

Article

Creating Response-Able Futures? Discussing the Conservative Laestadian Desire to Mother within Reproductive Justice

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Abstract: This article discusses the Conservative Laestadian women’s desire to mother and the procreational ethos of the Conservative Laestadian religious movement in the framework of reproductive justice and ecological crisis. The data draws from my doctoral study in which I examined the aspirations of women who belonged in the Conservative Laestadian religious revival movement in Finland. In my attempt to understand the Laestadian women’s desire to mother within the procreational ethos of this conservative religion, and to form an alternative approach to the issue in feminist ethico-ecological framework, I employ Donna J. Haraway’s concept of response-ability together with Bracha L. Ettinger’s theory of matrixial feminine transconnectivity. With this article, I propose that in their multivocality, diversity, and intertwined nature, the Laestadian women’s accounts of motherhood assist in understanding the many aspirations, intentions, agencies, and affects that operate within the desire to mother in this conservative religious movement. The Laestadian women’s diverging accounts enable us to consider motherhood as a manifold issue for a pious woman: a natural duty and an obligation, but also a position through which to claim the status of a subject. This invites us to think of the Laestadian women’s desire to mother more broadly as an entangled ethics of relationality, care, and kin-making beyond human reproduction. To promote a response-able approach to the issue of the desire to mother on the edge of the ecological disaster, we must address the unquestioned transgenerational and procreational models of motherhood and how these complicate the discussion on the reproductive rights of religious female subjects in the Western world. However, as the desire to mother extends toward shared response-ability and more inclusive futures, it requires questioning the human desire to reproduce.

Keywords: the Conservative Laestadian women; motherhood; desire to mother; procreational ethos; reproductive justice; ecological response-ability

1. Introduction: On Procreational Politics and Reproductive Justice

Contemporary societies are moving into postsecular times with a widespread push toward “the progressive disintegration of traditional, popular piety” and toward “modern forms of religious consciousness such as fundamentalism and reflective faith” (Mendieta 2010, pages not numbered). This compels us to focus on the expectations and impact of the religious beliefs on our lives. Religious beliefs often enter our lives in the form of narratives, through apocalyptic stories and the promise of an eternal existence, and, through predictions of how the “world” is coming to its end, how the religious community is saved from destruction through salvation.

Haraway’s (1997, 2016) theorizations of relational future politics of the Chthulucene concerning reproduction, reproductive rights, and justice link the question of Christian semantic (con)figurations to procreational politics. With these figurations, Haraway (1997) refers to Western Christian realism and its embedded logic of time that, through its figural interpretation, establishes history and events

based on Christian salvation and fulfillment, narratives of progress, temporality, and apocalypse. These figurations as performative images are a real and inhabitable map of the world, as Haraway puts it, and are “universes of knowledge, practice and power” as “the imaginary and the real figure each other in concrete fact, and so . . . the actual and the figural” constitute “lived material-semiotic worlds” (Haraway 1997, pp. 2, 11). Reproduction, as part of this apocalyptic figuration, has sustained the religious movements, because procreational politics and technoscience share the neoliberalist aims of promoting human superiority and sustaining the human race. Therefore, despite the obvious urgency of ecological crises and human overpopulation, some conservative religious groups still ignore their importance as “it touches too closely on the marrow of their faith”, in other words, their procreational purposes and their desire to intervene on the questions of reproductive rights, freedom, and justice (Haraway 2016, p. 6).

The data excerpts draw from my doctoral dissertation study and from the autobiographical and collaborative writings of six women, produced during a three-and-a-half-year period from 2012 to 2016. In the doctoral study, I examined women’s aspirations concerning womanhood and motherhood in a conservative religious movement. The women who participated in my doctoral study belong to a religious revival minority movement, namely the Conservative Laestadians, which is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland with around 100,000 members. During the first data production, thirteen women participated in a writing assignment and produced thirteen pieces of autobiographical writing. This was followed by face-to-face data production with the women using methods such as memory work and collaborative writing. The women in the study were between 19 and 45 years of age, and their educational and societal backgrounds ranged from having no secondary education to having obtained a doctoral degree, and between being a student, housewife, and working (including a working mother, a professional, and a self-employed woman).

As a researcher, my desire to study the Laestadian women emerged from my family background in the Conservative Laestadian movement, as my maternal grandmother was a Laestadian mother of twelve children; moreover, the debate on the Laestadian women’s reproductive rights in the media at the time informed my desire to explore this issue. As a non-Laestadian but with a family background in the movement, I was accepted as a participant in the data production with the Laestadian women. For my study, I chose the method of autobiographical writing as it enabled freer expression while guaranteeing anonymity for the women (Rantala 2018, 2019). The assignment “provoked” the women to write “against the grain”, which means questioning their given position as women in the religious movement to enable new ways of thinking (see Davies 1993), and working towards expression intertwined with embodied and other material and discursive processes within and beyond the social (see Davies and Gannon 2012; Braidotti 2005/2006). In this case, in my role as a researcher, I was aware of and responsible for the possible harms and effects that the research might have on the women who were from an exclusive movement. I was also fully aware of the heavy personal contributions it involved, and “what it means for lives to become data” (Lather 1991, p. 99). However, our open-ended collaborations enabled the women to lead the data production on their own terms and, for instance, to control how intimate the collaborative work would be, which again enabled the women to gain a sense of authority and self-governance. According to the women, they also felt that this enclosed and intimate way of working together boosted their self-confidence as women, and they indicated their desire to continue the collaboration for a further two years after the agreed data production ended.

2. Theoretical and Political Underpinnings

During the last decade or so, the Laestadian women have been at the center of Finnish media discussions, since the Laestadian movement’s negative attitude towards the use of birth control has been viewed as a human rights issue. The dispute concerning Laestadian women’s reproductive rights and freedom is closely connected to the feminist debates about women’s status and agency in conservative religious movements in general (e.g., Mahmood 2012; Avishai 2008; Gallagher 2004). Motherhood has a special significance to the Laestadian movement through reproduction. This makes

maternal identity the only officially recognized identity for an adult Laestadian woman, who changes from being a sister to being the mother of a large family. Therefore, women are referred to as “mothers” and “sisters” in Laestadianism, since womanhood and femaleness are both associated with female sexuality, which is considered taboo (Alasuutari 1992). Paradoxically, female sexuality is viewed as an uncontrollable force and, therefore, as sinful and dangerous, even though it is the vital force for procreation and for the continuation of the movement.

Due to the strong procreational ethos of the Laestadian movement and its disapproval of contraceptives, the women within the movement endure consecutive pregnancies and labor, often risking their health in the process. In Laestadianism, the primary purpose of reproducing the religious community orientates the members to promote motherhood above all other ways of forming communities and relations. While the Laestadian procreational ethos centers on shared communal faith, practices, and lifestyle, it focuses on the continuous growth of the number of its members. At the same time, the controversial issues of reproductive justice and overpopulation deeply touch the ecological, social, cultural, political, religious, and historical questions of our existence on earth, since “[r]eproductive politics are at the heart of questions about citizenship, liberty, family, and nation” (Haraway 1997, p. 189). Thus, cultivating a sustainable future involves anxiety about environmental destruction, climate change, and social disintegration, and it, therefore, urges us to regenerate the future beyond reproducing the human existence (Zylinska 2014).

For Haraway (1997, p. 36), “nothing comes without its world” as such, nature–cultural multi-species kinship demands that we accept response-ability beyond our worlds, locations, and desires (Haraway 2016). This kinship requires the creation of a different kind of future with less suffering and less destructive or oppressive forms of living together, which requires decentering the patriarchal reproductive family ideal based upon biological or genetic ties. In addition, we must promote a feminist future beyond reproduction and, as Haraway states, “make kin not babies” (Haraway 2015). Her commitment “is to make ‘kin’ mean something other/more than entities tied by ancestry or genealogy . . . Kin-making is making persons, not necessarily as individuals or as humans” (Haraway 2015, p. 161). This proposal is closely associated with growing concern about the size of the human population and reproduction, a subject that, despite its urgency, has been neglected by many, including feminist scholars, as being too politically challenging and problematic, undoubtedly, because it raises complex issues and allegations of racism, classism, and nationalism.

Ettinger, similar to Haraway, promotes the relational ethics and interconnectedness of all life but, as an artist and psychoanalyst, views relationality essentially from a perspective of human encounters, differing from Haraway’s multispecies approach. However, I bridge together these two differently positioned feminist theorists to examine the Laestadian women’s desire to mother as relational and response-able. In this, Ettinger’s (2006a) theory of matrixial feminine transconnectivity enables the understanding of feminine transgenerational relationality that is explicit in Laestadian motherhood and its “motherlines” that resonate and transmit the cultural values and practices among minority women in male-controlled spheres (see also O’Reilly 2004, pp. 20–22). By adding the symbolic and semiotic order of Haraway’s theory of religious (con)figurations to Ettinger’s thinking, we can understand how these figurations operate at the level of material–discursive processes. In other words, these theories allow us to examine the Conservative Laestadian transgenerational and procreational ethos as lived and re-produced in the form of affects and enactments by the women in the movement and foster sensitivity towards reading the women’s corporeal and affective experience of motherhood.

For a long time, various feminist groups have led sexual and reproductive rights movements and have focused on the oppressive sexual and reproductive commands that limit the rights of the vulnerable, poor, and marginalized. Moreover, they have also insisted on the right of all women to have access to contraception or abortion as part of gaining control of their own bodies. Reproductive rights could also be taken to denote the undesired reproductive politics of governance that appears to be directed to control the unprivileged women and mothers and their access to reproduction, reproductive health, and “choice” (Haraway 1997). Reproductive justice, in general, entails that all women—women

of color, queer women, poor and low-income women, and women with disabilities—have full control over all aspects of their sexual and reproductive lives, including their right to decide if and when to have children. The focus of social justice on the reproductive justice framework facilitates radical alliances between governments and organizations “fighting for racial, economic, and environmental justice, and for systemic change in law enforcement, health care, and education” (Roberts 2015, pages not numbered). This pressing question on reproductive justice concerns the Laestadian women for whom the issue is also complex, especially because of their multiple memberships—as members of a conservative religious movement as well as members of a Nordic welfare state that aims for a gender-equal and ecologically sustainable future (e.g., [The Nordic Welfare Research Conference 2019](#)). To address and articulate this issue, I approach it by asking with Haraway, “What is decolonial feminist reproductive freedom in a dangerously troubled multispecies world?” (Haraway 2016, p. 6). By using the decolonial feminist approach, I refer to the critique of heterosexualist gender oppression, which requires that the researcher understand the oppressing and resisting relation at the intersection of complex oppression systems (Lugones 2010).

With these questions and concepts in mind, I examine the Laestadian desire to mother in order to understand the complexity of the discussion on reproductive rights and freedoms among religious Western women. The six women in this article came from diverse Laestadian communities and areas in Finland. Two of the women were stay-at-home mothers and two were working mothers of young children from rural Finland. Two others were women from the urban areas in Finland of whom one was a graduate career woman and the other was still single and studying. The women were between their late twenties and mid-thirties at the time of the study. The excerpts are from the women’s autobiographical and collaboratively produced writings. With regard to Haraway’s previous question, I will read the Laestadian women’s accounts on motherhood with Haraway’s concept of response-ability combined with Ettinger’s (2006a) theory of matrixial feminine transconnectivity in the following section of the article.

3. The Laestadian Pregnant Body: A Sacred Symbol of Reproductivity

The Laestadian female body is not just an organ to be governed by the converted pious heart and soul (Laestadius 1968), but it is actually the immanent precursor of the forces that operate with the images, enunciations, and practices. Through these forces, according to Haraway (1997), the material–discursive processes, including religious rules and guidance, affect the symbolic and semiotic order of the Laestadian female body and produce pre-subjective and collective images, arrangements, and dispositions of the religious female (cf. Ettinger 2006a). For Laestadian women, motherhood is a sign of piousness, membership, and belonging. The Laestadian maternal body can be seen to function as a carrier and transmitter of the sacred religious community, ensuring its continuity. The Laestadian maternal pregnant body offers a “space” for women to be identified as virtuous in the eyes of the congregation, as it as a sign of piousness, which also serves the community, as Viivi here exemplifies:

Viivi: Those moments come to my mind, when I dreamed about being pregnant . . . I hoped the first pregnancy will soon be visible. (Autobiographical writings data 2012–2013)

In Laestadianism, pregnancy is the visible sign of transformation from a sister to a mother in the community (Nissilä 2013). Pregnancy is the embodied connection, as Ettinger (2005) explicates, a fusion, differentiation, and transformation, through which the subject-to-become co-emerges within the (m)other. The Laestadian female body is a site through which the “other” is produced as an interwoven fusion of communal relations and interconnections (Ettinger 2012, 2006a). Thus, the process of pregnancy is not an embodied connection between two separate bodies, but it is a fusion at the level of the collective, in which the different elements, forces, interactions, and imaginings meet. This affective relationality overcomes the thought of separate, unconnected individuals and, instead,

enjoins us to regard our being in the world through *mattering*, through becoming concrete and actual (Ettinger 2006a, 2006b, 2012; see also Barad 2003, 2007).

Mother's body makes space for the other to occupy the maternal body and its functions. Reetta is a stay-at-home mother of seven small children and identifies herself as a housewife. In Reetta's description, the mother is a provider: caring, even lactating, to provide sustenance for the other. In everyday encounters, mother and child form a collective flow that creates a co-productional encounter. Her desire to mother signifies this multiple relationality:

Reetta: Right now, as the mother of a newborn baby ... I get to admire at the precious gift, which was given to our family ... It is so amazing again how ready the baby grows in the tummy ... and how the mother can feed the baby with her milk! The pregnancy reshaped my body again, but it quickly restored itself after the childbirth. Nature runs its course. (Autobiographical writings data, 2012–2013)

Ettinger (2006a) explains this connection further as a passage between the mother and other with her theory of the matrixial, which she defines as a space modeled on a certain conception of feminine/pre-birth psychic intimate sharing:

In our life ... we are transconnected to maternal subjectivity right from the start. This is where our own passage from non-life to life took place. If we are all alive and survived then we went through a longer sojourn in the maternal womb, we have all been attuned ... transformingly connected to a female, adult female subject, femaleness. (Ettinger 2006a, pp. 123–24)

With this, Ettinger clarifies that the relationship between humans is transgenerationally marked with femininity, as our humanity and being can be traced back to the affective and embodied female corporeality. Although this femaleness, in which "the base subjective structure is gender" "emphasizes that this matrixial 'femininity' is not the opposite of the phallic masculine ... it is the other of the masculine-feminine opposition" that offers accessibility for all to the female bodily specific relationality (Massumi 2006, pp. 210–11). This notion becomes explicit in the Laestadian women's desire to "embody" the other to be able to claim a status of legitimate subject in the religious movement. This feminine could also articulate instead, as the response-ability to be responsive to the other requesting our capability of relating. The matrixial works in and on this "borderlinking" (Pollock 2006, pp. 189–201), which could be envisioned as "co-poiesis".¹ In the realm of co-poiesis, maternal is neither motherhood nor becoming or being a mother; instead, it is a relationship in which we are mentally attuned and transformingly connected to the other. Hanna, mother of three, described this embodied and mattering connection between a baby and a mother during our process of collaborative writing:

Hanna: The baby is going to be taken straight to the intensive care ... my lungs are squeezing in ... breath, breath in, deep, many times, breath ... sleep, could you come, please. (Collaborative writings data 2014)

Hanna attunes to the event when the baby was taken to the intensive care, and through her attunement she is able to experience the baby's breathing in her. In this context, Ettinger's theory of matrixial connectedness relates to Haraway's theorization of response-able since they both share the ethical and *mattering* aspect of situated (in matrixial encounter-event for Ettinger) desire to help ourselves and others to sustain and survive. For Haraway, relationality is about our shared response-ability for the earth and its multispecies, human and non-human others, earthlings, while, for Ettinger, relationality is about transgenerational feminine corporeal and at the level of pre-conscious psychic connectivity with the other. Ettinger's theory is essential for reading the Laestadian women's accounts

¹ Ettinger (2005) speaks about "co-poiesis" instead of co-production.

for their co-constitutive connections, in other words, becoming real and actual through responsive connections to others, in which the community emerges as the materialization of those connections. However, similarly for both, relationality signifies responsiveness, as Haraway (2016, p. 35) explains with the concept of response-ability, the act of “cultivat(ing) the capacity to respond”. The capacity to respond matters, how to withstand and witness the unbearable “multispecies, including human, urgency: of great mass death and extinction; of onrushing disasters” without losing one’s hope (Haraway 2016, p. 78). While this response-ability shapes conditions for lives and ecologies to flourish, it allows differences to *matter*. Both Ettinger and Haraway acknowledge promoting relationality and responsiveness as profoundly feminist projects, but they relate differently to questions of nurturing sustainable ethics and human accountability for being of the world: Haraway’s theory has a clear ecological multi-species focus whilst Ettinger’s theory has a more psychoanalytical, sensory, and affective lens.

The Laestadian procreational ethos and the Laestadian women’s accounts endorse the idea of a woman’s bodily specificity for conceiving new life and giving birth to life and, thereby, to combine processes of nature and culture. Thus, the Laestadian maternal body can be perceived as “a subject-in-process” and as a “filter in between ‘the nature’ confronting ‘the culture’” (Kristeva 1980, p. 135). However, this processuality makes it difficult for Laestadian women to claim motherhood as an identity especially when its primary function is to serve as a tool for reproduction (Baraitser 2009, p. 102; see also Griffin 1984). The Laestadian motherhood, in this sense, is a process through which “new” Laestadians are produced and which connects the social with nature. Although the Laestadian motherhood could be also considered as the reification of the Conservative Laestadian procreational ethos, a colonized subjectivity, this manages to prove how we humans are utterly relational beings. Here, relationality of being means that being-in-the-world is primordially being-with; that is, our lives “subsist” within the other as the (m)other other constantly co-constitutes itself with the other within its corporeality. This connectedness, relationality, is crucial for survival but it requires responsibility for the other, living in human or non-human ecologies, in order to make ourselves accountable for being of the world (Barad 2003, 2007; Haraway 2008).

However, within the reproductive justice framework, the Laestadian movement’s procreational aim to secure the continuation of the religious doctrine and its communities by demanding banning the use of birth control, premarital sex, and sex without the purpose of giving birth to new life seems unethical. This pressure to desire motherhood and abundant reproduction in order to become a legitimate member of the community actualizes as a contributory act to serve the community and manifests itself multiple ways: for instance, the number of children you have reflects your willingness with the willingness to be a pious member in the eyes of the community. Valma is an academic, a career-orientated woman, who feels strongly about her mission to work outside home but at the same time wants to have many children:

Valma: My youngest child is two, and so the people in my community are expecting to see a round tummy soon . . . (Autobiographical writings data, 2012–2013).

Maternal bodies could be regarded as particularly worthy in the Laestadian community, because the core of the tenet is in the sacredness and continuity of the community. Therefore, even temporary infertility or physical incapability to become pregnant is a serious matter for a Laestadian woman. Often, if the female body appears to fail to fulfill the expectation for and the norm of sequential pregnancies, this is perceived by the community as an “inability” or is considered as a lack of faith on the part of the woman. Nonetheless, a collective formation such as the Laestadian community is based on its relations and, therefore, involves the simultaneous emergence of multiple and differing desires concerning reproduction (see Massumi 2006; Guattari 1995). The “collective” is the multitude of relations-in-between folded into every subject (arrangement) and (con)figuration (Haraway 1997). Thus, although Laestadian motherhood is about the successive pregnancies and childbirths (Nissilä 2013), but it is also about freedom experienced within guidance:

Paula: We trust the Heavenly Father's family planning. He will give us children, . . . if, when and as many as he sees is good for us. We don't have to decide, when to have children. We can live without a worry in that sense. (Autobiographical writings data 2012–2013)

For Laestadian women, following the guidance means avoiding the use of contraceptives, since they are considered to interfere with women's duty and "the natural attitude" towards child-bearing in the community. With "the natural attitude" I refer here to the women's belief that they do not have to plan to have children—they are happy to receive what is given. Paula, like Reetta before, simply trusts the Heavenly Father for her family planning. For these women, the guidance is a smooth space of contentment, trust, and belonging even if they are aware of the dangers involved in it, such as losing one's health or even life in the process (Rantala 2018).

4. Contestations of the Transgenerational Desire to Mother

As motherhood is the sacred core of the movement—the virtuousness factor, enabling the salvation of its female members and the whole community through reproduction—it often is challenging for a member not to follow the norm. Viivi, a mother of five, has just started working after having the children and struggles now to cope with the expectations of continuous pregnancies, caring, and housework laid on her as a Laestadian mother. She wants to be a pious member in the eyes of the community, but through her refusal to oblige to the Laestadian norm of multiple pregnancies, she feels the burden and condemnation of her actions:

Viivi: When the fear of getting pregnant was not there, something, some part of me, was relieved. Still, I was really scared that someone would notice that I was using "something" ... I was not confident with it. I was afraid that I would reveal myself. I wanted to be a good believer and go to Heaven. (Autobiographical writings data, 2012–2013)

For her, resisting the sacred order is risky, as it could result in exclusion from the community and from the safety of family and friends. In her community, the women are expected not only to produce new members but also manage to secure the constant flow of the offspring.

To discuss the Laestadian desire to mother within the question of decolonial feminist reproductive freedom at the edge of ecological disaster, as Haraway (2016) previously suggested, we need to remember that the Laestadian women's multiple memberships complicate the discussion. On one hand, the women could be seen to belong to the margins of their society since they, as pious women, also belong to a patriarchal conservative movement in which the women's reproductive rights and freedom are limited by the laws of the religious communities. On the other hand, the Laestadian women could be regarded as white privileged Western women as they are also members of Finnish society with equal rights and access to its services, as described in Eevi's statement:

Eevi: In Laestadianism, women aim at housewifery to look after a flock of children, to become "beings" whose hopes, dreams and life do not really matter. Why educate yourself if you are never going to practise your skills? Wouldn't it be out of madness and insane to create some dreams and never actually be able to effectuate them? This kind of martyrdom irritates me extremely! I am not going to sign myself into this. I am going to be a mother, but not a housewife. I know, it can be challenging to combine family life, work life and career but in my family, we work together, just as well my husband can be a househusband just as well. (Autobiographical writings data 2012–2013)

Laestadian women live at the intersection of these realms and, therefore, their decisions concerning their reproductive rights and freedom should be affected by both: the religious community and Finnish society. Nevertheless, in my study, the Conservative Laestadian procreational ethos and the negative attitude toward the use of contraceptives and family planning were explicit in the women's accounts. Despite the fact that there were multiple voices affecting the women's decisions, the women approached the question mainly in two ways: one was to trust God's guidance and follow the procreational ethos of

the movement, which meant avoiding the use of birth control, and the other was to take matters in their own hands and to decide when to have children and how many. However, their decisions appeared to waver between their willingness to follow the guidance, the expectations of the community, and their own will. The decision not to have children or to restrict the number of children was linked to the women's sense of independence and their desire to work outside the home or to have a career. Sometimes, depending on the community, for Laestadian women who did not agree with the natural attitude of the community or wanted to decide themselves whether, when, and how many children they should have, the only option was to disengage from the movement as women who did not want to obey to the rules were considered a threat to the other members' commitment to belong and future of the community (Alasuutari 1992). However, for many Laestadians, leaving the exclusive and protective community is often a slow, challenging, and traumatic transition (Valkila 2013).

According to Valma, a career-minded academic and mother of two, the future of young Laestadian women was preordered by the Laestadian procreational ethos. Following the community procreational ethos ruled out many other options for the young Laestadian women:

Valma: Growing up in the community that is very conservative in its values and way of life is both a gift and a burden: On one hand, I have a ready model for female subjectivity; principles that help the choices in life and as well as the safe close community, which is invaluable for the growing up of children and teenagers! On the other when you become "a female subject" you will realize how many beautiful things are twisted to be quite the opposite, difficult, if not impossible In a Conservative Laestadian community, motherhood is so strong a norm . . . I feel really depressed every time I meet young mothers who have just got into the university while expecting their first ones, because I know that it is not going to be possible for them to work. I realize that not all the women in society plan to have a career, but in a Conservative Laestadian community, housewifery is such a strong norm, that the women who manage to "escape" it, are overlooked and marginalized. The older women can be what they want, since their life and careers start after they stop conceiving. It is possible to discuss these in the community, but still the community creates very strict rules about how to approach and articulate these subjects. It is ok to say that you find the rule denying the use of contraceptives difficult or I am tired and I would like to study, and so forth, but the prevailing "pastoral discourse" always come back to the same point: "these principles are accepted and found good in the community, and therefore it is no good to start changing them to fit them to your own life situations, since from the point of view of faith that means to place yourself in danger of being led by reasoning". (Autobiographical writings data 2012–2013)

Valma wished to remain in the movement but, at the same time, found the procreational law and the Laestadian duty to *remain* productive impossible to live up to. As Valma explicitly states, the Laestadian ethos of procreation is given as a natural attitude towards child-bearing and understood as God's law². Even though Valma resists the norm, the Laestadian women's desire to mother *matters* in her enunciation, as the religious figurations materialize and become 'embodied', therefore, become lived and acted upon (Haraway 1997). However, these religious figurations are not alone in affecting the women's desires, as there are also other relations, worlds, stories, knowledges, and figurations for the women to desire since the multiple social and religious material–discursive processes also structure the symbolic and semiotic order of Laestadian motherhood and the maternal body (Haraway 2016; Guattari 1995). These Laestadian women's contestations of motherhood manage to "interrogat[e] critical silences, excavat[e] the reasons questions [that] cannot make headway and seem ridiculous"

² Reverend Seppo Lohi in his official statement on 27 June 2009 at the SRK's summer services cited the Genesis commands to "be fruitful and multiply" as a Divine Act, which is not in our power to hinder or neglect." In his speech, Lohi compared contraceptive use to abortion (Lohi 2009).

at a time of heightened disputes on the issue of population overgrowth (Haraway 1997, p. 269). Nonetheless, these accounts demonstrate the cruel optimism involved in the Laestadian desire to mother which offers the women acknowledgment and subject status in the form of membership in the community whilst securing the endurance of the patriarchal movement at the expense of women's health and human rights. In this sense, the Laestadian movement's procreational tenet seems to share the progressive ethos of neoliberalism in which the aim is to escape the inevitable ecological catastrophe by constant expansion and growth.

5. Discussion: Making New Futures beyond Reproduction?

In this article, I proposed that the Laestadian women's accounts of desire to mother form a significant threshold for understanding religious procreational ethos and reproductive justice in decolonial feminist and post-anthropocene framing. To examine the Laestadian desire to mother, which entails the desire for women to be reproductive, I examined the procreational ethos of the Laestadian movement with Donna J. Haraway's Christian semantic (con)figurations. I also read the women's accounts with Haraway's concept of response-ability in the frame of reproductive and environmental justice while employing Bracha L. Ettinger's concept of matrixial feminine transconnectivity to illuminate the feminine corporeal and affective relationality embedded in Laestadian motherhood. While Haraway and Ettinger pertain to very different genealogies of feminist work and theory, the relational and materializing aspects of their theories facilitated an understanding of the Laestadian desire to mother as the desire to become a response-able subject through maternity, membership, and belonging. By using these two feminist theorists with rather diverse approaches produced a multifaceted and subtle reading which assisted in exploring this pressing ethical and political issue and unfolded the Laestadian desire to mother as an ontological and ethico-ecological question.

The complexity of the Laestadian women's accounts on the desire to mother enables us to question and shape on their behalf the normative and subjugative societal and scientific discourses concerning women's agency in conservative religious movements. The demands that religious movements impose on religious women by promoting excessive procreation affect the women's desires regarding motherhood and are, therefore, valuable when discussing reproductive justice. Moreover, the fact that motherhood still is often presented as a woman's only purpose in life and the alarming absence of choice for women concerning their sexual health as a basic human right around the world compels further examination of the connection between religious devotion and the desire to mother. The transformational politics within the Conservative Laestadian movement in Finland has enabled Laestadian women to question the movement's conservative values and endorsed their right to use contraception and make their own life choices. It has, thus, empowered Laestadian women to resist the reproductive aims of the movement that threaten to colonialize the women's bodies for reproduction. As the continuation of the Laestadian movement depends greatly on the women's engagement in reproduction, the women's aspirations concerning whether, when, and how many children they should have play a crucial role in negotiations of the movement's future.

The Laestadian women's desire to mother challenges the differentiation between the questions of reproductive rights and reproductive justice as Laestadian motherhood was both accepted and contested by the Laestadian women. In addition, the fact that the women's decisions concerning contraception use and having children are situational and, therefore, complex due to their various changing memberships and the differing worlds they simultaneously inhabit, adds even more complexity to the questions of reproductive rights, reproductive justice, and the established differentiation between these (see Clarke and Haraway 2018). This not only positions ethics at the center of the discussion, but it also raises further questions about within whose and to whose rules and norms one aspires. Therefore, the differing accounts of motherhood contribute to two significant coinciding questions: how the women survive within the complex relationship with a movement that is communal and protective even while it is confining and exploitative, and how the procreational ethos of these conservative religious movements

and their obligation on women to reproduce causes problems for the sustenance of the earth and must, arguably, compel the religious movements to reconsider their tenets.

Regarding religious motherhood as an imposed obligation also raises important questions concerning reproductive rights and freedoms among religious female subjects in the Western world. This demands a critical approach to the unquestioned patriarchal reproduction and limited reproductive freedom and the rights of women within conservative religious movements on the edge of the ecological disaster without questioning women's personal life choices and judging the religious values that *matter* in the (existence of) large religious families and communities. This, however, managed to raise an even greater concern—not only the human need to reproduce as a personal question involving the religious women's desire to mother—but in its place, the question of the survival of the life on the planet as a whole: how to undo the human desire to procreate, command to multiply, which might in its part prevent the multiple ecological crises from accumulating? In this, I return to the question suggested by Haraway (2016, p. 6), “[W]hat is decolonial feminist reproductive freedom in a dangerously troubled multispecies world?” To answer this, I needed to think beyond the individualist and humanist understandings of desire to mother to enable the affective, political, ecological, and ethical aspects to enter the question of reproductive justice, rights, and freedom. This is to understand the desire to mother as an extended and shared response-ability beyond individual desires in a struggle for more response-able and inclusive futures for all living creatures, not only humans.

As I proposed at the beginning, to cultivate a sustainable future often involves anxiety about environmental destruction, climate change, and social disintegration, and it urges us to regenerate the future beyond reproducing the human existence. As humans of the world, we are relationally embedded in its processes. The future of the planet is not just a humanist affair; it is our responsibility to extend and amplify the idea of mothering into becoming-with something other than before. This is not simply becoming a mother subject, a legitimate member of society or community, but becoming response-able for being of the world (see Haraway 2016; Braidotti 2005/2006). I encourage all to ponder with Haraway (2016, p. 209), what if we have already passed the time for the inquiry of “inalienable personal ‘right’ ... to birth or not to birth a new baby ... [while any kind of] coercion is wrong at every imaginable level in this matter” and that all there is left is to “kinnovate”, to make new futures with non-human and more-than-human species? Therefore, what is needed is not the optimism or the promise of survival, but a sincere desire to mother, to nurture the responsibility for the world and those lives already existing, and to “look for non-natalist kinnovations to individuals and collectives in queer, decolonial, and indigenous worlds” (Haraway 2016, p. 209). This, as an inspiring re-imagining of kin-making possibilities, is an ethical project to contest the patriarchal heteronormative nuclear family reproduction, to challenge the “need/choice” discourse on childbearing in the times of ecological crisis.

The critical voices of this (post)anthropocene kin-making argue that rather than focusing on alternative ways of populating the planet, we should “be concerned with the question of which kinds of kinship relations, social supports and human or non-human lives are granted the opportunity to thrive” (Murphy 2018, p. 110). Exploring the burden of human numbers on earth is dangerous in its oppressiveness and could be seen to promote racist thinking and to subjugate the already oppressed, poor, or otherwise disadvantaged groups (see Bashford 2013). However, despite the atrocities carried out in the name of population, there is a pressing need to imagine a way to promote multispecies reproductive justice. In defense of scientific inquiry on population, I would call with Haraway (2018) for an understanding of kin-making as a kind of activism, involving compos(t)ing response-able and liveable futures for all, thus, with the marginalized and vulnerable already existing.

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