# Pragmatism:
# A 21ˢᵗ Century
# Materialization of
# Western Ecofeminism

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*To all women and men out there, environmentalists; feminists; human rights and gender equality activists, advocates, lobbyists; conservationists; climate, gender and biodiversity experts; as well as volunteers in those fields. Keep fighting and doing what you do, for every day that passes the world becomes better thanks to you.*

## Abstract

This anthropological dissertation explores the 21st century materialization of the 70s-born social movement that is Ecological Feminism from empirical, theoretical as well as experiential perspectives. Since its emergence, the movement has taken on a myriad of shapes and manifestations and the Ecofeminism studied in a Dutch organization elaborated in this thesis constitutes just one of them. As such, it is different and new compared to existing forms, as well as irreducible to them. As feminists, human rights advocates and environmentalists of the Dutch society, the women and man at the core of Women Engage for a Common Future embody an Ecofeminism that is adapted to contemporary Dutch politics. The result is one of cooperation, advocacy and awareness-raising that finds itself equally molded to international work as it is mediated through millennial communicative channels and pertains to the sustainable development goals erected by international organs. Overall, these elements create a never-before-seen ecofeminist cocktail which aims at creating a healthier, fairer and more sustainable world where women play a bigger role. This goal is achieved through taking a more pragmatic, optimistic as well as realistic approach, essentially opening up the social movement to more than the simple combination of ecology and feminism.

*KEYWORDS: Ecofeminism, environmentalism, gender, sustainable development, Internet, social media, activism, advocacy, anthropology, WECF, essentialism*

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Abstract

Acknowledgments

## Introduction

*"If dominating and destructive relations to the Earth are interrelated with gender, class, and racial domination, then a healed relation to the Earth cannot come about simply through technological 'fixes'. […] It demands that we must speak of eco-justice, and not simply of domination of the Earth as though that happened unrelated to social domination."* – Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing

As part of Utrecht University's Cultural Anthropology master program, focused on developing sustainable citizens, the environmental aspect presented itself as something worth delving into. As much as environmental awareness is growing throughout the world, and especially in the western world, some of its facets remain very unknown and understudied. Ecofeminism constitutes one of those understudied fields as general society keeps dismissing the intimate link between not only the social world and ecology, but mostly between gender and ecology. Indeed, as talk about the current global environmental crisis goes on, it seems to be unilaterally concerned with ecological processes instead of integrating it to the social world altogether. What one appears to ignore is the undeniable connection that exist between everything social and everything ecological. As such, there is no theory better suited to tackle, make and illustrate that intimate link than the ecofeminist one. Through its integrated and intersectional approach, the two subjects that were left behind – gender and ecology – have now come together in giving a new understanding of the global environmental crisis: the social and the environmental cannot be studied, understood, or even thought of independently. Indeed, according to Bookchin, the environmental crisis is also and always a social crisis – which in turn, is related to the gender crisis.

But why the choice of Ecofeminism, specifically? There are multiple motivations behind this subject choice and some of them stem directly from my personal positions. Aside from being and studying to become an anthropologist, I firstly identify myself as being an environmentalist and a feminist. As such, having the possibility to study the combination of the two seemed to coincide marvelously with my personal interests, as an individual,

but also as an academic in contributing to the knowledge of this recent social movement and to raise awareness on its relevance. The subject of the research itself, 21st century western ecofeminism, was formed during the fieldwork period as it became increasingly clearer that the organization, on which my thesis is based, constitutes only a variant of the broad ecofeminist movement. Indeed, just like any other concept, Ecofeminism is highly diversified, each different branch resulting from the embodiment by specific peoples and cultural environments. Consequently, it was decided to focus on this element, and study how Western Ecofeminism can materialize itself in this millennium and whether that materialization differs from the original ones of the 1970s, and if it does, offer a glimpse into what the future of Western Ecofeminism may look like. As such, a new brand of Ecofeminism would attest to the ongoing evolution of the movement and the continuous diversification in variants that stems from it. In light of this, the dissertation will take you, reader, from the origins of ecofeminism to its new and adapted form of the 21st century studied today.

Consequently, this thesis revolves around the subject of Ecofeminism – also known as Ecological Feminism – on a more conceptual level. Although theoretically-oriented, the basis for the thesis is empirical and it was carried out as anthropological research "at home", in Utrecht, the Netherlands, for a period of three consecutive months. As such, the research was conducted within a local non-profit organization called Women Engaged for a Common Future (WECF); a rather small and still mostly unheard-of organization that strives to grow in the field of gender and environment, but yet doesn't describe itself as "ecofeminist" per se. The research population that served as anthropological foundation for this thesis is hence the members of the WECF Dutch office, in Utrecht – who will be presented in the third chapter. But concerning the matters of gender and environment, WECF has a way of contributing like no other, devoid of romanticism. As such, it focuses mainly on educating its followers and raising awareness on the ways things we surround ourselves with and the food we consume daily can negatively affect both men, women and the environment. Considering this, the NGO then uses all the means elaborated in this thesis to provide solutions that will benefit both women and the environment. Hence, although it does not identify as ecofeminist, it most certainly is.

Hence, this dissertation will provide, based on collected anthropological empirical data, theoretical concepts and my own critical thinking, the arguments illustrating one variant of Ecofeminism materialized within WECF. Nevertheless, this dissertation is not to be confused with those that purely focus on the information obtained on the topic. Indeed, as this thesis will elaborate on data obtained in the field, it will equally make the experience lived in the field one of its focuses for the following reason that first-hand-collected data cannot be studied independently from the context within which it was gathered (Georges, Jones, 1980; 3); it is thus for that reason that one chapter will see itself dedicated to the human experience of having done fieldwork in the NGO. As such, the Ecofeminism that is described in the upcoming chapters constitutes one of nonviolence, cooperation, and advocacy and it will be introduced by several core arguments including that 21$^{st}$ century-materialized western ecofeminism itself according to the cultural environment within which it is embedded, as well as according to the means made available by the new millennium – technology and the Internet. As such, the birth of new variants of Ecofeminism are not without consequences on the movement, let alone society. Indeed, non-profit bodies such as WECF inaugurate novel dimensions to the movement. Fundamentally, this points to the shifting of politics and of concepts within western society. All of the findings that are elaborated in this thesis have been extracted from the three-month fieldwork conducted at Women Engage for a Common Future's Dutch office, with my research participants' explicit informed consent. They have been subjected to data triangulation and are all integrated into the writing accordingly, with the help of pre-existing academic works. The empirical data that have been gathered from the fieldwork that are specific to this field site and this research population, and hence, that cannot be subjected to theoretical validation are nevertheless all empirically-based and sourced. Although there is no clear way to verify or prove that they have been extracted from the field without breaking the anonymity of my research participants, I, as the anthropologist responsible for this research, assure you they are as I was present to witness all of it myself. As such, this thesis presents the story I experienced during the short timeframe I did anthropological fieldwork at the organization.

Consequently, before delving into the data collected from the fieldwork and what it entails about the 21st century materialization of western Ecofeminism, there is a need to start at the very beginning: what is *Ecofeminism*?

## Chapter 1: Ecofeminism, What?

*"Trees, forests and deforestation. Water, drought and desertification. Food production, poverty and toxic wastes. Environmental destruction and women. And women? What do these environmental issues have to do with women?"* – Karen J. Warren, 1997, Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology

What is Ecofeminism? The term and concept of "Ecofeminism" is subject to a lot of confusion and questions as most people ignore its meaning and are unaware of its origin. Quite simply, this enigmatic term refers to "Ecological Feminism", namely, a brand of feminism that is taken on by the ecological perspective, or the environmental crisis understood from a gender standpoint, but more importantly, it constitutes an ecological philosophy and a social movement (Emmons Allison, 2010; 2). Either way, the result is the same: it concerns dealing with women's and environmental issues as stemming from the same patriarchal system that we are currently living in. An explanation that some would consider more cynical, yet nonetheless accurate, would be the following: women and nature share a similar position at the bottom of the hierarchy of this system, in other words, the oppression of women and the domination of nature come from the same male-dominated system that is has become globalized, today. However, essentially, Ecofeminism renders evident the link that exists between ecology and the social world, and more specifically, between nature and gender.

### a. Origins and Key Principles: Women and Nature as Twin Dominions

*"Ecofeminism is defined as a philosophical and political theory and movement which combines ecological concerns with feminist ones, regarding both as resulting from male domination of society."* – Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2010

Unlike more known and popular terms such as ecology, environmentalism and feminism, the term Ecofeminism finds itself to be much more uncommon and has people asking questions regarding its meaning. Concerning terminology, the term itself simply

stands for "*Ecological Feminism*"; it is simply a shortening for those two original and very-well known terms and it constitutes a legitimate word that is officially recognized. Ecofeminism, as such, can be considered as a philosophical theory, a discipline, a branch of the feminist school but it is also considered as a political movement that first emerged in the 1970s, as an intersection between newly-born feminist and environmentalist movements. It mostly emerged in the aftermath of women's efforts, attention and participation in environmental movements especially concerning preservation, conservation, wildlife, food and water issues. The term was officially coined in the 1970s, but prior to that, both ecological and women's movements had always been studied independently until Ecofeminism combined them both as a whole (Chen, 2014; 104). Indeed, as one my research participants said it very well, Ecofeminism embodies the combination of two subjects that were left behind and strives to solve ecological and environmental problems from a social and gender perspective (Chen, 2014; 105). In light if this, the term Ecofeminism or Ecological Feminism was thus coined in 1974 by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne, inaugurating a new branch of feminism, as well as a new school of thought, consisting of feminist developments from an ecological dimension (Chen, 2014; 104). Ecofeminism has since been taken on in many different countries throughout the world, enabling women and oppressed groups to fight for their rights as equal beings, as a well to fight for a better healthier environment and a more sustainable society.

As this thesis focuses on Ecofeminism, it also aims to raise awareness on the intrinsic link between gender and natural dominations (Chen, 2014; 106). Indeed, some refer to nature and women as being twin subordinations or as having a common language (Salman, 2007; 853) as they are subject to the same kind of patriarchal domination of a male-dominated society. As such, among the different approaches and views that exist within the ecofeminist movement, that makes up the key feature of Ecofeminism (Chen, 2014; 67). Hence, in light of such subjugations being social constructs and not biological determinants, they have the potential to change and Ecofeminism provides a forum for that change (Schmonsky, 2012; 4).

The dominations of both women and nature aren't in themselves directly or immediately perceptible, especially in the western world, where some western societies are considered to be leaders in gender equality – even if the reality is far from perfect, as stressed by my research participants. Nevertheless, in the beginning stages of feminist movements back in the 1970s-1980s, women quickly realized that they were more affected by ecological issues than men were. Indeed, as empirical data supports it, it is mostly women who bear the responsibility of feeding and caring for their children whilst not overlooking the maintenance of a household, and in developing countries, this increases women's vulnerability to environmental deterioration (Schmonsky, 2012; 5). As a result, women in so-called third world countries form the basis of ecological activism in the way that they are more tied and attuned to their living environment through local ecological knowledges such as that of plants, resources and animals (Nelson in Schmonsky, 2012; 6). However, the influence of women in regard to the natural world does not limit itself to them being the primary collateral damage. Indeed, some forms of Ecofeminism particularly flourish due to the associations that some make between the innate and biological qualities of a woman with that of the Earth: life-giving, nurturing, caring, etc. Nevertheless, it is mostly their high levels of vulnerability to ecological destruction, being physically closer to nature than men, that make their contributions and solutions to environmental issues the more plausible (Schmonsky, 2012; 6). Therefore, it is in this way that women became and are becoming increasingly intricate with the natural world, and this link is expressed and manifested in a plurality of different ways. However, before delving into that plurality, there is a need to clarify what concretely makes ecofeminism.

Although Ecofeminism is a highly diverse movement and school of thought, it nevertheless stands on some very solid common ground. According to the literature available on the subject, there are several characteristic components of Ecofeminism. Although the number and the nature of these components may slightly vary depending on the authors, there remain a few assumptions or themes that are shared by most ecofeminists and that serve as the basis for this school of thought or movement (Chen, 2014; 71). The first core assumption that drives Ecofeminism is that the oppression of women is intimately linked to the domination and exploitation of nature; this is synonymous with a term widely used in the movement: *Interconnectedness*, or the

"interrelated dominations of women and nature" (Kaur, 2013; 35). The second assumption consists in that the understanding of these links and connections are vital in grasping the full extent of the oppressive and patriarchal system, underlying the Ecofeminist movement. The next assumptions constitute the reinforcement of both feminist and ecological facet by each other; namely, that theory and practice of feminism must include the ecological perspective and inversely (Chen, 2014; 71). The fifth component that constitutes a key principle of Ecofeminism is the concept of *Patriarchy*. It is utilized in a way that the current global environmental crisis is said to have been a predictable outcome of the patriarchal culture (Salleh, 1988). Furthermore, Ecofeminism is built upon the rejection what is referred to as value dualism, namely dichotomies such as nature/ culture, reason/ emotion, man/ woman, human/ animal in the sense that each side of the pair is more oppositional and exclusive rather than complementary and inclusive (Warren, 1990; 122). Indeed, considering this, Ecofeminism promotes and encourages a holistic and inclusive view where everything is part of a whole. Hence, the movement is in no way compatible with such dualisms as they are at the root of patriarchy wherein they define man as different and dominant to women as well as separate from nature (Plumwood, 1991), rendering the natural world into something dead and made up of unintelligent matter (Schmonsky, 2012; 4). Finally, Ecofeminism is built upon inclusiveness, holism and integration as opposed to mechanical, reductionist and separative dualistic thinking (Chen, 2014; 71). Indeed, the bond between gender and nature inevitably promotes an organic, holistic and inclusive perception of reality (Kaur, 2013; 38). Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term back in 1974 and one of its purpose was indeed to signify a holistic understanding of liberation (Kaur, 2013; 35): that of women and nature from the patriarchal system, as well as that of all that links them together.

Hence, as it can be deduced from the paragraph above, these are all the elements that link the main distinct trends of ecofeminism. These components are then gathered and combined in different ways by different approaches and this is where the ecofeminist tree diverges into many branches. Just as the movement itself rejects reductionism concerning nature, women, society and the way society thinks in general, it is impossible for us, society, writer and readers, to reduce Ecofeminism to one trunk only. It is as diverse and complex as anything else and manifests itself differently depending on the language,

religion, culture, history, political and economic systems, etc. Consequently, the following part will briefly navigate you through the Ecofeminist mosaic.

## b. Diversification

*"Ecofeminism provides a diverse framework, since it does not have a unified theory of ecofeminism, and there is not a unified ecofeminist philosophy. The different views of ecofeminism are from different philosophical perspectives. Of course, what they have in common is the philosophical thought of the relationship between women and nature."* – Karen J. Warren, 1994

As it can be deduced, different relationships between women and nature translate into different practices and different ways of doing Ecofeminism. As this thesis presents the way that a millennial western ecofeminist body does and thinks ecofeminism, it may seem as radically different from what may have been experienced throughout the end of the 20th century. Indeed, considering the core principles elaborated above, the original Ecofeminism was one of revolt, boycotts and resistance and it remains the one our minds wanders to when talking about Ecofeminism, to this day. Several decades ago, Ecofeminism was known to be much more essentialist. Essentialism – in Feminism – can be considered as almost synonymous with biological determinism, which in turn, is synonymous with fixity and invariance (Moore, 2015; 9). Considering this, women were said to be treated differently – unequally – due to their different genetic code to men. However, as Simone de Beauvoir said it very well, "one is not born, but becomes a woman" (1953, 249) and as such, the distinction was made between gender and sex in the sense that sex is biologically determined whereas gender is socially constructed. This is where political ecofeminist activist found its root, challenging biological determinism, attesting to the fact that the situation of both women and the environment were and are socially constructed and that they are thus mutable and can withhold social transformations (Moore, 2015; 9). The rejection and struggle against biological determinism for the possibility of social change is key to feminism, as it is for Ecofeminism in the sense that neither women nor nature are pre-determined to be treated the way they currently are. As such, this is where ecofeminist resistance stems from, namely, challenging and

protesting against the uncritical biological assumption. However, although the current situation is far from ideal, things have changed since then and many effective and successful changes have been achieved. As a result, this translates into massively different practices and ways of doing ecofeminism as it allows new Ecofeminists to focus on change – like WECF – instead of challenging the problem, and to take on a more diplomatic, bilateral and cooperative approach. Hence, although this proactive form of resistance is still found and practiced among many Ecofeminists, it is also not limited to that, and it would be wrong to only limit oneself to viewing that as Ecofeminism.

There are many different types of ecofeminism. Since the original movement dating back to the 1970s, there has been an important diversification taking place across the world. Indeed, these various trends have been appearing in the years following the birth of this movement as Ecofeminism introduces itself as a fusion of modern feminist paradigms, each reflecting different interconnections between the domination of women and that of nature (Kaur, 2013; 20). Evidently, such different relationships between women and nature are geographically and culturally contingent, environmental issues differ and so do social problems. Consequently, although the original ecofeminist movement took off in the western world, it has been taken on by numerous other countries, especially developing countries such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Ecofeminist icons such as Vandana Shiva have paved the way and broadened the ecofeminist philosophy based on problems that have been experienced in other parts of the world. Thus, despite having in common the relationship between nature and women (Chen, 2014; 69), ecofeminists – just like any other adherents to broad movements – can disagree and diverge. Indeed, they are aware of the "standpoint consciousness" (Kaur, 2013; 36), affecting one's perception and understanding of the related dominations of women and nature, and as a result, also affecting the categorization of Ecofeminism (Warren, 1987).

As mentioned previously, Ecofeminism constitutes a misunderstood concept particularly due to its broadness, and thus creates confusion in terms of its boundaries. However, this can be considered as one of the movement's strengths. Ecofeminist Greta Gaard once described it as a lake from which ecofeminist roots, branches and complexity can be seen (Chen, 2014; 68). Hence, according the literature available on the matter, the following

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can be summed up as the main Ecofeminist branches that are recognized as official, today: Radical ecofeminism, Cultural ecofeminism, Spiritual ecofeminism, Social ecofeminism, Liberal ecofeminism, Socialist ecofeminism, and Marxist ecofeminism. All of these acknowledge the common domination of women and nature by patriarchy but put forward distinct reasons and explanation for it and can often be very critical of each other. In order to build my argument regarding the pragmatic Ecofeminism I studied in a Dutch NGO, it is important to mention how diversified the movement already is in the sense that the variant elaborated in this thesis retains some elements of pre-existing ecofeminist branches, yet it simultaneously constitutes one that is distinct and new. Thus, here is a brief summary of the more known ecofeminist trends:

- Cultural ecofeminism portrays the identities of women and that of nature is culturally molded – by male culture, evidently. In this sense, the dominations of women and nature is brought on by patriarchal culture, and are related in that way (Chen, 2014; 68). Hence, this variant tackles environmental issues through the critique of patriarchy (Kaur, 2013; 22) and is said to be derived from radical feminism – although cultural ecofeminists and radical feminists hold many opposing views (Pant, Quora).

- Socialist Ecofeminism identifies the relationship between women and nature as them being commodities under the globalized system of patriarchal capitalism (Kaur, 2013; 22). Socialist ecofeminists thus advocate to eliminate all systems and practices that would result in any kind of domination (Chen, 2014; 68).

- Social Ecofeminism constitutes the crossbreed of anarchist feminism and social ecology, suggesting that the root of the problem lies within politics and economics, as well as the social system, and that these need reforming in order to liberate women and nature. (Chen, 2014; 68). This is also a variant, from which elements can be found and recognized in WECF's Ecofeminism. According to collected empirical data from my research participants, political, legislative and economic reforms constitute integral components in building a more inclusive, 'genderly' equal and sustainable society.

- Liberal Ecofeminism combines mainstream environmentalism and regulatory means (Kaur, 2013; 22). Based on empirical findings collected from the fieldwork, this ecofeminist variant is the closest thing to that of Women Engage for a Common Future. The attending of and speaking at international events, conferences and conventions, from the COP to the United Nations and even World Health Organization (WHO) events attests to that. When it takes place, my research participants most often constitute the only gender and environmental experts. The rationale behind this mode of functioning, according to data collected during my fieldwork, is to influence international organs and push for the implementation of certain regulations at the international level, which will then be translated into regional, national and local regulations and legislations. This will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

- Spiritual Ecofeminism suggests God and its religion as being patriarchal and is practiced through the advocacy for the revival of ancient religions, taking the stance of the goddess and matriarchal culture in order to remake the relationship between women and nature (Chen, 2014; 68). It further suggests that prehistoric societies' worship of goddesses is paralleled by that of nature and peace, resulting in women not being subordinate to men and nature not being commodified and for man-led exploitation (Schmonsky, 2012; 3).

Thus, as one can see, forms of Ecofeminism are highly diverse and vary from strata to strata in the social and cultural world. Each society, that accepts and endorses the concept, interprets it and applies it in its own way – wherein it makes sense in relation to its geographical location, religious, spiritual and cultural beliefs, but also to its history, political, economic and social systems. Indeed, although ecofeminists adhere to the key feature of the interrelatedness of women and nature, it is equally where they diverge in terms of the nature of that relationship and this reflects the plurality of positions found in Feminism (Warren, 2000; 21). Consequently, considering this, Ecofeminism – just as it goes for any other concept – is irreducible to any one of its variant. Hence, having conducted fieldwork at this women's and environmental NGO that is WECF, may very

well help raise awareness on the diversification and myriad of forms that this movement has taken on – sometimes in forms that most people, and informed readers equally, don't expect, especially when it is as straightforward and simple as WECF's Ecofeminism.

The interpretation, application and practice of a movement varies heavily across nations and countries. Developed and privileged countries of Europe won't see the same type of ecofeminism as the ones in so-called developing or under-developed countries. A lot depends on the political climate of these countries; nevertheless, all changes in the gender domain constitute a cultural, religious but also more generally, a mind-set challenge. It challenges generations of thought and customs and becomes inevitably harder to implement because this concerns behavioral changes and human behavior constitutes the hardest thing to shift. Indeed, the aim – just like environmentalism or any politicized movement for that matter – is to change the way people think at their core rather than simply focusing on reforming laws, policies and institutions. Such cosmetic changes often fail to address the fundamental underlying attitudes at the root of the problem (Schmonsky, 2012; 2). Indeed, no matter how successful legislative, regulatory and political changes may be, they remain insufficient as this concerns a matter deeply internalized in our societies and cultures. As such, Ecofeminists combine environmental and women's demands for change with the aim of radically reshaping this society's basic socio-economic relations and values (Ruether, 1975; 204). Hence, this constitutes the mission that is undertaken by the non-profit organization within which I chose to conduct my anthropological fieldwork. Consequently, all things aside, I now present to you, Women Engage for a Common Future.

c. <u>Women Engage for a Common Future, A Women's Environmental NGO in Utrecht</u>

The Women Engage for a Common Future office in Utrecht is the official Dutch office of the organization, which considers itself as international – as it operates on an international level as well. For those who don't know Utrecht, it is a city of about 340,000 inhabitants, located in the heart of the Netherlands, about 35km south of Amsterdam and 59km East of Rotterdam. It has the size of a relatively small city and is very centralized on

its center – where the WECF Dutch office happens to be located. Next to the Central Station, in one of the Markt Vredenburg's adjacent streets – Korte Elisabethstraat – lies the building where the NGO rents one of the spaces for their respective office. From the exterior, the dull and mainstream-looking building does not seem to fit the agenda of a women's environmental non-profit organization. The office, three flights of stairs up, is no more than a standard-looking and character-less space, infused with white painted walls, standard office desks and rolling chairs, paired up with early-2000s computers that desperately need changing and updating. There are officially three room/ offices, one common room, one kitchen and one bathroom. Occupied by only five official members – at the fullest – with two or three additional interns (including myself) the office appears vacant and relatively lifeless. The feminist and environmental spirits of a potentially activist ecofeminist organization seem oddly absent. When one enters the WECF Dutch Office, one could enter into any company's office – the feeling of temporariness resides and is felt as one makes its way through the space. When I first came into the office for my research interview with one of my – what would later become – research participants, I found myself looking around and asking myself: what is WECF? Everything regarding the NGO will be addressed in greater details in Chapter 3.

Cultural, national and ethnic factors are not the only ones at the origins of new forms of ecofeminism. Within each society, subgroups and categories adopt their own meaning more influenced by individual beliefs. Radical ecofeminism, cultural ecofeminism, romanticized, idealized, sacredness, purity, the living soul of the great Mother Earth, or to the contrary implementing gender equality through the sustainable development goals, and the inclusion of the LGBTQ community, etc. all attests to the fact that within one society there can be many variants – ultimately, broadening Ecofeminism. To conclude this chapter, one can state that although all Ecofeminism variants live by environmental protection and women's empowerment, massive differences still exist pertaining to the argumentation that all variants certainly do not constitute the same thing (Chen, 2014; 69). This is where, I, myself, anthropologist of this research and writer of this thesis, come into the picture, as both researcher and research subject regarding the ecofeminist matter. The little that is known about Ecofeminism is also mainstreamed and widespread. Thus, despite the literature review done prior to the fieldwork, I internalized

a lack of awareness concerning Ecofeminism and essentially became the subject of a certain ecofeminist delusion.

## Chapter 2: The Ecofeminist Delusion

*"Anthropology, [...] is the most fascinating, bizarre, disturbing and necessary form of witnessing left to us [...]. As a mode of knowing that depends on the particular relationship formed by a particular anthropologist with a particular set of people in a particular time and place, anthropology has always been vexed about the question of vulnerability. [...] Nothing is stranger than this business of humans observing other humans in order to write about them"* – Ruth Behar, 1996, The Vulnerable Observer

Ecofeminism has long been and continues to be heavily associated with its original essentialist form and meaning: heavy activism translated through boycotts, marches, protests and rallies where women gather in hundreds and thousands with banners, signs, and chants – as described in Chapter 1. Indeed, this seems to be the view that most people – who have heard about ecofeminism – have in common. The images that made the movement popular, even five-decades old, seem to have left a very strong mark, if not a permanent one, on the minds of westerners. Ecofeminism, for those who are familiar with it, tends to be associated with resistance and can be said to be almost reduced to that – neglecting, obliviating and discrediting all other possible forms. However, since then, times have changed and evolved with the exception of the concept of Ecofeminism, as it appears. Concerning this matter, my position as a researcher came as a reflection of the stagnation in thought of the western society and illustrated the need for awareness raising around the still-very-vague-concept that constitutes Ecofeminism.

Consequently, in regard to the matter of Ecofeminism, my anthropological research was conducted in a women and environment non-profit organization known as Women Engage for a Common Future, or WECF, here in Utrecht, the Netherlands. After having searched online for potential environmental organization, here in the Netherlands, within which to conduct my research, and after receiving negative and meager reactions, I resorted to digging deeper and eventually stumbled onto Women Engage for a Common Future's website. I came into the organization with an open mind, as an intern or volunteer, after being enthusiastically taken in by my research participants. As such, I

conducted my research on a weekly basis of three consecutive days per week, during three consecutive months from the first week of February to the first week of May. Overall, the fieldwork period lasted 13 weeks – all of which took place in the WECF Dutch office, alongside my research participants – whom, for the purpose of this research as well as for their wellbeing, will remain anonymous.

However, despite the impressive amount of collected field data and their analysis, little importance is given to the ways invaluable information is obtained (Georges, Jones, 1980; 8). Consequently, how did the anthropological fieldwork go for me? What was the context within which I was able to gather the data that constitutes this thesis?

a. <u>Expect the Unexpected: A Reflection on Personal Position</u>

As Ruth Behar said it very well in her *Vulnerable Observer*, when doing anthropology, everything depends on the emotional and intellectual baggage that the anthropologist brings with him or her (Behar, 1996; 8). As the anthropologist for this research, I was aware of the personal, emotional and intellectual baggage I was bringing into the fieldwork with me – at least, I thought I was. I entered the field extremely motivated to study the NGO and the materialization of Ecofeminism, as I've always considered myself as both an environmentalist and a feminist. What better research to suit my personal views? Indeed, in the early stages of anthropological fieldwork, the research experience can be said to mirror the fieldworker's expectations in terms of what he or she wants to now (Georges, Jones, 1980; 3). However, as I underestimated the personal and human nature of this anthropological enterprise (Georges, Jones, 1980; 2) I quickly became the subject of my own research as I became subject to what I have decided to call the *Ecofeminist Delusion*. As such, the expectations of Ecofeminism I brought into the fieldwork would later turn out to be romanticized, idealized and essentialist.

Regarding my preconceptions – which also turned out to be misconceptions – as it is stated above, from conversations with individuals external to the fieldwork, Ecofeminism finds itself to be one or two things. The first, is unfamiliarity. Indeed, throughout the

fieldwork, I had the opportunity to discuss my research with many individuals most of which failed to acknowledge what I was referring to. The lack of reaction clearly reflected the lack of popularity associated with the term, pointing to the reality that it still constitutes a rather new movement. But mostly, this can also be said to be an illustration of the extent of the patriarchal male-dominated society we are currently living in, where culture, women and men are considered as distinct from nature, and hence where women and the environment don't make up an obvious topic of conversation. Considering this societal context, it becomes understandably evident that Ecofeminism, breaker of value dualisms, does not naturally come to mind. The second type of reaction I encountered came from more informed individuals, academics mostly, aware and familiar with the term and its meaning but less so regarding its complex materialization. They embodied my initial state of mind which consisted in a militant, activist, resistant and heavily proactive ecofeminism that mirrored the ones from the 1970s-1980s, picturing me with women marching in the streets, engaged and active during my fieldwork. The reality couldn't and wouldn't be further from that.

I came to Women Engage for a Common Future thinking I would find myself marching on the streets and protesting alongside my research participants, carrying banners and statement signs, chanting slogans and mottos for women and the environment. However, I equally didn't know what to expect. As anthropologists, we are told to keep an open mind when going into the field, in other words, we need to be knowledgeable in regard to background information, yet simultaneously naïve in regard to the precise topic we seek to discover through our research participants (O'Reilly, 2012; 149). As such, I hadn't particularly looked into the NGO – nor its people – within which I was about to do three consecutive months of fieldwork; I would let the field guide me into this discovery. Nevertheless, when preparing for the field, there often is a lack of emphasis regarding the personal element inherent to this type of research necessarily involving firsthand interaction with other people (Georges, Jones, 1980: 9). Consequently, any premise stating that research is well-planned and that events go smoothly, stemming from existing ethnographies (Georges, Jones, 1980; 9), was wronged and will be further disproved in this chapter.

As an anthropologist, how does one decide in which field to go and which population or phenomena to study? Indeed, there are some practical components involved, such as availability, accessibility, language, financial means, etc. but more importantly, one decides to study something or someone because one finds interest in it – an interest that pre-exists the field and the people, I may add. Whether a research topic is chosen because it intrigues, revolts, interests or sparks positive thoughts, it is impossible for the anthropologist to know everything about it prior to entering the field; there are simply some things that cannot be anticipated. Planning for the fieldwork allows for the anthropologist to envision the means to get to the expected ends. However, it is really the personal experience of the fieldwork and the research participants' responses that determine the results and the significance of the research (Georges, Jones, 1980; 2). Consequently, settling in the field proved delicate as I realized that my preconceptions were stronger than I expected and I rapidly became the subject of a delusion.

I knew, entering the field and conducting anthropological research, that the field would change me. I was prepared for the fact that the people I was about to surround myself with for three months were going to impact my being – regardless of my being objective in my anthropological findings – as it is humans studying humans, after all (Georges, Jones, 1980; 2). What I wasn't prepared for was *how* I, the anthropologist, would be affected and *what* would affect me. I certainly did not expect to be staying indoors, sitting at an office desk all day, behind a computer. And thus, as an activist on a personal level, I became very disappointed. It wouldn't be anthropological fieldwork if I said I did not struggle with that feeling of disappointment: the weight on the balance between the objective anthropologist and the subjective activist constantly shifted as I didn't agree with the way things were being done, on a personal level, but I had to remain objective to study the people and the organization for the sake of my research and for anthropology. Thankfully, I suppose, this proves to be quite common when conducting anthropological fieldwork. As Ruth Behar mentions Devereux in regard to the subjective nature of social knowledge as recognizing that subjectivity is more important than striving to achieve significant objectivity in making "true science" (Behar, 1996; 6). I therefore finally opted to use this subjective disappointment to my advantage as it fueled a need, in both the anthropologist and the activist in myself, to seek understanding as to why my research

participants were doing things a certain way. However, this delicate situation did not leave my methodology unaffected.

b. <u>From Deception to Methodology: Balancing Subjectivity and Objectivity</u>

"*In Works and Lives, Clifford Geertz comes at this question by suggesting that ethnographies are a strange cross between author-saturated and author-evacuated texts neither romance nor lab report, but something in between.*" – Ruth Behar, 1996, The Vulnerable Observer; 7

When conducting anthropological work, one is continuously reminded to reflect on one's personal subjective position, on one's findings and on one's relationship with one's research participant in order to respect the objectivity imperative. However, balancing objectivity and subjectivity is not an easy thing, especially when one's research subjects are first and foremost irrational and subjective human beings (Georges, Jones, 1980; 3). Thus, how does one write subjectivity into ethnography and still call it ethnography? (Behar, 1996; 6). In regard to my research, my subjective position actually happened to work in my favor as the preconceptions about Ecofeminism I took with me into the fieldwork, also represented the societal viewpoint for which awareness raising needed to be done, through my research. In that sense, my very own subjectivity became usable data for my anthropological work. In light of this, the feelings of disappointment and the delusion suddenly did not feel too subjective to use and suddenly I also became less anxious that a fire alarm would go off if and when my ethnography would become too 'personal' (Behar, 1996; 7). To the contrary, it gave me a new outlook on my fieldwork and enabled me to put things into perspective, as I felt more secure a possibility opened up for turning this into a method rather than letting it be a source of anxiety. Indeed, incursions of subjectivity don't necessarily corrupt research (Davies, Spencer, 2010; 4). In fact, it allowed me to sort out the relevant questions that led me to collect the relevant data necessary to raise awareness on the misunderstood topic of Ecofeminism. This act of self-reflection turned the delusion into a methodology, one that would provide me with a new state of mind as well as a new emotional state (Davies, Spencer, 2010; 8) wherein I became more lucid in regard to the topic and less preoccupied with my preconceptions.

Overall, this experience triggered a shift and opened my eyes to the complexity and broadness of the movement, fostering a will to discover the underlying reasons behind the form and the practices of Ecofeminism chosen by Women Engage for a Common Future.

Furthermore, the delusion enabled me to detach myself from my research participants even more, preventing me from going native in any way. Indeed, I continued working with my research participants, collaborating with them, immersing myself in the field but the disappointment at the root of all this reflection constantly reminded me that I was only present to study them: I was not and didn't have to become one of them – entirely, at least – I just needed to study them. Behar described the relationship between the anthropologist and the field very well, portraying it as the anthropologist penetrating a culture, yet letting the culture do most of the job simultaneously. But how far does one get into that culture? Well, enough as to almost go native but not enough as to become blind to it (Behar, 1996; 5). Thus, in relation to WECF, I acted as a participant but simultaneously kept my eyes open, following the paradoxical anthropological method of participant observation (Behar, 1996; 5). I kept my eyes open towards the NGO and my research participants but I also kept my eyes open towards myself and my potential biases. This allowed me to always take a step back when looking, analyzing and interpreting my findings, ensuring that they remained of an objective nature. Overall, this initial experience attests to the undeniable link that connects emotion to method (Davies, Spencer, 2010; 9).

'I am an anthropologist, this is fieldwork' constitutes a classic method to drain one's anxiety, in Behar's repertoire, utilized when confronted with delicate or controversial situations where one may be seen as complicitous with structures of power when doing participant observation (Behar, 1996; 6). Indeed, many were the times I found myself in such similar situation, as if stuck in my safe position of observer and researcher, documenting instead of acting. As an intern/ volunteer at Women Engage for a Common Future, many were the times where I had, in front of me, numbers and statistics attesting to the treatment and situation of women and the environment not only in developing countries but also right here at home without actually having the power or possibility to

do anything about it. The result was a constant personal conflict between the objective anthropologist and the subjective activist, struggling to sit idle and use those facts and numbers only to write articles that would later be published on the website. Moreover, the struggle amplified in the way awareness raising was done and in the discrepancy between my means and the NGO's. As it will be addressed in the next chapter, WECF operates primarily through advocacy - influencing legislations and regulations at an international level in the hope of them being implemented at national and local levels. In addition to this, awareness raising is thus carried out in a more formal and subtle fashion through the writing of articles and the sharing of news on social media platforms and their own website, and less so concretely through local events and actions. However, how does one fare when concrete change needs more than regulatory and legislative shifts? How does an anthropologist sit idle when one knows more can be done to really instigate the mindset and behavioral changes that need to take place in our society in order for things to change concretely and not just on paper? As an observer and researcher, does one simply stay behind the camera and switch on the tape recorder, or are there ethical limits that shouldn't be transgressed? (Behar, 1996; 2).

Consequently, after thoughtful considerations, I resigned to my traditional role of anthropologist and participant observer, collecting the necessary data to document this new, legitimate and noble work done by Women Engage for a Common Future. After all, if one can't prevent something from happening, shouldn't one at least strive to document it? (Behar, 1996; 2). Thus, in order to get the necessary data to document this form of Ecofeminism, I mainly started to resort to interviews, seeking answers directly from my research participants, members of the NGO themselves. Participant observation was evidently carried out on a daily basis, but due to my ecofeminist delusion, that methodology couldn't suffice anymore. However, this still proved to be a continuous personal struggle as I dwelled in anxiety, questioning myself as to whether or not my data was biased by the preconceptions I had brought along until halfway through the fieldwork period. Nevertheless, emotion shouldn't be thought of as antithetical to reason; to the contrary, it should be considered as a source of insight that can be disengaged and communicated through anthropological reflection (Davies, Spencer, 2010; 10). In that, personal emotion is an indispensable strength one needs to bring into the field, adding to

the invaluable objectivity of traditional anthropological methods. However, it does create a dual posture of one's personal identity and research identity (Behar, 1996; 10) that can nevertheless be used to one's advantage. Am I an activist ecofeminist or an expert on the topic of Ecofeminism? Probably a bit of both, but as long as I am able to distinguish the two, reflect upon them, and turn it into a well-balanced methodology, shouldn't this double posture complement the understanding of the lifeworld within which I immerse myself, rather than impede it? (Davies, Spencer, 2010; 1).

### c. Additional Methodologies

As stated above, in my conflicting positions and struggles, I thus strived to resolve this matter by diversifying the data-collecting methods I used throughout the fieldwork in order to get a better understanding of what I was truly studying and dealing with. As such, the main de facto methodology I used was participant observation as my place in the organization was that of an intern or a volunteer. I thus did work for WECF simultaneously as I conducted research for my thesis. Nevertheless, I made sure to strictly separate the two as I tried to avoid one's encroachment on the other. No matter how aware I am that WECF's work continued outside of my days at the office, I explicitly expressed myself in the beginning as to my working for them solely on the days I am present at the office. These days at the office were mostly filled with participant observation, being two-faceted as researcher and member of the NGO at the same time, actively listening during team meetings and lunch, noticing overlooked details with all my senses and analyzing each situation. The data resulting from all of this participant observation is mostly contextual: it built me a solid big picture of the organization in all of its work and with all of its members, observing how they operate and organize themselves, the type of strategies that are utilized, the kind of environmental or feminist jargon they use and the kinds of activities they are involved with. Hence, the participant observation findings are definitely integral to my research. To complement that, interviews – informal and opportunistic, mostly – came in very handy as they enabled me to directly ask my research participants about aspects of the organization that intrigued or confused me. As such, most of my informal and opportunistic interviews are with my gatekeeper – such interviews had more of a conversational feel than an actual interview and they gave way

to much more precise data and findings, which are also much more personalized and clear. The data from the diverse interviews I had with all of my research participants constituted the zoom-in findings to the zoom-out that participant observation enabled me. The two, in addition to the constant taking of field notes, the taking of photos, as well as the study of some of WECF's documents, constitute my main sources of empirical data and they compose the foundation for the findings elaborated in this thesis.

I, as the anthropologist for this research and the ethnographer for this piece of writing, am well aware of my personal subjective position on the matter. I am able to reflect on it in the hopes that it hasn't already blinded me in my findings, and in the hopes that the latter won't be tainted by the biases of some young individual's thirst for activism. I am a feminist, I am an environmentalist, I am an activist, does that bias the findings and societal relevance of this research? As objective and unbiased as an anthropologist tries to be, the findings and the ethnographic work will inevitably be tainted by the subjectivity of their host. Whether it is in the type of questions that are asked, in the type of data that is selected for the writing of the ethnography. However, it is for that reason that one exercises emotional reflexivity (Davies, Spencer, 2010; 17) and it is in this sense that my anthropological fieldwork is tainted by a certain vulnerability. The moments I documented and studied necessarily have my mark, whether or not it was intentional. But in order to fully understand what is observed and studied, what is internal to the anthropologist must be made known in that an observer never observes an event which would have taken place in his or her absence, and a listener never hears an account that would have been given to someone else (Behar, 1996; 6).

As such, it is now time to delve into the concrete organizational data that put me in such an uneasy position made up of personal conflicts and anthropological dilemmas. The following chapter will dive into a school of thought that confronts the traditional essentialist ecofeminist association, to explore the full extent of the ecofeminist movement. Consequently, it is time to delve into the world of Women Engage for a Common Future.

## Chapter 3: WECF, Origins, Strategies and Contributions

"*As a lifelong feminist, political activist and participant in the anti-nuclear peace movement, I came into the environmental movement out of a sense of horror at what the unbridled greed and social irresponsibility of multinationals, governments and war machines were doing to the health of our planet. It did not take long for me to find out that, typically, women were the major victims of these acts and also the ones most eager to clean up the man-made messes. From this concern shared by women in all regions of the world, came the creation of the Women's Environmental and Development Organization's (WEDO) international network*" – the network on which WECF International was modeled. – Bella Abzug, 1994, Women, The Environment and Sustainable Development, ix

Based on the interview conducted with the Executive Director of Women Engage for a Common Future, background knowledge was obtained. The organization was founded in 1994, following the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, where some of the current and founding members of WECF represented women and the environment, as well as met up with other local women, leading their struggles for the planet. Moreover, they came in contact with a women and environment organization entitled Women's Environmental and Development Organization (WEDO), and decided that a similar organization was required in and for the European region. As such, German feminist and environmentalist, Marie Kranendonk founded Women Engage for a Common Future and it was split in three distinct European countries: there is an office in Munich, Germany; one in Utrecht, the Netherlands, and one in Annemasse, France. And for this reason, WECF considers itself as more of a *network* than an organization. Considering the network narrative, although France, Germany and the Netherlands constitute the main countries and cities where official WECF offices are located, the organization is known to have an international span, working with organizations in Eastern European countries – formerly part of the Soviet Union – such as Georgia, Moldova, Bulgaria, and more. It is also currently working with organizations in African countries, the Stan countries, and they also have partners in many Asian countries, as well as local Dutch partners. As such, this not only points to the extent of this women's environmental influence but also

embodies the concrete idea of network rather than just an organization. Here is how WECF describes itself, in its own words, as taken from the NGO's official Facebook page: "WECF International, Women Engage for a Common Future, is a worldwide network of women's and environmental organizations. WECF safeguards our children's future by working on a healthy environment and sustainable development for all. WECF strives to balance the environment, health and economy by enabling women and men to participate at local and global level in policy processes for sustainable development. Our network's activities on our partners' own vision and needs. WECF implements solutions locally and influences policy internationally". Nevertheless, despite the diversity within the network, it is really within each office that it gets interesting. Although Women Engage for a Common Future works with a variety of women of diverse ethnic origin, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, their European offices are completely of monoethnic composition – in other words, purely Caucasian – and to the contrary of what some may think, this definitely influences the type of Ecofeminism that is practiced by this organization.

The following chapter will thus introduce you to the NGO, whom it is represented by, what it stands for, how it operates as well as give you a glimpse of what the 21st century non-profit world looks like.

## a. The People: Ecofeminists?

"*We are either going to have a future where women lead the way to make peace with the Earth or we are not going to have a human future at all.*" – Vandana Shiva

Who are the people who embody this variant of Ecofeminism, you may ask? The WECF Dutch office consists of five full time members, for whom working at WECF is a legitimate money-earning profession as well as a fulfillment of their passion for a more genderly and environmentally-conscious society, ultimately the goal they strive to achieve. These five individuals include: a director, a director of communications, a book-keeper, a financial person, as well as a project officer. Four out of the five are women and only one full-time member is male, but all are middle to upper-class Caucasian, and

coincidentally enough, all are blue/ light colored-eyed. Four of them are Dutch and one is French, which leads to the main language of communication within the Dutch office being English. These five women and men of Dutch and French origin constituted the pool of my research participants. Considering this, one may or may not already point out an odd element, which is the fact that to the contrary of mainstream thought, the organization – at least its Dutch counterpart – is not solely run by female individuals. It is indeed a misleading notion when an organization is labelled feminist or ecofeminist because it does not necessarily mean women-only (Moore, 2015; 5); thus, it is the case at WECF. Nevertheless, despite the absence of hierarchy within the organization, the most important positions, namely those of director and director of communications, are held by two mid-thirties to fifties female characters. Consequently, this concretely means that whenever international events are organized, representatives of the Dutch WECF office are indeed always female. It is thus women who speak and try to influence legislations, push for the implementation of regulations, and who travel regularly away from home to attend these sorts of events. Indeed, my gatekeeper, head of communication at WECF, was rarely present during my fieldwork period – this attests to the extent of travelling and movement required that some of my research participants engaged in, in order to carry out their work.

Although all of my research participants live in other Dutch cities commuting to Utrecht every day, armed with different backgrounds – geography degrees, radio and TV station director, business degrees, political background, etc. –, they come united by the desire and willpower to change the situation of women and that of the environment, not only in Europe but also throughout the world. Nevertheless, few are those who actually call themselves "ecofeminists". Indeed, as it became apparent through the interviews I conducted with them, all of my research participants are familiar with the term "ecofeminist", but most of them don't actually identify as such even if it fits their brand perfectly. As such, only one of my research participant strongly identified herself as a true ecofeminist, and she constitutes one of the founding members, having been with the NGO since it was created back in 1994. However, aside from this last research participant – who is not part of the WECF Dutch office, and whom I had the opportunity to interview one-on-one when on a visit to Utrecht – none of the members of the WECF Netherlands

team compose the founding members and none of them have been with the organization since it was founded. To the contrary, about half of my research participants were new to the world of Women Engage for a Common Future and my gatekeeper constituted the sole individual who had been in the organization long enough to provide me with the answers I needed. Nevertheless, despite her enthusiasm towards the term "ecofeminist" as encompassing both feminism and ecology in a catchy and short way, she never actually used it to describe herself or her work – not during my stay anyway.

In addition to the five full-time members, there are interns. The number of interns varied between the beginning and the end of my fieldwork period. When I arrived at the organization, there were two female interns – one Dutch and one Portuguese – both in their twenties and both Caucasian – although my Portuguese research participant did have a more southern look, tanned with long black hair, a bit like myself. I made up the third female intern/ volunteer at the organization, and the only individual of mixed origin – Asian and European – the sole member of the WECF Netherlands team that wasn't purely Caucasian. During the fieldwork, we were joined by WECF's first male intern, mid-twenties German, also completely Caucasian. Consequently, around the beginning of March, the office found itself at its fullest with nearly 9 distinct individuals coming in about four times a week. From there, numbers started decreasing and individuals started leaving as their internship came to an end. The remaining interns consisted of myself and my Portuguese research participant – the sole two female individuals who had distinct looks compared to the rest of the WECF Netherlands team. As I entered the last week of fieldwork, interviews were conducted to hire a new Dutch-speaking communications intern; all applicants were young Caucasian females in their twenties and the selected applicants found herself ethnically fitting the main protagonists. As I left the field, I also left behind me a nearly-all-white pool of research participants. Indeed, as evident as this element may appear, I seem to have overlooked it in the first half of the fieldwork period. In fact, I had become attuned to it to such an extent that it rendered me unable to point it out until a fresh pair of eyes external to my fieldwork did. This is how the scope of anthropological work narrowed itself down, focusing on how this group of white female and male individuals put their own spin on an ethnically and culturally diverse movement born in the 1970s, with the help of 21st century means – that will be elucidated in the next

chapter – and in adaptation to the current Dutch culture. Indeed, what makes WECF's particular in comparison to other women's environmental organizations? As disenchanting as this may sound, the network's specificity mostly relies in its strategies.

### b.  Advocacy Rather Than Activism: Breaking the Essentialist Association

"*It can be difficult to speak truth to power. Circumstances however, have made doing so increasingly necessary.*" – Aberjhani, Splendid Literarium



*WECF's core values and principles,*
*courtesy of WECF International*

How does WECF, as an environmental and women's organization, operate in the Netherlands? Throughout the fieldwork, as I noticed the lack – or absence – of action traditionally associated with activism – protests, marches, blockades, boycotts, civil disobedience, etc. – I began to wonder about the way Women Engage for a Common Future adopts to bring about ecofeminist change in the world. Considering the silence, quiet and calm filling the office, I concluded that the means must be rather subtle and discrete, as well as somehow detached from the immediate concrete reality. As such, the activism assumption I had brought with me into the organization was replaced by the lobbyist one – namely, that of attempting to influence and persuade legislators to enact or not enact a bill or legislation (Raffa, 2000; 2). However, as I delved deeper and asked my research participants individually, through in-depth interviews, whether they considered themselves more as activists or more as lobbyists, the answers were varied.

Some attested to their being activists, others to their being in between lobbyist and activist, but all agreed in that WECF, the organization in itself, was one of advocacy. But between lobbying and activism, what is advocacy? (Raffa, 2010; 1).

Advocacy, as presented by Jepson and Ladle, is the art of being persuasive and reasonable simultaneously, when invited to speak at important decision-making forums. It is about being listened to and respected in order to maintain and sustain long-term access to power (Jepson, Ladle, 2010; 36). As such, it is the bread and butter of many organizations, including Women Engage for a Common Future. Indeed, one of WECF's main goals is to attend big international events – such as those of the United Nations, Climate conferences, the COP, etc. – to address relevant issues linking women to health and the environment such as chemicals, pesticides, issues of water, climate change, etc. – in the hopes of influencing legislations and positioning for or against the implementation of certain regulations. More precisely, it involves being able to identify the key policy networks and committees, being visible to them, getting on those committees, and then exerting influence on either the way decisions are made or on the decisions themselves (Jepson, Ladle, 2010; 39). For example, partnered with many other organizations including Greenpeace, WECF pushed for the European ban of three specific pesticides that were proven to kill and endanger major pollinators like bees. After months of pushing and influencing, and after I left the field, the ban was finally adopted and put into place. Thus, this constitutes an entirely different way of functioning compared to the essentialist way of doing – civil disobedience, protesting, etc. – and although my research participants claim that they still engage in such resistant actions, advocacy constitutes their main course of action. But why, then, advocacy in particular?

My research participants, through the opportunistic and formal interviews I had with them, gave me different answers as to why advocacy was their preferred way of action. First and foremost, it is consistent with the brand of womanhood, namely of women working together and collaborating, instead of fighting or resisting one another. Advocacy, in contrast with activism, consists in cooperating and opening dialogues with government and state officials whereas activism is mostly expressed through a resistance towards such bodies. Secondly, it is directly dependent on the Dutch culture. Many were

the times where my gatekeeper informed me that WECF's partners in Eastern European countries have to be more activist and resistant because that is what is required to bring about effective change in regard to the situations of women and nature in that particular region of the word. However, the Dutch culture is more focused on cooperation: instead of resisting, long-term effective change is brought about through dialogue and collaboration with state and government officials, as well as with corporations – even if such corporations are involved in unsustainable practices. The third reason for this choice of advocacy, brought up during an interview, is simply because it is easier. WECF, as a worldwide network striving to "make the world healthier, more just and more sustainable" is equally concerned with legislations and regulations here in Europe as it is in other countries of the world where the women's and environmental treatment may be even less ideal than it is in the European region. Consequently, as stated above, going through international entities allows for regulations to be implemented and translated more easily into national and local laws, as this regulatory approach obliges signatory nations to do so (Jepson, Ladle, 2010; 41). As such, this entails that, through its political role, WECF as an NGO is simultaneously a domestic and international actor (Keck, Sikkink, 1999; 92).

However, this advocacy strategy simultaneously attests to the rapidly changing configuration of world politics (Keck, Sikkink, 1998; 89), potentially shifting from more activist – as presented in Chapter 1 – to more advocate. In turn, this certainly impacts the ecofeminist movement's internal structure and content in the sense that, the social movement that once was – and still is – known for its characteristic civil disobedience approach may be – partly – transitioning towards a more modern set of advocacy tactics – in the western world, at least. Consequently, this revolutionizes and transforms the social movement inside and out, giving it a renewed and more legitimate image, in a way. The final reason for choosing advocacy rather than activism is simply because participating in transnational networks can significantly enhance the resources available to domestic actors (Keck, Sikkink, 1998; 92), in this case, the domestic actor being Women Engage for a Common Future. Indeed, working at an international level with transnational organisms such as the European Commission or the European Environmental Bureau, among others, enables WECF to become the recipient of additional funds needed to carry out grounded Ecofeminist projects around the world.

Hence, overall, Women Engage for a Common Future heavily focuses on advocacy, which it considers to constitute a combination of both activism and lobbying. Namely, advocating as an optimistic and diplomatic network, focusing on educating and sensitizing the organization's followers – in particular through its Development Education Awareness Raising Project. This informative approach enables a focus on solutions rather than problems. Overall, WECF and its members are convinced of the power of persuasion and cooperation rather than that of resistance, and that certainly sets them apart from other women and environmental organizations that carry out Ecofeminist legacy. But how does WECF translate gender and environmental issues into their advocacy and how does it contribute to the movement?

Taking the route paved by advocacy, my research participants attend international – or regional, national – decision-making events where they weigh in as gender and environmental experts to push governing bodies to change their policies, rules, regulations or adopt new ones (Raffa, 2010; 2). The topics WECF members mostly cover include the impact that existing wealth and social inequalities – within and across countries – have on the environment of developing countries, affecting developing countries' natural resources such as water, and how, in turn, that affects women's access to education and work opportunities. WECF also strives to ensure gender mainstreaming in climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies. This involves accounting for gender in policies, legislations and actions regarding climate change, instead of it being sidelined and marginalized to specialist women's institutions (Charlesworth, 2005; 1). Here are a few examples of the NGO's advocacy – publicly available on WECF's social media.



*Courtesy of WECF International, Facebook*

Overall, the NGO strives to influence policy-making to include more women at the forefront of sustainable development decision-making. In addition to this, WECF's advocacy strategy has additional contributions to the movement in the sense that contemporary Ecofeminism emphasizes women's participation in democratic processes of policy-making (Emmons Allison, 2010; 8). Attending such events where heads of states gather – mostly male figures – constitutes an entry point for women into the public and political spheres, and WECF does just that, contributing to one of Ecofeminism's key achievements.

Considering this, the organization's advocacy proves to be rather successful and fruitful, in the Netherlands anyway. However, it may not be the case elsewhere as a lot of it depends on the cultural environment within which the ecofeminist body is embedded.

## c. Cultural Embeddedness of WECF: A Reflection of Western Society

"*Most explanatory models produced by social theorists in recent decades take for granted much of the organizational and ideological individualism of modern society.*" – W. Richard Scott, John W. Meyer et al., 1994, Institutional Environments and Organizations: Structural Complexity and Individualism; 11

Some academic and theoretical works suggest that social action in modern societies is highly structured by institutionalized rules (Richard Scott, Meyer, 1994; 9), and regarding my fieldwork, this view can definitely be applied. Indeed, one cannot overlook the fact that, in comparison to Southern countries, one of the western world's attributes is individualism, and as it will be elaborated in this chapter, WECF, as an NGO, is quite individualist. Just as it is a goal in anthropology to study a people within a certain context, it is thus equally impossible to fully understand any organizational body independently from its wider setting/ environment. In regard to my research, individualism in WECF needs to be addressed. Richard Scott and Meyer present the current situation with scientific research recently focusing more on organizations and associations as actors of the social system instead of the individual (Richard Scott, Meyer,

1994; 13), one could ask: but what about *within* such organizations? During the fieldwork, something that stood out quite evidently whether working, volunteering or interning at Women Engage for a Common Future, at least in the Dutch office in Utrecht, is the individualism that is felt throughout the office during work days. Evidently, the work and the brand of ecofeminism put forward cannot be studied independently from the people who embody it, however, in this case, the word "people" cannot truly be used as we are dealing much more with a group of individuals than with a people per se. Consequently, concerning my findings in regard to individualism, I'm taking an *institutionalist view* (Richard Scott, Meyer, 1994; 10).

The institutionalist view does not postulate that there are no individuals in society (Richard Scott, Meyer, 1994; 10), it just points to the importance of wider social, cultural and institutional settings in shaping both individuals and organizational bodies, such as non-profit organizations – including ones like Women Engage for a Common Future – both in content and appearance. Hence, despite an organization creating and having its own culture, it is also and mostly contingent upon the larger social culture within which it is embedded. Indeed, organizations can be said to constitute direct reflections of rules and structures built into the environment, or in other words, they reflect patterns established in a wider system (Richard Scott, Meyer, 1994; 2). As a result, if a society patterns as more individualist, this will inevitably be reflected within an organization. Thus, when studying an organization, whether corporate or non-profit, one cannot overlook the importance of wider cultural patterns as organizations *absorb* – in a way – the societies in which they are embedded (Richard Scott, Meyer, 1994; 4). As a matter of fact, every day practices, actions and goals express a society's underlying values (Schwartz, 2009; 2). Hence, regarding Women Engage for a Common Future, the NGO has absorbed Dutch's society individualism, fundamentally expressing underlying Dutch values and adding them to the Ecofeminist movement. As such, the NGO is internally quite individualist and it is translated through its support for small individual daily actions that can benefit the environment and one's health. But how exactly does that individualism manifests itself within WECF?

Despite of the members being bound by the will to create a more "just, healthy and sustainable world", it remains separate individuals working together. Indeed, each member has their own area of expertise, whether it is financial matters, politics, communication, projects, etc. and all work as a team, based on their individual strengths. As anthropologists, we traditionally conduct research or fieldwork in communities, and in groups of people that are intimately bound by an element – whether this constitutes a specific form of spirituality or a culture unknown to others. But what happens when an anthropologist has to immerse his or herself in a community that doesn't quite exist as such? This is the situation I was facing when conducting anthropological fieldwork at WECF Netherlands. In a way, it was hard, as the anthropologist for this research, to fully immerse myself in the field. Despite my identity as a feminist and environmentalist and my personal agenda partly aligning itself with those of my research participants and that of the organization, I struggled, nearly throughout the entire fieldwork, to become "part of the team". Throughout that same period, I constantly asked myself as to why it was difficult to fully immerse myself in this group of people, and that is precisely because they don't constitute a group of people, per se, but a group of individuals working together – courtesy of underlying Dutch values – and those are two different things that only become apparent when doing concrete anthropological fieldwork.

As part of the data I gathered during the fieldwork through my research participants during interviews, one aspect to not overlook consists in the fact that WECF is officially present in three distinct European countries and thus, each of the network's offices has inevitably absorbed the society that surrounds them. Indeed, insofar as cultural and institutionalized rules vary slightly, the organization's branches will equally differ as each group develops its own cultural identity in response to its country's historical experience (Schwartz, 2009; 1). This attests to the differing organizational identities of the WECF network and social work meaning based on the appropriate political, cultural and economic activities depending on the country where the NGO operates (Richard Scott, Meyer, 1994; 9). As neighboring and close France and Germany are to the Netherlands, one can expect slight, yet important, differences in each Women Engage for a Common Future office – these differences being completely reflective of the cultural rules brought forward in either France, Germany or The Netherlands.

I did not have the opportunity to visit the other WECF offices as I was limited in time and in resources, and as I decided to solely focus on one type of Ecofeminism – thus, one very specific to the Dutch society – but many were the times where my research participants explicited the differentials between WECF Nederland, WECF France and WECF Deutschland during our interviews. With their own set of institutionalized cultural rules, France and Germany are both home to different meanings of the term "feminism" and different notions of what a woman is and should be. The same goes for the Netherlands. Each country, and thus each WECF office, abides to a different set of cultural norms that shapes their entire ecofeminist work, and although together they constitute a unique network, all three WECF offices are far from identical as they are adapted to their surrounding societal environment. Where in the Dutch office, it is women who travel to advocate for women's and environmental causes, in the German office in Bavaria, women who travel, let alone leave home for work, are considered as leaving their children. In WECF France, the woman is seen as a business woman, putting her children in boarding schools, focusing on her professional career. Hence, the importance of the societal and cultural embeddedness (Richard Scott, Meyer, 1994; 4) in molding particular variants of Ecofeminism and their strategies. Thus, although the WECF network considers advocacy as its primary means of action, the strategy may and certainly does vary depending on whether its representatives address the German government, the French state or the Dutch authorities. Considering this, each society has its own way of bringing about long-term and effective change derived from a history of preferred ways to respond to basic issues. These ways then evolve to express and manifest themselves in the institutions, beliefs and practices of a society (Schwartz, 2009; 2). Consequently, the same inevitably goes for the type of Ecofeminism that is put forward by the different offices: all reflective of the society's history, beliefs and practices. The one presented in this thesis is focused and based on the Dutch liberal and individualist society, for which the preferred way to respond is cooperation, thus birthing a more individualist and collaborative ecofeminism.

As such, following the previous explanation on the institutionalist view, part of the individualism felt within the Dutch WECF office can be explained through the Dutch culture, it being more liberal and individualist, and it shaping the structural content of

WECF (Richard Scott, Meyer, 1994; 10). Despite individualist societies' individuals and organizations being inherently more autonomous in their abilities and ideas (Schwartz, 2009; 2), they remain nevertheless embedded in a cultural and institutional environment that governs their practices and that determines their general beliefs. Hence, the Ecofeminism elaborated in this thesis is directly and fundamentally contingent upon the Dutch culture. However, the latter is not sufficient in providing an explanation as to why the individual members of the WECF Dutch office are so disparate, more viewing themselves as acquaintances and co-workers than actual friends. Indeed, from the participant observation I conducted, the degree of ecofeminist affinity does not surpass the level of professionalism, and it certainly does not extend as far as an outside-of-work community. Thus, what more could explain such individualist behavior? One will soon find out that internet and social media campaigning may turn out to be a big part of the explanation.

## Chapter 4: Ecofeminism 2.0.

*"Sure, hashtags come and go, and the so-called weak ties of digital movements are no match for real world engagement. But they are not only better than nothing, they probably make the world, the one beyond the keyboard, a better place."* – David Carr, 2012, New York Times

#WECF #WECFInternational #Ecofeminism #Feminism #GenderEquality #GenderJustice #ClimateChange #SDGs #IntersectionalFeminism, etc. hashtags, social media posts, concise messages, precise timing, likes, shares, tweets and retweets, and more, are all the virtual world elements with which my research participants are faced with every day and for three months, the virtual world also became my reality. Without a doubt, one of the things that is most characteristic of Women Engage for a Common Future, or the Dutch office at least, is their use of the Internet. Indeed, according to many of the views expressed during the interviews I had with my research participants, social media and the Internet constitute an integral part of the organization's means of communication. Each member of the NGO has their own computer or PC, that they bring with them every time they come to the office and all office days are spent individually, on one's computer. Evidently, the organization is equipped with its very own website, but the virtual dimension of this NGO goes deeper and further than that. Consequently, I, as the anthropologist for this research and as a participant observer and an intern, was inevitably subject to the same scenario. This attested to the fact that in the 21st century and in a country where the means and the technology are available, this is probably how work, corporate or non-profit, is carried out. As such, the definition and meaning of activism, of ecofeminism, and of anthropology are changing, adapting to a more "updated" and digitalized environment.

Considering that this chapter covers social media and the Internet as means utilized by the organization to carry out its ecofeminist work in the 21st century, several references – amidst relatively more academic ones – will be directly issued from Internet sources we all have access to on a daily basis. These are nevertheless informative and contain the theories necessary to support this chapter, as shared by millennial Internet experts. This decision also stems from the fact that there is little academic literature

revolving around the topic of social media activity and NGO work, as well as to illustrate the extent of the virtual world we live in today.

a. <u>Internet and Social Media Activism/ Advocacy: The New Political Space</u>

*"How do the communicative practices constructed through them [Facebook and Twitter] reflect the forms of organization of contemporary social movements?"* – Paolo Gerbaudo, 2012, Tweets and the Streets

In an age where diverse forms of technology are widespread and where the Internet has become integral to our not only daily personal lives but also work life, it is only normal to be confronted with plenty of media and internet activity. As such, it is no different at Women Engage for a Common Future. Indeed, nowadays, activists and social movements utilize social media to pursue their goals (Wright, Graham, Jackson, 2016; 1). In the recent years, the Internet has grown ubiquitous to such an extent that various social media and Internet platforms are increasingly being used by governments, elected politicians, but also organizations, activists and citizens for political purposes (Wright, Graham, Jackson, 2016; 1). Within the organization, when asking about their online activity, all of my research participants argued that, for an organization, the Internet constitutes an undeniable communicative asset in the sense that the NGO is able to share ideas, raise awareness, sensitize the public, engage in advocacy, etc. anywhere, anytime (Srinivas, 2018). Indeed, the Internet constitutes an open space available worldwide and accessible 24/7. Thus, according to my research participants, today, it is nearly impossible to carry out non-profit work without the help of the Internet simply because it has become such an indispensable tool to reach millions of minds and to appeal to those with similar interests – at barely any cost. All one needs are a phone or computer and Internet access (Garlick, 2015). Hence, thanks to their money-saving and multiplying effects, today, almost all organizations, whether big or small, famous or starting up, are equipped with social media profiles and accounts, and WECF is no different in that regard.

Throughout the fieldwork, sitting behind an office desk and my computer, I kept wondering as to the true purpose of this extensive use of the Web: does tweeting, re-

tweeting, liking and sharing really matter when one aims to influence collective action on the ground, or is it purely an illusion making one feel part of the action whilst actually standing on the sidelines? (Gerbaudo, 2012; 2). Indeed, I found myself confused as to why so much time and effort was put into the Internet instead of into effective on the ground. Consequently, in the beginning phases of my fieldwork I became highly intrigued as to why and how the Internet could become such necessity to this advocate NGO. My curiosity increased even more considering that 4/5 of my research participants, full-time workers at the NGO, are in their mid-forties to fifties, not the age category to which one would associate extensive use of social media and Internet. Thus, I resorted to exploring the digital world of internet and social media activism.

As I discussed it with one my research participant during an interview, one thing that WECF asks of its recruits, interns, volunteers and members, is to have a Twitter account. 1/3 of my research participants, and myself, were asked to create a Twitter account because we joined WECF Twitter-less. Indeed, in addition to the organization's very own website, Facebook page, Instagram account, LinkedIn profile, YouTube channel, WECF is also massively present on Twitter. My gatekeeper allowing me access to all accounts and social media content, I became overwhelmed by the sheer abundance of such communicative practices - their uses being almost as diverse as the venues (Gerbaudo, 2012; 3), especially in an NGO that isn't very big yet. Considering its abundance in such communicative channels, one could argue that Women Engage for a Common Future is more present – or at least, more visible – on the virtual world than it is in the real world. However, for WECF information is of crucial importance in that knowledge constitutes the ideal weapon for change and the Internet allows for the sharing of unprecedented amounts of information. That information is in turn necessary and invaluable to raise awareness and incite the profound behavioral and mindset changes needed to reach the healthier, fairer and more sustainable society the NGO strives for. Furthermore, NGOs like WECF strongly depend on access to information as it enables them to become legitimate players. Contact with like-minded groups fosters access to crucial information, broadens NGOs' legitimacy as well as helps to mobilize information around particular policies (Keck, Sikkink, 1999; 96). Consequently, timing, content and

quantity management in information technology (Srinivas, 2018) are of the essence and have become a real *science* (Patel) for WECF and its members.

Every time important messages need to be shared on behalf of WECF, a very precise window of time for online activities is specified – this timeframe varies depending on the social media platform in question and corresponds to the highest level of activity on that platform, in that geographical region. Overall, the goal of the NGO is to give what its followers want, on the platform containing its larger target audience, and when that audience is most likely to see and engage it (Patel). On Twitter, this results in what the social media community calls "Twitter-athlon", namely, explosive amounts of tweets and re-tweets during a short window of time in the hopes of the NGO's messages reaching as many cyber-citizens as possible. The one I participated in, on International Women's Day, involved a timeframe from 12pm until 2pm; tweets were going out every 10 minutes or less, in three different languages – French, English, German –, for the launching of a website involving women in the sustainable development process – Women2030.org. The tweets were reporting women's inspirational stories in the domains of policy-making, ecology, education and development for women's empowerment around the world. When Twitter-athlons or similar activities occur, additional hashtags, links and keywords are specified to use mandatorily, in order to re-attach the organization to a larger discussion, movement or hot topic – current trending topics include plastics and climate change –, and as a result, become more visible to potential donors. Such hashtags depend on specific topics or event, and are usually accompanied by the mentioning or referring of other groups or organizations with which WECF shares affiliations. In this case, here is what a typical tweet would look like – all tweets are publicly available on the NGO's Twitter page.

Priscilla Achapka's work empowers women to tackle environmental issues through sustainable and affordable means. This enables women to mitigate and adapt to climate change and its impacts. #HerstoryOfChange #PressForProgress #IWD2018 @Women2030 @WomensMajorGroup @GlobalForestCoalition

*Courtesy of WECF_INT, Twitter*

Other similar processes are involved depending on the platform – Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. Overall, the entire process is quite intricate and complex for a rather simple result, but the organization remains very optimistic in regard to their use of the Internet and of various social media platforms.

Throughout the interviews I conducted with my research participants, asking one-on-one on the pros and cons of Internet and social media activism, most responded positively, seeing the pros as outweighing the cons. Indeed, as one of my research participant said it very well, the Internet, as an open space of communication (Sūtzl, Hug, 2012; 7), allows for the democratization of a cause or even information as it renders it more accessible to the general public, in the sense that anyone, anywhere, anytime can share something and have access to millions of cyber-citizens (Garlick, 2015). In a way, the Internet creates a new space for political discussion where one can encounter individuals and views that are similar to one's, and express them freely using everyday vernacular and expressive speech understandable by everyone (Wright, Graham, Jackson, 2016; 2). For some, citizens just as for organizations, publicly expressing one's opinions and views is synonymous and an expression of genuine political participation. As a matter of fact, as elected representatives and government officials increasingly create their own presence on social media, spaces like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and more, foster a connection between the personal and the political and can potentially bridge the gap between the lives of citizens and formal politics (Wright, Graham, Jackson, 2016; 2). Indeed, it opens up the terrain for discussions between, for example, WECF and local Dutch ministers or political figures on both a personal and political level, creating a more lifestyle-based politics (Graham, 2009; 168). This is especially important in advocacy as WECF is able to directly reach out and appeal to its target donors and funders, who are also key influencers and policy-makers in the European and International regions, through cost-saving, travel-free and time efficient means – the European Environmental Bureau, the European Commission, the UNEP, UNFCCC, etc. all present on social media. Overall, the use of such communicative channels proves quite promising as they appear to foster a communicative environment that promotes solidarity among web users (Graham, 2009; 168). Especially for WECF, for whom cooperation is crucial and who tries to get citizens to work together towards solutions instead of dividing them

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in the face of numerous environmental problems, the Internet and social media channels provide the ideal platform for collaboration (Srinivas, 2018). Considering all of the above, it is comprehensible that my research participants perceive social media and the Internet as a crucial and indispensable asset that knows no equal in real life.
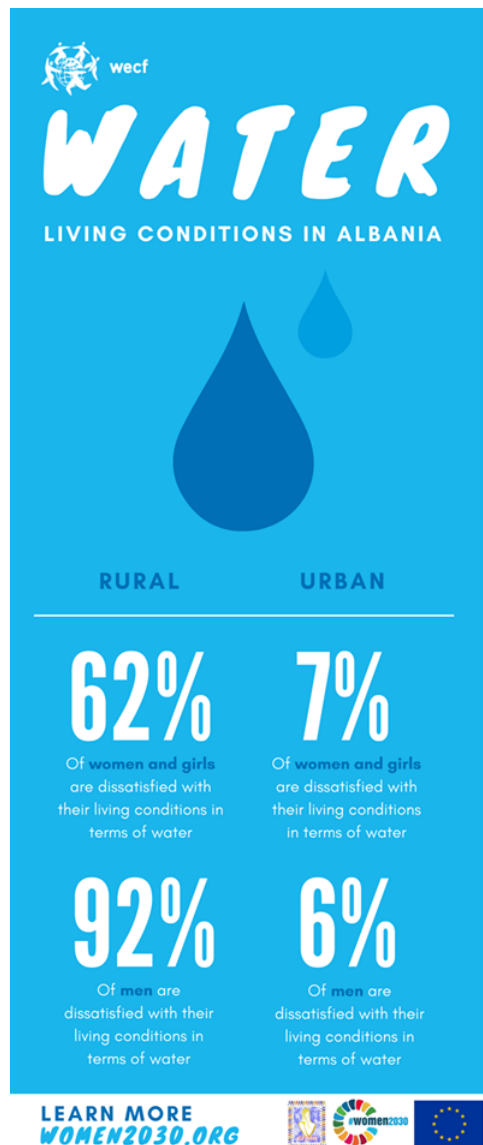
In regard to utilizing the Internet to make contributions to Ecofeminism, WECF focuses its efforts on education, sensitization, awareness building (Srinivas, 2018) as well as the empowerment of its followers – just as mentioned in the introduction. The awareness raising that is undertaken mainly revolves around sharing numbers, data and statistics concerning both gender and the environment; thus, mainly quantitative information to illustrate the full extent of the social and gender-related ecological problems. For example, the number of girls without access to adequate sanitation due to climate change, and the effect on their menstrual hygiene; or the amounts of plastic waste being thrown into the oceans and how it ends up in our food chain, etc. Here are a few examples.



*Courtesy of WECF_INT, Twitter*

The NGO also utilizes its communicative channels to encourage its followers to engage in daily sustainable practices. For example, from February to March, a 40-day plastic-free challenge was in play, and videos, ideas and articles were shared on the NGO's Facebook and Twitter to illustrate the ways one can successfully live without plastic or the ways to drastically decrease one's in daily activities – from groceries shopping, to suppressing plastic containers in beauty products, replacing standard toothbrushes by wooden ones, to using natural and organic menstrual products. WECF's YouTube channel is equally crucial in publishing short but instructive videos, from the effects pesticides have on women's health and how it gets transmitted to the baby during a pregnancy, to how plastic toys can prove very harmful to children, and to the effects nuclear waste has on women, increasing their risks of developing breast cancer. But, overall, what does this entail for Ecofeminism? As it was mentioned in the first chapter, Ecofeminist activity used to be much more hands on with women and nature being very tangible entities. However, due to the technological means made available by the new millennium, the definitions of both ecology and gender have shifted as the ecofeminist struggle has taken on a new arena: a virtual one. Hence, as opposed to being concrete entities that needed struggling for, the gender and environmental concepts have taken on an increasingly abstract nature. Nevertheless, in the midst of this digital trend, WECF strives to find ways to combine abstract concepts such as environment, health and gender and relate them to plastic, health and daily activities in tangible ways that appeal to people's everyday lives, in order to fulfill its Ecofeminist mission.

To conclude this part, the 21st century millennial digitalization of politicized space renders western Ecofeminism itself less tangible and more elusive. Nevertheless, WECF

is an example of an organization that manages to keep the movement grounded by concretizing and materializing abstract concepts into tangible individual actions. Thus, taking all of the above into consideration, the Internet indeed constitutes an effective and indispensable "tool of communication" that helps the NGO to get closer to achieving its ecofeminist goals in this virtual 21$^{st}$ century-society. Nevertheless, as my research participants emphasized the intimate link between virtual and real worlds, this is only true to a certain extent as too much presence on the Internet – relative to that of the real world – can become a real downfall, and can result in detachment. As such, as I asked my research participants about their thoughts on Internet and social media uses, most of them did not recognize the inherent risks of being too involved within the virtual world. With the data collected through interviews, as well as data gathered through participation observation from the point of view of an intern or volunteer – thus not from that of a decisive member of the organization – it seems that WECF's virtual presence is not balanced out by its presence in the real world, and this can severely hurt the NGO in terms of their advocacy work.

b. <u>Armchair Activism: The Limits</u>

"*So, while the digital age may enhance the power of those that are already active, it can't seem to drag the rest out of their armchairs.*" – Rosalie Tostevin, 2014, Online Activism: It's Easy to Click, But Just as Easy to Disengage

Although the Internet and social media have many advantages and are often considered as more beneficial than costly, there are some limits to virtual activity not being balanced out by concrete real-world events. The views of my research participants on this matter were divided. As such, when asking them about their Internet and social media uses, as stated earlier, most considered it to be positive, and when it came to the cons, few were these. The recurring answer from my research participants, concerning the pitfalls of the Internet and social media, consisted in "trolls", namely getting mean comments or messages, negative ones criticizing the NGO's work. Nevertheless, as WECF's online network is, as of now, not large enough to attract large numbers of trolls, it happens very rarely and my co-workers don't necessarily consider it a pressing matter.

Thus, in just a few short sentences, I have summed up the negative views that my research participants have over the use of Internet for advocacy purposes. However, as a fresh pair of eyes external to WECF, I perceived deeper and more concerning limits to WECF's very active presence on the Web and these aren't limited to a few occasional trolls.

As I was granted access to all social media platforms, accounts, libraries, and publications, I had the opportunity to sift through WECF's following and followers on its different communicative channels – Twitter and Instagram, mostly. As such, one thing stood up: all of Women Engage for a Common Future's followers resemble the NGO, very much, and share a commonality of interest (Claywell). Indeed, this is a luxury granted by the Internet, namely that of being able to choose and pick individuals or organizations whose likes and dislikes are similar to ours, and then build one's network around such commonalities (Claywell). In light of this, WECF chose – as any of us would – to build its ecofeminist network around accounts, individuals and organizations who engage in similar activities and with whom the NGO would be able to interact in regard to gender and environmental topics. Thus, the organization's online network includes: environmentalists, environmental NGOs such as Greenpeace, International and Regional bodies such as the UN, their human rights and environmental counterparts – UNFCCC, UNEP –, European bodies, conservation organizations such as Vogelbescherming Nederland and the Nature Conservancy, WECF partners such as Women's Major Group and Women's Environment Program Nigeria, as well as local Dutch political figures and evidently, other women's environmental organizations. On its own, there is no downfall to following being followed by similar entities, to the contrary, being surrounded by similar beings and statements can reinforce the positive work that is being done by NGOs such as WECF, and attract additional like-minded individuals (Claywell). However, on the long-term, this involves the risk of turning into a closed loop; I had a glimpse of this phenomenon during my fieldwork and it constitutes a much bigger downfall of extensive Internet and social media use than a few trolls.

As interns handling the basic social media and Internet activities such as regular posting, tweeting and sharing, we were more exposed and thus aware of the comments, likes and general activity of the organization. It became clear that we were asked to re-tweet, like and share the posts of the same accounts, every time – WECF International,

Women's Major Group, Women2030, etc. It is then that the closed loop became clearer: it is always the same accounts and individuals who like, re-tweet, mention and share WECF's posts, and in turn, WECF likes, shares, re-tweets and mentions back. It thus becomes a closed loop, a bubble, from which WECF can't seem to get out of and doesn't seem to notice. But regarding the actual social media practices, is liking, sharing, tweeting, mentioning and re-tweeting enough to fulfill the Ecofeminist mission that WECF strives to accomplish?

As communicative channels, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram may get the message across in a succinct and efficient way but they are simultaneously limiting in their nature. As concise, cost and time-efficient as it may be, such communicative channels don't always foster any discursive reciprocal change in the sense that people don't necessarily take the time to fully read and reply and that can result in a very shallow level of understanding (Graham, Wright, Jackson, 2016; 6). Indeed, the main social media activity of WECF revolves around Facebook and Twitter and the latter only has 140 characters for its users – whether individuals, organizations or companies – to share some information. In that sense, it can potentially compromise WECF's integrity (Garlick, 2015). Hence, it may become problematic in terms of establishing awareness raising for profound societal change. However, although, the NGO has a website of its own to publish content extensive information, it isn't part of the more popular social media platforms. As such, communicative channels may prove challenging on the long term as they may empower those who are already proactive and engaged, but for others, it may merely create the impression of activism or advocacy for a cause (Tostevin, 2014; 1). This is where concrete action is needed, on behalf of WECF, to balance out and complement virtual activity.

The Internet as such, with its many benefits and little costs can prove very useful, especially for non-profit and charitable organizations. Nevertheless, as integral to WECF as it is, it also carries some important risks that need acknowledgment and considering. One of these risks involves substituting offline interaction with online forms of interaction. As everyone is connected nearly all the time, these days, there is a tendency to use online interaction as opposed to meet face-to-face (Moreau, 2018). Indeed, it saves

on travel costs but NGO work requires an equal amount of grounded activity to fulfill its cause and in that sense, too much Internet interaction can impede the mission's overall work. Such online interaction can be linked to the phenomenon of *armchair activism* – or armchair advocacy in WECF's case – (Tostevin, 2014; 1), potentially depicting what goes on in the WECF Dutch office – at least, from an intern or volunteer's point of view. Individuals sitting behind a computer, another week, another hashtag, but what is actually being accomplished? (Carr, 2012; 2). Indeed, in terms of social media's ability to strengthen social movements, such platforms may promote what some call '*slacktivism*' or '*clicktivism*' rather than activism. Just like armchair activism, NGO work on social media carries the risk of bringing millions of cyber-citizens to a page while failing to mobilize actual people on the streets to create change (Obar, Zube and Lampe, 2012; 2). Consequently, according to data gathered from my participant observation, making a difference does seem quite easy in the digital age (Tostevin, 2014; 1), but could it be really that easy? Does that simplicity and easiness translate into real-world concrete solidarity? Or does it complement it, at least?

Another risk – or perhaps, reality – to take into consideration is the crowding of the Web as an open space. As a result of information sharing being free and becoming increasingly simpler, online space witnesses unprecedented crowding of irrelevant information and digital junk. Unfortunately, as the Internet becomes more accessible, such crowding trend does not decrease, rendering it harder for organizations and NGOs like WECF to reach their target audience with relevant, valid and invaluable information (Bhattacharya, 2016). As it is well-known and acknowledged by my research participants, WECF is part of a battle for visibility in a virtual world that is becoming increasingly overwhelming in content (Moreau, 2018). As such, the Internet, constitutes a double-edged sword. Indeed, it is available and accessible 24/7, 365 days of the year, anywhere on the globe, and to anyone equipped with a phone or computer with an Internet access. It equally enables the sharing and distribution of any kind of information at practically zero cost; it enables anyone access to millions of cyber-citizens, as well as the reconciliation between mainstream citizens and state officials. In that sense, it can be utilized as an intellectual weapon which has the power to influence mindsets and incite deep social change. Nevertheless, the Web's strength is equally its weakness as all of the

latter elements also render it a place characterized by information overload, where sensitizing information is mixed up with selfies and irrelevant personal posts.

Finally, the last downfall to take into consideration is cyber-citizens' uses of online spaces, namely, burnishing one's online avatar to attract more followers (Carr, 2012; 1). Prior to being an open space to share relevant information, the Internet and communicative channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, constitute first and foremost platforms fit for narcissistic purposes (Carr, 2012; 2). Consequently, when it comes to NGOs such as WECF, impressing one's followers through following and liking charitable pages is often the main driver and has consequences of not actually benefitting the organization *(*Carr, 2012; 2). In fact, studies have shown that the majority of people who 'like' a Facebook page for a cause don't complement that with a donation. Indeed, as we – social media users – are sheltered by millions of cyber-citizens, it creates some sort of bystander effect wherein it may reduce each individual's incentive to contribute (Tostevin, 2014; 2). However, we find ourselves equally scrutinized and under pressure to support charitable work. As a result, the visibility of the membership is sometimes the main motivation for liking a page in the first place (Tostevin, 2014; 2). In light of this, WECF's invaluable ecofeminist work may be confronted with some challenges inherent to the nature of the Internet and the communicative channels it utilizes. This highlights the digitalization trend society is moving towards, emphasizing the need for NGOs to complement online activity through offline action.

Thus, as it is made understood in this chapter, the Internet simultaneously constitutes an open and accessible space and a very complex and competitive one. As democratizing as its impact are, regarding non-profit work such as WECF's, the Internet and social media constitute virtual spaces that require a very subtle and delicate balance between real and digital solidarity. Overall, one cannot overlook or neglect the fact that the virtual world still does reflect the real world, in most part, but also that a like on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube or Instagram, may equally not translate into anything concrete in reality. The Internet is nearly impossible to study independently from the real world, and in that sense, digital activism or advocacy can difficultly be considered as independent and non-impacting the real world. As social media activism is a very useful and powerful tool, especially for the non-profit world, it is also a tool for

leniency, enabling individuals, citizens, advocates and activists to sit back and remain in their chair, while giving them the impression of actually contributing – hence the expression "armchair activism" (Tostevin, 2014; 2). As much good as this crucial asset can contribute, it can also severely hurt an organization by the conjured illusion of activism rather than helping the real thing (Tostevin, 2014; 2) – this does not describe or represent WECF as such, it is merely a series of risks worth considering when doing taking NGO work to the online world. Hence, social media and the Internet need to be considered in all of their pros but in all of their cons equally.

This constituted the last defining characteristic of WECF Netherlands, completing the last pieces of the WECF Ecofeminist puzzle. Now, it's about building the ecofeminist equivalent that ticks all of the boxes presented in the previous chapters. Hence, where does all of this lead us in terms of Ecofeminist variants?

## Concluding Argument: WECF's Ecofeminism: Not Cultural, Not Radical, but Pragmatic Ecofeminism

Having travelled back the origins of the Ecofeminist movement, elaborated on anthropological work and its challenges on the anthropologist as well as gone through the Dutch office of Women Engage for a Common Future, in all of its aspects, one question remains: what, hence, is the Ecofeminism practiced and endorsed by WECF and what are the impacts? As it was stated in previous chapters, the organization does not identify as "ecofeminist" per se. Nevertheless, it does engage in gender and environmental work, striving to make a better world through its inclusive gender perspective. As such, WECF continues the legacy of original ecofeminists but in its own and respective way, more attuned to the means made available by the millennial technological boom and more comprehensive of the efforts being made on an international level. As such, the Ecofeminism I decided to study and share through this research does not fit in one particular existing category of Ecofeminism. Indeed, there are many variants, each varying from subtle differences to entirely different conceptions of the relationship between gender and the environment (as seen in Chapter 1), and no one can be applied to the Dutch office of WECF. In light of this, the following concluding chapter is an attempt to elaborate and name a new brand of the movement, specific to the organization, and irreducible to any other form of Ecofeminism. Once that is established, I will elaborate on the potential impacts that this Ecofeminism has on society, on the movement itself, as well as what it can do for Women Engage for a Common Future.

### a. Pragmatic Ecofeminism

"*Idealism is opposed to Pragmatism, a philosophy that describes doing what works best. The word has historically described philosophers and politicians who were concerned more with the real-world application of ideas than with abstract notions. A pragmatic person is sensible, grounded and practical.*" – Pragmatic, Vocabulary.com

As it has been described above, Women Engage for a Common Future's ecofeminist work is far from idealist and essentialist, to the contrary of the nature of the movement when it first emerged 50 years ago. Nevertheless, it doesn't make it any less legitimate and valuable; as a matter of fact, it points to the creation of a particular type of Ecofeminism. As such, this points to the constant shifting and evolving of societies – and in this case, western society – and with them, the evolution of concepts such as gender, feminism, environmentalism and Ecofeminism, of course. In light of this, WECF being a relatively young network, as well as due to cultural and institutionalized factors as seen in Chapter 3, takes the more formal and rational route to Ecofeminism. Indeed, one thing my research participants stressed during our interview sessions and as deduced from my participant observation, the organization tries very hard to not be perceived as *'radical'* – although it was often followed by a failure to answer what qualified as such. The desire to not be associated with an *'extreme'* form of Ecofeminism – consisting solely in resistant actions such as protests and boycotts – is indeed very characteristic of WECF. As part of their brand, they emphasize the importance of working together, of solidarity and of cooperation because it reflects the way women operate, by working together. As such, diplomacy, cooperation and realism are put forward as the keys to a healthy, balanced and sustainable world where women play a bigger role. In light of this and due to the absence of idealism, I choose to qualify WECF's Ecofeminism as *Pragmatic*. Indeed, WECF's members focus on solving gender and environmental issues in a sensible way, adapted to the conditions that currently exist rather than obeying ideas or rules (Cambridge Dictionary).

Concerning the relationship between gender and the environment, as seen in Chapter 1, this is where variants can distinguish themselves. As such, my research participants see their work as being highly intersectional – namely, wealth, environment, gender and culture being all entangled and that what we choose to do or buy in the western world, such as in the Netherlands, inevitably affects the situation in developing countries of the Asian and African continents. Indeed, there is an undeniable gender and environmental interconnectedness that also calls upon inclusiveness and integration, as an approach. My research participants stress the inclusiveness that the organization is striving to promote and encourage, namely the integration of all kinds of individuals, especially marginalized

communities and the LGBTQ community. As my gatekeeper said, anyone can become a feminist, it is not only a left-wing matter, liberals can also be feminists. Consequently, as much as my research participants may politically affiliate themselves within the left, WECF's brand of ecofeminism is more of a crossbreed between liberal and social ecofeminism (see Chapter 1) translating mainly as advocacy and the regulatory approach, complemented by occasional acts of civil disobedience – despite not having been able to witness any during my fieldwork period – as well as social work such as development aid. Hence, considering the more social facet, through interviews, my research participants described how responsible they feel and are regarding the situation in so-called "third-world countries". They also emphasized the fact that, especially in such countries, women tend to be much more affected by climate change than men are, comparatively, due to their work in agriculture and their connection to the household – whereas it is much less apparent in western countries like the Netherlands. Hence, the creation of the WECF network has been a crucial and undeniable asset in regard to the Ecofeminist circle made up of diverse women from diverse environmental backgrounds, as it allows the more affected grassroot women from across the globe to voice their concerns in international fora that tackle and discuss solutions to solve the global environmental crisis (Braidotti, 1994, 2).

In addition to WECF's ecofeminism being diplomatic, cooperative and intersectional, it is also very liberal. As mentioned in Chapter 1, liberal ecofeminism is one of the more known variants of the movement, that focuses on legislations and international events, taking a regulatory approach – to influence the implementation of regulations. The organization does so also in a very formal or technical way: by sticking to the 2030 Agenda of sustainable development, following the 17 sustainable development goals established by the United Nations. Indeed, their ultimate goal is less spoken in terms of mother Earth, or the natural connection between gender and ecology, and more in terms of sustainability. As such, instead of the ecofeminist work being spiritual or idealized, it is very concrete and realistic, in a sense, as it de-complexifies the network's ecofeminism with the absence of anything intangible stemming from spirituality. In this sense, WECF's Ecofeminism can be said to be relatively straightforward. Indeed, there is no simpler way to combine gender and the environment than by analyzing gender and ecological relations

socially, environmentally, politically, economically, as well as literally, without adding any complementary spiritual or romantic dimension. In light of this, and to contrast the irrationality of spiritual Ecofeminism, WECF's can be considered as quite rational.



*The 17 Sustainable Development Goals,*
*courtesy of Make Europe Sustainable For All, WECF Project*

As a direct result of focusing on sustainability by operating according to the sustainable development goals, WECF focuses particularly on the 5th sustainable development goal, on gender equality, without nonetheless overlooking the others as they consider all goals to be intimately interconnected. This constitutes something that intrigued me to some extent, namely, the level of optimism and positivity, and the refusal to dwell on those problems – as activists, unlike myself, tend to dwell in the issues. Indeed, for Ecofeminism, this is almost new and unexpected, especially when one refers to the original movement mostly revolving around protests on the social origins of the gender and environmental situations (Moore, 2015, 9) – as described in Chapter 1. This optimism can be said to stem from previously successfully achieved changes but can be mostly attributed to the fact that dwelling on the problem does not solve it. Considering this, WECF may not be as hands on as initial protesting ecofeminists, but they are certainly proactive in finding solutions and creating change. Hence, WECF also

contributes to Ecofeminism by attesting to how proactivity and concrete activism such as blockades, boycotts, demonstrations and more, are independent from each other. The two are linked but they are in no way synonymous of each other. Consequently, there are other ways to bring about change and to be proactive in regard to gender and ecology, without resorting to activism or civil disobedience. The collaboration and advocacy described in Chapter 3 and then the Internet activity presented in Chapter 4, contribute to enabling WECF and its Ecofeminism to remain positive. Furthermore, instead of remaining in a submissive position as victims of climate change and of the male-dominated society, recent ecofeminists such as my research participants have opted for the posture of agents of change, using their climate change vulnerability as entry and starting points to incite change in domains such as water, sanitation and energy (Braidotti, 1994; 7). This clearly illustrates the shift that is taking place within society but also to debates concerning the relationship between gender and ecology: from women as victims of the environmental crisis to them becoming the best environmental managers for sustainable development (Braidotti, 1994; 2).

Considering all of the above and despite my initial delusion, I have learned a vast amount of small daily life and environmentally-benefitting actions to use not only as an anthropologist, but mostly as an individual. Although the fieldwork was short, my research participants managed to expand my mind and enabled me to perceive the world as intricately interconnected and as one whole rather than as separate entities – health, gender, ecology, economy, politics, etc. – coexisting in one space. After this research, I have become more socially and environmentally-conscious due to the NGO's crucial awareness raising and education strategies. In this sense, consequently, WECF is elevating Ecofeminism to the equal ranks of other pressing global by tackling the environmental crisis through a human rights perspective – right to safe and clean water, adequate sanitation, gender equality, education, renewable energies, etc. rendering it more accessible and attuned to the general public. As such, this opens up an entirely new door, broadening Ecofeminism to more than just feminism and ecology. Consequently, this is not without societal relevance and impacts.

b. <u>Conclusion: Impacts, Consequences and Relevance</u>

*"People do not revolt against what is natural, therefore inevitable; or inevitable therefore natural. Since what is resistible is not inevitable; what is not inevitable could be otherwise – it is arbitrary, therefore social. The logical and necessary implication of women's revolt, like all revolts, is that the situation can be changed. Belief in the possibility of change implies belief in the social origins of the situation".* – Christine Delphy, 1984; 144

As resistant I may have been to WECF's way of doing Ecofeminism, the societal relevance and impacts that it creates are not to be overlooked. Indeed, one may say that we are looking at the future of Ecofeminism, namely, one that is radically different from its original essentialist version, but that is nonetheless crucial and serves as the gateway to women playing a bigger role in the public and political spheres. In fact, one of the consequences of WECF's Ecofeminism remaining optimistic and solution-oriented is that it actively chooses to believe that women, men, citizens and governments, can work together to achieve a better more sustainable future. Considering this, WECF's Ecofeminism constitutes a conscious one in knowing that educating and raising awareness is more important than pointing fingers and placing blame. One does not have to stay in a position of victim, but one can actually use that vulnerability to one's advantage in making more conscious decisions as well as empowering oneself.

Secondly, it affects the Ecofeminist movement in the sense that it gives it more legitimacy. The original movement being very centered on civil disobedience and revolts, it limited itself by establishing a unilateral speech. Today, in the Dutch society, with 21st century means, WECF is able to build ecofeminist future by getting involved with governments and multinationals, whilst it does not necessarily agree with them, it certainly tries to work together for realistic and accessible solutions through bilateral dialogues.

Thirdly, taking the approach of sustainability instead of focusing on essentialist aspects of women sharing motherly qualities with the planet, renders Ecofeminism all that more accessible and comprehensible. Indeed, gender and ecology come together in what makes a society, namely, politics, economics, history, geography, culture, education,

religion and people. In that sense WECF opens doors for a broader and more inclusive Ecofeminist movement itself and simultaneously elevates women's citizenship and civic action (Emmons Allison, 2010; 9). My experience in the organization shows that Ecofeminism pertains to more than just Feminism; it is broader than both feminism and environmentalism; it encompasses more than the two terms it stands for, and this is precisely where one's mind must wander when thinking about Ecofeminism, from now on. It is also in this aspect that WECF's Ecofeminism is socially relevant: as it is related to the sustainable development agenda, it emphasizes the social aspect of environmentalism – and thus, the social facet of the global environmental crisis (Braidotti, 1994; 3).

Finally, this pragmatic Ecofeminism is paving the way for more liberal and pragmatic forms of Ecofeminism focused on achieving societal change for future generations. It opens up the Ecofeminist movement to other more formal and cooperative variants, ultimately disproving the essentialist ecofeminist association. WECF's ecofeminism is not, to the contrary of what I may have thought at first, *the* materialization, par excellence, of a modern millennial ecofeminism; it is *a* materialization of the complex and broad movement. Furthermore, it is only *one* 21st century materialization of western ecofeminism as it attests to the constantly evolving definition and materialization of Ecofeminism itself and to the variation across geographical regions of the world.

Consequently, throughout the thesis, one can hopefully perceive the evolution of Ecofeminism from its origins to today – as materialized in Women Engage for a Common Future's Dutch office. As it has been described in all the previous chapters, each variant of the movement is extremely contingent upon the geographical region, cultural norms, timeframe in relation to the broader historical scope, available means – related to time – and the individuals embodying the narrative themselves. As such, from all elements previously cited, the Ecofeminist equation can result in a mosaic of variants, each one as specific as another and as irreducible in philosophy, narrative, means, individuals and mission. This thesis brought to you one of the many forms of Ecofeminism that are present and practiced in Western society today, but it is nevertheless a variant that attests to the shifting of the Ecofeminist movement – from challenge and resistance, to dialogue and cooperation – and Women Engage for a Common Future contributes to transforming

Ecofeminism and ecofeminists into something worth exploring anthropologically further. WECF Netherlands, in the short three months that I studied it, makes ecofeminist matters tangible and manages to show how it touches and affects every single one of us globally through the way we consume, buy, eat, live and behave, by also providing viable and affordable alternatives. It renders Ecofeminism – a once vague, complex and misunderstood concept – simpler and more accessible, making it more attune as well as comprehensible to everyday life and situations, as well to everyone.

Ecofeminism is a rather recent yet simultaneously archaic term. As it is mentioned in the Introduction and other chapters, WECF does not use the ecofeminist label, yet it nevertheless retains the focus on gender and ecology (Gaard, 2014; 22). Indeed, despite the misuse of the name, the actions committed and the work done by the Women Engage for a Common Future network remains under the same analytical frame even if supported by different labels (Gaard, 2014; 24). In light of this, WECF's work is considered to be Ecofeminist and hopefully, I was able to translate their ecofeminist work into this piece of writing. As such, I hope it encourages you, readers, to open your eyes to the broadness and versatility of the Ecofeminist movement, prompting you to re-think the traditional misleading association of women protesting, and instead, to look at the bigger picture of what Ecofeminism really entails: gender and environment within a globalized society where nature, economics, social, biological and politics are entangled. As mentioned in Chapter 1, now that the situation and treatment of both women and nature is known to be strictly social, one can expect more ecofeminist changes within western society, throughout the world, but one can equally expect changes within the Ecofeminist movement itself. The struggle for more socially, genderly and environmentally conscious lifestyles is not over and it will continue on in the years and decades to come, and thus, Ecofeminism will keep growing and diversifying itself, each time again molding itself to the jargon, trending means, and social and cultural norms of its time.

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Pragmatism: A 21st Century Materialization of Western Ecofeminism

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