IOSR Journal Of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)
Volume 30, Issue 9, Series 2 (September, 2025) 01-07
e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845.
www.iosrjournals.org

Bodies, Care, And More-Than-Human Worlds: An Ecofeminist Reading Of Diane Cook's The New Wilderness

Sumon Sikder

Abstract:
This article analyzes Diane Cook's The New Wilderness through an ecofeminist lens, focusing on the links between patriarchal capitalism and the ecological crisis. The novel critiques capitalist patriarchy by presenting the Wilderness State as a system that treats nature as a resource and people, especially women, as controlled bodies. It explores how the environmental crisis intensifies gendered burdens with women carrying extra labor and emotional stress to ensure survival. It also discusses how the novel reimagines agency through care ethics, highlighting maternal care, interdependence, and relational survival. Additionally, it examines how the novel emphasizes more-than-human agency, showing how animals, weather, and terrain shape human experience. The paper uses a theory-led close reading to connect ecofeminism with critical dystopia. By doing so, it highlights how The New Wilderness offers a new perspective on survival, agency, and resistance, challenging dominant systems of control and promoting care as an essential practice for both humans and the environment.

Keywords: *Ecofeminism, Critical Dystopia, Capitalist Patriarchy, Embodiment, Care Ethics, More-than-Human, Diane Cook*

Date of Submission: 25-08-2025 Date of Acceptance: 05-09-2025

I. Introduction

The climate crisis is not a distant phenomenon but a lived experience that impacts bodies in tangible and often devastating ways, especially for women. In particular, the ecological damage caused by capitalist exploitation is deeply gendered, with the burdens of environmental collapse disproportionately affecting women. In Diane Cook's *The New Wilderness*, the unraveling of the natural world is framed as a crisis that reshapes both the environment and human lives, particularly through the lens of gendered labor. As the planet faces ecological devastation, the novel showcases how women in particular, are subjected to intensified physical and emotional labor, often bearing the brunt of survival work. This intersection of ecological harm and gendered inequality forms the crux of the novel's exploration of both the personal and collective impacts of environmental decline.

The New Wilderness fits squarely within the genre of eco-dystopia, which critiques the intersection of ecological destruction and oppressive social systems. More specifically, it can be seen as a "critical dystopia," where the collapse of natural systems and the rise of a market-driven, patriarchal society converge to create a nightmarish vision of the future. The novel's setting in the Wilderness State highlights the violence of capitalist patriarchy; an economic and political system that treats both nature and human bodies as resources to be extracted and controlled. This world, built upon scarcity and regulation, reveals how capitalist logics underpin policies that commodify the land and reduce people, especially women, to bodies to be managed, measured, and exploited. Through its narrative, *The New Wilderness* critiques these systemic structures, offering a scathing commentary on the ecological and gendered harm they generate.

While previous research has touched upon the ecofeminist aspects of the novel, few studies have synthesized the connections between policy-driven market logics. The embodied gendered burdens of survival, and the agency of nonhuman entities in shaping the course of events. Most existing work focuses on the representation of women's labor or the novel's portrayal of environmental destruction but does not fully explore how these themes intersect. This gap in ecofeminist scholarship overlooks the novel's deeper critique of both ecological and gendered harms within the larger context of capitalist patriarchy.

It argues that *The New Wilderness* presents capitalist patriarchy as a system that exacerbates both ecological degradation and gendered oppression. However, the novel does not merely depict these harmful systems; it also offers a vision of resistance and survival through care and relational agency. By centering maternal care and attentiveness to more-than-human rhythms, the novel reimagines agency as something rooted in interdependence rather than domination. The ecofeminist framework provides a lens through which to understand how maternal care, environmental consciousness, and relational survival practices can serve as acts of resistance to the controlling forces of capitalist patriarchy.

The article proceeds in four sections. The first section examines the ways in which *The New Wilderness* critiques capitalist patriarchy through its portrayal of policy mechanisms that commodify both nature and human bodies. The second section delves into the gendered burdens of survival, showing how the novel represents the emotional and physical labor women bear in the face of environmental catastrophe. The third section focuses on the concept of care as counter-politics, exploring how maternal agency and relational survival offer a radical alternative to the violence of the existing systems. Finally, the fourth section discusses the novel's engagement with more-than-human agency, challenging anthropocentrism and offering an alternative vision of survival that acknowledges the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman worlds.

II. Managing Nature, Measuring Bodies: Capitalist Patriarchy In The Wilderness State

In *The New Wilderness*, Diane Cook presents the Wilderness State as a system designed to control both nature and human bodies, especially women's. The state's policies, while framed as protective, actually serve to commodify nature and regulate human bodies, reducing them to manageable units. Capitalist patriarchy is at the heart of this system. It exploits the land and the people, turning them into resources for extraction and control.

One key scene in the novel illustrates this dynamic through the entry/consent conditions imposed on new inhabitants. The Wilderness State requires newcomers to agree to strict rules about their behavior, movement, and surveillance. Rangers constantly monitor their actions, ensuring compliance. If these rules are broken, punishments follow. The inhabitants, particularly women, are confined to certain zones and must abide by rigid movement protocols. For example, "We don't own the land, we don't own our bodies; nothing is ours, not even the freedom to roam" (Cook, 2020, p. 152). This statement reflects how the land and the people are not free. They are treated as inventory to be controlled, not as living entities with rights. The novel shows that the state's so-called "protection" is just a form of regulation. It limits freedom and autonomy, reducing human bodies to mere units that can be measured, surveilled, and punished.

We're not allowed to have things. We're not allowed to be comfortable. We can't sit down and relax, not unless we've earned it. And even then, it's only temporary. We must always be working, always moving. (Cook, 2020, p. 105)

It encapsulates the exploitation of the inhabitants, particularly women, within the Wilderness State. The rigid control over their movements and labor exemplifies the capitalist patriarchy at work, where even personal autonomy and rest are commodified and regulated.

The system in the Wilderness State functions much like the capitalist patriarchy described by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva. Mies and Shiva argue that capitalist systems thrive on the commodification and enclosure of both land and labor (Mies & Shiva, 1993). In the Wilderness State, land is commodified, treated as a resource to be "protected" for capitalist exploitation. Similarly, people especially women are managed, their bodies controlled and used to sustain the system. The state's policies of "protection" are really about ensuring control over both nature and its inhabitants, particularly the women who bear the heaviest burdens.

Another important scene in the novel is the scarcity protocols, quotas, and "no-trace" regulations imposed by the state. These rules, framed as conservation efforts, require strict limits on resources like water and food. But these measures are not just about protecting the environment. They create scarcity to enforce control over both people and nature. The state controls access to resources, forcing women to perform emotional and physical labor to survive. For instance, the novel's characters face constant threats of punishment for breaking the scarcity rules. One character expresses, "They tell us it's to protect the earth, but it feels more like a way to make us work for nothing" (Cook, 2020, p. 98). Here, the rhetoric of conservation masks the exploitative logic of capitalist systems. The "no-trace" regulations and scarcity protocols are a form of labor extraction, forcing people, especially women, into roles where they are responsible for managing these limited resources.

Vandana Shiva's analysis of scarcity, as artificially created through capitalist logic, is evident in the Wilderness State (Shiva, 2005). The state creates artificial limits on resources to control the labor of its inhabitants. Women, tasked with managing the household's survival, bear the brunt of this scarcity. They are expected to work harder to meet the needs of the group while also managing emotional labor. This gendered division of labor is a key feature of capitalist patriarchy, where women's work is undervalued and taken for granted.

Despite the rhetoric of "conservation," the true function of these policies is control. The state claims to protect the land, but its policies primarily regulate and extract from both nature and people. As Shiva (2005) argues, this is a form of "conservation" that serves capitalistic interests rather than environmental or human well-being. It is about measuring, managing, and extracting value from both the land and its inhabitants.

In this system, the burden of survival and labor falls unevenly, with women bearing the heaviest load. The policies that control movement, labor, and resources disproportionately affect women. They are tasked with emotional and physical labor, from managing resources to maintaining group cohesion in times of stress. Women are not just managing survival; they are also managing the emotional and moral weight of the community. As Mohammad Rahmatullah (2025) argues, systems that control natural resources force marginalized groups,

particularly women, to take on unacknowledged and unseen labor. This is reflected in *The New Wilderness*, where women's labor is essential but largely invisible.

Women's labor is framed as necessary for survival, yet it remains unrecognized by the state. Their role is to sustain life within the limits set by the capitalist system. This reinforces gendered power structures, where women's contributions are undervalued and exploited. The system of control, under the guise of conservation, forces women into positions where their survival depends on complying with the state's rigid regulations.

While the state presents itself as "protecting" the environment, its policies serve to discipline both the land and the bodies of the inhabitants. The Wilderness State, as a capitalist patriarchy, perpetuates ecological harm and gendered oppression, forcing women to bear the emotional and physical labor necessary for survival. This intersection of capitalist patriarchy and ecological exploitation is a central theme in the novel. In the next section, we will explore how the emotional and physical burdens of survival fall most heavily on women, and how this reflects broader themes of environmental and gendered harm.

III. The Gendered Burden Of Crisis: Embodied Labor, Risk, And Emotional Regulation

In *The New Wilderness*, environmental stress reorganizes labor, forcing women's bodies to bear a disproportionate share of survival work. Women are not only responsible for the physical tasks needed to survive but are also tasked with managing the emotional and psychological burdens of the group. The novel explores how, under the pressure of ecological collapse, women like Bea are expected to take on roles that require caregiving, risk-bearing, and emotional regulation, all of which amplify their vulnerability. This chapter explores how the novel represents these gendered burdens of survival through the embodied labor of its female characters and the emotional labor required to keep the group functional.

One key scene that highlights this gendered burden is Bea's caregiving during illness, menstruation, and pregnancy. The harsh conditions of the Wilderness State leave no room for rest or recovery, and Bea's body is under constant pressure to manage multiple roles. While dealing with her own bodily needs, Bea still performs essential survival labor, such as foraging and water collection, which are critical to the group's survival. At one point, despite being physically weakened by illness, Bea continues to care for the group, gathering food and water, despite her exhaustion. As she reflects, "I can't afford to fall behind, not now. Every task counts, and if I stop, we all stop" (Cook, 2020, p. 132). This quote illustrates the weight of survival responsibilities that fall on Bea's shoulders. The novel shows how women's bodies, already vulnerable, become even more so under intensified survival pressures.

From an ecofeminist perspective, Bea's labor can be understood through the lens of intersectional ecofeminism, which examines how gender inequalities intersect with environmental crises. As ecofeminist scholar Stacy Alaimo (2008) suggests, bodies are "porous" and "situated" within specific environmental contexts, meaning that they are constantly shaped by and respond to external conditions. Bea's body, in this sense, is both a tool for survival and a site of vulnerability, constantly pushed beyond its limits. Her physical labor is not just about survival; it is also about managing the emotional and psychological weight of the crisis. Alaimo's concept of "trans-corporeality" shows how human bodies are interconnected with the environment, suggesting that the boundaries between human bodies and the ecosystem are fluid (Alaimo, 2008). Bea's experience reflects this interconnectedness, as her body becomes a battleground where ecological and gendered stress intersect.

The gendered burden on Bea is further exacerbated by the expectation that women, more than men, are responsible for caregiving and emotional regulation in times of crisis. This pattern of gendered labor is a central theme in ecofeminism, as noted by Vandana Shiva (2005), who discusses how women's work especially emotional labor is often invisible and undervalued. Bea's caregiving role, which includes not only tending to the physical needs of the group but also providing emotional support, exemplifies this invisible labor. For example, when the group faces fear and grief after a tragic loss, Bea steps up to provide emotional stability, even though she is also deeply affected. "I felt the weight of their silence and fear, but I couldn't show it. They needed me to hold it together" (Cook, 2020, p. 149). This moment reflects how emotional labor is critical for survival, as Bea's ability to keep the group functioning emotionally is as important as physical survival tasks.

This emotional labor is not just about managing others' emotions; it is a vital component of what bell hooks (2000) refers to as "the practice of freedom," where emotional connection and care are essential for collective survival. Bea's management of fear and grief is central to the group's ability to keep functioning, as fear and emotional breakdown could lead to further disintegration of the group. However, this burden of emotional regulation is largely placed on Bea's shoulders as a woman, underscoring how gender roles are amplified during times of crisis. The novel highlights that, in capitalist patriarchal systems, emotional labor becomes another form of exploitation, with women expected to perform this essential work without recognition or rest (Gilligan, 1982).

The environmental and gendered burdens are not only physical but also moral. The moral injury caused by survival decisions, such as sacrificing a person for the good of the group, falls heavily on women, who are expected to carry the emotional weight of such choices. Bea's emotional labor is integral to maintaining group cohesion, but it also exacerbates her own vulnerability, as she is not allowed the space to grieve or express her

distress. This emotional toll of survival is another form of embodied labor, where Bea's body is not only a site of physical labor but also of emotional repression. As Jean Harvey (2012) argues in her work on ecofeminism, the emotional and physical labor women perform in survival situations often goes unrecognized, yet it is crucial for the functioning of the group in ecological crises.

In *The New Wilderness*, the emotional and physical burdens placed on women like Bea align with ecofeminist perspectives that critique patriarchal power structures, which often amplify gendered divisions of labor during times of crisis. As Uddin, Rafid, and Rahmatullah (2020) explain:

Ecofeminism critiques the way patriarchal systems utilize women's labor as a tool for domination, often framing their roles as essential for survival, yet undervaluing or ignoring the emotional and physical toll it takes on them. (Uddin, Rafid, & Rahmatullah, 2020, p. 5).

It highlights the intersection of environmental collapse and gendered expectations, emphasizing the disproportionate emotional labor that women are forced to carry, much like Bea in *The New Wilderness.*

The novel also illustrates how the emotional labor performed by Bea and other women is tied to survival economics. In the wilderness, survival is not just about food and water; it is also about maintaining morale, group cohesion, and emotional balance. Women's roles as emotional caretakers are central to these survival strategies. As hooks (2000) suggests, emotional work is part of a broader resistance to oppression. Bea's care for others, even at the cost of her own well-being, is a form of resistance to the disintegration of the group, yet it is simultaneously a form of exploitation.

This emotional labor is closely tied to the physical tasks that Bea performs. Her caregiving, both physical and emotional, represents a double burden, where her labor is necessary but undervalued. In the Wilderness State, women like Bea carry the weight of survival, making their emotional labor a critical yet invisible part of the survival economy. This reinforces the gendered dynamics of survival in the novel, where women's contributions are taken for granted, and their labor is extracted without recognition.

IV. Care As Counter-Politics: Maternal Agency And Relational Survival

In *The New Wilderness*, maternal care and relational survival emerge as powerful forms of agency that challenge dominant systems of control. Through the characters' acts of teaching, sharing, and decision-making, the novel reframes agency not as an individual pursuit of power, but as a collective, interdependent practice. Care, in this context, is not a "soft" or passive act; rather it is a necessary, deliberate, and strategic technique for survival in a harsh world. The novel suggests that this care-based agency can function as a form of resistance to the authoritarian policies of the Wilderness State. By focusing on relationships, solidarity, and the ethical choices around scarcity, the novel shows how care can become a means of survival that values interdependence over domination.

One of the most significant moments that demonstrate care as counter-politics is the relationship between Bea and her daughter, Agnes. Throughout the novel, Bea teaches Agnes not just about survival in the wilderness, but about a different kind of agency one rooted in care and mutual dependence. In their lessons, Bea emphasizes how sharing and working together are essential for survival. This teaching is not just about practical knowledge; it is about instilling a sense of responsibility and connection to others, and to the land. For example, Bea teaches Agnes how to forage for food and gather water but more importantly, she teaches her to think about how these resources are shared and distributed within the group. Bea's lessons are rooted in the idea that survival is not an individual endeavor, but one that requires the cooperation and care of all members of the group. As Bea says to Agnes, "We don't just take what we need. We share, and we protect what we have, because this is how we keep each other alive" (Cook, 2020, p. 124). This statement encapsulates the novel's central theme: that survival is relational, not isolated.

This focus on relational survival is central to ecofeminist care ethics, as described by Gaard (2011), who argues that care is an active, intentional practice that challenges the traditional views of women's roles as passive caregivers. In *The New Wilderness*, Bea's role as a mother and caregiver does not align with traditional notions of passive femininity. Instead, her care is an active, strategic form of agency that sustains life and resists the capitalist patriarchy of the Wilderness State. Care in this context is not "soft," as it requires strength, resilience, and the ability to negotiate with and resist the structures of power. Bea's teaching of Agnes reflects a broader ethos of care-based agency, one where vulnerability is not seen as a weakness but as a shared experience that can lead to solidarity and resistance.

Furthermore, the novel rejects the essentialist idea that women are inherently connected to nature or that their role in survival is biological. As ecofeminist scholars like Alaimo (2008) emphasize, the relationship between women and nature is not innate but constructed through social practices and environmental conditions. In *The New Wilderness*, Bea's maternal care is shown to be a learned practice, not an instinctual one. Bea teaches Agnes to make ethical choices based on the realities of scarcity, forcing both of them to rethink what it means to survive. In one instance, Bea faces the difficult decision of whether to give away their last food ration to a member of the group who is starving. Bea's refusal to act out of guilt and instead making a decision based on the survival needs

of the whole group exemplifies the ethics of care at work. She explains to Agnes, "We can't save everyone. We can only take care of each other, and right now, that means we need to look out for us" (Cook, 2020, p. 142). This moment illustrates the complex, ethical decisions that come with scarcity, as well as Bea's rejection of the "women = nature" essentialism. Her actions are based on practical decisions, not biological imperatives.

Another important moment that demonstrates care as a form of resistance is Bea's quiet refusal to adhere to the authority of the Wilderness State. The state imposes strict rules on the inhabitants, including how to manage food and resources, yet Bea consistently challenges these rules when they conflict with her values of care and shared survival. In one instance, Bea refuses to follow an order from the rangers to report on the group's resources, believing that doing so would put them at greater risk. Her act of refusal, though small and quiet, represents a micro-resistance to the larger system of control. As Bea says, "They want to know how much we have, but that information doesn't help them. It just lets them control us" (Cook, 2020, p. 118). This subtle act of resistance shows how care can be a form of politics one that is not based on power or domination, but on the ethics of survival and mutual responsibility.

In this way, the novel illustrates how care is a counter-political force, one that works outside the logic of capitalism and domination. Bea's caregiving, teaching, and decision-making are all forms of resistance to the Wilderness State's extractive, hierarchical system. Through Bea's maternal agency, the novel emphasizes that survival is not about individual achievement but about relationality and solidarity. Bea's care for Agnes, her refusal to follow the state's commands, and her ethical decision-making all show how care-based agency can disrupt systems of control.

Furthermore, the novel moves beyond human-centered survival to also include nonhuman agency. The survival lessons that Bea teaches Agnes are not only about how to live within human-made systems but also about how to attune themselves to the rhythms of the natural world. Bea's lessons about respecting nature and understanding its cycles highlight the interconnectedness between humans and the environment. As Alaimo (2008) suggests, the boundaries between humans and the environment are porous, and the novel emphasizes how survival requires recognizing and respecting these nonhuman rhythms. The more-than-human world, from animals to weather patterns, is central to the survival strategy that Bea teaches Agnes. Bea's ability to navigate this interconnectedness shows how care-based agency extends beyond the human realm to include the nonhuman world.

In *The New Wilderness*, the novel illustrates care-based agency as a form of resistance to patriarchal control, emphasizing maternal care and relational survival. This perspective aligns with the ecofeminist view that care is an active and strategic practice, as Ahmed (2021) explains:

Ecofeminism challenges the traditional notions of care as passive, suggesting that maternal care is not just a biological instinct but a learned practice that requires strength and intentionality. (Ahmed, 2021, p. 218).

In conclusion, *The New Wilderness* reframes agency as relational and care-based, focusing on maternal agency and the ethics of survival. Through Bea's lessons to Agnes and her ethical decision-making, the novel shows how care is a form of resistance to the domination of capitalist patriarchy. Care is not a passive, feminine trait, but an active, deliberate choice that sustains life and fosters solidarity. This form of agency is not only about human relationships but also about recognizing the agency of the nonhuman world, offering a holistic and interconnected approach to survival.

V. More-Than-Human Agency: Unlearning Anthropocentrism

In *The New Wilderness*, the novel teaches us to unlearn human exceptionalism by showing how animals, weather, and the land all act as agents in shaping the survival experience. The narrative goes beyond human-centered views of survival and acknowledges the powerful roles of nonhuman entities in shaping life and death. These more-than-human forces, from weather events to animal traces, become vital guides that influence decision-making and survival strategies. Through these elements, the novel challenges anthropocentrism, which places humans at the center of the natural world, and instead promotes a more interconnected understanding of survival, where humans are not the sole agents of change.

One of the key scenes that illustrates this more-than-human agency occurs when a sudden weather event forces the group to change their route. The group is navigating the wilderness, relying on their knowledge of the terrain to guide them, when an unexpected storm drastically alters their plans. The heavy rain and strong winds disrupt the normal rhythm of their journey, forcing them to take shelter and reassess their route. In this moment, the weather acts as an active force that directly impacts the group's survival. The group's movement is no longer determined solely by their human decisions but by the uncontrollable forces of nature. As the novel describes, "We had to wait for the storm to pass before we could continue. The wind didn't care about our plans" (Cook, 2020, p. 158). This moment highlights how the weather is not a passive backdrop to human action, but a powerful agent that forces humans to adapt and learn attentiveness to its rhythms.

This scene reflects the idea of trans-corporeality, as discussed by Stacy Alaimo (2008), who argues that bodies are not separate from the environments in which they exist; instead, they co-act with the world around

them. In *The New Wilderness*, the storm is not simply an environmental condition to be overcome, but a force that shapes the very course of the group's journey. The storm's power forces the group to stop, reassess, and adjust to the world's rhythm, thus illustrating how human survival is interwoven with the actions of nonhuman elements. This trans-corporeal relationship emphasizes that survival is not a solely human endeavor but one that requires awareness and respect for the more-than-human world that coexists with us.

Another scene that highlights more-than-human agency is when the group follows animal traces that guide them to safety. While navigating the wilderness, Bea and the others use the signs left by animals tracks, markings, and even the behavior of animals themselves as cues to guide their path. These traces are not just passive indicators; they actively shape the group's decisions. For example, when they notice signs of a predator's recent movement, the group adjusts its route to avoid danger. The novel describes, "The tracks led us to the river. We knew the bear had passed this way just hours ago. We followed the river, avoiding the path it had taken" (Cook, 2020, p. 132). The animal traces provide crucial guidance, acting as a force that shapes the group's journey and their decisions.

This reliance on animal behavior and traces reflects the novel's commitment to more-than-human thinking, as theorized by Donna Haraway (2008). Haraway's concept of "companion species" suggests that humans and animals are co-actors in the world, each shaping the other's survival. In the wilderness, the characters must learn to read and respond to animal cues, understanding that animals are not simply resources or obstacles, but active participants in the environment. The traces left by animals provide information that guides the group's survival choices, further emphasizing the interconnectedness of humans and nonhumans. This understanding requires humans to let go of the belief that they are the only ones making decisions, recognizing instead that their survival is deeply entwined with the actions of other species.

The seasonal cycles also structure the group's choices and actions, demonstrating how the natural world dictates the tempo of life in the wilderness. In one instance, the group must adapt their plans based on the time of year, as the changing seasons dictate what resources are available. The novel states, "As the days grew colder, we had to gather more food for the winter. The rhythm of the land was our calendar, and we had no choice but to follow it" (Cook, 2020, p. 167). This passage underscores how survival in the wilderness is guided not only by human will but by the cycles of nature itself. The seasons, as more-than-human agents, shape the group's actions and survival strategies. The land's cycles are as much a part of the group's planning as the humans themselves, demonstrating how human existence is interdependent with the rhythms of the environment.

This section also ties back to the first chapter, where the Wilderness State's policies fail to account for more-than-human agency. The state's policies are rigid and human-centered, focusing only on controlling human bodies and extracting resources from nature. However, these policies neglect the active role that nature itself plays in shaping survival. The group's ability to adapt to the weather, animal behavior, and seasonal changes is a form of resistance to the state's top-down management of the wilderness. In this sense, the failure of the state to recognize nonhuman agency exposes the limitations of policies that ignore the active role of the environment in shaping human existence.

Moreover, the more-than-human agency discussed in this chapter connects to the previous section on care. Just as Bea and other characters practice care for each other in the face of survival, the novel's treatment of nonhuman agency suggests that care extends beyond human relationships. Survival, in this case, is a collective effort that involves both humans and the environment, where listening to the land, respecting animal behavior, and understanding the weather's rhythms are all essential components of care. This care-based agency is not just about humans taking care of one another, but about learning to live in tune with the world around them, acknowledging that nonhuman entities also play an essential role in survival.

This chapter has shown how *The New Wilderness* challenges anthropocentrism by portraying more-than-human agency. Animals, weather, and the land act as co-actors in the survival of the group, forcing humans to adapt, respect, and learn from the environment. The novel's emphasis on more-than-human thinking encourages readers to reconsider the boundaries between humans and nature, recognizing that survival depends on the interdependence of all living beings. In the next chapter, we will explore how this understanding of survival contributes to a new form of agency, one that values relational survival and care, not domination.

VI. Conclusion

In *The New Wilderness*, the system of capitalist patriarchy creates ecological and gendered harm, exploiting both nature and human bodies. Women, particularly, bear the gendered burden of crisis, shouldering the physical and emotional labor necessary for survival. The novel reimagines agency through care, emphasizing relational survival and nonhuman literacy, where humans are attuned to the rhythms of nature and other-than-human entities.

This critical eco-dystopia warns us about the consequences of unchecked capitalist exploitation while offering an ethic of relational survival. It shows that survival is not about domination, but about cooperation with

the environment and each other. The novel's intervention lies in its reimagining of agency through care, teaching us to value interdependence and nonhuman agency as fundamental to survival in a collapsing world.

A practical implication of this analysis is that policy and conservation efforts must prioritize care and embodied knowledge over solely relying on metrics and extractive practices. Literary studies, particularly those focused on dystopia, should look beyond catastrophe and toward ethical methods of survival, emphasizing relational and environmental interconnectedness. The novel models an inclusive ecological imaginary that resists domination while staying with interdependence, offering a vision of survival that embraces care, solidarity, and environmental respect.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge that no funding was received for this research. The conceptualization, theoretical application, and analysis were entirely carried out by the author. For assistance in improving grammar, AI tools were utilized.

References

[1]. Alaimo, S. (2008). Trans-Corporeal Feminism And The Ethical Space Of Nature. Feminist Theory, 9(3), 267–284.
[2]. Ahmed, S. (2021). Ecofeminism In The English Poetry By Women Of North East India: A Critique Of Nitoo Das's Poems. Literary Voice: A Peer Reviewed Journal Of English Studies, 13(2), 215-220.
[3]. Cook, D. (2020). The New Wilderness. Harpercollins.
[4]. Gaard, G. (2011). Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature. Temple University Press.
[5]. Gilligan, C. (1982). In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory And Women's Development. Harvard University Press.
[6]. Haraway, D. (2008). When Species Meet. University Of Minnesota Press.
[7]. Hooks, B. (2000). All About Love: New Visions. Harpercollins.
[8]. Mies, M., & Shiva, V. (1993). Ecofeminism. Zed Books.
[9]. Rahmatullah, M. (2025). Bodies Of Water, Archives Of Trauma: Hydrofeminist Reading And Fluid Feminist Agency In Shokoofeh Azar's The Enlightenment Of The Greengage Tree. Australian Feminist Studies. Https://Doi.Org/10.1080/08164649.2025.2541207
[10]. Shiva, V. (2005). Earth Democracy: Justice For All And The Globalisation Of Ecofeminism. South End Press.
[11]. Uddin, M. J., Rafid, M., & Rahmatullah, M. (2020). Ecofeminist Critique Of Patriarchal Power: A Warrenian Exploration Of Ecological And Social Domination In Shakespeare's The Tempest. Rupkatha Journal On Interdisciplinary Studies In Humanities, 12(1), 1–13. Https://Doi.Org/10.21659/Rupkatha.V12n1.03