

Article

Reproductive Rights and Ecofeminism

Sally L. Kitch 

Women and Gender Studies, School of Social Transformation, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 86287-6403, USA; skitch@asu.edu

Abstract: The U.S. Supreme Court's reversal of *Roe v. Wade* in its *Dobbs* decision in June 2022 came as a shock. Yet, upon reflection, the decision simply reinforced what history has shown: women's rights and opportunities have always been subject to controls, fluctuations, and specious rationales. *Dobbs* is one in a long line of legal edicts in the U.S. and elsewhere that either allow or curtail and control female agency, including reproductive agency. The decision's devastating consequences for U.S. women's reproductive lives are damaging enough, but they are only part of the story. In addition to its hobbling effects on reproductive rights and justice, the *Dobbs* decision goes hand in hand with the underlying causes of today's unparalleled environmental emergency. This article argues, through ecofeminist theory and feminist and Native American climate fiction, that *Dobbs* is a catalyst for understanding the role of patriarchy—as a particularly insidious form of androcentrism—in the destruction of our planet. Evidence is mounting to support claims made by ecofeminists since the 1970s: patriarchy and resulting masculinist values have been foundational to the extractive and exploitative attitudes and practices regarding marginalized peoples, colonized lands, and racialized entitlements to natural resources that have endangered the earth's biosystems.

Keywords: ecofeminism; reproductive rights; reproductive justice; environmental justice; pregnancy; *Roe v. Wade*; *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*; abortion; U.S. Supreme Court; feminist climate fiction; Native American climate fiction; Louise Erdrich; Bina Shah; Octavia Butler; Margaret Atwood; William Sanders

1. Introduction

Americans were warned. In fact, the decision was leaked a few weeks before the final draft was published. Still, the U.S. Supreme Court's reversal of the landmark 1973 abortion rights case *Roe v. Wade* in its *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision in June 2022 came as a shock. It took several days before the realization fully hit—'twas ever thus. The decision offered a stark reminder that only the deluded should expect unimpeded progress toward full female personhood and the legal recognition of women's agency in all aspects of their lives. In truth, the rights and opportunities that women enjoy have always been subject to controls, fluctuations, and specious rationales. *Dobbs* is one decision in a long line of legal edicts in societies across the globe that either allow or curtail and control female agency, including reproductive agency.¹ Instead of acknowledging female reproductive capacity as a source of social and political power, such rulings and resulting policies throughout history have turned it into a liability. Indeed, the Justices supporting the biopolitics implicit in the *Dobbs* ruling declared that it was “beyond their constitutional authority to evaluate and protect the interests of pregnant people thereby eliminating any consideration of how the burdens of pregnancy and parenthood actually affect pregnant people.” More egregiously, excluding that consideration from their “analyses [obscures] how legal prohibitions on abortion disproportionately burden pregnant people of color, particularly the poor, and is an exercise of biopower that works to maintain institutionalized white supremacy” (Daum 2022, pp. 476–76).²

After nearly fifty years of a constitutionally guaranteed right to abortion, albeit with numerous restrictions and caveats, the United States once again deliberately disregards



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the link between female reproductive capacity and limited life prospects for birth-givers, thereby reinstating conventional gender conventions just as (and perhaps in reaction to) other social developments have loosened “maleness and femaleness from their symbolic principles” (Frazier 2016, p. 57).³ In the absence of state-by-state progressive abortion guidelines, especially those addressing rape, incest, and the well-being of pregnant bodies and minds, the U.S. is now a nation in which almost anyone with functioning male reproductive anatomy (including rapists, fathers, brothers, and funny uncles) has *de facto* legal permission to shape the future of any fertile female, regardless of her age, wishes, beliefs, or aspirations.

These consequences for U.S. women’s reproductive agency, identities, and lifeways are devastating enough. Yet, they are only part of the story. In addition to its hobbling effects on reproductive rights and justice, the *Dobbs* decision goes hand in hand with the underlying forces in many industrialized cultures that have produced today’s unparalleled environmental emergency. While reproductive rights activists in the U.S. protest the devastating effects of the *Dobbs* decision, they should also consider deeper linkages to environmental feminist (or ecofeminist) claims and activism. The U.S. case might also inform theorists and activists elsewhere as they explore the interconnections among social issues, attitudes, and forces in their own societies that may on the surface seem unrelated. Ecofeminism in the 2020s links those forces by articulating “a clear connection between the treatment of the bodies of women, the enslaved, the disabled, and the racialized, and the treatment of lands, animals, and plants: they are all naturalized terrains of experimentation or conquest” (Bahaffou and Gorecki 2020, p. xvii). By offering a moment of clarity about the role of patriarchy—as a particularly insidious form of androcentrism—in the callous limitation of female reproductive agency, the *Dobbs* decision invites an ecofeminist interpretation of its relationship to the destruction of our planet and to the biopolitics of environmental sustainability.

2. Embracing Ecofeminism

Implicit in ecofeminism’s mission is the connection between “the domination and oppression of women [and] the rampant exploitation of nature through masculin[ist] methods and attitudes” (Sarkar 2022). That does not mean that all men are exploiters of Nature and/or women, but rather that (mostly) Western capitalist/colonialist concepts of masculinity often lead to a “*masculinist* insensitivity to the bonds between human beings and ecogenic environments [that are] triggering and driving climate change—drought, floods, extreme weather, desertification, loss of arable land, loss of species, shrinking aquifers, and displacement of people” (Ralph 2021, p. 72; quoting Gaard 2017, p. 145). *Masculinist* is a term widely adopted to describe methods and attitudes supporting male dominance and involving “values and practices of competition, hierarchy, aggression, territorialism, confrontation, monopolization, and domination” (Ralph 2021, p. 71). The term is typically employed to connect concepts of privilege often implicit in male gender identities and the institutions of societies, especially industrialized and capitalist societies, that in turn perpetuate male privilege and characteristics associated with conventional masculinity.⁴

In contrast, “ecofeminist values and the practices that they define refer to cooperation, negotiation, compromise, nonhierarchical relations, empathy, sharing of space and place, listening, dialogue, and actively endeavoring to mitigate, [avoid], and [reduce] suffering and [prevent] violent confrontation” (Ralph 2021, p. 72). Many ecofeminists conclude that “we have to tear the planet away” from masculinist values (and the people who hold them) “in order to restore it for the humanity of tomorrow” (D’Eaubonne 2020, p. 221).

Such definitions do not simply blame male bad actors for the myriad forces driving nature’s commoditization and exploitation “to the point of destruction” (Merchant 1990, pp. 100–5). Rather, they encompass multiple symptoms and forces that huddle under the masculinist umbrella, such as white supremacy, extractive capitalism, and settler colonialism. *Masculinist* can also apply to women who support male dominance and adopt

exploitative values or who have driven or benefited from the exploitation of resources and peoples in conquered lands, as well as kidnapped slaves. *Masculinist* also complicates *Anthropocene* as an appropriate descriptor of the current geological era, as not all humans or all men have driven the social and industrial systems degrading the geochemical systems of the earth. *Masculinist* also complicates *Western* as the sole geographical term to describe the planetary location of polluters and exploiters. For example, China's historical role in industrialization and its current consumption of resources and fossil fuels compounds Euro-American industrial stresses on the ecological systems of the planet. Chinese labor practices also exploit female workers and penalize mothers in the workforce, while promoting a higher birthrate, all in the name of patriotic economic progress.⁵

There are reasons to critique ecofeminism, including the way some ecofeminists, along with other environmentalists, have thoughtlessly appropriated indigenous knowledges and worldviews without acknowledging their own history of "settler complicity in genocide within [the] occupied Indigenous territories" (Simpson 2004, p. 375). Even the term *feminism* may suggest "colonial logics" to some indigenous peoples. This objection has prompted "Indigenous feminists . . . to unsettle the 'feminist unification project' that pervades mainstream feminism" (Nixon 2015).

Other concerns about *ecofeminism* include the possibility that the concept conforms to stereotypes about women's inherent connection with or sensitivity to nature or attributes women's care-taking behaviors and attitudes about family and nature to gender genetics, rather than to socialization and role expectations. It is also worrying that ecofeminism might be construed to mean that women are primarily responsible for fixing today's environmental crisis.

Despite these concerns, more recent articulations of ecofeminism seem increasingly necessary for exposing and addressing the cultural elements of environmental science and policy. Adopting a gender lens helps to clarify both how the human species has arrived at this moment of environmental crisis and how we might proceed from here. Evidence is mounting to support claims made by ecofeminists since the 1970s: the attitudes, assumptions, and values that create gender hierarchies and oppression—endemic to patriarchy—reflect the attitudes, assumptions, and values driving the forces—including racism, extractive commodity capitalism, and settler colonialism—that threaten the ecological systems of and human survival on our planet. Since it has not much abated over time, patriarchy—typically understood as a system in which males are considered naturally superior to females and therefore rightly empowered to control their opportunities, achievements, and behaviors—can still be seen as foundational to the extractive and exploitative attitudes and practices regarding peoples, land, and natural resources that have endangered the earth's biosystems.

This conclusion represents decades of analysis and debate among feminist philosophers, theorists, historians, economists, and environmental scientists about the interconnection between human-made environmental hazards, including global warming and patriarchal social and economic systems and practices.⁶ *Patriarchal* in this usage, therefore, encompasses "not only male dominance but all the institutionalized inequities of sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, and anthropocentrism, buttressed and reinforced through militarism [and] capitalism" (Gaard 2017, p. 117). It also entails dualistic thinking, positing oppositional dyads, such as nature/culture, them/us, black/white, primitive/civilized, good/evil, human/animal, as the principles of social and natural organization.

By the 2000s, theorists across the spectrum concluded that gender is "the most significant factor in resource struggles and environmental change, rights, and knowledges across scales," from environmental and energy policies to household livelihood struggles. Gender's significance is evident in the division and unequal valuation of labor, household decision-making practices, agrarian restructuring, agribusiness, international development processes, colonial racial categorizations, post-colonial development projects, and industrial development utilizing extracted minerals and fossil fuels (Mollett 2017, pp. 147–49).

On this point, Native Americans and other environmental feminists can agree. Native American writer Louise Erdrich, for example, “makes it clear that ecofeminism is not solely a woman’s issue. Its values belong equally to Indigenous men and women who hold the land as sacred, not a possession that can easily be sold away” (Blend 2022, p. 209). This convergence of beliefs reinforces the urgency of transforming the attitudes, assumptions, and values that create gender hierarchies and all forms of social oppression in order to transform the attitudes, assumptions, and values driving the behaviors that endanger human well-being on our planet.

3. Reproductive Injustice and Environmental Hazards

The need to transform values and attitudes to avoid environmental catastrophe points back to *Dobbs*, a decision dominated by Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito’s judicial and social philosophy. Legal experts who have studied Alito’s decisions over time align his thinking with masculinist values. Alito apparently considers white Western (Christian) men the proper guardians of cultural and legal authority—those entitled to set standards and interpret truth and laws for others. Folks not in his demographic category—including Blacks, Muslims, Indigenous people, and all women—do not share this entitlement. Although Alito sometimes displays empathy in his opinions, it “rarely extends to people who are not like him.” Even at this moment, when Court decisions are going his way, Alito remains angry at a changing U.S. society “that is increasingly diverse and secular.” Like other white Christian American males who share his view, Alito resents a society that does not respect his authority: “they find their values increasingly contested; they want to exclude whom they want to exclude and resent it when others push back” (Talbot 2022, pp. 34–37).

This patriarchal and essentially racist perspective is significant for environmental issues because it suggests the obsessions of a belief system the U.S.-based Sierra Club calls *ecofascism*.⁷ Conspiracy theories central to ecofascism warn against an alleged scheme to replace Christian whites with immigrants, Jews, and non-white people. Blaming such allegedly inferior beings for today’s environmental destruction is part of the theory, as ecofascists deny that white-controlled mega-corporations and settler colonialists have historically been the worst polluters.⁸ Banning abortion and opposing immigration are ecofascist strategies for stymieing the replacement conspiracy, because the two together will help replenish what Justice Alito refers to in his decision as the “domestic supply of [white] infants” so that white racial dominance in the U.S. can continue. (Not reducing the reproductive hazards faced by people of color, as outlined below, can also be seen as part of that anti-replacement conspiracy strategy.)

Many ecofascists in the U.S. oppose action to reduce global warming by eliminating carbon emissions as an affront to white patriarchal/capitalist/colonial power, which allegedly emanates from industrial might and its key driver, fossil fuels (Hernandez-Simmons 2022; Westervelt 2022). Denying and curtailing female reproductive rights to ensure a robust birth rate for white women (and to put female reproductive agency in male hands) is consistent with promoting capitalist extractive and industrial power without concern for ecological consequences. A sense of entitlement to the appropriation of female reproductive labor and its “products” by those presumed to be their moral superiors not only echoes the colonial extractive appropriation of nature’s resources, but it also disregards the link between reproductive health and environmental policies and practices.⁹

Dobbs distills patriarchal imperialism down to the control of pregnancy and birthing based on the assumption that people doing that labor are female and are therefore, according to antiquated religious and English legal theory (which Alito cites in his decision), rightly subject to institutionalized male control. *Dobbs* also reflects an egregious application of biopolitics in which the Court majority implies that in *Dobbs*’ wake, pregnant bodies have become “base objects” understood for their use value and commoditized by the state (Featherstone 2021, p. 129). Once impregnated, those objects have one purpose, and any interference with that purpose can now be classified in many U.S. states as a

criminal act. Current threats to track pregnant people to make sure they ultimately give birth and do not fake a miscarriage or otherwise interfere with a pregnancy's trajectory toward the production of a baby provide chilling evidence of this commoditization. In privileging the products of pregnancy—fetuses and babies—over the people who do the heavy lifting and take the greatest risks to generate those products—pregnant birth-givers—*Dobbs* and other specious anti-abortion rationales reflect the mores of imperialist extractive capitalism and settler colonialism. Historically, those economic and political systems have also privileged products over processes, appropriated the labor and creations of others, taken credit for “discoveries” and knowledge usurped from conquered peoples who have long stewarded valued resources, and privileged conquerors' entitlement to extract and commandeer resources above concerns for the well-being of the planet or the potentially harmful consequences for the people who make industrial success possible.¹⁰

Environmental injustice, or the inequitable distribution of environmental hardships, is a related instrument in this imperialist (also ecofascist) toolbox, as racism and anti-immigrant sentiment shape patterns of environmental burdens, climate hazards, and environmental politics. Most importantly for ecofeminism, such effects of environmental injustice subject marginalized populations to reproductive harm.

In the U.S., those populations are increasingly forced to live and work in conditions that threaten their overall health. They are therefore less able to control decisions about their bodies and childbearing and less likely to give birth and raise children in safe and healthy environments. Since the 1970s, for example, Federal low-income housing projects have routinely been built in areas contaminated by toxic waste dumps, power plants, fuel pipelines, oil refineries, and petrochemical plants, thereby jeopardizing reproductive health for 1.5 million people of color. Indeed, 70 percent of the country's contaminated waste sites are located near low-income housing. Evidence is strong that living in such polluted environments severely impacts women's reproductive health, produces low birth weights, delays child development, and impedes the formation of babies' nervous systems, musculoskeletal systems, and integuments (*Vrijheid 2014*). It is hard not to see in this data echoes of the white supremacy that shapes both ecofascism and anti-abortion animus.

Indigenous communities in many nations have also been subjected to reproductive commoditization and harm by colonial forces. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson explains regarding Indigenous Canadians: “Initially, in the absence of white women, colonizers positioned and used Indigenous women for sexual gratification. By the mid-nineteenth century, the colonizers positioned all the sexual autonomy (and autonomy in general) of Indigenous women to be illicit—especially if it occurred ‘in public,’ the domain of white men.” Illicit sexuality included “any expression of relationship outside of churchwed, monogamous marriages between men and women of the same ‘race’” (*Simpson 2017*, p. 107). In the U.S., the reservation system and the Indian School system designed to socialize Native American children and families into mainstream white, heterosexual, patriarchal normativity, served a related purpose—to punish those families for deviations from colonists' sexual and reproductive values and practices (*Kitch 2009*, p. 192).

A sense of entitlement to control and manage female reproductive labor and products by those presumed to be their moral superiors has not only diminished indigenous self-determination, but it has also disregarded the link between reproductive health and environmental policies and practices. Like other marginalized groups in the U.S., Native American communities have been disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards that threaten reproductive health, often because of resource extraction and environmental contamination of Native American lands by mining and other industries.¹¹ Katsi Cook, founder of the Akwesasne (Mohawk) Mothers' Milk Project, explains: ‘We accumulate toxic chemicals like PCBs, DDT, Mirex, HCBs, etc., dumped into the waters by various industries. They are stored in our body fat and are excreted primarily through breast milk. What that means is that through our own breast milk, our sacred natural link to our babies, they stand the chance of getting concentrated dosages.’ Her project found that women who ate fish from the St. Lawrence River, contaminated by General Motors' dumping, had a 200 percent

greater concentration of PCBs in their breast milk than those who did not eat fish from the river (Nixon 2015, pp. 18–19).

Environmental hazards and human caused climate disruption also play a role in limiting access to family planning and other reproductive services, as well as in the increase in women's victimization by domestic violence and abuse, sexual assault, and femicide, all of which escalate following climate crises such as blizzards and hurricanes (Law Students for Reproductive Justice 2015). The mounting scientific evidence that environmental crises negatively affect female reproductive health and fetal health and hasten preterm birth, pregnancy-related deaths, and serious illness, especially among marginalized individuals and communities of color, led 28 organizations to sign a letter in November 2022 asking the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to establish a staff position devoted to reproductive justice. Their conclusion: "Reproductive justice is climate justice. Racial justice is climate justice" (Zaghab 2022).

These intersectional eco-reproductive causes and consequences converge in the *Dobbs* decision. Among the realities ignored by the Court and anti-abortion activists who celebrate *Dobbs* are the hazardous conditions under which significant portions of the U.S. population live. Forced pregnancies and birth-giving inflict undue hardships under such circumstances, which are exacerbated by conditions of poverty that make birthing three times as life-threatening for Black and Native American as for white populations. In addition, having disregarded medical science in making the *Dobbs* decision, the Court also ignored the overwhelming evidence that pregnancy and childbirth for anyone are more dangerous to the birth-giver of any race or class than abortion is (Thompson 2021).¹² Furthermore, *Dobbs* throws abortion decisions and guidelines back to the states, many of which have historically demonstrated their callous disregard for the health and well-being of pregnant people and disinterest in the welfare of babies after birth. The *Dobbs* decision thereby lets the U.S. federal government off the hook for its environmentally irresponsible—if not criminal—actions that have jeopardized birth-giving and reproductive health for marginalized populations over the past 50 years, while not requiring states to improve on the federal government's record.

In short, the *Dobbs* decision separates reproduction from social realities and justice issues—including environmental justice issues—in favor of a self-righteous commitment to a poorly defined abstraction—the right to life. The decision makes clear that the right to life does not in any meaningful way apply to pregnant bodies.

4. Harnessing Ecofeminism

Despite its historical omissions and missteps, the concept of ecofeminism can be an important mechanism for addressing links between reproductive politics and environmental harms and injustices. The hybrid term links environmental hazards to distorted and stereotyped views of masculinity and femininity, which echo dualistic hierarchies between nature and culture as well as among racial, class, and geographical identities. Ecofeminism can also be seen as a necessary counteragent against the sad reality that "there is little or no interest in the major role that discrimination against women plays and has been playing in the mainstream disregard for and disinterest in ecogenic environments" (Gaard 2017, pp. 126, 140).

To embrace ecofeminism for this task, it is important to recall that the gender-related standards, capacities, and predilections it describes and variously extolls or decries (and extrapolates from) are not innate to actual men and women. Rather, they reflect the social and cultural boxes into which *masculine* and *feminine* have been shoved to serve various purposes. Those boxes vary among cultures, but there are shared cross-cultural themes. Among them are assumed rather than evidence-based ideas about the relative social and cultural value of males and females and the reproductive differences between the sexes. Cultural biases about the meaning of those ranked distinctions are frequently used to rationalize stark differences in what is permissible or encouraged regarding men's and women's social participation and power, economic rights, public and private behavior,

roles and responsibilities, and a host of other mores and laws that have little to do with the physiological facts of reproduction.

Some theorists suspect that a primary motivation for these biased cultural and social perspectives on gendered value and role prescriptions may result from ancient resentments about women's greater reproductive power, which have produced definitions of manliness that compensate for the relatively minor role men play in propagating the species. Some religions attempted to overcome that weaker role by projecting maleness onto their idea of God(s) and mandating male control of female sexuality and childbearing as holy writ. Religious virginity requirements for female marriageability and harsh penalties for women adulterers also provide men with control over women's reproductive role and agency.

Secular theories of gender and sex similarly reflect efforts to overcome male reproductive dependency on females. Freud's concept of penis envy provides some evidence of this attempt, as does the Freudian idea that "women's sexuality is nothing but what is adopted for man—for man to envy it, is to covet that which is already for his use." According to Freudian theory, a man's "wish to possess aspects of a woman's body is explained as an expression of homosexual longings for the father." Freud dismissed men's "pregnancy wishes as forestallings of castration fears along with a regression to an earlier pregenital stage of sexual development (anal eroticism)" (Kittay 1984, p. 389).

Despite such male-aggrandizing narratives, there is evidence that something like womb envy also exists. Indeed, womb envy (and imitation) often appear in folklore, though penis envy does not (Ducat 2004, p. 43). Evidence for womb envy/imitation includes manhood initiation rituals requiring boys to be symbolically reborn as men by casting off connections with their mothers. Symbolic religious rebirth practices, like baptism, both mimic and attempt to supersede the physical birth process, even using sanctified water to replace the role of amniotic fluid (Bayne 2011). Selecting a virgin to bear a savior may not only sidestep actual female reproductive power, turning a woman into a vessel, but also elevate maleness as the most exalted (even sacred) source of reproduction.

Freudian-type notions of male reproductive and cultural value and purpose, along with resulting masculinist concepts of entitlement, have led some to define (white) Western man as "the measure of humanity... [with] full cognitive and behavioral autonomy to direct the course of the human species itself" (Frazier 2016; quoting Sylvia Wynter, p. 43). Alito could be the poster child for this viewpoint. Having installed himself on the pedestal of control, it follows that such a man's creeping recognition of fatal ecological flaws in his masculinist/extractive/capitalist/industrial project might drive him to exert control over proxies for the capital-N Nature that has rebelled against his geopolitical goals. Having long associated human females with Nature and himself with Culture, the masculinist may regard controlling pregnancy and childbearing as an attractive substitute for controlling Nature. Thus, a sense of entitlement to extract resources and exploit human bodies and labor could logically lead to exploitative, patriarchal reproductive politics, and vice versa.

5. Portents from Dystopia

Again, there were warnings. This time they arose from an unexpected source. Some feminist dystopian climate fiction (cli-fi) writers saw the "eco-reproductive" handwriting on the wall decades ago. Their prescience matters in the way that fiction often matters—it can communicate the fissures, interconnections, and injustices of real worlds in emotionally salient ways that connect with readers and capture their imaginations. Speculative fiction can envision those present-world realities on steroids and immerse readers in a future-scape they cannot otherwise experience. Dystopian speculative fiction, in particular, can help readers "understand the interconnected points of our unwell society as a first step toward restoring our environments" (Frazier 2020).

These literary sources are also relevant because ecofeminism flourishes in many forms and arenas, dystopian speculative fiction being one of them. So, the works of feminist cli-fi writers provide legitimate gender lenses on the intersection of environmental and social challenges, including scenarios in which masculinist reactions to environmental

degradation result in the exploitation of female reproductive power. Indeed, some feminist cli-fi writers saw long ago—before many scholars—how societies might react to a degraded environment (often leading to social disruptions) by increasing reproductive control. In addition, popular fiction can have greater public impact than scholarly work typically does and spread the word about the tenets of ecofeminism more broadly.¹³

Among the works of such writers are several cli-fi novels and stories that foresee the link between environmentally related social decline and increased control over female reproductive agency and identify the mechanism of that control as fundamentalist/imperialist Christian zealotry run amok. Emphasizing this control mechanism operating within a fictional deteriorating capitalist, masculinist society deserves attention in the real-world present for several reasons: anti-abortion Christian propaganda is a tenet of the ecofascism threat; the Justices crafting the *Dobbs* decision espouse conservative Christian religious views; and Christian nationalism is on the rise in the U.S. (and elsewhere), despite constitutional firewalls between church and state.¹⁴ Identifying imperialist forms of Christianity as mechanisms for enforcing repressive reproductive policies gives chilling recognition to present reality, in which U.S. fundamentalists are pushing policies that surveil and criminalize female reproductive agency and enforce clear gender demarcations and hierarchical gender relations.¹⁵

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* connected the eco-reproductive dots in 1985 (Atwood 1985). Although she is Canadian, Atwood's novel depicts the future United States transformed into the Republic of Gilead—a white supremacist, patriarchal, evangelical Christian bastion, dedicated to improving the white (healthy) birth rate through rape and forced surrogate motherhood for young, white, still fertile women. Those Handmaids are persuaded by regime-complicit Aunts that their role as birth slaves is a patriotic one. In truth, though, they have little choice but to comply; the alternative is cleaning up toxic waste.

Gilead emerged after a world conflagration caused by ecological crises that irreparably damaged women's reproductive systems, leaving most infertile. (Although many men also became infertile, by law only women are considered either barren or fruitful.) The putatively Christian Gilead government is militarized in multiple ways, led by Commanders, who embody the Big Man form of politics that has become increasingly familiar in the twenty-first century (Featherstone 2021, pp. 137–38). The Handmaids are forced to bear babies for the Commanders to whom they are assigned (and after whom they are named, as in Of-fred), losing not only their reproductive agency but also their identities. A Handmaid carries her pregnancy to term but participates in a charade in which the Commander's infertile wife surrounds the birth-giving Handmaid with her legs and pretends to be birthing the baby, who is surrendered to her after a brief period. "Unbabies" born with "a pinhead... two bodies, or a hole in its heart or no arms" are called "shredders" and killed. Abortion is illegal but infanticide of the disabled is okay (Sethna 2020, p. 3).

At the time she wrote the novel and since, Atwood has rightly noted that everything she depicted had already happened, in one way or another. She adapted the notion of forced pregnancy, for example, from the forced pregnancies in Hitler's Third Reich, as well as from stories about illegal polygamy involving underage girls in fundamentalist Mormon communities in Utah, among other sources (Sethna 2020, pp. 1–2). Atwood was also alarmed by the rise of the Christian Right in the U.S. in the late 1970s and the fervor within that coalition among conservative (mostly) Christian sects against the recently guaranteed constitutional right to abortion (Atwood 2018). Although most of the organized Christian Right groups have now disbanded, their anti-abortion fervor has infused U.S. politics ever since (McVicar 2018 see also Note 14).

Debauched Christianity also features prominently in cli-fi novels by African American writer Octavia Butler, written in the 1980s and 1990s. In *Parable of the Sower* (Butler 1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (Butler 1998) Butler explicitly links environmental and social degradation with an increase in patriarchal and racist control of women's bodies and

reproductive agency. That combination empowers so-called Christian forces to overtake both governments and social operations.

In *Sower*, a degraded U.S. capitalist society is beset by “neoliberal divestment” of social supports, including free public education and “widespread debt bondage to multinational corporations” (Whatcott 2021; Madhu Dubey quoted in Frazier 2016, p. 49). In this dehumanized neoliberal landscape of 2025, drug addled scavengers called “Paints” are compelled by the drug to rape, pillage, and set destructive fires. The main character Lauren seeks safety from the Paints’ scourge and other hazards created by desperate impoverished people deprived of water, food, healthcare, or any form of protection. She creates an alternative, humane belief system, Earthseed, and leads her followers from Robledo, California, to the Northern California mountains to found an alternative community called Acorn.

Toxic gender relations are emblematic in the novel of the patriarchal distortion of the disrupted world order and accompanying disregard for ecological ethics. A key symbol of that distortion is the minister Richard Moss, who symbolizes the depths to which patriarchal absolutism and masculinist reproductive practices have sunk. Moss has created a quasi-Christian religion in which God demands that men be patriarchal and father as many children as possible. His wealth allows him to assemble a virtual harem of homeless women and live with them in polygamous relationships. He is not alone. Some upper-class men have one wife and a bevy of “beautiful, disposable young servant girls. Nasty.” The women’s capitulation to these arrangements does not ensure their survival, however, as the products of their liaisons have more social value than they do. “When the girls get pregnant, if their rich employers won’t protect them, the employer’s wives throw them out to starve” (Butler 1993, p. 33.) Butler foresaw the commoditization of fetuses and babies in the future U.S. at the expense of the pregnant person’s well-being and rights decades before those anti-abortion hierarchies were codified in *Dobbs*.

Parable of the Talents (Butler 1998), the sequel to *Parable of the Sowers*, is set in the 2030s. The horrors confronting U.S. society have continued and spread. They entail individual and collective social pathologies, including economic inequalities, as well as environmental threats. The governmental infrastructure that should address such calamities has collapsed. Sadly, the novel’s future California looks a lot like a worst-case extrapolation from today’s chilling political and environmental trends in the U.S. (Frazier 2016, p. 48).

Things get worse in the novel over time. In 2032, a Big-Man Christian neoliberal fundamentalist, Andrew Jarret, is elected U.S. president using the slogan: Make America Great Again. (No kidding.) A Christian militia attacks Acorn, thereby dismantling the healing, collective, and ecologically beneficial Earthseed belief system. The invaders overtake Acorn and turn it into a Christian America “re-education camp,” where citizens are enslaved, raped, tortured, forced into inhumane labor, and electronically prevented from escaping. Almost predictably, eco-reproductive convergence results, compounded by other oppressive values and practices. The invaders kidnap Acorn’s children, including Lauren’s daughter Larkin, and adopt them out to “good Christian” families. As these novels make clear, the rise of patriarchal, white/Christian supremacist, neoliberal structures in American society means draconian reproductive control will not be far behind.

Although the novel has a satisfying ending, with the decline of Christian America’s influence, the defeat of Jarret in the next election, and, years later, Earthseed followers’ quest for resettlement in outer space, the politically driven disruption of Lauren and Larkin’s relationship is never fully resolved. That Larkin ends up blaming her mother for the dissolution of their bond is a sad reminder that politics and power grabs can undermine and damage reproductive relationships. Another cautionary tale for the post-*Dobbs* U.S.

Native American writer Louise Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God* (Erdrich 2017) offers another example of the dystopian eco-reproductive convergence and the wresting of reproductive rights and agency by misguided Christian-inspired forces. In Erdrich’s novel, ecological collapse appears to be reversing evolution, turning familiar animals and plants into environmental throwbacks and inciting fear that human babies will also regress to other life forms so the species will disappear (echoes of the “replacement theories”

that incite white supremacists). The parallel political and economic collapse in *Future Home* empowers a diffused unidentified extremist patriarchal regime, riddled with self-righteous Christian fundamentalists, that seeks to stave off species collapse by stalking and imprisoning pregnant women to monitor births and appropriate successful offspring for the state. Few of the kidnapped women survive to tell their tale, further attesting to the disposability of reproductive female life in times of environmental crisis.

The novel's pregnant protagonist, Cedar, is a part-Native American adopted child of loving white parents. Her complicated relationship with her birth and adoptive families reflects the turmoil of racialized reproductive relations in the U.S. After being warned that an extreme religious group, the Unborn Protection Society, has created a police force to abduct pregnant women, Cedar manages to hide herself with the help of Phil, the baby's father, and other supporters, for months. But eventually she is also kidnapped. Cedar lives through her baby's normal birth in captivity, but her son is taken from her. She never finds out where he is. She is then confined to a UPS Birthing Center where women are being forcibly impregnated and made to give birth. Far from ending happily, *Future Home of the Living God* is a striking cautionary tale—published five years before *Dobbs*—about the triple-decker harms of a decimated earthly ecosystem, human reproductive damage, and the appropriation and exploitation of female reproductive power and agency. The novel ends as Cedar recalls the last real snowstorm she experienced as a child, now that there is no snow, no baby, and no life for birth-givers. There is also no end to the potential grief American women now have in store.

U.S. writers are not the only authors of speculative fiction linking religious extremism with reproductive control and environmental destruction. Writing from a Muslim perspective, Pakistani writer Bina Shah's (2018) *Before She Sleeps* is a modern-day *Handmaid's Tale* about women's lives in repressive Muslim countries. Dystopian conditions for reproduction have resulted in the novel from post-nuclear fallout and a deadly disease, HPV (perhaps pre-figuring COVID-19), which have together killed off most women. Scarcity does not elevate female value in the novel, however. Rather, remaining women become more sexually and reproductively exploitable, as in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Even when religious institutions lose their direct power in the novel, religious-related restrictions, such as "female seclusion and veiling, gender selective abortion and infanticide, increase in a truly terrifying... world of post-religious authoritarianism." In the dystopian Green City, remaining women "are... farmed for progeny until exhaustion." Many are forced into polygenist marriages overseen by a coercive Perpetuation Bureau. Whereas Western eco-dystopias may demonstrate how easily rights in liberal societies can be rescinded in social emergencies, Shah shows how extreme patriarchy can become—and how cheap women's lives can be made—when those rights never existed in the first place (Hill 2019).

6. Turning the Tables: Toward Contingency Consciousness

Given the dire state of earth's planetary health and the looming prospect that increasing threats to survival can induce abuses of human power particularly directed at women and marginalized populations, it is sometimes difficult to see ways out of the monumental intersecting social and environmental challenges societies now face. Back in 2018, the IPCC Special Report "should have put to rest any remaining doubts about the [human] sources . . . of climate change" that threaten human and ecosystem health. UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned in 2021: "the state of the planet is broken." Yet the repetition of that fact ever since, including the 2023 IPCC report, does not necessarily convince many people of the urgency of the problem or make solving it a political and social priority. Rather, "structural, social, cultural, and especially political" obstacles "inhibit the pace and scale of implementation... needed to achieve the goals of The Paris Agreement." There is little indication that humanity recognizes the scary fact that we have only 6 to 10 years to alter the current trajectory of greenhouse gas emissions to avoid exceeding the warming levels beyond which ecosystem remediation becomes impossible (Ten New Insights in Climate Science 2021).

This article has demonstrated the role of masculinist perspectives and practices in preventing effective ecosystem remediation, as they have simultaneously sought to limit and control female reproductive agency, not only in the U.S.¹⁶ Patriarchal cultural and political systems have created persistent blind spots among contemporary leaders who fail to adopt more earth-friendly and female-friendly values. Masculinist concepts of success—which some theorists call Western cognitive imperialism—continue to reduce biodiversity, pollute the waters, toxify the air, amplify natural disasters, and generally threaten human and ecosystem health and well-being. This article suggests the importance of understanding the links between those masculinist environmental blind spots and the urge to contain and control female reproductive agency.

Ecofeminists point the way toward ameliorating the toxic impact of masculinist values and practices, such as those explored in this article. The ecofeminist speculative novels surveyed here are even more explicit. They support elevating rather than exploiting and dominating the racialized female subject in order to unleash new energy for creating a sustainable future. Earth's agency and well-being and women's reproductive agency and well-being are parallel planetary forces; knowledge and wisdom now at the margins could infuse the center with new direction. For Erdrich, whose novel ends almost in despair, there is still a message for those who have been transgressed upon by patriarchal, extractive capitalist powers. Native Americans can teach the transgressors whose lifeways are leading to catastrophe, but they also have something to learn. Regaining territorial sovereignty and rights should not be the sole ambitions of decolonial indigenous movements, the novel implies. They must also entail restoring and reinventing women's position in indigenous communities (Siepak 2020, pp. 60, 63, 72).

Octavia Butler also puts a woman of color at the center of a new Creation. In her 1987 novel *Dawn* (Butler 1987), the protagonist Lilith “reframes notions of black maternity, figuring black female reproduction as essential, rather than ancillary or antithetical, to the project of human development,” as Earthly culture typically casts it.¹⁷ In that way, Butler incorporates oppressive history into the future but without allowing that history to impose “a fatalistic limit on what comes next” (Mann and Nash 2018, pp. 62, 65–66). In an interesting link with Erdrich's novel, *Dawn* thus illustrates how human evolution “is constantly being discursively and biologically reconstructed” and relies “on dynamic relationships with other species and environments” (Faucheux 2014; Dowdall 2017). The novel also associates giving women control over human reproduction with the good of the species and the planet. Butler's *Parable* novels build upon *Dawn*'s insights about Black female reproduction as a potentially transformative power. Lauren, for example, is a disabled Black woman who in the present would be regarded as triply disadvantaged—by race, gender, and disability. But for Lauren coping with her invisible disability improves her ability to recognize mechanisms of power and hierarchal systems (Hinton 2018, pp. 451–53). That ability empowers her to fashion a new ethical/religious system, Earthseed, and to envision the racially and ethnically diverse community, Acorn, based on communal and nurturing principles. Lauren's perceptive powers offer hope in novels that otherwise depict women's debased reproductive power and foretell catastrophe ahead if current (masculinist) conditions continue (Canavan 2014).

Moving forward, however, ecofeminists might also consider expanding their perspective on the changes in values and practices that could transform human relationships with the planet and possibly with each other and non-human species. This expansion could entail defining masculinist perspectives as a form of *certainty consciousness*, evident in colonial, imperialist, and patriarchal world views. Thus, in addition to adhering to a hierarchical gender ideology, such perspectives reflect a belief in one's own rightness, which could entail imagining and depending on the permanency of the status quo and the misconstruction of Nature as a permanent force. It could also lead to assuming that present power relationships are the best predictors of and pathway toward the future. There are rewards for this viewpoint, as power often accrues to those who are most certain that their life experience and views are best, regardless of their effects on others. Conventional capitalist

industrialists, as well as certain religious leaders, politicians, and Supreme Court Justices, may be cases in point. Justice Alito's perspectives in the *Dobbs* decision illustrate a certainty consciousness which unthinkingly asserts masculinist entitlement to reproductive control, linked to certainties about various forms of Christian white, patriarchal, and colonialist entitlements.

By the same token, ecofeminism could identify a contrasting perspective as a *contingency consciousness*, which identifies with and respects the fluctuating and conditional processes of natural systems and recognizes the vagaries of human perceptions and systems. A contingency consciousness may develop among individuals or groups whose lives and lifeways depend on the whims or approval of others. They include most women as well as immigrants and members of marginalized sexual, racial, and ethnic groups of all genders, whose well-being hangs on the sufferance of changing regimes and legislative actions, as well as on shifts in political and social attitudes that can transform their positions, identities, and status overnight. People armed with the knowledge of their precarity, as many women necessarily are, may more readily recognize Nature's contingencies and identify their own precarity with the damage humans have inflicted on the earth. The contingent disempowered may also be better than the overconfident powerful at imagining alternative actions and developing perspectives that respond to urgency and promote resiliency, as they have long done in their own lives.

Although female reproductive biology by itself does not determine behavior or attitudes, female reproductive experience may impart a contingency consciousness, as pregnancy and childbirth typically require the anticipation of and adaptation to dramatically changing physical and social conditions. Pregnancy often shapes others' perceptions of pregnant people while it also inflates their bodies, strains their organs, stretches their skin, and spreads their feet. For many, nurturing another being inside one's body can create a new sense of self and life purpose. Such "contingency training" continues as infants' demands blur distinctions between day and night, and the requirements of nursing collapse private and public. Childrearing also requires constant shifts in priorities and unexpected dislocations on an almost daily basis. Partners and friends can participate in some of this contingency training and adaptive behavior, but not all.

Marginalized populations may also develop a contingency consciousness. Native Americans, for example, have long endured highly contingent—even post-apocalyptic—dystopian conditions. After colonial forces catapulted their ways of life and knowledge systems into a genocidal future centuries ago, most tribes experienced "state-sponsored 'extermination, assimilation, and manipulation'" (Christian Jil Benitez, quoted in Blend 2022, p. 211). Native writers often hope to restore contingency-informed knowledge and values to a new lifeway for indigenous peoples, which can include definitions of territory not as a consumable resource but as a place "where everything lives and everything connects in an *ever-moving web of relationships*, and it is through sustaining these connections that everything continues" (Kwaymullina 2017; italics added). A contingency consciousness is nurtured for many Native Americans by this credo: "land and culture are so deeply enmeshed that one does not exist without the other" (Blend 2022, p. 208). Because tribal and individual identities, both male and female, are interdependent with natural systems, humans must learn to align the values and variables of their lives with those systems.

Again, speculative fiction offers a glimpse into a possible near future we cannot otherwise see. Native American writer William Sanders' short story, "When This World Is All on Fire" (Sanders 2000) illustrates the dangers and injustices entailed in a desperate confrontation between a (white male) certainty consciousness and a (Native American) contingency consciousness. The story pillories white patriarchs who cannot overcome feelings of certainty and entitlement, even after ecological and social catastrophe.

"When This World Is All on Fire" begins as white Americans are fleeing from flooded lands in Louisiana and Florida, including Miami, Mobile, Savannah, New Orleans, and even Houston, to seek shelter on Indian reservations. The story takes place on the Cherokee reservation in Oklahoma, but it suggests that white climate refugees will soon flee to

other reservations to escape the desiccated farmlands of southern Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, as well as destructive earthquakes (likely from fracking) in Tennessee and Arkansas. White denizens of water-logged San Francisco and Manhattan will likely follow. Writing in 2000, Sanders imagined the dystopic state of his title years before the world truly caught on fire, as it now arguably has. Even then he realized he was describing a future “that’s already in the process of happening” (Sanders 2000, p. 149).

The sense of entitlement that characterizes the story’s white refugees is clear in their failure to ask permission to enter the reservation or to do whatever they like once they arrive. The reservation police regard these newcomers as dangerous squatters, who are often “careless with fire.” It is the officers’ job to evict them from their make-shift campsites to prevent catastrophe. As one officer, Captain Ridge, attempts to do just that, a middle-aged male squatter in a red baseball cap replies to his friendly greeting with a dismissive, “Go to hell, Indian.” When Ridge reminds the man that the laws they are enforcing “are made by the government of the Cherokee nation,” he sneers, “Nation!... Bunch of woods niggers, hogging good land while white people starve. You got no right.” Threatened with eviction from the reservation, the family’s young son challenges, “You planning to make us?” Riled up by Ridge’s positive response, the boy lunges at the officers screaming “Redskin motherfu__.” Only when the officers threaten to arrest the boy does the family patriarch agree to break camp and leave (Sanders 2000, pp. 156–57).

Demonstrating his certainty consciences, which includes his racism, the red-capped father transforms his wounded sense of racial entitlement into suspicion that Captain Ridge has designs on his teenage daughter. He interprets the officer’s attempt to help the girl, who is clearly alienated from her overbearing and verbally abusive father, as sexually threatening. Encountering her in town a week after the family was supposed to leave, Ridge saves the girl from arrest by paying for a cheap necklace that a merchant saw her slip into her pocket. Noticing her ruined sneakers, Ridge also buys her a simple pair of tennis shoes. When he returns the girl to her family, who have not kept their bargain to leave, the father responds with outrage and makes the girl take off the new shoes, implying that Ridge intended to compromise the girl—and challenge the father’s authority—with the gift. To the father, the girl is sexual meat who represents his patriarchal power; to Ridge, she is the sad, damaged product of a man trapped by certainty about his superiority, even though he has no home or means of supporting his family. Sanders thereby solidifies the connection between environmental arrogance and the compelling patriarchal need to control women as sexual and reproductive property. To the entitled certain, women are paired with Nature as things that must be controlled and appropriated to their use.

The story’s ending with a disastrous wildfire that white squatters have probably set suggests that the last frontier of hope for human survival could easily be decimated in the name of arrogant racial and patriarchal entitlement. With a planet in peril, human survival is sacrificed to white certainty that traditional hierarchical power dynamics must prevail, even if it means species destruction.

That outcome is prefigured in the *Dobbs* decision, which restores patriarchal power after *Roe* to its “rightful” position, even if it means sacrificing the well-being, agency, and survival of birth-givers. And maybe even the species. After all, might makes right. Right?

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Notes

- ¹ In March 2018, the Mississippi Legislature passed HB 1510, the Gestational Age Act, which banned abortion after the first 15 weeks. There are exceptions for a medical emergency or “severe fetal abnormality,” but not for cases of rape or incest. Republican

Gov. Phil Byrant signed the bill on 19 March 2018. Jackson Women’s Health Organization quickly challenged the law, and in November 2018 the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi ruled in the clinic’s favor. In December 2019, the Fifth Circuit unanimously upheld the lower court’s decision. Mississippi appealed that decision to the U.S. Supreme Court in 2021, which issued its ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* June 2022.

1. *Dobbs* effectively struck down the 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*, which had declared and protected a woman’s right to an abortion in the first 24 weeks of pregnancy. Writing for the five-justice majority (with Chief Justice Roberts concurring only in the judgment), Justice Samuel Alito argued that the right to privacy is not specifically guaranteed anywhere in the Constitution. He further argued (on his own authority) that any unenumerated rights must be “deeply rooted in the Nation’s history and tradition.” Reviewing the history of abortion restrictions in early United States, Alito concluded that the right to abortion is not. For many Americans, Alito’s insistence that rights be “deeply rooted” in U.S. history revealed a broad disinterest in historically marginalized communities, including women, people of color, and gay Americans. The only rights “deeply rooted” in our history are the ones that served the white, heterosexual men who dominated government at the time of the founding. While a previous SCOTUS decision in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* in 1992 had begun to address the equality dimensions of abortion rights, *Dobbs* moved in precisely the opposite direction, suggesting that non-majority groups must overcome special hurdles to have their rights recognized
2. Abortion rights will now be defined on a state-by-state basis. Several state courts have ruled that their constitutions guarantee the right to abortion, whether because of explicit references to “privacy” or by relying on language that broadly protects personal autonomy. Twenty-six states have statutes banning or severely restricting abortion, some based on laws passed in the nineteenth century. A few states have or have threatened to impose criminal sanctions against patients, providers, or anyone who enables a patient to access an abortion. (Sources for note: [Avery 2022](#); [The Dobbs v. Jackson Decision 2022](#); [Supreme Court Abortion Cases 2022](#)).
- 2 Although the *Dobbs* decision claims that abortion was not embedded in American society as the nation was formed, that claim reflects something else the decision ignores—history. In fact, “most forms of abortion were not illegal [before 1800] and those American women who wished to practice abortion did so” ([Mohr 1979](#), p. vii). In cities like Boston, midwives who practiced abortion even advertised assisting with menstruation delays in newspapers. The nascent American Medical Association waged a state-by-state campaign to have abortion declared illegal to push midwives, who performed most abortions, out of competition with doctors ([Mohr 1979](#)). In addition, the U.S. Constitution is entirely silent on the subject of abortion, while it instructed that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.” That “establishment clause” in the Bill of Rights was meant to “build a wall between the church and state,” in the words of Thomas Jefferson in 1802 ([Ryman and Alcorn 2009](#)).
- 3 This separation includes complicating the relationship between socially recognized women and pregnancy and childbirth. We must note that “women” is no longer a fixed category and that trans people recognized as men can become pregnant and deliver babies. The more neutral terms *birth-givers*, *people*, or *bodies*, appears in this article when possible, but the term *women* remains when that social group is the focus of a particular discussion, theory, or law.
- 4 Masculinism characterizes many societies, including pre-industrial and indigenous societies, so it is not exclusive to industrialist, colonialist, and extractive societies. The latter conditions may, however, magnify what industrialized societies might consider Nature’s or God’s law about the hierarchical role of the sexes and the “proper” place of males and females within it. Capitalist societies, which attach money to success, raise the stakes for participation and typically exploit women’s role in childbearing and nurturing as criteria for exclusion. The term *masculinist* was first used by nineteenth-century feminists Hubertine Auclert and Charlotte Perkins Gilman to denote defenders of male domination ([Allen 2009](#)). It is used in that way today in scholarship from geology to literary studies to photography to education. See, for example, Kerry Driscoll’s 2022 article, “Mark Twain’s Masculinist Fantasy of the West” (*The Mark Twain Annual* 20: 100–14). The term has also been used since the 1980s to mask the antifeminism of some men, especially in North America, who claim that feminism has gone too far, causing a “crisis of masculine identity.” Such masculinists declared it was important to take back control, especially in the family, oppose abortion, and defend male parental rights, even for men who have been violent toward their children. Robert Bly’s *Iron John* (1990) and Harvey Mansfield’s *Manliness* (2006) both advocated returning to the rites and traditions of virility. Pope Benedict XVI cast the Catholic Church’s lot in with masculinist anti-feminism in 2009, when he wrote that feminism was the “self-destruction of man, and hence a destruction of the work of God himself” ([Bard 2020](#)).
- 5 “Despite rapid growth and expansion of the service sector, women’s relative wages and labor force participation have declined in China during the last two decades, a 2021 paper from the International Monetary Fund reports.” The wage differential on mainland China can be as great as 25 percent. Job ads can still state gender preferences. <https://thechinaproject.com/2022/03/08/women-at-work-in-china-in-2022/> (accessed on 20 March 2023). New population expansion efforts in China are also pressuring Chinese women to have more babies, even as “employers are discriminating against women as [they] are perceived to have more care burdens and are thus deemed as secondary workers.” No supports for working mothers have so far been proposed. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/24/china-population-decline-negative-growth-what-it-means-for-world> (accessed on 20 March 2023).
- 6 See, for example, [Alaimo \(2010\)](#); [Gaard \(1997, 2017\)](#); [Kandiyoti \(1988\)](#); [King \(1983\)](#); [MacGregor \(2017, 2021\)](#); [Mathews \(2017\)](#); [Mellor \(2017, 2019\)](#); [Merchant \(1990\)](#); [Mies \(1986\)](#); [Plumwood \(1993\)](#); [Plumwood \(1996\)](#); [Ruether \(1975\)](#); [Salleh \(1992\)](#); [Sandilands \(1997a, 1997b\)](#); [Shiva \(1990\)](#); [Shiva and Mies \(1993\)](#); [Thompson and MacGregor \(2017\)](#); [Thompson \(2006\)](#).

- 7 The Sierra Club is an influential grassroots environmental organization in the U.S., with chapters in every state. It was founded in California by environmentalist John Muir. Long considered a white-focused organization, the club in recent years has diversified its concerns about the impact of environmental destruction on marginalized and indigenous communities (Sierra Club Website 2023).
- 8 In truth, “20 percent of the world’s peoples own 80 percent of its resources, consume two-thirds of its food, and are responsible for 75 percent of its ongoing pollution, with this leading to two billion of earth’s peoples living relatively affluent lives while four billion [are] still on the edge of hunger and immiseration” (Frazier 2016; Quoting Sylvia Wynter, p. 44).
- 9 Many ecofeminist writers have been making similar arguments for decades, including Gaard (1997); Kandiyoti (1988); King (1983); Shiva and Mies (1993).
- 10 This analysis is summarized and well supported by Kathryn Yusoff (2018). Yusoff also connects extractive settler economies with social systems that exploit the labor of colonial subjects in service to their sense of entitlement to the natural resources of occupied lands.
- 11 Many Native American writers have identified the inequities inflicted on their lands by extractive industries. Black Mesa, a 4000 square-mile plateau in northern Arizona contains the largest low-sulfur coal deposit in the U.S. It is also home to 16,000 Navajos and 8000 Hopi and sits atop the Navajo Aquifer. In 1966, tribal councils agreed to 35-year leases to the Peabody Coal Company of Kentucky, then the largest coal producer in the U.S. When water rights were going for USD 50 per acre-foot, the Hopi were paid USD 1.67 per acre foot; the Navajo got USD 5 per acre-foot, violating “every guideline that the Department of the Interior had set up for leasing on public lands. The lease had few environmental guidelines. The story gets worse from there (Parke-Sutherland 2018, pp. 130–31).
- 12 Researchers have found that women were about 14 times more likely to die during or after giving birth to a live baby than to die from complications of an abortion. Combining government data on live births and abortion-related deaths, Drs. Elizabeth Raymond and David Grimes found that one woman died during childbirth for every 11,000 or so babies born, compared to one woman of every 167,000 who died from a legal medical abortion between 1998 and 2005 (Pittman 2012). Maternal mortality and pregnancy complications are highest for adolescent girls and women birthing in low-resource settings (World Health Organization 2021). Abortion is safer than childbirth and a host of other common procedures—colonoscopy, tonsillectomy, and plastic surgery (Thompson 2021).
- 13 Margaret Atwood and Octavia Butler are both media stars even now, decades after their germinal works were published. According to the BBC in 2020, Butler has a cult following. Tee shirts warning that “Octavia tried to tell us” are still for sale, and there has been a podcast of the same name by Monica Coleman and Tananarive Due (Anderson 2020). Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale* was adapted into a hit TV show in 2017, and it is still streaming on Hulu. According to Vox, “her books aren’t just getting the prestige TV treatment; they’re being treated as prophetic texts.” *New Yorker* writer Rebecca Mead called Atwood “the prophet of dystopia.” Protestors are demanding to make Atwood’s work fiction again instead of reality *The Handmaid’s Tale* has not been out of print since it was first published. In addition to the TV show, the novel has also inspired a film and an opera. (Grady 2017) *Future Home of the Living God* was listed as one of the 100 Notable Books in 2017 by the New York Times Book Review. Although set in an unspecified future, Erdrich timed the publication of the novel, begun in 2002, to coincide with the Trump presidency and the increase in deaths from unsafe abortions and the newly reimposed global gag rule forbidding U.S. doctors in clinics abroad from telling patients about abortion options, even if abortion is legal in the country in which they work. She explained in 2017, “I only have to look at photographs of white men in dark suits deciding crucial issues of women’s health to know the timing is right” for publication of “*Future Home*” (Felicelli 2017).
- 14 Although anti-abortion beliefs are not necessarily based on religious views, “the whole edifice—the whole 50-year struggle, the whole raft of political organization [in the U.S.] and manipulation of the confirmation process [for Supreme Court Justices] to finally achieve a majority that would overturn *Roe*—has been really religious in its motivation from the start.” In addition, the five Justices who joined the majority opinion in *Dobbs* are (in the words of Steven Millies of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago) “particular kinds of Catholics” and products “of Catholicism’s conservative side” (Ledewitz 2022). A 2023 study by the Public Religion Research Institute and the Brookings Institution in the U.S. found that more than half of Republicans believe “the country should be a strictly Christian nation, either adhering to the ideals of Christian nationalism (21%) or sympathizing with those views (33%).” Christian nationalists eschew pluralism and an inclusive democracy, believe that U.S. laws should be rooted in so-called Christian values, and wish the nation consisted only of Christians. “According to the survey, half of Christian nationalism adherents and nearly 4 in 10 sympathizers said they support the idea of an authoritarian leader in order to keep these Christian values in society” (Lopez 2023).
- 15 In addition to the conventional, dualistic views of most religious American Christians about gender roles, birth control, and abortion—all of which reinforce women’s domestic identities and life purposes—most Christians in the U.S. (63 percent) are opposed to gender self-selection and the concept of gender dysphoria. “Among Christians, white evangelical Protestants (84 percent) are most likely to say that gender is determined by sex at birth. Many black Protestants (59 percent) and white mainline Protestants (55 percent) also feel this way.” Protestants are also likely to think that accepting transgender people in U.S. society goes too far. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/27/views-of-transgender-issues-divide-along-religious-lines/> (accessed on 20 March 2023).

- ¹⁶ Although the *Dobbs* decision itself did not ban abortion in the U.S., it gave tacit permission for such bans, even in cases of rape, incest, and maternal health threats, by states. The Court's decision also apparently implied permission to criminalize not only the performance of an abortion but also enabling or receiving one. In granting that permission, the U.S. is now in the company of such nations as Honduras (totally banned in 2021), Poland (effectively banned in 2021), Brazil (banned except for rape, fetal encephaly, and mother's health in 2020), and Iran (banned and surveilled in 2021), North Korea (banned by decree in 2015), Nicaragua (banned in 2006), and El Salvador (banned in 1998) (Alcoba 2021). Mexico, Ireland, and Argentina have recently relaxed their laws on abortion, and in much of Europe, Canada, Italy, and Australia, abortion access is restricted only by length of pregnancy (Elbaum and Chiwaya 2022).
- ¹⁷ Lilith has appeared in many guises in Jewish religious folklore. She is considered the first wife of Adam in Judaic mythology, banished from Eden for not obeying Adam. She is mentioned in the Book of Isaiah and other Jewish mythology sources from 500 CE onward. She also appears in the Babylonian Talmud in the Book of Adam and Eve and features in the Zohar Leviticus as "a hot fiery female who first cohabited with man." Some authorities refute her existence, however, including Maimonides.

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