

# Book Review: Hunnicutt, G. (2020). *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective: Intersections of Animal Oppression, Patriarchy and Domination of the Earth*. Routledge.

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In this book, *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective: Intersections of Animal Oppression, Patriarchy and Domination of the Earth*, Hunnicutt illuminates how gender violence is entangled with violence against nature and nonhuman animals. The book is structured in somewhat of a “funneling” approach where each chapter is positioned as more-or-less a subset of the previous one(s). In this way, Hunnicutt emphasizes that gender violence, even on the interpersonal level, is inseparable from wider human domination over nature in general.

In slightly more detail, the first chapter defines the concepts Hunnicutt primarily works with, namely, ecofeminism, nature, and gender violence. The use and values behind each of these terms are discussed. Chapter 2 discusses how the ideology of patriarchy closely resembles that of domination of nature. The crux of this similarity lies in differentiating one group from another by “othering” one group, and then devaluing this group. Once “othered,” groups are devalued for not possessing the traits of the valued group. Furthermore, and an important point of Hunnicutt’s, is that *which* particular group is othered is interchangeable. Replacing “nature” with “women” changes how violence manifests but it does not change the fact that violence is employed as a means of domination, control, and separation.

Chapter 3 looks at various ways nature, nonhuman animals, and women are devalued. Using examples of meat eating, blood sports, and sexual assault, Hunnicutt continually returns to the notion of humans constructing themselves as separate from and superior to nature. Chapter 4 considers how environmental catastrophes such as climate change differentially impact women over men, and nonhuman animals over people. The concluding chapter comments on how to build societies founded on cooperation instead of domination.

While the first chapter serves as a literature review for the book, the book as a whole serves as somewhat of a literature review for intersecting oppressions. Hunnicutt draws from a wide range of

disciplines, from gender to critical animal studies, peace studies, environmentalism, and anarchism. Throughout the book, Hunnicutt stresses that violence is always enacted in a gendered way, whether it be violence against nature, nonhuman animals, or other humans. Men overwhelmingly commit acts of violence against all three groups. Men also tend to commit different, and usually more severe, acts of violence than women. A fundamental tenet of the book is that societies with larger gender stratification tend to have higher rates of violence against women and nature (including animals). Conversely, societies that are more egalitarian tend to have little violence. Hunnicutt thus links social and ecological harms. It is not that one causes the other, per se, but that both reinforce and sustain each other. Therefore, this book is especially important for those working within the realms of human violence to get an introduction to the theory being gender violence being embedded within a much broader context of domination of nature and of the Other as nature.

There are two key strengths of this volume. The first is that Hunnicutt keeps nonhuman animals in focus. This is what generally separates ecofeminism from other feminist approaches to the environment, such as feminist political ecology or environmental justice. Animals are frequently overlooked in approaches to the environment, including traditional conservation biology, which allows the “sacrifice” of individuals for the good of the species. The second strength is that Hunnicutt does not only stick to women, animals, and the environment. Rather, she continually weaves in multiple oppressed groups such as those with disabilities, children, and people of color. As a result, this book presents a general and balanced overview of intersecting oppressions. Thus, anyone working for justice of a marginalized or devalued – that is, “othered” – group can find this book useful. Hunnicutt does not sideline any particular group, but rather illustrates how the oppression of each group is embedded within a larger framework of domination, all of which are foregrounded by the human domination of nature. It is

important not to lose sight of this, as many who work within issues of human justice and equality overlook the domination of nature (which necessarily includes nonhuman animals) as a contributing factor.

Therefore, Hunnicutt's primary conclusion is that social justice is inseparable from ecological justice. Neither can be adequately solved without the other. The onset of COVID-19 provides an all-too-sobering example of Hunnicutt's premise. Hunnicutt states that when the privileged side of a dualistic hierarchy is challenged, violence is often deployed as a strategy to maintain power and keep the devalued group under control. This is evident in all sorts of social movements – such as #HimToo as a counterprotest against #MeToo, Blue Lives Matter as a counterprotest to Black Lives Matter, or instances of humans harming animals for attacking them when the human provoked the animal first.

Humans constantly live in fear of the “natural world” harming them through natural disasters or disease. COVID-19 is no different. Humans have provoked the wider environment and it is now exposing humans' vulnerability. Understandably, many people are upset at the conditions we must live in due to the onset of this disease. But the important point is how we will deal with it. Will

humans accept the fact that we are part of the environment and “hear” what it is trying to tell us? Or will we use violence to further subdue nature after the pandemic has passed in an effort to reassert our challenged supremacy?

The answer is impossible to predict, but Hunnicutt's point with this book is that if we do not respect nature or begin to live more responsibly and respectfully towards it, we will continue to bring further violence on ourselves. For those who have not already come to this realization, this connection urgently needs to be made in the throes of COVID-19. As such, this book is a critical text for all those who may be unclear on the entanglements of human and nonhuman violence, especially connections between violence towards nature and violence towards women.

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