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Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue of *Feminist Encounters* on 'Gender and the Anthropocene'

Amanda Gouws [1]*, Deirdre Byrne [2]*, Azille Coetzee [3]

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This special issue of *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* is motivated by the need to craft a gendered, and specifically intersectional feminist, response to the Anthropocene. The term was coined in 2000 by scientists Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer to signal the growing agreement among scientists that the impact of humanity on the earth's condition and prospects could no longer be ignored. The term has been criticised by Brannen (2018), Haraway (2015) and others, but it has passed into popular discourse as a term that encapsulates the irreversibility of human actions on our planetary home.

Why, though, **gender** and the Anthropocene? Here, the etymological roots of the term are worth investigating: 'Anthropos' refers to a prototypical 'human being', who — as we have learned from gender theory — is always sexed as male and gendered as masculine. Hegemonic masculinity has led human beings to treat the non-human natural world with disdain and as a 'standing reserve' to be exploited in the same way as women have always been oppressed by patriarchy. In many patriarchal religions, nature is given to man for his dominion, pleasure and benefit in the same way as women were (cf. Merchant, King, Gaard). The connection between the oppression and exploitation of women, and the oppression and exploitation of nature, is at the heart of ecofeminist theory, and also underpins many of the scholarly explorations in this special issue.

Several prominent theorists of gender and feminism have written about the intersections between gender and the Anthropocene. For example, Claire Colebrook reminds us that there is no singular Anthropocene, but many, when she asks '*whose* Anthropocene?' (2019: 10, original emphasis). She answers her own question with 'An Anthropocene feminism […] might ask for whom this stratum becomes definitive of *the human*' (2019: 10, original emphasis). Questions such as these lead her to speculate about who would benefit, who would be able to speak, if there were no Anthropocene, and to conclude that 'We have Always been Post-Anthropocene' in living in a world where 'who speaks' and 'who gains' is inflected by gender, class, race, ethnicity, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, religion, language and other markers of differential social power (see also Braidotti, 2019).

When Colebrook urges us to ask for whom this stratum becomes definitive of the human, she poses a question that reveals the linkage not only between environmental destruction and gender violence, but also the ways in which the gendered processes that cause environmental degradation are connected to the violence of colonialism that introduced the extractive processes and land dispossession of capitalism.

Scholars like Davis and Todd (2017) locate the start date of the Anthropocene at the beginning of colonialism and settler-colonialism, thereby bringing the racist technologies of extractive capitalism in connection with the environmental destruction of the epoch. Kathryn Yusoff strikingly writes that '[t]he racial categorization of Blackness shares its natality with mining the New World, as does the material impetus for colonialism in the first instance' (Yusoff, 2019). Accordingly, the destruction of indigenous populations, cultures and ways of life is directly linked to human impact on the non-human environment, in so far as the racialised human / non-human distinction is historically relational to a discourse of settler-colonial rights and the concomitant material practices of extraction (Yusoff, 2019). Curley and Lister use the term 'Capitalocene' to link environmental change to the extinction that was wrought in the name of developing of the modern world system and its freedoms (Curley and Lister, 2020). Colonialism is a political and philosophical practice that is destructive of environments, creating unsustainable development and destroying indigenous lands, making it the social and political project that created the conditions for climate change while the extractive capacities of capitalism led to forced assimilation, violent displacement and

[1] *SARChI: Gender Politics, Stellenbosch University*, SOUTH AFRICA
[2] *University of South Africa*, SOUTH AFRICA
[3] *Centre for Historical Trauma and Transformation, Stellenbosch University*, SOUTH AFRICA
***Corresponding Authors:** ag1@sun.ac.za, byrnedc@unisa.ac.za

genocide (Cuyler and Lister, 2020: 258). Scholars such as Sylvia Wynter (1997), Alexander Weheliye (2014), and Katherine McKittrick (2006) explore the ways in which these racialised processes are all deeply gendered, in so far as the human / non-human distinction central to colonial domination and capitalist extraction is always already rooted in and maintained through gender normativities.

Starke, Schlunke and Edmonds (2018) refer to the consequences of colonial violence as making the familiar unfamiliar or introducing the 'uncanny' (drawing on Homi Bhabha's notion) in the following way: 'We recognise that deep genealogies of colonial violence have driven aspects of the Anthropocene, disordering worlds in a process that has made the familiar unfamiliar, and thus unhomely, out of place and outside accepted orders of time'. Hecht (2018) situates the African continent as pertinent to the Anthropocene by thinking through its scalar effects and what it means for Africa that was the epicentre of colonial practice, experimentation and slave provisioning. This recasts the notion of human control to human responsibility, putting the importance of politics or governments' willingness to confront states of exception that create bare life (cf. Agamben, 1998) for millions of people.

Violence (environmental, gendered, racial, ethnic) is therefore integral to the biopolitics of the Anthropocene. Although the making of the modern world and the capitalist pursuit of 'progress' justify excessive violence that can be described as spectacular (such as the biopolitically-engineered elimination that was common practice under colonialism), the Anthropocene also metes out violence, which inhabits routine practices and spaces of life in the form of gradual degradations of the environment that test people's perseverance, endurance and often allows only for precarious survival (which Elizabeth Povinelli calls the 'anthropology of ordinary suffering') (Povinelli, Colebrook and Yusoff, 2017). These debilitating violences that blur the division between life and death, or what Rob Nixon refers to as 'slow violence' (Nixon, 2011), can also be traced back to Foucault's notion of 'making live and letting die' (Povinelli, et al, 2017: 170).

The COVID-19 pandemic was a stark reminder of the place of violence in the Anthropocene. Claire Colebrook (2020) makes the important link between slow violence, the pandemic, and what she calls 'fast violence'. As she puts it: 'To say that the 2020 pandemic coincided with the spectacle of racial violence is accurate only if one thinks about coincidence less as a chance event and more as the way in which the speeds of violence are always racialised and always fast and slow at the same time'. While the pandemic rages across the USA at breakneck speed, in a way that attests to the worst political mismanagement, the death of George Floyd in racialised police brutality spoke of the slow violence of racial inequality and social exclusion that normalise racial violence. The fast and slow death (nearly nine minutes) of George Floyd highlights processes that can be traced back to slavery and colonisation. The point that Colebrook makes is that the speed with which this zoonotic virus spread exposed the social exclusion and marginalisation of millions of people on whose bodies violence is exercised continually in specifically gendered ways, in conditions of social and political marginalisation and environmental and climate degradation, that make zoonotic viruses possible in the first place.

In this Special Issue, we present feminist and queer theorisations of the Anthropocene that contribute to the untangling of the complex web of violent racialised/gendered subjugations and extractive technologies that continue to function in the making and maintenance of the modern capitalist world. This collection of articles shows how gender-blind and anti-intersectional or single-axis analyses cannot account for the differential impact of violence, social exclusion or even death on men, women and queer communities, as well as the differential impact of the Anthropocene on the global North and the global South.

The first article in this Special Issue is the text of the keynote lecture that Fiona Probyn-Rapsey delivered at 'Gender and the Anthropocene', a conference of the South African Association of Gender Studies that took place in Stellenbosch, South Africa, in September 2018. In this talk, Probyn-Rapsey explores the naming of the Anthropocene and how it works to obscure long histories of knowledge and resistance embedded in marginalised archives. This sets the tone for the rest of the Issue where the Anthropocene is theorised and problematised from within selected marginalised archives.

In her article 'Reducing Women to Bare Life: Sexual Violence in South Africa', Amanda Gouws traces the contours of sexual violence in South Africa back to its (settler) colonial roots, showing how slavery and colonisation contributed to creating conditions for gender based violence that extends to current day South Africa. Drawing on Agamben's theory of the state of exception and bare life, she exposes the continuities with colonial sexual violence that creates a state of exception for women in South Africa through the abandonment by law on the side of state agencies (police and the criminal justice system) that are supposed to enforce the law. Using the rape trial of the former South African President, Jacob Zuma, as well as lesbian rape and killings, she illustrates how violence strips women of state protection that creates conditions for the necropolitics of intimate femicide.

In her article 'Searching for Ethical Hope: Ideas on what Feminist Debates on the Anthropocene Can Offer Theorisation of Gender and Violence' Jane Bennett makes us pause to think about the ampersand in 'gender & violence' and asks why there is limited head-on engagement with rape in the Anthropocene. Writing in a beautiful poetic style that belies the degrading realities of violence, she engages with the poetry of Yvette Christiansë and Donna Haraway's cyborg. She takes us on a tour of what it means to develop a curriculum on Gender & Violence

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engaging embodied violence originating from colonial violence, encapsulated and curated by the Slave Lodge in Cape Town. Her article exposes the vulnerability of both the earth and the human body in the age of the Anthropocene, as well as making a plea for what has been erased or disappeared to be included in the archive of human memory – knowledge of the other that came to us through colonisation, slavery, and dehumanisation. Here the work of radical black intellectual, Sylvia Wynter, who theorises the history of the modern world from the perspective of plantation slavery, is engaged. Despite the realities of the ampersand (gender & violence) Bennett believes that, as she puts it: 'Close attunement to fragments of archive, imaginative insight, and genealogy may transform the concave impact of violence into legible, uncontainable, hopeful humanity.'

In 'Othering Mushrooms: Migratism and its Racist Entanglements in the Brexit Campaign' Lenka Vráblíková examines the media discourses surrounding the Brexit campaign through an analytical lens that she constructs by drawing on Sara Ahmed's conceptualisation of 'othering' as an embodied process and exploring the ambivalent position that mushrooms occupy in the cultural imagination. In an imaginative and thoughtful article, Vráblíková makes an argument for understanding the disgust and fear that mushrooms evoke in certain cultures, and the fascination and wonder they elicit in others, not as exclusive binaries, but as critically entangled and mutually constitutive cultural positions. In a fascinating analysis, Vráblíková looks at how a call for strict regulation of mushroom picking in British woodland coincided with the Brexit campaign and was covered concomitantly in the British Press. Vráblíková shows how situating a discourse of othering in 'nature' justifies and naturalises such othering and how it intensifies a fantasy of an idealised community that rests on the representation of the community's presence as being in crisis. She concludes that research into environmental histories is vital for the critical interrogation of the recent re-emergence of right-wing populism in contemporary global politics.

Several of the contributors to this issue use literature as lens to address the intersection of gender with the Anthropocene. Some of the authors have explored the planetary from feminist perspectives, as Allison Mackey does in her article, 'Reproduction beyond Hu/man Extinction: Detoxifying Care in Latin American Anthropocene Fictions', where she explores a new fictional sub-genre called 'cli-fi' or climate fiction. The speculative cli-fi texts by Anacristina Rossi and Samantha Schweblin that she explores address the question of reproduction, and its obverse, extinction, in a post-Anthropocene world where environmental disaster has already taken place. Mackey shares Colebrook's understanding that the Anthropocene also means extinction and that this, too, has gendered implications, especially for women.

Deirdre Byrne has also chosen to explore literary representations of the Anthropocene in her article 'Water in the Anthropocene: Perspectives on Poetry by South African Women', which homes in on water: one of the most important elements for continued organic life. Water is a recurring and powerful theme in poetry by South African women, but, as Byrne discovers, there is no awareness of its impending scarcity or the concomitant environmental degradation in the Anthropocene. Rather, water is better conceptualised as a multifaceted, entangled relationship (Jepson et al. 2017: 14).

Terry Westby-Nunn's exploration of Rachel Zadok's *Sister-Sister* in '"The Road Never Ends": Ecofeminism and Magical Realism in Rachel Zadok's *Sister-Sister*', also focuses on a relationship, but this time the spotlight falls on the connection between twin sisters. The novel, as well as Westby-Nunn's exploration of it, juxtaposes the stark 'road' and the natural world in both its flourishing and its despoliation. Zadok's magical realism allows her to examine the 'becomings-woman' of indigenous South African culture as well as the fictional twin girls.

Delia Rabie explores a different depiction of the natural world in her article, 'The Wild *Volksmoeder* in the Forest: An Analysis of the Human-Nonhuman Relationship in *Dreamforest* (2003)', where she explores representations of the Tsitsikamma Forest on South Africa's Garden Route. This forest, said to be home to the legendary Knysna elephants, also shelters families of woodcutters, who eke out a bare living by chopping wood. *Dreamforest* tells the story of the daughter of one of these families and, as Rabie shows, the entanglement between the arboreal and the feminine is powerfully represented.

Lastly, in 'Becoming (Musical) Woman', Cecilia Ferm Almqvist starts from the idea that the Anthropocene requires us to recognise that we are all participants in the 'becoming world' and explores the question of gender inequality in our contemporary modes of being and becoming with music. She looks at dominant streaming companies such as Spotify, who are driven by the patriarchal, capitalist forces that characterise the Anthropocene and therefore easily contribute to the maintenance of oppressive gender norms and patterns. Through interviews with female-identified women of various ages, analysed with reference to Rosi Braidotti's feminist thought, Almqvist works to locate in such platforms possibilities for complex and adventurous entanglements through which female-defined users can access opportunities for becoming expanding sexual selves, beyond the confines of prescribed gender identities.

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