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**Motherhood and environmental catastrophe:
Women's reproductive choices in response to evidence of
climate change**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of

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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a feminist psychological analysis of how climate change is affecting women's thoughts and feelings about having children in post-industrialised contexts. It consists of four peer-reviewed journal articles. Developed through feminist and multidisciplinary scholarship which resists narratives of human exceptionalism, the project attends to the psychological and ethical processes involved in learning to become subjects differently within the ruins of capitalism (Tsing, 2015). The project intentionally focusses on stories produced within post-industrial contexts, to stay with the trouble of environmental impacts stemming from Global North power relations. Article 1 offers a critical literature review of the 'stories telling stories' about gender and climate change. Situated within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Article 1 offers two case studies: UN texts; and climate policy in Aotearoa and Indigenous women's environmental literature in the South Pacific. Article 2 makes a theoretical turn toward figurations as "performative images that can be inhabited" (Haraway 1997/2018, p. 11), to understand how the question of 'Is it okay to have a child in contexts of climate change?' is being asked and animated. Through this attention to figures, the rationalisation of reproduction through a flat discourse of numbers and thresholds is troubled, opening space for a desiring feminist figure to be heard and seen. Article 3 performs a voice analysis with BirthStrike testimonial statements, to develop insights into the psychological processes of questioning reproduction in response to climate change. BirthStrike was a UK-based community movement which publically 'striked' against parenthood to raise awareness of the emotional and familial impacts of climate change. Through an iteration of the *Listening Guide* (Gilligan, 2015), I trace the movement of the psyche and come to hear four contrapuntal voices within these testimonials. The final article in the thesis draws on six individual interviews conducted with women living in Aotearoa New Zealand about how climate change is affecting their thoughts and feelings about having children. Article 4 produces a collage response to the stories the women told about desire for motherhood in the context of ecological crises, and offers another iteration of an arts-based methodology. As the project shows, engaging with desire, imagination and memory in relation to histories of colonial and capitalist extraction can enable affective and creative responses to climate change, including from locations of complicity. Wrestling with the question of motherhood in

relation to ecological crises can be an enlivening process, redirecting the force of desire outward, away from a preoccupation with lack and loss, toward the shape of social power relations. Overall, the project argues for continued resistance to the figure of the rational, unitary subject in efforts to become response-able to climate change in Global North contexts, including within the psychological discipline.

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INTRODUCTION

PREAMBLE

I happened upon this research project through stories. In 2019, while finishing my Masters' research on women's relationship expectations, I had started to notice stories about climate change and motherhood being told around me. These stories were mundane and accidental, shared amongst friends and acquaintances in the hurried break of a community meeting or while washing dishes. I recall the way an older woman became tearful as she spoke about her adult daughter's decision to not have biological children, because it "didn't seem right" to add further demand to the Earth's "natural resources." While I may not have agreed with this woman's expectations about grandmotherhood, her grief invited compassion. She was now in the process of giving away the toys, crib, and books that she had saved from her own and her daughter's childhoods. And I remember my 30-something friend telling me that despite having always envisioned herself becoming a mother, now that she felt she was in a position to do so – with settled career, partner, home, and health – she had become suddenly stricken with doubt. Was it ethical to bring a child into the world, when environmental reports showed that in the decades to come, there would be increased natural disasters, food scarcity, and geopolitical conflict driven by climate change? If she had a child, what kind of future would they inherit? My friend's posture and facial expression changed as she asked these questions aloud, as though she was experiencing some internal pain.

I may have stumbled across only a handful of these stories in the flow of everyday life, but they affected me emotionally and intellectually. They seemed to spin around a central theme – the ethical challenge of choosing to have (or not have) biological children in the face of climate change. Although I was certainly worried about climate change, I had no previous experience studying or working in climate-related fields. Neither had I knowingly experienced a desire to have biological children, myself. On the contrary, since my adolescence I had struggled to imagine myself as a mother, with my fascination being directed more toward stories and examples of historical women who had intentionally or otherwise pursued other vocations, in the absence of motherhood: Beatrix Potter writing animal stories while left to care for the rambling gardens of her family's rural property, Jane Austen secreting her pages of satire away when someone

entered the room. Later, I would become preoccupied with the lives of Georgia O’Keeffe, Hildegard von Bingen, and Simone Weil, for similar reasons.

Descended from colonising ancestors who left the United Kingdom and Ireland in the late 19th century in the pursuit of a ‘better life’ in the colonies, it is not surprising that it was stories of middle- and upper-class European and American women which offered me an alternative to the lives of the women I knew as a child. I grew up in the late 1980s and 1990s in Whāngarei, New Zealand, a small coastal town in the northernmost region of the country known for its sub-tropical climate and beaches, as well as its poverty, poorly maintained infrastructure, and high rates of substance abuse. The women of my everyday life – my mother, aunts, grandmothers, mothers of friends, friends of my mother – were all, in one way or another, maternal, and their maternity was both a source of joy and fear for me. They were working women who cooked dinner for me, my brother and our cousins at the end of a long day labouring on the farm, in the business, at the library, in a shop. The laughter, warmth, care and safety they readily offered me contrasted with their stoic attempts to conceal what looked to me like exhaustion and pain. This pain was surely physical and emotional, the latter a form of loneliness which broke through at odd times to be accidentally shared with us children, while we picked plums or played cards. These women were mothering through gendered violences of many kinds, often enacted in their own homes at the hands and words of their fathers, brothers, husbands, sons.

Just as witnessing the gendered, maternal labours of women had affected me as a child, the stories I was hearing as an adult about motherhood and climate change had an affective force. They caught my attention, even though I was not and am not personally grappling with the question of becoming a mother within contexts of ecological crises. The stories drew me onward toward the larger institutional narratives and gendered social power relations which I suspected were affecting the shape through which these smaller stories could be told. As I began to trace the echoes of ‘climate change and motherhood’ through media articles, academic literature, and policy documents, I soon realised that a cacophony of interest had sprung up in the Global North about reproductive choices in response to climate change. Such cacophony was part of the sound of the historical conditions we were and are collectively living through, which Anna Tsing (2015) has conceptualised as the ruins of capitalism, whereby the endless

progress falsely promised by 20th century capitalist narratives has given way to waste and precarity. Even in the Global North, we make our homes and livelihoods amidst industrial waste, insecure employment, widespread pollution and increasingly severe weather and health events.

During my initial reading of climate change literature, I familiarised myself with population control discourses and the long history of Western environmental groups taking up reproduction as a racialised climate mitigation tool against women on the margins of dominant power relations (Sasser, 2018). However, I also found a flurry of media articles exploring the decisions of people who are *not* on the margins, choosing not to have biological children because of climate change. I noticed two early patterns in the narration of these stories, and they echoed what I had heard in the stories of my friends and acquaintances. The first was one of mitigation: within a post-industrialised context, having a child had been calculated to dramatically increase an individual's lifetime carbon emissions, therefore having fewer or no children was a way to reduce one's 'carbon footprint.' The second pattern focussed more on relationships: given that the future impacts of climate change would be so severe, how could a person bring a child into the world, given the precarity and hardship they would undoubtedly face? While much of the grey-literature I reviewed did not explicitly engage with gender, feminist critiques were tracing how gender, race and class were operating through these narratives, to position women as vulnerable, virtuous, dangerously fertile, or not fertile enough, depending on their globalised locations (Arora-Jonsson, 2011, 2014; Bhatia et al., 2020; Gay-Antaki, 2020).

Community groups were responding to these narratives, both shaping and being shaped by the 'stories telling stories'¹ (Haraway, 2016) about climate change and reproduction in the Global North. Foremost amongst these groups was BirthStrike, a UK-based environmental movement which sought to raise public awareness about the psychosocial impacts of climate change by 'striking' against reproduction. The narrative

¹ I draw on Donna Haraway's emphasis on stories and storytelling throughout this thesis, as Haraway retheorises stories as non-metaphorical and lived in. I take up this thread more explicitly later in the introduction and in Article 1. Reflecting on her engagement with stories through her scholarly work, Haraway writes about how "Stories are always more generous, more capacious, than ideologies; in that fact is one of my strongest hopes. I want to know how to inhabit histories and stories rather than deny them. I want to know how critically to live both inherited and novel kinships, in a spirit neither of condemnation nor celebration. I want to know how to help build ongoing stories rather than histories that end" (Haraway, 2004, p. 1).

which BirthStrike set out to tell was one of political desperation and loss of a future where it was possible to imagine bringing a child into the world. Hence, striking against reproduction was explicitly not about reducing human numbers in the vein of population control, but was about activating political action in the Global North, through questioning reproduction (Dow & McMullen, 2022; McMullen & Dow, 2022). As with any story, however, BirthStrike's was not singular nor could it be neatly contained. It travelled, attracting new members who *did* story their reproductive choices through the shadow of population. It also attracted befuddled, angry responses from communities who were deeply attached to the idea of reproduction as a self-evident moral and religious good.

BirthStrike eventually disbanded, deleting its social media pages and apologising for inadvertently reinforcing population narratives. Prior to this happening, though, during the first months of my PhD I had collected more than 80 BirthStrike testimonial statements publicly posted by the group to its website and social media pages. The stories were full of emotional pain and efforts to reckon with the legacies and harms of colonisation and capitalism, from people living within and complicit to these systems. These stories, then, became part of the PhD, enabling me to trace how stories about climate change and reproduction were travelling along sticky narrative webs, between the institutional stories told through UN reports and governmental policies, to the stories told by and about community groups such as BirthStrike, to the embodied stories of individual women grappling with motherhood in the context of climate change.

A NOTE ON LOCATIONS

My own colonising, post-industrialised location affected my proximity to and mode of hearing stories about motherhood and climate change. As a highly educated Pākehā² woman, I was hearing stories from women who moved in similar circles to me. Despite our differing class backgrounds, we were all immensely privileged by global standards and complicit in relying on unsustainable carbon emissions to support our lifestyles. Similarly, my access to and ability to analyse larger institutional narratives was enabled by my location within colonial research institutions. The stories I was

² Person of European descent in New Zealand.

hearing about motherhood and climate change were, therefore, a Global North production. They spoke to the particular preoccupations and anxieties of Global North citizens, myself included, who have been alienated from our own political mobilisations and are left with individual decision-making as a way to respond to the structural causes of climate change.

It was from attending to this shared location within advanced capitalism that my PhD came to focus on the psychological processes of women living in post-industrialised societies. The tension of affluent women trying to stay with the trouble of climate change through their reproductive decision making fascinated me, offering a way to “critique the center from the center” of dominant social power relations within advanced capitalism (Braidotti, 2011, p. 34). Furthermore, I wanted to turn the lens of social science enquiry back upon Western subjects, rather than reify a harmful preoccupation with the reproductive practices of women in the Global South as a potential way to mitigate climate impacts (Sasser, 2018). While we certainly need to hear the stories and lived experiences of women who live on the margins of ecological precarity, including in locations such as Cambodia (Beban & Bourke Martignoni, 2021) and Nieu (Pasisi, 2019), this was beyond the scope of my project. I was moving with relationships and stories, as these led me back to ethical response-abilities³ (Haraway, 2016) within my own communities.

My disciplinary location in psychology invited my curiosity down affective pathways. Trained in feminist psychological theories and qualitative methodologies, I wanted to try and understand the affective and embodied psychological impacts of living through conditions of climactic change, expressed through this questioning of reproduction. As I began to explore psychological literature on climate change, however, I found a scarcity of studies which moved beyond post-positivist epistemological assumptions in how they approached relationships between people and environments, climate and ethics. Rather, the vast majority of psychological literature I read remained loyal to the value-neutral, a-historical and generalisable knowledge claims which have defined post-positivist psychologies (Rose, 1996). These studies typically focussed on

³ Haraway restories responsibility away from paternalistic orientations toward generative and ethical relationships which do not assume innocent or transcendental relational starting points. Rather, becoming able to respond to others – both human and more-than-human – is about knowing and acknowledging our situated histories, including relations of domination (Haraway, 2016).

‘factors’ which moderated responses to climate change, such as the relationship between gender and environmental responsibility, a framing which operationalised gender as an individual difference, not a social power relation. There was also a growing field of clinically-oriented psychological literature aimed at supporting people to live with the mental health impacts of climate change, conceptualised under headings such as climate anxiety and eco-anxiety. While such psychological research fills a very genuine need for therapeutic resources in relation to climate change, it rarely seemed to trouble the social power relations through which environmentally harmful practices have been perpetuated, including through colonisation and globalised extractive industries.

For the most part, I needed to move outside of the disciplinary boundaries of psychology to find literature which engaged with complex and embodied emotional processes such as grief, guilt, melancholy, and desire in response to climate change. Therefore, this thesis is multidisciplinary both by choice and necessity. Feminist theory, particularly feminist theories which challenge narratives of human exceptionalism, forms the bedrock of my ontological and epistemological assumptions (more on that in a moment). However, some of the most useful contributions to my research came from human geography, critical race studies, gender studies, philosophy, sociology, sustainability, and social anthropology (e.g., Arora-Jonsson, 2014; Lertzman, 2015; Neimanis & Loewen Walker, 2014; Tuana, 2013), as well as feminist fiction (Le Guin, 1989). The writings of Indigenous, Black and Third-World scholars, from multiple disciplinary locations, gifted me the challenge of thinking and relating to country, place, and climate in ways which at times felt alien to my Western-formed subjectivity (e.g., Bawaka Country et al., 2016; Jahnke, 1997; Tallbear & Willey, 2019; Te Awakotuku, 1991). I still have a lot of ‘psychological’ work to do here, to reckon with my own histories of colonisation and how these have shaped my understandings of and responses to climate change. Nevertheless, through engagement with Indigenous literature and cosmologies I do feel a greater capacity for relating in ways which exceed a human/nature binary.

It may be worth noting here that my relationship to psychology has, at best, been ambivalent, and this plays out across the thesis. As I again acknowledge the importance of locations, I want to emphasise the sheer good fortune I had of happening upon critical

and feminist psychologies at Massey University, a distance university in Aotearoa New Zealand which through its multiple modes of delivery has enabled people from diverse sociocultural locations who would otherwise be excluded from traditional on-campus offerings to access university education. Indeed, I may not have studied psychology in ‘this’ place if it were not for my mother, a high school graduate, enrolling in a 100-level distance psychology course at Massey, a part-time venture to keep her ‘mind active’ while she raised my brother and I, and worked in the family business. I was probably 11 or 12 at that time, and I recall the green cover of a Carl Rogers’ book she had left lying around and which I once attempted to read; or the way she thereafter became sought out within our extended family for her listening skills, her transient university study granting her some new authority.

My own undergraduate studies in psychology had, for the most part, however, been alienating. Whereas my expectations were that I was going to be learning about therapy and therapeutic processes, the crux of Rogers’ approach, I instead found myself mired in statistics, norms and deviances from the norm. There was no room for stories, here. This jarred against me, affecting my wellbeing perhaps more than I was able to express at the time. I finished my studies with acceptable grades, though it took me a long time to return to psychology. My love of stories, and the embodied stories of women’s gendered labour which I had witnessed as a child, had to find homes elsewhere. I have the language and theories, now, to recognise and name the disciplinary patterns which alienated me from psychology as iterations of the “god trick,” what Haraway describes as “a conquering gaze from nowhere” (Haraway, 1988, p. 581), wherein ‘objectivity’ becomes mistaken for a disavowal of our embodied locations and the social power relations through which we make knowledge. An embodied feminist objectivity, by comparison, is about “limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway, 1988, p. 582).

Feminist psychological research and teaching persists on the margins of psychological institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally (Morgan et al., 2011). Such precarity perhaps reflects the increasing commercialisation of universities more generally, whereby research is tethered to neoliberal ‘targets’ for profitability, as seen explicitly in recent legislative changes to New Zealand government research

funding (Schindler et al., 2025). Voicing critiques of intersecting social power relations – gender, race and class – from within institutions built upon these very power relations is a precarious venture, though. Such critiques directly challenge iterations of the god trick, requiring ongoing efforts to build collaborative networks across disciplinary differences, enabling these critiques to be heard at a structural level.

While psychology as a practice in Aotearoa New Zealand has made efforts to reckon with its history of colonisation, seen in the notable inclusion of Te Tiriti o Waitangi / The Treaty of Waitangi in the country's psychological codes, the discipline nevertheless remains heavily influenced by Eurocentric mythologies (Waitoki & Levy, 2016; Waitoki et al., 2023). That I call these myths is an acknowledgement that the stories Eurocentric psychology has told about itself and its supposed value-neutrality are not necessarily repeated in the everyday practice and everyday relationships of psychology. As Haraway noted regarding the god trick in wider scientific research, "They [scientists] tell parables about objectivity and scientific method to students in the first years of their initiation, but no practitioner of the high scientific arts would be caught dead acting on the textbook versions" (1988, p. 576).

This, then, is another embodied location I write from: the intersections of climate change, feminism and psychology, within the wider commercialisation of university research through advanced capitalism. In the spirit of staying with the trouble of our times, I do not dream of resolving the tensions between these uneasy locations. Rather, I note these tensions as I go, including in fleeting moments within the articles of this thesis. I offer these reflections as a note to the reader, an acknowledgement of my own troubled disciplinary history and my complicated hope that psychology can open space to hear and tell stories of pain, loss and determined recuperation in the face of structural violences of many kinds, including environmental.

FEMINIST STORIES

Feminist scholarship continues to teach me the importance of stories. I still frequently hear Donna Haraway's refrain running through my mind, that "it matters what stories tell stories" (2016, p. 37). As my introduction to feminist theory, feminist standpoint theory had seemed to be all about stories – of place, relationship, gender, power, and speaking to power from limited and partial locations, including to challenge

exploitative relationships that exist between women. If Haraway has offered me situated knowledge (1988) as a way to resist the universalising claims of psychological knowledge production, her concepts of non-innocence and response-ability (2004) have helped me to look with suspicion at the narrative binary of either apocalypse or final redemption in the stories we may be telling about climate change. Non-innocence involves resisting Oedipal origin stories as these naturalise a psychological preoccupation with patriarchal kinship models, including seeking redemption or wholeness through the figure of the 'mother' (Haraway, 1985, 1998). Response-ability, by comparison, involves developing the capacities and abilities to respond through relational ethics, including in relation to our companion species and the more-than-human organisms which we share Earth with. As Haraway notes, our task is to "stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth" (Haraway, 2016, p. 2). This then forms the theoretical basis of my project, wherein grappling with the question of motherhood in the context of climate change and ecological crises is situated within a larger emphasis on relational ethics.

As noted previously, my ontological and epistemological assumptions in this project are based on feminist scholarship which challenges narratives of human exceptionalism. Such scholarship resists the transcendental preoccupations of much Western knowledge production, whereby the naturalisation of binary distinctions between human/non-human, man/woman, colonising/colonised has enabled ongoing iterations of the god trick (Haraway, 1988). The most enduring ontological thread which I follow in the project is Haraway's nature-culture continuum. Haraway's brilliant twisting of nature and culture into naturecultures resists the ideological splitting of nature and culture as constituted by the above binaries and instead returns us to co-constitutive and relational modes of becoming. As Haraway notes, "My kinships are made up of the florid machinic, organic, and textual entities with which we share the earth and our flesh. These entities are full of bumptious life, and it would be a serious mistake to figure them mainly anthropomorphically or anthropocentrically" (Haraway, 2004, p. 1).

In following the thread of Haraway's naturecultures, my epistemological orientation is also attuned to situated knowledge. As we learn to recognise that "natures, cultures, subjects, and objects do not preexist their intertwined worldings"

(Haraway, 2016, p. 13), we also learn to become response-able to the situatedness of our knowledge production. Therefore, I assume throughout this thesis that knowledge is produced in and through relationships and stories which cannot be disentangled from complex histories of co-constitutive natureculture projects, including relations and stories of domination. While I engage recurrently with Haraway's scholarship throughout this thesis, I also draw on a wide range of feminist scholarship, including Rosi Braidotti's (2008, 2011, 2022) philosophical writings on process ontologies, Carol Gilligan's (1982/2003, 2004, 2015) feminist psychological insights into voice, and Indigenous women's scholarship on relationships to place, including Ngāhuia Te Awekotuku's (1991) writings in Aotearoa New Zealand. I locate myself theoretically within each of the articles and I draw theoretical connections between the articles in the interstitial sections. Therefore, I have not repeated these arguments here, other than to briefly orient the reader to my approach.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND ARTICLES

In terms of shape, the project has not substantively changed from its initial design. It was intended to be a PhD thesis by publication, consisting of three to four research articles focussing on how women in post-industrialised locations are responding to climate change psychologically and ethically, through their reproductive decision-making. Feminist theory and qualitative methodologies were intended to guide the project's development, with these open to change and adaptation as the research progressed. I planned to gather and analyse stories through multiple modes and locations, including one-on-one interviews with a small number of women in Aotearoa New Zealand, about how climate change has affected their thoughts and feelings about having children.

It is worth noting that while my overall focus in the thesis is on how climate change is affecting women's thoughts and feelings about motherhood, both Articles 2 and 3 do not exclude the voices of men and non-binary peoples from the analyses. Location explains this decision. Voices from multiple gendered locations were woven through the materials that I gathered up for Articles 2 and 3, and hence I attempt to attend to these voices as collective productions through which social power relations flow. I move explicitly to the voices of self-identifying women in Article 4, as these

stories were gathered through conversational interviews between each of the women and me.

Research questions

My research questions clustered around three key areas of focus: i) dominant narratives about climate change and gender; ii) figurations of population in relation to climate change and reproduction; and iii) the psychosocial impacts of climate change in the Global North, in relation to reproductive decision-making. Below, I provide my early iterations of research questions, as these guided the overall development of the project.

Part 1

Part 1 was intended to focus on the narratives and stories being told about climate change and gender. The analytical material I gathered for this article was textual, including governmental policy, UN reports and wider 'grey' literature on climate change. Part 1 carried through to Article 1, a critical literature review which considered how existing social power relations are reified in the stories we're using to tell stories about gender and climate change. Article 1 lays out the theoretical basis of the overall thesis and provides two case studies: i) United Nations and associated governmental policy on 'gender mainstreaming' in our climate responses; and ii) climate change legislation and Indigenous women's voices on environmental relationships in Aotearoa New Zealand and the South Pacific. My research questions for this initial stage of the research were:

- How are women and girls being positioned in climate change discourses?
- How do gendered climate change discourses intersect with wider social power relations, especially between the constructed binary oppositions of men and women, North and South, to enable and constrain our ways of contextualising climate change?
- How do feminist critiques offer new ways of conceptualising women and girls within climate change research and language?

Part 2

Part 2 shifted from the wider focus in Part 1 on gender and climate change, to look more closely at how population was being figured in conversations about climate

change and reproduction in the Global North. Part 2 informed Article 2, a tracing of the figures which are animating the question of “Is it okay to have a child in conditions of climactic change?” in a handful of Global North texts. Two important theoretical turning points developed out of writing Article 2. Firstly, I took up Haraway’s theory of figures and figurations, enabling me to critique the “material-semiotic” (2008, p. 4) figurations of population and reproduction in response to climate change, rather than personal and individual decisions. Secondly, I began to attend to the psychological pain underpinning the stories I was hearing about climate change and motherhood. This interest in the transformative potential of processing pain in response to dying worlds carries through to the later articles in the thesis.

My early research questions for Part 2 were:

- How are women in climate justice movements such as BirthStrike making sense of their reproductive decisions in relation to climate change?
- Which narratives are most prominent in how these stories are being told?
- How can women in post-colonial, post-industrial contexts talk about choosing to not have children because of climate change, without reiterating population control narratives?

Article 3 stretches across Part 2 and Part 3 of the thesis. In Article 3, I return to the testimonial statements published by BirthStrike members which I had collected in the early months of my research, to analyse the stories through an iteration of the Listening Guide (Gilligan, 2015). Here, I trace the movement of psychological voices and sense-making within the testimonials, as well as my own affective responses to the stories. Article 3 builds upon the insights I develop in Article 2, in how a dominant figuration of subjectivity as unified and rational in Global North contexts constrains our ability to become response-able to climate change, including through reproductive decision-making. Article 3 also reaches forward, enabling me to pursue a creative and relational analytical approach in the final section of the thesis.

Part 3

Part 3 was intended to focus on embodied stories about the impacts of climate change on women’s thoughts and feelings about having children. Both Article 3 and Article 4 follow this thread away from the god trick. For Article 4, I recruited and

interviewed⁴ six self-identifying women in Aotearoa New Zealand about their thoughts and feelings about having children in contexts of climate change. I then produce a collage response to the women's stories, which analysed how women were figuring their reproductive decisions and desires in conditions of ecological crisis. In both Article 3 and Article 4, I include and articulate my own embodied, affective responses to the stories, as this formed part of my methodological approach. I consider these fledgling methodological efforts to be some of the more significant contributions of the project. My research questions for this section of the thesis were:

- How is climate change affecting women's feelings about motherhood and having children in Aotearoa New Zealand?
- How are they experiencing this tension – emotionally, relationally, practically?
- How are their feelings and decisions about motherhood and climate change influenced?
- How are they finding 'new, inventive' ways of making kin in our capitalist ruins?

Structure of thesis

The thesis is structured according to how the research itself progressed, from the first to last article. Between each article I have included interstitial sections. These sections draw connections between the articles and the thesis as a whole. They also provide additional methodological detail as required, where this was not possible to include in the articles. At the time of writing, Articles 1, 2, and 3 are published in peer-reviewed journals. Article 4 is currently under review with a peer-reviewed journal. Articles 1 and 3 are single-authored, with Articles 2 and 4 co-authored with research supervisors. In the fourth interstitial section, I also briefly reflect on my experiences in 2023 undertaking six months of field work on motherhood and climate change in California, funded through a Fulbright scholarship. The California research is in addition to the current project and therefore does not form part of the current thesis, though it informed my thinking in the latter stages of this PhD, particularly in relation to collage. Findings from the California research are not yet published.

⁴ Full ethics approval was gained for this stage of the project.

ARTICLE 1: (Re)Storying Gender and Climate Change: Feminist Ethical Possibilities

Meynell, L. (2023). Re(storying) gender and climate change: Feminist ethical possibilities. *Ethics & the Environment*, 28(2), 81-115.

Statement of contributions: Article written and edited by PhD candidate as sole author.

This article critically considers how existing social power relations are reified in the stories we're using to tell stories about gender and climate change.

Throughout, I draw on Donna Haraway's argument that "it matters what stories make worlds, which worlds make stories" (2016, p. 12) to explore some of the theoretical possibilities for re-storying gender and climate change offered by feminist and critical scholars. I work through two contextual examples: i) United Nations and associated governmental policy on 'gender mainstreaming' in our climate responses; and ii) climate change legislation and Indigenous women's voices on environmental relationships in Aotearoa New Zealand and the South Pacific. I argue that alongside our need for urgent climate action, we must also disrupt the social power relations reified through hierarchical binaries in our climate change texts, such as Global North/Global South, masculine/feminine, and developing/developed, if we are to ethically and relationally respond to our climate crises.

INTRODUCTION: RESISTING HUMAN EXCEPTIONALISM

Feminist scholarship has long recognised the ways in which Western logocentric and androcentric narratives have dominated the stories we use to tell stories about ecological destruction and gender (Merchant, 1989). Writing through the genre of science fiction in the late 1980s, for example, Ursula Le Guin (1989) critiqued the cultural privileging of 'hero narratives' in our Eurocentric origin stories, as these narratives prize man's domination of nature—symbolised through prehistoric hunting—while devaluing the cultural and technological significance of simply having something to put things in—a carrier bag, a receptacle, a container, which can hold not only food, but a less violent means of storying the world. In Haraway's problematizations of science figured as a heroic quest, which are coming into formation at a similar time as Le Guin's 'carrier bag of fiction' theory (e.g., Haraway, 1988, 1989)

and which later directly engage with Le Guin's storytelling (e.g., Haraway, 1992, 2016), hero stories function to perpetuate human exceptionalism, wherein the subordination of other humans and more-than-human-species is treated as derivative of nature, not theory (Haraway, 1991). And crucially, as Haraway (2016) reminds us, we *can* change our theories, our stories; the world doesn't have to be ordered this way. Androcentrism is still evident in our responses to the climate crisis today, with feminist scholars arguing that proposals to geoengineer the climate, as a response to climate change, lack ethical analyses of gendered impacts (Buck, Gammon, & Preston, 2014; Sikka, 2018).

In this article, I critically review how existing social power relations are being reified in the stories we're using to tell stories about gender and climate change. I draw on feminist, Indigenous and environmental justice scholarship as well as my own situated knowledge to ask a series of critical, ethical questions about the possibilities for disrupting the dominant Eurocentric, androcentric and anthropocentric hierarchies which structure our climate change texts. By attending to intersectional and reflexive approaches, I consider how intersecting markers of difference (Brah & Phoenix, 2004) position women in climate change narratives; and how situated knowledge can help us to challenge human exceptionalism in our climate narratives, allowing us to engage in forms of climate justice which are ethically responsive and responsible to those we co-become with on Earth—including our fellow humans, companion species, and more-than-human worlds (Haraway, 2016).

I begin by reflexively locating myself in time and place, before discussing the theoretical possibilities for storying gender and climate change differently, to disrupt hierarchical binary structures which reify our existing social power relations. From there, I analyse the storytelling structures and social power relations at work in two case studies: i) UN and associated governmental texts on 'gender mainstreaming' in climate change policies; and ii) climate change legislation in Aotearoa New Zealand, and Indigenous women's voices on environmental relationships in Aotearoa New Zealand and the South Pacific.

IN TIME AND PLACE

Reflexivity within feminist and environmental justice scholarship enables us to locate ourselves and others within the relational flow of meaning and power and to

build political solidarity with the more-than-human world (Mallory, 2009). In her discussion of the significance of reflexivity in the interdisciplinary juncture between feminist and environmental justice, Alkon (2011) describes reflexivity as requiring “researchers to think deeply about the social relations that make research possible, and to consider the influence of social relationships, as well as their own backgrounds, on the construction of knowledge” (p. 130). To this depth, I add a Foucauldian emphasis on power—on how social power relations structure our experiences of being in the world and of the changing climate, as power is relational and dynamic, involving a “mode of action” which acts upon the possible actions of bodies (Foucault, 1982, p. 789). Thus, I begin by situating myself in time and place.

I am writing this article at the beginning of 2023 in a small town—Te Papaioea—in the lower North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, where summer is at its height. Here, the shock waves of Covid-19 have been felt, though softened by our relative geographical isolation and strict policy of border closures from April 2020 to August 2022. Indeed, Covid-19 and its inflationary aftermaths feel symptomatic of our wider environmental crises; Heyd (2020), for example, locates Covid-19 within the proposed geological epoch called the Anthropocene, as the pandemic which as of February 2023 has resulted in 6.8 million human deaths worldwide (WHO, 2023) follows two centuries of unprecedented human exploitation of Earth’s natural resources. In my world, climate change and its violent environmental conditions are mentioned often and with increasing urgency—this includes in news media, in conversation, in local and central government policy, in podcasts I listen to and in the academic communities I circulate. My world feels saturated by climate anxiety, just as I physically and emotionally experience climate weathering, as theorised by Neimanis and Loewen Walker (2014). One example of this weathering includes the intense and sudden sunburn we’re at pains to prevent in this part of the world, an embodied reminder of the hole in the ozone layer above the Southern Pole, recognised since the 1980s as caused by the unregulated emission of chlorofluorocarbons into the atmosphere (*Montreal Protocol*, 1987).

I also come to climate change through a web of lived experience shaped by feminist scholarship and situated in the colonizing, post-industrialised context of Aotearoa New Zealand. In this country, the intersection of gender, race and class persists in our social power relations, as neoliberal policy perpetuates the marginalizing

practices of colonialism. My genetic and cultural inheritances include a historically contingent mix of English, Samoan, German, and Irish ancestry. Yet as a Pākehā,¹ lower-middle-class, cisgendered woman born and raised here, I experience climate change through multiple intersecting marks of privilege: of being on the colonizing side of history, of being on the advanced capitalist side of world economies, of being on the high consuming side of food, energy, geographical space, and cultural/symbolic capital. I'm a PhD candidate in psychology, and my capacity to speak, write, and research from a position of relative legitimacy within the knowledge economy has been entwined with my privileged access to education at all levels. That I mark the distinctions encountered in my own life through the language of 'sides,' reminds me again of the thickness of binary language in my own everyday sense-making. Delete it and start again, or mull it over, as a way of staying with the trouble?

THEORETICAL POSSIBILITIES FOR (RE)STORYING OUR CLIMATE CRISES

I begin this section with carrier bags, both as a metaphor for resisting stories of human exceptionalism, and as a methodological approach to gathering up and carrying with me (through this article and beyond) the feminist theoretical possibilities for restorying our climate crises. I listen again to Ursula Le Guin writing about the carrier bag theory of fiction, affirming that:

"If it is a human thing to do to put something you want, because it's useful, edible, or beautiful, into a bag, or a basket, or a bit of rolled bark or leaf, or a net woven of your own hair, or what have you, and then take it home with you, home being another, larger kind of pouch or bag, a container for people... if to do that is human, if that's what it takes, then I am human after all." (Le Guin, 1989, p. 149)

And I consider the relational connections of Donna Haraway writing in response to both Ursula Le Guin's (1989) and Octavia E. Butler's (1993/2019) science fiction imaginings, telling us another story about how:

"The slight curve of the shell that holds just enough water, just a few seeds to give away and to receive, suggests stories of becoming-with, of reciprocal induction, of

1. New Zealander of European descent.

companion species whose job in living and dying is not to end the storying, the worlding.” (Haraway, 2016, pp. 118–19)

Following these lines of feminist creative expansion, this section is structured around me putting theoretical possibilities in my carrier bag of storytelling. Things become jumbled up in there, as I walk about with my writing, thinking, and relating; the roots of stories become entangled and the Eurocentric, androcentric tradition of trying to keep things distinct, linear, logical is disrupted, at least for the time being. As noted in the introduction, I also connect this work to the decolonization of our academic texts and spaces in Aotearoa New Zealand, in which feminist women who descend from and continue to benefit from colonising ancestors and structures are morally and politically tasked with making space for carrying and listening to Māori² women’s voices and stories, in all their differences and complexities. And there’s a need to recognize and reflect upon what we might *not* be entitled to put in our carrier bags, to claim as our own and/or put to our own particular usages. Here, I am thinking of what Helene Connor describes as a “kete (basket) of knowledge being produced by Māori feminist writers and researchers” (2007, p. 59), which represents sacred spaces and carrier bags for Māori women’s narrative practices of co-becoming. As I recognize that there are moral limits to what I can claim and put in my carrier bag, I am also being practical about the physical limits to what I can carry: I’m resisting the aspiration to build a complete and final ‘collection’ within my carrier bag, a fantasy which emerges from imperial and colonizing histories of the acquisition and exhibition of Indigenous taonga (treasures), embedded in the “Enlightenment loyalties” of positivist epistemologies (Harding, 1991, p. vii). Instead, what follows is a partial, multiple, and situated discussion of the possibilities for restorying gender and climate change.

Feminist relational ethics

Feminist standpoint theory is one of the first epistemological and ethical koha (gifts) I put in my carrier bag, particularly Donna Haraway’s (1988) theory of situated knowledges, which values its limited perspective as a form of feminist objectivity. I carry situated knowledge within this article as both a map of my epistemological assumptions *and* a possibility for resisting and disrupting the reification of dominant

2. Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand.

social power relations in our environmental texts. Now a classic article in feminist standpoint theory readings, Haraway's (1988) discussion of 'the science question in feminism' messes with the dualism which characterised critical debates on objectivity in the 1980s. Echoing Sandra Harding's (2012) call for a feminist successor science which neither innocently embraces nor totally rejects possibilities for scientific objectivity, Haraway emphasises the significance of our embodied, situated ways of seeing and knowing the world to knowledge production. As she tells us, "The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision" (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). Haraway resists narratives of human exceptionalism and totalizing vision, arguing instead that we must recognize that our knowledge is always produced through our limited locations, which extends to include our ocular-dominated human senses:

"We need to learn in our bodies, endowed with primate colour and stereoscopic vision, how to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and where we are not, in dimensions of mental and physical space we hardly know how to name." (Haraway, 1988, p. 582)

Imperative to legitimizing this situated knowledge is the recognition and resistance of what Haraway calls the 'god trick.' The god trick includes the Eurocentric aspirations to know all things—to observe, measure, and categorize the world—through a decontextualised, value-neutral position, a trick which feminist theorists argue still dominates our modes of climate change scientific reporting (Tuana, 2013). It is this "view from above, from nowhere" (Haraway, 1988, p. 589) that in part enables existing social power relations to be disguised and reinscribed through our knowledge production and our climate narratives. Rather, Haraway privileges our situated, ecologically emergent ways of knowing the world, offering us a pathway towards embodied objectivities. Such objectivities are not obsessed with singular or final knowledge claims, nor with notions of endless relativity, but with the achievement of partial, collective, and politically responsible scientific standpoints, as they develop from and with particular worlds. The multiplicities of meaning enabled by situated knowledge can work to disrupt the production and naturalization of binary structures in our storytelling modes, including within our academic disciplines and climate change discourses.

Intersectional theory emerging from Indigenous, Black, and Third World feminist scholarship has critiqued iterations of the god trick in feminist research and scholarship, as well. As with situated knowledge, I carry intersectional theory in this article both as an epistemological assumption and a possibility for restorying gender and climate change. Intersectional theory challenges feminist and mainstream assumptions of homogenous communities of feminist-aligned women who share the same gender struggles. In her renowned articulation of intersectional theory, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) used a traffic metaphor to describe her vision of intersecting social oppressions, where gender is entangled with race, class and other markers of difference to produce heterogenous forms of marginalization for women. Intersectionality helps us to resist the dominance of white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgendered women's voices and imaginations in feminist and ecological movements, instead emphasizing the situated sites of women's experiences and knowledge (Brah & Phoenix, 2004).

Held together, intersectionality and situated knowledge offer compelling feminist frameworks through which to hear and imagine alternative stories and responses to our collective climate crises. Here, I am mindful of the immense ground which has shifted since these theoretical debates shaped feminist scholarship and activism in the late twentieth century. And I'm also mindful of the potential for dominant Eurocentric voices, including my own, to absorb and co-opt Indigenous, Black and Third World feminist scholarships, rinsing them of their political implications. As Salem (2016) argues, intersectional theory itself has 'travelled' into the mainstream, and not always with its critical roots still attached. Hence, I engage with intersectional theory and reflexivity in this article to locate the climate change stories I discuss within our broader intersecting social power relations (Brah & Phoenix, 2004) *and* to critique and decolonize my own deeply embedded Eurocentric understandings, as part of my ethical commitment to becoming other-wise (Haraway, 2016). The commitment to relationship and relationality articulated through both situated knowledge and intersectionality informs my understanding and use of the term 'relational ethics' in this article. Forming through generations of rich, collaborative feminist scholarship, relational ethics is expansive and assumes that relationships constitute the very ontological and epistemological conditions through which we might become response-able to the ethical challenges of our times (Haraway, 2016; see discussion on sympoiesis).

Disrupting logocentrism

The concept of binaries appears often in this article, as well as in feminist environmental scholarship, as a means of describing the establishment of hierarchical relationships between two terms (or signs) within texts. However, many of the articles which draw on the concept of binaries to form their arguments do not articulate the theoretical underpinnings of their use of the term. Here, I attempt to provide brief clarification of the deconstructionist assumptions (an impossibility... (Derrida, 1997)) which inform my own use of the term 'binary.'³ Following Derrida's readings of de Saussure's structural theorizations of language as a system of signs: i) the relationship between the signified and signifier is understood to be arbitrary, i.e., the signifier does not represent in its sound or expression an inherent, 'true' meaning of the concept/signified; and ii) the meaning of a sign is established through its difference from other signs within a system, forming an interdependent network of meanings, including binary oppositions such as God/man and light/dark. Thus, signs do not establish their meaning positively, through inherent qualities, but relationally and negatively, through their difference from other signs and their movement of deferment, to postpone positive meaning (Derrida, 1967/2005).

Derrida's theorization of logocentrism is particularly important to our understanding of how binaries function in environmental texts. Logocentrism, based on the Greek *logos* ('the word') emerges from Western knowledge systems and works to establish hierarchical relationships within texts (and our worlds and worlding projects) through the privileging of one sign over another in binary oppositions. Thus, the hierarchical ordering of **masculine**/feminine, **logic**/emotion and **culture**/nature with the first term dominating the second comes to be naturalised in our texts, reifying our existing social power relations. Logocentrism functions epistemologically by assuming that as human beings, we can transcend the contextual interpretations imposed by our language and knowledge systems to know and describe 'reality' in pure and unmediated forms. Based on this theory, the first sign in a binary pair is assumed to be "grounded in the *logos* and so has clearer access to the truth, to the full presence of meaning, whereas the other is seen as lacking or corrupting of the truth as organised by the *logos*"

3. This does not equate to an assumption that other feminist uses of the term binary mirror my own theoretical associations.

(Hepburn, 1999, p. 644). In other words, logocentrism assumes that some signs, through their exceptionalism, can transcend their contextual becomings, just as, echoing human exceptionalism, some people (masculine, European, wealthy, industrious, brilliant?) can transcend nature. Although a deconstructionist reading assumes that there can be no straightforward dismissal or deletion of the binary oppositions within a system of signs, as meaning remains established through difference along an “infinite chain of representations” (Derrida, 1967/2005, p. 297), there is the possibility to disrupt logocentric order, logic, and plays of meaning within the text, as a text “already contains within it the tools for its own deconstruction” (Hepburn, 1999, p. 646). Although Derrida’s own analysis of the crises (or plagues) facing humanity overlooked environmental and more-than-human problems (Clark, 2011), deconstructionist readings are important theoretical practices through which we can denaturalize hierarchies in our environmental texts, enabling us to recognize and destabilize the logocentrism through which our environmentally destructive practices and relationships have been exercised and naturalised, such as **Global North**/Global South, **masculine**/feminine, **civilised**/savage and **developed**/developing.

“There are as many feminisms as there are deconstructions,” wrote Mary Poovey (1988, p. 51) in her 1980’s analysis of the relationship between deconstruction and feminist scholarship. In the decades since Poovey’s piece was written, the relationship between deconstruction and feminist scholarship has become no less heterogenous or diverse (e.g., Kamuf, 1997; Spivak, 1997; Arner & Falmagne, 2007). My purpose in this article is not to attend to the historical and theoretical depth of feminist interpretations of deconstruction (another impossibility), but to highlight how feminist critiques of ‘binary’ and ‘dualist’ structures within environmental texts have been instrumental in rethinking the ethical implications of our responses to climate change and gender.

Working from a scholarly location in feminist philosophy and the philosophy of science, Nancy Tuana (2013) has led efforts to identify and problematize the dualisms which often underlie and knit together climate change reports, as these include and extend beyond gendered constructs. Tuana has a broad goal of “catalyzing a new research agenda” (2013, p. 17) on gender and climate change, in which Tuana (2010) centres the importance of our ethical responsibilities in how we consume and produce knowledge on climate change, enacted in large part through our epistemic assumptions.

Drawing on feminist standpoint theories, Tuana (2013) emphasises the importance of resisting the god trick (Haraway, 1988) and the continued proliferation of climate change knowledge(s) which draw their legitimacy from adopting a decontextualised, value-neutral, scientific posture. As Tuana argues, it is imperative that we locate “epistemic gaps and injustices” in our climate change knowledge production (2013, p. 17), if we are to ethically examine whose interests are served by our various knowledge productions (and knowledge avoidances) on climate change. Part of Tuana’s work in locating these epistemic gaps in our climate change knowledge production is to identify and disrupt underlying dualist concepts which structure contemporary climate change reports, including those produced by the United Nations and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. As Tuana (2013) argues, the proliferation of dualisms in climate change literature, which privilege the first term and subordinate the second term, works to naturalize the social power relations which have produced the very environmental catastrophes the reports seek to respond to. Within environmental texts, Tuana presents the most basic of these dualisms as:

“objective and value free – subjective and value laden;
 science – indigenous knowledge;
 modern/ developed – primitive / less developed;
 knowledge – folk wisdom / ignorance;
 agency – passivity;
 masculine – feminine.” (Tuana, 2013, p. 26)

Compare for a moment this ‘list’ to Donna Haraway’s (1988, p. 588) production of a “dichotomous chart” which opens possibilities for resisting the claims and constraints of stories told about the value-neutrality of science, crafting an argument where location, rather than relativism, becomes the story through which totalising empiricisms can be challenged:

“universal rationality	ethnophilosophies
common language	heteroglossia
new organon	deconstruction
unified field theory	oppositional positioning
world system	local knowledges
master theory	webbed accounts.” (Haraway, 1988, p. 588)

Nancy Tuana draws on Sandra Harding's feminist philosophy of science to locate the dualisms present in climate change texts within "the trope of Western modernity" (Tuana, 2013, p. 28), which constructs women of the Global South in Western imaginations as always-already poor, as primitive and subjugated, and hence as lacking the agency to respond to and mitigate the effects of climate change. As will be discussed later in this article, these dualist constraints and the social power relations they reify have been critiqued by feminist scholars analysing climate change texts in subject-locations including environmental population control (Sasser, 2018) and the feminization of climate vulnerability (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). Ethically, these dualisms can be understood to function not only in reifying assumptions that women and girls are vulnerable and passive; they also fail to account for the vulnerabilities of men and boys, as well as gender diverse peoples, to the effects of climate change.

Sympoiesis and more-than-human relations

Looping forward to Haraway's (2016) more recent theorizations of the stories we use to tell stories, we encounter a similar concern for the relational structures of our meaning systems, articulating the profound influence our ontological and epistemological assumptions have upon our ethical work to "stay with the trouble of living and dying well in response-ability to a damaged earth" (Haraway, 2016, p. 2). Framed within her overarching epistemological work on situated knowledge and multispecies relations, Haraway emphasises the importance of thinking critically about the ways in which stories materialize through relational, embodied, historical layers, as collective sympoietic productions. In this sense, stories do not create themselves, nor, if I dip into Derridean language, do stories have recourse to an 'outside-text' in retelling their stories (Derrida, 1976/1997). Such an understanding of stories-as-sympoietic-productions disrupts the assumptions of human exceptionalism within Western understandings of self-created and self-creating man, writing himself into being in a solitary room, an ivory tower, or a SpaceX-powered flight to Mars. Rather, "stories nest like Russian dolls inside ever more stories and ramify like fungal webs throwing out ever more sticky threads" (Haraway, 2019, p. 565). Haraway credits Dempster's (1998) environmental research for bringing the concept of sympoietic systems to her theoretical attention, which, through a biological framework, Dempster defines as:

“collectively-producing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. Information and control are distributed amongst components. The systems are evolutionary and have the potential for surprising change.”

(Dempster, as cited in Haraway, 2016, p. 33)

Such an understanding of sympoiesis evokes a shift away from autopoietic systems—characterised in Haraway’s (2016) reading as autonomous, self-creating units—and works to disrupt an epistemological assumption that systems create and sustain themselves, distinct from their intersecting relations. There’s something here, too, about the dualist structure through which sympoiesis comes into articulation in Dempster’s (1998) and Haraway’s (2019) work—as a dethroning of autopoiesis—echoing deconstructivism’s premise that, although meaning is established through difference, this establishment can be expansive. As we work to widen and complicate rather than contract and simplify our climate change narratives, we enable an inclusive re-locating of the god trick to a multiplicity of locations.

Taken as a story to tell stories with, sympoiesis enables Haraway to reiterate the ‘making with’ processes between earth creatures and contexts, between stories and stories. Helping us to see and hear another story through which we can tell our stories, Haraway turns to compost, a ‘hot mix’ which resists notions of singular, discrete becoming. Telling stories about gender and climate change through the stories of compost, of sympoiesis, of multispecies relations, helps us to stay with the trouble of disrupting the reification of existing social power relations in our environmental texts. As we work towards a multiplicity of meaning in our stories about gender and climate change, privileging human and more-than-human relationships in our ethical responses, the hierarchical binary ordering of **men**/women, **human**/non-human, **first**/third, **technofix**/degrowth can be disrupted, along with the social power relations naturalised through their tiered arrangements, making the webs of meaning which circulate through these texts more sticky and interconnected.

Growing from related scholarly ‘compost’ as Haraway’s (2019) sympoietic writings, Anna Tsing’s (2015) scholarly storytelling with matsutake mushrooms manifests as a way to resist human exceptionalism in our narrative practices. Tsing locates matsutake mushrooms as the protagonists of her story—highly prized in Japan for their distinctive smell, the matsutake is also particular in its growing conditions,

refusing efforts to be cultivated at scale, preferring instead the “transformative mutualism” (p. 40) of pine forests, including those forests created and abandoned in the name of capital accumulation. History, in this worlding project, does not only belong to those humans classed as ‘exceptional,’ it also belongs to the “contaminated diversity” (p. 33) of fungal spores, pine trees, and matsutake pickers, who often come from communities displaced by war, marginalization, and environmental destruction. Telling a history which resists human exceptionalism requires what Tsing calls the “arts of noticing” (p. 17)—composed not only through sheer curiosity, but also “multiple temporalities, revitalizing description and imagination” (p. 21). As will be briefly explored in later sections of this article, re-figuring our imaginative impulses toward an ethics of multispecies relationality and care is crucial to our efforts to live in the ruins of capitalism. As Tsing puts it, “To write a history of ruin, we need to follow broken bits of many stories and to move in and out of many patches. In the play of global power, indeterminate encounters are still important” (2015, p. 213).

Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies further expand our climate imaginations, disrupting the god trick and tropes of Western modernity. To illustrate such an argument, I focus on a research paper co-authored by Bawaka Country (2016), an Indigenous Homeland in North East Arnhem Land, Australia. The human agents who join Bawaka Country in writing this paper include Indigenous women of the Yolŋu Aboriginal-Australian peoples, for whom Bawaka is their ancestral home; and women academics in human geography, who formed research partnerships with Yolŋu people and Bawaka Country. In one of the textual pieces developing from this collaboration, we are invited to learn what it might mean to know and live in a “world that is relational, that co-becomes with us and each other, that is knowing, that is alive—even in its death” (Bawaka Country et al., 2016, p. 456). Bawaka is recognised as the “lead author and heart of [the] paper,” the “author-ity” of the knowledge produced, the stories told, the relationships formed (Bawaka Country et al., 2016, p. 456). Yolŋu ontologies inform this academic storytelling, with particular emphasis given to the more-than-human kinship system of the Yolŋu people, known as *gurrutu*. *Gurrutu* is treated with respect and dignity within the journal article, recognised as a phenomenon which extends beyond singular definitions, and which certainly cannot be neatly accounted for within the human-centric and English-language limits of Western knowledge systems. However, this is not to say that *gurrutu* is without boundaries. As Bawaka Country et al.

tell us, “gurrutu’s relationality is strongly place-based. It flows, it emerges, but not in an infinitely open way. There is structure, pattern, meaning to its emergence” (2016, p. 460). With this patterned relationality, “A person, more-than-human, indeed Country, comes into being through relationships, but is not reducible to, or subsumed by, any relationship or particular set of relationships. Balance in all things must be maintained. These are relationships of care and of obligation” (Bawaka Country et al., 2016, p. 461).

There is much to be learned by sitting quietly with Bawaka Country et al.’s text and considering the ontological, epistemological, and ethical implications gurrutu might have for our understandings of and responses to gender and climate change. However, in writing this, I’m also wary of imposing my own Western, capitalist logic of ‘transaction’ upon the knowledge shared by Bawaka Country and Yolŋu women. I’m trying to stay with the situatedness of gurrutu and Bawaka Yolŋu knowledge systems, which cannot be transplanted, like a skin graft, onto the diseased body of Western extractivist political and economic systems. Rather, I hold Bawaka Country in my carrier bag of theory (Le Guin, 1989), mindful of its possibilities for helping us to expand—and politically locate—our limited androcentric and Eurocentric stories about gender and climate change. As we learn to hear and think with Indigenous stories of co-becoming, including within the academic texts which are co-written with Country and environments, we have the opportunity to bring into sight and disrupt deep-rooted hierarchical binary arrangements which produce, at least in part, our existing social power relations. If we can open this space within the closed fist of Western knowledge systems—theoretically and politically—we might just have a chance of moving beyond narratives of human exceptionalism and domination, to enable ethical response-abilities to our precarious human and more-than-human worlding projects (Haraway, 2016). In the following sections, I follow these ethical possibilities and responsibilities through two case studies, to explore how we might retell some of our existing gendered climate change stories to better respond to the crises unfolding in thick time around us.

CASE STUDY I: UN AND ASSOCIATED GOVERNMENTAL TEXTUAL PRODUCTIONS OF GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE

With my carrier bag packed full of feminist theoretical provisions, I journey into one of the thickest terrains of climate change storytelling—the United Nations. Here, in the living layers of policy, webbed and tangled, both gender and climate change have

been urgent items on geopolitical agendas for decades. The two are now becoming increasingly entwined, as gender is recognised as an overlooked component of climate change, which is partly determining, as our worlds heat up, who gets to live and who gets to die. ‘*Gender and climate change*’ as a co-joined political concept can be most readily located in the stories of the Conference of the Parties (COP), organised through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), though it’s worth noting that ‘gender and climate change’ is also spilling out into numerous UN-related reports and policies⁴, which gives our story here a certain weight and proliferation. COP21, hosted in Paris in 2015 and led by Christiana Figueres of Costa Rica, is recognised as the most significant climate change treaty to date, during which 196 countries signed a legally binding agreement to work together to keep global warming below a maximum threshold of two degrees Celsius, but preferably below 1.5 degrees Celsius. In COP21, we have a story that’s telling a story about climate change: the potential for human nations to overcome the supposed biological drive for domination and the competition for extractable earthly resources, to enact a partnership to limit further anthropogenic damage to Earth’s ecosystems.

COP25, held four years and three Conferences of the Parties later, in Madrid in 2019, tells another story, this time about the relationship between gender and climate change: signing parties agreed to strengthen gender-responsive approaches to climate change, although the conference failed to achieve more ambitious emission reduction targets overall. The gendered inclusions in COP25 included an enhanced Gender Action Plan (GAP) and Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG), both spanning five years (UNFCCC, 2019b). To quote from the report, Decision 3/CP.25:

“Recognizes with concern that climate change impacts on women and men can often differ owing to historical and current gender inequalities and multidimensional factors and can be more pronounced in developing countries and for local communities and indigenous peoples.” (UNFCCC, 2019b, p. 6)

4. Significant textual examples in ‘report’ format include the UN Food and Agriculture Organization’s (2006) *Gender: The Missing Component of the Response to Climate Change*; the UN Development Programme’s (2009) *Resource Guide on Gender and Climate Change*; the UNFCCC’s (2019a) *The Integration of Gender Considerations in Climate Policies, Plans and Actions*; the UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2019); *Analytical Study on Gender-Responsive Climate Action for the Full and Effective Enjoyment of the Rights of Women*; and the UN Environmental Programme’s (2019) *Gender, Climate & Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*.

Let's stay with the trouble of the story enacted through this statement, for a moment. At first reading, it seems as though we have a formal recognition of the disproportionate gendered impacts of climate change, which recognize '*with concern*' the historical and material intersections in how these impacts will be experienced. However, to what extent does this recognition/representation function to disrupt the social power relations which have underpinned climate change, especially when such recognition of harm remains operative only within neoliberal and colonizing geopolitical systems? For example, the use of the term 'developing countries' in the statement above is explicit enough to tell us that we're still working within an assumed hierarchical binary of First World/Third World and Global North/Global South. These hierarchies reproduce the "trope of Western modernity" (Tuana, 2013, p. 28), obscuring the histories of exploitation and marginalization through which progress narratives have been enacted, and which have produced the very conditions of precarity which now mark many non-Western countries as 'developing' and 'other' within the developed/developing binary. 'Climate change and gender' in this story is being enacted through language and characters which are so lacking in contextual and critical detail that we are invariably forced back upon familiar associations and stereotypes in imagining the scene that's being described to us. Symptoiesis and situated knowledge (Haraway, 2016) offer resistances to these flat, static representations, requiring us to locate ourselves and each other within the relentless historical contingency of place, space and social power relations. How might we open space for the "broken bits of many stories" (Tsing, 2015, p. 213) to be told, felt, seen, heard in our stories about gender and climate change?

Resisting value-neutrality in climate discourse and policy

As Nancy Tuana has argued through her philosophy of science readings of climate change texts, we must continually critique whether "we have the knowledges we need to ensure climate justice" (Tuana, 2013, p. 18). In one effort to critically trace the "knowledge-ignorance/power linkages" (Tuana, 2013, p. 19) enacted within and through climate change texts, Tuana (2013) analyses how a potential relationship between increasing global temperatures and vulnerability to the effects of climate change is constructed in IPCC reports, specifically through the 'burning embers' diagram (an early iteration of the diagram is provided in Figure 1.1; IPCC, 2001). Tuana

teases out the inherent contradictions in the way the modes of quantification and correlation adopted in the diagram are legitimised by its authors, through their explicit and repeated textual efforts to locate themselves and their knowledge production outside of 'value judgments,' in accordance with the rules and practices of post-positivist science. Yet, as Tuana analyses the diagram and its supporting text through a theory of feminist ethics and philosophy, she locates multiple, intersecting value judgments.

Tuana argues that as the burning embers model aggregates 'global' temperature rises through a presupposed matrix of five distinct forms of vulnerability, with three of these five forms phrased as 'risks,' it also makes fundamental, essentializing assumptions about the impacts of and vulnerabilities to climate change across diverse geographical and cultural contexts. Tuana critiques the underlying cultural values which have determined the authors' selection of aggregate impacts, asking us to consider how the overreliance on brute quantitative estimates of 'damage' and 'risk' in climate change research—often appearing in the form of economic costs and mortality rates—cannot account for the more complex lived losses caused by climate change, such as the loss of connection to land and the devastation of local biodiversity. I feel Bawaka Country et al's (2016) presence here, enabling us to hold "pain in relationship with joy, diminishment in relationship with growth" (p. 461), as we stay with the rich co-becomings which flow between seasons, plants, rocks, waters, mammals, birds, et al, enabling us to grieve and trouble the more-than-human losses of climate change. Such a process invites us to know and imagine the world differently—moving toward an appreciation of "contaminated diversity" which resists the clean, uncomplicated fantasies of colonial progress narratives (Tsing, 2015, p. 33).

Reading through her arguments in relation to wider environmental policies and texts, I wonder with Tuana about the location of women in the thick language being produced on climate change. Are we able to recognize and value women's diverse situated and intersectional knowledges, as this flows into women's abilities to mitigate and adapt to climate change in their embodied, cultural, geographical places? And can we practice the reflexive awareness needed to locate ourselves—and the broader social power relations which are enacted by and flow through us—amidst the thick language of climate change treaties and reports, especially as we are negotiating social

environments where the discursive formations of mainstream science are what make it possible to speak legitimately about climate change? In spite of the continued dominance which presumptions of value-neutrality hold within scientific narratives, situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988) and feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 2012) suggest another story—about how a movement towards reflexive and relational becoming promises not a collapse into relativism and climate denialism, but a manifestation of partial, collective and political scientific standpoints which can rigorously attend to the complexities of our environmentally-precarious times.

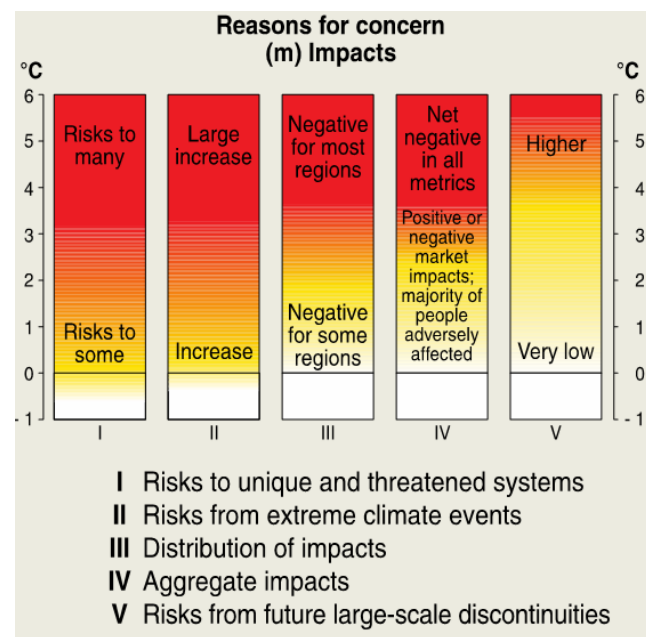


Figure 1.1: The Burning Embers Diagram (IPCC, 2001, p. 3).

Gender mainstreaming

‘Gender mainstreaming’ is another UN discursive formation which constrains our ability to meaningfully attend to the complexities of women’s intersecting exposures and vulnerabilities to increasing environmental catastrophes. Gender mainstreaming has become the dominant conceptual framework through which gender is integrated into climate change policy within UN organisations and it was formally inscribed into UN policy discourse in 1997, through the UN’s Economic and Social Council’s (ECOSOC) agreed resolutions. In this textual location, it is defined as:

“the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.” (ECOSOC, 1997, p. 2)

Here, the dominant story being told is of a decontextualised understanding of gender equality, where, as a colleague providing feedback on my draft puts it, “we still can’t story gender through social power relations in ways that enable movement.”⁵ As I am reading the UN statement on gender mainstreaming above, and as I am thinking with my friend, I also note the cold, metallic quality of the language used to bring ‘gender mainstreaming’ into formation; and I wonder, how we can speak our gendered losses and anxieties with and through such institutionalised texts? Speaking through my own emotional response to spending months reading and analysing these high-level climate documents, I have a sense of being oddly frozen (in a warming world...) within these textual categorizations of vulnerability and adaptability. Stories matter here, too. What kinds of stories can I hear and tell—of women’s responses to climate change, across political and embodied locations—when I am also held in place by dualistic categorizations of difference (and sameness)? And yet, in the fold of asking these questions, I remember that even though meaning is established through difference (Derrida, 1976/1997), such a formation of meaning can be expansive rather than contractive, as we disrupt the logocentric order and logic within the text; we *can* make our stories stickier, messier, more relational, as we stay with the historical contingencies of both our situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) and the environmental ravages enacted upon landscapes and more-than-human kin through advanced capitalism (Tsing, 2015).

Alongside the dualisms at work in climate change reports, feminist scholars have identified how binary distinctions are at work in the sticky, embodied, relational exchanges of climate change conferences, including at the highest levels of international relations. Here, efforts to meaningfully integrate considerations of gender into climate

5. Hazel Buckingham, written feedback on draft to author, 6 April 2022.

change policy are constrained by androcentric norms embedded within the diplomatic institutions and conventions tasked with generating global commitments to addressing climate change (Arora-Jonsson, 2011; Gay-Antaki, 2020). First-hand accounts of how gender is negotiated and ‘mainstreamed’ into climate change policies during the UN’s Conference of the Parties (COP) help us to analyse how gender is enacted in the embodied settings of these climate change treaty negotiations. For example, Gay-Antaki (2020) attended a series of COPs⁶ and produced a narrative analysis of her own field notes, observations, interview transcripts and COP documents. Her analysis emphasises the tight cultural spaces in which ‘gender’ is negotiated in these formal contexts, often resulting in the reification of essentialising narratives about women and climate change.

As Gay-Antaki (2020) shows, such tight cultural spaces and discursive restrictions are enacted through multiple, often competing stories about ‘gender’ and ‘vulnerability’. Perhaps most obviously, there is the disproportionate negotiating and voting power held by men at the COPs, as men still form the majority of delegates and negotiators chosen by their home countries to take up a representative role at the COPs. Informing this physical mass of men is the dominance and continued proliferation of androcentric discourses within COP discussions and ensuing treaty documents, which continue to position women and nature as other to (and less than) men and technological, scientific solutions. Economic and class-based dominations form a third intersecting social power relation at work during COPs, as economic privilege becomes distinct in the discursive spaces afforded by those who possess the most financial resources. And there’s race, manifesting the historical and contemporary colonization, extraction, and exploitation of the majority of the world’s peoples and ecological environments by European and Western powers, reproduced in climate change legislation through First/Third World, developed/developing, Global North/Global South binaries.

As gender intersects with race, class, and other ‘markers of difference’ in the contexts of COPs, inequalities between women are ignored and minimised, in part by a small group of powerful women who hold a disproportionate influence over how ‘gender’ is narrated and negotiated during the COPs, such as through the convening of

6. Gay-Antaki attended three Conferences of the Parties—COP16 in Mexico; COP20 in Lima; and COP21 in Paris. Her research also drew on interviews with more than twenty “activists, NGO representatives, delegates, expert negotiators, and academics on issues concerning gender and climate change” (Gay-Antaki, 2020, pp. 3-4).

gender discussions and interventions. For example, Gay-Antaki (2020) analyses how the Women and Gender Constituency (WGC) group operates hierarchically within the wider COP structure. The WGC became a formal constituency in 2009 with the aim of supporting gender mainstreaming during the COPs, and it has been influential in forcing 'gender' into high-level climate discussions and treaty ratifications. However, the leadership and membership of the WGC is embedded within Global North/Global South dualisms, with organizations from the Global North occupying the strongest positions within the constituency. While being mostly absent from the WGC's leadership positions, women from the Global South are positioned as the primary focus of the WGC's efforts, through narratives which intertwine femininity, poverty, climate change, and vulnerability in uncritical ways. In this story, 'women of the Global South' are textually produced as static, cut-out figures, void of agency or movement within both their situated responses to climate change and wider Eurocentric power relations.

Such totalizing gestures toward 'representation' by the WGC and other environmental groups work to discursively obscure the social power relations which flow between women, settling for a less threatening middle ground where 'gender and climate change' can draw the most sympathy and support from the wider COP membership (Gay-Antaki, 2020). Feminist theories such as situated knowledge and intersectionality offer us openings through which to disrupt these dualistic representations, enabling us to hear how women experience gender and climate change through their embodied, partial, fractured, and fluid social locations. The practice of hearing and telling these smaller, situated stories moves us toward sym-poietic co-becomings (Haraway, 2016) and problematises understandings of gender mainstreaming.

Vulnerability and virtue

Closely related to Global North/Global South binaries, 'gender and climate change' is also figured through the "dual themes" of vulnerability and virtuousness in climate change discourses (Arora-Jonsson, 2011, p. 744; Eastin, 2018). The vulnerability and virtuousness duality draws upon the proliferation of research and policy documents which assume that women, particularly women of the Global South, are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change, due in part to higher rates of poverty and financial insecurity experienced by women and girls globally. Working as a counterpart to this

vulnerability are essentialist assumptions about the virtuous nature of women, produced in part through social science research which attempts to quantify environmental and social conscientiousness through sexual differences (e.g., Davidson & Haan, 2012; Ekholm & Olofsson, 2017). When the threads of vulnerability and virtuousness are meticulously traced, the widespread claim that women and girls constitute seventy percent of the world's poor becomes untethered, a floating 'fact' which so comfortably fits gendered narratives that it has been textually repeated hundreds of times by environmental organizations writing about gender and climate change (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). Similarly, Arora-Jonsson (2011) argues that research on the assumed pro-environmentalism of women, supporting women's virtuous positionings within climate change discourses, has formed through gendered assumptions in the framing of research questions. Such a move reifies old tropes of women's binary location alongside nature/emotion/other, while adding climate chores to women's caring responsibilities. Here, I wonder how feminist understandings of strong objectivity (Harding, 1991) and epistemic gaps and injustices (Tuana, 2013) would open up this textual space, to disrupt these totalizing narratives of gender and climate change? And how would intersectionality shift the debates on climate vulnerability, enabling a more rigorous critique of the intersections of gender, class, race and global location?

An explicit focus on women's fertility and reproductive patterns in environmental texts echoes the gendered and Eurocentric assumptions in the themes of vulnerability and virtuousness, as rapid human population growth is discursively located as a contributor to climate change (e.g., Project Drawdown, 2020). Similar to the 70/30 split of gendered poverty, the claim that 'human overpopulation' is a direct cause of climate change has been circulated so prolifically and uncritically within environmental texts that it has become taken for granted as an incontestable empirical fact. As Jade Sasser's (2018) research demonstrates, if you follow the citational trails of overpopulation arguments, you will not be led back to ethically rigorous and locally sensitive studies. Rather, you will find yourself waist-deep in the swampy political conditions of the emergence of population studies, a field which with growing urgency in the mid-twentieth century attempted to calculate the universal human 'carrying capacity' of Earth through mathematical modelling and statistics, a paradoxical effort that both assumed the biological supremacy of European populations and claimed an

epistemological value-neutral status. Taking up these emergent populationist discourses in the name of environmental protection, environmental advocates naturalised the Eurocentric imaginary constructions and fears of a wildly fertile and economically unsensible ‘woman of the Global South,’ whose reproductive practices become the central focus of Western environmental interventions. Through these colonizing representations, an idealised feminine counterpart was also taking shape—a rational, neoliberal, self-governing Western woman:

“a moral agent who manages her fertility and the environment responsibly for the greater good. She is a modern woman who wants two or fewer children, engages in monogamous sexual relationships within the context of marriage, always uses contraceptives consistently and correctly, and makes childbearing decisions in concert with environmental values, including responsible (limited) consumption of energy and natural resources.” (Sasser, 2018, p. 4)

This figure of ideal femininity is what Sasser (2018) refers to as a sexual steward, a fantastical representation of individualised responsibility which can only hold its shape when seen from a decontextualised, disembodied no-where. When we embody this figure with the ongoing reproductive precarities which women in the Global North face—from limited access to abortion services, to high rates of intimate partner violence, to infertility and the rapid rise of in vitro fertilization, to the grief, anxiety and loss women may experience in trying to make the personal decision of whether it is ethical to bring a child into a world wracked by climate change—the sexual steward barely moves, except perhaps to fall apart. The sexual steward, then, cannot embody the complexities of women’s lived experiences of climate change, gender, or motherhood. She’s a fantastical figure, who does not carry the bruises and burdens of an intersectional location within our precarious worlding projects.

Ethical questions tumble out of me as I am thinking and feeling around the edges of these questions of representation and inclusion in how climate change is being narrated and legislated. I have a sense of scrambling, within the stories we have to tell stories with, to think and narrate difference differently. How can we ensure that women’s locations in climate change legislation go beyond representation—as a recognition of women’s vulnerability within patriarchal systems to the effects of climate change—to enable women’s situated and heterogenous participation in climate change

decision-making practices, to destabilize the social power relations which flow not only through gender, but through markers of race, class, sexuality, ability, and other categorizations of difference? Can we establish the relational spaces in which we can meaningfully respond to our privileges, marginalizations and vulnerabilities, resisting the domination of the 'other' required by binary structures, to story a world that despite being scarred by climate change, is replete with the complexities of third spaces and response-abilities (Haraway, 2016)? And indeed, with joy?

CASE STUDY II: CLIMATE CHANGE LEGISLATION IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND AND INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S VOICES ON ENVIRONMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS IN AOTEAROA AND TE MOANA-NUI-A-KIWA

"Our colonial experience traps us in the project of modernity. There can be no 'postmodern' for us until we have settled some business with the modern. This does not mean that we do not understand or employ multiple discourses, or act in incredibly contradictory ways, or exercise power ourselves in multiple ways. It means that there is unfinished business, that we are still being colonised (and know it), and that we are still searching for justice." (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999/2021, p. 38)

In the final section of this article, I turn my attention to how gender is storied in climate change legislature and policies in my own location of Aotearoa New Zealand; and how Indigenous women's voices on environmental relationships and stewardship in Aotearoa New Zealand and Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa (the wider Pacific region) offer us different stories through which to tell stories about gender and climate change. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999/2021) articulates in the quote above, colonization is ongoing and deeply entwined with 'the project of modernity.' Modernist narratives of linear progress, of technological and economic development, of empirical categorization, measurement, and definition, of the essentialization and universalization of the category of hu(man), are stubborn, sticky webs of stories which continue to centre human exceptionalism (and its violent, colonizing, gendered assumptions) in our understandings of and responses to ecological disasters and climate change (Mallory, 2009; Haraway, 2016).

Our imaginative movements are vital to disrupting and restorying our climate change responses (Paterson, 2016; Holgate, 2019). Thinking with symposium (Haraway,

2016), we might conceive of imagination as intensely relational, hardly singular or self-creating; and thinking with deconstruction (Hepburn, 1999), we might consider the ways in which the deferment of positive meaning and the refusal of logocentric logic enables pockets and folds of imaginative resistances and resources to take hold within our texts. Tsing's matsutake mushrooms remind us that our more-than-human kin have a stake in this imaginative effort, for "as long as we imagine that humans are made through progress, nonhumans are stuck within this imaginative framework too" (2015, p. 21).

Haraway has argued that Western imaginings are caught between a utopian vs. apocalyptic binary, wherein our anticipated futures are constrained by two dominant stories: a "cosmic faith in technofixes⁷, whether secular or religious" (2016, p. 3), which enables a fall back into notions of innocence and limits us from recognizing the importance of situated, community-led technological responses to environmental crises; and a deathly assumption that time's up for the human species, we've already set in place irreversible climate warming, and nothing we do from here will make a significant difference for future generations—and so we fall again, this time into a state of resignation, disabling movement and relational ethics. Rather, Haraway asks us to resist the immobilization of futurisms, channelling our attention instead to our situated locations and communities, as we become response-able to living and dying well on a damaged earth (Haraway, 2016). So, how does Aotearoa New Zealand's climate policies address the intersection of climate change and gender, and open space for situated knowledge and stories to be told, taken up, lived by in our precarious times?

Gender in Aotearoa New Zealand's climate policies

Aotearoa New Zealand has been a signing partner in major UN-convened climate change treaties during the previous forty years, including the Montreal Protocol (1987), the Kyoto Protocol (UNFCCC, 1997), and the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2020). And yet Aotearoa New Zealand remains behind other OECD nations in both its efforts to lower carbon emissions (UNFCCC, 2021) and to integrate gender into its climate change policies. To analyse the latter, I searched all of the major climate change policies and

7. For example, see Sikka's (2018) feminist analysis of geoengineering imperatives, such as fertilizing the ocean with iron to stimulate the growth of phytoplankton, which will sequester and store carbon dioxide from the atmosphere before sinking to the ocean floor.

acts legislated in Aotearoa New Zealand⁸ since 1986, to determine how often the words ‘gender,’ ‘equality,’ and/or ‘women’ appeared in their texts. ‘Women’ and ‘gender’ appear in just one piece of legislation—the Climate Change Response Act 2002—and this inclusion is indirect, through the Act’s amendment to include the Paris Agreement obligations. Thus, at the time of writing, there is almost no formal recognition of how gender and climate change intersect in the local context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

More encouragingly, Te Tiriti o Waitangi⁹ (the Treaty of Waitangi) is formally included in most climate change legislation in Aotearoa New Zealand, recognizing the legally binding bicultural relationship between Māori and the Crown. For example, Section 3A of the Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Act 2019 requires the Minister for Climate Change to consult with iwi and Māori “representative organisations” (2019, p. 4) and consider skills and expertise in relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi when appointing a Climate Change Commissioner. More broadly, Section 3A also requires the Minister to include specific strategies for iwi and Māori whenever developing national plans for reducing carbon emissions and developing climate adaptation strategies. Māori must be “adequately consulted” in the development of these climate strategies, and the Minister must “take into account the economic, social, health, environmental, ecological, and cultural effects of climate change on iwi and Māori” (*Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Act 2019*, p. 4). However, evidencing the ongoing colonizing structures in Aotearoa New Zealand, climate change legislature in this country does not acknowledge the right of Māori to tino rangatiratanga (political self-determination) as stipulated in Te Tiriti o Waitangi. At the time of writing, there are no provisions within our climate change legislation which

8. Including the Environment Act 1986; the Environmental Protection Authority Act 2011; the Climate Change Response Act 2002; the Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Act 2019; the Environmental Reporting Act 2015.

9. It is important to note that there are two versions of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi / Treaty of Waitangi—one in te reo Māori (Māori language) and one in English. Māori representatives signed the Māori version of the Treaty, and did not sign the English version. The British Crown representative (William Hobson) signed both the Māori and English versions of the Treaty, on behalf of the Queen Victoria of England. A key distinction between the two versions is that Māori, in signing the Māori version of the Treaty, agreed to give kawanatanga, or governance, to the Crown. Kawanatanga did not mean ceding complete sovereignty to the Crown, but rather allowing the British government to establish laws to govern their people in Aotearoa NZ. Rather, the Māori version guaranteed signing chiefs tino rangatiratanga, “the unqualified exercise of chieftainship over their lands, dwelling places, and all other possessions” (Te Papa, 2020, p. 1). The British version of the Treaty, however, stated that Māori were giving complete sovereignty to the Crown. Not all Māori rangatira (iwi chiefs) signed the Māori version of the Treaty (Te Papa, 2020).

recognize the legal rights of Māori at both regional and national levels, for example, to set emission reduction targets or to develop climate adaptation strategies which draw on Indigenous knowledges and ecological practices. In this sense, references to 'representation' and 'consultation' within Aotearoa New Zealand's climate change literature stops short of challenging the underlying social power relations which still position Māori as 'other' to and 'less than' the colonizing Pākehā 'norm,' even as colonizing and pollutive practices severely endanger the habitability of Aotearoa's whenua (land).

Kaitiakitanga (environmental stewardship)

The writing of Indigenous women in Aotearoa New Zealand and the wider South Pacific region on environmental relationships and responsibilities, often referred to as environmental stewardship or kaitiakitanga, can be read as invitations to think about our ethical relationships toward the lands, oceans, rivers, mountains, forests, and ecosystems which sustain human and more-than-human lives; to imagine and enact the possibilities for third spaces, joy, and grief in our climate anxious times. From my location as a Pākehā New Zealander, I think of these stories as gifts which must be heard and engaged with through relational ethics and a commitment to decolonization, attending to tikanga Māori (correct practice, protocol) in which koha (gifts) are based on relationships of reciprocity (McRae-Tarei, 2013). Reciprocity comes with a response-ability to resist misappropriating Indigenous stories, cosmogonies, knowledges and relationships, as frequently happens within Aotearoa's academic spaces (Pasisi & Henry, 2020). There's also the response-ability to resist hearing these stories as 'saviour' narratives which will, at the last possible moment, redeem us from the apocalyptic futures we're hurtling toward, while conveniently exempting us from doing the hard work of decolonizing our understandings and knowledge production, as well as giving up some of the colonizing ownership of land and environmental resources we might hold. We must stay with the "complicated, often ugly, and humbling" contaminated diversities of our colonised and capitalised landscapes (Tsing, 2015, p. 33).

Approaching the environmental writings of Indigenous women in Aotearoa and the South Pacific, it was necessary to cast a wider net in my reading, beyond the categories of climate change and gender. Climate change appears as a specific area of focus for some Indigenous women writing about the environment in Aotearoa and the

South Pacific, such as Jess Pasisi's (2020) research on Niue women's understandings of climate change. However, in much of the Indigenous literature I engaged with, climate change is not a distinctive concern; rather, such literature often writes about environmental destruction more broadly, as a practice of colonization, which arrived with the first European colonizers to the Pacific, and continuing to the present through neoliberal, globalised advanced capitalism.¹⁰

Māori women's environmental 'texts' develop through multiple forms, including waiata (song), raranga (weaving), toi whakaari (performative arts), whakairo (carving), whakataukī (proverbs), poetry, oral narratives, literature, academic publications. Such texts both resist colonial social power relations and reassert Māori ways of knowing and storying the world. Briar Wood, for example, tells us a story about the importance of resisting the habit of reading Māori women's stories through Western binaries, taking instead a braver step towards hearing the ontological possibilities offered by Māori women's storying of relationships to the environment:

"...it is possible to read Māori women's writing and imagery of earth as goddesses as an act of recovery; not as clinging to pre-Oedipal dreams of unitariness as escapism, but as their necessary and conscious evocation of the restoration of a balance in which earth's personification as female is respected and valued."
(Wood, 2007, p. 112)

Papatūānuku, earth goddess within Māori cosmogonies, is central to many Māori women's writings on environmental relationships. Papatūānuku weaves together the relationships between women and environment, cosmogony and gender, with such relationships grounded in the meanings and customs surrounding the word 'whenua.' Meaning both land and placenta, whenua holds "the personification of the body of Papatūānuku provider of nourishment and sustenance" (Jahnke, 1997, p. 28), with this relationship woven through Māori practices of burying a new born child's placenta on the child's ancestral homelands, "thus affirming a child's genealogical nexus with the land—whenua as tangata whenua [people of the land, Indigenous people]" (Jahnke, 1997, p. 28).

10. Symbolised, for example, by Aotearoa New Zealand's government giving permission to multinational corporations to test for deep sea oil drilling and gas fracking in iwi-held waters and coastlines in the 2010s, a further breach of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Grossman, 2018).

Wood, drawing on Jahnke's work, links Māori cosmogonies to the Indigenous resistance movements which gained momentum in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1980s, as Papatūānuku came to represent a "national symbol, signifying the importance of the land as living organism" (Wood, 2007, p. 112). Whakapapa, which as a noun can be translated to English as genealogy, kinship and ancestry, includes layers of relationality between people, land, cosmogony. For Ani Mikaere, whakapapa is a belief system which "connects us to everything there is, creating a myriad of relationships that speak to us of reciprocity, of responsibility and of the need for respect" (2011, p. 174). Papatūānuku is significant here, too, in embodying the relationship between women and whakapapa. As Mikaere beautifully writes, "One after the other, the generations emerge, creating a magnificent web of life, of which we form but one thread" (2011, p. 73). Mikaere helps us to resist romanticising these stories through a Western binary of science/folk-knowledge, emphasizing instead the importance of cosmogonies to the survival of Māori ancestral communities. Thus, the stories offered through Māori women's understandings of whakapapa, Papatūānuku, whenua help us to approach gender and climate change through a relational ethics which, in its telling and hearing, disrupts the dominance of Western narratives of human exceptionalism, of autopoietic self-creating man.

Hearing the situated environmental stories of Indigenous women in the Pacific

Environmental stewardship has also been brought into relation with mana wāhine scholarship (Māori women's feminist theory and activism) in Māori women's writing. Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1991; 2003), for example, interweaves the landscapes, the whenua, the flowers, the streams and rivers of Aotearoa New Zealand with theoretical discussions of Māori women's ways of knowing, feminist movements and environmental stewardship in her writing. Such environmental relationality extends from Māori understandings of custodianship of the land, rather than ownership or possession, which as Te Awekotuku writes, involves "caretaking for future generations, and an acknowledgment of the temporariness of human life. As the land remains, so do the people, who reflect its health, prosperity, and creative vigour" (1991, p. 68).

The Eurocentric contempt for Māori cosmogonies and practices in Aotearoa New Zealand saw the forced hospitalization of Māori women when giving birth. In this context, colonial hospitals deemed afterbirth unsanitary, leading to the unconsented

disposal of Māori women's and children's placenta soon after birth, a practice which violently disrupted the connection between whenua (placenta) and whenua (land), and which continued in New Zealand hospitals through to the late twentieth century (Mikaere, 2003). Te Awekotuku connects such colonizing practices to the violence enacted on the environment, through patriarchy and capitalism. Explicitly framing such environmental destruction as a form of gendered violence—of rape—Te Awekotuku tells us a story of how women and environments are intractably linked through the interweaving of feminine authorities, spirituality, whenua, and women:

“One image is indelibly printed in my mind—an image of almost ten years ago when feminism was a fresh force raging in my spirit. Travelling up the island, enjoying the voluptuously feminine shapes, the alluring contours and creases of the landscape, I suddenly encountered a scene of abysmal ugliness and grief. The leaking, stark clay scars of a formerly green and forested hillside, red soil exposed like bleeding viscera across a gaping, jagged gash of earth; singed and blackened tree stumps protruding helplessly from crusty slag piles; moisture rising dimly from the churned, uneven ground. And everywhere machines and noise and men. Obscenity—carnage—rape. Rape. I suddenly realised. That is what is happening to our world: to Aotearoa. By male greed, for male power and male gratification.”
(Te Awekotuku, 1991, p. 69–70)

Here, again, it matters what stories we use to *read* these stories: approaching them through a Māori understanding of Papatūānuku, whakapapa, and whenua disrupts binary hierarchies, and offers us a way to conceptualize climate change and gender as more than categories of risk and vulnerability, as more than apocalyptic futures, turning instead to an ethics of symposium and response-ability (Haraway, 2016), as we make the connections between gender and climate change stickier, more attentive to local contexts and intersecting locations.

Across multiple academic disciplines, Māori women have developed Indigenous ways of knowing and relating to the environment into theorizations of how we might respond differently, through policy and practice, to the multiplicities of crises that we face in Aotearoa and Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa. Margaret Forster (2019), for example, articulates the importance of atua wāhine, or the spiritual authority and power of the Māori feminine, to our kaitiakitanga (environmental stewardship) in Aotearoa. Forster

draws on whakapapa and genealogical methodologies to emphasize the possibilities for disrupting the dominant social power relations which have naturalised the subordination of nature, Māori and women in Aotearoa, achieved through logocentric orderings. Toward this purpose, Forster focusses on how kaitiakitanga, grounded in a Māori worldview which emphasises relationships and responsibilities between iwi (tribe) and whenua, has shifted and moved genealogically in response to the governmentality of British colonial control in Aotearoa since the nineteenth century.¹¹ Attending to the textual disruptions which are involved in the resistance of dominant social power relations, Forster points to the significance of kaitiakitanga being formally incorporated into Aotearoa legislation, notably through the Resource Management Act 1991 (Ministry for the Environment, 1991) and through the Whanganui River being recognised in 2017 as a legal entity or person by the New Zealand government (Ministry of Justice, 2017). Such a movement works to disrupt the human exceptionalism upon which colonial projects are woven, further enabling us to tell and hear stories where “Landscapes are not backdrops for historical action: they are themselves active. Watching landscapes in formation shows humans joining other living beings in shaping worlds” (Tsing, 2015, p. 152).

Drawing on the work of some of the Māori women writers already discussed in this section, Forster (2019) intertwines her discussion of kaitiakitanga with the feminine authorities embedded within Māori cosmogonies and stories, to articulate a vision of how we might respond to environmental issues differently, affirming the value and agency of both women and the natural world through a Māori worldview. Such a worldview intertwines kaitiakitanga, whakapapa, and whenua, assuming the complementarity of genders and the ongoing influence of and relationships to atua, or spiritual authorities,¹² such as Papatūānuku. As Forster writes, “the presence of atua as

11. For example, kaitiakitanga has become central to Māori land claims made through the Waitangi Tribunal, with these claims often led by Māori women environmental activists, and increasing opportunities for iwi groups to exercise stewardship over their ancestral lands, working with government, wider communities and fellow iwi in implementing relational ethics into environmental management (Forster, 2019).

12. “**(noun)** ancestor with continuing influence, god, demon, supernatural being, deity, ghost, object of superstitious regard, strange being - although often translated as 'god' and now also used for the Christian God, this is a misconception of the real meaning. Many Māori trace their ancestry from atua in their whakapapa and they are regarded as ancestors with influence over particular domains. These atua also were a way of rationalizing and perceiving the world. Normally invisible, atua may have visible representations” (Māori Dictionary, 2022, p. 1).

natural forces and natural resources is a reminder of the spiritual dimensions of the environment and invites a reimagining of the way the environment is understood and what counts as appropriate relationships and actions” (2019, p. 10). Such a reimagining, while not new to Indigenous peoples, has the potential to radically re-story Western understandings of and responses to climate change, disrupting the gendered hierarchies which position women as ‘virtuous and vulnerable’ (Arora-Jonsson, 2011) or ‘sexual stewards’ (Sasser, 2018) within much Western climate policy and literature. It enables a recognition of women’s experiences and stories as legitimate ways of knowing, necessary to developing ethical and locally situated climate change strategies and policies.

Though much of the Indigenous women’s scholarship in this section has focused on Māori worldviews and relational ethics, I want to return, now, to Jess Pasisi’s (2019) research on Niue women’s experiences and perceptions of climate change. Niue is an island nation in the South Pacific with a complex relationship to colonial New Zealand. Subject to missionary settlement from the eighteenth century and annexed to the British government in 1901, becoming a colony of New Zealand, Niue was subject to imperial demands to rapidly and unsustainably grow and export tropical fruit, a practice which soon depleted Niue’s soils. And feeding another imperial hunger, New Zealand claimed Niue men to serve in World War II, a move which links to what Pasisi describes as New Zealand’s “keen interest in using the brown bodies of Niue and many other parts of the Pacific to work in menial and hard-labour jobs for the fast-growing industrial economy” (2020, p. 62). Niue became self-governing from 1974, though it retains a close relationship to Aotearoa, remaining part of the Realm of New Zealand; Niue people hold New Zealand citizenship and the largest Niue communities are based in New Zealand (Stats NZ, 2022).

“A daughter of Niue” (2019, p. ii) who was born and grew up in Aotearoa, Pasisi collaborated with Niue women, who were based on the island, to privilege their voices, stories and knowledge of climate change. Pasisi developed her research methodology through drawing on the Niue artform of *hiapo*—which is made by harvesting the inner bark from paper mulberry trees; soaking, scraping, beating and joining the pieces of bark together, to form a large canvas of paperbark, on which designs, patterns, histories, and botanical motifs can be printed. We might also think situated knowledge and

sympoiesis (Haraway, 2016) through the hiapo methodology, as hiapo emphasises the more-than-metaphorical and material nature of storytelling, which relies upon the co-becoming of human and more-than-human elements and forces. For Pasisi, “Hiapo is a mediating space that connects Niue women to themselves, to those around them, and their environment” (2019, p. 18), which allows for flexibility in how climate change is approached and articulated in research. The women who shared their talanoa (stories) with her did not always use the phrase ‘climate change’ or identified their own environmental expertise as related to climate change, emphasising for Pasisi the need to reflect on and critique a Western essentialising assumption that “we already know what climate change is and looks like for Indigenous women” (2019, p. 93).

Rather, by opening up narrative space through the hiapo methodology, the Niue women participants in Pasisi’s project were able to tell stories about their lived experiences of environmental and social change. Sometimes within these narratives, climate change was located explicitly and critically as a Western framework, and was eschewed on that basis; at other times, Niue women were involved in developing complex climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, and they connected climate change to their lived experiences of cyclones, increasingly unpredictable seasonal patterns, invasive pests, and difficulties growing traditional food crops, all of which affected the wellbeing of Niue people and environments. In other words, climate change textured the social worlds of the Niue women in complex ways, demonstrating the need for increased awareness of the nuanced societal impacts of climate change:

“There is a reason that when I asked women to talk about climate change, people would speak about their journeys away from Niue, their return, how they were educated, what their kids were up to, their families, their gardens or their crops, their life stories; all things that made up who they were and therefore how they navigated life. Climate change isn’t only a set of risk factors but an impact on life and what that means and looks like isn’t straightforward or simple.” (Pasisi, 2019, pp. 107-108)

Staying with this emphasis on climate change as more than a set of risk factors and vulnerabilities, of mitigation and adaptation strategies, we have the possibility to move with relational ethics in our understandings of the intersection of gender and climate change, to create space for women’s situated knowledge of climate change to be heard

and meaningfully responded to—to hear, feel, see, know and enact worlding projects which are not defined by androcentrism and human exceptionalism.

CONCLUSION

This article has critically considered how existing social power relations are reified in the stories we're using to tell stories about gender and climate change. Throughout, I have drawn on feminist, intersectional, and Indigenous theories, to revisit the wealth of literature which has offered us situated, relational, more-than-human stories through which to understand and respond to climate change and gender. The two case studies provided—the first, focusing on UN and associated governmental policy on 'gender mainstreaming' in our climate responses; and the second, focusing on climate change legislation in Aotearoa New Zealand and Indigenous women's voices on environmental relationships in Aotearoa New Zealand and the South Pacific—have analysed how existing social power relations are reified through Western, binary narratives of climate change, which continue to embed our climate change responses within a narrative of human exceptionalism. As we resist the hero narratives which have prized Western man's domination of nature (and women, and Indigenous peoples, and more-than-human kin), we also create space in which to hear and ethically respond to diverse stories of gendered, environmental pain, disrupting hierarchised binaries and emphasising sympoiesis, kaitiakitanga, and response-abilities.

INTERSTITIAL 1

In Article 1, my intention was to provide a theoretical foundation for the articles and analyses that would follow. While the focus of the article was on the stories telling stories about gender and climate change, I also clarified and strengthened my own theoretical orientations through the process of writing the article. The most notable of these theoretical orientations are feminist critiques of human exceptionalism within Western narratives and subjectivities, as this exceptionalism has enabled fantasies of transcendence from nature-as-other and naturalised dominations of many kinds in our social power relations. If it is possible to notice a change in your own subjectivity, I like to think that feminist offerings of carrier bags and sympoiesis (Haraway, 2016) have affected my subjective formations, enabling pockets of openness through which I can sense new modes of relating, even if dimly.

As I write today, nearing the end of my PhD research, I realise that the figure of a carrier bag has become such a familiar companion to me that I rarely stop to explicitly think about it as a theoretical concept. Rather, I enjoy and rely upon the physicality of a carrier bag of stories and of knowledge in the same way that I unthinkingly depend upon my own backpack, packed for the workday ahead, or a reusable shopping bag, slung into the back seat of my car on the way to the grocery store. Carrier bags have become a taken-for-granted way of engaging with the world, gently challenging the stories of domination which had marked my childhood. They have relieved me of the Enlightenment dream of acquiring ever more knowledge and scholarliness, too. I cannot become a sky god, at one level I am a bundle of living nerves and sticky neuronal processes, as subject to relentless environmental change and cellular recuperation as the weeds and flowers in my garden. Carrier bags remind me of the value of limited, partial perspective, as this returns us to relational co-becomings and response-ability.

Alongside the carrier bag, Anna Tsing's (2015) conceptualisation of capitalist ruins provided me with a sensorial mode of writing about my own embodied experience of living through *these* times, including climate change. I take capitalist ruins for granted too, now, as a way of seeing and relating to the world around me. While some days I certainly still fall into despair at the political and environmental brutalities occurring at a structural level, the figure of a matsutake mushroom flourishing within the ruins of an

abandoned industrial pine forest, in sym-poietic relation with human and non-human agents, sustains my hope. I live and will die in the ruins of capitalism, but not without a carrier bag of stories and evidence of the capacity for change, recuperation and political mobilisation. Neimanis and Loewen Walker's (2014) theorisation of climate weathering similarly allowed me to name and describe the strange, embodied sensations of living-with changing climates and timescapes. Weathering shifted me toward "the body's material memory" (Neimanis & Loewen Walker, 2014, p. 569) as a way to know and name our historicity. I make these points so as to reflect on how theory and research are liveable, and how some of these theories help us to live within our historically-contingent locations more response-ably than others. I will carry this understanding with me long after my PhD research is complete.

In reflecting on the process of writing and re-reading Article 1 almost three years since it was published, I am struck by the length and weight of the article. I am revisited by embodied memories of the challenge of trying to gather up and make sense of the many stories and texts through which the article formed. Then, as I expect would be the case now, the climate-related materials were overflowing, proliferating at such a rate that it was difficult to keep up with them as they became available. This is another part of living and weathering with advanced capitalism, where, as Braidotti notes, an "accelerationist tendency" marks our knowledge production (2019, p. 32). I notice a pronounced sinking feeling when re-reading Case Study 1, on 'UN and associated governmental textual productions of gender and climate change.' The texts are so thick, the stories so impersonal, that I feel discombobulated, a leaf floating on an ocean of cold language. I compare this to the colours and emotions which I see and feel when reading Case Study 2, especially Indigenous women's writings in Aotearoa and the South Pacific. Here, flashes of yellow ochre, sap green and a gentle flow of creek water pass through my mind, resituating me within the landscapes in Aotearoa which I have known and found solace in. These affective forces come unbidden, and yet they are bidden: they appear spontaneously, and I chase after them, never quite able to touch them but wanting to. Surely wanting matters, including wanting otherwise within the alienations of advanced capitalism.

A closer engagement with figures marked my shift from Part 1 to Part 2 of the thesis. Haraway theorises figures as "not representations or didactic illustrations, but

rather material–semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another” (2008, p. 4). Figures animate natureculture becomings, “where the biological and literary or artistic come together with all of the force of lived reality” (Haraway, 2008, p. 4). Figures gave me a visual and conceptual framework for analysing how ‘climate change and motherhood’ was being storied and dramatised in the Global North, including from women’s embodied, psychological locations. I take up figures analytically in Article 2 and Article 4, though like Haraway’s natureculture continuum, the thread of figures and figurations runs throughout the thesis, even where they are not explicitly named. This can be seen in how Figures function within the thesis, such as Article 2’s screenshots and graphs and Article 4’s collages. These figures tell stories which I doubt I could have communicated through written mediums. They enable movement at the edge of the linearity of language, engaging both the imaginary and material as they “collect up hopes and fears and show possibilities and dangers” (Haraway, 2004, p. 1).

Article 2 moves toward the ‘cacophony’ of questioning reproduction in response to climate change in the Global North. It does so through tracing a handful of Global North texts circulating around the question “Is it okay to have a child in conditions of climate change?” Haraway’s (2016) writings on population appear within this handful of texts, as I try to stay with the trouble of Haraway’s engagement with population as a category to think with and the contentious responses she received from feminist scholars for doing so. Engaging with Braidotti’s (2008) writings on the transformative potential of processing pain also mark a turning point within the thesis. As I had limited scope to pursue these arguments within Article 2, a fuller discussion of de-psychologising pain is provided in Interstitial 2.

As I increasingly attuned to how pain flowed through the stories I was hearing about climate change and reproduction, I simultaneously noticed and heard notes of desire. Pain sharpened the edge of relational desires, enabling me to listen for a desire that was non-innocent and shaped through social power relations, rather than a preoccupation with lack and loss. I fleetingly trace desire in Article 2, through a desiring feminist figure. Desire springs up again in Article 3, marking one of the contrapuntal voices I heard within the BirthStrike texts. By Article 4, I give desire my full analytical focus, as I attempt to trace how desire for motherhood in conditions of ecological crisis

was figured in the individual stories of the women I interviewed for the project. It is in Article 4 that I offer a theoretical framing for how I understand desire within the thesis. This understanding is informed by feminist reconfigurations of desire such as Braidotti's (2011), which theorise desire as plenitude and a life-giving force, capable of activating political subjectivities.

Writing Article 2 helped me to contextualise population debates at the level of subjective formations. 'Population,' taken as a possible ethical response to climate change, belies the complex social power relations affecting our collective and individual subjectivities within advanced capitalism. Figurations of rational and unitary subjectivity enable population to be deployed without care for situated or relational histories, shaping responses to the question of "Is it okay to have a child?" into a rigid moral binary of yes/no. I begin to notice the disruptive potential of feminist figurations of desire within Article 2, as these feminist figurations both stay with the trouble of the Western social power relations and complicities which are producing climate change, and enable us to desire other-wise. Desire helps us to refuse the flattening effects of neoliberal number games, as these reify assumptions that universal mathematical metrics can and should determine our political choices. Desire insists otherwise, perhaps reconnecting us with a voice of relational care which becomes silenced with the internalisation of patriarchal power relations (Gilligan, 1982/2003).

ARTICLE 2: ‘Is it okay to have a child?’: Figuring subjectivities and reproductive decisions in response to climate change.

Meynell, L., Morgan, M., & van Ommen, C. (2023). ‘Is it okay to have a child?’: Figuring subjectivities and reproductive decisions in response to climate change. *Subjectivity*, 31, 16-41.

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In this article, we engage feminist theorisations of figurations as “performative images that can be inhabited” (Haraway, 1997/2018, p. 11) to trace some of the figures which are animating stories about climate change and reproduction in Global North contexts. We focus our reading on a handful of texts which circulate around the question of ‘*Is it okay to have a child, given our climate conditions and futures?*’ Throughout, we consider the relationship between figurations and our subjective becomings in response to environmental devastations. We critique and resist the hegemonic figuring of ‘the human subject’ as rational and unitary (Braidotti, 2014), as this figure naturalises the Western social power relations of advanced capitalism, population control and human exceptionalism. Seeking multiplicity, we look for figures and subjective openings which enable us to become response-able to the pain of ecological worlds dying around us (Haraway, 2016), including from our disciplinary location of psychology.

Key words: figures; subjectivity; reproduction; climate change; psychology; Donna Haraway.

INTRODUCTION

According to reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released in June 2021, the anthropogenic cause of global warming is “unequivocal” and Earth’s ecosystems are already severely compromised (IPCC, 2021, p. 4). As we live through what Rosi Braidotti describes as “a present that is trying to become an actual, sustainable future” (2022, p. 14), the stories we’re telling about climate change matter, as do the figures which are animating such stories. Thinking of figures as more-than-metaphorical and composed through material-semiotic knots (Haraway, 2008), figures

have world-building implications: they shape our subjectivities and our social power relations, including our experiences of environmental destruction. In this sense, the latest IPCC report not only reinforces increasingly desperate scientific stories about how climate change is radically undermining the liveability of Earth for human and more-than-human kinds, but it also potentially *figures* an affective and psychic response (Dawney, 2022). As Donna Haraway wrote in the late 1980s, “we need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life” (1988, p. 580).

So, how are the chances for life being bestowed upon children who are not-yet-born, as environmental damage is baked into Earth’s ecosystems by our current worlding projects? We might think of these dominant worlding projects through the conceptual framework of the third carbon age (Klare, 2014), distinguished from previous carbon lifecycles by the extraction of heavy oils, tar sands processing, and offshore oil and gas fracking, intensive extraction methods which produce severe carbon emissions in themselves. Or, considering the informatics of domination which mark the late 20th and early 21st century (Haraway, 1985), we might also speak of the fourth industrial revolution (Schwab, 2016), whereby advanced cybernetic and information economies produce new interfaces between human, organic and technological lifeforms with increasing velocity *and* environmental damages, as seen in the energy and extraction costs of cryptocurrencies (CCAF, 2022). In responding to the ethical implications of our historical times, this article will explore a dilemma being storied through Global North contexts: *is it okay to have a child, given our climate conditions and futures?* How are these stories being told in particular ways, with particular bodies and meanings in mind, and how might a focus on figures enable us to reread and reimagine these stories and subjectivities?

Location is important, as we stay with the trouble of the Global North’s heavy historical and contemporary responsibility for the global extraction and pollution of peoples, places, species, and environments. Without foreclosing the problematics of privilege that attend to globalising specific localities, in this article we keep our attention intentionally focussed on stories spawning from Global North contexts and knowledge institutions. We do this to resist the imperialising tendencies of Western

knowledge production, continued through a range of climate change literature, to position Global South peoples and bodies, particularly women's bodies, as the means to enact reproductive and environmental 'solutions' (Sasser, 2018). We also attend to how climate stories and anxieties emerge from and are entwined with our disciplinary locations within Western psychology, writing as we do from the colonising context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

We begin by discussing feminist understandings of figures and subjectivities. We follow this by reading a handful of Global North texts which are producing and circulating around the question of *'Is it okay to have a child?'*, to trace the figures which are animating these texts. As we will show, desire figures as a political and psychological force in the texts that we read, helping to disrupt the rationalisation of climate responses across deeply unjust categories of race, class and gender. And yet, neocolonial number games and their close relations – population control discourses and the individualisation of environmental responsibilities – are not easily overcome: they persist in the thick and urgent production of climactic and demographic quantified reports which are shaping the conditions of our times. Hence, we argue for the need to both refuse narratives of *overpopulation* and remain attentive to how the counting and distribution of people and planetary resources across geopolitical categories is affecting our subjective and psychological becomings. We conclude the article by considering how a movement toward de-psychologising pain might enable us to process the embodied and psychic melancholia of our times, to become subjects differently and more response-ably, as we learn to live and die in the ruins of capitalism (Haraway, 2016; Tsing, 2015).

FIGURATIONS AND SUBJECTIVITIES

Generative figures in feminist scholarship

We have noted that figures within Haraway's scholarship are conceptualised as "performative images that can be inhabited" (Haraway, 1997/2018, p. 11) and that they come into formation through material-semiotic knots or nodes. As with Haraway's collapsing of the nature vs. culture binary into a natureculture continuum throughout her scholarship (1998), Haraway's material-semiotic knots emphasise "the absolute simultaneity of materiality and semiosis. The inextricability of these two elements as

well as the deeply historically contingent quality of it all” (Haraway, 1998, p. 137). Haraway’s figures – including cyborgs (1985), OncoMouse (1997/2018), the modest witness (1997/2018), companion species (2008) and chthonic ones (2016) – agitate and provoke us to think differently about the stuff of the world; to stay with the trouble of how stories, figures and theories not only describe our worlding projects, but bring them into being.

The deep historical contingencies of Haraway’s figurations grounds the need for figures to be situated in place and space, just as Haraway’s (1988) articulations of feminist objectivity emphasise a commitment to partial and limited perspectives. Figures are knowingly and response-ably located and locatable within the apparatuses of historically specific social power relations *and* embodied (biological, technological) visions. Leila Dawney, who follows the threads of Haraway’s figurative work in relation to Auerbach’s and Foucault’s theorisations of figures¹ emphasises the affective workings and movements of figures, which are “at once social imaginary, media image, archetypal form and locus for public feelings” (2022, p. 22). In this sense, figures have a subversive and repressive power which extends to their capacity to open (and close) space for human beings to turn themselves into subjects differently, including in response to climate change.

Haraway’s figures have been fighting tooth and nail for the last several decades against a despotic figure of Western modernity: that of the unitary, rational subject. Rosi Braidotti, thinking with Deleuze, tells us stories about how such a vision of rational, unitary human subjectivity is hegemonic and premised on the qualities of being recognisably “male, white, heterosexual, educated, able-bodied, speaking a standard language, living in an urban center and owning property” (2008b, p. 27). Hence, patriarchal and colonial privileges are embodied within this figure, enabling the continuation of sexualised and racialised social power relations through advanced capitalism.

The figure of the rational unitary subject champions Man’s transcendence from nature, animating narratives of human exceptionalism (Braidotti, 2019). Within such figurations, violence, domination and the extraction of resources from those deemed

¹ Haraway (1997/2018) lays out the threads of these connections in *Modest-Witness@Second-Millennium*.

less-than-human (women, Indigenous peoples, nomadic peoples, non-human species, landscapes, ecosystems) is taken as inevitable, an incontestable passage through which patriarchal Eurocentric society has had to progress on its journey to evolutionary ascendancy (Haraway, 1991). The figure of the white, male, middle-class scientist as a hero of the Enlightenment and Modern historical periods is thickly woven through the ontological and epistemological patterns forming the image of the rational, unitary subject, crafting and legitimising a disembodied and universalising god's eye view as the supreme gaze in Western knowledge production (Haraway, 1988).

Resisting such politically suffocating figurations of human subjectivity allows us to recognise how advanced capitalist systems have moved beyond dualistic figurations of 'the subject,' to produce and feast on the proliferation of differences in the ongoing accumulation of capital (Braidotti, 2019). For Foucault, it is the histories of "the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (1982, p. 208) which stirs questions of social power relations. And as ecological (Code, 2010; Mallory, 2009), Indigenous (Bawaka Country et al., 2016; Tallbear & Willey, 2019) and posthuman (Braidotti, 2008b; Rutherford, 2018) feminist scholarship has demonstrated, often through creative and speculative writing, our subjectivities do not produce themselves. Rather, our subjectivities come into being relationally, in a thick and sticky web of figurations, responsibilities and affectivities (Braidotti, 2014), sympoietically responding to the more-than-human kin and environments we share our homes with on Earth (Haraway, 2016; Tsing, 2015).

Becoming subjects differently

Feminist scholarship continues to imagine other modes of becoming subjects, to respond ethically to our climate crises. Climate weathering, for example, articulates the modes by which we become subjects in relation to the climate and the thick textures of our environmental homes (Neimanis & Loewen Walker, 2014). Drawing on new materialist and ecofeminist writers to understand our subjectivities as embodied, temporal and in flux, Neimanis and Loewen Walker theorise a trans-corporal, -temporal and -relational ethos for "bringing climate change home" (2014, p. 559). Climate weathering resists the dominance of Western imaginings of what 'home' might look and feel like (...domesticated, individualist, heteronormative spaces where the privileged may shelter from the extreme effects of climate change?...). Instead, climate weathering

invites us to consider ourselves as “interpellated into the ecological spacetime of a much more expansive home, at once as distant as that melting icecap, and as close as our own skin” (2014, p. 559). Since the 1990s, and against much contestation from the wider scientific community, public health researcher Arline Geronimus (2023, 2003) has also developed theorisations of ‘weathering’ to critically analyse how racial and socioeconomic injustices weathered by Black women in the United States leads to multiple health inequities, such as higher rates of infant mortality. Though Neimanis and Loewen Walker do not explicitly connect their theorisations to Geronimus’s (2023) public health literature, the inter-disciplinary connections between the two conceptualisations of weathering invite future analysis, with weathering enabling an “intervention in our cultural imaginary of climate change” (Neimanis & Loewen Walker, 2014, p. 561), an imaginary which is not innocent to the interlacing of climate change with racial injustice, gendered violence and frenzied wealth inequality.

Environmental melancholia, in relation, focusses on our internalised, psychic relationships to the environment. Building on psychoanalytic understandings of loss and mourning, Lertzman conceptualises environmental melancholia as a “condition” (2015, p. 4) which moves through affects and unconscious processes, and enables us to consider how desires, anxieties and internal conflicts affect our responses to environmental degradation. Lertzman’s theorisation of environmental melancholia moves beyond the figure of the rational, unitary subject and the value-neutral ‘variables’ of social and cognitive psychological research on climate attitudes. It opens space for us to attend to the messy, nebulous, and shifting textures of our subjective becomings with environmental destruction, disrupting the places where we might have become emotionally snagged in place. Lertzman develops her insights through extensive ethnographic fieldwork with communities living on the edge of the Great Lakes in Wisconsin, where decades of unregulated industry have polluted the region’s lakes and rivers. Probing the complexities of psychological responses to environmental losses in interviews with community members, Lertzman learns that a melancholic response to ecological losses can also produce political apathy. Melancholia stuns the subject into stasis, whereby they cannot relationally process and mourn their loss, or even articulate *who/what* has been lost. Such environmentally melancholic subjects are caught in a net of political fatalism, disabled from responding to the very structural forces which are destroying their worlds (Lertzman, 2015).

Braidotti's writings on nomadic subjectivity demonstrate the thick interweaving of figurations with subjectivities, offering us both a figure and a philosophical framework with which to re-imagine and re-activate our social horizons of hope (2008a). The nomadic subject is "dynamic, time-bound, embodied and embedded," situated within a politics of location and an ethics of affirmation (2008b, p. 27). Eschewing the privileging of rationality and unitariness, nomadic subjectivity enables us to map the flows and eddies of our subjective becomings, swimming out of the fixed and static categorisations which have, for example, defined post-positivist knowledge production in psychology (Venn, 1984). Staying with our embodied and embedded experiences of climate change and ecological disaster, we can sense how we *affect* and are *affected by* those we co-become with on Earth, inviting ethical modes of relational reflexivity which extend beyond the category of the human to "enable us to account accurately for the complexities of our historicity" (Braidotti, 2008b, p. 26).

The political implications of drawing on feminist figurations and subjectivities within our disciplinary location of psychology are not insignificant: post-positivist psychology has exemplified the reification of negative differences, through its statistical and symbolic production of a normative figure of the 'universal human'. To this figure we apply Braidotti's (2019) description of the frozen reification of sameness, which produces a deadening stillness within the endless reproduction of Eurocentric, androcentric authorities of the past, rather than an ethical accountability to our present. Hence, we take up feminist figures in this article to both stay with the trouble (Haraway, 2016) of psychology's complicity in reifying binary understandings of environmental responsibility, and to take a creative leap toward actualising the potential (Braidotti, 2019) for our discipline to enact hearing and telling stories *differently* about the relationship between kin making and environmental crises.

We recognise that for all the transformative potential of posthuman and feminist theories, they are hardly 'new' when held alongside many Indigenous ontologies and cosmologies, such as those articulated by Indigenous communities in our situated locations of Australia (Bawaka Country et al., 2016) and Aotearoa New Zealand (Forster, 2019; Jahnke, 1997; Mikaere, 2011). Hence, the work of decolonising our subjectivities and knowledge productions within feminist and critical scholarship is ongoing and informs our commitment to hearing Indigenous women's voices on climate change

(Meynell, 2023). Our focus in this article is to provide “a critique of the center from the center” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 34), to trouble the majoritarian anxieties projected through neocolonial climate figurations. We want to approach Indigenous experiences of and resistances to these majoritarian projections with caution and respect, in recognition that the question of *‘Is it okay to have a child?’* holds vastly different political implications for Indigenous communities, many of whom survive in spite of ongoing colonial extermination efforts. Future research which can do justice to the incredible cosmological and situated diversities of Indigenous women’s writings on environment, kin and decolonisation, and carefully bring them into conversation with climate literature from colonising contexts, will be valued. We readily accept we have not achieved this in the scope of this article.

IS IT OKAY TO HAVE A CHILD?

We begin our reading with online media articles which are both producing and circulating around the question of *‘Is it okay to have a child?’* Such articles are continually proliferating, and resisting the idea of an exhaustive reading, we have included a scattering of their titles in Figure 2.1, as an invitation to begin sensing the multiple modes of distress they narrate. As the titles suggest, the dilemma people in Global North contexts appear to be experiencing includes fear and anxiety about bringing children into a world so plagued by environmental destruction, the worst of which will fall on future generations. As well, there is an emergent moral imperative, which locates the choice to *not* have a child (or children) as a tangible and calculable way to reduce the carbon footprint imposed by the traditional Western nuclear family model.

As in wider ‘grey’ environmental literature, biological imperatives are taken for granted in narratives about climate change and reproduction (e.g., Project Drawdown, 2020). Such imperatives reprioritise the normative gendered expectations of what it means to ‘have a child’ – a child is born to and raised by its biological parents, who are a cisgendered man and woman. In our reading, we take up the feminist tradition of imagining kinship practices beyond the conflation of sex with gender (Rich, 1980/2003), to think-with creative modes of parenting which do not require heteronormatively sexed bodies or relational arrangements (e.g., queer and

transgender parenting, fostering, surrogacy, being a god parent or 'aunty', single parenting, adoption, etc).



Figure 2.1: Newspaper articles articulating iterations of the question 'Is it okay to have a child?'. Note: see Table 1 in the Appendix for citations.

Becoming a desiring feminist subject

Meehan Crist's (2020) article, the title of which is included in Figure 2.1, traces some of the complexities experienced by women in post-industrialised countries who, faced with the climate crisis, are interrogating their desires to have children. Engaging with statements made by contemporary climate activists, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Bill McKibben and Donna Haraway, Crist explores what it means to be a person who brings a child into the world, this world, dogged with all its troubles:

"The polar icecaps are melting. Is it OK to have a child? Australia is on fire. Is it OK to have a child? My house is flooded, my crops have failed, my community is fleeing. Is it OK to have a child? It is, in a sense, an impossible question." (2020, p. 3)

The impossibility of the question for Crist lies in what she sees as the individualising of responsibility through the locus of reproductive decisions, obscuring the social power relations which are producing environmental damage. Crist refocuses on the structural determinants of climate change, as advanced capitalism mandates the privileging of profit motives over public and environmental interests. Such profit motives manifest today in the oil and gas industries' determination to extract and sell as much fossil fuel as possible, while our energy systems are still carbon-dependent (Li et al., 2022); and in the continued political influence these corporations exercise over governments in countries such as Australia (Wright et al., 2022). It matters, too, that BP produced the concept of 'the carbon footprint' as an effort to individualise responsibility onto the new 'subjects' of advanced capitalism – consumers (Kaufman, 2020).

Crist writes from the pain and pleasure of her own pregnancy – an embodied and embedded memory (Braidotti, 2002) – in narrating her and her partner's decision to have a child, despite the arguments to live otherwise, to make kin not babies (Haraway, 2016). What emerges from Crist's piece is much less a tidy theoretical position than a narrative of hope and a determination to move beyond the "toxic logic of the carbon footprint" in making kin (2020, p. 13). We think of the absurdity of advanced capitalism with Figure 2.2, where the carbon footprint of children is compared to those of cheeseburgers and Christmas trees. Defying this logic, Crist writes that "for me, having a child has been a commitment to life, and a commitment to the possibilities of a human

future on this warming planet. It means giving up claims to moral purity, not because nothing matters, but because things do” (2020, p. 13).

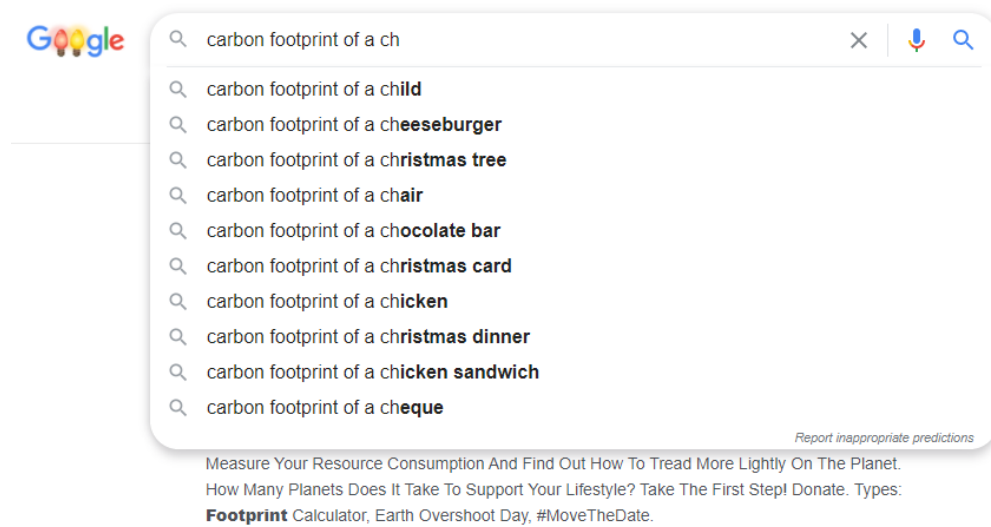


Figure 2.2: Screenshot of a Google search and corresponding autofill suggestions when using the terms “carbon footprint of a ch...” Taken December 2020.

We read Crist’s piece in relation to another feminist environmental text formed through a Global North context: Naomi Klein’s (2014) account of becoming a mother during her research into the destructive practices of big oil industries. Klein begins with grief: her grief for the damage already inflicted on our natural environments, as well as deepening despair over what she saw as the inevitability of total ecological breakdown. Calling this reaction ‘ecological despair,’ Klein begins to experience sharp pain and anxiety about the effects of climate change, to the point that she can no longer enjoy nature as she used to. Linking her responses to examples found in tourism advertising, Klein argues that “this is how many of us are consuming wilderness these days – as a kind of nihilistic, final farewell” (2014, p. 420). In our reading, the relational gesture of *faring nature well* carries considerable weight, tapping into the psychic dimensions of environmental melancholy – “an arrested, inchoate form of mourning” (Lertzman, 2015, p. xiii). And yet, capitalist entitlements are also worked into the production and consumption of ‘wilderness’ as a tourist product which we can nihilistically say goodbye to, as is the figure of an enduring human subject, who survives despite the loss of wild spaces and complex ecologies.

In Klein’s words, “ecological despair was a big part of why I resisted motherhood until my late thirties... And I was also fully aware that if we were to avoid [a dystopian

future], we would all have to cut down on the number of super-consumers we were producing” (2014, p. 420). We note Klein’s wry nod to the internalisation of carbon footprint logics, which insidiously extends to the rationalisation of reproduction. However, by building relationships with diverse communities who were committed to protecting and regenerating their local environments, many of them Indigenous communities², Klein comes to fundamentally change her perspective on motherhood. She makes the decision with her partner to attempt to have a (biological) child, and in doing so, is confronted by the limits of her own body and fertility – she struggles to conceive and miscarries, and so begins in vitro fertilisation (IVF).

While acknowledging that IVF enables parenthood for many, including trans and non-heterosexual people, Klein is also suspicious of how IVF shares figurative resonances with the geoengineering of the climate: both have the capacity to enter the public imagination as techno fixes to otherwise insurmountable health crises, and so in Haraway’s (2016) sense, reinforces the ideology of self-poetic man overcoming all biological challenges. Rather, Klein argues that learning to hear and respect the pains, protestations, and limits imposed by our own bodies is akin to hearing and respecting the ecological limits of our environments. After rejecting IVF, Klein does eventually manage to conceive and give birth to a child – her son – after she makes several significant life choices aimed at reducing her stress, including moving to a rural home in British Columbia, where during long hikes she “even caught [herself] appreciating beautiful moments without simultaneously mourning their loss” (2014, p. 437).

In our reading for the figures which animate Klein’s story, Global North privileges form the very warp and weft of climate change subjectivities. Klein attempts to recognise and resist these privileged figurations – indeed, her whole text is a critique of Western extractive economies, and she regularly critiques her own complicity with these structural powers. Even so, socioeconomic resources enable the figures in Klein’s narrative to *move*, mobilised through access to land and capital acquired through histories of colonisation. This movement is embodied, geographical and psychological.

² We want to be cautious here not to imply that engagement with Indigenous communities is unproblematic or free from colonising impulses, hence underscoring the importance of decolonising Global North subjectivities in environmental justice movements.

Reaching higher and safer climes allows ecological despair to be processed and motherhood to become tenable, both as a relational decision and as a biological process.

We recognise the figure of the sexual steward (Sasser, 2018) in both Klein's and Crist's narratives, as a gendered animation of women's reproductive 'stewardship' in Global North environmental discourses. Sasser describes the sexual steward as "a symbol of the ideal woman framed within the logics of private, individual decision-making and choice" (2018, p. 4). That such a figure appears within Klein's wider critique of capitalism speaks not to failures on Klein's part, but to the immense force through which capitalism figures our subjective becomings with climate change in Global North contexts. Again, we are returned to the unrelenting problem of how to turn ourselves into subjects differently (Foucault, 1982), when our very bodies and subjectivities are formed through globalised hierarchies of domination.

The political force of desire disrupts this problem, somewhat. Fighting back the sexual steward, we sense a *desiring* feminist figure trying to breach the surface in Klein's and Crist's narratives. Such a figure is thickly textured by the yearnings, anxieties, troubles and contradictions of our climate-conscious times. She's right in the thick of Global North patterns of patriarchy, colonisation, genocide, and extraction. Monitoring privilege is part of her makeup. And yet even so, this figure moves with the desire to have a child, a decision which is sym-poietic (Haraway, 2016), extending beyond heteronormative pairings to consider ecological relations. Braidotti's (2010; 2014) writings on desire as plenitude figure in this reading, as a philosophical opening through which we might understand how desire moves us as human subjects, reconfiguring desire not only as object-oriented (Braidotti, 2011), but as geographically- and environmentally-contingent, enabling "a deep yearning for transformation or a process of affirmation" (Braidotti, 2010, p. 416). Thus, how are we understanding the desire to have a child (biological or other-wise), even in the face of climactic disaster, as a movement toward affirmative ethics – as a commitment to life itself (Crist, 2020)?

Maybe one child, maybe none? Rationalising reproduction in the Global North

We move with the citational threads back in time, now, to Bill McKibben. Today, McKibben is a highly regarded American climate journalist, activist, and one of the

founders of 350.org, a climate movement which connects and promotes climate protests in diverse countries. In 1998 McKibben articulated one iteration of the question '*Is it okay to have a child?*' with his book *Maybe One* – partly a defence of the psychological stability and 'normalcy' of only children, and partly a moral argument for people in the United States to have no more children than required to replace themselves in number. McKibben (1998) argues that for the average US family, 1.5 children per adult woman is the 'ideal' reproductive formula. And since children can't be produced in decimals, better yet for the environment would be to have only one child per partnership.³

McKibben tells this story through his own situated location, inviting us into the process he and his wife, writer Sue Halpern, went through in balancing their desire for children with their environmental commitments. In the end, they decided that having *one* child was a compromise they could live with. McKibben draws on population statistics and even immigration numbers in telling this story. He proposes that with both reduced reproduction and immigration rates, the United States could reach a sustainable population by 2050 – what he sees as approximately 250 million people. McKibben is explicit in addressing his family planning arguments to people in Global North contexts, based on their excessively large carbon footprints. However, the inclusion of immigration into McKibben's rationale demonstrates the pervasive influence of populationism on Western imaginations, which works to rationalise and position people into categories of same/other, native-born/migrant, citizen/non-citizen, normal/abnormal to naturalise the mass exploitation of those considered less than fully 'human' (Braidotti, 2014). Such framings also ignore the complexities of increased migration and homelessness due to climate disasters (UN Environmental Programme, 2019).

Populationism and population control discourses have circulated within ecological justice movements since the late 19th century, to emphasise the role of contraception and 'family planning' in responding to climate change through reduced future human populations (Murphy, 2017; Sasser, 2018). Such discourses discriminate most heavily against women of colour in the Global South – those who are least responsible for

³ The kind of 'partnership' McKibben (1998) is referring to is left unarticulated – heterosexual, property owning, speaking a common language, constituted by two parents? McKibben presumably also means 'biological' when referring to children.

climate change (UN Environmental Programme, 2019) – locating the reproductive bodies of Global South women as a key site of Western environmental interventions (Sasser, 2018). Population control discourses are not distinct from ecofascism, an extreme ecological political movement with racist, classist, sexist roots which emerged concurrently with Nazism and other far-right ideologies in the 20th century. Ecofascism mixes up ecological justice with genocidal narratives of selective population extermination, inscribing the question of *'Is it okay to have a child?'* with haunting memories and ongoing lived experiences of human-to-human genocide.

McKibben's arguments oscillate around the figure of the rational, unitary subject, even as such a figure no longer can hold its shape within the rapacious effects of advanced capitalism and planetary collapse (Braidotti, 2014). Brute quantitative estimates dominate McKibben's narrative, made especially evident in the following excerpt, where McKibben takes up statistics to cut through the moral and emotional complexities which he sees as impeding climate justice:

"Everyone has heard the statistics time and again, usually in an attempt to make us feel guilty. But hear them one more time, with an open mind, simply trying to think strategically about how we will stave off the dangers to this planet. Pretend it's not a moral problem, just a mathematical one." (1998, p. 107)

While staying with the trouble of the violent categorisations of self/other which supersede and manifest in McKibben's text, we also want to open space in our reading to hear the complexities, contradictions, pains and desires expressed in McKibben's response to the question of *'Is it okay to have a child?'* Hearing Braidotti's emphasis that "we need to enact a vision of the subject that encompasses changes at the in-depth structures" (2014, p. 181), we wonder how *Maybe One* both takes for granted and begins to refuse the figure of rational, unitary subjectivity, moving toward nomadic subjectivity in spite of McKibben's attempt to rationalise and individualise reproduction. Notably, desire moves McKibben's narrative, as it does Crist's (2020) and Klein's (2014). Desire for climate justice animates McKibben's decades of climate activism, an activism which he ethically locates within the social power relations of the Global North and which he tells us burns stronger for becoming a parent. And narrating their decision to have a child, McKibben writes that "What eventually made up our minds was largely simple desire; like most, though certainly not all, people we felt some

need deeper than deep to raise and nurture a child. Anything else may simply be justification" (1998, p. 127). Desire, though problematically figured in McKibben's account as an overpowering genetic and normative force, also works to silence the machinations of logic, practicality and quantification in a text which otherwise builds its arguments around presumptions of rational, unitary subjectivity.

BirthStrike

Emerging in the UK under the leadership of Blythe Pepino, BirthStrike was a movement founded on people (including women, men, and gender diverse peoples) making a lifelong commitment to *not* have children, as a political campaign to force action on climate change. In her feature interviews with mainstream news publications (e.g., Hunt 2019), Pepino's story is narrated as part of a personal 'climate awakening'. A 32-year-old British-Welsh musician at the time of her interviews in 2019, Pepino contextualises her story through the emotional and physical yearning she felt to have a child with her partner. However, with her growing understanding of the severity of climate change, Pepino realised that she was too afraid to bring children of her own into the world. For Pepino, motherhood is desirable, but it has also become an ethically untenable decision in a world wracked by climate change.



Figure 2.3: Screen shot of the BirthStrike hashtag, taken in July 2020.

In our reading of media articles which re-narrate Pepino's story, giving up on motherhood is figured as a gendered sacrifice, summoning up threads of everyday heroism. BirthStrike members' motives are distinct from those of people who identify as child-free and who would prefer, even in an idyllic environment, not to have children. Pepino is also at pains to distance herself and the BirthStrike movement from the racist

and classist ideologies of population control. Rather, grief, fear and environmental activism are the pillars of the BirthStrike movement. In September 2020, however, BirthStrike announced on their webpage that the campaign was officially ending. Pepino and her fellow campaign manager Jessica Gaitán Johannesson had realised that they could not continue their political activism without the danger of reiterating population control narratives (Gaitán Johannesson, 2022). BirthStrike social media pages were deleted, with only a final notice of their dissolution left on their official page, *birthstrikeforfuture.com*. For those who wished to join, a new private online ‘support group’ was established called “Grieving parenthood in the climate crisis.”

In Heather McCullen and Katherine Dow’s (2022) analysis of how BirthStrike was heard and re-storied in mediated spaces, the campaign “carried significant ethical and political baggage that triggered numerous anxieties: ecological, demographic, reproductive, and existential” (2022, p. 660). The extensive media attention which BirthStrike managed to produce in such a short time speaks to the provocative power which reproductive and natalist figurations hold over public – and gendered, heteronormative – imaginations. BirthStrike’s leaders were not innocent to this provocative effect; rather, they sought to harness it, mobilising women from post-industrialised, professional and privileged backgrounds – women who might be reading publications like *Marie Claire*, for example – to politicise their climate concerns. And yet, the campaign “lost control of its own message” (Dow & McMullen, 2022, p. 1). The important ethical questions which the campaign sought to raise were also left unheard – including how subjects of post-industrialised nations might become response-able to the environmental legacies and impacts of their locations, including in how they/we form and practice kinship relations.

Again, figurations of climate subjectivities are forming through BirthStrike narratives, with the pledge to *not* have children affirming the significance of reproduction, desire and relational ethics to the feminist project of staying with the trouble of climate change. We want to deploy Sara Ahmed’s (2017) figure of the feminist killjoy to tangle with BirthStrike’s narrative, too, to help reveal the traces of wilful feminist subjectivity embodied in the campaign. A feminist killjoy gets in the way: she causes a problem by revealing a problem; the injustice is too great, too painful for her to stay silent, immobilised, and frozen. A feminist killjoy is even willing to kill off her own

‘babies’ – in this case, a political campaign – in her movement toward becoming response-able. In doing so, she might also kill the joy of her feminist fellows, pushing them to take their relational ethics further. Not only do BirthStrike members get in the way of heteronormative society, weaponizing their reproductive capacities to disrupt climate change; they also potentially make other feminist women feel uncomfortable, by demanding a collectively intensive, rigorous monitoring of Global North privileges in relation to climate change and reproduction.

BirthStrike reminds us that not having a child for ecological reasons remains not only a fear-based but a political response, perhaps interwoven with the complexities of environmental melancholia (Lertzman, 2015) and climate weathering (Neimanis & Loewen Walker, 2014). We absorb climate change, not only through acquiring linguistic and scientific information on the ecological threats we’re facing, but also in our emotional and affective responses to what we’re learning, hearing, and feeling (on and through the skin). This process of engaging with ecological disaster is in part psychic and unconscious (Lertzman, 2015): it can produce grief, guilt, and anxiety, yet it also invites us to stay with the ethical and relational dilemmas of our times – to channel desire and despair other-wise.

Make kin, not babies

BirthStrike offers a timely, situated example of the riskiness of talking about *making kin differently* in the colonising landscape of the Anthropocene (Haraway, 2016). It raises the question of how we can talk about *not* having children as a feminist, politically agentic response to climate change, without reinscribing the dominant gendered violence which has marked women’s bodies as the sites of imperialising interventions. In trying to have these conversations, BirthStrike runs into a similar spot of sticky ethical trouble as Donna Haraway does in broaching the subject of human population in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016). The catchphrase of “Make kin, not babies!” (2016, p. 102) is woven throughout Haraway’s text, as Haraway argues the need to think lovingly and ethically with increasingly fragile ecosystems and more-than-human kin about what increasing human populations might mean for living and dying on Earth. Citing the rapid expansion of human populations from 2.6 billion in 1950 to 8 billion today and current projections that human populations will reach at least 11 billion by 2100 (UN, 2022), Haraway is not innocent to the dangers of the discursive

space she is entering in articulating these arguments. She argues that fear of being tainted by racist, colonising legacies of population control discourses has stopped feminists from engaging in urgent and critical conversations about “the Great Acceleration of human numbers” (2016, p. 6).

Haraway urges us to stay with the trouble of what increasing human populations might mean for those we co-become with on Earth and to consider the multiple, non-biological ways in which we might make kin, as this requires human beings to move beyond heteronormative and biological assumptions about what ‘having a child’ might entail. In the *Children of Compost* stories, for example, Haraway fabulates the possibilities for cross-pollinated human and more-than-human beings, who are raised by more-than-two parents, through an intentional ethics of care and sustainability. Haraway’s storytelling helps us to locate reproductive choices within an ethics of multispecies care and relationality, such that we ask ‘*Is it okay to have a child?*’ in an ethical relationship with non-human species, animals and environmental kin.

In articulating her ‘make kin, not babies’ argument, however, Haraway provokes strong emotional and critical responses from feminist readers. Across a number of readings (Appleton & Glabau, 2022; Bhatia et al., 2020; Dow & Lamoreaux, 2020), feminist thinkers argue that Haraway simplistically and dangerously incorporates narratives of human over-population into her texts. The trouble is that Haraway takes up ‘population’ itself as a category to think with, a move made explicit in *Making Kin Not Population*, a small essay collection co-edited by Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway (2018). Alongside Clarke’s and Haraway’s own contributions, the collection includes essays from intersectional feminist thinkers, who write from Black, Indigenous and Global South locations in articulating rich and contrary responses to issues of kin-making. Within the volume, Haraway writes from a place of deep personal pain, as she asks us to bring a critical as well as affirmative spirit to thinking with ‘population’. As Haraway attests in her response to reviews of the collection:

“What I want is a different demography, one that worries about how, when, and if to count human beings in entangled living and dying with microbes, plants, animals, and apparatuses, and one that asks about numbers-in-worlds from non-Malthusian foundations. I am not interested in starting from comparative birth, death, and growth rates of the eaters and the eaten. I want a radical, nonhumanist demography

embedded in multi-kinded/multi-species justice and care.” (Strathern et al., 2019, p. 170)

In our reading of Clarke’s and Haraway’s contributions to *Making Kin*, we crave a more detailed mapping of the way demographic, socioeconomic and planetary health systems are being figured in contemporary climate literature, to enable a stronger understanding of what’s at stake in these knowledge productions, and for whom (Haraway, 1997/2018). For example, Haraway draws on Steffen et al.’s (2015) highly-cited work on ‘the trajectory of the Anthropocene,’ which graphs the rapid upward shifts in ‘socioeconomic trends’ which have occurred since the 1950s. These socioeconomic trends are accompanied by a different set of graphs showing the rapid worsening of ‘earth system trends’⁴. Steffen et al. call this post-1950s historical patterning the ‘Great Acceleration,’ a period bringing dire consequences for non-human species and planetary ecosystems. In Figure 2.4, we provide an earlier iteration of a Great Acceleration graph, produced by Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill (2007). Visual representations such as Figure 2.4 constitute part of the vital knowledge-making practices which are bringing the environmental precarities of our post-industrial times into view. And yet, we hesitate when we see ‘population’ positioned as the first measure within the socioeconomic trends reported in Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill’s (2007) graph, giving it the appearance of a beginning, or an origin.

As we consider Figure 2.4 and the story it tells about climate change causes, we are visited again by the vampiric figure of Anthropocentric Man, who tries to hide the monstrous effects of his ‘Industry’ behind the feminised figure of ‘Population.’ A different possibility for storying these population mappings is provided in Figure 2.5, where rather than ‘population’ itself being the central focus, we are encouraged to confront the wealth inequality wrapped up with climate change and population, concretised in the figure of the world’s richest 1% being responsible for 19% of total emission growth between 1990-2015 (see Figure 2.5; Kartha et al., 2020).

⁴ The Earth System trends include: carbon dioxide; nitrous oxide; methane; stratospheric ozone; surface temperature; ocean acidification; marine fish capture; shrimp aquaculture; nitrogen to coastal zone; tropical forest loss; domesticated land; terrestrial biosphere degradation (Steffen et al., 2015).

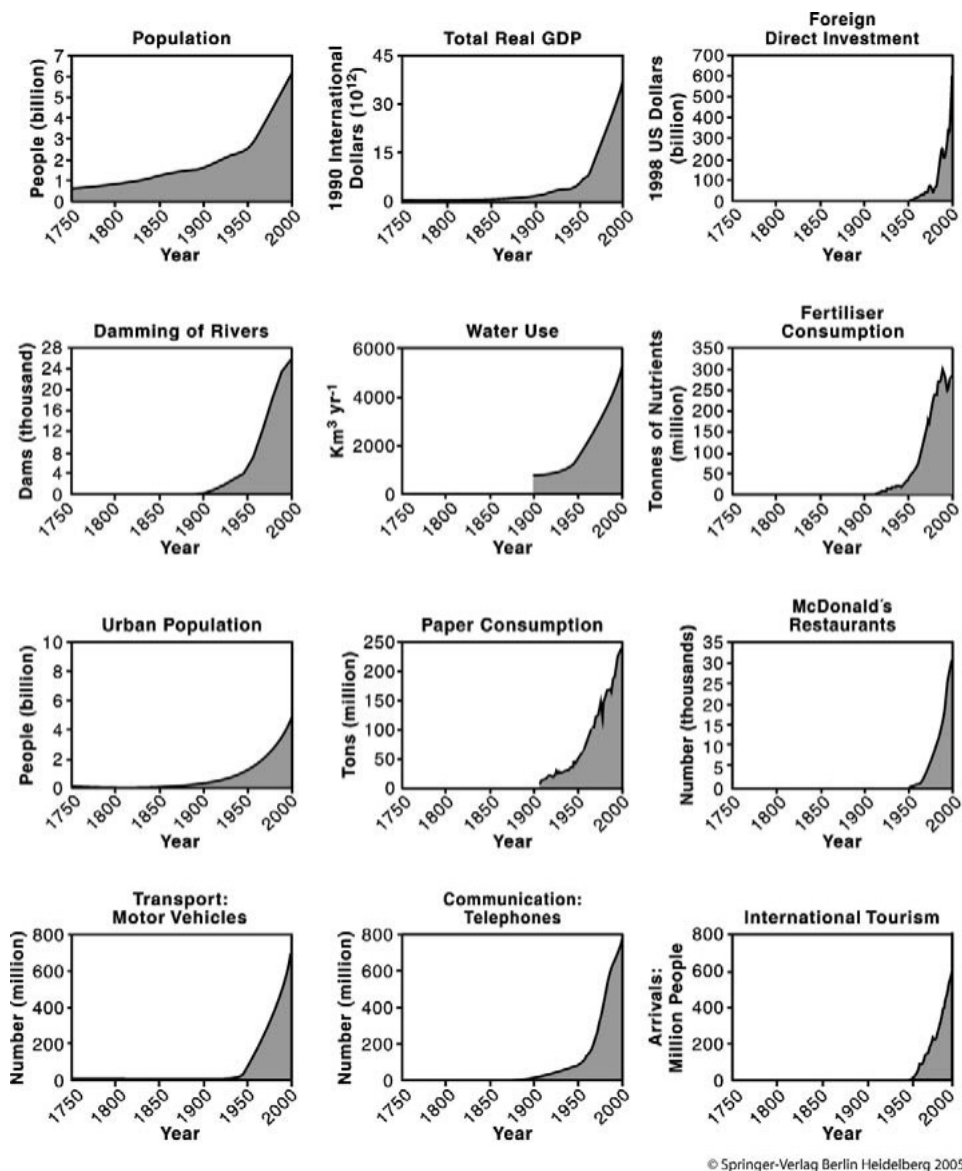


Figure 2.4: “The change in the human enterprise from 1750 to 2000 (28). The Great Acceleration is clearly shown in every component of the human enterprise included in the figure” (Steffen, Crutzen, & McNeill, 2007, p. 617).

Future feminist research on the figurative and relational orderings of population-economic-environmental knowledge productions also needs to account for the lack of consensus within scientific communities on the use of ‘population’ as a concept to analyse and respond to climate change. For example, while being very concerned about climate change, demographers themselves are “highly divided on the question whether the global population size should be reduced to lower CO₂ emissions, as well as on the question whether family planning is an effective policy instrument” (van Dalen &

Henkens, 2021, p. 551). Furthermore, the United States' Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) have explicitly disavowed the use of population growth arguments in climate change science and policy responses. The UCS describes population growth arguments as a "deeply flawed frame" (2021, p. 1) which not only distracts from attending to the primary drivers of climate change – the burning of fossil fuels – but perpetuates harm against marginalised communities who have the lowest rates of carbon emissions per person.

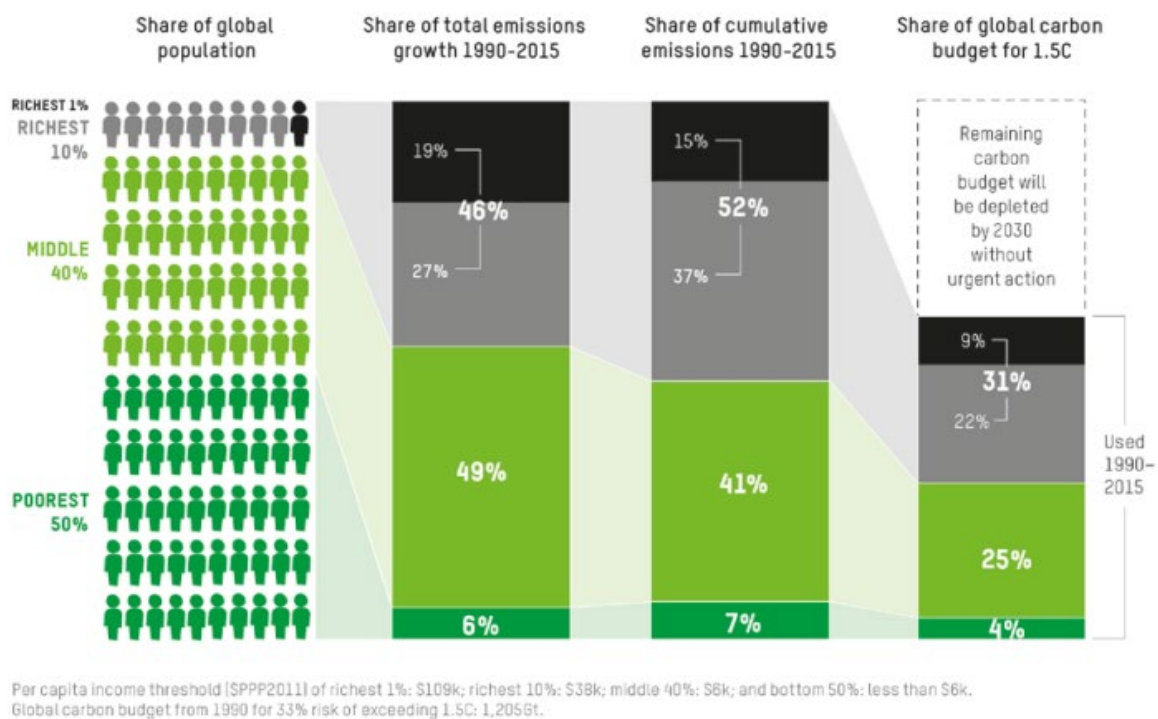


Figure 2.5: A summary of global carbon emissions across income thresholds, between 1990-2015 (Oxfam, 2020).

We wonder how Haraway might bring her disciplinary disloyalties – and her fierce pack of feminist figures – to bear upon such articulations from scientific communities, to both better explain and justify her own uptake of population as a category to think with, and to develop more elastic understandings of the intersections between climate change and reproductive rights, in the feminist spirit of strong objectivity (Harding, 2004). With Haraway (2016), we re-member that such work demands, as always, that those of us who have inherited the perverse privileges of 'Empire' decolonise our knowledge practices and subjectivities. Doing so requires that 'we' stay with the atrocities

committed – and still being committed – against colonised and marginalised peoples the world over, often in the name of scientific progress (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999/2021).

We trace the violence felt in Haraway's thinking-with demography back to the mathematical accounting systems through which 'human populations' are discursively constructed in wider ecological texts. Legitimising the expectation that we can measure people and their environmental costs through universal mathematical metrics, the figure of the rational, unitary figure reifies our understandings of a single and static form of subjectivity, requiring a rationalised and operationalised response to climate change. How do we stay with the trouble of the material resources required to enable human beings to live safely and with dignity, recognising as we do so that dominant social power relations flow through attempts to calculate these resources and apply them across geopolitical categories? As Jade Sasser's (2018) research documents, there never has been an ethically and statistically robust measure of the universal carrying capacity of Earth, and efforts to formulate such a measure are steeped in colonising and imperialising assumptions about who even counts as 'human' to begin with.

For Michelle Murphy (2017; 2018), who has extensively researched the history and contemporary deployments of populationism, and whose contribution to *Making Kin* offers a compelling refusal of population, the concept of 'population' itself has become "intolerable" (2018, p. 105) – so wrought with racial violence that it is beyond thinking with. Murphy writes that "in this moment of intensifying environmental violence, human density is attractive as a managerial policy problem and container for worry because it points the finger at preventing future human life without requiring the reordering of capitalism, colonialism, the nation-state, or heteropatriarchy as world orders" (2018). Hence, within Murphy's analysis, population figures as both a technology of neocolonial state control, as well as an affective force, appealing to fears and anxieties about climate change. We can also sense how the affective force of population attaches itself to the question of "*Is it okay to have a child?*", seductively simplifying and rationalising some of the stickier relational and emotional troubles produced by our climate weatherings (Neimanis & Loewen Walker, 2014).

From our own situated locations in psychology, we consider it important to stay with the trouble of how climate subjectivities in Global North contexts are being shaped by population discourses and abstract quantifications of environmental 'resources' and

‘thresholds’ – with and beyond population debates happening within feminism. Climate change reporting, analysis and responses are being produced at great speed through a thick discourse of numbers and quantifications, including costs and benefits, profits and losses, emission reductions and carbon offsetting, *and* demographics. Such economic and demographic reportings reduce misery and diversity to a narrow discourse of dynamic factors expressed in numbers. They are also politically potent, built into the mechanics of many of the beleaguered institutions tasked with forming and enacting treaties and agreements to keep global warming below 2° Celsius (e.g., OECD/The World Bank/UN Environment, 2018).

Thus, to be *against* population is still to be *in relation to* population. As “intolerable” as the concept of population may be (Murphy, 2017, p. 137), population still forms part of the conditions of our times, and as Braidotti tells us, we must think “with the times and also against them, not in a belligerent mode of oppositional consciousness, but as a humble and empowering gesture of co-construction of social horizons of hope” (2008a, p. 33). Invoking population only through the mode of critique or potesta might be to delimit our capacity to stay with the trouble of the pervasive influence of populationism in our everyday lives, our political economies and our climate discourses; or to process the trauma and violence bound up with populationism, a trauma which extends well beyond the human world, to the many more-than-human extinctions and genocides intertwined with climate change.

Following this line of flight (Braidotti, 2014), how can we open space to hear and tell *different stories / stories differently* about the implications of population discourses for our subjective becomings, as we both refuse the popular narrative of *overpopulation*, and think/feel with our more-than-human kin about the pain of worlds dying around us? Can we hear, for example, the pain of birds falling from the sky, plunging to their deaths in mass avian die offs occurring in North America, as raging wildfires disrupt traditional flight paths (Haraway & Despret, 2020)? Can we hear the stories told by members of BirthStrike, for example, without silencing these stories on the basis that they risk reifying population control discourses? How do we hear the sob of grief and terror embodied in these stories, as part of our commitment to becoming-together or not at all?

FINAL THOUGHTS: DE-PSYCHOLOGISING PAIN

We end by briefly considering psychology's location in relation to the processing of environmental losses and melancholia. As a discipline formed around the reification of binary categorisations of same/other and normal/abnormal (Rose, 1996), psychology is also marked by what Ian Parker (1989) describes as the contradiction of Western modernity. Herein, scientific truth is prized as the means to solve humanity's crises, while the responsibility and power to form meaning is attributed to individuals. For Parker, this discourse manifests in social psychology as "both a mechanistic study of behaviour which suffocates human agency and an individualistic notion of rationality which is predicated upon that agency" (1989, p. 48). We feel the weight of this contradiction in McKibben's (1998) plea for single-child families, which relies upon population and environmental statistics to establish the scientific credibility of its arguments, and then assigns responsibility to individuals to respond rationally, through their reproductive choices.

Though McKibben was writing in the late 1990s, similar discourses continue to flow through social science research on environmental responsibility, further hardening the question of *'Is it okay to have a child?'* into a story of individual responsibility and individual differences. Consider, for example, Wynes and Nicholas's (2017) study on how 'individual actions' and 'lifestyle changes' could support climate change mitigation efforts. Figure 2.6 is one of the powerful cultural artifacts resulting from this study, which reduces having a child to a flat and rational consumer choice, comparable to washing one's clothes in cold rather than hot water. What room is left to move, to breathe, to become nomadic within these relationally alienating figurations and subjective formations?

Staying with the trouble of the contradictions inherent to Western modernity (Parker, 1989), we wonder how we might open space within our disciplinary location in psychology, to hear how this contradiction and tension within environmental discourses is experienced through our embodied and embedded subjectivities? How might psychology respond to the challenges of our times, not only by resisting its complicity in individualising responsibility, but also by drawing on the rich therapeutic resources which cluster around psychology's disciplinary locations? How might a movement within psychology toward nomadic figurations and subjectivities enable the

processing of the environmental melancholia, contrasting desires, and profound grief evoked by our environmental conditions (Lertzman, 2015)?

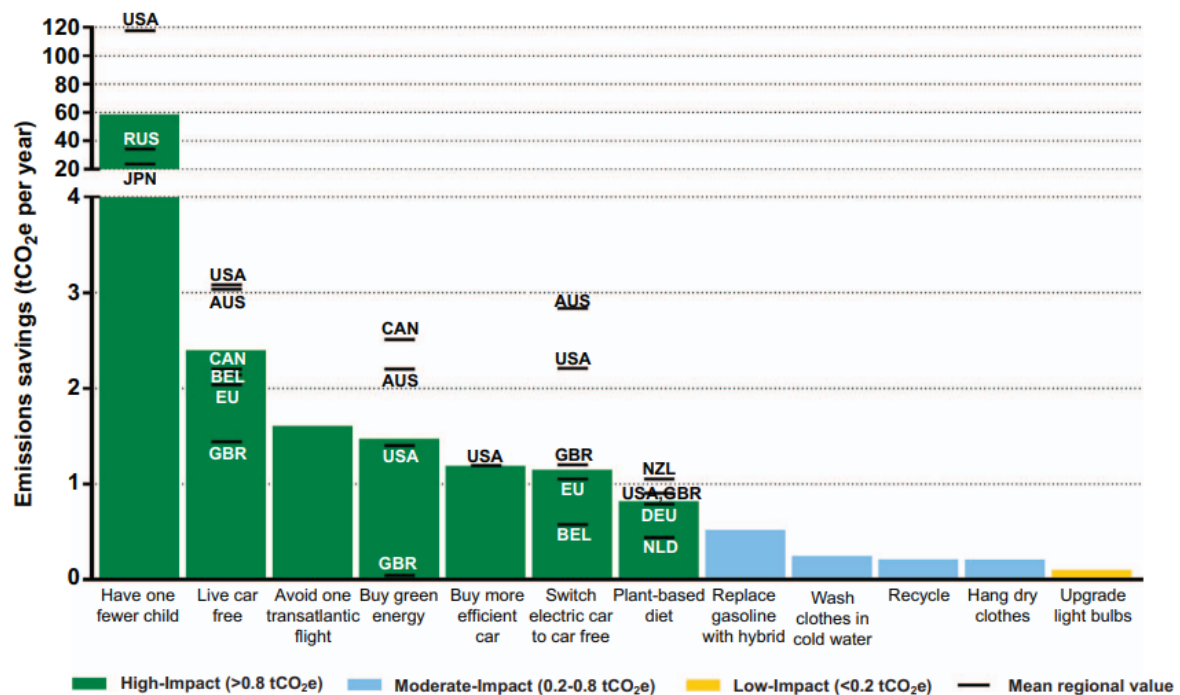


Figure 2.6: “A comparison of the emissions reductions from various individual actions” (Wynes & Nicholas, 2017, p. 4).

While such a movement resists figurations of rational, unitary subjectivity, it need not eschew numbers and counting altogether. As Haraway (2018) articulates, we can experience pain through numbers, and numbers can texture our pain; counting and numbers are themselves contextual and may be used in ethical ways (Strathern et al., 2019). Indigenous and decolonial mathematical approaches figure here – both in how Indigenous people have been counted as subjects, and in how Indigenous understandings of quantification are embedded within relational and material contexts (Walter & Andersen, 2013). For example, Walter and Suina (2019) discuss how the dominant mode of counting Indigenous peoples within neocolonial research has been through deficit-based measures, using crime, poverty, substance abuse and domestic violence statistics to figure Indigenous people as deficit subjects. As a counter to these ongoing colonising machinations, Walter and Suina emphasise not only the need for a “fundamental disturbance of the Western logics of statistical data” (p. 233); efforts to incorporate Indigenous statistics into the Western academy must retain and emphasise the embeddedness of Indigenous quantifications within the “Lifeworlds” and “dual

intersubjectivities of first world dispossessed Indigenous peoples” (p. 234). As we remind ourselves that Indigenous knowledge “cannot be transplanted, like a skin graft, onto the diseased body of Western extractivist political and economic systems” (Meynell, 2023, p. 16), we also wonder how such a shift to more intersubjective modes of quantification within climate literature would enable the question of *‘Is it okay to have a child?’* to be asked through relational, rather than solitary and melancholy, ethical trajectories?

As seen in the quantitative production of a deficit Indigenous subject (Walter & Suina, 2019), the logic of advanced capitalism is melancholic and negative, fuelled by fear of difference (Braidotti, 2008a). We see this logic at work in figurations of environmental melancholy, whereby unprocessed grief for environmental losses locks the subject in place, disabling their ability to psychically resist the structural forces producing the death of their world (Lertzman, 2015). A paradoxical move within psychology to de-psychologise pain might enable this myopia to be creatively transformed, enabling an understanding of pain as a mobilising force, rather than an expression of abnormality or pathology (Braidotti, 2008a). To consider the creative and transformative power of pain is not to disrespect pain, or to minimise the many unhealed wounds carried in our bodies and wider environments. It is, however, to shift our subjective becomings toward an ethics of relationality and affirmation, as this requires that we transform “the pain of loss into the active production of multiple forms of belonging and complex allegiances” (Braidotti, 2008a, pp. 21-22).

As figured in this article, both desire and pain move us toward relational connections, as desire sharpens the edge of pain, and pain brings depth to desire. In this sense, desire and pain are not necessarily contrary forces; rather, they can work together to create the topological and qualitative leap in imagination needed to redefine subjectivity as “an expanded self, whose relational capacity is not confined within the human species, but includes non-anthropomorphic elements” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 42). In this sense, climate change is not simply a problem of resources and reproductive choices, but of imagination. If we are to resist the logic and trajectory of advanced capitalism, we must imagine other-wise, for “how we live in the world is contingent upon how we imagine that world to be” (Neimanis & Loewen Walker, 2014, p. 563).

Organising around both points of coherence and of difference (Braidotti, 2019), feminist figures show us how to take such imaginative leaps, propelled into movement by pain, desire, and a sheer determination to not cede life on a warming planet to the deathly reifications of Man. Relentlessly historically specific, fleshed out as both killjoys and desiring feminist subjects, they expose advanced capitalism, population control and human exceptionalism as anything but ‘natural’ – and the question of *‘Is it okay to have child?’* as requiring so much more than a binary ‘yes/no’ answer. In their webs of material-semiotic relations, feminist figurations might yet teach us how to become response-able to the pain of ecological worlds dying around us, as we too die with them.

APPENDIX

Table 1: Media articles referenced in Figure 2.1

Bailey, S. (2019) BirthStrike: The people refusing to have kids because of ‘the ecological crisis’. *CNN*. Available: <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/05/health/birthstrike-climate-change-scn-intl/index.html>

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Carrington, D. (2017) Want to fight climate change? Have fewer children. *The Guardian*. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/12/want-to-fight-climate-change-have-fewer-children>

Court, A. (2020) Fears of climate change ‘apocalypse’ are stopping young people having children and 60 percent say they are worried their kids could ADD to the crisis, new study claims. <i>Daily Mail</i> . Available: https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8996309/Climate-change-apocalypse-stopping-young-people-having-children-new-study-claims.html
Crist, M. (2020) Is it OK to have a child? <i>London Review of Books</i> . Available: https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v42/n05/meehan-crist/is-it-ok-to-have-a-child
Fleming, A. (2018) Would you give up having children to save the planet? Meet the couples who have. <i>The Guardian</i> . Available: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/20/give-up-having-children-couples-save-planet-climate-crisis
Gies, E. (2015) Having kids is terrible for the environment, so I’m not having any. <i>The Washington Post</i> . Available: https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/07/14/having-kids-is-terrible-for-the-environment-so-im-not-having-any/
Ludden, J. (2016) Should we be having kids in the age of climate change? <i>NPR</i> . Available: https://www.npr.org/2016/08/18/479349760/should-we-be-having-kids-in-the-age-of-climate-change
Mythen, S. (2022) Eco-anxiety: Fear of climate change influencing young people’s decision to not have children. <i>New Zealand Herald</i> . Available: https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/eco-anxiety-fear-of-climate-change-influencing-young-peoples-decision-to-not-have-children/DOK2TS36PTGQQA6T7TEAXS46Q/
Pasley, J. (2017) Want to help combat climate change? Have one less child, study says. <i>Stuff</i> . Available: https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/parenting/family-life/97288090/want-to-help-combat-climate-change-have-one-less-child-study-says
Radio New Zealand. (2022) The ethics of having children during a climate emergency. <i>RNZ</i> . Available: https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/afternoons/audio/2018847366/the-ethics-of-having-children-during-a-climate-emergency
Relman, E. (2019) Fox News hosts accuse Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of ‘admitting to civilizational suicide’ after the congresswomen asks if it’s ‘okay to still have children’ with the threat of climate change. <i>Business Insider</i> . Available: https://www.businessinsider.com/fox-news-hosts-say-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-wants-to-get-rid-of-kids-2019-2
Scheinmen, T. (2019) The couples rethinking kids because of climate change. <i>BBC</i> . Available: https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20190920-the-couples-reconsidering-kids-because-of-climate-change
Shead, S. (2021) Climate change is making people think twice about having children. <i>CNBC</i> . Available: https://cnb.cx/2XfQAYp
Watson, S.K. (2021) If climate change is impacting your desire to have kids, you’re not alone. <i>Popular Science</i> . Available: https://www.popsoci.com/environment/having-children-climate-change/
Webster, B. (2021) Climate fears give the young second thoughts about having children. <i>The Times</i> . Available: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/climate-fears-give-the-young-second-thoughts-about-having-children-lh2bq6b9f
Williams, A. (2021) To breed or not to breed? <i>The New York Times</i> . Available: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/20/style/breed-children-climate-change.html

INTERSTITIAL 2

Article 2 closes with an invitation to consider how a “paradoxical move within psychology to de-psychologise pain” (p. 92) might help us to creatively transform environmental grief and melancholy, moving toward ethically response-able feminist figurations. As already noted in the thesis, pain moved throughout the stories I was hearing about climate change and reproduction, and this pain carried an affective force. Pain was relational and embodied, in that it caught my attention, drew me in, and invited me to hear the stories at a sensory and emotional level. As Thom van Dooren notes in his research on avian extinctions, stories carry relational consequences; through stories “we will inevitably be drawn into new connections, and with them new accountabilities and obligations” (2014, p. 10). In Article 3, I try to understand how we can respond as researchers to the affective forces which flow through the stories we seek out and hear, as we work towards transforming traditional expectations that researcher’s voices be disembodied, value-neutral and ahistorical in location. Following Carol Gilligan’s (2021) *Listening Guide* process, I listen for the movement of the psyche within BirthStrike testimonial statements, as this drew me toward notes of loss and hope. Article 3 taught me that the task of relational attunement and attention requires methodological flexibility and an ongoing process of iterative listening, moving us toward post-qualitative approaches more broadly (Camiré, 2025; de Rijke, 2023). Incorporating my own embodied reflections in the analysis itself, including the pain I felt in response to the stories, enabled me to follow this line of flight.

In Western cultural imaginations, we are all too familiar with the association of pain with suffering (Braidotti, 2008). Pain is to be avoided at great cost. Some pain is so annihilating, so capable of shattering our cherished habits, abilities, and perceptions of personhood that we may avoid even allowing the possibility of such losses to cross our minds. Denial attempts to spare us from some of the pain of our situated and historical conditions, by refusing to admit that these conditions may indeed be real, and may be happening to us. As Ernest Becker (1973) showed, denial has its place in enabling human ‘functioning’ even under the shadow of death and decay. And yet denial may rob us of the opportunity to become response-able to our historical conditions, including through our subjective formations.

It matters what stories are telling stories about pain. Through situated knowledge, our efforts to know and name pain can be understood as a resistance of the god trick, allowing us to “become answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway, 1989, p. 583). Haraway gestures to pain and death throughout her publications, not in a morbid preoccupation with endings, but to figure forms of kinship and community which are non-innocent and “rooted in friendship, work, partially shared purposes, intractable collective pain, inescapable mortality, and persistent hope” (Haraway, 2004, p. 284). With Haraway’s scholarship, I am able to imagine how pain flows along a natureculture continuum, as the many violences inflicted through colonisation and capitalist extraction ripple through our subjective becomings, overflowing our individual psychic defences. Pain might be seen and felt in response to a river, its water dull and deemed unswimmable due to nitrogen pollution. Pain might also animate the question of “Is it okay to have a child?” in conditions of climate change, inviting an ethical response-ability to those not yet born.

For Braidotti (2008), pain is an unavoidable aspect of learning to become subjects differently. She situates pain within her wider scholarly project on affirmative ethics, whereby “renewed political and ethical agency” (2011, p. 236) requires a creative and affirmative leap out of the melancholic logic of advanced capitalism. At the center of this melancholia is “the rational subject par excellence” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 223), a figure we have already met several times in this thesis. Haraway offers a vivid description of how this figure was historically formed:

“Enlightenment figures of coherent and masterful subjectivity, the bearers of rights, holders of property in the self, legitimate sons with access to language and the power to represent, subjects endowed with inner coherence and rational clarity, the masters of theory, founders of states, and fathers of families, bombs, and scientific theories-in short, Man as we have come to know and love him in the death-of-the-subject critiques.”
(Haraway, 2004, p. 48)

The rational, unitary subject is immobilised by fear of difference, and ‘he’ circles back upon himself in an endless loop of ontological essentialism, thereby draining himself of creative vitality and the capacity to sustain and undergo change. Such a figuration of human subjectivity has been privileged and naturalised within the psychological discipline (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, et al., 1984), forming the yardstick

against which ‘normative’ psychological development and functioning has been measured since the discipline’s inception. The rational, unitary subject may have produced a narrow set of parameters for who and what counts as human, but he is a figure nonetheless, open to contestation and refiguration.

When pain is psychologised through figurations of rational, unitary subjectivity, it becomes intolerable, a pathology or injury that must be denied or treated. Such a figuration of pain individualises suffering and directs our attention away from the social power relations and wider collective violences which have produced such psychic injuries. It also diminishes our creative and affective capacities to revisualise human subjectivity as relational and co-constitutional. Braidotti herself creatively leaps out of the melancholia of the Majority subject by pursuing a vision of subjectivity as nomadic and nonunitary, “simultaneously self-propelling and heterodefined, i.e., outward bound” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 35). A figure of nomadic subjectivity desires change and moves outward on the flows of these desires, even as change is painful. To quote Braidotti on pain,

“Ethics is essentially about transformation of negative into positive passions, i.e., moving beyond the pain. This does not mean denying the pain, but rather activating it, working it through. Again, the positivity here is not supposed to indicate a facile optimism, or a careless dismissal of human suffering. It involves compassionate witnessing of the pain of others...” (Braidotti, 2008, p. 25)

In my voice analysis of BirthStrike stories, I felt that the affective force of the stories was borne upon such a compassionate witnessing. It was not only that the stories bore testimony to ecological and social crises. They were also open to the pain of embodied witnessing, in all of its complex forms. I heard a movement toward response-ability and political activation in the stories, with this movement disrupting the flat individualising of responsibility figured by population discourses and consumption rhetoric, as traced in Article 2. The stories brought me into a form of witnessing, too – what was I to do with the heavy weight of sadness, and the green shoots of life and liveliness that I felt in response to the stories? As I wrote the closing section of Article 3, I felt the need to include a poem of my own, as a creative response to witnessing the pain and ethical potential of grappling with motherhood and reproduction in times of ecological crises.

Writing Article 3 was a venture into arts-based methodologies, as these approaches prioritize “imaginative, sensorial, embodied, and emotional intelligence that draws from memory and lies just beneath everyday consciousness” (Margolin et al., 2024, p. 2). Arts-based methodologies theoretically align with Braidotti’s (2014) emphasis on the transformative potential of writing from heart and memory, as creative practices enable us to become subjects differently. We need these stories and methodologies within psychology, if we are to begin to support the wider project of processing the embodied and collective pains of our historical moment. As Article 3 taught me, such approaches are emotionally demanding, but they are not without lightness, movement or empathy. They help us to show vulnerability as researchers, dislodging the figure of the rational, unitary subject a little further from the centre of our social power relations within academic scholarship.

ARTICLE 3: “I CANNOT BRING A CHILD INTO THIS WORLD”: HEARING AND WRITING I-POEMS WITH BIRTHSTRIKE NARRATIVES

Meynell, L. (2024). “I Cannot Bring A Child Into This World”: Hearing And Writing I Poems With BirthStrike Testimonials. *The Qualitative Report*, 29(4), 1149-1172.
<https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2024.6888>

Statement of contributions: Article written and edited by PhD candidate as sole author.

BirthStrike for Climate was a UK-based movement whose members “striked” against having children, to demonstrate the desperate need for political action on climate change. In this article, I engage with the Listening Guide (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017) to hear, trace and construct “I poems” with BirthStrike members’ testimonial statements, which were published online between 2019-2020. My analysis focusses on how BirthStrike stories articulate the psychosocial impacts of climate change, particularly in relation to questions about having (and not having) children in times of environmental and social crises. I provide an iteration of how the Listening Guide can be applied to non-spoken texts. As I will show, even in the absence of research participants, the listening process for me was a relational encounter: the stories moved me, stirring up strong affective resonances which in turn informed my hearing and writing process. My analysis is therefore an effort to give access to the affective flow I felt in response to the stories, as a process of both listening and being called to respond from an intersubjective location.

Keywords: BirthStrike, climate change, reproduction, the Listening Guide, Carol Gilligan

INTRODUCTION

In the face of astonishing losses to Earth’s ecosystems (IPCC, 2023), can we learn to hear, gently hold, and care for the thick affective flows—of grief, guilt, melancholy, joy, anger, courage, desire—produced and felt in response to our historical conditions? As Donna Haraway writes, living and dying well on a damaged Earth requires that we cultivate our capacities to respond, “passing patterns back and forth, giving and receiving, patterning, holding the unasked-for pattern in one’s hands, response-ability” (Haraway, 2016, p. 12). How might we do this emotional and relational work of becoming response-able from our locations as psychological researchers, where the stories and narrated subjects we encounter carry us to the strange and unsettling edges of “self” and “other”? These are some of the questions I asked myself, as I went through

the process of analysing BirthStrike's stories. These opening questions are, therefore, meditative, not research questions; I lay them down here, at the outset, to foreshadow the process through which I write in the second half of this article.

Social science research on the emotional and psychological impacts of climate change has proliferated in recent years, broadly conceptualised under the headings of climate anxiety (Clayton, 2020; Kennedy-Woodard & Kennedy-Williams, 2022; Ray, 2020), eco-anxiety (Oramus, 2023; Vakoch & Mickey, 2023), and climate change mental health (Goldman, 2022; Hayes et al., 2018). Such research tends to draw on cognitive and clinical psychological paradigms to frame understandings of and responses to climate change and is sometimes packaged in the form of self-help books. While recognising that such literature meets an urgent need, especially when considering the devastating impacts of climate change on young people's thoughts and feelings about the future (e.g., Hickman et al., 2021), it also comes with its epistemological limitations. At least in my own reading, the continued dominance of post-positivist assumptions about human subjectivity as singular and universalizable in social science climate research constrains efforts to attend to both the social power relations and the psychosocial structures which have produced environmental precarity in the first place (Meynell, 2023).

Feminist scholarship has been taking a different approach for decades, to critique how environmental harms fold into the intersecting social oppressions of gender, race and class. Indigenous, intersectional and decolonial feminist scholarships have probed the ways in which colonial, racial and geopolitical forces produce and normalise environmental and social devastations (e.g., Bhatia et al., 2020; Gay-Antaki, 2020; Hernandez, 2022; Kwaymullina, 2017; Mies et al., 2014; Te Awekotuku, 1991). And then there is the bright mix of feminist technoscience studies (e.g., Barad, 2015; Haraway, 1988, 1997/2018, 2016; TallBear, 2013; Tallbear & Willey, 2019; Tsing, 2015), feminist new materialisms (e.g., Alaimo, 2010; Colebrook, 2013; Neimanis & Loewen Walker, 2014; Verlie, 2022) and feminist philosophies (e.g., Braidotti, 2011, 2022; Plumwood, 1993; Tuana, 2010, 2013) which in different ways disrupt hegemonic epistemic and ontological assumptions underpinning violences of many kinds, including those enacted against our non-human kin. It is from this scholarship that the current project takes shape.

I focus in this article on the interrelation of climate change with emotional and ethical dilemmas about having children, as these emerge from Global North contexts. I ask, *how do BirthStrike voices articulate the psychosocial impacts of climate change, particularly in relation to having children?* The Listening Guide informs my analysis of BirthStrike's stories. The Listening Guide is based on Carol Gilligan's (1982/2003) feminist psychological understandings of voice as an embodied expression of associative psychological logic. I "listen" for the voices in BirthStrike members' written testimonials, which invites an interesting methodological variation on how to engage the Listening Guide beyond working with interview recordings and transcripts. As my analysis attempts to trace, the process of listening to non-spoken texts was nevertheless an affective encounter: the stories moved me with their pain, dignity, and determination to stay with the trouble of our times (Haraway, 2016), and I felt a call to respond. As well as writing "I poems" with selected BirthStrike stories in the analysis, I trace the movement of four contrapuntal voices: the voice of the child, or of before; the voice of affliction; the voice of longing and desire; and the voice of monitoring privilege.

My own location matters to how I hear and respond to the BirthStrike stories. I descend from colonising European ancestors who first arrived in the South Pacific in the 1800s. Born in Aotearoa New Zealand, I am a tangata Tiriti, or a person of the Treaty (Ngarewa-Packer, 2022). My citizenship and sense of belonging in Aotearoa rests upon the relational obligations between Māori (tangata whenua; Indigenous peoples of the land) and non-Māori, as this relationship is formally inscribed in Te Tiriti o Waitangi¹ (the Treaty of Waitangi). To be tangata Tiriti is to stay with the trouble of the colonial legacies which continue to shape New Zealand's contemporary landscapes and political relationships, including in climate change policy (Meynell, 2023). I am also a woman who does not have children. This is because desire to have (biological) children of my own hasn't figured in my own life. Hence, although I am continually weathered (emotionally, politically, physically) by climate change (Neimanis & Loewen Walker, 2014), and I am trying to become response-able to the violences of our times, enacted through colonisation and globalisation, I do not carry the emotional weight of ethically interrogating an embodied desire to have children.

¹ Te Tiriti o Waitangi recognises the right of Māori to tino rangatiratanga, or political self-determination, though this right continues to be denied by Crown governments to the present day (Mikaere, 2011).

BIRTHSTRIKE AND THE TROUBLE OF SINGLE STORIES

“I’m gutted to not be able to start my family, and I resent that our self-destruction and planetary destruction all for greed and ‘economic growth’ has stopped me from doing this. I’m 24 and instead of dreaming about my career and family, I’m burdened with the disease we’ve created. My decision not to have a child I truly feel is a necessity not a choice.” — BirthStrike member testimonial

BirthStrike for the Climate was a UK-based movement founded on members (including women, men and gender diverse peoples) making a commitment to not have children, as a political campaign to force action on climate change. The movement formed in 2018 and disbanded in September 2020 (McMullen & Dow, 2022). Initiated by Welsh musician Blythe Pepino, BirthStrike integrated environmental and feminist activisms, taking up reproduction as the means by which to “strike” against Western governments’ inadequate responses to climate change. BirthStrike was explicit in its political intentions: it distinguished itself from anti-natalist and population control narratives, took up with reproductive justice movements, and focussed its strike on the structural causes of climate change—the extraction and disposal of environments, human and more-than-human kinds through the long reach of colonisation, systemic racism, gendered violence and advanced capitalism. In this sense, and as suggested by the above quote, striking against birth was not necessarily considered to be a choice by BirthStrike members, but a necessity. Propelled by grief, fear and anguish, members expressed their sense of uncertainty and sometimes impossibility about bringing children into a world radically destabilised by climate change.

BirthStrike’s dissolution came about in response to sustained social justice concerns that the campaign potentially reified population control discourses. These concerns and the subsequent decision by BirthStrike leaders to end the campaign, in respect of these critiques, exemplifies the contentious emotional and discursive terrain through which BirthStrike came into being (Dow & McMullen, 2022; Gaitán Johannesson, 2022). Population control discourses have a complex history, being interwoven with the earliest Western environmental movements and continuing to exercise significant influence over Global North developmental and climate change understandings (Bhatia et al., 2020; Sasser, 2018). In its most rudimentary form, populationism speaks through guises of biological neutrality to tell a story about a

planet overpopulated by human beings, and of reproductive interventions as the technofix through which unsustainable growth can be controlled (Murphy, 2017; Sasser, 2018). Deeply racist, classist, sexist and ableist, in my view population functions according to a Western imperialising gaze: it takes up particular categories of people as the focus of its reproductive interventions and assumes that some humans are more and less desirable than others.

Despite the efforts of BirthStrike leaders such as Jessica Gaitán Johannesson and Blythe Pepino to tell a different story—one which focussed on the emotional impacts of climate change and attempted to trouble Global North privileges—BirthStrike became an example of narrative unruliness, attracting pro-natalist and anti-natalist hearings and tellings alike (McMullen & Dow, 2022). Indeed, population discourses do appear within the BirthStrike testimonials from time to time, as some members story their anguish about not having children in times of climate crisis through the decontextualised language of resource limits, population thresholds and a futureless Earth. BirthStrike was, importantly, a collective: it was composed of many voices, it was not clean or innocent in its formation, and it was subject to the wider forces of our advanced capitalist times, where a thick and urgent flow of demographic and economic discourses are shaping the ways we can turn ourselves into subjects (Meynell et al., 2023). Echoing these discursive flows, media restoryings of the BirthStrike campaign continually emphasised population concerns over the complex emotional impacts which BirthStrike sought to externalise and politically mobilise (McMullen & Dow, 2022). As Gaitán Johannesson writes, “Our group never suggested a tool for tackling the climate crisis, other than telling one of many necessary stories of what we are losing, what so many people have lost, and refusing to lose it silently” (2022, p. 151). And yet, “the population argument was there, waiting for us in every conversation” (2022, p. 142).

The current project does not focus explicitly on the social power relations forming population discourse in its silencing of the BirthStrike stories. The broader shaping of environmental movements in relation to population discourse are the focus of a growing literature (Bhatia et al., 2020; Meynell, 2023; Sasser, 2016, 2018). Analyses of how the BirthStrike campaign was shaped by population include McMullen and Dow’s (2022) reading of how BirthStrike was (mis)heard and responded to through mediated contexts, effectively silencing the existential alarm which BirthStrike sought to raise;

and Meynell, Morgan and van Ommen's (2023) discussion of the Global North figures which are animating the question of "Is it okay to have a child in conditions of environmental crisis?", including within the BirthStrike movement. By focussing on the affective resonances of BirthStrike stories, I am attempting to resist the powerful sway of population discourses in the stories we hear and tell in climate change literature. Hence, I read BirthStrike's formation and storytelling as part of a broader psychosocial response to living through conditions of environmental collapse, as these narratives express not only pain, but a desire to become other-wise—to imagine and bring into being "sustainable horizons of hope" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 41).

THEORETICAL LOCATIONS: FEMINIST RELATIONAL ETHICS

With all that we're tasked with holding and becoming response-able to in our times, it seems we need especially "capacious bags for collecting, carrying, and telling the stuff of living" (Haraway, 2016, p. 39). Here's where the figure of a carrier bag comes in, borne through material-semiotic knots which are not merely metaphorical but have world-building capacities (Haraway, 2008). Carrier bags aren't just for carrying. They're also useful for whacking at the edges of heteropatriarchal power relations. This includes knocking from his pedestal the figure of Western Man, whose domination of nature, whether through a spear or a laboratory, continues to justify the exploitation and silencing of those considered "other" (Haraway, 2019).

Feminist theorisations of carrier bags begin way back, in the layers of unnamed and interwoven women's labours and knowings. But also, for scholarly purposes, they begin with Elizabeth Fisher's (1980) argument that having something to put things in—a container, a bag, a bottle, a gourd, a baby sling—was technologically momentous for prehistoric humans, grounded in women's kinship practices. Ursula Le Guin (1989) continues the thread through her carrier bag theory of fiction, where stories about gathering wild oats seeds and collecting water become tellable and hearable, offering us less violent ways of knowing and storying the world than conflict-centred narratives; and Donna Haraway (2016) insists on the figurative power of carrier bags, which help us to resist human exceptionalism and to situate our thinking and knowledge practices within an ethics of multispecies justice. As I think with the narrative writings of Indigenous women scholars in my home of Aotearoa New Zealand (Connor, 2007; Simmonds, 2011), and with the incredible artistic practice and legacies of Māori

women's raranga/weaving (Evans et al., 2005), I am also reminded that carrier bags have limits. We cannot carry every story, nor do we have the right to, especially when we have descended and benefitted from histories of colonisation and exploitation, as I have (Meynell, 2023).

I think of carrier bags as woven from the very stuff of feminist relational ethics—women's stories and ways of knowing the world, their practices of care and resistance. The wider weave of feminist relational ethics privileges relationships and relationality with ontological and political generativity. We see these theoretical connections laid out in Donna Haraway's (2016, 2019) writings on sympoiesis, which attend to the relentless historical and relational contingencies of our worlding projects; Michelle Fine's (2017) feminist psychology writings on the movement of narratives, as stories call us to respond from transnational and intersubjective locations; Patricia Hill Collins's (2002) articulations of a Black feminist epistemology, where emotions and relationality are embraced within knowledge production; and Rosi Braidotti's (2008) movement toward affirmative ethics and process ontologies. Of course, the collective of feminist relational ethics far exceeds the citational threads made explicit here.

Carol Gilligan's feminist ethics of care forms a vital part of the carrier bag weave. Like Fine (2017), Gilligan's work developed from within the North American psychological discipline, and her ethics of care responds directly to the androcentric privileging of self-separation in psychological theories of moral development formulated from the mid-20th century. Based on her experiences of listening to girls and women share their sense-making processes, Gilligan came to hear a different voice, one which spoke through an associative rather than rational logic and valued relational connections over abstract claims to "justice" (Gilligan, 1982/2003, 2014). And yet why was this different voice and moral logic which Gilligan heard so often silenced, not only by society at large, but by girls and women themselves? Where had the voice retreated to?

Gilligan theorises voice as "natural and also cultural ... composed of breath and sound, words, rhythm and language" (1982/2003, p. xvi). In this way, voice is not reducible to a mind/body binary, but is dynamic, physiological and psychological. Our voices contradict themselves and contain multitudes – including emotional tones and registers, resonances and pitches, inconsistencies and disruptions, suppressions and

dissociations. For Gilligan, processes of “voicing” bring the inner psychic world of the speaker outward, externalising the speaker’s psychological processes and emotional terrains.



Figure 3.1: Kete/basket woven from harakeke/flax. On display in Te Puia, Māori Arts & Crafts Institute, Rotorua, Aotearoa New Zealand. Photo taken by author, October 2022.

By following the voices of women and girls, Gilligan was able to *hear* how patriarchy is a separating psychological force: it sows its seeds of binary hierarchical relations of domination and subordination within the fabric of our subjectivities, though it enforces this split in psyches² at different developmental stages across genders. Patriarchy is hardly inevitable or universal in its psychological tyranny, however. Though much silenced and straining to be heard, a voice of care and relationality nevertheless remains alive and resistant within the psyche, moving us toward the potential for hearing and responding differently. As we become response-able to the

² In making reference to the psyche and psychic worlds, Gilligan (2004) is drawing on her feminist readings of psychoanalytical texts, including the Greek myth of Psyche and Eros, to resist Oedipal narratives of self-becoming through separation. Rather, as Tolman and Head discuss, “psyche” within the Listening Guide is suggestive of “embodied and embedded psychological processes—associative rather than rational logic” (Tolman & Head, 2021, p. 153).

embodied and embedded pain and joy expressed through voicing practices, we're moving towards the affirmation of difference, rather than its fear, and the creation of trust, rather than its destruction (Gilligan, 2014).

I argue that the inner psychological workings of patriarchy documented in Gilligan's work scaffolds to our psychic relationships to environmental crises, too. The moral codes of patriarchy continue to dominate environmental policies and narratives within Global North contexts, re-figuring a binary distinction between nature/culture, masculine/feminine, and rational/emotional (Meynell, 2023; Tuana, 2013). Such figurations reify environmental responsibility as a decontextualised and individualised concern which can be mitigated and responded to through rational thought and action (Meynell et al., 2023). We see this logic at work in the device of the "carbon footprint," which seeks to inscribe environmental responsibilities through the mechanisms of individual decision-making and consumption, while obscuring the globalised hierarchies of domination through which unsustainable consumer economies and subjectivities are enacted (Crist, 2020; Kaufman, 2020).

An ethics of care, rather than an ethics of self-separation, is "grounded less in moral precepts than in psychological wisdom, underscoring the costs of not paying attention, not listening, being absent rather than present, not responding with integrity and respect" (Gilligan, 2014, p. 13). Doucet and Mauthner (2008) build on these understandings to trace the complexities of "how we come to know narrated subjects in research practice" (2008, p. 404). An intrinsically relational subject, the narrated subject is reflexively constituted through narration and voicing practices—both in the stories subjects tell and the interpretation of these stories by researchers. It may not be possible to "know" subjects beneath or beyond their narrated subjectivities, but by listening with care and curiosity, we can attend to the "multilayered nature of the expression of human experience and the interplay between self and relationship, psyche and culture" (Gilligan, 1982/2003, p. 163).

METHODOLOGY: WRITING I-POEMS WITH BIRTHSTRIKE NARRATIVES

Continuing the fledgling tradition of generative Listening Guide applications (e.g., Haynes, 2020; Kielgelmann, 2021; Koelsch, 2016), my analysis of BirthStrike's stories invited a departure from set methodological applications. This departure was

relationally informed, driven by the creative challenge of trying to “hear” the voices embedded within written rather than spoken texts. My analytical process is iterative, not prescriptive, and tries to give access to the affective flow I felt in response to the stories. The process is described and embedded within the analysis itself. For methodological transparency and to aid readers who are unfamiliar with the Listening Guide methodology, in the following sections I provide (i) a brief discussion of the Listening Guide’s stages of hearing, undertaken in this article; and (ii) my ethical and methodological specificities for collecting and selecting from the BirthStrike narratives.

The Listening Guide

The first stage of analysis, listening for the plot, involves reading broadly across the narrative(s) collected for analysis (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017). The researcher maps the features of the emotional terrain which the stories bring into being, guided through such questions as:

“who is present, is anyone missing, what are the major and minor themes, are there emotional hotspots, salient images or metaphors, what stories are told, are there gaps or ruptures in the narrative, and also what is the researcher’s response to being on this landscape with this person?” (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017, p. 78)

As is the case throughout the Listening Guide research process, listening for the plot involves attending both to what is articulated and what is not, or cannot, be said. However, it’s important to note that this first stage of listening does not involve forming analytical opinions or suppositions. Rather, there is a commitment to “resisting the profound pull to categorize, to compress too early” (Tolman & Head, 2021, p. 154). In other words, researchers must be willing to get in the water of the story and allow themselves to be swept along with the narrative and psychological currents, noting their own responses and reactions as they go.

The second stage of analysis, listening for the “I,” attends to how the narrated subject (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008) begins to form with and through the selected text. “I statements” (consisting of first-person singular subject and verb statements, such as “I felt... I cannot... I want...”) are highlighted and listed sequentially in the order they appear in the text, to trace the psychological movement of the narrated-subject-in-becoming. In this way, the researcher crafts a poem from the narrator’s own words. In

crafting I poems it may be tempting to retain the contextual detail which follows each I statement, especially where this gives the appearance of telling a thicker “research story” (Koelsch, 2015). However, by rendering the I statements down to the movements between subject and verb, the psychological process expressed by the narrator can be heard, felt, seen. The resulting I poems are starkly beautiful. They evoke and dignify the narrated self, “lay[ing] bare the associative logic of a particular psyche as it crosses a specific terrain” (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017, p. 79).

The third stage of the analysis, listening for contrapuntal voices, involves listening beyond the plot and the voice of self, to hear the multiplicity of voices expressed within the text. This stage of listening demonstrates the Listening Guide’s overarching assumption that subjectivity is not singular or rationalisable, but is formed and narrated through multiplicities of voices and psychic processes, as these voices and processes co-become in rich relationship to each other and to the conditions of everyday life. Indeed, the nuances and complexities enabled at this point of the research can be overwhelming, producing a “cacophony of orchestral sound” (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017, p. 79). For this reason, it’s important to be guided by the research question in hearing and perceiving the movement of contrapuntal voices. How do the voices sound, physically? Where are the tensions, disruptions, harmonies and silences? How do these relational interactions between voices express embodied psychic movements and associations? And how does the interplay of these voices move the researcher, as the researcher engages in “relational attunement” with these voices (Tolman & Head, 2021, p. 156)?

Collecting and selecting BirthStrike narratives

I collected a total of 80 BirthStrike testimonials between late-2019 and mid-2020 from the BirthStrike webpage (www.birthstrikeforfuture.com) and Instagram site.³ The testimonials are what I consider to be “activist texts”: they were published with the intention of awakening and activating as many people as possible to the political aspects of climate change. None of the testimonials came from “private” communication channels, such as member-only forums or group chats. Hence, I consider the stories to

³ These online pages are no longer active. The testimonials themselves were presumably deleted with the dissolution of the BirthStrike campaign and its social media pages in late 2020 and can no longer be accessed.

have existed in the public domain at the time of collection, not requiring the consent of individual authors to be collected and analysed for academic research.

The testimonials take the form of short blog posts, with the majority being approximately 200 words long, consisting of one or two paragraphs. This said, the texts vary extensively in length, from single sentences to short essays. Authorship of the testimonials is ambiguous. For the most part, BirthStrike members signed off their testimonials with a name and age, though it is not relevant or appropriate to this study to attempt to establish whether these “names” correspond with actual identities or are pseudonyms. In an effort to respect the privacy of BirthStrike members who may have contributed to these testimonials, and to intentionally relocate the stories as co-created rather than individually-authored texts, I removed names and any identifying details from the testimonials before including them in the voice analysis.

Ethical decisions about the collection, analysis and presentation of BirthStrike narratives were guided by feminist relational ethics and peer reviewed by senior academics. My approach sought to resist the pervasive individualisation and privatisation of knowledge “commons” enacted by colonisation and capitalism since modernity. Such extractive and individualising mechanisms continue to the present day, intensified through neoliberalism and advanced capitalism, to reduce ways of knowing and stories—including the stories we tell stories with (Haraway, 2019)—to single and patentable forms of narrative capital (Haraway, 1997/2018).

Underpinning and naturalising such economic, legal and cultural formations is the figure of the rational, unitary subject, hegemonically envisioned and enacted as “masculine/white/heterosexual/speaking a standard language/property-owning/urbanised” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 212). So often taking on universalising proportions through repetitions of the god trick (Haraway, 1988), this figure continues to underpin our expectations of “who” constitutes the subject of research ethics, as well as what is at stake in the protection of this subject’s individual rights and autonomy. In this project, I wanted to take a different approach, as I thought with Connor et al. (2015) about the stubborn complexities of doing research with online texts, which refuse to conform to the standard binary of public/private and demand that we shift our attention “from *what* individuals are saying to *how* this text is functioning for this community” (p. 236; italics in original).

Locating and listening to BirthStrike narratives as co-created texts is not to collapse or flatten the psychological specificity expressed within the narratives to a single or coherent note, as though co-creation must constitute sameness. Rather, I understand co-created stories to be carrier bags for many situated knowledges, many voices, many psyches, which with all their vital differences are propelled toward movement, mobilised by their pain(s) to protest their historical conditions. Rosi Braidotti's feminist philosophical shift toward the affirmation of difference enables such a figuration, whereby "to map out points of convergence is not reductive, but rather productive; it is a methodological example of an encounter with otherness as a generative or affirmative force" (Braidotti, 2008, p. 16). Thus, while an important aspect of the Listening Guide is to locate and listen for the formation of the first-person subject within the text, I understand such an "I" to be always and already in relation, not reducible to the binary of individual/collective which haunts psychological knowledge production. Through such a feminist relational understanding, I am still attending to and listening for the movement of "a particular psyche as it crosses a specific terrain" (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017, p. 79), even as I locate BirthStrike testimonials as co-created texts, containing the movements of many psyches through relational formations.

I began by reading broadly across the entire set of texts, 80 in number, mapping the emotional terrains and plots of the stories they contained (stage 1). Recognising the limits of my carrier bag and the impossibility of performing an in-depth listening analysis with all of the stories, I began to arrange the testimonials into smaller groups, based on their relevance to the research question and their narrative qualities. These qualities included: narrative point of view; the predominance of I-statements; the thickness of emotional language; and the plots of the stories they brought into being. This process enabled me to gather a more carriable set of 20 stories with which to conduct stages 2 and 3 of the Listening Guide. These stories were written in first-person, and thickly woven with I statements; perhaps because of this, they also tended to be emotive in language and told compelling personal stories, rather than focussing on the reiteration of climate change "facts." Although the remaining 60 stories did not continue on through to the later stages of the analysis, they form and bring into being the overall narrative terrain of the BirthStrike testimonials, constituting the relational text within which I listen for the movement of specific psyches and psychological processes.

ANALYSIS

Mapping the emotional and narrative terrain

The first stage of listening was emotionally difficult for me. I had obviously read snippets of the BirthStrike testimonials in forming a research proposal and collecting the online stories for analysis. However, I remember distinctly the first time I sat down at my desk with the intention of reading across the whole collection of stories—to listen for the plot. It was a Saturday morning in mid-winter, a quiet time I had set aside to “hang out”⁴ with the stories. Without any attempt to order or categorise the stories, I spent the next two hours reading across the testimonials, taking brief notes and making the first sketches of the emotional terrains that I felt the stories brought into view. I recall the way my body began to respond to these stories, the more I read—the hollow feeling which grew in my chest; the hunch which spread over my shoulders and down my spine, as though I was wearing a backpack which someone kept filling up with stones. Somewhere around the halfway mark of reading through the collection, I needed to stop and cry. The emotional weight of the stories rushed over me and poured out in leaky tears all over my workspace. Here at my desk, tired and soggy, the idea of listening from an “intersubjective” location did not seem terribly theoretical to me, but humbling and immediate. The stories had moved me with their pain and dignity, and I felt a call to respond.

Pain was a pervasive thread woven through the stories, though it was expressed through different forms. Some stories manifested their pain in what I heard as an agonised cry, a loud and heavy sob, in articulating the psychological effects of climate change, including how climactic conditions have stultified possibilities for bringing children into the world. Other stories were much more reliant on informational discourses in establishing the emotional impacts of climate change; they begin by “laying out the facts” of current and projected future environmental conditions, before locating themselves and their emotional responses within this larger picture of world events (e.g., Figure 3.2).

“The inevitable truth is humans have impacted on the natural ecosystem to such a degree that it’s unlikely we
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⁴ Here, I am drawing on Buckingham’s (2022) feminist community psychological research, where spending time and “hanging out” with the communities who were involved with the research project enabled meaningful conversations, insights, and stories to be shared and heard.

will stop the great mass extinction which has already started & will wipe out the human species. Climate breakdown has begun & it is impacting on communities across the world. Climate breakdown impacted on Syria starting the catastrophe & human displacement & war. I could not look my child in the eye with the knowledge & experience I have knowing their life would be not joyful & free of the impacts of climate breakdown."

Figure 3.2: A BirthStrike testimonial, from Stage 1 of the Listening Guide analysis.

As suggested by Figure 3.2, dystopian themes significantly shaped the landscape of the collective BirthStrike narratives. Woven alongside harrowing accounts of personal grief and loss, these dystopian futurisms play heavily in crafting an envisioned world where suffering, death, cruelty, scarcity of resources, and never-ending conflict and war would render childhood—and the having of children—an ethical and material impossibility. Revisiting these stories many times over months and years, I could not help but hear the tropic quality of some of these dystopian narratives, which (alongside their utopian cousins) continue to plot their stories through a broader narrative binary of apocalypse vs. salvation, total annihilation vs. final redemption (Haraway, 2016).

Though few in number, some stories drew on population discourses to figure the decision to not have a child as the ultimate sacrifice, one made for the greater good of planet Earth, a globalised location discursively cast as already groaning under the weight of human numbers. Coming across population discourses within the BirthStrike narratives felt particularly jarring, appearing as violent rents in the otherwise politically astute narrative fabric of the collected texts.

"It is not only climate breakdown for me, it is also the whole catastrophe of the capitalist market which at every turn creates less opportunities for a healthy balanced family life"

Figure 3.3: Political critiques in BirthStrike narratives.

"I fear for the future of my children, I imagine them dying with me when climate change decimates our food supply. I despair at the ignorance and willful [sic] greed and callous campaigns of the fossil fuel industries to maintain business as usual when they could have been part of the solution, and I'm disgusted at our politicians, who care more about pandering to powerful lobbies than protecting our futures."

Figure 3.4: Disgust at politicians and political systems in BirthStrike narratives.

If dystopian themes shaped the landscape of the collected texts, then political critiques constituted the clay, the river shoal, the volcanic rock of the stories. Political critiques were often blunt, locating capitalism and extractive economies as responsible not only for climate change and environmental destructions of many kinds, but for rendering “family life” untenable (e.g., Figure 3.3). A need for radical political intervention was articulated in the majority of stories, with some stories utilising the language of “war” and “system change” to emphasise the desperation of our historical and environmental conditions. Western governments were located as complicit in the destruction of a liveable planet; corrupted by their entanglements with “big business” and oil and gas industries, Western governments were seen to be obstructing rather than supporting mitigation efforts (e.g., Figure 3.4). Temporal pressures amplified the emotional intensities expressed throughout the stories. Such pressures were both planetary and personal. They were planetary in that timescales for climactic tipping points were frequently rhetorically deployed, to convey the urgency with which political action on climate change was/is needed. And they were personal in that climate change was often storied through a Bildungsroman⁵ or coming of age narrative structure, involving loss, a journey, a conflict, and a gradual process of coming to maturity (Golban, 2018).

For all that the stories were drenched in pain and despair, they were also full of determination, of a connection to community and of a willingness to trouble Global North privileges. Many stories spoke to the significance of finding a community in which they could express their fears, anxieties, depressions and decisions about having (and not having) children in times of climate crisis. The period preceding the finding and forming of community was often described as a period of darkness, of being forcibly silenced by terror and isolation. To find community was to be unearthed—to be able to share, connect and breathe. And in some stories, community and climate activism was

⁵ Modern iterations of bildungsroman narrative structures came to prominence in 18th century German and 19th English novels, though as Golban (2018) suggests, the form has a long history, developing through European classical and medieval storytelling. Bakhtin described bildungsroman as “an image of *man growing in national-historical time*” (as cited in Boes, 2012, p. 6). And yet Boes argues that while bildungsroman novels developed partly in response to modern European nationalism, many such novels failed to give “definitive form to the collective experience that they articulate. There is always some kind of remainder, some identity claim that resists nationalism’s aim for closure in what ... we can identify as the normative regime of the nation-state” (2012, p. 3).

described as a form of mothering, with concomitant demands on time and energy (Figure 3.5).

"I dont have time and i am scared for all children alive today. As activists in XR we are mothering the future and I don't have capacity for a family of my own."

Figure 3.5: A single BirthStrike entry, where activism is described as a form of mothering.

Who is missing from the collection? There are very few stories narrated “from the margins” within both Global North and Global South locations. At the same time, “the Global South” haunts the collected texts, figured through post-Cold War socioeconomic and political hierarchies, to cast less economically developed countries as the geographical location where the earliest and worst effects of climate change will be seen and felt. As in the reiterations of temporal climate tipping points, these references to the Global South carry the echoes of Western developmental and climate discursive productions. And yet, they’re also deeply personal, overshadowed by a sense of guilt, anguish, and a desire to address the outsized responsibility of Western nations—and the hyper resource-consuming citizens of those nations—for the damage done to Earth’s ecosystems.

Listening for the movement of the psyche

As I moved into the second and third stages of listening, I came to embody the stories in other ways. As I listened for the “I” and for contrapuntal voices across the smaller collection of 20 BirthStrike texts, I also needed to physically *hear* the way the stories were voiced – the tones they took on, the places where they paused, the moments where the voices flooded with emotion and wavered on the edge of saying something... almost unsayable? These texts were, of course, written texts, and I had no recourse to embodied and embedded memories of research interviews, let alone voice recordings. So, I began to read the stories aloud to myself, noting the places where my own voice broke and sang, dropped and rose in pitch, carried strength and vulnerability. I likened this voicing process to the reading aloud of poetry, which in a similar spirit to the carrier bag, helps us to re-member the thick relationality of storytelling and poetic performance (Haraway, 2019), which has not always been reducible to the figure of a self-producing, self-narrating individual human subject (Haraway, 1997/2018).

I made this methodological shift within the space and flexibility enabled by arts-based and poetic methodologies, including the Listening Guide, which continue to challenge hegemonic distinctions between the categories of “researcher” and “research subject” within social science research (e.g., Seppälä et al., 2021). For example, I was guided by Tangerås’s (2022) psychological research on how the reading aloud of poetry in a dementia care home enabled a spontaneous and creative intersubjective movement—the poem affects a person, and a person is moved by witnessing and sharing this process of affectivity with others. With the BirthStrike narratives, I don’t go so far so to mistake my own reading voice for “the voice of the text.” I am, however, fascinated by how the narratives came to inhabit me, lodging in the vibrations of my chest, throat, and mouth as I read them aloud, over and over again; and how I came to inhabit the narratives, in turn, as my voice and the many layers of lived experience which tremble through my voice told stories with BirthStrike’s stories.

- How do I distinguish myself from these stories?
- They are too heavy with pain, I am oversaturated and cannot hold the location of ‘researcher.’
- I cry – I cry and cry and cry. I write a poem in response. I need to take frequent breaks, to allow myself to digest the emotional content of the narratives.

Figure 3.6: Notes taken during my listening analysis.

The Listening Guide asks that researchers attend to and distinguish between their own responses and the story and voice of the research participant. The intention here is to privilege the voice of the research participant over the theoretical expectations of the researcher, and to enable the researcher to engage in a profoundly relational listening process. These are good intentions, and I did my best to adhere to them. And yet when I allowed the stories to pierce me at a deep emotional level, I found the “distinction” between researcher and text difficult to maintain. As I’ve already gestured to, and as my research notes from this stage of the listening analysis attest, the transformative power of listening also had the peculiar and somewhat terrifying effect of making me feel exposed, as though the protective casing which demarcates my own subjectivity – my psychological “skin,” so to speak – had been cracked open, requiring emotional first-aid to stitch it back up again (Figure 3.6).

"After becoming a vegan nearly 2 years ago, **I have gradually come into awareness** of our environmental situation. During the summer something that feels like an awakening occurred for me, **I suddenly saw things in a new light**, I became uncomfortably aware of my cultural conditioning and **I began questioning everything**, which has led to a shift in my world view. **I am gradually finding the language** to talk about these new concepts and reaching out to others that are experiencing the world in similar ways. **I experience intense grief and heartbreak and rage** at the destruction of our living planet and **I have moments of panic and fear at what the future holds. I have come to the conclusion that I cannot bring a child into this world** with such an uncertain and bleak looking future."

Figure 3.7: BirthStrike testimonial, with "I" statements in alternate text and bolded.

In considering how demarcations across subjects become hardened into categories, I think with Donna Haraway about how "inside and outside are lies. The edge is all there is" (Haraway, 1997/2018, p. 154). Though Haraway in this quotation is referring specifically to inside and outside of technoscientific narratives, nevertheless, the spirit of "the edge" carries me to thinking about the edge of encounters between research actors of all kinds—including fleshy researchers and the texts they animate and become animated by.

Returning to the Listening Guide, the movement toward listening for the "I" in stage two became a way for me to try and balance upon the edge of the research encounter with the BirthStrike narratives, as this balancing act demanded that I neither harden against or sentimentally succumb to notions of being inside or outside of the stories. Working with a smaller collection of twenty stories, I tracked "all instances, phrases, sentences, that constitute the narrator's presence in her own story" (Tolman & Head, 2021, p. 157). An example of this process has been provided in Figure 3.7, where I statements have been marked in an alternate font. From these statements, I then composed the first iteration of an I poem:

I have gradually come into awareness
I suddenly saw things in a new light

I became uncomfortably aware

I began questioning everything

I am gradually finding the language

I experience intense grief and heartbreak and rage

I have moments of panic and fear at what the future holds

I have come to the conclusion

I cannot bring a child into this world

I am attached to this first iteration of an I poem. I think it works both as a poem, and as an insight into some of the emotional tensions which generated the BirthStrike campaign. However, the contextual detail, while making the poem's plot self-evident, distracts from the psychological process of the narrated subject. So, I reluctantly remove even more detail from each I statement. I also give this second iteration of the poem a name – "Poem of Becoming" – based on the words of significance it contains.

Poem of Becoming

I have gradually come

I suddenly saw

I became

I began

I am gradually finding

I experience

I have moments

I have come

I cannot

When seen and heard in this poetic shape, the psychological formation and movement of the narrated subject becomes more distinct. I hear and feel in this poem the force and energy of change, of the "I" being propelled toward becoming a different

kind of subject. The psyche, in its associative logic, is on the move. In places, this change feels almost violent – *“I suddenly saw / I became.”* And yet change occurs through temporal and cartographic gradations, too, marked through a pattern of beginnings, gradual findings, and the having of moments and experiences, with these gradations bringing some gentleness to the psyche’s journey. The final two lines of the poem strike me in their certitude. They carry a weight of knowing, following as they do a series of assertions: *“I have come / I cannot.”* These lines, particularly the final negation of “I cannot,” articulates a psyche which is not above or outside of the particular terrain it is crossing. It is a psyche which has come to a threshold—an edge, perhaps, or a point of finitude, which cannot be transgressed.

Below, I have presented four more I poems composed from the BirthStrike collection. Each of these poems is formed from its own text or testimonial, though they speak together of different affective movements. I have also given these poems names. As with Poem of Becoming, two of these poems – Poem of the Child and Poem of Hope – flow through a series of assertions, before coming to rest at a final negation – *“I can’t”* and *“I reject.”* In Poem of the Child and Poem of Knowing, the narrated subject takes up the location of a witness – *“I went through, I knew”* and *“I have known, I have watched”* – in claiming and asserting the I’s knowledge. To know is to be heard; it is to have the psyche’s process of change to be witnessed and legitimated, in turn—including from and by the self. In Poem of the Child, the juxtaposition of the lines *“When I was a child / I would live”* hits me especially hard, knotting up a muscle somewhere in my abdomen, making it slightly harder to breathe. Perhaps it is the lingering joys and pains of my own childhood which hear and respond to this call, but the words—*“When I was a child / I would live”*—evoke in me both the lively memory and the tropic figure of a child, filled with sheer determination and desire *to live*. Holding this determination and desire in my carrier bag with the thicker terrain of BirthStrike stories, and the wider patterning of our historical times, where the chances for life are continually under threat, and I am teetering a little on *that* edge again, awash in feelings, not sure where I end and “they” begin.

Poem of the Child

I would live

When I was a child

I went through

I knew

I hope

I do all I can

I've come to terms

I can't

I reject

I have rejected

Poem of Enough

I was never

I have

I am now

I no longer see

I view

I think

I have enough

Poem of Knowing

I have known

I have watched

Even before I was aware

I decided

I don't

I just couldn't

But I can

Poem of Hope

I could bestow

Poem of Enough establishes a different pattern, beginning with a negation— "*I was never*" —and moves forward, through a series of assertions to another kind of ending: "*I think— I have enough.*" The poem's midway transition from "*I no longer see*" to "*I view*" is another interesting associative logic, not only in how the "I" moves backwards and forwards, in quick succession from *not seeing* to *viewing*, but also in how visual metaphors enable this psychic transformation to be explicated. I am reminded of Poem of Becoming's "*I suddenly saw,*" and I am taken by the image of a psyche—a soul, dare I say—being flooded with light. Biblical allusions aside, there is a sense in many of these poems of the psyche moving with a force greater than just "the self." There is a sense of

being swept along, of being rendered blind, of having sight restored, and of coming to a place of rest—of resolution and certainty, at least for the time being.

Listening for the interplay of voices

As with the second stage of listening, my listening for and mapping of the contrapuntal voices within the collective BirthStrike texts was an unambiguously physical process—I read the testimonials aloud, over and over again, as I attempted to tap into the emotional tones, sounds and musicality which were woven through the narratives. I was listening in relation to my research question, asking *how do BirthStrike voices articulate the psychosocial impacts of climate change, particularly in relation to having children?* With this question as my metronome, I came to hear an interweaving of at least four voices across the texts, which articulate the psychic impacts of climate change in different emotive modes and from different embodied and tropic locations. I have distinguished these voices through the following names and font choices:

- i) **the voice of the child, or before**
- ii) **the voice of affliction**
- iii) *the voice of desire and longing*
- iv) the voice of monitoring privilege

Though you see no bright colours here, colours were important to my process of tracking the voices across the texts and listening for their interplay. For example, the voice of the child, or before, was originally marked through aquamarine blue highlights. The voice of desire and longing was also marked in highlights—fuchsia. The colours were associated with the emotions the voices evoke. For publication purposes, I have removed these colours, though try to hear, if you can, the colour and the sound of the voices. I have provided an example of my hearing and marking of the voices across two BirthStrike testimonials (Figures 3.8, 3.9 and 3.10), though the analysis of contrapuntal voices occurred across the whole smaller collection of 20 stories.

The first of these voices, **the voice of the child, or before**, has an ethereal quality to it. It speaks from a distance, as though it is being carried over the clouds or the waves. The dreamlike quality of the voice of the child is in part produced through its soft and high pitch; it speaks sometimes in barely more than a whisper, other times in a gentle

rattling full of sadness and loss. The voice of the child is also a voice of witness: of coming to see, to know, and of being left on the other side of knowing. (Another edge). The voice of the child can't be easily reached, hence why it visits in dreams. It speaks to another place and another time, from before the narrated self came into its current shape—before the “I” was forced to confront the present moment of environmental catastrophe. “Big business” has betrayed the voice of the child, stolen its future, and left it hiding in the undertones of the “I.” Often, the voice of the child opens space for two more voices to flow through: the voice of desire and longing, which brings an emotional weight and urgency to the voice of the child's plea to not be forgotten; and the voice of monitoring privilege, which shifts the register toward a more ambivalent and uncertain location, where the “I” cannot be clearly distinguished from the child's tormentor – capitalist society and its consuming citizens.

When I was a child the mere mention of climate change would cause me to have a panic attack. The idea that the world could go through such a catastrophe, or that I would live to see it happen, was too much for me to handle. It fostered mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression. I went through periods of denial because that's the only way I knew how to deal with it.

Now I've come to terms with the reality that climate change is real, and knowing how that anxiety robbed me of my childhood and caused me so much suffering, *I can't bring an innocent child into the world knowing that they will have it even worse than I did,* and that they will not even begin to have a full life.

Figure 3.8: A BirthStrike testimonial with contrapuntal voices marked. Poem of the Child was formed from this text.

Unlike the voice of the child, **the voice of affliction** is right here, lodged in the gut of the “I.” The voice of affliction is acoustically heavy, expressed with a deep bass. Pain rises up with the voice of affliction, disrupting the lighter tones of the narrative—like an introjection of hard truth into the regular flow of the conversation. The voice of affliction often speaks through “I” statements, and it is blunt, erupting through bursts and impulses. It crackles somewhat with emotion, leaving the “I” breathless. This voice is not only stricken with pain; it is afflicted with excruciating and bewildering suffering of a kind that renders creative movement almost impossible. “I cannot imagine” the

voice of affliction tells us; “I can only see things getting worse!” (Figure 3.9). The voice of affliction’s heaviness is part of its certainty: it has been to the edge of its own knowing, and it cannot see beyond “an uncertain and bleak looking future” (Figure 3.10).

“I **already feel so stressed out** for the coming generations about how they will struggle to cope in a changing climate if nothing is done, **I cannot imagine** bringing a life (especially one that *I would care so deeply about*) in the knowledge that they will **struggle and worry** more than I **currently do**, as if nothing changes **I can only see things getting worse!** People want the best for their children, but I don’t think society at the moment are in a place to be able to do that, **due to the damage** we are inflicting upon the planet!”

Figure 3.9: A BirthStrike testimonial with contrapuntal voices marked.

As opposed to the heaviness of the voice of affliction, *the voice of longing and desire* has a rushing quality to it and a sense of elasticity. It stretches and yearns in its emotional capacities; it also ranges across a variety of vocal tones and pitches, expressing itself now with a tremble of hope, now with a brave note of self-denial. Of all the voices I hear in the collected BirthStrike narratives, the voice of longing and desire seems to express the most movement, and the most potential for surprise. This voice reminds us that be full of desire and longing is also to live shoulder to shoulder with pain and uncertainty—for desire does not guarantee its fulfilment, nor can fulfilment protect against loss. And yet in the face of *not knowing*, the voice of desire continues to move outward toward relational connections, the voice sometimes breaking in its yearning to “bring a life” (Figure 3.9), to imagine a “full life” (Figure 3.10). Compellingly, the voice of desire is often expressed through negation. The utterances of “I can’t...” “I cannot...” and “I reject...” move through the voice of desire, expressing the “intense grief and heartbreak and rage” (Figure 3.9) which renders the desire to “bring an innocent child into the world” (Figure 3.8) an ethical and emotional impossibility. In this movement toward expressing desire through negation, I hear the voice of longing and desire attempting to grapple with the voice of the child and the voice of affliction. How can “it” desire in ways which do not silence and deny the suffering of others? How can it

bring a life in other ways than having a child? Perhaps in this way, the voice of desire enables pain to be processed in a movement toward relational mobilisations and resistances, to desire other-wise in the thick political and environmental conditions producing “the destruction of our living planet” (Figure 3.10).

“After becoming a vegan nearly 2 years ago, I have gradually come into awareness of our environmental situation. During the summer something that feels like an awakening occurred for me, I suddenly saw things in a new light, I became uncomfortably aware of my cultural conditioning and I began questioning everything, which has led to a shift in my world view. I am gradually finding the language to talk about these new concepts and reaching out to others that are experiencing the world in similar ways. **I experience intense grief and heartbreak and rage at the destruction of our living planet** and **I have moments of panic and fear at what the future holds. I have come to the conclusion that I cannot bring a child into this world** with such an **uncertain and bleak looking future.**”

Figure 3.10: A testimonial with contrapuntal voices marked. Poem of Becoming was formed from this text.

The fourth voice, the voice of monitoring privilege, is the most ambivalent and uncertain of the contrapuntal voices. It has a tentative quality, slipping from the emotional variations of its sibling voices to hover at times in a flat and hollow tone of self-abnegation. Perhaps the lack of emotionality in the voice of monitoring privilege can be explained by the way it circles back regularly to climate change language and discursive formations in staking its claims. It is as though the logic underpinning the voice of monitoring privilege comes from outside, and the voice hasn’t come to trust in its own knowledge and ways of knowing, yet. It is trying hard to get to know itself, though—to become response-able to its own complicity in inhabiting Global North locations where environmental damages are enacted and naturalised in the name of economic progress. References to *awakening, becoming aware, shifting from denial to knowing* proliferate within the voice of monitoring’s evocations. As the voice of monitoring privilege tells us, punctuated by the sharp pain of the voice of affliction: “**I**

went through periods of denial because that's the only way I knew how to deal with it." Echoing the violence of change heard in Poem of Becoming's psychological movement, the voice of monitoring privilege tells us how to be awoken from denial is a painful process, requiring reflexive openness to our relational and situational constitutions as subjects: "I became uncomfortably aware of my cultural conditioning and I began questioning everything." That the voice of the child shadows this particular articulation speaks to how becoming an "I" who is capable of monitoring and resisting its own privileges is also to lose some of the tropic power of innocence—to mourn again the betrayal of the child.

I hear vulnerability in the voice of monitoring privilege, a sense of being open to discursive manipulation in the voice's tentative efforts to "find the language" it needs to map this particular emotional terrain (Figure 3.10); to "come to terms with the reality that climate change is real" (Figure 3.8). I can hear how population discourses *would* slip in here, seducing the "I" with what seems like a tangible way to reduce the scale of its own complicity, and hence to diminish some of the relational tensions and responsibilities bound up with staying with the trouble of our historical times (Haraway, 2016). Such seductions rest upon the wider discursive naturalisations of the myth of clean, quantifying knowledge-making systems, through which we can calculate, adjust and redistribute climate change consequences and responsibilities across gendered, racial and geopolitical categories. And yet, the voice of monitoring privilege also tells another story, especially as it moves with the voice of desire to imagine other-wise. In this other story, the voice of monitoring privilege speaks from a structural and political location in warning of what will befall us "if nothing is done." "if nothing changes" (Figure 3.9), and it processes and begins to mobilise its pain through a desire-filled "reaching out to others" (Figure 3.10). In such movements, I hear the discursive flow of the "plot" beginning to recede from the voice of monitoring privilege, opening space for the other contrapuntal voices to carry and process their pain as a movement toward relational becoming, to "bring a life."

HOLDING THE THREADS

"We are all responsible to and for shaping conditions for multispecies flourishing in the face of terrible histories, and sometimes joyful histories too, but we are not

all response-able in the same ways. The differences matter—in ecologies, economies, species, lives.” (Haraway, 2016, p. 29)

I began this article with a meditation of sorts. How can we learn to hear, gently hold, and care for the thick affective flows produced and felt in response to our historical conditions? And how might we respond to these affective movements from our locations as psychological researchers, where the stories and narrated subjects we encounter carry us to the strange and unsettling edges of “self” and “other?” Hovering at the point of saying goodbye, I hold these thoughts and BirthStrike’s stories like threads, searching for some strong and tidy knot to end with. And yet the threads tumble from my carrier bag, reminding me that there’s no such thing as a satisfying ending—not if we’re staying with the trouble of the terrible, and sometimes joyful, histories and futures which unfold before and after us (Haraway, 2016).

The hurtling violences of our times, moving with all the momentum of hundreds of years of known and denied cruelties, enslavings, and extractions, including the abuse and pollution of the non-human ecosystems from which human biology spawned, is breath-taking. I clutch at the threads, to not be swept away by it all. How can we make our carrier bags capacious, flexible and strong enough to catch and become response-able to these violences? To slow them down, disrupt their naturalisations, and in the process, learn to become human subjects other-wise? Donna Haraway (2016), as is often the case, reminds me that I don’t hold, clutch at, these threads alone. We can pass the threads, share the patterns, take a breath—a dog’s paw and an arachnid’s claw holding the pattern (Haraway, 2008). Giving and receiving. We’re stitching and holding these bags together, though not all from the same locations and not with the same capacities to respond. This is part of the delicate and determined work of learning to live and die well on a damaged Earth.

This research project has both strengthened my suspicions of categorical distinctions between subjects, while renewing my appreciation for differences in locations and response-abilities (Haraway, 1988). We don’t all speak in the same voice (Gilligan, 1982/2003), and we don’t all become response-able in the same ways (Haraway, 2008). The differences matter, indeed. It matters that in my relational engagement with BirthStrike stories, I have held the location of a knowledge producer, with its particular response-abilities of listening from a place of curiosity, rather than

judgement (Gilligan & Eddy, 2021), and of carrying and amplifying the stories I hear into the academic spaces I've been privileged to access. I have received an awful lot from the stories, affectively, but they were not given to me as gifts. I sought them out, moved by my desire to hear, to understand. Have I managed to give anything back to the stories themselves? Can stories "receive" a hearing, even in the absence of a direct relationship between embodied research subjects—those who tell and those who try to hear? I'm doubtful. I imagine the stories and their affective traces scattering out into the grandness of a late autumn evening sky, now a leaf and now a star, untouched by my small, close reading. And somehow, this is fitting—itself a way to laugh joyfully at the idea of satisfying endings and relational symmetry.

For a moment in time, BirthStrike stories carried and tried to become response-able to the pain of the cascading deaths of our worlds, while also yearning for ongoingness, stretching with desire toward others, toward life. I've carried the stories for a little while. And the carrying goes on. I work, now, a poem of my own into the pattern. I wrote this poem in the depths of listening to the BirthStrike stories—it came out as an inadequate but urgent articulation of the need to respond, to share my own pain. I stitch it here now, as a way to remember and say goodbye to the stories, to pass on the threads.

April 2022

We start with an ache
in our chests, documenting
our fall into the abyss,
reading stories of pain
and wonder, of unbecoming
and becoming again.
I wonder how it
feels, looks, sounds

down there, at the end of the world?

Soft, round, almost silent—

the seedpod quietly waiting,

holding some life, and death.

We start with a tremble

in our hands, knitting together

colours warm and bright: ochre, sage green,

the obsidian which I wear on my fingers, as though it has the power

to ward off incoming storms.

There's kindness here, too,

at the end of the world—

the way the horizon

burns gold, umber, warming us

as we huddle together,

wrapped in rags and grief.

It ends with an ache

in the chest, a refusal to die

alone, the way the purple thistle

finds its way to grow, again—

chopped off at the knees, and alive,

still breathing—do you see, do you hear?

INTERSTITIAL 3

Article 3's publication process tells part of the story of the edges of psychological qualitative knowledge production which I encountered during the project, and how these edges are under continual negotiation. I first submitted Article 3 in late 2023 to a prominent 'qualitative psychology' journal, thinking that it would be a good fit for the journal's methodological focus. The journal had emphasised in its submission guidelines that it welcomed innovative qualitative methodologies and creative analyses, and its previous editions showed a commitment to publishing articles which drew on Gilligan's *Listening Guide*. The article was returned two weeks later, however, with a detailed rejection note from the journal's editor. I was advised that the article was inappropriate for the journal because it lacked a traditional structure, it did not provide readers with an applicable summary of 'recommendations,' and, what seemed most bizarre to the editor, I had incorporated my own voice as a researcher into the analysis, a move that complicated the source material and rendered the findings unreliable. I was provided with suggestions for how to significantly rewrite the article, if I ever felt inclined to submit the paper to another journal.

I tell this story here not to split hairs with an unfavourable reading of the article; indeed, the editor's tone was kindly and helpful, and they seemed genuinely confused by the piece. The response did remind me, though, about the persistence of a shadow of post-positivist authority in psychological knowledge production, including within explicitly qualitative spaces. I sensed in the editor's quantitatively-tinged language a preoccupation with the very objectivity-through-separation psychological logic which Gilligan had sought to challenge through her work. It was the first rejection I had received during the PhD project, with Article 1 and 2 both being accepted with minor revisions by the first journals I had submitted them to. With my supervisors' agreement, I resubmitted Article 3 unchanged to a different qualitative methodology journal, to give it a different hearing. On this second attempt, the article was accepted with no revisions and was published shortly thereafter, as it appears in the thesis. That Article 3 was initially deemed a step too far qualitatively and creatively can be interpreted affirmatively: was I now tentatively crossing an edge between qualitative and arts-

based research in psychology, including a reimagining of demarcations between self/other (Camiré, 2025)?

I did not know at the time I started my PhD research how integral Gilligan's theory of voice would become to the overall shape and texture of the project. Importantly, Gilligan's insights into voice were produced within and from psychology. She had gained her PhD while teaching alongside some of the most influential psychological researchers of the mid-20th century, including Lawrence Kohlberg and Erik Erikson (Gilligan, 2004). Gilligan had dared to draw on and rewrite these men's theories, and in doing so she opened a door within psychology through which women's voices could be heard and affirmed. Through the feminist understanding of voice which Gilligan produced, pain was also de-psychologised away from a pathologisation of women's voices to a recognition of a different form of ethical and moral development: one which privileged care and relationality over separation and logic (Gilligan, 1982/2003). Gilligan had reached these insights through her embodied and empirical practice of listening to the voices of the girls and women she encountered in her research. Her theory was lived in, and liveable.

From Article 3 onward, voice enabled me to attune to the thick flow of emotions which travelled through stories about motherhood and climate change. It was through the process of listening for the movement of the psyche in BirthStrike testimonials in Article 3 that I was able to attune creatively to the figures, images and spatial movements which I traced through collage in the women's stories in Article 4. While over a year had passed between writing Article 3 and Article 4, in re-reading the articles sequentially I am struck by how some of the contrapuntal voices I heard in Article 3 seem to flow on through Article 4. The voice of desire is the most evident of these voices, however, I also hear the voices of the child, of affliction, and of monitoring responsibility making appearances in the women's stories and in my own collage responses in Article 4. This was, to the best of my knowledge, unintentional. My hunch is that Article 3 had been such an embodied process that I had internalised the notes and tones of the contrapuntal voices I had heard in the BirthStrike testimonials. How could I not notice these voices, then, when they reappeared in Article 4? It would be like trying to not recognise a musical phrase that you have encountered somewhere down the corridor of years, and which becomes familiar the moment you hear it.

As I move toward Article 4, I want to connect Gilligan's focus on voice to Braidotti's affirmative ethics, as this situates both Articles 3 and 4 within a wider movement toward creatively reimagining our subjective becomings, including through arts-based methodologies. As noted in *Interstitial 2*, Braidotti has theorised how the pervasive mood of advanced capitalism is one of "melancholy, mourning and negativity" (2008, p. 7). Environmental losses and the steady stream of climate-related warnings add to this sense of collective grief (Lertzman, 2015). If we are to resist this melancholia and move toward more sustainable futures, Braidotti argues, we need to pursue a "quest for creativity, in the form of experimenting with the immersion of one's sensibility in the field of forces – formatted as by music, colour, sound, light, speed, temperature, intensity" (2014, p. 172). Braidotti encourages us to engage with and write from our memories and imaginations in this pursuit, as this enables us to process our pain and actualise "affirmative ways of becoming" (2008, p. 23). Memory, in this conceptualisation, involves processes of subjective transformation. To remember is to both endure and to change, requiring that we acknowledge our own situated knowledge and open ourselves up to affective encounters with others. These encounters have the potential to cut through the fixed stories and identities we may have inhabited, drawing us onward and into shifting modes of intersubjectivity.

While Gilligan writes from a different tradition to Braidotti, her writings on voice also enact these changes at the level of subjectivity, drawing our attention to the pain of not speaking and not paying attention to the voices inside and surrounding us. Gilligan's (1982/2003) efforts to hear and trace the movement of the psyche within the voices of women and girls involves significant memory work. Reflecting on her experience of first coming to hear an ethic of care, she notes the dizzying effect of listening to the voices of pre-adolescent girls. The way in which these girls spoke – directly, astutely and without hesitation – untethered something from Gilligan's memories of girlhood. She followed her memories of learning not to speak, to sacrifice her own voice for the sake of maintaining harmonious relationships, as she crossed the threshold into adolescence. She recalls how her voice used to be "unclotted like the voices of girls in the time before the good-girl sets in" (2004, p. 134). Gilligan's commitment to listening with curiosity and care is dutifully applied to her own psychological formations, even as it brings to the fore old gendered pains. There is no listening for the voices of others without listening for resonances of these voices within the self, then. This is how I make sense of

my methodological decision to include my own memories and reflections in the writing of Articles 3 and 4. They would be entirely different pieces – an effort at self-silencing – had I attempted to corral off my own voice in the writing process. This does, nevertheless, mean we cannot revert back to hard separations between the voices of researcher and participant (Camiré, 2025).

INTERVIEWING WOMEN IN AOTEAROA ABOUT MOTHERHOOD AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Long before I had engaged in Article 3's voice analysis or had considered collage as a creative methodology for Article 4, I was intending to interview women participants about how climate change was affecting their thoughts and feelings about having children. This methodological decision was made at the outset of the project, and I was granted ethical approval by the Massey University Research Ethics Council in 2020 to recruit and interview a small number of self-identifying women in Aotearoa New Zealand, regarding motherhood and climate change (see Appendix for relevant ethics application documentation). I was mindful of the considerable emotional weight which this topic may carry for some women, and therefore I submitted a full ethics application, including provisions for making the interviews a safe and affirmative space for women to share their stories. As part of this process, I sought support from two Māori cultural advisors, who engaged with kōrero with me about my overall project and provided specific advice on how to ensure a culturally affirmative experience for any Māori women who might take part. I developed an interview schedule in preparation for speaking with the women, and although this guided my thinking and approach to conducting the interviews, in practice the interviews unfolded more as conversations: a relational exchange which was open to unanticipated shifts in focus and direction.

To take part in the project, participants needed to be self-identifying women, over the age of 18, located in Aotearoa New Zealand, and proficient in English. Potential participants were advised that they would be required to take part in a single, one-on-one interview with me, with this taking approximately an hour. They would be reimbursed with a \$40 grocery voucher as a gesture of thanks for sharing their stories. Participants were advised that I would transcribe their interviews and they would have an opportunity to review and release the transcript prior to its use in publications. I recruited participants through two avenues: snowball sampling, where I passed on the

information sheet to trusted intermediary contacts, who then sent this on to any women they thought might be interested in taking part in the project; and advertisements circulated in selected community spaces, such as environmental groups.

Six women participated in the project. The women were all living in Aotearoa New Zealand at the time of their interviews and they occupied multiple locations, including single and partnered, mothers and not mothers, cisgendered and trans. Interviews took place over two years, between 2021 and 2023. Four of the interviews occurred in person, and two were over Zoom. Conducting the interviews was the first stage of listening, and I carried the embodied memories of these listening experiences into Article 4's collage response. That I conducted most of the interviews in the early stages of my PhD meant that I carried the women's stories with me, in the background, as I wrote the first three publications. Though I was not fully cognizant of it at the time, in hindsight I believe that the experience of hearing these women's stories invited my attention down particular pathways as I wrote Articles 1, 2 and 3. For example, Delphi's spontaneous and lively use of the word 'desire' in her interview made a significant impression on me, sowing a seed of interest which I eventually pursued in Article 4, some three years after I met with her. This was also the case with Sophie, who was the first woman I interviewed for the project. Sophie's articulation of the differences between her own individual trauma and the societal trauma of living through ecological and political crises was another gift, helping me to resist the individualisation of responsibility in how the question of "Is it okay to have a child?" is asked. This said, all of the women's stories affected me emotionally and intellectually. I hope that each collage speaks to the complexity and diversity of affective flows which occurred within the interviews, which of course exceed the delimitations of a single journal article.

INTRODUCING COLLAGE

I want to think of the collaging process as another iteration of a listening process, though I did not theorise it as such within Article 4. I felt that I tested another edge methodologically in Article 4, with the venture into collage being far more creatively precarious than my previous work in Article 3. Whereas the *Listening Guide* came with a rich scholarly history and a clear methodological outline, publications on the use of collage in research practice were few in number. As I took a line of flight toward collage, therefore, I had to be willing to go out on a limb and figure out my analytical process

iteratively, as I re-engaged with the stories of the women I had interviewed. In theorising my analytical approach, I relied on a handful of articles which integrate collage into research practice, as well as wider literature supporting the use of arts-based methodologies in psychology (e.g., Chamberlain et al., 2018; Fine, 2018; Margolin et al., 2024). Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010), Holbrook and Pourchier (2014), and de Rijke (2023) were amongst the most significant papers on collage which supported my approach, and I discuss these briefly in Article 4. In the latter two of these articles, the researchers develop their own collages and incorporate their voices into a written analysis of their collage-making processes. This gave me something of a figuration through which to imagine and realise my own engagement with collage as a research practice.



Figure 4.1: Isabel Castro (1977). *Madre Tierra*. Photo taken for academic purposes by author in 2023 at *The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture*.

I first happened upon collage as a research practice during my six months of fieldwork in Riverside, California in 2023. I was there on a Fulbright scholarship, to gather stories and impressions about motherhood and climate change in the context of the region's frequent wildfires, droughts, and poor air quality. After several weeks of living in the baking summer heat of Riverside, I went to *The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture*, known as 'The Cheech,' one of the first art museums in North

America to privilege Chicano art. There, amongst the incredible diversity of pieces, I was drawn to artworks that incorporated photographs, historical documents, and found objects onto the pictorial surface, and often with an explicit political purpose. Examples include Isabel Castro's photcollage from the 1970s, in which Castro focussed on the sterilisation of Chicano women without their informed consent. Castro had photocopied, painted over and scratched photographs she had taken of members of the affected families, to show the violence inflicted upon them (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.2: Artemisa Clark (2017). From the Glitter series. Photo taken for academic purposes by author in 2023 at *The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture*.

Another piece that made an impression on me was Artemisa Clark's (2017) *Glitter* series. The accompanying artist statement described how Clark "manipulates newspaper images of state violence against Brown bodies with gold glitter...representing the erasure of this history from mainstream knowledge" (*The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture*, 2023, p. 1). Both Clark's and Castro's

pieces bore witness to social power relations and the brutalities of colonial state violence, and yet standing in front of the artworks, I still felt able to breathe. There was something about the way these Chicano women artists had mixed up ‘reality’ in the form of archival images and photographs with the artistic mediums of gold glitter, yellow paint, scratch marks and/or contextual arrangements that somehow broke the oppressive violence of the scenes depicted. Perhaps they invited a form of witnessing that remained stubbornly attuned toward warmth, empathy and a sense of relational familiarity, even in the face of unbearably cold and cruel human actions.

Later, in an annex of the Riverside Art Museum, I also found a collage crafting table. Visitors were invited to construct their own collages from the pile of old magazines and other crafting objects available, and some of the resulting collages were pinned to a corkboard on the wall above. I tell the story of my California research experiences in *Interstitial 4*, but I wanted to locate this particular encounter with collage and artworks here, in *Interstitial 3*, as it was seeing these artworks which made me even more curious about incorporating visual elements into my research approach, and this culminates in the collages I made for *Article 4*. I set about reading some of the many books on collage available in the UC Riverside library. Most of this early reading focussed on the history of collage as a craftwork and fine art. I continued this fascination with collage after I returned to New Zealand in late 2023, turning in this later reading toward collage as an arts-based research methodology.

COLLAGE AS A RESEARCH PRACTICE IN ARTICLE 4

If collage appears sparsely in psychological research, there is nonetheless growing literature supporting the use of arts-based methodologies in psychology (e.g., Chamberlain et al., 2018; Fine, 2018; Margolin, Pearson, & Jones, 2024; Segalo, 2018). Chamberlain et al. (2018) note that arts-based methodologies differ significantly from qualitative approaches within psychology, especially in relation to how meaning is made. Whereas qualitative research “attempts to be interpretative, that is, to offer the considered, argued, and theorised interpretations of the researcher from a rigorous examination and analysis of the data,” arts-based research “usually leaves interpretation wholly open to the reader; the ‘findings’ may be quite ambiguous in the meanings offered to the reader” (2018, p. 133). Similarly, Chamberlain et al. (2018) emphasise how arts-based research typically does not seek to “answer questions or

offer final meanings but rather to provoke questioning, deepen engagement, open debate, and inspire social action” (p. 133).

These distinctions between qualitative and arts-based approaches in psychology are important to situating my own use of collage in Article 4 as a generative rather than interpretative approach. Certainly, my own experiences of making the collages was that they expanded, rather than narrowed, my ability to engage with and respond to the women’s stories. I try, as much as possible, to steer clear of interpreting the women’s stories from ‘outside.’ Instead, I circle back repetitively to naming my own impressions, describing how the stories had affected me, and the creative process of making the collages. In this way, I hope I have approached “the form of experimenting with the immersion of one’s sensibility in the field of forces” which Braidotti locates within affirmative ethics (2008, p. 23).

While I provide a brief overview of my collaging process in Article 4, here I want to provide further description of the actions I took in producing collages in relation to the women’s stories. Not without a sense of irony, given the tendency to move away from step-wise methodologies in arts-based and post-qualitative research approaches, I want to break my collaging process down into ‘stages.’ I do this to enable methodological transparency and to emphasise that while arts-based research may be iterative, it need not forego structure or consistency. The stages I offer are non-linear, though they do have something of a beginning and an end. I hope that Figure 4.3 describes something of the shape of the process, involving loops, cross-overs and continuity. Here are the stages, which I describe below:

- Preparatory noticing
- Initial impressions
- Gathering materials
- Immersion
- Telling a story about the process

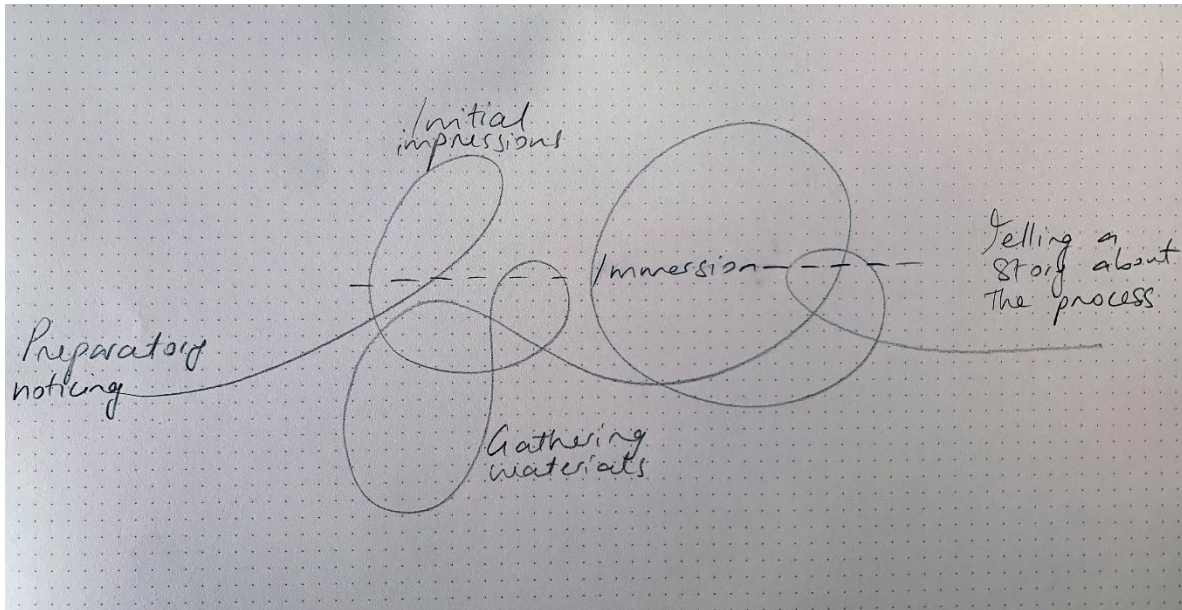


Figure 4.3: A figuration of the collaging process.

Preparatory noticing

Preparatory noticing encompassed early stages of listening to the women's stories and noticing my own responses to these stories. For me, this step included the relational encounter of the interviews itself, the embodied memories of meeting with the women, and my close, careful engagement with the stories through the transcription process. During both interviews and transcription, I kept brief notes of phrases, meanings, images and responses which had struck an intellectual and/or emotional chord with me. I also count amongst my preparatory noticing the background reading I had done on collage and arts-based methodologies. It would not have been possible for me to engage with collage-making as I did in Article 4 without the preceding opportunities to learn about collage as both an art form and research practice, and to familiarise myself with its historical and theoretical orientations. Familiarity is about location, of respecting that "nothing comes without its world" (Haraway, 1997, p. 37). Therefore, it seems important that we take the time and care to learn at least a little about those worlds before we assume that an analytical relationship can be possible in the context of our own study.

Initial impressions

Initial impressions occurred once I had done my preparations and was actually sitting down with the stories, with the intent to engage with collage in response to what

I felt, saw, heard. During this stage, I re-read each woman's transcribed story, noting down my initial impressions for collage making. Unlike the preceding stage of *Preparatory Noticing*, which involved a broad sense of curiosity and noticing of details, the stage of *Initial Impressions* was specific to the purpose of collage making and focussed more intently on the visual and figurative details which made an impression on me when re-reading the transcribed interviews. I was intentional about setting up my physical and emotional 'space' for this stage of the process. Perhaps in a similar vein to how Carl Jung emphasised the importance of establishing the 'temenos' of a therapy space, to create a sacred container or place where therapeutic engagement could occur without interruptions from the outside world (Cook & Picchi, 2013), I also tried to create a sacred container for re-engaging with each woman's story. For example, I set aside uninterrupted research time in a private, safe location for re-reading the transcribed stories. It was very important to my own process that I stayed with one story at a time, not moving on to another story until I had started and ended collaging a response to each story. Typically, within the first few minutes of re-reading a transcript, I had already been struck by hazy impressions of visual themes, symbols, colours, shapes and directional movements. For example, with Delphi's collage, I took her use of the anchor metaphor quite literally, and saw in my mind's eye how this could be figured through long strips of coloured paper, plunging downward like an anchor. I jotted down these impressions with either language or sketches, carrying them on into the stages of *Gathering Materials* and *Immersion*.

Gathering materials

Gathering materials was a highly iterative part of the collaging process. It involved finding and experimenting with the materials to be used for each collage, in relation to how each woman's story had affected me. As I note in Article 4, the materials of the collages themselves tell part of the story of the research practice and situated my responses to the women's stories within the detritus of advanced capitalism. Before I had made any collages, though, I had gathered some basic supplies. I bought cheap A5 sheets of watercolour paper and a glue stick from my local stationary shop. I also went to a charity shop and purchased several used magazines, for \$1 each. I was fortunate in that the charity shop had a wide variety of magazines available, and thinking with my preparatory noticing of the stories, I briefly flicked through the magazines before

purchasing them, looking for indications that the magazines would have images, colours and scenes which somewhat aligned with my impressions of the stories. I also chose some magazines seemingly at random, hoping that they would contain surprising images which may come in handy during the collaging process. They often did. Later, when sitting down to collage a response to each woman's story, I went through these magazines, selecting specific images, texts and details in response to what I had seen and felt in the preceding stage, *Initial Impressions*.

I have situated *Gathering Materials* in the centre of the collaging process, because it often required leaving the temenos of the reading/collaging space, to search for and gather objects in the outside world. For example, I started making Rosa's collage with images I found in the magazines. After two to three hours of collaging, I stepped back from the process, tired and yet feeling that the collage still needed additional details, especially texture. I went for a walk to the river near where I live, collecting at random a dried flax pod and a small bunch of bright red Callistemon blossoms. These somehow 'fit' with the collage I was making in response to Rosa's story, especially what I felt was a painful juxtaposition of the natural world with the artifices and throw-away consumerism of advanced capitalism.

Immersion

Immersion involved entering the temenos space of the collaging process, to create the collages. This was very much a crafting process, which as I note in Article 4, was reminiscent of my childhood experiences of playing with art mediums – Play Doh, finger painting, scrapbooking, colouring-in. Immersion was an embodied experience of being swept along by the creative process. It was enlivening, propelled by curiosity and often full of delight. I was chasing after the impressions I had felt and seen in the women's stories, transforming these impressions into something tactile and figurative. For some of the collages, immersion occurred from my first re-engagement with the women's stories. For example, I re-read Sophie's interview transcript and completed a collage in response all in an uninterrupted space of two or three hours. I emerged from the temenos of this immersive process somewhat bewildered, exhausted and satisfied. I felt a similar satisfied tiredness as when reaching home after a long and refreshing walk. For other collages, I dipped in and out of immersion, such as to gather materials and to

take a break from the collaging process. Overall, however, most of the collages were completed within the same day as re-reading a woman's interview transcript.

Telling a story about the collages

Telling a story about the collages marked the 'end' of the collaging process. This involved shifting out of the temenos space of creation into a more descriptive and analytical mode of thinking. Sometimes, several weeks had passed between making a collage and now telling a story about it. Even so, the most affective and embodied aspects of the collaging process easily came to the fore as I wrote these stories, reinforcing the emphasis which Braidotti places on writing from memory, whereby "what matters ultimately about the job of remembering is the capacity to engender the kind of conditions and relations that can empower creative alternatives" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 33). This stage of the collaging process was significant in that I now began to incorporate the women's own voices into the story I was writing, by selecting and including excerpts from the women's transcripts in Article 4. This required a delicate negotiation between showing what the women had said, for their voices and words carried significant weight, and not conflating the women's stories with the collages themselves. For this reason, telling a story about the collages involved a continual return to memory, impressions and affective flows, in a resistance of the traditional expectation to provide 'answers' to research questions as in qualitative psychological research (Chamberlain et al., 2018).

Summary

Article 4 is the concluding analytical component of the thesis. As noted previously, this article is currently under review with a peer-reviewed journal. It was by far my favourite article to write within the thesis. It is hard to describe just how freeing and restorative the collaging process was; it's my sense that it gave me access to some distant and hazy memories of being in a child's body, delighting in the nearness to colour, shape, crafts and stories. This creative experience can be likened to the psychological associations enabled by attending to one's own voice, whereby "intuitive knowing" and "empathetic connectedness" can be recovered from girlhood, prior to learning to silence the psyche (Gilligan, 2004, p. 140). The collages themselves are not intended to be viewed as art works or products. Rather, they are what remain from the

affective process. This emphasis on psychological process over aesthetic quality aligns with art and play therapy approaches which disrupt preoccupations with whether something 'looks right,' instead enabling a focus on psychological and affective engagement (Swan-Foster, 2016). I am sure that Article 4 leaves many questions unanswered. I hope nevertheless that it aligns with the wider aims of arts-based methodologies, as "a paradigm that values imaginative thinking and gives credibility to the unfolding creative process" (Margolin et al., 2024, p. 1).

ARTICLE FOUR: Women's reproductive desires in the context of climate change: Collaging an embodied response

Meynell, L., Morgan, M., & van Ommen, C. Women's reproductive desires in the context of climate change: Collaging an embodied response. Currently under review with *Feminism and Psychology* journal.

Statement of contributions: Article written and edited by PhD candidate. Supervision team gave theoretical advice on the substantive arguments and guidance on the methodological approach.

In this article, we engage with collage to respond creatively to six women's stories about having and not having children in conditions of ecological crisis. We focus on how the women figure their reproductive decisions and desires, as this enables the force of desire to be redirected toward the mobilisation of political subjectivities. As we attempt to show, collage as a research practice invited us to bring our own embodied and affective flows to our academic work, and to visually situate the women's stories within and through the detritus of advanced capitalism.

Keywords: collage, climate change, women, reproduction, desire.

INTRODUCTION

Ecological collapse has become such a part of the background noise of everyday life in post-industrialised society, some days it feels difficult to remain shocked, and hopeful. How do we imagine and create futures which are more liveable for human and non-human species than those already written into climate reports and geopolitical tragedies?

In this article, we are interested in how women are making sense of their reproductive decisions and desires in the historical moment we are collectively living through, where the accumulation of climate warnings and environmental disasters are blankly met with political inertia and the ongoing intensification of extractive technologies. How are women in post-industrialised societies staying with the trouble (Haraway, 2016) of what's happening ecologically and politically, right now? How are they experiencing and making sense of possibilities for motherhood, as this points us toward creative figurations of life in the ruins of capitalism (Tsing, 2015)?

Questions about whether it is ethical or pragmatically possible to bring children into a world beset with climate change have been circulating in post-industrialised contexts for decades. In previous work, we have noted how a focus on individual responsibilities and ‘calculable’ climate change actions de-emphasise the emotional and relational complexities of reproductive decision-making in times of crisis (Meynell, Morgan & van Ommen, 2023). In this article, we focus on individual women’s stories about their experiences of reproductive desire in the context of climate change. The women’s stories were gathered through one-on-one interviews conducted by the first author, Leola.

We are located within the institution of psychology in Aotearoa New Zealand and though we were not all born in this country, we share a common descent from colonial histories and ancestries. We acknowledge how these locations shape our ways of knowing and moving within the world. Feminist theories and methodologies give us room to stretch and breathe within the disciplinary structure of psychology, where the social power relations of gender, race and class continue to affect how knowledge is produced.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Our epistemological assumptions in this article are grounded in feminist scholarship which troubles narratives of human exceptionalism (e.g., Braidotti, 2011; Haraway, 2016; Tsing, 2015). We have discussed our understandings of these theories in relation to climate change and reproduction elsewhere (Meynell, 2023; Meynell, Morgan & van Ommen, 2023). Below, we provide a brief overview of how we are engaging with the concepts of desire, figuration and collage in this article, as it informs our response to the women’s stories.

Desire as a creative force

“Desire,” writes Rosi Braidotti, “is political because it entails the social construction of different desiring subjects, that is to say, subjects who desire differently” (2011, p. 34). Braidotti charts the interrelationship of desire and subjectivity, as desire moves us toward the political resistance of heteronormative figurations in our subjective formations. Braidotti dislodges the Western fathers’ melancholic

understandings of desire as a wound of lack and loss, to reconceptualise desire as plenitude, a lifegiving force which propels us toward becoming subjects differently.

To desire differently is to disrupt the “Majority Subject,” a figure of human subjectivity which has taken on universalising proportions in Western knowledge systems (Braidotti, 2011, p. 31). Such a figure appears as white-skinned, heterosexual, property-owning, and English-language speaking. He also takes up the trope of a scientist who attempts to transcend his corporeal and structural locations in the pursuit of knowledge. The majority subject sustains his power through dualistic oppositions and fear of difference – of men to women, humans to animals, developed nations to undeveloped nations, landowners to migrant and Indigenous peoples.

In contrast to this fear of difference, affirmation of difference is crucial to enabling the ethical and creative potentialities of desire (Braidotti, 2011). Becoming subjects who desire differently involves moving outward toward the peripheries of our subject locations, in a process of becoming-minoritarian. In this movement away from the centre and its dualisms, “the multiple locations of devalued difference are also, though not at the same time, positive sites for the redefinition of subjectivity” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 30).

Within feminist scholarship, Braidotti’s thinking about the politics of location interplays with Donna Haraway’s (1988) theory of situated knowledge, which recognises that our desire is not untethered from the historical contingencies into which we are born. Rather, we desire from our situated locations, which come with particular relationships and capacities to respond (Haraway, 2008). As human subjects learning to live and die on a damaged Earth, our task is to cultivate our abilities to respond, to become more able to hear and respond to the troubles of our worlds (Haraway, 2016).

Figurations

Figurations work through imagination and cultural repertoires to gesture towards not-yet-realised creative possibilities for subjectivity. Haraway describes figures as “performative images that can be inhabited” (1997/2018, p. 11) and Braidotti emphasises the potential for figures to “bring into representation that which the dominant system had declared off limits” (2011, p. 217). Importantly, figures are not

metaphorical; they are embodied, and they offer possibilities for feminist embodied methodologies within psychology. For example, we previously traced a desiring feminist figure within climate change literature, as this opened narrative space for us to hear how desire for a child, even in insecure historical conditions, can be experienced as an affective yearning which is not reducible to a dialectical set of moral rules or yes/no answers (Meynell, Morgan & van Ommen, 2023).

COLLAGE

We engage with collage in this article as a creative methodological practice. We recognise that collage has many iterations, including as a craftwork practiced within domestic spaces long before its induction into European fine-arts (Siegel, 2009). Modernist collages in the early 1900s broke with the representational focus of oil painting, incorporating every day and found objects into/onto the canvas to invite “ontological strangeness” in the viewer (de Rijke, 2023, p. 2). The Cubist works of Braque and Picasso exemplify this intention, where newspaper clippings, guitar strings, and chair caning form part of the pictorial plane.

The societal strife which marked early- and mid-twentieth century Europe was also woven through modernist iterations of collage. Dadaist artists protested capitalism by including artifacts of war, fascism, and a rising bourgeois consumer society into their collages (de Rijke, 2023). Kurt Schwitters’ decades’ long fascination with collage saw him build inhabitable, three-dimension collages, which has been described as “at least in part a reaction to the destruction he witnessed in the First World War and the need he felt to transform detritus into positive creation wherever he went” (Etgar, 2023, p. 12).

Collage has continued to evolve in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, with collage artists creatively playing with tensions – between scale and space, presence and absence, artwork and found materials. Feminist collagists such as Martha Rosler and Nancy Spero sought ruptures and discontinuities in gendered representations of women (Etgar, 2023). More recently, the links between environmental devastation and social power relations have been articulated through collage. For example, Nyugen E. Smith’s work interlays colonial artifacts with brightly painted rubble from extreme weather events, refugee camps, and throw-away consumerism (Etgar, 2023).

Collage has been incorporated into research methodologies. De Rijke (2023, p. 1) positions collage as an iterative, arts-based practice which enables sensation and feeling to come to the fore, opening a “borderlands epistemology” where non-dominant knowledge can be pursued. De Rijke offers her own collages as an example of what she calls an “associationist style of thinking, a possible (winding, inconclusive) path to knowledge, and a means for the researcher to put writer’s block aside and let the thinking process become lateral, visual, material, tactile, spatial” (2023, p. 8). Holbrook and Pourchier (2014, p. 756) situate collage within post-qualitative research, describing their engagement with collage as “a singular instance of method” which cannot be prescriptively followed.

METHODOLOGY

Collaging a response to the women’s stories

We drew on the above theorisations of desire, figuration and collage to take an analytical “line of flight” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 71) through our embodied encounters with research interviews. This required that we figured out some of our methodological coordinates as we went. Our analytical focus was how the six women who participated in the project figured their reproductive decisions and desires in the context of climate change. We did not presume what ‘desire’ looked like. We wanted to see, hear and feel how desire was narrated within the women’s stories, as this flowed through our own affective responses.

The first author, Leola, constructed the collages and wrote up the story of producing the collages, as she had conducted the interviews and carried the embodied memories of her encounters with the women. She began by reading broadly over each woman’s story, taking note of significant impressions, phrases and images that she noticed. Frequently, she began to experience a need to craft something in response to individual stories, with a visual ‘hunch’ forming in her mind. Such hunches included colours, structures, shapes, directional movements and symbols. She drew on a stack of used magazines, found objects and other ephemera in making the collages, situating her craftwork within the “contaminated diversity” of advanced capitalism (Tsing, 2015, p. 32). Relevant excerpts from the interviews were added to the story of the collages, as they exemplified the women’s talk about desire.

Participants

Six self-identifying women participated in single one-on-one interviews with Leola. The women were all living in Aotearoa New Zealand at the time of their interviews, and they occupied multiple locations, including single and partnered, mothers and not mothers, cisgendered and trans. The women were recruited through snowball sampling and advertisements placed in relevant community spaces. Full ethics approval was gained for the project. Identifying details were redacted from the transcripts and all names were changed to pseudonyms, with the women invited to choose their own pseudonyms. Participants were given an opportunity to review their transcripts prior to signing a release form allowing the transcripts to be included in research publications. Leola manually transcribed the interviews while listening to short sections on repeat, using ELAN software (The Language Archive, 2024). She attended to not only spoken language, but also pauses, emotional tone and laughter, to enable a more embodied representation of the interviews.

STORIES OF THE COLLAGES

In this section, Leola shifts into first-person writing to tell the story of making the collages in response to the women's stories. Excerpts from the transcripts are italicised, with words emphasised by the women appearing in bold. Phrases and words which had an affective impact on Leola during collage-making have been indicated through underlining.

Sophie... Societal trauma...

Sophie was the first participant I interviewed for the project. She was highly articulate about her political beliefs and located herself as a transfeminine person and gender abolitionist. At the time we spoke, she was in her early 20s and did not have children. Our conversation about children engaged with futurisms, as well as insights she had gained from seeing her friends' parenting practices. Children were interwoven with Sophie's sense of hope:

“And also, like, obviously children are the like, future... And if we just give up entirely on having children, um, then, then we - we've lost. And so it's very crucial to my own personal sense of hope for the world that we sort of understand this aspect of [pause] human interaction.”

Sophie's association of children with hope produced in me a cascade of images: children as innocent, children as victims, children as curious and whimsical, children as the salvation of humanity, the carriers of the fire. While representations of children can reify dominant heteronormative expectations of motherhood (Burman, 2007/2021), Sophie's association of children with hope refuses easy consolations.



Figure 5.1: Sophie – Suffering as a legacy.

She experiences her desire for parenthood non-innocently, in full view of what she calls the “societal traumas” of our current political systems and ecological fragilities. For this reason, she cannot imagine having children without witnessing structural efforts to challenge climate change, including “an abandonment of capitalism.” Sophie’s

distinction of societal trauma from individual trauma reverberated through my collaging process:

"My inner dialogue is like 'I can work on these isolated traumas that have happened to me as an individual.' ... Whereas the scale of the like societal trauma, for want of a better phrase, um, is so overwhelming. And so I can't see a clear path out of this thing..."

As she notes, dissociation is one possible response to this trauma:

"Your whole reality, um, just breaks. And that's like, that's what the societal trauma is ... Your sense of reality is gone."

"...dissociating from the reality of climate change, etc."

These articulations drew me toward images of capitalist wreckage during collage-making. I feel, and see, Sophie sitting on a knife-edge of desire. On one edge, there is hope, figured through images of children, including how "...a young person smiling is the purest, like, happiest thing I could see in the day..." On the other edge, there is suffering, conveyed through Sophie's evocation of the cost of societal trauma on her own life and the ethical risks of passing this suffering on to a child. What distinguishes Sophie's suffering is her efforts to recognise and process her pain, rather than remain transfixed by dissociation and grief. This moves her onward toward other potential subjectivities, including one activated by anger:

*"I'd hate to... um, be responsible for a kid, um, and watch them suffer in the way I'm suffering. There's grief for that loss. But there's also, **mostly** for me, anger. That, that that, um, sort of fundamental function [reproduction] has been... called into question?"*

During collage-making, I constructed the phrase 'Suffering as a legacy,' in response to Sophie's many references to suffering. Around this phrase oscillated an image of a child who has known suffering inside and out, and who now acts as a witness – the children of Gaza, Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Pacific Islands which will be lost to rising sea levels. This witness might look through a child's eyes, but they have seen centuries of suffering. They yearn for history to unfold differently.

Sophie's experiences as a transperson were central to her formation of this figure, enabling her to politicise "mothers and fathers" as "social categories" and find purpose in different ways of caring for children:

"If you think of how a village used to raise a child. And that child was the future of the village, not the future of a nuclear family. I think that's a more healthy way to think about it."

*"...as long as **I can** still be involved closely, with someone's child? Like, in a kind of cool aunty way."*

Sophie's refusal of figurations of neoliberal family structures moves her toward non-biological and community-based forms of kin making, situating her association of children with hope within relational practices. Such a movement resists the normative and dualistic "desire for a singular, unified homespace, secured through strong familial structures" emphasised within Western political rhetoric (Nowicki, 2018, p. 657).

Rosa... Snow on the mountain...

On first impressions, Rosa appeared to be a dutiful neoliberal citizen – highly practical and focussed on achievable actions. She was in her mid-20s, in a long-term relationship and planning to have one or two kids, someday. She had first become motivated to respond to climate change when she had finished her university studies and found she had an income to spend responsibly:

"I think once I kind of was earning money? [small laugh] And had, sort of... I could spend my money in places that I thought could make an impact, it became more of a thing for me."

Rosa might have carried the resonances of a responsible, rational subject, but she had gone rogue. She experienced strong emotions, especially annoyance, in response to the excessive volumes of plastic forced upon her in an ordinary day, and she shopped carefully to minimise her environmental impacts. Rosa laughs compassionately at these early efforts:

"...it seems so small and almost ridiculous now..."

*“Like **I wanted** to do good things for the climate... but... It kind of didn't feel like enough anymore?”*



Figure 5.2: Rosa – Who knows if there'll still be snow?

Together with her partner and other volunteers, Rosa had formed a local environmental group, which focused on petitioning government and organisations for climate policies and actions. The group had influenced significant outcomes, including a shift to electric buses in their city. Relationships were a central part of climate action, for Rosa:

“It meant that I could work with other likeminded people and sort of bounce ideas off them, of how we can make bigger impacts in... even just our cities?”

The gestures toward use, function, reach, impacts, wins, and outcomes throughout Rosa’s interview drew me toward images of contemporary capitalism in collage-making. If there are no distinct landscapes to which advanced capitalism can be pinned down, I was at least able to find a descriptive foothold in the ephemera of lifestyle magazines. These were filled to the brim with advertisements: for plump and ageless skin; cruises to Scandinavia; the benefits of spirulina; stylish outfits for the hottest days of summer, no credit card surcharge required. Even heatwaves can be made fashionable, as crisis capitalism wastes no opportunity for extraction and alienation. As I worked through these images, I sensed how the sheer tackiness of the products of advanced capitalism intersects with the news headlines defining our times: increasing heatwaves, tech-bro battles over AI, another ceasefire broken. Is this what societal dissociation looks and feels like?

It is when Rosa speaks about having children in the context of climate change that I experience the most intense emotions in response. Suddenly, outcomes are dislodged by grief, as Rosa recalls her memories of going skiing on Mount Ruapehu as a child:

“...already last season, skiing was... not good. Um, and so that really makes me think about the environment. And I want my kids to be able to have that sort of upbringing, but... who knows what that will look like?”

From here on, the image of a mountain centred the collage. While the structure of the mountain itself may endure, will it still have snow? And what of the children and parents who have formed their sense of kinship in part through playing in the snow?

“Because... who knows how much snow there’ll be?”

“And it seems to happen so fast... Like, when I was at school, there was so much snow on the mountain they had to, like, dig out the lift one year. And now there’s... I went last year and it... [pause] It was scary how little snow there was. And a lot of it was man-made snow, and not natural snow. So...”

Advanced capitalism and its indulgences appear again, in Rosa’s reference to man-made snow. It feels as though we are betraying the natural function of the mountain, and yet the cheerful dissociative disposition of advanced capitalism will promise fake

snow, in a consolatory effort to reassert the past as a ‘solution’ to its own ruinations. Rosa ends on an uncertain note, holding onto her hope for the mountain, while acknowledging that this hope may not extend beyond her own lifetime:

“I have a little bit of hope that the mountain will still be... okay? But... I don't have as much hope that it'll still be okay if I do have kids.”

Zoë... Wouldn't it be nice? Wouldn't it be nice...

Zoë's interview was most striking for its relationship to voice. At times Zoë was unable to speak, and the audio recording captures this as a lapse of spoken language. Zoë's voice shifted throughout the interview, from a delicate and self-deprecating humour, to grief, to despair, to hope, to compassion, to belief in the good-will of human beings, and back again... Zoë was a transwoman in her early 20s when I met with her and she noted that being trans affected her relationship to her voice, causing her to feel self-conscious at times.

Zoë had grown up in Aotearoa New Zealand and she readily recognised her privilege as someone of European descent. She had recently finished university studies and was alert to many social issues. While climate change “frames the way I [she] look[s] at the world, and its future, and the issues facing it,” she jokingly reassured me that she does not have a “schedule” for worrying about climate change. For her own mental health, she is intentional about managing her exposure to distressing climate news and information. She would not be able to help herself, or others, if she was tracking “which animal got extinct this week.”

Zoë described a feeling of dread in response to climate change, an anticipation that the future will require constant and intensifying adaptations:

“...the feeling of change, you know? I feel like my life, like my childhood is like, you know, I've lived in the last moment [briefly laughs] before people really started feeling the effects of, um, climate change.”

“...It's more like a... dread.”

Zoë did not foresee herself ever having her own children. It was not just climate change, or the potential challenges of having biological children as a transwoman, which

Zoë's disclosures of despair are made within a wider articulation of the importance of relationships to her everyday wellbeing:

"...the resource that I need to deal with that [depression] – you know, aside from what I've got, you know, inside me – is other people. And they're, they're very well placed to help with those kind of things, you know?"

She also draws on relationships in responding to my question about how she sustains hope in the face of worsening climate warnings, including her sense that human beings have the potential to reflect on and respond ethically to climate change.

As I re-read Zoë's transcript in preparation for collage-making, I was struck by multiple tensions – between nature and nurture, biology and technology, childhood and parenthood, despair and hope, voice and silence. Zoë's references to genes and biological parenthood carried wider gendered pains, as motherhood remains heavily entrenched within cis- and hetero-normative figurations:

"...ideas of motherhood are biologically tied up in certain, you know, like... Um. [Long pause]. You know, I feel like if I had been born with a uterus, I might have a stronger desire, because you know, you feel like that's what you've been given, or whatever, you know. Um."

As I was trying to make sense of these tensions during collage-making, I felt drawn to images of hands. Detached from the glossy pages of the magazines, the images of hands struck me with their vulnerability, strength and flexibility. Hands touching, hands creating connections. I was drawn to thinking about how human hands have been evolutionarily formed, across an inconceivable span of time. And yet these hands, our hands, have also crafted tools and weapons which are rapidly destroying the remaining liveability of our planet.

As I followed these associations, I spontaneously began to arrange the hands in a circular pattern. Thinking with Zoë's emphasis on relationships, the hands were moving in a gentle eddy which refused narratives of human exceptionalism, including the idea that through technology and culture we as human beings have unshackled ourselves from our evolutionary origins and relationships. I felt the supposed tensions of biology and technology coalesce into the circle of the collage, where "there is no border where evolution ends and history begins, where genes stop and environment takes up [...]"

Instead, there are turtles upon turtles of naturecultures all the way down” (Haraway, 2004, p. 2). I began to include non-human species and eyes in the collage, as they called forth in me some feeling of relationship, of responsibility to witness this moment in history, of the loss of so much evolutionary creation and diversity.

The title of the collage is a quote from when Zoë shifts to a dreamy sort of desire. Against her pain and dread for the future, of species loss and constant adaptation, Zoë wonders aloud in a whimsical voice, “Wouldn’t it be nice?” to have children:

“I still don't think I'm ever going to have kids, but I definitely feel kind of... the attraction of the idea, more and more?”

“You always think, you know... You always have these things that make you think, 'Wouldn't it be nice? Wouldn't it be nice?' You know?”

Here, I sense another form of desire. It is a desire which is more-than-biological, but cannot be separated from eons of evolution, or the uncertainties of the future. Desire is gently suspended as a thought which may not be realised, but which is pleasurable nonetheless, and still forms part of the moving circle

Tala... We need a revolution...

Tala was a married mother of four children. She was born and grew up in the Philippines, moving to Aotearoa New Zealand many years ago to pursue work opportunities. In her free time, Tala volunteered with community organisations, including a local environmental group. Tala is matter of fact throughout the interview about how political structures have caused climate change. Speaking of her lived experiences of climate change in the Philippines, she says:

“From when I grew up [in the Philippines] ah, the environment really changed. I feel like, ah, a big difference. Really, ah, I feel sad, because it's... The pollution is really severe.”

“...it [the climate] needs a revolution in the Philippines, to be honest [laughing]. I'll be straight-forward.”

Tala evokes her childhood in describing the changes wrought in her own lifetime by mining, deforestation and land conversion in the Philippines, much of which she notes has been enacted by Western corporations. She offers images of a child able to

experience cold temperatures, delighting in the fog escaping their mouth in winter. This child also has the freedom to climb a tree and eat to satiation.



Figure 5.4: Tala – Tala's manifesto

Tala uses strikingly direct language when she states during the interview that “the children are the future.” Her desire for the future is figured as larger than her relationships to her own children, seen in how she frequently returns to a refrain, that “Everything is connected.” She locates this desire in relation to future generations, enabled by becoming a mother herself:

"...I became more, ah, always thinking of the future. ... Not for myself, but um everyone's future. The world's future. Ah, so not only for my children. Because I'm, I'm thinking that, ah, everyone's connecting."

Tala's politicisation begins after she has graduated from college in the Philippines and joins the union. Tala describes how unionisation changed her thinking, a reminder of how human subjectivities can be formed through education:

"So imagine! [Laughs]. Imagine how I thought before. So... And then I couldn't believe that, you know... ... Um, and then, I thought that's the only way -- is revolution. There's no other way, because people are greedy."

In making Tala's collage, I wanted to form the 'paper' of the manifesto through images which relate to the histories of colonisation which have shaped both the Philippines and Aotearoa New Zealand. This aligned with Tala's attendance to colonisation and globalisation as mechanisms through which social and environmental harms have been perpetrated. The ongoingness of colonial violence is captured in Tala's references to Indigenous environmental defenders in the Philippines, who are being subjected to "non-stop killing."

"...So we're [the Philippines] basically, um, ah... Ah, receiving the, the, the impact of what the, the First World countries are doing at the moment. ... it affects mostly Indigenous people, like Lumad."

"...because people are being displaced, um, and then, ah, they, they also ruin the, the land. So it's, it affects the whole thing. Like, ah, it's, it's really connected."

A printed and spliced colonial map of the Philippines therefore forms the background of the collage, alongside other cultural artifacts. I covered this with tracing paper, to diffuse the directness of the images and create the sense of a palimpsest against which the manifesto would be formed. The manifesto itself then draws on Tala's own words. It is the only collage in which words and language figure strongly. Tala's political hope is a form of desire, and the spirit with which Tala figures this hope jars against the political weariness I occasionally notice in myself and in the contemporary critical scholarship which surrounds me, from my location within advanced capitalism. Tala's words manage to push against my caution, reasserting the possibilities for radical political mobilisation, in the name of the people and of the child.

Freya... An internal hunch, a feeling...

Freya was a senior policy analyst who worked in environmental policy for central government in Aotearoa New Zealand. At the time I interviewed her over Zoom, she was also a new mum, having given birth to her first child, Molly, several months earlier. Freya was “particularly enjoying experiencing her [Molly] experiencing the world, um, for the first time.”

Freya was in her mid-thirties and in a long-term partnership. She had been born in Aotearoa New Zealand to immigrant parents, with this shaping her understanding of kinship. Not growing up with extended family living nearby had set her apart culturally from other New Zealand families, she noted. As her partner was from Europe, this was perhaps part of her desire for having a child – a yearning for wider kinship.

Freya explained that she had been ambivalent about having children earlier in her life. She had not experienced a strong desire to become a mother, and as she and her partner entered their thirties, they wanted to “make a conscious decision [about having children], you know, rather than letting biology decide for us, or whatever”.

I was struck by Freya’s presence in the interview, which was so reliably professional and sophisticated that I experienced moments of hesitation about my own credibility as ‘interviewer.’ Freya effortlessly spoke through climate policy language, including resource management, ecosystem-based adaptations, comms teams, mental bandwidth, green consumerism, wins, impacts, and evidence-bases. Such language was juxtaposed with Freya’s warmth, kindness and candid expressions of emotion.

Freya located herself as an “incrementalist.” She noted that she didn’t need to be constantly reminded of or exposed to climate warnings to enact change. This would just lead to “listlessness and depression.” Rather, having accepted that there’s a problem, she wants to get on and work towards fixing it:

“I guess I’m an incrementalist, in that sense, in that I’d rather do something than wait for, I don’t know, wait for something magical to happen.”

Freya’s incrementalism was focussed on systemic and structural change, rather than individual responsibility. However, she had developed an understanding of the seductive draw of individual responsibility:

“...individual actions are direct, and can give you a kind of... return on your investment, because you feel good about it, about doing those things. [laughs]. So, um, even though those things are in themselves will not change the system, you, yeah, there's that kind of conflict around... how many moral points are you building up by not flying or [laughs]...”



Figure 5.5: Freya – An internal hunch, a feeling.

In re-reading Freya’s interview transcript, I knew I wanted to include actual examples of environmental policy in the collage, to capture the textual landscape in which Freya lived and worked, and in which she had partly formed her incrementalist

sensibilities. To this end, I printed pages from New Zealand's most prominent climate policies, as well as environmental headlines from local news outlets.

What most absorbed me in Freya's interview was the sense of joy, curiosity, and delight in discovery which coloured Freya's voice as she spoke about her relationship to her daughter. Parenthood appeared to have gifted Freya not only new worries, but also a fresh and boundless experience of being in the world:

"...something about playing a different role in your life, ah, pass some things on, or passing on the way you see the world or... experiencing that through a different lens, somehow."

"...it's very experiential at first and not very... cerebral. [both laugh]. So, it's just quite a refreshing change of perspective..."

Just as with the previous collages I had made, I was quickly drawn to a particular image or symbol in response to reading Freya's story. This was flowers. I saw the lushness and indulgence of flowers blooming and bursting from the centre of the collage, with strips of the environmental policy and headlines forming the background 'foliage'. The title of the collage came from a moment in the interview when Freya tries to describe her decision-making on parenthood:

"...it's hard to separate, like, what is now great about being a parent, from your reasons going into it. Because I think, even though I talk about cost-benefit analysis, I don't really think that that's how people make decisions. I think you have a... internal hunch, feeling, of what you want to do. And then you construct your argument around it [laughs] and convince yourself. Some, um, you know, you... I think really it's a gut, it's the gut feeling, isn't it..."

With this image of desire in mind, I went to work in the mode of Freya, incrementally building the collage up in layers. The images of the flowers themselves captivated me, and I carefully cut around the edges of the printed petals, wanting to preserve the intricate details of life in bloom. Eventually, I had exhausted my supply of printed flowers, and yet the collage still felt like it needed more – a final burst of flowers, to show that internal hunch, that gut feeling unfurling. It was a beautiful day in early spring, and I went out to my garden, picking the flowers of camellias, pansies, lavender, azalea and daisy... These I then arranged on the collage. I like that it's not

immediately discernible where the real flowers lie on the collage. I like how in the end, Freya's gut feeling is far more trustworthy than a cost-benefit analysis, how life is constantly surprising, full of newness and plenitude.

Delphi... That longing to be anchored...

Of the six women I interviewed, Delphi was able to speak the most freely about her desire for motherhood, and she does so from the outset of our conversation:

"I always had that... really strong desire to have children, so even in a situation like now [with climate change], I probably would?"

At the time I interviewed her, Delphi was a single parent to four children, two of whom still lived at home. Alongside supporting her children, Delphi was completing PhD studies and working in a management role. Her presence in the interview room was immediately comforting. I felt that she spoke from a place of non-defensive curiosity.

As I asked Delphi to describe what her desire for motherhood felt like, she drew on the metaphor of an anchor:

"...it was like, I guess that longing to be anchored, to be, to have, um... [pause] someone very close to you, someone who needs you, that need for significance is, is one thing. Um, wanting to be needed, wanting to be important and significant. Having something to pour my life into, or someone – to pour my life into."

Like Freya, Delphi narrates part of this pull for motherhood as a response to not having wider kinship networks around her. For Delphi, the relationship between mother and child enables a unique emotional connection, which she tentatively describes as "a kind of connection you don't get anywhere else?" It was these articulations of desire and connection that resonated with me as I began to construct Delphi's collage. As I tore and pasted long strips of water, sky, sea, plant and rock, I felt an embodied sense of plunging downward, like an anchor, to reach a place of secure connection. The images of rows of cars and human beings in collective prayer did not seem antithetical to this form of connection; rather, from the distance they looked like layers of sand drift, just another piece of nature-culture (Haraway, 2004), another form of human yearning.

Delphi acknowledged that she had made her decisions about motherhood a long time ago, but she was not free of troubles about how her children would navigate the challenges of climate change, including what she anticipated would be increased global conflict driven by a scarcity of resources. As Delphi noted, her children were “facing a much more restrictive future” than she had known as a young person. Two of her children had decided that they most likely would not have children, due in part to the uncertainties of climate change. Delphi expressed an empathetic sadness about this, for the loss of the potential for her children to experience “that kind of connection.”



Figure 5.6: Delphi – That longing to be anchored.

When I asked Delphi about how she coped with the emotional weight of the many responsibilities she carried, not only as a mother but in her work and studies, she referenced nature itself:

*"I'm in nature as much as I can. Which is, it's kind of counteracting that anxiety. ...
Nature is not, nature isn't completely spoiled, yet. You know? It's, it's useful."*

She also tried to focus on the present moment. This was partly an intentional strategy, and partly an involuntary response to what she experienced as a speeding up of time, an escalation of multiple urgencies, including climactic change.

"I kind of find it hard to, to look ahead like that? ... It just seems very... invisible. Like, I was going to say dark, but I don't mean dark in the horrible-dark sense. But just kind of fuzzy..."

Delphi again returned to nature in evoking this change in perspective:

"...if you go on a hike, you keep having these... You're going up a peak, you always have these false peaks. And you never know how far it is to the actual one. You have to get up one, and then you can see the next one..."

The image of Delphi walking onward without a clear sight of what lies ahead, holding steadfast to the present moment, transferred to my collage-making process. I felt that Delphi's desire was embodied in her humble acceptance of limited perspective. This was a form of desire which did not seek escape in dissociation, denial or exceptionalism. As an anchor plunging downward, it was moving toward relational connection and responsibility. I felt this flow of connection signified in the image of a bird on a rock, of a school of fish moving in unison, and the dew delicately hanging from an arachnid's legs. Importantly, Delphi does not narrate a paternalistic relationship to nature. While acknowledging the loss of wild spaces and wild futures, she dares to be emotionally responsive to nature in her efforts to endure within the ruins of capitalism. Collaging a response to Delphi's story felt especially subliminal. Submersed in the colours, textures and movements of the collaging process, I was carried toward some feeling of connection and kinship to more-than-human worlds that even now I am struggling to put into words, and which surely overflows the limits imposed by rational, unified subjectivity.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Collaging is an embodied and creative research practice which allowed Leola to affectively respond to the women's stories. We now come back together as co-authors to collaboratively reflect on the story of the collages and consider how wrestling with questions of motherhood in conditions of ecological crisis enables the force of desire to be figured differently, away from a shape of lack and loss and toward a shape of political mobilisation.

Collaging in the ruins of capitalism

Our engagement with collage in this article is historically situated within what Anna Tsing (2015, p. 2) calls the ruins of capitalism, whereby the “promise of stability” underpinning 20th century capitalist societies no longer holds. This was, of course, always a false promise, since the core of capitalism is instability, marked by endless boom-bust cycles. We are living in landscapes damaged by intensifying extraction and strewn with plastic waste. A preoccupation with death (Braidotti, 2008) and environmental melancholia (Lertzman, 2015) are possible psychological responses to encountering these plundered landscapes, especially for those of us who have prospered through histories of colonial and industrial violence and are complicit in producing ongoing ecological harms. And yet, as Tsing suggests through the figure of matsutake mushrooms spawning within abandoned industrial pine forests, damaged environments are not necessarily empty. They may be scarred, but they are not beyond recuperation. By attending to the “contaminated diversity” (p. 30) and “cacophony of stories” (p. 34) which continue to unfold within these landscapes, we might learn how to enable endurance for human and non-human species within the precarities of advanced capitalism. The gradual and “accidental” return of wildlife to Chernobyl teaches us this, too (UNEP, 2020, p. 1).

The process of collaging for Leola allowed her to materially sense these historical conditions. Indeed, the collaging materials themselves began to tell part of the story, as the old magazines from which she selected images were figured as both detritus, the leftovers of throw-away consumerism, and richly printed resources that just three hundred years ago would have stunned our ancestors with their excess of fonts, colours, representations. This connects us back to the history of collage, where found objects

and waste materials were reconfigured toward creative ends, inviting curiosity, surprise and the mobilisation of political activism (Etgar, 2023).

The shape of the force of desire

If desire is a force – lifegiving and a source of plenitude – it matters what shape this force takes. As we previously noted, traditional Western understandings of desire have figured the force of desire through lack and loss, whereby return to the ‘mother’ signified a return to “a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man” (Haraway, 2004, p. 33). Capitalism has exploited this preoccupation with lack and loss by directing the force of desire toward endless consumption without satiation (The Dangerous Maybe, 2022). Such origin stories constrict our “psychic determinants” to a “familiar kind of familial scene,” in turn diminishing the value of other forms of intimacy and kinship, including through friendship, collaboration, and non-human relations (Haraway, 1998, p. 126). Feminist reconceptualisations of desire, such as Braidotti’s (2011), redirect the forces of desire outward toward the shape of social power relations. In this movement away from the Majority Subject, desire becomes multiple rather than unitary, and capable of activating our subjectivities toward more liveable and sustainable political formations.

We sense this movement toward the shape of political mobilisation in each of the women’s stories about desire. Wrestling with the question of becoming a mother in times of crisis appears to enable this flow, encouraging desire for forms of kinship and relations which are more than individual, more than rational, more than human. We see this explicitly in Sophie’s story, where her rejection of motherhood as a gendered category within neoliberal family structures flows alongside her association of children with hope and her affective yearning to be meaningfully involved in a child’s life. Creative political activations are present in all the women’s stories about desire, though. They appear in Rosa’s resistance of a rational neoliberal consumer, in Zoë’s emphasis on how relationships support her to live with psychological pain, and in Tala’s steadfast belief in revolution. Freya’s and Delphi’s stories both speak to the limits of unified, rational subjectivity, showing us how maternal gut feeling and a longing to be anchored can disrupt the cost-benefit analyses and alienation of advanced capitalism. Wrestling with the question of becoming a mother, then, even in the absence of motherhood itself, enables desire to be figured differently, toward the political mobilisation of hope.

Pain and joy

Creating the collages was an unambiguously joyful experience for Leola. Loosened from the binds of language, collage enabled her to take up paper, scissors, and glue in the effort to see, hear and respond to the stories anew, displacing the linearity of narrative for the spatial configurations of collage. In this way, collage was a craftwork, reminiscent of the joyful experience of playing with crafts and colours as a child.

We heard a lot of pain within the women's stories. What distinguished this pain, though, was how it moved. Across the stories, pain functioned as a dynamic emotion, enabling the women to witness and respond to the great violences of our times. Trauma and grief did not hold the women back from expressing their joy, holding to their political determination, or desiring more liveable futures for *the* children. We think here of the transformative potential of acknowledging and processing pain, as a disruption of the dissociative and melancholic workings of advanced capitalism and a "gesture that actualizes affirmative ways of becoming" (Braidotti, 2008, p. 23).

The enlivening sensations of pleasure, joy, empathy, and playfulness which unravelled as colourful bundles of thread within the women's stories and on through the collage-making process invite us to imagine and hold hope: to mobilise political subjectivities in the desire for different futures.

INTERSTITIAL 4

The stories I heard during my research increasingly oriented my attention toward relationships to place, as I noticed how desire for political mobilisation on a dying planet was often voiced through connections to landscapes, places and sensory memories. Collaging a response to the women's stories in Article 4 helped me to realise how desire, far from being restricted to a preoccupation with lack and loss, propels us forward into affective relationships with 'others,' including both imagined, unborn kin and the non-human formations of mountains, flowers, albatrosses, and the waste products of advanced capitalism. In Interstitial 3, I note how I happened upon collage while completing fieldwork in California. Although this fieldwork is not included within my wider PhD project, I have included some reflections here on living and researching in California during the midpoint of my PhD research, as it strengthened my understanding of how our relationships to place can affect how we respond to climate change, politically and psychologically. Most importantly, living briefly in California taught me to value the differences in how colonial subjectivities are formed, including in how alienation from land is storied through historically contingent colonial narratives.



Figure 6.1: Riverside seen from Mount Rubidoux. Photo taken by author in 2023.

I had been drawn to California because of the state's environmental intensities: increasingly severe wildfires, heatwaves and droughts. I wondered what it would be like to try and grapple with the question of motherhood while also grappling with fire being at your door. I completed six months of fieldwork on a Fulbright scholarship in 2023, researching how climate change was affecting the reproductive decisions of women who lived there. Having not spent time in California prior to my research stay, many of my assumptions about the state were naïve, however. I did not understand just how vast the state was in terms of geographic scale and diversity of landscapes. Nor did I realise that within California, renowned for its liberal political leanings, I would feel the fragility and at times absence of collective social welfare.

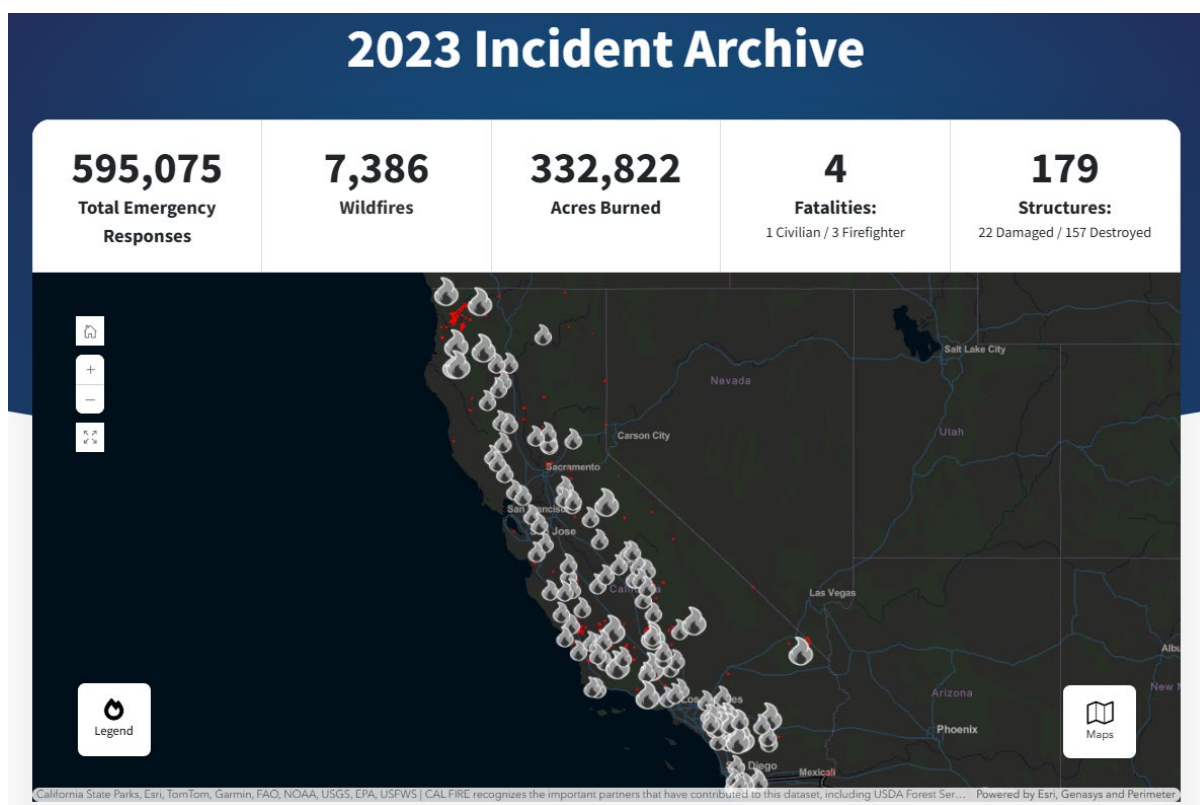


Figure 6.2: Screenshot of 2023 Californian wildfire Incident Archive
(<https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2023>).

I was based in Riverside, a city of about 300,000 people, fifty miles east of Los Angeles. Riverside forms part of the 'Inland Empire,' a region of Southern California characterised by its dry, arid climate, historic citrus growing industry, and now, massive Amazon distribution warehouses, making it one of the largest logistical centres in the US, with concomitant environmental impacts (Allison, 2020). Riverside and the Inland

Empire have a majority-Hispanic population, many of whom are first generation Mexican Americans. Attractive because of its more affordable housing, Riverside grew significantly in the mid-20th century, as lower-income workers from the Los Angeles region shifted east in the pursuit of home-ownership. Perhaps suggesting something of the Inland Empire's history, too, was the smog, which, on a clear day from the San Bernadino Mountains could be seen visibly floating above the valley. There was also the fast-food industry. McDonalds is one of the dozens of fast-food chains which started in the Inland Empire, with the first ever McDonalds' restaurant now converted into a local museum.



Figure 6.3: Leola on the UCR campus. Photo taken by friend in 2023.

Riverside is home to the University of California, Riverside (UCR), where I was supervised by Professor Jade Sasser in the department of Gender Studies. I had encountered Jade Sasser's research in the early stages of my PhD. A feminist scholar, her book *On Infertile Ground* (2018) traces the social power relations underpinning the use of population policies and discourse in environmental movements. She was also, at the time I visited, preparing a book on climate change and 'the kid question,'

now published (Sasser, 2024). I was generously provided with an apartment and writing space for the duration of my stay by the Center for Ideas and Societies, which promotes interdisciplinary research across the humanities, arts and social sciences.



Figure 6.4: On the UCR campus. Photo taken by author in 2023.

My first impressions of Riverside and the surrounding landscapes were dominated by the climate. I hadn't experienced heat like this before. Stepping out of the air-conditioned buildings, I would be met with what felt like an immovable front of heat. It was mercifully dry heat, but within minutes of walking in the open sun my body protested: I'd be covered in sweat, already starting to feel fatigued, and longing for shade. This was weathering in an entirely different landscape and climate, where, through immersion, "we are no longer outside observers, able to examine, log data, and calculate a future, but right in the thick of things" (Neimanis & Loewen Walker, 2014, p. 569). It didn't help, of course, that my stay coincided with the summer season, something that I hadn't given enough consideration when planning my trip. I soon learned some survival strategies. I bought myself lightweight clothing and an umbrella designed to block rain and sun; I also planned my routes and routines around the heat.



Figure 6.5: Leola at the Huntington Library and Botanic Gardens. Photo taken by friend in 2023.

There was a twenty-minute walk between my apartment building and the UCR library, which became my preferred place to write due to its excellent air conditioning. If I wanted to survive the walk, though, I'd need to leave the apartment preferably before 8am and not return until after 6pm. On days when I didn't manage this, I was punished by the heat. Morning and evening soon became my 'walking hours,' times when I would wander my neighbourhood and surrounding suburbs, trying to get a sense of the landscape. I was fascinated by the boulders which appeared to be bursting out of the hillsides, disrupting what otherwise looked to be intensively human-modified landscapes. And there were the heat-loving succulents and cacti, both those carefully tended to in the botanical gardens and the wild ones, growing in the hillsides.



Figure 6.6: Hillsides beyond the UCR campus. Photo taken by author in 2023.



Figure 6.7: Cacti at the UCR Botanical Gardens. Photo taken by author in 2023.



Figure 6.8: A history of citrus labels displayed on an electrical service box. Photo taken by author in 2023.



Figure 6.9: A dance festival in Riverside. Photo taken by author in 2023.

I was carless in America, and this gave me a particular vantage point through which to learn about my new home. I was immediately struck by the homelessness, which was far more confronting than anything I had previously seen in New Zealand. Running errands on foot, I often had to pick my way around the bedding and belongings of unhoused people, most of whom were people of colour. As Jade Sasser has noted throughout her research, vulnerability to the impacts of climate change is deeply interlinked with racism, though this is rarely acknowledged in climate literature (Sasser, 2024). During some of the hottest days of summer, I was shocked to see the lack of shade and water available to people who were trying to survive on the streets. The built environment was also punishing, the concrete and traffic-dominated spaces unaccommodating to either walkers or those without a private home. My sense of social decorum, which I locate as part of a wider cultural preference for privacy and politeness in New Zealand, was bewildered by the lack of care offered to vulnerable people. Surely this whole arrangement was concerning for everyone, including the wealthiest? I noticed that other people around me, though, seemed hardened or at least acclimatised to the homelessness. These impressions became part of a wider understanding I developed during my stay, that even in one of the most liberal states of the USA, the idea of governmental care for all citizens was marginal and contingent, weathered by histories of violence and a mistrust of state interventions.

Living in the US gave me a much greater appreciation for the fractured but nevertheless resilient intergenerational investment in the welfare state in New Zealand. By comparison, individualism dominated the corner of America that I was living in. I had, of course, been learning all about individualism as a marker of the American psyche since my undergraduate years, but to experience this in the flesh, as an outsider bewildered by the heat and hardship, was another learning experience. Driving a car, I discovered, was a way of protecting oneself against the offensiveness of homelessness, poverty, pollution and crumbling state architecture. In a car, you were not only mobile, able to dream of travelling hundreds of miles from coast to coast; you were also removed from the discomfort of a relationship with 'strange' others, including those living on the streets and the makeshift camps visible from the highways.

Octavia E. Butler's feminist science-fiction writing informed my experience of living in and travelling through California, with its odd combination of extreme wealth

disparity, progressive environmental policies, and widespread pollution. I had read Butler's (1993/2019) *The Parable of the Sower* prior to applying for my Fulbright scholarship, and I could not unsee the vision of America that Butler brought to life through the perspective of her protagonist, Lauren Olemina, when I lived there myself. Olemina is a black teenage girl who has been brought up in a small, gated community in suburban Los Angeles, which attempts to barricade itself against the growing violence and social unrest which lies on the streets outside.

The *Parable of the Sower* was published in 1993 and is set in 2024, and its prescience is chilling. Wracked by political extremism and poverty, the US has come under the fragile control of corporate overlords and political 'strong men,' whose authoritarianism promises some protection from the roaming, violent gangs and widespread fires which now mark California's landscapes. When Lauren's family home is destroyed and her family murdered, she is forced to take to the highways on foot, attempting to reach some kind of safety in the North. The route which Lauren takes crosses some of the landscapes and places I also came to know in Southern California. I visited Pasadena, where Butler had grown up, raised as an only child by her mother, a housemaid. At Pasadena's Huntington Library, I was able to see original pages of Butler's manuscripts. I imagined Butler walking the streets to school, quietly forming her impressions of the social and environmental madness of her – and now, our – times.

Alongside my efforts to notice and write down my impressions of California, to be affected by the place, I was also preparing to hear stories from others. Soon after landing in Riverside, I started developing a co-institutional ethics application between UCR and Massey University¹, to recruit and interview self-identifying women UCR students about how climate change was affecting their thoughts and feelings about having children. I interviewed eight women, most of whom were first generation Hispanic American. While the promise of individual prosperity appeared to be the dominant story-telling-stories about life in California, there were also cracks running across and through this narrative, allowing smaller counter-narratives to be heard.

These smaller stories appeared in the emphasis some of the women I interviewed placed on an ethical accountability to the environment they lived in, including in their

¹ I completed full ethics applications at both institutions, as I was a visiting scholar at UCR and enrolled as a PhD student at Massey.

decisions about having children. For example, one of the women I spoke to was 19 years old and in her first year of university. She had grown up in a rural Californian town and witnessed her neighbours' homes be destroyed by wildfires as a teenager, while her own family home was spared. She had connected climate change and the threat of wildfires with population after a high school teacher placed a 'population counter' on the wall of her classroom. She described in detail her memory of seeing the global human population counter tick over 8 billion, which put her into a freeze response and reinforced population as a cause of death of non-human species. Against the wishes of her conservative Hispanic parents, who she explained wanted her to marry and have children as soon as possible, she had instead chosen to study Entomology. She was passionate about insects and the promise of developing composting techniques that would benefit her local communities. She expressed uncertainty about whether she would ever have children or not. Stories such as these, along with many others from the women I interviewed, asked me to affectively respond from the location of an outsider, disassociated from familiar cultural and embodied memories of place.

While there are certainly limitations and challenges to being an outsider researcher, I also found several advantages. One of these advantages was that I very genuinely took up the role of a naïve enquirer, not as a gesture towards being non-judgmental but out of a sheer lack of cultural familiarity. Often during the interviews, I needed to ask the women to clarify their phrasings, the geographical places they referred to and familial norms for me in simple, straightforward language. This invited the women to speak to me from their locations as experts and reinforced that their stories were gifts, shared in a relational exchange which was not innocent to differences in locations and responsibilities. It helped, of course, that there was not a significant language barrier between us, with participants required to be proficient in English.² I had access to regular cultural supervision with Jade Sasser, to ensure that I was offering participants a culturally safe experience, however, at least from my own perspective, the women shared their stories without significant hesitations or relational difficulties. There were undoubtedly myriad subtle meanings which I missed through my outsider

² This was also, of course, troubling, given that many of the women I spoke to were fluent in Spanish. It serves as a reminder of how language practices, and particularly the dominance of the English language in Western knowledge institutions, continue to be entangled with the formations of colonising state apparatuses and embodied subjectivities.

location, but I have an embodied memory of the women's openness – their willingness and generosity in speaking with me.



Figure 6.10: *Caesalpinia* flowering on the UCR campus. Photo taken by author in 2023.

Living in California and hearing the stories of young women grappling with motherhood in intensified conditions of economic, racial and environmental precarity gave me a greater appreciation for “the stubborn particulars of place, history, and culture” (Segalo, Manoff & Fine, 2015, p. 343) in how structural violence is enacted. I want to hold, for a moment, the place and history of the Indigenous peoples of the region now called Riverside County, which prior to Spanish and American waves of colonisation was home to a diverse community of Native American/First Nations tribes, including Cahuilla, Luiseño, Serrano, and Tongva peoples (Akins & Bauer, 2021). While I occasionally encountered institutional recognition of the Indigenous peoples of the region, such as in UCR’s statements of land acknowledgement and the presence of a

Native American Students' Program on the UCR campus, the wider cultural and built environment of Riverside County felt deeply focussed on commercial and industrial growth, with a thin attention to histories of colonial harm. The Spanish missions of California, for example, are prominent tourist attractions, and from my outsider location these buildings seemed, at first glance, to be celebrated cultural 'origins,' as though nothing had existed before their construction. That these architectural landmarks were largely built by Indigenous peoples who had been alienated from their land and labour during the first waves of Spanish colonisation was a story that I had to go searching for. That the region's electricity generation, water infrastructure and expansive roading network was enabled by decades of State and Federal breaches and sheer denials of Indigenous treaties and settlement agreements was again a story I had to seek out, as it was told through the work of Indigenous scholars and activists but obfuscated to the current day by US administrations who are legalistically defensive of Indigenous land claims (Akins & Bauer, 2021). The commemoration of California's frontier and goldmining history, as seen in Figure 6.11, was another mythologisation of colonial history that I encountered, whereby Indigenous peoples and places are treated as background details to the heroic struggles of Western men.



Figure 6.11: A recreated goldmining town in California. Photo taken by author in 2023.

I make these reflections, of course, as a privileged white woman, whose ability to move safely within a foreign country was enabled by my descentance from colonising ancestors, my fluency in English, and my academic credentials. Therefore, my intent is not to pejoratively compare California's colonial history to New Zealand's, as though we have anything to be proud of in our own colonial heritages in the South Pacific. Living in California did help me to understand, however, that there is no singular or monolithic colonial subjectivity. It matters what stories tell stories (Haraway, 2016) about how we become colonial subjects, including in how we come to accept alienation from land and ecosystems in the name of economic growth. It was my experience that encountering colonialism from a differently textured location can shock colonial psyches into further recognising patterns of domination that may have become naturalised within familiar cultural heritages. Difference, therefore, is yet again generative, inviting an ethical accountability to ongoing forms of interpersonal and institutional violence (Haraway, 2016).



Figure 6.12: Donkeys on the outskirts of Riverside. Photo taken by author in 2023.

I felt immense relief and gratitude when returning home to Aotearoa New Zealand. The sight of open parks, walkable streets and natural environments less trammelled by heavy industry and traffic systems than those I had adapted to in California gave my body a feeling of grace: here, I could breathe and be less poised against sudden threats and dangers. That Aotearoa New Zealand is not yet a mini-model of the USA is largely thanks to the efforts of Indigenous peoples, who continue to defend the taonga³ of not only Aotearoa's lands, ecosystems, and non-human species, but Indigenous languages and spiritualities. Desire for motherhood in the face of climate change looks and feels differently through a thicker acknowledgement of colonial histories of domination, where becoming response-able to climate change and colonisation is not abstracted through global population metrics, but sits right here, in the lap of relationships to our neighbours and the places and environments we psychologically become attached to as 'home.' Desire, redirected toward the shape of social power relations, also necessarily asks us to grapple with these questions of response-ability to our own psychological formations, whereby care of the self involves care for the environments which enable us to breathe clean air, to drink uncontaminated water, and to make kin with a hope for future stability.

Collage helped me to express curiosity about how our relationships to place are implicated with colonial histories and our responses to climate change within post-industrialised locations. Collage as both an art form and a research practice asks us to remain in relationship with the material conditions of the places and times in which we live, while inviting new insights through ontological defamiliarization (de Rijke, 2023). Therefore, engagement with collage as a research practice and way of thinking and relating is woven through my thoughts, feelings and memories of living in California, as well as the possibilities for decolonising subjectivities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Collage asks us to engage creatively with the mere 'stuff' of everyday life – materials produced through capitalist extraction and deemed 'waste' the moment they cease to have monetary value; found objects, including seed pods, leaves and flowers; and stories. In doing so, collage may teach us a relationship to place which is not reducible to the production of objects or outcomes, but which rather invites curiosity and creative openness. Engaging in arts-based methodologies and practices such as collage, then,

³ Treasure.

may be part of the process of decolonising psychology as a discipline (Segalo, Manoff & Fine, 2015), including in how figurations of subjectivity are felt and embodied within post-industrialised locations. I hope to follow these threads further as I analyse and write my California research, and as the stories of the women I interviewed invite an affective relationship to not only their voices, but the environments in which they are situated.



Figure 6.11: A Riverside street mural commemorating victims of a 2017 terrorist attack. Photo taken by author in 2023.

CONCLUSION

A SUMMARY OF ARTICLES

In this thesis, I have attempted to contribute to understandings of how climate change is affecting women's thoughts and feelings about having children in post-industrialised locations. I approached this research aim through journal articles, with each article telling part of a story about the complexity of questioning motherhood in the context of environmental crises. By focussing on the experiences of women living in post-industrialised locations, my intention was to turn the focus of the research lens back onto Western subjects and subjectivities, and in doing so "critique the centre from the centre" of dominant social power relations within advanced capitalism (Braidotti, 2011, p. 34).

The thesis begins with Article 1, a critical literature review of the 'stories telling stories' about gender and climate change. Article 1 corresponds to Part 1 of my research questions, 'Dominant narratives about gender and climate change,' which included the following questions:

- How are women and girls being positioned in climate change discourses?
- How do gendered climate change discourses intersect with wider social power relations, especially between the constructed binary oppositions of men and women, North and South, to enable and constrain our ways of contextualising climate change?
- How do feminist critiques offer new ways of conceptualising women and girls within climate change research and language?

Article 1 provides a theoretical orientation for the analytical articles which would come later in the project. I engaged with a wide range of feminist, environmental and policy literature in producing Article 1. This literature enabled me to understand how the stories we are telling about climate change and gender in the Global North continue to reify the dominant social power relations which have naturalised human exceptionalism and environmental harms. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in the time of post-feminist rhetoric, a gendered burden was still being placed on women and girls, to respond to climate change through their individual reproductive decision making,

distracting us from a more concentrated attention on the social power relations producing ongoing fossil fuel dependence. One of the most significant insights developing from Article 1 was the importance of storying and figuring climate change in ways which enable more relationally capacious responses to the ills of centuries of colonisation, capitalism and extractive technologies. Carrier bags were found to be one such figure, enabling us to attend to sympoietic rather than autopoietic formations. A carrier bag, rather than a spear, became one of my companions on the PhD journey, offering a resilient but gentle way of holding together the tensions of reproduction in relation to climate change.

Article 2 takes a closer look at the preoccupation with the question of “Is it okay to have a child in the context of climate change?” in the Global North. It corresponds with Part 2 of my research questions, titled ‘Figurations of population in relation to climate change and reproduction.’ These were my Part 2 research questions:

- How are women in climate justice movements such as BirthStrike making sense of their reproductive decisions in relation to climate change?
- Which narratives are most prominent in how these stories are being told?
- How can women in post-colonial, post-industrial contexts talk about choosing to not have children because of climate change, without reiterating population control narratives?

Article 2 also relies on a carrier bag, as I put the troubles of populationism into the mix. The most significant contribution of Article 2, at least for my own sense-making, is that rationalising reproduction through a flat discourse of numbers and consumption takes away the relational implications of how we are making kin in Global North contexts. Rather than the figure of a sexual steward (Sasser, 2018), who reinforces the individualisation of responsibility for climate change through ‘sensible’ decision-making, including through reproductive decision-making, I became familiarised with a desiring feminist figure, who could name her desire for relational connections and motherhood, while also staying with the trouble of Global North complicities for environmental harms. Importantly, Article 2 taught me that there can be no binary yes/no answer to the question of “Is it okay to have a child?” Instead, we need to get in the weeds of relational response-abilities, including feeling the pain of the loss of

species, environments and possibilities in this time of mass extinctions, if we are to become subjects able to respond ethically to climate change from locations of complicity.

In Article 3, I perform a voice analysis of BirthStrike testimonials, to ‘hear’ how becoming response-able for Global North environmental harms extends to ethical accountabilities toward unborn others, perhaps including one’s own imagined children. The quote included in the title of Article 3 – “I cannot bring a child into this world” – suggests something of the character of the BirthStrike testimonials, which seriously wrestled with the loss of possibilities for bringing children into a world wracked by climactic change. Article 3 offered methodological innovations to both how the *Listening Guide* (Gilligan, 2015) can be applied to non-spoken texts and how the affective flows felt in response to stories can be incorporated into academic literature, through the voice of the researcher. Writing Article 3 was an emotionally demanding experience, and the four contrapuntal voices which I came to hear also came to be imprinted on my nervous system, alerting me to the tones and notes through which stories about reproduction and climate change can be told and heard. These voices include the voice of the child, or before; the voice of affliction; the voice of desire and longing; and the voice of monitoring privilege. The last of these voices spoke to the particular challenges of attempting to become response-able to histories of environmental and social violence, when our racial and class privileges have been formed through these very relationships of domination.

Article 3 sits between Part 2 and Part 3 research questions. Part 3 focusses on “the psychosocial impacts of climate change in the Global North, in relation to reproductive decision-making.” Part 3 research questions were:

- How is climate change affecting women’s feelings about motherhood and having children in Aotearoa New Zealand?
- How are they experiencing this tension – emotionally, relationally, practically?
- How are their feelings and decisions about motherhood and climate change influenced?
- How are they finding ‘new, inventive’ ways of making kin in our capitalist ruins?

Article 4 is the final research article produced for the thesis and responds to Part 3 research questions. Article 4 focusses on the stories I gathered through one-on-one interviews with women in Aotearoa New Zealand about how climate change was affecting their thoughts and feelings about having children. I interviewed six women for this part of thesis, some of whom were already mothers, and some of whom were engaging with futurisms about having children in contexts of climactic change. Participants carried complex situated locations and histories, including single and partnered, cis and trans, immigrants and those born in New Zealand to parents descending from European colonisers. Building on insights developed earlier in the thesis, I turned in Article 4 to hearing and responding to desire within the women's stories. I approached 'desire' through feminist theorisations which situate desire within ethical relational responsibilities which exceed Oedipal preoccupations with lack and loss. Rather, these feminist figurations of desire enable more-than-individual, more-than-human, and more-than-innocent modes of wanting.

After transcribing and allowing the women's stories to sit with me for some time, I turned to collage to produce an arts-based response to how desire was figured in the women's stories. I offer a fledgling overview of my methodological process in Interstitial 3, with my line of flight toward collage as a research practice on the long list of further writing I would like to do after the PhD project is finished. The experience of producing the collages taught me the importance of creative and arts-based methodologies in response to heart-breaking stories and situations. Just as the carrier bag in Article 1 opened up space for me to understand how we can tell and hold stories differently, engaging with collage as a research practice in Article 4 provided me with an embodied experience of crafting an affective response to hearing women's stories of pain and loss, desire and determination for 'life' in the face of climate change, whether that included having children or not. I like to think of Article 4 as a parting gesture that invites curiosity rather than foreclosing possibilities for making kin in the ruins of capitalism.

CONTRIBUTIONS

I want to invoke the figure of a carrier bag, once more, in considering how this thesis has produced contributions across diverse disciplinary landscapes. A carrier bag is equipped for travelling, of safely transporting parts of stories, gifts and contributions from place to place. A carrier bag also helps me to think of 'contributions' as more than

individual, formed through weaves of relational knowledge production which seek to honour the “finicky, disruptive details of good stories that don’t know how to finish” (Haraway, 2016, p. 125).

Firstly, this study’s situatedness within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand and the wider South Pacific region forms part of its contribution to understandings of how climate change is being understood, narrated and psychologically responded to. While I have reluctantly relied upon significations such as ‘the Global North’ and ‘Global North subjectivities’ to convey my meaning throughout this thesis, these phrases are at best convenient and risk reinforcing perceptions of some singular and unitary colonial subjectivity. Yet we know that there is no subjectivity which transcends our partial perspectives (Haraway, 1988), our embodied memories of domination (Morgan, 2005), or our connections to place (Forster, 2019), including in post-industrialised locations. This thesis is carried upon the landscapes and stories which make up ‘this’ place in which I was born, a jumbled and lively collection of islands, languages and histories of pain. The colonial production of a nation named ‘New Zealand’ lies atop the rich Indigenous knowledge and relationships to place which preceded European domination. Despite almost two centuries of the Crown government in New Zealand failing to honour its responsibilities to Māori inscribed within Te Tiriti o Waitangi, including respecting Māori sovereignty over their ancestral lands, forests, waters and political governance (Mikaere, 2011), these responsibilities are no less binding or urgent today. Climate change looks, feels and impacts on everyday life differently here, where bicultural partnership is woven through the founding documents of the country, psychological codes of practice, and, potentially, the situated subjectivities of the people who live here.

Spending time in the US reinforced for me the differences between Global North subjectivities, and how it does indeed matter how we tell stories about our capacities to become response-able to historical and contemporary violences. This thesis is one small contribution to the wider social project of learning to become subjects differently in response to climate change, through connection to place, memory and relational responsibilities. This brings me to another strength of my thesis: placing an emphasis throughout on the need to learn to become subjects differently, in becoming response-able to climate change. Doing so resituates us back within a field of social power

relations, rather than recharging neoliberal preoccupations with individual responsibility, figured through the question of “Is it okay to have a child?”. There is no innocence, here, where learning to become subjects differently is also a process of critically examining our assumptions about what it means to make kin, and accepting the loss of what might have been cherished associations of how ‘family’ is created and enacted. To be very clear, and at the risk of labouring the point, this task of subjective transformation belongs to those of us who have descended from and are complicit to ongoing forms of domination, including women such as myself who, while carrying embodied memories of gendered violence and labour, including those endured by my mother and grandmothers, are still nevertheless caught up in producing the systemic harms of advanced capitalism.

Turning to figurations helped me to critique the stories telling stories about reproduction and climate change in Global North locations, as this again put the emphasis on making changes at the level of subjectivity, rather than individual and embodied reproductive decision-making. I believe that figurations – those “creatures of imagined possibility and creatures of fierce and ordinary reality” (Haraway, 2008, p. 4) – are a great gift to us in trying to understand how responses to climate change are being embodied and enacted in these historical times of amplified environmental and social fragility. Figurations helped me to see how the stories we embody, both through our psychological processes and our actions, affect the world around us. Such affectivity may feel infinitesimal at times, but it matters what figures we enact our subjectivities through, as we follow Foucault’s departing insights, whereby care of the self involves care for others and “the practices we adopt to transform the self” (Hanna, 2013, p. 663). Even in the process of writing my thesis, the effort of resisting the figure of a sky god (Haraway, 2016), that master of value-neutral knowledge production who still dominates the psychological discipline, has enabled me to feel the pain of losing worlds, and the exhilaration of hope for recuperation.

It was through figurations, as well as the stories of the women who participated in this project, that I came to listen for the voice of desire in response to climate change and advanced capitalism. Desire is hard to argue with: “an ontological layer of affinity and sympathy between different enfleshed subjects” (Braidotti, 2014, p. 174), desire cleaved an opening in the heaviness of climate texts and policies which I engaged with in

the early stages of my PhD, opening space for me to hear and respond to stories about motherhood and climate change differently. Desire moves outward on lines of flight which invite affective responsivity between subjects, figuring a yearning for subjectivity that is “nonunitary yet politically engaged and ethically accountable” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 42). While I felt that desire called me, my attention in response to that call is one of the foremost contributions of this thesis, requiring that I placed my trust in iterative methodological practices and modes of hearing.

My fledgling methodological engagement with arts-based methodologies, including through voice analysis and collage, are some of the most tangible ‘contributions’ I can name from the project, offering figurations of research practices which are not reducible to interpretative efforts or the attempt to answer research questions (Chamberlain et al., 2018). While these methodological contributions may appear easier to name than processes of subjective change, they nevertheless cannot be enacted at a relational distance from the stories, voices and figures which might draw our attention as researcher-subjects. I hope that my efforts to include my own affective responses and voice in the analytical processes of Articles 3 and 4 are methodologically encouraging, inviting vulnerability in the act of listening with curiosity, rather than judgment (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017).

There is much that I could say about the need for the safe expression of vulnerability in the psychological discipline. This need is carried by both researchers and practitioners, who, despite being trained to receive the vulnerabilities of others, are nevertheless still expected to embody the figure of the Majority Subject in their professional personas. I have especially felt this pressure to mask vulnerability since becoming a registered psychologist, which has afforded me a new vantage point on how theory and practice come together in mapping the edges of psychology as a discipline. The embodied experiences of engaging in arts-based methodologies in this thesis reappears frequently in my work with clients, as I find myself attuning to clients’ voices, or gently asking them when they learned to silence their voice. I intend to continue to attend to the intersection of arts-based and feminist methodologies in therapeutic

practice in years to come, as clients humble me daily with their capacity to embody subjective transformations, including in their approach to death¹.

IN REFLECTION

There are so many more stories, so many different locations, which exceed the small container of my PhD research, and this is part of the storying, too: learning to value complexity in how it expands rather than narrows the focus of research, and of collaborative meaning-making. As we move toward an appreciation of situated knowledge, we are no longer searching for definitive answers in the mode of the 'sky gods' (Haraway, 1988). Rather, we begin and end and begin again with relationships. Feminist theories and methodologies have enabled me to think and write from a relational location, which, as Haraway suggests, "offers a more adequate, richer, better account of a world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others' practices of domination" (1988, p. 579).

So much has changed since I started this project in early 2020. There has been Covid, the invasion of Ukraine, the escalation of the genocide in Gaza, the second Trump administration, ongoing inflation and cost-of-living crises and now, the hype of AI. All of these historical turns are driven by a story of human exceptionalism and have brought forth further waves of industrial intensification and environmental destruction, along with the gross loss of human life and dignity. Right now, in Aotearoa New Zealand, we are facing the largest assault on environmental laws and regulations during at least my own lifetime (Boston, 2024). Efforts to reduce reliance on fossil fuels bring their own troubles. Take the Atacama Salt Flats of Chile, for example, where the expansion of lithium mining to meet the demands of the electric car industry is spoiling the rich biological matter of the salt flats, imperilling non-human species and bacteria, which incidentally may have provided vital alternatives to current antibiotic medicines (Perut et al., 2025).

This is the shape of social power relations which continue to privilege the profits of the few over the collective welfare of the many, including our companion species. Climate change, as we can conceptualise it through science, policy and theory, keeps

¹ I currently work in a psychology clinic which provides therapy to people diagnosed with cancer and long-term health conditions.

rolling on. It is often my impression that in the Global North we have collectively and individually become dulled to the threat of climactic change, as the impoverishing mechanisms of advanced capitalism force us to focus on our own individual survival – paying the bills and protecting our immediate family members – over collective political action. Thinking and feeling through a master narrative of despair is part of the problem, though, distancing us from the situated care and efforts at change happening in our local communities.

As Braidotti (2022) and Haraway (2016) have both argued, the more we succumb to the nihilistic spirit of our times, the less we carry our own hope and purpose forward into a future that is yet to be determined. While there have certainly been times during my PhD when I felt grief-stricken and world-weary by exposure to the facts of worsening environmental outlooks and concomitant political inaction, my research has nevertheless been an affectively enriching process, strengthening my ability to notice and hold onto the good in the nature-culture continuums in which I am entangled. I experienced this in different ways while writing each of the articles. With Article 1, for example, it was humbling to read the stories of Indigenous women, who despite surviving genocide and the loss of ancestral lands, refuse to cede the relational ontologies of their people. This was also the case in writing Article 4, where listening to women's stories of desire for motherhood in the context of climate change was enlivening, inviting affective and creative responses.

Although I started this project with a suspicion of how the question of “Is it okay to have a child?” in contexts of climactic change was being asked and answered, over the course of my research this suspicion has developed into an enduring personal conviction that reproduction is not a path to addressing climate change. The harms of population discourse and policies within environmental movements are vast and thoroughly documented, with women from Black, Indigenous and Third World communities experiencing the greatest of these harms (Sasser, 2018). Even if we could untangle population from its Malthusian roots, however, I am still doubtful of how population could be engaged with psychologically, as not only a category to think with, but as a question to feel with. Listening to women's stories about grappling with the question of motherhood in the context of climate change has informed this doubt regarding population. I have developed a greater appreciation for the complexity of

affective, psychological and relational flows which can travel through reproductive decision-making. These are situated entanglements which need not be rational or sensible. Indeed, they might be wildly insensible, driven by an incoherent need for connection, or a persistent sense of hope. It has been my intention throughout my PhD to be as curious and affirmative as possible of women's reproductive decisions, whatever they may be. This decision was made not only to respect the inherent situatedness of women's reproductive desires and decisions, but also to resist individualising responsibility through final moral judgments of what women do with their bodies, as this would reify the figure of the rational, unitary subject.

Reading Thom Van Dooran's (2014) *Flight Ways* while producing the final parts of this thesis also affected my thinking on reproduction. Van Dooran tells the story of avian lives disrupted by human encroachment, heavy industry, and climactic change. In one chapter, Van Dooran invites us to think with the Laysan Albatrosses, which make the long journey to their remote breeding grounds each year in the Midway Atoll. There, they undergo a "simply massive" (2014, p. 25) effort at breeding and raising a chick, requiring months of intensive food gathering and watchful care. In an attempt to withstand the rigours of breeding season, these albatrosses delay their reproductive efforts by several years after reaching sexual maturity and seek to develop stable mating partnerships. Even so, the odds of raising a chick to fledging are poor. These odds have been drastically lowered by capitalist waste: ocean plastics end up in chicks' stomachs, leading to malnutrition and dehydration, while the birds' exposure to chemicals such as persistent organochlorines affects their reproductive and neurological developments. Van Dooren asks us to hold this avoidable tragedy against wider questions about temporality and what it takes to form, maintain and end a species. As he notes, doing so "may allow us to hold the fleeting lives of individual birds in tension with the life of their larger species, to inhabit a time of extinctions in full consciousness of the vast periods that have been required to produce those living forms now being lost" (p. 36).

Hearing Van Dooren's storying of the Layan Albatross helped me to remember the long chains of ancestral links through which we arrive as human beings in our bodies, our environments, and our moments in history. Women and minority communities have borne the brunt of the weaponisation of reproduction in human societies, however, to quote one of the women I interviewed, reproduction is still "a thing we can do with our

bodies,” and it is an injustice to be alienated from embodied reproductive processes through relations of domination. Reducing reproduction down into a rational and quantitative affair, through the sensibilities of neoliberal number games, is to lose some of the awe and mystery of our very descent, of our connection to nameless mothers and unknown ancestors.

There are infinite strands of nature *and* culture in these twists of reproduction, forming “interwoven patterns of inheritance over immense temporal horizons” (Van Dooren, 2014, p. 41). These histories of descent do not exempt our responsibilities, as human subjects, of ethically examining our modes of making kinship, as these impact on other humans and non-humans alike. Rather, they may enhance our capacity to become response-able to unborn others. Even trying to imagine becoming a parent or raising a child within conditions of ecological and political crises may invite a deeper ethical accountability to others. In doing so, the prevailing melancholic mood of advanced capitalism might be resisted, as the life-giving force of desire is redirected outward, toward the shape of social power relations. This is about response-ability at the level of subjectivity, including in how we experience and narrate desire. Such a desire is non-innocent, capable of becoming response-able to the histories of colonisation and extraction which have brought us here, to the ruins of capitalism. And yet desire wants more: it escapes from the window, flies on, leaves the story untold.

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APPENDIX I: Recruitment Poster

MOTHERHOOD & CLIMATE CHANGE

*Is climate change
affecting how you feel
about having children?*

Consider sharing your
story with me, in a
confidential research
interview.

Kia ora, my name's Leola
Meynell and I'm under-
taking this research on
motherhood and climate
change as part of my PhD
thesis in Psychology at
Massey University.

If you would like to hear
more about the project
and participation, please
contact me via the details
provided below.



PARTICIPANTS MUST BE:

- Self-identifying women
(including transwomen)
- Between 18-40 years old
- Based in Central and/or
Lower North Island
- Proficient in English

Email: motherhood.climatechange@gmail.com

Phone: [REDACTED]

APPENDIX II: Information Sheet



Motherhood and environmental catastrophe: Women's reproductive choices in response to evidence of climate change

INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher

Tēnā koe. My name is Leola Meynell, and I am conducting this research as part of my Doctor of Philosophy degree, under the supervision of Professor Mandy Morgan and Dr Clifford van Ommen, School of Psychology, Massey University. If you have any questions, please feel welcome to contact either myself, Mandy, or Clifford by phone or email. Our contact details are provided on the last page.

Research project

I am interested in how climate change is affecting women's decisions to have children in Aotearoa New Zealand. Women are increasingly speaking out about the fear and apprehension they feel about bringing children into a world so threatened by ecological destruction. I hope to understand some of the ways women are making sense of and living with this fear, including choosing to have children and choosing *not* to have children. The research project will be a safe, non-judgmental, private, and confidential space in which to talk about your experiences and understandings of what motherhood means in the context of climate change. The project is inclusive and welcoming of all self-identifying women, including transwomen.

Participants

Participants must be at least 18 years old, proficient in English, and based in the Central and/or Lower North Island. Up to 12 participants will be involved in the study. I am recruiting participants through snowball sampling and circulation of posters. I have circulated posters in relevant community locations. Trusted intermediary contacts from

within my own social networks have also circulated this information sheet amongst women whom they know and who they think might be interested in taking part in the research. Therefore, you may have received this information sheet because someone that I trust knows you and thinks you might be interested in the project; or, you saw the poster and contacted me directly for more information.

What this study will involve

If you decide to take part in this study, you will have the opportunity to share your stories with me, either by engaging in a face-to-face or zoom interview with me, Leola; or by exchanging written exchanges with me, Leola, either by email or letter writing. The interview and/or written exchanges will be semi-structured and conversational. I will begin by asking you some basic questions about your experiences of understanding motherhood in relation to climate change, but I hope that your insights and responses will direct our discussion. Prior to collecting stories, I will meet with any interested women to discuss the research, establish any cultural support needed, and obtain your written informed consent. I expect that interviews and/or written exchanges will take approximately one hour to complete, but if you would like to talk or write to me for longer than that, I will make sure I have the time available. In-person interviews will take place in private discussion rooms in libraries most conveniently located to you, or, if you prefer, in your own home. If being interviewed in your own home, we will have a conversation about safety needs first, to ensure both participant and researcher safety. If participants require childcare services during interviews, your preferences will be discussed and reimbursement for childcare services will be provided. All participants will receive a \$35 grocery voucher as a koha/thank you for giving their time. If engaging in in-person interviews, participants will be provided with refreshments during the interview.

It is possible that discussing the implications of climate change on your understandings and negotiations of motherhood might bring up distressing feelings or memories, such as anxiety and grief. Therefore, I ask all participants to nominate a trusted support person from your personal network to be available for you to talk with before or after the interview. Support persons are also welcome to attend the interview with you. If you do not wish to nominate a support person, I will discuss professional supports available in your local area. Selected nationwide support services are printed at the end of this information sheet and are available to all participants.

Project procedures

If you decide to participate, it will be important that you understand the purpose and procedures of the research, and on that basis, sign an informed consent form before your interview. Participation is confidential, and I will take steps to protect participants' privacy. Interviews will be digitally sound recorded and stored on a password-protected cloud drive. Email exchanges will not be left in my email account, but will be transferred to a password protected online cloud and then deleted from the email

account, for safety purposes. In being sensitive to the potential meaningfulness of hand-written letters for participants, participants can request for these to not be destroyed after being digitised; digital copies will be stored in a password protected online cloud, and physical copies will be stored in a locked location in my supervisor's office, apart from consent forms and transcript release forms.

I will be transcribing the interviews myself, and participants' names and identifying details will be removed from transcripts and emails/letters, with pseudonyms being used instead. If you decide to participate, you will have the option of choosing your own pseudonym. Digital notes from the research project will be retained in a password-protected cloud until my thesis has been graded. Informed consent forms and transcript release forms will be kept for a minimum of five years; they will be securely stored by my primary supervisor. Digital transcripts and emails/letters must also be kept for a minimum of five years; these will be stored in a password-protected cloud, apart from consent and transcript release forms.

Before I begin the data analysis, participants will have the opportunity to read, consider, and request changes to their individual interview transcripts or emails/letters. If participants are satisfied with the accuracy of their transcripts and emails/letters and consent for extracts from them to be used in my analysis, they will be asked to sign a transcript release form. Participants will be asked to return copies of their interview transcripts and emails/letters. Participants can withdraw from the research at any time, up until releasing the transcript for analysis. When the research is finished, participants will be confidentially contacted, to discuss the findings and have an opportunity to give feedback. The research project is qualitative, based on feminist standpoint epistemologies and narrative analysis methodologies. I have selected this design as it emphasises participants' perspectives, understandings, and stories, whilst recognising the diversity of women's backgrounds and experiences.

Participants' Rights:

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question.
- Withdraw from the study (at any time up until your transcript has been finalised or analysis of the transcript has commenced).
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation.
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used.
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- Ask for the audio recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Participation is voluntary. If you would like to participate, please contact me (Leola) directly to arrange a meeting. You do not need to tell the person who passed on this information sheet whether or not you intend to contact me. Thank you for taking the time to consider my project.

Researchers' contact details:

Leola Meynell: [REDACTED] motherhood.climatechange@gmail.com

Mandy Morgan: (06) 356-9099, ext. 85075, C.A.Morgan@massey.ac.nz

Clifford Van Ommen: (09) 441-8175, ext. 43114, c.vanOmmen@massey.ac.nz

Professional support agencies available nationwide:

[Need to talk? 1737](#) is Aotearoa New Zealand's national mental health helpline. Call or text 1737 to talk with a trained mental health counsellor, free and available 24/7.

[Parent Help](#) is a non-judgmental, confidential helpline for parents and whānau who need support on a range of parenting concerns. Available to call from 9am-9pm, Monday to Sunday. Ph. 0800-568-856 or email info@parenthelp.org.nz.

[Safe to Talk](#) is a sexual harm helpline provided by the Ministry of Health NZ. They offer 24/7 confidential support by trained specialists. Ph. 0800-044-344, email support@safetotalk.nz, or live chat at <https://safetotalk.nz>.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 21/01. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Negar Partow, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 04 801 5799 x 63363, email humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz.

No external funding has been received for this research project.

APPENDIX III: Interview Schedule

Motherhood and environmental catastrophe: Women's reproductive choices in response to evidence of climate change

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interviews are semi-structured and conversational, based on principles of feminist research ethics and Margareta Hyden's teller-focussed interviewing (2013). An introduction and opening questions will be used to begin the conversation and develop rapport, however, it is hoped that participants' stories and perspectives will lead the interview. If needed, further open-ended questions can be used to deepen the conversation and elicit responses.

Introduction

Kia ora. Thank you for taking part in my research and giving your time to be interviewed today. I really value and appreciate your contribution. I want to begin by emphasising that I hope you'll feel emotionally safe here – it's a judgment-free zone and there are no 'right or wrong answers'. Although I have some prompts that I'll refer to if needed, I hope you'll feel comfortable to share any feelings, thoughts, and reflections that come to mind. The main purpose of the interview is for you to explore and tell your own story, and for me to listen.

If at any time you would like to take a break, or ask additional questions about the research, please feel free to do so. Do you have any other questions or concerns to discuss, before we begin? Is it okay for me to turn on the recorder now?

- Introduce myself and my reasons for researching the topic
- Ask participants to introduce themselves
- Break ice by talking about climate change, how it's affecting our social worlds, etc

PROMPTS

Opening questions

- Have you found yourself thinking about how climate change might affect having children?

If required to expand participant's story:

- Can you tell me about your experience of coming to have these thoughts / feelings?
 - Are there any particular moments or experiences which are significant to you in coming to think this way?
- Can you tell me who/what informed your understandings of climate change?
 - News / media?
 - Books?
 - Podcasts?
 - Friends? Family members? Intimate partner?
 - Community groups?
 - Online networks and social media?
- Can you tell me what feelings you have experienced along this journey to realising that climate change might affect having children?
 - Note: Unpack emotions which participants have already referred to in interview. Refer participants to feeling wheel (see Appendix I). Possible examples:
 - Generalised anxiety about climate change?
 - Fear of bringing children into the world?
 - A sense of optimism or despair?
 - Frustration at political inaction?
 - A commitment to reduce carbon emissions?
 - Guilt for having children or wanting to have children?
 - Anger, confusion, sadness, grief?

Who

- Who have you engaged about these concerns?
 - Intimate partner / girlfriend, boyfriend / spouse?
 - Family?
 - Friends?
 - Online community?
 - Other?
- If participant is/was partnered – can you tell me how you talk / talked about this with your intimate partner?
 - Do you both have similar concerns?
 - Is it easy to talk about?
 - Any tensions or other difficult emotions?
 - How has this change over time?
 - Do you experience any gendered pressures – e.g., a sense of responsibility to have children as a woman within an intimate partner relationship?
- Family
 - Do you talk about it?
 - How do they respond?
 - How does this make you feel?
- Friends, online community, etc
 - How important are these communities for facilitating your experiences and decisions?
 - How do they make you feel?
 - Supported and understood? Or...?
 - How has this changed over time?

Motherhood

- Can you remember how you felt about motherhood as a child and young person?
 - Did you experience a belief or expectation that you would become a mother?
 - No? How did you experience that?
 - Was there social pressure? E.g., comments from grandparents about having children.
- How do you understand motherhood and parenting in relation to climate change?
 - What emotions come up? (If needed, refer participants to emotions wheel (Appendix I)).
 - What kind of ways of negotiating these emotions and understandings have you found?
 - E.g., therapy, talking with friends, finding support in environmental activism?

- How effective are these engagements for you?
- If partnered, do you engage in these practices with your partner? How does your partner experience these emotions and responses similarly / differently?

On making reproductive decisions:

- If choosing to not have children:
 - How do you experience this decision?
 - What are the difficulties? E.g., emotional, practical, relational?
 - Why have you made this decision?
- If choosing to have children:
 - How do you experience this decision?
 - What are the difficulties? E.g., emotional, practical, relational?
 - Why have you made this decision?
- If already have children, but only a certain number:
 - How do you experience this decision?
 - What are the difficulties? E.g., emotional, practical, relational?
 - Why have you made this decision?
- If choosing to foster / engage in motherhood differently?
 - How do you experience this decision?
 - What are the difficulties? E.g., emotional, practical, relational?
 - Why have you made this decision?

Other ways of making kin

- What do you imagine the future will look like?
- What are your hopes and fears for our world?
- Are there any images that spring to mind when you think about this issue? Are there any that you are willing to share?
- How do you think we can learn to live in the midst of what's already been lost / destroyed?
- How might motherhood (all kinds of motherhood) as a practice be important here?

APPENDIX IV: Statements of Contribution



GRADUATE
RESEARCH
SCHOOL

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS

We, the student and the student's main supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the student's contribution as indicated below in the Statement of Originality.

Student name:	Leola Meynell		
Name and title of main supervisor:	Professor Mandy Morgan		
In which chapter is the manuscript/published work?	Chapter 2 (Article 1)		
Describe the contribution that the student and members of the supervisory team have made to the manuscript/published work: ¹ Article written and edited by PhD candidate as sole author.			
Please select one of the following three options:			
☒	The manuscript/published work is published or in press Please provide the full reference of the research output: Meynell, L. (2023). Re(storying) gender and climate change: Feminist ethical possibilities. <i>Ethics & the Environment</i> , 28(2), 81-115.		
☐	The manuscript is currently under review for publication Please provide the name of the journal:		
☐	It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal		
Student's signature:	Leola Meynell Digitally signed by Leola Meynell DN: cn=Leola Meynell, email=leola.meynell@massey.ac.nz Reason: I agree to the specified portions of this document Location: Massey Date: 2026.02.26 11:07:23 +13'00'	Main supervisor's signature:	Mandy Morgan Digitally signed by Mandy Morgan DN: cn=Mandy Morgan, o=Massey University, ou=School of Psychology email=c.morgan@massey.ac.nz Reason: I agree to the specified portions of this document Date: 2026.02.26 15:23:30 +13'00'

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Student name:	Leola Meynell
Name and title of main supervisor:	Professor Mandy Morgan
In which chapter is the manuscript/published work?	Chapter 4 (Article 2)
Describe the contribution that the student and members of the supervisory team have made to the manuscript/published work: ¹ Article written and edited by PhD candidate. Supervision team gave theoretical advice on the substantive arguments and guidance on the methodological approach.	
Please select one of the following three options:	
☒	The manuscript/published work is published or in press Please provide the full reference of the research output: Meynell, L., Morgan, M., & van Ommen, C. (2023). 'Is it okay to have a child?': Figuring subjectivities and reproductive decisions in response to climate change. <i>Subjectivity</i> , 31, 16-41.
☐	The manuscript is currently under review for publication Please provide the name of the journal:
☐	It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal
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Name and title of main supervisor:	Professor Mandy Morgan		
In which chapter is the manuscript/published work?	Chapter 6 (Article 3)		
Describe the contribution that the student and members of the supervisory team have made to the manuscript/published work: ¹ Article written and edited by PhD candidate as sole author.			
Please select one of the following three options:			
☒	The manuscript/published work is published or in press Please provide the full reference of the research output: Meynell, L. (2024). "I Cannot Bring A Child Into This World": Hearing And Writing I Poems With BirthStrike Testimonials. The Qualitative Report, 29(4), 1149-1172.		
☐	The manuscript is currently under review for publication Please provide the name of the journal:		
☐	It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal		
Student's signature:	 Leola Meynell Digitally signed by Leola Meynell DN: cn=Leola Meynell, email=leameynell@massey.ac.nz Reason: I agree to the specified portions of this document Location: Massey Date: 2026.02.26 11:11:36 +13'00'	Main supervisor's signature:	 Mandy Morgan Digitally signed by Mandy Morgan DN: cn=Mandy Morgan, o=Massey University, ou=School of Psychology email=c.a.morgan@massey.ac.nz Reason: I agree to the specified portions of this document Date: 2026.02.26 15:25:00 +13'00'
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Student name:	Leola Meynell
Name and title of main supervisor:	Professor Mandy Morgan
In which chapter is the manuscript/published work?	Chapter 8 (Article 4)
Describe the contribution that the student and members of the supervisory team have made to the manuscript/published work: ¹ Article written and edited by PhD candidate. Supervision team gave theoretical advice on the substantive arguments and guidance on the methodological approach.	
Please select one of the following three options:	
☐	The manuscript/published work is published or in press Please provide the full reference of the research output:
☒	The manuscript is currently under review for publication Please provide the name of the journal: Feminism & Psychology
☐	It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal
Student's signature:	Leola Meynell Digitally signed by Leola Meynell DN: cn=Leola Meynell, email=leomeynell@massey.ac.nz Reason: I agree to the specified portions of this document Location: Massey Date: 2026.02.26 11:14:06 +13'00'
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