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FOREWORD

What It Means to (Re)Centre Care

When the heat dome covered Western Canada in the summer of 2021, I was nearing the end of the second trimester of my pregnancy. I had already been experiencing some discomfort as my daughter had begun digging her tiny feet beneath my ribs, and the threat of the heat wave intensified these feelings in a condition—as Sarah Wiebe similarly describes—of “sweaty, sticky disarray.” During this time, my husband and I were living in Amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton) in Treaty Six territory. As temperatures climbed in the city to the high 30s and low 40s, I exchanged screenshots of daily weather app updates and made frequent phone calls to friends and family in British Columbia’s Lower Mainland and Victoria as I prayed for their safety amid the unrelenting heat. The weight of anxiety bore down on me as I feared for family struggling to stay cool. We could only watch what was happening from across the Rocky Mountains while we battled our own high temperatures. We were fortunate enough to have air conditioning in our home, so we opened our space...
to our friends in the city. My dear friend, in the final weeks of her own pregnancy, napped in our basement to beat the heat that had overtaken her home. As Wiebe echoes throughout *Hot Mess*, these moments of crisis place care at the centre, emphasizing the ways we come through for one another in the direst of times. At the same time, these moments also remind us of how practices of care are vital to the survival of the multitude of life at any point—not just in crisis—thus emphasizing the necessity of centring our teachings as Indigenous peoples.

My daughter was born on the prairies while we lived as visitors for three and a half years in Amiskwaciwâskahikan. Despite our landlocked environment while in Treaty Six, it was the sound of the ocean that her spirit craved, of all the sounds that could have possibly soothed her. It was the sound of waves that calmed her and lulled her to a peaceful sleep, which didn’t always come easily when she was an infant. She came into the world moving through water, transitioning from the amniotic fluid that surrounded her to the warm pool and then into my arms on a crisp morning. On her fourth day, we followed the teachings of our elders and welcomed her to the world with a cedar bath. Cedar is a sacred medicine, and we have been taught the power and healing of water, so bringing these two together brought further sacredness into her first moments, locating her in the world with our medicines. Several months later, when she first dipped her toes in the ocean waters, she looked both at peace and at home. A calmness settled over her, a recognition of belonging. These seemingly small moments remind me that she carries the
coast in her, as do we all as coastal Indigenous people. It is a reminder of the ways we become tethered to our homelands and waters, bound by the life force of place.

I am tasked with teaching her our ways as nuučaanuíł people; to support and guide her in living her life as quuí̱as. Our homelands and waters will anchor her as they do me. They will call her home—gentle waves kissing the shoreline, waters conveying messages from timeless guides. She will foster a relationship with place filled with the responsibilities called for by our teachings. Central to this are the practices of care that are integral to our teachings of and around hišukʔiš čawaak—everything is one. This philosophy calls on us as Indigenous peoples to remain active participants in a reciprocal relationship with all of creation, asking us to reflect on the spirit in everything and the ways in which we are connected in webs of kinship.

Centring hišukʔiš čawaak demands a reflection on our accountability and the ways we carry out our responsibilities in the relationships we hold interpersonally and with our more-than-human relations. Our responsibilities require deep care for our relations practised daily. We locate ourselves as but one life in a web where each life depends on the survival, health, and well-being of the other. These modes of care resist the ways the settler-colonial state has attempted to divide us from one another in emphasizing individualism and extractive relations. When we reflect on our engagement with the world being one of ongoing and renewable relationships of reciprocity, we shift the focus away from destructive discourses embedded in colonization and extraction, and
we embody the care necessary to continue envisioning the future. When we move through life holding these teachings as central, we not only extend care to our relations, but we fundamentally embody sustainable relations that honour the life in all of creation. These are the ways of relating to the multitude of life that I will instill in my own daughter, but that also hold relevance beyond this intimate relationship and have the capacity to fundamentally reshape our future globally.

The role of care remains a focal point throughout *Hot Mess*, as Wiebe emphasizes the crises of care exacerbated by states of emergency in a climate crisis. In doing so, she draws attention to the ways emergency patterns highlight the dividing lines between life that can and cannot be grieved and illuminates precisely what is at stake if society continues to fail to grapple with extractive relationships. Through a moving personal recounting of becoming a mother in a Code Red climate emergency, Wiebe explores what it would look like to push back against western extractive and transactional approaches to our living environments and, instead, to embody the care called for in many Indigenous teachings about our relationships to the world. Echoing the calls by Indigenous scholars, activists, and community members for generations, Wiebe posits this as a shift that would fundamentally alter society’s engagement with the world for the better. This collection of personal reflections serves as a poignant call to action to (re)centre care. I bracket off re- in *(re)centring care* to draw attention to the fact that care has been an ongoing integral practice across many Indigenous communities since time immemorial. Indeed, as noted earlier, care is foundational in
many of the teachings in our respective nations. Recentring (without the parentheses) can be taken to suggest a point in time when care was not pivotal. This usage is not my intent. Instead, I offer both options—recentring and centring—as a way of drawing attention to the various ongoing and revitalized practices of care necessary to our survival.

While life during a climate emergency is layered and complicated, taking the “mutually beneficial relations between a parent and infant as an organizing symbol of our political relations” opens space for the creative envisioning of futures that are generative, healthy, and sustaining.

— Rachel yac̓aaʔał George Professor, University of Victoria
THE YEAR I BECAME A MOTHER — 2021 — meteorologists warned that the heat dome trapping us in my home province of British Columbia would be deadly. For three days in a row, temperatures broke records by reaching 20 to 25 degrees above seasonal average in cities across the province, peaking at 49.6°C in Lytton — high enough to provoke nearby wildfires to burn the village to the ground.¹ Years later, local residents continue to live with the aftermath, trying to rebuild their communities. Reports reveal how heat records continue to be broken worldwide, and that the amplification of wildfires will lead to even more smoke.²

The heat dome was the deadliest weather event in Canadian history, with the BC Coroner’s report documenting 619 heat-related deaths.³ Most who died were elders with compromised pre-existing health conditions, living in isolation. More of the decedents lived in socially and materially deprived neighbourhoods in comparison with the rest of British Columbia’s
population with inadequate cooling infrastructure. This event signalled that the climate emergency is a matter of life and death, and that we are not prepared. Health authorities across the province now note that climate change events, ranging from wildfire smoke to droughts, heat, storms, and flooding, correspond with deadly health risks and signal an “existential threat.” The heat dome prompts critical reflection about the gradients of life between these extremes, about how people came together to care for one another and survive this highly consequential event for community and planetary health.

Such high heat can lead to loss of consciousness, organ failure, and death. It also exposes the hard truths that people with less greenery, and those living below the poverty line or living alone are more likely to die from extreme heat. People with complex mental health concerns such as schizophrenia are even more vulnerable. Waiting times to get through to 911 and then for an ambulance to arrive were contributing factors to increased vulnerabilities. 911 calls doubled during the peak of the heat dome between June 25 and July 1, 2021. In six instances, callers were informed that no ambulances were available. British Columbians learned some hard truths that summer about the pressing reality of the climate emergency, notably that we need to be better prepared and to check on one another, especially those considered vulnerable and those living alone.

With my 6-week-old son and partner in tow, I tried to keep my cool during the exceptionally hot first summer of his life. We dipped our feet into the ocean, ran an ice water bath, hung out in a kiddie pool with our neighbours, and knotted
frozen bandanas around our heads, the sweat impervious to our strategies. In those early, fragile days of motherhood, I was still struggling to find my groove as a nursing parent. Becoming a mother is already an unravelling of one’s sense of composure and identity; added to this was the hot mess of a dramatic, extreme weather event. This unnerving, chaotic feeling of becoming a sticky hot mess shaped the panicky early days of motherhood so much that it felt like a metaphor for the dramatically changing world my son was born into.

While riding out the heat wave, after the exceptionally hot June of 2021, I underestimated the amount of water I needed to keep not only my body, but my son’s body hydrated. Just a few months after a traumatic emergency C-section birth, I again found myself admitted to a hospital emergency ward, awaiting care for unrelenting migraines that began during the heat dome. The intense external weather pressure system mirrored and tested the limits of my internal pressure system.

After a bout of nausea that prevented me from nursing our son early one morning, and calls to every urgent care clinic in a 25-kilometre radius, my partner insisted we take a trip to the hospital. I joined the queue for triage that extended through the sliding doors and spilled onto the parking lot, and sat in a jam-packed waiting room for two hours before I saw the emergency doctor. The nurses could not find my veins to give me necessary fluid and medications to abort — not prevent — the incessant migraine episodes. “You have to go to your family doctor for that” was the emergency doctor’s response when I pressed her about preventive medications. If only we had a family doctor, I thought to myself, on the
brink of tears. The shortage of physicians is another crisis consuming Victoria, where we live.

That day in the emergency ward, I was away from my son for the first time since his birth from dawn till dusk. I learned some tough lessons about the nursing maternal body, most notably how much water one must take in to sustain another life. I became aware of just how intimately the current climate emergency can be felt in the core of our beings. I felt the crisis of care in my body, through my skin, twinned with the visceral sensations of what it feels like when we forget to care about our warming planet.

From my vantage point as a critical ecofeminist and new mother, I am concerned with and focused on how personal sensations are political, how states of emergency make the visceral realities of democratic politics affective, fleshed out in our bodies, on our skin, felt through our kin relationships. Political theorist Tim Luke, in *Anthropocene Alerts*, points out that global emergencies such as a pandemic or the climate emergency call for “an investigation of the relations between democracy, public engagement and policy.” I share his concerns. There is a dire need to look more closely at the democratic conditions of and the political environments leading up to official State of Emergency declarations — presenting a moment to interrogate and intervene in conversations about the administrative rationalities of emergency politics before it’s too late. Most often, State of Emergency declarations address exceptional moments that reinforce executive forms of hierarchical power relations with limited avenues for public engagement and input.
Emergency events and declarations are as much political as they are personal. My emergency Caesarean section took less than 15 minutes to perform — a terrifying event in the moment, yet a common one. Approximately 1 in 3 women birth their babies through an elective or emergency C-section in the United States, and about 1 in 5 globally. I share my experiences about navigating parenthood in an intensely changing climate in an effort to contribute to personal and political conversations about the need for more caring relations between and among humans and the planet. Weaving lived experiences, research, and political events, this book reflects on how we can care for each other during crises, especially when states of emergency are declared by political representatives.

Emergency events prompt hospitals and health authorities to declare certain codes to indicate unique sources of trauma. As an example, Code Orange is used to respond to a disaster. During multiple visits to the Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria near our home, I noted the Code Orange preparedness signs and emergency kits stashed behind the reception area. When the province of British Columbia declared a State of Emergency due to the rapidly spreading wildfires in the Okanagan in the summer of 2023, the Kelowna General Hospital and Interior Health authority declared a rare Code Orange to care for those fleeing wildfires. This declaration draws sharply into focus just how poignant, personal, and telling such declarations can be for human and planetary health. Such declarations are meant as a rarely used response to disasters or mass casualties.
A central question of this book asks: How do we care for each other, live well on this planet together, and nurture the conditions for life to flourish when exceptional emergency events become the norm? I argue that it requires thinking about life beyond individualism. We are all better off when we care for each other and this is especially true during emergency events. Moreover, I build upon critical ecofeminist, environmental justice, and Indigenous decolonial thought to highlight how living well for community and planetary well-being requires a radical shift away from extractive capitalism — continuously taking from the earth for profit — and instead, calls for refocusing on reciprocal relationships with the vital environments that sustain life.

I feel the planetary crisis acutely as I attempt to process an inferno of climate grief: during another hot summer in 2023, the province of British Columbia declared a State of Emergency due to unprecedented wildfire conditions, while entire cities like Yellowknife, Northwest Territories (Canada) and Maui, Hawai‘i burn — drawing sharply into focus why global leaders and scientists call the climate crisis a “Code Red emergency” — where the consequences of global heating become more extreme, manifest in events such as the spread of wildfire. Since I started writing about the politics of State of Emergency declarations more than a decade ago during the emergence of the 2012 Idle No More movement, I began to pay attention to emergencies near and far. State of Emergency declarations made by public officials including substandard housing conditions and mental health crises in northern communities like Attawapiskat; Hawai‘i Governor
Ige’s declaration against the protesters at Mauna Kea; former US President Donald Trump’s efforts to build a wall along the United States-Mexico border; the public health declarations around the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic; and the internationally recognized climate emergency. Emergency declarations seem to be the new normal. As critical policy scholar Michael Orsini writes, even grief due to the “avalanche of death” starts to become ordinary. Emergency conditions are matters of life and death. Our human bodies and bodies of water, along with our environments, are all at the frontlines.

A State of Emergency declaration is an extraordinary bureaucratic moment, a sovereign or authoritative decision, with consequential temporary rules and proceedings — often understood as a request for help from other orders of government. It can be declared by any governing body — be it municipal, First Nation, provincial, federal, or international. A State of Emergency can be understood as a policy assemblage: a bureaucratic entanglement of institutions, discourses, practices that are simultaneously symbolic and highly consequential for governance. The normal rules of proceedings can be suspended, and status quo democratic practices and norms can be temporarily suspended. This tension came to light in Hawai‘i when elected officials sought to declare a housing State of Emergency on July 17, 2023, leapfrogging over normal permitting procedures, and expediting certain forms of development without comprehensive civic consultation or input.

State of Emergency declarations often cast a light on some of the hidden, systemic inequalities that underpin the
asymmetrical power relations of liberal democracies themselves. In some instances, such as has been the experience of Attawapiskat leadership in Northern Ontario — a community affected by housing shortages, a youth mental health crisis, and water contamination — State of Emergency declarations reveal affected communities’ underlying concerns with environmental injustice, and significant gaps in Canada’s respect for Indigenous self-determination, rights, and treaty relations. These policy instruments have the power to challenge status quo governance and rules of proceeding, to serve as a call to action for democratic life otherwise, and to signal a pivotal moment to collectively reimagining healthier futures.

Such declarations raise questions about what it means to live through and survive a State of Emergency. These declarations affect personal circumstances specifically and democratic life more broadly — who has (and does not have) the power to make these declarations? State of Emergency declarations press us to flesh out the parameters for a healthier body politic. Living through states of emergency conditions prompts reflection about the consequences of emergencies for equity and how humans relate to each other and to broader ecologies.

Emergencies draw attention to unprecedented, unpredictable events, or so one might assume. It also becomes apparent how the exceptional masks what is routine. As emergencies become normalized, so too do the politics of resource mobilization, where public officials must decide swiftly how to respond to and manage these events. These are not neutral decisions. They are laden with power, significance,
and meaning. When emergency patterns emerge, so too do the dividing lines between grievable and nongrievable forms of life — more specifically about whose lives matter most when it comes to protection in a political community. Not everyone experiences a State of Emergency in the same way.

Emergency declarations, events, and experiences hold together complicated emotions. They trouble dualistic ways of thinking. By their very definition, emergencies are vital matters of life and death. At the same time, emergency declarations and events mean much more to those whose lives are directly affected by these vital poles of life or death scenarios. An emergency is generally a response to an unanticipated event. An emergency may signal panic or fear. Simultaneously, emergencies may signal a sense of possibility, for a response, and safety. Acute emergencies ignite swift action. But how do we contend with slow emergencies, when the causes are layered, systemic, and thus pose a challenge to diagnose?

The experiences of the day I left my baby behind to be treated in the emergency room shaped my thinking about the pace and feelings generated by emergencies and their variances, be they fast or slow. I had an issue, and later that day it was treated. At the same time, my issue was entwined with the climate emergency. This provoked a deeper visceral concern about how to treat systemic, chronic, long-term slow emergencies. Bodies — human like the nursing parent — are beacons, offering up important lessons about the root causes of emergency events and the need to reimagine conditions otherwise.

Emergencies are both lived experiences and metaphorical representations of contemporary body politics. When former
Chief of Attawapiskat, Theresa Spence, began her ceremonial fast in 2012, in response to a housing crisis in her community that led to a State of Emergency declaration, her body became a signal for the complicated, layered, multidimensional emotions related to colonial neglect and the breakdown of healthy treaty relationships. While the event catalyzed widespread social mobilization through the Idle No More movement, it also unmasked slow-moving violence, a slow emergency of pain, trauma, and neglect of Indigenous lives in her community and beyond. When both Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Governor-General David Johnston refused to meet with her, they also refused to respond to the emergency. As “heads of state” choose whether to respond to the crisis atmospheres or political emergencies that we experience, the palliative politics they enact deal with some of the immediate pain for some people, but they do not address systemic causes. Emergencies command attention, forcing the triaging of political life itself.

The hospital emergency management system lends an important perspective to our current climate emergency. Hospitals and health authorities have a unique colour-coded messaging system to alert staff to crises. Each colour has a specific warning resonance in the context of a hospital setting with broader implications for human relations with the planet. This book takes on the colour codes to explore the climate emergency. Each code evokes a mood, feeling, or sentiment in relation to a particular emergency condition. The codes have broader interpretive, metaphorical resonance for personal, political, and planetary life. Emergency code sensations are
deeply affective; they are as profoundly personal, felt, and visceral as they are power-laden and political. They serve as a literal and metaphorical colour-coded alert system, a signal to address the climate emergency through lived experience.

In 2021, the year my son was born, the United Nations Secretary-General along with scientists and global health officials called climate change a “code red for humanity”; this code sets the scene for the first vignette and title of the book. Code Red, in the hospital system, is often used for the threat of fire. Climate scientists are now calling attention to a global wildfire crisis, along with related extreme weather events and a rapidly warming world. Hot Mess discusses the blurry state of becoming a mother in this warming context as both a lived experience of new motherhood and living within our current climate emergency.

The second vignette, “Code Orange,” elaborates the relationships between fast and slow disasters. I discuss my research relationships based in Canada’s Chemical Valley, a site of slow-moving disasters in a pollution hotspot. This approach is informed by Rob Nixon’s work on slow disasters that are types of disasters that often seem so subtle they are unrecognized.

Following this discussion, “Code Pink” elaborates my own experience through an obstetrical emergency and presents details of my personal birth story. Code Pink often refers to a pediatric emergency and/or obstetrical emergency. I discuss the concept of Nuu-chah-nulth teaching yaʔakmis as explained by Indigenous governance scholar and seascapes research collaborator Dawn Smith — and the twin sensations of love and pain. Through these experiences, we learn more
about what matters most to us. This concept helps me think about matters of life and death, and to process the twin traumas of a challenging birth and the responsibilities that come with raising a son in this dramatically changing climate.

The next vignette, “Code Blue” discusses climate anxiety, postpartum mental health, encounters with hierarchical, instrumentalist, transactional managerial blue bureaucracies to elaborate upon complex emotions between love of the planet and a painful fear about the future. In the hospital system, a Code Blue often refers to a cardiac arrest and implies a serious life or death threat — I also think of it like a broken heart — the result of emotional or physical trauma, which may result from a sudden illness, the loss of a loved one, serious accident or natural disaster. Based on personal and policy examples, I suggest that it can be applied to the pain of processing climate disaster, and as a portal to consider waterways in more relational terms, as abundant forms of sea life. As I explain, turning to the ocean, to waterways, these bodies of water can offer human bodies some reprieve. Along with processing anxiety, heartache, pain, and grief, “blue” in this chapter reorients how we think about our bodies, environments, and territories in relation to water. Rigid, hierarchical, instrumentalist forms of blue bureaucracies highlight policy and governance challenges, which, in turn, contend with more relational approaches to waterways and abundant ocean governance, what some of my colleagues and I refer to as “seascapes.”

In our capitalist system, which conceives of environments in transactional terms, viewing natural resources as sources of profit, we are encouraged to make individualistic
choices about prosperity with little regard for our impact on planetary life. Individual responsibility for sustainable consumer choices branded “green” surround us, but rarely do these narratives unearth the systemic injustices perpetrated through the exploitation of our environments. In the vignette that follows, I aim to abandon or evacuate from superficial sustainability rhetoric, or “greenwashing,” and articulate instead the vital importance of finding alternatives to our current status quo corporate, profit driven capitalist economy. Code Green is a hospital code often used to discuss evacuations. Evacuating, or moving beyond extractive capitalism to centre care and economic alternatives to the status quo are discussed through a focus on circular and Indigenous economies that offer local teachings and insights for global economic systems of production and regeneration to centre care over profit.

While there are creative and imaginative ways of thinking about human/more-than-human ways of relating to environments beyond extractivism, this book also draws attention to ongoing forms of violence, including environmental violence and racism that persists in Canada and around the world. “Code Black” draws these violent power relations into focus. As Ingrid Waldron elaborates in There’s Something in the Water, race is implicated in environmental policymaking — through action and inaction.30 “Code Orange,” as discussed, sheds light on this with a discussion of persistent pollution in Canada’s Chemical Valley and the environmental health impacts on the Aamjiwnaang First Nation. As I write on International Women’s Day 2024, I
am simultaneously preparing my witness testimony for the Senate of Canada in support of Bill C-226: *An Act Respecting the Development of a National Strategy to Assess, Prevent and Address Environmental Racism and to Advance Environmental Justice*. This bill is largely inspired by Waldron’s scholarship and would contribute to environmental justice for affected communities across the country.

Environmental racism must be dismantled so that environmental justice can flourish. As explained in the Environmental Noxiousness, Racial Inequities and Community Health (ENRICH) project, led by Waldron, environmental racism includes distributive and procedural injustices, including the inequitable sitting of industrial polluters and other environmentally hazardous projects as well as institutional mechanisms and policies that perpetuate inequitable distribution of these activities of which racialized communities are most directly affected. In her book, and as elaborated on in “Code Black,” Waldron articulates four pillars of critical environmental justice and the Black Lives Matter movement to highlight the vital points of intervention on state-sanctioned forms of structural violence as well as identifies strategies for solidarity and radical transformation of the inequitable status quo. Violence is enacted through institutions, policies, discourses, knowledge systems, and practices with visceral consequences for racialized communities. This vignette concludes with some words of wisdom by bell hooks to connect themes of justice, love, and solidarity with pathways for more caring communities and worlds.
The final vignette blurs the singular code approach and discusses the nuances of colour coding schemes. “Code Grey” — a signal for systems failure — is about current struggles over essential minerals, such as lithium and nickel, required for the electric vehicle revolution. It is an environmental justice conflict poised to define the next generation, hailed as a green strategy for the future, while replicating deadly modes of extraction from lands and waters and marginalized workers. As the provincial government of British Columbia and other governments around the world push for the extraction of critical minerals, taxpayers generally, and local communities in particular, will pay the price for clean-up costs. The power-laden governing systems and development of essential infrastructure for what’s purported as clean, green technology both in the electric vehicle manufacturing sector and renewable energy (solar, wind, tidal, geothermal, etc.) come under scrutiny. This critical stance is a cautionary tale for these energy sectors, and one that simultaneously seeks to refocus on regenerative human/more-than-human relations rather than extraction.

The phrase “hot mess” is a metaphor for the layered and blurry state of being a new mother and navigating disastrous conditions of contemporary, urgent climate emergency politics. From the Code Pink emergency of birth to the Code Red facing the planet, to Code Orange climate disasters manifesting in both slow and spectacular tempos, “hot mess” highlights that we are living through a vital moment forcing us to rethink our relationships with the planet. In doing this critical and imaginative work, *Hot Mess* responds to the
climate emergency by underscoring a caring approach to each other and to the environment while refuting extractive relations. Following Eliane Brum, I begin with the premise that Western, Eurocentric ideals of mastery over nature — typical of modern ways of knowing — have severe consequences for planetary health and the health of human bodies. Capitalist values associated with the dominance of human activity over the natural world has led to the extraction of resources, an overreliance on fossil fuels, and ultimately, the climate emergency that we find ourselves living through. With a deeper diagnosis of the climate emergency’s political context, this book simultaneously seeks to challenge the individual blame model of health care, which so often seeps into motherhood shame and blame discourses. Instead, *Hot Mess* calls attention to the layers, textures, and nuances of emergencies and connections we encounter while contending with extractivism, seeking to centre and uphold communities of care.

Care is a radical intervention against the politics of extractive capitalism. In *The End of This World: Climate Justice in So-Called Canada*, contributors argue for the need to unite “to build a caring economy for all.” A caring economy requires putting limits on the capitalist economy. This means building a “regenerative economy rooted in care that allows opportunities for meaningful work for all and affords everyone access to the land, water, air, food, education, shelter and community they need to live a good life.” *Hot Mess* also calls for placing care at the centre of our economic and political lives.

I aim to open up conversations about issues, about how care is core to living well through and beyond the climate
emergency, while raising awareness about the all-too-often silenced intimate matters related to how our bodies respond to emergency interventions: informed consent, emergency C-sections, reproductive mental health and climate emergency events. By emphasizing care, community, and concern for future generations, I am cautiously optimistic about alternative ecological and decolonial futures, and how we might collectively envision and enact better relations among each other and between humans and the planet, including our atmospheres, lands, waters, animals, and plants, and our living environments.

Emergency events weigh heavily in my heart and on my mind, and they are reinvigorating conversations between critical ecofeminists and ecosocial theorists. Ecofeminism is a body of scholarship that motivates the personal and academic lens that I bring to bear on these lived experiences of layered crises and our current climate emergency. The critical ecofeminist vantage point that I present for this care-centred focus is both a theoretical approach and a frontline activist movement, centred on the politics of community and solidarity for healthy relationships with each other and more-than-human planetary life now and for future generations. Inspired by the concept of felt theory developed by Dian Million, Hot Mess draws into focus how situated bodies of knowledge and personal life-experiences are profoundly political. Million’s writings remind us that creating space for marginalized voices and experiential knowledges can serve as a radical intervention on patriarchal, capitalist worldviews and perspectives. With this ethic of solidarity, I share my
stories alongside the voices of many others to cast light on the viability of other more caring worlds – to show how life beyond extraction can be possible.

Individualistic, neoliberal, capitalist, profit driven ideologies drive our current climate emergency. Moving us out of these dire conditions requires creativity and imagination. It also requires listening to those with persuasive ideas. The act of cultivating relationships of connection, care, and community offers an urgent challenge to the extractivist status quo. This includes treating our lands and waters in a reciprocal way rather than as resources to extract. What would more caring relationships to each other and our environments look like?

These are huge questions. I do not have all the answers. What I offer is one counternarrative to the extractivist ideology that put us in this mess. Let’s consider how to reframe the relationship to our environment from one of crisis to one of care. The lens I want to bring to this conversation and the necessary reframing comes from my current relationships and ways of thinking about feminist mothering and parenthood. My perspective about becoming a parent when faced with these ecological conditions stems from centring networks of community beyond the nuclear family, raising children with feminist ethics and values, and treating the environment — what some might refer to as Mother Earth — with reciprocity and respect.

From my vantage point, feminist parenting requires noticing our environments, inside and outside our lives, homes, and communities. While I was pregnant, two female colleagues and I formed a global network called the Feminist Environmental
Research Network — or FERN for short. I see many parallels between this academic network and my personal approach to feminist mothering. Rather than supporting a competitive, ego-centric academic ethos, FERN centres community, relationships, collaboration, co-authorship, critical thinking, and creativity. These values are ones that I want to instill in my son as he grows into adulthood nurtured as he is by a critical ecofeminist home life. Research documents well how healthy environments produce healthy babies and healthy children. Women know this better than anyone else. Many of the mothers I speak with in my various doula circles and mom groups share our fears about the future. Concretely, together in our local community, we share strategies, recipes, tips, clothing, baby gear, and book recommendations, and we go on walks, do yoga, offer childcare to help parents for date nights, and check in with each other periodically. Metaphorically, and physically, we cultivate networks of care and challenge the neoliberal myth that we can parent on our own. Isolation kills. I’ve seen far too many loved ones, friends, and family members struggle with mental health as they become new mothers, juggling the layered responsibilities and pressures of childcare, home organization, meal preparation, sexual satisfaction, creating a viable return-to-work timeline and managing shifting identities with a new sense of purpose. Many mothers feel they either fail at home or they fail at work. Through cultivating caring communities and supportive, community-focused feminist parenting, we can shift relationships so we don’t always find ourselves alone, bearing the weight of the world on our own.
My understanding of feminist mothering and parenthood is shaped by an urgent climate emergency and critical ecofeminist theory and practice. Each signals how we need to care about each other, the world, and future generations if we want to survive. Several years ago, I had the opportunity to contribute to an academic collection about motherhood, feminism, and politics. The excellent chapters set out an ethos of feminist motherhood that inspired further collaborative writing with mothers in the academy and informs my intellectual approach to scholarship as well as to mothering, and to surviving the apocalypse.

Feminist parenting in my view means centring women and gender-diverse bodies, stories, experiences, voices, and perspectives in both health care policy conversations and climate emergency deliberations. It involves an ethos of care, love, and healthy relationships. This ethos, inspired by the late bell hooks, entails the challenging of patriarchal male-dominant societies, promoting environmental awareness, centring partnerships, cultivating care, critiquing the individualistic ideology of neoliberalism, and addressing structural inequality. Following bell hooks, feminism is for everybody, and it must be more than a lifestyle. It requires intersectionality, a close investigation of the interlocking forces of race, gender, and class. Feminist parenting also draws attention to issues of reproductive justice. For future generations to flourish, to live with and envision life beyond the Code Red climate emergency, we need healthy environments inside our bodies, communities, and worlds.