

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our profound gratitude to our supervisor Dr. CHABANE CHAOUCH Sarah for her remarkable support, guidance, and patience throughout every stage of this dissertation. Her exceptional expertise and tireless efforts have been crucial in shaping and completing this research. We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to work with her. This research would not have been possible without her intellectual guidance and endless support. Furthermore, we extend our gratitude to the panel of examiners namely Prof. Siber Mouloud and Dr. Aissat Karima for their time, efforts and constructive feedback in evaluating and examining this dissertation.

Dedications

*I dedicate this dissertation first of all for my parents who raised me,
For the boundless love they gave me and for believing and holding
faith in me.*

*To my sisters Anya, Menza and Thanina,
Who taught me what it means to be held and who taught me to always
smile, dream, and never give up.*

*To my closest friends,
for their endless love and support, for their warmth and wisdom.
Thank you for reminding me, in moment of doubt of who I truly I am.*

*To my precious binomial Soraya,
who I consider more than an academic partner, we walked in this road
together, we turned effort into achievement and companionship into
something unforgettable.*

Louiza

I dedicate this dissertation for my parents and my brother Mhena

Your love, patience, and strength have carried me through.

To my family,

Whose presence has been a shelter and a source of strength.

To my grandfather,

Whose memory is a gentle presence in my soul.

Your spirit will live in every step I take.

To my friends,

For the support, kindness and belief.

And to Louiza

With whom I shaped this work,

Page by page, thought by thought

This journey would not have been the same without you

Soraya

Abstract:

This dissertation aims to explore how Western thought has positioned nature and women as subordinate to man and reason. It discusses the effects of binary oppositions and humans' exploitation and oppression, which manifest in environmental degradation and systemic gender inequality. It attempts to examine the agency of nature and women, to highlight their resistance against male domination and oppression. It investigates the interconnected abuse of nature and the discrimination of women as well as the possibility of their resistance in Eric Barnes's *Above the ether* (2019) and *The city where we once lived* (2018). Therefore, this dissertation offers an ecofeminist perspective. To attain our objective, we rely on Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the mastery of nature* (1993) and "Nature in the active voice" (2009). The first chapter delves into the excessive abuse of the natural and the dehumanization of women. It demonstrates that humans live in a post-apocalyptic world, as they grapple with climate change and pollution. It also shows that the father's wife, the doctor's wife, the stranger, female teenagers, the missing woman, and the female commissioner are the main female characters who are discriminated in both novels. The second chapter focuses on the resistance of nature and women. Through our analysis, we reached the following findings. Barnes's novels depict how nature and women are portrayed as passive and instrumentalised. Hence, both nature and women are abused, exploited and discriminated in the narratives. Additionally, both some plants and women are active agents, who resist male oppression and abuse. In both literary texts, the forms of resistance are shown through dandelions, ivy and vines. Similarly, the investor, the doctor's wife, the missing woman and female scavengers are the main female characters who symbolize resistance.

Key words: Abuse, oppression, resistance, nature, plants, women.

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I. General Introduction:

Over the previous centuries, the correlation between the environmental degradation and social inequality has become more evident, especially Man's dominance over nature and man's discrimination of women. Numerous ecocritical scholars argue that the Age of Reason marks a transformation in human thought as several thinkers like René Descartes underlines 'Reason' as the foundation of knowledge; to illustrate, Descartes asserts that "I think, Therefore I am" (Descartes, 1637, part. VI). This means that the Enlightenment prioritizes science and reason. This had a major impact on the evolution of Western thinking since numerous conceptions emerged, including the rise of Man and nature as well as men and women dualisms. The emphasis on men's superiority indicates that both nature and women are inferior within Western culture. This suggests that men consider themselves superior to nature and women, as they consider both nature and women as irrational, passive objects, recipients and weak. This enables them to dominate and excessively exploit nature, as well as discriminate women. This has engendered environmental problems such as pollution, natural disasters, and global warming as well as gender inequality. Some contemporary American novels have played a major role in representing the excessive exploitation of nature and the discrimination of women. Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1991), Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), and Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* (2011) are some examples. They might also explore the possibility of agency of both nature and women so as to depict their resistance in Eric Barnes's novels *The city where we once lived* (2018) and *Above the ether* (2019).

A. The Review of the Literature:

Several researchers have tackled Eric Barnes's *The city where we once lived* (2018) and *Above the ether* (2019) from different perspectives. In "Tracing Corruption, Crime and Violence in Eric Barnes's *The City Where We Once Lived* (2018) and *Above the ether* (2019)",

Souhila Kentouche and Feriel Kaci address the adverse consequences of climate change on both the government and society. They argue that climate change causes the collapse of government and societal disintegration, which engenders corruption, crime and violence in the North End and the South End (Kentouche and Kaci, 2022, p. 7). They have relied on different literary theories, including Claire P. Curtis's *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract: "We'll Not Go Home Again"* (2010), Gregers Andersen's *Climate Fiction and Cultural Analysis: A New Perspective on Life in the Anthropocene* (2020) and Shela Sheikh's essay on "Violence". The study highlights how the corrupted government and the absence of laws lead to crime, violence, and a transformation in social relationship and behaviours. They focus on the emergence of violent and aggressive youngsters and teenagers in both the North End and the South End. Consequently, characters in both novels feel insecure and are obliged to commit violence in order to defend themselves and survive (Kentouche and Kaci, 2022, p. 13).

In *Climate change in popular culture: A warming world in the American imagination*, James Craig Holte (2022) examines several climate change narratives. Holte regards Eric Barnes's *The city where we ones lived* as a climate change fiction that investigates a futuristic post-apocalyptic world, where characters grapple with natural disasters. In this regard, he argues,

The City Where We Once Lived follows the life of one unnamed man living in an abandoned part of the city at the beginning of the wreckage caused by climate change. The result is a novel that is both realistic and hauntingly prophetic in its depiction of how ordinary people might react to a slow-moving catastrophe. (Holte, 2022, p. 43)

This unveils that the novel revolves around the life of an unknown protagonist, who lives in a deserted city which is called the North End. It also illustrates how the character lives in a world, which is induced by natural disasters. It gives insight on how ordinary people can react to climate change.

In “An Eco-critical Reading of Eric Barnes’s *The City Where We Once Lived* (2018),” Amel Talbi and Dalila Zioui (2023) examine the harmful consequences of the excessive exploitation of nature. In the theoretical framework, they start with Cheryll Glotfelty, Stephen R. Kellert and Ladelle *McWorther’s* definition of ecocriticism. They also focus on Adam Trexler’s *Anthropocene fictions: The novel in a time of climate change* (2015), Gregers Andersen’s *Climate fiction and cultural analysis: A new perspective on life in the Anthropocene* (2020) and Antonia Menhert’s *Climate change fictions: Representations of global warming in American literature* (2016). They argue that the abuse of nature has a negative impact on the planet and humans, as people have to struggle with natural disasters. Besides, they focus on nature’s revenge in the novel. In this sense, they claim, “Nature is represented as a powerful and active agent through natural disasters such as storms, floods, tornadoes. These natural disasters have an effect on the protagonist and citizens’ lives” (Talbi and Zioui, 2023, p. 13). Furthermore, they analyse characters’ displacement to other parts of the city for the sake of survival. In this context, they argue, “citizens escape because they are unable to find help due to the absence of a state and government... This marks the rise of refugees in the novel because thousands of people escape from the South End” (Talbi and Zioui, 2023, p. 47).

In “Social and Psychological Alienation in Barnes’s *Above the ether* (2019),” Kahina Iassamen examines social and psychological alienation. She employs various eco-critical concepts to examine the detrimental effects of environmental degradation on social alienation. She illustrates how the six characters experience social alienation because of the absence of human interaction. She examines characters’ alienation, depicting their emotional struggles and the significant outcomes of living in a post-apocalyptic setting. In addition, she uses Frank Johnson’s “Psychological Alienation: Isolation and Self-estrangement” to investigate the effect of social alienation on characters’ psychological alienation. She explores the

psychological conditions of some characters, focusing on their anxiety and inner conflicts. The result of her analysis indicates that social alienation has adversely affected characters' mental health (Kahina Iassamen, 2023, p. 29). The dissertation successfully illustrates the themes of environmental effects and human alienation, emphasizing the close relationship between social alienation and the mental wellbeing of characters.

In "The Representation of Women in Eric Barnes's *Above the ether* (2019)" Sarah Chabane Chaouch examines Eric Barnes's novel from a feminist perspective. She employs Sophia Phoca's "Feminism and Gender", Jill Lebihan's "Feminism and Literature", and Catherine Harnois's "Re-Presenting Feminisms: Present, Past and Future". She emphasizes on the representation of women in a post-apocalyptic world, which is induced by climate change. She focuses on women's experiences, highlighting their strength and abuse in a chaotic environment. She argues that

Some American novelists represent how can natural disasters cause the postapocalypse where the government is unable to control both natural disasters and people's lives. Under these circumstances, people cannot have a normal life because of the rise of insecurity, violence and cannibalism. Some writers uncover its negative effect on society, especially on women. (Chabane Chaouch, 2023, p. 594)

This underscores that numerous contemporary American novels employ post-apocalyptic genre and climate change fiction, including Eric Barnes's *Above the ether* (2019). In the above excerpt, she focuses on the representation of women, who live in difficult environments marked by climate change. This unveils that women endure suffering, hardship, and discrimination in the twenty-first century. Hence, women feel powerless after the collapse of the government, as they grapple with insecurity and violence. Nonetheless, her study does not focus on the abuse and discrimination of both nature and women as well as their potential for resistance.

This research paper explores Eric Barnes's *The city where we once lived* (2018) and *Above the ether* (2019) from an eco-critical perspective. Both novels revolve around characters who live in a post-apocalyptic environment due to humans' excessive abuse of nature before the apocalypse through their unreasonable use of diverse chemicals and pollutants throughout the years. Therefore, the characters of both novels face an extremely degraded natural environment and climate change. The objective of our study is to discuss both literary texts from an ecofeminist lens, relying on Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the mastery of nature* (1993) and "Nature in the Active Voice" (2009). This study attempts to investigate the representation of the excessive abuse of nature and the discrimination of women in Barnes's *The city where we once lived* (2018) and *Above the ether* (2019). This research, consequently, puts emphasis on men vs. nature and men vs. women dualisms so as to highlight the oppression both nature and women undergo. Besides, it aims to examine the possibility of plants and women to be active participants. It relies on Plumwood's deconstruction of dualisms in order to show that both nature and women are active agents who can resist male's domination and abuse.

B. Issue in Context:

From the previous review of the literature, we noticed that Eric Barnes's *The city where we once lived* and its prequel, *Above the ether* are approached from different perspectives. The previous critics have explored the detrimental effects of climate change on society, focusing on corruption, crime, violence, alienation and women. However, to our knowledge no research investigated the relationship between nature and women and the possibility for their resistance within a post-apocalyptic context in Eric Barnes's literary texts. Thus, we rely on Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) and "Nature in the Active Voice" (2009) to address the depiction of both nature and women from an Ecofeminist perspective. This study investigates the abuse of nature and women before and after the

apocalypse. It also concentrates on their resistance in both novels. In fact, Barnes describes plants as symbolically associated with female characters because of their common struggles. Some plants such as dandelions, ivy and vines exhibit resistance to various forms of pollution and existing chemicals and pesticide. We also find some women, like the female investor, the mother of the two children, the doctor's wife, the missing woman and the female scavengers who resist the harsh environment, discrimination and social inequality.

II. Methods and Materials

A. Methods:

The present research offers an ecofeminist reading of Eric Barnes's *The city where we once lived* (2018) and its prequel, *Above the ether* (2019). It aims to examine the excessive exploitation of nature and the discrimination of women. It also attempts to explore the resistance of plants and women in the novels. To do so, we will rely on Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the mastery of nature* (1993) and "Nature in the active voice" (2009). We have chosen Val Plumwood because she is an eco-feminist, philosopher, and eco-activist. She is renowned for her contributions to environmental philosophy and her pioneering writings on eco-feminism, namely *Feminism and the mastery of nature*. Her personal lived experiences in Australia prompted her to reevaluate the relationship between humans and the natural world. In addition to her academic work, she was deeply committed to environmental activism.

In a world increasingly defined by environmental crisis, ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary field that emerged in the 1990s in response to growing environmental concerns and the need for a more sustainable lifestyle. Ecocriticism delves into the description of nature in literature and how this representation reflects cultural attitudes towards the environment. In this vein, Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (p. xviii). From this perspective, ecocriticism examines how literary texts portray humans' connection with their

environment and shape human understanding of the ecological issues. More significantly, ecocriticism is an approach that incorporates several key concepts, including green studies, eco-feminism, and climate change fiction, and post-colonial ecocriticism. To illustrate, Glotfelty (1996) writes that “In philosophy, various subfields like environmental ethics, deep ecology, ecofeminism, and social ecology have emerged in an effort to understand and critique the root causes of environmental degradation” (Glotfelty, 1996, xxiii). Put differently, numerous disciplines have evolved so as to address and attack humans’ excessive abuse and exploitation of the natural world. As one of the influential theorists of ecocriticism, Val Plumwood develops her theory of ecofeminism to discuss the relationship between nature and women.

a. Definition of Ecofeminism

Francise d’Eubonne, a French feminist, coins the theory of ecofeminism, which is a subfield of ecocriticism. ‘Ecofeminism’ connects between the subjugation of women to the abuse of the natural world (Puleo, 2021, p. 27; Miles, n.d.). In *Feminism and the mastery of nature* (1993), Plumwood provides an extensive analysis of the connections between the domination of nature and the oppression of women. In this regard, Plumwood (1993) argues,

Ecofeminism has contributed a great deal both to activist struggle and to theorising links between women’s oppression and the domination of nature over the last two decades. In some versions it has engaged with all four forms of exploitation encompassed in race, class, gender and nature. (Plumwood, 1993, p. 1)

Plumwood’s theory offers a critique of the Age of Reason and Western culture’s deep reliance on ‘Reason’ because it has engendered various dualisms, particularly mind vs. body, superior vs. inferior, active vs. passive, master vs. slave, masculine vs. feminine, and Man vs. nature. These dualisms have resulted in the foundation of different forms of domination and oppression such as the domination of nature and the oppression of women. In this context, Val Plumwood (1993) argues,

The concept of reason provides the unifying and defining contrast for the concept of nature, much as the concept of husband does for that of wife, as master for slave. Reason in the western tradition has been constructed as the privileged domain of the master, who has conceived nature as a wife or subordinate other encompassing and representing the sphere of materiality, subsistence and the feminine which the master has split off and constructed as beneath him. (p. 3)

In the above excerpt, Plumwood critiques the way Western culture relies on Reason because Man considers himself as superior and master. Hence, he subordinates both nature and women and regards them as inferior. This enhances his domination and abuse of nature and women.

Man perceives himself as superior to the natural world because of his ability to think and reason. He excludes the natural world because he regards nature as a passive object and inferior. Plumwood (1993) asserts that the devaluation of the natural world goes back to Western Greek culture and rationalism (p. 72). Therefore, Plumwood opposes the Man vs. nature dualism that emerged a few centuries ago since it is the main source of nature's exclusion. In this sense, Plumwood (1993) writes, "Separation may be established by denying or minimising overlap qualities and activities, and by the erection of rigid barriers to prevent contact" (Plumwood, 1993, p. 49). In other words, the Man vs. nature dualism separates man from nature, hence justifying their debasement and domination of nature. This dualism supports the denial of Man's dependency on nature; this helps him to exploit nature for his economic gain and profits.

Man not only degrades and dominates nature but also attempts to exclude and oppress women. He considers a woman as inferior and worthy of discrimination because of her gender. In this context, Plumwood (1993) argues, "The feminine is explicitly and repeatedly associated in Plato with the lower order of nature as opposed to reason, associated with formless, undisciplined matter or primeval chaos" (p. 77). Put differently, a woman is seen as inferior because of her inability to think and use logical thinking. Man associates the feminine with "disorder and ungoverned emotion," "moral evil," "animal nature," "lower" and "slave

like” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 77). This shows that man associates a woman with various negative representations so that to emphasize her inferiority and facilitate marginalization, domination and oppression, it indicates that a woman is expected to achieve the roles of the wife or a mother. This suggests that a woman is ignored as nobody cares about her needs and rights.

b. Val Plumwood’s Deconstruction of Dualisms:

Some literary theorists believe that dualisms have created various forms of oppression in Western culture. Hence, in *Feminism and the mastery of nature* (1993), Val Plumwood attempts to deconstruct Man vs. nature and man vs. woman dualisms. She starts with the deconstruction of Man vs. nature by calling Western Culture to reconsider nature as capable of agency and intentionality. In this sense, she states,

Breaking the dualism involves both affirming and reconceptualising the underside, nature. Cartesian thought has stripped nature of the intentional and mindlike qualities which make an ethical response to it possible. Once nature is reconceived as capable of agency and intentionality, and human identity is reconceived in less polarised and disembodied ways, the great gulf which Cartesian thought established between the conscious, mindful human sphere and the mindless, clockwork natural one disappears. (Plumwood, 1993, p. 5)

In other words, to deconstruct the established dualism of Man vs. nature, Western culture needs to declare nature as an active agent. Acknowledging nature’s agency challenges the conception of nature as a passive and mindless object that can be exploited. This unveils the significance of recognizing nature as an autonomous and intentional subject that has a direction, goal and needs. Consequently, nature is an active participant in the ecosystem as it can act and respond.

Plumwood rejects the subjugation and discrimination of women based on their gender. Hence, she dismantles the duality of man vs. woman to contest Western Culture and the Master model. In this regard, she (1993) argues “Dismantling a dualism based on difference

requires the reconstruction of relationship and identity in terms of a non-hierarchical concept of difference” (p. 60). Moreover, she believes that women deserve a better life and treatment. This pushes her to highlight the reconstruction and redefinition of women’s identity so as to reject their subordination. Women are active agents and creative as they can participate in the reconstruction of human identity. Plumwood (1993) writes,

Women must be treated as just as fully human and as fully part of human culture as men. But both men and women must challenge the dualised conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognises human identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature. (Plumwood, 1993, p. 36)

In this passage, Plumwood offers an anti-dualistic approach that goes beyond the problematic of dualistic structures. She attempts to negate the man vs. woman dualism because a woman can be considered as an inferior, slave, or ‘other’. This helps the recreation of women’s identity, gender role, and status. Furthermore, Plumwood suggests a “third way” which reconstructs relationships and identities based on a non-hierarchical concept of difference. This involves the recognition of a women’s roles, emphasizing their independence and complexity while challenging the traditional male-centred perspective (p. 36-7).

c. Val Plumwood’s “Nature as an active voice”

In “Nature in the active voice” (2009), Val Plumwood challenges the prevailing Western perspective that views nature as passive, mindless and subordinate to humanity. She concentrates on the agency and creativity of nature and nonhuman species. She offers a fundamental shift in human thinking to encourage people respect the natural world. She argues that the organismic view of nature as a space of creativity and self-organizing systems must be suppressed by capitalism and reduction, because when nature is seen as active and intelligent, it becomes hard to ignore, exploit, or destroy for human profit (Plumwood, 2009, p.120). This change in thinking would foster a more respectful relationship with nature, acknowledging it as a dynamic force rather than a passive resource. She states that instead of

dismissing the intelligence of the non-human world and attributing creation to an external force, we should acknowledge the natural world as inherently creative and ‘agentic’ actively shaping and participating in its own unfolding (Plumwood, 2009, p. 124).

Plumwood, in “Nature in the active voice” (2009), advocates for a “philosophical animism” that challenges dominant frameworks such as reductive “materialism and creationism”. Reductive materialism strips the world of meaning, while creationism attributes agency only to an “anthropomorphic deity”. Both reductive materialism and creationism marginalize the inherent vitality of the non-human world. In contrast, “philosophical animism” asserts that rivers, trees, animals, plants and ecosystems possess distinct modalities of knowing, acting, and communicating that although distinct from human agency, are as real. Plumwood writes,

“So to the creationist, the Philosophical Animist would say: Your story of creation is really impoverished compared to the incredible, infinite complexity of the real earth story written in the rocks and in the bodies of living things, species diversity and evolution. Without the draining out of spirit and creativity from matter and its centralisation in your god figure, we have creative, active and mindful matter all around us. In an intentional universe we can have it both ways, a dispersed creativity and a decentralised intentionality. For this, we need to spread concepts of agency and creativity more widely into what we have thought of as the dead world of nature.” (Plumwood, 2009, p.123)

This worldview encourages us to move beyond seeing the non-human world as passive or exploitable, and to acknowledge it as active in a dynamic, communicative network of life. From this perspective, sound transforms into voice, movement becomes an intentional action, and adaptation reveals intelligence and interaction. What appears to be chaos or coincidence is understood as part of matter’s creative potential. This perspective is characterized by its intentional use of language that represents nature in the active voice, showing that agency is not a human attribute but also shared by species, landscapes and ecological systems. (Plumwood, 2009, p.125-6)

B. Materials:

a. The synopsis of *Above the ether*:

Eric Barnes's *Above the ether* is a prequel to *The City where we once lived*. The chapter subsections, indicate that the citizens of the South End have used various pollutants and chemicals in their city for their economic gains, leading to the disappearance of the natural world and the extinction of animals. Consequently, the citizens grapple with different natural calamities, such as storms, earthquakes, and floods, in a post-apocalyptic world. To illustrate, a female investor works for an elegant company as an evaluator of environmental risks in industrial zones for her economic profits. Furthermore, the novel revolves around the oppression and discrimination of women. A father escapes from a tsunami, taking his two children and leaving his wife face her ultimate death. The stranger lives with her husband in a deserted city because of the endless flames, punishing herself after the loss of their two children. This causes her self-alienation since she feels vulnerable and disregarded. A doctor and his wife live as refugees in a camp because the doctor provides medical care for the gangs and inhabitants, ignoring his wife's emotions. Some female teenagers are portrayed as victims of systemic abuse, transactional sex and emotional neglect. Furthermore, the uncontrolled spread of dandelions in the novel serves as a form of resistance and rebellion. Their persistence symbolizes a refusal to be eradicated and reclaiming a space in a collapsing world. Women's resistance is portrayed through some female characters such as the investor and the doctor's wife. The investor works in a competitive financial sector dominated by men while the doctor's wife kills four guardians to free herself from the camp.

b. The synopsis of *The City where we once lived*:

The City where we once lived (2018) is a climate change fiction that revolves around an unnamed protagonist's life in the North End. From the diverse chapter subsections, we learn that humans have used pollutants and chemicals in the industrial zone, leading to long-term damage of nature. He meets a woman and her son, who presently reside in the North End. The commissioners have taken her child in the South End. Hence, she kills her child's oppressor and flees from the south seeking safety in the north. The act of killing can be considered as a form of resistance against social inequality and system of dominance and oppression. The novel also depicts other women's resistance, including female scavengers. These women can endure extreme conditions and survive in the post-apocalyptic world. A female commissioner resists the committee's desire to destroy the city. The novel depicts the existence of some plants like ivy and vines imported from distant countries such as Northern India. Some scavengers found these plants in distant countries that can resist any harsh environment. The gardener offers the protagonist some plants as a gift.

III. Results:

This study investigated the representation of the exploitation and resistance of plants and women in Eric Barnes's *The city where we once lived* (2018) and its prequel *Above the ether* (2019). Our study examines Barnes's portrayal of the excessive abuse and exploitation of the natural world and women. It also explored the possibility of their resistance and reaction. Therefore, it offers an ecofeminist study of both novels. To achieve our objective, we relied on Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the mastery of nature* (1993), in which she critiques the dualistic thinking prevalent in Western philosophy that privileges male reasoning and dominance while subordinating nature and woman. We also drew upon Plumwood's "Nature in the active voice" (2009), in which she acknowledges nature as an active entity rather than a passive background. We aimed to demonstrate the excessive exploitation of nature and the discrimination of women and the possibility of their resistance.

The findings of the first chapter reveal that both nature and women are placed as objects of excessive exploitation and entrenched discrimination in Barnes's two novels. The exploration demonstrates that the environment destruction is systematically aligned with the marginalization of women highlighting the same position of weakness imposed by the patriarchal and capitalist structure. Additionally, the results emphasize that the novels depict environmental degradation as inseparable from social inequalities faced by women, who are silenced, instrumentalised, and socially marginalized. Therefore, the chapter confirms the ecofeminist perspective that the abuse of nature and the oppression of women are interconnected and are rooted in a shared pattern of oppression.

In the second chapter, we explored how both nature and women resist male abuse and domination in both narratives. Far from being passive victims, nature though damaged continues to adapt and persist. In both literary texts, several plants can survive the harsh

environment, including dandelions, ivy and vines. They continue to grow and thrive in different areas of the South End. Female characters embody care, survival, and moral clarity in the face of a dominating system. To illustrate, some female characters opposed men such as the investor, the doctor's wife, the unnamed woman and the female scavengers. This resistance reveals a fundamental reality that even in an overwhelming harm, nature and women hold power to endure and resist destruction and discrimination.

IV. Discussion

Chapter one: The Abuse of Nature and Women in *The city where we ones lived* (2019) and its prequel *Above the ether* (2018)

This chapter aims to explore how Eric Barnes's *The city where we once lived* and *Above the ether* depict the abuse of nature and women from an ecofeminist lens relying on Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the mastery of nature* (1993). In both *Above the Ether* (2018) and *The city where we once* (2019), Barnes offers a powerful depiction of humanity's destructiveness relationship to the natural world. In *Above the ether* the author not only mentions environmental degradation but illustrates it through vivid scenes of storms, demolished homes and neighbourhood swallowed by floods. Barnes explains how pollution from chemicals and unregulated expansion of industry pollutes the air and water, requiring South End residents to escape as their city descends into chaos and disaster. These pictures show how human life is directly disrupted by the collapse of nature leaving people confused and helpless. Similarly, *The city where we once lived* reveals the long-term effects of taking advantage of nature. The North is portrayed by Barnes as a "city of ghost", almost abandoned where blackened trees, poisoned rivers, and deteriorating structures bear witness to years of ecological disregard. The few residents that are left struggle daily to find clear water and endure the harsh living circumstances produced by industrial misuse. Through this haunting environment, Barnes illustrates how environmental destruction tears apart communities, isolates survivors and turns familiar locations into hostile regions. While the narratives vividly highlight the abuse of nature, they also shed light on the parallel abuse of women focusing on the Doctor's wife, the stranger, owned Mexican girls, the unnamed woman, and the female commissioner. This ecofeminist lens reveals how both forms of oppression are interconnected and mutually reinforcing the systemic nature of both environmental and gender-based injustices.

Val Plumwood identifies a foundational pattern of reasoning in Western thought that constructs binary oppositions, including reason vs. emotion, mind vs. body, master vs. slave, Man vs. nature and man vs. woman. This indicates that one side is superior than the other. This logic justifies the excessive exploitation of the non-human world and the subjugation of women. Within this approach, both nature and women are reduced to passive and voiceless resources. In this sense, she writes,

The category of nature is a field of multiple exclusion and control, not only of non-humans, but of various groups of humans and aspects of human life which are cast as nature. Thus racism, colonialism and sexism have drawn their conceptual strength from casting sexual, racial and ethnic difference as closer to the animal and the body construed as a sphere of inferiority. (Val Plumwood, 1993, p. 4)

In the above excerpt, Plumwood demonstrates that both nature and some groups of people are discriminated, especially ethnic groups, non-Westerners, and women. This indicates that both nature and women are viewed as inferior, passive, and docile. In other words, Western culture focuses on dualisms such as mind vs. body, master vs. slave, man vs. nature and man vs. woman. This provides a conceptual framework for the understanding the subordination of nature and women. It is because both nature and women are associated with some characteristics such as emotion and irrationality. In Barnes's climate change fiction, it seems that nature is devastated and damaged due to climate change and natural disasters like floods, earthquakes and fire, while women are mistreated and isolated because they are inferior.

1. The Representation of the Excessive Abuse of Nature in *Above the ether* and *The city here we once lived*:

Eric Barnes's *The city where we once lived* (2018) and *Above the ether* (2019) portray ecological collapse brought on by systematic neglect and human hubris. In the described cities; the South End and in the North End, environmental degradation is an everyday occurrence. This reveals that Western dualisms, specifically man vs. nature dualism, support

the abuse and instrumentalization of the non-human world. This section examines humans' excessive abuse of nature in both novels so as to demonstrate Plumwood's critique of master rationality and dominance of reason. It aims to explore the exploitation of the natural world in the North End and the South End.

Above the ether is a post-apocalyptic narrative, which is triggered by the climate change. Barnes shows hints of the excessive abuse of the natural world after the apocalypse. To illustrate, the female investor, in *Above the ether*, works for a private company and is the accountable on the financial system, making extensive investment decisions in zones affected by climate change. In line with this idea, Val Plumwood refers to the mistreatment of nature as no longer a resource for human ends and significant and valuable human being. This happens because humans consider themselves as the master and are preoccupied with their interests (Plumwood, 1993, p. 147). Humans have distanced themselves from their environment because of their superiority complex; hence, they are disconnected from the physical world. This mirrors the problems of the Western world. It is worth mentioning that this thinking helps humans harm their environment for their economic benefits. In this regard, Plumwood argues,

Dominant western culture has systematically inferiorised, backgrounded and denied dependency on the whole sphere of reproduction and subsistence. This denial of dependency is a major factor in the perpetuation of the non-sustainable modes of using nature which loom as such a threat to the future of western society. (Plumwood, 1993, p. 21)

The above passage argues that the main problem of the Western society is its failure to recognize and value the fundamental systems that sustain life, especially the ecological system that regenerates nature. She also uncovers that the dominant Western culture considers the natural sphere as inferior, 'other,' and docile.

The female investor works in a prestigious office, which is portrayed as an elegant, modern and elevated space. She works in a high building surrounded by glass and polished surfaces high above the chaos of the collapsing world outside. This entails the luxury of her environment in contrast to environment which is devastating all over the country. From her office, she calculates investments based on the outside of the environment which is devastating all over the country. In her office, she assesses the investments based on the financial profits from the environmental disasters, without addressing the outside reality. Her office is where the consequences of climate change are the main insights and an opportunity to collect funds. In this sense, Barnes (2019) writes,

She never thinks about the morality of making money off natural disasters. The rules say she can. There's nothing about what she does that is illegal. Her job is to make money. Increase it. Multiply it. Add to the pile she and her team and her company already have. She doesn't question this. She's very good at it. So she makes as much as she possibly can. She didn't always make her money off these disasters. For years, she made it other ways. But the disasters kept presenting themselves. More times than she could ignore. (Barnes, 2019, p. 59-60)

The above excerpt highlights the female investor's emotional detachment from the real world. She reduces nature into a passive object and prioritizes compassion over the natural world and the surviving citizens. This reveals that she is determined to focus on economic profit rather than questioning the ethics of her actions. In other words, the character reflects the 'master identity' because she is emotionally detached from nature but financially motivated and determined, her success depends on nature being destructed. This reflects her denial of dependency by exploiting the natural world and treating it as external. The investor's job demonstrates a system gratifying destruction.

Barnes refers to the ongoing presence of chemicals in nature in the post-apocalyptic world as a reminder of human excessive exploitation on the non-human world. Barnes presents landscapes scarred by industrial activities that generated toxins embedded in the soil,

where nothing grows. In this context, Barnes (2019) argues, “Farmland for hundreds of miles is no longer cost-effective to be planted” (p.36). These pollutants are a cumulative residue of many years of uncontrolled industrialization and a disregard of the ecological matters. This unveils the loss of wilderness in the South End. Therefore, Barnes sheds light on the effects of the excessive domination and abuse of the natural world through the use of dangerous chemicals. Moreover, the chemicals’ presence in the characters’ life is invisible and undetectable within the people struggling to survive in a collapsing world. For example, a father and his children grapple with an unpleasant smell while facing forced displacement. Barnes (2019) writes, “The smell of rot and chemicals dissipating only after half a day of driving” (p.171). This shows that they struggle with a disgusting and stinking smell and chemical in the post-apocalyptic setting. The absence of governmental structures in the South End complicate things, as the citizens grapple with leaked chemicals and pollutants.

In *Above the ether* (2019), nature is represented as an object under anthropogenic danger. The novel opens with massive flooding and farmland lies permanently underwater. It is not a temporary disaster but an irreversible reality. Plumwood (1993) writes, “Hierarchy within human society is declared to be irrelevant to explanations of the destruction of nature” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 17). Put differently, she shows that the domination of nature is deeply intertwined with broader social hierarchies. Therefore, environmental degradation cannot be separated from human activities. In the novel, the ferocious storms transform the land into a zone of evasion and ruins. In this sense, Barnes writes, “The water moves in a surge three or four feet high. Spread out across the farmland, pushing the cars and trucks from the relative height to the highway, a revelling force that keeps moving north” (Barnes, 2019, p.16). This passage illustrates the consequences of the disastrous and destructive floods due to climate change that stems from the human irresponsible activities. Hence, Barnes’s novel represents

the negative effects of human exploitation of the natural world and concentrates on scenes of natural collapse and human desperation.

More significantly, in the highway people try to escape from the South End to the North End. For example, the father and his two children find themselves caught in the dark water, heavy with the mud that almost turned black, with surface disturbed everywhere by branches and stray auto parts and other debris. The city suffocates under heat. In this context, Barnes (2019) writes, “The heat is obvious. Physical. A weight in the air” (p.5). The citizens evacuate as the city turns uninhabitable. Barnes (2019) adds, “People, far away, are climbing onto the roofs of their cars. Men and women and many children, all move forward, from roof top to roof top, even as the cars underneath them begin to shift, as if the earth below all of them were steadily giving way” (p. 14). This entails the violence of the climate change. It shows the power of natural disasters, notably floods, for the citizens face forced displacement to neighboring towns. They seek the roofs to save their lives. Barnes also delves into animals’ extinction, people’s fear and the landscape’s deterioration. This indicates that human negligence, incompetence, and apathy push nature to its limits. Thus, *Above the ether* becomes not only a depiction of ecological collapse but of human denial in the face of the systemic collapse.

The floods are presented as a persistent catastrophe that transform landscape and challenge human lives. The flooding is caused by the hurricanes and earthquakes in the Gulf which destroy the levees and worsen by the constant heavy rainfall. The floodwaters devastate the area killing several citizens and injuring other people. Barnes provides a vivid example of this devastation is portrayed in the highway. Barnes writes,

But they stop moving immediately, sinking knee deep, their children sinking to their waists, caught within a few steps by ground impossibly wet, all of them now only able to sway in place, swinging their arms,

wildly gasping for help as the water from the south finally reaches them. (p.15-16)

The passage portrays the overwhelming danger of the floods focusing in the citizens' hopelessness and desperation who are subject to the rising waters. Even when the water recedes, the aftermath leaves behind people's bodies, debris and every type of filth. This highlights the detrimental effects of the excessive abuse and exploitation of the natural world.

Barnes depicts a hurricane that hits the South End as one powerful reactions of climate collapse. It is not a simple storm but a devastation force that shows how far the environmental collapse has increased. The storm causes the destruction of the building, dispersion of families, and the collapse of the city. In this vein Barnes writes,

Reports from the Gulf. Flooding in all directions from the earthquake and the hurricane. To the south it was the storm, not the earthquake, that did the worst of the damage. Wind and rain pushing onto the mainland at top velocity, killing tens of thousands in just minutes. Wiping out the coastal towns. (Barnes, 2019, p. 148)

This passage depicts the consequences of a planet destabilized by human activities and neglect which led to significant human and material losses. Simply put, Barnes represents climate change as the main consequences of human exploitation. Hence, the citizens face several natural disasters, which are floods, earthquakes, and hurricanes.

In *Above the ether*, Barnes describes a drought as a slow natural disaster, which has a destructive force as it causes other disasters, particularly wildfires. Even though the drought is gradual, it creates profound damage as it causes hunger and forced displacement. The drought occurs as a result of deforestation and lack of rainfall and the overuse of water resources. In this context, Johns-Putra (2016) explains that they “suggested that it was the time when ecocriticism took seriously the relationship between climate change and literature as a worthwhile topic of study” (p. 267). This means that climate change fiction is introduced to

tackle climate change in literary texts. In the novel, the drought is dangerous because they can lead to climate change. Barnes (2019) writes,

Each spring has gotten worse. After six years of drought, subdivisions like this one have seen fires spread across the hillsides. The hills, it seems, are magnets for the flames. Lightning is the worst of it. Hitting dry landscapes of dying brush. (p.73)

This reveals how the lack of rain throughout the years has transformed the land into a place susceptible to fires. Drought here is portrayed not as temporary inconvenient but as a long-term degradation of the natural world. It highlights Val Plumwood's argument that humans treat nature as an endless resource and ignores its limits since they rely on their Western logic of domination. Hence, nature is no longer useful. This suggests that humans do not care about their environment.

Barnes depicts global warming in the South End through the recurring image of the fires sweeping across the hillsides near the house of the couple, the stranger and her husband. This couple resides in a modern mansion surrounded by the burnt forests. The stranger stands in her porch drinking her gin and watching the flames approach, but she does not feel threatened. Barnes argues, "The haze in the sky above their neighborhood colors in the landscape in a permanent dusk. The air smells like smoke. But she doesn't notice. The fires come so often that, now, what she'd notice is the absence of smoke" (Barnes, 2019, p. 3). This scene illustrates what Val Plumwood identifies as "backgrounding" of nature, which denotes that the degradation of nature is normalized (Plumwood, 1993, p. 21). Simply put, humans have caused global warming and the loss of forests because of the continuous fires. This shows that humans do not care about their environment because it is inferior and passive. Besides, when her husband proposes to move on before the flames reach their house, she answers, "We'll lose all our money," and "We'll go bankrupt" (Barnes, 2019, p. 4). This entails that what

really counts is their luxurious mansion and the property. Nature in this case is reduced to an invaluable object and a passive entity.

In *The city where we once lived*, Barnes does not focus on a sudden collapse of the world, instead he portrays the slow-motion breakdown of the North End. It is gradually poisoned and destroyed, emptied and forgotten through the years because of the excessive exploitation of nature, pollution and neglect. The abandonment of the city reflects a renounce from ecological responsibilities, poisoned soil, undrinkable and unclear water. Barnes writes, “Even in their decrepit state, these canals are part of a system that circulates in new water from the bay to the north, keeping the water here from stagnating but taking with it unknown quantities and types of chemicals and pollution, toxins seeping down from the limitless factories around me” (Barnes,2018, p. 64). Massive use of chemicals and petroleum plants and industrial factories. To illustrate, the unnamed protagonist depicts the negative effects of the use of chemicals. In this context Barnes writes, “But I realize that the sheet on the ground isn’t hard metal. It’s mercury. A pool of shiny liquid of unknown origin and depth, collected here on accident or on purpose, the unwanted by-product of one process of the creation of car engines over so many years” (Barnes,2018, p. 62). Mercury is a symbol of industrial toxicity as it has a harmful influence on the natural world. It might be considered as an invisible damage that causes pollution on the long-term. The presence of mercury might entail that humans has used it in the industrial zones before the apocalypse.

The North End exposure to chemicals is not a recent crisis but a deep-rooted environmental injustice. In the narratives, Barnes reveals that the chemical pollution has started several decades ago. It is rooted in the uncontrolled operations of herbicide and pesticide plant established in the early 1930s. The protagonist finds photographs of people working in piles of dry and toxic chemicals. Barnes writes, “Portraits of men and women and small children among the piles of dry, dusty chemicals being loaded into railcars and onto

barges along the docks on the forgotten bay that borders the far edge of the North End” (p.39). This indicates that the first residents of the North End were not only exposed to environmental damage but implanted in it. The absence of early intervention points to a system of environmental denial where the suffering of nature is backgrounded in favor of industrial activities. To illustrate, Barnes (2019) writes, “Those articles are from the 1970s. The plant stayed open for another thirty years” (p.39). This passage points that the ongoing existence of these plants in the North End despite the degradation of life in the industrial zones underscores how profoundly embedded the logic of instrumentalization is, where lands are treated as expendable resources of profit. This mistreatment of nature has a detrimental impact on the environment and nonhuman species through the years.

The protagonist represents air pollution in the North End because of the inappropriate use of chemicals, smell of sulfur and chlorine. These pollutants are transported by the wind in the air from the destroyed industrial zones. The unnatural stillness of the fog is a result of the severe disturbance in weather. The protagonist writes, “When the fog comes, covering the streets and the bases of the buildings around me, it seems that I am suspended alone here in the sky”(Barnes,2018,p.3). This shows that humans’ overuse of different pollutants in nature has a detrimental impact on the natural world. It also unveils that the citizens grapple with air pollution on a regular basis. The quote describes the protagonist’s inability to see since the fog covers the streets.

The protagonist describes the outcome of the excessive abuse of nature in different subsections. He focuses on the collapse of the natural world, particularly the absence of trees, grass and flowers in the North End. In this sense, he writes “The trees have died and the plants have died and the grass and shrubs and flowers of thousands and thousands of front yards and small parks are all brown now, crumbling, and slowly blowing away” (Barnes, 2019, p.4). This passage illustrates the loss of the natural world in the north because of the

disappearance of trees, plants grass and flowers in the North End. Hence, the citizens reside in a post-apocalyptic world, where they grapple with the loss of the natural world. This demonstrates the negative effects of the excessive exploitation of the nonhuman world throughout the years.

The unnamed protagonist portrays climate change and its consequences on the weather. The seasons are no longer recognizable due to climate change and places do not follow the rules of nature. In the North End, the weather does not get warm. In some places, people can no longer have summer, while others no longer have winter. This change came gradually in a few years in a dramatic way. Barnes writes, “And keep in mind the change in weather...The weather has changed dramatically. That is killing the plant life too. Some think that alone is what’s killing everything” (Barnes,2018, p. 147). Put differently, the weather is the principal reason behind the damage in the ecosystem and dying of nature. This mirrors the consequences of human excessive abuse of nature and ecological neglect throughout the years.

The protagonist depicts the presence of few residents in the North End. The city is characterized by emptiness and silence. The citizens ignore the agency of nature, for it is reduced to a contaminated zone which is unsuitable for life. The protagonist writes, “Something in the ground is killing us. No one knows this for sure. But it’s what people think” (Barnes,2018, p.4). This shows that something makes their lives unbearable and kills several citizens. It also unveils the citizens’ inability to understand their ecosystem. This echoes Plumwood’s critique of the ‘blind spot’ of rationalism where awareness is shaped by binary opposition. Hence, humans lose the ability to recognize their dependency and reciprocity with the natural world. She states,

The logic of domination and the deep structures of dualism create ‘blind spots’ in the dominant culture’s understanding of its relationship

to the biosphere, understandings which deny dependency and community to an even greater degree. (Plumwood,1993, p.194)

The above excerpt highlights the binary opposition of Man vs. nature, which encourages man's superiority. This creates 'blind spots' which denotes people's failure to comprehend their connection with the living world. In other words, this perspective denies the fact that humans are part of the biosphere. This makes the moral and ecological responsibilities almost impossible because the superior entity does not notice the vital connection between their well-being and that of nature. In essence the blind spot is not only theoretical, it is behind all the consequences of marginalization of nature and how it is treated. In the novel, the characters' inability to understand their environment shows that they marginalize the natural world.

Barnes portrays several images of silence, abandonment and isolation in the North End because of their hardship and misery. He represents the collapse of sense of community following environmental collapse in the city. We notice the presence of few citizens who live alone in different parts of the city. To illustrate, the protagonist grapples with misery, mental fatigue and deep alienation, while other citizens face death in silence. The protagonist writes, "A body on a bed, lying still, just a few inches away. Blackened and sunken into itself, draped in clothes, a woman, looking like the skeletal remains of a fire that touched nothing but her flesh. But there was no fire. Just time" (Barnes,2018, p.7). The passage is a metaphor of the consequences of environmental abuse. It uncovers how individuals might face their ultimate death in a post-apocalyptic world, without being found by family members, police, or the governmental system. The protagonist finds the corpse on a bed in an abandoned house. The death might have occurred several days ago because the corpse is black and "sunken" (Barnes, 2018, p. 7). This highlights the fact that climate change has a detrimental impact on the citizens of the North End. For example, the citizens grapple with food restriction in the North End. The inhabitants have one store where there are no fresh goods; consequently, people live with canned food and slices of bread some weeks.

1. The Representation of the Discrimination of Woman in *Above the ether* and *The city where we once lived*:

This section examines how Eric Barnes represents the discrimination, alienation and rejection of women in declining social and ecological system. His two narratives depict society undergoing profound decay marked by loss, violence and weak of social bonds, where female characters are constantly isolated and with limited access to agency and community. They are portrayed as commodified bodies navigating the patriarchal system. Drawing upon Val Plumwood's ecofeminist theory, the study focuses on how patriarchal structures in both novels shape women as passive and voiceless. The critique includes the pervasive influence of dualism as the logic of patriarchy and the master identity in addition to the simultaneous processes of instrumentalization and backgrounding applied on women.

In *Feminism and the mastery of nature* (1993), Plumwood reveals the emergence of the man vs. woman dichotomy and its impact on women. She delves into the discrimination of women because they are considered as inferior and 'other'. She states:

Instrumentalism is a mode of use which does not respect the other's independence or fullness of being, or acknowledge their agency. Its aim is to subsume the other maximally within the sphere of the user's own agency. It recognises no residue or autonomy in the instrumentalised other, and strives to deny or negate that other as a limit on the self and as a centre of resistance. (Plumwood, 1993, p. 142)

In the above passage, Plumwood argues that within patriarchal dualism women are usually associated with nature in their passivity and bodily existence, which make them accessible for exploitation without an ethical reflection. The instrumentalization is an exploitative way that the superior uses to reduce the inferior to an object to fulfil their goals. This framework is significant in the feminist concept where 'instrumentalism' denies the dignity of women, stripping away their humanity and agency by silencing them.

In *Above the ether*, a father and his children live in the South End. The father realizes that he no longer loves his wife as a result of an internal decision because of his lack of attention and absence of love. Thus, he leaves her behind and takes his children, when they face a growing disaster. In the novel, Barnes writes,

But he knows something. Now, seeing it unexpectedly amid the chaos. He knows he does not miss her. “She’s going to be okay,” he whispers to his children. Because that is what they need to hear. But he knows now, sadly, finally, without any doubt, he knows that he no longer loves her. (Barnes, 2019, p. 49)

This scene clearly illustrates what Val Plumwood calls backgrounding of the feminine other. This woman becomes invisible in his world, and her perilous situation is unacknowledged by the husband. The mother, in this scene, formerly a partner and a caregiver, is emotionally and physically abandoned in a critical situation. Barnes mirrors Plumwood’s claim that patriarchal logic treats a woman as subject to be used and endured, and set aside when no longer practical. The mother is backgrounded not by direct abuse or violence but through the normalization of the emotional distance as an explanation for neglect. Rather than acting in solidarity or recognizing her emotional distress and dependency, he identifies himself as rational. Hence, he takes his children and looks for a safe place. He leaves her paralyzed and emotionally left behind facing her ultimate death. He performs deeply the Western thinking in which the master asserts independence by rejecting what he sees as inferior, weak, emotional, and docile. Simone de Beauvoir writes that,

humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being...she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other’ (de Beauvoir 1965:8) (Plumwood,1993)

De Beauvoir explains that in the patriarchal societies, men position themselves as the universal standard of humanity, while women are only defined in relation the men. Women are denied their own independent identity an treated as secondary, marginal and dependent.

The doctor is another male character who lives in a refugee camp with his wife. He prefers the camp since the gangs provide him with safety while he takes care of the inhabitants. Nonetheless, his wife does not like the camp due to her childhood trauma because her father was killed by gangs. The doctor refuses to accept his wife's need to leave the camps, which she finds unsafe and uncomfortable. This highlights a kind of emotional domination since he prefers to stay as he feels respected and needed in the camp. Barnes writes, "Some days, he knows, he's come to find a comfort in how he lives here. In his position, his authority over his patients. His relationship with the authorities. He never mentions this to his wife" (Barnes,2019, p.101). This mirrors Plumwood's master identity explained in *Feminism and the mastery of nature* since man neglects the other's needs and voice. In this case, the wife is viewed as the 'other,' inferior and vulnerable. Thus, she is backgrounded and unheard because her decisions are not considered. The doctor justifies his decision by the value he receives from the gangs; however, his wife's need is rejected. This indicates that he chooses his comfort over her autonomy. This emotional control accurately illustrates the patriarchal logic, which is a central pattern to gender-based domination.

One day, they hear different loud voices outside their tent. The doctor's wife stands between their beds holding a knife in the dark because she is terrified by the pounding of two men. Her fear is not a reaction to the immediate threat; however, it is deeply associated with the deep psychological charge of their life in the camp. The doctor shows reassurance saying: "It's alright ...it's all fine" (p.125). This shows that he does not acknowledge her childhood trauma or her repeated requests to quit the camp. The wife's emotional needs are invisible and treated as insignificant. This uncovers that her desires are not truly heard. In this instance, the doctor's position aligns with the master identity concept in which the vulnerability and interdependence that stains human relationships are not acknowledged.

In *Above the ether*, the trafficking of young girls is depicted through the eyes of the doctor. The gangs who govern in a refugee's camp and control the camp are involved in trafficking young girls to northern areas of America. These girls are referred to as human packages, often sold by their parents or deceived into this choice. The doctor's task is treating the girls before they are sent to the North End. He checks them for disease, provides necessary vaccination, offers simple implants in their arms something which is required for them all and in some cases sterilization. In this vein, Barnes writes, "He's a veterinarian to prized cattle, maximizing their health before they're sent to a long and conscious slaughter" (Barnes, 2019, p. 105). This reveals that the doctor works for these gangs because they provide him with a stable life. It is horrific to the doctor that he is preparing these girls to be more effectively abused. These girls are deprived of their humanity and treated as property and sold as mere bodies. Hence, female teenagers are discriminated by men in the post-apocalyptic world following the fall of the government.

In *Above the ether* Barnes does not only describe the father and the doctor but also the stranger. He represents a couple's relationship from a woman's perspective in order to highlight her feelings and obstacles. The stranger is emotionally abused by her husband. The stranger asks for support and assistance, while her husband shows detachment and silence rather than care and empathy. In this sense, Plumwood (1993) explains, "Systematic devaluation and denial are perceptually ingrained in backgrounding, involving systematic not noticing, not seeing" (p. 69). In other words, backgrounding reveals a persistent pattern of ignoring, minimizing and devaluing as a normal way of perceiving the other. It is usually characterized by a lack of noticing and acknowledging the other person, especially a woman. In the novel, Barnes (2019) writes:

Why is it that I get all the blame and no support?" she says, arms crossed tighter. "Why is it that I can't feel safe here anymore? Why is it that every misstep of mine is thrown back into my face?" He stares.

“And you have nothing to say,” she says. “Always. Nothing to say. Nothing to do. No help to offer me. No love. No care. Just nothing.” He stares. “Could you say something nice to me?” she asks, nearly yelling. She’s turned red, eyes wet. “Could you say something kind?.” (Barnes,2019, p. 73)

The above excerpt shows that the stranger is always blamed by her husband for the loss of their children in the post-apocalyptic world. This unveils that the husband distances himself from her because she struggles with pain, carelessness, and the absence of support and love. As a result, she grapples with backgrounding and a denial of interdependence that Plumwood refers to in her theoretical book.

In *The City where we once lived* (2018), an unnamed woman informs the nameless protagonist about the citizens’ forced displacement from the South End because of infrastructure. When the woman refuses to abandon the neighborhood, the governmental system condemns her house and seizes her son declaring her unsuitable for parenting. Her motherhood is judged based on her living condition. In this context Plumwood (1993) argues, “In modern life, for example, instrumentalization remains part of the ideals not only of nature but of womanhood” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 146). Simply put, patriarchal societies consider women as nature, which are supposed to be under male authority, rather than exist as autonomous beings with rights. In the narrative, Barnes writes,

So they condemned our homes. And when they’d condemned our homes they could declare us, me, everyone, they could declare us all unfit. Unfit to stay. Unfit to live there. And unfit to be a parent. And I came home and they’d taken him. Away. To a foster parent. A protector. Because I was unfit. That’s what they said. ‘You are unfit. Look at where you live. Now the boy will be safe. (Barnes,2018, p. 103)

This passage shows the instrumentalization of women. This female character is considered as an object, passive, and vulnerable; therefore, her emotional pain, resilience and her love for her son are invisible to the government. It implies that this governmental system violates her humanity since the commissioners pretend social protection and care amid chaos. This unveils that her situation describes that the female gender is mistreated by an entire system that

continues to promote an ideal of womanhood based on control and submission. This can be viewed as a continuation of the same ideology that marginalizes nature.

In *The city where we once lived*, a female commissioner lives in the North End and works with other male commissioners. One day, the citizens of the city attend a meeting with the commissioners to discuss numerous issues, including the destiny of the city and its citizens. After the meeting, the protagonist and the female commissioner visit his office to discuss the current state of the city. Following their departure, they face two teenagers. These teenagers attempt to harass them, notably when they see a woman. Plumwood (1993), in this context, writes: “Denial or minimization of continuity is important in eliminating identification and sympathy between members of the dominating class and the dominated, and in eliminating possible confusion between powerful and powerless” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 49). This highlights the unstable relationship between man and woman because of the dichotomy between the powerful man and the powerless woman. This means that a woman is considered as inferior and vulnerable; hence, nobody cares about her emotions and suffering. In the novel, the female commissioner is afraid; therefore, she repeats “I hate to be afraid” (Barnes, 2018, p. 137). She presses her hands and jaw to get rid of her fear. This shows that she grapples with violent teenagers even though she holds a position of political authority. Consequently, she feels discriminated and vulnerable in a post-apocalyptic world. This echoes Plumwood’s explanation of the denial of women’s body and emotion because they are devalued.

Above the ether and *The city where we once lived* present women as inferior, vulnerable, and docile. They are victims of declining social, governmental and ecological systems. They have endured different types of abuse and discrimination such as emotional detachment, invisibility and neglect. In *Above the ether*, the father’s wife, the doctor’s wife, and stranger are the main female characters who are seen as vulnerable. Hence, they become emotionally

ignored by their partners. In *The city where we once lived*, the unnamed woman and the female commissioner are threatened because of their gender. This demonstrates that they endure emotional violence. Through Val Plumwood's ecofeminist theory, these acts of abuse are rooted in cultural logic that casts nature and women as passive, exploitable and insignificant. The concepts of backgrounding, instrumentalism and the master identity highlight how these female characters are used, ignored and discarded by the same systems that exploit nature.

To conclude, this chapter explored the abuse of nature and discrimination of women in *Above the ether* and *The city where once lived*. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first examined human's abuse of nature in both novels. In both the South End and the North End, people used chemicals in different activities, petroleum and pollutants resulting in the degradation of the natural world. Therefore, they struggle with the consequences of climate change. The citizens face various natural disasters, including floods, storms, and earthquakes. These natural disasters have a negative effect on the environment because citizens live in a post-apocalyptic context, pushing people to move north to escape the disasters. The second investigated the different forms of discrimination and oppression of female characters. The female characters face psychological domination and manipulation, detachment, neglect and alienation. Therefore, they are considered as passive, inferior and vulnerable by their male partners of gangsters. It explored and examined numerous characters in both literary texts, who are the father's wife, the doctor's wife, the stranger, the female teenagers, the unnamed woman and the female commissioners. Consequently, men consider women as inferior and vulnerable. We conclude that men mistreat both nature and women because both nature and women are associated with the body, emotion and passivity.

Having examined the intertwined discrimination against women and nature, the following chapter turns to their acts of resistance, highlighting how both challenge and redefine the boundaries imposed upon them.

Chapter two: The Resistance of Plants and Women in Eric Barnes's *Above the ether* (2019) and *The city where we once lived* (2018)

In the twenty-first century several contemporary theorists have examined environmental criticism and feminism to go against exploitation and discrimination. In *Feminism and the mastery of nature* (1993), Val Plumwood re-evaluates and re-examines the dualistic structures of thought that have shaped Western culture because it encourages the excessive abuse of nature and the domination of women (p. 2). Despite this enduring control, both nature and women are no longer passive objects. Through act of resilience, nature and women have consistently opposed the systems that aim to oppress them, offering a counter-discourse to the logic of the mastery and control. This form of resistance is clearly portrayed in Eric Barnes's *The city where we once lived* and its prequel *Above the ether*, where both plants and female figures survive in the face of environmental abuse and social domination.

This chapter aims to analyse the representation of resistance of both plants and women against the systematic domination and abuse in Eric Barnes's *The city where we once lived* and its prequel *Above the ether*. We attempt to rely on Val Plumwood's ecofeminist philosophy, especially her deconstructive reading of dualism of Man vs. nature and man vs. woman in *Feminism and the mastery of nature* (1993). We also focus on the idea of nature as active agent in "Nature in the Active Voice". This chapter investigates Barnes's portrayal of the agency of both nature and women in both literary texts. Nature and women are not represented as passive victims but as active entities capable of resistance. We focus on how plants resist environmental degradation and reclaim agency and how female characters choose to destabilize the cruelty and injustice surrounding them.

1. The Resistance of Plants in *Above the ether* and *The city where we once lived*:

Eric Barnes's *Above the ether* and *The city where we once lived* represent the deep and widespread environmental devastation in a post-apocalyptic setting. Barnes depicts nature as a passive entity, which is damaged and abused by humans. The natural world seems to have primarily been affected by chemicals and toxins from the cities' factories. This over exploitation of nature results in climate change and global warming in the North End and the South End. Barnes describes natural disasters, weather change and the absence of distinct seasons in some places. However, in the heart of this desolation and destruction, nature reveals the surprising emergence of resilient plant life.

In *Above the ether* (2019), Barnes portrays the beginning of the environmental collapse that caused the devastated world in *The city where we once lived*. He portrays the exploitation of the natural world through industrial pollution, chemicals, pesticide and environmental neglect. He also depicts the early stages of climate breakdown, violent floods, destructive wildfires, poisoned landscapes, and massive ecological collapse. Despite the ongoing destruction, a resilient plant emerges in the South End, named the "dandelions" (Barnes, 2019, p. 12). In *Feminism and the mastery of nature*, Plumwood (1993) dismantles the binary opposition of Man vs. nature because she refutes a relationship of "difference" (p. 60). This indicates that she deconstructs this dualism so that to create a non-hierarchical world. She also explains that "nature is reconceived as capable of agency and intentionality" (Plumwood, 1993, p. 5). In the same vein, she calls humans to recognize nature as an active agent in "Nature in the Active Voice". Plumwood (2009) writes,

Can we begin to entertain the hypothesis that the world of nature around us may have many of the intelligent and creative powers the splitters hive off to the designer? Suppose that instead of splitting and denigrating the intelligence of the non-human world and attributing creation to an external deity or driver, we began to try to see creativity

and agency in the other-than-human world around. (Plumwood, 2009, p. 124)

In other words, Plumwood highlights the fact that nature is an active entity that cannot be treated as a passive object. The natural world and nonhuman creatures possess the ability to have intentions and be creative. Hence, she calls humans to rethink their relationship with the natural world.

The dandelion is depicted as a resilient plant that has the ability to resist constant human abuse of nature. The dandelion grows everywhere and its persistence appears in every crack, brick wall and on every house and building. In this sense, Barnes (2019) states,

The dandelions grow everywhere. Along cracks in the sidewalk and in the mortar of brick walls, and one after another the dandelions grow from gaps in the shingles on every house of every street for mile after mile. Buildings twenty and thirty and fifty stories high have roofs covered in young, green dandelions, dandelion stems growing from every windowsill, every terrace, every architectural outcropping otherwise unnoticed and forgotten. (p. 12)

In the above excerpt, Barnes portrays dandelions as active agents in the South End. They grow everywhere, as they find a safe refuge in the crumbling human infrastructure. They can survive in “unnoticed and forgotten” places that humans cannot reach (Barnes, 2019, p. 12). This uncovers their capacity to hide in certain spots out of reach to prosper and expand in different areas.

Barnes describes dandelions as active agents and resilient. In *Feminism and the mastery of nature* and “Nature in the active voice,” Plumwood’s argument insists that nature is not a passive, background or a resource, but an active agent capable of response and resistance. Hence, she attacks the prevalent Western tendency that treats nature as voiceless, insisting on the recognition of nature’s agency and capacity to act (Plumwood, 2009, p. 113). In the novel, dandelions possess the potential to flourish and expand to new areas without being stopped. Thus, they have intentionality and the ability to act. In this context, Barnes writes, “The blades at the base of the dandelions grow tightly against whatever surface the roots have

penetrated, the green blades jagged, rough, like weapons set out to defend against attack” (Barnes, 2019, p. 15). This shows that Barnes attributes the dandelions the ability to think, act, and defend themselves. Their blades are viewed as weapons that help dandelions to protect themselves (Barnes, 2019, p. 15). This suggests that they are not merely surviving, but actively resisting the harsh environment of the South End. This unveils that they are actively guarding their space they have claimed. Consequently, this is a form of resistance to male domination. In this quote, Barnes offers a counter vision of the passivity of nature. Barnes (2019) adds that dandelions “grow tightly against whatever surface the roots have penetrated” (p. 15). This reinforces their tenacity and determined adaptation to environmental degradation.

Dandelions are described as powerful plants which defy men’s attempt to eradicate them. These dandelions cannot be easily eliminated by human beings because they impose limits and resist being a simple resource to eliminate. To illustrate, Barnes (2019) writes, “And still nothing will kill them. They can only be pulled from their place, carefully, with the roots intact, or else they will continue to spread across this city” (p. 12). This highlights the exceptional resistance of the dandelions, despite the different attempts to eradicate them and kill them through the use of chemicals or “herbicide” (p. 12). It stresses that nothing can kill the roots of the dandelions. This facilitates their growth and expansion across the South End. Therefore, dandelions symbolize agency and resistance in the post-apocalyptic setting, which is induced by climate change.

The dandelions, throughout the novel, are described in a way that emphasizes the essential resistance of nature, and they reflect the overwhelming and uncontrollable force of natural disasters. The dandelions symbolize nature’s resistance and quiet rebellion against human domination and abuse of the environment. Barnes (2019) writes, “And then they bloom, one morning, in the heat of this city’s constantly rising summer, the bright flowers

color this massive and abused place in a brilliant, unmatched yellow” (p. 20). Despite the oppression suggested by the setting of this city, these dandelions not only survive but also they thrive. Their growth in places “impossibly high, impossibly hidden” (p. 20), defy both spatial and environmental constraints of the polluted and the harsh conditions of the city (p. 20). This suggests the non-human creatures’ uprising. The dandelions’ growth shows nature’s resistance in a post-apocalyptic context. The floating white seeds of the dandelions are compared to a snowstorm. To illustrate, Barnes (2019) states,

soon this place is enveloped in clouds of white dandelion seeds flying through the air. People wear surgical masks across their mouths, goggles over their eyes, they trudge slowly through the dandelion release, fighting their way forward as if a snowstorm has descended upon them. (p. 20)

The spread of dandelions’ seeds draws disorienting and suffocating effects of a natural disaster. The sentence “enveloped in clouds” immediately brings the imagery of a sandstorm, or a heavy snowfall; this reduces visibility and forces people into a state of vulnerability (p. 20). Barnes (2019) adds, “People wear surgical masks across their mouths, goggles over their eyes, they trudge slowly through the dandelion release” (p. 20). This demonstrates a real-life response to environmental crises such as severe dust storms, wildfires, pollution, where breathing becomes difficult as the eyes must be covered. The comparison of the dandelions to a snowstorm highlights how nature can behave in unpredictable and powerful ways. These clouds of dandelions continue to float; hence, Barnes writes, “They have been blowing through the city for days” (p. 58). This highlights the persistence and endurance of the dandelions. This shows that the dandelions claim their agency against human control and environmental abuse.

Above the ether is the prequel of *The city where we once lived*. While *Above the ether* portrays the beginning of the environmental collapse, *The city where we once lived* explores the extended consequences of this environmental collapse. In the second novel, the factories in

the industrial zones have led to the destruction of nature, the decay of buildings, the collapse of infrastructure, and the disappearance of most of life forms. Plants survival and growth take a special significance of resistance. Barnes represents the theme of resistance through the ivy and vines. A gardener, informs the unnamed protagonist that some plants can survive even though vegetation has been wiped out. To illustrate, he says, “that doesn’t mean other plants can’t survive” (Barnes, 2018, p. 113). He also explains that some scavengers found some plants in the South End, notably in the mountains of the northern India. He argues,

Those plants, the ones I got for you, most originated in the mountains of northern India. An area where miners have, for decades dug for gold and other metals. Horrific chemicals are used to separate the gold from the rock. Those chemicals seeped into the mountainside and the groundwater and although originally most trees and shrubs were killed, eventually some life near those mines did find a way to survive. (Barnes, 2018, p. 146)

The above quote demonstrates that some plants may survive, including ivy and vines. These plants are active agents since they can adapt and thrive the severe and chemically contaminated conditions of their environment. The gardener suggests that this resistance to harsh chemical environment give them the ability to grow and survive in any devastated and harsh environment. Therefore, plants resist human’s excessive exploitation in the post-apocalyptic world.

In the novel, Barnes portrays the loss of vegetation in the South End. The unnamed protagonist’s memories of the landscape include “treeless yards” and “trees too young to notice” contribute to the image of a dull and indistinct environment where nature struggles to flourish (Barnes, 2018, p. 187). This image of a weakened and degraded natural world is contrasted with the unexpected resilience of certain plants that defy the idea of nothing can grow in decaying environment. The ivy and vines are the main resilient plants that demonstrate their ability to survive and grow in devastated world, which is induced by climate change and a post-apocalyptic environment. Their existence and ongoing growth in

this decaying context symbolize a form of resistance against the different forms of abuse of the environment and the Western logic of mastery and dualisms. For Plumwood, nature is not a meaningless resource but an entity that has needs and purposes. Therefore, it must be recognized and respected by humans. The plants from the South End succeed to demonstrate their agency through their persistence and resilience to survive in a hostile environment, for they claim their agency. This suggests that they are claiming to be respected and considered.

In *Above the ether* and *The city where we once lived*, Eric Barnes describes nature as a powerful entity, within the destroyed environment and human collapse. Through the various images of resilient plants, Barnes represents the strength and the resilience of natural world. He relies on some plants, which are dandelions, ivy and vines. Viewed through the lens of Val Plumwood's ecofeminist theory, the novels challenge the dualism that position nature as passive and subordinate to humans, especially male domination. Both Plumwood and Barnes show that nature is not simply a background or a victim because it is an active agent that can resist. Barnes's novels affirm Plumwood's call to recognize the agency and subjectivity of the non-human world, showing that even in the face of environmental collapse and abuse, nature resists and adapts and ultimately reclaims her agency.

2. The Resistance of Women in *Above the ether* and *The city where we once lived*:

Having explored the notion of nature's resistance, there is also women's resistance in *Above the ether* and *The city where we once lived*. Women are considered as the 'other' since they are often associated with nature in Western thought. Men consider women as passive, vulnerable, and weak to justify their exploitation and abuse. Hence, women refute the different forms of abuse, domination and oppression. In *Feminism and the mastery of nature*, Val Plumwood (1993) compares the abuse and domination of nature with the subjugation of certain human groups, such as women, due to the network of dualism (p. 2). From this perspective, women have historically been associated with nature and categorized as being

opposed to the realm of reason and culture, especially the one associated with the “master” (p. 3-5-44). Therefore, women resist male control, inferiorization, and exclusion to counter the Western culture. This indicates that women demonstrate a remarkable capacity to act against Western culture despite the enduring oppression and discrimination. In *Above the ether* and *The city where we once lived*, Eric Barnes portrays female characters who resist harsh environmental and social inequality, with their resilience, autonomy and moral strength. In other words, Barnes’s female characters confront systemic abuse, domination and discrimination by refusing to submit and by resisting it.

The act of resistance is not only about asserting equality, but also about recognizing the agency of the ‘other’ and asserting mutual and ethical coexistence that puts an end to hierarchical relations. In this sense, Plumwood (1993) argues,

We do have still some power to reject the master’s definition of us as passive bodies to be subsumed by his agency, mutilated, imprinted and conditioned. We remain active and intentional subjects, and we can still effect change, on ourselves and on the course of the social world. We can learn to recognise and eject the master identity in culture, in ourselves, and in political and economic structures. (p. 195)

From the above excerpt, Plumwood highlights the necessity to reject and deconstruct master’s definition of women that insist that they are passive bodies and vulnerable. It also entails that women should be both an active and intentional subject, capable of making changes in themselves and in the course of the social world. It also demonstrates their ability to remove the dominant political and economic structures. This notion of resistance is significant to ecofeminist theory because it challenges the dualisms that connect women and nature with weakness. In addition, it aims to situate them as active, intentional force capable of resistance and transformation.

In *Above the ether*, Barnes portrays women’s resistance through two female characters, who are the female investor and the doctor’s wife. These women show forms of resistance in

a post-apocalyptic world. From the opening of the narrative, Barnes describes the female investor as a free independent woman of immense wealth and exceptional competence in the world of finance. In this sense, Plumwood (1993) explains that the public sphere is linked to masculinity, while the private sphere is associated with femininity. She argues,

In the case of public/ private, the linking postulate connects the sphere of the public with reason via the qualities of freedom, universality and rationality which are supposedly constitutive of masculinity and the public sphere, and connects that of the private with nature via the qualities of dailiness, necessity, particularity and emotionality supposedly exemplified in and constitutive of femininity and the private sphere (Lloyd 1984:74–85). (p. 45)

Hence, she critiques this system of domination because women can be active participants in the contemporary world. To illustrate, the female investor is extremely skilled in her field and has made a considerable amount of money for her company. In this context, Barnes (2019) writes, “she already made the company a billion dollars off the disaster in the Gulf” (p. 60). This unveils that she has made a remarkable achievement in male-dominated world of finance. This emphasizes the considerable skills and intelligence that a woman can have even in a male dominated domain. Hence, Barnes offers an alternative reading to Western thought that considers women as passive. This shows that the female investor does not belong to the private sphere as long as she is an active agent in her city. She is also an independent and intelligent woman because she works in the public sphere.

The female investor is portrayed as a powerful and independent character. Her resistance lies in her autonomy to have mastery over her body, time, life and various relationships with people. For example, Barnes (2019) writes, “She isn’t married. She has no children. She has never had a boyfriend. She thinks, if she thinks about it, that’s how it will always be” (Barnes. 2019, p. 2). This uncovers her active agency, since she has power over her own body and her desires. This description contrasts male’s devaluation of the female body in the dualism of man vs. woman, where a man dominates a woman claiming that her body is considered as

male property. Furthermore, the female investor can experience her own desires in a post-apocalyptic world. To illustrate, she pays other people to fulfill her sexual desires, instead of satisfying men's sexual desires. Barnes (2019) states, "She never thinks about why she pays people to have sex with her. She doesn't question it. Debate it. Doesn't feel guilt or shame or insecurity. She likes the way she has sex. So she keeps on doing it" (p. 57). Simply put, she does not conform to traditional sexual morality because she shows a form of resistance to oppression. Therefore, she embodies a form of agency that challenges the dominant logic of women's inferiority and domination. This shows that the female character is depicted as the master of her own body and the subject in the contemporary world. This suggests women's ability to resist male domination and discrimination.

The doctor's wife is another female character who resists male inferiorization and dehumanization. The doctor and his wife live in a refugee camp in the South End, where thousands of migrants look for safety. In a post-apocalyptic context, the doctor's wife finds herself fighting for her survival, while the doctor works for the gangs and engages in illegal medical practices. The doctor enjoys his life in the camp since he finds comfort and loves his job. Hence, he prefers to stay in the camp, neglecting his wife's emotions. The doctor is aware that she will not tolerate this and "She'd kill him" (Barnes, 2019, p. 101). He does not wish to fully grasp the depth and despair of his wife's compelling need to leave. This shows that his wife is neglected and abandoned because she is considered as a passive object. This pushes her to resist her husband's continuous neglect and exclusion, as she feels the need to get out of the camp.

The doctor's wife does not like her husband's exclusion and the oppressive environment of the camp. She can defend herself in an environment where she grapples with constant violence. To illustrate, the doctor finds her holding a knife to face a perceived threat. Barnes (2019) writes, "He is woken in the night. Men outside their tent. Pounding loudly on the thin

door frame. The doctor sits up, confused. His wife is awake already. Standing naked between their beds, a knife held in her hand” (Barnes, 2019, p. 125). This entails that she is an active agent who can take care of herself and even protect herself in a dangerous environment. The presence of the knife affirms the wife’s agency as she defies the stereotypical image of femininity, including her passivity and domestic nature. This can be viewed as a form of potential resistance and force.

The doctor’s wife turns violent one day, since she returns to her husband’s tent with her hands covered in blood. The wife kills four guardians who work for the gangs. In this sense, Plumwood (1993) argues, “Women are capable of conflict, of domination and even, in the right circumstances, of violence” (p. 9). This challenges the traditional stereotype of women as passive, weak, and non-aggressive. Instead, it asserts that women, like men, are fully capable of engaging in power struggles, resistance and violent actions when necessary. Subsequently, she informs her husband that she “could no longer live here” (Barnes, 2019, p. 156). This uncovers that the wife can no longer stand her life in the camp because of her childhood trauma. This also unveils that the wife prefers her freedom to imprisonment in one of the camps. Consequently, Barnes represents her action as a desperate response to the fact that she wants to leave the camp and her husband does not do anything for it. The doctor’s wife becomes a powerful force of resistance because she assumes that she should stand for herself. She can be regarded as a symbol of resistance, as she resists domination, oppression and patriarchal system. This implies the significance of recognizing women’s humanity so as to offer a counter-discourse of the stereotypical images about women.

Barnes portrays women’s resistance in *The city where we once lived* (2018). The missing woman and female scavengers symbolize resistance in a male dominated world. To illustrate, the commissioners declare the missing woman as unfit in the South End. She says that she is declared to be “unfit to be parent” (Barnes, 2018, p. 102). This leads the unnamed woman to

kill the man who is responsible of her child's abuse because she finds it illegitimate to take her child. She confesses to the unnamed protagonist that she killed the man. Barnes writes, "In the morning, the women and the boy are gone. She has left me a handwritten note, sealed in an envelope she's slid underneath my office door. The women killed that man... She left him there to bleed" (Barnes, 2018, p. 102). Her final words are "All of them deserve the same" (Barnes, 2018, p. 102). This can be seen as an act of resistance, for she goes against the injustice and the system of domination that oppressed them. She believes that his death is fully deserved because of the prolonged suffering in the South End. Hence, the missing woman and her young son arrive to the abandoned North End, fleeing the oppressive system. Her presence in the North End is not only a simple search for refuge but also a search for safety and a direct escape from the dominating structure in the South. This suggests that she is an active agent who challenges the oppressive system. This parallels Plumwood's view that different methods can be created to escape dualism (Plumwood, 1993, p. 42). It seems that Barnes offers a deconstructive reading from a feminist perspective, featuring a female character who powerfully resists male discrimination.

In the post-apocalyptic environment, Barnes depicts a group of women who are strong, resilient and hard-working, particularly female scavengers. He describes their strength and resistance in the harsh environment of this post-apocalyptic world. The female scavengers challenge Western logic and stereotypes that define women as weak, submissive, and vulnerable. Scavenging is represented as a terrible and hard profession, since scavengers are covered in filth, dust, and blood (p. 22). Barnes (2018) states,

The scavengers pile up what they find in the streets where they are working. Men and women arrive, driving beat-up panel vans and offering money for what has been scavenged...The scavenging is terrible and hard, slow work, and the people who do it—some days fifty of them, some days a hundred or two hundred—they are covered in filth when they leave these structures, hair and faces and shoulders

turned gray from the dust, their hands blackened and bloodied even through their gloves. (Barnes, 2018, p. 22)

From the above excerpt, Barnes highlights that female scavengers are actively involved in scavenging equipment to survive in the post-apocalyptic world even though they are bruised. Therefore, they are as efficient as men because they work hard throughout the day. They are portrayed as strong women who can work in a harsh environment rather than remain passive. This highlights their ability to be resilient and powerful women. Hence, they embody a brute force, which is often associated in the Western society to the qualities of the master. In other words, the female scavengers embody the qualities of the 'master'.

The inhabitants of the North End grapple with different natural disasters, including floods, storms and earthquakes. By the end of the novel, they face massive floods that oblige most of the citizens to face displacement. In this context, Amel Talbi and Dalila Zioui (2023) in "An Eco-critical reading of Eric Barnes's *The city where we once lived*" (2018), argue that climate change has a negative impact on people because they become refugees (p. 10). When a natural disaster hits, the female scavengers are among the first citizens who attempt to help their community. They assist physically the refugees from the storm in climbing the ladders to reach a safe place. Barnes (2018) writes, "They are just survivors. And when they finally reach the overpass, grasping at the guardrail as they reach the top, it's clear these are not just survivors, they are refugees, who the scavengers and others from the North End must help from the ladders" (p. 223). This shows that they risk their lives to ensure the safety of the citizens. Put differently, Barnes describes the female scavengers as powerful women because they are not afraid of anything. This highlights their agency in an extremely dangerous world.

The female scavengers are active members during the floods, always ready to act and intervene when they are needed. To illustrate, they intervene when people fight while climbing the ladders. In this vein, Barnes (2018) argues,

I watch a scavenger see this happen. She steps up onto the guardrail above the fighting... Landing now on top of one of the men pushing forward. He falls. She kicks him in the head. She turns to the other man who'd been pushing forward. She hits him in the face... He falls too and she kicks him in the head also. (p. 228)

From the above excerpt, the female scavenger kicks two men in the head because they were pushing her. This results in their fall from the ladder. This scene is a powerful illustration of the female scavenger's resilience and strength. Barnes focuses on her ability to use violence to restore order. This act challenges the dualistic notion that would identify physical strength and decisive action solely as masculine. Hence, Barnes offers a deconstructive reading from a feminist standpoint by showing that the female scavengers are active participants in their society.

In *Above the ether* (2019) and *The city where we once lived* (2018), Barnes represents women's resistance through several female characters. In *Above the ether*, he concentrates on the female investor and the doctor's wife who are active agents in the South End because they oppose male dominance and discrimination. In *The city where we once lived*, he focuses on the missing woman and the female scavengers, who oppose alienation and oppression; thus, these women do not accept the roles that are assigned to them by an oppressive and patriarchal system. Val Plumwood's theory provides a powerful lens through which this resistance is understood. This unveils that women are resistant victims of environmental and cultural abuse, and that they are no longer passive, submissive, weak, and vulnerable. Barnes provides the reader with a deconstructive reading of men's patriarchy, oppression and discrimination. He depicts female characters who powerfully resist the oppressive forces, which are established by Western society.

To conclude, this chapter investigated the resistance of both plants and women in Eric Barnes's *Above the ether* and *The city where we once lived*, challenging the abusive and dominating rationality of the Western culture. Drawing on Val Plumwood's ecofeminist

theory, it demonstrated that both nature and women resist being reduced to passive or subordinate roles. Despite being exploited and damaged, nature proves resilient; plants such as dandelions, vines and ivy survive even in toxic and polluted environments, symbolizing endurance and renewal. Likewise, women display resilience through their emotional and intellectual strength, asserting agency through decisive actions and resistance to patriarchal control. Ultimately, both nature and women embody a shared struggle for survival and self-determination, defying systems that seek to silence or dominate them. In both narratives, Barnes describes female figures such as the doctor's wife, the missing woman and the female scavengers as embodiments of resistance against patriarchal and environmental domination. These characters demonstrate agency and resilience, proving that both women and nature can reclaim their voices and their rightful place in the contemporary world. Through this portrayal, Barnes successfully illustrates the intertwined resistance of women and nature, reflecting the core arguments of Val Plumwood's ecofeminist theory, which deconstructs dualisms and challenges systems of domination.

V. General Conclusion:

In conclusion, this dissertation is entitled “Plants as Women: The Representation of Resistance in Eric Barnes’s *Above the ether* (2019) and *The city where we once lived* (2018).” This research study explored how the patriarchal, dominating male figure of Western culture excessively exploited the natural world and oppress women in Eric Barnes’s narratives. It also examined the resistance of plants and women. This study relies on Val Plumwood’s theory of eco-feminism relying on *Feminism and the mastery of nature* (1993) and “Nature in the active voice” (2009). This study analyzed both the systematic abuse and the emergence of resistance of nature and women through two main chapters.

The first chapter is entitled “The Abuse of Nature and Women in Eric Barnes’s *The city where we once lived* and *Above the ether*”. It explores the linked representation of the abuse of nature and discrimination of women, underlying the fact that both forms of domination emerged from the same cultural roots. These forms of abuse and oppression are interrelated since their main root which is the dualistic thinking. In this chapter, we relied on Val Plumwood’s *Feminism and the mastery of nature* because she critiques the binary oppositions because all what is inferior to Man is regarded as weak, irrational, and emotional. Both nature and women are described as silent victims of this system because it ignores their intrinsic value, acknowledging them only when needed and dismissing them when no longer useful. Nature is presented as passive and abused through the use of chemical and pollutants in *The city where we once lived* and *Above the ether*. Hence, they have caused climate change and natural disasters. Similarly, Women are emotionally dismissed by their partners. The mother of the two children, the doctor’s wife, gangs’ owned teenagers, the unnamed women and the female commissioner are good examples. Plumwood’s concepts of master identity, ‘instrumentalism’, ‘backgrounding’, and ‘blind spots’ help us understand and analyse of the

logic of the Western dualistic thinking, particularly how nature and women are treated as objects by men.

The second chapter is entitled “The Resistance of Plants and Women in Eric Barnes’s *Above the ether* and *The city where we once lived*.” It explores the theme of resistance of nature, in particular plants, as well as that of women in the face of the widespread patterns of abuse, oppression and domination rooted in the Western culture and masculinity. Eric Barnes *The city where we once lived* and its prequel *Above the ether* are analysed through the lens of Val Plumwood’s critical theory of eco-feminism. This chapter reveals that despite the fact that both nature and women are abused and oppressed, they possess forms of agency that allow them to challenge the dominant system of the Western society. This chapter highlights that Barnes’s novels unveil how nature and women resist Western culture and its constructed hierarchical dualisms. This chapter reached the following finding. Nature resists through resilient plants, especially dandelions, ivy and vines. This demonstrates their capacity to be active and intentional agents despite the attempts to eradicate them through the use of various chemicals. Barnes also demonstrates resistance through the female characters, as the female investor, the doctor’s wife, the missing woman and female scavengers embody emotional and physical strength, autonomy, intelligence. Therefore, plants and women challenge the patriarchal domination and abuse in a post-apocalyptic world.

These chapters provide an image about the resistance of nature and women against the systemic abuse, exploitation, and oppression of Western society and patriarchal system. Drawing on Val Plumwood’s ecofeminist theory, Barnes’s narratives illustrate how both nature and women resist domination, against the oppression of the dualistic system. Both Plumwood and Barnes highlight a vision of a dismantled dualism, non-hierarchical world and a world where nature and women are considered as integral and complete entities, rather than subordinate or excluded.

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