitive – ‘a queer figure who is the site of a dramatic reimaging of freedom’ – is the embodiment of an alternative temporality, the abolitionist horizon (p. 5).

Overall, as theorised throughout *Fugitive Life*, the neoliberal-carceral state greatly impacts the potential of leftist movements; for this reason, the text could be taught in courses on US cultural and political formations of neoliberalism, and in gender and ethnic studies. Furthermore, Dillon’s theoretical framework would be powerfully taught alongside Julie Perini’s 2017 film, *The Gentleman Bank Robber: The Story of Butch Lesbian Freedom Fighter rita bo brown*. In combination, they provide a study of life-long commitment to liberation – a pedagogical approach much needed in a time of uprisings.

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Book Review

What's the Use? On the Uses of Use

Ann Schofield ^{1*}

Published: March 5, 2021

Book's Author: Sara Ahmed

Publication Date: 2019

Publisher: Duke University Press

Price: \$26.95

Number of Pages: 296 pp.

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Sara Ahmed is a practical feminist. This is not to say that she's not a serious, creative, or challenging feminist. She's all those things. But, like bell hooks, Brittany Cooper, and others, Ahmed takes often abstruse feminist theory and makes it accessible to non-academic readers. Her work offers a thinking person's guide to living a feminist life. She understands that creating social change means getting transformative ideas to the widest audience possible.

As well as writing for a broad audience, Ahmed is a prominent voice in efforts to reform British educational institutions. Most recently, frustrated by the University of London's inaction on issues of sexual harassment and sexual misconduct, she resigned in protest from a secure academic position at Goldsmiths College (a constituent college of the University of London) – a high profile resignation that dramatically drew attention to a seemingly insoluble problem. Her most recent book, *What's the Use: On the uses of use* (2019) elegantly attempts to understand the intractability of the university to become safer and more diverse.

Ahmed's accessibility and activism come together in *What's the Use*. With *What's the Use?* Ahmed completes a trilogy that began with *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) and continued with *Willful Subjects* (2014). As in the first two books, Ahmed's method is to 'follow words around.' Use, of course, is more grounded, less abstract than happiness or will and comes with a long literary and philosophical history. One of the delights of *What's the Use* comes from following the word use on a journey that ranges from Lucretius to Virginia Woolf, from John Locke to George Eliot, then takes a deep dive into utilitarian thinkers like Henry Sidgwick, John Stuart Mill, and Jeremy Bentham (a founder of the University of London). While Audre Lorde famously cautioned us that the master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house, Ahmed gracefully uses Western philosophical thought to help build her case for diversity in the university and the queerness of use.

Another, more fanciful part of Ahmed's method is her use of metaphors. Take, for example, the traditional bright red British post box – an object whose use could not be clearer. But, when nesting birds take up residence in a box and a sign appears on the box, 'Birds nesting. Please do not use this box. Many thanks,' the box has been re-purposed. Its use is in no way less essential than its original purpose but could hardly have been anticipated by the builders of the box. Similarly, in an example drawn from literature, George Eliot's character Silas Marner values his brown earthenware pot for its many uses, some of which he and the pot's maker hardly anticipated.

Not surprisingly, along with methodology, utilitarian thought, the ideas of Bentham in particular, centres Ahmed's book. She pays particular attention to utilitarian educational projects such as nineteenth-century monitorial schools, as well as the links of utilitarianism with the modern university. For Ahmed, utilitarianism is a

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prelude to contemporary thinking about use. Disability studies, for example, draws our attention to the use of common objects like doors. On the face of it the use of a door seems clear. But doors are made on a 'normative template' for the able bodied – as Ahmed points out, '[U]sability can thus be reframed as a question of accessibility' (59).

After building the framework for her argument in the first part of the book, Ahmed moves from historical and philosophical ideas about use to the practical in the third chapter of the book. Diversity is well established as a desirable goal for universities in the UK and USA. Most universities have either government mandated or voluntary programs aimed at diversifying their faculties, staff, and student bodies. Do they work? Do the programmes of boards, complaints, and designated diversity officers redress actually function? Ahmed cites examples we are all sadly all familiar with. 'Diversity hires' are welcomed into a university department, only to experience the sexism, racism, and/or homophobia that is 'business as usual'. A graduate student (or junior academic) brings a complaint against a supervisor, a senior colleague. She is cautioned that going ahead with the complaint could jeopardise her career, her future chances – no one will hire you. Evidence is 'she said, he said' or a complaint is filed, goes through channels, then – nothing. It seems to disappear into a Kafka-esque bottomless filing cabinet. In this chapter, Ahmed builds on her earlier work published as *On Being Included: On racism and diversity in institutional work* (2012), in which she described the frustrating task of the diversity worker – hired by universities, only to realise that hiring you *was* the institutional solution.

I read this chapter with especial sadness. More than forty years ago when we began to throw up the scaffolding of what became Women's Studies, we never anticipated how it would evolve into queer studies, sexuality studies, intersectionality – all aimed at transforming the university into a more inclusive, indeed a more useful place. We hardly anticipated how resistant this institution would be to change. Forty years ago, there was no recourse for sexual harassment, discrimination, and sexual misconduct. The attitudes—that's the way things are—boys will be boys—there are no minority scholars to recruit—prevailed. While these attitudes may have dissipated – at least publicly – and multiple avenues through which to register a complaint exist – the outcome, as Ahmed demonstrates, is often the same. The university remains the purview of normative white heteronormativity. But the 'usefulness' of the university, the social function so clearly established by utilitarian thinkers, that Ahmed has conclusively established can only function when all members feel protected and respected.

'Queer use' the theme of Ahmed's final chapter, she defines 'as when you use something for a purpose that is 'very different' from that which was 'originally intended' (p. 199) or 'how those who identify as queer make use of spaces' (p. 200). This chapter echoes her earlier work, *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), and shows Ahmed at her most provocative. Take, for example, her discussion of citational practice. Unlike in the prior book within which she cited no white males, Ahmed found it necessary here to cite many, given that she was writing about the history of utilitarianism. In other words, she makes a case for the *usefulness* of citations rather than simply following common practice. As she writes, 'Queer use offers another way of talking about diversity work: the work you have to do to open institutions to those for whom they were not intended' (p. 212-3).

My one reservation about the book – potentially because I am an American reader or perhaps just missing something – was that it seemed at points to conflate racial/ethnic discrimination and sexual harassment. Although these are different sides of the same coin, they *are* different. For me, this difference was not made sufficiently clear. While the root cause of both problems is resistance to change in patriarchal institutions, in the USA at least the laws and offices to deal with each problem are distinct.

Reading *What's the Use*, it's almost irresistible to ask what's its use? Feminist academics, graduate students, and advanced undergraduates would benefit from exposure to Ahmed's ideas and methods. In a utopian feminist future, I would most like to see diversity workers and university administrators reading, learning from, and implementing the suggestions in Ahmed's book. The outcome would be a more useful institution for all.

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Book Review

Beneath the Surface: A Transnational History of Skin Lighteners

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In *Beneath the Surface: A transnational history of skin lighteners*, Lynn M. Thomas offers a dense history of the use and meaning of skin lighteners in South Africa. Thomas rejects a simple narrative where African women and girls turned to skin lighteners out of a desire to be white. Instead, she offers a more complicated history, noting how a preference for lighter/brighter skin tapped into both indigenous and transnational understandings of femininity, beauty, and modernity.

Readers familiar with her previous work on the history of sexuality in colonial Kenya will anticipate a closely argued and exhaustively researched study which illuminates connections between racial and gendered formations, and attends both to the regimes of power produced by colonialism and the forms of resistance such regimes inspired. They will not be disappointed—this study offers a strongly intersectional analysis that understands women and girls as both the target of particularly gendered forms of racialisation, and as agential subjects who negotiated their own lives through aesthetic practices. The project is even more connected, however, to Thomas's work with the Modern Girl Around the World Research Group,¹ particularly in its attention to how consumer culture produced new definitions and practices of girlhood.

A central theme of Thomas's study is that the use of skin lighteners cannot be understood simply as a form of racial false consciousness, in which dark-skinned people use creams and tinctures to turn themselves white. Instead, she argues that 'we must also attend to intersecting political and affective formations of class, gender and sexuality, and to a variety of transregional and multisited processes' (p. 2). To do this, the author adopts an eclectic approach to source material: her sources include archival evidence of pre-colonial cosmetic practices, data from oral histories, articles and images from African periodicals, medical studies, and marketing research. In order to produce a study that attends to the transnational flow of not only skin lighteners themselves but also of attitudes towards them, she adopts a method of 'connective comparison' which 'draws attention to how 'things previously understood to be local come into being through complex global dynamics' that are neither derivative nor linear' (p. 12, quoting from *The Modern Girl Around the World*). By doing so, she is able to elucidate how global dynamics (for instance, the development of an international consumer culture, or the emergence of a transnational Black Consciousness movement) shaped attitudes towards skin tone and skin lightening practices at a local level.

¹ This work culminated in an edited collection to which Thomas was an editor and contributor, *The Modern Girl Around the World*.

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Scholars who are interested in race and gender in Africa will have an obvious interest in this book, particularly as almost all of the scholarship on the use of skin lighteners by black/African peoples has focused on the USA.² But for scholars who are not Africanists, the most valuable contribution of this study may be Thomas's concept of 'technologies of visibility'; technologies of visibility include skin lightening practices that allowed African people, particularly women and girls, to make themselves 'legible' in ways that improved their job prospects, enhanced their desirability as sexual and/or romantic partners, and, perhaps most significantly, marked them as 'modern' subjects. This last point reminded me of Aren Aizura's work on Thai gender-transition clinics, where he argues that Thai transwomen engage in aesthetic practices (including skin lightening) to access forms of 'sometechnical capital' that allow them to claim modernity. What these studies have in common is an analysis of cosmetic practices that moves beyond the simplistic notion that those who try to lighten/brighten their skin do so out of a desire to 'look white,' pointing instead to the broader meanings of skin tone within both indigenous worldviews and global discourses.

Indigenous attitudes towards skin tone, in fact, form the subject of the first chapter. Here, Thomas outlines the prevalence of skin lightening/brightening practices in pre-colonial South Africa. Using archival evidence from traders, ethnographers, missionaries, and officials, she demonstrates that several ethnolinguistic groups in South Africa showed a preference for lighter/brighter skin and used pigments to achieve this look. (Significantly, not all ethnolinguistic groups shared this preference: isiZulu speakers seem to have preferred darker skin.) Such practices, she argues, 'were tied to gender and generational beauty ideals rather than to racial designations' (p. 23).

Chapter Two examines a black South African newspaper, *Bantu World*, for evidence about the use and meaning of skin lighteners in the 1930s, when commercially produced skin lighteners became to be heavily marketed in the region. In particular, she offers a fascinating reading of the beauty contests sponsored by *Bantu World*, showing how the use of lighteners signalled African girls' and women's claims to modernity and their status as 'respectable women.'

The author turns next to a discussion of the manufacturing and marketing of skin lighteners in South Africa, which shifted from a primarily white consumer base to a majority brown and black market in the 1930s and 40s. She pairs this trend with an analysis of the increasing popularity of 'tanning' among white women during the same time period, highlighting contemporary discourses that mockingly compared white attempts to become darker to black and brown folks' desire to lighten their skin. Through this comparison, Thomas establishes that *gradations* in skin colour were much more significant than a simple black/white divide; women and girls of all skin tones engaged in cosmetic practices that altered their colour in order to achieve a 'modern' look, and—for racialised women—in order to '[attract] favourable attention and [express] gendered forms of racial respectability' (p. 97).

Chapter Four turns again to a discussion of beauty contests in South African periodicals, but this time during the two decades following the establishment of Apartheid rule in 1948. While acknowledging that skin lightening may have enabled African women to access jobs and opportunities that were generally reserved for those classified as Coloured under the Apartheid regime, Thomas argues that the belief that lighter skin made one more beautiful was a more influential factor. The beauty contests held in the pages of South African periodicals, particularly those marketed to black populations like *Drum*, *Zonke!*, and *Bantu World*, both championed the desirability of black women while simultaneously engaging in practices (including photographic techniques designed to wash out black skin) that asserted the superiority of lighter skin tones. (Duke Press deserves special praise for including so many high-quality images in this chapter, as they allow Thomas's visual analysis to shine.)

In the next chapter, Thomas offers a transnational analysis of discourses surrounding skin lightening in the 1960s. She shifts her focus to East Africa, where the use of South African-produced skin lighteners was widely condemned by postcolonial leaders. In part, these leaders were influenced by the broader Black Consciousness movement, which asserted the value and desirability of black aesthetics. However, the author shows that the Kenyan rejection of skin lighteners was even more motivated by a gendered politics that condemned women who used these products as promiscuous and rebellious. At the same time, physicians in the USA and South Africa began to raise concerns about the medical effects of skin lighteners.

While these two lines of critique remained relatively distinct in the 60s, by the 1970s they merged as skin lighteners were increasingly targeted as both dangerous and anti-black. Thomas's gendered analysis is particularly strong in Chapter Six, as she discusses how African and Afro-American women were caught between a Black Consciousness movement which marginalised issues of gender, and a mainstream feminist movement which tended to ignore or minimise racial differences. New assertions of racial pride and increased attention to the dangerous medical consequences of skin lighteners led South Africa to ban depigmenting agents in the 1990s. Yet, this ban has not eliminated the use of skin-lighteners—rather, as the author notes in her conclusion, women and girls in Sub-Saharan Africa increasingly rely on illegally imported products, often containing dangerous levels of chemicals like hydroquinone.

² An exception is Timothy Burke's *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*.

One area that Thomas leaves relatively unexplored is the use of skin lighteners by African men. While she mentions that these products were used by men and boys in several parts of the text—and even notes that men sometimes demanded to be included in the beauty contests held in the pages of African periodicals (p. 198)—she does not delve very deeply into the relationship between skin tone, consumerism, and masculinity. While this may be a decision informed by a need to limit the scope of her argument, it prevents her from analysing how femininity and girlhood were produced in relation to both hegemonic and dissident masculinities. In particular, she notes in several places how ‘modern girls’ were castigated by African men, who saw their aesthetic practices as signs of immorality (e.g., p. 61). It would be interesting to learn how African men who engaged in similar aesthetic practices fit into this discourse.

Additionally, while Thomas’s decision to focus her analysis on the use of skin lighteners by women classified as African or Coloured allows her to provide a particularly dense history, it also leaves a few questions unanswered. As I read, I found myself wanting more information about how other racialised populations in South Africa viewed/used skin lighteners—for instance, South Asian, Chinese, or Cape Malay communities.

Finally, while Thomas pays close attention to transatlantic discourses surrounding skin colour and lighteners, her analysis is primarily unidirectional. With a few exceptions—as when she discusses Kenyan politician Tom Mboya’s condemnation of skin lighteners during a visit to the US in 1954 (p. 173-4)—her study shows how African American discourses influenced South Africans. Yet, surely South African aesthetics also influenced the USA, particularly during the Black Power movement of the 1960s and 70s. Ultimately, however, these lingering questions point less to any failings of this book, and more to its potential to prompt veins of inquiry that will be answered in future research. *Beneath the Surface* offers a densely contextualised and deeply nuanced study that significantly expands our understanding of the intertwined production of race, gender, and modernity.

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