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Ecofeminist Animals

Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth edited by **CAROL J. ADAMS** and **LORI GRUEN**
Bloomsbury, 2014 \$25.99

Reviewed by **ASTRIDA NEIMANIS**

What ever happened to ecofeminism? The answer is of course nothing, and everything. While ecofeminist analyses have never gone away, a perception unfortunately lingers that ecofeminism belongs to some hippier time of Earth Mothers, green goddesses and “babes in the woods” (Gaard 20), rather than constituting a lively, contemporary practice. Ecofeminism continues (as it did *avant la lettre*) to offer critical insight into the ways that sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, ableism, speciesism, and environmental degradation all participate in an interlocking logic of domination. In the context of escalating environmental devastation, ecofeminism may be more relevant than ever. We should be turning to ecofeminist analyses more often, and more urgently, for guidance on how to get on in this Anthropocenic world in more just and caring ways. Adams and Gruen’s edited collection, consisting of thirteen chapters by philosophers, artists, activists, sociologists, and political scientists, is one place to turn for such guidance.

While ecofeminism has not gone away, nor is it static. It continues to develop, not least, because the world that ecofeminism responds to is also changing. So too is the world of theory. This gives ecofeminism opportunities to engage with burgeoning ideas within feminist and related theory as a way of making its own positions more nuanced and robust. As detailed below, certain chapters in this collection integrate and learn *with* several

of these developments. But before turning to these examples, we might first ask what ecofeminism *is*, and what is at stake in such definitional moves.

As the editors of this collection suggest:

Ecofeminism addresses the various ways that sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, and ableism are informed by and support speciesism and how analysing the ways these forces intersect can produce less violent, more just practices. (1)

Importantly, this definition underlines the interlocking nature of feminist and ecological problems. As with any other definition, though, it also engages in boundary-work—that is, establishing the parameters of a discourse (what conversations “count” as ecofeminist?), and suggesting who might be its spokespeople (which theorists “count” as ecofeminist?). Moreover, we could consider: How do the stories we tell about ecofeminism facilitate new ecofeminisms (or not)? What work is done when we evoke this term in certain contexts, but forget it in others? In other words, out of definitions and delimitations come histories and alliances. Just as many new conversations on posthumanisms, new materialisms, and critical Anthropocene studies fail to acknowledge important ecofeminist precursors, ecofeminism—like any other area of scholarship—is always writing its own history through its own politics of citation and inclusion. Certain genealogies of ecofeminism are reinforced, some early beginnings wither away, and various new shoots rhizomatically reunite with old roots.

I make note of such definitional boundary-work because this new

collection further develops one genealogy of ecofeminism, and sticks mostly to a closely related set of questions. As noted in Gruen and Adams' definition of ecofeminism, speciesism is the key concern here. Moreover, the strange appositional grammar of the book's title—suggesting concern for “feminist intersections with other animals and the earth” (as though other animals were a category parallel to “the earth,” and thus perhaps separate from it) also belies the book's prioritization of the question of other animals.

Tracing ecofeminist work in relation to the mega- and meso-fauna that we domesticate, farm, and eat is vital, and this book does it well. The collection's first three chapters by Adams and Gruen, Deane Curtin, and Deborah Splicer, addressing the “groundwork” of the speciesism/ecofeminism intersection, compassion, and joy, respectively, as well as Richard Twine's chapter on ecofeminism, veganism, and universalism, all present strong arguments that contribute to this field. Adams' chapter on the “anthropornography” of “Ursula Hamdress,” a pin-up pig, is delightful just in giving readers the opportunity to contemplate the deeper structures that buttress such confounding cultural displays. At the same time, it is interesting to think about the kind of boundary-work that is done by keeping the survey of ecofeminism in this collection so closely tethered to the question of other animals. While no collection can cover everything, the silence on more diverse genealogies of ecofeminism—particularly beyond the US (one thinks of Chipko, Vandana Shiva, Wangari Maathai, Maria Mies, Ariel Salleh, Greenham Common, Clayquot Sound, Pine Gap, Katsi Cook . . . this list just scratches the surface)—is also a kind of genealogy-building. While eating and living with animals remains a pivotal

ecofeminist question, explorations of climate change, water degradation, indigenous sovereignty, extraction industries, and their intersectional critique are mostly missing from the story of ecofeminism that *this* book tells.

Again, this collection's focus on ecofeminist animals is certainly not a problem in itself—all knowledge is situated, after all, and every storyteller makes choices—but overt acknowledgement of its own partial perspective would strengthen this collection. Moreover, this acknowledgment might help readers to better understand why chapters like Ralph Acampora's are included. While his is an interesting speculation about “testing conceptual edibility for speciesism,” why is it ecofeminist (particularly given Karen Emmerman's claim in this volume that “an ecofeminist approach resists describing conflicts in . . . abstracted and unrealistic ways” (161))? The question of who counts as “ecofeminist” also engages the boundary-work of genealogy building. Acampora is a remarkable animal studies scholar, but his work's importance within an updated appraisal of ecofeminism begs explanation—especially given the absence of other kinds of ecofeminist approaches.

Most exciting, then, are those chapters that push ecofeminist questions of other animals and intersectionality into new territory. These include Karen Emmerman's chapter on ecofeminism in action, where the entangled life of a particular human child (her own) and her commitment to vegan ethics demand attention to context and narrative. Lori Gruen's chapter on death and grief also investigates some unacknowledged yet vital discomforts within vegetarian ecofeminism—namely our “complicity in the pain and death of others,” no matter what our meat-eating choices. Acknowledging humility and “the limits of

good intentions” (136), Gruen convincingly advocates for communal grieving practices that can “honor [sic] the precariousness and fragility of our entangled lives”—human and other animal (139). Importantly, Emmerman and Gruen’s knotty self-reflections are possible within ecofeminism *today*—that is, once the need to expend considerable ink and effort defending ecofeminism against charges of Earth mother essentialism has been significantly overcome. A willingness, such as Gruen and Emmerman’s, to question and complicate arduously staked ecofeminist territory absolutely adds to the robustness of contemporary ecofeminism, and of this collection.

Moreover, as noted above, engaging with new directions in feminist studies pushes contemporary ecofeminism in interesting directions. For example, developments in queer, trans*, and masculinity studies provide rich resources for reconsidering the more-than-human world’s gender and sexual non-normativities. Here, patrice jones’ inspirational chapter on “eros and the mechanisms of eco-defense” is a nice addition to queer ecologies scholarship in its suggestion of “a theory and praxis of animal liberation that resuscitates the queer spirit of rebellious and generous connectedness” (91). Greta Gaard’s chapter on “EcoMasculinities, EcoGenders and EcoSexualities” also facilitates “ecophilic and eco-erotic” interspecies justice, with particular attention to masculinities (237). As Gaard astutely notes, because masculinity “has been constructed as so very *anti-ecological* . . . its interrogation and transformation seem especially crucial” (231). In engaging with Karen Barad’s onto-epistemology, Josephine Donovan’s “Participatory Epistemology, Sympathy, and Animal Ethics” connects ecofeminist analyses

with recent cutting-edge work in so-called feminist new materialisms. Donovan’s chapter also demonstrates ecofeminism’s important contribution to theories of participatory knowledge, where “both observer and observed are living beings who operate within the same communicative medium” (86). Finally, Sunaura Taylor’s “Interdependent Animals” brings ecofeminism into the thick of critical disability studies. Skilfully approaching the “false dichotomy” between independence and dependence (113), Taylor provocatively asks: “Does an animal’s dependence on human care have to be understood as inevitably negative?” (123)

Yet among the most thought-provoking chapters is Claire Jean Kim’s (interesting not least because fellow contributor Richard Twine notes that Kim “is not an ecofeminist as such” (198)—referring us back to the boundary-work of labels and definitions). In “The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Michael Vick,” Kim grapples with the intersectional complexities in the story of the black NFL star’s rags-to-riches success that crumbles with the discovery of his dog-fighting ring. The entanglements of race, speciesism, masculinity, and power, on Kim’s account, reveal not only that “there is no race-free space,” nor only that the “American Dream” is anthropocentric, but also that a truly intersectional politics is truly difficult; the impetus to a zero-sum game (anti-racism *or* anti-speciesism) is hard to resist, and hard to deflect. As Kim proves, “wonderful” and “horrible” do share a commensurate grammar; understanding how these contradictions function must be part of ecofeminism’s work. Kim’s desire to dig into the difficult work that ecofeminism asks of us is so salient that I cannot resist closing this review by quoting her at length:

It may be that forms of domination—white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, human supremacy, mastery over nature and more—are so intricately woven together, so dependent upon each other for sustenance, that they will stand or fall together. That as long as there are beasts, there will be Negro brutes. Can we imagine a world where white supremacy has been eradicated, but not human supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and the destruction of the planet motor on? Do we want to? Probably not, yet we remain, for the most part, in our separate silos, pursuing separate struggles with hardly a sideways glance at each other. We embrace intersectionality as a theoretical insight, but do we accept what this might mean of us politically? (188)

“Perhaps it is time to dream a new dream,” Kim suggests, and “imagine the world we want to create and think about how to get there” (189). Ecofeminism, as this collection shows, gives us many tools for such imaginings. It also gives us reasons to dream even more inclusively still.

Works Cited

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