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**Spiritual Ecofeminism: “Healing the Earth” with
Starhawk’s Work**

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Abstract

Starhawk (Miriam Simos) is the author of *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (1979) and *The Earth Path: Grounding your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature* (2004). This MA thesis examines Starhawk's theories within the framework of ecofeminism and evaluates her contributions to the genre of spiritual ecofeminist essays. It aims to assess the distinctiveness of her writings within the broader field of ecofeminist literature, drawing upon the insights of critics such as Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, Greta Gaard, Carol P. Christ, and Ariel Salleh, among other contributors.

Employing a comprehensive methodology that combines literary analysis, feminist theory, and interdisciplinary research, this study explores the intricate connections between feminism, spirituality, and environmentalism in Starhawk's works. This MA thesis is structured into two main parts, each serving a distinct purpose. The first part focuses on essential definitions and aspects related to the development of the thesis, while the second is dedicated to the analysis of Starhawk's works, exploring concepts such as the witch, the Goddess¹ and rituals. Through a critical examination of Starhawk's writings, this section delves into the profound connections between feminist spirituality, ecological consciousness, and the socially-engaged themes in her works.

Through this comprehensive analysis, the research paper reaches intriguing conclusions. It highlights the unique and valuable insights offered by Starhawk's spiritual ecofeminist essays, emphasizing the interplay between feminism, spirituality, and environmentalism. Furthermore, her works serve as a compelling call to action, urging individuals to embrace the intrinsic sanctity of all living beings and actively work towards a world characterized by coexistence and sustainability.

¹ The use of a capital "G" for the term "Goddess" implies this thesis adopts Starhawk's recognition of this energy as a sacred and divine entity.

Introduction

The works of Starhawk (Miriam Simos), including *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (1979) and *The Earth Path: Grounding Your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature* (2004), have been celebrated for their contributions to the field of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism, as a theoretical framework that emerged during the 1970s, aims to investigate the interconnections between feminism and environmentalism. This intersectional approach acknowledges the intrinsic links between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the environment. Moreover, it frequently promotes a comprehensive perspective on social justice and environmental sustainability. As this MA thesis notes, Starhawk's writings accentuate the intrinsic interconnectedness of social equity, environmental guardianship, and individual self-actualization. This is important insofar it urges individuals to embrace the inherent sanctity of all living beings and actively endeavor to co-create a world characterized by harmonious coexistence and sustainable flourishing. Next, I will elucidate the aims, methodology, and structure of this project, providing a roadmap for the exploration that lies ahead.

This project aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the contributions of Starhawk to the field of ecofeminism. Hence, this research paper aspires to critically examine her theories within the framework of ecofeminism and to assess the distinctiveness of her spiritual ecofeminist essays as a genre. By analysing her writings, this project seeks to uncover the unique insights and perspectives that Starhawk brings to the intersection of feminism, spirituality, and environmentalism.

The methodology employed in this thesis is multifaceted, combining literary analysis, feminist theory, and interdisciplinary research. The project will draw upon a range of secondary texts and critical perspectives to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis. The secondary texts will include works by critics and scholars in the field of ecofeminism, such as

Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva's *Ecofeminism*, which explores the interconnectedness of capitalist patriarchy, environmental degradation, and the oppression of women as well as how these systems reinforce each other. In addition to Mies and Shiva's work, Carol P. Christ's "Why Women Need the Goddess" is also significant insofar it discusses the significance of the Goddess as a symbol of female power, interconnectedness, and personal empowerment. Her exploration of the Goddess energy offers valuable insights into feminist spirituality and its potential to inspire transformative action in the face of environmental challenges. There are other contributions to this dissertation of paramount importance. They would be Greta Gaard's "Ecofeminism Revisited", Heather Eaton's "Liaison or Liability: Weaving Spirituality into Feminist Politics", and Carolyn Merchant's *Radical Ecology*. Expanding beyond the realm of ecofeminism, this thesis also incorporates sources from other fields, including James Cresser's "Quantum Mechanics" and Daniel Chandler's "Introduction to Genre Theory". These critical perspectives will be used to situate Starhawk's writings within the broader context of ecofeminist literature and to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis.

The first part of this MA thesis is focused on essential definitions and aspects related to the development of the project. It begins with the definition of various concepts that sets the stage for the subsequent analysis by providing an overview of ecofeminism, its origins, and its principles. This introductory part serves as a theoretical foundation for understanding the significance of Starhawk's contributions within the ecofeminist framework. The analysis conducted in this study is enriched by a scrutiny of secondary texts and diverse critical perspectives, encompassing an array of influential works within the field of ecofeminism and pertinent disciplines.

Building upon this foundation, the subsequent segment of the project is devoted to an analysis of Starhawk's notable works, namely, *The Spiral Dance* and *The Earth Path*. Within this focused investigation, particular attention is directed towards the symbolic representations

of the witch, the Goddess, and rituals. This section entails an exploration that aims to penetrate the multifaceted themes, intricate concepts, and methodological approaches that permeate Starhawk's literary oeuvre. The overarching objective is to facilitate a comprehension of the intricate interrelationships between feminist spirituality, ecological consciousness, and the expansive themes elucidated within her writings. By subjecting her texts to a critical examination, this segment endeavors to unveil the distinct insights and perspectives that Starhawk offers at the crossroads of feminism, spirituality, and environmentalism. Also, this second section examines the genre of Starhawk's work, as well as her language of spirituality while giving examples to understand how her unique spiritual language empowers women to regain their position of power and authority and proclaim their own distinctive viewpoints and experiences.

Part one: a few definitions

1.1. What is ecofeminism?

Ecofeminism is a political framework that asserts the special strength and integrity of every living being (Mies and Shiva 38). It is a woman-identified movement that denounces the existent masculinist dynamics and blames these forces for the degradation of the environment and the oppressive situation that women endure. For ecofeminists, all forms of oppression are interconnected. In the case of *Ecofeminism*, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva state: “We began to see that the relationship of exploitative dominance between man and nature and the exploitative and oppressive relationship between men and women were closely connected” (27). Thus, ecofeminism is focused on the liberation of both women and the environment from patriarchal authority.

However, there are different branches of the ecofeminist movement, as María Jesús Lorenzo Modia and Margarita Estévez-Saá posit “[n]owadays it seems almost naïve to talk of ecofeminism in the singular, since a diverse range of trends and orientations have been identified” (3). Carolyn Merchant divides ecofeminism into four categories: liberal, cultural, social and socialist (197). Liberal ecofeminism aligns its principles with the objectives of reforming environmentalism, seeking to effectuate shifts in the human-nature relationship by operating within existing systems of governance. This branch aims to utilise legal regulations as catalysts for change. Cultural ecofeminism takes a critical stance, examining environmental issues through a feminist lens, particularly focusing on patriarchal power structures. In addition to critiquing prevailing problems, cultural ecofeminism puts forth alternative perspectives and approaches that hold the potential to emancipate both women and the natural world. Social and socialist ecofeminism situate their analyses within the context of capitalist patriarchy, revealing the intricate web of interconnections between capitalist relations and the domination of women

and nature by men. While each branch possesses distinct strategies and theoretical frameworks, they all share a common purpose: challenging and transforming oppressive systems to foster gender and environmental justice (Merchant 197).

In this MA thesis, I will focus on cultural ecofeminism, which according to Merchant, sees spirituality “as a source of both personal and social change” (202). Therefore, cultural or spiritual ecofeminists focus on how gender categories affect people to illustrate how society’s standards unfairly dominate both the environment and women. This philosophy also declares that capitalist values provide an inadequate understanding of society; its proponents promote a different way of looking at the world that views the Earth as sacred but also acknowledges how dependent humans are on nature and values all life forms as precious.

The origins of ecofeminism as a movement merit exploration for this object of study. Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, a coalition of academic and professional women organised several conferences and workshops in the US, which led to the creation of the current ecofeminist movement (Merchant 194). They met to debate how feminism and ecology should work together to advance respect for both women and the natural world, and they were inspired by the idea that long-standing historical associations between women and nature had resulted in both of them being oppressed. In their observations, it became apparent that while men were often depicted as rational, organized beings, deemed fully capable of overseeing the utilization and progress of both women and nature, the latter were commonly portrayed as tumultuous, disorganized entities, perpetuating the notion of their inherent need for (male) regulation. However, it is important to acknowledge that the recognition of the interconnection between women and the ecosystem was at times disregarded. As noted by Mies and Shiva, this disregard stemmed from the challenges faced by certain women, particularly middle-class, urban women, in “perceiving the commonality between the oppression of nature and theirs” (5). Their attention and focus on liberating themselves from patriarchal systems might have limited their

ability to fully consider the environmental dimension. The disregard for women's perspectives was effectively accomplished by employing factors such as social class and urbanization as diversions, deflecting attention away from the pressing challenges that nature confronts. The reason for this is that capitalist patriarchy, or so-called "modern" society, is founded on cosmology that structurally divides reality into two sections, with one often perceived as superior, thriving, and moving forward at the expense of the other (Mies and Shiva 30).

Most of the early work on ecofeminism focused on tracing the historical relationships between women and nature before looking for ways to break those relationships. Theologian Rosemary Ruether, one of the pioneers of ecofeminism, maintained that for women to fight towards their freedom, they must recognise and combat the dominance of nature (Cooley 3). According to Paula M. Cooley, Ruether saw "both forms of injustice arise from patriarchal power relations of domination and deceit, power relations that presuppose an identification of woman and nature as objects of domination" (3). To abolish patriarchal institutions that prioritise hierarchy, repression, and unjust socioeconomic relations, she urged women and environmentalists to collaborate.

By the late 1980s, ecofeminism established itself as a mainstream movement (Gaard 28). Many academics attribute this popularisation to the feminist thinker Ynestra King, who wrote "What Is Ecofeminism?" in 1987, which was later published in *The Nation*. However, ecofeminism saw its first of many splinterings as it continued to evolve. During the late 1980s, radical ecofeminism and cultural ecofeminism emerged as two separate schools of thought within the ecofeminism movement (Gaard 9). Radical ecofeminists claim that to degrade both nature and women, dominant patriarchal culture equalizes them both. This focus on patriarchy is due to them recognising "[the] historical and cross-cultural persecution of women as legitimized by the various male-dominated institutions of religion, culture, and medical science" (Gaard 28). Radical thinkers have a special interest in the ways in which nature and

women have been associated with undesirable or marketable qualities while males have been perceived as being able to produce order.

In a different vein, cultural ecofeminists support integrating women and the environment simultaneously in their pursuit of a better society. They assert that due to their biology, gender roles as family nurturers and food providers (especially in the Global South), as well as other factors, women have a closer affinity with nature (Salleh 14). However, this promotes essentialist accusations. Cultural ecofeminists contend that affiliations with nature enable women to be more aware of the value of the environment and how deeply it is affected by capitalism. Nonetheless, it is important to understand that this branch of ecofeminism is focused on women because of their perception of ecological destruction as “stemming from the dominance of characteristics associated with men over those associated with women” (Carlassare 94). As a means of restoring both the spirituality of nature and women’s crucial role in it, cultural ecofeminism also has origins in nature-based religions, Goddess worship, and nature appreciation (Carlassare 90).

There are a few recurring themes that unify all types of ecofeminism. One of them is the idea that women are in a special position to comprehend how gender inequality and environmental degradation are related. This point of view relies on the recognition that women have historically been in charge of taking care of their families, communities, and oftentimes in ways that require deep ties to nature. Ariel Salleh posits, “women are left to look after sustenance—providing food and water, health and care” (14). Therefore, this experience gives women a unique perspective on environmental concerns that emphasizes the value of fostering relationships with nature rather than using it to one’s advantage or for personal gain. However, is this viewpoint applicable in contemporary times and across all regions worldwide? This assertion requires a critical examination concerning its validity in present times and across global regions. It illuminates the significance of the relationship between gender inequality and

environmental degradation, primarily within the context of the Global South. Moreover, local factors, socio-economic conditions, and cultural nuances intricately shape the interplay between gender, nature, and environmental concerns. These factors exhibit significant variation across regions and communities, leading to diverse perspectives and experiences. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics is imperative to avoid oversimplification and to appreciate the diverse range of lived experiences and environmental realities on a global scale.

The notion that all forms of oppression are interrelated is another prevalent element in ecofeminist philosophy. This viewpoint is grounded in the understanding that oppressive systems reinforce one another and that efforts to eliminate one kind of oppression must necessarily address others. Said dimension is explored by many scholars, such as Val Plumwood, who states that “[t]he quest for coherence requires that each form of oppression develops sensitivity to other forms, both at the level of practice and that of theory. This perspective is based on the recognition that systems of power and domination are mutually reinforcing and that efforts to address one form of oppression must also address others” (25). One example of these different forms of oppression that need to be addressed together would be the aforementioned ecofeminist idea that the exploitation of women’s bodies is linked to the exploitation of nature. This is because both are seen as resources to be used for profit or pleasure that should be solved simultaneously. Another exemplification of this would be the oppression of indigenous peoples, as it is linked to environmental destruction since indigenous communities often have “deep connections to the land and are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation” (Gaard 32).

Despite their differences, all forms of ecofeminism share a commitment to challenging dominant systems of power that perpetuate social inequality and environmental destruction. Ecofeminists argue that addressing one form of oppression requires addressing others as well,

as mentioned before; this perspective has led many ecofeminists to advocate for what Salleh denominates as “a more holistic approach” to social change that recognises all living beings’ interdependence (136). However, it is also important to state that ecofeminism has faced criticism from both mainstream feminist scholars and former ecofeminists themselves, such as Karie Marie Nogaard, who critiques ecofeminism for being essentialist. Similarly, others criticise ecofeminism due to the “persistent mainstream feminist assumption that ecofeminism was ethnocentric, [...] just a white women’s thing and an irrelevant distraction from feminism’s more critical work addressing social injustices” (Gaard 20). Despite these critiques, ecofeminism continues to be an important framework for understanding the intersections between gender, nature, and power.

1.2. What is spiritual feminism?

The spiritual dimension of feminism (often regarded as cultural feminism) was introduced when women rediscovered the interconnectedness of nature’s situation with that of women (Christ 5). Therefore, “spiritual feminism is characterised by a spirituality that is grounded in the earth and acknowledges that we are all a part of a larger community that is interrelated” (5). Carol P. Christ also discusses how spiritual feminism is not associated with any one particular religion; instead, “it is based on the principles of kindness, compassion, and nonviolence” (5).

Following the rediscovery of this spiritual dimension, feminists began to realize the significance of the “witch² hunts” as well as the figure of the witch (Mies and Shiva 16). During the 15th century, with the appearance of the Inquisition, many so-called witches were prosecuted and murdered. They were seen as devil worshippers with ill intentions when they

² The use of lowercase for the term "witch" in this context should not be interpreted as creating a binary opposition with the capitalized term "Earth." The capitalization of "Earth" points out its sacred nature within the conceptual framework adopted in this thesis.

actually wanted to liberate women and the environment from patriarchy, which is characterised by its fear of women in power positions. With the establishment of the capitalist system, spirituality has been denigrated and rejected continuously, since it fosters the preservation of the habitat, which is another example of a contrary purpose to the capitalist agenda of perpetual accumulation (Mies and Shiva 23).

The book that inspired the mass hysteria against witches is *Malleus Maleficarum* (a.k.a. *The Witches' Hammer*), published in the 1480s. Written by two German monks, the book states that women are the main practitioners of witchcraft since they are more “credulous and prone to indecency” (Gershon). Historically seen as a Satan worshipper and an evil being, Mies and Shiva redefine the witch as a women’s rights advocate that wanted to liberate them, as well as the environment, from patriarchal destruction (7). Mies and Shiva also state that this was the reason for their persecution since witches did not comply with the system (19). However, it is important to mention that not only Catholicism oppressed women, but also Islam and Judaism. These three patriarchal monotheistic religions are the most practised around the world and all of them have been hostile towards women (Mies and Shiva 17). New religions have arisen since then and “some tried to revive or recreate a Goddess-based religion” (Mies and Shiva 17). The rediscovery of the sacredness of life is where the emphasis on “spirituality” finds its ecological importance. This sacredness is reflected in ordinary life, our labour, the events happening around us, and our immanence³ rather than in a transcendent deity.

For ecofeminists like Starhawk, this holiness should be celebrated via rituals, dancing, and music. In Starhawk’s case, she explained to Christ her conception of the Goddess, which is duly documented in “Why Women Need the Goddess”: “It all depends on how I feel. When I feel weak, she is someone who can help and protect me. When I feel strong, she is the symbol

³ The conception of “immanence” that this thesis adopts refers to the Goddess, energy that permeates both the physical and spiritual and that promotes personal power.

of my own power. At other times I feel her as the natural energy in my body and the world” (5). In this perspective, the Goddess is not seen as existing outside of human experience or beyond the natural world. Rather, she is recognized as immanent within the fabric of existence, intimately intertwined with the physical world, human beings, and the cycles of nature. This understanding suggests that the divine can be encountered and experienced directly within oneself and the surrounding environment.

1.3. Is ecofeminism material or spiritual?

To understand how women are oppressed, it is important to define materialist feminism, which emphasises capitalism and patriarchy as essential components of women’s oppression (Sydee and Beder 2). Gender is viewed by materialist feminism as a social construct, hence, the conception that women are expected to fulfil gender roles, such as raising children, is rejected by this feminist school. The ideal society for materialist feminism is one in which men and women are treated equally in both social and economic spheres, as historically “women were relegated to the private sphere and therefore denied equal access to participate in ‘civil society’” (Sydee and Beder 4).

The fundamental contradiction of capitalism, according to materialist ecofeminists, is not between capital and labour but between “production and reproduction” (Sydee and Beder 2). In our society, there exists a clear distinction between valued and economically recognized male labour and the often unnoticed and undervalued domestic work performed by women. This is thought to be the deepest contradiction of patriarchal capitalism because women’s reproductive occupation remains in nature while men’s productive labour is removed from nature. As Jasmine Sydee and Sharon Beder state, “it is their close connection with the environment that puts women in a position to liberate humanity and nature from capitalist domination in order to create new healthy societies” (2). Sydee and Beder’s analysis revolves

around the conception of “healthy” societies, which is deeply ingrained in the conviction that women’s profound connection with the environment grants them the agency to emancipate both humanity and nature from the grip of capitalist domination. While the precise delineation of “healthy” remains implicit, it encompasses a comprehensive approach to well-being that transcends mere physical health. These societies prioritize the principles of social and environmental justice, equitable resource allocation, and the preservation of ecological equilibrium. This framework goes beyond personal well-being and includes the well-being of communities and the environment. It requires substantial changes to tackle broader problems of inequality, exploitation, and environmental harm, while recognizing the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental aspects.

Some ecofeminist perspectives place less emphasis on materialism than others. When thinkers and activists examine the comprehensive significance of reality and elevate it to a sacred realm, certain ecofeminist philosophical trajectories are “almost wholly spiritual” (Sydee and Beder 1). These ecofeminists with a spiritual inclination strive to honour women and their connection to nature as a source of fortitude, power, and virtue. They contend that re-establishing human contact with nature, modelling communities and self-actualization after the patterns and webs of nature have spiritual undertones (Sydee and Beder 3). Hence, these ecofeminists aspire to dismantle the distinction-based hierarchies and reintegrate people into nature. The previously mentioned materialist ecofeminist lens was established as a criticism of this spiritual perspective. The main divergence between the two is that the materialist dimension believes that “spiritual ecofeminism fails to acknowledge how capitalism perpetuates sexism and causes environmental harm” (Sydee and Beder 3). I respectfully disagree with the assertion put forth in the quotation that spiritual ecofeminism disregards the role of capitalism in perpetuating sexism and environmental harm.

On the contrary, spiritual ecofeminism actively acknowledges the detrimental impact of patriarchal structures and comprehends the intricate interconnectedness between social, economic, and environmental concerns. It recognizes the need for comprehensive approaches to address the causes of oppression, encompassing both structural transformations and individual empowerment. While spiritual ecofeminism places emphasis on personal growth and inner transformation as catalysts for broader societal change, this emphasis does not imply a lack of awareness regarding the effects of capitalism. Instead, it underscores the belief that individual agency and consciousness play integral roles in effecting larger shifts. By fostering a profound connection with the self, nature, and spirituality, spiritual ecofeminism seeks to challenge patriarchal norms, promote sustainable practices, and advocate for social justice (Mies and Shiva 41). Thus, spiritual ecofeminism offers a nuanced and holistic perspective that combines the acknowledgement of systemic issues with a call for personal and collective empowerment, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between capitalism, sexism, and environmental degradation.

Although spiritual ecofeminism is partially criticised by materialist ecofeminism in its development, as previously stated, the limits between the two are not clearly drawn (Sydee and Beder 2). For materialist ecofeminists, the dissolution of duality is merely the first step towards freedom. At the same time, spiritual ecofeminists demonstrate that the connection of women with nature is a source of power and resilience rather than a pretext for subordination and exploitation. Therein lies a propensity for this ecofeminist school to assert that because women are “closer to nature”, they ought to be the social and ecological leaders of humanity (Sydee and Beder 5). This perspective responds pragmatically to centuries of female oppression, suggesting that women assuming leadership roles based on their connection with nature can address power imbalances and promote a fairer society.

Many women worry that spiritual ecofeminism's focus on a change-oriented ethic misses the influence and strength of capitalism in influencing both the lifestyles of women and the world at large (Sydee and Beder 5). It is suggested, alternatives for change remain too based on self-realization and individual development, preventing ecofeminism from "acknowledging North-South socioeconomic ties or gathering ethnic relations" (Sydee and Beder 4). Sydee and Beder state that white middle-class ecofeminists are ignorant of the fact that their lifestyle choices and financial security have been made possible by the ongoing exploitation of their "sisters" in the South (5). They go on to say "their (re)discovery is derived from the experiences and knowledge of women who are still regarded as 'Other'" (5). Hence, it is necessary to recognise the importance of adopting a more inclusive and intersectional approach to ecofeminist discourse, one that acknowledges the structural forces at play and actively engages with the experiences of marginalized communities.

I consider the ecofeminist movement to be both material and spiritual since it does defend that the capitalist system and the value arrangement on which the world is currently operating are to blame for the situation that both women and the ecosystem are undergoing. As stated by Sydee: "a materialist analysis always has a fluid relationship to a spiritual or ethical analysis" (4); thus, ecofeminism should be regarded as both. Similarly, Heather Eaton asserts:

Ecofeminism is both theory and activism. Theoretically, much of ecofeminism is rooted in Eurowestern philosophical and political analyses, exposes the logic of domination which permeates the cultural tenets of and contributes to social and ecological oppression. Some ecofeminists embrace spirituality. These spiritualities are understood here to mean those perspectives, both mainstream and alternative, which unite feminist and ecological concerns within a religious and/or spiritual framework. (2)

This declaration underscores once again the comprehensive nature of ecofeminism, incorporating both materialist analysis that centres on the capitalist system and its value

structures, as well as spiritual or ethical analysis that recognizes the interrelatedness of feminist and ecological issues within the realm of religious or spiritual frameworks.

Furthermore, materialists and spiritualists both see and face the same problems but they address them differently, so it would be useful for the ecofeminist movement as a whole to integrate both materialism and spirituality. At the same time, ecofeminism in general terms posits the necessity of this connection to the natural world. Moreover, spiritual ecofeminism, as we will explore throughout this MA thesis, does not believe that men and women have inherently different characters; instead, it focuses on women because they have been survivors living in a male-centred society for centuries, which has led to trauma and stigma. Henceforth, the actual purpose of spiritual ecofeminism is not that one gender is better than the other; alternatively, it focuses on showing women how capable they are in a society that has made them believe they are not.

Part two: Starhawk's spiritual ecofeminism

2.1. *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*

The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess was written by Starhawk in 1979, though it was re-edited twice, in 1989 and 1999. The volume is about how preserving the environment would be beneficial for the liberation of society, especially women, from capitalist values. This book intertwines feminist spirituality and ecological awareness. It presents readers with a compelling invitation to partake in transformative rituals and experiential exercises aimed at nurturing a profound communion with the divine feminine and the Earth itself. Positioned within the framework of ecofeminism, this text accentuates the interconnectedness of social equity, environmental guardianship, and individual self-actualization⁴. It imparts a poignant message, urging individuals to wholeheartedly embrace the inherent sanctity of all living beings and actively endeavour to co-create a world characterized by harmonious coexistence and sustainable flourishing⁵. Even though Starhawk speaks in terms of nature (meaning that her work is focused largely on the environment), it is clear from her oeuvre that this is not a simplistic reification. She calls for a more integrated perspective of human relationships with the environment and other beings, criticising eradicated interactions that have resulted in pollution and ecological catastrophe.

As previously mentioned, Mies and Shiva claim the revival of ancient Goddess religions (17). This is exactly what is illustrated in Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, as its subtitle suggests. In the first chapter of the book, the author discusses how spirituality and the Goddess were once dismissed. This work,

⁴ In the context of Starhawk, individual self-actualization refers to the process of personal growth, empowerment, and fulfillment that occurs when individuals align themselves with ecofeminist principles and engage in spiritual practices that foster connection with the natural world.

⁵ For Starhawk, sustainable flourishing refers to a state of balanced and harmonious growth, both individually and collectively, that is achieved through the integration of ecological, social, and spiritual well-being.

however, provides tangible proof of the recreation Mies and Shiva declare. At the same time, Starhawk condemns the double standards that demonise Paganism⁶ but exalt other religions: “Is Buddhism invalid if we cannot find archaeological evidence of Buddha’s existence? Are Christ’s teachings unimportant if we cannot find his birth certificate or death warrant?” (Starhawk *Spiral* 3). Therefore, she defends the validity of a spiritual **ecofeminist** approach, which has often been discredited. This is significant insofar as it shows how important spirituality can be, meaning that it is an aspect of life that should not be that easily dismissed, especially considering that other religions are dignified. This contrasts with Paganism, which is probably due to the fact that most mainstream religious practices are anthropomorphic and controlled by men (i.e. Christianity’s figure of the Pope) whereas Pagan religions are focused on people’s power and validity.

2.1.1. The witch and the Goddess as spiritual ecofeminist figures

The figure of the witch, as previously mentioned, has been prosecuted since the Middle Ages. In *The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk states what witchcraft and the Goddess religion genuinely defend. The book illustrates that witches and pagans³ are concerned with calls of service whenever they are needed, “[w]e work for all forms of justice: environmental, social, political, racial, gender, and economic. Our feminism includes a radical analysis of power, seeing all systems of oppression as interrelated, rooted in structures of domination and control” (Starhawk *Spiral* 5). With this statement, the author confirms the existence of a spiritual component within feminism, which aligns perfectly with the ecofeminist idea that issues such as gender equality, environmental issues and social injustice are inevitably associated.

⁶ Paganism for Starhawk is a religious tradition that encompasses “participating in social and political initiatives to celebrate the Earth” (*Spiral* 26).

Therefore, it is safe to say that the preservation of nature is a priority for both ecofeminists and witches.

Chapter 1 is titled “Witchcraft as Goddess Religion”; said religion is the practice of what is denominated witchcraft, which “takes its teachings from nature, and reads inspiration in the movements of the sun, moon, and stars, the flight of birds, the slow growth of trees, and the cycles of the seasons” (Starhawk *Spiral* 38). The author cites *Malleus Maleficarum* to deride its words condemning spirituality, hereby denouncing the book and the stigma that it represents. However, as seen in *Ecofeminism*, patriarchy does not fear the figure of the witch by itself; they fear that “powerless women could influence powerful men” (Mies and Shiva 17) by rediscovering and embracing the ancient wisdom that the old magic represents.

Women’s sensuality, sexual energy, and life force are all directly tied to this wisdom. According to Mies and Shiva, the aspect of this ecofeminist spiritual practice that most people adopt—like the author of *The Spiral Dance*—is female sexuality (17). Since female sexuality has been illicit since the Middle Ages, it should come as no surprise that spiritual practitioners were degraded given the significance of female sexual energy in what would be considered witchcraft. Many scholars, including Mies and Shiva, argue that women’s bodies are inherently linked to the cycles of nature, such as the phases of the moon and the changing of the seasons. Thus, there is a conception of sexuality as closely related to nature. They believe it is because women can connect with this natural world and access their spiritual power through the expression of their sexual selves⁷.

Starhawk is not the only author that reflects on the witch; in “Why Women Need the Goddess”, Christ discusses the figure of the witch and its historical significance as well. She notes that spiritual feminism has reclaimed and redefined the figure of the witch as a symbol

⁷ It is important to clarify that men and non-binary people can also do what is described here. This perspective is focused on women due to the oppressive situation they have endured for centuries, but it does not deny other genders’ capability of doing the same.

of female power and resistance against patriarchal oppression (2). As Christ explains, “the witch is a symbol of female power because she represents an alternative to male-dominated religion and society” (7). By embracing the figure of the witch, feminist spirituality seeks to challenge traditional gender roles and promote equality among all practitioners (Starhawk *Spiral* 26). Hence, this reclamation of the witch as a positive symbol is part of a wider-scale movement to reclaim female spirituality from patriarchal institutions that have historically suppressed it.

It is safe to assert that the fear of women in positions of authority is what underlies this rejection of spirituality. Moreover, there is the notion that for the Goddess religion, all lives are equally sacred and valuable: “All living beings are worthy of respect” (Starhawk *Spiral* 6), “all life forms [are] sacred and respect them as such” (Mies and Shiva 18). Once more, this runs counter to the capitalist system under which the world is governed because a large portion of it is based on damaging the environment to profit from it. For many animal species, the destruction of ecology that capitalism supports has catastrophic repercussions. Some kinds of animals are more vulnerable to climate change than others; today, there are 50 species from a variety of environments that are listed as endangered, including the green sea turtle and the poison dart frog (Zipkin).

Starhawk makes an effort to convey the characteristics of the Goddess throughout *The Spiral Dance*. She is a female spirit that permeates various facets of our existence, such as “the food we eat, the people we love, the job we do, and the homes we live in” (Starhawk *Spiral* 65). The Goddess also serves as a psychological metaphor for the proper application of a woman’s power to heal and nourish both society and the environment. It is important to understand how the Goddess is symbolised; she is portrayed by a variety of natural phenomena or actual physical attributes, such as breasts, which stand for her capacity for nurturing, or shapes that allude to the female genitalia (Starhawk *Spiral* 25). To explain it differently, the Goddess

is a representation of limitless energy that permeates all facets of everyday life, which is rather different from other deities. In the Christian faith, god is portrayed as an old Caucasian male, which could be considered as a reductive representation. Women also play a very small role in this religion; they primarily serve either as mothers or as unmarried, sexually pure individuals. Therefore, Starhawk's deliberate effort to depict the Goddess in *The Spiral Dance* serves the purpose of highlighting the multifaceted presence of this female spirit in our daily lives. As she pervades aspects such as our nourishment, relationships, work, and living environments, the Goddess becomes a powerful psychological metaphor embodying a woman's ability to heal and nurture society and the environment.

In both Christ's "Why Women Need the Goddess" and Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance*, the Goddess is portrayed as a symbol of female power and spirituality, which means that this conception is similar to many spiritual ecofeminists. Christ argues that the worship of the Goddess is necessary for women to reclaim their spiritual heritage from patriarchal institutions that have historically suppressed it (6). Similarly, Starhawk sees the worship of the Goddess as a way for women to connect with their own power and creativity (26). Both authors emphasize that the Goddess is not just an external deity, but also an internal force within each individual practitioner. As Christ explains, "The symbol of a divinity 'out there' is part of the legacy of patriarchal oppression [...] she is not also out there as well as within themselves and in all natural processes" (Christ 5), while Starhawk writes that "the Goddess is within us" (*Spiral* 26). Both authors also see the worship of the Goddess as a way to promote equality among all practitioners, regardless of their gender identity. As Christ notes, "[t]he symbol reflects the sacred power within women and nature" (5), while Starhawk writes that in spiritual feminism, "there are no fixed gender roles; women and men are equally capable of being warriors or healers" (*Spiral* 26). Overall, both authors view the worship of the Goddess as a way for women to reclaim their spiritual power and connect with their own creativity and strength.

Therefore, in spiritual feminism, the figure of the witch and the worship of the Goddess are intertwined as symbols of female power and resistance against patriarchal oppression. In the case of Starhawk and Christ, both authors emphasize that the Goddess is not just an external deity, but also an internal force within each individual practitioner. As stated earlier, embracing these symbols is a way for feminist spirituality to challenge traditional gender roles and promote equality among all practitioners (Starhawk *Spiral* 26). Hence, both Christ and Starhawk see the worship of the Goddess and the reclamation of female spirituality as essential for empowering women and promoting social change. This perspective aligns with the principles of ecofeminism, which explores the interconnectedness of feminist and ecological concerns.

2.2. *The Earth Path: Grounding Your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature*

This book demonstrates the principles of Earth-based spirituality and environmental activism. It is divided into twelve chapters plus extra information for the reader that might be useful. This would be a list of “exercises, meditations and rituals” (Starhawk *Earth* 5) with detailed information about how to perform these activities, which will be addressed in the next section.

The Earth Path is a concept that was born out of the necessity of Pagan groups to dive into the processes of nature itself to completely understand them (Starhawk “Regenerative”). The book gives examples of ecological activism, demonstrating that the change in how the environment is treated is partly in our hands. Such ventures are deeply explored by Starhawk throughout her book, nonetheless, this section will focus on the twelfth chapter, “Healing the Earth”. In it, the author describes different projects as well as the impact they have had in their respective areas from a social and environmental perspective.

It is important to address what the Earth-based values the author describes convey. Starhawk starts the venture of explaining such principles by stating that “systems do not change from within, instead, systems try to maintain themselves” (Starhawk *Earth* 38). She continues with an example of her experience with simplified frames⁸ and explains how, as humans, we tend to simplify certain circumstances and choose the frame that allows us to perceive all types of information around us in a comfortable manner (*Earth* 38). This can be applied to systems, which is why we often fail to recognise that everything is connected. When referring to “systems” in this context, it encompasses complex socio-economic frameworks like the capitalist system, characterized by networks of economic activities, power structures, and social relations.

The choices that we make is what defines our morals since we do choose what we value most or what we consider sacred. Considering something as sacred is defined by Starhawk as “[something] that it is profoundly important, that [...] has a value in and of itself that goes beyond our immediate comfort or convenience, that we don’t want to see it diminished or denigrated in any way” (*Earth* 44). In other words, humans tend to decide based on what they consider better for themselves or what they enjoy. Henceforth, the decision itself reflects the morals and integrity of the individual. In the case of Starhawk, she actively chooses a simplified framework that is based on “a Goddess-centered view of the world” (*Earth* 44). The author ultimately explains how important it is for individuals to choose for themselves, but also how every decision impacts the world as an interconnected system.

Starhawk continues by explaining the values that are characteristics of Pagan beliefs, which ultimately are summarised as perceiving the world as a “dynamic whole” (*Earth* 4). She explains this conception as a “world that is alive and dynamic, where everything is part of

⁸ In the context of Starhawk’s explanation, the term “frame” refers to the way we perceive and interpret information or circumstances. It represents the mental construct or perspective through which we view and understand the world around us.

an interconnected whole. Everything is interactive and reflective of the whole” (Earth 16). Consequently, the ideas that defend that everything is connected propose to start the transformation of society at the root of the problem, which begins with an unhealthy ecosystem. Nevertheless, this “healing” does not convey just the environment, but also “benefit” (*Earth* 40). This means that it is beneficial for us to care for our surroundings, but this responsibility is also extrapolated to ourselves and what we put out in the world (i.e. love and compassion). All of the elements just described would create what Starhawk defines as a “healthy environment,” which would be a system that is “dynamic, not static, ever-changing and adapting and evolving” (*Earth* 46). She continues by addressing the importance of this: “When a system is whole and healthy, when it is based on relationships of interdependence and cooperation that further resilience, diversity, abundance, sustainability, creativity, and freedom, it exhibits that balance we humans call ‘justice’” (*Earth* 41). This conception of the world as an interconnected whole is not exclusive to Starhawk’s spirituality; there are many examples of different disciplines that also defend this perspective. One example of this would be quantum mechanics, which according to James Cresser, “admits the possibility of an interconnectedness or an ‘entanglement’ between physical systems, even those possibly separated by vast distances” (2). Additionally, Karin Bauer also examines this concept of interconnectedness, in this case, related to Vedic and early Buddhist traditions (1). This reinforces that this perspective on the world is not confined to spiritual practices, not even one specific religion, as well as being a multidisciplinary approach that is object of analysis in diverse fields of study.

Therefore, this is how *The Earth Path* suggests how caring for others, ourselves and our habitat might be the best way to live a healthy life, physically and emotionally, as everything is connected.

2.2.1. Rituals as spiritual ecofeminist practices

This section will analyse the rituals that are significant for *The Earth Path* and the consequences they have from an ecofeminist lens. It is also necessary to address the stigmatisation these practices experience from a historical point of view.

The stigmatisation of rituals is not new. Pagan rites, rituals⁹ and their performance were especially discredited during the 15th century and the expansion of different religious practices (i.e. Christianity) (Mies and Shiva 41). This is partly because in ancient times, societies such as the Vikings and the Aztecs had different interpretations of mortality and were keen on blood sacrifices during their rituals. These actions are characterized by their dramatic and intense nature and have historically instilled dread toward rituals in people's hearts. As Sophie Miller suggests, "the ritual becomes obsolete as it no longer serves a purpose within the framework of newly structured norms". However, this hostility is also partly because the Goddess religion, a spiritual practice that requires these rites and rituals, empowers women and their sexuality. According to *Ecofeminism*, the animosity towards spiritual activities is, nonetheless, deeply rooted in the divergence from the attitude promoted by Francis Bacon and his followers who established Western rationality as the norm; that is, "Western rationality, the West's paradigm of science and concept of freedom are all based on overcoming and transcending this dependence, on the subordination of nature to the (male) will, and the disenchantment of all her forces" (Mies and Shiva 42). Therefore, it could be said that so-called pagan spirituality has been rejected and stigmatized for trying to change this paradigm and liberate nature, as well as women, which would endanger Western principles.

Concerning ecofeminist values, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva proclaim the importance of spiritual practices by stating how significant they are for different cultures. For

⁹ Rite: "a ceremony performed by a particular group of people, often for religious purposes ("Rite"). Ritual: "a series of actions that are always performed in the same way, especially as part of a religious ceremony" ("Ritual").

instance, in Indian culture, several rituals are “performed to reproduce and conserve culture as well as to celebrate the renewal of life” (193). However, it is important to say that the usefulness of rituals is not only dedicated to this but also to celebrate perceiving all life forms as sacred (Mies and Shiva 42). From here we can argue that rituals are both necessary and beneficial for many purposes, such as preserving a culture or even as a practice to assist positive changes in the world, psychologically and physically. At the same time, it is crucial to consider that all rituals could be considered as a multicultural practice. They are important in different civilizations around the world, such as Indonesia, Finland and Mexico (Lush).

Rites and rituals are key factors in the Goddess religious practices Starhawk describes in *The Earth Path*. They are necessary for healing oneself and, consequently, the environment. *Ecofeminism* also mentions these practices and how useful they are since people from numerous backgrounds come together to honour the spirit that represents “birth, love and death” (Mies and Shiva 42). The importance of rituals for spiritual practitioners is substantial, hence, it is crucial to recognize what they are and what they convey. As Miller suggests, “[r]ituals are often markers or catalysts for energetic shifts. Rituals also assist in the renewal of self, support connection within the community and keep tradition alive in a conscious way. On many levels, rituals help us become more in tune with what is truly meaningful; that which is of so much importance it stands the test of time”. It is interesting to connect this statement to what Starhawk posits about rituals, which were “designed to give back to our world” (*Earth* 15). Henceforth, both perspectives about rituals complement each other, as they both defend the beneficial aspects that they provide.

At the same time, Starhawk describes magic itself as the practice of “the art of changing consciousness at will” as well as an “ancient tradition of psychology” (*Earth* 11). Hence, magic must be ethical and focus on social justice. In other words, it should aim for a fair and dynamic world in which every individual and life form is respected and celebrated. By

considering these magical principles as a universal truth, rituals and rites can be useful to transform ourselves by doing inner work before doing outer work with our environment, or as a complementary practice of healing that is less self-centred. This psychological factor of performing rites that Starhawk describes has been explored by many connoisseurs, such as John Welwood, who states that “grounding and communing with the Earth is the essence of this spiritual and psychological journey” (5). Once again, it is apparent the interconnectedness of spirituality with the environment, which is supported by a scientific base, and how important it is to heal the Earth to heal ourselves, as Starhawk repeatedly claims. Welwood also comments upon simplified frames; he concurs with Starhawk about how these frameworks are necessary for humans, “we need earthly structures and frameworks in which to live” (10). Furthermore, both authors agree about how allowing change to happen and attuning to it spiritually is necessary.

Starhawk provides descriptions and explanations of various rituals, highlighting their significance within feminist spirituality and ecological consciousness. These rituals serve as transformative practices aimed at fostering a deeper connection with the natural world, the divine feminine, and one’s inner self. One example of these rituals contained in *The Earth Path* would be “The Energy Brushdown” ritual (134). It presents a concise and practical method for energetic cleansing and the release of negative energies. It involves severing the partner’s aura; subsequently, the procedure involves meticulously eliminating and dispelling any unfavorable energies, culminating in a deliberate and purposeful gesture of dispelling them. Finally, the process concludes with a deliberate and intentional motion of gently and thoroughly reinvigorating the surrounding environment. This ritual can also be performed on oneself, preferably over running water. It is important to recognize that subtle energies and chakras play a significant role in healing and meditation practices. The key teaching regarding

subtle energies is that they follow intention, emphasizing the need for clear direction and alignment of energy with intended goals.

2.2.2. “Healing the Earth”

Chapter XII is called “Healing the Earth”, a compelling title that introduces us to the topic. In this segment of the book, Starhawk proposes that the Earth is a battleground with forces equally vigorous fighting for its dominance (*Earth* 268). From this statement, she explains that one of them is the patriarchal and capitalist system we live in, while the other one is the love and respect for nature that some people defend. This aligns perfectly with the ecofeminist notion that establishes that the prevailing global system under which the world operates fosters a capitalist and patriarchal conception of the Earth, as well as its status as an enemy to the environment. As a consequence, “Monsanto¹⁰ can release genetically modified canola that pollutes an organic farmer’s fields with its pollen, but Monsanto does not have to add that cost to its accounts” (Starhawk *Earth* 24). The prevalence of such events is witnessing a rising trajectory concurrent with the aspirations of individuals to accumulate greater wealth. This trend finds its roots in the capitalist milieu, where monetary assets serve as a conduit for power dynamics and social advantage. It is no surprise that many people want power, most of them to liberate themselves from the authority of others. It is understandable that people want to be in control and that they desire this asset to be respected and celebrated. Nonetheless, the price that nature pays for this yearning is high and most people do not care or do not consider this. As a species, humans need a healthy, clean habitat for us to be healthful; not only humans need this, but also every living organism on this planet. Moreover, Starhawk states that we

¹⁰ Monsanto Company is a provider of agricultural products for farmers; some of these products would be herbicides and pesticides (“Euronews”). However, it is known that its practices endanger nature. As a result, many are against Monsanto, including Vandana Shiva, who states: “Monsanto, a poison maker, has become a seed giant with the largest share in control [...], [Monsanto] wants superprofits through total control over nature and humanity” (Shiva “Why”).

must change course in what regards nature before the damage is irreparable (*Earth* 216). Hence, she encourages the readers to become “Earth-healers” (*Earth* 272) to preserve not only the environment but also our livelihood and physical and psychological health.

These statements bear logical coherence as capitalism is a system that perpetuates accumulation and promotes the domain of an exploitative, male-dominated class and state power (Harvey 19). Thus, those in power positions do not care about the damage to the environment. Instead, they are focused on destroying and building it again to earn some type of profit. Hence, landscapes are often mishandled, as Starhawk argues, “I can see that my land is impoverished, in a state of recovery after centuries of abuse” (*Earth* 218). Therefore, the author provides eco-friendly alternatives and projects for people that do not conform to destructive schemes, as I will show below.

There are two significant ventures explained in chapter XII in which Starhawk participated: City Repair and the Cancun Project. City Repair is a project done in Portland to reconstruct the sense of community in the city. Hence, the author explains that the pattern used to build cities is concerned with space and using it efficiently to allow movement, but not designed for human interaction, in fact, it discourages it, which has damaged the Portland community (Starhawk *Earth* 220). In other words, some cities are designed to pass through them easily and quickly, but these designs do not promote, for instance, spaces for people to interact with each other. This is especially exacerbated in the US. Therefore, this project began as a way of restoring human communication by providing accessible and free spaces for people to meet. Starhawk states that this project was not well-received at first. Nevertheless, as time went by, it became more accepted since it solved issues the urban planners were facing, such as “improving livability, making streets safer, building local culture, increasing communication and slowing traffic in residential areas” (*Earth* 221). It is also interesting to mention the importance of communication that underlies this project. Any initiative that

improves communication is thus beneficial because society is becoming more and more individualistic, capitalist and computer-driven nowadays.

The City Repair project, as well as the Cancun Project, demonstrates a strong correlation with ecofeminism. Both initiatives challenge the prevailing paradigm of individualism and profit-driven urban development. Instead, they promote principles of inclusivity, sustainability and the cultivation of meaningful human connections. Through efforts to reconstruct a sense of community, provide accessible meeting spaces, and address the alienation caused by conventional city-building patterns, these projects embody the core values of ecofeminism. This is achieved by prioritizing the well-being of both communities and the environment, as these projects strive to create urban spaces that foster equity, cooperation, and a deep sense of belonging. In this way, City Repair and the Cancun Project embody ecofeminist principles in their conscious endeavors to transform urban landscapes into sustainable and socially interconnected environments.

Additionally, it is essential for humans and other living things to communicate, which is what Starhawk exemplifies with this project. Thus, the spiritual component of this venture relies on communication with others and healing the community. Starhawk explains that this is the right approach for taking care of the land since this would be the foundation for this purpose: healing ourselves, as individuals and as a community, in order to heal our environment. The notion of “healing ourselves” in the context presented refers to addressing and remedying the multifaceted aspects of personal and communal well-being. It encompasses a process of self-reflection, self-improvement, and collective restoration, aiming to foster individual and community healing as a precursor to the restoration and rejuvenation of the environment.

In addition, Starhawk’s project emphasizes the vital importance of communication for both humans and other living beings. This spiritual undertaking underscores the significance

of interpersonal connections and community healing. She asserts that nurturing these connections is pivotal in caring for the land, serving as the bedrock for restoring individual and communal well-being, which in turn contributes to the healing of our environment. The concept of “healing ourselves” within this context entails addressing and rectifying the diverse facets of personal and collective flourishing. Hence, it encompasses introspection, self-improvement, and collective revitalization, all aimed at fostering individual and community healing as a fundamental step towards rejuvenating and safeguarding the environment.

The Cancun Project is intrinsically related to indigenous people and their rebellion against corporate globalisation (Starhawk *Earth* 223). The author provides the example of the Zapatista movement, which originated in the rainforests of Chiapas (Mexico) in 1994 when the North American Free Trade Agreement¹¹ was approved (*Earth* 278). Since Zapatistas embarked on this endeavour, they have recovered control of some rainforests, thus protecting their integrity. The Cancun project was about helping specific groups of people gather to protest against opening the world’s resources to exploitation, hence, undermining citizens’ ability to regulate “environmental, health and labor standards” (*Earth* 223). These dissenters were provided camping spaces but no amenities, and that is where Starhawk began her venture to help by offering low-cost, sustainable options for their commodity such as dishwashers operating on rainwater that would later be reused for watering plants. Vandana Shiva is cited by Starhawk at this point, as the former points out the issues farmers in India faced regarding resources and land usage, leading ultimately to serious consequences, for instance, the suicide of 650 farmers (*Earth* 281).

Hence, the Cancun Project is a beacon of hope not only for people that live off agriculture but also for women. It demonstrates that they are valid and resourceful by showing

¹¹ “Settlement between two or more countries in which nations agree on certain commitments that affect the exchange of goods and services, as well as assurances for shareholders and rights to intellectual property among other subjects” (“NAFTA”).

how possible it is for them to create and nurture, to be useful for creating a better, more sustainable world, something that has been denied by patriarchy, e.g.: “Abby, Juniper, Riverwind, Eileen, and Cole demonstrated that women can build and design and make things” (*Earth* 280). This is crucial considering that numerous women from diverse backgrounds and cultures participated in the Cancun Project. Therefore, a sense of unity is created among them to learn that they are capable and talented, which is valuable since knowledge is power. The importance of these types of projects is more significant than it may appear since women are able to realize and appreciate their innate qualities and talents, which is attributable to this unity and powerful sense of belonging.

The Cancun Project exemplifies the core tenets of spiritual ecofeminism, providing a platform for women to challenge patriarchal structures and reclaim their innate connection to nature. Through active participation, diverse women experience unity and empowerment, recognizing their intrinsic qualities and contributions. Essentially, this project showcases the resourcefulness of women, emphasizing their vital role in creating a sustainable world. Hence, it signifies a transformative shift towards holistic well-being, where women’s wisdom and leadership are valued, fostering collective flourishing for communities and the environment.

However, it is important to mention that this project experienced various setbacks such as the tragic suicide of Hyung Hai Lee as a sign of protest, this being the most tragic misfortune (*Starhawk Earth* 281). In a more lighthearted vein, it is important to address that there were also blockades at the camping site, among other difficulties. The spiritual component of the Cancun Project is based on accepting that “[c]onfrontation is often necessary and unavoidable [...] but when we bring out creativity and vision into the points of conflict, transformative moments can occur” (*Earth* 278). This implies that difficulty can inspire us to be and do better. For women, this is significant due to the historical lack of participation and marginalisation that is promoted by capitalism. Thus, social initiatives such as this one demonstrate to women

how valid it is to be assertive and to develop agency as they do have a voice that is worth listening to.

At this point it is important to address how politics is related to spirituality. According to Heather Eaton: “spirituality must be political; that is, ecofeminists who have leanings towards spirituality, even if they are more suited to contemplation than activism, need to be politically aware” (6). This is due to the necessity of critical ecofeminist theory to be cultivated with theories of emancipation. It is also important for this critical theory to prevent the mistake of perceiving spirituality as a voyage to a utopia; instead, spirituality is focused on reality and how the world operates as a whole. Therefore, the intersection between spirituality, feminism and politics could lead to a global transformation, if applied correctly (Eaton 7). At the same time, this interconnectedness addresses one of the main objections towards spirituality, which is significant to debunk wrong perceptions about it. Therefore, spirituality is not about denying the circumstances of our world; in fact, spirituality is focused on inspiring engagement with the world as it is and working towards positive change.

Starhawk delivers a clear message in “Healing the Earth”, which is that healing the community and ourselves is the initial step for healing the land we inhabit. She states that carving our own political space is the best response to “an undemocratic, exclusionary process often done by companies and those who govern us” (Starhawk *Earth* 227). It is interesting to state who these companies that she mentions are. They are numerous businesses that share a common trait, which is damaging the environment for their own economic profit; one example of this would be the timber companies that exploit the tanoaks, one of the favourite foods of the Pomo¹² (*Earth* 157). Another example would be the already-mentioned Monsanto, a business that pollutes fields destined for agriculture. The author then encourages the reader to

¹² According to Alex Paul, the Pomo are “a group of Native American people who originally lived in California”.

partake in the spiritual practices described above to aid this process of healing, such as meditations and blessings for those seeking to repair the ecosystem.

2.3. Starhawk's genres of writing

I will next discuss a few formal issues concerning my object of study. Starhawk is primarily known as a writer of non-fiction books on spirituality, witchcraft, feminism, and activism . Her works often explore the intersections between these topics and provide readers with a framework for using magic and witchcraft as tools for personal and collective transformation.

Starhawk's books can be classified as a mix of genres. Genre is defined by Daniel Chandler as “[a] term is widely used in rhetoric, literary theory, media theory, and more recently linguistics, to refer to a distinctive type of ‘text’” (1). For example, her books often contain elements of memoir, in which she shares stories from her own life and spiritual journey. Thomas Couser defines the memoir as a “nonfictional record or re-presentation of actual humans’ experience” (15). Therefore, as Starhawk often describes events from personal experience (i.e. *City Repair*), the memoir is important while arguing about Starhawk's genres of writing. These stories are often used to illustrate broader spiritual principles or to convey important political and social messages.

At the same time, Starhawk's works are also grounded in rigorous research and scholarship, drawing on sources from a wide range of fields including “psychology, anthropology, history, and ecology” (Pollock 2). Her writing often combines personal reflection with broader cultural analysis and critique, providing readers with a deep understanding of the social and political context. It is within this context that witchcraft and spirituality operate, which is characteristic of the scholarly analysis genre (“What”).

Starhawk also writes novels—such as *Walking to Mercury* (1998) and *City of Refuge* (2016); it is important to mention that her novels also incorporate elements of research and analysis in various ways, for instance, through her own experiences and beliefs, which are grounded in her study of feminist spirituality, ecofeminism, and other related fields. This means that her novels often contain elements of social and political critique, and explore themes such as environmentalism, social justice, and personal empowerment.

In addition to personal memoir and scholarly analysis, Starhawk's works often contain instructions that provide readers with guidance on how to engage in spiritual and magical practices themselves. This feature of Starhawk's writing is significant for this thesis, as she often includes detailed step-by-step guidance on how to perform the rites and rituals she herself performs and mentions in her novels, which is characteristic of the technical writing genre. According to Adam Pope, instructions should be considered “an essential part of any project that is oriented around sequential tasks”. In Starhawk's case, it can include instructions for rituals, spells, and other forms of magical work, as well as suggestions for incorporating spirituality into everyday life, such as the ones included above.

Starhawk's writing could also be considered to belong to the genre of self-transformation in the sense that it often aims to inspire personal and collective transformation, which according to John Barbour is characteristic of said genre. Many of her works place a strong emphasis on the value of spiritual development and self-empowerment. Furthermore, she provides helpful information for anyone looking to better understand themselves, others, and the world around them. As shown above, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* includes exercises and step-by-step rituals intended to help readers connect with their individual spiritual path. However, Starhawk's books are not strictly self-help or self-transformation books, since they go beyond said classification. She achieves this through her significant ecofeminist task, which as mentioned before, is characterised by

inspiring engagement with nature and defending social initiatives that promote equality, especially among women. Nonetheless, it is important to advocate for self-help books. If we consider Starhawk's philosophy, when you help yourself, you are also helping the Earth, as everything is interconnected. Hence, it would be necessary to stop stigmatizing the self-help genre as a whole. Also, the notion that every type of change, either positive or negative, starts from within is a concept that was explored by many; it is not exclusive to Starhawk. One example would be Gloria Anzaldúa, who wrote that "[n]othing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (105).

Henceforth, the genres of Starhawk's writing can be described as a unique blend of personal memoir, scholarly analysis, practical instruction and self-transformation, all focused on exploring the connections between spirituality, environmental activism, and social justice. Furthermore, she encourages her readers to become ecofeminist activists as follows: "We should ... become healers of this wounded world" (Starhawk *Earth* 42). Thus, if we cherish and embrace this understanding, a deep sense of responsibility and agency can be cultivated. This would have astounding implications since it inspires actions that contribute to the restoration and well-being of our shared global community.

2.3.1. Language as empowerment

The language of spirituality can empower women in several ways. In Starhawk's case, "she utilizes a unique spiritual language derived from a re-conceptualization of classical psychoanalytic notions. Starhawk helps women to become personally and socially empowered" (Pollock 1). In many religious and spiritual traditions, women have historically been excluded from positions of responsibility. Women can regain their position of power and authority and proclaim their own distinctive viewpoints and experiences by creating their own spiritual language. This is the reason why language is so important in this context. Furthermore, a sense of community and connection can also be fostered by women using this language of

spirituality, enabling them to come together and share their experiences, setbacks, and victories. For women who might feel alone or ostracized in other social or cultural contexts, this can be particularly powerful (Pollock 5).

Additionally, this spiritual language has the potential to be a tool for personal development and transformation that enables women to access their inner worlds and sense of meaning and purpose. Thus, the language of spirituality can help women develop self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-empowerment by encouraging them to engage with spirituality. It also can challenge gender norms and stereotypes by providing alternative narratives and symbols that celebrate the diversity and complexity of women's experiences, e.g.: the Goddess is the energy that reflects and empowers women. By presenting new models of femininity and womanhood, the language of spirituality can “empower women to embrace their own unique identities and reject limiting societal expectations” (Pollock 8).

This language is characterised by incorporating nature-centric terms and symbolism to convey Starhawk's ideas and beliefs. For instance, she may describe the Earth as a living, interconnected organism, referring to it as “the mother of life” (*Earth* 194) or using metaphors that evoke a sense of nurturing, such as the “womb of life” (*Spiral* 106). Another example of this unique language of spirituality would be the employment of imagery related to natural elements, cycles, and seasons to illustrate spiritual concepts and practices, e.g.: “Goddess as the complex cycle of birth, growth, decay, and regeneration that makes for soil fertility” (*Earth* 24). Thus, Starhawk's language reflects a deep reverence for the Earth and a recognition of the inherent spirituality in a conception of nature that also includes women.

Conclusions

The first part of this thesis explores ecofeminism and its various branches. It is a movement primarily associated with women, challenging the prevailing masculinist dynamics and attributing them as a significant contributor to environmental degradation and the oppressive conditions experienced by women. It is recognized that all forms of oppression are interconnected, and ecofeminism seeks to liberate both women and the environment from the dominance of patriarchal authority. To delve deeper into the relationship between feminism, spirituality, and environmentalism, I chose to adopt a spiritual ecofeminist perspective, drawing inspiration from Starhawk's literary works. This choice serves as a foundation for investigating the intricate connections between these three domains.

In the second part, this study delves into the realm of Starhawk's spiritual ecofeminism, focusing on the intricate themes that permeate her literary works and their profound ties to feminist spirituality and ecological consciousness. A pivotal work in Starhawk's oeuvre, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, is meticulously examined in this section. It unravels the ecofeminist spiritual archetypes of the witch and the Goddess, unearthing their significance and influence. Another notable work, *The Earth Path: Grounding Your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature*, is thoroughly analysed to explore the role of rituals as spiritual ecofeminist practices and the concept of "healing the Earth". Additionally, this section scrutinizes the genres employed in Starhawk's works and how the language of spirituality empowers women, forging a distinct feminist spirituality.

One of the objectives of this research paper has been to undertake a comprehensive exploration of the valuable contributions made by Starhawk to the realm of ecofeminism. With this aim in mind, a critical examination of her theories within the framework of ecofeminism was conducted, allowing for an assessment of the distinctive nature of her spiritual ecofeminist essays as a genre. Through a thorough analysis of her writings, this project aimed to unveil the

insights and perspectives that Starhawk offers at the intersection of feminism, spirituality, and environmentalism. It is with a sense of fulfilment that this study achieves its aims by critically exploring Starhawk's theories within the ecofeminist framework and examining the distinctiveness of her spiritual ecofeminist essays, revealing insights at the intersection of feminism, spirituality, and environmentalism.

Moreover, this study has explored the transformative potential of ecofeminist spirituality. Through the adoption of a spiritual worldview, individuals can establish a bond with the natural world and acknowledge the intrinsic sacredness of all living entities. This transformation in consciousness has the capacity to challenge the dominant capitalist patriarchy that places profit and power above the welfare of humanity and the environment.

The aforementioned observations underscore the undeniable potential of embracing a spiritual perspective on a broader scale, precipitating substantial transformations within society. A spiritual orientation facilitates a departure from the prevalent exploitative and extractive mindset characterizing the contemporary capitalist system. Instead, it engenders values revolving around interconnectedness, compassion, and sustainability. By recognizing the inherent worth of all sentient beings and acknowledging the intricate interdependencies permeating all facets of existence, individuals are emboldened to interrogate and challenge prevailing structures of oppression, thus propelling progress towards a more equitable and harmonious world.

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Appendix

Born Miriam Simos in 1951, Starhawk is an anarchist activist, ecofeminist, self-proclaimed witch and writer. Her first book is *The Earth Path: Grounding your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature*, published in 1979 by Harper & Row. The book became a bestseller, launching Starhawk’s career as an activist and spokesperson for Wicca, the peace movement, and ecofeminism. She has also authored *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (2011), *Walking to Mercury* (1998), and *City of Refuge* (2016), among other titles. Nowadays and according to her website *Starhawk.org*, she is immersed in her project “Earth Activist Training”, which is a teaching program concerned with permaculture¹³ design grounded in spirituality. Also, she travels internationally to impart knowledge on Earth-based spirituality, the transformative power of ritual, and the essential skills of activism.

¹³ “Permaculture is primarily a system of ethical land use and design for sustainable human settlements” (Mollison et al.)