



War, Woman, and Environment: An Ecofeminist Reading of *A Thousand Ships* by Natalie Haynes

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Abstract

This study aims to offer an ecofeminist reading of Natalie Haynes' novel *A Thousand Ships* (2019) to analyse how the text reflects and critiques the intersections of militarism, gendered violence, and environmental destruction. Ecofeminism, as a critical and interdisciplinary approach, reveals the relationships between the oppression of women and the degradation of nature, both of which are argued to stem from patriarchal and capitalist structures. While the novel does not explicitly aim to explore such themes as war, heroism, and gender within ecological frameworks, it inevitably highlights the interconnected nature of these themes. Through women's narratives and the narrative of Gaia, the Earth Goddess, the novel reflects how patriarchal and capitalist systems exploit both women and the environment. The study also draws parallels between the Trojan women's experiences and contemporary conflicts, such as those in Gaza and Ukraine, where women, children, and nature are disproportionately affected by war, as reflected in official reports prepared on these issues for the respective regions. By situating *A Thousand Ships* within an ecofeminist context, therefore, this study demonstrates how literature can reflect and critique the ongoing and universal nature of women's suffering and environmental degradation and highlights their interconnectedness due to the pervasive influence of patriarchal and capitalist practices. Such an approach not only expands the existing scholarship but also emphasises the importance of understanding and addressing these issues in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, environment, woman, war, *A Thousand Ships*.

Savaş, Kadın ve Çevre: Natalie Haynes'in *A Thousand Ships* [Bin Gemi] Romanının Ekofeminist Bir Okuması

Öz

Bu çalışma, Natalie Haynes'in *A Thousand Ships* [Bin Gemi] (2019) romanının ekofeminist bir okumasını yapmayı ve romanın militarizm, cinsiyete dayalı şiddet ve çevresel tahribat gibi konuların kesişimlerini nasıl yansıttığını ve eleştirdiğini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ekofeminizm, eleştirel ve disiplinlerarası bir yaklaşım olarak, kadınların boyunduruk altına alınması ile doğanın tahribatı arasındaki bağlantıları, her ikisinin de ataerkil ve kapitalist sistemlerin bir sonucu olduğunu ileri sürerek ortaya koyar. Roman, savaş, kahramanlık ve cinsiyet gibi temaları ekolojik çerçeveler içinde açıkça incelemeyi amaçlamasa da bu temaların birbirleriyle bağlantılı doğasını kaçınılmaz olarak

vurgulamaktadır. Troya Savaşı'na bir şekilde dahil olmuş kadınların ve Toprak Ana Gaia'nın anlatıları aracılığıyla roman, ataerkil ve kapitalist sistemlerin hem kadınları hem de çevreyi nasıl sömürdüğünü yansıtır. Çalışma ayrıca, romandaki kadın karakterlerin anlatıları ve deneyimleri ile günümüzde hâlen devam eden Gazze ve Ukrayna'daki savaşların kadınlar, çocuklar ve çevre üzerindeki etkilerini, adı geçen bölgeler için ilgili konularda hazırlanan resmi raporlar üzerinden benzerlikler kurarak ele almaktadır. Böylece, *A Thousand Ships* romanının ekofeminist bir okumasını yaparak bu çalışma, edebiyatın cinsiyete dayalı şiddet ve çevresel tahribatın sürekli ve evrensel doğasını nasıl yansıtıp eleştirdiğini ve bu sorunların ataerkil ve kapitalist uygulamaların yaygın etkisi nedeniyle birbirleriyle bağlantılı olduğunu vurgular. Böyle bir yaklaşım yalnızca mevcut akademik çalışmaları genişletmekle kalmaz, aynı zamanda bu birbirleriyle bağlantılı sorunları hem tarihsel hem de çağdaş bağlamlarda anlamının ve ele almanın önemini vurgular.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ekofeminizm, çevre, kadın, savaş, Bin Gemi.

INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminism, as an interdisciplinary and critical framework, seeks to uncover the relations between women's subjugation and the exploitation of nature, both of which are considered to be the consequences of patriarchal and capitalist structures. These structures are reinforced by hegemonic ideologies embedded within language and culture, which perpetuate various forms of dominance. This study employs an ecofeminist framework to analyse Natalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships* (2019), to explore the novel's reflection on and critique of militarism, gender-based violence, and environmental degradation. While Haynes does not explicitly address themes such as war, heroism, and gender within ecological paradigms, these issues are inevitably foregrounded through the text, revealing their intrinsic interrelation. Furthermore, this paper endeavours to draw comparative parallels between the experiences of the Trojan women in the novel and the contemporary realities women face in conflict zones, such as Gaza and Ukraine, as reflected in the official reports on these issues. These contemporary conflicts, much like those in ancient times, disproportionately affect women, children, and the environment. This pattern echoes ecofeminist arguments, which highlight the deep connection between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature, and it demonstrates how patriarchal and capitalist systems perpetuate violence against both vulnerable communities and the environment.

Ecofeminism endeavours to uncover how systemic inequalities and environmental degradation are linked with such concepts of dominance as militarism, patriarchy, sexism, and capitalism. *A Thousand Ships*, therefore, can be analysed through this lens to show how war, gender, and nature are deeply intertwined. As Chris Cuomo argues, "[...] the conceptual frameworks that are used to justify racism, sexism, and the mistreatment of nature (etc.), are interwoven and mutually reinforcing" (2002, p. 4). The patriarchal and capitalist structures that initiate war not only exploit and dominate women but also extend this domination to the natural environment. In the novel, this connection is reflected through the individual narratives of women involved in the Trojan War in one way or another. Women's narratives particularly highlight the instances of gendered violence in times of war. Likewise, the narration of Gaia, the Earth Goddess, reflects on the destruction of nature and highlights how humans' anthropocentric lifestyle – represented in practices such as uncontrolled reproduction, the exploitation of natural resources, and war – ravages the environment. Thus, the novel can be argued to reinforce the idea that such concepts as patriarchy, militarism, sexism, and anthropocentrism treat both women and nature as resources to be controlled or conquered. Haynes' exploration of women's pain and plight during and after the Trojan War also highlights the ongoing nature of women's suffering in wartime, illustrating the deep-rooted and widespread issues of gendered violence and environmental degradation across different contexts. This study, therefore, aims to illuminate how Haynes' portrayal of suffering women during the Trojan War mirrors real-world injustices, emphasising the importance of empathy and the need for action in addressing ongoing crises. By situating the novel within an ecofeminist framework, alongside examining the real effects of contemporary wars on women and the environment through reports on the ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine, one can better understand how literature reflects and critiques the interconnectedness of war, nature, and gender.

Ecofeminism: Intersection of Ecocriticism and Feminism

Ecofeminism aims to lay bare the relationship between women's subjugation and environmental degradation, both of which, as per ecofeminist arguments, result from the patriarchal and capitalist systems that draw their strength primarily from the hegemonic conceptual frameworks embedded in language and culture. In that sense, ecofeminism interacts with the academic traditions that address the dualities and binaries in language and thought. Exploring hierarchical oppositions within Western philosophy and intellectual traditions has been a central focus for structuralists, poststructuralists, and feminist thinkers. For instance, by positing the idea that "[...] in language there are only differences without

positive terms" (1959, p. 120), Ferdinand de Saussure, a foundational figure in structuralism, contends that the meaning of concepts (or signs) comes from how they differ and contrast with other concepts in the same system, rather than from any inherent properties or positive content. In a similar vein, Claude Lévi-Strauss, known as the founder of structural anthropology, applies the structuralist approach to myths. He argues that "[...] *mythical thought always works from the awareness of oppositions towards their progressive mediation, [...]*" (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 440), suggesting that human cognition and cultural narratives are fundamentally structured around binary oppositions. On the other hand, Jacques Derrida, a seminal figure in poststructuralism, famously asserts that "[...] *in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a vis-à-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand*" (1981, p. 41). In this formula, "*philosophical opposition*", to use Derrida's phrase, is characterised by the notion of hierarchy where one term exerts control or superiority over the other in various dimensions such as value, logic, and more. Relying on her lifelong friend Derrida's arguments, Hélène Cixous, one of the foundational figures in poststructural feminism, elaborates on such hegemonic binary oppositions as "*activity/passivity, culture/nature, day/night, head/hearth, and logos/pathos*" (1997, p. 63) in her renowned work "*Sorties*" in order to prompt readers to question the position of women within this system. According to Cixous, the Western intellectual framework is inherently phallogocentric, and therefore it revolves around and prioritises the male viewpoint. This results in the association of certain traits such as power, rationality, culture, and activity with masculinity, while weakness, irrationality, nature, and passivity are associated with femininity. In consideration of the aforementioned, it can be argued that ecofeminism is inherently linked to these foundational arguments, and it builds upon them with its critical examination of the interconnected oppressions of women and nature. According to Karen J. Warren, a pivotal figure in ecofeminism,

[a]n ecofeminist philosophical perspective on empirical women-nature connections extends this sort of feminist critique of oppressive conceptual frameworks, and the behaviors of domination they give rise to, to nonhuman nature. Making visible oppressive conceptual frameworks and the logic of domination which undergirds them, wherever and whenever they occur, is a central project of ecofeminist philosophy. (1997, p. 20)

Ecofeminism, thus, expands poststructuralist and feminist arguments to include the exploitation of nature by foregrounding the intricate connection between the subjugation of women and the oppression of nature and nonhuman entities. It can be posited that central to ecofeminist philosophy is the examination and dismantling of oppressive ideological structures and the pervasive web of domination that upholds them in various contexts.

Ecofeminism as a concept began to develop in the 1970s and 1980s, in parallel with the second wave of feminism and a growing global consciousness about environmental issues. Nevertheless, it emerged in the late 20th century as a distinct movement which unites environmentalism and feminism. Ecofeminism refers to an intellectual and political movement that integrates environmental issues with feminist ideas. It aims to highlight the interconnectedness of the exploitation of nature and women, and it suggests that both forms of exploitation stem from patriarchal and capitalist structures. In that sense, ecofeminism seeks to challenge binary thinking that separates men from women, and essentially humans from nature. Instead, ecofeminism advocates for a holistic approach to addressing such challenging issues as social and environmental justice by acknowledging the interrelatedness of different types of oppression and environmental degradation.

A French feminist, Françoise d'Eaubonne is argued to have coined the term *écoféminisme* (ecofeminism) in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974), translated into English as *Feminism or Death* (Gaard and Murphy, 1998, p. 7; Merchant, 2005, p. 194; Mies & Shiva, 2014, p. 13). D'Eaubonne

characterises ecofeminism as a “*new humanism*” (2022, p. 194), and her characterisation underscores ecofeminism’s capacity for integration and transformation as it endeavours to connect environmentalism, feminism, and wider social concerns. According to d’Eaubonne, women’s interests are inherently connected with the broader human community, while the individual interests of men are separate from those of the general population. Therefore, d’Eaubonne suggests that only the feminine, which encompasses all levels of society and nature, can bring about an “*ecological revolution*” (2022, p. 222) and that “[...] *the planet placed in the feminine will flourish for all*” (2022, p. 222). Hence, the term, *écoféminisme*, unites the two significant social movements of feminism and environmentalism, providing a new critical framework for comprehending and addressing the underlying causes of both gender inequality and environmental degradation.

Though d’Eaubonne is thought to be one of the first to use the term, several authors, including Carolyn Merchant, Mary Daly, Susan Griffin, Vandana Shiva, and Ynestra King, began articulating ecofeminist ideas and arguments in the 1980s, laying the foundation for the development of the core principles of the movement. Thus, ecofeminism originated from various movements, such as the labour and peace movements, the liberation of animals and the environment, and debates on women’s health care. In *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978), Susan Griffin parodies the patriarchal thought which is “*objective, detached and bodiless*” (1980, p. vx) on matters of women and nature. In that sense, Griffin explores how women and nature have been historically suppressed and exploited by the patriarchal mindset. Griffin’s book is identified as “[...] *one of the earliest and most powerful pieces of ecofeminist literature to reveal the deeply-seated symbolic and philosophical associations between women and nature in the Western intellectual tradition*” (Warren, 2001, p. 5497).

Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978), which is considered to be one of the first texts of radical feminism,

exposed the historical and cross-cultural persecution of women as legitimized by the various male-dominated institutions of religion, culture, and medical science (that is, Indian suttee, Chinese footbinding, African genital mutilation, European witch-burnings, American gynecology, Nazi medicine), linking the physical health of women and the environment with the recuperation of a woman-centered language and thought. (Gaard, 2011, p. 28)

Using d’Eaubonne’s concept of *écoféminisme* as a point of reference, Daly notes that while she understands and agrees with the concept’s basic tenets, she is more concerned with the “*mind/spirit/body pollution inflicted through patriarchal myth and language on all levels*” (1990, p. 9). Ynestra King is, on the other hand, reputed to be one of the organisers of the first ecofeminist conference, “*Women and Life on Earth: A Conference on Eco-Feminism in the Eighties*,” which took place in 1980 at Amherst (Sturgeon, 2016, p. 262; Mies & Shiva, 2014, p. 14). In one of her studies, King articulates the fundamental philosophy of ecofeminist theory as follows: “*In ecofeminism, nature is the central category of analysis. An analysis of the interrelated dominations of nature –psyche and sexuality, human oppression, and nonhuman nature– and the historic position of women in relation to those forms of domination is the starting point of ecofeminist theory*” (1990, p. 117). It is apparent that ecofeminism places nature as the focal point of its examination and explores the interconnectedness of the domination of nature and the historical oppression of women to bring about a holistic ecofeminist theory geared towards attaining social and environmental justice.

In *The Death of Nature* (1980), Carolyn Merchant examines how the Scientific Revolution and modern science, which led to the emergence of a rather mechanistic worldview, contributed to the exploitation of nature and the foundation of a new socioeconomic order that resulted in the subjugation of women. Merchant argues that “[...] *nature and women are both perceived to be on a lower level than culture,*

which has been associated symbolically and historically with men", and that "[...] the assumption of a nature-culture dichotomy was used as a justification for keeping women in their place in the established hierarchical order of nature, [...]" (1983, p. 144). Merchant clearly acknowledges that her intention is not to reinstate the classical notion of mother nature. Rather, Merchant attempts to explore "the roots of our current environmental dilemma and its connections to science, technology, and the economy" (1983, p. xxi) by analysing the "anthropomorphic and stereotypic labels" (1983, p. xxi) associated with women and nature. As a result, Merchant's arguments in *The Death of Nature* contributed to the theorisation of ecofeminism in the following years.

Similar to most other critical theories and perspectives, ecofeminism displays a range of views and sometimes contradictory approaches within its own framework, such as cultural ecofeminism, social ecofeminism, socialist ecofeminism, and liberal ecofeminism (Merchant, 2005, pp. 200-212). Therefore, ecofeminism has had its share of criticism, even from within, and one of the most criticised aspects of ecofeminism is the perception that it is essentialist in nature. For instance, according to Janet Biehl, an American author and translator, ecofeminism's overemphasis on "a male-derived image of 'women=nature'" (1991, p. 27) and caring, nurturing, and mediating images of women invoked by ecofeminism hamper feminist ideals. Biehl argues that "[t]o focus overwhelmingly on women's 'caring nature' as the source of ecologically necessary 'value' easily leads to the notion that women are to remain intuitive and discourages them from expanding their human horizons and capacities" (1991, pp. 15-16). Yet, Biehl criticises ecofeminism as a cohesive philosophy with consistent principles, ignoring the variety of approaches and perspectives it encompasses. The biological essentialism she criticises is the argument of only certain ecofeminist thought, such as cultural ecofeminism, which "[...] embraces intuition, an ethic of caring, and web-like human-nature relationships" (Merchant, 2005, p. 202). Conversely, materialist or socialist ecofeminism highlights the ways in which capitalist economies, especially those driven by globalisation and industrialisation, exploit both women and the environment. As Warren asserts, "[s]ince ecofeminism grows out of and reflects different and distinct feminisms (e.g., liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism), ecofeminist positions are as diverse as the feminisms from which they gain their strength and meaning" (2000, p. 21). Like Biehl, Melissa Leach, a social anthropologist and geographer, argues that the women-nature connection is essentialist and it "[...] has failed to conserve the environment and sometimes both" (2007, p. 72). Leach posits that ecofeminism centres around "[...] fables about women's natural, cultural or ideological closeness to nature [...]" (2007, p. 67). As a response to Leach's argument, Niamh Moore investigates the genealogical account of ecofeminism by highlighting a wealth of feminist theory that calls into question the necessity of the essentialism critique and emphasises its detrimental effects (Moore, 2008, p. 464). Moore also criticises Leach for not explicitly referencing the ecofeminists who adopt a "post-structuralist" or "anti-dualistic" (2008, p. 465) stance in their arguments.

Warren states that she endorses what is called strategic essentialism since it "[...] permits, as a practical strategy, talk about commonalities among individuals and groups as moral persons, selves, women, and nature without thereby implying any biologically determined, socially constructed, conceptually essentialist account of moral persons, selves, women, and nature" (2000, p. 91). Likewise, in *Ecofeminist Nature* (1997), Noel Sturgeon states that the strategic use of essentialism within ecofeminism serves important political purposes as "[...] it creates unity between very different kinds of women; it justifies a feminist critique of environmentalists; and it solidifies connections among feminism(s), participatory democratic structures, and nonviolent direct action" (2016, p. 11). Both arguments advocate for strategic essentialism as a tool for political and practical purposes to avoid the implications of traditional essentialist thinking. On the other hand, Stacy Alaimo offers a different and impressive perspective on the notions of body and environment. She argues that vulnerability, defined as "a sense of precarious, bodily openness to the material world" (Alaimo, 2009, p. 23), can cultivate environmental ethics, particularly feminist ones, as vulnerability is rooted in body politics. Alaimo, thus, reinterprets vulnerability as a site of agency, where

environmental and gendered struggles converge to create more sustainable and equitable futures. Alaimo argues that human bodies and the environment are intricately linked and cannot be considered separately (2008, p. 237). She suggests that both human and nonhuman bodies are constantly changing and interconnected with the material world in intricate ways. This interconnectedness, referred to as trans-corporeality, implies that ethical and political concerns should acknowledge the intermingling of human bodies with the environment (Alaimo, 2008, p. 238). It can be argued that Alaimo's emphasis on the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman bodies through both material processes and cultural practices avoids essentialism by acknowledging that gender identities and experiences are influenced by intricate interactions among cultural norms, material circumstances, and environmental elements, rather than being based on any unchanging, inherent nature.

Ecofeminism becomes influential in offering critical insights regarding the interconnected oppressions of women and the environment. It can offer a more complex comprehension of the relationship between female subjugation and environmental degradation, especially by foregrounding the fact that the same patriarchal and capitalist structures underpin both the exploitation of the environment and the oppression of women. As Gaard argues:

Drawing on the insights of ecology, feminism, and socialism, ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. (1993, p. 1)

In that sense, it can be argued that ecofeminism revolves around the idea that the dominant ideologies contributing to social oppression founded on gender, race, or class also underpin the exploitation of the natural world. Therefore, any efforts towards liberation must include environmental concerns to achieve a truly comprehensive and sustainable form of liberation.

War, Gendered Violence, and Environment: A Web of Interconnectedness

English writer, classist, and broadcaster Natalie Haynes' literary oeuvre includes a range of novels, such as *The Amber Fury* (2014), *The Children of Jocasta* (2017), *A Thousand Ships* (2019), *Stone Blind: Medusa's Story* (2022), which offer feminist rewritings of ancient Greek and Roman myths through which she excavates the stories and voices of women who have been largely silenced, ignored, and forgotten over time. In one of her recent interviews, Haynes argues that "[m]yths are a mirror - they reflect the times in which they are read or viewed as much as the time in which they were created" (qtd. in Darly, 2023, para. 8), thereby encapsulating the binding premise of her novels. By reinterpreting and rewriting myths through a contemporary lens, Haynes explores how these stories, though rooted in the past, continue to resonate with modern audiences, reflecting social, cultural, and political concerns. The enduring relevance of myths, therefore, paves the way for each generation to find new meanings and connections with them.

Despite the widespread popularity of Haynes and her novel *A Thousand Ships*, shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction 2020, there is a noticeable scarcity of academic publications discussing the book. On the other hand, the existing scholarly works tend to focus on analysing the novel primarily through the concept of rewriting, rather than exploring it from various critical perspectives. For instance, in "Meta-Epic Reflections on Twenty-First Century Rewritings of Homer, or: The Meta-Epic Novel" (2022), Lena Linne focuses on meta-epic reflections in Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*, along with a brief discussion of other selected contemporary novels on Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In "Do We Have a New Song Yet? The New Wave of Women's Novels and the Homeric Tradition" (2022), Barbara Goff analyses three rewrites, one of which is *A Thousand Ships*, to reveal the strategies these novels adopt in

playing with various narrative voices that reflect a sense of self-consciousness about the art of storytelling. “‘That Girl Briseïs’ and Her Modern Representations” (2023) by Zuzanna Szatanik focuses on the portrayal of the character Briseis in Homer’s *Iliad*, Haynes’ *A Thousand Ships*, and Madeline Miller’s *The Song of Achilles*. In “Reflexivity and New Metanarratives. Contemporary English-language Retellings of Classical Mythology” (2023), Katarzyna Szmigiero explores the idea of revisionism within the context of reflexivity and refers to Haynes’ *A Thousand Ships* as one of the examples of mythological retellings.

Considering the body of literature on Haynes’ *A Thousand Ships*, the significance of this study lies in its contribution to the existing scholarship by reading the novel through an ecofeminist perspective. Even though the novel itself does not aim exclusively at exploring the notions of war, man/manhood, heroism, and woman/womanhood within the context of nature and the environment, the novel inevitably reflects how these concepts are interconnected, much like one can witness in real-life incidents. Ongoing wars and conflicts, whether in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, or elsewhere, result in significant damage that has a lasting impact on communities, ecosystems, and the well-being of individuals. Through analysing the interconnectedness of these concepts, this study can shed light on how literature reflects and critiques the ongoing relationship between militarism, environmental destruction, and gendered violence. In that sense, ecofeminism proves to be an effective theoretical framework for this study as it is a political movement motivated by a range of issues from “[...] women’s and environmental health to science, development, and technology; the treatments of animals; and peace and nuclear, antimilitarist activism” (Warren, 1998, p. 269). Ecofeminism, thus, endeavours to identify and challenge the conceptual frameworks of dominance that support different “isms of domination” (Warren, 1998, pp. 266-267), including militarism, sexism, racism, and ethnocentrism. Ecofeminism’s commitment to addressing systemic inequalities and environmental degradation is reflected in the breadth of its concerns, which range from development and health to animal welfare and peace activism. Therefore, it is contended that ecofeminism is an effective lens to use when analysing the intricate connections between war, nature and gender.

It is important to note that when writing *A Thousand Ships*, Haynes was inspired not only by any text, book, or story related to Greek myth and mythology but also by a documentary on restorative justice in Rwanda that she saw at the Cannes Film Festival. To cite Haynes: “What I looked at was how these women [Rwandan Women] who had obviously survived the war insofar as they were still alive, but they had been brutalized in the waging of that war ... And they were then being asked essentially to live next door to the man who had killed their relatives and brutalized their bodies” (qtd. in Garcia-Navarro, 2021, para. 6). Apparently, this experience led the author to question the nature of war, justice, and gender, noting, “I guess justice is one way of describing this. It doesn’t look to me like these women are receiving any kind of justice. It looks like they’re having to tolerate what they’re given because there’s no alternative. That theme ran through writing *A Thousand Ships* for me ...” (qtd. in Garcia-Navarro, 2021, para. 7). The reflections of Haynes regarding the inspiration behind *A Thousand Ships* provide significant insights into her thematic examination of gender, justice, and war. Through reimagining and rewriting certain instances of the Trojan War and its aftermath by focusing on the suffering and resilience of female characters, whose experiences and voices are overlooked in historical and mythological contexts, Haynes explores the notion of gendered violence which goes beyond immediate physical and emotional trauma and transforms into persistent forms of abuse and discrimination in post-conflict settings.

A Thousand Ships is a feminist retelling of Homer’s *Iliad* and the Greek myths surrounding the characters involved in the epic poem. Haynes’ novel centres around, to cite Calliope, one of the central narrators and probably the fictional persona of Haynes herself, “the story of all of them” (Haynes, 2019, p. 339). In that sense, the novel offers a polyphonic account of the Trojan War and its aftermath with a

collection of women narrators from goddesses to queens, from wives, mothers, daughters to slaves jumping back and forth through time. Each woman's narration reveals how women are "[...] *metamorphosing from people into property*" (Haynes, 2020, p. 81) during and aftermath of the war. Epic traditions, particularly those rooted in ancient and classical literature, have often overlooked or marginalised women's experiences in wars. These narratives tend to focus on the valiant deeds of male warriors and glorify the notions of heroism, bravery, and honour. Women in such epics are nearly always reduced to supporting roles, and they are mainly portrayed as the spoils of war, objects of male desire, or figures of lamentation, rather than as active participants or independent individuals in the conflict. Yet, as Calliope says, "[e]pic is countless tragedies, woven together. Heroes don't become heroes without carnage, and carnage has both causes and consequences. And those don't begin and end on a battlefield" (Haynes, 2020, p. 109). It can be argued that Haynes' focus on the causes and consequences of carnage beyond the battlefield, particularly the gendered violence that women endure, such as sexual violence, enslavement, and displacement, exposes how patriarchal worldview perpetuates and normalises such violence in times of war and beyond.

The destruction of a city or settlement during wartime, along with the loss of the male population actively involved in the conflict, irreversibly disrupts the flow of daily life and also harms the environment. As a result, vulnerable groups such as the elderly, disabled individuals, women, and children are inevitably more affected. Displacement, therefore, is one of the central concerns in *A Thousand Ships*. Chapter 3, for instance, focuses on the portrayal of the Trojan women, survivors of a great war, who are deprived of food, shelter, and protection. The omniscient narrator comments that "[w]hen a war was ended, the men lost their lives. But the women lost everything else" (Haynes, 2020, p. 34). The war-ravaged women, who have lost their homes, mothers, fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, and loved ones, now await distribution among the chief Achaean warriors, who demonstrated remarkable courage and manliness in the sack of Troy. The women of the Achaean-conquered city of Troy have been stripped of their free will and reduced to passive objects under the control of their conquerors:

When the Greeks had finished looting the city, they would return to their camp, a short distance along the shore. They would debate among themselves, or perhaps one of the elders would decide, and then women would be allotted to the leaders of the different Greek tribes, in order of status. And then each woman would be separated from her family, her friends, her neighbours, and given to a stranger whose language she didn't speak. [...] But when a city was sacked, everything within it was destroyed, right down to its words. (Haynes, 2020, p. 62)

It highlights the dehumanisation of women in the aftermath of war. It describes how women, treated as spoils, are distributed among warriors based on rank, forcibly separated from their families and given to strangers whose language they do not understand. This process reduces women to property. The final line of the quotation above powerfully conveys not only the physical destruction of the city but also the erasure of its culture, and identity, and the emotional devastation of its people.

Haynes' portrayal of the suffering endured by the women of Troy resonates with contemporary incidents, particularly the ongoing Gaza-Israel and Ukraine-Russia wars. In an interview about the publication of *A Thousand Ships*, Haynes reveals: "There's nothing I would like more than for the story of women displaced by war to become irrelevant. Unfortunately, it remains extremely relevant to us today" (qtd. in Garcia-Navarro, 2021, para. 7). Haynes' statement draws attention to the ongoing relevance and urgency of addressing the suffering of women displaced by war, and it reflects the persistent and troubling nature of this issue in contemporary society. Recognising the parallels between Haynes' narration of suffering women during and in the aftermath of the Trojan War and these contemporary incidents, therefore, foregrounds the enduring and widespread nature of women's suffering during times of war in order to make us consider the importance of empathy and taking action in response to

these ongoing crises. As Calliope argues in *A Thousand Ships*, “War is not a sport, to be decided in a quick bout on a strip of contested land” (Haynes, 2020, p. 109). Calliope’s words, then, suggest that war is not merely a brief, heroic competition over territory or honour but a prolonged and destructive force that reshapes societies, families, and landscapes. This idea aligns with current conflicts, like those in Gaza and Ukraine, where war transforms political, social, and environmental landscapes. For instance, according to *Gender Alert: The Gendered Impact of Crisis in Gaza*, a report published by UN Women in January 2024, more than 24,620 Palestinians, with 70 per cent being women and children, have been killed since the beginning of the war. As Briseis muses in Chapter 10 of *A Thousand Ships*, war makes no distinction “between warriors and unarmed men and women” (Haynes, 2020, p. 93). The statistic that 70 per cent of the 24,620 Palestinians killed are women and children indicates the severe gendered consequences of war, and it aligns with Briseis’ reflection in *A Thousand Ships* that conflict indiscriminately harms both soldiers/fighters and unarmed civilians alike.

According to the same report, more than 1,9 million people have been displaced, with 1 million of that number reported to be women and girls. Approximately 2 million people, the entire population of Gaza, have been struggling with “worse levels of acute food insecurity” (UN Women, 2024, p. 4). The impact of war on civilians, as detailed in the report, can be analogised to the literary depiction of conflict in *A Thousand Ships*. As Creusa, the wife of Aeneas, observes:

They [Greeks] had arrived with their tall ships all those years and had achieved what, exactly? The battles had been waged nearer the city, then further away; advancing right up to the beached vessels, then closing back towards Troy. There had been single combat and all-out war. There had been sickness and famine on both sides. (Haynes, 2020, p. 7)

Just as Creusa describes such relentless cycles of battle, famine, and disease that plague both sides of the conflict, the modern crises in Gaza and Ukraine reflect a similar pattern of suffering and deprivation among civilians. These instances, therefore, indicate how war’s devastation extends beyond the battlefield, affecting the most vulnerable populations and perpetuating a cycle of hardship. Likewise, in February 2024, the *Third Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA3)* was released by the World Bank, the Government of Ukraine, the European Commission, and the United Nations to present the assessment of the two years of the ongoing war in Ukraine. According to this report, the war has particularly affected women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ individuals as they have more specific needs and priorities compared to men. The report states that in 2023, households headed by men had an average total income per capita that was 20% higher than that of households headed by women. Furthermore, in comparison to households led by men (37%), those led by women are more prone to classify their needs as “Extreme” or “Extreme+” in one or more sectors (41%) (The World Bank et al., p. 77). The report also indicates that “[r]isks of gender-based violence (GBV), including war-related sexual violence (CRSV), human trafficking, and intimate partner violence, have been heightened since February 2022” (The World Bank et al., p. 77). Although the National Police received fewer reports of domestic abuse in 2022, by November 2023, there had been a rise in cases to 243,980 (The World Bank et al., pp. 77-78). Similarly, in *Gender Alert: The Gendered Impact of Crisis in Gaza*, it is stated that as the war continues, “[t]ensions within families and communities are increasing, which in turn increases the risks of gender-related protection concerns, including gender-based violence” (UN Women, 2024, p. 7). In the same report, it is further stated that due to the scarcity of food, closure of schools, disruption of educational opportunities, lack of protection, and loss of income, socio-cultural problems such as early marriage are likely to increase in the near future (UN Women, p. 7). As is evident, these reports show that because of their specific needs, women and children experience more challenging circumstances than men do during times of war. Women and children are particularly vulnerable when their needs for food, a stable environment, healthcare, shelter, and hygiene are not regularly met.

Similar to the aforementioned reports prepared for war-torn Gaza and Ukraine, the female narrators in *A Thousand Ships* also present diverse stories of gendered violence, resulting from the patriarchal, phallogocentric perspectives and practices that fuel the concept of war. For instance, Iphigenia is murdered by her father, Agamemnon, to win the favour of the gods. Clytemnestra, queen of Mycenae and wife of Agamemnon, questions this act as follows: “To kill a girl, a daughter, was bad enough. But to do so in a ritual which has made a mockery of her youth, of her maidenhood. A false marriage! Had any mother ever suffered something more vicious or cruel? To dress the girl up, promise her a great warrior to be her husband, and then to cut her down” (Haynes, 2020, p. 292). It highlights how patriarchal structures not only disregard female lives but also exploit such traditional female roles as maidenhood and marriage in order to justify violence. Clytemnestra’s anguish not only stems from the loss of her daughter but also from the vicious exploitation of Iphigenia’s youth, beauty, and femininity; in short, her womanhood, by a patriarchal framework that prioritises war over life. Similarly, Polyxena, the youngest princess of Troy, is another character who falls victim to the patriarchal rituals of the ancient world, as she is sacrificed as a tribute to the spirit of Achilles. A Trojan Princess Cassandra’s assault by the Achaean warrior Ajax during the sack of Troy exemplifies another brutal form of gendered violence. Andromache, a tragic figure whose husband Hector and son Astyanax are killed by Achilles and his son Neoptolemus, respectively, is also given to Neoptolemus as a war prize. She is compelled to become the wife of the man who has traumatised both her mind and body: “Her blood would be mixed with the blood of the man who had killed her son. And Neoptolemus was son of Achilles, who had killed her husband. To be enslaved by this vicious clan of murderers was terrible enough, but to produce a new scion was worse” (Haynes, 2020, p. 330). This situation not only represents a loss of personal agency but also a perverse continuation of the cycle of violence through displacement and gendered violence.

In the *Third Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA3)* report, it is also stated that “[w]omen are playing a key role in the humanitarian response and recovery efforts but are not equally involved in planning and decision-making” (the World Bank et al., 2024, p. 78). One of Haynes’ objectives in writing *A Thousand Ships* is to highlight the fact that women, often overlooked in discussions of war and traditional notions of masculinity and heroism, also have significant stories within these narratives, and their experiences during and after conflict deserve recognition as acts of heroism. Haynes expresses this perspective through the character of Calliope, who voices Haynes’ stance at different points in the novel. At the end of the book, Calliope says: “And I have sung of the women, the women in the shadows. I have sung of the forgotten, the ignored, the untold. [...] A war does not ignore half the people whose lives it touches. So why do we?” (Haynes, 2020, p. 339). As highlighted in the official reports, the phenomenon of war—and by extension, any phenomenon associated with patriarchy and capitalism—tends to marginalise the existence of women as the other. This marginalisation also extends to the environment, as capitalist and patriarchal systems that devalue, ignore, and marginalise women similarly tend to do the same with the environment and nature.

There is an interconnected relationship between the oppression of women under patriarchy and the destruction of the environment and its inhabitants in times of war. In this context, “[...] ecofeminism stresses the depth to which human realities are embedded in ecological realities, and the fact that we are all composed of physical and conceptual relationships” (Cuomo, 2002, p. 1). Therefore, along with the injustices and oppression faced by women during and in the aftermath of wars and conflicts, it is imperative to reflect on the concurrent degradation of the environment, which is one of the immediate but often overlooked consequences of warfare. The 2024 report, *The Environmental Consequences of the War against Ukraine*, produced collaboratively by the Conflict and Environment Observatory and Zoï Environment Network with input from the OSCE’s network of experts, seeks to deliver an initial evaluation of the environmental harm and hazards resulting from the conflict between February 2022 and February 2023. According to the report, the war has already damaged a large number of nuclear installations and sites

that contain radioactive materials. The damage or disruption caused by military attacks, power outages, or organisational failures, therefore, poses significant risks of radioactive contamination, which could affect vast areas of Ukraine and neighbouring countries. The report highlights that the widespread deployment of explosive weaponry has severely impacted urban environments, causing significant destruction to infrastructure, including water and sanitation systems. Additionally, it has led to a marked deterioration in air and soil quality and resulted in the accumulation of substantial debris. Additionally, a high-intensity armed conflict and the use of long-ranged weapons harmed wildlife, destroyed vegetation, contaminated water sources, disrupted ecosystems, and increased soil erosion. The report concludes that a comprehensive environmental assessment and recovery plan that would also address the effects of the conflict on gender should be developed (Conflict and Environment Observatory, 2024, p. 47). Likewise, in the UN Environment Programme's report, *The Environmental Impact of the Conflict in Ukraine*, published in the early stages of the war in 2022, nature is identified as a "forgotten victim of conflict" (p. 11). This report effectively draws public attention to the complex interplay between the environment and women by incorporating considerations of gender into the assessment of environmental impacts in conflict situations. The report emphasises the heightened vulnerability of certain groups, such as women and children, in the face of environmental catastrophes. It argues that "[t]he resulting environmental pollution and contamination with hazardous substances, like chemical spills and soil pollution, present differentiated risks to women, men and children in general and to women at the reproductive age and pregnant women in particular" (UN Environment Programme, 2022, p. 12). These arguments also align with the basic premises of ecofeminism as they emphasise the interdependence of gender and environmental concerns and the necessity of a comprehensive strategy that addresses both gender and ecological issues. The same organisation, the United Nations Environment Programme, also prepared a preliminary report, *Environmental Impact of Conflict in Gaza*, in 2024. Despite the prevailing restrictions in Gaza and safety concerns, however, the report still presents valuable preliminary evaluations of the environmental damage caused by the conflict.

Although *A Thousand Ships* neither explicitly reflects ecofeminist concerns nor specifically explores the impacts of war on the environment and women, there are instances in the novel that highlight this web of interconnectedness. It can be argued that "[...] Othering in the form of sexism and anthropocentrism are considered essential to an ecofeminist understanding of violence against women as a culturally imbued category of sex and violence against the Earth through the assumed entitlements of human supremacy" (Gallo-Cruz, 2022, p. 101). In that sense, sexism and anthropocentrism are two systems of domination that shape the socio-cultural dynamics in patriarchal societies. Ecofeminism argues that the oppression of women and the exploitation of the Earth are deeply interconnected as both arise from hierarchical structures that separate and devalue the other, whether that other is women, non-human beings, or nature itself. By categorising women as an inferior, culturally constructed group, patriarchy justifies violence against them, and likewise, anthropocentrism legitimises human dominance over the Earth. Therefore, ecofeminism argues that environmental degradation and gendered violence are not separate phenomena but manifestations of a shared ideology of domination that privileges masculine, human-centred authority over vulnerable or marginalised groups. In Haynes' *A Thousand Ships*, Gaia, also known as Mother Earth, is introduced as a character in Chapter 39. Thus far, the story has shifted back and forth in time, focusing on the feelings and experiences of women who are connected to the Trojan War in one way or another, whether it is before, during, or after the conflict. It seems unusual to relinquish the narrative voice to a figure who, one might think, has no place in a story centred around a war. However, Gaia was present before, during, and after the war, and will continue to exist. Gaia's story will never end, unlike the stories of the Trojan women, which eventually come to an end. It is evident that Haynes' inclusion of Gaia as a character in the book is motivated by environmental concerns. Gaia's perspective, conveyed by a third-person omniscient narrator, serves as a profound

critique of mankind's destructive tendencies, not only through war but also through greed, overconsumption, and environmental degradation, highlighting the broader consequences of an anthropocentric lifestyle. Gaia has seen a "more ruinous war" (Haynes, 2020, p. 276), and her perspective reflects a natural world that endures through countless cycles of violence and destruction. She describes how mankind weighs heavily on her and expresses her lamentation as follows:

She felt sorrow course through her: her purpose was to nurture and provide for men. But they kept taking more from her than she had to give. She looked out across the expanse and saw trees denuded of their fruits, fields ploughed until they could give up no more crops. Why could men not just be less greedy, she wondered. (Haynes, 2020, pp. 277-278)

According to the omniscient narrator, Gaia wants more catastrophic wars because she sees them as a chance to lower the human population. Given that Gaia, the Earth goddess typically associated with fostering life, paradoxically advocates destruction, this could be interpreted as an example of irony. This ironic turn in the novel highlights the extent of mankind's harmful impact on the planet. Mother Earth, overwhelmed by human greed, overpopulation, and environmental degradation, ironically prefers fewer humans:

Stop, she wanted to cry out, please stop. You cannot all fit on the space between the oceans, you cannot grow enough food on the land beneath the mountains. You cannot graze enough livestock on the grasses around your cities, you cannot build enough homes on the peaks of your hills. You must stop, so that I can rest beneath your ever-increasing weight. (Haynes, 2020, pp. 276-277)

This quotation can be read as a criticism of the anthropocentric worldview, which fosters the notions of expansion and consumption, and likewise, prioritises meeting individual needs at the expense of the planet's limits and resources. Gaia's perspective, therefore, shows the Earth as an entity which is fighting to keep up with humanity's incessant demands rather than just as a passive provider. The environmental degradation Gaia describes due to expansion and overconsumption can be viewed as an extension of the patriarchal dominance reflected in the narratives of the female characters in the novel. Just as Gaia suffers from the relentless expansion and exploitation by humans, the women's stories highlight how patriarchal systems control their lives and diminish their agency.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, by analysing the novel through an ecofeminist lens, it is contended that Haynes' portrayal of the Trojan women's suffering reflects broader systemic issues of militarism, patriarchy, and environmental degradation. The novel, while not explicitly an ecofeminist text, inevitably addresses these themes and demonstrates the intricate connections between gendered violence and ecological harm. The parallels drawn between the experiences of the Trojan women and the contemporary struggles faced by women in such conflict zones as Gaza and Ukraine also highlight the persistent and universal nature of these issues. As evidenced by reports on these modern conflicts, the exploitation and marginalisation of women and the environment continue to be pressing global concerns. In this study, therefore, ecofeminism, as a critical framework, offers a compelling framework for examining the links between systemic inequalities and environmental harm, particularly as they intersect with ideas of power, such as militarism, patriarchy, capitalism, and sexism. When read through this lens, *A Thousand Ships* reveals the intricate connections between war, gender, and the natural world. It is the same ideological structures that rationalise racism, sexism, and environmental exploitation, and these structures are closely intertwined, reinforcing one another. Patriarchal and capitalist forces that drive conflict and war not only subjugate women but also extend their dominance over the environment. This interplay is evident in the novel's depiction of the women involved in the Trojan War, and the

individual stories of these women highlight the gender-based violence prevalent during and after such conflicts. Additionally, the portrayal of Gaia, the Earth Goddess, is argued to be a reflection on the destruction of nature and draws readers' attention to the anthropocentric behaviours that lead to environmental devastation. Hence, it can be argued that the novel conveys the idea that systems rooted in patriarchy, militarism, sexism, and anthropocentrism treat both women and nature as entities to be controlled and subdued.

Last but certainly not least, this study foregrounds the power of literature to reveal and challenge the deeply interconnected struggles for gender equality, social justice, and environmental protection. Through an ecofeminist reading of Haynes' *A Thousand Ships* and by considering the contemporary impacts of conflicts such as those in Gaza and Ukraine on both women and the environment, this study demonstrates how literature can both reflect and critique these ongoing injustices. It also reinforces the urgent need for empathy and action to address these crises. Furthermore, the study illustrates how the pain and suffering of vulnerable groups—particularly women, children, and the elderly in conflict zones—are not isolated but deeply linked to broader systemic issues. In this way, the study not only contributes to the advancement of ecofeminist thought but also calls for a more compassionate, interdisciplinary conversation that acknowledges the urgency of these global challenges. Ultimately, it is a call to act, to recognise the profound human cost of war, environmental destruction, and gendered violence, and to respond with solidarity and collective effort.

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