

# **Ecofeminism on the Edge**

# WOMEN, ECONOMY AND LABOUR RELATIONS

**Series Editor:** Martina Topic, Leeds Beckett University, UK

This series aims to publish monographs and edited collections that tackle the position of women in the economy as well as explore labor relations. By labor relations, it means studying human relations in work in its broadest sense and analyzing how labor relations affect social inequality with particular reference to women. In terms of social inequality, this series particularly welcomes analyses of women and class and broader analyses of labor relations. The series will publish perspectives from around the world and thus the series fits into the understanding of labor relations through both work relations in a Western sense and non-Western forms of labor. The series is also interested in studies of the position of women in worker's unions, the stance on women's affairs within workers' unions, and the position of women and women's affairs in labor movements. Both historical and contemporary perspectives are welcome. Studies in industrial and economic sociology are particularly welcome.

The book series aims to publish books from a variety of perspectives, e.g., the series will equally accept both theoretical and empirical perspectives. Also, the book series will accept case study perspectives on women working in various industries. We would particularly like to hear from authors who research the position of women in working-class jobs, e.g., factory workers, supermarket workers, etc. Studies on women in feminized industries (e.g., nursing, teaching, PR) and masculine industries (construction, business, finance) are equally welcome. The main aim of this book series is to deconstruct women's position in the economy and explore labor relations from a feminist perspective. All feminist perspectives are welcome, which includes liberal feminist perspectives, as well as analyses of the position of women from radical and socialist feminist positions. In the case of the latter, we particularly welcome proposals that tackle the economic system and inequalities with special reference to the position of women. The proposed books should particularly focus on analyzing structural problems that bring about inequality, the distinctiveness of women's contributions to the economy, work conditions and masculinities in organizations and wider societies and differences between men and women. Besides, books that tackle economic systems and link this to the position of women are also welcome.

# Ecofeminism on the Edge: Theory and Practice

EDITED BY

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# Foreword to the Book: Why Do We Need Ecofeminism?

*“...it is impossible, within patriarchy, to suppress a market economy. And it is impossible, in a market system, to not devastate the planet. It is up to women, now, to reclaim the voice of humanity...”*  
(d’Eaubonne, [1990]1997: 4)

The poignant quote above, from one of the mothers of ecofeminism, outlines what this form of feminism is about. It is a distinctive position to feminist research that, unlike many other approaches, tries to speak to everyone, women, indigenous people and ethnic minorities, those suffering discrimination because of their social class, speciesism, etc. It does so by focusing on the critique of capitalism and the environmental destruction capitalism inevitably brings, regardless of what proponents of the so-called green capitalism say (Topić, 2021), but it puts women at the center of ecological struggle and also tackles technology as an issue in environmental protection. In addition to that, ecofeminism speaks of speciesism which is seen as part of the masculine ideology where humanity dominates the planet first through speciesism and this discrimination then cascades down to enforce the domination of genders, races, and classes through anthropocentrism (Topić, 2021; Warren, 1990; Alloun, 2015; Mayer, 2006; Iovino, 2013; Bahofen, 1990; Holy, 2007). In a nutshell, ecofeminism tackles -isms: racism, sexism, and speciesism and it is an anti-capitalist critique of economic and social conditions that lead to the inequality of races, species, and women (Salleh, 2000). In that, ecofeminism celebrates women’s role in preserving the environment and there are many studies outlining the historical role of women in the environmentalist movement (Mallory, 2006; Brownhill and Turner, 2020; Goldstein, 2006; Holy, 2007; Leahy, 2003; McStay and Dunlap, 1983).

As a movement, ecofeminism generally celebrates women and their differences and diversity, including criticism of the so-called women male dealers or those who embrace masculinity and join the masculine world, thus leaving the majority of women behind. Some women are indeed tougher than men and work hard to abandon any association with femininity such as proving that they are not soft, emotional and can get the job done, thus they can be found as successful in open markets, armed forces and military interventions, etc. (Brownhill and Turner, 2020). In my own research into women in mass communication

industries, advertising, public relations and media, this proved to be the case and I used the concept of *blokishness* to argue that only *blokish* women, or those who embrace masculine characteristics, succeed in the organizational life of mass communication industries and go ahead in their careers. Some of these masculine characteristics include aggression, boldness, directness, competence, toughness, competitiveness, tomboy upbringing, not being a woman's woman or a girly girl, etc. (Topić, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Topić and Bruegmann, 2021; Mills, 2014).

In other words, the problem is not in men per se but a masculine identity which is conceptualized and defined, in patriarchy, with domination and conquering and this includes nature, women and those perceived as others such as non-white races, for example. While studying discrimination is not new, ecofeminism opposes the separation of humanity from nature, thus offering a distinctive critique and an empirical tool to study inequality because ecofeminism speaks of interconnectedness between nature and developing new relationships based on ecological responses (Donovan, 1990). According to ecofeminists, humans should be one with nature, however, "capitalist patriarchal economies rest heavily on a profound human alienation from nature, one that is generated in the exploitation of people's labour and resources" (Canavan et al., 2010: 184). Therefore, ecofeminists often express criticism of technology as a fundamentally masculine way of controlling nature and further damaging the planet, thus arguing that the survival of humans is threatened despite masculine advances in industrialization and technology. Some ecofeminists argued that "it is continually assumed that the economic 'costs' are limited to some lost growth within continued growth and that innovation and technological change ('progress') will be sources of solutions to any given environmental problem" (Gills and Morgan, 2020: 6, emphasis in the original). For example, geoen지니어ing is an attempt to control nature through technological intervention, with technology meddling in Earth's processes to reverse climate change such as Carbon Dioxide Removal (removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere), iron fertilization of oceans (to increase the production of algae blooms) and Solar Radiation Management (to reflect sun's rays back into space to reduce temperatures) (Sikka, 2017; Hulme, 2014; Preston, 2012). Buck et al. (2014) argued that most of the demographic pushing for this agenda is male, thus also anthropocentric and with an instrumentalist view of nature, which fits into the "masculine temperament of abstraction, objectivity, precision and calculation" (p. 653). Thus, a critique of capitalism is needed because

[...] market mechanisms and the logic of capitalism in the form of an expansionary capital accumulation system. By default, it leads to a de-emphasis of the positive or even necessary role for prohibitions, large scale state intervention, government planning, and regulation, in halting and reversing material expansion. Moreover, it entirely ignores radical social change organized "from below" (substituting for this the green consumer). (Gills and Morgan, 2020: 6)

Therefore, as humans, we have a fragmented and hierarchical relationship with nature "rooted in a culture where science and technology are posited as the

epitome of reason in contract with pre-modernity, which was centred around nature, myth and religion” (Cross, 2008: 29). A part of the rise of modernity and growth of science and scientific reasoning led by “a masculine way of thinking of the world” (Bordo, 1986: 441) is connected to Cartesian dualistic objectivism, which resulted in an instrumental role of nature where humanity denies its connection with nature and attempts to dominate it instead (Singer, 2002). This is an anthropocentric position toward nature where humans are seen as having the right to exploit nature and the planet because they see themselves as at the center of the universe (Godfrey, 2008).

What is particularly relevant for ecofeminism is the notion that women and men are fundamentally different and act differently from one another (Scharff, 1995). This is one area that has not been enormously explored despite its research potential. I have done some work in this area, for example by looking at how women lead eco-villages (Topić, 2020) and by analyzing the press’ writing on economic growth, global warming, food waste, corporate social responsibility and plastic (Topić, 2021). In the first case, I looked at whether women founded eco-villages, and if so, which values are these villages founded on, whether the vision and philosophy of eco-villages are at least partially founded on the values of ecofeminism, which are anti-hierarchy, equality, collectivism, and whether there are differences between villages founded by women and those founded by men. In the case of the latter, I looked at how journalists write about economic growth and environmental affairs, who writes about it, whether there is a problem with speciesism, whether technology is presented as a solution to environmental problems, and whether there is a prevalent masculine view of economic growth and environmental affairs. In both studies, I found differences between men and women, as per ecofeminist theory, and fundamentally different points of view. In eco-villages research, the findings have shown that eco-villages formed by women tend to have less hierarchy, more collectivism and higher equality while eco-villages formed by men tend to have more hierarchy and are more inclined to have some form of capitalist rule (Topić, 2020). In research on the environmental affairs in the British press, it turned out that women have merged into the masculine culture of newsrooms, a finding well-known from journalism research (Mills, 2014; Topić and Bruegmann, 2021) and write in a masculine way advocating for economic growth, but they still do so to a lesser extent than men thus opening a question what would happen if more women joined politics and economics, two prestigious beats in journalism traditionally occupied by male journalists (Topić, 2021).

Therefore, why do we need to study ecofeminism? Or is ecofeminism still alive, as the editors of this book ask? It is not as alive as other forms of feminism, and it cannot be called mainstream in feminist research. What is more, some see it as a relic of the past but this form of feminist inquiry has been revived by some of us who have started to use it to study inequality, myself and editors of this book, authors from several countries who contributed chapters, and main authors and mothers of ecofeminism such as Ariel Salleh, also an author in this book, still write and live this philosophy. However, the reason we need to revive it and work harder to make it visible and more popularized is because this form of feminism

focuses on studying and celebrating women, first and foremost, in all of their diversity, thus ecofeminism is inclusive, diverse and speaks to everyone. What is more, it is a form of feminism that can be operationalized in empirical research so that ecofeminists like me, who are trained as social scientists, can use it without losing anything from their original training. Ecofeminism also bridges disciplines and belongs to nobody in particular but to everyone in general.

In this book, editors used ecofeminism to explore theories and discourse, art and practices, thus using ecofeminist framework to bridge disciplines with a total of 16 papers written by 21 authors from Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France, the Netherlands, Northern Macedonia, Serbia, Spain, and the UK. In the first part, on theories and discourses, chapters provide ecofeminist readings of media studies, anthropology and environmental humanities, looking at issues such as political and eco oppression, media representation of ecofeminist audiences, ecofeminist aspects of Slavic gymnastics for women, relationship with animals and ecocriticism and ecofeminism. In the arts section, chapters elaborate on literature, fairy tales, films, and visual art. In the third section, chapters talk about ecofeminism and women's position in Bolivian society and Nigerian rural areas, as well as ecofeminist readings of law and Anthropocene, creative work and women and ecofeminism from the perspective of one of its mothers, Ariel Salleh. The chapters, with so many topics and disciplinary perspectives, demonstrate the value of this theoretical and philosophical framework, and along with my social science approach to ecofeminism, show that ecofeminism is far from dead and should be promoted and used more because only an approach that tries to speak to everyone and that looks at structural inequalities and goes deeper than men versus women dichotomy can help us understand and address the most pressing issues of today, including the climate change that threatens us all. In the world of climate change, what approach could tackle this better than the one that takes inequality between humanity and nature as its central point of epistemological and philosophical inquiry?

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# Ecofeminism – Introduction

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## I

### Is Ecofeminism Still Alive?

This connection between eco (environmentalism, i.e., environmental, green ideas related to nature protection) and feminism (movement and ideas for gender equality and women's emancipation) was created in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne. It connected the common causes of all problems in patriarchy, speciesism, racism, and capitalism as an ideology of power toward everyone and everything, including women, the Third World, nature, animals, Black/Afro-American, Asian, and other non-white races, Indigenous people and others.

Conversely, global ecofeminism finds itself in constant social conflict with dominant ideologies (social democracy, liberalism, conservatism, fascism, nationalism, etc.), bounded by the square: capitalism – racism – speciesism – patriarchy. Therefore, the idea of the Earth as an ecofeminist planet based on cooperation between subjects, species, races, classes, and genders seems like a utopia. On the other hand, the modern world faces significant challenges of environmental changes (in the form of climate change, natural disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, forest destruction, expanding deserts, shrinking glaciers, etc.) that generate social changes (migration, workplaces, class, and racial conflicts) visible through protests, riots, and violence throughout Western Europe and the US, and long-term political-economic changes (in addition to the above, the post-humanist issue of artificial intelligence and robots in the future and their interaction with people) deal with the consequences of all these challenges, not their causes.

This ecofeminist collection of papers, created as a fragment of the ecofeminist discussion of theorists from SE Europe, summarizes views on how the ecofeminist idea on the basis of domination and exploitation differs from the ideas of deep ecology. It does so by asserting that the cause of environmental degradation is not anthropocentrism, the rule of the human species, but in patriarchal androcentrism. Although ecofeminism has often been declared an androphobic movement because of this idea, its exposure of the oppression suffered by those who do not have the right to their own truth, and especially by the Third World, has

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also included numerous members of the opposite sex in its ranks. We should keep in mind that Françoise d'Eaubonne, who coined the term ecofeminism in 1974, called women to partake in an ecological revolution to save the planet. Ecofeminists identified and linked phenomena that are analogous to the logic of patriarchal domination – the destruction of nature and the subjugation of women.

Ecofeminism is one of the more interesting responses to all crises today, including environmental (FFF – Fridays for future, climate change), racial (BLM – Black Lives Matter), gender (#MeToo), economic (capitalism, job loss, hunger), political (yellow vests), and the health (corona, plague) crisis we are facing recently.

First of all, ecofeminism is multi-developed as an academic research field, political ideology, and activism, but also a way of life, which is visible in ecofeminist communities and villages such as Gea Viva and The Earth for us (Zemlja za nas) on the island of Brač in Croatia. Therefore, it is simultaneously a global and a local movement, an idea, and a realization.

The main argument for ecofeminism is that the historical and philosophical viewpoint used to justify male dominance over nature is very similar to the viewpoint that justifies male dominance over women. As the *patriarchy* lies at the root of social domination both over women and over nature, ecofeminism points out that the direction and *goal of ecological practice* should be – the *patriarchy* itself (Galić, 2020). Françoise d'Eaubonne states that previous revolutions did not amount to any real changes, and that only ecofeminism can end patriarchy and save human society from environmental destruction, nuclear danger, and the profit system that is at the root of all wars. She is also critical of Marxism as it has failed to bring an end to exchange value, which forms the basis of commercial economy. As stated by d'Eaubonne, this is because it is impossible to abolish commodity in patriarchy, just as it is impossible not to destroy the planet. All of the above is confirmed by the capitalocene strategy, which treats nature only as a resource. Or, as Marti Kheel states: “No other animal/animal species locks up, enslaves nor breeds other animals to satisfy their own appetite for meat. HOWEVER, in patriarchy, capitalism, this fact is ignored” (Kheel, 2008, [2000]: 77).

Martina Topić provided great visibility to this problem, as she among her other works dealing with ecofeminism, published the collection *Women and the Media in Capitalism and Socialism: An Ecofeminist Inquiry* in 2023. She once explained her decision to continue her education in Great Britain, where she liked the “accessibility of the lecturers and the lack of hierarchy and formality.” She also added:

I've always had problems with hierarchy and authority, so it's easier for me to work in Britain where there is very little of it, and everyone is very informal. It's no surprise that I accepted ecofeminism as an ideology, since it greatly deals with hierarchy which it considers patriarchal and masculine.

Ecofeminism itself questions the binary codes (two opposite pairs such as day–night, summer–winter, man–woman), which in this case is connected with the concepts of nature and culture, so they are often put in opposition. Thus, they contribute to the disruption and destruction of nature. Currently, the

Amazon rainforests, their burning, and cutting are often justified by “civilizational reasons,” which undoubtedly affect life, symbiosis, water, air, and climate change.

In Uganda, where the ecofeminist Beatrice Rukanyanga from the organization NAPE gathers over 5,000 women, works and forests are being rapidly destroyed, and cultivated monoculture estates and farms are being built to aim for rapid economic recovery. Apart from the felling of trees, migrations, and killing of animals, for the local population, rainforests and forests are a place of coexistence, a source of food, medicines, energy, beliefs, and biodiversity. Unfortunately, their destruction also leads to natural disasters, identity problems, and climate change. It is important to emphasize that, according to UN data, 80% of victims of natural disasters are women.

In addition to the above, it is necessary to point out the existence of the so-called razor wire as a border between Slovenia and Croatia, which, apart from trying to prevent people, has a very disastrous effect on animals and nature as part of their world and usual routes and migrations.<sup>1</sup> The whole idea of limiting movement and space, which Mirela Holy also wrote about, was reflected in nature and the animal world.

Mirela Holy, former Minister of the Environment of the Republic of Croatia, interpreted the case of the Slovenian razor wire in Zarez: biweekly for cultural and social events (426–427, February 12, 2016: 14) from the ecofeminist paradigm within which emphasizes that the installation of razor wire on the Slovenian-Croatian border is a crime, first of all a crime against nature and animals, but also a crime against the idea of humanism, within the framework of which it opposes the concept of patria (which it is based on the notion of I-We/Other in which I/We are good and valuable, and the Other is bad and worthless) and the concept of the matrix for which the whole world is home. According to the ecofeminist paradigm, Matria, in contrast to Patria, celebrates the idea of Mother Earth as the right to life of all life forms on planet Earth and not the celebration of a living space limited by political borders or razor wire. In short, for Matria, home is the whole world, the whole planet Earth, and love is not and cannot reflect the desire to possess.

Several months after the razor wire had been put up or, more specifically, a few days before Easter 2016, Slovenian Police representatives suddenly began removing it from the Croatian-Slovenian border and announced that, instead of the wire reminiscent of concentration camps, they would put up a panel fence that would “look more presentable,” and would not kill so-called “wild game.” On International Animal Rights Day, 10 December 2015, members of the activist group *Animal Friends Association* from Croatia organised an action in a public space to draw attention to these deadly walls, fences, cages and wires that are considered perfectly normal by both the former and current Slovenian and Croatian governments.

Furthermore, in 2015 the Slovenian activist association *For Animals!* organised a performance against the slow and cruel death of animals in the background

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<sup>1</sup>As Croatia joined the Schengen Agreement in 2023, border controls are no longer carried out between Croatia and Slovenia.

of the capitalist division of the country into nation-states. The performance was held on Saturday, from 11 a.m. until 12 p.m., on Maribor's Main Square. Unlike the Croatian association, the Slovenian one focused on the struggle against the capitalist division among states. The performance also symbolically addressed the racism of Slovenia and the European Union towards migrants.

On the other hand, the women of Kruščica, residents of a small town near Vitez in Bosnia and Herzegovina, literally sat on the bridge and were on duty for 503 days in 2017 and 2018 to stop the excavators who tried to build a hydroelectric plant on the Kruščica River.

The collection aims to actualize ecofeminism and encourage critical reflection and analysis of long-term ecofeminism in Croatia and Southeast Europe, permeating global and local approaches, knowledge transfer, and openness to young authors. For these reasons, the book can be read on several levels: theoretical as a contribution to the knowledge of the theory of ecofeminism in the context of contemporary trends, socio-political as an analysis of social processes and structures, activist through the analytical perspective of activism of individual groups and actors in public, performative, and political life.

Such local activism, which succeeded despite punishments, threats, physical, and psychological attacks (including the police) and the disagreement of a part of the local community, shows the way spontaneous but purposeful ecofeminist organizing and nature protection work.

## II

### **Vegetarian/Vegan Ecofeminism, or, the Personal Is Political, or, Food Designates Us Politically**

When it comes to animalistic ecofeminism, which Greta Gaard (2002) calls vegetarian ecofeminism,<sup>2</sup> theorists and practitioners, eco/feminists Carol J. Adams and Marti Kheel (Curtin, 1996, 67) usually stand out, along with Greta Gaard (2019).<sup>3</sup> In her book *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Adams notes: "Not only is animal defense the theory and vegetarianism the practice, but feminism is the theory and vegetarianism is part of the practice" (Adams, 1991: 167), thus highlighting the link between the movement for animal rights and feminism, which would ultimately have to include ethical vegetarianism, veganism. Some authors in Croatia also touch on the topic of vegetarian ecofeminism. Sarah Czerny, in her book *Absent Interests: On the Abstraction of Human and*

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<sup>2</sup>The term *vegan ecofeminism* seems more apt to us. Greta Gaard introduces a distinction between vegetarian feminism and vegetarian ecofeminism, pointing out that vegetarian feminism provided the conceptual basis for vegetarian ecofeminism (Gaard, 2002: 127).

<sup>3</sup>Greta Gaard points out that ecofeminist perspectives are again gaining popularity because they emphasize intersectionality and posthumanism in their new analyses, pointing to problems such as global warming (Gaard, 2019, http).

*Animal Milks* (Leiden: Brill, 2022) examines how people produce and consume milk coming from different species (human, goat, sheep, cow, and donkey) in order to, using Anna Tsing’s term “abstraction processes,” demonstrate the mechanisms that enable the transformation of plants and animals into resources. The book is based on a two-year ethnographic research and covers a number of social environments related to milk in Croatia: milk producers who work with cows, sheep, goats, and donkeys on large and small farms, nursing mothers, veterinarians, microbiologists, pediatricians, tourist boards, milk consumers, milk processing factories, and retired milkmaids. The author found milk to be a useful ethnographic lens for exploring the process of abstraction as described by Tsing, as milk can be produced, at least theoretically, by every species of mammal. Milk has the potential to transcend the human–animal conceptual divide created by humans, although human and animal milk are often examined separately in the literature. Although milk coming from different species is often treated by humans as having similar functions and purposes (to feed infant mammals), when looking more closely at the social relations surrounding milk, or “relations with milk” as the author calls them, it is evident that milk is treated quite differently in everyday human social practices. While some individuals in Croatia may have strong opinions on which milk people should consume and which milk they should not, these attitudes are most certainly not monolithic: What is perfectly acceptable to some is repulsive to others. The research has shown that people in Croatia do not approach milk(s) in the same way, not even milk of the same type, and that there are constant discussions on the forms that milk should have. Therefore, the book presents the argument that the form of the milk is the product of social relations made up of people, animals, and milk. The book *Absent Interests: On the Abstraction of Human and Animal Milks*, with its provocative question “How does milk become cow, donkey or human milk?,” on the one hand exposes the mechanisms used by humans to transform animals into resources, and on the other hand questions the synergy between human and animal and its innovativeness confirms the importance of this research area in the wider social and political context.

At the International Academic Conference: “Ecoantropology: Between Man and Environment” (Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, 2023), Marija Geiger Zeman, Martina Topić, and Gabrielle Round presented their paper “Becoming a Vegan: Understanding Vegan Identities and Vegan Biographies,” focusing on *vegan identities* and *vegan biographies* (Stephens Griffin, 2017) of women practicing veganism in the United Kingdom and Republic of Croatia who participated in the bilateral international project *Women and Veganism* (Leeds Beckett University and Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar/Zagreb) conducted in February and March 2023. The presentation focused on:

- 1) the socio-demographic characteristics of the UK and Croatian samples (age, education, class, political orientation); 2) the first results of the study related to questions of personal definition of veganism, reasons for becoming a vegan, the process of becoming a vegan and new dimension of personal and social identity.

In her article on Ivana Brlić Mažuranić's story *Ribar Palunko i njegova žena* *Fisherman Plunk and His Wife*, presented for the first time in Zagreb during the 9th Annual ZeGeVege Festival (2016), Lada Čale Feldman pointed out everyday, literary, and theoretical common grounds between veganism, feminism, and ecocriticism. The lecture discussed connections between *Fisherman Plunk and His Wife* with humanity, sex, animals, and art, and explained the importance of the fairytale beginning and ending while talking about the same thing – dinner.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Eco-Eco Human Milk in the Context of Tajči Čekada's Concept of "Negotiations Between Species"***

The mentioned topic of *interspecies negotiations*<sup>5</sup> was explored by the intermedia artist Tajči Čekada with her campaign *EkoEko ljudsko mlijeko – Ljudsko mlijeko, jedino čovjeku svojstveno mlijeko* (EcoEco Human Milk – Human Milk, the Only Suitable Milk for Humans, 2017),<sup>6</sup> during which the artist made certain products from human breast milk that she provocatively called human milk, not breast milk (spreads similar to Nutella – *EkoTella*, depending on the amount of milk she was able to source, considering that a large amount of human milk is needed to make cheese since its composition differs rather significantly from cow and goat milk).

The first part of the video shows the collection of the milk from the donor women, featuring explicit images of lactating mothers pumping their breast-milk with the help of a manual device, then writing their names onto the milk bottles the artist collected in her portable refrigerator. The second part of the video performance shows how the artist – intent on problematizing the abuse

<sup>4</sup>Cf. <https://www.prijatelj-zivotinja.hr/index.en.php?id=1952>.

<sup>5</sup>This is a phrase used by the artist for the title of her collection *Diplomatic Outfits for Interspecies Negotiations (20 Avant-garde Models)* (2005). While commenting on the collection, which is based on a white and red color combination, art historian and multimedia artist Krešo Kovačiček, among other things, stated the following: "Humankind is preparing for their encounter with other intelligent beings – and the term 'kind' is becoming obsolete here, the ontological status is reduced to simply the 'species' and its variability. Terms such as multiculturalism and multiethnic/multinational are reduced only to the concept of the 'other', which is projected onto the external space (extra-terrestrial), while the development of communication technologies will in reality lead to an inversion." Cf. <https://www.tajcicekada.com/diplomatske-oprave-za-pregovore-medu-vrstama/>.

<sup>6</sup>Tajči Čekada (born in Rijeka, 1979) works in costume design, fashion design, performance art, photography, and video. The beginning of her artistic work is connected with Rijeka's Palach club, from the late 90s (1998–2008), when the club was active as an artistic organization of MMC Palach, which, among other things, acted as a focal point for Rijeka's action and performance scene. Website: [www.tajcicekada.com](http://www.tajcicekada.com).

of living bodies and the non-consensual commodification of bodily fluids – will make dairy products from the human maternal milk she collected, following the instructions of skilled goat farmers and dairy-product producers, Armano and Marijana Jeričević.

The products have been labeled with logos to stress the transformation of corporeal material entities into consumer products. The label reads “eco-friendly human milk” and the commodity has been advertised with possible slogans such as “The only suitable milk for humans.” The campaign included posters, banners, and leaflets – in line with the marketing principles of the increasingly competitive dairy industry. Tajči Čekada admitted that a major source of inspiration for this project was the sudden arrival of consumer society to Croatia after the fall of the socialist regime (in 1991, The Croatian War of Independence was fought from 1991 to 1995).

She recalls how the “dairy giants” initiated a hunt for consumer victims, primarily targeting children, who constitute a vulnerable target group since they depend on adult caretakers who aim to satisfy their needs while educating them to become proper consumers. “The milk propaganda” served factories’, like Dukat or Vindija’s (*companies engaged in milk processing in Croatia*), financial interests by “spreading an abundance of untruths and lies.” The artist criticizes the manipulative propaganda lines, such as “Healthy every morning!” and “Healthy for your child!,” which sustain the myth of accessible well-being while serving capitalist interests. Čekada feels hostile to these slogans since she firmly doubts “the idea that milk from other species is a necessary part of human diet.”

She shot the third part of the video at an organic market in Rijeka, where she had set up her own market stall, offering promotional material about human dairy products to the interested public. She offered her products by the side of the Jeričevićs, who were selling their own (goat milk) goods. The aim of this human–animal product parallel was to document how products made from animal milk would be sold, taken, eaten, and tasted in a much quicker and unproblematic manner than the products made from human milk, which would surely disgust many people. The artist finds it surprising how food products made from animal bodily fluids, flesh, or organs are fully acceptable to humans as part of their everyday lives, whereas the more natural nourishment, products made from the milk of their own species, provokes horror and disgust. This illustrates the double standard for the commodification of human versus non-human bodies in the context of Mary Douglas’s structuralist dichotomy of “pure – danger.” The artist wanted to see how different people would drink the human milk (colostrum), with what level of *distancing*; when they find themselves experiencing disgust or shock, perhaps some of them will also realize that they were in fact raised on the very same milk, that this is the only specifically *human* milk, and that humans are the only animals who drink the milk of other species well into their adulthood.

In the theoretical contextualization of the work, the artist is critical of the corporate link between the dairy industry and the school system, pointing out how

US laws require that all schools provide milk with every child's meal or risk losing access to government subsidies, i.e., lose their funding.

In the US, laws stipulate that all schools must provide milk to children with each meal or, if not, the schools will stop receiving subsidies, thus the government is basically threatening schools with cutting funding. Those responsible for this statute chose to *ignore*, among many other things, the fact that up to 90% of African American, 70% of Asian, and 15% of Caucasian children cannot digest lactose. The dairy industry is subsidised with up to three billion dollars a year.

This illustrates the ethnocentric, marginalizing short-sightedness of food politics and the exclusionary ideology permeating the state subsidy system.<sup>7</sup>

The work once again confirms that animal rights are also a feminist question. It is well-known that industrial livestock farming, even on so-called “happy farms,” incorporates institutionalized forced intercourse and violence. Female animals live an existence of ongoing rape and constant pregnancies; once they have been “used up,” as the artist warns in her work, they are sent to the slaughterhouse. *Rape rack* is an actual professional term for the contraption used to subdue the animals during their impregnation. Its purpose is to make constant pregnancies possible with animals such as cows or pigs, and also to make hens produce an enormous amount of eggs.<sup>8</sup> In that sense, it is also interesting to examine the (auto)interpretations the artist has provided as comments on her *Facebook* profile:

Maybe the question was whether adult humans need milk at all, maybe the focus was on the dairy industry and the way it operates, maybe the problem was in how heavily subsidised this industry is, maybe the issue is the effect dairy has on health, maybe it is about animal rights, human solidarity, morality, ecology, politics, religion... (Tajči Čekada, *Facebook*)

For me personally, the most important element is the fact that industrial livestock farming, even on so-called “happy farms,” incorporates institutionalized forced intercourse and violence, which is something that is unfortunately not often discussed in some feminist circles.

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<sup>7</sup>Source: “Istina o mlijeku” (<http://www.4dportal.com/hr/component/content/article/40/1230-istina-o-mlijeku>). It is interesting to note here that the consumption of cow milk is in decline in the USA, but is increasing in Asia even though it is not a part of the Eastern culinary tradition (Marshall, 2019).

<sup>8</sup>Cf. “Is Your Food a Product of Rape?” <https://www.peta.org/features/rape-milk-pork-turkey/>.