

**Gender and
Climate Catastrophe**

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Redaktionsledelsens forord

For 15 år siden udgav *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* et særnummer med titlen "Gendering Climate Change". Med dette nye særnummer, "Gender and Climate Catastrophe", genbesøger vi det vigtige og fortsat højaktuelle 'klima-nummer' fra 2009. Desværre er klimakrisen ikke blevet mindre preserende siden da – snarere tværtimod. Klimaforandringer har fået endnu tydeligere og alvorligere konsekvenser for både mennesker og miljø. Vi står over for en eskalerende global krise med stigende temperaturer, hyppigere naturkatastrofer og et omfattende tab af biodiversitet. Samtidig forværres sociale og økonomiske uligheder som en direkte følge af klimaforandringerne, og selvom vi igen og igen bliver fortalt, at det er afgørende at handle NU for at minimere fremtidige ødelæggelser, kan det være svært at øjne politisk vilje til at gennemføre initiativer, der medfører reelle forandringer. Også af denne grund har dette særnummer et særligt blik for krisen, der skriver sig ind som et gennemgående og akut tema i nummeret i relation til klima, men også køn. De fire temaredaetører, Tara Mehrabi, Martin Hultman, Signe Ulbjerg og Liu Xin peger i deres indledning på

– med henvisning til økofeminist Greta Gaard – at kønsforskning og feministisk teori siden midten af 1970'erne været godt rustet, både epistemologisk og metodologisk, til at tydeliggøre den kønnede karakter af overforbrug i det globale nord såvel som til at adressere strukturelle uligheder i relation til klimakrisen. Køn er med andre ord centralt for forståelsen af klimaforandringer som en fundamental krise, der påvirker miljømæssige, økonomiske, sociale og politiske relationer. Netop derfor er dette klima-nummer anno 2024 så vigtigt – om end det næppe bliver det sidste, der er nødvendigt at skrive om dette tema. Med det endnu voksende behov for kritisk refleksion, nuancering og handling, byder vi dette nummer velkommen og takker temaredaetionen for deres store indsats.

God læselyst!

På redaktionens vegne

Michael Nebeling Petersen, Mons Bissenbakker & Camilla Bruun Eriksen

Gender and Climate Catastrophe

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What was for decades an intellectual exercise, a concern, a fear, a prediction, an ominous warning, a cautionary tale, is now our cumulative global reality.

—Hedenqvist et al., 2021

Can I imagine my elsewhere?

—Hélène Cixous, 1975

Introduction

One of the most circulated terms of our time, yet not circulated enough, is climate change (or climate crisis/environmental crisis). As a phenomenon, climate change is often discussed in political and scientific discourses as an effect of the Anthropocene¹, a term that marks the new geological ethos in which humans' overwhelming influence on Earth has risen to haunt the living—human and non-human (Grusin, 2017; Hird & Yusoff, 2016; Walton, 2020). This haunting is materialized in multiple planetary responses taking the shape of typhoons and floods in East Africa and Asia, hurricanes in the Caribbean and the United States, droughts in

South Africa and the Middle East, the melting of permafrost and ice sheets in Siberia and Greenland, wildfires in Australia and America, flooding in Central Europe caused by Storm Boris², plus potential “planetary boundary threats”³ connected to marine plastic debris, wastelands, water and soil contamination, and toxic fall outs (Villarrubia-Gómez et al., 2018; see also Hird, 2017). This is not to mention everyday experiences and emergent modes of living and dying on a damaged planet (Tsing et al., 2017; see also Alaimo, 2019; Radomska et al., 2020; Sandilands, 2017), environmental health problems (Ah-King & Hayward, 2014; Alaimo, 2010; Cielemecka & Åsberg, 2019; Léchenne et al., 2024; Murphy, 2017; Roberts, 2007; Tuana, 2008), environmental violence and struggles for justice (Åsberg & Radomska, 2023; Gaard, 2017), (multi-)species extinction (Margulies, 2022; Radomska, 2023, 2024; van Dooren, 2014), climate migration and mass displacement connected to environmental changes, food shortages, and so on (Carney, 2024; Gioli & Milan, 2018; Rajabhoj, 2021). All contribute to more existential and philosophical questions around life, death, and the problem of human-centrism (Åsberg, 2017; Åsberg & Braidotti, 2018).

The cause of such devastations is often connected to unevenly produced Co2 emissions and fossil fuels, capitalist modes of production and consumption, and wars and military conflicts (Christensen et al., 2009). To put it simply, “settler/colonial neoliberal capitalism” heavily connected to “multiple and slow violences of masculinist social injustices” (Hedenqvist et al., 2021) have brought us to a moment of crisis. This crisis possibly started already with the agricultural revolution and has yet to be stopped, if only a global census could be reached to abolish this extractivist machinery (Hird et al., 2022). It could be argued that in the Anthropocene—or even (m)Anthropocene, to emphasize its white, rich, extractivist, Global North, male dominance (Pulé & Hultman, 2021)—the concept of “crisis” carries with it an ominous warning and a witnessing to the degradation of a planet that is not doing well. The concept of crisis embodies a “terrible time but also the end of the (lived) time” (Jones et al., 2020, p. 388; see also Margulies, 2022), suggesting an urgency to act with accountability and care for the Other if we are to survive—nature, other species, and dehumanized others (Karkulehto et al., 2022; Plumwood, 2002; Tanyang, 2020). Though emerging from a disastrous existential and planetary catastrophe, the concept of crisis could also be understood in relation to its Greek etymology “krisis,” meaning “decision,” a linguistic strategy that shifts the emphasis from disaster to a lack of effective and ethical decision-making, radical change in action, and responsiveness to the environment, which some may say is the real crisis at hand (Warren & Clayton, 2020; Woodbury, 2019). The era of a crisis in this sense is a temporal continuum: a period of the revelation of a state of emergency and the criticalness of the coming years in which big decisions are to be made. In this sense, a crisis is always already transformative (Hearn, 2022; Wojnicka, 2021).

Understanding crisis as a disaster and its disastrous effects on the one hand, and as the critique of the global responses on the other hand, has been part of environmental studies and gender studies, with many scholars situating “this crisis” within contemporary gendered political

contexts. Issues such as post-truth, populism and environmental denial (Krange et al., 2021; MacGregor, 2014, 2022; Rosamond & Davitti, 2023; Vowles & Hultman, 2021), toxic masculinity, petro-masculinity and industrial/breadwinner masculinities (Daggett, 2018; Hultman & Pulé, 2018; Letourneau & Davidson, 2022), colonial capitalism and progress narratives (Hird et al., 2022; Shiva, 2008, 2016, 2020; Tuana, 2023), intersectionality and human rights (Rosamond & Davitti, 2023), techno-escapes and techno-solutionism (Haraway, 2015; Öhman, 2016; Shen et al., 2023), epistemologies and knowledge production practices (Gaard, 2017; Haraway, 2015; Latour et al., 2018; Neimanis et al., 2015; Tsing, 2012), and uneven distribution of vulnerabilities and agency (Alaimo, 2010; Johnson, 2017; Kirkland, 2011) represent some such discussions. The stakes here are not only calling for a sharper analytical lens that attends to the sociopolitical aspects of climate change catastrophe, and accountability for the uneven distribution of risks and vulnerabilities along the lines of social categories, nor is it enough merely to highlight the inefficiency of the political responses by different governments. It is also necessary to get to the nitty-gritty of how sociopolitically situated relations of power along the axes of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic conditions, geopolitical locations, species, and more are constitutive of climate change while being (re)constructed by it.

Perhaps, the presented complexity needs imagination, political radicalness, and a pinch of non-positivist scientific knowledge production where matters of gender and climate change emerge as entangled phenomena. It is not surprising that a surge of alternative engagements and modes of knowledge production is flourishing, often embedded in activism and collective resistance (MacGregor, 2019; Smyth & Walters, 2020, Tanyang, 2020; Miller et al., 2013), artistic/creative re-imagining/re-envisioning (Alaimo, 2019; Allison, 2017; Haraway, 2015; Margulies, 2022; Radomska, 2023, 2024; Wynter & McKittrick, 2015), and Indigenous cosmologies and citizen sciences (Alook & Bidder, 2023; Burnett, 2022; Davies & Mah, 2020; Knoblock, 2023; Lewis et al., 2020; de la Bellacasa 2017; Öhman, 2016; Öhman & Wyld, 2014). Many

of the scholars cited above, such as Tuana (2008), Haraway (2015), Tsing et al. (2017), de la Bellacasa (2017), Hedenqvist et al. (2021), and Åsberg and Radomska (2023), call for a radical commitment to a multi-relational, multispecies, decolonial, feminist care economy that perhaps needs to be anchoring itself to a politics of degrowth and practicing the “art of living on a damaged planet” (Tsing et al., 2017). This is especially needed for those configurations of men and masculinities who damage the planet the most (Eversberg & Schmelzer, 2023).

Lastly, committing to climate change responsible responses through political and ethical actions needs to attend to emotions, not only emotions that are produced through the affective register of trauma/grief/crisis, but also the joyfulness, exhilaration, and pleasure that can be summoned through mundane practices of caring for the environment (Nightingale et al., 2022; Wågström & Michael, 2023). An embodied relational meaningfulness that spawns an imaginary of an otherwise towards which the act of stopping climate change is reoriented (see, e.g., Bauhardt, 2014; Dengler & Lang, 2022; Hultman & Pulé, 2018; Orozco & Mason-Deese, 2022). In other words, in line with feminist utopianism, working towards climate care and justice is not merely a sorrowful act, or a must-do, born out of catastrophe and in the hope of saving the planet for the future (Haraway, 2015). Instead, climate care could be something meaningful in the present, and for the present, that is joyful and fulfilling (see, e.g., Houtbeckers, 2021; Khanna, 2021; Soper, 2023).

The climate crisis involves both material reconfigurations and haunting of the ghosts of “settler/colonial neoliberal capitalism,” as well as a crisis in how humans make decisions about the emergency, and it is for this reason that feminism/gender studies have implicitly and explicitly contributed to these discussions. As Greta Gaard (2015, p. 20) argues, gender studies have since the mid-1970s been well-equipped, epistemologically and methodologically speaking, to address “structural inequalities in the climate crisis, and to unmask the gendered character of first-world overconsumption.” In this special issue, we build on the previously presented feminist scholarships

as the contributors engage with matters of the climate crisis from various locations and perspectives within gender studies: for example, queer, posthumanist, decolonial, ecological, and feminist theories. In what follows, we start by revisiting a previous special issue titled “Gendering Climate Change” that was published in this journal in 2009. As we reflect on how matters of gender and climate issues were theorized in this 2009 special issue and read it through the mapped-out previous research we have presented so far, we aim to situate the current issue’s contributions in contemporary gender studies.

Revisiting the special issue on “Gendering Climate Change”

In 2009, Hilda Rømer Christensen, Michala Hvidt Brengaard, and Helene Hjorth Oldrup co-edited a special issue for the journal *Gender, Women, & Research*, titled “Gendering Climate Change” (from here on referred to as GCC), which was released in conjunction with a large international conference on the topic. The aim for curating GCC, as mentioned by the editors in the introduction, was to provide “a critical corrective to mainstream research and political strategies, where the focus on climate mainly emphasises ‘gender-neutral’ technology, economy, energy security and high politics” (Christensen et al., 2009, p. 4). They described the contributions of their edited collection along three main lines, which we briefly explain below. We do this because, 15 years later, the discussions presented in GCC remain highly relevant and return in similar yet different fashions in the current special issue’s contributions. Namely, (1) How can thinking about climate change, and the challenges connected to it, contribute to the enrichment of feminist/gender studies theory and method? (2) How can discussions about gendered structures of power in climate change discourses/planning take a non-dualistic approach by critically exploring the interrelations between global/local, human/non-human, and public/private to name a few? (3) Lastly, how can gender analysis, gender-responsiveness, and gender-sensitive

approaches be included in political, scientific, and technological knowledge productions and practices about climate change?

Christensen, Brengaard, and Oldrup (2009) situated the GCC, and the above-mentioned questions, at the intersection of gender studies and climate research, starting with the genealogies of ecofeminism developed in the 1980s. They argue that ecofeminism raised awareness about the exploitation of women and nature as entangled, claiming that the freedom of one depends on the other. According to ecofeminists, nature as well as women have been historically exposed in similar ways to the gendered systems of power and capital, in a world running on masculine values. In other words, ecofeminism argues that the very modernist patriarchal articulation of nature as feminine (feminization of nature and naturalization of women) and against masculine culture (masculinization of culture and the figure of the rational man) “permits the treatment of women and the earth as resources to be controlled and exploited” (Christensen et al., 2009, p. 5). Instead, ecofeminist thinkers suggest replacing overtly normalized and highly valued masculine traits, such as rationalism, production, and technological progress, with “the life-giving principles of women and nature” (p. 5).

The GCC special issue affirmatively engaged ecofeminism as the contributors critically revisited and reflected on ecofeminism through different theoretical moves. For example, revisiting postcolonial ecofeminism through a postmodern lens, Sowmya Dechamma (2009) problematizes Vandana Shiva’s ecofeminist writings as she argues that Shiva tends to homogenize the Indian context and the “Indian Woman.” Dechamma argues that Shiva is so caught in an oppositional dualism of West/East in her postcolonial critiques of environmental issues and the pressing issue of “biopiracy” that she fails to account for the existing “Hindu patriarchy” and its multiple caste structures. Dechamma argues that, though a critical move against the hegemony of the West in agricultural industries was perhaps much needed, Shiva’s theorizing does this at the expense of essentializing not only the “third world and its woman,” but the

binary of man/woman itself. Moreover, Dechamma argues that ecofeminist writings often draw on a sense of essentialized spiritualism, which though important, as it highlights such cosmologies as a valid source of knowledge, downplays the complex power relations within and between sects with which such spiritualism is affiliated (2009, p. 101; see also Agarwal, 1996). Dechamma asks, “Apart from being a symbolic power, does a goddess really challenge male religion?” (2009, p. 103; see also Menon, 1999). Other postmodern and poststructuralist contributions that take an anti-essentialist approach to gender and nature in the GCC come from queer and intersectionality theories (e.g. Soper, 2009; see also Alaimo, 2010; Sandilands, 1999). Similar to Dechamma’s postcolonial take, these theoretical contributions problematize the essentialized connection between female embodiment and womanhood common in ecofeminist writings. An essentialism that misses the differences within the category “woman,” such as class, while simultaneously naturalizing and romanticizing the unholy relationship between body/woman and nature (Soper, 2009).

Other contributions to the GCC special issue could be traced to liberal ecofeminist perspectives. These contributions engage the policy processes through which climate issues are discussed and decisions are made, highlighting that the mentioned practices and processes still exclude women’s voices/knowledges (Röhr, 2009; see also Hannan, 2009; Seager, 2009). Moreover, they argue that even when women enter the discourse, they are often represented as victims. The contributors to GCC argue that we need to go beyond discourses that paint women as passive victims of climate change and rely on women’s embodied knowledge and agency as a vehicle for change. Similar to postcolonial, postmodern criticism, this line of argumentation also reflects on the importance of positionality and situatedness. Furthermore, it presents the inclusion of women and their various embodied knowledge as one prominent departure from the masculine, colonial, capitalist, technoscientific approaches to climate change issues and climate change policies (Bauer, 2009; Crowley, 2009; Offenberger & Nentwich, 2009; Seager, 2009).

Lastly, the GCC special issue presents a material transcorporeal feminist approach in which corporeal theories meet intersectionality (Alaimo, 2009; Lykke, 2009). In other words, going beyond a dualistic approach to theory (going beyond positivism as well as cultural essentialism towards material-discursive entanglements), Stacy Alaimo (2009) and Nina Lykke (2009) argue that feminists need to pay attention to the entanglements of matter and discourse through which climate change and gender are enacted in differentiated ways. For example, Alaimo's concept of "transcorporeality" recognizes the substantial interconnections between human corporeality and the "more-than-human" world. And Lykke revisits the notion of intersectionality as a promising concept that helps us to analyze gendered power relations while including matters of nature, body, and species. She asks who the human and non-human vulnerable groups are among the "vulnerable themselves." Such new materialist rethinking of climate change issues and gender not only deconstructs and de-essentializes the category of gender and its relation to nature but also nature itself as material-discursive configurations always embedded in, and enacting, power relations (Hultman, 2013).

While not the direct object of study in the contributions to the 2009 special issue, grassroots activism is yet another prominent thread within gender studies when discussing climate change, especially studies that are situated at the intersection of gender research and decolonial/post-colonial/Indigenous studies (Gärdebo et al., 2014; Shamasunder et al., 2020)⁴. Historically, women have been active in planetary care, showing up around the table when climate change has been discussed (Röhr, 2009). However, despite such a history of planetary care and knowledge, women organizing around environmental health, habitats, and livelihood have been marginalized in debates about climate change in global, regional, national, and local processes (Gaard, 2015). Instead, since the first United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP) in 1995, solution-making and strategizing for climate response has been heavily portrayed and approached as "a technoscience challenge to be solved, re-iterating

the colonial capitalist systems of power and domination" (Gaard, 2015, p. 20; see also Röhr, 2009). This technoscientific solutionism that is heavily connected to masculinity tends to refrain from "substantially transforming ideologies and economies of domination, exploitation and colonialism" (Gaard, 2015, p. 20), which according to many (eco)feminists is a much-needed incentive in climate change actions.

We find the above-mentioned topics, approaches, and theories that shaped GCC in 2009 still relevant and even pressing for gender research on climate change. Gender scholarship and gender equity have yet to take center stage in academia, economy, or politics (Ahlborg et al., 2024; Arora-Jonsson & Wahlström, 2023). However, we would like to position this special issue and ourselves slightly differently in line with changes in the field (MacGregor, 2022). We do this for a number of reasons: because it helps us to better capture (1) the contributions to the current special issue, (2) contemporary gender research on climate change, and (3) the urgent need to elaborate on constructive ways forward, while simultaneously staying connected to GCC. Namely:

- Narratives of growth, development and progress
- Whiteness, masculinity, and climate catastrophe
- From technoscapes to posthuman care
- Affective registers, feminist aesthetics, and writing with climate change.

Narratives of growth, development, and progress

As mentioned above, the unevenly distributed effects of the planetary emergency, the gender dimension of the climate footprint, and intersectional aspects of climate change/responses along the lines of gender, race, class, and more have been part of gender research for fifty years (Arora-Jonsson, 2014). Answering the "woman's questions" has been a crucial part of the development

strategies of the Global North, especially when acting in the Global South.

Feminist engagement with matters of environmentalism and women during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s can be divided into three main themes: firstly, the question of women and development (WAD); secondly, women in development (WID); and lastly, gender and development (GAD) (Arora-Jonsson & Gurung, 2023; Chowdhury, 2016). WAD took a “welfarist” approach to the “woman question” in development, connecting it to reproduction. As such, WAD reduced the (environmental and economic) struggles of the Global South and its women to a population matter that could be solved through family planning and sterilization programs targeting women (Chowdhury, 2016). Other issues, such as providing clean water and food security, were also discussed as important environmental issues to work with through developmental aids. The discourse often reduced women in the Global South to passive victims who needed to be rescued by the Global South’s initiatives and development agenda (Arora-Jonsson, 2011; see also Resurrección, 2013; Shiva, 1993, 1994).

In the 1970s, as critiques surfaced against such developmental agendas (e.g. by postcolonial and decolonial thinkers), the Global North took a different approach to the question of the woman in the Global South, namely emphasizing the importance of women’s embodied knowledge and labor, especially in agriculture. By applying a top-down approach to knowledge production and knowledge transfer, WID attempted to address issues such as forest resources and agricultural vulnerabilities, while investing in increasing women’s participation in the labor market as a strategy for development. Through different programs for financing, educating, and integrating women in the labor market, WID tended to “extend the benefit of modernization to women as well as men” (Chowdhury, 2016, p. 151). In effect, most such plans failed as they did not take into account the local cultural specificities around the role of women in social production and unwaged labor, exposing women to further inequality rather than empowering them.

Considering local gender relations, GAD was introduced as an alternative framework for development. Namely, “GAD suggested that development needed not merely to take women into account but also to bring democracy to bear on the development process by the creation of strategies to allow the poor to both identify their needs and recommend tactics to improve their condition” (Chowdhury, 2016, p. 153). Though GAD tried to include women more effectively in decision-making, even “educating” them so they could become leaders in the future development agenda through “empowerment, capacity building, and need satisfaction,” they were criticized for yet again ignoring gender relations and the gendered distribution of power along multiple axes of class, gender, race, and so on. Improving on this, GAD included the “men question” on its agenda for change (which we will address more in the next section). Moreover, this bottom-up approach to development still exposed women to heavy loans and other financial debts, as they were to compete within a global chain of commerce. As such, these development agendas were criticized for capitalizing on the potential labor of women and their precarity in the Global South.

While the question of entangled power relations began with the GAD generation, it was in the 1990s, according to Gaard, that a radical shift towards intersectionality took effect in development discourses, reorienting gender research on environmental issues towards an “emphasis on feminist political ecology” (2015, p. 21; see also Chowdhury, 2016; Resurrección, 2013). Gaard argues that this shift turned the focus from the woman’s question to problematizing the logic of development itself and the intersectionality of power relations. For example, researching the macro-level of gender structures connected to globalization and colonialization on the one hand, and the micro-level of examining local institutions’ roles including marriage as an institution on the other hand, became a prominent approach to the studies of gender and climate. In other words, gender was approached in terms of entangled systems of domination that structure power relations within the context of climate change differently among

women (Gaard, 2015, p. 22; see also Goebel, 2005; MacGregor, 2010). This shift is important, because such power relations are historically situated, especially given the colonial capitalist and heteropatriarchal origins of development agendas and the Eurocentric vision of progressive growth (Arora-Jonsson, 2012). This is a legacy in which women/vulnerable groups were represented as passive, “incapable,” and “lacking” knowledge, and hence in need of Western leadership. An imaginary that decolonial feminist scholars, especially those working on the interaction of race, climate change, and gender, have been deconstructing for decades, advocating the importance of women’s and marginalized voices and their inclusion in policy decisions as active (political) agents of knowledge production/change (McLeod et al., 2018). It is for this reason that an intersectionality lens on climate change policies and practice takes its point of departure for knowledge production and practice in marginalized experiences rather than narratives of progress and development (Nightingale, 2011).

In the current special issue, situated in such intersectional politics of feminist struggles and resistance to climate change, Ana Paulina Morera Quesada and Jenna M. Coughlin analyze how globalization of the discourses of activism through the globalized image of Greta Thunberg helps young activists in the Global South to simultaneously gain recognition while also facing erasure as they become “another Greta.” In this article, titled “The Other Greta Effect (OGE): Recognizing Youth Climate Activists beyond Thunberg,” the authors argue that while global leaders bask in the image of Greta Thunberg to portray Europe as the beacon of gender equality and climate change mitigation, they miss her message of climate justice. In other words, they argue that the OGE as a phenomenon downplays the structural causes of climate change, and still claims the role of environmental leaders for the Global North. Instead of such a reductionist representation, the authors present the Global Youth Activists Map as an alternative visualization of climate activism and climate justice and “ecologically informed intersectional analys[is]” of youth activists’ motivations and messages

(Tuana, 2019, p. 3; Quesada and Coughlin, this issue). They show that young activists in the Global South experience being labeled as “other Gretas” differently, and respond to it as both empowering and dismissive. Either way, these young activists reflect on the importance of having their own voices, narratives, and autonomy in order to be taken seriously.

An emphasis on feminist political ecology, historicity, and through intersectionality is important, not only in terms of representations or including voices from the margins but also in terms of an interruption and subversion of the hegemony of developmentalist solutions (Gonda, 2019). In other words, in the absence of such historicity situated in the intersecting axes of power, glocal political decisions about climate mitigation solutions may reproduce the same systems of global exploitation that have brought climate catastrophe to Earth. For example, much research shows the embeddedness of sustainable solutions and climate policies within colonial heteropatriarchy, which exposes marginalized communities to new modes of colonization, referred to as green colonialism/greenwashing/climate apartheid (Pelser, 2022; Ramirez et al., 2024; Sultana, 2022; Tilley et al., 2023; Tuana, 2019, 2023). In fact, practicing such accountability and attending to such complexities provides an openness to alternative modes of knowledge production as well as the right/claim to knowledge. As many scholars, whose work we have referred to in this section, argue, contemporary knowledge production about climate change as well as developed solutions are embedded in an existing network of power relations that are bound to certain ideas of progress and development, hence failing to address the issue of climate change responsibly (Di Chiro, 2017). Glocal political discourses on climate change, policy approaches, and policy instruments are still heavily situated in the “neoliberal project of market environmentalism” (Seager, 2009; see also Buckingham, 2020; Gaard, 2015; Liverman, 2009). Therefore, thresholds for action are often formulated as a trade-off between economic growth and planetary protection (Seager, 2009), heavily situated in the colonial progress logic of development.

For example, as Gaard describes, in the 1987 report from the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, led by Brundland, it was mentioned that an environmentally aware and sustainable development is one that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” According to Gaard, this very statement disregards how a “continuation of the contemporary notions of economic growth and practices connected to it is fundamentally unsustainable when thinking about our finite planet” (2015, p. 21; see also Stoddard et al., 2021).

In line with such a feminist agenda, in this special issue, Nina Lykke highlights how mainstream political rhetorics in Denmark construct the country as a “green world leader, while turning a blind eye to the ecocides that have formed its landscapes.” In her article, “Listening to the Ancestral Wisdom of Diatomite Cliffs: Rethinking Danish History in Times of Climate Catastrophe,” Lykke thinks with Berlant’s concept of “cruel optimism” to analyze how such approaches to green leadership might be getting in the way of actual environmental mitigation. Instead of getting stuck in such neoliberal colonial modes of thinking about climate change, Lykke invites us to “explore whether affected and affecting creative writing and speculative story-telling can be used to counter-act the cruelly optimistic indifference and insensitivity towards the more-than-human world, cultivated through normalization and naturalization” (Lykke, this issue).

Lastly, the arbitrary articulation of climate change policies, marked by the marketization of a solution and neoliberalism, describes responsibility for climate change, and action, as something general and universal. It underplays the role of the global industrial revolution and colonial extractivism, which established the Global North as the nucleus for progress and technological innovation, whose establishment as such was and is most responsible for the contemporary climate catastrophe. However, climate change responsibility, as well as the green transition, often hold the “Global South” responsible for upholding certain standards, both in terms of development policies

and climate change mitigation systems, which if not contradictory are unrealistic and lead to extreme economic debts for these “developing nations” (Westholm & Arora-Jonsson, 2015). Current gender scholarship is therefore questioning the last 30 years of global climate politics and carbon trading schemes from the starting point of planetary boundaries, equity, climate justice, and just transition (Arora-Jonsson et al., 2023). It is for this reason that most recent gender studies’ engagement with the question of climate change by necessity has merged with politics of degrowth—not least focusing on bringing down emissions from the polluter elites (Hopkins et al., 2023; Koch et al., 2024; MacGregor, 2019). For example, in this issue, Eeva Houtbeckers’ essay, “The Political Economy of Ecofeminist Degrowth,” explores ecofeminist developments as a field of knowledge and their critiques towards the capitalist growth agenda. While mapping this political economy of ecofeminism, Eeva identifies the contemporary themes in ecofeminist degrowth by analyzing Ariel Salleh and Stefania Barca’s writings. The author argues that “it is important to highlight ecofeminist thinking so that current degrowth debates do not ignore the institutionalized exploitation of women, minorities, and other species in economic activity” (Houtbeckers, this issue).

Whiteness, masculinity, and climate catastrophe

Modern industrial fossil-fueled societies are founded on and structured by a worldview in which humans have considered themselves to stand above nature with a boundless right to dominate, control, and exploit it. For half a century, ecofeminists have called for more research focusing on male norms, positionalities, practices, and power (for an overview, read MacGregor and Seymor, 2017). Various branches of ecofeminism since the mid-1970s have revealed that men (if a binary categorization is used), or specific groups of men, have solidified, sustained, and benefited most from heteropatriarchy by way of strategies such as objectification of nature, hierarchization between males and

females, and separation between body and mind, as well as segregation of bodies that are marked differently. Despite this rich scholarship, focused research on these gendered enactments connected to matters of nature remained sparse until the early 2010s (Hultman, 2013, 2021). During the late 2010s and early 2020s, a few reviews of the field have been carried out (Hyldig & Faber, 2024; Paulson & Boose, 2019; Yates, 2022), as well as theoretical development (Hultman & Pulé, 2018; Pulé & Hultman, 2021). Today we recognize studies on masculinities at the intersection of gender studies and climate research and below we present three such configurations of masculinities as representing these developments in scholarship: (1) industrial/breadwinner, (2) ecomodern, and (3) ecological, as proposed by Martin Hultman (2017; see also Hultman & Pulé, 2018, Pulé & Hultman 2021).

Industrial/breadwinner masculinities are configurations that are built on the historical gendered notions of masculinity and gendered division of labor situated in the Global North and connected to the notion of hegemonic whiteness. As such, industrial/breadwinner masculinities anchor themselves in fossil fuel-related ways of living and infrastructuring societies that intentionally oppose effective climate action, as shown by research on climate denial organizations (Anshelm & Hultman, 2014; Vowles, & Hultman, 2021). Such configurations of masculinities are revived and reproduced by climate obstructionist think tanks (Moreno-Soldevila, 2022; Pasek, 2021), fossil fuel companies and their workers (Allen, 2021; Letourneau & Davidson, 2022; Letourneau et al., 2023), the polluter elites (Hopkins et al., 2023), as well as, ideologically, part of the far right (Barla & Bjork-James, 2021; Kaul & Buchanan, 2023; Vowles & Hultman, 2021). Industrial/breadwinner masculinities are not least straightforwardly formulated as petro-masculinity by Cara Daggett (2018). All the above are on display in Katrien Van der Heyden's essay in this special issue, in which she connects the misogynistic harassment against the youth movement Fridays For Futures with the climate denial of industrial/breadwinner masculinities.

Ecomodern masculinities are another research strand that has emerged in between critical

masculinities studies and climate research. Ecomodern masculinities are associated with those greenwashed industrial/breadwinner masculinities that may pose as solutions to our dire climate situation, but are more or less simply conserving business-as-ecocidal-usual. Critical research that addresses ecomodern masculinities includes, but is not limited to, the rise of biofuels (Dockstader & Bell, 2020), identity politics of satirical 21st-century American cultural artifacts (Heiliger, 2021), changes in the values and practices of Arnold Schwarzenegger (Hultman, 2021), commercials for men's underwear (Allan, 2021), climbing culture (Salovaara, 2020), historical gendering of nuclear power (Wågström, 2021), techno-solutionism (Kendrick & Nagel, 2020; McIvor, 2024), as well as revealing perhaps the scariest configuration of ecomodern masculinity today, which is the white supremacy of Tesla's Elon Musk (Vivi & Hermans, 2022).

Last, but not least, are ecological masculinities. In connection to studies of masculinities, there has been a proliferation of scholarship that engages in posthumanism, affective, and prefigurative politics. This is a way of exploring the openings long provided by ecofeminisms and suggests enacting masculinities that stay within the planetary boundaries in an ecologically recognized way, as Judith Butler emphasizes in the interview part of this special issue. It is the mode of organizing and re-creating social relationships that strive to imagine the future society we need. Such prefigurative ecological masculinities have been elaborated on in connection to, for example, ideas of commoning care (Dengler & Lang, 2022), veganism (Aavik, 2021), degrowth subjectivities (Eversberg & Schmelzer, 2023; Khanna, 2021; Paulson, 2024), comics on climate activism (Nordenstam & Victorin, 2023), and pedagogy (Hedenqvist et al., 2021; Kennedy & Russell, 2021; Twine, 2024). In this special issue the calls for reconfiguring the human relationality with our various companion species are many and illustrative. Lykke describes the possibilities of recognizing our geological history, thereby making ourselves more humble and caring. Ida Bencke, Linda Lapiņa, Anne-Sophie Bogetoft Mortensen, and Christa Holm Vogelius

discuss how encounters with water within and outside of our porous thin skin make us aware of all the material interconnectedness and flows we are to deal with.

The above strands of masculinities research are elaborated on in new critical, experimental, and empirically dense case studies when analyzing the Mythopoetic Men's Movement (Pulé & Hultman, 2019), far-right ecologies (Darwish, 2021), rural masculinities in Nicaragua (Gonda, 2021), organic slaughterhouses (Rutt & Tjørring, 2024), and fossil fuel capitalism (Allen, 2022). The years that have gone by since the special issue on Gendering Climate Change (2009) have seen the proliferation of critical as well as prefigurative studies of masculinities, providing the field with another set of opportunities for change.

From technoscapes to posthuman care

As mentioned, the concepts and terminologies that are used to describe and analyze climate change-related issues in academia, among politicians, as well as by company leaders, are predominantly based on technical-scientific and economic framing, which, as Sandra Harding (1995) observed almost 20 years ago, follows a form of weak objectivity. That is, the idea that technical-scientific knowledge is objective and neutral, devoid of and separate from social, cultural, and political processes, and as Donna Haraway (1988) asserts, independent of its local and embodied arrangements (playing the God-Trick, as Haraway terms it). Feminist cultural studies scholars as well as feminist STS scholars have been reflecting in particular on how accounts of nature are not innocent and are often entangled with sexism, racism, ableism, and heteronormativity (Alaimo, 2017; Bryld & Lykke, 2000; Haraway, 2013b; Lykke, 2013). But what does a critical engagement with technoscience within the context of climate change mean, especially in the era of post-truth and anti-climate discourse, when we need to be aware that certain forms of technoscience critique (when done bluntly, cynically, or shallowly)

may have the opposite of the desired effect? Let us provide some examples.

The concept of ecosystem services serves as a good example of when critique is productive. It was first developed by the ecologist Gretchen C. Daily in an edited volume titled *Nature's Services: Societal Dependence on Natural Systems* in 1997, to draw attention to and to underscore the value and dire consequences of the overreaching practices of humanity on ecosystems (Daily, 1997). In recent years, the concept of ecosystem services has become widely used as a discourse and framework for market-driven solutions to climate change problems, such as the financial practices of carbon credit trading and carbon offsetting (Liu, 2024). It produces an economic framework that reduces to an economic valuation the multi-scaled and multi-layered industrial regulations and relations, materialities, and temporalities of energy infrastructures and resources, relations of embodied labor, and practices of production, consumption, and waste (Haraway et al., 2016). Another example of when technoscience poses as objective, but is rather in need of critique, is the consensus reached at the G8 summit in 2009 marking a 2°C rise in global temperature as an "acceptable" threshold, signposting a manageable level of danger to the planet (Seager, 2009). This was an ecological threshold for climate policy change that was suggested by economist William Nordhaus, or as Seager phrases it, the "economic man," not an environmental scientist (Seager, 2009, p. 13). It is a threshold that has been "modelling acceptable danger" for climate risk, landing "somewhere between 'likely to be quite bad' and 'likely to be really catastrophic'" (Seager, 2009, p. 14). Such narratives of risk, calculation, and scientifically produced and measurable calculations often lead to both big and small political decisions being taken, though they often lack critical engagement with or reflections on technoscience as sociotechnical assemblages.

Other such important entanglements of science and technology with sociopolitical aspects in need of critical analysis are: funding and collaborations between academia and military organizations and the global war industry (e.g. Braidotti,

2013; Bryld & Lykke, 2000; Haraway, 2013a; Wind, 2024); ecology and taxonomy in relation to whiteness, ableism, and heteronormativity (Subramaniam, 2014; see also Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010; Szczygielska, 2017; Seymour, 2020); and sustainability of new technological solutions such as digitalization (e.g. D'ignazio & Klein, 2023; Kuntsman, 2020). These scholarships encourage researchers of science and technology to be more attentive to questions such as who is producing certain knowledge about what? What methods and methodologies are used and how do such choices situate the outcome in certain ways? How are certain projects funded, and by whom? What kind of new challenges and problems do technoscientific artifacts bring with them? In short, how do science, technology, society, and nature co-produce one another in constantly shifting assemblages that are not merely scientific? This is not a post-truth claim that aims at undoing facts or disregarding scientific knowledge about nature, ecologies, or environmental issues. This is not climate change denial, but to bring attention to why we produce, value, and advocate certain knowledge and methods when discussing climate change mitigation in politics, academia, as well as everyday life. It is more important than ever that we continue doing this, and at the same time doing it in such a way that the critique cannot be used to reject knowledge about the climate catastrophe in the making (Ekberg et al., 2022). Researchers at the intersection of gender studies and climate research carry out such critical engagements in various ways, two of which we would like to expand on here: (1) critical engagement with techno-solutionism; and (2) posthuman care: staying in the company of land, water, and multi-species connections.

Techno-solutionism is often referred to as a process in which a social problem is turned into a technical or engineering problem in need of a techno-fix (see, e.g., Sætra & Selinger, 2023). An example, as Sætra and Selinger (2023) mention, within the context of climate change, is mitigation of greenhouse gas from cars, which is seen not only as a matter of engineering, design, or finding the "right" fuel, but also concerns social norms of public transportation. It is a sociotechnical matter

that according to Röhr (2009) is extremely gendered, connected to matters of public space, family responsibilities, driving habits, mobility, and more. In connection with climate change this has a very long history, and its ideological format has been named ecomodernism (Hultman & Anshelm, 2017). One example of ecomodern techno-solutionism is hydrogen (Hultman & Nordlund, 2013), another is carbon capture and storage (Hansson, 2012), and a third is geoengineering (Fleming, 2021)—all gendered. Many gender researchers have reflected on the problem of techno-solutionism as attending to the symptom at best, rather than solving the roots of the climate change issues, which needs social and radical infrastructural changes. More recent such techno-solutionist tropes include, for example, digital solutions for sustainability, which are criticized for underplaying the environmental effects of digitalization (e.g. Certomà et al., 2024; Kuntsman, 2020). Feminist scholars have long been criticizing the often military-funded origins of such techno-solutionist approaches and their masculine colonial modes of knowledge production, to which we have referred many times in this review. However, another line of critique to which feminist scholars have been contributing is analysis of narratives and practices of restoration and preservation. For example, genetic modification or restoration of vanishing (environmental/existing species) DNA, as well as the DNA of "vanishing people," has become central over the last 10 years (see, e.g., M'charek, 2005; Shen et al., 2023), while others reflect on matters of epigenetics and the entanglement of genes and environmental matters and social practices connected to gender and more (e.g. Packer, 2022). For example, in this special issue, Anne Nørkjær Bang and Charlotte Halmø Kroløkke analyze the core idea of the SpaceX company's project of colonizing Mars (by Elon Musk), namely the figuration of a multiplanetary human species, and how in such imaginaries the long-lasting modernist, colonial, and masculine ideas and dichotomies between human and non-human are reproduced. It is for this reason that the authors of this article, titled "Being among the Stars: Et feministisk-posthumanistisk perspektiv på det

multiplanetære menneske,” urge the importance of moving away from such human-centric understandings of nature, earth, as well as humanness through a feminist posthuman lens, which brings us to the next signpost.

Many feminist STS scholars, as well as cultural studies feminists, have been suggesting that a posthuman approach to climate change and climate care might be what we need if we are ever to depart from colonial capitalist masculine extractivism. The main argument is that we need to reimagine the human subject not as something outside and above nature but situated and becoming with it (Åsberg & Mehrabi, 2016; Haraway et al., 2016; Hultman & Pulé, 2018; Lykke, 2013). In this view, which is strongly inspired by Indigenous cosmologies, nature is not something passive or merely a resource for humans to use, but it is agential, something whose agency is performative of us humans and the world we live in. Two emerging lines of thinking within posthuman and Indigenous feminist research during the past decade have been thinking with and through water and land (see, e.g., Alaimo, 2013; Lykke, 2019), acknowledging Rights of Nature (Hultman, 2024). For example, through theoretical concepts such as hydrofeminism, hydrocommons, and hydro-logic, scholars such as Astrida Neimanis argue for an “aqueous understanding” of bodies and communities that are connected through water yet are exposed to water vulnerabilities differently (2017; see also Mehrabi & Straube, forthcoming).

Contributing to this body of scholarship, our contributors to this special issue also think with land, water, and multispecies care. For example, in the discussion essay “The (Im-)Possibilities and (Dis-)Comforts of Watery We’s: Exploring Entanglement, Mothering and Solidarity within Hydrofeminism(s),” Ida Bencke, Linda Lapiņa, Anne-Sophie Bogetoft Mortensen, and Christa Holm Vogelius reflectively discuss hydrofeminism and its potentials and limits for feminist theorizing. They ask who is “we,” an often used pronoun, within the field of hydrofeminism that aims to highlight transpecies watery connection. As they engage with such discourses, they deconstruct the notion of “we,” through figuration of motherhood, queer

embodiment, and racial politics. Nina Lykke, in her article in this special issue, invites the reader to rethink politics of land, water, and nature through a more-than-human perspective, that of a cliff, formed by the micro-algae, diatoms, 55 million years ago, in the Danish fjords. In her article, the cliff “performs as the protagonist of a folktale-inspired story about the coming into being of Denmark through series of ecocides,” calling attention to the entanglement of human, non-human, and nature. Malou Juelskjær, through the figuration of Earth, asks how one can care about, for, and with earth (both in terms of the planet Earth but also precarious lands and situated places). Their article thinks with an association called Skovgro, which redevelops agricultural lands, especially places where the health of bodies of water is threatened. Thinking with these practices of rewilding of lands and water provides food for thought about multispecies co-existence and flourishing. The next step for more-than-human engagements seems to be happening as we speak, with scholarship experimenting with and making visible practices of new ecohabitat co-living.

Affective registers, feminist aesthetics, and writing with climate change

In addition to its epistemological dimensions, feminist researchers attend to the aesthetics of climate and environment issues, asking how and why certain aesthetic registers become mobilized for racialized and gendered environmental politics (see, e.g., Seymour, 2020). For example, cuteness as an environmental aesthetic has been used for affirmative ecological reimagination and also recruited to justify oppressive and exploitative logics undergirding (green) capitalism and ecofascist discourses (Liu, forthcoming). To illustrate, in a study on the ecofascist Moomin cartoons, Maria Darwish (2024) shows how fascist employment of cartoon characters uses cuteness to hierarchically oppose the compassionate fascist masculinist nationalist protectors against their racialized others, who are

portrayed as cruel to animals. Feminist approaches to epistemology and aesthetics of climate and environmental problems further extend the analysis of gender beyond the critique of whether and how gender differences and perspectives are included. Instead, and importantly, they demonstrate that the historical and emerging ways of knowing and feeling climate are conditioned upon the epistemological frameworks and affective aesthetic registers that are themselves gendered and gendering (see, e.g., Alaimo, 2013; Lykke, 2021; Lykke et al., 2024; Straube, 2024; 2019).

The utilization and analysis of the aesthetics of climate crises are central to the essay “How Dare You: Et udstillingsekspærimet om køn, kamp og klimakrise” By Cecil Marie Schou Pallesen and Signe Uldbjerg from KØN – Gender Museum Denmark (in this issue). The essay explores the format of a specific museum exhibition and its potential for creating a historical and object-oriented awareness towards the materiality and sensuality of gendered consumer culture and environmental activism. The artwork depicted on the front page of this special issue stems from the exhibition and carries some of the aesthetic and material stories of climate change: specifically, stories of the mass production of waste in modern textile industries, as well as the counter-cultures and histories of preindustrial and manual labour and production, its romanticization and its connections to unequal and exploitative labour conditions.

To be able to tackle such gendered and gendering affective registers, feminists suggest adopting an alternative genre of writing that is sensitive to how knowledge is produced, where, by, and for whom, and the aesthetic registers such narratives evoke and mobilize hold the potential for transforming debates about gender and climate change. In this special issue, many contributors deploy other genres to allow for more just and equitable modes of knowing, sensing, and imagining climate. Instead of simply justifying or arguing for the relevance of gender for climate, these contributions effectively and forcefully demonstrate and rework the intersectionally gendered dynamics that make climate change sensible and intelligible.

In the article “Listening to the Ancestral Wisdom of Diatomite Cliffs: Rethinking Danish History in Times of Climate Catastrophe,” Nina Lykke employs the genre of speculative fiction, which serves to defamiliarize the anthropocentric and modern instrumentalist lens that frames the issues of environmental and climate change. “The (Im-)possibilities and (Dis-)Comforts of Watery We’s: Exploring Entanglement, Mothering and Solidarity within Hydrofeminism(s)” utilizes conversation as a form of writing, which makes visible the differences and negotiations, including “clashes and (dis)comforts” that speak of inequalities, embodied differences, and multiple positionalities that are internal to the collective knowledge production processes of hydrofeminisms. In “Misogyny against Climate Justice Activists,” Katrien Van der Heyden employs the narrative style of autobiographical writing to give an account of the misogynistic harassment that her non-binary child and her family experienced as climate activists. Importantly, this personal account performs a form of solidarity that invites the reader to not only witness but to connect to, stand with and for, and in so doing participate in, practices of care that radically challenge the paternalistic and misogynistic logic of care. The authors of these texts explicitly reflect and explain how and why they opt for these specific modes of writing, reflections that generate a sense of intimacy of speaking with. That is, a call to arms that encourages the reader to participate in the collective rewriting and reimagining of climate.

Conclusion

“There must be a counter-imagination to resist the fear, authoritarian regimes stoke and demand. This means envisioning a way of living together based on equality and freedom. We should not fear each other’s freedom—your freedom does not take away from mine. It is also crucial to forge alliances among feminists, LGBTQ+ communities, and those fighting for migrant rights. We believe this must be connected to the healing of the Earth. We need to ask ourselves, more broadly than just

in terms of gender, what kind of world we want to live in. And how do we live in that world together? One essential element of the response is to not contribute further to the exclusion or subordination of others, and certainly not to further violence or discrimination. We must be more conscious of how interconnected we are as living beings and find political and social methods of organizing that recognize and value our shared entanglement, our interdependent lives.” (Butler, this issue)

So far we have been articulating why we think climate change is a feminist issue *today*, especially when one commits to underscoring the importance of the histories and continued feminist reflection and discussions on gender. What are the specific affordances of feminist analytical approaches and political and ethical orientations for engaging with climate change beyond the field of gender studies and outside academic research?

To address these questions, in this review, we turn once again to the question of gender through the lens of epistemology, aesthetics, politics, ethics, and methodologies through the lens of feminist technoscience studies. We outlined the changing understanding of gender in feminist engagement with climate change. For example, and to recapitulate, we identified a shift, although far from linear or final, from a tendency to essentialize women’s relation to and participation in environmental practices, especially within the context of development discourses, to intersectional and decolonial approaches that make visible and challenge the elision of gender in the framing of climate change as predominantly an economic and science-technological concern. Lastly, we discussed the importance of attending to affects, emotions, and creative modes of writing as a potential scape for reimagining climate matters responsibly.

Moreover, we explained that separation between gender as social questions concerning identity, and climate change as a natural, scientific, economic, and technological problem also informs certain anti-gender, anti-climate discourses often connected to modes of masculinities, such as industrial/breadwinner, ecomodern, and ecological masculinities. In the context of austerity measures and changing forms of authoritarian

neoliberalism, work on gender equality is seen by critics, who might not otherwise be involved in far-right and anti-gender movements, as a distraction that takes resources from, and hence hinders, measures against climate breakdown. For example, in this special issue, in an interview with Judith Butler, Dorthe Staunæs and Cecilie Nørgaard discuss their recent book, *Who Is Afraid of Gender?* (in this issue), revisiting the importance of concepts such as gender, equality, diversity, and knowledge in an American context where such concepts are continuously cited in different contexts. They ask, “Does gender on the public agenda mean more freedom?” and would it lead to decolonizing relations of power and promote more sustainable ways of living, especially in the presence of anti-gender ideologies and fear of the Other (migrants, trans community, climate)? In a world in which gender is “structural” and “plastic,” how can we move beyond affective rhetorics of “wokeness,” fear, and concern for the nation, family, and tradition? As cited in the quote above, how can we “find political and social methods of organizing that recognize and value our shared entanglement, our interdependent lives?”

To summarize, critical reflections and debates within gender studies collectively demonstrate the various ways in which gender is central to the understanding of climate change as “an epochal crisis” (Fraser, 2021), affecting environmental, economic, social, and political relations. And yet, academic and public discussions outside the scholarly field of gender studies still routinely posit gender in essentialist and binary terms, and as questions of social equality that are distinct and less urgent than climate change questions; a message that this special issue with all its contributions deconstructs, opposes, and urges readers to move beyond.

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Notes

- ¹ It is argued that this concept was first coined within Earth sciences by Paul Cortzen in 2000 and then used by the historian John McNeil in 2001 (see Hird & Yusoff, 2016; Steffen, 2021).
- ² See <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/>.
- ³ A planetary boundary threat is when major chemical changes happen to the environment with three distinct characteristics: when Earth's vitality and ecosystems are threatened by unknown disruptors; when such devastating effects are not discovered until it becomes a global struggle; and when it is clear that the effects are not immediately reversible (Villarrubia-Gómez et al., 2018).
- ⁴ Grassroots activism such as that by the Fridays For Future network of climate strikers launched by Greta Thunberg, the Waorani people fighting for the Amazon against oil extraction, the Anishinaabe Indigenous clean water advocates from Wikwemikong First Nation Manitoulin Island in Ontario, Canada, the Persatuan Tindakan Alam Sekitar Kuala Langat (Kuala Langat Environmental Action Group) in Malaysia who protest against the import of plastic waste, or the Sámi community in Sweden fighting for the well-being of their lands, provides examples of resistance, resilience, care, and response-able co-habitation.

Who's Afraid of Gender?

A conversation with Judith Butler on Anxieties, Alliances Across Differences and Hope for the Future

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Does gender on the public agenda mean more freedom? What's behind the sharp rise of the anti-gender movement? Why can't we talk about gender without addressing race and colonialism? And how is gender radically intertwined with sustainable ways of living? We sat down with professor and philosopher Judith Butler to talk about their new book *Who's Afraid of Gender?* (2024).

Gender and diversity have moved to the centre of public conversation, challenging old-world stereotypes and unequal conditions. The intensified focus on gender is welcomed enthusiastically by many. Genuine equality is seen as hindered by privileges and barriers, and for these people, gender is not a fixed destiny but a structure that must and can be changed. For them, gender is 'structural' and 'plastic.' For others, this way of thinking about gender, equality, and identity is a serious break with the world they know and the frameworks they are used to. Instead of enthusiasm, they feel confused and anxiously ask: 'Now are we not even allowed to say or do this or that?'

The idea of 'gender as structural and plastic' is apparently so controversial for some that its spread must be stopped with bans, resolutions, and shutdowns. This is certainly the case with Hungary's president, Viktor Orbán, who has

banned gender studies in Hungary. Also in several U.S. states, books on gender are being removed from school libraries. In Denmark, some libraries that have promoted non-stereotypical understandings of gender have faced heavy criticism for 'wokeness.' Meanwhile, the Vatican, with the Bible in hand, has clashed with gender studies' leading figure, Judith Butler, arguing that God alone determines gender. All of these cases are discussed in Butler's latest book, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* We meet Butler online for a conversation about the book and the anxiety gathered around what Butler calls 'anti-gender ideology' and the 'anti-gender fantasy,' but also the hope which Butler's ideas of alliances and radical interconnectedness offer.

Gender as performative

Butler's presence radiates through the screen. Such presence is needed in a time when the freedom project that gender studies was meant to contribute to, has been hit with substantial criticism. The recognition of the anti-gender movement and how it accumulates feelings of fear and anxiety, prompted Butler to write this new book

in an inviting, accessible format for a broader audience.

Dorthe Staunæs (DS): Why was it important for you to write the new book, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* What kinds of concerns did you have?

Judith Butler (JB): Well, for a long time, I was used to fielding academic questions about gender, about the performativity of gender: 'How is gender different from sex? Is gender different from sex? What is meant by performative? What is the theory of social construction? Does gender take leave of the body? What about the materiality of the body?' There was a cluster of questions that would come to me time and again about my early theory on the performativity of gender, which I worked on about 30-35 years ago. Then I realized that there was a political movement against gender. It was mainly right-wing, but there is also a feminist version that was constructing gender as this horrific and destructive power and as something that needed to be cancelled, banned, censored, or overcome. I learned that those who used gender in their social policy analysis or taught gender studies were also coming under attack, as we know from the exit of the Central European University from Budapest, which was perhaps the most traumatic example. But we can name many gender studies programs that have been defunded or de-departmentalized in the last several years as a result of a political movement against them. I know that in Denmark, there have been such proposals and they have been debated in the parliament, and I have followed some of those debates.

DS: We will return to the gender phantasm, the anti-gender movement, and the Danish version of this political movement, but let us first rewind to the performative understanding of gender that you, so to speak, invented.

JB: When I developed the idea of gender as performative in the late 1980s, I was trying to capture something about how we are given a gender. We are assigned a gender, society expects it of

us, and we also have some choice about how to live out that assignment, how to deal with those social expectations. I was trying to take into account two dimensions of gendered life: First, the fact that we are assigned and we are brought up a certain way; we are taught what gender is by how we are treated. Second, at the same time, in the midst of that process, options open for us; certain windows onto freedom emerge. 'Well, I am not going to be that kind of woman,' or 'I am not going to be that kind of man,' or 'I am going to find my own way of being a woman, man,' or 'actually, neither category quite works for me. Maybe there is another vocabulary that is being developed in my community or my culture that allows me to understand myself or live in a more free and less painful way.' So, it was always a way of trying to take into account the way in which the world makes us, and in the course of that process we also, to some degree, make ourselves. Of course, some people think 'oh, Butler thinks you can be anything you want.' Well, no, there are constraints. We are deeply affected by history, society, family, religious institutions. We are formed there. We cannot just throw off our formations as if we are radically free individuals. That process of formation does not exactly happen once or twice. It is ongoing. And as we get older, we start to think about who we are, and what we want to be; we become able to redirect the course of our gendered lives. Freedom appears always under constraint and in historically specific situations. I was trying to capture that ambiguity, but some people would say, 'oh, Butler thinks everything is determined by society and that is the meaning of social construction.' Or others say, 'Butler is a neoliberal or believes in radically free individuals who can do anything.' But the fact is, I was trying to overcome that distinction. Sometimes it worked.

According to Butler, gender does not represent or is not equal to reproductive organs. Gender is an identification category assigned at birth (or when scanning the womb). How we should live the gender we are assigned, is determined by the norms we learn at school, in the workplace, in social media, in culture, and not at least in the

family. Gender is thus a structure that materializes through what we all do. There are norms for doing gender. But norms also change when taken up. One can live different versions of, or alternatives to, the assigned gender. Not without difficulty, and sometimes also with violent consequences. Both fans and critics of the concept of gender may find it difficult to cope with the ambiguity that Butler conveys:

JB: Let us remember that when I wrote *Gender Trouble* (1990), I was speaking to a feminist audience. And feminist theory and radical feminism had introduced gender as an extremely important category way before I wrote *Gender Trouble*. So, Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin in the U.S. context, but also most socialist feminists, used gender to talk about the social meanings of being a woman or a man. The term gender came out of feminism, and Joan W. Scott gave a definitive set of definitions for its use in history. Conceptualizing the gender division of labor was one of the great contributions that socialist feminists made to Marxist and socialist theory, as well as speaking about the gendering of housework. But also, in fundamental feminist claims, like: 'Why would a woman have a right to have an abortion? Should she have that kind of autonomy over her own body?' There were and remain people who say: 'No, the state has an interest in what a woman does with her body' and believe that form of state paternalism is justified. Now, that's a way of defining a woman as non-autonomous. So, that is an instance of the construction of gender: the law against the right to abortion is construing a woman as necessarily in a subordinate position to state paternalism. Now, that formulation is obviously not feminism, and it is not gender identity in any trans sense, and it is certainly not gender performativity. Although women who resist that kind of state control, claiming that they should have that freedom and that right, are saying, among other things: 'Not only do we have that right, but we are autonomous beings.' They are redefining gender. They are redefining gender in the act of making the claim. That is performativity, right? You do not have to leave the gender

that you are assigned at birth to be thinking gender in performative terms. You are redefining a category of what a woman is and should be. The departure from an assignment is performative as well. It is a break that does something. Feminist studies have always been insisting on redefining the category of women so that it clearly expresses freedom, equality, justice. In that sense, performativity has been part of feminism from the very beginning; it is not a departure.

I think what happened with me is that I saw that so many of my feminist colleagues were staying within the framework of marriage, within the framework of heterosexuality, and within the framework of binary gender, and then they went on to define gender in all kinds of interesting ways. But they did not call that framework into question, so it was limiting and damaging. That was what we call 'the heteronormative' or what I call 'the heterosexual matrix'. So, I challenged that. Among many other people in queer theory and LGBTQ, right? We were all challenging that.

The anti-gender phantasm

According to Butler, anxiety seems to have shifted away from earlier critiques of homosexual marriage and parental rights, and from concerns over cisgendered women's movements, to focus instead on the very notion of gender and diversity—especially the idea of gender as fluid. Those who subscribe to the anti-gender ideology today, fear that things are spiralling out of control and they long for reassurance that there are only two genders, determined solely by an immutable biology. The figure of a boundary-crossing transgender or gender nonconforming person disrupts this certainty; that figure (which is not any actual person) is then used for creating unease and fear. Today, fear and anxiety assemble with concerns for the nation, the family, and the patriarch in the anti-gender phantasm and fuel the need to attack, control, and eliminate elements that have to do with gender. Was the anxiety and resistance different in the early 1990s when Butler published *Gender Trouble*?

JB: Well, I do think feminism and lesbian and gay rights were at the center of the right-wing agenda. There were many people against rights to reproductive technology on the right. There were many people against equal wages for women. There were many people who opposed gay and lesbian human rights. There were, I think, many right-wing attacks on feminism and gay and lesbian legal rights, including rights of parenting, rights of marriage, protection against harassment and discrimination. I think the attacks have shifted to 'gender' because gender is increasingly identified with gender identity and with trans politics.

JB: Then of course comes the fear about what is trans, and about what is being taught in schools about gender affirmative healthcare² for young people. Should it be allowed? Should it be prohibited? Are young people being encouraged or recruited to become gay or trans or whatever it is. Remember that we are also living in a time where many of the signatories to the Istanbul Convention³ have withdrawn their signatures precisely because they do not want to accept the idea of gender-based violence or comply with the requirement to instruct civil servants in anti-harassment procedures or to oppose rape or violence within families. So, I think there is more of a continuity between then and now than we may think.

JB: Gender in early feminism, including radical feminism, could mean any number of things, right? But now, as Joan W. Scott (1986) has maintained, it was an analytic framework for understanding power differentials. Recently, however, gender seems more to be about 'my' gender or gender identity and how that's recognized. And the debates center on questions such as 'Should it be recognized? Is the sex that I am assigned at birth necessarily the gender that I am supposed to live out in life or is there a difference between them?' You do not need a distinction between sex and gender to distinguish between the original assignment of a particular sex and the sex lived out in life. But we all know that those can be different. Now there are some who want to say it should not be different, that it should *never* be different, right? For them, sex is immutable.

Orbán, Trump, DeSantis in Florida. I think Meloni, certainly Putin. And some of your politicians in Denmark.

Shutting down knowledge

The tension between gender as a constructive concept and as a destructive demon also appears in Danish debates and daily life. Educators, consultants, artists, welfare organizations, businesses, and families feel a strong need to address diversity, inequality, discrimination, and sexism. They seek experts, attend courses, read books, and implement local policy and organizational changes. In contrast, there is noticeable political pressure from above to do little or nothing. Efforts regarding gender must not become 'political' or 'activist,' as several centre-right politicians paradoxically state. However, as Butler points out, doing nothing is also political, as it maintains the status quo and still constitutes gender. Butler recognizes the image of knowledge being 'shut down' and delegitimized from their analyses of the U.S. and other countries, including Denmark. In May 2024, in Denmark, a ministerial task force consisting of gender and equality researchers and stakeholders published a report with 21 recommendations on gender equality in education (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet, 2024). Immediately, the report and recommendations were dismissed by the Minister of Education, as he criticized the report as 'nonsense' and claimed that schools should not become battlegrounds for identity politics. As we discuss this with Butler, they say:

JB: All you need to do is invoke the phantasm of gender and gender politics and it becomes an occasion to trigger a mechanism for censorship and exclusion. All you need to do is to mention the demon 'gender' because, as a phantasm, it becomes something represented as dangerous, threatening society. You do not have to explain it, because what you have done is to have collected a bunch of fears and anxieties under a single sign,

and people are asked whether they should get rid of everything associated with that sign, and then people will say yes, right? Reject that thing. Some would say that gender studies is not rigorous scholarship or it is sloppy. But what criteria are they using, and what biases inform those criteria? There are, at the same time, fundamental tenants of academic life – open inquiry, critical thought—that are also being attacked. The new wave of censorship and misinformation seeks to close down debate, and it does.

The effort to shut down knowledge reveals that schools and welfare institutions have already become battlegrounds for and against gender issues. While politicians have long called on research to legitimize policies, Butler observes that studies on gender are now being delegitimized and demonized, and professionals working with gender are harassed. This mirrors the resistance faced by climate researchers, whose work shows that societal problems of inequality, destruction, and violence cannot be solved by maintaining the status quo, but only by changing behaviours, mindsets, and the distribution of privilege.

Conflating the national and the natural

The conversation moves to the question about the connection between the anti-gender movement and anti-migration ways of thinking. We ask Butler how that conflation between the national and the natural is discussed in *Who's Afraid of Gender?*

JB: I think that there are forms of nationalism that frame many of these debates, right? Gender is a concept or 'ideology' that comes from the outside; it is an unwanted import, or it is an imperialist power; it is being generated in urban centers, in Europe or in the United States, that will destroy local communities and the spirit of the nation. Putin will say that it is a threat to national security because Russian spiritual values are linked to the sacred nature of the (heteronormative) family as stipulated by the Russian Orthodox Church, right?

Gender must be kept out, and it is, in fact, one reason he opposes the European Union so strenuously. It is because there are a variety of laws and policies that protect against discrimination based on gender. He calls it "Gayropa," famously. But Orbán uses that argument too; the idea that the nation of Hungary is such that it needs to keep gender out. It also needs to keep migrants out. Both of these threaten to undermine the purity of the nation and means of its reproduction, right? So, Orbán is explicitly against miscegenation. He does not want mixed race Hungarians being reproduced. And that is a way of holding on to a sexual order that is at once heterosexual and White and Hungarian and is anti-migrant and anti-gay, lesbian, et cetera. He clusters all these issues in his policies: the heteronormativity of the family is necessary to reproduce the nation, and national purity requires both heterosexuality and anti-migrant politics. A heterosexual norm, which, at least Orbán would say, is not just a national value, but a *natural* one. He conflates the national and the natural. Putin does the same, but so too does Meloni in her own way. And the right-wing in France is now very devious. So, you know, it will confuse the issue so it does not seem homophobic or transphobic, but it is, profoundly.

No history of gender without race

In *Who's Afraid of Gender?* Butler draws on key insights from Black feminism and Black American studies (e.g., Saidiya Hartman, Hortense Spillers, C. Riley Snorton) as well as postcolonial and decolonial approaches (e.g., Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí, María Lugones, Aníbal Quijano). These perspectives help illuminate how dimorphism—the idea that creatures exist in only two kinds—manifests in actions and toxic anxieties about what counts as liveable lives.

JB: When we talk about what it means to be a woman or a man, we simultaneously make assumptions about race, even if unspoken. Whiteness was an unmarked assumption in much feminist theory until Black feminist critique was

taken seriously. We cannot tell the history of gender without also telling the history of race and racialization.

According to the literature Butler engages with, gender norms were shaped by colonization, capitalism, enslavement, and racist surgeries. For example by violently rearranging gender and kinship relations through the commodification of humans, separating children from mothers, and making them property, while the slave owner was established as the absolute patriarch. These events, Butler notes, were overlooked by early second-wave feminism, which ignored the racialized and colonial legacies in the nature/culture divide and the binary gender ideal (i.e., 'he' or 'she') rather than acknowledging more identities (e.g., 'they').

JB: There are two chapters, one on race and another on colonialism, where I seek to show that gender norms have been created through slavery and racist surgical practices as demonstrated by C. Riley Snorton's work. But Hortense Spillers clearly elaborated this in a different way, in 1986, before *Gender Trouble*. It's really important to return to her work. Certain kinds of racial norms operate in our assumptions about what it is to look like a woman or to fully be a woman. Those norms emerge from white supremacist frameworks of value. Spillers was asking, 'can a Black woman be a woman?' in the way that Fanon asks, 'can a Black man be a man?' Thus, we have good reasons to ask, 'what is the idea of woman at work here?' And what is this idea of man that makes it unclear whether Blackness can be included in the gender norms or whether it is a kind of exclusion or a kind of material from which white gender norms are produced by contrast or by opposition.

JB: Another thing that has really worried me is that I have heard right-wing anti-gender people and anti-migrant people, very often the same, using arguments that sounded left-wing; when people say 'oh, these are colonizing processes, gender is part of the colonization of local cultures' or, 'critical race theory will make us all feel like

we, White people, are all racist to the core and everything about our history is racist and must be rejected.' These are fantastical conclusions.

DS: It is these strange ways of co-opting critiques.

JB: Yes, I looked a little bit more into the colonization issue because, as we know, there are decolonial feminists who have also said gender is produced through colonial power. But when decolonial feminists say that, what they are saying is that Christian missionaries came into Africa and Latin America and tried to impose certain kinds of northern European norms or U.S. norms on cultures that produced man and woman according to certain ideals of whiteness. So, there you have a convergence of what happened in the Southern States of the United States, the institution of slavery and its violent aftermath, and the history of colonization. Gender got produced precisely within a binary. So, as gender studies scholars, or as feminists, or as people who are involved in gender politics, we need to have anti-racism as a fundamental commitment. We also need an anti-colonial criticism in order not to be reproducing those norms.

DS: You do not use the word 'intersectionality' so often in your book. Are you going into another archive of texts?

JB: I think I mention it, but I have always been a little surprised because the history of Black feminism, of Latino feminism, Latin American feminism, it has been dealing with race for a very long time without the concept of intersectionality. Sometimes in Europe, intersectionality tends to stand for race, and I do not know how that happened. But, you know, Angela Davis does not use intersectionality. I mean, there are many strains of Black feminism, including Audre Lorde and C. Riley Snorton, who understand intersectionality to be one concept. It is very important, but it does not stand for all of Black feminism, or for all of anti-racist or anti-colonial feminism.

DS: Yes. I do not know, my colleagues and I have been discussing the Nordic reception of intersectionality in for instance a special issue of *NORA* (Hvenegård-Lassen & Staunæs, 2020; Hvenegård-Lassen, Staunæs & Lund, 2020). Also, in the newly published Danish anthology on performative and intersectional feminism (Hvenegård-Lassen, Staunæs & Khawaja, 2024; Nebeling Petersen, Khawaja & Kivi, 2024), we translated a chapter about doing gender and justice by you into Danish (Butler, 2024b), just as we translated chapters by Snorton (2024) and Spillers (2024). Maybe it is something about what a concept like intersectionality travels along with. When intersectionality first travelled from the United States into the Nordic countries in the 2000s, it quite often travelled together with standpoint feminism, law, and sociology. It also came with Black British feminism, social psychology, and socialism (Lykke, 2020). I guess the other archive, the one including Spillers, Snorton, Hartmann et cetera, that is a different archive. One where race comes first, as the genre of human and gender is a code in that genre. It is an archive from the humanities, it is history, and it links with poststructuralism, posthumanism and postcolonial thinking. I mean, the question of archives, paradigms, and travels, might be one of the reasons why intersectionality has had that profound way of coming into European feminism as the proxy for race, but did not get the grasp for simultaneously deconstructing gender and the human?

JB: Yes. Well, I think intersectionality is fundamentally a legal framework. The concept has been very important for those who seek to produce a more complex analysis, one that brings gender, race, and class together. And that is very important in order to avoid the reproduction of a White feminism that is blind to issues of race. So that seems absolutely right. But at least in the United States, both standpoint feminism and intersectionality are very useful and very important, but we have also had a criticism from within Black feminism of both positions. Saidiya

Hartman does not use the term intersectionality. Or Claudia Rankine, or, you know, any number of Black feminists who are extremely important to the field. I think intersectionality does not allow for a historical analysis or a textured analysis. It can become an easy model that you impose on anything. It is important that we keep the field open to an array of positions within Black feminism and postcolonial perspectives. Debates on these internal differences are important for thinking something through in more complex ways.

The interconnectedness is key to hope and the healing of the earth

Gender as performative should not be confused with what 1970s second-wave feminism called the distinction between biological sex and social gender. That distinction left biological sex as fixed, with culture as the driver of change. Butler argues that neither biology nor the social is pre-given or exists independently. Nature and culture are always formed in a radical, mutual interplay. In *Who's Afraid of Gender?* Butler explores this relationship through another feminist thinker, biologist Donna J. Haraway, who since the 1980s has contributed to an ecofeminist and ecocritical approach to gender. Haraway argues that humans, for better or worse, are radically connected to, and dependent on, other living beings. We experience this in terms of gender, and also, as Butler adds, with the climate crisis. Butler's thinking of the near future involves hope for alliances. It involves care across differences and in relation to other living creatures at the Earth. Throughout the conversation, Butler returns to the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and culture, especially considering feminist ecocriticism, which has long engaged with the planetary crises we now face.

JB: There must be a counter-imagination to resist the fear, authoritarian regimes stoke and demand. This means envisioning a way of living together based on equality and freedom. We should not fear each other's freedom—your freedom does

not take away from mine. It is also crucial to forge alliances among feminists, LGBTQ+ communities, and those fighting for migrant rights. I believe this must be connected to the healing of the Earth. We need to ask ourselves, more broadly than just in terms of gender, what kind of world we want to live in. And how do we live in that world together? One essential element of the

response is to not contribute further to the exclusion or subordination of others, and certainly not to further violence or discrimination. We must be more conscious of how interconnected we are as living beings and find political and social methods of organizing that recognize and value our shared entanglement, our interdependent lives.

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Notes

- ¹ This interview came into being due to Cecilie Nørgaard's insisting knock on Judith Butler's door, asking for an interview, as the guest editor for the Danish Magazine *Eurowoman*. Dorthe Staunæs conducted the interview on June 18, 2024. Together, we edited this version for *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning*.
- ² In Danish: 'kønsbekræftende behandling.'
- ³ The Istanbul Convention is short for the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. It requires parties to develop laws, policies, and support services to end violence against women and domestic violence.

The (Im-)Possibilities and (Dis-)Comforts of Watery We's: Exploring Entanglement, Mothering and Solidarity within Hydrofeminism(s)

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Introduction

Water is a connector, a differentiator, a facilitator, a communicator. It brings all kinds of bodies into intimate contact, despite and because of our differences. (Neimanis 2018)

This essay reflects on how hydrofeminist discussions of connectedness, inequality, and a leaky 'we' across differences may inform thinking about gender and other intersecting markers of difference in relation to climate catastrophe. We unpack and interrogate the 'we' in hydrofeminism through three main prisms: (1) the gendered notion of motherhood and the practice of mothering, as seen through ecofeminist, queer, and black feminist perspectives, linking this to critiques and possibilities of identification; (2) the (dis-)comfort,

racialization, and affordances of leaky academic institutions; and (3) responsibility, situated accountability, and indebtedness with regards to unequally distributed privileges and politics of location. These themes emerged from a symposium, "With and Against the Current: Exploring Hydrofeminism(s)," which we co-organized at the University of Copenhagen on 11–12 December 2023.¹ Initially planned as an afternoon lecture by cultural theorist Astrida Neimanis, whose work in *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (2017) and elsewhere has been instrumental in defining hydrofeminism, the event expanded organically. The symposium included a collective presentation by Astrida Neimanis and wildlife pathologist Aleksija Neimane, with a screening of *We Are All Mothers* by filmmaker Patty Chang from the group's collaborative project on marine mammal death; keynotes by Astrida Neimanis and author, community builder, and scholar Alexis

Pauline Gumbs; and talks and performances by artist Madeleine Andersson, author Siri Ravn Hjelm Jacobsen, dancer and choreographer Lydia Östberg Diakité, and author Lesley Ann Brown. With contributions from participants within different disciplines in the sciences, arts, and humanities, holding varying independent and institutional affiliations, and practicing within a Scandinavian and international context, we aimed to showcase the broad range of hydrofeminism's impact and application.

As a novel epistemological/methodological concept, hydrofeminism has gained traction within the fields of environmental humanities and feminist theory over the past decade. Hydrofeminisms offer valuable perspectives on the connections, solidarities, and inequalities, leaks, and flows, between water(y) bodies, and point to some of the ways in which intersectionality, inequality, and difference mediate the climate catastrophe and its effects. These feminist theories of our shared ecological landscape highlight our different imbrications in the watery flows that we, both humans and more-than-humans, are a part of, and encourage us to consider ourselves as watery containers that can learn from how water connects and permeates all of our bodies. Two of the speakers at the symposium, Astrida Neimanis and Alexis Pauline Gumbs, whose work we engage with in this essay, can account for some central debates in hydrofeminism. Neimanis's 2017 book *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Methodology* has become a landmark work in hydrofeminism. The book deals with the tensions of how water, on the one hand, connects, challenging boundaries, dichotomies, and separation; and on the other hand, how watery thinking, instead of fetishized and fetishizing 'oneness', simultaneously exposes inequalities and coloniality of environmental violence. Thus Neimanis (see also 2024) also points to the dangers of being seduced by romantic ideas about watery abundance and connection. Rather than being canonized as a hydrofeminist thinker, Gumbs identifies as a "Queer Black Troublemaker, Black Feminist Love Evangelist and an aspirational cousin to all sentient beings"—a position that

can also be read as a stance on hydrofeminism (<https://www.alexispauline.com/about>). In her 2020 creative nonfiction book *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, Gumbs meditates on the lessons in fugitivity and survival that marine mammals might teach us. Many of the species that she writes about are endangered or have become extinct, and Gumbs' writing exposes connections between colonial violence, enslavement, environmental racism, and the violence experienced by sea mammals—and potentials for adaptation, resistance, and change.

What is at stake in this essay drawing on the above-mentioned scholarly work is that even if fluid exchanges provide an image for environmental embeddedness—and one that has been particularly fertile for embodied feminist imaginations—bodies of water do not affect all human bodies alike. Even within Scandinavia, there are significant regional, cultural, bodily, and economic differences between levels of dependency on coastal climates, levels of vulnerability to flood zones, and degrees of exposure to groundwater toxins. Globally, bodies of water have their own histories and temporalities, connected to but distinct from the rhythms of terrestrial life.

The symposium generated questions about what knowledges are cultivated within academic settings, how to break with academic protocol, and what the implications are of disrupting the general 'we' so often assumed within these spaces. How can hydrofeminisms help, and how might they hinder, thinking collectively from a 'we' marked by fracture, inequality, and non-alignment? To put it plainly: in what instances does the implied 'we' in hydrofeminism become problematic?

Exploring the tensions of 'we': a conversation

In any collaborative relation there is a fear of deep checking in. What do we do in the event of the force of clashing ...? (Berlant & Stewart 2019, 28)

In this time of climate catastrophe—fueled by centuries of colonialism, slavery and heteropatriarchal mastery, and augmented by a global pandemic with its grotesquely uneven distribution of vulnerability—just who do 'we' think 'we' are? (Neimanis 2024, xxiv)

We—a limited we, the authors of this essay—chose to shape our writing as a conversation to bring forth and cultivate our distinct voices and perspectives. Being accountable and bearing witness to the intersectionality of climate catastrophe, we aim to create a shared space of critique, disagreement, and testimony through collaborative autoethnographic writing (Lapadat 2017). The conversation enables us to show the clashes and (dis)comforts of the 'we' as authors, embodying the tensions that are central to how gender and other markers of difference intersect with climate catastrophe. The conversation format adds another layer to our discussion of community and 'we-ness' within hydrofeminisms. It affords an exploration of how we manifest, both as individuals and as a collective voice, throughout this piece of writing. The conversation format explores how we are influenced by our gender identities, our racialization, our bodies, and our (precarious or more stable) employment in or outside the university. It also asks how we are challenged, as individuals as well as a writing collective, in the writing process by the conversation format. In other words, the conversation format enables a hands-on exploration of the connections and inequalities, leaks and flows, offered by hydrofeminist thought.

Are we all mothers? Gestures towards a tentative, hesitant, and leaky 'we'

Our conversation starts by discussing the video *We Are All Mothers* (2022), visual artist and filmmaker Patty Chang's contribution to the interdisciplinary research project between her, feminist theorist and scholar Astrida Neimanis, and wildlife pathologist Aleksija Neimane, entitled *Learning*

Endings. The collaboration documents necropsies of deceased marine mammals and explores how art practice can contribute to bringing care to this work. Constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic, the three collaborators met online, where Neimanis and Chang bore witness to the necropsies performed by Neimane, introducing visual documentation and ritual to the scientific practice. In the video, through the necropsy of a baby porpoise, Chang reflects on the emotional connection of different species through motherhood, bringing into the scene of mammal death her own care and anxieties for her young son.² Thus, the film addresses the dynamics of connectedness and care across watery—first and foremost mammal—bodies, through exploring topics like mothering, bodily vulnerabilities, exposure to toxins, and death; and how these are entangled with (interspecies) difference and inequality, reflecting tensions that fuel hydrofeminist thought.

Linda: Christa and I had a conversation about motherhood in relation to the screening of *We Are All Mothers*, and Astrida's reflections about the term 'mother'. The moment in the film, showing the breastmilk in the dead baby porpoise's belly, aiming to make it more relatable to me, because I have a presumed relation with breastfeeding, was disturbing for me. I felt that this moment in the film essentialized gender—it interpellated me, as a carrier of mammary glands and reproductive organs that might be used for giving birth, as a per-default mothering body that should feel interspecies identification with other "bodies like mine."

Christa: Yeah, I had a lot of conflicted feelings about the film, because on the one hand, it's really beautiful and moving, but its focus on identification feels so taboo in environmental studies today. There are so many species and beings that are difficult or impossible for us to identify with, "strange strangers," and effacing these differences is arguably also an attempt to eradicate the otherness of and in the world (Morton 2010). Identification has also been problematized through black feminist and queer challenging of solidarity, or even empathy, as emerging through perceived similarity,

also present in Alexis Pauline Gumbs' work. And then my second response was in response to the title, to question whether we really are all mothers—or want to be considered in this way. I think there is something powerful about being able to talk about motherhood in an academic context. But at the same time, I don't understand insisting on the "all." Linda and I talked about the moment on the first day when Astrida said, motherhood is not everything, but it is more than what it is usually said to be. I almost wish we had gotten to talk a bit more about that. Because why motherhood and not care? Or why motherhood and not other terms that actually already are more expansive than motherhood typically is?

Linda: For me, parenthood is problematic, as it refers to biological procreation and reproduction. I would rather think with the notion of ancestry, linking it to Alexis Pauline Gumbs' work. Ancestry for me is more expansive, referring to ties with other living beings that do not align with ideas about linear generational time, primacy of procreation or interspecies difference. The notion of ancestry challenges the idea of the mother-child relation as *the* primary (human) intimacy. In the conversation following the screening of the film, it was interesting to experience the echo of discourses about, for instance, refugee "mothers and children," where someone becomes more 'grievable' (Butler 2016) because they are a baby or a mother. This shows how idea(l)s about heteronormative parenting (the mother is a feminized body) can constrain our imagination and affectivity with regards to more-than-human bodies.

Anne-Sophie: I also thought that especially the title of the movie [*We Are All Mothers*] worked against itself. The title seems to suggest a kind of universalizing gesture, that motherhood is something everyone is a part of. However, *I do not think that mothering and parenting is a universal experience*. This claim to a universal, and in this case a parental we is one of the potential pitfalls of thinking with water. As Astrida herself writes in a recent introduction with the fitting title "Hydrofeminisms and the desire for a watery 'we': "while this watery

abundance is certainly a beautiful idea, the risk here is that 'we' all get swept up and swept away" (Neimanis 2024, xxiv).

Christa: I agree that the universalizing gesture was a big part of what was difficult in the motherhood conversation. I want these conversations to make space for different ways of relating—and not relating. In the end, I think a big part of what bothers me about the insistence on motherhood is just how unqueer and binary it feels—at the same time that a lot of hydrofeminist writing, and certainly *Bodies of Water*, leans so heavily on the idea of queerness to talk about breaking with linearity and fixed categorizations.

Motherhood seems a place where it's hard not to bring our own experiences into the critical conversation. I talked to a friend after the film screening, a mother to two young kids, who had a really strong negative reaction to what she saw as the film's abjection of motherhood, its representation of the role of mother as suffering. I hadn't thought of that, but could see what she meant when she said it. And my own response is definitely colored by my experience as a stepmother, a role that to me seems important in its own right but that I wouldn't want to conflate with motherhood, and my non-binary partner's experience as a non-biological parent, but not a mother. I know I'm being ridiculously literal here, but I think relying on a term like motherhood, which comes with such strong cultural associations, encourages these responses. Maybe the idea of universalizing motherhood was meant as a provocation, and in that case, I wish we had taken it up a bit more explicitly.

Ida: As much as I agree that we should be careful with too-easy identifications across all kinds of significant otherness and difference, I also think there is something powerful in carefully rehearsing identification in spite of everything that sets us apart. In *Undrowned*, Alexis Pauline Gumbs positions identification as a—problematic, yet potentially powerful—mode of solidarity. She writes: "My hope, my grand poetic intervention here is to move from identification, also known as that process through which we say what is what, like

which dolphin is that over there and what are its properties, to *identification*, that process through which we expand our empathy and the boundaries of who we are become more fluid, because we *identify with* the experience of someone different, maybe someone of a whole different so-called species." She goes on to say that the project is not about gathering sympathy for marine mammals because "they are like us," but to challenge normative definitions of the human "so tangled in separation and domination that it is consistently making our lives incompatible with the planet" (Gumbs 2020, 9).

The way I understand this is that, for Gumbs, identification via disruptive language can be a strategic tool for articulating shared suffering and urgencies across difference, in this case articulating shared struggles across histories and practices between marine mammals and black feminists, a poetic starting point for collective protest. I think it's important to note that Gumbs' identification is different than a colonizing gesture of a universal 'we'. It is an identification motivated *by* difference, by acknowledging shared—but not necessarily equal—vulnerabilities to the violences of colonial capitalism. Again, as much as I think we should be wary with identification, I also think there is a certain way in which identification can be mobilized as a way of moving beyond the pitfalls of sympathy without connection (Ferdinand 2022), which seem to haunt a lot of attempts to organize across difference.

On a slightly different note, I read the title 'We Are All Mothers' as a gesture—however problematic and provocative—towards an expanded notion of motherhood. This, too, could be read in line with queer, black feminist work on mothering that pushes against white and heteronormative idea(l)s on motherhood by offering mothering as a verb, a practice of care-as-dissent to existing family, gender, and species categories. At least, this is an analytical framework which could be tested against the content of the film. What I found especially interesting was how the film proposed the practice of acquiring knowledge about something or someone—here the interdisciplinary coming-together of artists and scientists over the

autopsy of the dead porpoise—as an act of 'birthing' each other through categories, scientific and/or metaphorical. This, to me, makes it very clear that 'mother' is no innocent category, but a highly ambivalent practice that carries within itself the violence of definition, as much as it carries a promise of sustenance.

Linda: I also see ambivalence as central to the film's portrayal of mothering. I thought the film addressed the entanglements (inseparability and co-occurrences) of care, harm, and environmental violence through reflecting on breastfeeding as a practice of mammal mothering. Here, mothering manifests as a care relation which might pass on toxicity, harm, and violence. The film refers to the toxicity of the breastmilk of Inuit women to highlight how producing breastmilk could be a body's way to expel toxins, and then asking more generally whether mothering could be a way of passing on violence, in this case environmental racism, that the mothering body has suffered. Here, care becomes 'slow violence' (Nixon 2013) due to environmental racism and the differentiated effects of climate catastrophe. I wonder how these care-harm-violence entanglements might apply—or not—to the black feminist and queer conceptualizations of mothering beyond procreation.

Differentiated (dis-)comforts: practicing hydrofeminisms in- and outside leaky and haunted institutions

Anne-Sophie: I think what you just said Linda about slow violence and environmental racism is what ties the different elements of the symposium together. So far we have focused a lot on Neimanis and Neimane's contribution to the symposium as well as Patty Chang's film *We Are All mothers*, which all took place on day one, but for me what was particularly interesting about day two was Lesley-Ann's introduction to Alexis Pauline Gumbs and Gumbs' book *Undrowned* which, in my opinion, represented a very different, perhaps even

opposite, consideration of hydrofeminism to the one presented in Chang's work. By reiterating the words, *some of you really need to hear this*, Lesley-Ann's introduction was, at least the way I heard it, a way of insisting that the lecture hall in which we all sat during those two days is a differentiated space. It was a way of reminding us, or at least it reminded me, that we are not one big homogeneous, harmonious we. It was the opposite of universalism; it was the opposite of saying we are all connected, or we are all mothers. It was a way of calling some of us out on our privileges and making us remember the power structures that are at play in a university setting, and I think it was needed at this time when some of us, and here I am including myself, had settled into the space quite comfortably. Lesley-Ann was not afraid to make the space a little bit uncomfortable again, and I think that was important.

Linda: I think I follow you—and yet I also think that at the same time, Lesley-Ann was making the space *more* comfortable to other bodies. I think what Lesley-Ann showed with her intervention was that this symposium is not necessarily a privileged bubble “at the university.” On the contrary, some people are already feeling very uncomfortable in this space. Consequently, when Lesley-Ann said that *some of us* in the audience need to hear what she is saying, more than others, I would guess that it made it more possible, breathable, for some bodies to be there.

I also thought about the different difficulties in hearing something. With Lesley-Ann's

some of you really need to hear this, I might feel “okay, wow, I'm guessing *I* really need to hear this, but it is making me feel fragile” (DiAngelo 2018), and then will I hear that? On the other hand, with Alexis Pauline Gumbs self-identifying as a Black, queer love evangelist and an aspirational cousin to all living beings, I wonder how love evangelism might be received within a university setting. People can also fail to hear something because it does not seem academic enough, or serious enough, pointing to euro-centric idea(l)s of knowledge.

Christa: For me, the discomfort that Lesley-Ann brought up was a motivation to self-question and think critically about your own positionality in terms of racial histories and institutional histories, whereas Astrida's discomfort in her keynote on settler-colonialism was more a reflection on the discomfort itself, a motivation to be in this discomfort. Though there was a moment at the end of this part of the conference where she said, it does not end here, you should obviously go out into the world and do something with these thoughts.

Ida: For me, the discomfort produced by Lesley-Ann's call-out reminded me of the responsibility inherent in hosting moments of knowledge sharing which invites marginalized epistemologies and bodies to the table. As organizers who are racialized as white and currently—however tentatively—enjoying the privileges of the university (which is not to say that we are not experiencing its violences as well), I really wonder how to navigate these—sometimes leaky, sometimes pretty solid—boundaries between sanctioned knowledge, and then those ways of knowing and articulating worlds which are historically shunned from the institutional spaces of academia. As Linda is saying, sometimes our willingness to listen is hindered by the ‘un-academic language’ of repressed knowledge systems. What do we ‘owe’ those of our guests who represent and embody marginalized positions and speak from marginalized epistemologies? Invitation, I think, is not enough, making space is not enough. I think the question of holding space is urgent, of learning how to take on the responsibility of—and strategic possibilities granted by—privilege. A start could be for those of us who are racialized as white (and/or enjoy other privileges) to put ourselves at risk rather than inviting someone else to take on a position of risk. So for example, what would it have meant if we, the white organizers and hosts, would have called out the power structures and dis/comforts of the space, instead of leaving that silent gap for Lesley-Ann Brown, our invited guest who is not affiliated with the institution and who also does not enjoy white privilege, to fill? For me, hydrofeminist thinking opens questions of debt and solidarity,

which ultimately are political and strategic questions that demand our sustained (self)critical and creative attention. They are, I think, excellent examples of the importance of coupling political and speculative practice.

Christa: That was one of the powerful things about the symposium for me, how important institutionality and affiliations became on both of the days. Of our two keynotes, Neimanis has an institutional affiliation and Gumbs has explicitly chosen not to go down that path—but of course, there are several institutions hosting the symposium itself. In Lesley-Ann Brown's introduction I thought that her provocation against institutions was really powerful, but at the same time the institution is also an incredibly leaky, to use your word Linda, place and in some ways less and less institutional. Most of us are precariously employed within the institution, and so even as we're having these important conversations about positionality, the institution is becoming a less and less solid place to be situated from.

Linda: It feels like a violent contradiction, between the institution being leaky, porous, even dissolving in some respects, while also still being rigid and haunted. I think about the architecture, the bodies that enter the institution, the bodies that get the paycheck, that are in front of the room. I am thinking of my own body in front of the room: a white, queer, and female-passing and increasingly almost always Danish- and Western European-passing body, it is part of reproducing the white space of academia, especially since I have become permanently employed a couple of years ago. Perhaps here, the leakages coexist with, and might even reinforce walls that keep some bodies out—thinking of intersecting markers of difference and whiteness, in this case.

Anne-Sophie: Yes, and then, going back to the broad theme of our symposium and this conversation, I think that simplified interpretations of hydrofeminism or the theoretical work being done within the field have a tendency to think that leakages are purely a positive thing. However, many

who are working within academic institutions would probably agree that the leaky institution, as you call it Christa, where many are forced to lead a very precarious work-life, can be really damaging. And so, the leaky institution where people are constantly filtering in and out might be productive for the institution, but it is also very damaging to a lot of individual lives. Being part of a leaky institution and maintaining healthy personal finances, for example, often does not mix well.

Beyond entanglement? Fetishization, complicity, and responsibility

Ida: I think there is significance to how hydrofeminism resonates with so many people from so many fields of artistic and intellectual practice. The problem, as I see it, is a tendency towards a kind of fetishization of entanglement that lacks critical depth and political content. In my opinion, entanglement is a *problem*, never an answer or a solution. Acknowledging deep relationality is merely the beginning of a long journey into probing the question of what, then, we can do and build together (Ferdinand 2022, 233). Entanglement prompts accountability, not just on a theoretical level, but in ways that are embodied, practiced, risky, and real. For me, hydrofeminist responsibility is about practicing a kind of situated accountability that disallows reproductions of western, affirmative innocence which is unable to or unwilling to deal with whiteness and privilege. It is a tough job, of course, because it highlights questions of injustice and inequality, and it invites discomfort and guilt, which is always awkward and painful.

Anne-Sophie: I think that it is when other scholars simplify what someone like Astrida is trying to do that the problem of fetishization arises. Once you simplify it down to this idea about, *oh thinking with leakages and waters is what is going to connect us all and then it is all good*, then we have a problem. But hydrofeminism cannot and should not be boiled down to such a simple argument of universalism, although it does seem to carry that dangerous interpretative potential (Neimanis

2024; Povinelli 2022). Also relating to the question of fetishization, I think it is so important to remember that *watery spaces are also historical spaces*. There is a tendency to fetishize the ocean as this great place of origin and then sort of forget that the sea is filled with painful history or histories for a lot of people (Ferdinand 2022; Sharpe 2016 and many others). And that again relates to the question of problematic universalism, when we forget to differentiate between the way different bodies relate to different spaces and institutions, be this Copenhagen University or the ocean as this great imaginary as well as an actual physical space.

Linda: I think it matters what words we use. I agree that the way Astrida uses “entanglement” includes complicity and points to unequal power relations. Yet, I would sometimes like to say *complicity*, instead of entanglement. Or responsibility—not the way Haraway (2012) writes about it, “response-ability,” but the old-fashioned, unsexy responsibility.

Ida: There are a few sentences in *Hydrofeminism*, that are pretty overlooked, where Astrida reminds us that entanglement comes with the question of debt. Once we have come to understand our bodies as ecosystems in indefinite relation, she asks: “what do we owe, and how do we pay?” (Neimanis 2017, xx). For me, this is a very challenging and crucial question, that demands attention towards and commitment to not just clever cultural analysis, but actual struggle and structural change. Imagine if our collected hydrofeminist and environmental inquiries would start there, with exactly the question of what we owe each other across our different, entangled, privileges and positions, and what the many different ways of paying our debts could look like?

Christa: The tricky thing with entanglement is that even if the writing is quite clear about hierarchies of power and different levels of accountability, the term itself does imply a situation where we're more equally actors than we are. In that way, I think it brings us back to the motherhood/mothering conversation, and the issues that came up

around that term. In this same vein, I've struggled sometimes in reading hydrofeminist texts which state explicitly that they are anti-essentializing (Neimanis 2017), but where my initial reaction to reading is the opposite of that.

Linda: For me, there is a lot at stake in how I articulate my point of view in these discussions. I recognize the tendency to place myself on some moral higher ground, like now I find out that it is about complicity and responsibility, and I am going to argue for this to convince others. It can become pointing fingers and critiquing injustice, in a way that centers my perspective and reproduces my privileges and blind spots. It points to the question of what kinds of critiques, also of institutions, can be articulated and enacted from different positions. As a faculty member with a permanent contract, my critique of institutions grows from a position of complicity, and having access to resources which I might have the possibility and the responsibility to re-distribute. This differs from the positionality of the critiques put forth by, for instance, independent scholars or activists. And perhaps it also prompts a responsibility to listen. I have a feeling that these reflections on intersectionality, positionality, and politics of location within and around leaky institutions are also relevant when grappling with the broader hydrofeminist questions about our entangled, differently (under) privileged bodies of water, and our indebtedness to each other.

Christa: Maybe there just is an inherent problem with having these conversations within institutions and we just have to accept that. Gumbs' lecture would have sounded a lot different from within an institution—part of what was powerful about her words was also knowing that she has chosen a different path. Maybe we just have to accept that there are some things that are problematic in this institutional position rather than trying to get out of it—and working from there.

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Notes

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- ² For more on this video see: <https://www.learningendings.org/current> and <https://patty-chang.square-space.com/new-page-3/>.

The Other Greta Effect (OGE): Recognizing Youth Climate Activists Beyond Thunberg

By Ana Paulina Morera Quesada and Jenna M. Coughlin¹

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Abstract

Since Greta Thunberg's rise to international prominence as a youth climate activist, other youth activists have been identified in mass media as the 'Greta Thunberg' of their respective nations or regions. Through an analysis informed by decolonial approaches to global media studies and climate change and scholarship on climate justice, this article finds that this discursive phenomenon, termed the 'Other Great Effect' (OGE), constructs Greta Thunberg as a global icon whose identity and approach establish a normative framework for youth climate activism. The OGE supports a universalizing narrative that legitimates the global North as leaders on climate change policy and downplays the different contexts, experiences, and identities represented within youth activism. Through case studies of four young activists who have been subjected to the Other Greta Effect, we find that the OGE paradoxically contributes to these activists' illegibility while also providing opportunities to call for a more diverse climate movement. Finally, we present the Global Youth Activists Map as an alternative visualization that advances a more intersectional approach to climate justice.

KEYWORDS: youth climate activism, media studies, climate justice, decolonial studies

Introduction

Imagine going to a sacred water ceremony with your family and being unable to interact with the body of water you have visited because of its toxic levels. Imagine being called an “instigator” by a politician in power for peacefully protesting for your future. Imagine being the only Black African woman among a group of White climate activists at an important summit and having your image cropped out of a group photograph. Imagine living in a country where climate devastation was so unbearable that it forced you and your family to migrate to a new country. Imagine organizing a strike in front of governmental institutions, founding your own climate movement organization and addressing millions of people in a crowd—only to be referred to as “the Greta Thunberg” of your community. These are not hypothetical situations, but rather the realities faced by Autumn Peltier, Anuna De Wever, Vanessa Nakate, and Xiye Bastida, respectively (Hanson 2019; Campbell 2020; Hernández 2019; Forbes Staff 2021). Their identities and experiences as young climate activists have been diminished by a label that associates their hard work with another activist—a White, European girl.

Greta Thunberg has played a crucial role in mobilizing masses to take climate action in recent years. Her vulnerable and relatable rhetoric connected with audiences, framing climate change as a moral issue centered on adults’ responsibility to protect children. Scholars have termed her impact the ‘Greta Thunberg Effect’ (Sabherwal et al. 2020)—a phenomenon whereby “familiarity with Greta Thunberg is related to individuals’ greater sense of collective efficacy ... and, may in turn motivate them to take collective actions to reduce global warming” (Sabherwal et al. 2020, 329). Subsequent research has confirmed Thunberg’s influence and investigated its mechanisms and impacts (Han & Ahn 2020; Haugseth & Smepllass 2023; Jung et al. 2020; Nisbett & Spaiser 2022; Prakoso et al. 2021; Salerno 2023; Spaiser et al. 2022; Wahlström & Uba 2023).

The tremendous amount of media attention Greta Thunberg received transformed her into what Ghosh refers to as a ‘global icon’ (2011).

Global icons can be widely circulated commercial symbols, such as the Coca-Cola logo, but when they take the form of a ‘bio-icon,’ they are people whose image not only serves as the symbol of a particular social cause, but also participates in narratives about globalization (2011, 11–12). While Ghosh analyzes icons who have had an enduring impact, such as Mother Theresa, Thunberg’s notoriety has arguably been more fleeting; however, at the height of her fame, she became the symbol of youth climate activism. Although bio-icons can reinforce dominant ideologies, Ghosh notes, “on occasion, a bio-icon might serve as a placeholder for anti-hegemonic aspirations: Iconic activists such as Wangari Maathai or Ken Saro-Wiwa, for instance, facilitate the placing of ecological demands” (23). Thunberg’s demand that world leaders prioritize a livable environment for children over economic growth channeled the “anti-hegemonic aspirations” of many. Her iconic status was reinforced by what we refer to as the ‘Other Greta Effect’ (OGE)—a media phenomenon in which like-minded young activists are labeled the ‘Greta Thunberg’ of another place, usually their country or region of origin.

Although we argue that this label has been harmful in some respects, we do not deny the importance of the recognition it has afforded other young climate activists. During the period when Thunberg captured the most media attention—from her first addresses to international audiences in late 2018 until the COVID-19 pandemic prevented mass gatherings in spring 2020—her iconic status garnered attention for many other youth activists who gained access to larger audiences in both mainstream media outlets and on social media. The four young activists whose stories we highlight have articulated several beneficial aspects of being associated with Thunberg. However, several of them also identify downsides to being represented as ‘other Gretas.’ Especially when applied to activists from outside the global North—or from Indigenous and/or racialized communities within it—the OGE participates in a discourse that is both hierarchical and homogenizing: By foregrounding Thunberg, it reinforces a narrative that the global North is best suited to take the lead in addressing

climate change, and by framing other activists as children *like Greta*, it situates them within a universal human rights framework that disregards their local and particular interests (Mies and Shiva 2014, 9–12). Both tendencies run counter to a climate justice framing, which emphasizes the interrelationships between ecological destruction and forms of social and economic injustice, and insists that solutions to ecological problems must be “sensitive to relations of unequal global geometries of power and how these intersect with relations of class, race, gender, generation, indigenous rights and socio-nature” (Chatterton 2013, 606).

An irony of the OGE is that many youth activists are themselves well-versed in climate justice and emphasize this framework in their own rhetoric, Thunberg included. As such, we do not wish to imply that Thunberg is personally responsible for diminishing other youth activists; in fact, she and other activists from the global North have sought to amplify their voices. Instead, we argue that the OGE is paradoxical because activists who are compared to Thunberg gain beneficial recognition while also experiencing a lack of attention to their distinctive identities, inspirations, and contributions to global climate activism. As Madhanagopal et al. argue, it is the distinct experiences and knowledge of people from the global South that make their contributions to climate change research and policy so important (2022, 4). Yet it is important to recognize that the OGE does not deprive these young activists of agency; rather, being labeled a ‘Greta’ can provide opportunities to engage critically with climate change discourse.

Our approach to analyzing the OGE responds to the aim of this special issue to find inspiration in the etymology of the word ‘crisis’ in the Greek “*krisis*” meaning ‘decision’ (Warren & Clayton 2020, 1). Although labeling youth activists ‘Gretas’ may seem like a trivial media ploy meant to generate clicks, the OGE conveys powerful assumptions about who should lead and whose voices ought to be heard when social, economic, and political decisions about climate change are being made. Our study also contributes to a body of research that examines notions of age, ability, gender, and race in media discourse about Greta Thunberg and

her position in youth climate activism (Bergmann & Ossewaarde 2020; Conrad 2021; Lakind 2020; Locke 2023; McFaddon 2020; Taft 2020; Vowles & Hultman 2022; White 2022). We first define the ‘Other Greta Effect’ and analyze its relationship to discourses of globalization that emphasize the leadership of the global North and downplay the structural causes of climate change, despite Thunberg’s own emphasis on climate justice. We then examine four case studies of activists labeled ‘Gretas’ to understand how they experience and respond to the OGE: Autumn Peltier and Anuna De Wever demonstrate the polyphonic nature of activists’ personal narratives and the importance of recognizing the particular collectives they represent. Vanessa Nakate and Xiye Bastida defy illegibility by contesting the ‘Greta’ label and advocating for more diversity in youth climate activism. Finally, we present the Global Youth Activists Map as an alternative visualization that can provide tools for a more “ecologically informed intersectional analysis” of youth activists’ motivations and messages (Tuana 2019, 3).

Methodology

This article is part of the project “Responses to Greta Thunberg in International Media.” Developed in 2019 by a group of undergraduate researchers under the leadership of Coughlin, the project website provides an introduction to Greta Thunberg and youth climate activism intended to serve a young audience. It also houses a publicly available database of news and opinion journalism written in response to Thunberg’s activism. A central goal of the project is to compare responses to Thunberg’s rhetoric and activism across languages and cultural contexts. This article draws on news and opinion articles from the database that were published in different international media outlets and languages, primarily English and Spanish. Other primary sources include books, speeches, interviews, and social media posts by Thunberg, Peltier, De Wever, Nakate, and Bastida. We close read these texts to analyze how examples of the OGE in mass media frame young activists’ positions

within global climate activism, as well as how the narratives and frames used by the activists themselves challenge the implications of being labeled a 'Greta.' Scholarly literature on global mass media, ecofeminism, decolonization, and climate justice, as well as scholarship on the rhetoric of Thunberg and other activists and its reception, informs our readings.

Morera Quesada chose the activists who serve as case studies because they hold influential positions within youth climate activism, yet they are given a less prominent position in global mass media than Thunberg. Moreover, as a racialized Costa Rican, Morera Quesada is passionate about creating intersectional platforms that uplift the voices of activists of color around the world. Their names, their stories, and their impact deserve to be known and listened to. As a scholar of Nordic studies working at an institution founded by Norwegian settlers on the homeland of the Wahpekute band of the Dakota nation, Coughlin is interested in how the OGE extends 'Nordic Whiteness' by representing the Nordic countries as promoters of moral goodness on the world stage (Lundström & Teitelbaum 2017), including ecological goodness, despite the unevenness of their actual environmental record (Anker 2020, 237–240; Hennig 2018, 3–5; Midttun & Olsson 2018).

The Other Greta Effect

The OGE has been ubiquitous since Thunberg became an icon of youth climate activism. A search for 'the Greta Thunberg of' in Access World News yielded 170 results between January 2019 and January 2024.² The most common instances of the phrase characterize a person—usually a girl or young woman—as the most prominent climate advocate from a particular country or region.³ The search mentioned above yielded examples that reference nine nations or regions, including Pakistan, Ecuador, Argentina, China, America, Mexico, Bangladesh, the Amazon, and India. Some youth activists are named the 'Greta' of an entire continent, such as Ridhima Pandey, who has been

called the "Greta Thunberg of Asia" (Bainbridge & Vimonsuk 2019).

In a sense, the OGE serves as a means of interpreting the larger movement to which young climate activists belong. In *Global Icons*, Ghosh argues that "mass-mediated images are precisely the widely and cheaply available means for apprehending global interconnections" (2011, 11). Global icons do not simply reflect "global" values but "legitimate historically and culturally particular aspirations as widely shared universal ones" (2011, 12). Having become iconic through the mass distribution of her image and speeches, Thunberg became a shorthand for understanding the global interconnections of the climate crisis. Appointing Thunberg as an icon of youth activism suggests that the world's youth face a common crisis and that Thunberg's pointed rhetoric and boldness in urging adults to act is an aspirational model for youth political participation. Thunberg has framed climate change as a human rights issue by focusing on how its effects violate the rights of children. Like other youth activists, she has presented herself as both a victim and a leader (Nisbett & Spaiser 2023, 9), emphasizing her status as a child who is harmed by climate change as well as a sharp critic of those in power. This rhetoric bears similarities to what Hesford calls the 'human rights spectacle'—a visual rhetoric that portrays individual girls, usually from the global South, as symbols of ongoing human rights abuses. Like other 'human rights spectacles,' Thunberg's likeness participates in "social and rhetorical processes of incorporation and recognition" into the "normative frameworks" of international human rights discourse (2011, 7). Her speeches and image have contributed to a normative framework in which continuing to emit fossil fuels is increasingly understood as a violation of the rights of children (Spaiser et al. 2022). But as a child of the wealthy global North, Thunberg is hardly the 'universal' face of climate injustice: She represents societies that are most responsible for the climate crisis, rather than those most impacted. Shiva and Mies argue that the discourse of "universal human rights" can facilitate "the global domination of local and particular interests, by means of subsuming the multiple diversities

of economies, cultures and of nature under the control of a few” corporations and governments (2014, 9). Framing the rights of children as a global cause can be used to justify activities, such as mining, carbon capture pipelines, or renewable energy development, against the interests or wishes of local people.

The OGE also presumes a particular audience perspective: As in the visual rhetoric of human rights that Hesford analyzes, promoting Thunberg as the icon for youth activism “support[s] the logic of a global morality market that privileges Westerners as world citizens” (2011, 9). An illustration of this logic can be found in headlines such as, “If Greta Thunberg inspires you, you’ll love these 4 teen climate activists too” (Segran 2019). The audience is assumed to be a Western consumer whose moral position can be enhanced by adding other youth to the roster of activists they care about. Rather than having their unique perspectives and approaches recognized, these other activists become figures associated with the ‘good cause’ s that Thunberg symbolizes. As Hesford points out, portraying girls and women from the global South as “awaiting” help from the global North rather than “active agents in history” is commonplace in international human rights rhetoric (2011, 6). While not as disempowering as being framed as “victim[s]” in need of “rescue” (Hesford 2011, 2), the OGE reproduces this logic, implying that activists needed the inspiration and recognition Thunberg’s activism has afforded them to become effective advocates.

However, the universalizing effect of the OGE runs counter to Thunberg’s own rhetoric. Thunberg has stressed the importance of climate justice since her earliest protests in 2018, and this focus has persisted in Fridays for Future, the global school strike movement that Thunberg helped to establish. Although other activist organizations have been calling for climate justice for decades (Chatterton 2013), Fridays for Future has been particularly effective in establishing climate justice as a normative framework in international climate deliberations (Nesbitt & Spaiser 2023; Spaiser et al. 2022). Activists committed to climate justice recognize that nations in the global South are

“more vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change,” but they are also attentive to the causes of this inequity and the various forms climate injustice can take (Madhanagopal et al. 2022, 2). As Madhanagopal et al. emphasize, “looking at climate change through a lens of justice reveals various socially constructed racial-ethnic, geopolitical, cultural, social, and economic inequalities” (2022, 1).

Climate justice is a recurring theme in Thunberg’s speeches: She mentions “equity” and later “justice” in nearly every major speech delivered from 2018 to 2020 (Thunberg 2019). Addressing the Houses of Parliament in London in 2019, she describes children from wealthier countries such as Sweden as “the lucky ones,” presumably because they are shielded from the worst impacts of climate change, since she adds, “Those who will be affected the hardest are already suffering the consequences, but their voices are not heard” (2019, 57). She also emphasizes the need for wealthier countries who have contributed most to climate change to take a greater share of responsibility for cutting emissions. In her speech “Almost Everything Is Black and White,” she asks, “How can we expect countries like India and Nigeria to care about the climate crisis if we, who already have everything, don’t care even a second about it or our actual commitments to the Paris Agreement?” (2019, 8). Such statements reflect a pattern in Thunberg’s rhetoric of acknowledging her position of privilege while exposing how climate injustice has resulted from systems of oppression.

Yet, the OGE undermines Thunberg’s emphasis on climate justice. Drawing on Desmond Tutu’s use of the term “climate apartheid” rather than simply “injustice,” Tuana argues, “We do not appreciate the complex nature of climate change apartheid if we understand it simply as differential impacts or differential treatment” (5). Instead, we need to notice the “interfusion of beliefs and dispositions with institutions and legal policies” through which oppression is normalized (2019, 5). “To appreciate the nature and import of climate change apartheid,” she argues, “requires attention to the more subtle, normalized, and often muted ways in which systematic, institutional racism circulates in

societies, as well as the ways in which it is impacted by other forms of systemic oppression such as those due to gender, sexuality, or class” (2019, 5–6). The prevalence of the OGE reflects racist and neocolonial “beliefs and dispositions” about the legitimacy of White/global North leadership in addressing the climate crisis. Following Tuana’s charge that we investigate “genealogically,” we connect this belief to the discourse of “globalizing environmentalisms,” which Sturgeon traces to the post-Cold War era (1999, 256). In this discourse, which established environmental protection as a ‘global’ concern, “Western countries are presented as locations of sane, world-saving scientific and political practices, while Third World countries are backwards, polluting, and dangerous locations in need of international environmental policing.” As Sturgeon notes, such discourse is “widespread” in *The Limits to Growth*, which was co-authored by Norwegian Jørgen Rand (1999, 268). *The Limits to Growth* had a significant influence on *Our Common Future* (Anker 2020, 216–220), the report that both “reinvigorated” the term “sustainable development” and “brought global warming to the forefront” of the World Commission on Environment and Development (18). The chairman of the commission that authored *Our Common Future*, Gro Harlem Brundtland, was the first woman to serve as prime minister of Norway. Within a discourse of universal human rights, Thunberg’s leadership represents a victory for girls’ influence on climate politics, just as Brundtland’s leadership was regarded as a sign of political progress for women. The success of both aligns with a common narrative of Nordic gender exceptionalism—that the Nordic countries have been particularly successful at achieving gender equality—as well as environmental exceptionalism (Hennig et al. 2018, 3–5). Framing Thunberg as a global icon for youth activism is meaningful in part because it conforms to existing perceptions of the Nordic countries as leaders on climate change policy. Hesford argues that one motivation for the ‘human rights spectacle’ is “the cultural politics of recognition—an identity-based politics of visibility—that dominated Western liberal feminism at the end of the 20th century and that directed public attention away from the regressive

politics and growth of global capitalism” (2011, 7). While the OGE certainly affords recognition to activists beyond Thunberg, it tends to do so as part of a celebration of girls in leadership. In doing so, it can also draw attention away from these activists’ pointed critiques of the global consumerism, growth-oriented capitalism, and the inequalities that make their experiences of the climate crisis so different.

Hesford acknowledges that “the human rights spectacle ... in its more optimistic formations, holds the potential for social intervention and contestation” (2011, 6). In the case studies that follow, we provide examples in which the ‘Greta’ label has provided opportunities for young activists to intervene in neocolonial and racist discourses and contest dominant framings of climate change. An example of such critical engagement comes from the Nigerian author Chika Unigwe, who critiqued the OGE in *The Guardian* in 2019. Unigwe takes issue with the implication that other activists have followed Thunberg’s lead:

For years, young people across the world have been campaigning to draw attention to the crisis our planet is facing, and to tackle it. ... Yet, frustratingly these other activists are often referred to in the media as the ‘Greta Thunberg’ of their country, or are said to be following in her footsteps, even in cases where they began their public activism long before she started hers (2019).

Unigwe’s critique identifies the OGE as a form of ‘white saviorism’:

The ‘white savior’ narrative invalidates the impact of locals working in their communities, and perpetuates the stereotype of ‘the native with no agency’ who cannot help themselves ... It is insulting to present the members of the communities most threatened by climate change as passive onlookers who are only now being spurred on by the ‘Thunberg effect’ (2019).

Here Unigwe points out that this seemingly innocent label in fact perpetuates harmful biases against people from the global South. Research

has shown that interest in climate change has been consistently higher in Africa than in Europe (Salerno 2023, 8). Thunberg did increase public interest in climate change, but the effect was stronger in wealthy countries with high emissions than in countries where people were already experiencing the effects of climate change (Salerno 2023, 8). Unigwe points out that the OGE persists despite the fact that Thunberg is “aware of and regularly mentions her fellow youth activists in her speeches, to remind journalists that there are others working alongside her.” Unigwe’s criticisms echo concerns expressed by scholars that climate change activism in the global South often goes unacknowledged and that those most impacted by climate change are underrepresented in research and policymaking (Mies and Shiva 2014; Madhanagopal et al. 2022; Marquardt et al. 2024).

Narratives of Youth Climate Activism

The four youth activists who form the case studies for this article have all been subjected to the OGE. Autumn Peltier has been referred to as “Canada’s Own Greta Thunberg” (Hanson 2019), Anuna de Wever has been called the “Belgian Greta Thunberg” (Campbell 2020), Vanessa Nakate has been called a “Greta of the South” (Hernández 2019), and Xiye Bastida has been called “the Greta Thunberg of America” (Staff 2021). Mies and Shiva argue that the “capitalist-patriarchal perspective interprets difference as hierarchical and uniformity as a prerequisite for equality” (2). The OGE positions Thunberg as exceptional while simultaneously implying that every activist conforms to her model. However, differences in activists’ perspectives and experiences are crucial for achieving climate justice. They seek to communicate with global audiences using scientific data, anecdotes, and personal observations, and by calling for collective action and climate justice. Tuana argues that “illegible lives are being constructed in the domain of climate practices and policies” due to lack of attention to race and racism (2019, 3). While the OGE may bring recognition to youth activists other than Thunberg, unless the specific

legacies of colonialism and racism that impact them are recognized, being labeled a ‘Greta’ will not render them ‘legible.’

One of the reasons Thunberg’s rhetoric has been so effective is the strength of her personal narrative, as she communicates her individual experience in a compelling way, while addressing climate issues that affect a large number of people. Thunberg’s rhetoric reflects shared experiences of the climate crisis, such as climate anxiety, climate doomism, and overall frustrations towards people in positions of power. In her analysis of Thunberg’s activism as a form of life writing, Martínez García claims that Thunberg’s voice possesses a polyphonic nature (2020, 354): she has the ability to raise not only her voice, but the voices of many other young people, including those who are most vulnerable to the effects of the climate crisis. In a 2019 speech before the Houses of Parliament in London, Thunberg stated, “I speak on behalf of future generations. I know many of you don’t want to listen to us – you say we are just children” (2019, 55). Martínez García explains that Thunberg’s use of ‘I’ in statements such as this “reasserts her identity as Greta” (2019, 355), while her use of ‘we’ refers to “the various social groups her activism is devoted to: children, autistic people, activists, and humans” (2019, 356). “The shifting personal pronouns employed by Greta Thunberg in her life-writing project,” Martínez García argues, “exemplify a willingness to move beyond the personal and involve others in public advocacy and engagement” (2019, 358).

Sharing personal narratives is a method employed by many youth climate activists, including Autumn Peltier from the Wiikwemkoong First Nation on Manitoulin Island, Canada. Autumn Peltier has been an advocate for clean water since she was 8 years old and was appointed Chief Water Commissioner for the Anishinabek Nation in 2019. In September 2019, Peltier spoke during the Youth Climate Summit portion of the UN Climate Action Summit. Fridays for Future called for a global climate strike on the Friday before the event. Thunberg attended the strike in New York, having crossed the Atlantic to address the UN in August 2019. This was Peltier’s second time addressing

the UN; she had also spoken on the issue of clean water in March 2018, several months before Thunberg's first strike in August 2018. In an interview, Peltier describes the audience in 2019 as more favorable to her message; she mentions, "I felt like I was being listened to" (Bengal 2019). By acting as a polyphonic megaphone, Thunberg brought attention to youth climate activism, which helped to amplify Peltier's voice in global media and gave her personal narrative legitimacy.

Peltier also acts as a polyphonic megaphone, but not always for the same social groups that Thunberg does. Peltier is the niece of activist Josephine Mandamin, a founding member of the water protectors movement, who urged Peltier to continue with her work after she passed. Peltier has stated, "Carrying on her legacy is one of the most important things to me" (Goddard 2022). Her work does not revolve solely around her personal narrative, but also continues the voices of those who came before her. Peltier seeks climate justice for her local community, her culture, and her immediate ecosystem, having spoken out against drinking water contamination on First Nations reserves as well as oil pipeline projects that threaten local watersheds. Peltier connects these threats to water with the legacy of colonization that allows developers and policymakers to disregard First Nations' cultural beliefs about water as well as their sovereignty. As a member of the Anishinabek Nation, Peltier can use 'we' to represent the broader concerns of First Nations communities, while Thunberg cannot. Thus, the OGE, while rightly expanding the notion of youth activism to include a variety of actors from around the world, obscures important differences in the environmental problems that individual activists can testify to and the communities they are able to represent.

Called the 'Greta of Belgium,' Anuna De Wever has received media attention due to the impact of their activism on Belgian climate policy. Inspired by Thunberg's model, they organized the first climate strike in Brussels, which was attended by more than 35,000 people (Hess 2020). However, despite being one of the most prominent figureheads in youth climate activism in Europe,

De Wever states, "One of the biggest things we've been trying to do is to pass the mic to people in the global south" (Hess 2020). This 'we' is used to express the perspective of activists from the global North who seek to show solidarity in the pursuit of climate justice. One way of doing so is by insisting that youth from the global South have the opportunity to speak for themselves. Although being labeled a 'Greta' does not have the racial or colonial implications for De Wever that it has for Black, brown, or Indigenous activists, the label does disregard De Wever's gender identity. Like the 'human rights spectacle' described by Hesford, the OGE elicits sympathy for Thunberg by emphasizing her girlhood and highlighting her "youth, beauty, and innocence" (Hesford 2011, 1). A nonbinary activist such as De Wever is seen as incompatible with this feminine norm, causing them to be misgendered in the media.⁴ This is both harmful to them personally and obscures the gender diversity present in the youth climate activism movement.

Whichever personal narrative these activists decide to share, being labeled 'Gretas' tends to represent them as exceptional individuals following Thunberg's model. However, studies of media portrayals of Thunberg and other youth activists as 'heroes' demonstrate that when applied by others, such narratives can be patronizing and display a tendency to elevate Thunberg's role over that of other activists (Bergmann & Ossewaarde 2020; Coughlin & Hauck 2023; Moriarty 2021; Ryalls & Mazzarella 2021). Similarly, feminist studies of the figure of the 'girl activist' as presented in popular media have critiqued heroic framings of girls who engage in politics: Drawing on work by Banet-Weiser and Taft, Locke argues, "Even if unwittingly, depictions of a girl's politics as heroic amplifies her hostile circumstances and diminishes her networks of support and solidarity and the bonds that animate them" (2023, 120). Locke adds that "hyper-individualized stories of white girl activists both efface the collective work they are doing and privilege white activists at the expense of girls of color, particularly Black girls" (2023, 120). Though these heroic narratives follow a traditional, individualistic model, youth climate activists themselves often strive to decenter the "main hero," directing

attention instead to their collective efficacy (Molder et al. 2022). Their narratives more closely conform to what Moriarty has called “community as hero,” which “celebrate[s] collective action while also working to hold accountable the groups and organizations that continue to destroy environments” (2021, 207).

Locke highlights Nakate’s story in addition to Thunberg’s “with the hopes of recentering both activists’ stories beyond the individual ‘girl hero’ frame, while being attuned [to] the anti-feminist, neocolonial, and white supremacists conditions that shape climate politics and the young activists’ work” (2023, 122). Rather than lone heroes, Locke’s analysis of their origin stories and activities demonstrates the different “institutions and networks” to which both activists belong (2023, 123). Research on the attitudes of Fridays for Future (FFF) participants in Europe found a positive relationship between the extent of Thunberg’s influence on participants’ activism and “their identification with the other protesters present, hence a shared sense of collective identity” (Wahlström & Uba 2023, 11). To the extent to which Thunberg mobilizes other activists, she seems to do so by “contributing to a sense of cohesion and common purpose” (2023, 12), rather than inspiring them to undertake individual heroic actions. By utilizing this collective narrative, youth climate activists strengthen the polyphonic nature of their rhetoric and amplify the voice of not a single individual, but a diverse generation that has coalesced around a common goal.

‘Other Gretas’ Defying Illegibility

The examples presented thus far demonstrate how climate activists have taken the OGE as an opportunity to contest the ways this framing renders their particular identities and experiences “illegible” (Tuana 2020, 3). As Tuana argues, societies in the global North and global South are not “equally vulnerable to the many types of violence perpetuated by systematic oppression” (Tuana 2020, 19); hence, activists are experiencing the effects of the climate crisis differently, as well as

other social issues related to “gender, sexuality, or class” (Tuana 2020, 5-6). When youth climate activists are given attention by calling them the ‘Greta’ of their country, many of the “complex exchanges between racism and environmental exploitation” are ignored (Tuana 2020, 6). By utilizing a “global feminisms” framework in which girls’ political advancement is the main focus, the OGE gives “inadequate attention to the intersectional approach” (Chowdhury 2009, 56, 60). However, youth climate activists have themselves sought to draw attention to the complexities of their own experiences with climate change and their unique positions as activists.

Vanessa Nakate was moved to critique the disproportionate attention paid to White climate activists after being rendered not just illegible, but invisible. At a Fridays for Future press conference coinciding with the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2019, Nakate was photographed by the Associated Press (AP) along with several fellow White activists—Thunberg included. However, when the photograph appeared on the AP news website, Nakate had been cropped out. In response, Nakate tweeted, “You didn’t just erase a photo. You erased a continent” (Nakate 2021, 69). In her book *A Bigger Picture*, Nakate describes her reaction as a mix of hurt, anger, and frustration (2021, 65–79). Being cropped out of the picture for Nakate was not only about having her individual contributions ignored, but about the broader exclusion of Africa from climate change discourse.

The decision to crop Nakate out of a photograph of White girls could be linked to the racialized iconography of the “innocent child” in environmental rhetoric: Lakind connects Thunberg to the character Susan Spotless from Keep America Beautiful (KAB)’s 1964 environmental campaign—a young, White girl characterized as “as sacrosanct and requiring of protection” (Lakind 2020). Lakind argues that Susan Spotless enforces a narrative that White children are inherently more capable of protecting the environment due to their innocence and cleanliness. Conversely, racialized children are characterized as “resilient, unruly, and in need of management,” reinforcing the idea that their White counterparts exist to save

them from their “unruly” ways. In a similar account of the intersections between race and the politics of girlhood, Taft argues that the “identities and political visions” of racialized activists “are perhaps more challenging to contain or less desirable for public consumption” than those of White activists (2020, 8). It could be argued that this lack of desirability stems from the threat their positionality as individuals of color living in marginalized communities represents to systems of oppression. Therefore, since Nakate does not conform to the racialized ideal of the “innocent child,” she is excluded from the climate activism narrative.

At the same time, in being singled out as the ‘Greta of Africa,’ Nakate has her status elevated above that of other African activists. Nakate challenges this tokenism by asserting the importance of diverse movements, also within socially marginalized communities: “There are times when I ask if another activist could be interviewed, and there are always questions of ‘What is [their] background? Are they eloquent enough? Have they spoken before?’” (Chan 2021). Similarly, in her book, *A Bigger Picture*, she writes of the pressure she felt to represent “those Ugandans and other Africans who couldn’t be at the UN Youth Climate Summit, COP 25, or Davos. ... In erasing me, the AP erased climate activists across the continent who were trying to show that the climate crisis was an African issue; along with the fact that Africans were being most affected” (2021, 73). This demonstrates that racialized youth climate activists, especially Black girls, experience more pressure than their White counterparts, as they are often charged with representing a larger and more diverse community with fewer resources (Marquardt et al. 2024). As Locke points out, activists such as Nakate do not simply “replicate Thunberg’s model”: In writing that she “decided to emulate Greta,” Nakate means that Thunberg served as “a touch point for Nakate’s strategizing and developing a sense of her work as connected to others and the world” (2023, 123). Through her social media platform as well as her memoir *A Bigger Picture*, Nakate points out how erasure and tokenization of her as an individual reflects the broader problem of illegibility that marginalized

communities in Africa experience within climate change discourse.

Xiye Bastida, a Mexican-born, U.S. migrant, has also used the experience of being labeled a ‘Greta’ as an opportunity to challenge its homogenizing effects. Bastida writes that the first time she was called the “Greta Thunberg of America,” her initial response was positive: “I was gladly surprised because it gave me a feeling of validation. It made me feel that I was doing something right” (Bastida 2020). The second time, however, she felt disillusioned: “I realized that calling me ‘America’s Greta Thunberg’ was not designed to be empowering for me, but rather, it was a tactic designed to get more clicks on the article.” For youth climate activists, a space in global media, even if it is a comparative space, is a form of acknowledgement of their activism. However, activists who are more impacted by climate change due to environmental injustice experience frustration when this label draws attention away from the particular impacts of climate change they and their communities are experiencing. The Otomí Indigenous community to which Bastida belongs is facing challenges to their cultural continuity due to threats to their land: deforestation and pipelines have forced many to migrate. Bastida insists that the climate activism movement must be diverse, echoing Thunberg’s own statements that no single activist should be the center of attention. She frames this thought as a climate justice issue by stating, “singling out climate activists tends to invisibilize the diversity of stories of those who are living in conditions of poverty and pollution now exacerbated by the climate crisis” (Bastida 2020). As Bastida writes, “Calling me ‘the Greta Thunberg of the United States’ distorts my experiences, my struggles, inspiration—my story. But most critically, it diminishes the years of resilience that racialized activists have endured.” Here Bastida critiques the OGE for effacing the long history of activism outside the global North. But Bastida also points out how the OGE diminishes Thunberg’s unique experiences and identity. Thunberg has argued that her autism shapes her experience with the climate crisis because it allows her to see it as black or white situation: you either reduce emissions or accept

the end of civilization (2019, 6). Thunberg has a unique approach to activism, just as Bastida has hers. Both Nakate and Bastida seek to add more context and complexity to the story of their activism; in doing so, they make their communities more legible. By voicing their misgivings about being labeled a 'Greta,' they intervene in global climate discourse, creating space for "strategic coalitions to take place among disempowered people and between privileged and underprivileged people in one political collectivity" (Madhanagopal et al. 2022, 291).

A Visual Alternative: The Global Youth Activists Map

These four young climate activists' reflections on the OGE represent an intervention in media discourse about climate change as a global issue. Among the benefits they mention are the increased attention they receive due to their association with Thunberg, more receptive audiences as youth activism is afforded greater legitimacy, and a sense of validation that their work is effective. They also credit comparisons to Thunberg with diversifying the representation of climate activists, and they express the hope that associations between their work and hers will contribute to the perception that their movement is cohesive and shares a common purpose. At the same time, they recognize that the OGE can relegate them to side characters in a narrative in which Thunberg is the central protagonist. Moreover the OGE can result in activists being tokenized as the sole representative for large, heterogeneous communities, subjecting them to greater scrutiny and undermining the goal of bringing a diversity of voices into the climate conversation.

Lack of recognition is not a problem limited to youth climate activists. As Madhanagopal et al. insist, "Glaring knowledge gaps exist in the research regarding the growing diversity and complexity of the environmental movements in the low-income and socially marginalized regions outside Europe and North America" (2022, 2). Attending to the complexities of specific

environmental harms experienced by particular communities is important for achieving climate justice. Rather than "general accounts" of climate injustice, Tuana argues that "our ecologically informed intersectional analyses must be to the detailed, historical, spatial, situated genealogies of the incorporations of racism and environmental exploitations" (2019, 22). The Global Youth Activists map is an intervention meant to address these knowledge gaps and amplify the voices of activists from marginalized communities (Morera Quesada 2022). Published on the Responses to Thunberg website, the map provides access to information about 35 young climate activists from around the world. The map includes basic information such as the names, hometowns, and birth dates of youth activists, as well as their impact and a significant text by or about them (e.g., an interview, article, personal essay/blog entry, or YouTube video). ArcGIS, the software used to create the map, allows the viewer to learn about these activists as well as visualize their geographic distribution.

Activists were identified for inclusion by three methods: 1) their name was mentioned in an article in which Thunberg's name was also mentioned, 2) they were featured in an article about youth climate activism, and/or 3) through a simple internet search: climate activist in X country. Another consideration was how much information was available about them—for example the city they come from and the environmental problem in their country that led them to speak up. Their birth year was also important to include because it shows the trajectory of their activism: some activists started their environmental advocacy at a much younger age than Thunberg. The texts associated with each activist further inform users on the positionality and experiences of the different activists. These pieces were specifically chosen to showcase their voices, opinions, and personal projects. Their approaches vary widely, which demonstrates the diversity of the climate activism movement: from founding alliances to planting a tree for every soccer goal scored to writing songs, these young people have found innovative and creative ways to tackle the climate crisis.

Whereas global media outlets have the power to decide who the next 'Greta' is, this map empowers young people to choose which activists they want to know more about. It can be shared online, allowing users to contribute to promoting knowledge about activists beyond Thunberg. Through increased knowledge, users can better understand the importance of diverse participation in climate activism and policy, especially by those most impacted by climate change. As Madhanagopal et al. argue, "everybody—and particularly those in the Global South who often find themselves alienated from their basic human rights—should be allowed to actively partake and influence decisions that

impact their livelihoods, environments, and living conditions in one way or another" (2022, 4). While young users may not be equipped to perform the kind of "ecologically informed intersectional analyses" Tuana calls for, the Global Youth Activists Map provides the initial information they need to delve deeper into the causes and consequences of the specific environmental problems young activists from marginalized communities are facing. Although the map is a small gesture toward addressing a significant knowledge gap, it gives young users agency to explore beyond Thunberg and find young activists with whom they can identify and begin to practice solidarity.

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Notes

- ¹ We wish to thank the editors for including our research in this issue, especially Tara Mehrabi for suggesting scholarship that enhanced the article. We also thank our reviewers for their constructive feedback, which helped us enrich our analysis through the use of decolonial frameworks.
- ² This study focuses on the rhetoric surrounding Thunberg while she was still a child participating in school strikes. We have not considered her activism since she has become an adult and has been subject to legal consequences for her participation in non-violent direct action.
- ³ A few examples label an individual as a climate leader within a particular domain, such as the British runner Innes Fitzgerald, who has earned the moniker, “the Greta Thunberg of sport” for her refusal to fly to competitions (Passmore 2023).
- ⁴ For an article in Spanish misgendering De Wever, see “La adolescente que levanta a los institutos belgas contra el cambio climático” (Sánchez 2019).

Jordholderske; mere-end-menneskelig keren

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Abstract

På 2.7 HA stubbemark som tidligere (ufrivilligt) har gjort tjeneste i den konventionelle, dvs. pesticid-baserede, landbrugsindustri, gør jeg mig erfaringer med at assistere mere-end-menneskelige processer med at bringe jorden ind i en anden væren: Et lille laboratorium for planetære problematikker og en myriade af entanglements, i alle de handlinger, som finder sted i relation til arealet. I artiklen vender jeg jorden igen og igen, og med et fokus på soil-care-relations undersøges bl.a. landbrugsjordens koloniale (nutids)historie. Feltarbejdet begrebssættes som 'økotone processer' og jeg afprøver 'jordholderske' som et flertalsbegreb for mere-end menneskeligt mellemartslige anliggender mellem jordvæsener og J/jord.

KEYWORDS: Jord, vand, keren, feministisk posthumanistisk tænkning, plantagiocæn, plantropocæn.

Artiklen vender og drejer hvordan man kan kere sig om, for og med J/jorden (Jorden (planetært) og jorden (konkrete arealer)), i prekære tider. Klima- og biodiversitetskriserne selvfølgelig J/jorden, rematerialiserer jorden og gør den uafgjort. J/jorden er skadet og i forskellige former for sammenbrud. Jord kan samtidig være et vibrerende, levende og livgivende stof. 'Genforvildning'¹ og regenerativt landbrug er praksisser, som søger at bearbejde skadede landskaber, skadede liv; plante-, dyre-, insekt-, svampe-, jorde-liv. J/jorden kalder på nye fællesskaber, forståelser og handlinger, og en række socio-materielle kollektive bevægelser (Ghelfi & Papadopoulos 2022) forsøger disse år at medvirke til planetære og lokale ændringer, ved at virke med jorden – alt imens der arbejdes på at bevirke nye natursyn, at undersøge hvad mellem-artslig-retfærdighed kan være, samt hvordan vi kommer i nærheden af retfærdighed i henseende til den geopolitiske akse Det Globale Syd/Nord. Sådanne materielle, sociale og politiske undersøgelser og jordbearbejdelser bevidner, at det, at kere sig om og med Jorden, at håndtere – at virke med - jord, involverer specifikke jord-ontologier, natursyn og praksisser for, hvad det kan indebære at kere sig. Artiklen bearbejder disse hensyn via en case, hvor en forening (*Skovgro*) har erhvervet et stykke landbrugsjord, som skal omdannes til natur/skov. Foreningen omlægger landbrugsjord på arealer, hvor (drikke)vand er truet, og har sideløbende formål om at skabe viden, sansning, læring, fællesskaber, kunst, debat, handleevne i relation til natur.² J/jorden er artiklens hovedfokus, og herigennem udfoldes forskellige men intra-agerende elementer, som hver især lægger lag til praksisser for kerens mere-end-menneskeligt. _

Artiklens gang og (videnskabsteoretiske) tilgang

Først præsenteres en mere-end-menneskelig, feministisk posthumanistisk drejning af begrebet omsorg/kerens. Det skal hjælpe med at åbne problematikker i det at interessere sig, tage vare på og lade sig lede af J/jord. Jeg er inspireret af

Maria Puig de la Bellacasas arbejde med at tænke jord og omsorg gennem hinanden, praktisk, etisk og spekulativt. Hun skriver, at "[h]uman-soil relations of care and soil ontologies are entangled. What soil is thought to be affects the ways in which it is cared for, and vice versa, modes of care have effects in what soils become" (Bellacasa 2017, 170). Denne gensidige skaben³ af jord og kerens er i fokus i analysen, hvor et areal undergår en transformation fra landbrugsindustri til natur/biodivers væren.

Artiklen tråder nogle af J/jordens forbundetheder af tider, steder, stof, mening, handling. Trådningen går via et grundspørgsmål om, hvordan man kan begynde at kere sig, mere-end menneskeligt. Formålet er at vende jorden igen og igen, og invitere læseren ind i forskellige men intra-agerende (sam-skabende) elementer, der involverer økosystemer, kolonihistorie, lovgivning i relation til jord, plante-processer, 'bidtrykket på arealet', ejendoms-logikker, drikkevandsprøver, osv. Det er en analysetilgang, hvor arealet (Vallestrup) bliver et analytisk fænomen (Barad 2007). Fænomenet begrebsætter, at enheder (et 'areal', eller 'køn') er fortløbende processuelle, relationelle materialiseringer. Det analytiske arbejde indebærer at tråde materialiseringer og deres specifikke skabende-grænsesættende materielt-diskursive, multi-temporale og spatiale forbundetheder.⁴ Denne 'fænomen-grafering' (Juelskjær 2019⁵) er en *performativ* kortlægning (ikke en repræsentation) af forskning-og-felt. Fænomenet og -graferingen skal forstås ethico-onto-epistemologisk (Barad 2007), og dette begreb markerer u-adskilthed – og stadig tilbliven - af væren/verden og viden, hvor forskning og forsker også konstitueres – og mulighedssættes/ansvarliggøres/response-abiliseres – i og af processen.⁶

Jord-og-menneske processer har til alle tider været i prekære udvekslinger, altid forviklet, forbundet og transformerende. Det skrald – eller rettere de industriskabte kemiske monstre - vi hælder i naturen, indoptager vi efterfølgende selv; der er i den forstand ikke noget ontologisk udenfor: 'Natur' og 'vi' er ikke afgrænsede enheder, men forbundne tilblivelser. Samtidig er 'vi' en

problematisk betegnelse (de la Cadena 2019); ansvar og effekter er uretfærdigt distribueret (se fx *Pollution is Colonialism* af Liboiron 2021, og jf. nærværende tidsskrift-temanummer). de la Cadena påpeger eurocentrisme og en epistemisk racisme: "It seems almost impossible to imagine a response to the ecological crisis that does not take the world that is responsible for the plausible destruction of the planet as the exclusive starting point in a conversation about the current condition of the planet" (Blaser and Cadena 2018, 3). En intersektionel tilgang må til, også i relation til økologiske kriser (Lykke 2009).

Jeg introducerer økoton (fx Holland et al 1991) som feltbegreb. En økoton er et biologisk begreb for en blandingszone (fx en strandkant, et skovbryn), et sted, hvor forskellige zoners liv flyder gennem hinanden og laver liv i det liminale. Begrebet bliver også brugt udvidet og metaforisk (Neimanis 2019). Økoton som feltbegreb hjælper (begrebsligt og praktisk) med til, at jeg kan arbejde med J/jorden som et levende og bevægeligt, fler-artsligt, mange-stoffigt mellemværende. Et mellemværende for hvorledes det kan være muligt at kere sig gennem konkrete og glokale materielle praksisser i planetære kriser. Samtidig medgives og undersøges, at og hvordan forskningsarbejdet også fortløbende er - uintenderet men medskyldig - indviklet og impliceret i geopolitiske uretfærdigheder. Der er ikke nogen lige vej gennem den historisk aktuelle planetære misere.

Som overgang fra de begrebspræsentationer til resten af artiklen – det vil sige afsnittene med de analytiske trådninger - tegnes et lille billede af dansk produktionslandskab, som arealet er situeret i. Jeg afprøver også begrebet 'jordholderske' som et flertalsbegreb for mere-end menneskeligt mellemartslige anliggender mellem jordvæsener og J/jord.

At kere sig for, om, med

Det er ikke lige meget, hvordan man agerer i relation til J/jorden, som Bellacasa pointerer (2017). Man kan prøve med omsorg. Omsorgsbegrebet trækker en feministisk forskningstradition for at

analysere såvel kønnede arbejdsbetingelser som det emotionelle og mentale arbejde, der hviler på mennesker i såkaldte kvindeknoterede og racialiserede og socialklassede arbejde og livssituationer (fx *Kvinder Køn og Forskning 1997-2: Vel-færd, arbejde, omsorg*; Bellacasa 2017). Omsorg forstås ofte som noget, mennesker gør, i relation til andre mennesker. Fx at drage omsorg for nogen eller noget, hvor omsorgen er målorienteret, rettet mod at forbedre personens/patientens situation (Schrader 2015, 668). Man ved (eller tror sig vidende), hvad der er brug for, og der er komplekse asymmetrier i at gi/modtage.

Denne omsorgsmodalitet oversat fra menneske-menneske relationer til menneske-jord relationer (i artiklens empiri) kunne lyde: Der er noget jord, som via opkøb ændrer status fra landbrugsjord til 'natur' med henblik på gavn for biodiversitet og vand, og jorden tilplantes gradvist med arter, som fagfolk hævder fremmer det lokale mere-end menneskelige liv og heri jordens liv og kvalitet. Her handles kerende ud fra en forestilling om, hvad jord (og Jorden) er, og hvad der kan være brug for. Enkelt og målorienteret ("fix jorden"). Men måske er kerens/omsorg ikke ukompliceret - hvilket feministisk omsorgsforskning også understreger - og måske er det heller ikke tilstrækkeligt. Måske skal der begrebsjustering eller omtanke til, når omsorg er relateret til det mere-end menneskelige, når omsorg er flettet ind i forhold og materier, som indebærer multispatiale og multitemporale dimensioner og dynamikker, foruden også jordens og vandets organiske og uorganiske væsner ("critters" Haraway 2016) og slægtninge ("kin" *ibid.*).

Astrid Schrader (2015) foreslår en skelnen mellem "care for" og "(begin to) care about", foranlediget af hendes studerendes reaktioner på radioaktivt bestrålede, deformerede bladlus, i en undervisningssituation hvor temaet var videnspolitik i forlængelse af Chernobyl kernekraftkatastrofen. Hvordan skal vi dog bringes til at bekymre os om deformede bladlus, når der er så megen menneskelig lidelse? spørger de hende, og markerer, at mennesket har prioritet. Med 'at kere sig om' ("care about"), argumenterer Schrader for at bringe begrebet ud af arts-hierarkiseringen og at

gøre mere-end menneskelig kerens mulig. Her kan du ikke nødvendigvis umiddelbart forestille dig, hvad der er brug for; måske skal ændringen eller håndteringen (omsorgsarbejdet) foregå hos dig, ikke hos den/det andet. At kere sig *om*, er en proces, der indebærer en åbenhed og afventen, en art passivitet (ibid.). Det handler også om at lære at indstille sig til at kunne forholde sig til noget, man som udgangspunkt ikke kan identificere sig med – men som dog involverer affektive processer (Schrader 2015, 668⁸). Begrebsforskningen sætter også fokus på, at det ikke går an, at man først og fremmest forholder sig og reagerer med kerens, når der er en art(s) identifikation og et sæt af håndteringer tilgængeligt. Ved en afgrundsdyb afstand, hvor man ikke kan mærke/afgøre den anden/det andet, men netop registrere afstanden, kan man øve sig i "abyssal intimacy" (ibid.), altså, en afgrundslig intimitet.⁹ Det er både at strække sit sensorium samt at sanse og begribe dets begrænsninger. At være sårbar, afprøvende og justere sig og de netværker man bliver til og tilskrives agens igennem.

Jeg medbringer den grundlæggende (afgrundslige) u-afgørbarhed som en etik i arbejdet. Registrerer og beskriver (zoner af) u-afgørbarhed i mere-end menneskelige relationer, i multi-artslige ansamlinger ("multispecies assemblages" Haraway 2016) og relateringer. Zoner ('økotoner', se nedenfor), hvor hvad der er brug for, også er omskifteligt og betinget af hver intra-aktion (Barad 2007). Når fænomenet ikke kan endeligt afgøres, må man arbejde prøvende og i mange retninger. Undersøge hvad der kan være brug for i de specifikke intra-aktioner, i et (bevægeligt, mangefacetteret) fænomen, som er viklet sammen med (og reagerer på og med) menneskeskabte planetære kriser og disses vildtvoksende effekter og uretfærdighedsproduktioner. I tillæg påmindes Léna Silberzahn, at "ecological justice" indebærer, at mennesker ikke alene betragter sig selv som "ecological caregivers, but also as care receivers from more-than-human earth dwellers" (2024, 1). En tænkning, som udfordrer eurocentrisk ekceptionalisme. Der er meget at lære.

Felt og feltbegreb formgives

Det videnskabelige arbejde undersøger mere-end menneskelige processer i jord-arbejdet (relateret til en forenings transformation af landbrugsjord). En empiriproduktion uden fast grænse med et rummeligt arkiv: opslagsværk om trolddomsurter, samtaler med skovfoged, et internationalt netværk om soil-care, klimarapporter, interview med storbonde-onkel, billedmateriale, posthumanistisk/jordet autoetnografi, Vestsjællandsk kolonihistorie, lov-materiale, vandprøver og kortlægninger af grundvandsmagasiner, artsregistreringer osv. Alt imens orienterer jeg mig i nye fagdiscipliner.

Der er brug for et feltbegreb til forskningsarbejdet, og for tiden afprøver jeg økoton, som kommer af Øko: *hjem* og Tonos: *Spænding*. En økoton er at forstå som en transitionszone, et tærskelområde, hvor forskellige økologier, i forskellige spændingsforhold, flyder gennem hinanden og skaber transformationer og differentieringer. Det giver mening at tænke felt-og-forskning som formgivning i og af et sådant tærskelområde (både i biologi-faglig og i metaforisk forstand). Astrida Neimanis skriver:

Økoton. Vi må lære at være hjemme i mellemrummets skælvende spænding. Intet andet hjem er tilgængeligt. I-mellem natur og kultur, i-mellem biologi og filosofi, i-mellem mennesket og alt det, vi støder ind i, alt vi desperat afskærmer os selv fra, alt vi kaster os selv ind i, forlist og dumdrigt, iagttagende, forbløffet, idet vores hud bliver tyndere. (2019, 21).

Måske kræver det lidt tyndere hud at skabe ansatserne til et mere-end menneskeligt sensorium og fler-artslig slægtskabs-gørelser (knyttet til arealet). Tyndere hud for at forestille sig – og bidrage til - tilstrækkelige handlinger, etikker/kerens, politikker og modpres. Tyndere hud til at registrere sig som jordboer med alt andet jordboende. En økoton er et sted for udvekslinger mellem væsner og slægtskabsformer (jord-og-menneske processer har til alle tider har været i prekære udvekslinger, altid forviklet, forbundet og emergerende). Et sted for en stadig knytten-an og knytten sig

til. Udvekslinger i stadige forgreninger, vildskud, sammenflydninger. Hvor forskellige arter væver og samvæver forskellige tråde – hvor vind og regn trækker andre tider og steder gennem vævet. Nogle tråde forgrener sig hen over lange historiske og geologiske stræk. Nogle påkalder liv andre død. En økoton er ikke et stykke - eller tilblivelse af et stykke – ideelt og fredfyldt edens have. Tværtimod. "We must garden against Eden", understreger Natasha Myers (2018) idet hun udfolder tanker om det plantropocæne (ligeledes inspirationskilde i forskningsarbejdet). Her må man (forstå sit) sam-arbejde med planterne, man må "Con-spire with plants" (ibid.). Her samvæves 'konspirere' at være i ledtogt med samt 'at trække vejret sammen med'. Det betoner, at vi trækker vejret takket være og i udveksling med planteorganismene.

Med økoton kan man insistere på at holde åbent, at lægge til, engagere sig i zonens blandingsformer, ikke falde ned i én dimension. Det er at arbejde med terraformning i "n-dimensioner" (Haraway 2016), ikke endelige, fortløbende verdensgenererende. Hvor det ikke er ligegyldigt, hvad der blandes.

Forening og forskning arbejder sig ind i landskabet, er med til at ændre på landskabet alt imens landskabet ændrer os – alt imens jeg, med forskningens sensorium, registrerer disse rørelser. Arealet (Vallestrup) er mere-end et fysisk site. Der foregår en stadig terraformning. En væren og blive-til af og med i og gennem multiple, forbundne (stadigt bevægelige) tider og steder. Eller med Barad's ord: "Time-beings do not merely inhabit or take a place, but rather are of the landtimescape - the spacetime-mattering of the world in its sedimenting enfoldings of iterative intra-activity" (Barad 2018, 238-9). Forskningsarbejdet indebærer at holde hus (/jord) med disse stadigt emergerende forbundetheder af og i stadig og ombrydende terraformning ("landtimescapes" ibid.).

En kile i dyrket land (præsentation af et areal)

Skovgros (første) jordstykke er et 2.7 HA-areal, beliggende i Vallestrup ved Holbæk. En lille

rektangulær skive i landskabet. Et landskab der vidner om jordens mangefacetterede virke og status, og om hvordan produktionslandskabet forandrer sig: Mod øst og syd er jorden dyrket 'konventionelt', det vil sige sprøjtede marker og korn i snorlige rækker. På det sydlige stykke, på den anden side af landevejen, skal et solcellefirma muligvis 'beplante' arealet med paneler.¹⁰ Det er ikke populært i lokalområdet, og firmaet prøver at lave individuelle aftaler for økonomisk kompensation til boligejere for at bremse kollektiv modstand, fortæller en husejer. Seneste nyt er, at der måske skal plantes skov i stedet for solceller. Naboen mod vest er en lille fyrskovsplantage, hvor træerne er i færd med at gå ud. Et efter et vælter de ind på Vallestrup-arealet. Det er en gave, for det døde træ inviterer liv til (insekter, svampe) og beriger herigennem jorden. Mod nord græsser køer. Det er samtidig et areal, hvor mennesker med jagttegn udøver retten til at skyde dyr og vildænder, for fra tid til anden flænger geværskud luften. Nord-arealets skæbne er uafgjort, fordi kortlægninger af undergrunden viser, at der er råstofvindingsmuligheder. Lodsejeren vil gerne sælge, der er penge i grusgrav. Lokalmiljøet forpurrede planerne i forbindelse med høringsprocessen. En lille, lokal, sejr over ekstraktivismen. Men råstofefterspørgslen er uforstyrret. Region Sjælland beslutter sig for en revidering af Råstofplan 2020, og åbner dermed en ny ansøgningsrunde for råstofindvinding (beretter lokalavis d. 14/2-24), og med en høringsfrist på 3 uger, når lokalmiljøet ikke at opruste modstanden, så nu ser det sort ud – eller det ser ud til grusgrav, støj, møg og en fremtidig daglig færden af omkring 33 lastvogne. Vallestrup grænser op til tre af Fors A/S drikkevandsboringer. Boringer der, som så mange i det danske landskab, er på - eller klods op ad – landbrugsjorden (halvdelen af landets boringer er forurenede over grænseværdierne), hvor lovgivning, nølende, er på vej som påbud af beskyttelse (BNBO'er = boringsnære beskyttelsesområder). Fordi Skovgro har sat beskyttelse af vand i sine formålsparagraffer, kan man samarbejde med forsyningsselskaber og fonde om at opkøbe jord i relation til vandboringer og grundvandsmagasiner. Skovgro kiler sig ind i og former på produktionslandskabet. Fra at være

landmandens hvedemark skal arealet nu være til som mere-end menneskelige biodiverse processer samt besøges af mennesker, som har til hensigt at gå nysgerrigt og lyttende til værks og plante med hænderne, med en etik og praksis baseret på at 'assistere arealerne' i overgangen fra landbrugsareal til et biodiverst areal, der med tiden bliver til/springer i skov. Plantetilgangen er del af et paradigmeskifte, et brud med den plantagetænkning, som kolonitiden systematiserede og radikaliserede ('det Plantagiocæne'¹¹, som Haraway & Tsing 2019 kalder det – uddybes senere). Det er også et forsøg på en relativ menneskelig underordning. Eller, at gøre handlinger arealforbundne. I det arealet skal ophøre med at gøre (ufrivillig) tjeneste i den agre planteindustri laves en ståstedsanalyse for arealets naturpotentialer.¹² I 'år 0' er kvaliteterne set i et biodiversitetsperspektiv få, og skovfogeden betegner jorden som 'gold og steril'. Men arealet er ikke i år 0, tværtimod vidner lavpunktet om en lang historie af jordbearbejdning. I 1680'erne blev det danske land(skab) udmatrikuleret, her er Vallestrup registreret som landbrugsjord. Holbæk Museums afdeling for kolonihistorie viser desuden, hvordan områdets godsejere havde handels- og plantageaktiviteter i Dansk Vestindien (uddybes senere). Plantage- og industrisporene vidner om, at skaderne er dybe. Partiel interesse og partiel forståelse af hvad der tæller for jord og liv. Frem til "gold og steril". EU har lavet et første "soil directive", et forsøg på at modvirke (specifikke aspekter af) situationen. Et direktiv til at monitorere jordens 'helbred'.¹³ Der tages dog ikke livtag med de dyrkningsparadigmer, kapitallogikker og deres historiske og fortløbende spor, som er medproducent af problemerne (det Plantagiocæne, det Kapitalocæne, Agropedogenese¹⁴, neo-kolonialisme). Der er mange tider, mange lag i jorden, som må vendes, når man skal kere sig om tider, der kan komme, og jord(-liv), der skal trives.

Jordholderske

I samklang med et anderledes jord- og natursyn arbejder jeg med ideen om, at man kan agere *jordholderske* fremfor det menneske-centrerede og

potentielt ekstraktive jordbesidder. Jordholdersken er inspireret af Vandana Shivas tekst *Oikonomia: at bringe økonomien tilbage til Jorden* (2022). Ordet økonomi har rod i det græske 'oikos': hus, familie, husholdning, bolig, leveområde.¹⁵ Shiva påpeger, at økologi, økonomi og køn er forbundet med konstruktionen af hjem, idet økologi/oecologia kommer af samme ordstamme som oikos, og antyder et natursyn, hvor "de levende organismer på jorden dannede en samlet økonomisk enhed i lighed med en husstand eller en familie, der bor tæt sammen" (2022, 10). I lyset af klodens begrænsede 'ressourcer' og den u-bæredygtige og ekstraktive omgang hermed, åbner Shiva økonomibegrebet for at undersøge og gen/omvikle det.

Med 'hjem' som metafor både for økologi og økonomi var der ikke noget hierarkisk skel mellem hjemlig produktion og produktion af varer til udveksling og handel. Der var heller ikke noget skel mellem naturens økonomi, opretholdelsesøkonomien og markedsøkonomien". (Shiva 2022, 10-11). "I dag er økonomien kommet på vildspor. Den er blevet defekt [...] Den skal bringes tilbage i Jordens tjeneste i overensstemmelse med økologien, Jordens love". (ibid, 3)

Oikos, husholdningen, må altså bringes hjem til Jorden, og må bringes i plus.¹⁶ Men, hvad er hjem? Hvem er hjem et hjem for? Hvem og hvad regnes med, når husholdningen skal balancere? Hvilke grænsesættelser og åbninger skaber hjemmet? Hvilke kønnede, klassede, racialiserede hierarkiseringer? Shiva undersøger geopolitiske og globale u/retfærdighedsproduktioner. Problematikker, som man må forstå sig forbundet med og forpligtet på, når man omlægger landbrugsjord til natur inden for Danmarks geografiske grænser. Ydermere indebærer Shivas tilgang en mere-end-menneskelig arealforståelse: Jordboere (og jordholdersker) er ikke kun mennesker men alt levende. Når jeg argumenterer for jordholderske, og ikke at holde hjem, er det fordi husholdersken har konnotationer af tæmning af hjemmets indre, af renholdning, rytmer, grænsesættelse og dikotomier af privat/offentlig, hjem/arbejde - foruden diverse

kønnede og kønnende konnotationer. For ikke at gå i et med disse husholdningens selvfølgeligheder foreslår jeg begrebet jordholderske, inspireret af Shiva og med en parallel etisk fordring om at bringe økonomien tilbage til J/jorden.

En måde at bringe økonomien og menneskelig aktivitet tilbage til J/jorden, er at opøve kapabiliteten til at assistere jorden (blive jordens assistent – altså, det er jorden, der holder, giver, skaber). Hvordan ved man, hvilken assistance der er brug for? De overordnede linjer lader sig trække, men i det specifikke viser det sig lidt mere mudret. Når hænder forbinder sig, knytter sig til spæde, plantede træer, melder der sig et affektivt arbejde, i det hjorte gør, hvad hjorte gør: spiser træernes skud og beskadiger barken. Affekter igangsætter overvejelser over hegning af arealet, overvejelser som er konkrete (og måske i nogle ører trivielle), men som samtidig rummer alle grundproblematikkerne om natursyn, agens og vilje, i relation til det mere-end menneskelige: Hvilke grænsesættelser og hierarkiseringer finder sted, hvem-hvad bliver subjekt i kerens, hvem, hvad afgør? Områder af tidsler kan aflæses som en 'risiko' ift. potentiel artsdominans over arealet og dermed mindre biodiversitet ("kan/skal tidsler 'bekæmpes'"). Tidsler kan fx give ly for de ege-agern som sås¹⁷, for hjortene bryder sig ikke om at gå i tidslerne ("kan tidsler 'trimmes'"). En tidsel er rodfast, men bevæger sig med vinden via sine fnuglette frø. Man kan ikke gribe dem i luften, de skal gribes før. Man skal være på arealet til rette tid, i rette (besøgs)rytmer; tidsler-frø-vind, derimod, er i et uafbrudt (areal/jord) sam-liv. Man må bøje sig, fylde lommerne med tidselrøstande, og ellers lade leve, åbne hånden. Begejstring over sommerfugle, insekter, urter og arter – blandet med gys over, at knolde af frisk jord, som ved første øjekast (for byboeren) ligner muldvarpeskud ("jubii, de vender og ilter jorden, velkommen kære kin") nok var mosegrisespor ("åh nej, de spiser de nye planters rødder"). Økotonen væver konkrete og affektive processer, og en jordholderskes kerens må derfor – i menneskeversionen – tillige indebære detaljerige registreringer af menneskelige viljer til at (undlade at) handle. Man må oparbejde en kapabilitet til at tøve, afvente og undlade/justere handlinger ved at involvere sig,

tage bestik af, og lytte til, landskabets flora, fauna, insekter, dyrespor, 'bidtryk' mv. - vare sig mod nye artshierakiseringer og bevæge sig i 'afgrundslig intimitet' (Schrader 2015).

Overvejelserne vidner tillige om et arbejde, som rummer vilje til at virke (at tro sig biodiversitetsfremmende), en vilje til at forsøge at inddæmme (tro sig medstyrende). Et arbejde i skrøbelige og famlende balanceringer i henseende til det mellem-artslige liv. Et ubekvemt spørgsmål er, i hvilket omfang det er muligt at handle sammen-med fremfor *henover* og *på*? At assistere er at underordne sig – og/eller at spørge først. At lade sig føre gennem at indoptage (erkende) grundlæggende udvekslinger i økotonen, som man er del af og planetært udleveret med. I økotonen må huden blive tyndere (Neimanis 2019). Natasha Myers foreslår, at man allierer sig med planterne, netop ved at fremme, assistere og lade være (i citatet dog i henseende til planter i bymiljøer):

Your job in the Planthroposcene is to stage plant/people conspiracies to keep this planet livable and breathable. Your primary commitment will be to support plant growth. Everywhere. Start by letting the plants grow where they want to: let them break through the concrete; root into every fissure and surface (Myers 2018, 61).

At være med til at holde jord indebærer at udvikle et plantropocænt sensorium. Det er dermed også at registrere affekterne og bearbejde viljerne til at regere eller tro sig som regerende. At spørge konkret, ved hver aktivitet: Hvad indebærer det, hér, at assistere jord? Hvad vil mon jorden? Hvilke andet-end-menneskelige, organiske som uorganiske væsener (og sam-flydende, økotoneprocesser) er allerede i færd med at gøre sit/deres (agere jordholdersker)? Hvordan gå *med* og ikke gå i vejen? Gøre sig nysgerrig på og genåbne de løbende grænsesættelser (i relation til planter, dyr, organiske processer, vildt-hegn osv.). Gøre Antropos mindre, men gøre mere, andet: vikle sig i multiartslige ansamlinger og erfare udleveretheden i disse jordholdende-slægtskaber. Forholde sig på én og samme tid meget konkret (måske trivielt) og

spekulativt/(natur)filosofisk. At skrive alt imens, for at have en etnografi og et arkiv, der gør det muligt, vedvarende at tage stilling til både blindheder og romantiseringer. Gøre sig tilgængelig for udfordring, omstyrning. Igen og igen tage ved lære.¹⁸ At gøre jordholderske er et flertalsbegreb for mere-end-menneskeligt, mellemartslige anliggender mellem jordvæsener og J/jord - i stadige, vaklende forsøg, hvor agens og sam-arbejde er i vedvarende ('flerstemmelig') tilblivelse. Det er J/jorden, som holder.

Keren som 'tai-chi'

Selv i lille skala (2.7 HA, ca. 7 fodboldbaner) er det ikke lige meget, hverken konkret eller som et laboratorium for tænkning og ombearbejdning, hvad og hvordan man kerer sig i relation til jord. At assistere jord i større skala end en baghave/baggård kræver, i dansk kontekst, at man erhverver sig retten til (at gøre noget med) et areal. Man må eje (besidde). Men man kan ikke uden videre komme til landbrugsjord, hvis man ikke i forvejen er – og ikke har planer om at blive - gårdejer. Love beskytter arealers status som landbrugspligtig. Foreningen Skovgros arbejder med at blive godkendt til at købe og eje jord går via vedtægter, som definerer foreningen som almennyttig (ikke erhverv). Arbejdet går videre omkring advokatbistand, ansøgninger til SKAT og landbrugsstyrelse om tilladelse til opkøb af landbrugsjord uden ejendomme. 60% af Danmarks areal er opdyrket land, og på hovedparten dyrkes foder til "produktionsdyr" (en landbrugsejer er desuden for 90% vedkommende en mand).¹⁹

Hvordan blev det mon sådan? Én fortælling om jord-ontologier, natursyn og herskerstrategier væver en tråd gennem matrikuleringen af det danske areal i 1680erne. Matrikuleringen var forudsætningen for, at kong Christian V kunne udskrive og inddrive skatter (Pedersen 1975). Kongens Rentekammer definerede metodikken for hvorledes værdi skulle opmåles og vurderes. De stadfæstede matrikelværdier blev anvendt som grundlag for beskatning af fast ejendom frem til 1903. Alle arealer fik vurderet sin jordkvalitet, kategoriseret

som "god", "middelmådig" og "ond". Ved ond jord har man en "slet mark" som giver "liden Grøde og tit Misvækst" (Pedersen 1975, 32). Jordtypens ringe afkast har industrialiseringen af landbruget relativt modvirket (pesticider, gødning). Til gengæld er jorden i stedet for ond, nu, som følge af dette produktionsparadigme/håndteringen af jorden, at betegne som "gold og steril"²⁰ (Skovfoged, interview).

Jorden bliver objekt i økonomisk udmåling og udveksling knyttet til specifikke menneskehensyn og ageren: i 1680erne var det kongens penge-økonomiske formåen. Matrikuleringen omfattede også skovene, et skovareals "Skyldværdi, og derigennem dens Skatteevne" blev opgjort som: "[...] Brugsværdien, om det Antal Høveder eller Svin der kan faa deres aarlige Næring paa disse Arealer." (Pedersen 1975, 24). Skovværdi målt i husdyrs (!) foder: "32 Svins Olden til 1 Td. Hart-Korn" (ibid., 32), samt i forhold til materielt afkast såsom hø, gærdsel, bygningstømmer og brændsel. Blikket på og værdisætning af 'natur' var altså dens tjeneste/ressource i husholdet, lokalt og nationalt.²¹ Igen, jord- og natursynet er (gennem matrikuleringen) knyttet til ekstraktion/ressourceudnyttelse og økonomisk udveksling/akkumulation.²² I 2024 er der prisstigninger på landbrugsarealer. Objektet jord bliver også til gennem dynamikken udbud/efterspørgsel. Energisektoren har brug for arealer - nu skal der gro solceller/strøm på jorden. En tidligere liberalisering af landbrugsloven åbnede til udenlandske kapitalfondes jordkøb.²³ Virtualitet er en del af jordens økonomi. I juni 2024 kom 3-parternes udspil/aftale for CO2 regulering og varslede en jordfond, som også medvirker jordprisstigninger.

Det kan anskues som et subversivt arbejde at – via borgeren/foreningen og dens samarbejdsrelationer – købe jord for at fælles/fælled-gøre. At ændre på hvad det vil sige at eje. At annullere den kapitalistiske ekstraktion og 'gold-gørelsen' af jorden (subversivt, relativt betragtet. I planetær skala ville beløbet gøre større gavn som sikring af fx tropisk regnskov. Det er et af projektets Global-Nord-akilleshæle²⁴). Samt at få tinglyst arealet til ny matrikulær væren som 'natur'. En (romantisierende) udlægning kunne være, at foreningen

køber jorden tilbage til naturen, men der er stadig et ejendomsforhold og et possessivt pronomen: Nu er jorden i *foreningens* hænder. Juridisk betragtet er hvad den gør/ikke gør med jorden defineret i samarbejdsaftalen mellem forening, Fors A/S og Dansk Økojord. Indenfor dette fællesskab bliver foreningen med-jordbesidder(holderske), en specifik manifestation og forvaltning af (historisk specifikke, situerede) privilegier. Man kan sige, at foreningen og dens økonomiske samarbejdspartnere bruger pengeøkonomi til at 'bringe' jorden ind i andre livsomstændigheder og andre økonomier. Økonomier, som blandt andet opskriver værdien af ikke-menneskelige arter, (mikro)organiske processer og vand. At 'bringe' jorden ind i en anden tid, tidsregning og rytmer, hvor den ikke længere bestandigt skal yde i en lineær ekstraktiv produktion. Med det (delvist) subversive arbejde er der tale om kerens som en art pengeøkonomisk tai-chi (at bøje og om dirigere energien), hvor energien om dirigeres fra ekstraktivisme til regenerativ jordværen, hvor jorden bliver hjem for de arter, der plantes og de, som selvsås, hvor jorden bliver livfuld - frem for gold og steril.²⁵ Og hvor der videre må arbejdes på kerens for geopolitiske forbundetheder med andre jorde og jordboere.

Kerens i/mod plantagens spor: at vedgå sig arv og gæld

At assistere jord kræver (og er en fortsat øvelse i) at få sans for jorden. Man kan plante træer med forskellige opmærksomheder. Hvis fokus er på CO2 reduktion, altså atmosfæren/luften over jorden, bliver træerne først og fremmest middel til at forbedre luftens kvalitet og at bremse accelerationen af temperaturstigningerne. Det vil sige, flest mulige træer på et areal og træer med høj CO2 bindingskvalitet og med kvalitet i henseende til træindustri.²⁶ Sådan skal *nogle* arealer måske forvaltes. Men denne træer-mod-CO2-optimisme forslår ikke. Dels er der ikke arealer nok, dels kan det ikke alene bringe planeten ud af misæren med temperaturstigningerne – der skal systemiske forandringer til – forandringer som samtidig fremmer global retfærdighed, og stopper ødelæggelser i

det Globale Syd osv. Der er ydermere det problem, at med en entydig CO2-skov fortsætter man i plantagens spor; en fortsættelse af en monokultur, nu med træer fremfor hvede. Andre dyrkningsformer og planteparadigmer må til, hvis arealer skal fremme et diverst mere-end menneskeligt liv i, på og over jorden; hvis mennesker skal gå mindre i vejen for planetens liv. Skovfoged Asger Hansen, rammesætter (for foreningen) arbejdet væk fra den jord/stubbemark, som han betegner som:

”et voksemedium beregnet til planteavl. Den [jorden] er gold og steril. Den skal beriges i forhold til det man ønsker at skabe her. Med biodiversitet er nøgleordet kontinuitet, altså tid. Hvis du virkelig ønsker at skabe en biodiversitet, der er så rodfæstet som muligt, så er det en proces, der kræver tid. ... en måde at tænke på skoven som i jorden først, og så træerne, er en meget mere dynamisk og organisk måde at plante skov på”. (Hansen 2023²⁷)

At assistere jord i at gå fra gold og steril til at komme til live igen er at agere som midlertidig med-virkende og med-formgivende. Det er at 'vedgå sig arv og gæld' fra plantagen (Wynter 1971), fra landbrugsindustrien, både konkret og lokalt og historisk og transnationalt (det vil i denne sammenhæng også sige i henseende til kolonihistorien. Uddybes senere). At vedgå sig arv og gæld er en betegnelse fra en ikke længere gældende arveretspraksis: For at få adgang til arv skulle man vedgå, at hvis arven efterfølgende viste sig at være gæld, ville man hæfte for denne. Det vil også sige, at hvis man sagde 'nej tak' slap man for generationernes arv. Denne retspraksis rimer alt for godt med den tilgang til at 'gældssætte' og 'takke nej' i henseende til naturen/J/jorden – og til jordboere andre steder og andre tider - som har stået på i generationer. Alt imens man er løbet fra gælden, er gælden løbet gevaldigt op (jf. antropocæne kriser, inter-generationel- og global uretfærdighed). Etikken må være at efterlade (til kommende tider) det, man har i hænderne, i bedre stand end man fandt det (Juelskjær 2024). Vel vidende, at skader og skadesvirkninger er fortløbende og at ens

medvirken som borger i det Globale Nord er vidt forgrenet og at gældsspørgsmålet også må skubbes 'op' for iværksættelse af systemisk forandring, nationalt og over-nationalt. At indgå i økotone processer indebærer at vedgå sig arv og gæld. Aktivt arbejde med at nedbringe gælden. Holde sig ydmyg, handle og plante til mulige fremtider, leve-lige økosystemer. Plantagens paradigme var en radikal simplificering af hvad der må leve; nemlig alene det, som skønne(de)s at fremme produktio-nen. En radikal indstiftelse af menneske-vilje til at forvalte liv/død, og større og større enheder for 'ra-tional drift'. Det danske landskab ændrede sig op gennem industrialisering og modernisering. Væk med markhegn osv. alt det, som gør maskiner-nes kørsel besværlig. 'Forædling' af sorter, sprøjte hvad der sprøjtes kan.²⁸ At bevæge sig igennem et dansk landskab er at bevidne landbrugets (g) rådighed. Rådighed over arealer, over liv og død, over luft og atmosfære: i luften svæver gyllemo-lekyler, men også den hauntologiske tilstedevæ-relse af alle de væsner – insekter og andre arter - som burde være. Hos en erhvervskonsulent, som arbejder på landbrugsområdet, lærer forenings-stifterne, at hvad angår køb og salg af arealer er landmanden orienteret mod 12-24-36: Bredden på landbrugsmaskinernes sprøjtearme foldet ud på marken. Arealet skal passe bedst muligt ind i dette regnestykke, for at det er attraktivt for lods-ejeren at frasælge områder berørt af vandborin-ger. Hvis det bliver for bøvlet at betjene markerne, er det ikke værd at sælge (og så kan man jo lade være, det er jo 'min jord'). Denne oplysning efter-lader mig i en sær stemning. Det er et urovækkende, 'godt' empirisk eksempel på produktionsparadig-met, som positionerer sig så selvfølgelig som overordnet grundvand, vandløb, det kystnære liv, insekterne, borgerne, fremtidigt liv. Love designet på partielle præmisser, interesseorganisationer og politikker, grænse-vogter vedvarende forholdene og modarbejder grundlæggende omlægninger af industrien.²⁹

The plantation was precisely the conjuncture between ecological simplifications, the disci-pline of plants in particular, and the disci-pline of humans to work on those. That legacy,

which I [Tsing] think is very much with us today, is so naturalized that many people be-lieve that that is the meaning of the term ag-riculture; we forget that there are other ways to farm. (Haraway & Tsing 2019)

Begrebet Plantagiocæn fremhæver at og hvordan landbrugsindustrien har afstedkommet masseudryddelse af biodiverse områder til fordel for monobeplantning (plantagen), og at planta-gerne netop (historisk og fortløbende) er knyttet til europæisk imperialism og -kolonialisme, som indebar transatlantisk slaveri, ekstraktion af natur-ressourcer og viden, folkedrab foruden destruk-tion af biodiverse områder og skabelse af planta-gen (sukker, kaffe mv.). Tsing pointerer, at selvom plantageontologien stadig har et fast greb i dyrk-ningsformerne, kan man gøre noget andet.³⁰ Man kan fx tænke og praktisere *regenerativt*, hvilket indebærer at tænke og praktisere på måder, hvor man giver mere tilbage end man tager.³¹ Et andet begreb, en ganske anden ontologi. Som kerer sig om tider, der skal komme og om liv i bredere for-stand, hvor jordboere indbefatter alle jord-væsner. At lave rum og tid til liv.

Ansvar for og med handlinger g(l)emt i jorden

Der er mere til spørgsmålene om skader og (g)rå-dighed. I Kong Christian V's matrikulering af 1682 er Vallestrup at finde under Asminderup Sogn, Holbæk Amt. Der er anført 3 gårde med produk-tion/værdi 30,47 Hartkorn/tdr. og areal på 151,1 TønderLand (Pedersen 1975). Hvilket gods hørte gårdene og jordene mon under, hvilke spor ligger i jorden i Vallestrup (i foreningens 'varetægt')? I 1600tallet var man i færd med kolonisering af det 'Danske Vestindien' med en omfattende planta-ge-gørelse til følge.

The term plantation for me [Tsing] evokes the heritage of a particular set of histories involving what happened after the European invasion of the New World, particularly in-volving the capture of Africans as enslaved

labor and the simplification of crops so as to allow enslaved laborers to be the agricultural workers. (Haraway & Tsing 2019)

At kere sig i relation til jorden er også at åbne for de mange temporaliteter og handlinger i og gennem tid, som jorden er kultiveret med, som den har bevidnet. At (med-)holde jord er at udvise interesse og gen/fortælle begravede historier, historier som tager os "into that discipline-of-people/discipline-of-plants conjuncture" (ibid.). Vestsjællands Museum i Holbæks afdeling for kolonihistorie har en kortlægning af områdets (daværende) godser og disses engagementer i plantager og i handel. Et kommende arbejde må læse kolonisporet med sporet om jordeje, jordreformer, love der regulerer jord og regulerer mennesker i koloniperioden og den samtidige forandring og plantage-gørelse af jord i Holbæk-området. Følge varer, værdier, jorde, samt praksisser og logikker og landskabsformninger mellem de to lokaliteter (og samtidige formninger af specifikke former for magt og vold i relation til jord, produktion, værdi. Slavegørelse i Vestindien. Hånds-og-halsret og stavnsbinding i DK).³² Vestsjællandske godsejere havde indflydelse i statsførelsen, i lovudvikling foruden i drift af jord og mennesker. De havde aktieandele i Vestindisk-Guinesisk Kompagni og Plantagedrift. Nogle familier erhvervede selv og drev plantager, der var rejser frem og tilbage mellem Vestsjælland og Caribien. Der er (igen) arv og gæld at trække frem, der er tid og historie i jorden i Vallestrup. Det er et fortløbende arbejde og en søgen efter retfærd; at ikke lade fortiden være, at grave historierne op af jorden, at fordoble museets historier ude på arealet, lægge flere fortællinger til; et vedvarende arbejde alt den stund at 'dansk tilgang' til sin kolonitid er, at den – og ansvar relateret til den - hører til i fortiden (Juelskjær 2019, Belle et.al 2019). Hvorimod caribisk tilgang fx er:

"You do not have the right to significantly participate in the destruction of a people for 300 years and then just walk away. That is wrong. Should Denmark lead the way in making amends? I think it should".³³

Vedgå sig arv og gæld. Og gen/skabe agens tværs gennem tider, fx fortælle om de plante/urte/grønsags/haver, som slavegjorte skabte og dyrkede ved deres beboelser på plantagerne, som skabte levegrundlag for mennesker under ulevelige vilkår samt refugium for biodiverse væsener og processer (Wynter 1971, Davis et.al. 2019). Centrale lag ind i begreb og litteratur i tilknytning til det plantagiocæne. I jord-arbejde arves densiteten – og den stadige tilblivelse - af fortider, nutider og fremtider. Det er at medvirke til at tage ansvar og kerer for ikke bare hvad der var, men hvad der også vil kunne blive, i alle temporaliteterne, i alle jordlagene.

At afmontere possessive pronominer

Flere temporaliteter, flere materialitetsformer og flere u-afgjorte spørgsmål om ansvar og retfærd knyttet til J/jorden. Artiklens sidste nedslag: At åbne forskning gennem foreningsskabelse er også at blive filtret sammen med ens samarbejdspartneres verdensgørelser. Forsyningsselskabet skal beskytte drikkevandet og har virksomhedslogos som "Vores vand, vores ansvar". Det er rigtigt og vigtigt, samtidig er der noget med det possessive pronomen, som kradser i forskerens posthumanistiske sensorium. Hvilke grænse- dragninger er der i en sådan etisk fordring?³⁴ Foreningens naturbestræbelser – og samarbejdet med vandforsyningsselskaber - er forbundet til landbrugets (velkendte og veldokumenterede) skadesvirkninger og det at afbøde disse. Det samfundsmæssige og politiske fokus er rettet mod drikkevandsboringerne dvs. de jordområder af landbruget med kildepladser (såkaldt BNBO'er) og sekundært det grundvandsdannende opland til vandboringerne, og på hvilke stoffer man måler i vandet og disses grænseværdier. Vores tid er Antropocæn: der er spor af menneskehandling alle vegne, også i vandet – og tiden er antropocentrisk: der er en menneskecentreret optagethed af, hvad vandet (først og fremmest) er for os, for mennesket.³⁵ Vand bliver til 'menneske-vand' (i EU's drikkevandsdirektiv hedder det "water intended for human consumption"). Monitorering af vand handler

om menneskelige helbredshensyn og om i tide at opdage effekter af menneskehandling. ³⁶ Pesticidrester mv. bevæger sig med regnvandet, ned gennem jordlagene, over tid. Det kan tage årtier at nå grundvandsmagasinerne. Jordens beskaffenhed (er den sandet, leret) og dens agens som filter, gør også sit, i forhold til hvordan historien ender. Det er almen viden – men også en ethico-onto-epistemologisk (Barad 2007) pointe: Selve materialiseringen af vandets beskaffenhed sker via tid-handlinger-jordtype-regnmængde-mv. Vandet på vej til grundvandsmagasinerne er ontologisk u-bestemt (ender det som forurenede drikkevand eller gør det ikke). Landbrugets sprøjtehandlinger handler, lang tid efter markkørslen. De er stadig på vej til at materialisere sig, enten fortyndet til ubetydelighed eller som et sundhedsproblem. (Frem)tiden er u-bestemt, men ikke arbitrær. Vandet bærer på handlinger, vandet materialiserer specifik tid. Fremtiden afgør, i hvilket omfang fortidens landmand var/er en skurk. Enhederne grænseværdier, pesticider og drikkevand opstår som effekt af intra-aktioner, hvorigennem jord, landbrugsindustri, sprøjtegifte, menneskekroppe, måleinstrumenter, regnvand såvel som planter og insekter m.m. sammenvæves og adskilles/grænsesættes, specifikt, med specifikke effekter. Grænseværdi er en verdensgenererende praksis, som grænsesætter natur og kultur i relation til hinanden og ikke mindst sætter noget inden for og uden for fare: Det underliggende spørgsmål er ydermere, hvem og hvad skæres indenfor og udenfor fare og beskyttelse? Vand er mere end 'menneske-vand'. Vand udvaskes fra sprøjtede og kunstgødgede marker til søer, vandløb og havet. 'Natur' bliver løbende til og konditioneret sammen med industri/menneskeliv. Keren må overskrive skellet vand/menneskevand, så alle levende organismer tæller som 'kroppe-af-vand' (Neimanis 2019), og politik genereres ud fra det grundvilkår, at alle kroppe er permeable og -ulige, u-retfærdigt - forbundne (Juelskjær 2024).

Økotonen får et specifikt vertikalt snit med det vand, som løber ned gennem jorden. Til-løber det reservoir af liv, som vi kalder 'grundvandsmagasiner'. Med (vanligt) menneskecentreret fokus kan man se for sig, at jorden har skabt et kammer til vores vand, hvor det blot venter på, at

landets forsyningsselskaber hiver det op til vandværkskunderne. Hvad de færreste kunder nok er opmærksomme på, er, at kammeret er livfuldt. Her finder komplekse mikro-biologiske livsprocesser sted. ³⁷ Kammeret er et 'levende noget', og kvalitetene og specificiteterne af dette noget er vi (og alt mulig andet liv) afhængige af, for at leve. Igen, det mere-end-menneskelige varetager omfattende kerende jordholderske-arbejde; mennesket er modtager af kerer (Silberzahn 2024).

At samle på (og opsamle) kerer

"Plants live on land because fungi made soil by digesting rocks" (Tsing 2015, 22). Det er et sted at knytte an. At prøve at sanse lange geologiske stræk, og mennesket som art i og med disse (Juelskjær 2023). Til at tippe punktet for hvem og hvad, der er center, puffer til den hang til menneskelig ekceptionalisme, arts-overordning og eurocentrisme, som mudrer og accentuerer arbejdet med at begynde at kere sig i en mere-end-menneskelig verden.

Artiklen har således påbegyndt at 'vende' J/jorden ved at afprøve måder at kere sig som specifikke materielle praksisser med en mere-end-menneskelig sensibilitet (det være sig i mere-end-sociale kollektive bevægelser som i forskningspraksisser). Vende J/jorden for at vise og underminere reduktionistiske forståelse af J/jorden som ressource (Bellacasa 2017: 170), og for at (påbegynde) at træde forbundetheder, som skitserer behov for kerer i en tid, hvor den stadige produktion af u-retfærdigheder kan opleves som afgrundslige.

I økotonen må alle huder blive tyndere, for at der kan kultiveres økologisk onto-politik. Et fortløbende arbejde med at skitse på translationer mellem såkaldte skalaer, ujævne tider, rum, organismer. Ikke for at glatte afgrunde ud, men måske for at anslå muligheder for at væve med en afgrundslig intimitet. Lytte, stille spørgsmål, forholde sig til svar, skabe nye anledninger, gøre sig mindre/andet, tage bestik, translaterer tegn. Arbejdet som/med en økoton i stadig tilblivelse, hvor både forgangne og mulige kommende tider

og handlinger blander sig. Fænomenet muterer/forvandler sig (og forskningen ligeledes hermed).

Keren, også som en vilje til at ændre sig, og at skubbe på ændringer. (Begrebs)arbejdet med 'at holde jord', indebærer at vedvarende gen/forstå, at (og hvordan) det er jorden, som holder, og

holder for. Øve sig må man. Artiklen tilbyder sig, på den måde, ved at demonstrere en række paradokser, i en forventning om, at det også er ved at stå ved disse, at en samtale og en udforskning, der kan være værd at være i, kan åbne sig.

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Noter

- ¹ Fagfagligt benyttes den engelske term 'rewilding', feltet bærer altså denne anglicisme. Jeg bruger dansk begreb, endskønt 'genforvildning' (endnu) ikke er slået igennem. Der er desuden faglige diskussioner om, hvorvidt paradigmet reelt indebærer en 'gen'forvildning – da der ikke er evidens for store græssere i ur-

skoven (se fx Bent Odgaard). Genoprettelse af natur indebærer, at et specifikt greb gøres til det 'oprindelige'. For brug af term: "Biodiversitetseffekter af rewilding" Fløjgaard m.fl (2021). Molslaboratoriet Rewilding på Molslaboratoriet (naturhistoriskmuseum.dk)

- ² 3 stiftere (heriblandt undertegnede) begyndte 2021, nu en bestyrelse på 7. Vedtægter, plantepraktisser, deltagelse i debatarrangementer mv: www.skovgro.dk. Første jordstykke (2.7 HA, Vallestrup) erhvervet 2023 i samarbejde med Fors A/S (som har vandboringer ved arealet) og Dansk Økojord (som nu ejer hovedpart af jorden, Skovgro tilplanter). Andet jordstykke (5 HA, Odsherred) er i gang med at blive foreningens via bevilling fra Nordea Fonden (juni 2024) samt med tilskud fra (og samarbejde med) Nyrup Andelsvandværk, som har tre boringer på arealet, der beskyttes i jordkøbet. En gruppe borgere ved Mårslet/Aarhus har sommer 2024 tilsluttet sig foreningen og leder efter et jordstykke (sandsynligvis i model med Dansk Økojord som økonomisk partner). Biodiversitetsregistrering på Vallestrup er påbegyndt via Arter.dk.

Foreningen udgør både et privat engagement og et videnskabeligt (felt)arbejde. I antologi om forskningsetik (Juelskjær 2024) kalder jeg (inspireret af landart-kunstner Robert Smithson) dette en "mudret praksis", og kapitlet udforsker denne mudrethed og dens forskningsetiske implikationer. I nærværende artikel argumenteres ej for det videnskabeligt forsvarlige i denne arbejdsform.

Foreningen har intet ansvar for eller 'aktier' i forskningen.

- ³ En onto-epistemologisk videnskabsposition. I tråd med agential realisme (se næste fodnote).
- ⁴ Artiklen er inspireret af agential realistisk tænkning. Artiklens formål er *ikke* at præsentere agential realisme, derfor denne komprimerede fodnote om enkelte agential realistiske grundforhold. Artiklen kan fint læses uden at læseren har kendskab til agential realisme.

Agential realisme bygger på Karen Barads originale samtænkning (eller diffraktive læsning) af poststrukturalistisk, feministisk-, postkolonial mv. tænkninger med en fysik-filosofisk og kvantefysisk tænkning. Herigennem får (kønnede og kønnende, racialiserende etc.) tilblivelsesprocesser dels et mere-end-menneskeligt fokus og samtidig bliver tid og rum (qua kvantefysikken) til tilblivende og transformativ størrelser. Frem for at undersøge *interaktioner* i tid og sted, undersøges *intra-aktioner*, som er processer, som om-skaber og forbinder tider, steder, diskurs, materialitet/stof. Agential realisme er ikke en 'materialitetstænkning', men derimod en mere omfattende teoretisering af kausalitet og tilblivelse – af tid, rum, diskurs, stof, væren. Alle agential realistiske begreber har relationel (ikke essentialistisk) karakter. Agential realisme er en entanglement/forbundetheds-tænkning; der findes ikke individuelt eksisterende enheder.

- ⁵ Analysetilgangen 'fra objekt til fænomen' beskrevet i Reardon et.al 2015; Barad i samtale, Juelskjær et.al 2021; samt udforsket og eksemplificeret i Juelskjær 2019.
- ⁶ Se også Juelskjær et.al 2021 kapitel 7.
- ⁷ Artiklen gennemgår ikke den omfattende omsorgsforskning.
- ⁸ Schrader trækker en onto-epistemologisk pointe fra Barad (2007): Det handler ikke om at skaffe sig mere viden til at lukke 'videns-gabet' (en epistemologisk problemstilling) men om en fundamental, ontologisk u-bestemthed ved fænomenet (se fx Schrader i samtale, Juelskjær et.al 2021), som er i iterativ intra-aktiv tilblivelse.
- ⁹ De to modaliteter (for/about) er ikke nødvendigvis dikotome. Schraders tillæg kan fx aktiveres i situationer, hvor man er i færd med at 'care for': som en etik, der vedrører at bremse og forstyrre en forestillet sikkerhed om hvad der er brug for (Juelskjær et.al 2018).
- ¹⁰ Det er ikke ligegyldigt hvor de placeres. Og solceller er, som al anden teknologi, ikke blot et uskyldigt objekt, endskønt fortællingen om, hvad den 'gør godt' forsøger at skære forbindelserne til skaderne. Terraformning i forbindelse med 'grøn omstilling/business-as-usual' handler også om de ødelæggelser af landskaber, liv og livsgrundlag som er konsekvenser af råstofudvinding- og følgeindustri.

Nærværende forskningstilgang indebærer netop at træde disse forbundetheder og de ansvar, som de implicerer. Dette skal også skubbe imod en problematisk 'bare-plant-nogle-træer' diskurs.

¹¹ Oversat fra Plantationocene/red. Staunæs et.al. 2024. Alle Haraway begreber er oversat vha denne.

¹² Ved miljøkonsulentfirmaet Habitats.

¹³ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/proposal-directive-soil-monitoring-and-resilience_en. Jord her nu i en sundhedsdiskurs, som knytter jordens helbred til menneskets og til geopolitik.

¹⁴ Agropedogenese (Kuzakov & Zamanian 2019) markerer menneskelige handlinger som en 'jordformende faktor', som medårsag til jorderosion og forarmning, altså, endnu en begrebspecificering ift antropocæne kriser. **Pedrogenese** kommer af græsk pedo-, eller pedon/ 'jord, jordbund,' og genesis/'oprindelse, fødsel'. Dvs. jordbundsudvikling, jordbundsdannelse eller jordbundsgenese, dvs. jordbundsprofildannende processer, der reguleres af effekterne af placering, miljø og historie (wiki). **Agro**, vdr. landbrug.

Se også Kopittke et.al 2019.

¹⁵ Den store danske lex.

¹⁶ I fagfeltet økologisk økonomi (se Røbke 2020) argumenteres for at tænke i reale ressourcer som det regulerende princip i henseende til pengeøkonomien. Penge som en virtuel ressource kan altid tilføjes 'flere nuller', hvorimod der er reale grænser for de reale ressourcer. Derfor skal penge bruges som styringsinstrument i balancering af de reale ressourcer. Danmarks 'earth overshoot day' var i 2024 d. 16/3. Klodens var d. 1/8.

I forlængelse heraf kan man finde degrowth eller *modvækst* 'bevægelsen' og -forskning, som går efter kapitalismens vækstparadigme og dens produktion af global uretfærdighed og skade. 'Grøn omstilling' er koblet ind i vækstparadigmet. For maskulinitetsformer læst kritisk gennem modvækst, se Eversberg & Schmeizer 2023.

¹⁷ Eg er en nøgleart, dvs. livsgrundlag for hundredvis af organismer.

¹⁸ Se også projektet "Hosting lands" <https://hostinglands.com/dk>

¹⁹ For analyse af maskulinitetsformer – også dens 'økoenlige' varianter - knyttet ind i landbrugsindustrien se Hultman 2017. Dette analysegreb kunne være givtigt i fænomen-graferingen. Forfølges ej i nærværende artikel.

²⁰ Jeg spekulerer over specificiteterne af god-ond i forhold til gold-steril i jordbeskrivelserne. Hvad indikerer dette, onto-epistemologisk? Hvilke affektive tråde og tilknytninger? Hvilke forhold mellem jord og mennesker? Måske en historiker kan udlede termerne god/ond i 1600tallet: Hvorfor tilskrives jorden vilje/intention/egenskab (er det fx knyttet til noget bibelsk? Var det erfaringen med at være udleveret til jordens/naturens kræfter)? Jeg kommer i tanke om det gamle udtryk om, at noget kan 'falde i god jord', et udtryk for, at noget (eller nogens viljer og intentioner) bliver positivt modtaget og får en gunstig effekt.

Gold & steril har andre konnotationer, gold: dels til noget rumligt/landskabeligt – det øde, uden liv (en konstatering af en stedslig tilstand). Men også ikke-liv som ufrugtbar, som ikke i stand til at bære frugt/liv/afkom, knyttet til menneske og dyrekroppe, et fravær af frugtbarhed. 'Steril' er dels betegnelsen for genstande eller overflader som er 100% fri for mikroorganismer, mens sterilisering er den aktive proces at gøre noget rent, eller ufrugtbar. dvs. konnoterer måske til teknologi, laboratorier (tech-landbruget), hvor nogets tilstand som steril er konsekvens af en handling – sterilisering, som er begået mod/iværksat i forhold til et område, en genstand, en krop, en (mikro)organisme. En aktiv gøren noget dødt/skabe et fravær.

I god-ond har jorden en magt over mennesket ift. hvad den vil give? I gold-steril har mennesket sat sine viljer igennem, med de konsekvenser, som begreberne beskriver.

²¹ Apropos ekstraktion: Skovhugsten (næste fodnote) betød, at i 1805 var kun 4% areal i Danmark skovdækket. Fredsskovsforordningen af 1805 beskytter og fremmer skovene (i dag knapt 15%). Men paradigmet former et landskab med opdeling af områder for (ofte hegnet) skov og områder for åbent land, hvil-

- ket får konsekvenser for biodiversitetens udvikling: der mangler habitatkorridorer til skove/naturområder hen over dyrkningsområder, åbent og bebygget land. Men det er et andet fortællepor.
- ²² Brugsretten var hierarkiseret/klasse-skaleret: husdyrene spiste olden/agern, som ellers var blevet til nye træer. Bønderne havde ret til at samle og skære kviste til brændsel og til at etablere gærder. Godsejerne havde retten til at fælde træerne og Kongens flåde havde brug for tømmer til skibe til handel (herunder transatlantisk slavehandel og kolonivarer) og krigsførelse.
- ²³ Dansk landbrug har gennem årtier opkøbt jord og driver giga-landbrug i Østeuropa.
- ²⁴ Men ikke den eneste. En række andre problemstillinger diskuteres i Juelskjær 2024; 2025. fx forbundet-heder mellem arealudnyttelse i Danmark og skovrydning, soyaplantager og prekære livsvilkår i Latinamerika - og foreningens og forskerens ansvar ind i dette. Denne global-nord/syd problematik savner jeg udfoldet i nærværende artikel.
- ²⁵ En anden vej at gå fra gold til liv er fx regenerativt jordbrug og at lave blandformer af træer, frugttræer, grønsagsproduktion.
- ²⁶ At fremme brugen af træ fx i byggebranchen.
- ²⁷ Skovfoged Asger Hansen, Interview med Juelskjær, marts 2023
- ²⁸ Det er vigtigt at ikke blot pege landmanden ud (isoleret). Det er *hele* produktionsparadigmet og netværket af afhængigheder, der er i spil og ansvarlig for logikker, industri-praksisser samt ikke mindst principperne for landbrugsøkonomien, foruden politisk reguleringen af området ift. brug af pesticider osv. Se Hultman (2017) om betydningen af industriens maskulinitetsformer. Endvidere påpeger forskning, at det tidlige før-industrielle landbrug har gavnet artsdiversitet (se Bent Odgaard).
- ²⁹ Der er mange analytiske spor i den problematik, som her fremstår simplificeret, men som ville bringe teksten for vidt omkring. Fx er det så godt som umuligt i Danmark at leve af at producere grøntsager til danske forbrugere. Hele den økonomiske tilgang til erhvervet må ændres, pløje og sprøjtefri dyrkning fremmes, samt fremme lokal plantebaseret fødevarereproduktionsfællesskaber osv. Binde økonomi i relation til de reelle ressourcer (jf. den økologiske økonomi. Se fodnote 11 og fx Røbke 2020).
- ³⁰ For dansk landbrugshistorie se fx Ahl 2023. For andre lokaliteter se fx Ishikawa 2020; Shiva 2009.
- ³¹ Den tænkning og praksis, begrebet 'regenerativt landbrug/dyrkningsformer' markerer, har eksisteret og er blevet praktiseret, vedligeholdt og udviklet af fællesskaber og folk hele vejen igennem tiderne. Det er ikke noget som *opfindes 'nu'*, men det opdages og udbredes heldigvis af mange, i denne tid. Se fx Ahl 2023.
- ³² Forskningsarbejdet er ikke fondsfinansieret men foregår indenfor rammerne af en ordinær universitetslektorstilling. De forskellige (fænomengraferede) tråde må følges gradvist.
- ³³ Wayne James, USVI, fra videoen "Dansk Vestindien, en koloni bliver til". Citeret i Juelskjær 2019.
- ³⁴ Problematikken er også behandlet i Juelskjær 2024.
Fors A/S er et offentligt forsyningselskab med visionært og vidtrækkende sigte på vandbeskyttelse via skov- og naturgørelse. De private vandværker står i en mere prekær situation, de er ikke professionelle aktører men blot borgere fra området, valgt ind i vandværkets bestyrelse og her skal varetage fællesskabets interesser. De private vandværker er understøttet af organisationen Danske Vandværker.
- ³⁵ I 2023-4 er opmærksomheden på de indre farvandes liv/død dog intensiveret.
- ³⁶ Menneskelige helbredshensyn er absolut også relevante, og pointen er ikke her at om-vende hierarkiet. Vand er i det hele taget en prekær substans (som kan våbengøres i konflikt- og krigszoner), og adgangen til rent drikkevand eller vand overhovedet er både uens og uretfærdigt distribueret, planetært, og vil blive en stadig mere prekær substans som planetære kriser udruller sig, i forskellige fremtidige scenarier for Jordens liv.
- ³⁷ Se Kate Scow i samtale med Bellacasa & Papadopoulos. Ecological Reparation: Groundwater Microbial Kinship-Care (youtube.com)

“Being among the stars”: Et feministisk-posthumanistisk perspektiv på det multiplanetære menneske

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Abstract

I en tid hvor rumudforskning i stigende grad bliver underlagt kommercielle logikker, alt imens konsekvenserne af ekstraktiv kapitalisme på Jordens økosystemer bliver stadig mere tydelige, er det nødvendigt, at feministisk forskning også bidrager til samtalen om vores relationer til de mere-end-menneskelige verdener "out there", som nu af nye, private rumfartsvirksomheder bliver iscenesat som en lovende ny "frontier". Med den erkendelse som udgangspunkt, søger vi i denne artikel at udvikle et feministisk-posthumanistisk perspektiv på den SpaceX-drevne mission om at gøre mennesket til en multiplanetær art gennem Mars-kolonisering. I artiklen undersøger vi, hvordan mennesket forestilles som multiplanetær art gennem SpaceX' formidling af dets Mars-program og argumenterer for, at det multiplanetære menneske forestilles ud af tre overordnede linjer: 1) Multiplanetaritet som risikohåndtering 2) multiplanetaritet som "livets gave" og 3) multiplanetaritet som en del af et attraktivt menneskeligt liv i ikke bare den globale, men også galaktiske elite – en idé, der i disse fremstillinger har umiddelbare effekter på det jordiske liv gennem sin affektive styrke og evne til at cirkulere optimisme, produktivitet og håb for en fremtid som måske – måske aldrig – materialiserer sig. På den måde viser vores studie, at SpaceX' forestillinger om multiplanetaritet bygger på re-aktualiseringen af troper og forestilling fra efterkrigstidens Space Age og mobiliseringen af koloniale, naturkulturelle skillelinjer – en retorik, der forstærkes i kraft af forventningen om menneskeskabte katastrofetilstande på Jorden: Multiplanetaritet opstår her som en redningskrans – ikke så meget for faktiske mennesker, der er truet af klimakatastrofe, men for en særlig måde at leve på, rodfæstet i vestlig forbrugskultur.

KEYWORDS: feministisk-posthumanistisk perspektiv, kolonisering, Multiplanetaritet, galaktiske elite, SpaceX, klimakatastrofe

Introduktion: ”Cadet, Imperial Military Academy, Trantor”

“You want to wake up in the morning and think the future is going to be great – and that’s what being a spacefaring civilization is all about. It’s about believing in the future and thinking that the future will be better than the past. And I can’t think of anything more exciting than going out there and being among the stars.” (SpaceX, Uden dato B)

Med et ”I am right here!” dukkede en storsmilende, afslappet udseende Elon Musk den 16. oktober 2020 op på kommunikationsmediet Zoom, hvor 9000 tilhørere sad klar bag skærmene til at overvære hans samtale med NGO’en Mars Societys ligeledes berømte stifter Robert Zubrin (Zubrin 2020). Samtalen var programsat som en del af Mars Societys årlige konference, der dette år havde fået overskriften ”Rising together - To Mars” (Mars Society 2020). Her skulle en række talere fra forskellige vinkler adressere udfordringer og potentialer ved Mars-udforskning netop nu og ultimativt: menneskelig kolonisering af Jordens støvede, rustrøde naboplanet. Den pludselige begrænsning i menneskelig mobilitet på Jorden i forbindelse med den verserende Covid-19-pandemi umuliggjorde tilsyneladende ikke konkret rejseplanlægning af interplanetære dimensioner. Zubrin præsenterede sin gæst med et henkastet ”(y)ou need no introduction” (Zubrin 2020, 0:20), mens Musk prøvende justerede billedet på sit webcamera vertikalt, så det akkurat kunne rumme hele påskriften på hans grå t-shirt: ”Cadet, Imperial Military Academy, Trantor”.

Arrangementet taget i betragtning kunne den administrerende direktør for den fremadstormende private rumfartsvirksomhed SpaceX næppe have truffet et bedre tøjvalg: Planeten Trantor er magtens centrum i Isaac Asimovs fiktive menneskestyrede interstellare imperium Galactic Empire, kendt fra sci-fi-romanserien *Foundation*-trilogien (1951), og inspireret af Rom i Romerrigets storhedstid – omdrejningspunktet i et antropocentrisk rum-epos, hvor mennesker har besat og

bosat sig på planeter i hele Mælkevejen. Efter lidt kammeratlig latter i begge skærbilleder stillede Zubrin sit første spørgsmål – ”the basics”, som han mumlende introducerede det, selvom det, der fulgte, næppe var at karakterisere som basalt eller simpelt: ”You started SpaceX to make humanity multiplanetary. Why do you see that as a critical goal?” (Zubrin 2020, 0:40).

I denne artikel forfølger vi, med udgangspunkt i feministisk, posthumanistisk teori, denne ”basale” idé om det multiplanetære menneske, som den bliver udfoldet i SpaceX’ formidling af virksomhedens visioner om en nærtforestående menneskelig kolonisering af Mars. Vi søger i den forbindelse at besvare spørgsmålet: Hvordan bliver det multiplanetære menneske forestillet i formidlingen af SpaceX’ Mars-program? Feministisk posthumanisme (Åsberg og Braidotti 2018) og beslægtede teoretiske retninger har inden for de seneste år fostret produktive analyser af de brudflader, der kommer til syne i det, Andreas Malm og Jason W. Moore (2016), og senere Donna Haraway (2015), har kaldt ’det kapitaloscæne’ – et koncept, der, modsat sin oprindelige inspirationskilde ’det antropocæne’, peger direkte på kapitalistiske systemer, som det, der sætter de mest afgørende aftryk på Jordens økosystemer, snarere end ’menneskelig’ aktivitet som sådan. I en tid, hvor rum(ud)forskning i stigende grad bliver underlagt kommercielle logikker samtidig med at konsekvenserne af nogle menneskers ubæredygtige udnyttelse af Jordens ressourcer træder stadigt tydeligere frem, finder vi det afgørende, at feministisk forskning også bidrager til den aktuelle samtale om vores relationer til de mere-end-jordiske verdener ”out there” (Space X Uden dato B), som nu har den tvivlsomme ære at blive sat i scene som næste stop, en ny ”frontier” (Kilgore 2003; Schwartz 2017), for ekstraktivistisk kapitalisme (Temmen 2022). Vores formål med denne artikel er at bidrage til udviklingen af et sådant feministisk posthumanistisk perspektiv på det multiplanetære menneske.

Artiklen er inddelt i fire sektioner. Vi begynder med en præsentation af SpaceX som case og skitserer dernæst, hvordan Mars-forestillinger er blevet behandlet i humanistisk forskning samt

vores feministiske, posthumanistiske teoretiske og analytiske udgangspunkt. Vores analyse følger herefter over tre sektioner, efterfulgt af en konklusion.

Afgang: SpaceX og det multiplanetære menneske

Forestillinger om mennesker på Mars er hverken nye eller entydigt at tilskrive SpaceX. Mars har tværtimod ageret kulisse for nedskrevne fiktive rumrejse-fortællinger siden 1600-tallet, hvor Galileo Galilei for første gang opfangede planeten teleskopisk, og mennesker på Mars har ligeledes været gennemgående figurer indenfor både filmisk og litterær science fiction i århundreder (Heise 2011; Markley 2005). Bestsellere som Kim Stanley Robinsons Mars-trilogi (1992-1996) har for eksempel iscenesat kolonisering og jordligning af Mars som et utopisk projekt, hvor Mars bliver ’terraformet’ til et socialt og økologisk balanceret hjem for mennesker, mens Jorden plages af kriser som følge af ’overbefolkning’ – i sig selv en forestilling, der er blevet anvendt til at legitimere voldsomme indgreb i nogle, ofte racialiserede eller på andre måder socialt marginaliserede, menneskers liv på Jorden for ’menneskeligheden’ og ’det fælles bedste’ (Mitchell & Chaudhury 2020). Nyere TV-serier som *Mars* (2016-2018) og *The Expanse* (2015-2022) fremskriver ligeledes Mars - og andre himmellegemer i solsystemet - som muligt nyt hjem for mennesker. Sideløbende har talrige private virksomheder og stater eksperimenteret med forskellige former for menneskelige interventioner på og omkring Mars, og den gensidige udveksling af idéer mellem science fiction og rumforskning og -udforskning er blevet bemærket og anerkendt af mange rum-aktører og forskere, herunder Elon Musk (se også Bryld og Lykke 2000; Deudney 2020; Markley 2005; Kilgore 2003). Efterkrigstidens rum-guldalder byggede, viser Bryld og Lykke (2000) for eksempel, i høj grad på stærke kulturelle forestillinger om Jordens begrænsninger og udflytningen til Mars som et nødvendigt næste trin i menneskets evolution, hvor Jorden

ofte blev visualiseret og beskrevet som en ’cradle’, en kravlegård for menneskeligheden, som den på et tidspunkt måtte forlade, hvis den ville blive voksen. Fremblomstringen af den såkaldte NewSpace-sektor, den private og kommercielle del af rumfartsindustrien, ved indgangen til det 21. århundrede og den øgede offentlige og politiske interesse for menneskelige aktiviteter i rummet, herunder ressourceudvinding og bosættelse på andre himmellegemer end Jorden (Deudney 2020), markerer således også en tilbagevenden til og reaktualisering af nogle af disse forestillinger. Flere steder har man nu konkrete planer om bemandede missioner til Mars inden for de kommende årtier (NASA Uden dato; ESA 2023; Williams 2023), og faste baser på andre himmellegemer end Jorden bliver præsenteret som et realiserbart mål indenfor overskuelig fremtid, blandt andet gennem NASA’s Artemis-missioner (NASA U.D.). I denne forbindelse har SpaceX, der betragtes som en vægtig disruptiv kraft inden for moderne rumfart (Muegge og Reid 2019; Reddy 2018), spillet en aktiv rolle i promovningen og populariseringen af forestillingen om mennesket som en fremtidig ’multiplanetær art’ - i sig selv et begreb, der er åbent overfor mange fortolkningsmuligheder (Chon-Torres og Murga-Moreno 2021) - gennem etableringen af en koloni på Mars, uagtet det forhold, at der stadig vurderes at være ganske lang vej igen for realiseringen af sådan et foretagende (Deudney 2020; Musk i Zubrin 2020, 5:18). Da SpaceX’ visioner for menneskets fremtid på Mars er mere end almindeligt vidtrækkende og omfatter komplette, selvforsynende byer og vidtforgrebet infrastruktur, både på Mars og mellem planeter, skal virksomheden ikke betragtes som repræsentant for samtlige rumfartsvirksomheder eller forskningsprojekter med fokus på Mars, men mere som en *ekstrem*, eller ligefrem *paradigmatisk*, case (Flyvbjerg 2006), der illustrerer, hvor langt der bliver tænkt på området i dag i en euro-amerikansk geografisk og kulturel kontekst.

Digitale medier spiller, ikke overraskende, en central rolle i formidlingen af SpaceX’ Mars-visioner og løbende fremskridt i forhold til disse. Ikke blot har virksomheden en visuelt

stimulerende og jævnligt opdateret hjemmeside, SpaceX er også aktiv på en række sociale medier: Youtube, X, Instagram, LinkedIn og Flickr. Derudover er administrerende direktør Musk i sig selv også en ’influencer’ i sværvægtsklassen med hele 152 millioner følgere på det sociale medie X (tidligere Twitter), som han desuden selv ejer. Musks præsentationer ”Making Humans a Multiplanetary Species” (Musk 2016) og ”Making Life Multiplanetary” (Musk 2017) er hver især, i skrivende stund, blevet set henholdsvis 4 og 2,6 millioner gange gennem SpaceX’ YouTube-kanal. Vi har derfor også valgt at fokusere på offentligt tilgængeligt, online materiale. Denne type data giver et godt indblik i, hvordan SpaceX arbejder med at oversætte, formidle og udbrede sine visioner og idéer til et bredt publikum af almindeligt interesserede.

Konkret baserer vores undersøgelse sig på fire mere afgrænsede eksempler på formidling af forestillingen om det multiplanetære menneske gennem Mars-kolonisering: SpaceX’ hjemmeside (www.spacex.com), videoerne ”Making Humans a Multiplanetary Species” (Musk 2016) og ”Making Life Multiplanetary” (Musk 2017) fra SpaceX’ Youtube-kanal, samt det livestreamede interview ”Elon Musk - 2020 Mars Society Virtual Convention” fra Mars Societys Youtube-kanal (Zubrin 2020). Interviewet med Zubrin er et eksempel på Musks aktuelle overvejelser på området, præsenteret for Mars Societys medlemmer og øvrige interesserede. Mars Society er en indflydelsesrig nordamerikansk interesseorganisation, der siden 1998 har arbejdet for at promovere Mars-kolonisering med et udpræget transhumanistisk filosofisk udgangspunkt: visionen er at begynde en ny ”branch of humanity” (Mars Society U.D.), der ved hjælp af teknologien overskrider de grænser, der binder den nuværende til Jorden. De to videoer fra SpaceX’ Youtube-kanal er gengivelser af foredrag, som Musk har afholdt om SpaceX’ Mars-planer på henholdsvis International Astronautical Congress (IAC) i Guadalajara i 2016 og Adelaide 2017, den sidste præsenteret som en ’opdatering’ af den første. International Astronautical Congress (IAC) er en verdensledende videnskabelig kongres for rumaktører. Den bliver

afholdt af International Astronautical Federation, hvis medlemmer overvejende er rumfartsvirksomheder fra Europa, Asien og Nordamerika. En stor del af det materiale, der bliver præsenteret i oplæggene, findes også på SpaceX’ hjemmeside, og det synes på den måde at udgøre en slags grundstamme i SpaceX’ kommunikation om Mars-kolonisering og multiplanetaritet. Disse fire nedslag er desuden udvalgt, fordi de nærmest udelukkende behandler SpaceX’ Mars-planer (og altså ikke andre SpaceX-relaterede projekter eller Musk-ejede virksomheder) og uden undtagelse er af nyere dato (2016-2020). Arkivet består af 50 screendumps fra SpaceX’ hjemmeside og de to videofilmede foredrag, transskription af de tre videoer, samt noter fra indsamlingsprocessen.

Multiplanetære forestillinger:

Teoretisk og analytisk udgangspunkt

Forestillinger om rummet og mennesket i rummet har været genstand for en del humanistisk forskning, særligt fra de æstetisk-historiske discipliner (Geppert 2018; Heise 2011; Markley 2005; Kilgore 2003; Temmen 2022), hvor Mars blandt andet, som for eksempel hos Robert Markley (2005), er blevet analyseret frem som et spejl på menneskeligheden, der reflekterer vores håb og frygt for fremtiden, og på den måde også peger på sprækker i skellene Jorden og Mars, fakta og fiktion, mellem ydre rum og indre. Jens Temmen (2022) fokuserer specifikt på diskurser om multiplanetaritet og ’terraforming’ af Mars med udgangspunkt i Hollywood-filmen *Finch* (2021) og den prisbelønnede erindringsbog *Once Upon A Time I Lived On Mars* (2020) og argumenterer for, at værkerne iscenesætter kolonisering og jordliggørelse af Mars som en del af en velkendt teknologisk og evolutionær fremskridtsfortælling, hvor disse interventioner opstår som konkrete løsninger på den igangværende klimakrise. På den måde legitimerer de en fortsættelse og udvidelse af de kapitalistiske og koloniale logikker og systemer, der har bidraget væsentligt til krisens opståen, konkluderer Temmen. Forestillinger er ligeledes et centralt begreb hos Micha Rahder (2019), der

i sin undersøgelse af to forskellige forestillingsverdener knyttet til det multiplanetære menneske – én med rod i New Space-aktørers rumekspansionisme og én med rod i feministisk science fiction – argumenterer for at forskellige forestillinger om fremtiden producerer forskellige fremtidige virkeligheder og derfor også for vigtigheden i at beskæftige sig med netop det forestillede.

Et andet indflydelsesrigt bidrag fra denne gren af humaniora, som dog ikke eksklusivt har Mars som fokus, kommer fra De Witt Douglas Kilgore (2003), der med begrebet *astrofuturisme* giver en karakteristik af en bestemt utopisk tænke-måde funderet i den amerikanske efterkrigstid, der udfolder sig i både fiktion, populærvidenskab og inden for politisk aktivisme. Her bliver rumudforskning og -ekspansionisme iscenesat som et middel til at overkomme sociale forskelle, først og fremmest race-, men også klasse- og kønsbetingede, og omgøre historiens fejltagelser – den amerikanske drøm flyttet til det ydre rum. Astrofuturismen fungerer imidlertid ikke bare ved at plante falske forhåbninger om en ny amerikansk ’frontier’, viser Kilgore gennem talrige populærkulturelle eksempler, men også som et røgslør, “deflecting attention from America’s treatment of its racialized minorities and safeguarding the white nation’s status as inheritor of Europe’s colonial mantle and its standing as the vanguard of technological modernity.” (Kilgore 2003, 223). JS Johnson Schwartz (2017, 167) tager også fat i forestillingen om rummet som en ny “western frontier”, en forestilling, baseret på Frederick Turners berømte *frontier-tese*, i hvilken grænselandet mellem bosættelse og vildnis blev betragtet som et afgørende sted for og symbol på udviklingen af det amerikanske demokrati og folkesjæl. Han argumenterer for omgående at forkaste forestillingen om rummet som et magisk, nyt grænseland og mulighedsrum, en idé båret frem af for eksempel Zubrin i *The Case for Mars* (1996) og af den amerikanske, internationale NGO National Space Society. Idéen om den amerikanske frontier har for længst vist sig at være en myte, og i gentænkninger som ‘the space frontier’ eller ‘the martian frontier’ bliver myten, peger Schwartz (2017) på, instrumentaliseret til at retfærdiggøre, ligefrem

glorificere, kolonisering af andre planeter i demokratiets navn.

Andre studier placerer sig i stedet i forlængelse af en feministisk STS-tradition, idet de interesserer sig for måder hvorpå teknologier og mennesker, samfund og natur, sammenvikles indenfor moderne rumforskning, -udforskning og -entreprenørskab, og hvordan der med disse midlertidige konfigurationer opstår nye forestillinger om mennesket, kroppen, samfundet og fremtiden (Franklin, Lury & Stacey 2000; Tutton 2018; Rahder 2019). Sarah Franklin et al. bruger begrebet pan-menneskelighed til at pege på, hvordan forestillingen om ‘det globale’, der for eksempel knytter sig til de første billeder af Jorden set fra rummet, involverer en forestilling om et globalt fællesskab og universelt, fællesmenneskeligt udgangspunkt, der transcenderer sociale, geografiske, kønnede, kropslige og racebetingede hierarkier: “This is the space of *panhumanity*, of a newly imaged and imagined form of global unity” (Franklin, Lury & Stacy 2000, 28). Tilsvarende viser Richard Tutton (2018) i sit interviewstudie, hvordan frivillige fra Mars One-projektet baserer deres deltagelse på socio-tekniske forestillinger (Jasanoff 2015) om en attraktiv og alternativ social struktur, karakteriseret ved værdier som medmenneskelighed, sammenhold på tværs af kulturelle skel og forfølgelsen af et fælles mål for menneskeligheden. I mellemtiden har Daniel Deudney (2020) fra et udgangspunkt i politologien beskæftiget sig med New Space og samtidige forestillinger om mennesker i det ydre rum. Deudney argumenterer for, at den rum-ekspansionistiske ideologi, der binder mange New Space-projekter sammen, bliver opretholdt gennem forestillinger om Jorden og menneskeligheden som værende i en akut truende terminal tilstand. Migrationen af mennesker væk fra Jorden og til andre himmellegemer opfattes her både som det endelige mål - menneskelighedens telos - og samtidig den naturlige konsekvens af en kompleks og voksende liste over katastrofescenarier, indeholdende naturkatastrofer, krige, pandemier, biovåben og så videre, for Planeten Jordens nært forestående endeligt (Deudney 2020, 14). På den måde opstår muligheden for at “blive en multiplantær art” (Musk 2017, 1:54) og kolonisere andre planeter

som både forløsningen af menneskets iboende potentiale og samtidig en fornuftig reaktion på de risici, vi står overfor.

Indenfor det, der siden er blevet konceptualiseret som den posthumane vending i humaniora, har forskere samlet sig om et ønske om at tænke både hinsides humaniora som disciplinær og disciplinerende kategori, men også forbi humanistisk antropocentrisme og menneskelig exceptionalisme og universalisme (Braidotti 2013; Ferrando 2014; Haraway 2008; Åsberg og Braidotti 2018). Feministisk forskning indenfor denne vending har særligt interesseret sig for kritikken af humanismens universalistiske menneske-ideal, ofte visuelt repræsenteret ved Leonardo Da Vincis geometrisk ideelle *Homo Vitruvianus* (ca. 1490), og genforhandlingen af bestemte måder hierarkisk at ordne verden på, for eksempel i dikotomier og animacitetshierarkier (Chen, 2012) som natur/kultur, human/nonhuman, levende/død, mand/kvinde, bevidst/ubevidst, civiliseret/vild både opstår og virker i praksis – og for at vise, hvordan de, på trods af den status, de ofte får tillagt som naturgivne sandheder, er kulturelle konstruktioner. Disse konstruktioner kan, og vil, forandre sig og har altid været i forandring, men det betyder ikke, at de måder de midlertidigt stabiliserer sig på, ikke er vigtige eller kan føles virkelige. Tværtimod bliver de instrumentaliseret i utallige sammenhænge, blandt andet til at legitimere forskellige politikker, handlinger og indgreb – fra beskyttelse til udryddelse (Chen 2012; Heise 2016; Shukin 2009). Erika Cudworth og Stephen Hobden (2014) har for eksempel med et posthumanistisk analytisk blik klarlagt hvordan begrebet ’civilisation’, som også bliver anvendt løbende af Musk, er betinget af både adskillelse fra og hævde over ’det naturlige’, og hvordan begrebet gennem tiden er blevet mobiliseret til for eksempel at legitimere vestlig kontrol med og domesticering af den ’eksotiske’ natur, hos både menneskelige og mere-end-menneskelige aktører, gennem kulturelle praksisser. De viser på den måde, som også Achille Mbembe (2001) overbevisende har vist i sit arbejde med og kritik af postkolonial tænkning, hvordan koloniale logikker væver sig sammen med natur-kultur-dikotomier (Cudworth og Hobden 2014, 759).

Posthumanisme bør afgørende adskilles fra de transhumanistiske tænkemåder, der ofte ligger til grund for rumekspansionismens fortaleres argumenter. Godt nok problematiserer transhumanismen, ligesom posthumanismen, snævre forståelser af mennesket som kategori, men ikke nødvendigvis med udgangspunkt i en kritisk analyse af den historiske arv, der hænger ved disse forståelser, og dens konsekvenser eller med et ønske om at gøre op med dikotomisk tænkning (Ferrando 2014). Derimod er man indenfor transhumanismen særligt optaget af de biologiske og teknologiske fremtidige potentialer for mennesket, der kan være i en overskridelse af konventionelle grænser for ’det menneskelige’ – gennem f.eks. kryopreservering, hjerneimplantater, ”mind uploading” og andre kybernetiske udødeligheds-teknologier. Transhumanismen tager altså ikke afstand fra, men bygger oven på, oplysningstidens humanisme og kan anskues som en form for ”ultra-humanisme” (Ferrando 2014, 27), fokuseret på optimering af menneskelivet og menneskekroppen ved hjælp af teknologiske nyskabelser.

I denne artikel bygger vi videre på denne ovenfor skitserede forskning og teoridannelse, idet vi ligeledes beskæftiger os med forestillinger om Mars som situerede, kontingente sammenfiltringer af visioner, håb og løfter – orienterede mod fremtiden, men samtidig bestemmende for hvordan vi tænker, taler og handler i nutiden – samt for hvordan der med disse forestillinger opstår og opretholdes bestemte forståelser af hvad liv, bevidsthed og menneskelighed kan siges at være. Med andre ord ser vi, som Marcel Stoetzler og Nira Yuval-Davis formulerer det, på forestillinger som ”both *individual* and *collective*, *self-* as well as *other-* directed, a necessary *condition* as well as the *product* of the dialogical process involved in the construction of knowledge” (Stoetzler og Yuval-Davis 2002, 316). Over de følgende tre analyseafsnit viser vi, hvordan SpaceX medierer og animerer det multiplanetære liv og gør Mars beboelig. Overordnet argumenterer vi for, at mennesket som multiplanetær art hos SpaceX bliver forestillet i forlængelse af tre centrale tematiske tråde: 1) Multiplanetaritet som risikohåndtering, 2) Multiplanetaritet som en ’livets gave’ og 3)

Multiplanetaritet som en del af et attraktivt, kosmopolitisk liv.

Multiplanetaritet som risikohåndtering

På andendagen på International Astronautical Congress 29. september 2016 i Guadalajara, Mexico holdt Musk et opsigtsvækkende oplæg. Oplægget, som i dag kan ses på SpaceX' YouTube-kanal under overskriften ”Making Humans a Multiplanetary Species” (Musk 2016), blev skudt i gang med denne disjunktive udlægning af menneskelighedens fremtid:

History is going to bifurcate along two directions. One path is we stay on Earth forever, and then there will be some eventual extinction event. I do not have an immediate doomsday prophecy, but eventually, history suggests, there will be some doomsday event. The alternative is to become a spacefaring civilization and a multiplanetary species, which I hope you would agree is the right way to go (Musk 2016, 2:05).

Musk udstikker med pædagogisk tydelighed retningen for i hvert fald én af trådene i SpaceX' argumentation for Mars-kolonisering: Forestillingen om Jorden og menneskeligheden som værende i en terminal tilstand (Deudney 2020), dette som et problem, og multiplanetaritet som problemets løsning – en slags risikohåndtering for menneskeligheden som helhed og et evolutionært og teknologisk fremskridt (Deudney 2020; Temmen 2021). Det gælder i denne skillevejs-logik for menneskearten, at den enten kan vælge en vej, der ikke indebærer kolonisering af andre himmellegemer og dermed uundgåeligt fører til udslettelse eller vælge at udvikle sig til en multiplanetær art – den undergangsdømte jordiske menneskeligheds uspecificerede modsætning, svævende et sted mellem Evigt Liv og, mindre løftigt, udsættelse af udslettelse.

Godt nok havde Musk ikke nogen ”immediate doomsday prophecy” (Musk 2016, 2.05) parat

i 2016, men fire år senere, på Mars Societys online konference og i en globalt covid19-mærket verden, var der alt fra spektakulære supervulkaner til sørgelig selvudslettelse på menneskelighedens horisont: ”There is some chance that we will have a giant war or a super volcano or a comet might hit the earth or we might just self-extinguish, it might be more of a whimper than a bang... and frankly, right now civilization is not looking super strong, you know” (Musk i Zubrin 2020 4.23). Disse affektivt ladede (Chen 2012) og strategiske sammenstillinger mellem livet på Jorden i den antropocæne tilstand og udsathed, ligefrem udslettelse, på den ene side og rumekspansionisme og overlevelse på den anden er gennemgående i formuleringen og formidlingen af idéen om det multiplanetære menneske og Mars-kolonisering hos SpaceX, der på den måde reproducerer og samtidig intensiverer de diskurser om rumudforskning, der har cirkuleret siden efterkrigstidens Space Age (Bryld & Lykke 2000). Iscenesættelsen af det jordbundne menneskeliv som værende i en terminal tilstand bliver i citatet ovenfor ganske vist retorisk opblødt af en del fremtidsorienterede ”måske'er” (”might”), men får til gengæld en anderledes akut apokalyptisk karakter i den efterfølgende analyse af tingenes tilstand i det skæbnsvangre historiske øjeblik, der bliver tegnet op, vores ”right now”: ”Civilisationen” er svækket. Det er usikre tider. Vi er, synes det, i undtagelsestilstand, og en sådan særlig tilstand legitimerer særligt radikale løsningsforslag og teknologisk acceleration.

Denne forestilling om det jordiske menneskeliv, som det multiplanetære menneskeliv konstrueres i opposition til, er tilsyneladende ikke bare ladet med frygt, men også med en form for desillusion. Dette bliver tydeliggjort i Musks opsummering af sin pointe umiddelbart efter: ”Being forever confined to earth until some eventual extinction event is depressing and not fun” (Musk i Zubrin 2020, 6:08). Livet på Jorden er altså ikke bare udryddelsestruet, men også en ”confinement”, en form for afstraffelse, tvang eller, måske mere præcist i denne sammenhæng, frihedsberøvelse for dem, der er nødt til at leve det: Jorden begrænser den frie mobilitet og strukturerer livet henimod uundgåelig død. Multiplanetaritet er i denne

forstand heller ikke bare en mulighed - eller et valg - men bliver sat i scene som et imperativ: For at nå frem til et ”sikkert sted” (Musk i Zubrin 2020, 4:08) må dette forestillet ligeligt eksponerede ”vi” – der på den ene side fremstillet som en universel helhed og på den anden side specifikt indrammes af referencer til nordamerikansk forbrugerkultur (Mitchell og Chaudhury, 2020) – nødvendigvis løsrive sig fra den tilsyneladende både dødsensfarlige og dødsens kedelige Jord (”depressing and not fun”). Det rette mål er ikke bare et kort visit på planetens overflade, en lille base til forskning, eller til minedrift for den sags skyld, men en fuldt fungerende Mars-by, der kan holde sig i live helt uden ressource-tilførsel fra Jorden:

The acid test really is, if the ships from Earth stop coming for any reason, does Mars die out? For any reason! It could be banal or it could be nuclear armageddon. (...) If it does, we are not in a secure place. So I think this really might come down to, you know, The Great Filter front. Is this, are we going to create a self-sustaining city on Mars before or after World War III?” (Musk i Zubrin 2020, 3:42-4:22).

Referencen til Robin Hansons (1998) *The Great Filter*-hypotese fungerer som understøttelse af Musks indledningsvist præsenterede historiesyn. Ganske kort fortalt henviser konceptet *Det Store Filter* til, hvad end det må være, der afholder bestemte livsformer i at udvikle sig til multiplanetære livsformer – i Musks udlægning her for eksempel en tredje verdenskrig. Der må, foreslår teorien, være ’noget’ en bestemt livsform skal forbi eller overvinde, før denne kan blive i stand til at rejse ud og kolonisere andre planeter. Hypotesens logik naturliggør med andre ord kolonisering i rummet som et evolutionært udviklingsstadium på en hierarkisk ordnet stige, en ”path between simple dead stuff and explosive life” (Hansson 1998), en form for animacitetshierarki (Chen 2012), hvor det mest livagtige stadium er multiplanetært liv, ”colonization explosion” (Hansson 1998). Dens indbyggede forestilling om rumkolonisering som forbeholdt exceptionelle livsformer,

der evner at passere det store udviklingsmæssige filter, inddrager Musk også flere steder i sin argumentation for, at mennesket bør kolonisere andre himmellegemer, for eksempel i interviewet med Zubrin:

”Far as we know, we are the only life, I mean, people think there are aliens, but I haven’t seen any sign of aliens, so as far as we know, we are the only life... we could be the only life, let’s put it that way, and.... We need to take the set of actions that are most likely to make the future good and result in the continuance of consciousness as we know it” (Musk i Zubrin 2020, 1:10).

’Menneskelighedens’ exceptionelle position som det ”eneste liv” i et ellers dødt univers, ”liv” her afgørende puljet sammen med ”bevidsthed” (”consciousness”), gør ’os’ i denne tankegang særligt bevaringsværdige. ”Vi” er nødt til (”need to”) at handle for at sikre dette sjældne evolutionære tilfældes overlevelse og udbredelse.

Som Chen blandt flere andre har vist, er netop denne form for exceptionisme, baseret på arbitrære grænsedragninger mellem for eksempel levende og ikke-levende og bevidst og ikke-bevidst (Chen 2012), et vigtigt element i legitimeringen af en aktørs regulering af, dominans og kontrol over, endda eliminering af, andre. Samtidig er appellen til (fremtidig og potentiel) risiko og udsathed specifikt, som blandt andre Heise og Shukin har peget på, et overbevisende virkemiddel i legitimeringen indgreb i det biologiske. Når Musk iscenesætter menneskeligheden som i en sårbar og truet tilstand og tilmed peger på en forebyggelsesmulighed, kolonisering af Mars, er det således en biopolitisk motiveret kalden til handling, der er vanskelig at overhøre: Mars skal indtages og helst ”before it’s too late” (ibid., 23.45). Aktivt igangsatte, hurtige og signifikante teknologiske landvindinger, det, Musk refererer til som ”radical innovation” (ibid., 22:05), opstår her som selve overlevelsens forudsætning. Store, historiske civilisationer - ingen nævnt, ingen glemt - er faldet fordi man ikke prioriterede teknologisk innovation, argumenterer han blandt andet:

“I think what a lot of people don’t appreciate is that technology doesn’t automatically improve. It only improves if a lot of really strong engineering talent is applied to the problem. And there are many examples in history where civilizations have reached a certain technology level and then have fallen well below that and then recovered only millenia later.” (Musk 2016, 48:02)

Begrebet “civilisation” går igen flere steder i materialet (se også Musk 2016, 2:05, SpaceX, Uden dato B; Musk i Zubrin 2020, 6:08). Det fungerer hos Musk og SpaceX som en alt-inkluderende samlebetegnelse for “menneskeligheden som sådan”, et universelt, pan-menneskeligt “vi” (Franklin et al. 2000), der kan anvendes, og bliver anvendt, synonymt med ligeledes luftige begreber som “life”, “humanity” og “consciousness” (Musk i Zubrin 2020) og retorisk knytter mennesker sammen på tværs af tid og rum. Som Braidotti (2013) blandt andre peger på er den “existential risk”, som Musk selv kalder det, imidlertid ikke - og har aldrig været - distribueret ligeligt mellem mennesker eller mere-end-menneskelige aktører, og på den måde slører de brede samlebetegnelser globale forskelle. Ligeledes indikerer det visuelle materiale, at det i særlig grad er nordamerikansk øvre-middelklasse-kultur, der skal overflyttes til Mars og dermed konserveres. For eksempel viser en centralt placeret visualisering af livet på Mars på SpaceX hjemmeside en tilsyneladende Mars-boende kernefamilie i pænt hverdagstøj med jeans og pull-overs - mor, far, datter og søn – der, trygt skærmet bag en glasrude, beundrer udsigten ud over en lille Mars-bosættelse af bikubelignende konstruktioner og en stor lysende, biosfære med tætvoxende grønne planter, mens et rumskib letter i horisonten og spreder en tyk over Mars-overfladen. Måske er den på vej tilbage mod jorden måske tilbage til Jorden, måske til Saturn-månerne Titan eller Enceladus – eller videre endnu: Tilværelsen ser mageligt let ud for den nære fremtids The Jetsons, der umærkeligt er flyttet fra Ligustervænet til Mars. At familien tilmed er animeret med antydet brun hudfarve fungerer som understøttelse af den astrofuturistiske utopi, hvor Mars-frontier’en

iscenesættes som et sted, hvor sociale forskelle udviskes og universel lighed, for de, der kan inkluderes i “universel menneskelighed”, hersker (Kilgore 2003).

Brugen af ordet “civilisation” om det, der er truet, antyder desuden, at der her er tale om en vestlig, imperialistisk konfiguration af menneskelighed som kategori. Begrebet henter, som vi har set hos blandt andre Cudworth og Hobden betydning i en adskillelse og hierarkisering mellem kultur og natur, det civiliserede og det vilde, det rationelle og det kaotiske og trækker tydelige tråde til jordisk kolonihistorie. De kolonihistoriske associationer bliver forstærket yderligere, når Musk flere steder knytter ordet “spacefaring” til civilisationen (se blandt andet Musk i Zubrin 2020, 6:08), og på den måde fremkalder associative forbindelser til tidligere tiders store ‘seafaring civilizations’, for eksempel vikingerne eller kolonitidens Europas magtfulde riger, som England, Frankrig og Portugal.

Det multiplanetære menneskeliv forestilles således, muliggjort af produktionen af livet på Jorden som en påtvungen straf med døden til følge, som spændende (“exciting”) og repræsenterer en fremtid, som er værd at se frem til – en optimering af menneskelivet, ikke kun for arten som helhed, men også på individniveau, gennem det blotte håb om projektets forløsning (Tutton 2018).

Livets gave

Musikken forstummer, og skibet med dets lysende blå motorer står alene mod den sorte himmel. På dette tidspunkt i videoen foretager rumskibet en uventet transformation: Ud fra siderne skyder tynde, viftelignende solpaneler, som får det til ligne et lille, flyvende insekt. Vi følger den gennem rummet, mens afstanden til Jorden øges, ser vi på en lille tæller, sekund for sekund. Lysende glider den igennem et enormt mørkt rum, “INTERPLANETARY COAST”, står der, med små skinnende stjerner i baggrunden. Og så, endelig, er den i sigte, den runde, røde planet. Et heroisk synthesizer-tema sætter ind, og rumskibet

begynder sin hæsblesende vej ned mod overfladen. Vingerne er nu foldet ind, og i form som en lille patron skyder den gennem Mars' atmosfære og lander med sine fire fødder plantet solidt på overfladen, indhyllet i støv. Først nu ser vi besætningen igen. De har ryggen vendt mod os, og ansigterne vendt mod rumskibets luge. Den glider op og afslører Mars' rødlige overflade mod en blå himmel, badet i behageligt sollys. Herefter klippes der brat til en sekvens af Mars set fra rummet, roterende om sin egen akse. Planeten drejer hurtigere og hurtigere, som i et slags timelapse, hvor tiden løbende komprimeres. Oceaner med flydende blå vand dukker op på den røde overflade, vegetation breder sig og farver de golve klippeområder grønne. Da planeten stopper med at dreje, og billedet går i sort, er Mars forvandlet til en slags Jorden 2.0. Publikum klapper og hujer højlydt. Musk ser afventende ud over stolerækkerne og siger så: "So what you saw there is really quite close to what we will actually build".

Videsekvensen beskrevet herover indtager en central placering i Musks oplæg i forbindelse med IAC i 2016 (Musk 2016, 21:38), både fordi den tidsmæssigt fremkommer i præsentationens gyldne snit, ca. 20 minutter inde i 1 time og 5 minutters præsentation, men også fordi den præsenteres af Musk som en præcis visualisering af SpaceX's konkrete Mars-planer: Den er, lægger Musk særligt vægt på, "not an artists expression", men derimod "made from SpaceX's engineering CAD-models" (ibid, 21:45). Videoens naturalistiske visuelle stil underbygger budskabet fra den administrerende direktør: At vi her bliver præsenteret for noget, der har rod i virkeligheden og videnskaben, i troværdige, tekniske design-modeller, snarere end i fantasi eller utopi. Det er "what we plan to try to make it look like" (ibid., 21:56).

Videoen præsenterer Mars på to måder, som begge, om end lidt paradoksalt, er typiske for SpaceX' formidling: Som noget, der er markant anderledes end Jorden – en mystisk, øde planet, som man skal krydse store tomrum og fjerne "interplanetære kyster" for at nå frem til. Men også som

noget, der har en form for slægtskab med Jorden (Markley 2005): Blot ved at mennesker flytter dertil, kan den for eksempel komme til at ligne og fungere som Jorden. Dette bliver tydeligt illustreret i terraforming-sekvensen til sidst i videoen, hvor Mars' for mennesket golde natur domesticeres, civiliseres (Cudworth og Hobden, 2014) og animeres til genkendelig, frodig Jordlighed.

Videsekvensen fra Musks foredrag i 2016 er ikke det eneste sted i det empiriske materiale, hvor denne type af forskels- og lighedsskabende-dynamikker, med mennesket og teknologien som mediator, finder sted. I 2017 ekspliciteres det for eksempel hvordan selv farverne på skumring og dagslys på Jorden og Mars er i poetisk og fascinerende kontrast: "(O)n Mars, the sky is blue at dawn and dusk and red during the day. It is the opposite of Earth" (Musk 2017, 40:20), og i 2020 hører vi, hvordan livet på Mars er barskt, og naturen, som her undtagelsesvist får tildelt tydelig agens (Chen 2012), vil gå til modangreb på selv det mindste truede fremmedlegeme, der forsøger at gøre sit indtog. Som Musk ikke videre fortrøstningsfuldt formulerer det: "(a)nything that can survive on Mars is so freaking tough, it is insane" (Musk i Zubrin 2020, 28:22). Planeten kan med andre ord også forsvare sig selv, hvis den vil, og rumekspansionismens fortalere er således fritaget fra bekymringer om, hvad deres fremtidige fremfærd der vil bringe med sig.

Sådanne kontinuerlige bevægelser mellem andetgørelse og familiarisering har Mbembe blandt andre peget på som karakteristiske for imperialistiske tankegange. Han skriver for eksempel om de koloniserede indbyggere i Afrikas liv som repræsenteret ved to tegn: Det monstrøse, "Of what, even as it opens an appealing depth before us, is constantly eluding and escaping us" (Mbembe 2001, 1), og det intime, "he/she is familiar to us. We can give an account of him/her in the same way we can understand the psychic life of the beast. We can even through a process of domestication and training, bring the African to where he or she can enjoy a fully human life." (ibid., 2) På samme måde synes Mars både sær og sært familiær i SpaceX's formidling; både ufremkommelig og upåvirkelig af "anything we send from

Earth” (Musk i Zubrin 2020, 28:22) og potentielt, med menneskelig intervention, Jordan 2.0, fyldt med spirende liv.

Visuelle repræsentationer af Mars’ ’tomme’, golde og ubeboede overflade er ligeledes gennemgående i det empiriske materiale og bidrager, udover at iscenesætte Mars som en slags terra nullius, en uforløst ’ny verden’ (Deudney 2020; Schwartz 2017), til at legitimere menneskelig kolonialisering af Mars, som noget der ikke kun er til gavn for mennesker, men også for Mars, som i denne tankegang modtager liv og mening i koloniseringsøjeblikket:

”So how do we figure out how to take you to Mars and create a self-sustaining city—a city that is not merely an outpost but which can become a planet in its own right, and thus, we can become a truly multi-planetary species?” (Musk 2016, 2.50).

Ligesom at Afrika hos Mbembe først opstår i det øjeblik kontinentet kan gøres til redskab for koloniherrødmødet, bliver Mars for alvor til som planet, ”become a planet in its own right”, med menneskelig intervention. Før var der ingenting, ”nothingness” (Mbembe 2001, 4). Der optegnes ligefrem en form for sammenvikling af skæbner mellem mennesket og Mars: Mennesket kan bringe Mars til live ved at indtage den, og Mars kan bringe menneskeligheden til (mere) liv ved at tillade den, at nå sit ypperste udviklingsstadium: ”become a truly multi-planetary species” (se forrige sektion).

Skæbnesammenfaldet ligger desuden ikke blot i fremtiden: En pointe, der får plads både i videomaterialet og på SpaceX’s hjemmeside (se for eksempel SpaceX, Uden dato B) er netop, at Mars i tidligere tider har været ”a lot like earth” (Musk 2016, 5.40). Jordlignelsen af Mars, gennem blandt andet opvarmning, bliver således fremstillet som et projekt, der handler om at tage Mars tilbage til en mere levende og jordlignende fortid; genoplive den. Kolonisering opstår her som en slags ”livets gave”, gavmildt overbragt fra animacitetshierarkiets top til bund. Som Mbembe tidligere har beskrevet: ”(...) The colonial potentate also portrays itself as a free gift, proposing to relieve its object of poverty and free it from debased condition by raising it to the level of a human being”

(Mbembe 2001, 34-35). Vi ser desuden eksempler denne Mars’ menneskeligt iværksatte rejse mod livagtighed og mening i foredraget fra 2017: Blandt andet viser Musk, som afslutning på sin tale over en serie billeder, hvordan den forestillede Mars-by vil brede sig fra en simpel base til en hel ecumenopolis, som førnævnte Galactic Empires Trantor, genkendeligt organiseret med huse, veje og grønne oaser pakket ind i drivhuse.

I Musks (2017, 39:20) oplæg ler og klapper publikum højere for hver gang billedet skifter, og byen forgrener sig endnu et stykke ud over Mars-overfladen. Musk afslutter showet med et afslappet: ”Yeah and... over time, terraforming Mars and make it really a nice place to be” (ibid., 39:55), hvortil en tilskuer begejstret råber ”You can do it, Elon!” og den mørklagte sal stemmer i med højlydt jublen. Forestillingen om den koloniserede røde planet har tilsyneladende affektiv værdi (Chen 2013), som ikke kun er baseret på vestlig undergangsparanoia (se forrige sektion), men også glæde, optimisme og håb (Tutton 2018).

Igen indtager medier og teknologi, på flere niveauer, en væsentlig rolle i formidlingen af og produktionen af disse forestillinger, som det, der både materielt og symbolsk bringer liv og fremtid til Mars og til mennesket. I videoen repræsenteres denne vitaliserende teknologi for eksempel ved det falliske rumfartøj og til sidst den lille patronformede tilbageværende del af rumskibet, der som sædcellesubstitut sætter terraforming-processen i gang (se Fig. 7) og dermed befrugter Mars med liv i grønt og blå. Musk trækker selv en sådan maskulint kønnet forbindelse mellem fartøj og fallos, når han gentagne gange taler om, at ”size matters” (Musk i Zubrin 2020, 13:32), når det handler om rumskibe, eller spøgefuldt indskyder ”it’s quite big” (Musk 2016, 24:51), da billedet af SpaceX’s nyeste rumskibsmodel, Starship, toner frem på skærmen under hans foredrag. Denne type sammenligninger er, over årene, blevet fast inventar på ”space race”-entreprenørernes Twitter-profiler (Mcenery 2019) – et, om end kuriøst, eksempel på, hvordan medier, teknologier og kroppe væver sig sammen, og på hvordan teknologien både kønnes, seksualiseres, feticheres og tilsyneladende også indtager en plads i det reproduktive domæne indenfor

denne form for transhumanistisk, rumekspansivistisk ideologi (Braidotti 2013; Bryld og Lykke, 2002; Franklin et al. 2000).

Mars bliver altså i SpaceX’ formidling forestillet som en slags Janushoved: Den ene side - gold og øde, Jordens mystiske modsætning med en livløshed, der berettiger at betragte den som objekt for menneskers ageren (Chen 2012). Den anden side - Jordens nære slægtning, klar til at puste liv i ved hjælp af menneskelig teknologisk intervention. Som når Musk gennemgår forskelle og ligheder mellem Jorden og Mars og konkluderer, at den eneste afgørende variation mellem de to er antallet af mennesker, der bebor dem – og konstaterer, at dét kan ændres: “We just need to change that bottom row. Because currently, we have 7 billion people on Earth and zero on Mars” (Musk 2016, 6.48, se også SpaceX Uden dato B).

Liv i galaksens overhalingsbane

I 2017 havde Musk udvidet sin præsentation af SpaceX’ Mars-program fra 2016 på en række områder: For det første kunne han nu præsentere en mere økonomisk bæredygtig model for projektet end tidligere: “I think we figured out how to pay for it!” (Musk 2017, 3:01). I umiddelbar forlængelse heraf kunne han, for det andet, præsentere et nyt fartøj, der kunne erstatte hele tre tidligere SpaceX-fartøjer på én gang – det, der i dag hedder Starship, men på det tidspunkt gik under navnet BFR, en forkortelse for Big Falcon Rocket eller, i mere joviale sammenhænge, Big Fucking Rocket (Coldewey 2018). En tredje markant, men måske mindre umiddelbart opsigtsvækkende, ændring i materialet var imidlertid, at han, modsat foredraget i 2016, hvor han afslutningsvist foreslog, at SpaceX-systemerne kunne bruges til udforskning og kolonisering længere ude i solsystemet, endte med at tage publikum med tilbage til Jorden: Foredragets finale var således en video, som medierede SpaceX’s Mars-rumskibe ind i en ny og anderledes kontekst som terrestrialt transport-system for transnationale pendlere (Musk 2017, 40:50):

“NEW YORK CITY. 6 AM.” Vi svæver med kameraet langs en havnefront med tilhørende genkendelig Manhattan-skyline badet i gulligt morgenlys. En besætning af anonyme silhuetter går over en landgangsbro mod en groft animeret færge. Et skilt lyser op på broen: “NOW BOARDING”, signalerer det: “NEW YORK CITY TO SHANGHAI. DEPARTS AT 7.00 AM. STATUS: ON TIME”. Nederst på skiltet ses en afbildning af Jorden set fra rummet og et SpaceX-logo. Herefter toner nye informationer frem på den digitale skærm: “DISTANCE: 7392 ML/11897 KM. TRAVEL TIME: 39 MINUTES”.

Musikken forstærkes, da færgen skyder afsted gennem vandet og ud mod en affyringsrampe, hvor et stort rumfartøj står klar. Besætningen går ombord. Sekunder efter suzer fartøjet gennem luften til lyden af et vandfald af violiner. Kameraet fortsætter længere og længere ud i rummet, indtil rumfartøjet til sidst blot er en lille streg på billedet, der skjøtter hen over jordkloden i en blød bue. Sekunder senere er det landet i Shanghai, hvor himlen er mørkeblå, og storbyen lyser op i baggrunden i regnbuens farver.

Der klippes nu til en visualisering af en planet set fra rummet, roterende om sin egen akse. Denne gang er det ikke Mars, men Jorden. Hen over skærmen, med den roterende kugle i baggrunden, får vi præsenteret en lang række fiktive rejsetider mellem verdens metropoler: “Hong Kong to Singapore: 22 min.”, “Los Angeles to Toronto: 24 min.”, “Bangkok to Dubai: 27 min.” Skriften skifter hurtigere og hurtigere, nye byer og nye tidsangivelser, men mønsteret er det samme: Et overvældende væld af langdistancerejser, foretaget på minutter. Publikum klapper ivrigt. “Anywhere on Earth in under an hour” står der til sidst, mens turkisblå flyveruter tegner sig ud over hele kloden.

Med afsæt i det empiriske materiale, ser vi, i dette sidste analyseafsnit på, hvordan det

multiplanetære menneske bliver indskrevet i en velkendt diskurs om globalisering som ubegrænsede muligheder og friktionsløs færden ved hjælp af nye teknologier, transportsystemer og digitale medier (Franklin et al. 2000; Kilgore 2003). Her på tværs af nationale grænser som globaliteter, fremstår multiplanetaritet som rammen om et spændende og samtidig komfortabelt liv i universets overhalingsbane: “The great thing about going to space is that there is no friction. So once you are out of the atmosphere it will go smooth as silk. No turbulence, nothing.” (ibid., 42:53). Det multiplanetære menneske bliver kædet sammen med en forlængelse af et liv i den jordiske globale, kosmopolitiske elite, som et supermobilt subjekt for hvem idéen om globaliseringens tid-rum-fortætning først og fremmest er en gevinst (Braidotti 2013; Jansson 2017).

Særligt tydeligt bliver dette i iscenesættelserne af livet ombord på et Mars-rumskib, for eksempel på den virtuelle rundtur i SpaceX’ Mars-rumskibs besætningsafdeling, som Musk senere i foredraget tager publikum med på. Her viser Musk rundt i en animeret afdeling af fartøjet, der fremstår lys og ren, dog slående umøbleret, i en forventeligt minimalistisk, futuristisk stil, og turen slutter symbolsk med at kameraet uproblematisk glider gennem vinduet, ud mod Mars (Musk, 2016, 41:38). Grænser og naturlove ophæves – ja, faktisk, eksisterer de ikke. Musk forklarer efterfølgende:

I just want to give you a sense of what it would actually be like to be in the spaceship. In order to make it appealing and increase that portion of the venn-diagram of people who would actually want to go, it’s got to be really fun and exciting. It can’t feel cramped or boring. So the crew compartment, or the occupant compartment, is set up so that you can do zero G games, you can float around, there would be movies, electropuls, cabins, a restaurant. It will be like... really fun to go. You are going to have a great time. (ibid, 41:59).

Rumskibets besætning er her mere “occupants” end “crew”, og livet ombord og *abroad* bliver

animeret som en stereotypisk gennemsnits-amerikanernes paradys (Kilgore 2003): Der vil være restauranter og mulighed for en tur i biografen. Billetten til planeten skal, hører vi i samme oplæg, koste det samme som et gennemsnitligt hus i USA (Musk 2016., 8:33). Jobsikkerheden ved ankomst kan garanteres på forhånd: “Jobs will not be in short supply” (ibid., 9.20), og internetforbindelsen ligeså (Musk i Zubrin 2020, 40:31). Så snart systemet til at producere brændstof *in situ* er færdigudviklet, vil der være mulighed for at tage på rumsafari, “planet hopping or moon hopping” (Musk 2016, 1:03:21) til “anywhere you want in the greater solar system” (ibid, 1:04:20). Der vil være planter “just making oxygen all day long” (Musk i Zubrin 2020, 16.35) og livlig trafik, der sørger for at fragte mennesker og ressourcer til og fra Mars på daglig basis, forsikrer han desuden med reference til den militaristiske amerikanske sci-fi-serie “Battlestar Galactica” (2004/1978): “The Mars colonial fleet would depart en masse, kind of like Battlestar Galactica, if you have seen that thing. Good show” (Musk 2016, 23:15). Modsat Jorden konstrueres Mars i disse eksempler som symbol den ultimative uindskrænkede frihed, en lovende “space frontier” (Kilgore 2003; Schwartz 2017) fuld af muligheder for spirende liv, selvrealisering og magelig, genkendelig konsumeristisk livsførsel: En planet lige til at varme op, “nuke”, som der står på en af de mange t-shirts SpaceX sælger i deres hjemmeside-shop (“Nuke Mars”, SpaceX Uden dato D), i mikrobølgeovnen, som en kop nudelsuppe eller en frysepizza.

Formidlingen gør projektet både genkendeligt og spændende, men de fuldender også iscenesættelsen af Musk som SpaceX’ frontfigur og ikon for det multiplanetære menneske: Han er virkelighedens Tony Stark (Langmann 2022): den rige velgører, der kan få ting til at ske, idealisten, kosmopolitten og pioneren med de vilde, modige og innovative idéer og en ukuelig tro på en bedre fremtid, og samtidig – insideren, nørden, der kan både sin ingeniør- og internetjargon og sine referencer til kult-fiktion – en lidt usandsynlig helt, der er kommet langt på grund af sin dedikation og engagement i sub- eller måske ligefrem modkulturen. Approprieringen af Occupy Wall

Street-bevægelsens slogan og æstetik på t-shirten med påskriften ”Occupy Mars”, der er til salg i SpaceX’ hjemmesides indbyggede ”shop” (SpaceX Uden dato D) fungerer som et tydeligt eksempel på denne selvscenesættelse.

Troen på og håbet om en fremtidig mulighed for en abstrakt multiplanetær menneskelighed spiller, snarere end den virkelige mulighed for selv at ”blive multiplanetær”, en central rolle i formidlingen af og argumentationen for Mars-kolonialisering: Musk nævner selv, at en selvopretholdende by på Mars formentlig ikke kommer til at ske i hans levetid (Musk i Zubrin, 2020, 5:09), men *håbet om muligheden* for et multiplanetært liv fremstilles uagtet som noget, der fylder hverdagen med glæde, fremtidstro, motivation og optimisme – noget, som kan disciplinere individer hen imod forestillingen om den produktive og aktive borger, der står motiveret ud af sengen om morgenen:

”We need things that make you want to get out of bed in the morning and be excited about the future. And I think being a space-faring civilization is one of those things that everyone can get excited about.” (Musk i Zubrin 2020, 6:08).

Drømmen om multiplanetaritet er, synes det, i sig selv nok til at legitimere multiplanetaritet som mål. Dette er, som Franklin et al. (2000, 32) skriver, ”the advent of panhumanity”: ”(it) seems to offer the possibility of both a future that can be anticipated and a future that might never happen: tomorrow, and the possibility that tomorrow might never come.”

Vi har i dette afsnit vist, hvordan det multiplanetære menneskeliv hos SpaceX forestilles i forlængelse af specifikke kulturelle fortællinger om det gode og udbredelsesværdige menneskeliv som et både socialt og fysisk mobilt, komfortabelt og underholdende liv, organiseret inden for rammerne af det, Braidotti (2013, 59) ville kalde ”advanced capitalism.” Forestillingen trækker på en ”American Dream”-dramaturgi (Kilgore 2003), hvor det potentielt multiplanetære menneske indgår i en slags ”zero to hero”-fortælling og derved bevæger sig fra animacitetshierarkiets bund til det ydre

rum - på vej til Mars og på vej til at føre menneskeligheden forbi Det Store Filter mod ”colonization explosion” (Hansson 1998). Troen på multiplanetaritet fragter således i fortællingen visionære mennesker fra Jordens til solsystemets elite – og på sigt: fra en døende planet til et mere frit og levende liv ”among the stars” (SpaceX Uden dato B).

Konklusion. Hvem er ombord?

I en historisk kontekst hvor udtrykket ”fodaftryk” (”footprints”) på Jordoverfladen, medmindre man kan kalde dem både grønne og smittefri, unægtelig klinger kontroversielt, påkalder det sig kritisk, kulturanalytisk opmærksomhed, at fodaftryk på lige præcis Mars i vid udstrækning vækker både national stolthed og international samarbejdsvilje, håb og optimisme. I denne artikel har vi således rettet opmærksomhed mod forestillingen om at udvikle mennesket til en multiplanetær art gennem ikke bare fodaftryk på, men decideret kolonisering af netop Mars, som den kommer til udtryk hos en af ”den nye rumalders” (Washington Post Staff, 2023) mest markante aktører, SpaceX. Vi har igennem vores analyse argumenteret for, at det multiplanetære menneske forestilles i forlængelse af tre tematiske tråde hos SpaceX: Multiplanetaritet som risikohåndtering, som en ”livets gave” til både Mars og mennesker og som en del af et komfortabelt, kosmopolitisk pendlerliv – en drøm, der skal få mennesker overalt på Jorden til at glædes over og være optimistiske omkring deres liv og fremtid (Musk i Zubrin 2020, 6:08), uagtet at Mars-kolonisering formentlig ikke kommer til at ske i deres levetid (ibid. 5:09). Vi ser altså i SpaceX’ version af det multiplanetære menneske ikke blot en vision om et radikalt brud med jordoverfladen, en ny og anderledes værensform ”among the stars” (SpaceX Uden dato B), men også en reproduktion af kendte troper fra efterkrigstidens rum-alder (Bryld og Lykke 2002) og genetablering af, i en euro-amerikansk kontekst, kulturelt dominerende sociale og kulturelle normer og hierarkier.

Forestillingen om mennesket ’efter Jorden’ er så afgjort en forestilling, der involverer menneskelige og mere-end-menneskelige aktører

(Aronowsky 2017; Rahder 2019). Robotter, raketter, plantefrø, kemikalier, bakteriekolonier, luft, vand og jord bliver sat i både diskursiv og materiel bevægelse - allerede på vejen mod Mars vil det at kunne indgå i og opretholde økosystemer være afgørende egenskaber for astronauternes overlevelse: ombord på rumskibet er interdependens, som Leah V. Aronowsky skriver, ”literally, a way of life” (Aronowsky 2017: 372). Netop derfor er det afgørende at undersøge - og udfordre - måder hvorpå ledende rumaktører forstår, indgår i og formidler disse mere end menneskelige relationer.

SpaceX’ formidling fungerer på mange måder som en naturalisering af idéen om det multiplanetære menneske: Multiplanetaritet opstår

som både et moralsk imperativ og et evolutionært ’naturligt’ næste skridt for mennesket som art. En feministisk posthumanistisk analysestrategi kan imidlertid anvendes til at foretage den modsatte bevægelse og aktivt af-naturalisere projektet - vise, hvordan denne ”basale” vision om en multiplanetær menneskelighed (Zubrin 2020, 0:40), snarere end at være en evolutionær selvfølgelighed, er en knudret, ikke-uskyldig, kulturel konstruktion, hos SpaceX opretholdt af transhumanistisk, antropocentristisk og dikotomisk tænkning og kapitalistiske infrastrukturer, og ved at pege på netop konstruktionens kontingens skabe rum for andre måder at tænke, tale og handle på.

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Listening to the Ancestral Wisdom of Diatomite Cliffs: Rethinking Danish History in Times of Climate Catastrophe

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Abstract

This article focuses on green politics in Denmark, highlighting how mainstream political rhetorics with cruel optimism promote the country as a green world leader, while turning a blind eye to the ecocides that have formed its landscapes. The primary aim is to critically consider how the terraforming of farmland through ecocidal approaches has been naturalized and normalized as part of national identity-building. A second aim is, affirmatively, to explore whether affected and affecting creative writing and speculative story-telling can be used to counter-act the cruelly optimistic indifference and insensitivity towards the more-than-human world, cultivated through normalization and naturalization. The article uses a vignette methodology. Two vignettes focus on human-human power relations, reflecting on the formation of Danish national identity during modernity. The third vignette shifts the perspective through a writing experiment, telling a speculative-spectrally fictionalized version of Danish history from a *more-than-human* perspective. A cliff, made by the micro-algae, diatoms, 55 million years ago, performs as the protagonist of a folktale-inspired story about the coming into being of Denmark through series of ecocides. The conclusion reflects on the defamiliarizing effects of the posthuman poetics used in the third vignette's writing experiment, and compares notes with posthumanist and decolonial scholarship.

KEYWORDS: green politics, Danish history, cruel optimism, ecocidal approaches, speculative story-telling, defamiliarizing

Introduction

“Blah-blah-blah” was Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg’s comment on the outcome of the UN’s climate conference, COP26, in Glasgow, October–November 2021 (Thunberg 2021). The “Blah-blah-blah” slogan was repeated on banners carried by activists who demonstrated in Glasgow to pressure world leaders to take more effective action against climate change. This article takes off from the “Blah-blah-blah” slogan, and the gaps in current political debates between climate activists and established politics on ways to ensure sustainable multispecies co-habitation on the planet. On the one hand, climate activists from all over the world articulate the urgency to radically rethink, reimagine and change current, modern worlding practices, shaped during the last centuries of capitalist and colonial expansion and extractivism. On the other hand, established, mainstream politics seems unable to detach itself from the pragmatics of here-and-now geopolitical and national power struggles, and is bent on promoting tech-fix solutions to the climate crisis without taking the need for radical change into consideration. ‘Green’ solutions such as the use of Power-to-X technologies¹ to reduce CO₂ emissions into the atmosphere are, for example, called upon as if they were magic wands that can guarantee voters the smooth continuation of their current modern lifestyles and patterns of consumption.

The more urgent the climate catastrophe and the general ecological crises become, the more widely tech-fix rhetorics are mobilized to perform in the service of what cultural critic Lauren Berlant (2011) calls cruel optimism. Berlant defines cruel optimism as being attached to a desired individual or broader political goal, the materializing of which, at the same time, becomes an obstacle to the flourishing of those attracted to it. Even though Berlant does not discuss the climate question, her cultural analysis of cruel optimism fits the ways in which world leaders, governments and mainstream publics often approach ecological crises, including the climate issue. The desired goal is to maintain modern lifestyles and consumption patterns, and through utilitarian alliances provide

frameworks for eternally perpetuated capitalist profit-making. But the deepening of the ecological crises and the increasingly frequent climate change-related disasters demonstrate that the continued pursuit of these goals leads towards planetary depletion and environmental collapse. Nonetheless, a rhetoric of cruel optimism is mobilized to gloss over the dilemmas.

I suggest that what Thunberg and other climate activists do with the “Blah-blah-blah” slogan is to disrupt the cruelly optimistic, mainstream political rhetorics on climate change mitigation through tech-fix solutions. “Blah-blah-blah” is a precise diagnosis of the widespread, cruelly optimistic rhetorics of political establishments. The “Blah-blah-blah” response is a way of speaking truth to power – a critical-affirmative pinpointing of the urgent need for a radical shift of rhetorics to disrupt epistemologies of ignorance and to trouble the gaze that, with cruel optimism, normalizes the crises and mobilizes tech-fixes as magic wands.

In this article, I reflect upon the ethico-political and affective shifts that the “Blah-blah-blah” slogan calls for. But I also consider the ways in which investments in cruel optimism prevent such shifts from happening. The focus is green politics in Denmark – a country which cruelly optimistic, mainstream political rhetorics promote as a world leader in green politics, while turning a blind eye to the ecocides that have made it one of the most terraformed countries in the world, surpassed only by Bangladesh in terms of the compass of arable land (59.8%). On the one hand, it is my aim to critically consider the shaping of Denmark as a nation during modernity, which for specific historical and geographical reasons has normalized and naturalized the terraforming of farmland through ecocidal approaches in even more intense ways than is the case in the surrounding parts of Northern Europe. On the other hand, I wish to explore whether affected and affecting story-telling can be used to counter-act the cruelly optimistic indifference and insensitivity that have been cultivated and sustained through these processes of normalization and naturalization.

The article is structured as three inter-related vignettes that together critically address

Denmark's ecocidal necropolitics, and affirmatively try to trace more-than-human agencies with which green politics should create alliances rather than continue to ignore. Vignette 1 discusses how a specific kind of cruel optimism historically became part of Danish national identity-building during modernity. It focuses on the formation of a cultural imaginary, built on a narrative about compensating for drastically shrinking external borders through internal expansion of agricultural lands, set in motion as huge terraforming efforts to cultivate heathlands and drain peatlands. Vignette 2 highlights some disastrous contemporary effects of the intensive internal Danish expansion of agricultural lands in previous centuries. I exemplify with two currently ongoing ecological disasters, both involving crucial but submerged more-than-human agencies – of algae and peat – that call for attunement and alliance-building rather than neglect. I discuss how the cruel optimism that is analysed in Vignette 1 as embedded in a certain nationally cherished version of Danish history seems to sustain epistemologies of ignorance vis-à-vis these disasters and uphold an affective *indifference* to the crucial but submerged perspectives of dead and dying seabeds and peatlands.

While the first two vignettes consider Danish history with a focus on *human* power relations, Vignette 3 turns the tables. Through a fiction writing experiment, it presents snapshots from a speculative-spectrally fictionalized version of Danish history, told from a *more-than-human* perspective. A cliff, made by the micro-algae, diatoms, 55 million years ago, and located in the Danish fjord, Limfjorden, on the island Fur, is made to perform as the protagonist of a folktale-inspired story about the coming into being of Denmark through a series of ecocides. Through the story, I raise the speculative question: what if we started to attune to and listen to the spectres of dying seabeds, peatlands and cliffs scarred by commercial mining?

In the conclusion, I reflect on the narrative shift from a human to a more-than-human vantage point, undertaken through the move from Vignettes 1 and 2 to the writing experiment in Vignette 3. I consider whether the folktale genre, embedded as it is in ancient, a-modern² cosmologies which do

not differentiate between human and non-human, culture and nature, life and non-life, may be apt for eco-ethical kinds of story-telling that can contribute to defamiliarizing departures from the cruelly optimistic “Blah-blah-blah” discourses and their foundations in human exceptionalist thought. To sustain my arguments I reflect on the power of activism (Funderburk 2021), i.e. the mixing of art/story-telling/research/eco-political activism. Moreover, I compare notes with posthumanist and decolonial scholarship on indigenous modes of entering into more-than-human alliances.

Vignette 1: Terraforming Denmark during Modernity

That Denmark's official promotion of itself as a world leader in green politics is built on shaky ground and embedded in a problematic rhetoric of cruel optimism becomes clear when we look at some statistics. If we consider the overall percentages of land that has been terraformed, i.e. transformed through human intervention from ‘wild’ to ‘domesticated’, Denmark stands out as the top terraformer in the European Union, and worldwide as well. With 59.8% arable land in 2021, Denmark shares the position as the most terraformed country on the planet with Bangladesh (Arp 2022; World Bank 2024).

The terraforming of Denmark has taken place in a highly accelerated form as part of the process of modernity. In the period 1750–1950, heathlands, which previously covered large parts of Denmark, particularly the peninsular of Jutland, shrank to a minimum due to systematic cultivation (Nielsen 2012). During the same period, peatlands, also widespread in Denmark before modernity, have been drained on a large scale, and, like the heathlands, transformed into agricultural areas. Around 1800 wild bogs and meadows constituted 25% of the Danish land area, whereas these types of wetlands today make up only 4.5% (lex.dk 2024).

Historically, the intensive cultivation of land in Denmark is linked to a national history of loss. Danish history throughout modernity is to a large

extent a history of loss of territory as part of the many bloody wars that characterized the formation of the European nation-states from early modernity to the two world wars of the 20th century. From the mid-17th century to the late 19th century, the Danish nation-state was formed through wars, in particular with the neighbouring nation-states of Sweden and Germany. It is a historical fact that Denmark lost most of these wars, and the nation-state-building was, therefore, accompanied by a drastic loss of the territory that the Danish kings and nation-builders tried to lay claim to. What is now considered Southern Sweden, the regions of Skåne, Halland and Blekinge, were before the 17th century considered Danish territory, and characterized by close cultural bonds with Denmark in terms of language and local customs (Sanders 2006). However, these lands were lost to Sweden in 1658; Øresund was constituted as a border rather than as a shared place for herring fishing (Christensen et al. 1987, 233ff). Furthermore, the whole of Norway, which since the late Middle Ages had been governed by the Danish king, was lost to Sweden in 1814 in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. Finally, the duchies of Holstein and Schleswig, also for centuries defined as belonging to the Kingdom of Denmark, were lost to Germany in 1864. A small piece of this land was transferred back to Denmark after a plebiscite in the aftermath of WWI, in 1920. But the major part of the land of the former duchies remained German after 1864.

That the formation of the Danish nation-state took place against a background of drastically shrinking territories over several centuries had a cultural and historical impact on the building of a national Danish identity that took place in the same period. A tenet that became popular in Denmark, and which even today is widely considered to account for Danish national identity, says: "What has been lost externally must be internally regained" ["Hvad udad tabes skal indad vindes"] (Hansen 2014, Ch. 8, n.p.). These kinds of tenets, publicly adopted as a mirror which many parts of a population feel reflects their national identity, are to be considered empty signifiers (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). That is, they are flexible signifiers that can be associated with many meanings.

One of the meanings that has historically been attached to this tenet in Denmark is that some kind of compensation for the 'external' territorial losses could be gained through the hard labour of cultivating the heathlands and draining the peatlands, making both kinds of land available for agricultural production.

The transformation of heathlands and peatlands into arable areas that took place in the period 1750–1950 was far from an easy or straightforward project. To a large extent, it was carried out by poor people who saw the hard work required to transform the land as perhaps their only survival strategy. It is also part of the history that many of these people remained poor, even though they sometimes succeeded in making a living through the setting up of small farms on terraformed land.

The hard lives of the people who cultivated the heathlands have been portrayed and celebrated in Danish literature by writers who came from these areas, such as Steen Steensen Blicher (1782–1848) and Jeppe Aakjær (1866–1930). Most recently, the struggle to transform the heath into arable land has been critically explored in the novel *Kaptajnen og Ann Barbara* [The Captain and Ann Barbara] by Danish writer Ida Jessen (2020), and in a film based on the novel: the award-winning epic historical drama film *Bastarden/Promised Land* (2023) by Danish filmmaker Nikolaj Arcel. From a posthuman perspective, Danish artist Grethe Wittrock put the agencies of materials from the heathlands at the centre of the exhibition *At slå rødder* [To Root], at Museum Silkeborg (2024), also inspired by Jessen's novel.

The terraforming process that took place over a period of around 200 years resulted in heathlands and peatlands being transformed into agricultural lands to such a degree that, today, there are only a few areas of heath- and peatlands left on Danish territory. Historically, the cultivation process was accompanied by agricultural reforms and the development of farmers' movements. In the late 18th century, these movements led to the Danish peasant class being freed from the feudal dependencies of noble landowners. During the 19th century, the more well-off peasants slowly gained political power. In the 20th century,

the farmers and their political representatives in different kinds of liberal parties became a major force (next to the workers' movement and the Social Democratic Party) in the development of modern Danish society. The liberal parties, the farmers' movements and their trade and lobby organizations today still take much pride in the narrative of the formation of Denmark as an agricultural nation that has historically succeeded in spite of losses – resonating with the tenet of “What has been lost externally must be internally regained”.

There are resonances between contemporary Danish farmers' movements and farmers' movements in other EU countries which, today, are protesting against green politics. However, to understand these movements, it is crucial to look at their specific historical and identity political formations in different national contexts; this is what I have tried to sketch briefly in the first vignette.

Vignette 2: Contemporary Disasters – Delaying Green Initiatives

The specific narrative of Denmark as a proud agricultural nation, forging ahead successfully in spite of a limited territory, as told in Vignette 1, has facilitated the ways in which farmers' trade and lobby organizations have today established themselves as an influential political force. The power of these organizations is nowadays often used to block or delay green initiatives that interfere with unsustainable practices of agricultural production. To illustrate this, I shall foreground two examples of green politics that, in recent decades, have been delayed with detrimental ecological effects.

One of these initiatives is political attempts to establish buffer zones between wetlands, rivers, estuaries and coastal waters, on the one hand, and fields, treated with fertilizers, consisting of nitrogens and phosphates, on the other. The lack of sufficiently large buffer zones has resulted in excessive discharges of fertilizers into wetlands, and is leading to major ecological catastrophes; Danish fjords and coastal waters are today dead or dying due to widespread oxygen depletion (Greenpeace 2022; Hansen & Rytter 2023). To illustrate

the seriousness and extent of the disaster, I quote from the most recent (2023) scientific report from the National Centre for Environment and Energy at Aarhus University that annually analyses the state of the art in Danish coastal waters:

Oxygen depletion worsened markedly during the reporting period (24 August–21 September). High water temperatures and mostly calm wind conditions stimulated the development of oxygen depletion. For the first time since 2008, there was widespread oxygen depletion in southern and central Kattegat. The most affected areas in the inner Danish waters were Limfjorden, Mariager Fjord, the southern Little Belt, the south-east Jutland fjords, the South Funen Archipelago and Fehmarn Belt. In many of these areas the bottom water was anoxic, and toxic sulphide was released from the bottom. In these areas, a large part of the water volume was affected by predominantly severe oxygen depletion. Dead fish were observed in Limfjorden, and a shroud appeared on the bottom in several areas. The extent of the oxygen depletion was the second largest ever recorded for September. In several areas, the situation was highly critical, especially for benthic animals, fish and plants. (Hansen & Rytter 2023, 8)

The immediate reason for the deadly oxygen depletion is excessive algal blooms. The underlying explanation for the disasters is unsustainable agricultural production, allowed to take place much too close to rivers, fjords and other coastal waters. The result is enormous discharges of nitrogens and phosphates into the waters (eutrofication). These discharges nourish excessive algal blooms that cause oxygen depletion which eventually kills all life in the waters. Climate change contributes as well. The algal blooms are accelerating with increased water temperatures during summers that become hotter and hotter. According to Greenpeace estimates, based on reports from the Danish Ministry of the Environment, 95% of Danish coastal waters are today dead, dying or in a very bad ecological condition (Greenpeace 2022, 1). It

is also asserted that 70% of the algal blooms must be seen as caused by discharges from agrobusinesses (Miljøministeriet 2021, 53; Greenpeace 2022, 2). The former heathlands of the peninsula of Jutland, now to a large degree taken up by pig and cow farms, are among the major polluters. The large fjord of Limfjorden, cross-cutting the northern part of Jutland, is registered as having huge problems with oxygen depletion and excessive algae growth due to discharges from these pig and cow farming businesses (Hansen & Rytter 2023, 14).

Another much-delayed green initiative is political plans to 'rewet' low-lying soils. Many of the low-lying soils in Denmark consist of drained peatlands. 'Rewetting' means undoing the drainage and allowing these lands to become wetlands again. The former peatbogs disappear when drained, and it will take centuries for them to regenerate. But a first step towards regeneration would be to allow the areas to become wetlands again. The delaying of the plans to rewet low-lying soils has dire ecological effects, insofar as peatlands sequester a lot of CO₂, while continued draining and ensuring drying processes mean the areas emit huge amounts of CO₂, formerly sequestered by the bogs. The rewetting would stop the emissions, and, in the long run, enable the restored wetlands to once again sequester CO₂.

A recent scientific report by scientists from the Department of Agroecology at Aarhus University maps the low-lying soils in Denmark (Beucher et al. 2023), while pinpointing how disastrous the delaying of the rewetting is, because CO₂ is being emitted from the drained areas much more quickly than expected. According to the report's data sets, the area of CO₂-rich low-lying soils has been reduced from 171,603 hectares in 2014 to 117,836 hectares in 2023. This implies that the peat in the 53,757 hectares that make up the difference between the 2014 and the 2023 measurements has finally died, and that all the CO₂ that this peat sequestered has been emitted into the atmosphere (Beucher et al. 2023, 9). This "reduction" is, therefore, a highly problematic expression of the fact that the peat could have lived on and a lot of CO₂ sequestered, had these soils been rewetted

during the 10-year period between the two measurements. Nonetheless, the Danish Minister of the Environment, Lars Aagaard from one of the liberal parties, Moderaterne, delivered a model example of cruel optimism on the occasion of the publication of the Aarhus scientists' findings. He declared the hectare reduction and the finally dead peatlands to be a piece of happy news, insofar as there were now fewer areas in urgent need of rewetting (Gjerding 2024)!

The delays of the rewetting of the low-lying soils and the lack of political will to establish buffer zones around coastal waters, rivers and estuaries, are detrimental. Still, they are not causing enough of a public outcry to push politicians into taking serious and immediate action. Even though green organizations, politicians and parties invested in green politics in Denmark try to draw attention to the problems, there is widespread indifference and lack of attention to the dead and dying seabeds and peatlands.

The public indifference is no doubt related to the ways in which the modern anthropocentric eye, not only in contemporary Denmark but in the modern world more generally, is highly selective when it comes to recognizing ecological disasters. Disasters are most often measured and evaluated from a human exceptionalizing and narrowly utilitarian perspective with a focus on what is good or bad for those humans who are intersectionally privileged with regard to race, class and geopolitical positioning. Moreover, it is clear that disasters that take place 'invisibly' so to speak, i.e. hidden beneath the nice-looking, blue surfaces of coastal waters,³ or under the earth's crust in prospering fields of low-lying soils, tend to fall under the radar of public attention. Merging with these more general reasons for public indifference towards dying seabeds and peatlands in Denmark, I suggest that cruel optimism – the canonized history of the country as a nation of heroic farmers who succeeded in countering external losses through excessive internal terraforming of land – also plays a role. It is too painful for mainstream Danish national self-understanding to admit that the excessive terraforming efforts of the last 200–300 years, seen in retrospect, have had disastrous

and partly irreparable ecological effects (Hansen 2014).

In light of the climate catastrophe, all the other ecological disasters and the urgent need for radical change of modern capitalist modes of production and consumption, it is clearly time to rethink the cruelly optimistic story of the formation of modern Denmark. In Vignette 3, therefore, I will try to speculatively tell a quite different – more-than-human – story about Danish history than that of heroic farmers struggling to fulfil the demands of the “What has been lost externally must be internally regained” tenet.

As a caveat, though, before I engage in my story-telling, allow me to underline that I do not consider it possible for a human (me) to transgress a human vantage point, nor do I believe in ventriloquism for more-than-human existents.⁴ So I do not pretend that Vignette 3’s alternative tale about Denmark’s formation is anything but speculative fiction. With this vignette, I want instead to pose the question of whether artistic/narrative techniques, fictional formats and experiments with posthuman poetics and speculative story-telling can prompt disruptions of indifference to other-than-human agencies, and initiate processes of re-sensitization and attunement to more-than-human worlds.

Vignette 3. Memoirs of a Diatomite Cliff – A Writing Experiment⁵

Once upon a time there was a big old cliff, made of diatomite – a soft and light, siliceous rock, formed through sediments of fossilized micro-algae of the group, diatoms. The cliff was beautifully coloured, spanning most of the spectrum of brown, red, yellow, green, blue, black, grey and white. Before it became a sedimentary cliff, it had existed as multiple swarms of diatoms, which moved around in the warm waters of a subtropical sea that around 55 million years before the Danish nation-state was constituted had covered the same area. Diatoms, existing on Earth since the Jurassic period 150 million years ago, are unique among microscopic single-cell algae insofar as they are encased by

a silica shell, called frustule. The shell gives the algae a structural colouration due to iridescence. Through various chemical processes that take place during and after sedimentation, diatomite rocks can also come to appear multi-coloured.

The old cliff had for many years been stationary, and it felt happy about the ways in which grass, bushes, flowers and trees grew big on its top. But it also remembered its youth well, and enjoyed recalling how, back then, 55 million years earlier, on the threshold between what geologists called Palaeocene and Eocene, it had existed as swarms of diatoms that had been moved around by the lazy waves of the warm sea, and later, after death, sedimented to eventually become lithified as rock. The cliff remembered how its much younger self, these youthful swarms, had practised quorum sensing, i.e. acting in unison without a leader. To swarm around in the warm waters like this had been really fun and joyful. But like oysters who swarm as larvae but set as adults, the cliff enjoyed its post-death stationary life as a gigantic rock just as much as it had liked its early life as a swarming micro-organism. It was great to feel gigantic.

When the cliff remembered its swarming life, it sometimes thought about the ways in which it had diversified back then through what human scientists much later categorized as ‘asexual’ cell division, as well as through something which the same scientists named ‘sexual’ reproduction, because it implied the work of differently built germ cells. The cliff was amused when it heard scientists, sometimes standing on the beach in front of it, describe the ‘strange’ specificities of diatom reproduction to students:

“Diatoms reproduce both sexually and asexually,” the scientists said in a serious voice. “Like other micro-algae, diatom cells divide into two genetically identical cells. Each of these cells keeps one of the two half shells of the ‘parent’ diatom and grows a smaller half shell within the original one. This process implies that new generations of diatoms get smaller and smaller. But this generational decrease has always been reversed. In longer

vegetative periods, individual diatoms grow sexually different cells, germ cells. When these germ cells are attracted to each other and fuse, they generate a so-called 'auxospore'. The 'auxospore' sheds the small silica shells, inherited from the 'parents', and develops into a much larger diatom, covered by an organic membrane, which eventually generates a bigger pair of shells. So diatoms are special because they combine sexual and asexual reproduction," the scientists ended their little lecture.

Every time the cliff heard this story, it could not help but laugh. The scientists made diatom modes of going in and out of different kinds of reproduction and diversification, which had been their way of life since the Jurassic era, sound pretty perverted and anomalous. Well, the cliff pondered, perhaps it was rather these modern scientists who were a bit perverted and anomalous. Their obsession with sex and sexual difference, female versus male, was strange. But it was amusing to see one's life and habits reflected through the eyes of a different species with other habits and desires, the cliff thought. However, why were these scientists so obsessed by the difference between sexual and asexual diatom reproduction? Just because reproduction through germ cells seemed to mean so much to the reproduction of their own human species, why did they have to make it a norm and measuring rod for everyone else? Why didn't they understand that it is exciting sometimes to fuse and produce the auxospore, while at other times it is great to just divide and become multiple without having to take a detour through sexual difference? The cliff was always puzzled when listening to the scientists.

When remembering its aeons-long life, the old cliff also thought about the harder times that had led to mass death. It remembered all too well the roaring sound of volcanoes, and the enormous ash clouds that had sometimes covered the sky 55 million years ago, when its body of sediments was formed. These were terrible times. The air and upper layers of the waters became filled with ash particles that shadowed the sun, hindering

photosynthesis and forcing some individuals in the diatom swarm into a vegetative state, while most died. Gigantic numbers of dying or vegetating diatoms in these periods were sinking to the bottom of the sea together with other algae and plants that could not photosynthesize either. Mass rotting of dead diatoms and plants on the seabed used up all the oxygen in the waters there, resulting in anoxic conditions leading to the formation of hydrogen sulphide – a gas known as a chemical asphyxiant causing even more death. Alongside the joyful times of swarming around in the warm waters, the old cliff remembered these bad times of disruption and mass death very well, when the clouds of ash from erupting volcanoes rolled over the sky, hiding the sun.

However, the cliff remembered the periods when the ash clouds arrived not only as hard and terrible. These times had also somehow been invigorating, because the mass of dead diatoms, fossilizing and gathering as layers on the seabed, was also what had set the lithification of the sedimented algae mass in motion, laying the foundation of the gigantic cliff body as it existed today. The chain reactions, started by the ash clouds, were what had made a thicker and thicker diatomite seabed emerge. From looking back at the events, the old cliff also knew that the swarms of diatoms had always returned when the ash clouds vanished. Not all diatoms had died, because they had the ability to live in a vegetative state, a kind of hibernation. When the sky had cleared, the diatoms had started to diversify again, and soon the big swarms were back. It was truly sad and terrible when the ash clouds came, the cliff thought, but the good times of swarming returned regularly. The cliff had actually counted the ash layers in its giant body, and knew that, while the sediments were building up, there had been 187 anoxic events due to volcanic eruptions, ash clouds and instants of mass death. It had also calculated that this equalled a period of about 300,000 years in its 55 million years of life, and it remembered clearly that, in between the ash events, there had been long periods of happy swarming in the warm waters. So regeneration had always occurred.

Another period of turmoil that the cliff remembered well was not so long ago, around 10,000 years back. Long before that, it had come to maturity as a gigantic – 60 metres thick – lithified sediment of diatomite seabed, and had existed as such for aeons. During the later part of these aeons, the weather had become extremely cold, and ice had covered the area which, in the cliff's youth, had been a subtropical sea. The cliff remembered that the cold in itself did not matter much to its lithified body. However, what caused a stir was when the ice started to push it around. These were again strange times full of dramatic transformations. The cliff remembered how large parts of its body were made to fold upwards, transforming it from seabed to cliff. The push of the ice was pretty hard sometimes, but the bending upwards, and the becoming-cliff raising above the sea level, was also fun, the cliff thought. It opened new horizons and gave space for the unfolding of new sensibilities, related to air rather than water. It was interesting to think about how it was made to feel wind and air against the upper part of its body, while still being grounded in its old watery sea-home with the lower parts.

Over its 55 million years of life, the cliff had experienced a lot. Many shifts between dramatic and eventful periods, and more quiet times had occurred. However, in the memories of the old cliff, the most recent decennia and decades were what really worried it. None of the earlier transformations had happened with such a frenzied speed, which made it impossible for species and minerals affected by the changes to attune and unfold processes of regeneration or morph into new formations. Such processes of attunement, regeneration and generative morphing take time. The old cliff knew from experience that transformations can take aeons. Therefore, it was really worrying, the cliff thought, to see humans in frenzied haste make farmland out of the peatlands that together with a big fjord had surrounded the cliff since the ice had melted 10,000 years earlier. These strange human creatures also changed the widespread heathlands of the area into arable land. The cliff knew, of course, that the heathlands were an outcome of earlier human interventions. After the ice

had melted, big forestry plains had developed. But since humans had started to live there, when the climate became less cold, the big forests had over the years been cut down to provide grazing opportunities for domesticated animals, and wood for cooking and heating cottages. In the long run, the forests could not stand the pressure put on them by this human use, and the disappearance of the forests had given rise to a landscape of low hardy bushes such as heatherplants. But why, the cliff thought, should all these heather and other bushes that had evolved so beautifully over centuries now all of a sudden give way to farmland?

Not that farmland per se was bad, seen from the cliff's perspective. But the transformations went much too fast, were too all-encompassing and carried out with too much violence and a lack of respect for land, waters, soil, plants, animals, algae and their mutual ecological balances and entanglements. All land around the cliff and the fjord was forced into major human-generated processes of transformation during a period of less than 200 years. It was a process that was one-sidedly governed by a human-centric approach that neglected the needs and perspectives of other species, and that in utilitarian ways only served human consumption and profit-making. Heathlands were dug up, their plant and animal life disrupted and many species made extinct. Peatbogs were drained so that the peat that had grown thick in an unbroken intergenerational continuity for thousands and thousands of years was killed from one moment to the next. When transformed into agricultural lands, the former heath- and peatlands were made to host big cow and pig farms, where the animals lived a sad prison life. Many of these farms were also located much too close to the waters of the fjord. This meant that discharge of enormous amounts of nitrogens and phosphates came to seriously damage the fjord's ecosystems and balances. What a mess these humans create, the cliff thought. The excessive discharges led the living diatoms that still abounded in the fjord to proliferate so much that they soon covered the surface waters and no sun could penetrate to the bottom, making it more and more difficult for fish, plants and algae to live there. With much sadness,

the big cliff felt the seabeds around it becoming sicker and sicker; they transformed from places where balanced cycles of life and death could unfold, instead developing sulphur bacteria and toxic iron sulphide, and, in the end, dying completely.

It added to the worries of the cliff that the humans swarming around it had also started to mine its diatomite body, digging long craters into it, systematically extracting materials and transforming them into insulation bricks and cat litter to be sold commercially. The cliff actually heard some of the miners saying that Denmark had become the next biggest producer of diatomite in the world, mining 17% of the worlds commercially sold diatomite in 2023, surpassed only by the USA, which mined 32% (U.S. Geological Survey 2024). If this excessive extraction of riches from my body continues for very long, the cliff said to itself, then my 55 million-year-old body will disappear in a few decades.

At some point the mining of diatomite stopped in the areas along the coast, and the cliff experienced a moment of relief. Not for long, however, because the area was then transformed into a popular target for the tourism industry. This meant that hordes of fossil hunters were sent out from the local natural history museum with small axes, which they used to make thousands and thousands of small holes on the surface of the cliff body. These fossil hunters do not destroy my body on such a large scale as the miners did, the cliff thought, but they, too, are seriously wounding my body through their stupid fossil hunting. Why can't they just let the fossils of plants and animals from 55 million years ago rest in the graves that my body has caringly upheld for them for aeons?

When the cliff looked at all the human-made destruction going on around it, it became really sad. It saw how the human-induced changes were different from those that took place in the past, because they were so temporally accelerated that no attunement or regeneration was possible. What happened instead was what one of the smarter humans, an eco-activist and critical extinction studies scholar, Deborah Bird Rose, called 'double-death'. The cliff had grasped this term, 'double-death', when listening to a group of eco-activists who had visited the beaches in front

of it, and organized a workshop there. The cliff had found that the term 'double-death', which the workshop participants had talked about heatedly for a whole day, so well expressed the deep sadness it felt over the dying taking place around it. This dying was so different from what it had experienced in earlier times, and the cliff felt that Rose had explained this difference perfectly. With the term 'double-death', she had defined the kind of death that finally terminates intergenerational continuity, when it makes a group (e.g. a species) become extinct rather than giving rise to new life cycles. The cliff remembered one of the workshop participants quoting Rose, saying: "The notion of double-death contrasts with the ecological and evolutionary contexts in which death is immanent in and necessary to life" (Rose 2012, 128), and, moreover, added a quote explaining her notions of 'aenocide' (the discontinuation of a generational flow through aeons) and the 'murdering' of 'ethical time':

Generational time is the time of aeons, and ethical time is the flow of death narratives across generations, aenocide is therefore "the murdering of ethical time through the annihilation of all following generations" (Hatley 2000: 2019). In considering the murder of ethical time in contexts outside the human, it becomes clear that to murder the ethical time of one group is to imperil the time of other groups, and that in fact there is no knowing where the destruction will stop. (Rose 2012, 137)

Spot-on, the old cliff thought. The intergenerational dying that takes place in the ecosystems around me now, due to excessive human interventions, is exactly what fills me with so much sadness.

In spite of the increasingly sad feelings that seized the cliff, it nonetheless felt that it had allies among the humans. The workshop participants gave the cliff hope for different futures. However, most of them spoke predominantly about the dying fish and plants which they could see immediately in the fjord. The other kinds of more invisible death taking place, such as that of diatoms

or peat, were not discussed much. The cliff noted that even these eco-activists were rather selective when it came to deciding about ecological grievability. How can I bring them to a more comprehensive understanding of what to mourn, feel compassion and advocate for, the old cliff asked itself. Would these eco-activists perhaps be more able to sense things differently and more comprehensively if I told them my story?

The cliff decided to give the story-telling a try, and this is how the tale I just told you came about. I heard it, as I have now told it to you, while sitting in front of the cliff in a contemplative mood, trying to listen carefully to its murmurs and to understand its ancestral wisdom.

Can a Shift in Vantage Point Disrupt the “Blah-blah-blah”?

In Vignettes 1 and 2, I briefly outlined the history of the Danish nation-state and national identity formation as a proud farming nation. I also reflected critically upon the excessive terraforming and extractivist efforts that accompanied the formation, and pinpointed specific kinds of cruelly optimistic and human exceptionalist discourses that have emerged from the process. In Vignette 3, I tried to imagine what an alternative history could look like, when, in a speculatively fictional mode, it was told from the submerged vantage point of the land- and seascapes being submitted to violent terraforming processes. With the telling of this alternative tale, I hope to contribute to a disruption of the “Blah-blah-blah”, through which Thunberg and other eco-activists diagnosed the cruel optimism and human exceptionalism that thrive in discourses on green politics by Danish politicians and world leaders more broadly.

The story-telling and the experimental shift in vantage point is, first and foremost, inspired by the ancient folktale genre – a genre found in most a-modern cultures, including those of Europe before modernity.⁶ As an age-old genre, folktales are temporally set in a mythical past of ‘once upon a time’, which reflects the a-modern cosm-ontologies from which the genre emerged.

I have elsewhere (Lykke 2024b) analysed this mythical time as Aionic (Deleuze 2020), i.e. related to instants working in all directions and making touch across times possible, rather than to chrononormative linearity and progress. These are cosm-ontologies in which linear time and the related idea of development from ‘primitive animism’ to ‘civilized rationality’, as well as the dichotomous distinctions such as human/non-human, culture/nature, life/non-life, now/before, natural/supernatural, do not matter or make sense. When I recycle the genre in a contemporary context, I reclaim this a-modern way of thinking-feeling beyond dichotomies – a way of thinking-feeling that today is being recognized as articulating indigenous philosophies, but whose ancient wisdoms the European folktales also articulated.

Though recycling the folktale genre in a contemporary – modern – context, I do not claim to be able to simply shed my modern skin and reconnect with a body of ‘pure’ a-modern cosmologies laying there ready and untouched for me to immerse myself in. What I try to do instead is to poetically re-enact these cosm-ontologies as they are embedded in the folktale genre – and to use an artistic re-enactment with the purpose of defamiliarizing, denaturalizing and denormalizing the cruelly optimistic, human exceptionalizing narratives of the formation of Danish national identities that I critically analysed in the first two vignettes.

Artistically ignoring the distinction between life/non-life and human/more-than-human existents, I point towards the existence of other-than-humans who can lay claim to the lands which humans in recent history named Denmark, and terraformed without taking notice of the interests and perspectives of these other-than-humans. By subjectivating the more-than-human world, including even that part of it which, according to modern distinctions, is characterized as non-life, such as lithified rock/cliff, I raise ethical and ontological questions about my human relationship to all those more-than-human existents. The format of the genre gives me the artistic possibility to position my embodied human self as an object of the gaze/perception of the more-than-humans rather than the other way round, and also to question the

human exceptionalizing teleology of a linear progress narrative within which modern histories of nation-building are normally conceived. Recycling the genre conventions of the folktale in a defamiliarizing mode makes it possible for me to critically suggest that what from a human exceptionalizing and nationalist point of view was considered progress, should perhaps rather be called ecocide and extinction when seen from this more-than-human vantage point.

Integrating a writing experiment in my analysis, I am methodologically inspired by the growing trend in posthumanist art and scholarship towards mixed-genre writing/art-making and the blurring of boundaries between creative and academic working modes. I build on the now classic theorizations of writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson 2000) and postqualitative writing (St. Pierre 2018), but also on my own earlier research on alternative writing strategies (Lykke 2014) and posthuman poetics (Lykke 2022; Lykke, Aglert & Henriksen 2024; Lykke forthcoming a). However, my use of the folktale is, furthermore, inspired by the ways in which both feminist science fiction theory (Barr 1993, 10–11; Bryld & Lykke 2000, 40) and decolonial feminism (Tlostanova 2024) suggest defamiliarization as an ethico-aesthetical writing strategy that can open new horizons, where epistemologies of ignorance and blind spots have cemented certain outlooks.

Finally, I am inspired by posthumanist and decolonial thinkers. I take clues from anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli's work on geontopower (2016) – a power that, with climate change and the debates on the present period of the planet's history as Anthropocene, the Age of 'Man', is making itself more and more forcefully known as a power formation to take into account as perhaps even more important than biopower (and its derivatives) as analysed by Foucault ([1976] 2020). While biopower puts focus on questions of ways to govern life/death relations, geontopower, Povinelli argues (2016, 4–6), addresses the regulation of the relationship between life (bios) and non-life (geos), by maintaining a sharp distinction between the two. Such a distinction allows for a rejection of indigenous claims to land rights based on ancient,

ancestral cosmologies in which, for example, a mountain or a river perform as subjects. Povinelli's examples are drawn from her longstanding collaboration with indigenous people in the Northern Territory of Australia, and show the frictions between the practices of her indigenous friends which blur the boundaries between life and non-life, and the settler colonial establishing of geontopower.

Secondly, I draw on the work of anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena (2017). With her concept of the 'Anthropo-not-seen', and use of cases from Latin America, de la Cadena has provided a theoretical platform to rethink largely invisible aspects of the Anthropocene necropolitics performed by colonialism and extractivist capitalism towards world-making processes that do not enact divisions of human/non-human, culture/nature, life/non-life, now/before, subject/object, and natural/supernatural. De la Cadena argues that when modernity commonizes these divisions, alternative world-making practices of indigenous communities that do not enact them become violently forced into these distinctions. However, the alternative practices also keep exceeding the divisions, de la Cadena underlines. She emphasizes that a focus on the excesses is important in the search for alternatives. One of the examples of excesses that she foregrounds is the Quechua word *Runakuna*, used by her indigenous friends and collaborators Mariano and Nazrio Turpo to refer to earth beings, and to articulate the way in which they experience themselves as connected to instead of separate and different from the surrounding earth, rivers, trees and animals.

Povinelli's reflections on geontopower as a key supplement to biopower, and de la Cadena's on Anthropo-not-seen excesses, resistances and processes of uncommoning the divisions, installed by macropolitical power formations, have inspired me. Together with the spiritual-material practices of co-becoming together with the Fur cliffs that, as elaborately described in my book *Vibrant Death* (2022), I developed as part of the process of mourning the death of my lesbian life partner whose ashes are spread outside of these cliffs, Povinelli and de la Cadena have helped me rethink and reimagine my relations to the cliffs,

seabeds, peat- and heathlands of the land that around 200–300 years ago was made into the nation-state of Denmark. Their theoretical frameworks made it possible to theorize the ways in which terraforming processes happening in tandem with nation-state-building were based on commoning, on making divisions between human and other-than-human, culture and nature, life and non-life into a common – normalized and naturalized – understanding. In folktales, which articulate the cosm-ontology of my human ancestors in these lands, there are no such distinctions. Mountains, bogs, trees, cliffs, seabeds etc. can speak and act as can humans. So with my telling of Danish history from the perspective of Limfjorden's diatomite seabeds and cliffs, I want to contribute to a process of *uncommoning* and *undoing* the naturalized and normalized divisions.

Taking inspiration from rock formations, which Povinelli's indigenous friends wanted to protect in accordance with ancient cosmologies, and the *Runakuna*, discussed by de la Cadena and her friends, the Turpos, I want the tale of the old cliff to suggest not only an alternative – more-than-human – vantage point, but also an alternative worlding practice. What do I mean by that? I think that current radical efforts to establish mountains, rivers and so on as entities with legal rights are important, and it would certainly represent a

leap ahead in green politics in Denmark to start approaching its more-than-human world in this way. However, I do not think that the search for a proper ethical response to the “Blah-blah-blah” should stay on the level of demanding ‘rights’ for more-than-human existents. This can be a stepping stone, not an end-goal. The discussion of ‘rights’ for non-human existents stays within a humanist framework that does not challenge the exceptionalizing view of the ‘civilized’ modern human as standard and norm. Instead, we (humans) need to re-sensitize ourselves to an understanding of the more-than-human world and our place in it that leaves behind the modern divisions of human/other-than-human, subject/object, culture/nature, life/non-life etc. What a poetic-narrative revitalizing of the cosm-ontologies reflected in the folktales can do to push us (humans) in this direction is to defamiliarize modern instrumentalizing worlding practices. I see posthuman poetics and aesthetics which, in defamiliarizing modes, work to decentre modern human perspectives and re-centre other-than-human vantage points as a way of trying to catalyse re-sensitization processes – processes that are badly needed, as Thunberg and the activists protesting under the “Blah-blah-blah” banners have reminded the world. I hope my little cliff story will be read as a humble contribution along these lines.

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Notes

- ¹ Power-to-X technology is an umbrella term for many kinds of technologies that use electrolysis (separation of the components of a substance through electricity). These technologies have been promoted by the Danish government as one of the means to reach the country's goal of a 70% reduction of CO2 emissions by 2030. Power-to-X technologies are to be combined with technologies to capture CO2 from industries with high degrees of emissions. Instead of releasing the CO2 into the atmosphere, it is to be captured, transformed through large-scale electrolysis and then stored in empty oilfields in the North Sea. There are many technical problems involved, and politicians have been criticized for promoting the idea before feasibility, risks and costs have been clarified. The optimistic Power-to-X rhetoric of Danish politicians is an example of the cruel optimism I am addressing in this article.
- ² I prefer to use the term 'a-modern' instead of 'pre-modern' to avoid a linear way of thinking history as progress narrative.
- ³ In September 2022, Greenpeace organized a series of dives to the bottom of Danish coastal waters as part of a campaign to create public awareness about the catastrophe taking place beneath the surface. Noting the widespread public indifference to the disaster of mass death of coastal waters, Greenpeace suggested that "because it takes place under the surface of the sea, we do not see it, and the responsible ministries walk under the radar". See <https://www.greenpeace.org/denmark/div/se-videoen-af-havbundens-dod/> (accessed 9 October 2022, translated from Danish by the author).
- ⁴ I adopt anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli's use of the term 'existents' (2016, 5), because it covers

subjects across borders not only between human and non-human beings, but also between life and non-life existences.

- ⁵ The geological and biological knowledge of the micro-algae, diatoms, and the mineral, diatomite (made of sediments of fossilized diatoms), on which my piece of speculative fiction writing is based, is collected through reading of scientific as well as popular science articles as part of my earlier published research and poetry on diatoms and diatomite (Lykke 2019; 2022; 2024a and b; forthcoming b; Hazekamp & Lykke 2022).
- ⁶ Danish folktales, myths and legends, like those from other parts of the world, are part of a long oral tradition, and were, in the late 19th and early 20th century, collected and published by folklorist Evald Tang Kristensen (1843–1929). Today, they can only be accessed through written sources, which nonetheless make it clear that they were shaped in a context where the divisions between human/ other-than-human, culture/nature, life/non-life, natural/supernatural etc. (the divisions that were later commonized by modernity) were not part of world-making practices.

The political economy of ecofeminist degrowth

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Abstract

Socio-ecological crises pose numerous problems for the continuity of human communities and more-than-human beings. First, previous thinkers have shown how capitalism and continuous economic growth are tightly linked, which has led to overproduction and overconsumption. Second, ecofeminists point out that not everyone is responsible for these crises. Furthermore, dualist and hierarchical mindsets maintain the exploitation of women, minorities, and more-than-human beings. Bridging these two debates is important to dismantling gendered economic exploitation on the one hand and the capitalist growth economy on the other. This text briefly introduces the history of ecofeminism and the ecofeminist political economy. It also identifies themes in ecofeminist degrowth thinking by analysing the works of Ariel Salleh and Stefania Barca. It is important to highlight ecofeminist thinking so that current degrowth debates do not ignore the institutionalised exploitation of women, minorities, and other species in economic activity.

Introduction

Intertwined socio-ecological crises, such as global warming, biodiversity loss, and the crisis of care, pose numerous problems for the human communities and more-than-human beings. The root causes are matters of political economy. Degrowth thinkers argue that continuous economic growth in capitalism has led to overproduction and overconsumption (Muraca 2012; Kallis et al. 2012). However, ecofeminists point out that not all humans are responsible for these crises but suffer from them since dualist and hierarchical mindsets perpetuate institutional exploitation of, for example, women, ethnic minorities, and more-than-human beings (MacGregor 2017; Warren 2000).

Linking ecofeminist and degrowth debates is important for dismantling gendered economic exploitation and the capitalist growth economy. To generate potential solutions, it is important to bring together ecofeminist and degrowth thinking and challenge conventional ways of thinking about the economy, nature, and agency. However, ecofeminist thinking, such as feminist criticism of the environmental movement, have been mostly ignored when creating the canon of the environmental movement in the United States (Sturgeon 1997). A similar disregard of earlier ecofeminist thinking is also evident in the field of degrowth (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019).

The aim of this review is to present examples of ecofeminist degrowth thinking, which as a concept combines feminist degrowth thinking and an ecofeminist political economy. First, I briefly outline the history of ecofeminism, ecofeminist political economy, and degrowth thinking. Second, I identify themes of ecofeminist political economy in Ariel Salleh's book *Ecofeminism as politics: nature, Marx, and the postmodern* (1997/2017) and Stefania Barca's book *Forces of reproduction: notes for a counter-hegemonic Anthropocene* (2020). Barca and Salleh have both written actively on ecofeminism and political economy elsewhere (see e.g. Barca 2019; Salleh 2009). They have participated in degrowth conferences and in the *Feminism(s) and Degrowth Alliance* (FaDA).

My motive for this text is also practical, because as a scholar-activist I want to clarify the political economy of ecofeminist degrowth. I have been involved in the Finnish Degrowth movement (*Kohtuusliike*) and the coordination group of FaDA, where I have facilitated discussions on topics such as eco-fascism, care income, and being involved in drafting a position paper on the importance of care during a pandemic (FaDA 2020). Since 2020, I have gained new perspectives to degrowth research since co-founding *Degrowth*, an open access research journal.

Ecofeminism in brief

Gender and the environment as a field brings together both environmental and gender studies, which as separate strands emerged in the Western thought from the 1960s onwards (MacGregor 2017, 2). In general, the field of gender and the environment is broad, including a variety of orientations such as feminist science and technology studies, ecological feminism, materialist feminism, and ecofeminism (ibid., 7-8). In this text, I focus on ecofeminism, which brings together a wide range of activism and thinking, particularly on issues related to political economy.

Ecofeminism includes activism, direct action, and academic work, all of which have influenced one other. Academics have taken part in social movements and direct action, while activists have developed new concepts and highlight silenced perspectives (Sturgeon 1997). There are excellent overviews of ecofeminism available, for example, on ecofeminist philosophy (Warren 2000) or ecofeminist direct action, politics, and academic research (Sturgeon 1997). The authors remind that their ecofeminist accounts are written from a Western perspective. Writers on ecofeminism in the Global South include Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (2014) and Bina Agarwal (1992; 1998).

Economist Bina Agarwal (1992) wrote already in the 1990s about the material link between gender and nature. According to her, feminist environmental thinking must consider the diverse

impact of environmental problems on people depending on their gender and socio-economic status. Almost 30 years later, Agarwal pointed out in a conference talk that the interface between ecological economics and feminist economics remains insufficient (ISEE & Degrowth Conference 2021).

Ecofeminism combines the traditions of feminist and environmental thinking. On the one hand, ecofeminists have presented a feminist critique of environmentalism and direct action, while on the other hand they have also demonstrated the scarcity of environmentalism in feminism (Sturgeon 1997). Karen Warren (after Sturgeon 1997, 46) presents the following minimal criteria that unite ecofeminist thinking. First, the thinking shows important links between women and the oppression of nature. Second, understanding these links is important for understanding the oppression of women and nature. Third, feminist theory and action should incorporate ecological thinking. Fourth, solutions to ecological problems should include feminist perspectives. A particular merit of ecofeminism is how it demonstrates the more-than-human exploitation of nature, other species, women, and minority groups based on dualistic and hierarchical thinking (Warren 2000; Sturgeon 1997).

Ecofeminism, broadly understood, is concerned with abuses of power that unjustifiably subjugate others, such as women, other species, or ecosystems. Ecofeminist philosophy identifies at least five ways of thinking and acting about subordination (Warren 2000, 46-48). First, hierarchical thinking values something as superior to another. For example, 'man' and 'culture' are superior to 'woman' and 'nature'. Second, things are given opposite values and thus dualisms are encouraged. Attributes are seen as exclusive rather than permissive and as opposing rather than complementary. For example, 'white', 'masculinity', 'rational' and 'culture' exclude 'colour', 'femininity', 'emotional' and 'nature', making former categories more tempting.

Third, power is exercised over others, often from the top down, rather than with others. While some is legitimate use of power, not all is. In particular, the use of power is problematic when it

enables the oppression of those in a lower position. Fourth, privilege is seen as belonging to those in a higher position, and this position is actively maintained. Sometimes, some privileges are given to the inferior in order not to challenge the distribution of privileges. Fifth, the whole system is justified by the logic of supremacy, where superiority is used for justifying the subordination. The superior position is determined by certain characteristics, such as rationality or whiteness, which are not considered to be possessed by the inferior or their representatives.

Despite these principles, ecofeminism is not a unanimous field. Noël Sturgeon (1997, 28-29) identifies five approaches, of which at least the second and fourth are in apparent contradiction. The first approach holds that patriarchy regards women and nature as equal - that is, as less valuable than men and culture. In this case, women and nature are understood as an inexhaustible resource to be exploited for economic gain (Ok-sala 2018). Therefore, feminist analysis must take environmental issues into account. The second approach is like the first, since it also requires environmental studies to understand the subordinate position of women: the superiority of men's culture over women's culture and nature effectively oppresses women, non-men, and more-than-human beings. The emancipation of women is particularly dangerous because it challenges the notion of the other species as a passive and immaterial entity that can be endlessly treated as an object. In the third approach, women and nature have a special relationship, because in different times and cultures women have been responsible for domestic, agricultural and care work, and thus environmental problems are first reflected in their work and lives.

In the fourth approach, women are thought to be biologically closer to nature than men, as women reproduce humanity through their bodies and work, including childbirth, breastfeeding, and nursing. In addition, menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth are thought to bring women closer to natural rhythms and life-and-death issues, which also makes them more compassionate towards more-than-human nature. The fifth approach focuses on feminist spirituality, which draws on nature-based

religions such as paganism, witchcraft, goddess worship and indigenous worldviews, all of which place female deities either in the main or on an equal footing with male deities.

Sturgeon (1997) and others who have followed her have analysed the tensions between these positions and how ecofeminism also risks producing hierarchical and dualistic thinking between different tendencies and their practitioners. Some (eco)feminists see the idea of femininity as more directly linked to nature as damaging, as it risks essentialising femininity and justifying the continuation of oppression based on femininity. Critics of a more direct link often represent academic (eco)feminism, while those who advocate a link operate outside the academy. Understanding the links between gender and more-than-human nature is intertwined with issues such as global justice and class.

The political economy of degrowth

Degrowth is a movement of diverse actors questioning the ideological position of the growth economy in culture, politics, and economics. Activists, thinkers, and researchers are calling for a holistic cultural change that places human and more-than-human well-being at the top of the political agenda – instead of economic efficiency, pseudo-development, and the growth economy (Muraca 2012; Kallis et al. 2020). The political economy of degrowth is not a technical calculation of overproduction and overconsumption, but rather it invites to consider social, historical, and local differences in organising social life (Barca et al. 2019, 2).

The complex question of post-growth societies requires analysing the political economy of degrowth. In general, the political economy of degrowth aims at holistic change (Buch-Hansen 2018). Most degrowth thinkers reject the emphasis on consumption, labour, and individualism that underlies in many economic theories. These perspectives invite a notion of a monolithic economy and tend to result in processes of commodification of life (Barca et al. 2019, 4). Instead, degrowth is considered as plural, and the commercialisation

of different aspects of life is resisted. This heterodox orientation has enabled the adoption of grassroots ideas and the theoretical development of different ideas. However, it is precisely the diversity of the political economy of degrowth that can prevent the diffusion of these perspectives into policymaking (Paulson 2017).

In just over a decade, the critique of economic growth has shifted from activist meetings to high-profile events on sustainable development, such as Finland's presidency of the Council of the European Union (Mikola and Saikkonen 2020). Although a slow or postgrowth economy has become more commonly acknowledged, degrowth thinking still has a radical reputation, which is reflected in disparaging or fearful comments in public speech.

Although the degrowth movement aims for a just society, gender is less theorised. Ecofeminism is often mentioned in degrowth texts, but usually only in the conclusions as a potential way forward. In some texts, ecofeminist thinking is seen as a holistic alternative to the capitalist growth economy (see for example Kallis et al. 2012). These references are produced both by feminist degrowth thinkers and those whose familiarity with ecofeminism is not clear. Even when ecofeminism is mentioned, its applications may remain unclear to the reader. For example, it remains uncertain what an ecofeminist political (degrowth) economy is, how it would be achieved, how existing institutions should be changed, and how ecofeminism is manifested beyond the politicisation of care work.

Catia Gregoratti and Riya Raphael (2019) show how the (eco)feminist tradition has remained hidden in degrowth thinking. They highlight the work of Maria Mies and Marilyn Waring, whose relevance to degrowth is obvious but rarely referred to in introductions to degrowth. Mies has done a remarkable job of exploring the multiple subsistence perspectives, and Waring has pioneered in showing how the value of women's and more-than-human being's (care) work is missing from the economic calculations used in policymaking.

In general, gender and care have not received the same attention as just transition programmes, although investments in care and reproductive

work are important for the continuity of societies (Elomäki and Ylöstalo 2020). There is a risk that the importance of gender and care will also be ignored in degrowth thinking. If degrowth thinking considers ecofeminist perspectives and develops thinking based on them, this may increase the attention paid to gender and care in political economy more broadly.

According to Hubert Buch-Hansen (2018, 161-162), the transition to degrowth societies requires four factors: a deep crisis, an alternative political agenda, an inclusive coalition to mainstream the agenda, and (tacit) majority consent. According to Buch-Hansen, the first two elements are already in place but mainstreaming the agenda with majority support is missing. However, in the spirit of Gregoratt and Raphael (2019), one can ask how a limited knowledge of (eco)feminist (degrowth) thinking affects mainstreaming degrowth and the drive towards ecologically and socially sustainable societies. If a significant part of research on gender and the environment remains hidden or is reduced to a mere care issue (*ibid.*, 95), there is a risk that gendered assumptions will also dominate in degrowth thinking and programmes that seek to win the support of an overall coalition and majority approval.

Ecofeminist political economy

In general, ecofeminists make visible the patriarchal order that predates capitalism, in which nature is understood as feminine and women as natural, among other things. In addition to this representation, ecofeminists produce local understandings of capitalist logics that define a gendered economy and division of labour (Oksala 2018).

An ecofeminist analysis shows how the dominant and supposedly neutral conception of man in economics is fundamentally skewed. According to Mary Mellor (2017), ecofeminist political economy returns to the pre-growth economic traditions, where the economy was analysed as a social activity from more diverse perspectives. In her analysis, Mellor (2017) combines Marxist materialism, ecological economics, and feminist

economics on the gendered division of labour. According to Mellor, the focus on women's work can be labelled as essentialist: there is a risk of attributing certain characteristics to women, and thus reproducing the gendered division of labour. However, she argues that an ecofeminist analysis reveals how women's work is first externalised from economic accounting, but then continuously exploited to sustain the economy. Although women's work maintains the continuity of communities, it is stigmatised as feminine, with a lower status than masculine and, in a capitalist system, profit-seeking work. Moreover, in conceptions that emphasise economic rationality, nature is only considered to have value if it can be counted and resold.

Ecofeminist political economy thus challenges the genderless understanding of the capitalist growth economy and seeks to reject dualisms in all economic thinking (Mellor 2006). Ecofeminist analysis makes visible a two-tiered system in which people must first find paid work to make ends meet (Mellor 2017) – instead, the goal is a one-tier system where people work to satisfy their own needs and those of their community. To achieve a one-tier system, Mellor (2017, 91-97) presents a number of actions. First, instead of the emphasis on exchange value, valuation needs to shift to use value. This is possible when the economy is understood more broadly as subsistence or provisioning, which includes unpaid and paid work that ensures people's wellbeing and satisfies their needs. Second, provisioning needs to include the idea of sufficiency, which aims at an ecologically sustainable life. This is already the case today in the work of small farmers, indigenous peoples, and care workers in some regions.

However, the pursuit of sufficiency should not only lead to self-sufficiency for the wealthy or privileged ones, but communities must be able to provide for children, the elderly, and the sick. Since women have traditionally been left to do this work, it is essential to share the work among all and to pay attention to the bargaining power of women. Third, the democratisation of money would allow for a negotiation on how care is valued. In addition, money should be made communal by increasing

the use of alternative currency systems. Fourth, removing the right of private banks to create money and returning them to lending only against deposits would reduce the pressure to bail out private banks in financial crises with public funds. This would further reduce the need to cut public spending. Overall, the reduction of public expenditure make it particularly difficult for women, children, the elderly, the sick and the poor to make ends meet. Money should be made commons and used, for example, to pay a citizens' wage, allowing people to spend their time on something other than maintaining a two-tier system.

Johanna Oksala (2018) considers it important to update ecofeminist thinking on economic institutions. The first update concerns accounting, for which several ecological commodities have recently been created, such as emissions trading. The creation of ecological commodities means that natural processes taking place despite the capitalist system are commodified by creating an exchange value for them, which can then be incorporated into the system. Consumption by some, often the rich, is made possible by compensating consumption elsewhere, for example by not cutting down forests, often in the poorest countries. According to Oksala, the same logic applies to the unpaid care work of women, which is increasingly being incorporated into the capitalistic wage labour system. However, these new low-paid workers are often poor women from ethnic minorities who leave their countries of origin for work, either voluntarily or as slaves.

Another update proposed by Oksala (2018) makes visible the increasingly intensive incorporation of biological processes into capitalist value creation by consciously modifying processes to make them more productive and competitive or by removing obstacles to them. Biological processes are thus not only commercially exploited but are accelerated by rapidly developing technologies to increase profits, while their environmental risks are downplayed or ignored (Oksala 2018). For example, instead of leaving forests to grow on their own after cutting them, planted trees are fertilised and pesticides are used to improve yields. According to Oksala, these biotechnologies are presented as

effective responses to the ecological crises. The argument of efficiency can be questioned from a degrowth perspective, since more efficient production does not automatically mean less overall consumption. The same efficiency thinking applies to the commercialisation of female fertility technologies, which has led to the emergence of a significant new global market, for example increasing the production of gametes and surrogate mothers (Oksala 2018).

Ecofeminist degrowth thinking in Stefania Barca's and Ariel Salleh's books

When degrowth thinking and ecofeminism independently are less applied concepts in political economy, ecofeminist degrowth thinking is still emerging. Indeed, *ecofeminist degrowth thinking* is rarely used as such, although it is used to bring together feminist degrowth thinking and ecofeminist analysis of the economy.

Next, I focus on two active ecofeminist degrowth thinkers and their work. Stefania Barca, who is based in Europe, has written on labour and just transition and has promoted the care income. Ariel Salleh is from Australia and has worked in universities in South Africa and Germany. Her output, dating to the 1980s, is extensive and she co-founded the scholarly journal *Capitalism Nature Socialism*. As both have written specifically on issues of political economy, their work is of interest for the purposes of this text. Moreover, they both have a link with the degrowth movement, since they have participated in international degrowth conferences. They both draw from the Marxist tradition, which is reflected in their critique and the references in their publications.

For the remaining of this text, I present themes from two separate books by both thinkers. Barca's 79-page *Forces of reproduction: notes for a counter-hegemonic Anthropocene* from 2020, as its title suggests, deconstructs the totalitarian narrative of the Anthropocene, and highlights human and more-than-human reproductive labour.

The book starts from conflicts in Latin America, where indigenous people defend their remaining multi-species habitats from destruction. Some are paying for this with their lives. Salleh's 369-page *Ecofeminism as politics: nature, Marx, and the postmodern* is a classic in its field, originally published in 1997. It is divided into three parts: Women and ecopolitics, An embodied materialism, and Making postcolonial sense. For this text, I use the commemorative edition published 20 years later, in which Salleh comments on the topicality of the work in a new 15-page introduction (Salleh 2017).

The books differ in length, structure, and time of writing, which makes them complementary. Whereas Barca's *Forces of reproduction* is a long essay on the theme of the book's title, Salleh's *Ecofeminism as politics* presents a wide range of previous research in different fields and builds an argument in a dialectical way. Neither explicitly comments on current academic debates on degrowth, which would also have been more difficult for the 1997 work because the concept was still marginal at the time. Materiality is, however, an essential crosscutting theme in both books. The themes presented below contribute to opening what ecofeminist (degrowth) political economy may be, already discussed one way or another in feminist analyses of the degrowth economy (see e.g. Dengler and Lang 2021; Saave and Muraca 2021; Dengler and Strunk 2018; Paulsson 2017; Paulsson et al. 2023).

A critique of anthropocentrism and androcentrism

Since the ecological crisis is not the same to everyone, it is referred to as a socio-ecological crisis. This is to underline the fact that technological solutions alone are not enough to change the overall consumption of materials and energy, but that cultural change is also needed. In *Forces of reproduction*, Barca deconstructs the apparent way in which emphasising technology has become part of the discourse. She analyses a 3-minute video presented at the 2012 *Rio Earth Summit on*

Environment and Development entitled "Welcome to the Anthropocene", which describes the course of industrial development over the past 250 years. Although the video presents the need to stay within planetary boundaries (Rockström et al. 2009), it addresses humanity as a united group: we have reached peak oil demand, we are producing more and more greenhouse gases and we have created a hole in the ozone layer (Barca 2020, 8). In reality, only a minority of the planet's inhabitants have participated in this activity, even though it has harmed the majority. Therefore, Barca refers to this discourse as the Master's narrative, which represents ecocapitalist realism (ibid., 15).

The Master's narrative ignores colonialism, sexism, class-based discrimination, and speciesism made visible by ecofeminists and other critical thinkers (Barca 2020, 18). When talking about humanity, many unspoken assumptions are often reproduced: the only significant civilization is Western; only Western science, technology and industry have historical agency; social inequalities and the exploitation that results from them are irrelevant; other species do not matter (ibid., 18). Barca (ibid., 59-60) suggests rejecting these assumptions and adopting an ecofeminist historical and materialist analysis.

The subtitle of Salleh's *Ecofeminism as politics* describes the political field to which the work relates: nature, Marx, and the postmodern. Salleh refers several times to Marx's work. She shows that in socialism too the importance of women and more-than-human beings has been hidden, since the focus has been on the oppressed genderless worker (Salleh 2017, 145). Salleh (ibid., 239-240) identifies four ways in which women's relationship to nature, labour and capital differs from men's. Firstly, women's bodies function as birthing and nursing bodies. Secondly, historically these differences have been harnessed for care and tasks that bridge the gap between men and nature. Thirdly, women have been assigned manual labour as farmers, weavers, herbalists, and potters. Fourthly, this has led to symbolic representations that recreate a feminine connection with nature in poetry, paintings, philosophy, and everyday speech. Through these developments,

the work that sustains women's lives has become differentiated from that of men.

Salleh comments the labelling of ecofeminism as essentialist. According to Salleh (2017, 19), women already have an alternative relationship with nature, as called for by activists, which can be used to politically transform social relations. Later, she argues that women do not have an ontologically closer relationship with nature than men do (ibid., 36) and that feminine suffering is universal because it manifests how women and others – such as ethnic minorities, children, animals, plants, rocks, water, and air – are exploited (ibid., 37). In this case, ecofeminists do not claim anything special for themselves, but equal rights for all. Later, Salleh (ibid., 251) draws on Gayatri Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism, in which the dialectical revelation of essentialism makes it possible to make visible the structural relations that determine people's place in society, rather than their psychological characteristics. Salleh (ibid., 251-252) describes this as a political work that benefits from an ecofeminist, materialist analysis.

Examples of eco-feminist material analysis

Material analysis is such a seamless part of Barca's and Salleh's writings that its separation is partly artificial. However, the following examples show more concretely how material analysis has been carried out in the ecofeminist tradition. Val Plumwood, whose work they both refer to, has produced an excellent work on the subject: *Environmental culture: the ecological crisis of reason* (2002).

Barca (2020, 21) shows how earlier material analysis traces the emergence of the capitalist and industrial system to the plantation system of the 16th century, which exploited the global slave trade and resulted in huge monocultures to produce commodities. The modern day Master's narrative attached to the socio-ecological crisis comes too late in this perspective, since many people and other species have already faced

colonial violence for centuries (ibid., 26). As a result, countless people have sought to free themselves from oppression by establishing anti-capitalistic territories and initiatives. The concept of the Anthropocene, which treats humanity as a whole, is racist and colonialist, which encourages decolonial thinking and action in times of ecocrisis (ibid., 20). In a non-critical interpretation of the Anthropocene, the current system would not be changed but the colonial history of the system would be silenced, and its continuity supported by saving the system without reparations.

For Salleh (2017, 61), ecofeminist material analysis traces the hegemony of masculinity across time in cultures, nature, bodies, work, logics, and technologies - returning to cultures, nature and so on. This analysis demonstrates how social movements from a variety of starting points seek to demonstrate culturally deeply rooted practices. Actors who do not fit into a hegemonic masculinity may become aware of their fragmented identities (ibid., 259-260). Moreover, in ecofeminist material analysis, this epistemology of the feminist standpoint, or way of knowing, is complemented by an understanding of the competent skills that actors master in their everyday lives, by which they live in the world as part of nature rather than apart from it (ibid., 262). A materially grounded epistemology is formed when women's suffering is linked to political understandings (ibid., 263).

Reproductive labour and the debt of capitalism

The title of Barca's work, *Forces of reproduction*, refers directly to reproductive labour that enables human communities and societies to function. Barca (2020) does not approach reproduction directly but draws out its multiple aspects by deconstructing the concept of the Anthropocene. She identifies colonialism, sexism, class-based discrimination, and speciesism based on previous literature. Barca's analysis makes visible the many ways in which the (slave) labour of ethnic groups, women, the lower classes, and other species has been incorporated into capitalistic

value creation through un(der)paid and subjugated labour.

Using the body as an example, Salleh (2017, 67) shows how the creation of life and the risking of life as part of operating in the world are set against each other in Western thinking. Women are demoted to a lower status by claiming that they do not participate in dangerous work in society because they give birth to life. Yet, pregnancy and childbirth can be very stressful, dangerous, and traumatising for women. Salleh's analysis of Marx's texts suggests a similar hierarchy, with human labour as a means of self-fulfilment that exploits the 'unproductive' reproductive labour of women and nature (ibid., 117). Therefore, Salleh (ibid., 113) questions the centrality of production in Marxist thought, as reproductive labour would have been a more natural starting point. She concludes that Western male thinkers have a special relationship with the concept of production (ibid., 127). Like Oksala's (2018) observations on biotechnology, Salleh (2017, 129) argues that men have made possible, through science-based reproductive technologies, the reproduction of humanity that can be harnessed to serve economic interests. The necessary question that follows from this, according to Salleh (ibid., 129), is how men and women reproducing masculinity can establish a material and discursive connection at a time of ecological crisis, during which the linear and exponential patterns of capitalism and socialism are challenged.

In relation to reproductive labour, it is appropriate to introduce Salleh's concept 'the debt of capitalism', including social, ecological and embodied debt (Salleh 2009, 4-5). A social debt is incurred by capitalist employers when working bodies and minds produce value in the industrial wage labour system or as unpaid slaves. An ecological debt is incurred between the Global North and the Global South when production exploits the South's natural resources or undermines the livelihoods of people in the Global South who live outside the industrial system. A embodied debt has been incurred in the global North and South to the reproductive labourers who generate use value and enable production by creating new workers for the

capitalist system. Therefore, movements against capitalism must consider workers, women, indigenous peoples, peasants, and environmentalists who have the potential to open the black box of the patriarchal system (Salleh 2009, 5).

Ecofeminist organising

Salleh (2017, 263) portrays four principles by which ecofeminists challenge the Western, Eurocentric worldview. First, nature and history form a material whole. Second, nature, women and men are simultaneously active subjects and passive objects. Third, "the woman-nature metabolism" is essential for analysing the historical enjoyment of rights, property, and sexuality. Fourth, reproductive labour is a model for sustainability.

In the conclusion of *Forces of reproduction*, Barca (2020, 60) refers to the meta-industrial workers of whom Salleh has written (Salleh 2009). The meta-industrial workers maintain a meta-industrial economy, the most visible elements of which are, for example, economic productivity discourse, wage labour and exchange value that benefits a small number of people (Salleh 2009, 24). This speech and action conceal the reproductive labour performed by women, peasants, indigenous peoples, among others, based on metabolic and utility value, which is sometimes compensated, albeit minimally. At the bottom, is the ecological discourse of nature and thermodynamics, where energy and material have agency, which is expressed in plants and animals. Their value is metabolic, and they are not compensated in any way.

Barca states that the common goal of the alliance of workers and meta-industrial workers is to keep the 'world alive' by exploiting the already existing counterbalancing forces of the Anthropocene and the Master's narrative. This requires the liberation of the forces of reproduction: the abandonment of plantations, indigenous autonomous conservation projects, the takeover of industrial means of production by workers, trade union environmental campaigning, community farming and reforestation, agroecology, permaculture, and land liberated from industrial use (Barca 2020, 61).

An ecofeminist mobilisation requires an understanding of how women's experiences are in fact shared (Salleh 2017, 250). What matters is not the emphasis on class, ethnicity, or age, but how we act together. However, Salleh argues that Northern hemisphere feminism needs to be more sensitive to class and ethnic differences (*ibid.*, 153). An influential social movement requires a sufficiently large number of participants and their understanding of why the problem exists, who wants to change it, what options are available, and how to implement them (*ibid.*, 269).

Directions for debating the political economy of ecofeminist degrowth

Next, I provide some guidelines for the political economy of degrowth and its ecofeminist analysis, as advocated by Mellor (2017). In Oksala's (2018) proposal, the feminist movement and the environmental movement should have a common goal: to challenge capitalism. Feminist economics and ecological economics have both shown that the work done by women, the oppressed or nature cannot be explicitly expressed in monetary terms or incorporated into a capitalist market economy. Therefore, according to Oksala, it is not enough to place care work or nature conservation 'outside' capitalism, but the goal must be more radical: to challenge capitalism.

Yet, there is a tension in ecofeminist thinking. Although ecofeminist philosophy is holistic, its action springs from local understandings. This tension underlies, among other things, the critique of ecofeminist initiatives and thinking. The question is therefore how to achieve an ecofeminist society when many local movements are forming their own visions of the good life. Warren (2000) estimates that an ecofeminist society will only be achieved in hundreds of years. However, according to Mies, grassroots subsistence does not automatically mean small and local, but can be

extended to a global economic system in which 'unproductive' work, such as domestic labour, is valued. Then the system would be based on the production of life rather than on overconsumption and the pursuit of profits (Gregoratti and Raphael 2018, 90).

FaDA plays its part in making space for ecofeminist degrowth. The network meets at international degrowth conferences and brings together feminist research and activism on degrowth, including between conferences (see e.g. FaDA 2020). Members of the network promote feminist degrowth thinking and highlight the importance of gender and care in understanding degrowth (Dengler and Lang 2021; Saave and Muraca 2021; Dengler and Strunk 2018; Paulsson et al. 2023).

When discussing the political economy of degrowth, it is important to highlight the work, thinking, and texts of ecofeminist thinkers so that the debate does not ignore the institutionalised exploitation of women, minorities, and other species as a resource to be freely subjugated in the economy. Ecofeminist degrowth thinking brings important perspectives to challenge capitalism. In addition to the political economy of care, the ecofeminist thinkers and actors presented in this text demonstrate that previous research has specified many other themes relevant to analysis, such as anthropocentrism, reproductive labour, and ecofeminist organising. The themes of the two books presented here alongside with other literature on ecofeminist political economy are only a glimpse into a field with rich ideas. For example, ecofeminists have extensively discussed food, veganism, and the politics of other species (see e.g. Gaard 2011). Moreover, gender diversity brings with it the need to queer ecofeminist thinking in the 2020s (Gaard 2015).

Ecofeminist literature, thinking and action are incredibly lush. Exploring this opens new ways of thinking and acting in times of ecological crisis and commenting on current policy proposals from an interdisciplinary ecofeminist perspective.

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Misogyny against climate justice activists

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Abstract

The 2019 climate strikes were led by women with Greta Thunberg being the first to start the Fridays for Future schoolstrikes. Anuna followed this example in Belgium. Being in this leading position, both received a huge amount of online harassment. The harassers were mainly young boys. The harassment was mainly sexual. This goes to show how the patriarchal masculinity experienced by the boys is felt to be threatened and needs to be defended by instigating violence against women. The deconstruction of patriarchal masculinity into caring types of masculinities/humanities, is to be prioritised in feminist and climate movements.

Author's preamble note: With a master's degree in gender studies and having worked in academia for many years on this topic, I'm a gender expert, however currently working for Oxfam Belgium. This is why this essay is not written in academic language. I rather use the style of a narrative. Telling a personal tale, hoping this brings enough elements to vibrate in the academic context and theory building.

In 2015 researchers (Kasumovic, and Kuznekoff 2015¹) observed the behavior of bullying during online gaming. Most bullies were boys and victims were girls (no surprise there). However, the researchers wanted to dig deeper and find out why some boys' behavior was ok (fair, respectful play) and others' was bad (harassment of other players). They found out that the variable determining if a boy was more likely to be a bully or a gentleman, had to do with his performance in the game: when losing he would be much more likely to bully girls (especially girls outperforming them) and when winning they would be more likely to behave like a gentlemen.

'We hypothesised that female-initiated disruption of a male hierarchy incites hostile behaviour from poor performing males who stand to lose the most status.... We suggest that low-status males increase female-directed hostility to minimize the loss of status as a consequence of hierarchical re-configuration resulting from the entrance of a woman into the competitive arena.'

(Kasumovic MM, Kuznekoff JH (2015))

All of this comes as no surprise. After all, we live in a world dominated by patriarchal gender stereotypes, where many boys grow up with the message that the worst thing that could happen to them 'is to be like a girl (a sissy, a pussy,...)'. Many boys are taught that their position is and needs to be superior at all times. So, a woman out-performing them feels for some boys like an existential threat to the core of their identity: their masculinity.

A couple of years after this research, that is exactly what my daughter did, outperform boys and take up a leadership role. December of 2018 – my seventeen-year-old daughter (Anuna De Wever Van der Heyden)² was really outraged upon hearing that the Belgian government refused to join the high ambition coalition at the end of the COP meeting³ despite the fact that almost 100.000 people had protested in the streets of Brussels in favor of that. We discussed the complexities And she realized that she was too young to vote in the next election. While voting was not an option nor the protests proven effective, I explained to her that civil disobedience could be another way for resistance. Naively I showed her the video of what Greta Thunberg had just started doing in Sweden. Striking on a school day and sitting in front of the Parliament, more or less on her own.

The next day Anuna assembled her friends (all of which were girls and just one boy) and organized the first school strike in Brussels. To our complete surprise 3000 pupils walked out of the class that day, the next week 7.000, then 10.000 and they kept striking every week until the election in May 2019. While definitely Greta Thunberg was the public face of the Fridays for Future movement worldwide, in Belgium it was Anuna that became the public face and de facto spokesperson. She quickly amplified the scale to thousands of youths walking out of school every week. It quickly spread throughout the rest of Europe and the world and became the biggest youth movement we've had for decades.

Anuna became an overnight celebrity in Belgium. Her success in gaining wide support for the schoolstrikes and navigating the complexities that come with it was impressive, to say the least for a seventeen-year-old. But in this essay, I will not linger on the success but rather look at the downside and dark shadow cast on her being a girl leading a movement.

Start of harassment

The first death threat came about two weeks into the school strikes. Some commentators on social

media had discovered that Anuna had a twin sister, so they commented they could take care of that 'with a twin-barreled gun'. And that was just the start of daily death threats that would last for about a year (until Corona struck and the bullies turned their attention to the virologists).

Death threats were one thing, sexual harassment another. Having been close to them, I estimate Anuna and Greta together received the biggest collection of dick pics ever. Anuna was also a subject of constant threats of 'corrective rape' because she was openly lesbian. It was suggested that 'a black man should rape her, so she'd become a real woman', thereby creating an all-time low example of how misogyny and white racist patriarchy go together.

Now this is interesting because if the world would not be patriarchal, you'd expect the backlash to be full of arguments denying climate change. But that was not the case, it was never about climate. The focus of the backlash was on the gender, sex and sexual orientation of the women involved, with Greta also receiving very demeaning harassment about her autism. The school strikes of 2019 turned out to be an exemplary case of gender policing whereby women are punished for stepping out of their patriarchally imposed league, resonating with the very findings of the research mentioned above on computer games and gender. Symbolically the image could not have been more powerful at the dawn of the 21st century of young women taking on old white men in politics and (fossil fuel) businesses. And so the gender policing backlash was enormous.

Since we'd been an anonymous family up until Dec 2018, we'd never taken measures to protect our privacy too much online and people could easily find our address resulting in dog shit in the mailbox and needing police assistance to open up certain suspicious letters. My children were no longer allowed to open the front door when the doorbell rang and ultimately, we needed police protection almost 24/7. Threats were made to bomb an event where she would receive a prize for her work and we needed undercover protection during the strikes. Anuna was the subject of a horrible hunting party at a festival

(luckily they could not locate the tent where she was hiding). Often stuff was thrown at her by random boys crossing her on the street and she received a never-ending stream of online threats day and night. You start to wonder if trolls ever sleep, but more likely they work in shifts, as well as being cyborgs multiplied and magnified by AI-algorithms and fossil-fueled computers and conservative think tanks all night long.

It is quite remarkable that she always escaped physical injury, but the mental scars of living through this with your head held high, are obviously there. Now, three years later, I would like to unpack in this essay why this misogyny happened and what lessons learned might help us to move on.

Looking at masculinity

There is of course the mechanism mentioned earlier, boys growing up with the clear message that they should be positioned higher up the chain of command than the women in their lives. When this is upended it seems to be perceived as a threat to the core of their identity, their masculinity. If you've learned that the world is a nail, everything starts to look like a hammer and so if you learn that life is about competition, everyone becomes a rival, especially girls who break the rule and start to compete in the boys' league.

At this point, it might also be interesting to look at the profile of the men who harassed her. At first, we were not too scared because when we investigated the profiles most turned out to be old retired white men who've become very angry as life didn't deal them the cards they'd wish they'd got. The post-WWII generation of white European men is riddled with false entitlement about their status and power in society. They were infused with the 'alpha male myth' and felt that if they didn't end up at the top of the power chain at the end of their life, something was terribly wrong with society or with the women in their lives. Sad as their position may be, we did not think they'd have the energy or strength to leave their computer screen and arrange a physical attack on Anuna.

However, quite fast the profile of bullies became a lot younger. The age range of 18- to 30-year-old boys with hoodies, fast cars, swastikas and guns in their profile pictures came into play. The far right was weaponizing climate denial. This worried us much more because it only takes one of them whose anger issues are out of control to create a disaster. This is the generation of boys who – unlike their fathers or grandfathers – are told that false entitlement is a problem of white masculinity (Kimmel, 2013 calls them angry white men; Connel, 2005 talks about life fast fie young and Hultman & Pulé, 2018 talk about industrial breadwinner masculinity). That they will be dealt with accordingly by a generation of woke diverse youth who believe diversity and inclusion are the keys to a well-functioning organization and society. These are the boys who see their privilege melting in front of their eyes before they get to the age they can start claiming it properly. So, while their fathers are angry because the promise wasn't held, these boys are angry because no more promises are made. If life is considered as one big competition, then finding themselves on an equal playing field feels threatening to them. If you consider privilege to be your natural prerogative, then fair play becomes a threat.

Also, we cannot ignore the role of social media with algorithms that push these boys easily into the rabbit hole. Algorithms can strengthen misogyny and hardly any proper moderation is done by the social media platforms⁴. Internet accelerates radicalization of extremist 'incels' or radicalized boys drowning in the toxic manosphere (Joe Whittacker, 2022⁵).

So, their harassment addressed to Anuna was no more than an already existing anger that they funnelled towards her as a symbol of the very wrong turn society had taken, according to them. Greta, Anuna and all the other women in Fridays for Future became the icons of the 'justice' movement (climate justice, gender justice, economic justice, ...); a justice that feels so unjust for those presuming their privilege is natural and untouchable. This is most likely the greatest challenge ahead for the young generation: to push through the justice agenda and upending

the entire patriarchal, capitalist and colonial system that is built on structural and fundamental injustices. Seen from the perspective of this bigger context it was no wonder that there was so little argument about climate itself by her opponents, but rather raw aggression towards her very existence. The preferred weapon in this battle is sexual harassment and intimidation, an old-time favorite to keep women in line in many societies.

This was quite a challenge for my daughter to take on, and no wonder she became for some the icon of evil or the angelic prophet to others, depending on where you stand on the spectrum of justice.

That was then and this is now. We are in 2023, Anuna is non-binary, so I will refer to them as they/them for the rest of the text, but wanted to use she/her in the beginning since this is what society perceived them to be. Which is as such a very interesting example of how our societies still stick to the binary code and label people as fits their categories. At the same time, I do not think the harassment would have been any less if they'd been outspoken non-binary, because belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community is enough to be branded as a threat.

Masculinity and care

Now, besides the argument described above of many boys not being attracted to the justice movement as this upends their privileges, there are other reasons why men and boys were at the forefront in the battle against female/LGTBQIA+ climate activists. It is the argument of care (Kimmel, 2013⁶; Connell, 2005⁷). Being a climate activist means taking on care duties. Not only for yourself or for your community, but caring about the entirety of humanity and life on this planet. That is taking caretaking to the next level.

Men have definitely been providing care in patriarchal societies (as heads of households, organisations, countries, and so on); a kind of care that came with privilege and power. However, the kind of care that is called for by climate activists is rather the kind of care that is relational rather

than oppressive. It is a form of care that is kind rather than authoritative, supportive rather than exploiting, care that is healing rather than punishing. The kind of care women are supposed to provide in patriarchal societies is an invisible care and free of charge. Care that is about connection and not about establishing a power relationship. When we expect men to take up the kind of care reserved for women, we actually invite them to let go of their long-held beliefs about what it means to be a man. It is in this encounter with care that they expose themselves and are subjected to gender-policing by other men who do not value their radical act of upending the status quo.

It is one thing when women /LGTBQIA+ find themselves on the frontline of the transition to a gender just world, but when they are joined by men, these men are – to patriarchal men - not just rebels with a cause but downright traitors to patriarchy, succumbing to the lure of a feminine identity that no men should ever want to aspire to in his life. No wonder so few men hear the call and join the transition to develop their healing, caring and nurturing side. Patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism (these last two being, in my opinion, mere symptoms of the first), are based on establishing and maintaining unequal power positions, so anything calling for connection, intimacy and caring for others is a threat to all three of these destructive structures.

In my understanding this is exactly what Martin Hultman⁸ calls moving away from the **ego**-logical male position towards the **eco**-logical position. The ego-logical position being the patriarchal man or breadwinner who puts himself at the pinnacle of power. The eco-logical position however, assumes a place among and in connection to others in a caring way. The tension between the two is exactly the great divide stretching out on the horizon of male identity at the beginning of the 21st century. The path of destruction or care. Obviously, destruction is not the core objective of patriarchy as it would leave them with little to overpower in the end, but destruction is a sure strategy to get to the real objective which is domination. Destruction is the weapon. As such the fact that the harassment is so sexual, comes as no surprise as it takes away the agency and dignity of

the women involved over their own bodies. By destroying the power women have over their bodies (by raping them or threatening them with it), men embody the ultimate power over the female body. Cynically power here becomes having the power and liberty to destroy the very thing you want to possess. Rape is meant to destroy the female sexuality and is all about power. Same with the planet, in the greediness to get to the top of the pecking order, men are willing to destroy the very thing they want to preside over, our planet Earth.

Even three years later I am still amazed at the strength of the hate and anger expressed by these men and boys. The unrelenting threat was real and it left me with a panic disorder that needed long-term treatment afterwards. But make no mistake, I would do it all over again in a blink of an eye because unfortunately, this is the dark tunnel we need to go through if we really want the transition to succeed. And as such I was still very lucky and privileged to be living in a country like Belgium where we really got great assistance from the police offering us all the protection they could, and having access to a good psychological care system that helped us to recover. In many other parts of the world, the police might join the bullies and therapists would be unavailable. The global majority would be on their own, whereas I am still a privileged activist despite the horrors we went through.

As for Anuna, they and I continue our path. Occasionally, I still need to file a complaint with the police for threats against me, while for them it remains a daily matter of being harassed, threatened and bullied online. They found a way of dealing with it, like so many activists have. But it shouldn't be like that. Because the moment we start to accept that receiving death threats, on a daily basis, just because of our ideas, is something normal, we undermine what it means to live in a democracy.

Now how do we move away from this?

It takes a lot of inner work and courage to step down from the ladder of privilege, share power

and build genuine connections. Moreover, stepping away from something doesn't work unless you know what you are stepping towards.

Exactly the capacity to imagine a desirable future would be my first suggestion of remedy. Many young people have a very clear picture of the apocalypse waiting for us, they visualize it and fear it. Fewer though are the young people who can visualize their desirable future. What world would that be and what would their place be in it? Do we focus on the fossil fuel cars people will have to give up or on the clean air we will finally be able to breathe? This shift in focus is crucial, not only when it comes to our climate future, but also when it comes to our gender future. Men and boys often focus on what they fear losing without being able to visualise what they will win: it is not just about stepping down from their privilege. It is also about belonging and creating intimate relationships which are more fulfilling than standing on the stage of power. We need to amplify what we can win in this future and how it can give meaning and healing to so many toxic relationships in our lives. This means finding the radical courage to fiercely reach out in a kind way. Fierce kindness sounds so contradictory, but it might be a feminist answer to angry white men.

This essay has been very binary in its description of female/male differences to emphasize the challenge of the crisis in gender relationships. When describing the men and boys who spend their days harassing women who challenge their worldview, I am well aware that this section of angry white men does not represent men at all. There are so many more masculinities out there. Some men and boys are just discovering other ways to live their lives, some broke away from the messages their fathers gave them, some have embraced connection and some are totally into all the justice movements. This means there are untold possibilities of bridges that can be built between different men to navigate the minefield towards transition. All it takes is one person at a time.

As a gender expert, I was once involved in a project with men who took the training to become gender trainers. When interviewed about

their motivations to step into this role and embarking on a journey to bring other men around, they all told tales of how gender stereotypes had traumatized the women in their lives. Rape, violence, toxicity had traumatized some of the women close to them. Being a by-stander to gender harassment trauma up close and personal they had seen first-hand the scars such forms of violence have left on the women they loved, which was the tipping point for these men to decide to get involved.

But what does this mean as a lesson learned to get men on board (or at least behaving respectfully towards climate activists)? Obviously, we do not want more traumatized women to get men's attention and empathy going. But we do want to get under their skin, up close and personal to talk more about our already-experienced trauma.

It took a long time for women to create safe spaces where they could do that. Maybe now is the time to start creating more brave spaces. A brave space where women can say it as it is, supporting each other in doing so and knowing that there are men who are genuinely listening and caring. It is about believing that our stories are worth being heard and that our voices can be amplified across continents. As in many movements we owe so much to the black women who made these brave spaces possible. Think for example about the #MeToo movement started by Tarana Burke.

As I was lying in bed at night, wide awake with thoughts of my three kids going off on a school strike the next day, wondering if all three would come home that night safe and sound, I felt an enormous connection to all the mothers out there who had been standing on the frontline of their battles and were able to voice messages to make people turn. Not in anger, but in wonder, in curiosity, in empathy, in support, in care.

Since my 17-year-old child decided to walk out of school to strike for the climate on that dark December night at our kitchen table, I have never once doubted the power of brave women. Yes, we have scars, my life has become divided between the period before and after. Yes, the fear was

sometimes unbearable and the hurt deep. But, as we amplify our voices – as I am trying to do in this essay – the caring women and men of the world can carry ourselves and our children through the tunnel of unsocial media and flood it with words of support, courage, love and connection. In the

end that is the narrative we will remember that got us through the night.

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Notes

- ¹ Kasumovic MM, Kuznekoff JH (14 Sep 2015) Correction: Insights into Sexism: Male Status and Performance Moderates Female-Directed Hostile and Amicable Behaviour. PLOS ONE 10(9): e0138399. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0138399>
- ² Since it is a very important feminist principle to not talk about without talking with, I have asked both Anuna's and Greta's review and approval of their being mentioned in this essay.
- ³ Every year a COP meeting is held (Conference of the Parties) to discuss climate change. The COP's participants are countries represented by their governments. Some of these governments are much more ambitious with regards to climate goals than others. So in 2018 there was a group of highly ambitious government and the Belgian government decided not to join this coalition.
- ⁴ Institute for strategic dialogue: Algorithms as a Weapon Against Women: How YouTube Lures Boys and Young Men into the 'Manosphere'. April 2022. <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/algorithms-as-a-weapon-against-women-how-youtube-lures-boys-and-young-men-into-the-manosphere/>
- ⁵ Joe Whittacker (2022), *Online Radicalisation, What we know*, European Commission, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/RAN-online-radicalisation_en.pdf
- ⁶ Kimmel, Micheal (2013), *Angry White Men*, Nation Books.
- ⁷ Connell, R.W. 2005 second edition, *Masculinities*, University of California Press.
- ⁸ Martin Hultman and Paul Pulé, 2021, *Ecological Masculinities: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Guidance*, Routledge Studies in Gender and Environments. Part of: Routledge Studies in Gender and Environments (6 books) | Sep 26, 2021.

How Dare You: Et udstillingseksperiment om køn, kamp og klimakrise

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KØN - Gender Museum Denmark er et statsanerkendt specialmuseum i Aarhus med ansvarsområde inden for kønnenes kulturhistorie. For folk uden indgående kendskab til museums-lingo, betyder den smøre, at vi er et museum, der modtager statslig støtte og har ansvar for en museumssamling af historiske genstande, som tilhører staten, men som administreres, udvides, formidles og undersøges af KØN. Derudover vil det sige, at vores samling, og de måder, den anvendes på, skal omhandle kønnenes kulturhistorie. Herunder hører emner som seksualitet, kønsidentitet, kønsulighed, feministisk aktivisme, familieformer, kønsdiskrimination, kønnede oplevelser, kønnede handlemønstre, kvindehistorie, queer historie, kønnede minoritetserfaringer og meget mere. Som et kulturhistorisk museum arbejder vi med samlingen og med de hverdagslige historiske genstande, som den indeholder. Vi er altså ikke et kunstmuseum, hvor værker er hovedåren i vores formidling, vi er heller ikke et naturhistorisk museum, hvor naturvidenskaberne er udgangspunktet for vores vidensdeling, og endelig har vi heller ikke arkæologisk ansvar, og beskæftiger os derfor primært med historisk tid.

Vores samling består af 28.142 registrerede genstande, 2.572 fotografier og 1.461 arkivalier. Alle skal de på den ene eller den anden måde

kunne sætte os i stand til at belyse og bevare kønnenes kulturhistorie i Danmark.

Når vi som museum sætter fokus på klima og miljø, er det altså ikke bare fordi, det er et nyt og spændende emne, som mange institutioner i dag kaster sig over. Det er i lige så høj grad fordi vi mener, at vores samling kan bruges til at sige nogle helt særlige ting om køn, kamp og klimakrise i dag såvel som historisk. Med særudstillingen *How Dare You - køn, kamp og klimakrise* forbinde vi krydspunkterne mellem det kønnede og det klimarelaterede gennem genstande, interviews, videoer, fortællinger og scenografi. Udstillingen berører klima- og miljørelaterede problematikker, som også har en særlig fundering i kønnede praksisser og i kønshistoriske omvæltninger. Hvad betød f.eks. kvinders indtog på arbejdsmarkedet for almindelige husholdningers forbrug og dermed for miljøet? Hvorfor er så mange unge klimaaktivister kvinder? Hvordan indgår kød og store biler som en del af moderne vestlige maskulinitetskonstruktioner? Og hvad er den kønnede kulturhistorie bag nogle af den moderne klimakamps praksisser for f.eks. genbrug, håndværk og husholdning?

Fordi KØNs samling giver et unikt indblik i kønnede liv, giver samlingen også et helt særligt udgangspunkt for at forstå den kønnede

kulturhistorie, der ligger bag nogle af vor tids klimaudfordringer såvel som -løsninger.

Udstillingens idé og grundlag

Oprindeligt var udgangspunktet for udstillingen et forskningsprojekt, i hvilket postdoc Jakob Rosendahl har fokuseret på *pigebilleder*; portrætteringer af piger, og mere specifikt Greta Thunberg (Rosendahl in press). Her var anslaget til koblingen mellem køn og klima. Man skal ikke google de to ord mange gange, før man ved, at køn og klima hænger uløseligt sammen - på mange planer. Det er dog ny viden for mange. Der var en vigtig historie for os at fortælle. Som kulturhistorisk museum havde vi lyst til at vise, hvordan den kønnede kulturhistorie er dybt aktuel og kan tale direkte ind i en række problematikker forbundet til klimakrisen. Der er således en lige linje mellem FNs rapporter om køn og klima og vores samling.

Udstillingen udviklede sig dog hurtigt ud over pigebillederne, selvom disse stadig spiller en central rolle som ramme for udstillingsoplevelsen. I den brede kobling af køn, klima og museumssamling, har vi taget udgangspunkt i den opdeling af natur og kultur, som opstod i Oplysningstiden. I sin bog fra 1993, *Feminism and the mastery of nature*, har Val Plumwood en model, hvor hun opstiller to rækker af modsætningspar ud fra natur><kultur-tænkningen, hvor det bliver tydeligt dels at opdelingen i høj grad er kønnet, dels at det, som knytter sig til kultur er blevet - og til stadighed bliver - opfattet som mere værd end det, som knytter sig til natur. Der er noget og nogen, som må herske, udnytte, tæmme - og noget og nogen, som skal herskes over, udnyttes og tæmmes. At frigøre kvinden og det feminine er således også at frigøre naturen og alt det og alle dem, som har været set som vilde, uciviliserede og potentielt farlige. Og omvendt: den måde, hvorpå teknologi, fremdrift og udvinding; det, som man traditionelt har set som 'maskuline' - og vestlige - dyder; tillægges værdi, er kernen af det, som i dag ødelægger klimaet. Økologisk feminisme og økofeminisme er således inspiration og fundament for udstillingens perspektiv. Vi

undersøger, hvordan natur><kultur-tankegangen kommer til udtryk op gennem historien, herunder i ideerne om og forventningerne til kønnene i relation til forbrug.

Museologisk arbejder udstillingen med genstandsbegrebet, og hvad Maria Rentetzi (2023) har kaldt "The gender of things". Særligt hvordan nutidige og historiske genstande kønnes på grund af de praksisser og den brug, der knytter sig til dem, samt de måder køn er tænkt ind i genstandenes design og markedsføring. Udstillingen indeholder f.eks. En stor del historiske genstande, såsom repareret tøj, køkkentøj til konservering og vidnesbyrd om møjsommeligt vaskearbejde i en verden uden engangsprodukter. Disse sættes over for nyere opfindelser som hurtigere biler, polyestertøj, tupperware og engangsbleer, der fortæller historien om hvordan mennesker, og dermed ikke mindst vores produktion, teknologi og udvikling har fået travlt. Modsætningen, som bærer reference til Plumwoods model over oplysningstidens binære natur><kultur-ideologi, bliver tydelig med genstande, der netop er kønnede. Blandt de ældre genstande er designet og udviklingen sjældent særligt kønnet, men brugen har derimod været det, da datidens vedligehold og omsorgsarbejde ofte har været udført af kvinder. De yngre produkter er måske nogle gange mindre kønnede i forbrugernes mønstre, men er til gengæld en del af et produktionssystem, der i design og markedsføring henvender sig til det feminine, omsorgsfulde og reproduktive. Disse genstande er derfor mere synligt kønnede. Med andre ord hænger den industri og produktion, som vi interesserer os for i et klimaperspektiv, også sammen med en kønning af produktudviklingen.

Med udstillingen prøver vi at få publikum til at indse, hvordan modsætningsforholdet mellem natur/klima og industri/teknologi også udspiller sig gennem nogle særlige kønnede produkter, der er med til at flytte kønnethed fra praksis til produktion og dermed indfange idéen om kønnenes modsætning i sin egen singulære produktions- og forbrugslogik. Den logik giver producenter mulighed for at kapitalisere på kønnet arbejde og på kommercielle kønssystemer. I udstillingen bliver det særligt tydeligt, hvordan kønnet design

i et produktionsregi har gjort det muligt at kapitalisere på særligt kvinders hus- og omsorgsarbejde ved at udvikle kønnede engangsprodukter markedsført til den femininiserede forbruger. Udstillingen kan blandt andet få os til at sætte spørgsmålstegn ved, hvorfor moderne forbrugskultur og -produkter i deres design og udvikling er så kønnede, som de er. Også selvom deres brug i praksis ikke nødvendigvis behøvede at være det.

Tanker om formidling

Natur-<kultur-tankegangen kan i høj grad spores i vores samling, som gennem udstillingen fortæller historier om kønnet forbrug. Gennem genstande kan man formidle nogle meget konkrete fortællinger, som så peger på nogle større og mere overordnede strukturer. For eksempel har vi en række kogebøger, både historiske, hvor husmoderen lærer at tilberede kød til sin mand, og nutidige, hvor mænd opfordres til at realisere sig selv gennem jagt, grill og avanceret tilberedning. Her ser vi tydeligt koblingen mellem styrke, maskulinitet og kød. Altså: der er en kulturel forståelse af, at mænd har mere brug for kød. Og vi ved, at mænd i gennemsnit spiser en del mere kød end kvinder. Kødproduktion udleder meget CO₂ - og således forbinder kogebogen sig til køn og klimakrise. På samme måde har vi et tema om *fast fashion*, som i høj grad markedsføres til kvinder. Kvinder forventes at udskifte garderoben jævnligt, at klæde sig efter deres alder, kropstype og tidens mode. Det er mere kompliceret at klæde sig korrekt som kvinde end som mand. Og modeindustrien, som skønhedsindustrien og hygiejneindustrien, bygger på disse forventninger til kvinders udseende. Samtidig ved vi, at det primært er mænd, som ejer jord og produktionsvirksomheder, mens det oftest er kvinder i det globale syd, som arbejder både i dyrkning og produktion. Der er på den måde mange former for ulighed forbundet med tekstilbranchen, og mange forskellige links til både køn og klima.

Det har været overraskende nemt at finde alle disse historier frem, som formidler koblingen mellem køn og klima. Og ikke kun i vores egne

samlings. Vi har også interviewet en række mennesker, som på forskellige måder forholder sig til klimakrisen og på den ene eller den anden måde udfordrer de kønnede forventninger og konnotationer indenfor deres respektive felter. I de konkrete kuratoriske valg, har vi accepteret, at tematikken er kompleks og kræver en del tekst. Men vi har også forsøgt at arbejde med en scenografi, som gør, at man stadig får noget ud af udstillingen, selvom man går lidt hurtigt igennem og ikke får det hele med. Vi har samarbejdet med designer Kathrine Hoffmann, som sammen med en gruppe frivillige har spundet reb af tekstilaffald, og rebene danner et rodnet, eller et netværk, som binder udstillingens dele sammen. Vi har også valgt at male væggene med lermaling, og vi har arbejdet radikalt med genbrug og næsten ikke indkøbt noget nyt til udstillingen. På den måde er udstillingen også en æstetisk, og måske også æstetisk udfordrende, oplevelse. Vi håber, den giver anledning til en eller anden form for refleksion - om det så er på baggrund af grundig læsning af formidlingsteksterne, indholdet i en video eller blot det æstetiske udtryk.

Netop udstillingens æstetiske udtryk er også ofte blevet bemærket af gæsterne. Ud over at være en del af et praktisk eksperiment med at bruge mindre miljøbelastende og flere genbrugte materialer, viser æstetikken sig også at formidle en form for råhed, som bringer naturen og dens kontraster ind i udstillingslokalet. For nogle gæster har den upolerede æstetik også vist sig at bære referencer til en historisk tid, som netop ligger før moderne produktionsmåder og -materialer. Særligt tekstilværket, som snor sig gennem hele udstillingen, rummer en slags historisk dobbelthed. Hvor værket for nogle træder frem i kraft af sin brug af genbrugsmaterialer, og dermed er et vidnesbyrd om den moderne tekstilindustri affaldsproduktion, lægger andre mere mærke til det håndlavede præg og den gammeldags præindustrielle rebbinderteknik, der har været brugt til at skabe værket.

Uden det nødvendigvis var intentionelt, rummer udstillingen altså for nogen en slags romantisering af en præindustriel fortid. Den stemning er interessant, fordi det ikke har været

vores formål at romantisere en tid, hvor de ligestillingsproblematikker, der er i hjertet af vores organisation, har været endnu mere udtalte end de globalt set er for de fleste mennesker i dag. Samtidig har vi gerne, til en hvis grad, villet hylde de femininiserede håndværker og håndarbejder, der tages op af en moderne miljøbevægelse, men ofte uden anerkendelse af den kvinde- og minoritetshistorie, de kommer fra.

Det er interessant i sig selv, at en udstilling, der eksperimenterer med en mere uperfekt og naturlig æstetik, kan læses som en romantisering af et forældet femininitetsideal, og det understreger måske også netop udstillingens grundlæggende teoretiske pointer, som beskrevet i forrige afsnit.

Hvorfor klima på kønnes museum?

Museer skal ville noget - arbejde med det, som fylder i menneskers bevidsthed og stille spørgsmål, skabe refleksion, opfordre til samtaler. Vores ansvarsområde er den kønnede kulturhistorie. Og når køn som tema i så høj grad er forbundet til klimakrisen, så har vi en forpligtelse til at formidle dét. Det var allerede i 1992, at FN beskrev, hvordan kampen for ligestilling hænger sammen med kampen for klimaet [UNCED 1992]. I dag ser vi en klimabevægelse, som ofte også er feministisk og dekolonial, og en anerkendelse af, at mange uligheder hænger sammen.

Denne ambition hænger sammen med museets rolle som (bredt forstået) politisk organisation. I bogen *Det Aktivistiske Museum* (2023) viser bl.a. Louise Fabian, hvordan museer på sin vis altid har været aktivistiske institutioner. Ikke alene har museerne og deres samlinger tjent en vigtig rolle i konstruktionen af en nationalstat og en fælles historieforståelse, men museerne har også, særligt i nyere tid, måttet rumme kritikken af netop den fælles historie og dens marginalisering og objektivisering af fremmedgjorte mennesker. Særligt når museernes samlinger indeholder antropologiske genstande fra andre steder i verden. KØN har fra museets spæde år som kvindemuseum været bevidst om, at den historie, vi

formidler er en modfortælling. Som organisation har vi altid modarbejdet idéen om *historien* og insisteret på at historiefortælling er en multiplicitet af menneskelige erfaringer og sandheder, som ofte modstrider den gængse forestilling om én tid og én kultur. I dag er historier om klimakriser en vigtig modfortælling til den ellers optimistiske og maskuliniserede fortælling om det globale nordiske økonomiske og teknologiske udvikling. Modhistorierne findes derfor netop i de marginaliseredes historier: Hos de kvinder, der har bevaret og hævdet præindustrielle og reproduktive håndværker, hos de folkeslag der har frasagt sig dele af moderne teknologisk og kapitalistisk udvikling for at værne om og bevare kultur og natur i deres nærområder, og hos de mennesker, der forsøger at vende den teknologiske udvikling til en mere langsom og cirkulær form for produktions- og forbrugstankegang.

Samtidig er museet ikke primært en aktivistisk organisation. I endnu højere grad er vi en vidensorganisation, der skal stå som garant for at den politiske og sociale debat underbygges af faglig og redelig viden. Som museum skal vi ikke fortælle publikum, hvad de skal gøre og mene, men vi skal i vores formidling underbygge og nuancere og skabe et forskningsbaseret fundament. Museet skal være et sted, man går hen for at lære noget på en anden måde, end når man læser en bog. Et sted hvor der er plads til fordybelse, og til at modstridende historier og fortællinger kan sameksistere på hver deres præmisser. Der skal være plads til tvivl og til ikke at vide alt om alting, ligesom vi skal stå fast på de kendsgerninger, der ifølge netop vores tids bedste forskningsbaserede overbevisning er ufravigelige.

Vi kuraterer udstillinger ud fra ønsket om at fortælle gode historier og give anledning til eftertanke og samtale. Vi kan godt lide at stille spørgsmål i vores formidlingstekster. På den måde bevarer vi åbenheden og inddrager publikum i udstillingen. I "How Dare You" har vi et rum, hvor vi opfordrer publikum til at skrive små noter på manilamærker. Mærkerne hænger i tråde ned fra loftet og vidner om de mange forskellige tanker, bekymringer og erfaringer, som er forbundet til temaerne køn og klima, og det er rørende at se,

hvor mange der rent faktisk har taget sig tid til at skrive og hænge op. Ideen er, at udstillingsrummet også skal kunne være et sted, hvor man deler det, man har på sinde, og hvor forskellige måder at forstå verden på kan mødes. Museer er ikke neutrale steder. Men vores ambition er at skabe et åbent, imødekommende og trygt rum, hvor der er plads til at blive overrasket og at få nye perspektiver på tingene. Tekstilværket, som også ses på forsiden af dette nummer af *Kvinder, Køn og Forskning*, vokser gennem udstillingen som et rodnet af kønnede, kulturelle og kommercielle praksisser - et symbol på vores alle sammens gensidige forbundethed med, afhængighed af og ansvar for jorden og hinanden. Vi ønsker at skabe et rum, hvor vi også tør spørge vores publikum "hvor og hvad er du i det rodnet?"

Udstillingen "How Dare You: Køn, kamp og klimakrise" kan ses på KØN i Aarhus indtil 30. December 2024. Følgende personer fortjener anerkendelse i forbindelse med vores omtale af udstillingen: Marie Sommer Arnoldsen (Kurator), Katrine Hoffmann (designer), Simone Due Rasmussen (Museumsudvikler), Karin Skipper-Ulstrup (Kommunikations- og marketingsansvarlig), Ida Galsgaard (Kommunikationsmedarbejder), Pernille Albrechtsen (undervisnings- og formidlingsinspektør), Casper Ellehage (Museumsassistent), Mathilde Skat Rahr (Formidlingspraktikant), Sofia Karlson (Studentervedhjælper), Birgit Grønnebæk (samlingsmedarbejder), Hanne Jørgensen (samlingsmedarbejder), Astrid Andersen (samlingspraktikant), Karen Steen Hansen (Museumsassistent), Helle Pedersen (Museumsassistent), Elisabeth Stryger (IT-medarbejder), Pernille Taagaard Dinesen (Museumsdirektør), Jakob Rosendal (Tilknyttet forsker), samt alle de aktører, der har bidraget med anonyme eller navngivne fortællinger til udstillingen.

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