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CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE ANTHROPOCENE: ECOFEMINIST ETHICS OF INDEPENDENCE, REPAIR, AND RESPONSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

The accelerating crises of the Anthropocene demand a fundamental shift in how we think about our relationship with the natural world. This paper argues that ecofeminism – by linking the exploitation of nature with the oppression of women – offers an essential framework for reimagining environmental care. It challenges the entrenched belief in human independence and exceptionalism, showing how patriarchal and capitalist systems have long legitimised the domination of both ecosystems and marginalised communities. Instead, it calls for an ethic of interdependence and kinship, recognising humans as members of an "earth family" deeply entangled with all forms of life. Drawing on thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Val Plumwood, Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Ariel Salleh, Ronnie Hawkins, and Serenella Iovino, as well as grassroots movements like the Chipko and Green Belt initiatives, the paper highlights "care" and "repair" as central to ecological healing. It examines how concepts like "response-ability" and the rights of nature, shaped by Indigenous philosophies, expand responsibility beyond the human sphere. It advocates humility, reciprocity, and structural change, rejecting quick technological fixes as the basis for a planetary ethic. Ultimately, it suggests that caring for the environment today is as much about transforming social systems as it is about restoring damaged landscapes.

KEYWORDS: Interdependence; Kinship; Rights of Nature; Decolonisation; Capitalist Patriarchy.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the epoch of the Anthropocene – an era defined by unprecedented human impact on the environment – how might an ecofeminist ethics guide us in caring for a damaged planet? The Anthropocene's cascading crises (climate change, mass extinctions, pollution) pose urgent ethical and political questions. Yet, conventional environmental ethics often remain unresolved on issues of human exceptionalism, technological "solutions", and our responsibility toward non-human life. Ecofeminism offers a critical lens by linking the domination of nature with the domination of women, arguing that both are rooted in the same patriarchal and capitalist logics (Gaard and Gruen, 1993, p. 2; Warren, 1990, p. 1). This paper explores how ecofeminist thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Val Plumwood, Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Ariel Salleh, Ronnie Zoe Hawkins, and Serenella Iovino reconceptualise our relationship with the environment through the frameworks of interdependence, repair, and responsibility.

What would it mean to replace the illusion of human independence with an acknowledgment of entanglement and kinship? How can practices of care and repair restore bonds in a wounded world? And what new forms of responsibility – or "response-ability" (Haraway, 2016, p. 164) – emerge from seeing humans as part of an ecological family? The discussion traverses ethical, political, and epistemological dimensions of ecofeminism, arguing that caring for the environment in the Anthropocene requires profound shifts in how we understand autonomy, healing, and obligation. Throughout, the term "environment" is not treated as a passive backdrop for human action but as an active matrix of relationships in which feminist ethics take root. Rather than offering a final answer, the paper raises critical questions that remain unresolved – inviting ongoing inquiry into our ecological responsibilities in this troubled time.

1.1. From Independence to Interdependence: Challenging the Illusion of Separation

A central critique that ecofeminism raises in Anthropocene discourse is the illusion of human independence from the environment. Val Plumwood (1993, p. 43) argued that modern Western thought is structured by dualisms – culture/nature, male/female, mind/body – that position "Man" as master over a separate, inferior "Nature". This supposed independence of the human subject is a fiction of what she terms the *"master consciousness"*: a model of the autonomous human that defines itself in radical discontinuity from the rest of life (Plumwood, 1993, p. 52). This logic underpins both the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature (Warren, 1993, p. 11).

The Enlightenment ideal of the autonomous, rational Man depends on denying the interdependencies and care systems that sustain life. But in the Anthropocene, the fallacy of independence has become painfully clear: climate instability, zoonotic pandemics, and ecosystem collapse reveal how deeply entangled human survival is with planetary systems. Ecofeminism states that we must reconceptualize humans not as independent masters of the environment, but as profoundly interdependent with all other life.

Plumwood (1993, pp. 60, 67) calls for "reconstructing identities" in ways that affirm continuity among all lifeforms, while also recognising what she terms "a non-hierarchical concept of difference" between self and other. In other words, difference does not require opposition or domination. Humans differ from trees or whales, but all are members of a continuous community of life. This ethical shift from independence to continuity also implies a shift in knowledge: from knowing *"about"* nature to knowing *"with"* it. Ronnie Zoe Hawkins (1998, p. 159) builds on Plumwood's insights to propose a "virtue ethics for humans living within ecosystems" grounded in "a non-dualistic understanding of ourselves as biological beings interacting with and partly constructing our world". Such an ethic aims to overcome oppression and halt ecological destruction, replacing the fantasy of the atomistic individual with a recognition of the environment as a web of relationships among human and non-human actors.

Donna Haraway (2016, p. 58) elaborates on this idea through her concept of *sympoiesis*, which literally means "making-with". She asserts that "nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organising. *Sympoiesis* is a simple word for worlding-with, in company" (Haraway, 2016, p. 58). This perspective directly challenges the neoliberal and scientific notion of a self-organising, self-sufficient organism (or enterprise) capable of creating itself in isolation. Haraway contends that nothing in the environment truly exists independently; life is always co-constituting through relationships (2016, p. 68). She contrasts *sympoiesis* with autopoiesis ("self-making"), observing that even the term "individual" is misleading if it implies an entity with completely self-defined boundaries (Haraway, 2016, p. 33). Instead, boundaries are porous, and all beings are fundamentally interdependent (Haraway, 2016,

p. 33). Haraway's (2016, p. 4) often cited assertion – "we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations...We become-with each other or not at all" – encapsulates an ecofeminist stance that the survival of the Anthropocene depends on embracing interdependence. In her vision of the *Chthulucene* (Haraway's proposed alternative to the Anthropocene), life is characterised by entangled, "tentacular threads" (2016, p. 5) in which species forge kinship through unusual alliances, and ecological kinship webs replace the alienation of the master subjects. Importantly, "making kin" is not limited to blood relatives or even to human relationships; rather, it "troubles important matters, like to whom one is actually responsible" (Haraway, 2016, p. 2). By adopting this expanded notion of kinship – we see ourselves as kin with fungi, rivers, and insects, then the scope of ethical responsibility extends far beyond the human species.

This vision of kinship also aligns with Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies's (2014, p. 9) critique of "capitalist patriarchy". In *Ecofeminism*, they argue that the capitalist development model is based on a framework of disconnection, in which the environment is treated as merely a storehouse of resources and a dumping ground for waste, just as it treats women's labour as invisible rather than as integral, sustaining forces (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 22). Their ecofeminist perspective asserts that the exploitation of women and the exploitation of nature are not parallel problems but structurally linked (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 14). Ariel Salleh (2014, p. 9), in her foreword to *Ecofeminism*, highlights this perspective "offers an alternative to the relativism" of late capitalist culture by emphasising the fundamental dependence on nature's gifts. She writes that Mies and Shiva, "paint a sharp contrast between the social decay of passive consumerism and the social vitality of skilful, self-sufficient and autonomous livelihood economies: subsistence" (Salleh, 2014, p. iii). Here, autonomy does not refer to the false self-sufficiency of the Western industrial consumer, but to the strength of communities that sustain themselves through mutual exchange with their environment, fulfilling needs locally and sustainably. In such a "subsistence economy", the environment is not a passive setting, but an active "living commons – the basis of life" (Mies and Shiva, 2014, pp. 13, 19), offering the means of life and demanding respectful human engagement.

This vision of localised, reciprocal living directly challenges Anthropocene narratives that depict humanity as an all-powerful geological force. Shiva (2014, p. 17) notes that, "Scientists are now saying we have entered a new age, Anthropocene age, the age in which our species, the human, is becoming the most significant force on the planet". She further warns that:

...if we continue to understand our role as rooted in the old paradigm of capitalist patriarchy – based on a mechanistic world-view, an industrial, capital-centred competitive economy, and a culture of dominance, violence, war and ecological and human irresponsibility – we will witness the rapid unfolding of increasing climate catastrophe, species extinction, economic collapse, and human injustice and inequality. (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 19).

From an ecofeminist perspective, this paradigm rests on a false notion of independence, treating humans as separate from the "Earth family" and seeking to dominate nature as an external object. In contrast, Mies and Shiva (2014, p. 20) advocate a new paradigm in which humans are seen as "members of the Earth family, with responsibility to care for all other forms of life on Earth in all its diversity, from the tiniest microbe to the largest mammal". In this vision, the figure of *Homo dominus* – humans as masters – is replaced with one of interconnected personhood, where humans stand as daughters, sons, and siblings within the larger ecological community. The ethical stakes are profound: seeing nature as family places on us a duty to nurture and respect it, rather than to exploit it.

Serenella Iovino's work on "Material ecocriticism" further strengthens the ecofeminist reorientation of the environment as a network of active subjects rather than a passive backdrop. She contends that the traditional view of the "environment" as a surrounding, external setting is giving way to an understanding of it as "interplay of material subjects" (Iovino, 2014, p. 56). For her, matter itself possesses agency and a narrative: "nature" is not a static object but "an ongoing process of dynamic materialisation and differentiation across time and space" (Iovino, 2014, p. 6). This perspective erases the rigid human-nature divide inherited from Cartesian thought and aligns with ecofeminist commitments that value knowledge and "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 2016, p. 97), as opposed to the illusion of a detached, objective gaze. If all matter carries stories and all being are entangled, then humans can no longer imagine themselves separate observers or masters of the environment – they are participants within a shared web of agency. In this light, the environment becomes a community of subjects, not a collection of objects. Such a view dismantles the ideology of human exceptionalism and calls for an ethic based on partnership.

Therefore, ecofeminist theory challenges the Anthropocene's dominant myth of human supremacy by reaffirming interdependence as the core reality of life. It replaces the ethic of independence – which legitimised treating "Nature" as inert property – with an ethic of relationship. Here, the environment is a "living commons" (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 19) in which humans share, not an asset they control. This relational worldview forms the basis for an ecofeminist ethic of care, urging a stance rooted in humility, cooperation, and kinship with non-human beings. The question that follows is: in practical terms, how can we care for and mend a world so deeply harmed? The next section turns to ecofeminist approaches to "repair" and "care" in the Anthropocene.

1.2. Ethics Of Care and Repair in a Damaged Environment

As the Anthropocene's damage intensifies – with extreme weather, collapsing ecosystems, and polluted landscapes – ecofeminist ethics places care and repair at the centre of its response. For ecofeminists, "caring for the environment" is not a sentimental slogan, instead, it is a radical rethinking of values that challenges the exploitative and violent patterns of patriarchal capitalism. They contend that the historically feminised and undervalued labour of care must be extended beyond human society to embrace the non-human world, and recognised as a foundational principle in times of ecological crisis. This means not only nurturing what can still flourish, but also repairing or restoring what has been damaged – healing the planet's living systems while also mending our fractured relationship with them.

The idea of repair in this context is multifaceted. On one level, it refers to concrete actions such as cleaning contaminated rivers, restoring soil health, protecting biodiversity, and supporting human communities affected by environmental injustice. Yet repair is also a moral stance. Haraway's notion of "staying with the trouble" (2016, p. 18) rejects both the lure of purely technological fixes and the temptation to give in to hopelessness. For her, "staying with the trouble" means engaging fully with our damaged earthly conditions with commitment and creativity, "to stir up potent responses to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places" (Haraway, 2016, p. 18). Repair, in other words, is both resistance and re-worlding: resisting further damage by rejecting mindset of mastery, and actively rebuilding and reweaving the fabric of life.

A well-known illustration of ecofeminist discussions of care is the Chipko Movement in India. During the 1970s, women from Himalayan villages physically hugged trees to stop them from being cut down by commercial loggers (Grow Billion Trees, 2025). Vandana Shiva, who documented Chipko in her book *Staying Alive* (1988), describes this movement as an expression of a feminine and indigenous ethic of care for the environment (p. 88). The Hindi word "Chipko", means "to cling" or "to embrace", reflecting the deep bond between the villagers – especially women, who relied on the forests for fuel and water – and their forest environment (Grow Billion Trees, 2025). By hugging the trees, the women affirmed that the forest was not a commodity to be exploited but an integral part of their community – a source of life that needed protection and affection. The movement's rallying cry, "the forest is our mother's home," encapsulates the ecofeminist belief that nature has nurtured us, and it is our responsibility to nurture nature in return (Tottenham Trees, 2025). This ethos stood in stark opposition to the patriarchal and colonial mindset that viewed forests merely as timber for profit.

As Ariel Salleh (2014, p. 7) notes, that from the "forest dwellers of North India some 300 years ago to the mothers of coalmining Appalachia right now" women have persistently fought to build communities that sustain life. This same spirit was alive at Standing Rock in the United States (2016–2017), where Indigenous women were at the forefront of a peaceful campaign against the Dakota Access Pipeline to defend water resources (Hu, 2024). Calling themselves "water protectors", (Hu, 2024) they rooted their struggle in the care of the Missouri River and reverence for Mother Earth for the sake of generations to come. As one Water Protector explained, "We are not protesters. We are protectors. We are peacefully defending our land and our ways of life. We are standing together in prayer, and fighting for what is right" (The Guardian, 2016). Like the Chipko activists, the women at Standing Rock combined direct resistance with cultural, spiritual, and communal practices of care – organising prayer gatherings, community kitchens, and networks of mutual support, all dedicated to protecting water. The movement was widely described as "led and sustained by women", many of whom drew strength from matriarchal traditions and a deep sense of responsibility to the land (The Guardian, 2016). Even in the face of violent state responses, including water cannons, tear gas, and mass arrests, they stayed committed to nonviolence and collective care. In doing so, their leadership became a powerful global symbol of resistance rooted in love, responsibility,

and a shared duty to protect the Earth.

Salleh (2014, p.7) observes that "ecofeminist solutions are also synergistic; the organisation of daily life around subsistence fosters food sovereignty, participatory democracy and reciprocity with natural ecosystems". In practice, this might mean community gardens in areas lacking fresh food, seed-saving and organic farming to restore soil health and keep food systems in local hands, or Indigenous land stewardship practices that help ecosystems recover. Central to this vision is the idea of subsistence. Far from implying bare survival, the "subsistence perspective" – articulated by Maria Mies and Shiva – describes a way of living in which human needs are met through sustainable connection with the environment, emphasising mutual care over profit-driven growth (2014, p. 389). Historically, much of women's work – such as collecting firewood without harming forests, saving seeds, or managing water – has been focused on sustaining the conditions necessary for life, in stark opposition to the extractive "take-and-discard" logic of industrial capitalism. Ecofeminists argue that, in the Anthropocene, expanding an ethic of care requires elevating these often undervalued, feminised practices of environmental care. It also means acknowledging that repair is not a one-time fix but an ongoing commitment – a form of "response-ability" (Haraway, 2016, p. 164) cultivated through sustained, respectful engagement with the more-than-human world.

Haraway's ideas of "making kin" and "response-ability" (her term for the capacity to respond with care) show how repair is also about restoring relationships (2016, pp. 2, 164). For her, making kin means mending the damaged connections between humans and other species by creating new bonds of solidarity. She highlights examples of "multi-species collaborations" – such as scientists, activists, and animals working together to track pollution – as ways in which "response-ability" (Haraway, 2016, pp. 207, 164) can be cultivated. One striking case is the PigeonBlog, an art-activism project where homing pigeons were equipped with air-quality sensors to gather data on city pollution (Haraway, 2016, pp. 21-22). Here, humans and pigeons became partners, making each other "response-able" to urban environmental challenges in novel ways (Haraway, 2016, p. 21). The pigeons were no longer viewed merely as pollution victims or urban pests. Instead, they were recognised as active agents whose natural abilities – like flight and navigation – enhanced environmental monitoring and repair. These unconventional collaborations point toward a deeper ethical shift: bridging the divide between humans and the rest of nature through relationships rooted in mutual care and cooperation. In doing so, the act of repairing environmental problems such as air pollution is tied to repairing our perception of animals – seeing them not as tools or nuisances, but as co-habitants and partners in our shared environment (Haraway, 2016, pp. 21-22).

At a broader philosophical level, the ecofeminist ethic of care and repair directly challenges the Enlightenment vision of an emotionless, value-neutral science that seeks to control nature. Maria Mies points out how modern technoscience – symbolised by the Manhattan Project engineers who proudly called themselves the "fathers" of the atomic bomb – was built on an outright rejection of care and moral accountability (2014, p. 21). These "fathers of destruction", as she terms them, celebrated a kind of rationality stripped of empathy, enabling the creation of nuclear weapons (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 21), genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and other harmful technologies without concern for their human or ecological impact.

Ecofeminists reject this dangerous detachment by advocating for the "feminisation" of knowledge – not to make it gendered female, but to integrate values often associated with feminine roles, such as empathy, care, and a holistic sense of connection. In this vision, science becomes a practice of engaging with the world, rather than studying it from a detached distance – with the goal of restoration rather than exploitation. As previously discussed, this perspective aligns with Serenella Iovino's "material ecocriticism", which urges us to listen to the "stories" of matter (2014, p. 65) and recognise that the environment itself has agency and can play an active role in its own recovery. For example, after ecological harm, the land often shows self-healing abilities – a forest can slowly regenerate after logging, and a river can cleanse itself once pollutants stop. Human efforts to repair should work alongside these natural processes – respecting and aiding them in the same way a nurse aids a patient's own healing capacity.

This ethic of collaborative repair is clearly visible in ecological restoration and rewilding movements, many of which are led by feminist and Indigenous activists. A notable example is the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, founded in 1977 by Wangari Maathai, a Global South ecofeminist contemporary of Vandana Shiva (The Green Belt Movement, 2018). Through the movement, women planted millions of trees to restore forests, protect water sources, and improve access to firewood and food. In doing so,

they went beyond physical repair to foster the social fabric – empowering rural women, strengthening community bonds, and renewing their relationship with the land. Maathai (2004) described how "trees became a symbol for peace" – peace among people and peace with the earth.

This mirrors Mies and Shiva's (2014, p. 20) vision of "making peace with the Earth" as an alternative to what they call a "planetary war" (p. 18) against nature. The contrast is striking: one path follows the destructive Anthropocene logic of "geo-engineering" and corporate biotechnology – which includes "creating artificial volcanoes, fertilising the oceans with iron fillings, putting reflectors in the sky to stop the sun from shining on the Earth, (thus) displacing the real problem of humankind's violence against the Earth" – revealing what Shiva terms "arrogant ignorance" (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 18). The other path reflects an ecofeminist commitment to patient, humble care, co-creation with the environment, and what Shiva calls a "creative and constructive Anthropocene" (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 20) rooted in ecological humility and Earth Democracy.

An ethics grounded in care and repair also recognises grief and mourning as essential parts of the caring process. Ecofeminist thinkers remind us that environmental loss – the extinction of species, the collapse of ecosystems, and the suffering of animals in factory farms and laboratories – carries profound emotional weight. Rather than suppressing such feelings or labelling them as unscientific, ecofeminism treats them as a vital ethical response. Haraway (2016, p. 18) urges us to "stay with the grief" as part of "staying with the trouble", allowing sorrow to deepen our compassion and strengthen our resolve. This can take tangible forms, such as memorial rituals for extinct species or destroyed landscapes, which some ecofeminist artists and activists have already pioneered. In this way, mourning itself becomes an act of care: it honours the inherent worth of what has been lost and reaffirms our bonds, for we only mourn what we love – and to mourn non-humans or places is to acknowledge them as kin.

Ultimately, the ecofeminist ethic of care and repair in the Anthropocene is as much about healing fractured relationships between people and the natural world as it is about restoring damaged ecosystems. It calls on humanity to act as healers rather than dominators or conquerors, to recognise the quiet, often overlooked forms of care – long carried by women and indigenous communities – and to extend that care to all living beings. This means restoring ecosystems, defending local communities and their livelihoods, and a shifting from an exploitative mindset to one of nurture. However, an ethic of care inevitably raises deeper questions of responsibility: who will act, on whose behalf, and to whom are we ultimately accountable?

Ecofeminists expand this idea through the concept of "response-ability" (Haraway, 2016, p. 164) which recognises our shared, interdependent world and demands that responsibility extends beyond human society to encompass the entire community of life. It is within this broader frame that movements for the Rights of Nature emerge, offering legal and cultural mechanisms to institutionalise such responsibility and align it with Indigenous epistemologies of relational care.

1.3. Rights of Nature and Indigenous Epistemologies of Responsibility

Ecofeminist perspectives on environmental responsibility often intersect with indigenous philosophies and with emerging legal innovations such as the rights of nature. As already discussed, Vandana Shiva (2014, p. 19) emphasises that we recognise ourselves as members of the "Earth family" – bounded by responsibilities to all forms of life. Many indigenous traditions share this ethos, grounding human duties within a larger community of beings. One such example is *sumak kawsay,* a Quechua concept meaning "good living" in harmony with nature (Rodríguez Morales, 2022). It influenced Ecuador's 2008 Constitution, which was the first in the world to grant legal rights to nature. In this constitution, "Nature, or Pachamama (Mother Earth), where life is reproduced and occurs, has the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its cycles, structure, functions, and evolutionary processes. All persons, communities, peoples, and nations can call upon public authorities to enforce the rights of nature" (Dearing, 2024). This legal shift, inspired by Indigenous movements, empowered communities to file lawsuits on behalf of rivers, forests, and other ecosystems. Similarly, in 2010 Bolivia enacted the "Law of Mother Earth" – influenced by Indigenous cosmologies that see Earth as a living being with rights (Villavicencio-Calzadilla, 2025). These laws aim to change how responsibility is understood: rather than viewing nature as property, they treat it as a holder of rights, requiring governments and people to respect and care for the world beyond humans.

A striking example of this paradigm is New Zealand's Whanganui River, which in 2017 was recognised as "*Te Awa Tupua",* a legal person with its

own rights after decades of advocacy by Māori iwi tribes (Te Awa Tupua Act 2017, p. 7). In Māori thought, humans and the river share kinship – expressed in the saying "Ko au Awa, ko te Awa ko au" translating as "I am the River and the River is me" (Mika and Scheyvens, 2021, p. 11). The Whanganui River Settlement declares and acknowledges the river as "an indivisible and living whole...comprising all its physical and metaphysical elements" (Bresler, 2020). Crucially, this recognition "is predicated on the Māori world view...which acknowledges the interconnectedness and interrelationship of all living and non-living things" stating that we are in a "kinship relationship with our environment" (Harmsworth, 2021, pp. 25, 36). In practical terms, the law appoints guards to speak for the river's interests, marking a shift from mechanistic legal thinking to an ecological paradigm where duties extend beyond human society. Ecofeminists welcome such reforms for institutionalising care for the more-than-human world and aligning with Indigenous ethics of reciprocity, where all beings are seen as interdependent.

At the same time, ecofeminist scholars also warn that these ideas can be misused. They point out that governments or companies sometimes grant rights to Nature symbolically while materially continuing their business-as-usual. For instance, in Bolivia, President Evo Morales spoke about respecting Pachamama (Mother Earth) and passed laws in her name, but the government also increased oil, gas, and mineral extraction. Maryse Helbert observes that in Bolivian practice, Mother Earth was rhetorically honoured yet reframed as a benevolent provider whose "gifts" (timber, minerals, hydrocarbons) served state-led development (2020, p. 7).

Ecofeminists critique this paradox, saying that true environmental responsibility cannot be achieved if old patterns of exploitation are simply covered with green words. Vandana Shiva writes that the global North has often used the rhetoric of "saving" nature (or "civilising" or "developing" the South) as a new form of colonial control and seizing resources. She calls this the "third phase of colonisation", where the environmental agenda is taken over by elites, creating new forms of exploitation (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 350). Similarly, Ariel Salleh (2023) cautions that the mainstream "green economy" monetizes ecosystem services, turning nature into a tradeable asset while leaving patriarchal-capitalist structures untouched.

From an ecofeminist standpoint, genuine responsibility means not only granting ecosystems legal rights but also dismantling the power systems that cause ecological harm. This includes holding corporations, governments, and wealthy industrialized nations accountable for climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. We see this in international movements for climate justice, where Salleh argues that rich countries owe an "embodied debt" to vulnerable communities and future generations (Salleh, 2023). Legal initiatives such as prosecuting fossil fuel companies for climate harm or criminalising *ecocide* extend this vision of accountability to a global scale.

1.4. Planetary Ethics: Ecofeminism, Global Justice, And Decolonisation

Ecofeminist approaches to responsibility, ultimately converge into a vision of a planetary ethic – one that operates on a global scale yet remains sensitive to local differences. It is built on fairness, care, and the need to change the systems that have caused harm. Unlike, mainstream environmental ethics, which can be abstract or overly technical, ecofeminism insists that ecological issues are inseparable from struggles of power, history, colonialism, and gender inequality.

As Salleh (2014, p. 7) succinctly puts it

Ecofeminism is the only political framework I know of that can spell out the historical links between neoliberal capital, militarism, corporate science, worker alienation, domestic violence extractivism, nuclear weapons, industrial toxics, land and water grabs, deforestation, genetic engineering, climate change, and the myth of modern progress.

This broad analysis reflects what Salleh describes as "only connect" – the belief that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of marginalised people are expressions of the same system and therefore must be tackled together (2014, p. 7). A planetary ethic shaped by ecofeminism calls for integrated solutions: economies centred on sustainability and ecological balance instead of endless expansion, technologies guided by care and precaution rather than profit, and governments that involve and protect all forms of life.

Decolonisation is a key part of this vision. Shiva and Mies argue that the mindset of colonisation – whether applied to land, people, or ecosystems – must be dismantled both in the Global South and the Global North. Shiva shows that even after formal colonial rule ended, wealthy nations have continued to extract resources and wealth from poorer regions, often through unfair trade and financial systems which created "new burdens and new bondages" (2014, p. 351) She calls for "decolonizing the North", meaning that wealthy nations must give up their

sense of entitlement to the planet's resources and stop causing environmental harm to poorer regions (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 351). This requires admitting that the "process of wealth creation (has) simultaneously create(d) poverty" elsewhere (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 351).

Practical steps could include cancelling debts that force Global South countries to over-exploit nature, sharing clean technologies, and protecting Indigenous land rights. It also means "ethical decolonisation" – respecting Indigenous and women's knowledge systems that have long valued living with nature (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 351). Shiva points out that many non-Western cultures have traditionally embraced the idea of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* – "the Earth as one family", based on a "democracy of all life" where human well-being depends on living in harmony with nature (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 351). Modern capitalist patriarchy replaced this with what Shiva calls "man's empire over nature", supported by a science that denied nature's sacred and living qualities (Mies and Shiva, 2014, p. 351). A planetary ecofeminist ethics seeks to reverse this worldview and place humans back in the community of life – not by going back to the past, but by creating new ways of living that are just, sustainable, and non-dominating.

This transformative vision is already visible in grassroots movements such as those discussed above – Kenya's Green Belt Movement and India's Chipko Movement. Across, the Global South, women are leading environmental justice efforts – from anti-mining protests in Latin America to the Standing Rock Sioux-led campaign against oil pipelines in North America – often in the name of protecting "Mother Earth" and future generations. Arts and literature also play a role, with climate fiction and Indigenous futurist works, such as *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) by Cherie Dimaline and Octavia Butler's novels, which often feature women or marginalised characters who model empathy, adaptability, and responsibility during crises. Again, these narratives echo Haraway's idea of "making kin" – expanding our sense of kinship beyond blood ties to include other species and strangers. Haraway asks (2016, p. 2), "to whom and what are we responsible? Who lives and who dies, and how, in this kinship?". These questions lie at the heart of ecofeminism's planetary ethic, pushing us to rethink our responsibilities – from personal care to global policy – in order to cultivate what Haraway calls "conditions for ongoingness" (2016, p. 38), where "multispecies" (p. 2) communities can live and thrive together on a healthy planet.

2. CONCLUSION

In the Anthropocene, caring for a wounded planet becomes less a conclusion than an opening to profound ethical questions. The Ecofeminist voices explored – from Donna Haraway to Val Plumwood, Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Ariel Salleh, Ronnie Hawkins, and Serenella Iovino – converge on a vision of interdependence and care, yet they do not provide a final answer. Their insights prompt us to contemplate our responsibilities. Haraway's (2016, p.114) reminder is that "there is no innocence in these kin stories, and the accountabilities are extensive and permanently unfinished". Ecofeminism questions whether care can meet the planetary crisis without systemic change. Accountability must be collective yet differentiated, recognising that developed nations cause disproportionate harm. Ideas like rights of nature or "Earth citizenship" (Sönmez, 2015) seek to root justice more deeply, while Hawkins's call to acknowledge nonhuman agency pushes us towards new legal and moral frameworks. Mies and Shiva's "subsistence perspective" imagines freedom grounded in ecological limits, challenging a growth-driven perspective (2014, p. 389). Grassroots movements – Indigenous water protectors, seed savers, and community guardians – embody ecofeminist values, though the meaning of "repair" remains contested between control-oriented solutions and humility-driven restoration.

Ecofeminism does not provide a blueprint but poses questions: How can we unite compassion with structural change? How do we define prosperity as balance rather than accumulation? – questions whose answers we must continue to weave into the fabric of a still-unfolding future.

Acknowledgement: The present research is theoretical in scope, drawing upon a range of literary and critical ecofeminist texts, and seeks to contribute to the growing field of literature and environment by illuminating their intricate interrelations. I extend my sincere gratitude to my academic colleagues and institutional community for their thoughtful engagement throughout this project. As a Professor of English, I remain indebted to the scholars whose work shaped this study and to all who supported its completion. Prepared strictly for academic purposes, this paper reflects my ongoing commitment to interdisciplinary inquiry

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